

Mecheln – Auschwitz 1942 – 1944

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De vernietiging van de Joden en zigeuners van België
La destruction des Juifs et des Tsiganes de Belgique
The destruction of the Jews and gypsies from Belgium

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La destruction des Juifs et des Tsiganes de Belgique
The destruction of the Jews and gypsies from Belgium

Ward Adriaens
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Patricia Ramet
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Ilse Marquenie



Ward Adriaens

Concept en inleiding

Concept et introduction

Concept and introduction

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Textes, biographies et statistiques

Texts, biographies and statistics

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PREFACE

Bert Anciaux

As early as 1947 the Fort at Breendonk received recognition as “national memorial” – and rightfully so, because this place of terror and dread symbolizes the inhuman and unimaginable suffering of the Second World War.

The Dossin Barracks, however, tell an entirely different story. After the liberation, this gathering camp for Jews and Gypsies simply returned to its pre-war military function.

As if nothing had happened and everything had already been buried in the past. As if its role as deportation centre were but a footnote in history.

It took 50 years – half a century – before a private initiative, supported by former deportees, attempted to mend this “oblivion” by establishing the *Jewish Museum of Deportation and Resistance* (JMDR), modestly housed in a corner of the former barracks and by now converted into a housing complex.

Right from the very start of the JMDR, in 1996, the Flemish Government has subsidized the operational costs for this museum and documentation centre. But the choice by the Flemish Community to rectify the *inadvertence* from the post-war period by supporting a large museum and building project, was a deliberate one. It was to be a project proportionate to the deeply tragic events which took place in and around the Dossin Barracks.

Thanks to the operational means provided by the Flemish Community and especially thanks to the continued and intensive archive work, the archive and documentation centre at the JMDR has provided the basis for this exceptional publication: a unique collection of 18.522 portraits of people who were persecuted, abused and murdered because of a racist and anti-Semitic ideology. An ideology which, much to anyone’s regret, then also found supporters in our own country and its public institutions.

By supporting this difficult feat, the Flemish Community contributes to a historical and pedagogical project with a European dimension: to literally give a face to those pages of the Holocaust written in Belgium and the north of France. At the same time this publication is also the ultimate homage to all victims.

It is of the utmost importance that this episode of our national and European history should become and remain accessible, comprehensible and tangible, for as many people as possible.

For that reason we are presenting this series of albums to all public libraries “*for education and admonition*”. Because even today, the monsters of racism, anti-Semitism, homophobia and hatred towards Gypsies still rear their ugly head. Exclusion and fanaticism, albeit in different forms and new circumstances, are still a threat; every single day, often with the same murderous result. Because time and time again the weakest have to pay the price.

I congratulate the team of historians, archivists and technical employees of the JMDR for their initiative and tenacious work. This exceptional publication is a unique enrichment of our own documentation, and will undoubtedly be met with critical acclaim and appreciation even beyond our borders.

–

Bert Anciaux

Flemish Minister of Culture, Youth, Sports and Brussels

PREFACE

Sir Natan Ramet

We have the honour to present the four-part series *Mecheln-Auschwitz* as a memorial of the genocide of the Jews and Gypsies of Belgium and Northern France. It stands as a reminder of all the 25,259 people who were deported from Belgium because they were registered as “harmful”, and as a reminder of the persecution, deportation and attempted destruction of the Jews in Belgium.

These faces and these lists of names serve as a headstone for the victims of the Shoah. Virtually all of them died without a place of burial, we do not even know where their ashes lie. I erected a marker to the memory of my father near the spot where his remains might rest, along with those of the dozens of his companions in adversity. For these fallen there are no impressive cemeteries with crosses, no individual stones, no monuments bearing the names of the dead as there are in the fields of Flanders. There is just the one monument at Anderlecht mentioning the names of the deported. Only their names have been carved in stone.

And then, to add insult to injury, the aching absence of a *corpus delicti* has been used to downplay or deny the very fact of the genocide.

By publishing this unique collection of portraits we hope to put a human and accessible face on those who were only numbers. Barely sixty years ago, these people lived here, in our towns, mingled with us, and they had a face. We see their pictures, but they too are watching us.

This memorial must also serve as a reminder for future generations.

As Chairman of the Jewish Museum of Deportation and Resistance and as a survivor of Auschwitz and the death marches, I wish to express my wholehearted gratitude to the Director of the Museum, Mr. Ward Adriaens, for his vision, his initiative and the realization of the various archival projects of the JMDR, such as the project *Give them a face*, which is the basis of this memorial. I also wish to thank Mrs. Patricia Ramet for identifying thousands of files and Mr. Eric Hautermann for accurately digitizing the photographs. Further my thanks are due to Dr. Maxime Steinberg and Ds. Laurence Schram for their contributions to the historiography of the persecutions. Finally, I wish to thank all the board members, employees and JMDR volunteers, who have worked so hard over the last thirteen years to make this memorial a reality, and the sponsors, without whom this publication would not have been possible.

Mecheln-Auschwitz is a *kaddish* for all my camp comrades who disappeared in the torment of the Shoah, it is a testimony which will leave no heart unmoved.

–

Sir Natan Ramet

Doctor Honoris Causa *Vrije Universiteit Brussel*,
Founder and Chairman of the *Jewish Museum of Deportation and Resistance*,

Honorary chairman of the *Kazern Dossin. Memorial, Museum and Documentation Centre for the Holocaust and Human Rights*,
Survivor of Auschwitz and Dachau.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Mecheln-Auschwitz

1942-1944

An archive project by the Jewish Museum of Deportation and Resistance and its historical context

By Ward Adriaens

director

The collection of 18,522 portraits and the alphabetical list of 25,259 deportees of the *SS-Sammellager Mecheln* is the result of 13 years' work by management and staff of the documentation centre for the JMDR on the main archive files compiled during WWII by the anti-Semitic and racist persecutions in Belgium and the north of France. Based on data unlocked through indexes and inventories a renewed historical abstract was written. It has become known as the four-part series *Mecheln-Auschwitz*.

• BELGIUM

The twentieth century confronted Belgium with no less than three murderous "man-made disasters" - catastrophes unparalleled throughout our national history.

The First World War was a veritable foray catapulting the country from the sixth to the twenty fifth place on the economic order. Over 42,000 Belgian soldiers and 10,000 citizens were killed in this conflict. The story of the devastations of the First World War is still tangibly present in the countryside of Flanders with its numerous graveyards and memorials. Its museum, Flanders Fields, is located in Ieper, housed in the Halls destroyed during the war.

The persecution of political and military resistance to the *New Order* during the Second World War was a political persecution affecting 44,000 Belgian citizens who ended up in German prisons and concentration camps in Belgium and larger Germany. 14,000 detainees never returned. The story of the political persecution in Belgium is told by various locations, such as the Fort of Huy or the Liège Citadel, but the most striking is undoubtedly the National

Memorial Fort Breendonk, which was completely renovated in 2003. It is one of the most sinister places of Western Europe. Fort Breendonk is the symbol of Nazi repression and SS terror in Belgium.

Throughout the twentieth century large parts of Europe were ruled by terror and violence. Incarcerating and murdering political opponents was part of the corporate culture of European totalitarian states.

The period of 1939 until 1945 also brought a surge of racist and anti-Semitic persecution over Europe. Belgium was not spared. The *Sicherheitspolizei-Sicherheitsdienst* (Sipo-SD) registered some 56,000 people as Jew. The Gypsies were identified and controlled by the Belgian Alien Police. The occupying forces deported 24,908 Jews and 351 Gypsies via the *SS-Sammellager Mecheln* to Auschwitz. A mere 1,223 of them survived this deportation and genocide.

In twentieth century Europe people were destroyed on a large scale because of who their mother was, because of their heritage. This disaster is commonly referred to as the *Holocaust*.

The large scale persecution of Jews and Gypsies in Belgium has had a museum and documentation centre since 1996, housed in the *Dossin Barracks*, the former *SS-Sammellager* in Malines.

In 1996 the Jewish Museum of Deportation and Resistance (JMDR) opened its doors in the Dossin Barracks, at the initiative of the Central Israeli Consistory of Belgium and of the Union of Jewish Deportees. The chairmanship is until today filled by Knight and Doctor Honoris Causa of the Free University of Brussels Natan Ramet, survivor of Auschwitz, the death marches and the Dachau



Entrance of Fort Breendonk



Entrance of the Kazern Dossin

concentration camp. Under his inspiring leadership the museum was off to a very good start.

The new museum quickly occupied a firm position between the museums in Ieper and Breendonk in the field of memorial education. It offers, in a very limited space, a strong historical summary of the judeocide as it was prepared for in Belgium.

- THE ARCHIVE AND DOCUMENTATION CENTRE OF THE JMDR

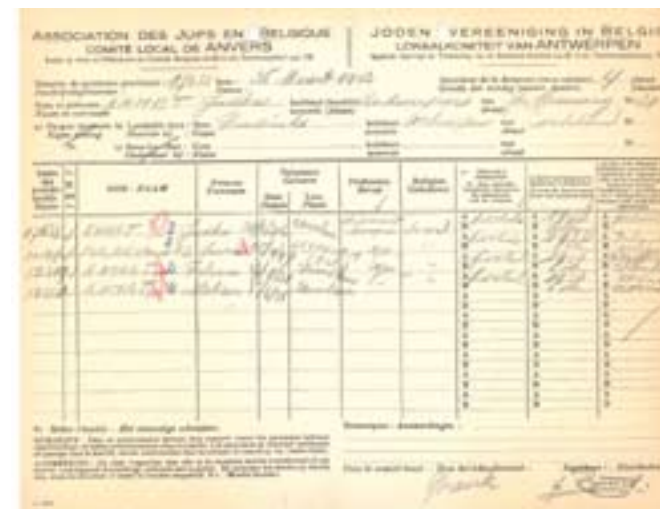
The soul of any theme museum is its documentation centre. A historical museum must be a centre of knowledge. To unlock available information is therefore one of the main assignments. A challenge which was that much greater since Belgium is most likely the best documented country in Europe as for surviving documents. However, the documents are spread over various depots and archiving institutions in the country.

From its opening onwards, and under the impulse of its director, the JMDR started centralizing archives and documents relating to the anti-Semitic and racist persecutions. To unlock and centralize the information from the numerous archives across the land, he opted for setting up various digitalization projects. Back in 1996, this approach met with considerable opposition. Digital information storage was not yet acknowledged as an acceptable method to preserve the contents of archives. For many archivists cellulose remained the only imaginable information carrier. With considerable effort and without other options microfilm might be considered, but bits and bytes were just *not done*.

What started back then on a small scale with two *flatbed scanners*, has now developed into a digital collection unlocking about 450,000 images online. We methodically tracked down the archive files formed by the persecution. We signed agreements with the owners to guarantee their privacy and rights. At the time, some archives were in a very precarious condition, we had to remove dust, fungi, metals and in one case even bird excrements. That phase was then followed by the actual making of the inventory, digitalization and finally the acid free packaging.



Damaged documents, remains of cleaning relics, acid free packaging



In 2004, the Flemish government rewarded the JMMD for its efforts for preserving and unlocking by issuing a decree to recognize and subsidize the museum as an archive institute. Thanks to private funding from the Jewish community and numerous Jewish and gentile friends of the museum, the JMMD now disposes of a well equipped scanning service with experienced staff.

• THE ARCHIVE SOURCES FOR MECHLN-AUSCHWITZ

The main objective for the archive project of the JMMD was to map the victims of persecution. Six enormous archive files allow us to accurately identify the historical disaster that struck Belgium. We unlocked the two archives that intended to register the Jews as a group, the *Jewish register of Belgium* and the members' registration of the "*Jodenvereniging in België*" and four archives documenting a large subgroup: the *Jewish register of Antwerp*, filing cards of deportees from Drancy, the *Transportlisten Mecheln-Auschwitz* and the *Relics*.

NO.	NOM	PRENOM	DATE DE NAISSANCE	DATE DE DEPART	DESTINATION	STATUT	REMARQUES
101.	Natan	Ramet	24/01/1891	10/10/1942	Stockholm	H	Ensemble
102.	Natan	Ramet	24/01/1891	10/10/1942	Stockholm	H	Ensemble
103.	Pierre	Ramet	24/01/1891	10/10/1942	Stockholm	H	Ensemble
104.	Pierre	Ramet	24/01/1891	10/10/1942	Stockholm	F	Ensemble
105.	Pierre	Ramet	24/01/1891	10/10/1942	Stockholm	F	Ensemble
106.	Pierre	Ramet	24/01/1891	10/10/1942	Stockholm	H	Ensemble
107.	Pierre	Ramet	24/01/1891	10/10/1942	Stockholm	H	Ensemble
108.	Pierre	Ramet	24/01/1891	10/10/1942	Stockholm	F	Ensemble
109.	Pierre	Ramet	24/01/1891	10/10/1942	Stockholm	H	Ensemble
110.	Pierre	Ramet	24/01/1891	10/10/1942	Stockholm	H	Ensemble
111.	Pierre	Ramet	24/01/1891	10/10/1942	Stockholm	H	Ensemble
112.	Pierre	Ramet	24/01/1891	10/10/1942	Stockholm	H	Ensemble
113.	Pierre	Ramet	24/01/1891	10/10/1942	Stockholm	H	Ensemble
114.	Pierre	Ramet	24/01/1891	10/10/1942	Stockholm	H	Ensemble
115.	Pierre	Ramet	24/01/1891	10/10/1942	Stockholm	H	Ensemble
116.	Pierre	Ramet	24/01/1891	10/10/1942	Stockholm	H	Ensemble
117.	Pierre	Ramet	24/01/1891	10/10/1942	Stockholm	H	Ensemble
118.	Pierre	Ramet	24/01/1891	10/10/1942	Stockholm	H	Ensemble
119.	Pierre	Ramet	24/01/1891	10/10/1942	Stockholm	H	Ensemble
120.	Pierre	Ramet	24/01/1891	10/10/1942	Stockholm	H	Ensemble

Natan Ramet registered in the Jewish Register, the membership list of the AJB and the *Transportliste*

1 Literally: the Association of Jews in Belgium

- *Jewish register of Belgium*. Registration of Jews by the local Belgian authorities.
Inventory managed by Ilse Marquenie. Index with 40,069 names, 63,122 digital images.
© Jewish Museum of Belgium (Brussels). Digitalization and processing by the JMDR.
- The members' registration of the society of Jews in Belgium. Inventory managed by Ilse Marquenie. Index with 31,316 names, 11,966 images.
© Study centre War and Society (Brussels). Digitalization and processing by the JMDR.
- The *Filing cards Drancy* created by the Office for War Victims about Jews living in Belgium but interned and/or deported via France.
Inventory managed by Ward Adriaens. Index with 9,423 names, 29,937 digital images.
© Office for War Victims (Brussels). Digitalization and processing by the JMDR.
- The *Transportlisten Mecheln-Auschwitz* from the camp administration in the *SS-Sammellager Mecheln*.
Inventory managed by Ward Adriaens. Index with 26,316 names from the original lists and those improved by the Office for War Victims, 2,624 digital images.
© Office for War Victims (Brussels). Digitalization and processing by the JMDR.
- *Jewish register of Antwerp*. Registration of Jews by the local authorities in the Antwerp agglomeration.
Inventory by Ilse Marquenie. Index with 10,005 names, 20,010 digital images.
© Central Management of Jewish Benevolence Antwerp. Digitalization and processing by the JMDR.
- The *Relics*, collection of 3,089 envelopes containing personal documents of Jewish detainees in the *Sammellager Mecheln*, as confiscated by the SS administration.
Inventory by Ilse Marquenie and Laurence Schram. Index with 4,441 names, 26,400 digital images.
© Office for War Victims (Brussels). Digitalization and processing by the JMDR.

For now, the archives *Sipo-SD Filing cards Mecheln-Auschwitz* and *Sipo-SD Filing cards of non-deported Jews*, as established by the *Sicherheitspolizei-Sicherheitsdienst*, are missing from this list of key archives. These archives are currently being inventoried and digitalized by the Office for War Victims.

When designing and improving these vast databases we must emphasize the tenacious work of our assistant-archivist Ilse Marquenie, which made subsequent applications possible, among others the current publication.

The inventories of these archives provide us with the databases allowing us to identify the victims. The use of databases also enables numerous applications to refine and adjust manual counts of earlier investigators.

The digital storage of those key sources and the information centralization allowed for an efficient search centre to be established at the heart of the documentation centre. This search centre is available for scientific research and surviving relatives. In 2008 alone archivist Laurence Schram and assistant-archivist Ilse Marquenie answered written applications of more than 1,000 surviving relatives and scientific institutions. Currently, work is under way, with limited means, to set up a portal site to provide scientific institutions with access to the digital information.

• THE FILES OF THE OFFICE FOR IMMIGRATION AFFAIRS AND THE PROJECT *GIVE THEM A FACE*

Armed with the databases of persons registered as Jews or gypsies during WWII, we were able to tap into an invaluable source: the personal files kept by the Belgian Aliens Police. After all, the Belgian Ministry of Internal Affairs, Office for Immigration Affairs, had carefully kept more than 2,700,000 files established to keep track of migration into and out of Belgium between 1831 and 1945. In addition to unique socio-economic information, most of the individual files also contain the officially required portraits of migrants.

Thanks to the scientific work of several historians, in the first place our scientific advisor, Dr. Maxime Steinberg, we know that over 90% of persons registered as Jew during the occupation did not possess the Belgian nationality. The working theory was therefore that

the vast archives of the Office for Immigration Affairs would also contain the files of most Jewish migrants. They are the migrants who were still on Belgian territory in 1940 and who ended up as Jews in the various German, Belgian and/or Jewish registrations.

The ambition to unlock thousands of files of the Aliens Police remains, however, a gargantuan task, which cannot be carried out by the JMDR alone. Therefore the director launched the project *Give them a face* in 2005.

An official application to obtain the necessary permissions to explore the archive treasure in the basements of the Ministry of Internal Affairs was drafted. Member of Parliament Claude Marinower argued the case before the Minister of Internal Affairs of the time, Patrick Dewael. After consulting with Freddy Roosemont, the Director-General of the Office for Immigration Affairs, the Minister subsequently granted access to the individual files for the JMDR. Moreover, the Director-General allowed us to use an office inside his department. The humane involvement of the staff at the Office for Immigration Affairs, especially the archive's manager Louis-Philippe Arnhem, must be emphasized.

With the ministerial permission obtained, we succeeded in convincing structural sponsors to link their name to the project (see below). Their sponsoring enabled us to hire a project leader, Patricia Ramet, and a technical officer, Eric Hautermann, who soon after confirmed our working theory. Up to now, September 2008, they were able to trace over 21,000 individual files of deportees by comparing the JMDR databases to the indexes of the Aliens Police stored on microfilm in a more or less alphabetical order. Hence, the files of the Aliens Police are the most valuable source of our collection of portraits.

The project *Give them a face* did indeed make a priority out of digitalizing the portraits. At the start of September we had stored over 21,000 images: 18,522 of deportees from Malines and more than 3,000 of the 5,000 or so deportees with an address in Belgium but deported on transports leaving from the assembly camp of Drancy, from the camps of Compiègne, Pithiviers, Beaune La Rolande and Angers between 8 June 1942 and 17 August 1944.

• THE PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE IN BELGIUM

During the summer of 2008 the Office for Immigration Affairs transferred ownership of the individual files of the Aliens Police established prior to 1945 to the Public Record Office in Belgium. The Public Record Office (PRO) is the only institution in the country that is capable of professionally storing such a large archive. An agreement was reached with the archivist, Dr. Karel Velle, to continue the project *Give them a face* and to expand it from the portraits to the files themselves. A modest estimate calculates that the 21,000 identified files represent about 2,5 million documents. Since September 2008 the files are being digitalized at Malines. We hope to conclude this operation by 2013 and to provide scientific researchers in official scientific institutions and surviving relatives with a digital copy of the files of deported Jews and Gypsies through a portal site.

Through the nature of the transfer the Public Record Office owns all the rights for the files of the Aliens Police, including the portraits. Due to a special agreement reached with the PRO permission was obtained for the one-time publication of these portraits. The portraits as well as the digital copies of the files themselves will soon be available for perusal in the reading room of the Public Records Office and in selected scientific institutions abroad.

With the permission of the Public Records Office, the four-part publication *Mecheln-Auschwitz 1942-1944* aims to unlock this impressive collection of portraits to the public.

• THE FOUR PARTS OF MECHELN-AUSCHWITZ. 1942-1944

1 | The destruction of the Jews and gypsies from Belgium

By Maxime Steinberg and Laurence Schram

Naturally, archives serve historical research. Without historiography, without context the most interesting documents remain but *collector items* for enthusiasts or *curiosa* for insiders. For a historical summary of the deportation of Jews and Gypsies accompanying the portrait albums, the JMDR once more called upon the expertise of the proven duo Dr. Maxime Steinberg and MA Laurence Schram, both linked to the scientific staff of the JMDR.

Professor Steinberg is linked to the *Institut d'Etudes du Judaïsme*² of the *Université Libre de Bruxelles*³. When he was approached as a scientific advisor to the newly founded JMDR in 1994, he had been walking the lonely road of the then barren field of Holocaust history in Belgium since the seventies. His pioneering work was the foundation for the scientific research at hand. He deserves, without a doubt, the title of *nestor* of historiography in this field. His *opus magnum* is the pioneering series *L'étoile et le fusil*⁴.

Ever since she graduated, MA Laurence Schram has been working on research on the survivors of the deportations from Malines. She manages the internal collections and the search centre of the JMDR. Along the way she expanded her activities to the actual research which resulted in noted articles and publications. Her doctorate on the history, the organisation and the fate of the deportees from the Dossin Barracks is eagerly anticipated.

Together, they designed the scenario for the permanent exhibition of the JMDR in the Dossin Barracks, which opened in 1996. In 2005 they repeated this feat by writing the strategy for the remarkable permanent Belgian exhibition in Block XX in Auschwitz, with the appreciated help of assistant-archivist Ilse Marquenie. Manager Ward Adriaens coordinated both projects. At this moment that same team is contributing to a scenario for the renewed Holocaust museum *Dossin Barracks* in Malines.

Maxime Steinberg and Laurence Schram signed on for the first part of *Mecheln-Auschwitz*. Their contribution is primarily intended to be a summary of the current historiography on the subject. They outline the historical context of the murderous events in and around the Dossin Barracks, which they rightfully called 'the waiting room for death'. This part is completed with an overview of the various transports.

Their contribution became more than a summary. The fortunate cooperation of the experienced and tested researcher and the indefatigable researcher, who managed to involve computer sciences in her research, enabled a global approach of the history of the deportation, the deportation and destruction of the Jews and Gypsies of Belgium and the north of France. The digitally unlocked

information of the JMDR documentation centre resulted in many new insights in various fields which received the attention they deserved in this historical summary. The merit of that summary is that it focuses on the fate of individuals, of both those who accept the measures taken against them, hoping for the better, and those who refuse to be subjected and thereby disrupt and ultimately thwart the plans of the occupier.

2 | Faces of the deportation Malines-Auschwitz. Transports 1-13

3 | Faces of the deportation Malines-Auschwitz. Transports 14-26

*By Patricia Ramet, Eric Hautermann and Ilse Marquenie,
Including short biographies selected and realized by
Maxime Steinberg and Laurence Schram*

Both parts unlock, transport by transport, 18,522 portraits of identified deportees from the *SS-Sammellager Mecheln*. The portraits have been sorted by transport and transport number, as they were preserved in the original *Transportlisten* and the database *Dossin Barracks Deportees* (see below).

Most portraits were found in the files of the Aliens Police, through the project *Give them a face*. But permission to publish a number of portraits from, their collection was also granted by the Office for War Victims, *Mémorial de la Shoah/Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine*⁵ (Paris) and Yad Vashem (Jerusalem) and of course the JMDR itself.

As said before, identification of the files of deportees by Patricia Ramet was only possible thanks to the preceding process of inventorying the archive sources. Tracking down the portraits, a historical source which had never before been tapped into, turned out to be quite useful and productive when rectifying a number of rushed identifications in the past.

In spite of its impressive appearance, the collection of portraits has its limitations. Not all deportees were given a face. 6,737 portraits are still missing, or almost one out of four. Especially contemporary children's portraits are relatively underrepresented, even though they were an important target in the genocide. Administrations and registrations only sporadically contain their portraits, forcing

² Institute for the Studies of Judaism

³ Free University of Brussels (French spoken)

⁴ The star and the gun

⁵ Holocaust Memorial/Jewish Contemporary Documentation Centre

us to rely almost exclusively on private archives for this group. Most children's portraits are in fact portraits of people who were deported at a later age. Of course, all portraits are but snapshots in time of a human life.

Every transport is preceded by a number of illustrated personal or family cases, selected by the JMDR staff. They are but examples of the biographical probes which became possible for almost all deportees thanks to the digitally centralized archive sources and which can be requested by surviving relatives or researchers through the JMDR search centre.

With the publication of the series *Mecheln-Auschwitz* we hope to spark a dynamics which will further expand our collection, which was closed in September 2008, especially by contributions of surviving relatives who would kindly provide their pictures for digitalization. For this reason we are planning the publication of an appendix in 2012, at the opening of the new museum, containing all portraits reaching us after September 2008.

The publication of the appendix to *Mecheln-Auschwitz* further aims at unlocking the available portraits of deportees from the smaller special transports from Malines to Buchenwald and Ravensbück (132 deportees), Bergen-Belsen (14) and Vittel (72). The story of these transports will be written down as well.

After consulting with the *Mémorial de la Shoah/Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine* in Paris and the Public Records Office in Belgium we plan to publish all 3,600 portraits of Jews domiciled in Belgium but deported from Drancy by 2010.

• DIDACTICAL APPLICATIONS

The collection of portraits has already yielded several didactical applications. In the field of memorial education the collection certainly has a promising future ahead of itself.

All portraits are already accessible through a touch screen at the museum in the former Dossin Barracks in Malines and in the Belgian museum in Auschwitz. The *Mémorial de la Shoah/CDJC* in Paris now disposes of 3,100 portraits of about 5,034 Jews domiciled in Belgium who were deported through France.



Transport XX installation

In addition the JMDR realized the impressive installation titled *Transport XX*. *Transport XX* is the only transport of Jews in Europe which was attacked to rescue deportees. Of the 1,631 deportees in the twentieth transport we now have 1,250 portraits. These portraits allowed us to reconstruct the transport. Using 21 canvases of three by five, the installation is 120 meters long. The installation has already enjoyed widespread public interest in Malines, Antwerp, Cologne and Eupen. The installation comes with a book describing the history of this unique transport, written by Dr. Maxime Steinberg and MA Laurence Schram.

4 | The alphabetical list of names of the deportees *Mecheln-Auschwitz*

By Laurence Schram

The carbon copies of the original *Transportlisten Mecheln-Auschwitz* (excluding Transport 4) typed by young Jewish steno typists in the *Sammellager Mecheln* reveal to us the names of the deportees. They were entered in their order of arrival at the camp. The list mentions the transport number, the number in the transport, name, first name, date and place of birth, nationality and occupation. After the liberation, annotations remarks and corrections were made first by clerks of the *Aide aux Israélites Victimes de la Guerre* (AIVG – a private institution with its roots in the resistance organisation *Jewish Defence Committee* of the Independence Front), then by the Ministry of Reconstruction and Repatriation and finally by the Office for War Victims (OWV) on the carbon copies themselves. These carbon copies are now being kept at the Office for War Victims.

They have been inventoried, digitalized and wrapped acid-free by the JMDR.

The spelling of names and places, as they were taken down in the circumstances of the camp in those days and not always based on identity papers, often presents the researcher with difficulties. Thrice before an alphabetical list has been presented to the public.

In July 1954 the Office for War Victims published a first three-part stencilled alphabetical list, based on the *Transportlisten*, as well as on information from the *Sipo-SD* filing cards and the individual files established by AIVG, the Ministry for Reconstruction and the OVV itself: *Alphabetical list of persons arrested by the occupying forces as Israelite or Gypsy and deported with the convoys from the assembly camp of Malines between 4 August 1942 and 31 July 1944*.

In 1971 that same office prints an improved and completed version in 6 parts. Both publications provide the name, first name, date and place of birth, the name of the married women, transport and deportation number, date of deportation and, if known, the registration number in Auschwitz. An additional field provides information on repatriation, escape, identity etc.

In 1982 Serge Klarsfeld and Maxime Steinberg published the *Memorial of the deportation of the Jews in Belgium*, a simplified version of the previous, without date of departure or registration number, but with a short description of the context of the transports and a statistical summary of the number of deportees, men, women and children, escapees and survivors. This statistical summary, at the time realized without the help of modern computer technology, was the start of the scientific research on the deportation. The work remains until today the main access for research into the fate of individual deportees.

In 1999 the JMDR in turn completed its inventorying, digitalization and acid-free conservation of the original archive of the *Transportlisten Mecheln-Auschwitz* managed by Ward Adriaens. Two databases since represent the main access to the original and digital archive. They are the names as they appear originally on the carbon copies and the names as they appear on the same carbon copies corrected manually by clerks of the Office for War Victims in an attempt to identify the deportees.

With this information, Laurence Schram set to work. She combined and collated the data from the inventory of the *Transportlisten Mecheln-Auschwitz*, enriched and cross-referenced with data from various original and digitalized sources, into a single practical database, entitled *Dossin Barracks Deportees*. To achieve this, she consulted over 2,000 personal files and over 17,000 filing cards of the *Sipo-SD* kept at the Office for War Victims. In addition, the perusal of personal files by the National Security/Aliens Police, kept by the Public Records Office, yielded valuable additional information, specifically concerning escapes and repatriation. Thus, the assembled individual and biographical information enabled a more accurate interpretation of the deportation, explaining the differences with previously published counts and statistics.

The field for places of birth requires a warning. The toponyms have been spelled as they appear in the *Transportlisten*, often with several spelling variations, caused by changes in borders and regimes, by errors during registration or erroneous transcription by the JMDR itself. The places of birth of the deportees nonetheless lead us to countless residences of Jews throughout Europe, to the *Jiddischland*. They are an important indication of the migration to the west. Hardly any research has been done in this field, waiting for the hand of a historian-geographer. Until this research has been completed, the *Dossin Barracks Deportees* uses the original spelling as found in the *Transportlisten*.

• EXPANSION AND WIDENING THE CONTENT

In September 2008, in addition to the JMDR a new institute was founded: the non-profit organization *Dossin Barracks*. Memorial, Museum and Documentation centre on the Holocaust and Human Rights. The management of *Dossin Barracks* is composed of representatives for the JMDR, completed with representatives for the Flemish government, the city of Malines and the province Antwerp as well as academics from Belgian universities. Undoubtedly, this managerial and academic expansion provides the new museum and its documentation centre with a larger social basis.

The Flemish government has also included an impressive construction programme in the expansion of the current museum and documentation centre. By 2012 a completely renewed Holocaust museum, *Dossin Barracks*, equipped with all the museum basics

and pedagogic areas, will be operational. The expansion allows for a renewed and permanent historical display on the events that took place in the *Dossin Barracks* themselves, the preceding events, how and when the destruction of Jews and Gypsies took place, focusing on the role of Germans, Belgians, Jews and Gypsies in the complex history of the anti-Semitic and racist persecutions in Belgium and the north of France.

The expanded museum will also broaden its content. In addition to the permanent exhibition, space is available for a dynamic policy of temporary exhibitions and manifestations on human rights, offering the story of the judeocide to the public in a larger context. Temporary exhibitions, manifestations, seminars, lectures, publications, ... will underline the connections between historical and current events and expose any mechanisms still at work today.

The expanded museum with a broader content is called vzw⁶ **Dossin Barracks. Memorial, Museum and Documentation centre on the Holocaust and Human Rights.**

⁶ Non-profit organization



The new building project © AWG Architecten – bOb Van Reeth

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Mecheln – Auschwitz:
The Destruction of the Jews
and Gypsies from Belgium
1942–1944

*Maxime Steinberg and
Laurence Schram*

1 The Kazern Dossin in Mechelen: the Beginning



The Kazern Dossin shortly after opening in 1942. During the initial 'call-up' period there were not many children in the Kazern Dossin.

From 1942 until 1944 the *Kazern Dossin* served as an assembly camp for the Jews of Belgium prior to their journey from Mechelen to Auschwitz. This genocidal deportation effected almost half of the country's Jewish population. 43% of Jews in Belgium – we shall avoid shortening this to Belgian Jews which, in fact, is not appropriate – passed through the Général Dossin de Saint-Georges Barracks in Mechelen. These demilitarised barracks, belonging to the Belgian army, served as the *Samellager Mecheln*, an assembly camp.

The *Kazern Dossin* was ideally placed for its function as a *Sammellager*: on a spur line adjacent to the national railway network situated exactly between Brussels and Antwerp where 90% of the Jews were domiciled. The *Kazern Dossin* was opened on 27 July 1942 solely to collect and deport Jews to Auschwitz under the terms of the *Endlösung*. Similar camps in Drancy, France and Westerbork in The Netherlands also functioned as detention centres.



The railway line at Birkenau. View of the inside of the camp taken shortly after liberation.

The 1.200 km journey, to Auschwitz in southern Poland, usually took between 2 and 3 days. On average two thirds of the prisoners were put to death immediately upon arrival. *SS-Sammellager Mecheln* was in fact the antechamber of death. The vast majority of the killings were done by a gas based on potassium cyanide and marketed under the name of *Zyklon B*.

In its function as an antechamber of the Judeocide, *SS-Sammellager Mecheln* did not serve as a dispatch centre for the network of concentration camps or other camps in the German Reich, nor as a hub for deportation. Its sole purpose was to take the country's Jews to Auschwitz-Birkenau.

For this purpose, the location of the *Sammellager* in Mechelen was ideal. The line between Brussels and Antwerp, which allowed the Jews to be brought to the *Kazern Dossin*, included a junction in Mechelen via Muizen station, leading to Louvain, where the railway line crossed the Brussels-Cologne line to Germany. Auschwitz, known as Oswiecim in Polish, was 1,200 kilometres to the east, in Upper Silesia, in the western part of Poland incorporated into national-socialist Germany, Germany's Third Reich.

Between 4 August 1942 and 31 July 1944, 28 train Transports transported 25,259 deportees from Mechelen to Auschwitz. Transport Z, which was attached to Transport 23 (15 January 1944), included 351 Gypsies, 335 of whom were to die in captivity in Birkenau. Called Auschwitz II for a while at the end of 1943, this annex to the Auschwitz camp included a camp for Gypsy families among its internment camps. Although, compared with the Jews, these other deportees from Mechelen were not exterminated upon arrival, 335 deportees from the Z Transport died during their

captivity in Auschwitz or in other camps. At the end of the war, only 16 Gypsies were still alive.

At the time, the deportation of the Jews was a source of *misunderstandings* between the German authorities. It was wrongfully confused with the transfer of detainees to a concentration camp. At the end of October 1942, the Police group drew *attention to [...the] distinction between deportation to the East and the transfer of detainees to a concentration camp in the Reich*. Later, we shall see why the highest official German authority made this distinction and we shall endeavour to see exactly what this meant when the Jewish Transports arrived at Auschwitz-Birkenau. The concrete data available to the historian reveals the actual extent of this genocidal deportation and its true meaning. First of all, we shall examine the key players' plan of action, beginning with the Germans, since this issue of misunderstandings regarding *the deportation to the East* of the Jews assembled at the *Kazern Dossin* in Mechelen falls under German control.

2 Jewish Prisoners in Fort Breendonk: 1940-1942

The misunderstandings related to the procedure of taking the imprisoned Jews to the assembly camp in Mechelen. The German sections of the prisons were under military command and therefore ultimately under the military authority of the occupying forces. The issue also concerned the Jewish prisoners at Fort Breendonk, though in a less formal manner. To be specific, it was a question of a detention camp belonging to the *Sicherheitspolizei und Sicherheitsdienst*, i.e. the security police and the security service. (We shall henceforth use the German acronym *Sipo-SD* to designate this authority and we shall not simplify it, given the decisive role of the *SD* in the deportation of the Jews in 1942).

In the summer of 1940 the Military Commander for Belgium and the North of France, General Alexander von Falkenhausen and his Head of Military Administration, Eggert Reeder placed Fort Breendonk under the control of the *Sipo-SD*, which, until the opening of the *Kazern Dossin*, served as a camp for Jews, as well as various other categories of prisoners. On 20 September 1940 the *Sipo-SD* therefore had a *reception camp* in Breendonk – according to the jargon of Nazi bureaucracy – for *Jews and dangerous prisoners*.

Until the opening of the *Kazern Dossin*, Fort Breendonk served as a Jewish camp. In 1941, half of the 400 prisoners were Jews. Conditions in Fort Breendonk were appalling. During the period 1940 - 1944 98 prisoners died as a result of maltreatment by the



1. Eggert Reeder, honorary SS Brigadeführer, was the Militärverwaltungschef, the Head of the Military Administration.

2. Freiherr Alexander von Falkenhausen was the Militärbefehlshaber, the Military Commander, Governor of Belgium and the North of France.

SS of which 58 were Jews. This does not include the 240 other prisoners (communists, terrorists, members of the resistance etc.) who were officially executed in the camp. 11 of those who were put to death were Jews i.e. 5%. At this time Jews only constituted 0.7% of the country's population. This indicates the prevalence of anti-Semitism in the overall policy of the occupying powers.

In less than one year the *Sipo-SD* internment camp of Fort Breendonk acquired a sinister reputation becoming known as 'The Hell of Breendonk'. An inspection of the camp by Eggert Reeder in September 1941 found that the uncontrolled regime of repression and murder in the camp was definitely not enhancing the reputation of the Army. The policy of repression, including racial repression, continued to bear the sinister mark left by Fort Breendonk. The *Lagerleiter*, SS Major Philipp Schmitt may well have been dismissed in the end, but only eighteen months following the inspection and only for embezzlement and other corrupt practices he committed for his own benefit at the *Kazern Dossin*. It was under his direct command.

On 15 July 1942 Eggert Reeder's second in command, General Harry von Craushaar instructed the commander of Fort Breendonk to take the necessary steps to establish a *Sammellager* in Mechelen. SS Major Schmitt, the Commander of Fort Breendonk, was also to be responsible for the day to day running of the *Kazern Dossin*. This facilitated the administrative processes between the two camps. However Schmitt waited for the deportation of Jews to become well established before sending 189 of the 253 Jews which he held in Fort Breendonk to the *Kazern Dossin*.



Fort Breendonk, 13 June 1940. Jewish prisoners at work.

In any case the Jewish prisoners were, to all intents and purposes, under the control of the military authorities. Administrative and legal questions, were, however, raised when Jews were sent to the *Sipo* and *SD* for deportation out of the country where the authority of the Military Commander was paramount. In practice, as in the case of Fort Breendonk everything ran smoothly. From 22 July 1942 the Military Administration's Police group which controlled the police forces in the country and authorised any arrests that had been made invited the relevant services and authorities to *inspect the prisons [...]with a view to ascertaining who the Jewish prisoners were and who would fall under these rules.* However the Police group insisted on maintaining their prerogative that *before releasing prisoners for further investigation they should be questioned. Jews who were destined for relinquishment were immediately sent to the camp intended as a collecting point for candidates for forced labour in the Third Reich i.e. the Kazern Dossin, Mechelen.* Once this had been organised and put into practice the system ran like clockwork. On 25 July 1942 the prison of Saint-Gillis informed SS *Obersturmführer* Kurt Asche, at *Sipo-SD*, Brussels that they had 10 Jews among their inmates. Too busy at the time in setting up the first Transports for Auschwitz, Asche only replied on 1 August that Gerhard Frank would come to collect them. On 3 August they were destined to be included on Transport 2 as numbers 494 to 497 and 500 to 505.

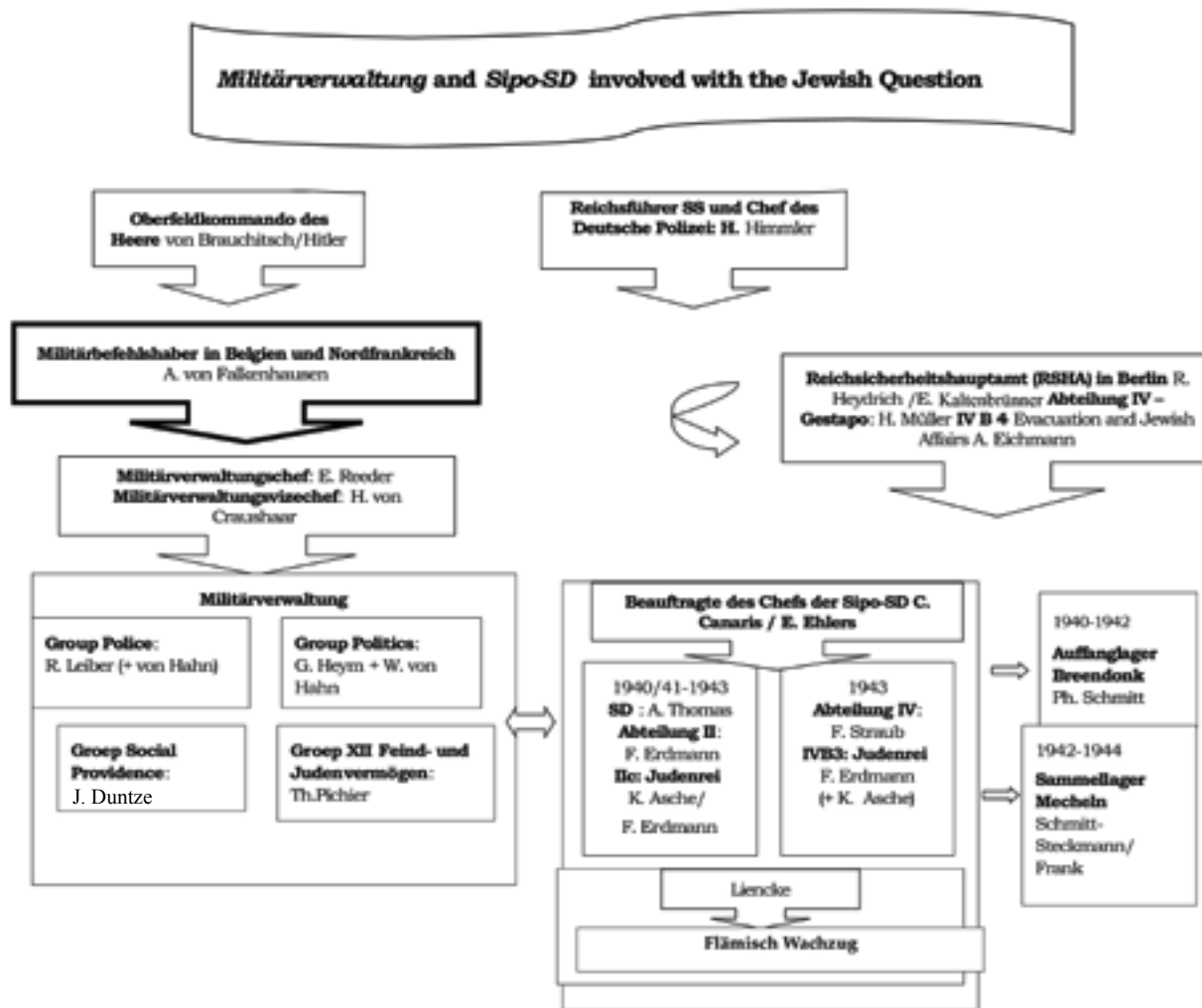
3 The *Sipo-SD*, their Commanders and Jewish Affairs

It was exceptionally beneficial that SS *Sturmscharführer* Gerhard Johannes Frank was, prior to his appointment in the *Kazern Dossin*, a professional policeman, a *Kriminalsekretär*. It was due to his professional background that he was chosen to replace SS Major Schmitt, on 9 March 1943, as commander of the *Kazern Dossin* even though he failed to be promoted to the ranks of officer.

Kurt Asche was in charge from November 1940 and was promoted to SS Leutnant in April 1941. He was not a professional policeman. He was, from the beginning, *Judenreferent*, responsible for Jewish Affairs. He was a political militant, even an *Alter Kämpfer* and since 1931, prior to the seizure of power by the Nazis, a member of the *Sturmabteilung*. He joined the SS and belonged to the *SD* before it merged with the security police in 1939. He continued to maintain allegiance to this organization during his term of duty in Belgium. What was commonly known as the 'Jewish Section' was in fact a one man department who had complete authority to act as he thought fit. When he was promoted to lieutenant in April 1941 his superior officers appreciated the fact *that in his work Asche had constantly shown a great deal of zeal and ardour the results of which had been completely satisfactory.* His greatest attribute was the fact that *he had been able to accomplish all of the tasks in his sector, for a long time, without the help of his superiors.*



The former SS Officer for Jewish Affairs, Kurt Asche, during his trial in Kiel in 1980. He was convicted as being an accessory to assassination in the deportation of the Jews of Belgium. He was sentenced to seven years imprisonment.



The Militärverwaltung and the Sipo-SD involved with the Jewish Question.

Responsible for Jewish Affairs since 1936 he occupied the position of II c in the central administration offices, in Brussels. Section II refers to 'ideological adversaries' and the 'c' refers to *Judenrei* in the complete anti-Semitic meaning of the word. On the other hand, in Berlin, Jewish Affairs and Evacuation were no longer in the hands of the security forces but under the control of the *Gestapo*, or more specifically Section IV of the *RSHA*. *SS-Oberstleutnant* Adolf Eichmann occupied the position IV b4. Strictly speaking he was neither equal nor superior to *SS Leutnant* Kurt Asche in Brussels. The relationship was based on the *Führer's principle*, of delegating the sole powers of authority to the head of the *Sipo-SD* in Belgium, *SS Major* Ernst Ehlers. It was, in fact, under his authority that the vast majority of the deportations

from Mechelen to Auschwitz were carried out. Ehlers was not an autodidact like Asche who worked previously as an assistant in an ironmongers. Ehlers was a lawyer and arrived in Brussels in November 1941. He succeeded Constantin Canaris, also a lawyer, as well as an historian, who, in turn, succeeded him in February 1944, to oversee the final phase of the deportation of Jews from Belgium.

As head of the *Reich's* security agencies operating in Belgium, Ehlers was, undoubtedly the most well informed SS officer as to the true objectives of the Third *Reich's* anti-Jewish policy.

In 1941 he was transferred from Minsk in Belarus, where, as an SS captain he commanded the *Gestapo* of *Einsatzgruppe B*. In the East, when they became operational after the invasion of the

Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, the role of the *Einsatzgruppen* was essentially to murder the local Jewish population. Of course the SS killers did not only shoot Jews but the victims were so numerous that communists, gypsies the mentally sick etc. only feature as a minor statistic and a reminder that other groups of 'undesirables' were also liquidated. The death squads were highly mobile moving between towns and villages and shooting all the Jews that they could find. Sometimes just a few, sometimes hundreds, thousands or even more. The dead were left in ravines or pits, which had been dug before the executions took place, outside the settlements. The first general report from *Einsatzgruppe B*, to which Ehlers belonged, dates from 5 November 1941, just after his departure to Brussels. *Einsatzgruppe B* was not the most successful of the *Einsatzgruppen*. Since being deployed in Belarus their tally was only 45,487 Jewish victims. Another of Ehlers' tasks was to collate reports and statistics from the three *Intervention Commandos* of *Einsatzgruppe B*.

In Brussels Ehlers' tasks were different from in Belarus. He now acted as spokesman for the Military Commander and for the head of his administration. It became his responsibility to reconcile the wishes of the Belgian authorities with the occupiers anti-Semitic policies, the execution of which fell to his department dependant on decisions taken in the *Reich*. Ehler was responsible to Reinhard Heydrich, head of the *RHSA* and ultimately to Heinrich Himmler, *Reichführer-SS* and Chief of the German Police. Ernst Ehlers was the official representative of the *RSHA* in Belgium.

Day to day business was dealt with by the head of the SS in the *Sipo-SD*, SS Major Alfred Thomas. The head of Section IV, the equivalent of the *Reich's Gestapo*, an organization to which Eichmann and his team belonged, was SS Major Franz Straub. It was Straub who took over the position of Thomas after the latter died as a result of an air raid on *Gestapo* HQ at 453, ave. Louise, Brussels on 20 January 1943. (This raid was carried out on the personal initiative of Baron Jean de Sélys de Longchamp who had been seconded to the RAF). Deprived of their commander SS Captain Fritz Erdmann, the head of Section II moved to IV B with his staff. In November 1942 Thomas had entrusted Straub with the responsibility of Jewish Affairs. Kurt Asche had gone too far in accepting the resignation of the Chief Rabbi, Saloman Ullmann as President of the 'pure bred Jews'. An association created on the order of the occupying Military Authorities. He had attempted to impose a German Jew as the official representative of the Jews, and this contrary to the wishes of the military authorities who preferred a Jew of Belgian nationality; Marcel Blum president of the Israelite Community.



Marcel Blum. The new president of the AJB.

Due to this mistake Asche was relieved of his post and replaced by Fritz Erdmann. Since Erdmann was a newcomer to this particular work he decided to retain Asche as his second in command as well as the efficient Frank who assisted both of them. Moving to IV, the new *Judenreferent* of the *Sipo-SD* thus became Officer IV B 3 which, however, did not correspond exactly to the position IV B 4 of Eichmann at the *RSHA*. We shall see later how the relationship developed between Eichmann and his counterpart for Jewish Affairs in Brussels.

In 1942, during the period under Thomas, the head of *Abteilung II*, Erdmann, was, to a certain extent, kept in the dark regarding policy decisions. Erdmann had a staff of 11 and was personally responsible for Masonic Affairs and as such was Officer II a. SS Second *Leutnant* Gerhard Seeck, Officer II b was in charge of Political Sects and Churches. The other ideological adversary, communism fell under the authority of Straub's organisation in Section IV A. Without doubt Thomas had agents everywhere. Even in II, only Seeck and Asche were, in May 1942, as members of the *SD*, kept fully abreast of developments. Thomas gathered around himself a group of information gathering agents who effectively formed Section III of the *Sipo-SD* in Belgium.

The *Führer's* principle (that all SS were *Führers* according to their rank in German) did not endow them with ubiquity. From the beginning Asche had his counterpart in each of the three towns in Belgium where Jews were permitted to take up residence. In Antwerp where, prior to the deportations less than 17.000 Jews lived, the local *Judenreferent* was SS *Oberscharführer* Erich Holm, an adjutant. In 1942 when physical force was required in the round-

ups to meet deportation quotas another SS adjutant, Karl Vierk, assisted him. But they were the only Germans who were allocated to the department dealing with Jewish Affairs. In other towns which had between 2,000 and 4,000 Jews (before deportations) the *Judenreferent* was also the only German in the *Judenabteilung*. In Liège and Charleroi, the SS chief adjutants, Wilhelm Stade and Heinrich Knappkotter had to manage with the staff at their disposal; firstly by recruiting ex-Belgian German-speakers from the eastern provinces of Belgium which had been incorporated into the *Reich*, and secondly by utilizing the long standing immigrant as interpreter. In Antwerp and Brussels it was the *Flemish SS* who provided essential support staff to the German *Judenreferenten*.

4 The *Sipo-SD* and their Collaborators during Anti-Jewish Raids and Round-ups

The addition of Flemish auxiliaries led to a strengthening of the *Judenabteilung* in Antwerpen. Half a dozen translators from the *SS Standaard Vlaanderen*, the *Flemish SS*, succeeded one another as interpreters for Erich Holm. In May 1942 the first member of this group, Peter Ganses, even enlisted in the *SS Freiwilligen Standard NordWest* in Hamburg, a group of 'Nordic' volunteers of the *Waffen SS*. He rejoined Holm's staff at the beginning of 1942 and assisted him, during the summer, with the first batch of Jews from Antwerp. On 1 September 1942, Ganses, a chemical engineer and a specialist in criminology, was transferred to Berlin to the criminal technical institute of the *Reich's* CID H.Q. Gustaaf Fortan succeeded Ganses and was assigned to the *Sipo-SD* in Brussels until the end of November and took part in the second phase of Jewish round-ups. Joris Wiethase worked under Holm until the end of 1942 and he was followed by Jan Van Schoor, Joris Crespín, Raymond Plovy and Frans Backx. As interpreters that were appointed as Police Assistants and as such were empowered to make arrests. This was not the case with the other Flemings who worked under Holm, his five right hand men the actions of whom will be brought to the forefront during the closing phase of the *Endlösung* in Antwerp i.e. the search for Jews who had gone into hiding. With these Flemings the SS NCO for Jewish Affairs constituted an operational *Judenabteilung*. Their role was decisive: they organized the manhunt. A score of *Flemish SS* who had volunteered for these anti-Jewish raids formed a roster to carry out these tasks. The relationship was further strengthened due to the fact that one of Holm's interpreters, Luc Remacle, was the

brother of Jos Remacle, adjutant to SS Second *Leutnant* Auguste Schollen the head of the *Stormban Antwerpen* of the *Flemish SS* for Antwerp and the suburbs.

It was within this framework that Holms' henchmen at last constituted an *anti-Jewish police force*, something which the *Volksverwering's* press had been calling for since July 1941. Both as militant and dissident members of this organization, Holms' Flemings belonged to the most radical and anti-Semitic movement in the New Order. They represented the azimuth of racism. Their organization which aimed to cover the whole of Belgium was called 'The Defence of the People, League for the Protection of Race and Country'. According to its basic principles their main objective was to spread the idea of race and to oppose opinions contrary to these ideals. These anti-Jewish activists attacked *the false principle of equality of men* and those who supported this principle were guilty of *decadence within the population*.

As early as 1940 their objective was no less than the *radical extermination of this harmful and decadent concept*. In February 1943 these racist thoughts were summarized in the Hitler syllogism: *The Jews wanted war. They are the cause of our suffering. They will be exterminated*. In the years 1937-1938 the extreme right proclaimed its *Aryan* ambitions. Based in Flanders with minor branches in Brussels and Wallonia the *Volksverwering* didn't have any real base outside Antwerp. However the Flemish agreed in principle with their fellow *Walloon National Socialists*.

During the Nazi occupation they continued to be a minority group. The Anti-Jewish League had a publication with a print-run of 6,000 copies and were supported by barely seven hundred members in the summer of 1941. By the end of the year they had attracted a further three hundred. The Flemish believers came into fraternal contact with their national socialist counterparts in Wallonia. Walloons and Flemings were united in brotherhood. "*We fight shoulder to shoulder*", declared the League's leader after the *Sipo-SD* had installed his organization in the capital in 1941.

The charismatic leader, the Antwerp lawyer René Lambrichts, was more of a Belgian nationalist. However he retained good relations with the Antwerp lawyer, René Lagrou's *Algemene SS Vlaanderen*, who was a staunch supporter of the *Anschluss* of Flanders into the German Third *Reich*. His ideas were supported by Heinrich Himmler. One of the founders of the *Flemish SS*, Ward Hermans, supported the new beginning of Lambrichts' group in the autumn of 1940.



Beneath an effigy of Hitler, the orator Ward Hermans, the godfather of the Anti-Jewish League and founder of SS Vlaanderen.

Lambrichts' relations with the *Propaganda Abteilung* were equally good. This local propaganda Service from the military ultimately fell under the authority of Joseph Goebbels, in Berlin. Major Gerhardus, the head of the service in Belgium, spoke favourably of the *competent and personal contribution* of Lambrichts in spreading anti-semitism. From October 1940 the Anti-Jewish League had at their disposal the powerful voice of the press, in the newspaper *Volksverwering* which openly praised the *first measures taken against the Jews*, on 28 October, *a day of great joy when the thoughts of all anti-Jews are with the Führer of the Third Reich*. They were *unconditionally on Hitler's side*.

This was the message that the Leader of the League had for the first meeting in the Rubenspaleis on 15 December. *Antwerp is ridding itself of its Jews. All Europe is ridding itself of its Jews. And this is being done thanks to the magnificent leadership of Adolf Hitler. We want to help him put our continent on a new road.*

In 1940 such declarations of faith were part of the spirit of the times. Five days after the publication of the anti-Jewish statutes in the *Verordnungsblatt*, the German official gazette, Staf De Clercq, the leader of the *Vlaams Nationaal Verbond* (VNV), announced that he had become a national socialist. Twenty years previously when he had been appointed to the leadership, he had told his supporters in Brussels that *"Jews could not be compatriots"*. The rejection of citizenship and political equality for Jews is essentially anti-semitic and an intrinsic part of Hitler's national socialism. The VNV's official publication, *Volk en Staat*, was ambiguous in its use of the term anti-semitism. Later on it would wholeheartedly embrace the grossest anti-Jewish clichés, to the extent that it

threatened to alienate its dissatisfied voters. According to *Volk en Staat*, Germany's laws made it *possible to extract the poison from public life. All fair-dealing traders, honest bankers, and upright citizens are overjoyed*.

The Flemish Nationalist paper also revealed its ideological reference points, *"The curtain has fallen. Gentlemen of the Old Testament, you can pack your bags. It is now time for our own people first"*.

This variant of judeophobia has its roots in Christian anti-judaism, and is not an expression of religious feeling among the members of the racist and Aryan Anti-Jewish League, or among the German leadership. As a fanatical enemy of the Jews, the movement headed by Lambrichts was fiercely opposed to *everybody who accepted a supralegal ideology that runs counter to the interests of the people [...] Volksverwering fights against everybody, who uses force in the guise of religion*. It also opposes the [...] influence of *"jewry", freemasonry, clericalism, ultramontanism and jesuitism in public and private life*. In this respect *Volksche Aanval* – the new Dutch language publication launched by Lambrichts at the end of 1941 with the effective support of the *Propaganda Abteilung* – does not hesitate to condemn the *national socialist clericalism of certain parties*. Here he was alluding to those within the VNV who had Catholic sympathies. In January 1942, the *Sipo-SD* noted in its special report on "jewry" that *so far the Flemish Nationalist Party still does not understand the racial and Jewish problem*. This accusation was to weigh heavily in the struggle between the VNV and the Nazi organizations favoured by Himmler's SS: the *Flemish SS* and *DeVlag* (the *Deutsch-Vlämische Arbeitsgemeinschaft*).

However, the antisemitism of the VNV was not a peripheral phenomenon and VNV members took an active part in anti-Jewish actions. In May 1941 the VNV acknowledged that its dogmatic opposition did not sit easily with its sympathizers. *In our propaganda*, wrote *Volksche Aanval*, *we are often asked why we stress the error of political Catholicism when we are above all anti-Jewish*. Even so Lambrichts and his League stuck to their guns. The Belgian sympathizers, Flemings and Walloons, were faithful followers of Hitler and not just ordinary judeophobes. It is not about *anti-semitism à la Saint Ignatius*, but *[about] a complete revolution that will rid us of these parasites*, declares *L'Ami du Peuple* in 1941. *It is a struggle in which either they or we shall be destroyed*. The French-language publication of the Aryan organization, however, is not choosy about which weapons it uses *for a settling of accounts in these times*. When it rejects Saint Ignatius it does so by invoking The Book of Matthew. *For twenty centuries*, the September 1941

issue wrote, *the Jews have been responsible for various destructions and wars. We must use the words that they themselves used when Jesus was crucified, "His blood be on us and our children!" We the Walloon National Socialists, we know that we are implementing this judgement.*

In December 1941 *Volksche Aanval* is even more inspired, when the paper refers not to Christian anti-Judaism but to the words of the *Führer* as an evangelical message, *"These are words of Hitler in September [sic] 1939, 'Should the Jews again succeed in provoking a world war, then this will mean the destruction of the Jewish race in Europe' ". In fact this prediction of the genocide by the Führer dates from January 1939, when he uttered them on the occasion of the 6th anniversary of his ascent to power.*

It was acknowledged, however, that this fanatic and whole hearted support condemned them to remain a small group, *a tiny minority fighting against a formidable coalition.* Less than a year later, in March 1943, one month after the German defeat in Stalingrad, the last edition of *L'Ami du Peuple* (the French weekly publication of the anti-Jewish League), attributed their failure *to the belief in the anti-Semitic struggle stems only from the will of Hitler. The protagonists of the anti-Jewish struggle[...] came up against and continues to come against not only the stubborn resistance of the Jews, aided by Jewish high finance, Jew-lovers and freemasons but also the incredulity, passivity and ignorance of the masses.*

Although their membership was comparatively small the anti-Jewish League were nonetheless thorough when completing the liquidation of the *Jewish Question* in Antwerp, by mobilising volunteers from *SS Vlaanderen*. In Brussels too the *Stormban Brabant* supplied additional personnel in the quest to hunt down Jews. The *Rexists* were only accepted in the *SS* at a somewhat later date and they formed a small Jewish section at the end of 1943 within the Z Brigade that originated from *Rexist* fighting groups. However in Brussels, where the *Judenabteilung* had far more influence than in Antwerp, the Flemish auxiliaries remained independent from the police.

Erdmann clarified this at the beginning of 1944. *For the external service i.e. the arresting of Jews and the confiscation of their homes, [he] had always only one auxiliary member of staff.* Indeed, he complained about the obvious lack of staff in his department. *On various occasions he drew the attention of Thomas as well as that of the Head of the 'Dienststelle', Ehlers, to this problem, without ever receiving one iota of support to make up the shortfall in manpower.*

During his trial Erdmann emphasised this point in order to strengthen his defence case. In Court XXII the *SS* and the police accused him of serious negligence in the service and specifically with the embezzlement of Jewish property for his own personal benefit. He was found guilty and sentenced to four years gaol. Asche was similarly accused and was sentenced to 16 months imprisonment in the disciplinary camp of Dantzig-Matzkan.

In Brussels, Antwerp and Mechelen the majority of *SS* staff involved in Jewish affairs constituted a veritable underworld of the *Endlösung*, sometimes working for their own account and sometimes with a select circle of colleagues. With arbitrary powers over their victims numerous *SS* were corrupt. They appropriated with impunity, or so they believed, Jewish possessions, which was destined for the *Reich*. Only a few *SS* police remained incorruptible, most were tempted to steal for themselves from the Jews, and this state of affairs continued even after these responsibilities had been taken over by the professionals from the *Kripo*.

5 The German and Flemish SS in the Kazern Dossin

Contrary to the self centered statement of his former superior, Erdmann, staff numbers at the *Judenabteilung* remained more or less constant comprising on average about 10 men, and this regardless of transfers or even arrests from its ranks. Section V of the *Sipo-SD (Kripo)* had to intervene after a raid on Jews who held the Belgian nationality and belonged to the upper echelons of society. Even the transfer of personnel which occurred when the *SS Sammellager Mecheln* was fully operational was eventually compensated for by the arrival of replacements. Brussels' Section II provided most of the German staff at the *Kazern Dossin*.

Five of its agents, all members of the *Kripo* were seconded there. Only one was an officer: *SS* Second *Leutnant* Karl Mainzhausen. The other four were NCO's namely; Hans Rodenbusch, Hermann Reimann, Walter Kaiser and Max Boden. With *SS* Major Schmitt and his second in command, *SS* Capt. Rudolf Steckmann, they constituted the German presence in the *Kazern Dossin* when the camp was first opened. Three or four, including *SS* Staff Sergeant Czunczeleit, who came from other sections, completed or replaced certain members of staff who returned to their previously held posts in Brussels. They were later joined by three or four German *SS*; *SS* Chief Adjutant Noppeney (from March 1943) as well as *SS* Sergeant Stark and *SS* Corporal Probst.



SS Philipp Schmitt, Commander of Fort Breendonk and the Kazern Dossin. Head of Jewish repression in occupied Belgium.
Herman-Israël Hirsch, 19 years old. An amputee after being bitten by Schmitt's dog. Deported on Transport 21.

Although Schmitt was officially the commander of the *Kazern Dossin* he tended to give preference to his position as commander of Fort Breendonk. However his visits to Mechelen were accompanied by periods of terror for the inmates. He unleashed his ferocious dog on the prisoners, which once resulted in Herman-Israël Hirsch having a limb amputated after an horrific scene on New Year's Day 1943. *A day of anguish, great misery and terror, a day we shall never forget.* So wrote Joseph Hakker, who was later to escape from Transport 18, which left on 15 January 1943. He later published his account of events on the *secrets of the Kazern Dossin* in the clandestine newspaper *Le Coq Victorieux*, before the end of the year. On this particular day both Schmitt and his SS henchmen really lashed into the prisoners. On 11 January he transferred 37 of them to Fort Breendonk. Philippe Lam, aged 42, and Nusem Zybenberg, aged 43, died on 23 January and according to the official death certificates the cause of death was *depression* and *weak circulation*, respectively. Two others died on 4 February; Leibusch Lubka, aged 41 and Albert Deleeuw, aged 47. On 11 February 1943 the 29 year old Wolf Flichtenreich died. Wolf Hartlooper, aged 50 and Albert Speiro, aged 31 both died on 4 March to be followed next day by the 32 year old Isaac Altbaum. They drowned in the moat of Fort Breendonk and from suffocation in the mud. They were left on the side to die. Fort Breendonk is considered to be the place in Belgium where Jews were subjected to the most suffering. In the *Kazern Dossin* deportees only stayed, in general, for a short time. Some 50 Jews died in Mechelen over a period of two years, primarily very young children and the elderly.



Max Boden brought before the Belgian courts: this German SS ensured the continuity of command in the Kazern Dossin.

During the Schmitt era it was Rudolf Steckmann assisted by Max Boden who were responsible for the day to day business and running of *SS Sammellager Mecheln*. Boden played a fundamental role during the entire period that the camp existed. He was responsible for the *Aufnahme* of the newly arrived prisoners. Prisoner details were noted upon arrival and later correlated with information applied to the lists of detainees sent on the Transports to Auschwitz. This administrative work was done by young Jewish women with a secretarial background who could speak German. They were arrested on 22 July 1942 on a train travelling from Brussels to Antwerp. They were temporarily imprisoned for 5 days in Fort Breendonk before being transferred to the *Kazern Dossin* in time for the opening.

About 15 or so *Flemish SS* were regularly added to the 10 Germans based in Mechelen. Almost 50% of them were guards seconded from Fort Breendonk. They were already well versed in brutality and cruelty. Approximately a further 60 *Flemish SS* in Mechelen were in no way less cruel. They were all members of movements within the New Order (*VNV, Dietsche Militie/Zwarte Brigade, De Vlag, SS Vlaanderen etc.*). They were, in fact, all part of *SS Vlaanderen*, having received their training in Antwerp or with the *Brussels Stormbannen*. Some were appointed guards in the *Kazern Dossin* whilst others were selected as guards for the *Sipo-SD HQ* in Brussels, the *SD-Wachgruppe*, who allocated them to the external surveillance of the *Sammellager*.



The omnipresent Jean Poppe, Flemish SS, serving in the *Kazern Dossin*.
Herman Van Mol, an Antwerp police officer, who enrolled in the Flemish SS and became responsible for the *SD-Wachzug*.

One of the first *Flemish SS* to serve in the *Kazern Dossin* was Jean Poppe, a 35 year old former ship's steward. From August 1942 he worked in the *Aufnahme* and the internal surveillance and security service of the *Kazern Dossin*. Taking advantage of his position he did not hesitate to steal Jewish possessions which had been confiscated in the name of the *Reich*. This led him to being relieved of his function in March 1943.

The successor to Poppe was the equally violent Jean-Baptiste Journée, a former metal worker, who had joined the *Waffen-SS* and was a veteran of the Eastern Front. He left for the front in September 1942 and returned to Belgium in February 1943. At the age of 36 he was integrated into the *SD-Wachgruppe* and began a tour of duty in the *Kazern Dossin* in April 1943. After a year of service in Mechelen during which time he struck the fear of death into the inmates, he was posted to Brussels to guard the HQ of the *Sipo-SD*.

A number of other *Flemish SS* gained their military experience by serving on the Eastern Front.

Among them was Frans Albert Van Hul, who volunteered for the *Vlaamse Legioen*. In August 1941 this 30 year old waiter left for Poland. He was posted to the small 'Jewish' town of Debica where he was confronted with the ghetto life to which the Jews were subjected. He was not perturbed when he was posted back to Belgium and accepted a position at the *Kazern Dossin* at the beginning of February 1943 where he served outside and in the guard house, where he welcomed visitors. In 1944 he joined the team of guards at Fort Breendonk.

The external surveillance of the *Kazern Dossin* was, in the beginning, entrusted to the *Wehrmacht*. Towards the end of 1942, however, these tasks were placed in the hands of a detachment of the *SD-Wachzug* under the command of *SS Leutnant Liencke*.



September 1942 at the training camp of the Flemish SS in Schoten near Antwerp. *SS Leutnant Liencke* (No. 4) and trainees of the *SD-Wachzug*.

Between 24 and 36 *Flemish SS* took up their duties between 08.00 and 20.00 hours.

The *SD-Wachgruppe* was headed by two police officers from Antwerp, Herman Van Mol and Adolf Gabriel De Rijck. Both of these men had previously been members of the *SS Vlaanderen* since 1941 prior to joining *De Vlag* in 1942. They both resigned their positions in the police force to join the *SD-Wachgruppe*. The former did his training in Schoten whilst the latter trained in La Cambre, Brussels. The 34 year old Van Mol was soon appointed head of the guards and he retained this position when he was posted to the *Kazern Dossin* in March 1943. The 29 year old De Rijck joined him one month later. Van Mol was occasionally given guard duty at Fort Breendonk. De Rijck was given the responsibility of escorting Transport 21 through Belgium to the German border.

This arrangement of *Jewish Sections* and *Sammellager*, comprised about 60 men, both German and *Flemish SS*. This organisation proved to be a highly efficient use of human resources. The occupier only needed to employ about 20 Germans at any one time in order to successfully organize the deportations to the East (*Osteinsatz*). The Germans and the *Flemish SS* organized the assembly and departure of 28 Transports taking more than 25,000 prisoners to the East. At first this process ran quite smoothly and this is borne out by the fact that between the departure of the first Transport on 4 August 1942 and the departure of Transport 17 on 31 October 1942, (a period of 88 days) more than 16,000 prisoners had been deported i.e. approx. 2/3 of the total.

Suzanne Kaminski, b. 11 March 1943.
Sipo-SD registration card stamped: Arbeitseinsatz

It was during this comparatively short period that the *Kazern Dossin* really functioned as a *Sammellager* for the *Endlösung*. Prisoners were only housed in Mechelen for a few days e.g. there were the 10 prisoners that Frank brought from the gaol in Saint Gilles to the *Kazern Dossin*. They were registered by the *Aufnahme* on 3 August and sent on Transport 2 on 11 August spending only 8 days in Mechelen. The deportees in Transport 2 stayed in Mechelen for between 4 and 8 days and on Transport 2 for between 4 and 11 days. Deportees in Transport 3 stayed between 1 and 8 days. The deportees in Transport 4 were rounded-up in the night of the 15 and 16 August 1942 during the First Raid of the *Endlösung* – two days later they were on Transport 4. In fact 6 Transports left Mechelen before the end of August, 5 in September and 6 more in October. It was remarkable to note the demographic extent of the enterprise led by the SS of the *SS Sammelager Mecheln* in less than three months 29.6% of the resident Jewish population had been sent to Auschwitz.

In 1942 the Brussels *Sipo-SD* had at their disposal a central register which assisted them in implementing this *evacuation* [which] *concerns all Jews living in Belgium and none [of which] will return to the country*. This allusion was made by the cynical Asche during an interview that he granted to the official Jewish representative on 23 October 1942. Asche obviously had considerable personal pleasure in hinting as to the ultimate objectives of the *Endlösung*. The *Sipo-SD* card index register had the names of 56,187 ‘pure bred Jews’. Nearly half of the cards were stamped for deportation to the East: *Arbeitseinsatz*, with the number of the person in the Transport and their date of departure.

This stamp indicating *forced labour*, left no doubt that the Jews of Belgium were destined for Destruction. This stamp was also applied to the files of 4,083 deportees (16%) under the age of 15 and even to that of Suzanne Kaminski, who was only 39 days old! She was in fact the youngest deportee and her file indicates her as a worker. Together with the Transport lists these files represent, in most cases, the last traces that remain of most of the deported Jews. However the overall statistics of Jewish deportation does not enable us to truly grasp the extent of the catastrophe which took place during these three decisive months of 1942. If we examine the events more closely we can ascertain that 2/3 of the Jews who were deported were sent to Auschwitz.

6 The “Evacuation”: an Aim Shared with the Military Authorities and the SS

In mid-September 1942, when the Transports to the East were running at their most frequent, the Military Authorities published a report on the *evacuation* of the Jews from the country (Belgium). This report covered the summer months of June, July and August and in it Reeder explained that *we have begun [...] with the transportation of the Jews to the East (Abtransport der Juden nach dem Osten)*. *This policy was first and foremost adopted as a means of ensuring a regular supply of forced labour; it was for this reason that it was especially aimed at Jews (and Jewesses) who were suitable for work*. However the commander of the Military Authorities did not fail to emphasize that this whole operation was being carried out *according to the express instructions of SS Reichsführer Himmler*. Furthermore Reeder specified that *according to subsequent instructions from the RSHA [...] this operation should only be viewed as a general evacuation of Jews (Allgemeinen Evakuierung)*.

Reeder authorised the SS to take action against Jews provided that those holding the Belgian nationality were temporarily exempted (6.60% of Jews registered by the *Sipo-SD*) for political reasons. In a report, drawn up by Reeder in April 1941, he suggests that *the evacuation of Jews (Abscheidung der Juden) be organized in a centralized and planned manner*. However, even by the spring of 1941 no such organized plan, or, for that matter, objective had been forthcoming from Berlin. Officially the evacuation problem was up to this time in the hands of the local authorities. Reeder, furthermore, protested *that within the occupied territories different services were being held responsible for removing Jews beyond their borders*.

Whilst awaiting for the authorization to impose a structured evacuation plan, the Military Authorities had to take steps to prepare the Jews for *evacuation*. To this end a series of *Judenverordnungen* were issued. Between 28 October 1940 and 21 September 1942 17 *Judenverordnungen* were issued establishing the legal status of Jews in the community. The Nazi decree did not classify Jews according to their religion, social status etc. but solely on an anti-Semitic and racist basis. It was necessary to examine the religious origins of three grandparents going back three generations in order to ascertain "pure bred Jew" status.

The decree was, from the start, coercive. In case of a breach in the regulations Jews were liable to a prison sentence, that was all the more feared since its duration was not specified, this in turn resulted in the confiscation of property and sometimes the threat of a simple *security measure*, which meant imprisonment in Fort Breendonk. Supported by these sanctions the decree increased the constraints on Jews together with greater discrimination, stigmatism, segregation and finally total exclusion from public life as a whole with the introduction of the yellow star.

The introduction of the obligatory wearing of the yellow star and the restrictions and repression to which Jews were subjected in the occupied territories in the West had far more serious and far reaching consequences in that they were, in fact, *a stage in the solution to the European Jewish Question*, as explained by the SS to those in charge of Jewish Affairs in France and Belgium. SS Capt. Théodor Dannecker and SS Leutnant Kurt Asche, who met in Paris on 14 March 1942 prepared a joint statement regarding orders to wear the yellow star. Dannecker and Asche conferred with each on a regular basis and met each other several times in 1942 in Berlin in the offices of Eichmann in Kurfürstenstrasse 116.



Simon Likvermann, aged 8, imprisoned in the Kazern Dossin on 4 September 1943. Deported on 20 September 1943. Gassed upon arrival in Auschwitz.

However it soon became apparent that the *Massnahmen gegen Juden* would only be really effective if the policies were whole heartedly supported by the *Sipo-SD* and other local occupying authorities. In the case of the yellow star the two military organizations delayed the promulgation of the ruling by more than two months due to worries as to the psychological impact of the decree. Since his transfer, Dannecker, Eichmann's former colleague at Section II-112 (Jewish Affairs in the SS Security Service), enthusiastically accepted the role of mentor in *the great task that is the responsibility of those in charge of Jewish Affairs [...] in the occupied territories of Europe*. In Brussels Asche was his protégé. He also worked in the SD though, in Berlin, the city with the most Jews in the *Reich*. Both of these men, knew, in the spring of 1942, that the *evacuation* now meant a *Final Solution to the Jewish Question with the ultimate objective of annihilating the remainder of the enemy* (Dannecker 13 May 1942).

The military commanders realised that the yellow star not only stemmed from the Nazi's anti-Semitic desire to humiliate the Jews but also that by imposing this decree they had, in fact, crossed a line regarding the fate of the Jews in the occupied territories. Jews had been wearing the yellow star since 9 June 1942 and on 15 June Reeder stated: *we can consider the legislation concerning the Jews in Belgium as complete*. They had been identified, registered, put on file and had *Juif-Jood* stamped in red ink on their ID cards. At night they were confined to one of the four cities which had been assigned to them: Brussels, Antwerp, Liège, and Charleroi. They were thus placed in legal ghettos under the control of the *AJB*, which, on behalf of the *Sipo-SD*, ensured the collection of taxes, and, amongst other things, dealt with the social problems of the most deprived Jewish children who were excluded from "Aryan" schools.

Jews, thus, slowly but surely, became isolated from the rest of the population as their economic and social ties were broken. In two months, from March to May 1942 their businesses were forced to close and they were removed from the Register of Commerce. Stocks of merchandise were liquidated or seized and the proceeds paid into an individual sub-account of the *Brüsseler Treuhandgesellschaft (BTG)*. This organization was constituted under Belgian law to manage Jewish property on behalf of Group XII under the control of Theodor Pichier (*Jewish Property and Enemy Property*). The ultimate objective was to turn confiscated Jewish property into cash.

7 The Army's Share: the Prior Aryanization of the Economy

The *BTG* was established in the *Kazern Dossin* from the beginning. Their first representative was a German chartered accountant, Dr. Erich Crull, a corrupt official who was dismissed in September 1943 for embezzlement. He had a staff of 8 including a German, SS Leutnant Probst (known only under this name), a Flemish employee from the *BTG*, Albert Aelbers, his sister Hubertine and four Jewish prisoners. Aelbers, aged 25 in 1942, was already an activist in the *VNV* prior to the outbreak of war. A pro Nazi, he became responsible for propaganda within the National Socialist Youth Movement in Flanders.

Max Boden also worked for Crull in the *Aufnahme*. During the registration of Jews for the (next) Transports, wallets, handbags, jewellery, currency and other valuables were confiscated. Body searches of men women and children ensured that they kept nothing for themselves. From the currency that they seized the *BTG*



Albert Aelbers (VNV). Responsible for the despoilment of the Deportees' property.

had to pay the *Sipo-SD* the costs for the housing and transport of the deportees which was estimated to be BEF 1,000 per head and which was later raised to BEF 1,500 per head. These payments are reckoned to have reached between BEF 25 and BEF 37 million for the entire duration of the deportations. Furthermore despoilments did not end with the seizures made during the *Aufnahme*. Crull extracted statements from the inmates authorizing the transfer of all real estate, bank accounts and other assets to the Reich. At the end of September 1943 the 23,127 deportees had deposited 17,400 transfer deeds in the *Kazern Dossin*. However it later emerged that most statements were, apart from a few exceptions, useless as the Jews had already been stripped of all their possessions.

This Aryanisation of the economy went hand in hand with the anti-Semitic legislation introduced in the autumn of 1940. Goering, plenipotentiary of the four-year plan to put the economy on a war footing, aimed to seize, both Jewish businesses and the pivotal positions in Belgian businesses held by Jews. In order to proceed with this policy a law defining Jewish businesses was essential prior to transferring the control of Jewish dominated businesses to Aryan control, *preferably German or Flemish*. In this way Goering forced the Military Administration to introduce the *race issue* into the equation and this was something that had tended to be overlooked during the first months of the occupation. Both von Falkenhausen and Reeder were reluctant to introduce *measures against the Jews* taking a more practical and realistic view of the economy.

The Military Administration had understood from the outset that the Jews of Belgium held many of the economically powerful positions in the economy. Members of the Middle Class, Upper Class and even the Aristocracy, a significant number whom were *influential Jews-both on an economic and political level fled to enemy countries*. These people were considered by the Germans as *residential enemies*. Their property was sequestered, not because they were Jewish but because they had taken up residence in a country that was hostile to the *Reich*. However the tracking down of Jewish real estate and businesses proved to be disappointing. From the 7,408 registered businesses only 3% were liable to be Aryanised. The remainder were small family businesses which were quite simply liquidated – another practice of *the Aryanisation of the economy*. On 15 June 1942, the Military Authorities were able to announce that in the previous three months *6,057 businesses* had been liquidated and that *Jews now only have very limited possibilities for existence*. Reeder said this from an economic and social aspect. Excluded from economic life and virtually no resources their *evacuation* had no detrimental effect on the country's economic output (for the benefit of the Reich). Consequently their activity report considered *that the next step to take would be their (Jews) evacuation from Belgium which cannot, however be done directly, but only in accordance with the general programme of the Reich's competent authorities*.

8 The Order for the Deportation of the Jews of the West: 11 June 1942

When they issued their report of 15 June 1942 the commanders of the Military Administration were unaware that four days earlier Eichmann had called together the *Judenferenten* of Brussels, Paris and The Hague for a meeting in Berlin. He told them that *the SS Reichsführer had ordered that large numbers of Jews from [...] the occupied territories in the West were to be sent to the KL Auschwitz to work. The only condition was that the Jews (of both sexes) should be aged between 16 and 40 years. Every batch of deported Jews should preferably include 10% who were unsuitable to work*. This was, however, still not the *evacuation* which the Military Authorities expected to be dealing with, but it was the beginning through *Arbeitseinsatz*.

Himmler's decision was made on the basis of his pragmatism as an economist i.e. the utilization of Jewish slave labour to support the requirements of the war economy. Auschwitz and its subsidiary camps constituted an industrial complex comprising



Himmler, the SS Reichsführer .

some 30 camps and *Kommandos*.

Himmler's edict of 11 June 1942 does however, leave unanswered, questions concerning the ideological aspects of the extermination of the Jews. The standard 10% of people unsuitable for work that Himmler authorised which should accompany Transports from the West meant that they were destined for *Sonderbehandlung* which became, at this time, synonymous with *extermination*, and Eichmann explicitly refers to this concept in a note dated 26 July 1942. However the term *Sonderbehandlung* would shortly be replaced by the term *Endlösung*. The policy which set out to destroy Jews was really inaugurated during the early summer of 1941 with the murder of (mainly) Jewesses and children by the *Einsatzgruppen* in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union. They were later replaced by *SS Sonderkommandos* who were based in the General Government of Poland firstly in *Belzec* (March 1942) followed by *Sobibor* and finally *Treblinka* as well as territories which were incorporated into the Third Reich; Chelmno (1941) and Auschwitz-Birkenau (1942).

In accordance with the terms of the edict of 11 June 1942 the first trains carrying Jews to the East left The Netherlands on 14 July 1942 and France on 19 July 1942. In the summer of 1942 the *evacuation* of Jews from the General Government of Poland also commenced. The *evacuation* of the Warsaw Ghetto began on 22 July 1942 and in less than 2 months 300,000 of the citizens of Warsaw arrived in Treblinka, where, unlike Auschwitz, they were sent upon arrival to the gas chambers. During this crucial year of 1942 the true and sinister meaning of *Sonderbehandlung* for European Jewry was gradually revealed. In April 1943 Himmler was obliged to censor the term in a statistical report, however he appreciated the subtlety of the *camouflage* that had been so successful up to this time. As far as he was concerned *the most important fact was still that Jews were being taken to the East*.

To the East was synonymous with *Sonderbehandlung*. The head of the SS Central Office for Administration and Economy, Oswald Pohl, used the term when referring to Auschwitz during the summer of 1942. Responsible for Himmler's industrial projects, on which the edict of 11 June 1942 was based, Pohl negotiated the utilization of 50,000 deported Jews for forced labour in armaments factories in the sub-camps of Auschwitz. Accommodation was provided in barracks situated in Birkenau. On 15 September 1942, Pohl received the official agreement from the Minister of Armaments, Alfred Speer. The very next day Pohl reported to Himmler : *We shall skim off the necessary labour force on the front line at Auschwitz [...] the Jews suitable for work destined for migration to the East will, therefore, have to break their journey and perform arms work*. The cynical Pohl did not need to say more to Himmler on the fate of the Jews who were unsuitable for work.

Migration to the East stopped at Auschwitz. The SS carried out the selections in an area between *Auschwitz* and *Birkenau*. Those who were not selected to work were taken, in waiting trucks by the *Waffen SS*, a couple of kilometers further to the gas chambers in Birkenau. (The extent of the devastation, by the *SS Sonderkommando*, on the deportees from Belgium will be mentioned later.)

The report of Richard Korherr, Himmler's statistics inspector showed that migration to the East was carried out, upon arrival in Auschwitz, in the form of *Sonderbehandlung*.

Korrher's report is essentially a statistical document on the *Final Solution of the Jewish Question in Europe*. It concluded that up to 31 December 1942 the number of Jews in Europe had been reduced by 2,500,000 (excluding births, deaths and emigrations). Korherr's report included the total number of *evacuations [...] including the Sonderbehandlung*, 1,786,356 Jews. Although he was

aware of Himmler's orders to censor and camouflage his report, in this instance he overlooked to include the aforementioned forbidden phrase. In his accounts he also kept a tally of the *evacuation from the Russian territories* since the beginning of the campaigns in the East. His figure of 630,000 was only an approximate indication based on figures from the *RSHA* which only took account of *part of the Soviet Jews*. The report on *the fight against the groups in the East*, which Hitler demanded to be informed of, revealed that during the period from August to November 1942 no less than 363,211 Jews were executed in the occupied Soviet territories. Details pertaining to Jews from the West included statistics on *evacuations* and *Sonderbehandlung*. As at the end of October, November or December (depending on the country) 38,571 Jews had been deported from The Netherlands, 16,886 from Belgium and 41,911 from France respectively. In the case of Belgium these figures correspond to those registered on the Transports which departed from Mechelen. A copy was intended for Eichmann's office in Berlin, however the figures did not always agree with the number of arrivals in Auschwitz. The difference being due to 251 prisoners who escaped en route to the East. Historians have estimated that 16,625 Jews were taken to Auschwitz during this period.

In Berlin Eichmann had established, since the autumn of 1941, statistics over the distribution of Jews throughout Europe on a national basis. It was on this information that Heydrich based his presentation at the Wannsee Conference on 20 January 1942. His guests included representatives and under secretaries of state from the main government departments, but not the ministers themselves. In this way Heydrich could set his stamp of authority on an audience of inferior rank who were not in a position to criticise his policy. He thus strengthened his nomination, which he reminded them of, *to the post of plenipotentiary for the preparation of the Final Solution of the problem of the Jews of Europe*. Goering gave him the mandate on 31 July 1941.

Heydrich had, however, no intention in sharing his executive power. He immediately set about drawing boundaries and by positioning himself under the wing of Himmler and at the same time creating and maintaining a sphere of confusion as to the respective roles of Himmler and himself. *It is the SS Reichsführer and the head of the German police (Himmler) and the head of the Sipo-SD (Heydrich) who will be responsible for all the measures aimed at solving the Jewish Question regardless of geographical restrictions*.



Reinhard Heydrich: Himmler's deputy charged with the execution of the Endlösung.

Once this had been properly established Heydrich explained the official anti-Jewish policy and the implications that this had already brought about since the Autumn of 1941. His objective was *to clear German living space of Jews within the framework of the law*. Since Himmler had banned *emigration* in October 1941 *another possibility* was to be applied; *the evacuation of Jews to the East, a solution which was adopted with the full agreement of Hitler*. Henceforth illegal methods were to be used and it was in this field that the SS, with their complete loyalty to the *Führer*, excelled. Based on Eichmann's figures Heydrich reckoned that *the Endlösung would effect approximately 11 million people*. Eichmann believed that there were 1,068,000 Jews in the Low Countries and France at the time of the invasion (10 May 1940), however this figure was excessive and in reality the number did not exceed half a million i.e. Belgium 56,000, France 300,000 and The Netherlands 140,000. At the Wannsee Conference the estimate put forward for Belgium (43,000) was revised upwards. This figure did not take account of the entire number of Jews in Belgium. It did not include *"the suspects of May 1940"* (8,000 German Jews who were arrested on the day of the invasion and interned in the South of France). It also did not include 4,500 Jewish refugees who fled and did not return to Belgium. From this total of 12,500 Jews of Belgium who went to France 5,034 were deported via Drancy or Compiègne to Auschwitz or Sobibor.

Thomas and Asche amended the figure of 43,000 in their *special report* of 31 January 1942 entitled *Jewry in Belgium*. SS officers in charge of the *evacuation* counted 50,000 to 60,000 Jews living in Belgium at this time children included.

9 The Belgian Link: from the Jewish Register to the Deportation File

The statistics could not be more precise. On 31 January 1942 the room containing the card index cabinets of the *Sipo-SD* registered only 19,000 Jews. The progress of this work was indispensable when one began with the *evacuations*. However Belgium did not have a centrally organized system of civilian registration and these affairs were dealt with by the local authorities. However there was a central register for foreigners which had been set up in the 1930's and was under the control of the Public Security Service. Only the local assistant police superintendents were empowered to examine the central register of foreigners which covered their area of jurisdiction. Of the 253,000 foreigners registered in October 1939 20% were Jewish and were filed as such by the *Sipo-SD*. Of the 56,186 Jews on file 52,506, i.e. 93% were of foreign nationality or stateless. There were only 3,680 Jews who had the Belgian nationality i.e. 6.60%. The vast majority of Jews living in Belgium were in fact not Belgians, a fact that it is important to remember when the Transports to the East began.

On consulting the archives of the Public Security Service, at the Place Poelaert in Brussels, whose duties, during the war years, were restricted to policing foreign nationals in Belgium, only a few identifiable files were discovered. At the end of 1940 a high ranking military advisor for Jewish Affairs, Johannes Duntze, understood this fundamental difficulty. *This liberal Belgium*, he wrote, *would consider it an inadmissible intrusion in a person's private life to ask them about their religion*. He also emphasised that *no racial problem has been identified*.

The difficult decision faced by the Belgian authorities in striking a balance between accepting and working against the anti-Semitic policies of the occupying forces inevitably resulted in a relaxing of the basic values of Belgian democracy. The general secretaries of the Belgian ministries based themselves on the decree of 11 October 1940 when refusing to issue a special statute for Jews that was both unconstitutional and contrary to the international terms and conditions of war. The evening before Reeder's deputy, von Craushaar, left it up to the general secretaries.

In the absence of the elected government, then in exile in London, these general secretaries and other top civil servants held the political authority in occupied Belgium. Jean Vossen, the general secretary at the Home Office was the chosen representative of the Military Authorities. On behalf of his colleagues he refuted the decree of 11 October 1940. Now that this door had been closed the Military Authorities could, perhaps, even more effectively forego

the need of drawing the Belgian authorities into the New Order. The institution of a French-style revolution that would establish the authority of state backed anti-Semitism would not be forthcoming in Belgium.

The political parties from the extreme right failed to take advantage of the situation and to strengthen their political power base. The French speaking *Rex* party under Léon Degrelle had been in decline since the 1937 elections in Brussels. The party was still composed of Belgian nationalists rather than “Germanic Walloons” and their disastrous performance in the 1939 elections was highlighted when they received only 4.40% of the vote. In the northern part of the country the Flemish *VNV* continued to do well and in the 1939 elections 1 person in 9 voted for them. In 1941 the party changed its name to *Eenheidsbeweging-VNV* and had 50,000 registered members (in 1944 10,000 members). Although it remained a minority party the Military Authorities tended to support Flemish policy principles, however they did not agree with the party’s ambition to establish a “thiotic” state based on the union of The Netherlands and Flanders from the ruins of Belgium.

However the *VNV* could only manage to infiltrate the Belgian political apparatus with support from the New Order which gave them more flexibility and allowed them to play a secondary role in local politics, similar, in fact, to that of the *Rex* party in Wallonia. In Flanders the basis that it established provided it with staff from the New Order enabling them to take over the mayorships from the former “failing” regimes in the boroughs. It soon became apparent that it was essential that the Military Authorities retained as much of the Belgian administrative apparatus and staff as possible, which, Reeder said to the general secretaries on 5 June 1940, *will lighten the sacrifices imposed on the population*. What Reeder did not say, of course, was that because of this strategic choice the occupying forces were lacking sufficient civil servants (and police officers) to administer these tasks, and to enforce the anti-Jewish policy, with only German personnel. Belgian staff, therefore, formed an essential part of the overall administration of Belgium during the war.

The Germans were in no position to manage the Jewish Question without Belgian administrative know-how. However their specialist in this field, *Oberkriegsverwaltungsrat* Duntze skillfully succeeded in reversing the terms of the relationship by manoeuvring the Belgians into a position of subordination. It was *the correct execution of the Jewish order* which became a *test for the Belgian services as to their collaborative loyalty with the occupying forces*. On 2 December 1940, Duntze put Henri Adam, general inspector at the Home Office, to the test. Adam, who, replacing Vossen who was on sick leave, confirmed the terms of a Belgian

circular dated 6 December 1940 which was sent to all the mayors in Belgium instructing them to retain a register of all Jews under their jurisdiction. In response to Duntze, Adam assumed his responsibilities: *the Belgian services will faithfully execute these instructions*.

International Law acknowledged that the occupying forces were entitled to demand this loyalty from the authorities of the country that they were occupying. In response to von Craushaar’s edict of 11 October 1940, Vossen drew the German attention to Article 43 of The Hague Convention regarding *regulations concerning the laws and customs of war on land*, which had been adopted on 10 October 1907. All occupying forces *who are charged with legal authority are to act with respect for the laws of the land unless it seems essential to act otherwise*.

Duntze, explained later the concern of the Military Authorities to avoid offending the Belgians by pointing out these *scruples stemming from respect of the Constitution*. The Hague Convention proved to be a double edged sword in a political and ideologically orientated occupation. From the Belgian point of view it was the duty of the Belgian civil servants *to loyally and conscientiously exercise their responsibilities and not undertake or omit anything that might be harmful to the enemy government in the occupied parts of Belgium*.

The constitution and penal code together with the Hague Convention were institutional organizations which were supposed to ensure that no harm was to come to the civilian population during the occupation. In October 1940 the leading Belgian civil servants supported the policy of respecting the law of the land however they avoided voicing a confrontational opinion on the entire German plan to Aryanise the Belgian economy. The Hague Convention categorically forbade civil servants in an occupied territory to participate in any form of persecution. Article 4 clearly stipulates that *the honour and rights of the family, the lives of individuals and private property, as well as religious beliefs and acts of worship, must be respected. Private property cannot be confiscated*. Submitting this extract to the Germans to support the case against anti-Semitic proclamations would have made it necessary to confront the occupier head on with the Jewish Question. In 1940 Belgians, in general, had little stomach for this, even in the Resistance, which was still in the early stages of organizing itself.

It was almost two years before the Belgian authorities finally refused to execute an anti-Semitic order from the Germans. Anticipating the psychological shock that would be caused by the arrival of thousands of Jews visibly being forced to wear a yellow star, the mayors of the boroughs surrounding Brussels spoke openly of one’s personal respect for his fellow human beings – this would

hopefully cushion the impact of the rule which came into force on 1 June 1942. The mayors refused to *collaborate in [its] execution*. In his letter to the German authorities, dated 5 June 1942, their president, Jules Coelst, mayor of Brussels justified their desertion: *We cannot associate ourselves with an order that so directly infringes the dignity of any person whoever he may be*. For the next two days the yellow star was distributed by the *Oberfeldkommandantur 672 (OFK)*, the occupying force in Brussels, before ordering the *AJB* to take over this work. However the resistant mayor(s) was not reprimanded. It was as though the Germans would be prepared to accept a certain amount of resistance from the civilian population.

In 1940 the general secretaries did not really give much consideration to refusing to execute German edicts. The second anti-Jewish order which was announced on 10 October 1940 and issued on 28 October 1940. The response from the Belgian authorities only raised one point, that of the exclusion of Jews from public positions. The sacking of Jewish civil servants, with Belgian nationality, effected all ranks of officials. However in spite of the delicacy in implementing such an order to which the Germans attached a great deal of importance, it had, in fact, an almost insignificant impact. Only 64 Jewish candidates for dismissal were found among the hundreds of thousands of officials working in the public sector. Only 40 out of 1,300 university staff were found to be Jewish. At the Bar in Brussels only 50 Jewish lawyers were found out of a total of 1,450, but only 14 were present. In Antwerp there were only 3 or 4 Jews out of almost 400 Bar Members. In drawing up his annual report on anti-Jewish policy in September 1941, Duntze once again congratulated himself on *the elimination of Jews from public life and their professions, executed in general in a loyal manner*.

The compulsory registration of Jews which resulted from their exclusion from all aspects of public life was the fundamental step, the alpha and the omega, to the Jewish Question and its solution. In this instance the Germans manoeuvred with tact. *In the measures that we have taken*, explained Duntze, *we have taken the necessary precautions to reach our objectives without any political repercussions*. The Jewish Question which at first appeared to be a high risk policy was dealt with pragmatically in order to avoid any provocation. Instead of adopting a specific *modus operandi* from the beginning the occupying forces proceeded slowly and adapted their decisions to fit the circumstances which prevailed at that time. This cautious start reduced Belgian intervention to a minimum. It was, in fact the Jews who were summoned to request their own registration in a special register which the local authorities maintained. The occupying forces did not give a formal

order to mayors to draw up such a register however they did issue them with specific guidelines as to what, according to Nazi doctrine a Jew was and what details should appear in the register. This was a clever move as it broke the triangular relationship which existed between the Belgians, the Jews and the occupying forces.

It opened a space of lesser evil in the politics of presence of the Belgian authorities. The register kept by the communal civil servants allowed them to help the Jews comply with German orders.

The legislative council, consulted by the general secretaries, gave their support to this 'spontaneous' step taken by the Jews. The legislative council comprised high court judges, Q.C.'s. and other high ranking officials from the judiciary. Its secretary, at this time, Viscount Raoul Hayoit de Termicourt, was the solicitor general at the Court of Appeal, the highest ranking judge in the civil system. His advice was based on a twofold interpretation of the law. He noted that *keeping a register of Jews by the local authorities was achieved based on the spontaneous statements made by the interested parties*. Both the civil servants and the Jews executed an order without actually participating in it.

Hayoit de Termicourt consulted his predecessor, Jean Servais, on this matter. Servais used the metaphor 'to put one's head on the chopping block' to explain his assessment of the situation by saying *a condemned man who puts his head on the chopping block obeys but does not participate in his execution*. The highest legal authorities of the land thereby recommended a so called 'passive execution' of German orders in order to enable the general secretaries to escape from the predicament in which they found themselves. According to them, therefore, their actions did not involve any act that was either contrary to the Constitution or Belgian law nor was it forbidden by the penal code even in the absence of malicious intent. In the legal notice of 21 November 1942, anyone who, *under duress [...] is subject to the measure[...], does not participate in it*. Subtle legal jargon had covered the general secretaries in the execution of measures taken against the Jews.

Once they had opted to take this path mayors rapidly accepted the role of the *Sipo-SD* auxiliaries.

The appointment of a new general secretary at the Home Office, Gérard Romsée, who was a member of the *VNV* board of directors and a strong supporter of the New Order, allowed the Germans to take another step forward in their anti-Jewish policy. The occupying authorities succeeded in convincing the local authorities to stamp Jewish ID cards in red with the words 'Jood-Juif', simply by sending a *communication* to the general secretary.



Dressed in civilian clothes, Gerard Romsée, a member of the VNV board of directors who was promoted to Secretary General at the Home Office. On 29 July 1941 he issued the order to place the 'Jood-Juif' stamp on the ID cards of Jews and to pass their names to the Sipo-SD.

By means of a circular note dated 29 July 1941, Romsée instructed the mayors, to carry out this edict and at the same time to send the names and addresses of Jews who fell under their jurisdiction to the *Sipo-SD* HQ in 453, ave. Louise, Brussels. Furthermore Romsée ordered the mayors to indicate with a distinctive sign those Jews who had voluntarily presented themselves to have their ID cards endorsed and those who had to be forced to attend for registration. Copies of the Register of Jews allowed the *Sipo's* anti-Jewish section to draw up a central register which proved essential when the evacuations commenced. They were given to a Belgian *investigation office* an extension of the *Judenabteilung*. It was called *The Anti-Jewish Centre for Flanders and Wallonia* and was staffed by a small group originating from the *Volksverwerping*. The director was Petrus (Pierre) Beeckmans, a professional advertising agent in charge of advertisements which were published in the Anti-Jewish League press. He employed his wife and two associates. They were supported by 30 reliable (according to the *Sipo-SD*) volunteers.

Nº 20808

Nº van het paspoort O. V.
No du passeport S. P.

Naam
Nom **LEWKOWICZ**

Voornaam
Prénoms **Paula**

Geboorte te **Gzembuchawa**
Né à

Plaats **in 1923**
Le **Pool**

Nationaliteit
Nationalité **Pools**

Handtekening
Paula Lewkowicz

Beeld


Handtekening van de hantelaar
Paula Lewkowicz

Handtekening van de hantelaar
Paula Lewkowicz

Nº 20808

Burgerlijke
État civil

Beroep
Profession

Vorige verblijfplaats
Résidence précédente
Antwerpen 27.4.38

Ingeschreven **Boek 301** **blad 10311**
Inscrit **Vol.**

Antwerpen 81 JAN 1942

8-1-44

De Ambtenaar van den Burgerlijken Stand
of zijn gedelegeerde
Officier de l'Etat civil (ou son délégué)

Paula Lewkowicz

Achtereenvolgende verblijfplaatsen. — Résidences successives.

GEMEENTEN - COMMUNES	STRAAT - RUE	Nº	Datum	Boek Blad	Vol. Fol.
HOLLANDE		21	22.6.38		

to vervullen, in het bezit zijn van een arbeidsvergunning.

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Interned in Mechelen on 10 August 1943, Perla Lewkowicz was deported on Transport 22 A on 20 September 1943. There is no trace of her after her arrival in Auschwitz.

In March 1941 Thomas permitted Beeckman's team to establish their offices in 52, rue Philippe de Champagne, Brussels, an *enemy property* that had previously been occupied by The Belgian Association for the Emigration of Refugees, whose activities were drawn to an abrupt halt on 10 May 1940. *Volksverwerking* occupied the first floor. The league retained its militant core in Antwerp – the cradle of the organization – to maintain contact with the local *Judenreferent*, Erich Holm. The Antwerp office was headed by one Félix Lauterborn, an unemployed photographer cum reporter who ran the organizations bookshop in the Wiegstraat. In Brussels Thomas harboured ambitious projects for the head of the league, the Antwerp lawyer Lambrichts. As in France the *Sipo-SD* envisaged setting up a Royal Commission for the Jewish Question in Belgium under Lambrichts.

But of course Belgium was not France and anti-Semitism did not fall within the scope of Belgian law. The political framework in which Reeder and his advisors dealt with the Jewish Question was not suitable to such a radical modification of the institutions in the occupied country. In April 1941, exactly when the administration imposed its candidate on the general secretary of the Home Office, Reeder feared that with regard to the Jewish Question, *the Belgian Executive* would become *more passive and more hesitant than it currently was* if the Antwerp radicals of the New Order were permitted to impose their views. Reeder said that it was essential to handle carefully this *Belgian Executive whose collaboration we cannot afford to lose*.

Beeckman's *Anti-Jewish Office*, a substitute for the totally impractical Royal Commission, came into its own in July 1941. Its 30 voluntary staff functioned as *contollers* for the *Sipo-SD*. They were not given police powers but *Kontrolle Auftrag*. In case of difficulties that were authorised to call on the *Feldgendarmarie* or even the Belgian police for assistance. The anti-Jewish League press continually demanded that the general secretaries should create an anti-Jewish police force within the framework of a commission for the Jewish Question which could not be found. The task of the *controllors* consisted of, as, *L'Ami du Peuple* proudly published, *proceeding to identify and locate nearly all of the Jewish houses in accordance with the law*, as stipulated by the German edict of 31 May 1941 which obliged all *Jewish businesses* to be indicated. In the 5 months between 1 August and 31 December 1941 these militant controllers visited 2,857 businesses i.e. 40% of the total number which had been registered. By every contravention of the law an official report was made. *Uncooperative transgressors were punished by police sentencing* the *Sipo-SD* stated in their report of January 1942.

As a privileged auxilliary of the *Judenabteilung*, it was the *Anti-Jewish Office* that became responsible for the Register of Jews. Beeckman's team *put on file* all the Jews who had been registered at the local level. Just before the deportations began the *Sipo-SD* was able to estimate the number of Jews as between 52,000 and 55,000.

10 The Conditions by which Belgian Citizens Could be Exempted. July 1942

On 11 June 1942, in Berlin, Asche, now knew that the 10,000 deportees that had been assigned to him represented 20% of the Jews which had to be evacuated from Belgium. In Berlin on 28 August 1942 a 'work conference' was held with those Nazis responsible for Jewish Affairs in the West, whereby, it was decided to raise the quota of deportees of Jews from Belgium for 1942 to 20,000. Eichmann also announced that the deportation of foreign Jews should be completed by the end of June 1943. However this objective failed to be reached, due, in the main, to the lack of cooperation from the victims. By October 1942 only 80% of the quota had been reached. Furthermore Ehlers had only been able to arrive at this figure by obtaining Reeder's authority, *in extremis*, on 25 September 1942, to supplement these quotas by drawing on Jews from the work camps of the *Organization Todt*, in France.

Without these reinforcements the results of the *Sipo-SD* would have, indeed, only been mediocre.

Although the first batch of 10,000 deportees were rounded-up and more or less dispatched according to schedule it was not until the departure of Transport 20 on 19 April 1943 that the second consignment of 10,000 deportees was completed. At the end of October 1942 the SS of Jewish Affairs had only managed to gather 5,000 of the planned 10,000 deportees i.e. 50% of the second phase of the deportations. The numbers had been bolstered by bringing in 2,252 'forced labourers' from the *Organization Todt* workshops, which were rounded-up by the army, to partially camouflage the figures. However this situation brought Ehlers into a somewhat weaker position when he was called before Reeder to explain matters. The head of the Military Administration reprimanded Ehlers for the *abuse* which had occurred *recently, contrary to the agreements which had previously been made and which could lead to serious consequences from a political point of view*. Reeder was, of course, referring to the arrest of Jews holding the Belgian nationality.

In support of this hypothesis the public was reminded that *the rise in anti-Semitism is largely due to the immigration of Jews of foreign nationality in the 1930's*.

In Brussels on 9 July 1942 Werner Von Bargaen informed the Foreign Office that Reeder had personally contacted Himmler on that day regarding this difficulty. Reeder feared the political repercussions that would result from the deportation of Jews holding the Belgian nationality. It would be perceived as [the] *beginning* [of the] *general deportation*. Since 6 March 1942 the Military Commander had been empowered to enforce a policy of forced labour. The previous generation of Belgians still had clear memories of the deportation of 120,000 of their fellow citizens to the German Empire during the Great War. In an attempt to calm the population von Falkenhausen promised not to deport forced labourers beyond the borders.

However the Nazis had to ensure the supply of sufficient labour for the construction of the Atlantic Wall as well as for the production of charcoal in the (French) Ardennes. Reeder circumvented this problem by utilizing the Jews of Belgium, the majority of whom were not Belgian citizens. Furthermore most of these Jews had been deprived of a viable income following the forced liquidation of their businesses in the spring of 1942 or, according to the Nazis, they could be categorized as antisocial. Between 13 June and 12 September 1942, 2,252 Jewish “forced labourers”, including 115 male Belgian citizens, were dispatched without further ado in 8 successive Transports to the worksites of the *Organization Todt* where they were interned in “Jewish” camps.

Steering a close course between these obstacles, Reeder had no real objection to the mass deportation of Jews as long as those holding the Belgian nationality were temporarily exempted. Himmler granted him this concession in order to maintain good relations with the Belgian authorities. Reeder's calculations turned out to be correct. After the departure of the first 10,000 deportees *to the East*, he was, somewhat relieved to be able to announce, on 15 September 1942, that *this action did not attract too much attention [...] The representatives of the Belgian Ministry of Justice and the other Belgian institutions have always maintained that they only wanted to take care of Jews holding the Belgian nationality. Even the Catholic Church abandoned the idea of protesting against the fate of the Jews [...] because the Germans declared that they only wanted to take care of German Jews which they took to mean the Jews of Greater Germany, including Poland, Silesia, Ukraine, Yugoslavia and Austria.*

Defused before the event, the feared crisis with the Belgian authorities only materialised a year later, when, under pressure from Berlin and Himmler himself the immunity of the Belgian Jews came to an end. During the night of 3 and 4 September 1943, under the code name *Aktion Illis* 975 Jews were seized i.e. about 25% of the 3,680 Jews who were registered on the card index of the *Sipo-SD* and who had remained in their legal domicile in Brussels and Antwerp. On 20 September 1943 these Belgian Jews were transported from Mechelen to Auschwitz with Transport 22 B (The ‘B’ indicates *Belgischer*) which was coupled with Transport 22 A (The ‘A’ indicates *Ausländischer*). To ease the impact of Transport 22 B on the Belgian authorities the Military Authorities agreed to release more than 100 Belgian Jews who had been taken during the round-up of 3 and 4 September. The majority of them were compelled to live in *AJB* homes and hostels. These establishments, developed by order of the occupying forces on 30 April 1943, marked the end of the period of immunity for Belgian Jews.

On 20 July 1943 von Falkenhausen, in the absence of Reeder, only agreed to the deportation of Belgian Jews provided *an exception is made for those, who for any reason whatsoever, are declared unfit for deportation by the Military Authorities*. Straub of the *Sipo-SD* agreed to this.

Consequently Transport 22 B only took 577 of those caught in the round-up out of a total of 794 deported Belgians. Confronted with the deportations of 20 September 1943 the general secretaries raised a somewhat fainthearted protest against the fate of their fellow citizens. They reminded von Falkenhausen of the fact that they were essential *for the country's administration* which was functioning under the orders of the occupying forces. This argument reinforced their *protest against measures that both ignored the most basic principles of the law and the respect owed to human freedom*.

However the general secretaries did not follow their own reasoning through to its logical and ultimate conclusion. In fact far from announcing a split with the occupying powers Belgian officials confined themselves *to the painful impression felt by the authorities and the Belgian population as a whole as to the measures taken against some of [their] fellow citizens*. Notwithstanding this cautious attitude von Falkenhausen was asked *to intervene in order to put an end to a situation that breached both the rule of law and the treatment of one's fellow human beings*. However the humanitarian aspect had its limitations. It failed to take account of the foreigners who were deported. More than 21,000 were deported in 1 year whilst the Belgian authorities just looked on, and this situation continued until 31 July 1944 by which time a further 3,000 foreign Jews had met their fate.



1. Chief Rabbi Salomon Ullmann, President of the AJB
2. Maurice Benedictus, Director of the AJB
3. Nico Workum, President of the Antwerp Local Committee
4. Salomon Van den Berg, President of the Brussels Local Committee

11 The Jewish Service for Employment

The strategic concern to soften any possible repercussions from either the Belgian authorities or their citizens inspired the *Sipo-SD*, together with Reeder's military advisors, to devise a plan to proceed with sending Transports to Auschwitz during the summer of 1942. Through necessity Ehlers and Thomas both favoured a calm and orderly round-up of deportees. They were told to come as "work providers" and about 300 per day were expected to arrive at the *Kazern Dossin*. While the Military Police and the *Feldgendarmarie* were available to seize those Jews who resisted, or, in their absence their relatives, there were insufficient German police officers to successfully use force in the early stages of these round-ups. The *Sipo-SD* counted on the obedience of the Jews; a trait which they showed during the execution of the first anti-Semitic edicts. The SS also reckoned on the docility of the official Jewish leaders, who were kept well under control by Asche. The *AJB*, which was formed on 25 November 1941, was responsible for the enrolment of their members who were, in fact, compelled to join the organization. The articles of association were published with their racist definition of Jews and their objective *to activate and encourage the emigration of Jews*.

Officially appointed, 5 out of 7 of the directors were Belgian nationals. This ratio was totally disproportionate to the breakdown of nationalities amongst the Jewish population resident in Belgium at that time. The president was Chief Rabbi Salomon Ullmann, the chief Jewish religious representative in the Belgian army. His attitude to the situation was that a (restricted) dialogue with

the occupier and an acceptance of the prevailing conditions was preferable to confrontation. In February 1941 he called on all the Israelites *of good will*, and invited them to show their solidarity, by becoming members of their religious community. He believed that only then would they, collectively, be able to sort out their communal difficulties.

Within a couple of months Ullmann was in a position to be able to form, under his authority, a reconciliation committee for the Israelite communities of the main cities i.e. Antwerp and Brussels. Promoted by the SS officer for Jewish Affairs, without the knowledge of the Military Authorities, the new structure was the beginning of a unique organization for Jews outside the already existing Belgian institutions. This coordinating committee acted as a substitute for the Central Israelite Consistory which was, under Belgian law, authorised to represent the Jews as Israelites.

The next step in this procedure resulted in the Military Authorities granting permission to the *Sipo-SD* to set up an organization of "pure race Jews" whose directors would be composed of ex-presidents of Israelite communities who had already dissociated themselves from these groups. In Antwerp, Holm, who was in charge of Jewish Affairs at this time, proposed Maurice Benedictus as the director of this new organization. He came from a family of cigar makers who had been established in the city since the 19th century. Due to his position on the fringe of Judaism, the Military Authorities, who were reluctant to promote the religion of the Jews, chose Benedictus as the director of the *AJB*. He was 35 years of age, of Belgian nationality and he had the necessary credentials for the role of chief spokesman for the Jews in their dealings with the *Sipo-SD*.

From the outset Asche would have preferred a German Jewish intermediary but he finally got his wish when the deportations began and Benedictus was found to be too weak for the job in hand. In mid-April, when Benedictus paid his first visit to the avenue Louise, Asche challenged his ability to function satisfactorily. He hoped that the *AJB* would *scrupulously fulfil the tasks that they had been entrusted with*. However according to Benedictus *first and foremost the AJB had to fulfil the role as defender of the Jewish interests of its members with regard to the Military Authorities* and he asked that *as such, it could put forward its arguments*. To all of this Asche willingly gave his approval.

Meanwhile, secretly, the Jewish resistance condemned this strategy of “defending Jewish interests”. Jewish resistance was still in its infancy and basically confined to the far left, Zionists and communists who tended to be anchored among Jewish immigrants from Poland. The movement was both sociological and ideological but essentially political. The Jewish resistance, at least during the initial phases, acted as the political opposition to the *AJB*. In relation to the order creating legal ghettos, the *Linke Poale Sion* began publishing its Yiddish paper *Oundzer Wort*. Between December 1941 and August 1944 this clandestine paper, edited by Abusz Werber and published in the lingua franca of most of the Jewish immigrants, spoke out 28 times, a remarkable lifetime for an underground newspaper.

The communists distributed the Belgian party’s press in Jewish circles and later through Pinkus Broder alias *Pierre* in Charleroi and Boris Syzster in Brussels publishing *Oundzer Kampf* under Hitler’s occupation. However it was an extract taken from an article published on 10 May 1942, the 2nd anniversary of the invasion of Belgium, in the *Linke Poale Sion* that proved to be the most virulent and at the same time the most lyrical. It described the *AJB* as *the direct representative of the Nazis*. The Jewish resistance vehemently opposed itself against *being the lacky of the Gestapo in the Jewish community. It is the hammer forged from our flesh and blood which, manipulated by the Nazis, strikes at the Jewish workers and masses*. Among the communists verbal confrontation turned to physical violence.

12 The Retaliation of the Jewish Partisans against the Deportation

In the spring of 1942, a Bulgarian, Théodore Angheloff, a former soldier with the International Brigades in Spain, set about organizing, together with other groups in Brussels, the *Corps Mobile des Partisans*. The German police knew that he was the *leader* of the *communist terrorist group* and he was arrested on 19 January 1943. He was executed by firing squad on 30 November 1943. The organization was a breeding ground for “terrorist” hostages and condemned men who were on the Nazi “wanted list”, and subjected to “legal” assassination for terrorising the country which resulted in a rapid fall-off in their numbers. Since most of their members were Jewish, the continued official round-up of Jews further depleted their ranks. Their leader, Anghelhoff, was not Jewish and they were actually not structured as a Jewish group.

Armed resistance was the *modus operandi* of the *Main d’Oeuvre Immigrée (MOI)*, an organization for which Anghelhoff, in Brussels, had been the political secretary since the outbreak of WWII. They had been, since the 1930’s, a clandestine group owing to the risk of expulsion. The *MOI* mobilised foreigners within the Belgian Communist Party, who were organised into groups according to which language they spoke. In Brussels three groups were formed: Yiddish, comprised of Jewish immigrants from Poland; Magyar composed of immigrants from the Balkans and Russian with immigrants from Bessarabia. The three groups formed within Anghelhoff’s *Mobile Corps des Partisans* consisted of 24 combatants who were personally recruited by Anghelhoff, half of whom had fought in the Spanish Civil War between 1936 and 1938.

It was the first company of Szaja Rochman (*Charles*), an old soldier from the Spanish Civil War, that Anghelhoff launched against the *AJB* in the first summer of the deportations: on 25 July 1942 and 29 August 1942. The initial part of the campaign commenced 2 days prior to the opening of the *Kazern Dossin*. Whilst 10 of their fellow soldiers were busy in the surrounding area and Rochman and Anghelhoff retreated, 4 partisans surrounded the new *AJB* offices (open since 17 July 1942) situated at 56, Boulevard du Midi, Brussels. For a month this Jewish “forced labour” service was the nerve centre of the legal ghetto in the evacuation of the Jews. On 15 July 1942 the SS appointed Benedictus, as director of the *AJB*, to be personally responsible for the “forced labour” service. The other leaders within the *AJB* were instructed to assist Benedictus. In the beginning his sole task was to compile a dossier with the names of all the members of the “legal” Jewish institutions i.e. some 40,000 people. The SS gave the impression that they attached a *great deal*

of importance to having this information completed by 25 July 1942. Alfred Blum, the son of the president of the Israelite Community of Brussels noted, in his report of 20 July 1942, the surprise visit of Asche who was accompanied by a newcomer *SS Leutnant* Anton Burger. He was a special emissary sent by Eichmann who stayed in the Belgian capital for a fortnight until after the departure of Transport 1 for Auschwitz on 4 August 1942.

Burger returned to Belgium 2 years later in order to oversee the winding up of the Jewish Question in Belgium. He came to seize the last remaining Jews in one final round-up, who had been subjected to the anti-Jewish order and their constraints, a sort of open ghetto with the *AJB* and its allied institutions at its centre, in fact a paradoxical sanctuary, protected to a greater or lesser degree from being sought out as a clandestine movement. For the Jewish institution, this "legal" ghetto constituted a "safe haven" for some 4,000 people with diverse backgrounds and which was more or less tolerated by the German authorities e.g. leaders and staff from the institution, leather 'workers' completing orders for the German armed forces, 'Zionist veterans' who were, subject to approval from the German Foreign Office, used to barter for German POW's and so called "abandoned children" and old men and women from *AJB* homes and hostels who were accommodated under their responsibility. With the rapidly approaching Allied Forces and the retreat of the German army Burger was unable to obtain sufficient fuel for the trucks to carry out the raid. It had been planned for 29 August 1944, the day after the *Sipo-SD* hastily withdrew to Hasselt, in the Limbourg, but as it turned out the final *Judenaktion* never materialized. Even the last planned deportation train to the East, Transport 27, destined for Bergen-Belsen, never left the *Kazern Dossin*, due to the rapid advance of The Red Army through Poland.

In 1942, however, Burger's mission in Belgium met with greater success. His harshness broke away from the civility that Asche had shown towards the director of the *AJB*. Henceforth the representatives of the *AJB* were now obliged to stand to attention when addressed by Burger and subjected to his objurgations. His brutal behaviour tested the docility of the Jewish leaders. Furthermore the infamous file compiled for the *Forced Labour Service* was to become a test case. Its only purpose was to provide an operational structure for the ensuing *evacuation* for purposes other than administration i.e. *staff[...]to fulfil the tasks assigned to them*, as Asche told Benedictus on 27 July 1942. While the 10 days assigned to the *Forced Labour Service* for completion of its entries ended on 25 July 1942, the establishment of this system on 17 July



Three of those responsible for the attack on the *AJB* on 25 July 1942

'Richard Hugo'

Wolf Weichmann (1899-1944)

Moszek Rozenchwajg (1920-1943)

Mordko Bresler (1918-1942)

1942 led the Jewish partisans to erroneously set fire to the files that had already been delivered, thus only destroying the copies.

The Red Flag – the central body of the communist party, underlined *the daring of a few armed men who entered the AJB offices by force, locking employees in a room and destroying the files compiled according to Gestapo orders*. Four partisans broke in. One was only known by his nom de guerre, *Richard Hugo*. He was not Jewish. He was an old soldier from the International Brigades. He was German and his presence gave authenticity to cries from the 'German Police' to be let into the building. Wolf Weichmann and Moszek Rozenchwajg, who also participated in this action were captured and sentenced to death after being convicted of usurpation of office, in an action regarding money, against a Jewish millionaire who denounced them to the Belgian Police. They were captured in February 1943, handed over to the Germans and executed in September 1943. The fourth man, Mordko Bresler, was also an old soldier from the Spanish Civil War. He was gunned down on 12 November 1942 at the end of the rue du Lombard, the victim of a Jew hunt. Richard Hugo was also a victim of a street shoot-out being killed at the Gare du Midi in the autumn of 1943.

On 25 July 1942 the partisans were surprised to find 13 people at a Jewish service on a Saturday. A partisan holding a gun, kept them at bay whilst his comrades set fire to what they believed was the file stored in a room on the floor above them. This was in all probability Rozenchwajg who, whilst threatening the *AJB* staff, lectured them. Blum who was present at the time summarised Rozenchwajg's words in his incident report to the German authorities. *The man lectured us and told us that we were working not in the interests of the Jews but against them and that we were assisting in their mass deportation to Poland by compiling these individual dossiers.*

13 The Summons Issued by the AJB

The time was fast approaching to commence the *evacuation* of Jews from Mechelen and the *Sipo-SD* no longer needed the list of Jews drawn up by the *AJB* in March 1942 through their compulsory registration. The Anti-Jewish Offices of Flanders and Wallonia, provided the *SS* with more detailed and complete files which they obtained from the local authorities anti-Semitic registers. Towards the end of June 1942, Reggie Claeys, serving with the “Jewish Section” of the *Flemish SS*, a simple *SS Mann* and a tireless typist for the *Arbeitseinsatzbefehl*, completed the forms for the work orders.

The *Sipo-SD* issued 12,000 such orders expecting sufficient response which would enable them to achieve their quota of 10,000 individual deportations from the *Kazern Dossin* by 3 September 1942. The work orders were issued on the Military Commander’s heading paper and signed in manuscript by Ehlers whose name and position as Deputy Head of the *Sipo-SD* in Belgium were not abbreviated on the papers. Under the heading of the Military Commander was written his abbreviated title in German i.e. *BDS*, alongside which was written *Abt II*. Only those who were au fait with Jewish Affairs knew that *Abt II* referred to and was part of the *Judenabteilung*. The work order informed the recipients of the summons, the day and the exact time on which they should present themselves at the *Kazern Dossin*. Should they fail to turn up they were threatened with arrest and transfer to a *concentration camp in Germany* and confiscation of their property. A stamp in red ink on the *Arbeitseinsatzbefehl*, in German, stated that this order had been *distributed by the AJB*.

The orders which were to be distributed arrived at the Jewish Forced Labour Service before 25 July 1942, probably on Wednesday 22 July 1942. On this day Chief Rabbi Ullmann informed the General Secretary for Justice, Gaston Schuind, who, in turn, informed the Military Administration the next day, as to their concerns for the welfare of Belgian citizens. In any case there was not much time remaining for the *AJB* employees to distribute the summons to the “workers” who were expected to turn up in Mechelen on Monday 27 July 1942. Similar to the postmen of the “Final Solution” the delivery was shared out between employees and specially employed young people based in all the relevant local authorities who were allocated the so called *departure lists* per street and per number. In fact they were the arrival lists for the *Kazern Dossin* and were spread out between 27 July 1942 and 3 September 1942 the limit set to assemble the initial 10,000 deportees i.e. an average intake of 300 per day.

The distribution of *Arbeitseinsatzbefehle* did not have the desired effect of drawing Jews to the *Sammellager* in Mechelen. Faced with the prospect of deportation people were reluctant to respond positively to the summons and only 4,023 out of the 12,000 who were instructed to present themselves at the *Kazern Dossin* turned up i.e. 33.50%. These Jews who came to Mechelen with their *Arbeitseinsatzbefehle* constituted 40% of the initial 10,040 deportees. From the very beginning it took longer than planned to complete the trains for the East. Transport 1 took 5 days to assemble instead of 3 days (between 27 and 31 July 1942).

In avenue Louise, Brussels, Burger and Asche were aware of this worrying development and set about increasing the pressure on Benedictus which resulted in him suffering a timely breakdown. At the end of the year he had fled to Portugal with forged papers in the name of Maurice Bernard. He officially handed his resignation to Chief Rabbi Ullmann on 31 July 1942.

After meeting with Benedictus on Thursday 30 July 1942 the weekly meeting of directors of the *AJB* was delayed until Saturday 1 August 1942. His signature appears in the register of Jewish presidents that day.

The call to those who had been summoned was discussed at a *meeting with the country’s representatives*, according to Ullmann’s post-war testimony. When the time came to address the Jewish population, his officials sought, for the first time, to irradicate anything that tarnished their legitimacy as an authority which had been imposed by the occupying forces. They called for the unequivocal support *from all members of the general public*. This statement was made after the war by Blum’s son, a direct witness and perhaps the best informed person at the time. In his post-war defence he claimed that *more than 30 people, a dozen of which were members of the AJB* (i.e. committee and commission members) *and 30 of which were from other groups and organizations* [Jewish circles who did not want to have responsibilities within the *AJB* but nonetheless were forced to be members] were present. This *representation of Jewish public opinion at the time, except for the far left*, gave, according to Blum, *its unanimous agreement to the AJB to draw up this letter*. According to the terminology of the son of the second president of the *AJB* included the extreme left *Linke Poale Sion* whose voice, *Oundzer Wort*, published a reminder, the day before Liberation, of its systematic opposition to the *AJB*, referring to the call of 1 August 1942 as the *sign of Cain engraved on the sad past of this institution*.

ASSOCIATION OF JEWS IN BELGIUM:

LOCAL COMMITTEE - ANTWERP

Established in accordance with the Order of the Occupying Forces of 25 November 1941

The occupying forces have established and provided us with an 'Arbeitseinsatzbefehl' for your attention.

The Association of Jews is obliged to deliver this order to you by hand as soon as possible.

According to the assurances provided by the Occupying Forces, this is indeed a work order and not a deportation order.

You are requested to bring your luggage, as stipulated in the order.

The serious events of the past few days compel us to draw your attention to the fact that non-compliance with this order may result in the suffering of harm or injury for the members of your family, as well as for the entire Jewish population in the country.

P.S. If this order could not be handed to you in person because you were not at home, you are requested to collect it immediately from the offices of the Association of Jews, Local Committee – Antwerp, Lange Leemstraat 155.

Vorstand de J.V.B. S. **ULLMAN**

President of the Association of Jews in Belgium

Vorstand der Juedischen Kultusgemeind Brüssel M.**BLUM**

President of the Israelite Community, Brussels

Vorsitzender sraelitische gemeinde von Antwerpen M. **GRATZER**

President of the Israelite Community, Antwerp

Vorsitzender des Lokalkomitees Brüssel der J.V.B. S. **VANDEN BERG**

President of the Local Committee of the A.J.B., Brussels

Vorsitzender des Lokalkomitees von Antwerpen N. **WORKUM**

President of the Local Committee of the A.J.B., Antwerp

Verwaltungschef der J.V.B. M. **BENEDICTUS**

Director of the A.J.B.

Vorsitzender des Lokalkomitees Lüttich der J.V.B. N. **NOZYCE**

President of the Local Committee, Liège

Vorsitzender des Lokalkomitees Charleroi der J.V.B. J. **MEHLWURM**

President of the Local Committee, Charleroi

Vorsitzender des Hilfwerkes O.C.I.S. D. **LAZAR**

President of "Hulpwerken O.C.I.S."

R. **HOLZINGER**

The Call for Obedience : 1 August 1942



The Call for Obedience : 1 August 1942

14 The Call for Obedience by the Jewish Leading Figures

The text which was attached to each summons was formally issued by the *AJB* on their own heading paper. It was countersigned by some 10 leading figures in the *AJB*: the president of the *AJB*; members of the local committees; Marcel Blum, president of the Israelite Community of Brussels. David Lazar countersigned the document on behalf of another consistorial institution, *l'Oeuvre Centrale Israelite de Secours*. The Dutch version of the text was signed by Majer Grätzer, who signed on behalf of the Israelite Community of Antwerp, however he failed to mention that he was a member of the the local branch of the *AJB* or that he was the acting secretary of the Israelite Consistorial Office, which had up to this time remained on the sidelines. In fact, *the representation of Jewish public opinion* was restricted to well established Jewish institutions, whose presidents, had become quite important during the occupation, personally invited the requisitioned "service providers" to present themselves to *the Kazern Dossin*.

The Association of Jews in Belgium is required to send [them] as quickly as possible this work order established by the occupying forces on [their] behalf. Having specified this point the Jewish presidents reported *the assurance given by the occupying forces that it is indeed for work purposes and not as a deportation measure.* Even those who countersigned this call for labour did not believe it. Salomon Vanden Berg, president of the Brussels Local Committee, noted in his diary on 31 July 1942, prior to giving reassurances on this point to those who had received a summons, that, *12,000 Jewish men women and children must go to Mechelen to be sent to 'who knows where' to do 'who knows what'.* Having said that Vanden Berg and other notables, permitted themselves to *draw attention to the fact that any failure to conform to the work order could lead to unfortunate consequences for both [the] members of one's family and the country's entire Jewish population.*

To this day it is still not known which one of the signatories did, in fact, draw up this call for obedience, which, simultaneously confirmed the political involvement of the Jewish presidents in launching the trains for “Poland”. However one of them played a decisive role in the outcome of the crisis with the *Sipo-SD*. At its first meeting on the Thursday after the clash at the end of July 1942, the steering committee thanked him *for the devotion [he had] shown by intervening in the issue of putting Jews to work.* In the list of signatories he was the only one who was not a president and, in fact, did not hold any official position within the *AJB*.

Robert Holzinger was a Jewish German refugee who came from Vienna in 1939 and, like his Jewish compatriots, had, since November 1941, been deprived of his German nationality. In the early days he was a member of the German Jewish Committee known as “la rue de Ruysbroeck”, until its compulsory absorption into the *AJB*.

German Jews were better represented by the German Jewish Committee than their Belgian counterparts. Refugees from the Greater Germany accounted for between 12% and 18% of the Jewish population of Belgium; two to three times more than Jews holding the Belgian nationality. Forced to become part of the only authorized organization for “pure bred Jews” the former German Jewish Committee fought for its place in the *AJB*. It insisted on being allocated some of the tasks which had been assigned to the *AJB*. He was one of the employees of the German Committee, a “mixed” Jew – married to a non-Jew -, Hans Berlin, who since his first contact with Benedictus, acted as a skilled intermediary in relation to the *Judenabteilung* for the *AJB*’s intervention(s) service. Holzinger finally succeeded Benedictus at the end of July 1942. The SS Office for Jewish Affairs was satisfied with this arrangement as they were able, at last, to pass their orders to the *AJB* through a German Jew.

15 The Arm of Vengeance of the Jewish Partisans

A month later, on 31 August 1942 Vanden Berg wrote in his diary *that if Holzinger's killer was not found within 24 hours, we would see something that would bear no comparison to the child's game that we had seen up to now.* Asche was furious. The *Sipo-SD* noted in his file that he had been *killed by terrorists.* Cowardly assassinated Vanden Berg noted in his diary. From his point of view, *he was a decent man who had taken over the responsibility of the intervention service regarding the issue of forcing Jews to work. He was simply trying to execute a very laudable task in that he tried to have the sick exempted from these tasks.* On the day of the funeral Vanden Berg together with a number of his colleagues who had also already received death threats, protested: *We are accused of delivering our fellow Jews to the enemy far too easily and[we] are also threatened with the same fate. God knows, he went on, that we have done our utmost to prevent these deportations, however no one apparently appreciates our efforts.* Vanden Berg attributed the attack, *the crime,* he wrote, *against people for whom we have been unable to do anything.* In spite of the fact that he believed himself to be correct in his analysis of the situation he was aware that Holzinger had little room for manoeuvre. Although he tended to be more easily accepted in the avenue Louise because he was a German Jew, his successes tended to be few and far between. Vanden Berg was sorry: *unfortunately while we have, from time to time, been able to offer some assistance to the occasional victim, there has been nothing that we can do for the vast majority.* Furthermore anyone who was exempted merely had their place taken by some other unfortunate victim. The senior members of the *AJB* knew this and considering the role played by Holzinger, Vanden Berg admitted that *in the end this will do nothing to alter the situation because these gentlemen must have their 12.000 Jews and they will take them.* The clandestine newspaper *Le Drapeau Rouge*, interpreted the events of September 1942 differently. *The leader of the Jewish Association, who didn't hesitate to cooperate with the occupying forces and to martyrise his Jewish compatriots, paid for his betrayal. The arm of vengeance has shot him down in the street.* Apparently the newspaper received the information from a reliable source. On 29 August 1942 a detachment of 3 Partisans from the first Jewish Company of the mobile corps carried out its second raid against the *AJB* while the Transports had been leaving for Auschwitz since the beginning of the month.



The Voice of the Belgian Communist Party reports on the action taken by Partisans against Robert Holzinger.

On 29 August 1942 at 4 p.m. Moszek “Wladek” Rakower, the former political secretary of the Yiddish Communist Group approached the target by bicycle near his home in Schaarbeek, a suburb of Brussels, fired 4 shots from his revolver and mortally wounded Holzinger, whilst 2 other Partisans, Chaïm Abel and Simon Engelszser kept a lookout in the street. He died in Schaarbeek Hospital at 8 p.m. According to the *Sipo-SD*, Rakower and Engelszser were *arrested after the assassination by an SS officer [the Fleming, August Schollen, leader of SS Vlaanderen’s Stormban Antwerpen] at the scene of the crime*, near the gate to Schaarbeek, on 4 December. As a result of remaining silent under interrogation by the SS they were executed by firing squad on 6 January 1943, since *the simple fact that it was [in both cases] a Jew found with a loaded revolver, led us to assume that he belonged to a terrorist organization*. Abel was caught in a Jew hunt in June 1943 and sent to Auschwitz on Transport 21 which left Mechelen on 31 July 1943 and was never heard of again.

The attack against Holzinger illustrates perfectly the communist strategy of armed warfare. During the first summer of the deportations the Jewish partisans killed the key (Jewish) player of the *Sipo-SD* during the forced labour campaign of August 1942. They left another, more inaccessible, though not impossible target, Asche, who gave Holzinger his orders. It was not a paradox that the Nazi responsible for deporting Jews to Auschwitz remained alive. At this point in time the armed resistance was not aimed at the Germans but sought out more politically motivated attacks of

vengeance. *Resist the Nazi torturers and strike their accomplices*, read the headlines of the communist newspaper announcing the attack of the *arm of vengeance*.

It was a particular type of Jewish behaviour that was targeted together with the leaders in the *AJB* who received letters threatening them with a similar fate. *Le Drapeau Rouge*, convinced that they had understood this warning quickly announced that *the Gestapo should have closed down the premises of this institution which had become obsolete*. The only thing that happened was, as the *AJB*’s representatives explained in mid September 1942, that *following the death of Holzinger, and owing to the fact that the security service had ceased to pass its work orders through us, the link with this organization was therefore temporarily suspended*.

The death of Holzinger put, for once and for all, an end to assembling the deportees in a calm and orderly fashion. This became patently obvious by the middle of August 1942. According to the communists *in general* [the Jewish population] *prefers to accept the miseries of illegality rather than having to face working for the enemy*. The communist newspaper and the occupying forces both anticipated the real movement however the Germans had every intention of getting there first. Hence the raids in the summer of 1942.

16 Variations in the Raiding Techniques

When the Jews were taken by the Nazis they were not all arrested at the same time or even by the same method. Towards the end of September 1942, Von Bargaen, a German diplomat in Brussels, made the following distinction: *Whilst the Jews came forward in the beginning [...], it was later necessary to carry out raids and isolated arrests (Einzelfestnahmen)*. These targeted arrests, i.e. raids on peoples homes were carried out after the formation of Transport 1, however their frequency continued to increase during the deportation period until they became the main method of assembling victims for deportation to Auschwitz.

With the departure of Transport 10, which marked the completion of the deportation of the first batch of Jews, only 15.50% had been netted by individual arrests i.e. 1,549 out of the 10,040. The great round-ups which were carried out in Belgium during the summer of 1942 produced 3,954 victims to which should be added 514 that were taken in Northern France i.e. 44.5%. The remaining 40% of Jews captured for deportation were sourced from the summons system.

100 days in 1942: gathering the deportees (1)			
Formation of 10 transports in the <i>Kazern Dossin</i> , from 27 July to 15 September 1942			
Circumstances	German, Belgian, French and Jewish actors	Deportees arrived	% deportees circumstances
By Arbeitseinsatzbefehl	Sipo + AJB	4023	40,1
By individual arrests	Feldgd + Sipo + SS Fldgd	1549	15,4
By raids in Belgium	Feldgd + Sipo + SS Fldgd + Belgian police in Antwerp	3954	39,4
By raids in the North of France	Feldgd + French police and gendarmes	514	5,1
Total raids		4468	44,5
Jewish deportees from Mechelen		10040	100,0
? = number unknown - Feldgd = Feldgendarmen - FL. SS = Flemish SS - Sipo = Sicherheitspolizei-DSK = Devisenschutzkommando			
© JMDV - Laurence Schram & Maxime Steinberg, 2008			
100 days in 1942: gathering the deportees (2)			
Formation of 7 transports in the <i>Kazern Dossin</i> , from 16 September to 31 October 1942			
By raids	Feldgd + Sipo + SS Fldgd	761	11,5
By individual arrests	Feldgd + Sipo + SS Fldgd	4.232	64,3
By the order for forced labour in the North of France (13 June to 12 September 1942) and taken to Mechelen	Militärverwaltung + Labour Exchange + Belgian police from Antwerp	1.592	24,2
Total Jewish deportees from Mechelen		6.585	100,0
? = number unknown - Feldgd = Feldgendarmen - FL. SS = Flemish SS -Sipo = Sicherheitspolizei-DSK = Devisenschutzkommando			
© JMDV - Laurence Schram & Maxime Steinberg, 2008			

Only one more round-up was organized in 1942 i.e. on 22 and 23 September 1942. The SS now operated by throwing traps to ensnare Jews (761) and their Aryan friends who were caught at the rationing centers when they came with their legal identity papers bearing the fatal stamp *Jood-Juif*, for their monthly distribution of vital stamps. Recourse to this technique of arrest indicated that the hunt had begun in earnest at the beginning of the autumn. However during the last 3 months of 1942, isolated arrests (4,232) provided the last 7 Transports of the year with 64.30% of the deportees.

During 1943 and 1944 the hunt for Jews had gone underground, however 7,706 victims were caught (89%) during this period and brought to the *Sammellager*, most as a result of sporadic arrests and denunciations. The two round-ups which were carried out during these years accounted for the remaining 11%.

17 Aktion Iltis against the Belgian Jews

The final round-up of Belgian Jews, codenamed *Iltis*, was carried out during the night of 3 and 4 September 1943. In Brussels there were no 'blocks' of houses that could be simply surrounded and combed from the top to the bottom of each building. The Belgian Jews were more integrated within the population as a whole and were dispersed throughout Brussels. *Aktion Iltis* deployed small groups across the city with 14 vehicles each containing 3 SS, 1 German and 2 Flemings from the *Sipo-SD* company of guards. Asche and 2 SS in a truck, accompanied the captured Jews to the garage of 510, avenue Louise, Brussels, the former HQ of the *Judenabteilung*.

Owing to the fact that many of those who were arrested belonged to the bourgeoisie and even the aristocracy, it was left to the *Devisenschutzkommando* – a customs police unit which reported directly to the *Reich's* Ministry of Finance – who carried out the arrests in the victims homes.

According to Erdmann's *Aktion Ilitis* the Germans were to execute the plan in one fell swoop so as not to give the Jews time to hide their assets. All in all the raid in Brussels mobilised about 80 men and succeeded in seizing 750 Jews in their homes. Secretly *Le Flambeau*, the voice of the *Jewish Defence Committee (CDJ)* jeered at the naivety of the Belgian Jews. *You would have to be quite naïve to [believe] in the promises of the likes of Hitler and his henchmen. Despite the mass deportations of foreign Jews [...], those holding the Belgian nationality have deluded themselves in the hope that they will not be troubled. It has been said*, explained this spokesman of the Jewish Resistance, *that Queen Elisabeth, the Queen Mother (the spouse of King Albert II), as well as other key figures, had obtained Hitler's promise that Belgian Jews would not be deported.*

The rumour originates from a memo dated 4 August 1942 addressed to the president of the *AJB* in Brussels. The writer was Felix Landrien, the director of the Department for POW's. He offered the Queen Mother the possibility of getting out of this situation without losing face. An agreement (the lesser of the two evils) had been granted to the Belgian authorities just one month previously. One assured the Queen Mother that these measures would be applied in a humanitarian manner, that *the families would not be separated*, and that upon arrival at their destination, the deportees would be treated *decently*, which in fact - under a humanitarian pretext - invited the Belgian authorities to approve the deportation of foreign Jews. With regard to the latter, the Queen Mother complied with the gentleman's agreement made, shortly afterwards on 12 August 1942, between Baron Wilhelm von Hahn from the Military Administration's Police Group which had been responsible for the Jewish Question since the spring of 1942 and Count Gobert d'Aspremont Lynden, the deputy head of King Leopold's cabinet and Baron Eduard de Streel, the secretary of Queen Elisabeth. It was a matter of organizing a space for intervention, of *not following up the requests of foreign Jews who were of no particular interest* i.e. *not in a special situation (for instance children who had been separated from their parents) of highly justifiable exceptions* likely to be submitted to the German Baron. The children in question were considered to be *abandoned* since, according to the cynicism of Nazi jargon, they had not accompanied their parents who had been forced to work in the East. At this point in time the SS were not authorized to include large numbers of children in the Transports which left Mechelen for Auschwitz. However they were included right from the start, Transport 1 had 94 deportees under the age of 16. This figure fulfilled the quota of 10% who were considered unfit for work. Children even featured among the "summoned workers", 55 of them were born in the 1930's.

The results of the round-ups soon altered the composition of the trains destined for Auschwitz.

Children and the elderly rapidly became the most numerous contingent in the Transports, a dramatic turnaround in the make-up of the Transports which resulted in the systematic and immediate extermination of victims upon arrival in Auschwitz. It was the infamous *Vel' d'Hiv* round-up, conducted in Paris during the night of 16 and 17 July 1942, which prompted the *RSHA* to modify their initial plan. The sheer scale of this round-up had not been seen in the West before, 13,152 *undesirable elements*, foreign or stateless Jews, including their children, numbering 4,051 i.e. 30% of the total, were seized. During the preparations for *Spring Breeze* the French authorities suggested the mass deportation of children in order to fulfil the quota demanded by the Germans, thus enabling the French police to prevent the surrendering of French citizens, even Jewish to the occupying forces. Surprised at this unexpected suggestion, Dannecker, who was responsible for Jewish Affairs in France, immediately submitted this proposition to Eichmann on 6 July 1942. He received a belated response: one of Eichmann's deputies sent the authorization to include them on the trains as from 15 August 1942. It was to similar orders from the *RSHA* that the Military Authorities in Belgium and Northern France referred to, when explaining their shift in policy from *forced labour* to *general evacuation*.

Whilst the round-ups were dealing with the Jewish Question, the abandoned children were often taken in by neighbours who, quite innocently, informed the *AJB*. The practice of putting up these children in Aryan households was soon prohibited and the Military Authorities put the *AJB* in charge of opening a new home for "abandoned children" in Wezembeek-Oppem, on the outskirts of Brussels. *L'Oeuvre Nationale de l'Enfance (ONE)* assisted in the setting up of this institution. Maurice Heiber, a philanthropist and benefactor of the Israelite Orphanage of Brussels, was placed in charge of the social services for the compulsory community of "pure bred" Jews, however he was perturbed by the fact that all these Jewish children "orphaned" as a result of the round-up were being held in one place. On 18 August 1942 he made his concerns known to the directress of *ONE*, Yvonne Nevejean. Answerable to the Home Office and the families themselves, this high ranking civil servant *confirmed that ONE would fight in favour of this question [of abandoned children] and that all its efforts would be directed in this defence.*

Heiber (codenamed 'H') and Nevejean (codenamed 'N') both joined the children's section of the *CDJ* several months later. Howe Jospa, alias 'Yvonne' had been the mainstay of this organization since the end of August 1942, even before the official constitution of the *CDJ*.

3,000 Jewish children were provided with false identities and placed in various institutions, including Catholic, and with Belgian families. In August 1944, just before the Liberation, 2,104 children were still being cared for within this system i.e. 30% of all the children who were saved from deportation, the vast majority of them secretly. Even the children who were in *AJB* homes, of which there were several hundred, finally followed this path. The managers and staff left them in the hands of Nevejean before taking, what was then, an illegal path in order to escape the last raid of the *Endlösung*. The rescue attempts were even more risky when attempted legally and the victims were at the complete mercy of the outcome of the round-up. On 21 September 1942 the Antwerp *Sipo-SD* rounded-up children who were residing in homes which formed part of the city's care services, 10 children from the *Pennsylvania Foundation*, 5 boys from the *Jongenshuis* and 25 girls from the *Meisjeshuis*. They were all deported with Transport 11 on 26 September 1942. They all died in the Auschwitz gas chambers. The youngest, Maurice Pfefer, was 5 years old. Just before the last train departure of 1942, Transports 16 and 17 on 30 October 1942, 8 Jewish children aged 4 and under were snatched from the *Good-Engels* day nursery in Antwerp.

In Brussels too, legal homes proved to be traps for the innocent victims. The very same day the new home in Wezembeek-Oppem was entirely raided. 66 people were taken – 58 children and 8 teachers – to the *Kazern Dossin*. Marie Albert, the Jewish directress, of Belgian nationality was authorised to accompany them to the main entrance of the *Sammellager*. Before leaving she just had time to whisper to the non-Jewish charlady, Julia Dehaes, that she should immediately inform the directress of *ONE*, about what had happened. Not knowing what else to do in such a desperate situation Nevejean turned to Queen Elisabeth, the Queen Mother, for help.

Yvonne Nevejean moved quickly in order to secure their freedom. She contacted the *AJB*, and in turn, they called on Léon Plateau for further assistance. He held the office of Director of Religions at the Ministry of Justice and was responsible for the practice of the Israelite religion. The effect was immediate. The next day, in fact the day prior to departure of the last Transports, the 58 children were released *in extremis*. Steckmann, the commander of the *Kazern Dossin* also released another 7 children and all of them went to the home which had been returned to them by General Reeder. Only Ziskind Gutmacher and Israel Wajnacht, the children's primary school teachers, got on the train for Auschwitz the next day. They were foreign Jews and fell outside the Queen's circle of protective influence. Gutmacher, who was then 20 years old, survived the Shoah but Wajnacht who was only 19 at the time, died in Auschwitz on 2 December 1942.



Ziskind Gutmacher (1922 Lodz – 1948 Brussels)
Israel Wajnacht (1922 Warsaw – 1942 Auschwitz)

The Germans were now bombarded with numerous distractive situations within the framework of these (Belgian) circumstances. The military administration wanted to minimize the impact of the Deportations and even permitted a number of 'abandoned children', that were forbidden to be housed by Aryan families, to be given shelter in a Jewish home for children. They stayed there whilst awaiting the total evacuation of the Jewish population under the *Sipo-SD*. As in the beginning of the Deportation, when Belgian Jews were entitled to a modicum of protection, a rumour now began to circulate that the unexpected release of the 'abandoned children' was the result of an intervention by Queen Elisabeth. However the Royal Household was in no way involved with this particular event nor with the release, en masse, of Jews holding the Belgian nationality who had been interned in the *Kazern Dossin* since the raids of 1942. These arrests were contrary to the agreements concluded with the Military Authorities on 25 September 1942 which led to Reeder reprimanding Ehlers on the *extremely unfortunate consequences, from a political point of view*, of the abuses of the *Sipo-SD*. However neither the Military Authorities, its Police Group, nor its specialist in Jewish Affairs, Baron von Hahn, lifted a finger to liberate the wrongly arrested Belgian citizens. Unable to meet the conditions necessary for transportation to Auschwitz, since they had not been arrested for violating any anti-Jewish orders e.g. not displaying the yellow star, these people were forced to remain interned in the *Sammellager*. At the end of June 1943 they numbered more than 470.

Asche, however, refused the pleas of the *AJB* to have them released. The *Sipo-SD* was well aware of the pressure being applied by the Foreign Office in Berlin to the Military Authorities in Belgium to lift the immunity of the Belgian Jews. The SS had no qualms

in explaining this to the representatives of the Jewish community. When the Transports stopped in the autumn of 1942 they were told that when they resumed in January 1943, *the differences that currently exist will be withdrawn, and it will therefore no longer be necessary to bother about releasing these prisoners only to have to arrest them again at a later date.*

However on 15 February 1943 the question of freeing imprisoned Belgian citizens came up once again. Chief Rabbi Ullmann, who, even after resigning, continued his philanthropic work, approached the deputy head of the King's Cabinet. He submitted the cases of two war veterans who were interred in the *Kazern Dossin*. Gobert d'Aspremont Lynden tackled Leopold III's German "guardian", Colonel Werner Kiewitz, on this subject. It was a bad moment and the German stalled. He forwarded the request to Gérard Romsée who had the ear of the Military Authorities. Kiewitz knew that within the Nazi hierarchy it was becoming increasingly more unacceptable for POW's to leave the area designated for their captivity. On 18 February 1943, Heinrich Müller, the head of Section IV of the *RSHA* arrived in Brussels to give the King the *Führer's* formal demand by hand. Hitler strongly disapproved of Leopold III's stand regarding the deportation of Belgians for forced labour in Germany and threatened to compel him *to change his residence to one beyond the frontiers of Belgium if he stepped outside the reserve again* to which he was confined.

The King's protests made no references to the deportation of Jews to the East even though it was presented as a service and and perceived as such in the royal entourage. This, so called, dispatching of workers from the kingdom was not legally covered in an order from the Military Authorities permitting the forced removal of residents from the occupied territories. The order of von Falkenhausen dated 6 October 1942, covered only men between the ages of 18 and 50, and women between 21 and 35 of age. This triggered a mass movement of public opinion against the enforced labour of Belgians in Germany.

In contrast to the indifference shown by the authorities in regard to the deportation of the Jews, and specifically those of a foreign nationality, which continued throughout October 1942, it was the population in general, including members of the establishment who rose up against this policy which had been enforced upon them by the Nazis. The judiciary, which had remained silent during the round-ups and the departure of the Transports to the East, expressed *the painful emotion of the Belgian population* when faced with the threat of the forced labour of Belgians in Germany. Furthermore senior members of the judiciary reprimanded the country's mayors and the local police forces by proceeding with the arrests of anyone resisting the German order, the latter were liable to criminal proceedings for arbitrary arrests. Even the

general secretaries took a stance against this contentious order. They denounced the fact that the forced labourers were, *snatched from their homes against their will and taken from their familiar surroundings in their own country and exposed to increased dangers in a foreign land.* Cardinal van Roey and finally even the King found an excuse to be able to join the opposition movement.

However this sudden reaction by the occupied country's authorities came to an abrupt halt when the question of Jewish deportations was raised. No one seized the opportunity to include their plight in the protests. In particular the King and the Queen Mother did not reassert their positions when Jewish deportations started up again on 15 January 1943 after a break of 3 months. Transports 18 and 19, which left Mechelen as one train, took people of all ages, including children with their parents. 17% of the deportees were children under the age of 16 and 6 of them were even "abandoned" children.

The King chose for adopting a negotiated politic, as the better of two evils, leading to a concentrated intervention in individual cases judged on merit. The possible steps taken by the King on behalf of the war veterans do not mention that the King's cabinet or the Queen Mother herself are responsible for Jews holding the Belgian nationality, in the *Kazern Dossin*. Louis Fredericq, the head of the cabinet of Leopold III, is therefore justly surprised when Felix Landrien (vide: pp 212, memo 4 August 1942) advises him on 7 July 1943 about the rumour that the release of the Jews at the end of June 1943 was a direct result of the forceful intervention of Queen Elisabeth. According to what was said to him the Israelites should have been arrested and then released, this being the result from a decision taken after the intervention of the Queen Mother. He also noted that the Israelite authorities (*AJB*) were exceptionally pleased with this result. Louis Fredericq conferred the same day with Count Henricourt de Grunne, head of the Royal Household, who was equally surprised. The Count had no knowledge of a measure following the Queen Mother's intervention. On 26 and 27 June 1943 the *Sammellager Mecheln* released 2 groups comprised of 143 and 160 Jews holding the Belgian nationality. On 29 June 1943, although too late to prevent the last group from leaving, Erdmann rushed to the *Kazern Dossin* in order to communicate Himmler's order that Jews with the Belgian nationality should be included in the Transports leaving for Auschwitz. As a result of this, therefore, although General von Falkenhausen only authorised the *Sipo-SD* round-up on 20 July 1943 against the Belgian Jews, the 3rd group, whose freedom had been announced, remained in Mechelen up to the time of the departure of the Transport of Belgians (Transport 22 B) on 20 September 1943. From the 794 deportees on Transport 22 B, 169 were already present in the *Kazern Dossin* prior to the commencement of *Aktion Ilitis*.

The rumour that Queen Elisabeth, the Queen Mother was influential in the release of the others and the protection of the Belgian Jews in general had an unexpected effect. Count de Grunne quickly noted that the Jews were the losers in the power struggle between the Military Authorities and the Sipo-SD. These great acts of clemency are not always what they appear. *These great measures seem to have been a blatant lie* the Count de Grunne wrote to her in a letter dated 7 July 1943, the majority of the 225 Belgian Jews taken in Antwerp during the night of 3 and 4 September 1943 were freed from Mechelen and confident in the protection from which they now benefited, allowed themselves to be tricked by the cunning Holm. By way of a raid in this town emptied of its Jews since the devastation of the summer of 1942, the local *Judenreferent* contented itself with liberating them in June, alongside the directors and employees of the local *AJB* committee. In Antwerp the *Judenaktion* of 3 September 1943 marked the end of the Jewish Question. The liquidation of the official ghetto and its inmates made the City of Antwerp *Judenrein*.

An unexpected observer admired Holm's *clever blow*. According to Salomon Vanden Berg, who was himself harassed in Brussels during the raid, the Antwerp *SS* *so brilliantly caught out these good Belgians*. As soon as they came out of the *Kazern Dossin*, he gathered together, the first time in July 1943, 130 *returnees* who were summoned to his office at 21, Della Faillelaan, Antwerp, through the local *AJB* with which he had renewed ties. From the end of the summer of 1942 the local Jewish authorities, *who represented Jewish interests and liaised with the Military Authorities*, were not in a position to maintain a regular relationship with Holm. The *SS* needed him to keep hold of the 139 Jews from Antwerp who had been freed. The majority, 101 in fact, had been stripped of everything. Since their arrest all of their furniture had been removed from their homes. The deportation of Jews freed up housing. With the completion of the first batch of 10,000 deportations, Group XII of the Military Administration in charge of Jewish property prepared themselves to repossess 2,500 Jewish homes, which aroused the lust of a coalition of German services, including the Army.

The most relentless was Franz Mader, the head of the Belgian arm of the Western Service of the Ministry of Occupied Territories in the East. Alfred Rosenberg, his minister, obtained Hitler's approval for his administration to commandeer all the furniture from the Jews of the West. This was the subject of the *Möbelaktion*. The final order, regarding the statute of the Jews, which was delayed until 21 September 1942, in order to complete the first wave of deportations, forbade the Jews to make any unauthorised transactions regarding the disposal of their personal possessions and assets. With the help of the *Sipo-SD*, who collected the keys



Mader's Transportations. One of the depots of Jewish property seized in the West. Oberhausen, Germany.

of "abandoned" houses, Mader and his 150 employees organized the transportation of more than 100,000 cubic meters of furniture, fixtures and fittings until June 1944. Operation *Möbelaktion* ran in tandem with the deportations. Group XII estimated that the value of this merchandise was 10,000,000 Reichs Mark or BEF 125,000,000. At today's equivalent that would amount to about EUR 75,000,000.

With their furniture taken away, Holm kept those Jews, who had been released in June 1943, in suspense in spite of their demands for the return of their chattels. In a good natured manner Holm assured them that *only part of the planned measures could be solved immediately, and that the furniture issue would have to remain in suspense for a few more days*. Two months later, during the week prior to the raid, Holm went to the *AJB*'s local committee and ordered them to summon 130 of those who had been freed to their offices in the Della Faillelaan in Antwerp on Friday 3 September 1943, at 7.30p.m. They would then be able to talk with *two gentlemen from Paris and two from Berlin, senior officials from the Ministry of the East, who dealt exclusively with the question of furniture*. The time of the meeting was, as every Jew knew, half an hour into the curfew however according to Salomon Vanden Berg, Holm (charmingly) issued them his personal safe conduct authority and even authorized them to take single carriage trams to the local HQ of the *Sipo-SD*. In the afternoon, the *AJB*'s local committee and its principle members of staff, 19 in all, gathered together. Holm also summoned them, asking them to bring him a general report on the activities of the local committee and its services since 1942. The officials, their staff and those "liberated" had only just arrived at the Della Faillelaan - there were still 125- when they were arrested.



Bitzika Vadoche. Gypsy card: temporary resident's card for Gypsies. Auschwitz number Z 9,143. Died in Birkenau.

In Antwerp, the *Aktion Ilitis*, failed to achieve all of its objectives. Holm had no illusions about the possible outcome. He had only provided 2 lorries for the transfer of the 225 Belgians who were ultimately snatched in Antwerp and taken to the *Kazern Dossin*. The first truck arrived safely. Normaly the journey from Antwerp to Mechelen, by road would only have taken about 30 minutes. However the journey of the second truck with 145 prisoners turned into one of tragedy.

Holm and his Flemings piled them into the *death truck*, as it became known after the war. It was a pantehnicon supplied by the Antwerp firm which had a monopoly contract for moving Jewish furniture in Antwerp. This almost hermetically sealed and overloaded vehicule took more than 50 minutes to complete the journey. The driver and 2 Flemish SS took a 20 minute break en route to partake of a little refreshment. Meanwhile the incarcerated Jews slowly suffocated. Upon arrival in Mechelen 9 Jews were found to be dead and 14 others were rushed to Notre Dame Hospital. From the 145 remaining survivors very few were able to support themselves. The camps infirmary was busy throughout the night.

18 The Gypsy Raid

A few weeks after the completion of *Aktion Ilitis*, 350 Gypsies were rounded-up in Belgium and the North of France. Compared with the Jewish round-ups the Nazis needed no special edit or authority to isolate and take the Gypsies. Stigmatised as pariahs these people were already discriminated against by the Belgian authorities and, on the initiative of the Aliens Department, regulations against them became even more restrictive under the German occupation. With the cooperation of the Belgian police the Gypsies were held in camps between 5 and 20 January 1942. They were issued with a 3 month traveller's card, *Zigeunerkaart*. They were ordered to report on the 5th of each month to the nearest police station. The Gypsies, who were by nature a nomadic people, had their fingerprints and photographs taken for registration and tracking purposes. People who had a fixed abode tended to escape this system of ethnic control.

The order to deport the Gypsies to the *Zigeunerlager Auschwitz*, arrived on 29 February 1943 in Section V of the Brussels' *Sipo-SD*, the *Kripo*, at the same time as the order was received in The Hague. However in occupied France, where most of the Gypsies in the West were to be found, the *RSHA* did not issue an order to imprison Gypsies in Auschwitz. Himmler's order dated 16 December 1942 concerned the Gypsies of the *Reich* : their

internment in a concentration camp was considered as the *end to the fight against the Gypsy scourge*. The decision was based on a policy aimed at forced settling and exclusion, which reached its zenith within the concentration camp system.

Only Gypsies taken within the jurisdiction of the Military Commander for Belgium and the North of France together with those from the *Reich*’s police HQ in The Netherlands, 2 small Transports in all, were deported to Auschwitz. In Brussels the Gypsies fell under the jurisdiction of *SS Leutnant* Hoffman, Deputy Head of the *Kripo* in Belgium. On 29 February 1943 the *Sipo-SD* received orders from Berlin regarding the deportation of Gypsies to Auschwitz. Despatched by the *Kripo* they also reached Section V and not Section IV i.e. the *Gestapo* as was customary. However the round-up occurred somewhat late. It began 8 months later. In Belgium the Gypsies were arrested in their camps by the *Felgendarmarie* and by the National Police in France. The Gypsies from France, half of whom were French citizens were taken to the *Kazern Dossin*, in 4 groups between 5 and 9 November 1943.

Excluding the mass arrests targeting particular ethnic groups and categories, Jews of Belgian nationality or Gypsies, the raids took place within the space of 1 month, from mid-August to the last days of summer in 1942.

19 The Schedule of the Round-ups

The comparatively short period covering the mass arrests proved decisive for the Jewish population. Unlike the period when Jews were summoned to the *Kazern Dossin* and subjected to sporadic arrests the round-ups of the late summer of 1942 effected the entire Jewish community and their successive and repeated

ravages compelled Jews to either go, en masse, into hiding or to act illegally for their own safety and protection.

The devastating raids were focused on Antwerp, a city, where, contrary to Brussel, the local authorities had no qualms about distributing the infamous Yellow Star. The Catholic mayor pursued a policy of compromise with regard to the Jewish Question which, in fact, made a complete farce of the supposedly passive execution of German orders. Léon Delwaide, the Deputy Mayor before the outbreak of the war, was promoted to Mayor in December 1940. He neither succumbed to the exhortations of the elected members of the *VNV* nor the *Rex* party who attempted to encourage him to go beyond the anti-Jewish orders which the Nazis had issued. However Delwaide had, before WWII, maintained good relations with the Flemish nationalists. Delwaide supported the idea of a *Flemish gathering* founded on an alliance between the Catholic party and the *VNV*. In January 1942 he agreed to accept the appointment as Mayor of Greater Antwerp with a council of aldermen in which the pre-war elected members of the New Order had control of the executive in the City of Antwerp and the suburbs. This reform in the extensive surrounding areas, a modification of the institutions imposed by the occupying forces, allowed the latter to benefit from a centralised command of the police forces operating within the Antwerp conglomeration.

Within this framework, the occupying forces, i.e. the *Sipo-SD* and the *Feldgendarmarie*, were able to develop the practice, so typical of Nazism, by which they fostered direct relations with the Belgian police and circumnavigated the governmental hierarchy and in particular, in this case, the authority of the mayors. Delwaide, who was chief of the Antwerp police, did well out of the

Round-ups of Foreign Jews in 1942				
Date	City	Belgian police	Germans and Belgians of the New Order	Jews arrested and deported
Night 15-16/8/1942	Antwerp	58	?Feldgd + ?Sipo	845
Night 28-29/8/1942	Antwerp	68 + 50/60?	Sipo	943
Night 3-4/9/1942	Brussels	0	?Feldgd + ?Sipo	660
11-12/9/1942	Antwerp	?	?Feldgd + ?Sipo + 20 Vl. SS	745
11-12/9/1942	Lens-Lille	French police	?Feldgd + ?Sipo	514
22-23/9/1942	Antwerp	0	?Feldgd + ?Sipo + 20? Vl. SS	761
Total number of Jews rounded-up and deported during the mass arrests of 1942				4,468 of which 3,954 in Belgium
? = number unestablished - Feldgd = Feldgendarmen - SS Flm = Flemish SS -Sipo = Sicherheitspolizei-DSK = Devisenschutzkommando				
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situation. He was an experienced politician and master in the art of prevarication and, whilst keeping his hands firmly on the reins of power, delegating his legal responsibility. Acting as though he had no influence in terms of the arrests, he left this task to his chief superintendent, Jozef De Potter, who had occupied this post before the war, to second his officers, as of June 1942, in assisting in the rounding-up of the Jewish “forced labourers” to be deported to the strategic building sites for the *Atlantic Wall*.

From the total of 9 trains that left Belgium, 6 of them originated in Antwerp. During the summer of 1942, the city was the main center of the forced labour policy directed solely against the Jews. Furthermore, as Jews began to resist being summoned to Mechelen for *evacuation*, Antwerp became the center of a police system which brought them, men, women, children and the elderly, by force to the *Kazern Dossin*. From the 5 major raids that the *Sipo-SD* managed to organise, 4 of them were made in Antwerp and only 1 in Brussels.

Paradoxically, it was, however, in Brussels, where more than 50% of Belgium’s Jews lived, that they suffered less devastation than Antwerp from the mass arrests and the resulting deportations. It has been estimated that only 30% of the Jews in Brussels were deported whilst nationally this figure was almost 50%. These figures can be explained by the fact that in Antwerp 75% of the Jews were taken for deportation as a result of the raids.

The appointment of the mayors had serious consequences for the Jewish population. Contrary to the acquiescing behaviour of Delwaide, Jules Coelst put on a show of legal resistance. He was however politically very close to Delwaide during the 1930’s. He was an established member of the Catholic party, and like Delwaide, he positioned himself as a defender of the middle classes against the competition from the immigrants i.e. the Jews. His refusal to allow his staff to be seconded by the occupying forces for the distribution of the Yellow Stars was somewhat ambivalent. While he protested in the name of human dignity, the ethical argument still needed patriotic justification, although erroneous, that *a large number of Jews are, in fact Belgian*.

A month later this unruly mayor was once again in the limelight when he refused to make his police force available to the German authorities to arrest resistant Jews *because the mayor, chief of police, would have to answer to the repressive courts of the ‘chef d’arrestation arbitraire’*. On 3 July 1942, the *OFK 672* had asked him, *to take [...] by force any Jews resisting deportation for forced labour in France*. The only Transport to leave Brussels was on 26 June 1942. It included only 85 Jewish forced labourers out of

the 200 who had been summoned. These numbers reflect the full extent of the insubordination of the targeted Jews and the predicted disobedience with regard to those who would be summoned for deportation from Mechelen. In Brussels, the Germans were forced to operate only with their own forces, assisted from time to time by a few New Order auxiliaries, who led the Germans to the hiding places or even the legal residences of the Jews.

L’Ami du Peuple, which invited members of the anti-Jewish League to assist in the flushing out of Jews from their hiding places, explained, in their edition dated 22 August 1942, that *not all the Jews found such “generous” Belgians and were caught in their homes or hiding places by the Feldgendarmarie. You would have thought that the ‘wailing wall’ had moved from Jerusalem to Anderlecht* (a borough of Brussels). Whilst these isolated arrests increased in the capital, the occupying forces delayed launching fullscale and widespread operations that were essential for filling the transports with deportees destined for the East.

20 The Only Raid in Brussels in the Night of 3 and 4 September 1942

Following the raids in Antwerp during August 1942 SS-*Sturmabführer* Thomas, who at this time was in need of reinforcements in Brussels, attempted to circumnavigate the support offered by the city’s mayor. Instead he was inclined to rely upon the cooperative *Kolonel* Van Coppenolle, a Flemish nationalist and a member of the New Order whom Romsée, of the *VNV*, had arranged to have promoted to the position of chief of the Belgian police, and who also commanded the constabulary. It was therefore a Belgian superior officer who ordered the chief superintendent of Brussels to send an emissary, on the morning of 3 September 1942, to 453, avenue Louise. The second in command of Central Division, Albert Tasseel, learnt from Thomas that between 100 and 150 policemen were being called up for this specific operation. Their duty would be to accompany the Germans responsible for arresting *a certain number of foreigners – Jews – who have not responded to the summons*.

Contrary to Antwerp’s deputy police superintendents who had these resources available, he informed the SS officer, second in command at the *RSHA* in Belgium, that the mayor and the chief of police had decided, henceforth, not to allow the police to cooperate with the Germans in this matter any longer. Thomas insisted: it was, to be specific, not a question of Belgians *but foreigners*, and



The perimeter of the Brussels Raid.

the Belgian police were only auxiliaries in this action. Thomas' xenophobic arguments held no sway over the patriotic objections voiced by the capital's mayor and his colleagues from the surrounding suburbs of Brussels.

With reinforcements from the Belgian police force Thomas drew up a plan of attack to capture Jews who lived in the surroundings of the *Gare du Midi* and the *Gare du Nord*, two areas in Brussels where most of the Jewish immigrants had taken up residence. The round-up took place during the night of 3 and 4 September 1942. In the streets around the *Gare du Midi* and the adjacent boroughs of St. Gillis and Anderlecht about 660 Jews were snatched from their homes and brought to the *Sammellager* in Mechelen, providing the *Sipo-SD* with sufficient deportees to complete the formation of Transport 8 and begin with Transport 9. In St. Gillis about 100 Jews were arrested the rue de Mérode.

Two families were taken from house number 44. A seamstress, Malka Chaja Skoczylas lived here alone with her 3 children, Regina aged 15, Jacob aged 12 and Willy Szwarcbort aged 9. Another family of tailors were taken from the same house: Abram Lekowicz, his wife, Chaja Szmulewicz and their 2 children, Eugénie aged 14 and Pierrot aged 11. The Jewish tenants of 44, rue de Mérode did not survive the deportation. In rue de Hollande and rue de Suède, which ran at right angles to each other, the German police apprehended 31 and 28 Jews respectively. They seized about 25% of their victims in these 3 streets, in all 159 Jews, of which 48 were children under the age of 15.

On the northern side of the *Gare du Midi*, in Anderlecht 52 Jews were taken into custody, 31 of whom were located in the rue Brogniez. At number 114, Moszek-Bacalel Najmiller, a 69 year old tailor was arrested. He did not survive. At number 126 they arrested a family of 5, the Rozencwajgs, the youngest of whom was Albert who was not yet 5 years old. During this raid 30 children under 5 were taken away including 9 children who were not yet even 2 years old: Gertrud Grunblatt, Rosalie Gradus, Simon Van Cleef, Josephine Singer, Jeanette Dawidowicz, Sylvain Clément Fajgenbaum, Ester Bauman, Aron Nathan Perkal and Léon Badler – all of whom were born in Belgium and all of whom died in Auschwitz.

On the other side of the Boulevard du Midi, in the heart of Brussels lies the Marolles Quarter. Here the results of the raid were even more destructive: 48 Jews were arrested in the rue des Tanneurs, 17 in the rue St. Ghislain and 20 in the rue de Nancy. From the 85 arrests which were made in these streets 25 were children. In rue des Tanneurs 205, the family Grunblatt were taken.

Gertrude Grunblatt, deportee number 52 on Transport 9, was only 15 months old when she disappeared forever in Auschwitz. Hélène Domb was just 2 years old when she was allocated number 756 on Transport 13. Her 5 year old brother, Isidor, was given number 755 and deported on the same Transport. The parents of Hélène and Isidor Grunblatt suffered a similar fate to their children when they were arrested at their home in rue de Nancy. The oldest person to be snatched in this raid lived at 28, rue de Nancy. Moïse Glickman was deported at the age of 76. He did not survive. During this action 11 people over the age of 70 were captured.

However it should be borne in mind that the 660 Jews rounded-up in Brussels and taken to the *Kazern Dossin* constituted a much lower number than those who were taken even during the smallest raid in Antwerp. Owing to continued staff shortages this was the first and last round-up of Jews in Brussels.

21 The Antwerp Raids – *Modus Operandi*

The raids which took place in the confined area of central Antwerp during August 1942 resulted in the arrest of 1,788 Jews. 845 were taken during the night of 15 and 16 August 1942 and an additional 943 in the night spanning 28 and 29 August 1942. A further 120 arrests were made in the suburbs of Antwerp during this period. Approximately 11% of Antwerp's Jewry were captured in 2 round-ups. These 2 nights of raids in Antwerp were just as extensive as the 2 days of round-ups during the great Parisian raids which took

place a month later. In the 'Belgian' *Vel' d'Hiver*, the arrests made during the second night of the Antwerp raids were carried out almost solely by the police in Antwerp.

The increasing number of arrests confirmed the collusive support of the Belgian police. The greater number of police involved in the arrests increased the area covered and inevitably the greater the devastation to the Jewish population as a whole. In the First Raid, where the Belgian police were compelled to take on an auxiliary role, the Germans seized 802 Jews, i.e. 94% of the that night's arrests, by simply restricting their operations to 10 streets. During the second round-up, where the Belgian police were the principal players, 30 streets had to be covered to snatch 650 people which amounted to less than 70% of the night's arrests. It was therefore necessary to deploy their forces in a total of 78 streets in order to equal the number of arrests made in the First Raid, and even exceed it.

In September 1942 the 2 round-ups in Antwerp only succeeded in delivering 1,505 Jews to the *Sammellager*. The September raids were composed of less than 9% Antwerp Jews. On 11 and 12 September 1942 the role of the Belgian police was limited to the occasional intervention, however during the raid which took place during the night of 22 and 23 September 1942 the raiders were composed of Holm's right hand men from Antwerp and the *Flemish SS*. The circumstances were certainly different. The last raid in September effectively brought the major operations against the Jews of Antwerp to an end. Between August and September 1942 20% of the Antwerp Jews had been eliminated. By comparison only 2% of the Jews of Brussels had been arrested. In the calculating the final cost of Jewish lives in the deportations resulting from the round-ups Antwerp bore the greatest burden.

The August raids, which were the most devastating, showed that thanks to the assistance of the Belgian police, the Nazi police force was able to make the most out of the Jewish demographic characteristics in Antwerp. Compared with Brussels, where the population was more dispersed, the Jewish settlement was situated around a single railway station, the Centraal Station. Since it was more concentrated, the devastation was all the greater with the deployment of a combined force of 100 to 150 Belgian and German policemen. It was the system used that turned out to be essential in order to seize the quota for a Transport of 1,000 deportees in a single night. Alfred Thomas, as we have just said, called upon the aid of the Belgian police for the Brussels raid and it is because he did not obtain it that his results were mediocre when compared with Antwerp.

Earlier, the system in Antwerp had included the same number of executants. A deputy superintendent from the police in



Eric Holm (in civies) the SS-NCO responsible for Jewish Affairs with his SS-Männer at the Antwerp office of the Sipo-SD

Deurne, Jos Bouhon, gave an interesting, though problematical, indication concerning this subject. The report he sent to the Crown prosecutor, following the night raid of 28 to 29 August (the Second Raid), concerned *the arrest of a thousand Jews of foreign nationality upon the order of the German police, the Sicherheitspolizei*. His report said that the person behind this was a German section head whom he hesitated to formally identify. *Probably Holm*, he wrote. Perhaps, but it is more likely that it was the leader to whom Holm reported in Antwerp, *SS Leutnant Otto Desselman*, the head of the local branch of the *Sipo-SD*, or maybe it was Alfred Thomas himself who organised the entire anti-Jewish action across the country. The point is that it was a question of forcing the hands of the Belgians in Antwerp and, in this crescendo of implications, of making them responsible for carrying out the arrests themselves in a much wider area making the raid far more extensive.

This raid, initially intended for the night of 27 to 28 August 1942, was cancelled even before it had begun. At 6.30p.m. – we shall remember this hour –Antwerp's main police office informed the Precinct VI by telephone that *the Sicherheitspolizei's service order will not take place tonight*. It was in relation to this abortive raid on 27 August 1942, that the *section head* in question stated: *I had 40 SS-Männer, 45 Feldgendarmes under my authority. I was also sure of the cooperation of the Belgian police and the national constabulary*. It is unknown whether, as announced, *Kolonel Van Coppenolle*, whose good relations with Thomas we well know, sent his policemen of this abortive raid. There is still some scepticism regarding the *SS-Männer* whose number exceeds the total number at the local branch of the *Sipo-SD*, unless Brussels sent *SS* reinforcements. Furthermore, the *Flemish SS* only intervened *en masse* in the raids as from September 1942.



Jozef De Potter, Antwerp's Chief Superintendent, provided the *Sipo-SD* with 64 police officers for the Round-up of 27 August 1942.

On the other hand, Jozef De Potter's *Deportation of the Jews* service order allocated on 27 August 1942, for special duty, 60 police officers and 3 deputy superintendents from Precint VII, Precint X and Berchem (a suburb adjacent to the city). Therefore an extensive night operation against the Jews of Antwerp required the deployment of an operational force, albeit of diverse structure, of at least 148 men. Moreover the Germans were equipped with cars and trucks for the mass arrests to an extent that they had so far not employed in an occupied country.

During the first raid the Belgian police's mission was essentially to seal off blocks of houses. The 3 deputy superintendents whom De Potter ordered to report to the *Sipo-SD*, at 9p.m., returned with orders to *seal off* certain *areas*. They had been promised help from the *Feldgendarmarie*. Indeed the police noticed cars and lorries arriving with *Feldgendarmes* and members of the *Sipo-SD*. The Germans then proceeded to *arrest nearly all of the residents* in the area designated 'for cleansing'. Those who had been arrested were then *loaded into the trucks*, women and children included, and placed in the custody of the Belgians.

It was during the second raid that the Belgian police did nearly all of the 'work' themselves. Henceforth in one raid after another the Belgian police were tactfully manoeuvred so as to increase their involvement in the *Judenaktionen*. For the first time

on 15 August 1942, De Potter did not specify *the different missions* assigned at night to the 58 superintendents and police officers who had been selected to carry out the *Sipo-SD's order*. Nevertheless they made themselves available. In Antwerp, since 1940, the legal nature of such a German order to be executed by the Belgian police in a specific location, was of no concern to the Belgian authorities. However, it should be clearly understood that it was not just a question of a general patrol through the city to ensure overall security and the location was not just any quarter in the city.

It was the Jewish Quarter which was the target of the city's anti-Semitic movement. In December 1940, *Volk en Staat*, the unofficial newspaper of the VNV, lashed out with a vitriolic description of the *ghetto*, [...] *a foul quarter with Jews who enrich themselves, Jews with or without beards under their large hooked noses, filthy and ragged*. This area, with a high density of Jewish homes, had already suffered a pogrom on Easter Monday 1941. This Belgian-style '*Kristalnacht*', carried out in broad daylight, followed the release of the film '*Le Juif Immuable*'.

The 'Rex' (cinema), situated on the *De Keyserlei*, adjacent to the Jewish Quarter, was full; an audience of 1,500 was present to see Fritz Hippler's film. This successful film revived and popularised the *Führer's* prophecy, which he made on 30 January 1939, *on the extermination of the Jewish race in Europe* in a world war provoked by *international Jewish finance*. These words were enthusiastically applauded by the audience.

Spurred on by the leader of the Anti-Jewish League, René Lambrichts, 200 members of the audience that filled the auditorium, seized the opportunity to go on the rampage. They



The Antwerp Pogrom 14 April 1941. The fire at the synagogue in the Van den Nestlei. The crowd looks on.

were primarily militants from the *Volksverwering*, the *Dietsche Militie*, *Zwarte Brigade* and the *Algemene SS Vlaanderen*. They were at home in Antwerp. The city was an exemplary model of the New Order. The *Volksverwering* was the cradle of militant anti-Semitism and its bastion was Flanders. It was also the azimuth of radicalism. The most radical of the movements: *De Vlag* and the *Flemish SS* were, in general, supported by the denizens of Antwerp. Their most fanatical militants rivalled the members of the Anti-Jewish League in their frenzied enthusiasm to solve the Jewish Question in 'Germanic Flanders'. The far right Flemish nationalist movement, the *VNV* and its militia, the *Zwarte Brigade* had been won over by Nazi doctrine and proved to be no less ardent in their behaviour than their German counterparts. United in their hatred they all descended on the Jewish Quarter. Armed with clubs they succeeded in breaking about 200 windows and setting alight to 2 synagogues, one in the Oostenstraat and the other in the Van den Nestlei.

This violence was confined to a small group of anti-Semitic Belgian fanatics. After about 1 year and in spite of an increase in the intensity of the campaign, René Lambrecht's organization had less than 1,000 members. The *Sipo-SD* was forced to *concede*, however, that only a small majority of the population understood the extent of the Jewish Question. However, the violence demonstrated vividly the powerful anti-Jewish state of mind in Antwerp which Major Gerhardus, of the *Propaganda Abteilung*, announced before the Easter Pogrom of 1941. This outburst of anti-Semitic frenzy remained, however, was confined to Antwerp. The behaviour of the crowds was also symptomatic. Curious and passive they contemplated the fires. The firemen who arrived to extinguish the fires were prevented from taking action by the crazed militants.

Several Antwerp policemen were present but their numbers were too few to control the crowd faced with these dangerous excesses. On the other hand there were sufficient Belgian police officers when it came to hunting down Jews on the orders of the Germans. As from 1940 the governing authorities in Antwerp, from the mayor to the Crown prosecutor condoned the actions of the local police when executing orders emanating from the occupier against Jews. They turned a blind eye to infringements of Belgian law when aimed at a sector of the population whose very existence was under threat.

The lack of official reaction tended to trivialize this essentially illegal behaviour by the Belgian police. From November 1940 the local authorities' civil status departments willingly provided the Germans with lists of foreigners who had recently immigrated to Belgium. Jews were thus already identified even before the census of "pure bred" Jews had begun, which, incidently,

was just as illegal. On the basis of these lists of foreigners, the *Kommandantur* issued more than 8,000 expulsion orders for Jews. Antwerp's police force distributed these orders. On 21 December 1942 the first batch of expelled Jews left Antwerp, in the custody of the local police, in the direction of Hasselt (a city 100 km to the east of Antwerp in the province of Limburg). On the initiative of the Governor of Limburg, Gerard Romsée, the local authorities and the police took responsibility for these expelled Jews. By 12 February 1941 a total of 3,273 Jews, including families, were thus expelled. This specific measure effected approximately 10% of the Jews of Antwerp, which was still the most populous "Jewish" city, at the time, in Belgium. The expelled Jews were compelled to reside in some 45 Limburg boroughs, villages and towns under the control of the local police. Many people resisted expulsion after the first group had been expelled. The police, at the request of the *Kommandantur*, proceeded with their arrests as long as there was no recourse to violence.

22 The First Raid in Antwerp. The Night of 15 to 16 August 1942

Based on the first round-up the Antwerp police force made themselves freely available to play an active role in the deportation of Jewish forced labourers. In 1942, however they no longer restrained themselves from resorting to the use of force or even violence to achieve their objectives. The role that they played soon became standard procedure in the execution of successive German orders. The (Belgian) Employment Offices distributed each individual summons to those victims who had been selected for the *Organization Todt* in France, whose work was of strategic importance to the war effort. The police were also on duty at Cockerill Quay, where the Jews were gathered together prior to being taken to the railway station. During the evening of 14 August 1942 they were already busy preparing the fourth train of Jewish forced labourers destined for Northern France.

The *Sipo-SD* took advantage of this situation which leant weight to 'forced labour in the East' policy. The chief superintendent of the Antwerp police did not give details as to the objectives of the 58 police officers who were mobilised that evening, stating only that this was for *special availability*. The Nazi police, however, issued 75 *Abeitseinsatzbefehle* from the police station in the Vestingstraat in the Precinct VI and a further 77 from the police station in the Floristraat situated in the Precinct VII. Both police

stations were located within a stone's throw from the center of that night's round-up. The Antwerp police did not take over the tasks of the Jewish postmen who delivered the summons to Jewish households. The *Sipo-SD* used the summons to involve the Belgian police from day one and the policemen from the Precinct VII simply considered this to be part of the *operation to arrest Jews*. Handing over the summons was simply a pretext to take the person who had been summoned by force since he was automatically considered to be resisting. Officers from the 7th precinct arrested 20 'summoned' Jews during the course of the night.

During this, the First Raid, the Belgian police sealed off the adjacent blocks where the Germans, *Felgendarmes* and the SS made the arrests. 845 Jews were taken during this raid, 704 of whom were deported to Auschwitz from Mechelen on Transport 4 and the remaining 141 were sent to the East at a later date. The efficiency of the round-ups is borne out in the following statistics: 7 days were required to complete Transport 3 which left the *Kazern Dossin* on 15 August 1942. 2 days were needed to complete Transport 4. However the composition of the trains became disrupted as the majority of the deportees were unsuitable for *forced labour in the East*.

57% of the Jews arrested during the First Raid were between 5 and 15 years of age. 261 were children, 57 of whom were not even 5 years old. Furthermore 236 adults were, for various reasons, unsuitable for work. 30 deportees were over 70 years old. The oldest among them was Henri Rappaport who was 88 when arrested. He was taken from his home in 49, Somerstraat together with 4 other residents. In total 111 residents were taken in this street from houses with numbers between 6 and 71. This was the heart of the Jewish Quarter where the Germans snatched 90% of the total number of Jews in only 7 streets. A section of the Lange Kievitstraat was almost entirely decimated. From houses numbered 32 to 167, 147 people were taken. At number 114 they took the youngest child who fell victim in this raid, Simon Lic who was not even 3 months old. He was deported with his young mother, Flora Palkovicova on 25 August 1942. His father Joël Lic was away at the time of the raid. He formed part of a contingent of Jewish men forced to work in the North of France. He was deported 2 months after his wife. He did not survive the deportation either.

In the Leeuwerikstraat, a street which runs at right angles to the Somerstraat and the Lange Kievitstraat, the Germans rounded-up 130 men women and children in houses numbered 3 to 62. At number 55 they took the family of little Maurice Pfefer, one of the few children whose deportation was delayed until the departure of Transport 11 on 26 September 1942. His older brother Marcel, his father Wolf and his mother, Ruchla Zalberg were deported on Transport 4.

In the Lentestraat, a small adjacent street which runs out into the Provinciestraat, 84 Jews were taken from their homes. At number 8, Ryfka Gliksman, who lived alone with her 2 sons, Simon aged 5 and Oscar who was 16 months old were taken and deported on Transport 5 to meet their death in Auschwitz. At number 39 the entire family Wroclawski was arrested: the father Chil, the mother Chana and their 2 small daughters, Bertha who was 4 years old and Charlotte who was only 8 months. They were deported on Transport 4. In the same house Menachim Schleier (84) and his wife Dwora (68) were also arrested. They did not survive the deportation.

500 yds. From the Lentestraat is the Marinisstraat. This street was a secondary center of the operation. In houses numbered between 3 and 25, 109 people were arrested. In 3 adjacent streets 181 Jews were taken away: 93 in the Van der Meydenstraat, 71 in the Kroonstraat and 17 in the Bouwensstraat. All these people were seized in their own homes, on a Saturday night (or early on Sunday), at the end of the Sabbath.

23 The Second Raid in Antwerp. The Night of 28 to 29 August 1942

A fortnight later during the night of 28 and 29 August 1942, which incidently happened to be the Sabbath, the *Sipo-SD* launched their Second Raid against the Jews living in Antwerp. The Germans summoned 4 deputy police superintendents to the Della Faillelaan at 7p.m.. They were told that the area covered by the raid would be more extensive than the previous round-up. They would comb Precinct VII of Zurenborg and the suburbs Borgerhout, Berchem and Deurne. Whilst the deputy superintendents received their final orders, the permanent guard at city hall, *in consultation with [...] the chief superintendent*, hurriedly mobilised *reinforcements* from other police stations, providing an additional 68 officers.

30 officers were sent to the Precinct VII where the main attack took place. This area was adjacent to that which was devastated during the First Raid. These Belgian policemen, seconded at the last moment, came to reinforce the 60 or so officers intended for the abortive raid on 27 August 1942. At the *Sipo-SD* meeting, the *section head* announced that *Brussels* – which involved the intervention of *SS Major Thomas* – gave the Belgian police the order to operate *alone* this time, owing to the failed raid of 27 August 1942. According to Bouhon, the above captioned deputy superintendent, the *Sipo-SD* noticed that after about half an hour the Jews had been alerted. The time at which



The extent of the First Raid In Antwerp. The Night of 15 and 16 August 1942.



Renée and Nathan Aron Wolf taken from their home at 189, Kroonstraat. Gassed with their mother, Rosa Marinower, upon arrival in Auschwitz. Henry Rappaport – 88 years old. The oldest victim of this round-up.

this failed raid had been abandoned was recorded: 6.30p.m. i.e. which according to the original plan was almost 3 hours before the deputy superintendents, summoned at 9p.m., went to collect their instructions from the *Sipo-SD* for the night.

According to Bouhon, however, the German *leader* knew the numbers and names of the policemen who had denounced the raid. There were no repercussions. However Bouhon did mention next day that the following night deputy superintendents must



At the edge of the area covered by the Second Raid the Belgian police arrested the Vos family at 8, Sterrenbogstraat. Emilius Vos, his wife Rebecca Nabarro and their 3 children, Isaak, Herman and Andries, were taken away. Only Emilius Vos survived the deportation.

comply with the order to arrest all Jews within their sectors. Those who disobeyed were threatened with *Camp Breendonk*. All that was said in this statement – whose incoherences render it unlikely – addressed to the Crown prosecutor, Edouard Baers, was support for the fact that Bouhon, as well as his three other colleagues who were present, had all executed the German order to arrest 250 foreign Jews during the night.



The Second Raid in Antwerp. A more extensive area was covered.

At 4.30p.m. the next day the *Sipo-SD* took all the Jews who were taken in the previous night's round-up to the *Sammellager* in Mechelen. They were held prior to their transportation to Mechelen by the Belgian police either in a synagogue, a local school which was in fact closed for the summer holidays, or a requisitioned cinema. The *Kazern Dossin* could not handle this influx since it was swamped with deportees who were destined to be sent to the East on Transport 6 which was just about to depart and Transport 7 which was, at the same time, in the process of being formed. On 27 August 1942, the evening before the raid, the *Kazern Dossin* had registered the arrival of 241 Jews, 136 of whom came as a result of the German's *Arbeitsauftrag*. The arrival of a further 784 Jews taken during the Antwerp raid enabled the Germans to complete the formation of Transport 7 in a single day. The remaining 159 captured in Antwerp were later deported on Transport 8.

The Second Raid in Antwerp covered a much greater area than the previous round-up. In the borough of Deurne Jewish homes were scattered all over the place: 72 Jews were arrested in 26 streets. Berchem, another Antwerp suburb, also had a Jewish Quarter but it was far less densely populated than the center of the city. It extended on either side of the *Uitbreidingstraat* for about 1km. The Antwerp police arrested 188 Jews in this area in 21 streets. The police went through the streets that had already been combed out by the Germans during the First Raid. With the exception of 24 addresses they targeted houses which had been overlooked by the *Sipo-SD* and the *Feldgendarmes*. In the *Kroonstraat* the local police



Jakob Gunsberg, his wife Reizel Bernstein and their son Gideon, rooted out by the Belgian police in the cellar in *Korte van Ruusbroeckstraat*. They did not survive their deportation.

made 80 arrests at dwellings numbered between 90 and 210. At number 161, 7 people were arrested, 2 mothers and their children: none of whom survived the deportation. Zali Gitterman-ova, 33 years old, lived alone with her 2 sons, Isaak (7) and Josef (8). Rosa Falikovic-ova, 30 years old was alone when she was arrested with her 3 sons, Michel (6), Bernard (3) and Albert (1). Her husband had been seconded for forced labour in the North of France. He was later sent to Auschwitz from Mechelen on Transport 16. When he arrived in Auschwitz his family had already been gassed. He did not return.

In the *Van der Meydenstraat* and the *Bouwensstraat*, close to the *Kroonstraat*, 67 Jews were rounded-up. In the *Provinciestraat*, which is parallel to the *Kroonstraat* and runs into Precinct VII of Zurenborg, the Antwerp police arrested 79 people at 24 addresses. In the *Rolwagenstraat* another 40 victims were taken. At number 10 they arrested three people: Joseph Delmotte, an 85 year old Dutch Jew who had been living in Antwerp for 42 years and his 2 spinster daughters, Clara (55) and Elisabeth (54). They did not return from Auschwitz.

In the neighbouring *Korte van Ruusbroeckstraat* the police from Precinct VII took 44 men women and children. The arrests did not proceed without difficulties – an officer was obliged to break the door down of house number 8 in order to apprehend the resisting residents. The police finally rooted out the family who had taken refuge in the cellar. Jakob Gunsberg, his wife Reizel Bernstein and their 15 year old son Gideon were arrested and later deported on Transport 7. They did not survive. This was not the only case of resistance. The reports which were later written by the police officers who took part in the raid displayed a clear conscience in what they had done and even referred to *the ill will of the Jewish inhabitants*, i.e. their refusal to submit to the arrests. When the Jews realised that the Antwerp police were acting without the direct support of the Germans they became

less fearful in attempting to avoid arrest. The police had to go about their work in the *cellars and attics and on the rooves and verandas*.

The Antwerp police were deployed in considerable numbers on the streets in an intensive and extensive programme of rounding-up Jews for deportation. When quotas were not met the police returned to the most densely populated Jewish Quarters finishing off the work begun by the Germans during the previous raid. A fortnight later the *Sipo-SD* began their work again.

24 The Third Raid in Antwerp. 11 and 12 September 1942

A fortnight later, on 11 and 12 September 1942 the *Sipo-SD* launched their third mass round-up in Antwerp. It was probably planned to take place on this particular date in order to coincide with Rosh Hashannah (the Jewish New Year). This raid was different in that it took place in broad daylight and spread itself over 2 consecutive days. It was more of a Jew-hunt across the city. On the first day *as soon as dawn broke the 'actions' began in the streets and houses where Jews were known to be residing: Jewish passers-by were accosted in the streets and ordered to show their ID cards. Foreign Jews were immediately arrested and taken away to the Kazern Dossin. Only Jews who held the Belgian nationality were spared arrest. These 'actions' continued unabated until the afternoon of Saturday 12 September.* Even the local *AJB* was given a rough time by the authorities. This, in fact, resulted in a Jewish report of the Antwerp raid being sent to Baron von Hahn, in Brussels, pleading, in vain, for a number of important local committee members to be exempted from deportation on Transport 10.

These two days of mass arrests provided a substantial number of deportees for Transport 9, which departed from Mechelen on 12 September 1942 and Transport 10 which left on 15 September 1942.

Transport 9 was composed of 282 Jews from Brussels, who were registered in the *Kazern Dossin* on 4 September 1942 and 56 detainees from Breendonk. Sporadic arrests could not furnish the Transports quickly enough with sufficient deportees and in fact between 6 and 10 September 1942 only 20 new detainees were daily being registered at the *Kazern Dossin*. The time required to assemble the trains was therefore getting longer. During this period all the deportees had to be taken to Mechelen by force. Jews who were taken during the Third Raid in Antwerp were unable to make up the numbers to fill the trains so the 'action' was extended to the



Anna, her sister Simone, her brother Henri and their father Marcel on the right in the second row. Gela, the eldest daughter, is on the left. All Arrested in Lens, on September 11 1942, arrived at the *Kazern Dossin* on 12 September 1942. Deported to Auschwitz with Transport 10 on 15 September 1942. No survivors.

North of France where the French police seized 514 Jews in the Lens area on 11 September 1942. The *Feldgendarmarie* sent them to the *Kazern Dossin* by train which they reached on 12 September 1942. Transport 9 had already departed for the East. The formation of Transport 9 was completed with 326 Jews from Antwerp. The Jews rounded up in the North of France and the 355 rounded up in Antwerp completed Transport 10.

This frantic hunt in the city for Jews produced only modest results – 681 were netted in Antwerp, only a handful more than in Brussels the previous week. This fact also showed how nervous the occupying forces had become and their pressing desire to complete this part of their mission as quickly as possible. At the same time as Jews were being rounded-up for deportation by the *Sipo-SD* the Antwerp section of the *Feldkommandantur* set 12 September 1942 as the departure date to send another Transport

of forced Jewish labourers to the North of France. This train was to be the last of 8 which were destined for the *Organisation Todt*. Forced labour took an estimated 1,650 men from Antwerp i.e. 9% of the Jewish population of Antwerp.

As was the case in August 1942 the Belgian police did their work. On 10 September they had distributed 500 summons, a procedure which was launched by the National Employment Authorities on 8 September. However, after a month of arrests and raids there was still no guarantee of success. The summons system had run its course and had by now run out of resources. The *Sipo-SD*, to all intents and purposes, gave up. On 12 September 1942 the summons to report to the authorities at the Cockerill Quay was a failure when only 40 from the 500 summoned turned up. The *Sipo-SD* took advantage of the situation to make up the numbers for deportation to the East. While the *Feldgendarmarie*, mobilised since the start of the raid on the morning of 11 September 1942, continued with their 'action' against those who resisted to be enrolled for forced labour, Erich Holm's auxiliaries proceeded to arrest friends and relatives of those summoned for forced labour. These 'offensive arrests' at the Employment Office were made, on 25 September 1942, contrary to the agreements which had been made between the Military Administration and the *Sipo-SD*, which General Reeder denounced in his meeting with SS Major Ehlers.

As an indication of the Germans concern, Robert Van der Heyden, a Belgian civil servant responsible for Jewish forced labour, and a member of the *VNV*, had even summoned 43 *AJB* employees and colleagues to the Employment Office. According to previously agreed terms, they were not to be called upon to supply forced labour to the Nazis. In Brussels the Military Administration had issued members of the *AJB* committees and their colleagues with legitimisation cards, *cartes blanches*, which offered a certain protection to both them and their families. At the very least, the Germans insisted that the Jewish Association employ a staff with the Belgian nationality, over represented in any case, in the lists of appointees which they subjected for approval. On 10 September 1942 Maurice Benedictus who was still the director of the Jewish organisation together with Nico Workum, president of the local committee, approached Joseph Duysan, the head of the Employment Office in Antwerp, and still a member of the *VNV*. This high-ranking civil servant of the New Order was uncompromising in his response. He warned them that if they attempted anything whatsoever during the gathering at the Cockerill Quay then they would be arrested by

the *Feldgendarmarie*. However Erich Holm, surprisingly, agreed to consider their request. The representative of Jewish Affairs in Antwerp went to the local Jewish committee offices in the Lange Leemstraat in an attempt to bring an aura of calm to the situation with at least some good news: Rosh Hashannah would be allowed to be celebrated in the synagogue *undisturbed*. The SS NCO was exceedingly considerate towards the 'protected' members of the *AJB* who had been summoned to the Cockerill Quay. He authorised 4 colleagues to absent themselves from appearing at the Employment Office, next day.

On 12 September 1942 Holm, whilst on duty at the station where the train was preparing to leave for France with a detachment of forced labourers, he procured, on his own authority, the release of a number of 'protected' members of the *AJB*. On 11 September 1942 Holm even telephoned the *Kazern Dossin* on behalf of the Jewish leaders but he was unable to secure the release of 2 important members of the committee i.e. the secretary cum director, Oscar Teitelbaum together with his chief correspondence clerk, Rosa Spira, both of whom held the Polish nationality. They were taken from their offices in the Lange Leemstraat in the morning. Nothing could stop the *Sipo-SD* teams who were set loose in the 2 days of raids centered around Rosh Hashannah. Holm's auxiliaries did not hesitate to 'disturb' the authorised Jewish festivities. They raided the local committee offices and took away all foreign Jews who were present, whether they were the poor who had come from the soup kitchen or members of staff from this Jewish institution. There was an atmosphere of complete insecurity.

On this occasion, however, the *Sipo-SD* had not requisitioned the assistance of the local police. The raid, which benefited from the support of the *Feldgendarmarie* and Holm's Flemish auxiliaries, took place in broad daylight. The Antwerp police from the Precincts VI and VII were ready and available and this state of readiness was confirmed by an officer from the 6th precinct who reported; *to [...]help [the Feldgendarmes] to take the Jews from the Hovenierstraat and the neighbouring streets, from 9.45 to 10.50p.m.. 3 Jews were taken from 37a, Hovenierstraat and were later registered on Transports leaving Mechelen for the East, Ryfka Krymalowska, a widow and her 2 children who were born in Antwerp, Paulus who was 19 years old and Albert who was 14. Not one of them survived the war.*

Nine others lived in neighbouring streets. From the Hovenierstraat to the Korte Herenthalsestraat the raid continued via the Schupstraat where 20 Jews were taken. In the other direction the Hovenierstraat led via the Rijfstraat to the



A Flemish SS parade on the Meir, Antwerp. From 22 – 24 September 1942 they participated openly in the Trap at the Ration Offices.

Vestingstraat where 22 more Jews were arrested. At the Central Station, where those who had been rounded-up were taken prior to being brought by train to Mechelen, 10 police officers were on duty until 3p.m. to escort a *Transport of Jews who had been requisitioned, i.e. rounded-up*. Whilst waiting for sufficient numbers to take the train the arrested Jews were put in a basement of the station which opened out into the Pelikaanstraat, a 'Jewish' street where the *Feldkommandatur* had established its offices.

This 'unusual' raid, though perhaps appropriate to the conditions that prevailed after the previous mass arrests, covered the whole city in its scope. In 2 days Jews were taken from no less than 94 streets. The circle of arrests had never been so extensive. Obviously the pressure was increasing upon the authorities to



The Fingherman-Obrijan Family circa 1932. On the Plantin en Moretuslei. Mosché Fingherman, his wife Rosa Obrijan and their children Bertha (15), Salomon (12) and Georges Léon (11). They were arrested on the second day of the 'Trap'. Mother and children were deported to Auschwitz and did not survive.

complete their work before the Jews could disperse themselves and go into hiding. Not all the Jews were arrested in their homes. In more than 50% of the streets and in a best case scenario, only 5 people were arrested. In 25% of the streets arrests appeared to be 'casual' and only 1 person was captured. The result per street was therefore modest. The results of the raid only took on massive proportions in a few streets e.g. Provinciestraat: 42 victims; Lange Kievitstraat: 35 victims and Van der Meydenstraat: 33 victims. All of these streets had been combed out during previous raids.

The Third Raid in Antwerp marked a break from the manner in which the 2 previous raids in Antwerp had been carried out and marked the end of the period of 'mass arrests'.

25 The Fourth Raid in Antwerp. 22 - 23 - 24 September 1942

However a Fourth Raid was organised in Antwerp which took place on 22, 23 and 24 September 1942. The extent of the arrests – 761 in 3 days – distinguished this ‘action’ from previous round-ups which were based more on isolated arrests. The demand to fill the trains to the East compelled the authorities to adopt different tactics. At the *Kazern Dossin* the lists of deportees for Transport 11 started to be drawn up on 16 September 1942 and by 21 September 1942 357 deportees had been registered. All of them were taken in an *Einzelaktion* which was carried out across the entire country with an average of 60 arrests a day. By 22 September 1942 this wide-scale operation had already provided the *Kazern Dossin* with 33 victims from Antwerp. On 23 September 1942, the second day of the Fourth Raid, 124 Jews were rounded up in Antwerp and on the last day of the round-up a further 310 Jews were taken. Finally, after the Fourth Raid had been officially terminated, on 25 September 1942 another 293 Jews fell victim to a ‘Trap’. As Jews left their homes en masse, Erich Holm sought them out and took them when they came to the Ration Office to obtain their coupons.

In the period leading up to the time when Jews went into hiding and one had to improvise in order to obtain food and other essential commodities, Jews had to risk going to the local Ration Offices in order to obtain the sheets of essential stamps which could be exchanged for supplies. Otherwise one was forced to revert to pay the exorbitant prices of the black market. Stamps were issued on a monthly quota basis. In the case of Jews their ID cards were stamped in large red letters with the words *Jood-Juif*. This gave them away. Karl Vierk, Holm’s German colleague who was in charge of the raid ordered the communal staff to hand over to him the Jewish ID cards when they were called out at the main distribution center which was situated on the Meir, the main shopping street in Antwerp.

The City Hall on the Meir, was occupied by Erich Holm’s Flemish Auxiliaries, Félix Lauterborn and his 2 *Volksverwering* colleagues, Karel Janssens and Paul Martens as well as more than a dozen *Flemish SS*, volunteers from Auguste Schollen’s *Stormban*, all dressed in civies. Those who were pinpointed, whether Jew or Gentile, were, as discreetly as possible, taken to one side and forced to give the address of the Jewish ID holder. Others, stationed at the exit, checked to see if any ‘Jewish’ ID holders had managed to slip through the net. Posted outside, the *Feldgendarmes* assisted them, going to the addresses which they

were given to arrest members of the Jewish families. Similar operations took place simultaneously in 3 other boroughs of Antwerp i.e. Borgerhout, Berchem and Deurne. Holm positioned Gustaaf Vannisbecq and René Bollaerts there, dissidents of the *Volksverwering* and *Flemish SS*, assisted by other *SS Flanders* volunteers. In all there were about 20 of them who took part in the *Sipo-SD*’s anti-Jewish actions in Greater Antwerp.

This ‘Trap’ made the raid extensive. Those rounded-up lived in 111 streets. The circle of arrests had never been so extensive in Antwerp. However in 46 of the streets only 1 person was arrested. Nevertheless Jews, who, living officially in streets where previous raids had passed were now taken into custody. Leuwerikstraat which suffered heavy losses during the First Raid provided another 15 people. 61 were arrested on the Plantin en Moretuslei, a long and broad avenue running out of the city which had already been ‘visited’ by the authorities but never to this extent.

21 more were captured in the Lange Kievitstraat which had already been virtually ‘cleansed’ during the First Raid. However considering the havoc caused to the Jewish community during the previous raids the outcome of the Fourth Raid, spread over 3 days did not exceed a daily average of more than 220 people, all of whom were deported to Auschwitz on Transport 11. The pace of the daily arrests demonstrated the German desire to seize as many Jews as possible, although the number who were able to escape detection continued to exceed those captured.

In Liège and Charleroi about 3,000 Jews were living. The local Jewish Affairs SS organised their ‘raid’ in extremis with the help of the *Feldgendarmarie*. On 25 September 1942, the evening prior to the departure of Transport 11 the *Kazern Dossin* registered the arrival of 57 Jews from Liège. A group of 27 Jews also arrived from Charleroi, a city which, although smaller than Liège had a larger Jewish population. It was here that the *AJB* committee provided the Germans, in response to their demands, with a false list of its members whilst *Solidarité Juive*, which soon changed its name to *CDJ*, warned Jews of the imminent anti-Jewish action. (The local *AJB* immediately closed down after these events). Under different circumstances the daily arrests in Antwerp were proportionally not much higher than in either Liège or Charleroi.

The seizing of Jews who were pointed out at the communal service centers, which were being used for a very different purpose, with the full knowledge of the citizens of Antwerp who were also concerned with the distribution of stamps and coupons. The *Sipo-SD* did not differentiate between the Jews who had gone into hiding and those who remained in their legal domicile. It was a race against time to seize as many large groups of Jews

as possible. Even Belgian Jews were taken. Maurice Benedictus and Nico Workum, 2 Belgian Jews, pressured the Antwerp mayor, Delwaide to intercede on behalf of the Belgian Jews with the German authorities. Belgian Jews still had to claim their ration coupons without risk of being arrested. Delwaide who had been given instructions, remained reticent. Up to then he had refrained from interfering in the previous raids, even though his police force required his intervention. Now, for the first time, he agreed to make one gesture of support for the Belgian Jews. He obtained an interview with Dr. Seyfert, the newly appointed head of administration at *Feldkommandantur 510*. The German officer, according to Benedictus' report, *promised to do what he could to make these abuses stop, which indeed was the case.*

The 'Trap' was short lived. But Seyfert turned to Reeder who summoned the head of the *Sipo-SD*, Ehlers, on 25 September 1942. Meanwhile the *Sammellager* continued to register all those who had been rounded-up in the 'Antwerp Ration Raids'. The head of the Military Administration had already scolded him about the arrest of Belgian Jews and also regarding the arrests carried out when ration coupons were being issued. On 30 September 1942 the head of the Military Administration warned the *Ober- and Feldkommandantur* that *the police security services have received instructions to carry out the action in such a way so as to raise as little public attention as possible and not arouse sympathy for the population's Jews.* The local authorities who had to be informed in advance of the planned wide scale operations, were asked *to make executive police forces – the Feldgendarmarie – available to the security police, wherever possible.* They were to *abstain from calling on the Belgian police force.*

In practice the Military Administration was superceded. The *Sipo-SD's* call to order related to raids that could no longer be executed. The vast majority of the remaining Jews fell outside the statutory parameters of the anti-Jewish orders imposed by the Military Command. The Jewish Question was now out of control. The orders of 30 September 1942 were no longer relevant to the prevailing situation.

26 Jews Now beyond Control

The Germans planned to *monitor the illegal emigration of Jews, whose numbers had, recently, significantly increased.* Indeed it was already too late to control such a phenomenon. At the borders this role fell, in general, to German customs officers, border guards and other officials. They monitored the route from The Netherlands focusing their attention on Dutch fugitives attempting to enter Belgium. They also guarded the French border which



Joseph' (Ghert Jospa) : A communist intellectual and initiator of the Jewish Defence. He formed a committee representing all political views.

1. 'Pierre' (Benjamin Nykerk)
2. 'Michel' (Emile Hambresin – Front de l'Indépendance)
3. 'Robert' (Israël Mandelbaum)
4. 'Dumont' (Chaïm Perelman)
5. 'Henri' (Abusch Weber)

The children's section of the CDJ

'Yvonne' (Howe Jospa-Groissman), 'Jeanne' (Ida Sterno), 'Brigitte' (Suzanne Moons), Andrée Geulen, Yvonne Nevejean, Director of "Oeuvre Nationale de l'Enfance".

fugitives tried to cross in their attempt to reach the Unoccupied Zone, Switzerland, Spain or Portugal. Within the jurisdiction of the Military Command those who were caught were sent directly to the *Kazern Dossin*, including those apprehended by the customs officers of the Currency Protection *Kommando*, a small group established mainly in Brussels.

By mid-September 1942 The Military Administration needed to provide some reassurance regarding this clandestine emigration. They realised that *the transport of the first 10,000 (deported) Jews to the East naturally provoked a great deal of panic amongst the remaining Jews,* however they tended to minimise the repercussions within the rest of the Jewish community. *Many of them attempted to flee to the French Unoccupied Zone, but most of them were either arrested by the border guards or the French police.* There are no figures available which would allow us to estimate the extent of these arrests however the overall number of deportations

does not suggest, a posteriori, the high level of illegal emigration that the Germans had feared in September 1942. From the 5,034 Jews of Belgium deported from France only 1,937 were fugitives, whose names were on file in the *Sipo-SD*'s offices in Brussels. Bearing in mind the proportion of foreign Jews deported from France, approximately 4,000 fugitives were probably the subject of underground emigration.

Rather than launching themselves into an adventure, the outcome of which was, to say the least, uncertain, Jews preferred to hide in their own country and not opt to try to escape abroad. In fact the underground Committee for the Defence of Jews did not undertake to organise escape routes to France although they did use routes to make contact with the Swiss representative of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

Dutch Jews, members of the CDJ, and particularly one of the founder members, the industrialist, Benjamin Nykerk, assisted fugitives who had come from The Netherlands. Nykerk, who was also a member of the *Dutch-Paris Network*, helped in the establishment of the *Zwitserweg*. In May 1943, at a time when the CDJ could no longer pay the board and lodging for the 800 children under its care, Nykerk met with Sally Mayer, the representative of the *Joint* in Switzerland, with a view to obtaining desperately needed funds.

Formed after the Brussels Raid at the beginning of September 1942, on the initiative of Ghert Jospa. The CDJ positioned themselves under the aegis of the '*Front de l'Indépendance*', an organization which was basically a resistance movement. Under this label, the Jewish Committee brought together its *far left* representatives, communists and Zionists and the *bourgeoisie* i.e. with other, less structured Zionist tendencies - rather circles of personal relations - active in the Brussels AJB. Within a month of its foundation the *Bulletin du Front de l'Indépendance* was published on 27 October 1942, primarily for the benefit of its own executives, and laying out its plan of *practical measures to help the Jewish population*. The main idea was to *disseminate the Jews among the Gentile population in order to conceal them from the Gestapo searches [...]obliged to work with relatively limited numbers of staff*. In the spirit of its founding members this became a question of a real rescue operation, in the literal sense of the word. This plan covered the whole continent and the CDJ (Jewish Defence) was well aware of an existential stake that characterised and justified the urgency of its action. *Tens of thousands of human beings are being exposed to the real possibility of a terrifying death. There is not much time to spare. Everything must be done to try to save them.*

The ideological and political, rather than the psychological, awareness of the Judeocide that was in progress, was based on

the *distressing statements* made by the Polish government in exile, on 2 June 1942, on the BBC. In similar terms used by the Belgian resistance 5 months later, they referred to *the execution of Jews in Poland, where between 700,000 and 800,000 people were killed in cold blood*. Without referring explicitly to this matter in a subsequent telegram to his minister in Berlin in November 1942, the German diplomat in Brussels attributed such information to the fact that the Jews refused to comply with the Nazi demands to accept work in the East, *owing to the rumours of extermination etc*. In December 1943 when the CDJ submitted new and urgent demands to their sponsors in Switzerland they explained that they had focused their clandestine activities on rescuing children in order to assist the parents risking the uncertainties of going underground. At this point in time the CDJ was not really in a position to meet the requisite needs of parents and they had, in fact, to wait until the end of 1943 before they were able to get supplied with ration stamps.

They came from the local government offices of Antwerp, or at least from members of the resistance who were employed there. Alfons Goethals, the formal local secretary of Camile Huysmans, the pre-war socialist mayor, reacted to the scandal which had been caused when his department was used to trap Jews. Through personal relations his assistant, Edgarus Van de Castele, exempted Jews from the need to collect their stamps from the coupon issuing office by arranging to have their coupons sent to them. Contacted by the CDJ in 1943, Goethals diverted the surplus stamps provided by the Ministry of Food for emergencies. When the unutilized stamps were returned in a sealed envelope the CDJ sent back fake stamps instead of authentic ones which were later distributed in complete secrecy to those in need of aid whether from Antwerp or not.

With regard to the rescue of children the CDJ – as noted in their secret report at the end of 1943 – realised *that there were greater possibilities than they dared hope for*. In September 1942, the Reich's Brussels based Foreign Affairs Department reported on the support given to Jews on the run. Seeing that they *had left their homes and that they were endeavouring to take refuge among Aryan Belgians*, German diplomats were convinced *that these attempts at hiding were supported by a large proportion of the Belgian population*. *Difficulties arose from the fact that many Jews were in possession of forged Belgian ID papers*. When analysing the arrests some 2 years later, the *Sipo-SD* based their argument on *the illegal residence of the Jews* in order to explain their *difficulties* in completing the Transports; this was the *result of the fact that in 80% of the cases, Jews had forged ID cards*.

In their edict dated 30 September 1942, the Military Administration, concerned about Jews escaping, claimed that



The hunt for Jews in hiding began in Autumn 1942.

by removing the Yellow Star Jews were discouraged and even prevented from leaving the area in which they were obliged to reside or from hiding in small towns.

By this time it was too late to stop the movement. The Antwerp *Feldkommandantur* had certainly taken precautions. Following its initiative, the Belgian Governor of the province, on 23 September 1942, devoted himself to countering the support given to the fleeing Antwerp Jews.

The Flemish nationalist philologist, Jan Grauls, was on the point of settling in the capital as Mayor of Greater Brussels; the result of a reform that arrived too late to help the deportation of the Jews. However, Grauls, Governor of the Province of Antwerp since 1940, did not need any reforms in the administrative structure to execute the anti-Semitic policies of the Germans. He was one of the key players in the expulsion of recently immigrated Jews, from Antwerp to the Limburg. In response to the German demand, it was the Governor of Antwerp who encouraged Delwaide and his administration in Antwerp, in November 1940, to take part in the first wide scale Jewish round-up. Furthermore this was followed, in January 1941, by the Graul inspired use of the police force of Antwerp and the adjacent suburbs in the hunt for Jews resisting expulsion. He was the first person to use the 'ration office trap' to catch Jews during the monthly distributions of coupons.

The *Sipo-SD* put Graul's anti-Semitic feelings to good use. On the day after the first 'ration office trap' Governor Grauls addressed the inhabitants of the province because *Jews of Belgian nationality [sic] and foreign nationality have left their current homes and moved in with non-Jewish families, without authorization and also by paying their cohabitants large sums of money. Some others have*



Max-Albert Vandenberg, the director of 'Les Colonies Scolaires Catholiques'. Arrested for shielding Jews, especially children. Died in KL Neuengamme, April 1945.

taken their children to stay with peasants or other families with the intention of having them accepted into the family. Upon the order of the Feldkommandantur of Antwerp, the Governor made it known that such actions are absolutely forbidden and that any breach [of these regulations] will be severely and mercilessly punished.

The 'war council' of *Feldkommandantur* 520 usually sentenced 'Aryans' convicted of having given Jews shelter to between 3 and 6 months gaol, providing that they had not been involved in any other *anti-German activity*. Paradoxically the sentence in Brussels for taking Jews in, was nearly always 6 months. However, these sentences were arbitrary and had no legal basis, even under the legislation of the occupying forces. There was, in fact, no specific order from the German Military Command obliging landlords and householders to declare Jewish tenants. Keen to reduce the involvement of 'Aryans' to a minimum, the first edict dated 28 October 1940 obliged 'pure bred Jews' to inscribe themselves on their local Register of Jews on their own initiative. Subsequently, 2 years later, when they left their legal domiciles at the end of the summer (1942), the insubordinate Jews placed themselves outside the regulations in order to escape deportation.

Since the offence of illegally offering Jews accommodation was not legally binding, the President of the Bar in Liège, Jules Musch, defending his colleague Max-Albert Vandenberg, thus



Icek Glogowski alias 'Jacques'. One of the *Sipo-SD*'s Jewish 'hunting dogs'.

managed to prevent his conviction in July 1943. The 'war council' of *OFK 589* nevertheless condemned him to 5 months in prison, which was in fact his death sentence. On completion of his sentence, the *Sipo-SD*, after erasing the wrong, immediately arrested him and had him sent to *KL Neuengamme*, from whence he never returned. Vandenberg was the director of the charity 'Les Colonies Scolaires Catholiques' in the Province of Liège. He immersed himself in the effort to rescue Jewish children with the support of the Bishop of Liège, Louis-Joseph Kerckhofs, head of the only ecclesiastical see mobilised against the occupying forces in Belgium. According to the Germans he *accepted Jewish children in the children's homes under his direction and shielded them from the measures against the Jews*. Although he was not found guilty of any crime on that occasion he was later convicted of having acquired false identity papers for Jews.

The measures taken by the Germans after the summer of 1942 served to increase the level of repression against the Jews but they failed to restrict the growth of insubordination against the authorities. The auxiliaries of the *Sipo-SD* were better informed than the Military Authorities as to the situation on the ground regarding the hunting down of the Jews. *There are hardly any to be seen*, 'L'Ami du Peuple' noted with a certain bitterness and perplexity on 26 September 1942. *Where have they gone? Deported unfortunately, these goyim simpletons whine, always ready to shed a tear when it is a whop with a hooked nose. Deported, certainly, and all the better, but*

only a small percentage has been subjected to this fate.

By this time the Transports to Auschwitz had already taken 21% of the nations Jews. What really mattered at this time to the ever watchful anti-Semites was: *Where are the others? They are here, there and everywhere. You will not recognise them because they are not wearing the star.*

Can't you see their mouths, their hair, their hands, the backs of their necks, their flat feet? That's what a Jew looks like. The method was rudimentary and problematical. *L'Ami du Peuple*, which only had a circulation of about 6,000 called upon the assistance of 1,000 or so faithful followers. The spokesman of the Anti-Jewish League made denouncement a national duty, a *Belgian duty*. *The hour of the Great Departure is upon us!*, read the headlines on one page of the issue dated 17 October 1942. *No misplaced pity. Help us. It is your duty as a good Belgian.*

The 'bad Belgians' were *those who are hiding Jews*. A couple of weeks later the hateful scribbler lashed out: *it is a scandal in this era that there are still enough people prepared to protect these demons with a human face. Part of our population is so in love with the Jews that they are no better than the Jews themselves.*

In order for one to comprehend the raging words of these solitary anti-Jewish militants, it is essential to put the reasons behind denouncement into perspective. It is likely that the majority of isolated arrests, in any case those following the raids i.e. from Autumn 1942 until the end of the Summer in 1944, resulted from denouncements made to the *Volksverwerping-Défense du Peuple*, and other New Order auxiliaries, directly to the *Sipo-SD* or other German police services. The informants were not all militants or anti-Jewish sympathisers. Cupidity was also a powerful incentive and the *Sipo-SD* used a bonus system whose amount was increased at the beginning of 1944 in order to stimulate and revive the hunt.

In Brussels the Nazis also used Jewish trackers to hunt down Jews. The most infamous one was 'Gros Jacques', a Polish Jew, called Icek Glogowski, who cruised around the city accompanied by the SS who arrested Jews that he pointed out. At night the *Sipo-SD* and their Flemish auxiliaries raided houses that had been pointed out to them by informers. Sometimes one arrest led to a whole chain of arrests. Denouncement although significant, usually escaped historical enquiry just as after the war its perpetrators escaped being brought before the courts. The lack of documented evidence being the deciding factor. Nonetheless, the majority of Jews who were in hiding - and there were tens of thousands - were not denounced.

The truth is that after the raids, the hunts which were carried out only had a modicum of success. One should bare in mind the several hundred Jews who were arrested on a daily basis during

the period of the 'ration office trap' in Antwerp in order to grasp the stalling of the *Endlösung* after the Autumn of 1942. At the end of the year the combined forces of the entire police apparatus and their auxiliaries only succeeded in arresting 658 Jews during the entire month of December in Belgium and the North of France. The average numbers of new arrivals at the *Kazern Dossin* fell to about 20 per day. Furthermore over the next few months it fell again by 50%. In terms of repression; in May 1943, 310 Jews were arrested. In May 1944 this figure had only reached 362, inspite of the higher payments which were made to informers. The Military Administration's report stated one month earlier, that the execution of the Reich Security Office's last orders by the *Sipo-SD* on the reinforcement of the measures to evacuate Jews had encountered great difficulties owing to the illegal residence of the majority of Jews.

In this respect the number of arrests reported by the *Sipo-SD* was, perhaps, remarkable from the point of view of Nazi repression in the Occupied Territory: within this framework the hunt for Jews undoubtedly improved the yield and helped to maintain the statistics of the political police. Of the thousand or so arrests that were made every month the Jews were generally the most numerous group. As regards the *Endlösung*, many more Jews should have been taken each day: at an average of 10 Jews per day the total eradication of Jews from the population of Belgium would only be completed in the distant future and the outcome of the war was turning out to be problematical for Nazi Germany.

Clearly the *Sipo-SD*, as the only qualified executive force, no longer controlled the Jewish Question at the end of the summer of 1942, and the other authorities provided no assistance to enable them to restore their hold on matters. The majority of those who escaped the raids and the sporadic arrests were no longer under control. The head of the Military Administration took action at the end of this crucial year of Jewish Deportations. Reeder who understood the situation with a remarkable level of lucidity, doubted its overall success and his activity report for the last quarter of 1942 warned *the Jews who are in the country are so well hidden that the planned execution of further Transports to the East will be very difficult*.

What actually happened proved him to be right. Almost every other Jew in Belgium died under the *Endlösung*, with 66% of the victims being sent to Auschwitz in less than 100 days between the summer and the autumn of 1942. From the autumn of 1942 the *Endlösung* lost its impetus mainly due to a general insubordination of the remaining Jewish population. 2 years of hunts were needed to capture the number of deportees that was less than 50% of the amount that were rounded-up during the 3 most intensive months



Himmler, 6 October 1943: 'And what will we do with the women and children?'

of Jewish deportations. It was during the period of *Deportations to the East* in 1942 that the fate of the country's Jews hung on these Transports from Mechelen to Auschwitz.

From the beginning of this fateful year, the drama which took place upon arrival of these Transports at their final destination proved Reeder's services correct. His police group eliminating the *misunderstandings* regarding the *Deportations to the East*, had explained, at the end of October, that *it was a measure of a different nature and more severe than the simple transfer to a concentration camp*.

27 Immediate Extermination of the Jewish Deportees upon their Arrival in Auschwitz-Birkenau

The fate of the Jews from Mechelen upon arrival at Auschwitz shows the full extent of this difference in nature, and by way of severity, its extreme cruelty. As opposed to a transfer camp the final destination of the Jews actually ended in a massacre for most of them almost immediately after stepping off the trains. Between 1942 and 1944 15,737 were gassed upon arrival i.e. 28% of all the Jews of Belgium. 63% of the deportees were murdered upon arrival at their final destination.

Bearing in mind the drawbacks of statistical averaging these figures do reveal the violent genocidal tragedy which was repeated upon the arrival of every train. The victims of the Judeocide were the first to arrive, and, killed immediately, were the most numerous. This peak in the killings, reveals the extent to which the

The deportation from Mechelen to Auschwitz - general overview								
	1942-1945	%*	1942	%*	1943	%*	1944	%*
Gassed upon arrival	15.737	63,2	10.708	64,4	3.928	66,2	1.101	46,9
of which women and girls**	9.359	75,2	6.377	97,1	2.359	76,7	623	55,3
Forced labour*	9.171	36,8	5.917	35,6	2.005	33,8	1.249	53,1
of which survivors*	1.207	4,8	384	2,3	258	4,3	565	24,0
Killed by deportation*	23.701	95,2	16.241	97,7	5.675	95,7	1.785	76,0
Total	24.908	100%	16.625	66,8	5.933	23,8	2.350	9,4
* calculated given the total number of deportees ** calculated given the total number of deportees								
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actual deportation of Jews was genocidal. Etymologically speaking – and oddly, without the ambiguities of its legal definition – it may be clearly defined as the assassination of a people i.e. a Judeocide. From the *Kazern Dossin*, aptly named the ante-chamber of death, deportation led these people to their place of extermination. This, as already stated, was immediately and systematically applied to the majority of arriving deportees. This tragedy did not acquire its full meaning after the war, in the summary statement of Jewish deaths during the Nazi occupation. The Judeocide is not retrospective. The end does not reveal it. On the contrary – and this is exactly what the statistics overlook – , the end in no way resembles the beginning.

The rate at which new arrivals in Auschwitz were immediately put to death was not constant. Of the Jews of Belgium most in fact did not hold the Belgian nationality and the rate of their immediate death upon arrival fluctuated significantly. In 1944 when the SS killers of Auschwitz were unleashed on the 429,000 Jews who came from Hungary, the third largest group of Jews in Europe, 300,000 were murdered immediately upon arrival, whereas the Transports from Mechelen (small trainloads) remained, so to speak, relatively unscathed: the extermination rate falling from 50% to 47%. In 1942 the first 2 Transports from Mechelen, filled to a greater extent than the last Transports to make this journey in 1944, were not dealt with in the same way as the average deportation Transport from Mechelen. 26% were immediately exterminated when Transport 1 arrived and 40% when Transport 2 arrived in Auschwitz.

It follows therefore, that subsequent Transports suffered a far greater carnage than the average upon arrival. The rate of immediate extermination exceeded 70% in the trains which contained Jews taken in the raids. These turned out to be more decisive at Auschwitz than in occupied Belgium, in the fury of the Judeocide. With the arrival of Transport 4, which was formed with people taken during the raid of 15 August 1942, and which opened the way for the mass inclusion of children in the deportation programme, the rate reached an unequalled peak : 83% gassed

upon arrival. The extermination rates for the following Transports were: Transport 5 – 78%; Transport 6 – 71%; Transport 7 – 73%. Transport 11 formed by Jews snatched during the Fourth Raid in Antwerp had an extermination rate of 80%.

During the period between the summer and the autumn of 1942 the destruction of the Jews of Belgium reached its azimuth, a fortiori with regard to the entire deportation from Mechelen. It was during these fatal 3 months that more than 66% of the deportees were gassed upon arrival in Auschwitz 10,711 out of 15,741. These figures only refer to the deported Jews and do not include the 351 Gypsies deported from the *Kazern Dossin* including the children.

In the case of the Jews of Belgium sex and age were the fundamental criteria on which the SS based their first and immediate execution selection. According to the concept of their leader the Judeocide (Himmler used the term *extermination of the Jewish people*) was accomplished only when they killed women and children. Having reached the pinnacle of his power within the Third Reich the *Reichsführer-SS* explained it to the *Reichsleiter and Gauleiter – the highest dignitaries in the party* – gathered in Posen in Warthegau on 6 October 1943. Within this confined group Himmler spoke in confidence about the *most difficult question [...] to solve in [his] whole life : the Jewish Question*. This being that he had to decide what to do with *the women and children*. *I felt that I did not have the right to exterminate the men – or, if you prefer, to kill them or have them killed – and leave the children to grow up who would take revenge on our children and our descendants. It was necessary to take the serious decision to make this people disappear from the face of the earth*. The programme of the Judeocide, which had never before been so clearly defined, consisted of exterminating, not leaving to die, but to kill – in the most violent sense of the word – women, mothers, wives, sisters, young women, girls as well as boys, in order to definitively deprive the Jews of any kind of future.

It is from this point, where the age and sex of the victims are the determining factors, that one could assess the rate of immediate

extermination, upon arrival in Auschwitz, of the deportees arriving by train from Mechelen. The average was around 62%. The reason why this figure is so high is because the SS *Sonderkommando* at Auschwitz murdered mainly women and girls (76%). The male rate dropped to 50%. The available documentation does not permit us to breakdown the deaths according to the age of the victims. However this undoubtedly was a factor which should be taken into account. The contrary can be seen in the occasional Transports where less than 50% were gassed upon arrival: children under the age of 15 years, always present, were the least numerous. Transport 1, 26% of whom were gassed immediately had 5% children as deportees. The percentage number of children was also 5% on Transport 26 and 37% of the deportees were gassed upon arrival. On the other hand the Transports which carried the highest percentage of children were also those where the extermination rate upon arrival was among the highest. On Transport 4, 83% of the deportees were gassed immediately and 25% of the deportees were children. On Transport 11, 80% of the deportees were gassed immediately and 27% of the deportees were children. Of course these are statistical comparisons and deviations must be expected: the greatest number of children (27%) were to be found on Transports 12 and 13 and were nevertheless decimated at the rate of 72%.

The highest correlation, even though no distinction can be made according to age, is undeniably between the extermination rate of the Transports and that of the deportees killed, 87% of the women and girls were killed from Transport 4, whose global extermination rate is the highest. In Transport 11, which was similarly devastated, 94% of the deportees were gassed immediately. However these statistics, are, once again, not constant; with an extermination rate of 90% among the deportees Transports 12 and 13 did not lose more than 72% of their deportees.

The predominant role of women and children in the decimation of the trains coming from Mechelen upon arrival in Auschwitz was certified by an SS doctor who followed – he was one of the players – the entire process from the selection to the killing of the deportees who had arrived from the West in September and October 1942. Doctors played an important role in the Judeocide in Auschwitz. We have seen that within this framework, the industrial ambitions of the SS as an economic organization reached a pragmatic compromise with the ideological imperative of the Judeocide. The doctors from the *Waffen SS* garrison in Auschwitz intervened in the selection of Jews whom they assessed, at a glance, based on their appearance, whether or not they were fit for work and automatically excluding the vast majority of women as well as their children. The evidence given by Dr. Johann Paul



Eyewitness and participant in the extermination of Jews from Western Europe.

Kremer on this matter in his statement at the Auschwitz Trial held in Krakow in 1947, deserves our undivided attention. Kremer was accused on the evidence contained in his personal diary where he mentioned the *special actions* which he took part in as a doctor from the end of August 1942 until the beginning of December 1942. Of the 15 mentioned 9 actually concerned Transports from the West. His entry dated 10 September 1942 referred to Transport 8 which arrived that day from Mechelen and from which 64% of the deportees were exterminated and from this total 94% were females. Kremer maybe also mentioned another *special action* against Transports 12 and 13 which arrived on the same train on 12 October 1942. In his entry of 12 October 1942 Kremer intentionally failed to mention this double 'Belgian' Transport *in the night, a special action against a trainload of people from The Netherlands*. (73 were exterminated. And yet this Transport number 25 from The Netherlands arrived the day before on 11 September 1942. Perhaps Kremer took part in one of the two *special actions* on 12 October 1942.....

Anyway with his notes taken at that time the SS doctor was perhaps the chief witness in the extermination of the Jews from the West. Kremer's deposition, where he avoided incriminating himself, shows his interpretation of his diary. He went on to explain what the *external special action* consisted of (mentioned on 2 September 1942). He specified that it was *with the people destined to be gassed*. The SS officers – he was also an officer: SS Second Lieutenant Kremer did not admit that doctors decided which human beings would be gassed – *chose among the new arrivals those who*

were fit for work, both men and women and all the others – among them the elderly, all the children, the women carrying small children in their arms, as well as people incapable of working – were loaded into trucks and driven to the gas chambers. Kremer, an army reservist and the oldest officer, who had been recalled to the *Waffen SS* garrison followed the cohort of people condemned to death in the ambulance, with the SS nurse and his box of Zyklon B to be poured into the gas chamber.

The remarks of this eyewitness enable us to say with a modicum of certainty that a mother deported in 1942 with her young child would have been condemned to death and gassed upon arrival at Auschwitz as would her child and any other small children. The fate of elderly people would most certainly have been the same. However an historian would have been more apprehensive in drawing such conclusions when considering the deportees from 1944 when the circumstances had changed considerably. The documentation that has been preserved does not allow us to identify the vast majority of the deportees by name on the day of their arrival in Auschwitz and leaves us with no trace of their last days except the fact that they were deported. Their name classifies them in a deportation of no return which, retrospectively masks the event which took place upon arrival at their final destination. The fact of the matter is that in the case of Auschwitz, the trainloads of deportees were not all exterminated as was the case in Belzec, Sobibor or Treblinka where the SS killed practically everyone. Indeed the selection process was not a specific characteristic of the Judeocide. It was really a process which was unique to the Jews who were sent to Auschwitz, the largest concentration camp which doubled as an extermination centre.

The selection took place where the people disembarked from the trains. 95% of the deportees from Mechelen got off the train in the middle of the countryside between the town of Auschwitz, where the original camp was, and 3km. from the Birkenau annex (known as Auschwitz II after 1945). In the beginning Birkenau was a *Kriegsgefangenenlager*, established in 1941 for captured Soviets who were compelled to work for the Nazis.

On 4 October 1943, addressing his SS Generals – 2 days prior to speaking in confidence about *the serious decision to do away with the Jews* – Himmler regretted *that the Russian POW's died of hunger by their tens and even hundreds of thousands*. Actually more than 3 million. Owing to the general trend of the war Himmler decided on 26 January 1942 to change the function of *KGL Auschwitz*, which did not depend on the army, to a forced labour camp of Jews of Greater



1. Bunker I
2. Bunker II : Gas Chambers where, between, August 1942 and January 1943, 11,780 deportees from Mechelen, from the first 19 Transports, were killed upon arrival.
3. Gas Chambers V and IV
4. Gas Chambers III and II: 3,960 deportees from Mechelen from Transports 20 – 26 were killed upon arrival between April 1943 and August 1944.
5. Judenrampe: Platform where 24,188 Jews left the train, arriving in 24 Transports between August 1942 and April 1944.
6. Judenrampe Birkenau: Platform where the last, 1,071 deportees from Mechelen got off the train, arriving in 2 Transports between May and August 1944.
7. Zigeunerlager: Place of internment for 351 Gypsies deported from Mechelen.

Germany. This decision heralded the general mobilization of the captive labour force for the needs of the war economy. Although this occurred in April the Jews of the Third Reich were not sent to Auschwitz in 1942. The decision was delayed until 11 June when when essentially only Jews deported from the West were selected for slave labour in the Auschwitz complex of camps.

As from July 1942 with the mass arrival of the first deportees from the *evacuation* of the West, an extermination centre was functioning in the north-west of Birkenau, outside its perimeter, on the edge of the birch forest which hid it from view. It was very basic. Some distance from one another were located 2 farms which could be transformed into hermetically sealed gas chambers. The 'red house' and the 'white house' according to the colour on the outside. They were known in the local SS jargon as *Bunker I* and *Bunker II* even though they were not built of concrete. This first extermination centre in Birkenau had no crematorium so the dead

bodies were buried in communal graves which soon began to fill up. More than 40,000 deportees from the West were gassed in November 1942. It was soon necessary to dig up the bodies and bury them in incineration pits. The crematoria in Birkenau date from after the mass arrival of 97,000 Jews from the West in 1942.

Built during the winter of 1942-43, the new concrete buildings, combining gas chambers and crematoria, were a veritable industrial death complex where the living were poisoned with potassium cyanide in the gas chambers and their bodies directly incinerated in the adjacent furnaces. It was completed on 26 June 1943 and included 4 units with a theoretical capacity of 4,000 corpses per day. This cremation potential bore no relation to the requirements of a large concentration camp. Renewed at the same time the *KL Auschwitz* crematorium – the *Konzentrationslager* – the original concentration camp, only had a maximum capacity of 340 corpses per day. Designed for the mass extermination of Jews as they stepped from the train the industrial complex at Birkenau massacred them one after the other, leaving only ashes that were immediately dispersed. The complex reached full capacity in May 1944 with the mass arrival of the Hungarian Jews. The railway line was extended, for this purpose, inside Birkenau right up to the extermination centre; the integrated death complex of spring 1943 now had a continuous flow human extermination material reducing the time lost to a minimum between the moment of arrival, through the selection process to the resulting massacre. However the ovens could not keep pace with the frenzy of the killers and the overused furnaces were continually breaking down through lack of maintenance. In order to cope they had to resort to the use of open pits again, as in 1942, and to bring *Bunker II* back on stream.

Very few of the Jews deported from Mechelen took this new branch of the railway which was designed to take the Hungarian Jews. Only 2 small trains in 1944, the last from Belgium, Transports 25 and 26 allowed their 1,071 deportees to disembark on the new platform for Jews in Birkenau. However as from Transport 20 in April 1943, the 'Belgian' deportees were killed in the new building of the extermination centre. However, the people who were gassed between April 1943 and July 1944 only made up about 25% of the Belgian quota in the immediate Judeocide.

The main events concerning the Jews of Belgium were already accomplished by 1942. Kremer's 'documentary' diary refers to the circumstances surrounding the killing of the majority of the Jews who came from Mechelen. The entry of 10 September 1942 relating to Transport 8 is, however, somewhat laconic. It simply states *a special action, the 5th time*. Kremer made an error in his calculations. In fact it was the 6th 'special action'. The indication

of serial continuity is nonetheless valuable. The paths taken by the majority of the deportees who arrived on the dates mentioned by Kremer has been lost due to the fact that they disappeared during the *Sonderaktionen* of the German text. The doctor's diary says very little about what this is exactly. But from the first 'special action' *outside*, on 2 September 1942 on Transport 16 from France (gassed 74%), Kremer, a man of letters – he was also a doctor of philosophy and letters – considered that *in comparison, Dante's Hell [...] almost appeared to be a comedy. There is good reason why Auschwitz is called the extermination camp (das Lager der Vernichtung)*. The SS in the garrison spoke in these terms to the new arrivals. Obligated to adhere to secrecy regarding the orders given to him, the very day that he started working there, Kremer said nothing anymore about them.

However the veneer of ideology could not cover up the horrors of the exterminations. The Professor of Pathology at Munster University commented on 12 October 1942 in his diary the problems encountered with the *special action* against the 'Dutch' Transport: *dreadful scenes in front of the Bunker*. Thus, there was a first *Bunker* where the *special actions* of the SS at Auschwitz led to terrifying scenes. A week later, Kremer snapped again, with another *Dutch* Transport, number 26 (60% gassed). His diary did not stipulate which of the two *Bunkers* were party to the *horrible scenes involving 3 women who were pleading for their lives*. At his trial in 1947, the accused, Kremer, explained that *they did not want to enter the gas chamber and were pleading to be allowed to live. They were 3 young women, in good health, but despite that, their pleas were not answered and the SS taking part in this action shot them in cold blood*.

While the notes and diary entries of Kremer on the *special actions* against deportees arriving by train from the West and on the horrors of the exterminations have helped us define the circumstances of the deaths of the Jews upon their arrival at their final destination, the eyewitness tells us nothing of their extent. Although the historian is sufficiently well documented to establish precise figures he cannot avoid certain approximations. The main source of documentation is the Transport lists which were drawn up at the *SS Sammellager Mecheln* and the files from the *Sipo-SD's* room containing the card index cabinets, which also includes information regarding the trains. The files also provide us with the last addresses of the deportees. Examined together with the Register of Jews and the *AJB's* compulsory membership forms, coupled with the deportation lists, they allow us to reconstruct the arrests and, in particular, the geography of the raids.

Besides the number, age, sex of the deportees we are holding a series of reference numbers attributed to the *RSHA Mecheln* Transports. They enable us to identify the deportees interned in Auschwitz and its sub-camps.

The fate of the deportees from Mechelen upon arrival at Auschwitz-Birkenau				
	Men and boys	%	Women and girls	%
Gassed upon arrival	6378	49,8	9359	75,2
Forced labour	6430	50,2	3092	24,8
Totaal: 25 259	12 808	100	12 451	100
©JMDV, Laurence Schram & Maxime Steinberg. 2008				

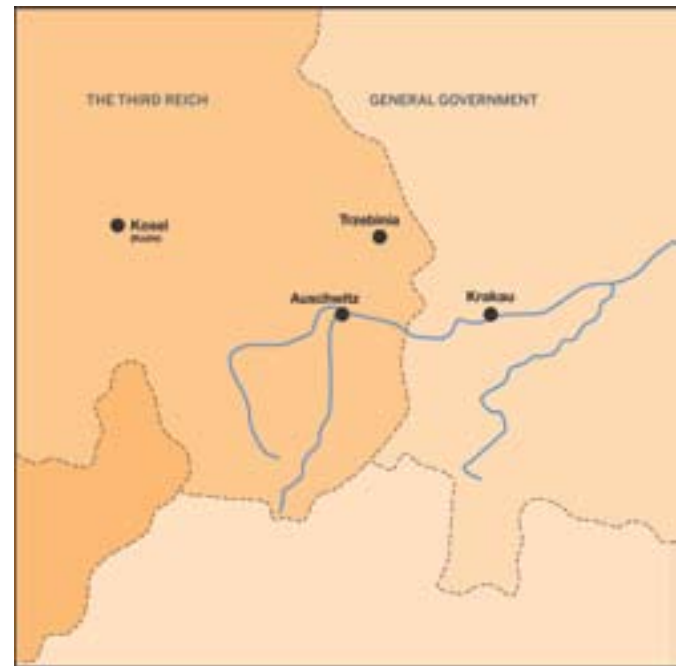
The document results from the resistance within the administrative staff held at the Auschwitz camp. In this genocidal deportation, the registrations never related to all the deportees, only those admitted to the concentration camp. In the case of the Jews of Belgium the figures refer to the 33% who remained alive after the others from the Transports had been exterminated.

The statistics open two paths of investigation. While they indicate the percentage rate of the exterminations carried out immediately upon arrival in Auschwitz, they also permit us to study another aspect of the deaths i.e. those that occurred within the concentration camp system.

28 A Deportation of no Return

In total 9,522 deportees from Mechelen were, without exception, sent to work in Upper Silesia or in the Auschwitz complex. We know the identity of 3,683 deportees. Only the reference numbers of 2,375 detainees are known. They correspond to the series of numbers allocated to the Transports from Mechelen. In Auschwitz we have found the death certificates of 1,080 deportees from Mechelen who died in Auschwitz and whose reference numbers are unknown. These death certificates feature in the *Sterbebücher*. During his time at Auschwitz, Kremer signed a number of these death certificates in his capacity as doctor.

The existence of these archives remained unknown for nearly half a century. Seized by the Red Army when they liberated the camp, they remained hidden in the Soviet's secret archives. This precious information was not even sent to the international research service of the Red Cross, who were authorized to send traces of people



Six Transports stop in Kosel, en route to Auschwitz.

who went missing during WWII to national governments. It became possible to examine the *Sterbebücher* in 1999 thanks to the work of the Jewish Museum of Deportation and Resistance (established in a wing of the former *Kazern Dossin*). Although they have been updated, these death certificates are incomplete and do not give us figures for the total number of deaths among the detainees from Belgium. As such they only give us a figure which indicates the ravages of death, in the concentration camp among the detainees of 1942. The death certificates of 1942 that have been found relate to 932 of the 4,580 Jews from Mechelen forced to work in Auschwitz. We are aware that books are both missing and incomplete however we can estimate the death rate for these *Häftlinge* at more than 20% for only the first year of captivity. For the years 1943 and 1944 the *Sterbebücher* are too incomplete to make a valid statistical estimation.

The analysis for 1942 shows considerable peaks in the death rate in the history of KL Auschwitz. During the period from 31 August 1942 until 5 September 1942 115 deaths were registered showing the decimation caused by the typhoid epidemic and the elimination of detainees unsuitable for work. From 16 to 25 September 1942 there were another 180 deaths among the Belgian deportees.

The number of deportees from Mechelen accepted in the Auschwitz complex and given a registration number shows the extent of the massacre of those refused entrance to the



Judka Ramet died at the *Zwangerbeitslager für Juden* in Trzebinia. Although aged 56 he got off the Transport 6 at Kosel. He was accompanied by his son Nathan aged 17.

concentration camp. These 9,522 deportees, of whom 90% were forced to work, should be subtracted from the 25,259 deportees who were sent to Upper Silesia. The result is the figure, already cited, of a total of 15,737 Jewish deportees gassed during the Auschwitz SS *special actions* against the *people from outside*. This total should be considered as a minimum. The data available obliges us to enter approximate figures into the statistics of the Transports.

On examining the numbers given to the deportees on Transport 25 upon its arrival in Auschwitz on 21 May 1944 we discover an unusual situation. When the train left Mechelen it was carried 257 men and 251 women. However the reference numbers relate to 300 men i.e. a higher number of interned detainees than the number deported from Mechelen. Upon verification it appears that this train was completed en route or upon arrival at Auschwitz with the addition of approximately 200 people, whose origin and exact number have still not been determined. Furthermore the numbers tattooed on the women repatriated from this batch do not correspond to the numbers allocated on 21 May 1944, the day of the trains arrival. The documents attest to the internment of 99 women, while the difference in the reference numbers of the survivors prove that at least 154 of them were interned. In the final statistics we can only provide a plausible explanation of the figures for this Transport.

The same is true for Transport 6. According to the Auschwitz archives no reference number was given to the men on this train while the series of numbers given to the women exceeded their number. However the *Sterbebücher* mentioned 21 deaths in the camp, including those of 2 men. Consequently the number of men interned must be revised up and that of the women down, which

forces us to establish an average figure for this case as well.

Transport 6 was the first of 6 Transports to stop in the Polish town of Kosel (also Transports 7, 8, 9, 12 and 13) 100 km from Auschwitz. Men aged between 15 and 50 were ordered off the trains but in fact all of them did not disembark. Upon arrival at Auschwitz there were registrations for men in this age group, sometimes husbands and fathers who had disobeyed the Kosel order. At Kosel a maximum of 1,334 men in this age group obeyed the order to get off the trains. They were distributed among the *Schmelt Organization's Zwangerbeitslager für Juden (ZAL)*, in the Breslau sector i.e. upper Silesia.

SS General Albert Schmelt was Himmler's representative responsible for the forced labour of foreign and stateless Jews in the Polish territories which had been incorporated into the Third *Reich*. The area covered the province of Posen and the Lodz Ghetto on the one hand and Upper Silesia on the other, where Schmelt was able to divert some of the Jews who were suitable for work to Auschwitz. Korherr's statistical report on the *Endlösung* included 50,570 Jews detained in the Schmelt camps at the beginning of 1943. The majority, 42,382 *stateless* Jews, were from the West taken from the trains bound for Auschwitz or just seized, all were administratively denaturalised. The range of ages of those who were retained was based on the accounts given by the 'Koselians', but correspond to, at least for the 40 year olds, to 50 year olds, the official age limit for forced labour. As for the younger ones, the rule on 11 June 1942 was for those who were abandoned when the raids took place, set at a minimum of 16 years of age. The youngest at Kosel testified that the order referred to those who were 15 years of age or older.

There were comparatively quite a large number of survivors; Of the 167 survivors from the 6 Transports in question, 145 were 'Koselians'. They represent 11% of the 1,334 men aged between 15 and 50 from the trains. On the other hand, 12 other survivors from the same Transports only represent 2% of the deportees forced to work in the Auschwitz complex. This overrepresentation of 'Koselians' does not mean that people did not die of exhaustion, malnutrition and disease at the *Schmelt ZAL*.

As in the concentration camps, the 'Koselians' underwent the often fatal medical examination where the diagnosis was given according to which the detainee *would no longer be suitable for work after a fortnight*. The doctors assessment meant that *in a fortnight, the sick person will be burnt at Oswitz [sic], burnt alive [sic]*. Two witnesses who escaped from a ZAL, also commented: *when a detainee began to show signs of oedema – the result of undernourishment and exhaustion – the others supported him and brought him to work: woe betide anyone who complained of being ill: this resulted in being sent directly to Oswitz without further ado*.

This version was published in June 1943 in *Oundzer Kampf*, the printed voice of the CDJ in Charleroi. It was translated into French and published in the October edition of *l'Indépendance*, the eponymous newspaper of the Front in the Charleroi area, the first Belgian newspaper to publish the name Auschwitz albeit in the Yiddish form Oschevits. Pinkus Broder alias *Pierre*, the editor of *Oundzer Kampf* noted down this account from 2 Antwerp Jews, Léopold Goldwurm and William Herskovic. Broder, a militant communist, considered this as a call for vengeance and armed conflict. Deported from Drancy on different Transports on 26 August 1942 and 12 September 1942. The two men got off the train at Kosel and met up again at Pyskowice ZAL, near Gleiwitz, between Breslau and Kattowitz. The date of their escape has not been established. Herskovic reckoned it to be towards the end of 1942, though it was most probably in February 1943 when the first gas chamber and crematorium came onstream in Birkenau. A Polish worker had managed to get them a pair of pliers and during a dispute between the SS guards and the camp *Kapos* they succeeded in cutting their way through 3 barbed wire fences which surrounded the camp. The system in the forced labour camps for Jews bore similarities to those in the concentration camps. Some 'Koselians' became, in turn, *Häftlinge* in the Auschwitz complex. On 2 and 3 November 1943, 21 'Koselians', originally deported from Mechelen, were transferred from Szopienice ZAL to Auschwitz. They were registered in the series from 159,000 to 160,000 and had their number tattooed on their left forearm. Following the reorganization of the Auschwitz complex, the ZAL passed under the control of

Auschwitz III (Monowitz) which had become a concentration camp under the administrative umbrella of Auschwitz I. Consequently, on 1 April 1944, 3,056 'Koselians' from the Blechhammer camp were registered with an Auschwitz number, in the series 176,000 to 179,000. among them 64 deportees from the *Kazern Dossin* have been identified.

Registered at Auschwitz the deportees from Mechelen officially known as *Judenschutzhäftlinge*, were placed in preventive detention. This administrative jargon, which had an air of legality, did not mean preventive imprisonment for reprehensible acts. In this case they would have depended on the law and, if found guilty, would have been liable to a sentence in the prisons belonging to the legal system. On the contrary it was precisely because they had not committed any crime that they were interned in the concentration camps of Himmler's SS organisation. It was the SS who gave them a criminal identity in the name of socioracial purity, interned for crimes that they could only have committed had they been free. In truth, at the time of the Judeocide, the Jews of Auschwitz were taken there as a servile and renewable labour force: *extermination through work*.

The head of the *RSHA*, Reihard Heydrich, announced at the Wannsee Conference in January 1942 that *the majority of Jews who had been allocated to the labour service in the East will be naturally eliminated through their weakened physical state*. A year later Korherr's report attempted to calculate the death rate figures. The results of his work are particularly revealing regarding the deaths of the Jews who came to *KL Auschwitz* which allowed him to arrive at a death rate of 76% for men and 77% for women. For the year 1942 we have an approximate measure of the death rate of Jewish prisoners in the camp, which had become, with the arrival of Jews from the West, an enormous 'Jewish' concentration camp. This death rate which, incidentally was only applicable to the Jews should of course be put into perspective. For all inmates of the concentration camps 1942 was a catastrophic year, whereby even Himmler was anxious that he would not breach his economic objectives and ordered the SS doctors *to lower the death rate* within the camps. The carnage of 1942 had a profound effect on the deportees from Mechelen who were interned in the Auschwitz complex. It was during that year that the greatest number of Jews out of the entire Deportation were forced to work in the East. There were 5,917 of them i.e. 66% for the 3 crucial months of 1942. From the final count 9,522 of the 25,259 deportees sent from Mechelen between 1942 and 1944, were retained to work in the camps.

The deportation of gypsies from Mechelen to Auschwitz - 15 January 1944		
Gassed upon arrival	0	0,0
of whom women and girls	0	0,0
Interned in the family camp	351	100,0
of whom survivors	16	4,6
Killed by deportation	335	95,4
Total	351	100%
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29 The Paradox of Survival

On 8 May 1945, of the 16,625 deported in 1942, only 385 were still alive, barely 2%. While the Jews forced to work in 1942 represented two-thirds of the internees of the entire deportation, this proportion was reversed, forming only a third of the group of 1,223 survivors.

In 1943 the SS were already unable to deport more than 6,192 from Mechelen. Only 257 were still alive after the war. The survival rate rose to 4%. Such rates are statistically insignificant considering the extent of the Jewish deportations. The number of survivors really only takes on a significant proportion for the deportations that took place in 1944 : 22% from the 2,701 deported with Transports 23 to 26. 581 escaped the hell of the camps and the death marches – accounting for more than 50% of the Mechelen – Auschwitz group of survivors.

Paradoxically, the fewer the deportees the greater the percentage of survivors.

This can perhaps be explained by analysing the structure of the deportations. The Deportees from 1942 who went to Auschwitz, by far the fewest, were eliminated at an average percentage rate of 65% as soon as they got off the trains. The others, accepted into the camps as slave labourers, were subjected to torturous work accompanied numerous acts of ill treatment. Their ranks were decimated by lack of food and horrific sanitary conditions. Victims of recurring epidemics the inmates of 1942 were also decimated by the frequent *selections* which further drastically reduced their numbers. The occasional survivor had to hang on for more than two and half years first having to survive the trials and tribulations of captivity and afterwards the evacuations and death marches.

The deportees who arrived in 1944 were interned under very different conditions. The SS *Sonderkommando* mobilised for the mass extermination of the Jews from Hungary, paid much less attention to the small Transports from Belgium. Proportionally, more of them were kept for slave labour. The immediate average extermination rate fell to 47%. Furthermore the Jewish deportees

from 1944 did not suffer from the outbreaks of decimating epidemics and the living conditions were not as horrific as during the first year of the forced labour camps. In July 1944 the new arrivals in Auschwitz had to undergo less than 1 year of captivity before liberation, but like the majority of survivors they had to survive the most treacherous phase of their captivity – the death marches from January to April 1945.

The Transport of Gypsies which left Mechelen on 15 January 1944 is a special case in the history of the Deportations. Compared with the Jewish Transports the 351 Gypsies, including 166 children, were accepted into the camp. However once interned in the Gypsy family camp, which was isolated from the rest of the Auschwitz complex and overrun with epidemics and famine, they were simply left to die.

The very young and the elderly were the first to die. The first death occurred on 13 February 1944, Georgette Hédouin aged 66. She was followed on the same day by Jeanette Steinbach aged 4 months. A couple of days later two 3-month old babies died, Madeleine Alderboom and Renée Lagrené. Between 15 January 1944 and 31 July 1944, after 6 months of captivity 50% of the Gypsy deportees from Mechelen had died (178). On 2 August the weakest survivors were gassed along with 3,000 other Gypsies still living in the family camp, the day before its liquidation. There were estimated to be 108, nearly 33%, from the Transport of 15 January 1944. The most resistant, some 49 men and women, were sent to some of the Reich's other camps, mainly Buchenwald in the spring. Most of them did not survive. The 15 Gypsy survivors represented only 4% of those taken to Mechelen. Although these deportees were not subjected to immediate extermination, they were proportionally just as decimated as the Jewish deportees from the *Kazern Dossin*.

However those who survived the Deportations, including the Gypsies, do not even represent 5% of the deportees who were sent from Mechelen to Auschwitz. These statistics will always have the

tendency to divert our attention away from the true extent of the concentration camp deaths.

This is the paradox of these macabre statistics and, as in the figures of the Judeocide at the beginning, the end distorts the perception of the beginning. The 565 survivors from 1944 represent 46% of the survivors of the Jewish survivors deported from Mechelen to Auschwitz. They leave barely any space for the deportees of 1942–43. For the latter, survival was rare and in fact absolutely exceptional after 3 years of captivity.

At 88% the story of those deported from Mechelen to the concentration camps is also one of death. At this stage the Deportation from Mechelen also turned out to be one of no return. In total, those who died in the camps and those, nearly twice as many, who were victims of the initial Judeocide, bring the number of deaths resulting from Deportation to 24,037. With a death rate of 95% it was a complete genocidal deportation.

The Final Solution in Belgium				
Jewish population in occupied Belgium	Deported from Mechelen			% Jewish deaths
	to Auschwitz	survivors 8 May 1945	Deceased	
55.670 filing cards of the Judenabteilung of the Sipo-SD including Jews from the North of France (a)				43,2
Non registered Gypsies	-351	-16	-335	
56.186 registered Jews	24.908	1.207	23.701	42,2
		4,8%		
	to Buchenwald, Ravensbrück and Vittel			
	218 (c)	127	91	
56.186 registered Jews	25.126	1.334	23.792	42,4%
Refugees from occupied Belgium in France	Deported from Drancy to Auschwitz or Sobibor			
	1.937d	(± 122)	(± 1.815)	
56.186 registered Jews	27.064	(± 1.457)	(±25.607)	44,6%
	Deported from Drancy to Auschwitz or Sobibor			
Refugees during the exodus and suspects of 1940 in France	3.097	(± 195)	(± 2.902)	
Jewish population in Belgium on 10 May 1945	Deported from France or Belgium			
69.951 Jews	30.161	1.652	28.509	40,8%
a) Excluding 'aryan' spouses.				
b) Figures based on statistics of the Office for War Victims have been updated as a result of improvements made by Laurence Schram.				
c) Jews mostly with the Turkish (neutral) or Hungarian (Axis) nationality arrested within the framework of the Final Solution, but deported to camps without gas chambers.				
d) Jews who fled Belgium after the anti-Jewish count of 1940 and registered by the <i>Sipo-Sd</i> .				
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Mecheln-Auschwitz:
The History of the Transports
1942-1944

*Maxime Steinberg and
Laurence Schram*

Twenty-eight Transports, 27 of which were made up of Jews, and one of Gypsies, took deportees from the *Kazern Dossin* in Mechelen to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Five of these Transports were grouped in pairs. Five of them carried Jews, while the other one carried Gypsies. When the train consisted of two Jewish Transports, the Transports were merged on arrival. They were the object of duplicate orders. However when the single Gypsy Transport was combined with a Jewish Transport, the Transports were not allowed to merge upon arrival and the persons on board these Transports suffered different fates. They were the object of separate orders. The final Transport we shall discuss would have been the 27th Transport of Jews, but its departure was prevented by the arrival of the Allied Forces.

1 Transport 1 of 4 August 1942

The first Transport to *evacuate* the Jews of Belgium consisted of 999 people: 426 women and 573 men. This first phase of the *deportation to the East* was the result of an *Arbeitseinsatz* (literally: labour intake), whereby forced labour was sent to the Auschwitz concentration camp. The Transport was composed of “work performers” who had been called up to the Dossin *Sammellager*. Of these 819 came to the *Kazern Dossin* on their own, personal summons in hand. These papers were known officially as the *Arbeitsauftrag*. This document ordered the addressee to report for work and was issued by the *Sipo-SD* and delivered to people’s homes by the *AJB*. The summons was personal and numbered. Furthermore as soon as the deportee arrived in the *Sammellager* this number was entered on the Transport list in a column headed *AB* (standing for *Arbeitseinsatz*) against the name of the deportee.

At the *Aufnahme*, or reception, Jewish workers entered the names of the new internees on the *Transportliste*, and gave them an order number for the Transport. From now on this was their identification number. The internees had to wear a sign around their necks showing their Transport number in Roman numerals and their “passenger” number in Arabic numerals. They no longer had any other identity as their papers had been confiscated when they registered.

Originally the *Sammellager* was expected to receive 300 draftees every day. But the far-sighted *Sipo-SD* had arranged for a far greater number of draft notices to be distributed. There was even one deportee on Transport 1 whose draft number was 9,153. Even so the Transport list did not reach its quota of 1,000 deportees in three days. Opened on 27 July 1942, it was closed on the 31st, i.e. in five days. Although initially composed of drafted “work performers”, the Transport also included 51 children under the age of 15 as well as five 61-year-olds, who had likewise been drafted for “work”. More than half the children, 29 in all, were entered in the Transport list mentioning the number of their “*AB*”. Eleven others came to the *Kazern Dossin* together with a drafted parent. The remaining six children were alone, and were arrested and deported without a parent. In total the German police supplied 167 Jews to the *Sipo-SD* for this Transport. They were registered on the list with the reference “*KV*”, standing for *Keine Vorladung*, or “no summons”. The majority were added to the end of the list to make up the numbers for this Transport, which otherwise could not be finalized because of the insufficient numbers of labourers. One deportee in six on this first Transport did not receive draft papers.

On 4 August 1942, the deportees got into a train made up of third-class carriages, each according to his/her number on the

Transport list. After an exhausting two-day journey, they arrived at Auschwitz-Birkenau on the 5th, although one deportee had gone missing on the Belgian leg of the journey, despite the escort of 25 *Schupos* specially called in from Germany. This was number 93, a 17 year-old girl called Hanna Karpowitz, who had jumped from the moving train. She had voluntarily come to the *Kazern Dossin* in response to *Arbeitseinsatzbefehl* number 192. Her escape, the only one from this Transport, demonstrates the helplessness of those who had obeyed the order to come to the *Sammellager*. Hanna Karpowitz was recaptured and returned to the *Kazern Dossin* by force on 5 August. She was deported on the next Transport and disappeared into Auschwitz-Birkenau without further trace.

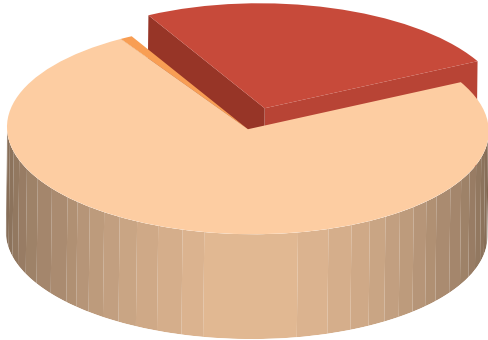
Upon arrival at the camp site in the middle of the countryside, the majority of deportees on Transport 1 were selected for work in the Auschwitz complex. Four hundred and twenty-six men were registered under numbers 56,433 to 56,858. The 318 women were given numbers 14,784 to 15,101. With 74.4% of the deportees put to work, this Transport had the lowest rate of immediate execution of all the Transports that set out from Mechelen. Only 254 of all the deportees, about half men and half women, disappeared without a trace. They were taken to one of the two *Bunkers* of the execution centre on the edge of the Birkenau camp. The gassed bodies were buried.

Death soon decimated the ranks of the deportees who were spared immediate execution. The partial and incomplete Auschwitz *Sterbebücher* only record the deaths of 237 of them. The first recorded death was that of Ellen Koehler, who died on 12 August 1942. Born in Berlin this young woman (18) survived the camp’s regime for just eight days. The camp administration recorded a significant number of deaths on 31 August (ten deaths) and 1 September (also ten deaths), when a typhus epidemic added to the ravages of internal selection within the camp. Among these 20 deaths, fifteen were of women. The death rate for this Transport peaked between 16 and 18 September. On these three days, 36 of the deportees from Mechelen died, representing 13% of all the deaths in this period. The last death certificate found for anybody from Transport 1 was for Abram Fajvel Rotmensz, *Häftling*, and identified by camp number 56,740. He died on 2 March 1943. A 36 year-old furrier who lived in Ecaussinnes, he had reported to the *Kazern Dossin* with his labour draft papers. A man in his prime, he managed to survive almost six months in the deadly conditions of Auschwitz.

Only a very few lived to see the liberation on 8 May 1945. Not only did they endure the deadly conditions in Auschwitz for three years, they also survived the Death Marches, first of all when Auschwitz was evacuated in January 1945, then those of Spring 1945. The Liberation found them alive in Dachau, Sachsenhausen,

Mauthausen and Buchenwald. One of them was even liberated in Auschwitz on 27 January. There were only seven in all, six men, one woman, and no children.

99.3% of all the persons on Transport 1 did not live to tell the tale.



TRANSPORT 1 OF 4 AUGUST 1942

- Employed in Auschwitz and the adjacent sub camps: 744 deportees (74,5%)
- Of whom survived: 7 deportees (0,7%)
- Gassed upon arrival in Birkenau: 254 deportees (25,5%)

Transport destroyed at a rate of 99,3%

2 Transport 2 of 11 August 1942

There were 999 deportees on this Transport, 485 of whom were men and 514 women. Among them were 51 children under the age of 15, the same proportion as on Transport 1. Thirty-five were purported “work performers” drafted for this purpose and registered under an *AB* number. Eleven other children came to the *Kazern Dossin* with a drafted parent. Five other children were arrested, but only one of them unaccompanied. There were 160 arrestees on the Transport. Forty-three of the first 100 people registered on the Transport list were arrestees. Their presence attests to the slowing response to the labour draft. The list was started on 31 July and was finalized eight days later on 7 August. Even so 84% of the people on the Transport were “work performers” who responded to the draft.

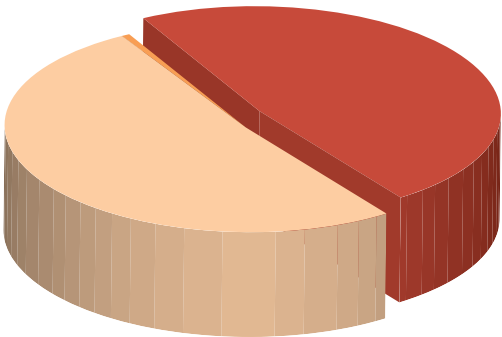
The Transport left Mechelen on 11 August and arrived at Auschwitz-Birkenau on the 13th, after a two-day journey in third-class carriages. The selection was carried out in the middle of the countryside and the SS still favoured sending the deportees for forced labour. Indeed 52% of the deportees were given a registration number. These included 290 men, with numbers 58,226 to 58,515,

and 228 women from 16,737 to 16,964. The other 48%, were taken to the extermination centre in a birch wood in the north-west corner of the Birkenau camp, and gassed with hydrogen cyanide. In fact this procedure tends to mask the genocidal intent of the massacre. While 195 men and boys were gassed, i.e. 40% of the group, the rate of immediate extermination of women and girls (286 deportees) reached 57%. This percentage is an early indicator of the historical sense given to the *deportation to the East*.

Death soon overtook the deportees admitted to the camp. The partial and incomplete Auschwitz *Sterbebücher* records the deaths of 177 of them. The first thirteen deaths occurred on 19 August, just a week after the arrival of Transport 2. Between 13 and 28 August 1942, the camp’s administration registered an average of four deaths a day among the Transport 2 deportees. A peak in this Transport’s death rate was reached on 4 September, when 27 deaths were recorded on a single day. Of the 177 prisoners whose deaths in the camp were recorded, 155 had already succumbed before the eighth week of work in the camp, representing an average of three deaths a day.

Only a tiny fraction lived until 8 May 1945. After three years only three deportees were still living: one man and two women, but no children. Cecile Herskovicova and Bruchla Zelda Mechlovits, were aged 30 and 23 respectively when they returned to Belgium in 1945. The first went on the Death March to Ravensbrück, and the second to Mauthausen. As for Meyer Paur, he survived three years in captivity. Amazingly he was 62 when he was repatriated, but died shortly after repatriation.

The death rate for Transport 2 was 99.7%.



TRANSPORT 2 OF 11 AUGUST 1942

- Employed in Auschwitz and the adjacent sub camps: 518 deportees (51,9%)
- Of whom survived: 3 deportees (0,3%)
- Gassed upon arrival in Birkenau: 481 deportees (48,1%)

Transport destroyed at a rate of 99,7%

3 Transport 3 of 15 August 1942

This Transport consisted of 1,000 deportees, 428 men and 572 women. There were 98 children under the age of 15 among them, about twice as many as on the previous Transports. They were also younger. The youngest, a little Jewish girl from Antwerp called Anna Kaufmann, would not live to see her second birthday. This Transport counted fewer child “work performers” registered under an *AB* number, and there were only 28. Three children came with a parent who had been called up. In contrast no fewer than 67 had been arrested, nearly all with their parents. There were also more arrests, with 261 deportees on Transport 3 having been taken by force to the *Kazern Dossin*. Even so three-quarters of Transport 3 was made up of “work performers” who had responded to the draft. Like the previous Transport, the formation of Transport 3 had taken twice as long as expected, seven days in all. The list, which was opened on 7 August, was finalized on the 14th, when 205 deportees who had been picked up against their will were added to it.

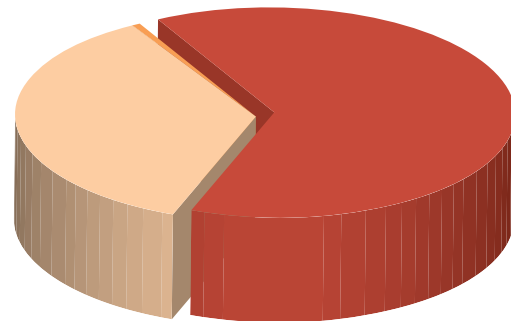
Transport 3, which left Mechelen on 15 August, arrived at the railway siding for Jews (the *Judenrampe*) between Auschwitz and Birkenau on the 17th. It was in mid-August that the systematic extermination of Jews from the West, i.e. France and Belgium, really got going. Transport 3 from Mechelen was the first Transport for which the immediate execution rate for the deportees significantly exceeded the rate of admission to the camps. Two-thirds of the deportees on this Transport were taken from the disembarkation siding to the *Bunkers* in the birch woods, where they were executed with hydrogen cyanide. Remarkably, the rate of immediate execution was almost identical for males (63%) as it was for females (64%).

Only 362 of the deportees were accepted into Auschwitz and its sub-camps: 157 men were given numbers 59,344 to 59,500, while 205 women were allocated the numbers from 17,317 to 17,521. The *Auschwitz Sterbebücher*, incomplete as they are, record the deaths of 96 of them. The first death recorded was that of Nicolae Herskovits, a 33-year-old diamond cutter. He was arrested the day before he was Transported. Despite being selected for work and tattooed with number 59,398, he died the day after his arrival in Auschwitz. Although fragmentary the *Sterbebücher*, allow the historian to determine that on average about one person from the Transport died every day in the period between its arrival and the end of August. In September this average rises to two deaths a day, only to fall again in October to one death every two days. The last person from Transport 3 whose death is recorded in what remains of the Auschwitz archives is David Debowski. He was a 43-year-old Polish Jew and was probably able to make the most of his professional skills as a metalworker during his stay in Auschwitz,

albeit not enough to survive beyond 31 October 1942, after two and a half months of slave labour.

The ranks of the other deportees on this Transport continued to diminish. By 8 May 1945 only five were left alive: four men and one woman. Moses Schuldenfrei and Chaim Lejb Markowicz escaped the Death Marches. The former was liberated from Auschwitz on 27 January 1945 by the Red Army. The latter was transferred at the end of 1943 from Auschwitz to the *Kommando* responsible for cleaning up the ruins of the Warsaw ghetto and arrived in Dachau on 6 August 1944. He was liberated by the American army from Mühldorf, one of the camp's *Kommandos*. The other survivors were subjected to the terrible Death March, one of them ended up in Sachsenhausen, the second in Mauthausen and the third in Neustadt, a Buchenwald *Kommando*.

In all 99.5% of the persons on Transport 3 were wiped out.



TRANSPORT 3 OF 15 AUGUST 1942

- Employed in Auschwitz and the adjacent sub camps: 362 deportees (36,2%)
- Of whom survived: 5 deportees (0,5%)
- Gassed upon arrival in Birkenau: 638 deportees (63,8%)

Transport destroyed at a rate of 99,5%

4 Transport 4 of 18 August 1942

In many respects Transport 4 was one of the most remarkable in the story of the *Endlösung* in Belgium. Composed of 999 deportees when it arrived at the *Judenrampe* between Auschwitz and Birkenau. It was the only Transport from Mechelen with no survivors at all. All the deportees on this Transport died, and indeed 824 deportees were gassed shortly after they got out of the train.

Transport 4 also stands out because of the way it was put together. Most of the deportees on the Transport had been picked up

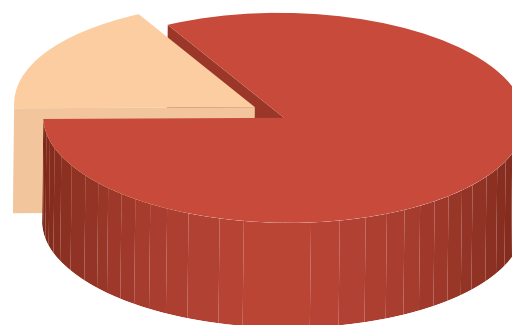
during the first great raid, which also marked the start of the mass deportation of children. One deportee out of four was less than 15 years old and 122 were under 10. It was also the first time that the *evacuation* of the Jews included babies. Ten of the deportees were not even 2 years old. The youngest, Charles Nathan Szmulewicz, was only 3 months.

Aimed at an entire population, this Transport carried 211 Jews older than 50, 28 of whom were over 70. The oldest, Henri Rappaport, born in Warsaw in 1854, was picked up in Somerstraat in Antwerp during this first nighttime raid. The *Judenaktion* in Antwerp made it possible to fill up Transport 4 in two days. It was carried out by the German police with the backing of Antwerp's police force during the hours of darkness of the night of 15-16 August. Started on the 14th, the Transport list was finalized on the 15th. Of the people on the Transport, 704 had been rounded up in the raid, while a further 124 had reported in response to the draft. A further 172 were people who had been arrested at random. Simon Gutfreund, a Jewish boy of 18 from Brussels, was on the Transport and was the only person who managed to escape. Sadly he was quickly recaptured and deported on the next Transport. After arrival he vanished without a trace.

Transport 4 of 18 August 1942 reached Auschwitz-Birkenau two days later. The *Sonderaktion* - the "special action" of the SS - selected only 175 deportees for work. The 104 men were allocated numbers 60,178 to 60,281, while the 71 women were tattooed with numbers 17,714 to 17,784. The SS gassed 456 women and girls upon arrival, i.e. an immediate execution rate of 87%, while the immediate execution rate for the men and boys was 78%.

Death soon overtook the small number of prisoners admitted as slave labourers to the camp. Jacques Hermann, 33, rounded up in Lange Kievitstraat in Antwerp, died the day after his arrival in Auschwitz. He was the first deportee from Transport 4 to die in the camp and is recorded as dying on 21 August 1942. The *Sterbebücher*, partly destroyed during the evacuation of the camp in January 1945, record only 54 deaths, just a third of the *Häftlinge* (prisoners) brought by this Transport. Almost half of the detainees died within a few days, with ten deportees dying between 31 August and 5 September and sixteen between 16 and 25 September 1942. The last deportee from this Transport to be recorded in the Auschwitz archives was Abraham Chaïm Kozak. A cobbler, he had been arrested following a raid on his home in Leeuwerikstraat in Antwerp. This young man of 18 died on 21 January 1943 after five months in Auschwitz.

Nothing is known of the others who were on this Transport.



TRANSPORT 4 OF 18 AUGUST 1942

- Employed in Auschwitz and the adjacent sub camps: 175 deportees (17,5%)
- Of whom survived: 0 deportees (0%)
- Gassed upon arrival in Birkenau: 824 deportees (82,5%)

Transport destroyed at a rate of 100%

5 Transport 5 of 25 August 1942

Transport 5 comprised 996 people, 486 men and 510 women. The Transport list was started on 16 August. Among the first to be registered were 141 Jews from Antwerp who had been rounded up during the night of 15 August but could not be included in the previous Transport. The *Transportliste* was closed on 24 August. Half of the people on it were "work performers" who had responded to the draft. There were 487 of them, including 56 children under the age of 15. There were also eleven children under the age of 10 who had been drafted to "work in the East". The number of children who had been arrested or rounded up was greater too. All in all there were 113, 78 of whom were under the age of 10. The youngest, Simon Lic, was not even three when he was picked up with his mother, Flora Palkovicova, 21, in their home in Lange Kievitstraat. Simon's father, her husband, had been sent to the Mazures forced labour camp in the French Ardennes in July. By the time he was moved to Auschwitz-Birkenau on Transport 15, his wife and son had already been dead for two months, and like them, he disappeared without a trace.

Notwithstanding the greater number of child arrestees, Transport 5 carried fewer children than Transport 4, and children represented 17% of the total. Now that people over 50 were being taken, the rate of people unfit for work was 29%. The oldest of all was Chana Wisnic, 82. She and her daughter Lea Rosenfeld, 51, were picked up in the raid from their home in Ploegstraat, in

Antwerp. Both disappeared without a trace.

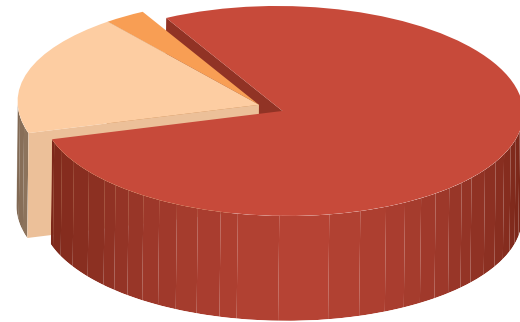
After a two-day journey in third-class carriages, the majority of the deportees were gassed upon arrival at Auschwitz-Birkenau on 27 August. The overall immediate execution rate for this Transport was 78%, with the rate for women being higher at 87%. Only 101 men were selected for work. They were given numbers 61,938 to 62,038. The 114 women admitted to the camp were given numbers 18,449 to 18,562.

Death soon thinned out the already meagre ranks of the slave labourers from Transport 5.

Anszel Wolf Eisensteyn, 38, a Jewish tailor from Brussels, died on 31 August. He had reported to the *Kazern Dossin*, with his draft papers and survived only five days in Auschwitz. The *Sterbebücher* record the deaths of 76 of the *Häftlinge*, or about one third, from this Transport. Many deaths occurred in a three week period between 11 September and 2 October, when over half of the group, 41 in all, died. The last recorded death from Transport 5 was that of Arthur Maier, 22, on 9 January 1943. He had lasted hardly five months under the Auschwitz regime.

Remarkably though there were more people from Transport 5 who survived until the Liberation. There 27 in total, all of them men. Among the survivors were nine deportees who had gone to the *Kazern Dossin*, with their AB number. But there were also survivors who had first been in prison, three in Saint-Gilles and six in Fort Breendonk, and who had been sent to the *Kazern Dossin*. Eight of the survivors had been transferred from the Auschwitz complex of camps to the Warsaw *Kommando* to clean up the ruins of the ghetto, in October 1943. They arrived in Dachau on 6 August 1944, where some were assigned to the Mühldorf *Kommando* and others to Kaufering. Others were evacuated from Auschwitz in January 1945, and survived the Death March to Dachau, where they were finally freed by the Americans, while others were evacuated from Auschwitz on 18 January 1945 to end up in Mauthausen. The US army liberated seven survivors in Ebensee, one in Melk and two who had remained at the main camp. When Auschwitz was liberated by the Red Army on 27 January, there were still two survivors of Transport 5 left.

Despite these few who escaped death, 97% of the deportees on Transport 5 died.



TRANSPORT 5 OF 25 AUGUST 1942

- Employed in Auschwitz and the adjacent sub camps: 215 deportees (21,6%)
- Of whom survived: 27 deportees (2,7%)
- Gassed upon arrival in Birkenau: 781 deportees (78,4%)

Transport destroyed at a rate of 97,3%

6 Transport 6 of 29 August 1942

There were 1,000 people on Transport 6, 415 men and 585 women. The *Transportliste*, which was started on 19 August, was finalized on the 27th, the day before the second big night raid in Antwerp. The *Kazern Dossin* was full of people who had received labour draft papers. Despite the raids, 823 people had reported for work at the *Kazern Dossin*. The *Sipo-SD* provided no details. 163 of the “work performers” drafted were over 50. AB 3.100 was the oldest. He was Léon Raske, a 65-year-old Dutch Jew and diamond cutter who lived in Deurne. Similarly, there were 90 “work performers” under the age of 15 registered for this Transport. The youngest, AB 3.658, was Max Chedryck from Antwerp, who was only 5 years old. He was summoned to the *Kazern Dossin* on 28 August just like his mother, Chana Semiatycki (38), his brother, Josef Szlama (15), and his sister Sara (13). The father, Moses Rubin Chedryck did not receive a work order, but the next day he joined his family for the journey to the East from which none of them would return. There were 24 other children among the Jews who had been picked up in isolated incidents. Even so only 11% of the people on this Transport were children, and when we look at the 179 deportees of over 50, we find that only 11 were over 60, thus demonstrating the effectiveness of the draft system.

Transport 6 left Mechelen on 29 August 1942. On 31 August it became the first Transport to stop at Kosel, about 100 kilometres west of Auschwitz-Birkenau. All men between 15 to 50 were

told to get out of the train to join the slave labourers working for *Organisation Schmelt* in Upper Silesia. They were scattered among the various forced labour camps for Jews. We do not know the exact number of deportees who obeyed the order at Kosel. 267 men from the Transport fell into this age group, but there is no way of knowing whether all of them complied. This uncertainty forces us to set a minimum figure for the estimated number of deportees gassed upon arrival at Birkenau.

As a result all we can say is that at least 733 deportees arrived at Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Here too we are faced with conflicting evidence: according to the Auschwitz registration system, no deportees on Transport 6 were selected for work and therefore no registration numbers were allocated to the Jews arriving from the *Kazern Dossin* on 31 August. Even so, death certificates for 19 men and 2 women from Transport 6 indicate that at least 21 of these deportees were admitted to the camp. 15 *Häftlinge* from this group died between 4 and 30 September 1942, one of the deadliest months of 1942. Another 5 prisoners died during October 1942. The last recorded death for a Transport 6 deportee is dated 6 December 1943. In the absence of registration numbers, the historian is obliged to estimate the number of deportees selected for work in the concentration camp. There were probably about 91 of them, namely 22 men and 69 women. On this occasion fewer men than women were admitted to Auschwitz. Hardly surprising as after the stop at Kosel, most of those on board of Transport 6 were unfit for work, and consisted of children and women and men over the age of 50.

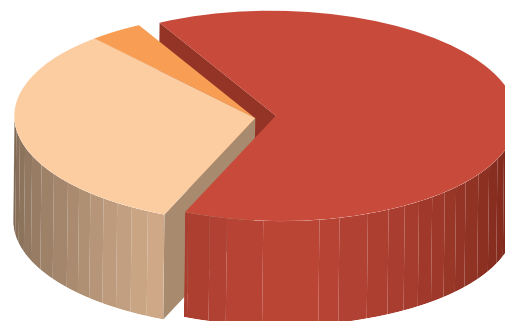
In the final analysis, the number of victims of the *SS Sonderaktion* applied to Transport 6 may be estimated at 642. 126 men and boys were gassed immediately in the *Bunkers* at Birkenau. The same fate awaited 516 women and girls. Although high, the 64% immediate execution rate applied to Transport 6 was lower than that of the Transports which went before it and those that followed.

There were 35 survivors in 1945, all of them men and all "Koselians". The majority of them were assigned to the Kleinmangersdorf and Babitz forced labour camps for Jews or *ZALs* (*Zwangsarbeitslager*). The others were spread among various other *ZALs*, such as Breslau, Blechhammer, Trzebinia, Szopienice, etc. They were employed on the construction of the Berlin-Breslau-Krakow road. Nearly half of the slave labourers who went through Kleinmangersdorf, Trzebinia and Szopienice, were transferred in October 1943 to the *Kommando* responsible for cleaning up the ruins of the Warsaw ghetto. The seventeen survivors from this group reached Dachau and its *Kommandos* together, where they held out until the arrival of the American troops.

Except for Abraham Levie Blog, who remained at Blechhammer

until his liberation by the Red Army in January 1945, the rest of the by now highly dispersed group went on the Death Marches to Buchenwald, Mauthausen, Gross-Rosen and Dachau. These 18 other survivors hung on until their liberation by the US army.

These 35 survivors represent only a tiny proportion of those who were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau on Transport 6. All in all 96.5% of Transport 6 was wiped out.



TRANSPORT 6 OF 29 AUGUST 1942

Employed in Auschwitz and the adjacent sub camps: 358 deportees (35,8%)
Of whom survived: 35 deportees (3,5%)
Gassed upon arrival in Birkenau: 642 deportees (64,2%)

Transport destroyed at a rate of 96,5%

7 Transport 7 of 1 September 1942

It took the *Sipo-SD* less than three days to assemble the 1,000 deportees of Transport 7 - 555 women and 445 men. The *Transportliste*, started on 27 August, mentions only 72 "work performers" who answered the summons to the *Sammellager*. This was an indication that effectiveness of the labour draft was coming to an end. The defining event in the formation of this Transport was the second great Antwerp raid organized by the *Sipo-SD*, the *Feldgendarmes* and the Antwerp police after nightfall on 28 August 1942. On this second occasion Antwerp's police force played a far more active role in the raid. Instead of just providing support, local policemen made arrests, and occasionally used violence.

This was the Sabbath, the day on which Jewish families were most likely to be together. The arrestees were taken to the *Sammellager* only on the 29th, once the previous Transport had left. Because of the lack of space, the SS at the *Kazern Dossin* could

not take in the 943 arrested during this *Judenaktion*. As soon as they arrived in Mechelen, 784 internees were put on the list for Transport 7, whereas the remaining 159 were held over for the following Transport.

One remarkable aspect of this Transport was the number of people “unfit for work”. There were 317 children under the age of 15, 309 of whom had been arrested. Never before had there been so many children. The youngest was less than eighteen months old. Jackeline Bryn was arrested with her mother, Laja Fajgla Bryn, 25, in Antwerp outside the perimeter of the raid. The Transport 7 took them to Auschwitz, where they disappeared without a trace. There were 229 deportees over the age of 50 and only five of them had reported in response to the labour draft. Once again the *Sipo-SD* action was aimed at the entire Jewish population.

Transport 7 arrived in Auschwitz-Birkenau on 3 September, after a stop at Kosel. Men between 15 to 50 were told to get off the train. There were only 170 of them. It is not possible to say whether all obeyed or not. We can only assume that fathers would have preferred to remain with their wives and children. As a result the figure for the number of men who actually got off the train and the number of Jews gassed after disembarkation at the *Judenrampe* is an estimate.

At least 734 deportees out of the 1,000 were executed on the spot. Like the Transports immediately preceding it, the immediate execution rate for Transport 7 was very high. The high average rate is because the SS immediately consigned 85% of the girls and women to death by gassing. The SS dealt mercilessly with the people left on the Transport after the able-bodied men had gone. 265 men and boys and 469 women and girls were executed immediately. No trace of them after their arrival at Auschwitz-Birkenau remains.

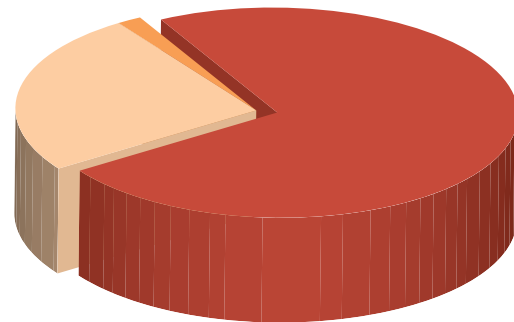
The SS who made the selection accepted only 96 deportees from Transport 7 for the concentration camp. The 10 men who were selected were given numbers 62,909 to 62,918, while the women were tattooed with numbers 18,867 to 18,952. The *Sterbebücher*, the compendiums of death certificates that were partially destroyed by the SS during the hurried evacuation from Auschwitz, mention eleven deaths for the 96 internees from Transport 7. The first death was recorded 11 days after the arrival of the Transport. This was Loti Mühlrad, 20, an office worker who had fled from The Netherlands. The last recorded death for the group, was that of Samuel Weiss, 52. He was a butcher from Antwerp and had been picked up in the raid of 28 August. He stood up to the Auschwitz regime for five months, and died on 4 January 1943.

Only one person from this little group of *Häftlinge* survived until 1945. Interned on 3 September in the main camp in Auschwitz, David Kac, 32, remained in one concentration camp during his

entire captivity. A qualified physician, he was even able to practice in the “Revier” or sick bay. He was liberated from Auschwitz on 27 January 1945 by the Soviet Army.

The 14 others from Transport 7 who lived to 1945 were all “Koselians”. They were sent to the various *Schmelt Organisation* forced labour camps for Jews in Upper Silesia. They circulated between the ZALs of Kleinmangersdorf, Babitz, Blechhammer, Trzebinia, Szopienice, etc., before being sent on the Death March. Five of them arrived at Buchenwald and four others at Dachau and its *Kommandos*. The remaining survivors were sent to Gross-Rosen or Theresienstadt, or liberated during the march.

The fact that these 15 survived, does little to mitigate the chilling statistics for Transport 7: 98.5% of the people who left the *Kazern Dossin* on 1 September 1942 never returned.



TRANSPORT 7 OF 1 SEPTEMBER 1942

- Employed in Auschwitz and the adjacent sub camps: 266 deportees (26,6%)
- Of whom survived: 15 deportees (1,5%)
- Gassed upon arrival in Birkenau: 734 deportees (73,4%)

Transport destroyed at a rate of 98,5%

8 Transport 8 of 8 September 1942

Transport 8 was made up of 1,000 people, 498 men and 502 women. There were 207 children under 15 on the Transport, continuing the trend seen on the previous Transport. The list was started on 29 August, when 159 people who had been rounded up in the raid in Antwerp the night before but could not be accommodated on Transport 7 were put down for Transport 8. The labour draft system was on its last legs. 107 “work performers”, including six children and 210 old people, were the very last to come to the *Kazern Dossin*. The sporadic arrests of those who had refused to

come forward, or members of their families, could not make up the difference. Between 30 August and 3 September, i.e. over a period of five days, the daily average figure for admission to the *Kazern Dossin* fell back to 92.

On 31 August 1942, SS Leutnant Kurt Asche burst into the *AJB* offices on the Boulevard d'Anvers in Brussels. He threatened serious reprisals if the assassin of Robert Holzinger was not found. This German Jew, a refugee from Austria, had been compelled to act as an intermediary between the *Sipo-SD* and the *AJB* since 1 August. On 29 August he had been shot at 6.30 pm on the street in Schaerbeek. This was the second act of armed resistance against the deportation. It was committed by the 1st Company of the Mobile Partisan Corps, which had been established in the MOI, a section of the Communist Party concerned with immigrant labour or "Main d'Oeuvre Immigrée". On 25 July, one of the three detachments of the MOI had broken into *AJB* headquarters on the Boulevard du Midi in Brussels and set fire to copies of the files compiled on the order of the SS officer for Jewish Affairs.

It was the group led by Moszek Rakower – shot on 6 January 1943 as a "terrorist hostage" – which assassinated Holzinger on 29 August 1942. Because the draft notices had already gone out, the *Sipo-SD* waited until the end of the operation before launching a third raid. This time the raid was aimed at the Gare du Midi district of Brussels and started after dark on 3 September. On the 4th, the *Kazern Dossin* was suddenly able to make up the numbers for Transport 8 with the 318 people rounded up during the night. The majority of the victims were all picked up during this sole raid to be carried out in Brussels in 1942. The youngest, Léon Badler was three and a half years old. He was seized with his parents at rue de Suède in Saint-Gilles, near rue de Mérode, where three other relations were arrested. The oldest deportee on the Transport was not picked up during the raid. This was Isaac Winter, who was 77 and who lived alone at rue des Palais in Schaerbeek. He had been sent to the *Kazern Dossin* on 31 August.

Transport 8 arrived at the sidings between Auschwitz and Birkenau on 10 September, after a two-day train journey in third-class carriages. Just like the two previous Transports, it had stopped in Kosel, where an unspecified number of men, but 276 at the most, aged between 15 and 50 years old were made to get off the train. They were scattered among various forced labour camps for Jews in Upper Silesia. A minimum of 724 deportees therefore arrived at Auschwitz, two-thirds of whom, i.e. 502, were women and girls. The SS at Auschwitz took 438 of the deportees – more than 87% – to the gas chambers concealed in the birch woods. The SS doctor, Johan-Paul Kremer, mentions these *Bunkers* in his personal diary, where he also describes his participation in the *Sonderaktion* of 10

September.

In contrast to the women and girls, there is no precise figure for the men and boys gassed. At the least 41% of the latter were executed on the spot. Apart from the "Koselians" it thus seems that 85 deportees from Transport 8 were still alive: 21 men received registration numbers 63,223 to 63,243, and 64 women, numbers 19,295 to 19,358.

Death did not delay in recruiting from the ranks of the remaining 85 *Häftlinge* from Transport 8 in Auschwitz. The partial and incomplete *Sterbebücher* record eighteen of their deaths.

The first to die was Marie Cypra Roszkowski, who expired on 23 September 1942. Only 22, this young woman from Lodz lasted only 13 days in the camp. The Auschwitz camp administration had already recorded high death rates on 31 August (10 deaths) and 1 September (10 deaths), the consequence of the combined effects of a typhus epidemic and internal selection in the camp. In less than two months, the administration at Auschwitz made up death certificates for at least fifteen of the Transport 8 deportees from Mechelen. The last death certificate that can be found for this Transport was that of Karl Kahn, a former prisoner in Fort Breendonk, and registered in Auschwitz under number 63,231. This man in the prime of his life died after a year in captivity at Auschwitz at the age of 44.

Of the 361 deportees from the Transport forced to work in Upper Silesia or in the Auschwitz complex, only 34 survived captivity. There were only two women in this group. These were Helene and Spora Elie Stark. They had been brought to the *Kazern Dossin* on 1 September with their respective husbands, Kalma Wilder and Israel Majerczyk. The two sisters, aged 32 and 28 respectively, were selected for work by the SS and interned in the concentration camp with registration numbers 19356 and 19332. They stayed in Birkenau until the final evacuation, and went on the Death March to Ravensbrück and then on to Malchow, one of the camp's dependencies, where they were finally liberated by the American army.

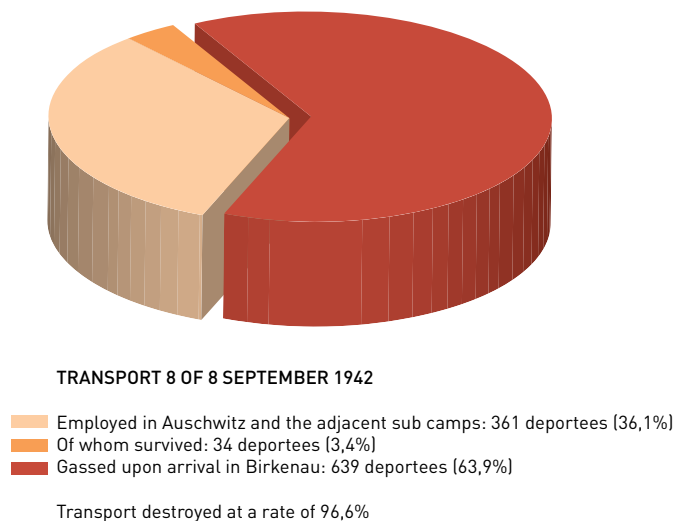
Helene's husband, Kalma Wilder, 33, did not survive deportation. Spora Elie's husband, Israel Majerczyk, 21, had more luck. He was ordered off the train at Kosel and was successively put to work in the *ZALs* at Laurahütte, Sosnowitz and Szopienice, before being taken to Auschwitz on 1 November 1943. On 20 November, he was transferred to the Warsaw *Kommando*, where the detainees had to clean up the ruins of the ghetto. Once this task had been completed, he was interned in Dachau on 6 August 1944, where he held out until his liberation from the Kaufering *Kommando* by US troops.

Once again, there was a far higher survival rate among the "Koselians": 31 out of a total of 34. Twenty of them were employed in Sakrau, another forced labour camp for Jews dependent on *Organisation Schmelt*. Six others were put to work in the Laurahütte

steelworks. The rest were scattered over the various ZALs and worked on building the Berlin-Breslau-Krakow road. All these "Koselians" went on the Death March, twelve to Dachau, ten to Buchenwald, and a few to Gross-Rosen... before being liberated by the US army.

The only survivor to be liberated from Mauthausen was Henschel Koplewicz. He was also the sole male survivor not to get off at Kosel. Interned in Auschwitz on 30 August, this was not his first experience in a concentration camp. He had been imprisoned in Fort Breendonk in October 1940 before being sent to Auschwitz, via the Dossin *Sammellager*. He got out of Auschwitz only when he was sent on the Death March in January 1945. This brought him to Mauthausen, where he held out until 6 May 1945, when he was liberated.

These 34 survivors are little more than a drop in the ocean of deportations from Mechelen to Auschwitz-Birkenau: 96.6% of all the people deported on Transport 8 were wiped out.



9 Transport 9 of 12 September 1942

Transport 9 was made up of 1,000 people, 498 men and 502 women. Like Transport 8 Transport 9 included a lot of children. Indeed one deportee in five, a total of 191, was a child under the age of 15. This was also the first Transport for which all the deportees were taken to the *Kazern Dossin* by force. The Transport list was

started on 4 September 1942 with the remaining 282 people who had been rounded up during Brussels raid of the previous night.

Sporadic arrests between 5 to 10 September yielded about 80 new detainees every day for the *Sammellager*, making a total of 392 deportees. The first day of a new *Judenaktion* in Antwerp yielded a further 326 deportees bringing the numbers up to 1,000 on 11 September. This *Judenaktion* lasted two days and was more of a generalized hunt than the previous raids. Both the youngest and the oldest members of Transport 9 were brought forcibly to the *Sammellager*. Marguerite Sabo had just turned one, whereas Rosa Blanckleder would not live to celebrate her 79th birthday in October 1942.

Transport 9 left Mechelen on 12 September 1942 and arrived at Auschwitz-Birkenau on the 14th, again after stopping at Kosel. All men between 15 and 50 were ordered to get off the train so that they could be sent to the various forced labour camps for Jews within the *Organization Schmelt* in Upper Silesia. Although 278 of the men on the Transport fell into this age category, we do not know exactly how many obeyed the order. This uncertainty forces us to set a minimum figure for the estimated number of deportees gassed upon arrival at Birkenau.

All we can say is that when the train arrived at the sidings between Auschwitz and Birkenau, at least 572 deportees were sent to the execution centre in the *Bunkers* in the birch woods at Birkenau. The women were then subjected to a rigorous weeding out process by the SS. Only 105 women were selected. They were given numbers 19,608 to 19,712. A total of 502 women and children descended from the train. The remaining 397, or 79%, disappeared forever. They were gassed immediately. The number of men and boys gassed is more difficult to determine. After the stop at Kosel practically all the males were either too young or too old to work. Only 45 men were interned. They were given numbers 63,531 to 63,575. The others, at least 175, were gassed, assuming that all other males between 15 and 50 had got off at Kosel. Despite this uncertainty, this means that average rate of immediate execution was 57%, which is remarkably low for this particular period of the Judeocide.

Whatever the precise number may have been, death was soon to wreak havoc among the deportees of Transport 9 in the camps of Upper Silesia and Auschwitz. The partial and incomplete Auschwitz *Sterbebücher* record 24 of them. The first death occurred on 17 September. Alter Szurek had been held in Breendonk before being deported to Auschwitz, via the *Kazern Dossin*. This 43-year-old dentist died three days after his arrival. The following month seems to have been particularly deadly between 2 and 7 October, the camp's administration recorded one death a day among the deportees of 12 September. The last death of which a

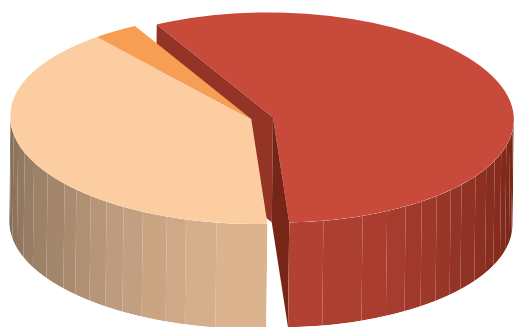
record remains in the Auschwitz archives, was that of Helena Lea Lamm, a 28-year-old Physical Education teacher. Put to work on 14 September, her good physical condition probably explains why she survived 15 months in captivity in Birkenau. Her death was recorded in Auschwitz on 15 December 1943.

There were 30 survivors in 1945. Although more women were put to work in the concentration camp, only one of them lived to be repatriated. Chuma Gus was arrested in her home in Saint-Gilles, Brussels, three days after the Brussels raid. Her husband, Philip Isidoor Frank was arrested with her. They were deported together on Transport 9 and both arrived at Auschwitz-Birkenau on 14 September as Philip Isidoor Frank had preferred to remain with his wife rather than get off at Kosel. Chuma Gus, a 29-year-old nurse, survived two years and four months Birkenau and was on the January 1945 Death March. When she arrived at Ravensbrück she was transferred to the Neustadt *Kommando*, where she was liberated by the Americans. When she got back to Belgium, she was reunited with her husband who was one of the few men on Transport 9 to be admitted to Auschwitz.

7 men, aged 19 to 47, among the survivors did not get off at Kosel. All the other survivors were "Koselians". The majority of them, 20 in all, were sent to the Sakrau forced labour camp for Jews. There were nine "Koselians" in Blechhammer where, when the Auschwitz complex was being reorganized, they were registered with numbers 17,6512 to 17,9567.

All the survivors from Transport 9 experienced the Death Marches at first hand. Seven of them ended up at Buchenwald and its *Kommandos*, seven others landed in Mauthausen or its annexes. The others were scattered in small groups over the other concentration camps, Dachau, Natzweiler, and Flossenbürg. All held out until April or May, when they were liberated by the US Army.

These 30 survivors are little more than a drop in the ocean of deportations from Mechelen to Auschwitz-Birkenau: 97% of all the people deported on Transport 9 were wiped out.



TRANSPORT 9 OF 12 SEPTEMBER 1942

- Employed in Auschwitz and the adjacent sub camps: 428 deportees (42,8%)
- Of whom survived: 30 deportees (3%)
- Gassed upon arrival in Birkenau: 572 deportees (57,2%)

Transport destroyed at a rate of 97%

10 Transport 10 of 15 December 1942

This Transport carried 1,048 deportees, 538 men and 510 women. It marked the completion of the deportation programme of 11 June 1942, which aimed at removing a first batch of 10,000 deportees. From now on the German authorities made no bones about speaking of "evacuation" and not just "labour deployment". Following new instructions given on 28 August 1942, the SS officer for Jewish affairs made this clear to representatives of the *AJB* on several occasions. On 25 October, Kurt Asche even went so far as to tell them that the *evacuation will affect all Jews in Belgium and none of them will return to the country*.

That the SS of the *Kazern Dossin*, were able to assemble Transport 10 in only three days, was the result of mass arrests in Antwerp and Northern France. The list was started on 11 September. While the *Transportliste* was being compiled, the 355 Jews who had been rounded up in Antwerp on the 11th and 12th, and could not be included in the previous Transport, were put together with 514 Jews who had been picked up in a wave of arrests in Northern France. Gun in hand, the *Feldgendarmarie* and the French police had arrested Jews in Lille, Lens and Douai in dawn raids on Jewish homes on 11 September 1942, the day after Rosh Hashannah (Jewish New Year).

Jews from Lens were taken to Lens railway station. There they were loaded into goods wagons already holding Jewish arrestees from Douai. Those picked up in Lille were taken to the Lille-Saint-Sauveur railway station, where they were forced to board a train that took them to Mechelen via Lille-Fives.

On 14 September, the day before Transport 10 left, thirteen other Jews arrested in the French départements of Nord and Pas-de-Calais were also taken to the *Kazern Dossin*. The Jews seized in Lens could not count on any help from the local population. At Lille, on the other hand, some Jews were tipped off about the impending arrests, while in Lille-Fives, railway workers, members of the protestant community and others, saved fifteen Jews from their fate.

Little Josef Jozefowicz, born in Lens and just six weeks old, had no such luck. He was taken to Mechelen where he was the youngest deportee on Transport 10. He was registered on the deportation list with his parents, Léa Geldner and Idel Ber Jozefowicz. The oldest deportee on Transport 10, Moise Aschkenazy, 79, was also picked up in France. Neither would return in 1945.

On 15 September 1942, the 1,048 deportees were taken from the *Sammellager* to Auschwitz in a passenger train. Again, the number of children was high, with 229 children under the age of 15. In other

words almost every fifth deportee was a child.

The train did not stop at Kosel. On the 17th the Transports entire human cargo was disgorged at the *Judenrampe* at Auschwitz. These sidings were in the middle of the countryside, beyond Auschwitz station.

The SS condemned 717 deportees from Transport 10 (308 men and boys and 409 women and girls) to an immediate death in the *Bunkers*, the two farm buildings converted into gas chambers. There they were poisoned with hydrogen cyanide. The rate of immediate execution for Transport 10 was in excess of 68%. The rate for women and girls, the favoured targets of the SS, was over 80%

At first, the bodies were buried. There were no crematoria in Birkenau at that time. Four days after gassing, the bodies were disinterred and incinerated in open fires to limit the risk of disease.

Only 331 of the deportees on Transport 10 were selected for work. All were tattooed before being admitted to the Auschwitz concentration camp: the 230 men numbered from 64,005 to 64,234, whereas the 101 women were numbered from 19,821 to 19,921.

A typhus epidemic broke out on 30 September, and this undoubtedly explains why 45 of the 81 death certificates to be found in the Auschwitz records for this Transport are dated October 1942.

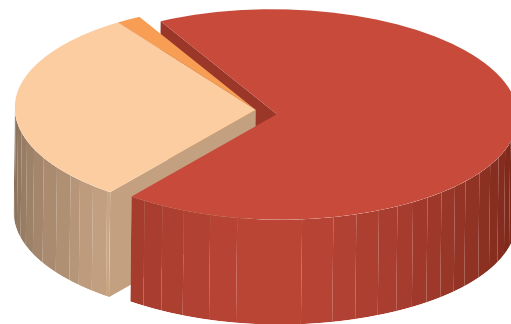
Although these records are admittedly incomplete, because a large part of them was destroyed by the SS before the evacuation of Auschwitz, they do allow us to track variations in the death rate in the camp. A new peak occurred in January 1943, when a further eighteen of the 81 death certificates were made up. During that particular month, extensive work to expand the camp was combined with almost daily selection in the *Blocks*. This, combined with a new typhus epidemic that affected the Buna-Monowitz camp in particular, increased the overall death rate. Many of the men from Transport 10 had been put to work in this *Kommando*.

17 of the deportees from Transport 10 were still alive on 8 May 1945. As always very few of them were women, just two in fact. These were Lotte and Henny Lipschutz, Jewish German refugees who had been rounded up in Antwerp during the extended raid of 11 and 12 September 1942 and taken to the *Kazern Dossin* on 14 September. Aged 24 and 20, the two sisters were selected for work in the camp and identified by registration numbers 19850 and 19851. They remained in Birkenau during their entire captivity and held out until 27 January 1945, when they were liberated by Soviet troops. They were repatriated together, on 18 September 1945, almost three years after their arrival at Birkenau.

Of the fifteen male survivors only two escaped the general evacuation of the Auschwitz complex in January 1945. These

were Abraham Sokolski and David Piotrkowski, aged 47 and 36 respectively in 1945. At the end of 1943 they were transferred from Auschwitz to the *Kommando* responsible for clearing up the ruins of the Warsaw ghetto. They arrived in Dachau on 6 August 1944, where they survived until the arrival of the US army. They had been arrested in Douai and Lens. The other survivors did not escape the Death Marches which took them, in small groups or alone, to concentration camps in the Reich: Dachau, Flossenbürg, Buchenwald, Dora or Mauthausen.

With only seventeen survivors, Transport 10 had deadly effect. The Transport's death rate was 98.4%.



TRANSPORT 10 OF 15 SEPTEMBER 1942

- Employed in Auschwitz and the adjacent sub camps: 331 deportees (31,6%)
- Of whom survived: 17 deportees (1,6%)
- Gassed upon arrival in Birkenau: 717 deportees (68,4%)

Transport destroyed at a rate of 98,4%

11 Transport 11 of 26 September 1942

Transport 11 was made up of 1,742 deportees, 793 men and 949 women. Children under 15 were more numerous than ever, there were 467 on the Transport. This was the first Transport of the second wave of the 1942 evacuation programme, and it was the most numerous of all the Mechelen Transports. The list was started on 16 September and was finalized on the 25th, with the inclusion during the last three days of 761 people rounded up in Antwerp. This last great raid in Antwerp, marked the end of the mass arrests. Nonetheless it differed from the previous raids in that the initiative came from the rationing services in Antwerp and the adjoining boroughs of Borgerhout and Deurne. The SS non-commissioned officer for local Jewish affairs, Erich Holm, and his

German deputy, Karl Vierk, set up a trap whereby their anti-Jewish helpers in Antwerp and cronies in the *Flemish SS* were able to flush out the growing number of Jews who had gone into hiding, or lying low at their official address. They simply arrested anyone who had presented an identity card stamped "Jood-Juif" (Jew) when applying for the ration coupons which the holder was entitled to every month. Armed with the addresses, the *Feldgendarmes*, guided by the *Flemish SS*, did the rest. After this action had filled half the Transport, a group of 57 Jews from Liège was added on 25 September, as well as 27 others arrested in Charleroi the day before, in a final rush. The latter round-ups, however, reflected the small size of the Jewish communities in these towns, and were more like targeted arrests. The remainder of the Transport was filled up with people who had been arrested individually or as part of an isolated group. From now on this was to become the main way of finding deportees.

The youngest and the oldest people of Transport 11 were picked up in the ration raids in Antwerp. Beno Peterfreund was nine months old when he was arrested with his entire family on 24 September. The Peterfreund-Schlachtets were Polish Jews living in Oostenstraat, in Antwerp's Jewish quarter. There were five of them apart from baby Beno: his mother, Sara Schlachtet, 40, his father Moses Leib Peterfreund, 38, his two big sisters, Bina, 14, and Hendel Malka, 13, and his bigger brother, Charles, 4. They had no chance of survival when they disembarked from the train in Auschwitz-Birkenau. They all disappeared, the father included, without a trace.

The same applied to the oldest deportee, Sara Hirsch, 86, a Polish Jew living in Wipstraat in Antwerp. She was taken to the Dossin *Sammellager* on 25 September.

Transport 11 left Mechelen the next day and arrived at the sidings between Auschwitz and Birkenau on September 1942. Although remarkable for being the biggest of the Belgian Transports it also stood out because of the marked disparity between the sexes. Indeed the women and girls outnumbered the men and boys by more than a third. The immediate execution rate of 94% was the highest for all the Mechelen Transports. The SS special action sent 891 women and girls for immediate execution in the gas chambers. The immediate execution rate for the men and boys was 64%, bringing the overall immediate execution rate to 80%, almost as high as the 82% of Transport 4.

The SS selected 344 deportees from Transport 11 as fit for work. The 286 men were given numbers 66,070 to 66,355 while the 58 women selected were given numbers 21,034 to 21,091.

The slave labourers provided by Transport 11 were soon visited by death.

The first to go was Lajb Koziol, 46, who died on 30 September 1942.. This Jewish shopkeeper from Ostend lasted just two days in Auschwitz. The *Sterbebücher*, the incomplete series of death certificates from Auschwitz, mention the deaths of 75 of the *Häftlinge*, i.e. 22% of all the Transport 11 deportees admitted to the camp. The death rate would have been highest in October when a typhus epidemic reached a peak. In the period between 5 and 31 October, the camp's administration recorded 45 deaths. One deportee in seven died during these 26 days. The last death of a Transport 11 deportee to be recorded dates from 14 March 1943. This was Szlama Rosenberg, registration number 66,308, who died two days after his 46th birthday. A cobbler who had lived in rue de Fiennes in Brussels, he survived the Auschwitz regime for just over four and a half months.

Although no record of their deaths still exists the other deportees from this Transport continued to die. By 8 May 1945 only 31 were still alive. There was just one woman among them. Sara Adler was from The Netherlands. Taken to the *Kazern Dossin* with her husband, Nachim Moldauer, on 18 September 1942, they were deported together on Transport 11. Nachim Moldauer, 45, disappeared without a trace. After surviving for two and a half years, Sara Adler returned to The Netherlands in 1945, where she was reunited with her two children, whom she had entrusted to the safekeeping of others.

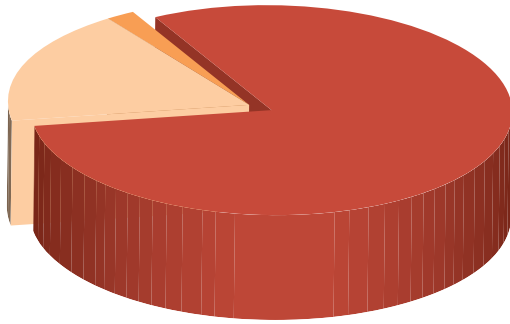
Of the 30 men, only five escaped the final evacuation from Auschwitz in January 1945.

Szmul Karolinski, deported at the age of 24, spent his entire captivity in the main camp of Auschwitz. On 27 January 1945 he was liberated by Soviet troops and although he was among the first to be liberated, he was among the last to be repatriated. He only returned to Belgium in early June 1945.

The four others, Leiba Baumann, 41, Lejbus Gutman, 38, Jankiel Kutnowski, 27, and Michala Podchlebnika were transferred at the end of 1943 from Auschwitz to the *Kommando* responsible for clearing up the ruins of the Warsaw ghetto. They arrived in Dachau on 6 August 1944 and were assigned to the Mühldorf *Kommando*, where they held out until the arrival of the US army.

The other survivors endured the terrible Death March. Six were liberated in Theresienstadt, four in Mauthausen or its annexes, four in Dachau, and three in Buchenwald. The remaining survivors were the only ones from Transport 11 who were alone when liberated, one in Rajsko, an Auschwitz *Kommando*, another in Bergen-Belsen, Dora, Flossenbürg, Gross-Rosen, etc.

The death rate for Transport 11 was 98.2%.



TRANSPORT 11 OF 26 SEPTEMBER 1942

- Employed in Auschwitz and the adjacent sub camps: 344 deportees (19,7%)
- Of whom survived: 31 deportees (1,8%)
- Gassed upon arrival in Birkenau: 1398 deportees (80,3%)

Transport destroyed at a rate of 98,2%

12 Transports 12 and 13 of 10 October 1942

Transports 12 and 13 were formed separately in the *Kazern Dossin*. The *Transportliste* of Transport 12 was opened on 26 September 1942, with the names of a few Jews picked up in Brussels and 142 Jews from Antwerp. The latter were probably arrested as part of the ration stamp trap set up by the *Sipo-SD* and the Flemish SS in the city's rationing offices. The big raids were now over and it took the *Sipo-SD* ten days to gather the 1,000 deportees for this Transport, made up of 446 men and 554 women. On 6 October, Transport list 12 was finalized, and the Dossin administration started on Transport list 13 the very same day. This list was finalized on 9 October, the day before the Transport was due to leave. It was a small Transport of 681 deportees, made up of 322 men and 359 women.

On 10 October 1942, the two Transports leaving Mechelen were merged into a single train of 1,681 deportees. Many of the deportees were "unsuitable" for work, indeed 452 of them, over half, were children under the age of 15, whereas a further 436 were over 50.

The train lost 7 deportees before it arrived at the border. Walter Aron, 47, and Ruchla Laja Stokowska, 52, escaped from Transport 12. Lottia Lieber, 27, and her husband, Marian Gewercman, 31, who had been attached to Transport 13 without being given a deportation number, jumped from their carriage together. The 3

other escapees, with numbers 528, 529 and 530 on Transport list 13 were respectively Lipa Keller, 57, her son, Ludwig, 30, Martin Lewin, 44. All seven stayed out of the clutches of the Germans.

The train stopped at Kosel. It was the last time that a Mechelen Transport would do so. There would have been 1,674 people left on the train. The men aged between 15 and 50 were ordered to get off. There were 346 of them in this age range so if they all obeyed there would have been 1,328 left on the train. However, we cannot know for sure if all obeyed. We can only assume that many fathers would have preferred to remain with their wives and children. As a result the figures for the number of men who got off the train and the number of Jews gassed after disembarkation at the *Judenrampe* can only be approximate.

The at least 1,328 persons remaining in the two Transports were processed as one upon arrival at Auschwitz-Birkenau on 12 October. The SS of the *Endlösung* considered at least 1,212 of them to be "unsuitable" for work and sent them for immediate execution, in the *Bunkers* in the birch woods, where they were gassed with hydrogen cyanide. The selection process for the women and girls was merciless, with over 90% of them being automatically condemned to death. The immediate execution rate for the men and boys was lower, standing at 51%. The average of these very divergent death rates, was 72%. As such this global figure gives a distorted view of the executions, as it masks the extent to which the Judeocide was aimed at women and children.

At the selection, 116 deportees from Transports 12 and 13 were chosen for slave labour in the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp. The 28 men selected were tattooed with numbers 67,726 to 67,753, whereas the 88 women were given numbers 22,397 to 22,484.

The quality of the records left by the Auschwitz *Sterbebücher* deteriorates sharply as of November 1942. Only 16 death certificates exist for the two Transports. But here too they reveal the deadliness of October 1942. Only 12 certificates for the newly arrived deportees date from this month when typhus raged in the camp.

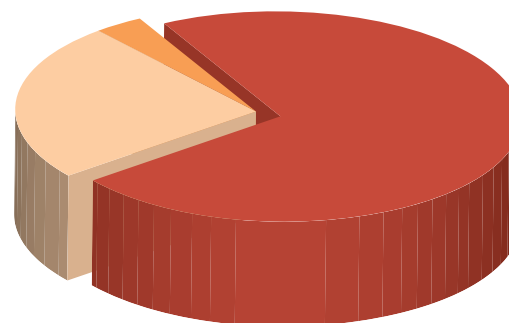
The first recorded deaths occurred on 16 October 1942, and remarkably all were of men who were somewhat old to be put to work. They were Chaim Gutwirth, 65, leather worker, Mendel Baumel, 56, tailor, and Felix Maier, 57, journalist. They only survived four days in Auschwitz. The last death certificate to be found for this Transport is that of Moszek Fischel Krupka. Just like twenty other deportees on board Transports 12 and 13, this 39-year-old actor had been sent to work on the Atlantic Wall before being deported to Auschwitz via the *Kazern Dossin*. A man in the prime of his life, he managed to survive in Auschwitz for just over four months and died on 19 February 1943.

The 462 deportees put to work in the *Organisation Schmelt* forced labour camps for Jews and in the Auschwitz concentration camp complex struggled to remain alive. By 1945, there were only 54 survivors: 28 deportees from Transport 12 and 26 from Transport 13. Once again, hardly any of them were women. On this occasion Tauba Edelman was the only one. Arrested with her husband, Boruch Bindel, she was taken to the *Sammellager* on 30 September 1942. They were deported together, but Boruch Bindel vanished without a trace. Tauba Edelman, 33, became a *Häftlinge* with number 22,404. She endured the extreme regime in the Auschwitz and Birkenau camps, the hardships, the ill-treatment and pseudo-scientific medical experiments. She survived the final evacuation from Auschwitz. Forced to take to the road on 18 January 1945 to march to Ravensbrück, and sent hither and thither, her nightmare finally ended when she was liberated on the road by US troops. When she returned to Belgium in May 1945, she was reunited with her children, Jacques and Rachel, who had escaped deportation.

Of the 53 men who survived, 39 were sent to Gogolin, a forced labour camp for Jews, where they worked on the construction of the Berlin-Breslau-Krakow road. Seven others ended up in Mechthal and worked on the construction of an electricity plant. Four were taken to Blechhammer, a big camp employing nearly 4,500 Jewish prisoners. It is unknown where the three other survivors went. Half the group of survivors, 27 “Koselians”, ended up at Blechhammer. On 1 April 1944, following an administrative reorganisation of the Auschwitz complex, they were registered with numbers 176,512 to 179,567. Some escaped the Death March, with 4 being liberated by the Soviet troops at Blechhammer and another at Auschwitz.

The mass evacuation from Auschwitz and its sub-camps in January 1945 would scatter the remaining survivors of Transports 12 and 13 among the various camps and *Kommandos* closer to the German heartland. 20 were liberated in Buchenwald and its *Kommandos*, 8 in Gross-Rosen, 5 in Dachau, 4 in Natzweiler, 2 in Flossenbürg. 1 was found in Mauthausen, 1 in Dora, and another in Theresienstadt,...

These 54 survived Transports 12 and 13, however, 96.8% of the original contingent did not.



TRANSPORTS 12 AND 13 OF 10 OCTOBER 1942

Employed in Auschwitz and the adjacent sub camps: 462 deportees (27,6%)
Of whom survived: 54 deportees (3,2%)
Gassed upon arrival in Birkenau: 1212 deportees (72,4%)

Transport destroyed at a rate of 96,8%

13 Transports 14 and 15 of 24 October 1942

Like Transports 12 & 13, Transports 14 & 15 were scheduled for joint departure on 24 October 1942. Although they were prepared separately by the Dossin officials, they left with the same train and after arrival at Auschwitz-Birkenau their history merges. It took sixteen days to make the preparations for these Transports. Between 10 and 22 October, the administration at the *Kazern Dossin* registered 997 deportees, 437 men and 560 women, for Transport 14, while the *Transportliste* for Transport 15 comprised 477 names, 345 men and 132 women, who were registered in a period of three days, between 21 and 23 October. Among the first 250 people to be registered for Transport were 234 forced Jewish labourers repatriated from Northern France. This influx of men, meant that for the first time the men on the Transports outnumbered the women.

On 24 October, the 1,474 deportees from Mechelen were put onto a single train. There were fewer people who were “unsuitable” for work than usual and they represented 42% of the two Transports. Their numbers comprised 302 children under 15 and 326 persons older than 50. The oldest person of all was Herman Nebenzahl, an 89-year-old widower. He had been arrested in Antwerp on 19 October 1942, six weeks after being forced to belatedly register himself in the *Borgerhout* register of Jews. His advanced age would have meant that he had no chance at all of avoiding execution. Inevitably the youngest of the deportees would also have been

immediately executed.

Charles Dab recte Fleischman was eight weeks old when he was arrested in Antwerp with his sister, Sara (4), and his mother, Charlotte Pinkas recta Niederberger (28). His father, Adolf, had been sent for forced labour. For Charlotte, accompanied by a little girl and nursing a baby, the deportation to Auschwitz-Birkenau was a death sentence. Adolf Dab recte Fleischman, who was on Transport 16 managed to escape. Despite being rearrested and redeported on 19 April 1943 he survived and returned to Belgium in 1945 to find his family gone.

Two deportees managed to jump from the train. Aron Schwarzbbaum, 42, who had already been in Breendonk for eight months, managed to escape. He was a painter and decorator and avoided recapture by the Germans. Rejla Wajnberg, an unmarried 49-year-old hairdresser, also managed to escape from the carriage. She was less lucky and was rearrested and taken back to Mechelen on 30 October. She was deported the very next day and vanishes from the records.

After arrival at the sidings on 26 October 1942, the two Transports were treated as one. The 1,472 deportees left on the Transports were then subjected to selection. The SS immediately condemned 896 people they considered “unsuitable” for work. 321 men and boys and 575 women and girls were sent to the *Bunkers*, where they were gassed with hydrogen cyanide. The immediate death rate for females was in excess of 83%, while for males it was “only” 41%. The global rate of 61% gives a distorted view of the executions, as it masks the extent to which the Judeocide was aimed at women and children.

The 576 Jews from Transports 14 and 15 saved by the selection were put to work in the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp. Far more men were admitted as slave labourers than women. There were 460 male prisoners, who were assigned numbers 70,354 to 70,813 while there were only 116 women, who were given numbers 22,949 to 23,064.

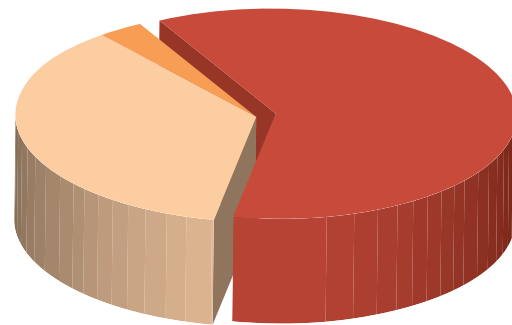
Death soon took its toll, as shown by the Auschwitz *Sterbebücher*, incomplete though they may be. The registers for November and December 1942 are particularly defective. Eighty-two death certificates relating to Transports 14 and 15, which arrived on 26 October, are preserved. The first death recorded in the archives was that of a goldsmith who despite being 65 squeaked through the selection. This was Hugo Atlas who was from Schaerbeek. He died in Auschwitz on 28 October, just two days after being interned. 22 death certificates that were made up in November remain. Two date from the 1st, while all the others are dated either 28 or 29 November. The cull continued in December 1942, with 32 deaths recorded in the *Sterbebücher*. 24 of them were recorded between 1 and 5 December, while 8 date from 18-22 December. There were an additional 20 deaths in January, spread evenly throughout the month. The final

death certificate is dated 17 February 1943 and is for Jakob Jozef Nachmanowicz, a cap-maker from Schaerbeek. He survived the Auschwitz regime for three months and three weeks.

Of the 576 deportees admitted to Auschwitz from Transports 14 and 15 only 41 survived. No women at all survived. We have no information about 2 of the survivors. 30 of the survivors had been transferred to the main camp in Jawisowitz. Only Otto Dawid, number 70,389, remained in this Auschwitz *Kommando*, where he was liberated on 29 January 1945 by Soviet troops two days after the liberation of the main camp. He was 29 at the time. Three other detainees escaped the Death March. Sigmund Balkanyi, number 70,672, a plumber from Antwerp, had first been sent to work for *Organization Todt* in the Mazures forced labour camp before being deported to Auschwitz. Later he was transferred to Jawisowitz and then to Breslau, where he was liberated at the age of 24 by the Red Army on 29 January 1945. Jyla Balkanyi, number 70,378 and Meyer Klein, number 70,468, were still in Auschwitz when the Red Army liberated the camp on 27 January. Jyla Balkanyi was 32 and Meyer Klein 22 when they returned to Belgium.

The other slave labourers from Jawisowitz or other Auschwitz sub-camps had to endure the Death March. 18 of them were liberated from Buchenwald and its *Kommandos* by the US army, 3 were liberated from Dachau, 3 from Gusen, a sub-camp of Mauthausen, 2 from Gross-Rosen, 2 from Theresienstadt, ...

One thousand four hundred and thirty-one deportees from Transports 14 and 15 died. They were either executed after they disembarked from the train, or they died in the hell of the camps. 97.2% of the people deported on these Transports were wiped out.



TRANSPORTS 14 AND 15 OF 24 OCTOBER 1942

- Employed in Auschwitz and the adjacent sub camps: 576 deportees (39,1%)
- Of whom survived: 41 deportees (2,8%)
- Gassed upon arrival in Birkenau: 896 deportees (60,9%)

Transport destroyed at a rate of 97,2%

14 Transports 16 and 17 of 31 October 1942

Their formation and fate mean that Transports 16 and 17 share the same history, and become indistinguishable after arriving at Auschwitz-Birkenau. The *Transportlisten* for the two Transports were compiled at a time that the *Sipo-SD* was having difficulty in sending enough deportees to the *Kazern Dossin*. Since 24 October 1942 isolated arrests had generated an average of 40 new inmates a day. Nonetheless the *Sipo-SD* managed to scrape together 1,937 deportees by the end of the month. On 25 September 1942, Eggert Reeder, the head of the Military Administration, acting in response to a request by Ernst Ehlers, the head of the *Sipo-SD* in Belgium, gave permission for the numerous “forced labourers” who had been sent to *Organization Todt* construction sites in France in June to be returned to Mechelen. A detachment of the *Sammellager SS* in charge of the administrative staff detained at the *Kazern Dossin* spent the last five days of October 1942 touring the “Jewish” camps in Northern France and the French Ardennes. Visiting site after site they registered 1,315 men. Of these 756 were assigned to the list for Transport 16, while the 559 others were used to start the next list. These deportees were not admitted to the *Dossin Sammellager*. Rather the train which brought them from France stopped at Muizen, on the outskirts of Mechelen. The Jews held in the *Sammellager* were taken to this station to make up the numbers. In the meantime, the *Sipo-SD* had used the *AJB* to inform the families of these workers of their arrival in Muizen suggesting that they would be reunited with their loved ones. At least 160 women, daughters and sons responded to the invitation. Because their names were entered further down on the Transport lists, they would have travelled in the same train, but not in the same carriage as their loved ones.

Several months of captivity in the *Organization Todt* camps had made the forced workers more militant. As a result 229 men – almost one in five – jumped from the train while it passed through Belgium. A further eleven Jews who had been sent to the *Kazern Dossin* also escaped. Another factor that encouraged the former *Organization Todt* workers was that they were all men in their prime and were not hampered by having family members in their carriages.

Rebellion came at a price. Rudi Israel Lachmann, 21, paid with his life. A professional cook, and slave labourer on the Atlantic Wall, he jumped from the train along with David Herszaft and others in his carriage. The *Schupos* reacted, gunning him down while trying to escape.

A grim fate also awaited David Herszaft. He was executed by firing squad in December 1942 in Hechtel woods near the military

town of Leopoldsburg in the province of Limburg. As a leather worker in Molenbeek, a working-class borough of Brussels, he had communist party contacts who found a hiding place for him. Camille De Roeck hid him in the place where the group kept their clandestine publications. De Roeck also kept a stock comprising *20 packets of explosives, hand grenades, infantry munitions and revolvers cartridges* at the same location. On 12 December 1942 David Herszaft was executed as a communist and for being in possession of these arms. Camille De Roeck was executed as well. To avoid any suggestion that Herszaft might have been innocent, the *Sipo-SD* represented him as a dangerous “terrorist”, describing him “*as a Jewish communist immigrant acting as a go-between between Belgian and foreign communists*”. According to the *Sipo-SD* he had “*recently been in contact with active groups of Partisans of the Belgian Communist Party for whom he worked*”. In fact, the *recently* referred to nothing more than the two weeks between his escape on 31 October 1942 and his incarceration on 16 November in the prison at Saint-Gilles.

Although over the 240 escapees managed to evade the Germans, a 100 of them were recaptured and 94 of them were deported once again. This was the case of Eстера Rozenwald and Jacheta Baum, the only women to escape from Transports 16 and 17. Eстера Rozenwald, 35, was a resident of Liège, and had been put on Transport 17. Her husband, Haskiel Grintich, had already been deported on Transport 9 on 12 September and was never seen again. She escaped from the passenger train taking her to Auschwitz-Birkenau. When she was rearrested she was put on Transport 22 A on 20 September 1943 and disappeared for good. Jacheta Baum, 39, and her husband, Szymon Imerglik, 40, were taken to the *Dossin Sammellager* on 29 October. They were deported together on the Transport 17. Both jumped from the train and both were recaptured. When they were returned to the *Sammellager* for a second time, they were accompanied by their son, Joel Fiszal, 14. Transport 21 took them to Auschwitz-Birkenau on 31 July 1943. They disappeared without a trace.

1,697 deportees got down from the train at the *Judenrampe*, between Auschwitz and Birkenau, on 3 November 1942. There were 702 men and 120 women from Transport 16, and 673 men and 202 women from Transport 17. As these trains were mostly made up of forced labourers, the number of deportees who were “unsuitable” for work was unusually low. The two Transports counted only 120 children under the age of 15 and 181 people over the age of 50. They represented less than 18% of the total. This factor is reflected in an immediate execution rate of “only” 54%. As usual the SS continued to weed out the women and girls, and 77% of them were executed as soon as they got off the train. Among them was Etna Kolender, 93, the oldest person ever to be deported from Mechelen.

The selection admitted 777 deportees from these Transports for labour in the camp. 702 of them were men and they were given numbers 72,246 to 72,947. Just 75 were women and they given numbers 23,415 to 23,489.

The ranks of the *Häftlinge* soon shrivelled. The Auschwitz *Sterbebücher*, incomplete as they are for the months of November and December 1942, do not allow us to assess the death toll for the first month of captivity. But on 30 November 1942 alone, there were eight deaths among the deportees of 31 October and 34 death certificates were drawn up on the first five days of December. The *Sterbebücher* for January 1943 are, however, complete and reveal that 90 people from Transports 16 and 17 alone died during that month. The last of the surviving 165 death certificates is for Szyja Mordka Strosberg, who was deported at the age of 27. A leather worker from Antwerp, and former labourer in the camps of *Organization Todt*, he survived the Auschwitz regime for five months and ten days.

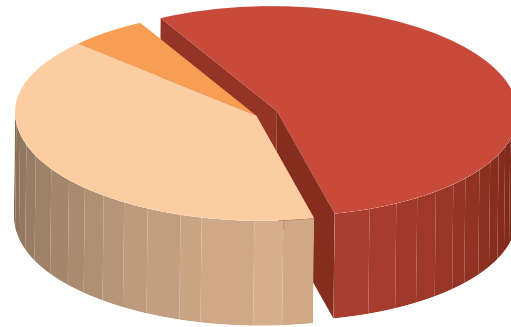
Most of the deportees on the 2 Transports of 31 October 1942 had been forced labourers in France, and it is the forced labourers who are the most prominent among the 86 survivors of these Transports. Elias Kahan was an exception. Arrested with his mother, Esther Friedman, 41, he was among the first to be registered for Transport 16. His mother disappeared upon arrival at Auschwitz-Birkenau. Though he was only 14, Elias was selected for work. He was tattooed with number 72,500. He spent his entire captivity in the Auschwitz camp itself. He was liberated from Auschwitz with six other survivors of these Transports on 27 January 1945, having escaped the Death Marches.

Eight other survivors also escaped the deadly evacuation of Auschwitz-Birkenau. During October 1943, they were part of a group of detainees transferred to the Warschau *Kommando* to clean up the ruins of the ghetto. On 6 August 1944 the remnants of the *Kommando* was sent to Dachau and its sub-camps. In April 1945, the Americans liberated them as well as six other deportees from Transports 16 and 17 who had arrived in Dachau after having survived the Death March from Auschwitz.

Other survivors had been put to work in the Auschwitz *Kommandos*. Most of them, 32 in all, were sent to the Jawisowitz coalmine to which many of the “Belgians” were assigned. The cement works in Golleschau took 15. The IG Farben site in Monowitz employed another six. All of them went on the Death March and were scattered here and there. About 15 of them ended up in Theresienstadt where they were liberated by the Soviets in early May 1945. The Americans liberated 15 others from Buchenwald and its *Kommandos*. 9 of the deportees of 31 October 1942 ended up in Mauthausen and its dependencies, while 8 reached Flossenbürg.

The experiences of these survivors provide a glimpse of the

itinerary that the *Häftlinge* who did not survive would have followed. The ultimate death rate for Transports 16 and 17 was 94.9%.



TRANSPORTS 16 AND 17 OF 31 OCTOBER 1942

- Employed in Auschwitz and the adjacent sub camps: 777 deportees (45,8%)
- Of whom survived: 86 deportees (5,1%)
- Gassed upon arrival in Birkenau: 920 deportees (54,2%)

Transport destroyed at a rate of 94,9%

15 Transports 18 and 19 of 14 January 1943

Transports 18 and 19 were formed separately at the *Kazern Dossin*, but were dispatched by the same train and merged upon arrival at Auschwitz-Birkenau. Isolated arrests, manhunts, and betrayals were now the only way to catch Jews. By the autumn of 1942, rounding up Jews had become more difficult, and the occupiers were forced to concede that the deportation tempo demanded by Berlin was untenable. For the first time the *Sipo-SD* needed two and a half months to gather the required number for this new double Transport. The *Transportlisten* for Transports 18 and 19 were prepared simultaneously; registrations for Transport 18 began on 3 November 1942, and on the next day for Transport 19. The work was completed on the day the train left; 15 January 1943.

When they left Mechelen, the two Transports formed a single train of 1,625 deportees. There were 670 people on board who were “unsuitable” for work, including 270 children under the age of 15. They represented 40% of the total. This was the last time that the deportees would be taken to Auschwitz-Birkenau in passenger coaches.

Several deportees on the train refused to resign themselves

to their fate. On the way 55 men and 12 women leaped from the moving train. Here we may note that one of the jumpers was only four. She was Monique Fritz and had been taken to the Dossin *Sammellager* on 18 November 1942 with her Viennese refugee parents: Hans Israel, 31, a mechanic, and Margareta Magier, 24. Margareta and her child were not arrested again by the Germans, but Hans was caught and deported on Transport 20 on 19 April 1943. Despite being put in a goods wagon that was specially reserved for escapees from previous Transports, he managed to escape between Tienen and Liège and was never caught again.

Forty of the 67 escapees from Transports 18 and 19 succeeded in staying out of the clutches of the Germans, whereas 27 others were recaptured and all but four were redeported.

On 18 January 1943, the 1,558 remaining deportees disembarked at the sidings between Auschwitz and Birkenau. There were 755 men and 803 women and they were immediately subjected to the selection. Here the SS rejected 1,090 men and women as being “unsuitable” for work and sent them off to the *Bunkers*, where they were gassed with hydrogen cyanide. Of these, 368 were men and boys and 722 were women and girls. The immediate execution rate for females on Transports 18 and 19 was close to 90%, whereas the rate for males was “only” 49%. The average rate of 70% gives a distorted view of the executions, as it masks the extent to which the Judeocide was aimed at women and children, simply because they represented the future.

The 468 people from Transport 18 and 19 selected for work were admitted to Auschwitz and its *Kommandos*. Once again a far greater proportion of men were admitted as slave labour than women. The 387 men were given numbers 89,076 to 89,462, whereas only 81 numbers, from 29370 to 29450 were given to women.

The *Sterbebücher*, which were partially destroyed during the evacuation of the camp in January 1945, record the deaths of 47 of these deportees, about a tenth of all the *Häftlinge* who arrived on Transports 18 and 19. All these certificates date from a period of less than three months after the arrival of the two Transports. The first date from 25 January 1943 and record the deaths of Chaïm Menachkevitchi, 36, a metal worker and former Breendonk prisoner, Julius Jacoby, 42, a tailor, Mendel Frisch, 42, a carpenter, Szulem Karmazyn, 45, a dentist, and Zygmunt Miller, 49, a mechanic. They survived barely eight days in the hell of Auschwitz. The last surviving death certificates record the deaths of two women deportees, Marjem Scheer and Rachela Klapper, on 8 March 1943. They survived the Auschwitz regime for only two months. Whereas Marjem Scheer, 31, had been arrested alone, Rachela Klapper, 19, was accompanied by her parents, Efraim Klapper, 61, and Dwojra

Schnall, 55. Neither survived and they vanished after their arrival at Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Nor did death spare the other prisoners admitted to the camp. Only 12 were still alive in May 1945. We can reconstruct the camp careers of eight of them.

Emil Gemeiner, 31, was a Viennese Jew and given number 89,492. He spent some time in the main camp before being sent to the Monowitz *Kommando*, where he worked in the IG-Farben factories. He was then returned to Auschwitz and was liberated there by Soviet troops on 27 January 1945.

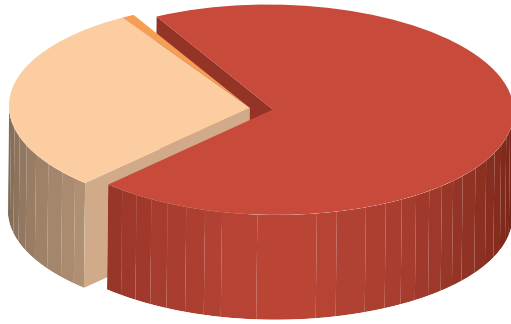
Louis Zurek had been an *Organization Todt* forced labourer. He had escaped from Transport 16, but was recaptured by the *Sipo-SD* and redeported. When he arrived at Auschwitz, he was selected for slave labour and was first put to work in the main camp and sent later to the Königshütte *Kommando*. In early January 1945, he was taken a few kilometres further away to Eintrachtshütte, which was 40 km from Auschwitz. He was 38 when he was liberated by the Red Army.

Although he was liberated at Mühldorf, a sub-camp of Dachau, Hans Handl, a travelling salesman, did not go on the Death March. This Austrian refugee was arrested as a suspect by the Belgian authorities on 10 May 1940 and interned at Saint-Cyprien, Gurs, and Les Milles in southern France. He was 39 when he arrived in the *Kazern Dossin* on 21 November 1942, and was deported on Transport 18. Considered fit for work by the SS selection team, he was given number 89,497. In October 1943, Hans Handl was sent to Warsaw with the *Kommando* responsible for cleaning up the ghetto. On 6 August 1944 he was transferred to Dachau, where he survived until the arrival of the US army.

Leon Messer, another survivor, had been deported at the age of 22 on Transport 19, and ended up in Dachau. Like Louis Zurek, he had been a forced labourer in the North of France. He too had escaped from the Transport of 31 October 1942. The final evacuation from Auschwitz took him to Sachsenhausen, then to the main Dachau camp, where he was liberated by the US Army.

It has been possible to reconstruct the journeys of four of the other survivors as well. These ended up at Buchenwald and at Flossenbürg after enduring the Death March.

Twelve survivors represent less than 1% of all the people who arrived on board Transports 18 and 19. The death rate of 99.2% for these Transports is comparable to the 1942 Transports, where the Judeocide took precedence over labour requirements.



TRANSPORTS 18 AND 19 OF 15 JANUARY 1943

- Employed in Auschwitz and the adjacent sub camps: 468 deportees (30%)
- Of whom survived: 12 deportees (0,7%)
- Gassed upon arrival in Birkenau: 1090 deportees (70%)

Transport destroyed at a rate of 99,3%

16 Transport 20 of 19 April 1943

In many ways Transport 20 was exceptional. Vast numbers of Jews had gone underground since the autumn of 1942, which significantly slowed the formation of trains. Once again, it took three months to gather enough deportees into the *Kazern Dossin*. The list was started on 16 January and was finalized 92 days later on 17 April 1943, with 1,631 registered deportees. This Transport was entirely a product of the persecution of the Jews and took all ages to their destruction. The youngest Jewish deportee, was Suzanne Kaminski, 5 weeks and 4 days old. Her mother, Josephine Schutz, 27, and a seamstress from Brussels, was seven months pregnant when the SS registered her for Transport 20. Neither she nor her baby survived after arriving. At 90, Jacob Blom was the oldest person on the Transport. He did not survive either. 357 (or 22%) of those deported on Transport 20 were over the age of 50 and 76 of these were over 70. At the other end of the age scale, 237 deportees, i.e. 17%, were children under the age of 15. Overall 39% of the deportees were “unsuitable” for forced labour.

If the composition of the Transport was simply a reflection of a pitiless policy, Transport 20 is still memorable for its many escapees. The 233 (or 14.3% of the total) deportees jumping from the train bear witness to a widespread spirit of rebellion. Unlike the escapees from the Transport of 31 October 1942, these people were not refractory “forced labourers” resisting a second deportation. Those who jumped from the moving train – while the *Schupos* blazed

away at them – were of all ages. The youngest, Simon Gronowski, was 12 years old; the oldest, Alex Cleffmann, was 65. It was very difficult to escape. For the first time the deportees were locked into cattle trucks. These only had one locked sliding door and a skylight that had been nailed shut with planks and barbed wire.

The escape specialists had started preparing their perilous departure as soon as they had arrived in the Dossin *Sammellager*. They managed to organize a “resistance truck” with the help of a Jewish employee, Eva Fastag – the person who had typed the *Transportlisten* since the camp had been opened in Mechelen. Encouraged by Israel Jacob Cyngiser, she retyped the sheets of the list so that a dozen activists belonging to various elements of the Jewish resistance could share the same truck. Five days before leaving, they broke into the Dossin workshops and took what tools they could get hold of. Some of them also managed to get tools from outside, sent in the parcels that the internees were allowed to receive.

Twenty-six of the 233 escapees were shot down or fatally wounded by the *Schupos* installed at the front and the back of the train. The youngest of these victims was Hélène Zylberszac, a young woman of 16.

Coincidentally a plan for the mass liberation of the deportees was also being hatched on the outside. A young Jewish doctor, Georges Livschitz, known as Youra, persuaded two former schoolfriends from the Atheneum in Uccle, Robert Maistriau and Jean Franklemon, to help him. The CDJ, who gave him the idea, provided him with BEF 50,000 in small notes to distribute to the fugitives so that they could at least pay for their journey back to the relative safety of a big town. Livschitz obtained a pistol from his friend Robert Leclercq. Armed just with this weapon, the three young men tricked the train into stopping between Boortmeerbeek and Wespelaar. While Livschitz attracted the fire of the escort and had to run for his life, and Franklemon tangled with a *Schupo*, Maistriau managed to open a cattle truck in the middle of the train, allowing fifteen deportees to escape.

Transport 20, now reduced to 1,398 deportees, arrived at the sidings between Auschwitz and Birkenau on 22 April. The *special action* of the *SS-Sonderkommando* immediately consigned 877 deportees to the new gas chambers, which had been built during the winter. The immediate execution rate of 63% was not exceptional for the Mechelen Transports, and as usual for the Judeocide, 50% more women and girls were gassed upon arrival than men and boys.

Although the percentage of deportees from Transport 20, who were sent to their immediate deaths upon arrival was nothing out of the ordinary, the fate of the 521 *Häftlinge* again makes this an unusual Transport. The 276 men were given numbers 117,455 to

117,730, whereas the 245 women accepted into the camp were given numbers 42,451 to 42,695.

It is probable that all these women were sent to Block X at Birkenau, where the camp's SS doctors were undertaking pseudo-medical experiments. Of the 65 women who were repatriated, at least 53 had passed through the sinister *Block*. They all followed the same itinerary. Interned the same day in *Block X*, they remained together until the last day of the evacuation from Auschwitz-Birkenau on 18 January 1945 when they were all transferred to Ravensbrück. They then became scattered in the chaos of the evacuations and the Death Marches and in April 1945 were found in Malchow or Retzow, the *Kommandos* of this camp, although others were liberated by the Soviet army in Leipzig. All these women had survived for at least two years as the objects of SS medical experiments, hardship, epidemics, ill-treatment and finally the Death Marches.

As for the men, at least 70 were transferred to Buna-Monowitz on the day of their arrival. These survivors represent the visible tip of the iceberg. It is likely that a large number of the Transport 20 deportees were sent to Monowitz, where they were used for earth-moving, construction, and cable-laying works. This group of 70 survivors alone represents a quarter of all the men selected from Transport 20 as fit for work. Monowitz was evacuated on 18 January 1945. Only thirteen of the survivors did not take part in the final evacuation and remained in Monowitz or Auschwitz, where they were liberated by the Red Army in January 1945. The majority of those repatriated were evacuated to Buchenwald: along with 4,000 other detainees, 30 survivors from Transport 20 were evacuated by train and on foot. They managed to hang on until the American troops arrived. Another 39 survivors were found at Flossenbürg. There were at least 1,200 men on this Death March, and passed through Gleiwitz and Sachsenhausen-Oranienburg before arriving at their destination. For some of them, the journey did not end at Flossenbürg, as nineteen detainees continued the Death March to Dachau, where they survived until liberation by the US army. Six other deportees were isolated from the "Belgian" group and ended up in Nordhausen, Ravensbrück or Mauthausen.

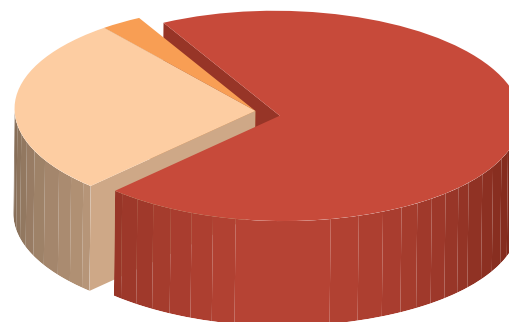
There were still 88 men and 65 women left over from Transport 20 in 1945.

Unusually the survivors included one boy and two girls, who had been deported at the age of 13 or 14. Between them Majer Glat, Dora Korenberg and Maria Laja Kruszel represented a fifth of all the children who had survived deportation from the *Kazern Dossin* between 1942 and 1944.

The 153 survivors represented 11% of the deportees on Transport 20. This was an unusually high survival rate, more than double the 5% average for all the Transports of Jews from Mechelen

to Auschwitz. If we compare this rate with the survival rates for the Transports immediately preceding it (0.8%) or following it (2.7%), it is particularly surprising. From this point of view too the Transport of 19 April 1943 was once again an exceptional Transport.

The presence of these 153 survivors has a limited impact on the death rate of Transport 20. Although well below the death rates of the Transports following or preceding it, it was nonetheless an appalling 89.1%.



TRANSPORT 20 OF 19 APRIL 1943

Employed in Auschwitz and the adjacent sub camps: 521 deportees (37,3%)
Of whom survived: 153 deportees (10,9%)
Gassed upon arrival in Birkenau: 877 deportees (62,7%)

Transport destroyed at a rate of 89,1%

17 Transport 21 of 31 July 1943

Transport 21 was made up of 1,562 deportees, 780 women and 782 men. The contingent of 174 children was relatively small, although a third of the total were people "unsuitable" for work. This is explained by the presence of 321 people over the age of 50. Once again the *Sipo-SD* had trouble in corraling enough Jews. To this end it sought closer collaboration with all German services in Belgium, particularly with the *Devisenschutzkommando* and the German border guards. The currency protection *Kommando* reported to the *Reich's* financial administration and was responsible for seizing diamonds, gold, silver, etc. belonging to Jews and others, whereas the customs services had the job of stopping people crossing the border in secret. The two services worked closely together and hunted down fugitives from Belgium and Holland attempting to reach Switzerland or Spain and seized any valuables they might be carrying. If the arrestees were Jewish, they were turned over to the *Sipo-SD*. The next step

was usually the *Kazern Dossin*, the antechamber of Auschwitz-Birkenau. Informants were encouraged by the prospect of receiving 10% of the value of any confiscations and were active and dangerous contributors to the work of these services. Informants, for example, were responsible for betraying 100 Jews from Holland, most of them from Amsterdam, as they attempted to cross the border. They were arrested and taken to the *Sammellager*.

Despite the arrival of these fugitives in Mechelen, it took three and a half months to finalize the *Transportliste* that had been started on 15 April 1943, before the departure of the previous Transport. For more than half this period, the *Kazern Dossin* received no new inmates. The departure list was closed on 27 July 1943, a few days before the departure.

On 31 July the 1,562 deportees were loaded into cattle trucks. This was the second Transport to leave *Kazern Dossin* in this type of transportation. Because of the numerous escapes from the preceding Transport, precautions were taken to prevent them happening again. The route of Transport 21 was altered and the train's escort, usually *Schupos*, was reinforced. Men from the *Sd-Wachgruppe*, a company of SS guards attached to the *Sipo-SD*, and German agents from the "Jewish section" escorted the Transport to the border. Even so 10 deportees escaped despite the risks. 4 of the escapees, Juma Wolf Szmulewicz, 45, Josek Majer Benkiel, 36, and his wife, Chaja Bina, 33, and David Kanner, 19, were shot by the guards when they jumped from the train. Six other fugitives, including two young women, Eva Mandel recta Kwadrat and Eva Ledermann, both 21, were rearrested and taken back to the *Sammellager* where they were put on a special list reserved for recaptured escapees. They were sent to Auschwitz on Transport 22 and were never seen again.

Transport 21 left Mechelen on 31 July 1943 and arrived at the *Judenrampe*, the sidings some way past the station, on 2 August. The 1,552 deportees were ordered out of the train in the countryside between the Auschwitz and Birkenau camps. The *Sonderaktion*, the SS special action, sent 1,086 deportees for immediate execution in the new combined gas chambers and crematoria. These death factories had been completed in the spring of 1943 in an area in the Birkenau camp set apart for the *SS-Sonderkommando*. Those found to be "unsuitable" for work were executed using hydrogen cyanide and, once dead, their bodies were immediately cremated. These were the second group of deportees from Mechelen to be disposed of in these installations. The group of "unsuitables" included 521 men and 565 women, i.e. 73% of the women and girls, and 67% of the men and boys. The proportion of women sent to their immediate death was well under that of 1942, although it was still higher than the proportion of men sent to the same fate.

The SS selected 466 deportees from Transport 21 for work. The 225 men were given numbers 133,250 to 133,504 and the 211 women were given numbers 51,770 to 51,980.

Death soon overtook the slave labourers accepted into the camp, although the record in Auschwitz *Sterbebücher* is too patchy to allow us to determine the death rates. Only nine death certificates were made out for the *Häftlinge* from Transport 21. The deaths of seven women were certified between 6 and 8 December 1943. The last deaths for which records have been preserved are for Werner Ginsberg, an escapee from Transport 18, who was recaptured and redeported at the age of 30, and Reinhold Sallisohn, 35, who had been a salesman. Their deaths were recorded within a day of one other, on 2 and 3 January 1944 respectively. These men, in the prime of their lives, survived five and a half months of slave labour.

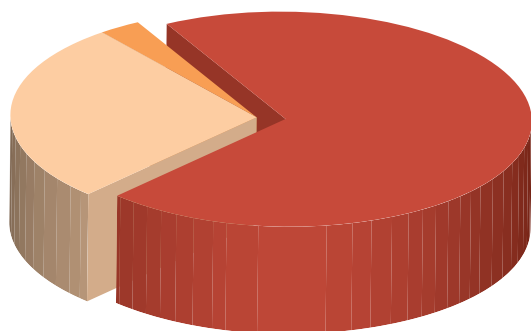
By May 1945, there were only 42 deportees, 21 men and 21 women, left alive. There were no children among them.

Of the women, five endured the Death March to Ravensbrück and its *Kommandos* where they were liberated by the Americans, along with another survivor from Transport 21, who had been transferred from Birkenau to Ravensbrück. The youngest of this little group, Maud Edith Libis, was 18 when she got back to Belgium. Three other female survivors were evacuated from Auschwitz to Bergen-Belsen, where they were liberated by British troops. Itta Hudessa Wiernik, who had played in the orchestra at Birkenau, was one of them. She was repatriated in May 1945 at the age of 18. She had survived 22 months detention at Auschwitz-Birkenau and Bergen-Belsen.

The paths through the system of the other women differed widely from one another, some of them having even been abandoned by the SS during the Death March.

Of the male survivors, there were eight who had not been in the deadly evacuation of January 1945. They were liberated from Auschwitz or from the Blechhammer, Gleiwitz or Jaworzno sub-camps by the Red Army. This was the case for the youngest person from Transport 21 to be repatriated. Efraim Frajmund spent his entire captivity at Auschwitz and Jaworzno, where the detainees worked in a coal mine. This *Kommando* was abandoned by the SS on 19 January 1945. Efraim Frajmund survived until the arrival of the Soviet troops a week later. He was 17 when he returned to Belgium. However, there was a Death March from Jaworzno. Passing through Gross-Rosen and Buchenwald, it ended up in Natzweiler, where two deportees from Transport 21 held out until liberation. In Dachau, the US army liberated three others, two of whom were former slave labourers from the *Kommando* responsible for cleaning up the ruins of the Warsaw ghetto. Five survivors were liberated while on a Death March that crossed the path of the allied forces.

Of the 1,552 who had arrived in Auschwitz-Birkenau 42 survived
- 97.3% of the Transport 21 had been forever destroyed.



TRANSPORT 21 OF 31 JULY 1943

- Employed in Auschwitz and the adjacent sub camps: 466 deportees (30%)
- Of whom survived: 42 deportees (2,7%)
- Gassed upon arrival in Birkenau: 1086 deportees (70%)

Transport destroyed at a rate of 97,3%

18 Transports 22 A and 22 B of 20 September 1943

Although these two Transports, 22 A and 22 B, were joined together upon leaving Mechelen, the conditions governing their preparation were quite different. Transport 22 A was an ordinary Transport. The letter A, standing for *Ausländisch*, meaning foreigner, indicated that the Transport was composed of foreign Jews, just like the 21 preceding Transports. Foreign or stateless Jews now had a good year's experience of clandestine life and it was becoming increasingly difficult to flush them out. As a result it took the *Sipo-SD* 51 days to round up a mere 639 people, 76 of whom were children. Twenty deportees were registered on a special list of persons who had escaped from the previous Transports.

Transport 22 B, on the other hand, was a special Transport, distinguished by the letter B for *Belgisch* (Belgian). For the first time, Jews of Belgian nationality were being deported. There were 794 of them on board the train, and they had been picked up in a final great raid. Most of them, 557 to be precise, were arrested in their homes after dark on 3 September 1943. The raid was conducted in Antwerp and more especially in Brussels. In more than a year between the summer of 1942 and September 1943 Jews with Belgian citizenship had been immune from deportation

as long they complied with the regulations governing the status of Jews. Belgian Jews had of course been arrested and detained in the *Kazern Dossin* during the great raids of the summer 1942. Belgium's Queen Elisabeth had intervened on their behalf and had succeeded in obtaining the liberation of 303 Belgian Jews on 26 and 29 June 1943. However, the *Sipo-SD* acting on direct orders from Berlin refused to release the final group of Belgian Jews detained in the *Sammellager*. On 20 July the Military Administration agreed to withdraw its protection of these Belgian Jews.

The *Sipo-SD* was thus able to organise a final great raid, which once again involved the *Devisenschutzkommando*, which was eager to seize the assets of Belgian Jews. During this final night action, at least 577 Belgian Jews were apprehended, and the *Sipo-SD*, who were not always fussy about details, also arrested some 50 foreigners. For the 145 arrested in Antwerp the journey to the *Sammellager* quickly turned into a nightmare. When the hermetically sealed lorry was opened at the *Kazern Dossin* after a period of two hours, nine of the passengers were found to have died from suffocation and a further 80 were unconscious on the floor.

A clash with the Belgian authorities ensued on 6 September 1943. The leader of the cabinet of the secretary general for the Ministry of Justice protested to the Military Administration, letting it be known in veiled terms unless concessions were made the secretary-generals would stop running the country for the Germans. In response the Military Administration, which had been prepared for this eventuality, released 35 Belgians shortly before the departure of Transport 22 B.

Despite its special nature the "Belgian" Transport was combined with Transport 22 A in the same train of goods wagons. It was the last double Transport to go to Auschwitz-Birkenau. On the way, eight deportees, but only one woman, managed to jump from the train. With the exception of Michel Altschuler, 18, and a metalworker, all the escapees were foreigners. Altschuler was rearrested after his escape and taken back to the *Sammellager*, where he was put on a special list reserved for recaptured fugitives and deported on Transport 23 to disappear forever.

Upon arrival at Auschwitz-Birkenau on 22 September 1943, no distinction was made between the Belgian citizens and the foreign Jews. They merged into a single Transport. The 1,425 deportees – 710 men and 715 women – disembarked at the *Judenrampe*. The *SS* of the *Endlösung* considered 875 of them to be "unsuitable" for work and sent them for immediate execution. It was the third time that the new gas chambers/crematoria were used for deportees from Mechelen. The selection was far more severe for the women and girls than for the men and boys. On this occasion 75% of

the women and girls were automatically condemned to death, compared to 48% of the men.

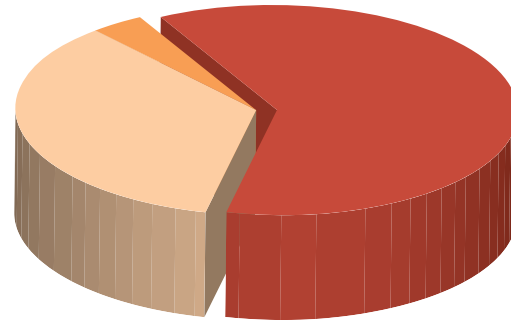
At the selection 550 deportees from Transports 22 A and 22 B were admitted to Auschwitz-Birkenau as slave labour. The 371 men were tattooed with numbers 15,1481 to 15,1851 whereas the 179 women were given numbers 62,805 to 62,983. The Auschwitz *Sterbebücher* are once again too incomplete to make it possible to determine the death rate at Auschwitz and its sub-camps. Only fifteen death certificates for the *Häftlinge* of Transport 22 are preserved. We see that the deaths of thirteen women were recorded on 6 and 8 December 1943 and that the first death for whom there is a record was a man. This was Julius Kantorowicz, 34, a furrier by trade. He died after only 6 days in Auschwitz. The final certificate to be found for Transport 22 dates from 18 December 1943. It is for Isaak Joseph Gottfried, 38, a cobbler who survived the slave labour regime at Auschwitz for less than three months.

There is no need to refer to the *Sterbebücher* to see how death struck at the two groups of detainees on Transport 20. Of the 550 deportees admitted to the camp only 31 detainees from the "foreign" Transport and 19 from the "Belgian" one survived. Yet again, there were no children among them and the women were as usual in the minority: only six survived. Two of them, Estera Schonfeld-Ova, a furrier, and Estelle Faynsztein, a hairdresser, were evacuated to Bergen-Belsen at the end of October 1944. Estera Schonfeld-Ova remained in this camp, where she was liberated by the British on 15 April 1945. She was 28. As for Estelle Faynsztein, she was sent on to Ollendorf, a town in Thuringia, and was liberated while on the way there by the US army. The others went on the Death March to Ravensbrück, a concentration camp mainly for women, and its *Kommandos*. Here they were liberated by Soviet troops at the end of April 1945. They had held out nineteen months in the hell of the camps.

The fate of the men selected for work from Transports 22A and 22B was quite different. By tracing the routes of the 44 survivors we can form an idea of what happened to the others as well. Although the majority of these men stayed to work in Auschwitz until the great evacuation of January 1945, 13 were transferred from the main camp in Auschwitz to the Warsaw *Kommando*, where they worked on cleaning up what remained of the ghetto after its destruction. Once this task had been completed, they were sent on 6 August 1944 to Dachau and its annexes. They were liberated here and from Mühldorf by US troops. Shortly after internment at Auschwitz many of the *Häftlinge* were put to work in the foundry of the Eintrachthütte *Kommando* in Schwientochlowitz. The detainees in this sub-camp were evacuated to Mauthausen in overcrowded railway trucks in January 1945. 11 survivors of the double Transport of September

1943 were liberated here. 6 survivors others escaped the deadly evacuation and were liberated in Auschwitz or its *Kommandos*. The remainder of the group were sent on yet another Death March and the few who survived were liberated in Buchenwald and Dora.

With just 50 survivors, the death rate for Transports 22 A and 22 B was 96.5%.



TRANSPORTS 22A AND 22B OF 20 SEPTEMBER 1943

- Employed in Auschwitz and the adjacent sub camps: 550 deportees (38,6%)
- Of whom survived: 50 deportees (3,5%)
- Gassed upon arrival in Birkenau: 875 deportees (61,4%)

Transport destroyed at a rate of 96,5%

19 Transport 23 of 15 January 1944

The number of people who went on Transport 23 is lower. The era of the Transports of 1,000 deportees had come to an end. There were 659 people, including 344 men and 315 women. The Jews were now accustomed to the underground life. Nearly all of them were caught in the Jew hunts or were betrayed. The *Transportliste*, begun on 22 September 1943, was completed in 112 days, on 10 January 1944. The average number of entries at Mechelen fell to six a day. It had never been as low. Yet again, a special list reserved for recaptured escapees from previous trains was added to the main list. They were particularly supervised during the three-day journey.

Transport 23, whose passengers were loaded into goods wagons, left Mechelen on 15 January 1944, on the same train as a special Transport reserved for Gypsies. The journey lasted three days in the goods wagons. But once they arrived at their destination, the two Transports did not mix, unlike the previous

grouped Transports from Mechelen.

Transport 23 lost five detainees, two women and three men, before the border. Schaja Cukier, a 35-year-old seamstress, was shot down when she tried to escape. However, it was not her first attempt. Schaja Cukier had already jumped from Transport 20. Arrested a second time by the Germans, she resisted even though she was injured. Taken to Schaerbeek Hospital, the convalescent escaped from this establishment. Caught a third time, she was taken back to the *Kazern Dossin* on 31 December 1943 and registered on Transport 23. The four other escapees from this Transport were all recaptured and deported later.

Arriving on 17 January 1944, Transport 23 disembarked its human cargo: 341 men and 313 women. There were relatively few children, only 56, while there were 97 over the age of 50. Those “unsuitable” for work constituted 23% of the group.

On the *Judenrampe*, the SS of the *Endlösung* carried out a selection after which 416 deported Jews were destined for immediate extermination in the gas chambers / crematoria of Birkenau. Yet again, 69% of the women and girls and 59% of the men and boys were killed upon arrival. The 267 women and 56 children, who represented the future of the “Jewish race”, continued to be the favoured target of the SS killers. Within this context, little Freddy Lamm, born at the hospital in Mechelen in September 1943, had no chance of survival. His parents, Abraham Israël Lamm and Rachel Rapaport, were Belgian Jews living in Antwerp. They were arrested during the raid on Jews with Belgian citizenship, in the night of 3 and 4 September 1943. It is probably because Rachel Rapaport was close to giving birth that the couple was not registered for the Belgian Transport of 20 September. The future mother was admitted to Notre Dame de Mechelen Hospital, where the Mechelen SS allowed her to give birth. When she returned to the assembly camp with her baby, the whole family was incorporated into Transport 23. This 33-year-old mother and her 4-month-old baby were sent to their deaths following the selection, while the father, Abraham Israël Lamm, 35 years old, was considered fit for work and tattooed with registration number 17,2353, and like 237 other deportees, integrated into the population of slave labourers in the concentration camp.

The camp’s registration system allocated numbers 17,2296 to 172435 to the 140 men and numbers 74,512 to 74609 to the 98 women. Death decimated the ranks of the 238 new *Häftlinge*. The path followed by the 99 survivors in the concentration camp system, allows us to work out the itinerary of those who did not survive.

Of the 140 men, there were only 33 survivors in 1945. Nearly all of them had been allocated to Buna-Monowitz, some having been sent there the day they arrived. In all likelihood, a large group of

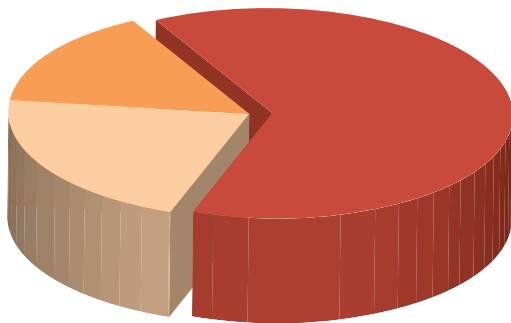
men put to work were used in Monowitz and employed for heavy labour in this *Kommando* where IG Farben intended to develop a synthetic rubber manufacturing plant. Several Death Marches left from Monowitz. The biggest one took 12 of the survivors to Buchenwald. 4 survivors from Transport 23 ended up in Bergen-Belsen, after having passed through Dora. 3 more passed through Sachsenhausen before ending their evacuation at Flossenbürg. A final small group of 3 ended up in Dachau. The others were scattered, isolated in other concentration camps: Neuengamme, Mauthausen or Ravensbrück, depending on which route they took. 6 *Häftlinge*, liberated from Auschwitz or its sub-camps, did not take part in the great evacuation of the complex in January 1945.

Among the 33 men who returned from deportation, Bernard Feldmann was only 15 years old. His was the final name on the deportation list of Transport 23. Taken to the *Kazern Dossin* on 10 January 1944, this young Jew from Antwerp was deported alone. A refugee from the Reich in 1938, he was, just like his parents, forced to live in the Limburg region. Authorised to leave the commune of Beverlo, the family settled in Brussels, where they changed address at least three times between 1941 and the end of 1942. Bernard Feldmann, deported at the age of 14, survived one year of detention at Auschwitz as well as 4 months of Death March. Evacuated to the camp at Buchenwald in January 1945, his journey did not end there. He was shifted about until he reached the Sachsenhausen camp, where he was liberated in April 1945. He had to wait another 2 months before being able to join his parents once again in Belgium.

It was the first time that more women than men returned from the deportation. Although only 98 of them were admitted to the camp to work, there were 66 survivors in this group. There was an exceptionally large number of them: more than two-thirds of the detainees from Transport 23 were still alive in May 1945. However, except for Adele Lieblein, 39 years old, who remained at Auschwitz and Birkenau until the arrival of the Soviet troops, all went on the Death March of January 1945. 5 survivors were evacuated to Bergen-Belsen, where they were liberated by the British army. The majority were evacuated to Ravensbrück, a concentration camp initially reserved for women. For 8 of the 52 women who arrived at this camp and its *Kommandos*, the nightmare did not end there. This small group was marched to Leipzig. The youngest of the survivors from Transport 23 was among them. Sara Goldberg, 13, was taken to the assembly camp with her parents, Razla Abramowicz, 34, and Israel Mortek Goldberg, 35, on 31 December 1943. While the father vanishes upon his arrival at Auschwitz-Birkenau, mother and daughter were chosen for work and registered under numbers 74,535 and 74,536 respectively. Undoubtedly, Sara Goldberg and

her mother helped and supported each other throughout their time in the concentration camp system. They survived the same itinerary of forced labour at Birkenau, the Death March to Ravensbrück then to the *Taucha Kommando* at Leipzig. The American troops found them both alive when the camp was liberated in April 1945.

For the first time, the percentage of deaths was significantly affected by the number of survivors. Nevertheless, 84.9% of Transport 23 disappeared, although its death rate was well below the average of the preceding or following Transports.



TRANSPORT 23 OF 15 JANUARY 1944

Employed in Auschwitz and the adjacent sub camps: 238 deportees (36,4%)
 Of whom survived: 99 deportees (15,1%)
 Gassed upon arrival in Birkenau: 416 deportees (63,6%)

Transport destroyed at a rate of 84,9%

24 The Gypsy Transport of 15 January 1944

Transport Z of 15 January 1944 – Z for *Zigeuner* (Gypsy) in German – was the only deportation of Gypsies from the *Kazern Dossin* in Mechelen to Auschwitz. The *Zigeuner* list was prepared between 5 November 1943 and 12 January 1944, although in reality it was completed in 6 days when 350 people – whole families of men, women and children, arrested in Belgium and Northern France – were brought in groups to Mechelen. A baby girl, born in the barracks on 11 December 1943, became number 351. Her mother, Rosa Demestre, 23 years old, was interned when she was 8 months pregnant. Born in the *Kazern Dossin*, Jacqueline Vadoche, the youngest female deportee from Mechelen, was put in the train to Auschwitz when she was just 5 weeks old. Upon arrival at Auschwitz, this group was not sent for immediate execution so the tiny baby was given registration number Z 9,852. As there was

no other place for it, the baby was tattooed on the sole of her left foot. Jacqueline Vadoche died on 1 May after 106 days of life in captivity.

Until their late and unforeseen arrest, the Gypsies had been the object of only one specific measure by the occupying forces. According to a general military security ordinance issued on 12 November 1940, after the defeat of the Luftwaffe in the Battle of Britain, they were forbidden to travel in East and West Flanders and the district of Antwerp. In general the Gypsies, who were informed of the measure by the Belgian gendarmerie, complied: none of the deported children had been born in the forbidden zone. Even so, the German secret military police, based in Antwerp, raided a camp where seven families of about 40 people were bivouacked in February 1943. The soldiers arrested only 9 men, who were taken to Antwerp prison on 6 February 1943.

Shortly afterwards on 29 March 1943, the criminal police of section V of the *Sipo-SD* received instructions from the *Kripo* (*Kriminalpolizei*) in Berlin concerning deportation to the *Zigeunerlager* (Gypsy camp) Auschwitz. The new measure was the result of a policing policy aimed at the forced settlement and the radical isolation of the Gypsies in the Third Reich. The measure covered the Gypsies of The Netherlands and Belgium, as well as those of Northern France. SS Leutnant Hoffmann, the deputy head of the *Kripo* in Brussels, who was responsible for this affair, did not take the nine arrestees from Antwerp to the nearby Jewish assembly camp. They were transferred to the prison in Saint-Gilles in July, and were then taken to the Citadel at Huy around 19 August, with a view to their transfer [...to] Auschwitz. They eventually arrived there via the prison of Aachen (Aix-la-Chappelle) on 15 October 1943. These deported Gypsies were registered on 23 November and were given numbers Z 8,887 to Z 8,897, while their fellows were being rounded-up in Belgium. Two other Gypsies were transferred at the same time. Of the 11, only Joseph Colicon survived captivity.

The raid on the Gypsies was carried out without the occupying forces having to take any specific measures to discriminate against them racially and extend the *fight against the Gypsy scourge* in effect in Nazi Germany to this country. The Belgian regulations, the standard policies of the Aliens Police, and the controls by the Gendarmerie were more than adequate, and turned out to be more severe than the German harassment. This system of control and surveillance was even more restrictive under the occupation, though it fell within the scope of the Belgian police and outside that of the occupying forces. On 12 December 1941, the Aliens Police introduced a traveller's card. Significantly, it was called a *Zigeunerkaart* in Dutch, grafting ethnic discrimination into national regulations which recognized only Belgian or foreign citizens. The

card, which was a three-month residence permit, forced non-Belgian travellers to submit to checks on the 5th of every month. These had to be carried out by the Brigade of Gendarmerie closest to the place where they were staying. Between 5 and 20 January 1942, the Gendarmerie, helped by municipal police forces, forced the travellers to camp at a specific spot and proceeded to replace their old travel warrants, which had expired. On 5 July 1943 the Aliens Police and the Gendarmes, who located and monitored the movements of the foreign travellers in the Gypsy camps, counted 123 persons over the age of 15 (60 men and 63 women) and 100 children below this age, i.e. a total of 223 people.

By the end of the year, there were slightly more foreign Gypsies interned in the *Kazern Dossin*, namely 246. Not all of these persons though had been arrested in Belgium. A quick series of arrests were then made in November 1943 which continued until 6 December. They again took place in Tournai, as well as in Hasselt and Brussels. At this time there were 166 Gypsies, several of whom had been arrested in Arras and Douai in France.

The same scenario was repeated throughout the region: the *Feldgendarmerie*, knowing the locations of the camps, sent their vehicles in early in the morning. The caravans were surrounded. Brandishing their weapons, the German military police forced entire families into the waiting lorries. In Northern France where the Germans were helped by the French police, the raids were larger in scale. On 9 December, 182 Gypsies were brought to the *Kazern Dossin*, 131 of them were French. 11 other French Gypsies were already on the *Zigeuner* list. Nearly a third of them had been interned in Montreuil-en-Bellay. Others passed through the prisons in Loos or Lille before being taken to Mechelen.

Unlike the Jewish detainees, who were accommodated in the dormitories of the barracks, the Gypsies were billeted in a locked room. Deprived of parcels from the outside, they suffered desperate hunger. They slept on palliasses, had no access to the sanitary facilities or hospital care, and were kept apart from the rest of the interned population. These conditions were a merely inkling of what awaited them at *Zigeunerlager Auschwitz*. Little Jacqueline Vadoche was not born in the hospital but in this intensely overcrowded room.

A total of 351 gypsies left Mechelen: 176 men and 175 women. Almost half of the people on Transport Z were children under the age of 15. There were 166 to be exact. Transport Z left on 15 January 1944, as part of the same train as Transport 23, which carried Jews. The journey in goods wagons lasted three days. But unlike earlier grouped transports from Mechelen the two transports did not merge upon arrival on the 17th. The Gypsies got off the train at the isolated *Judenrampe*, but they were not subjected to selection

and the entire group was admitted to the Birkenau camp.

They were then identified by registration numbers Z 9,050 to Z 9,226. Isolated in Birkenau and kept apart from all the others, they were confined to a spot that can only be described as a place to die. They were given only half the meagre food rations the other detainees were allowed. The “living” conditions were especially inhumane in this Gypsy area, where there were not even the most basic sanitary installations. The endemic presence of typhus and other diseases (scabies, dysentery, noma, etc.) made their situation even more pitiful.

The *Zigeunerbuch*, the prison register, which escaped destruction, preserves the records of 220 of the 351 Gypsies from Mechelen. A total of 178 deaths were recorded between 17 January and 31 July. In the six months of their captivity, half of Transport Z from Mechelen died. The first deaths date from February, 14 people, including 8 children under the age of 4, including 5 babies. March was the deadliest month, 56 deaths, including 28 women and 17 children under the age of 5. The only way out of this disaster was a decision to incorporate the strongest Gypsies into the slave labour system, which was taken in the spring of 1944 in the context of the withdrawal from Auschwitz to camps closer to the German heartland. A total of 3,000 Gypsies were selected for work on 15 April, 25 May and 2 August. On each occasion deportees from Mechelen were included in the transfers to Buchenwald, Flossenbürg and Ravensbrück. At *Zigeunerlager Auschwitz* itself there were only 109 people from Mechelen left among the 3,000 remaining Gypsies. All of them were taken to the Birkenau gas chambers/crematoria on 2 August 1944. The liquidation of the last family camp put an end to the anomalous presence of a camp of non-working inmates, including young children, in a concentration camp complex designed to cater to the needs of the war economy on behalf of the economic administration of the SS.

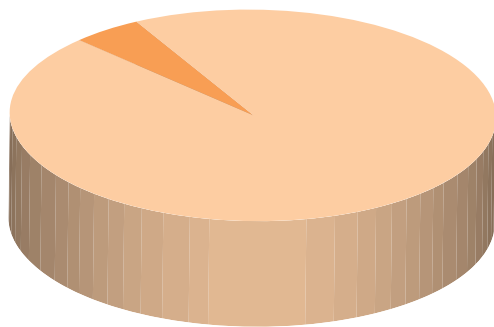
Of the 64 Gypsies from Mechelen who were put to work in other camps, only 16 were still alive at the end of the war. There were as many women as men, as well as 3 boys and 2 girls who were under 15 when they left the *Kazern Dossin*. Marie and Joséphine Lagrené were 14 and Anton 13 when they disembarked at Auschwitz with the other 22 Lagrenés on Transport Z. They were the only survivors of their clan, part of which had been arrested in the Lille region, and which even had a fixed abode in shanties at Pont-de-la-Deûle. Worse still not one of the 15 Gorgans or 14 Karolis deported from Mechelen survived.

There was nonetheless one Karoli who survived the deportation to Auschwitz. Steven Karoli, 18, was not deported with the Gypsies. He escaped the raid, but was arrested by the Brussels police on 2 March 1944 in Brussels. He was taken into custody by the Aliens

Police and incarcerated in Saint-Gilles prison, which sent him to the *Kazern Dossin* on 15 April 1944. He was treated as if he was a Jew, and put on Transport 25, which proved to have the highest survival rate of all the Mechelen transports. Steven Karoli was one of these survivors.

Transport Z on the other hand suffered greater depredations than the Jewish transports in the same year of 1944 and 95.4% of the people on it were wiped out.

Unlike the Jews, the Gypsies were not put to death upon arrival, nonetheless these Gypsy families from Belgium and the North of France were destroyed just as surely by this deportation of no return.



TRANSPORT Z (TZIGANES) OF 15 JANUARY 1944

- Employed in Auschwitz and the adjacent sub camps: 100 deportees (100%)
- Of whom survived: 16 deportees (4,6%)
- Gassed upon arrival in Birkenau: 0 deportees (0%)

Transport destroyed at a rate of 95,4%

25 Transport 24 of 4 April 1944

Typical of the deportations of 1944, Transport 24 was yet again composed of a limited number of people. Its *Transportliste*, which was completed with a special list on which the recaptured escapees were registered, had 626 deportees. It included fourteen Jews, who entered the *Kazern Dossin* in 1942, and 92 in 1943. It would appear that the SS had dipped into the reservoir of internees at the assembly camp to form the group for this Transport. It took 84 days to draw up the deportation list. If we ignore the 106 registered on the list who had already been at the *Kazern Dossin* for several weeks or months, the average number of daily entries at the camp was 6 a day. The list was completed the evening before

the departure with 332 men and 294 women.

Only one deportee managed to escape from the Transport's goods wagons. Emil Israël Weber was the last fugitive of the deportation from Mechelen to Auschwitz. Recaptured by the Germans, he was taken back to the assembly camp and registered on the special list of the following Transport. This 27-year-old mechanic was among those from Transport 25 to be repatriated.

On 7 April, Transport 24 unloaded its 625 prisoners – 331 men and 294 women – onto the *Judenrampe*, between the Auschwitz and Birkenau camps. It was the last time that a train from Mechelen would stop here. There were not many children, only 48, i.e. less than 8% of the total number on the Transport. There were 99 over 50. Together, they formed 23% of the total number. Proceeding with the selection, the SS killers of the *Endlösung* sent 270 Jews to the gas chambers/crematoria at Birkenau. The rate of immediate extermination fell to 43%. During 1944, these levels, which continued to decrease, were much lower than those of the crucial year during which the fate of the deportees from Dossin was sealed. However, one parameter was constant: the proportion of women executed immediately (49%) remained higher than that of the men (38%).

Of the 5 babies under a year old who were brought on board, the youngest was Jacqueline Katzner. Deported with her parents and her brother Henri, she was only three and a half months old. At the moment of the selection, the family was separated by the SS doctors. The baby, her mother, Lea Prisant, 28 years old, her brother, Henri, two and a half, had no chance of survival. Standard targets of the Judeocide, all three were killed straight away.

The father, Hirsch Katzner, a 34-year-old locksmith, was judged fit for work and admitted to the Auschwitz concentration camp, where he was tattooed with registration number 179,799 on his left arm. He returned in 1945, alone...

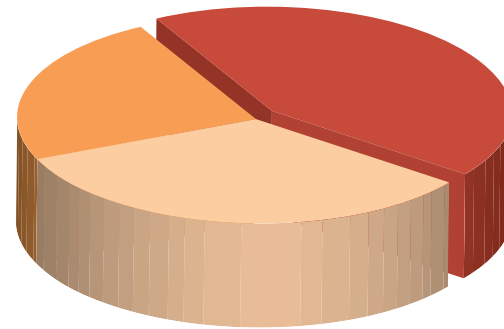
He was part of a group of 13 survivors evacuated from Auschwitz to Gross-Rosen then Dachau and its *Kommandos*. He survived until the arrival of the American troops at the end of April / beginning of May 1945.

The main Death March, with the largest number of men from Transport 24, was the one to Bergen-Belsen. 15 of them survived, managing to hold on until the British army liberated the camp on 15 April 1945. 8 other survivors, all workers allocated to the Laurahütte steelworks, ended up in Mauthausen, one of the Reich's toughest concentration camps, where the sanitary and food situation had gotten even worse during the evacuations, and also due to overcrowding. These 8 men from Transport 24 survived one year and one month of forced labour, malnutrition and ill treatment. They even survived the Death March. The 7

detainees liberated from Buchenwald were part of a larger group, composed of *Häftlinge* from various Auschwitz sub-camps, such as Laurahütte, Jawisowitz or Gleiwitz, which was decimated on the way and also passed through Gross-Rosen. The many camps from which the survivors were liberated bear witness to the chaos during this period, which was particularly dreadful for the detainees. The Auschwitz detainees were split up into numerous groups, setting off on a Death March and each following different itineraries. Subsequently, some of the 60 surviving men were found scattered among the internal concentration camps: 3 were liberated from Flossenburg, 2 from Neuengamme, 1 from Ravensbrück, another from Theresienstadt,... According to the data available, it seems that only 3 men evaded the Death March. On 27 January 1945, Isak Wolf, 41 years old, Emile Antoine Van Frank, 29 years old, and Max Zoukrowitch, 22 years old, were among the survivors liberated from Auschwitz by the Red Army.

The female survivors were also scattered in a similar way, even though the majority of women detained at Auschwitz took part in the Death March to Ravensbrück. Of the 86 survivors from Transport 24, about 30 of them were liberated from this camp formerly reserved for women, or from some of its *Kommandos*. 15 deportees from 4 April 1944 were liberated from Bergen-Belsen by the British army and survived to be repatriated. The others were dispersed along the way. 6 women ended up in Leipzig, where the Red Army rescued them, and 5 in Theresienstadt. 2 groups of 4 survivors were liberated from Neuengamme and Dachau respectively and its annexes, and only 2 from Buchenwald... 7 survivors spent their entire internment at Auschwitz-Birkenau. They escaped the deadly evacuations and were liberated from here on 27 January 1945 by the Soviet troops. This was the case for Ida Potacznick, a seamstress from Saint-Gilles, who had to wait until 24 June 1945 to be able to return to Belgium to join her husband and parents, who had escaped deportation.

The presence of 146 survivors, among whom were a large number of women, significantly reduces the percentage of deaths from Transport 24. It was the first time it fell below 80%. With a death rate of 76.6%, well under the average for the preceding Transports, this is indicative of a declining trend in the death rate of the following Transports.



TRANSPORT 24 OF 4 APRIL 1944

- Employed in Auschwitz and the adjacent sub camps: 355 deportees (56,8%)
- Of whom survived: 146 deportees (23,4%)
- Gassed upon arrival in Birkenau: 270 deportees (43,2%)

Transport destroyed at a rate of 76,6%

26 Transport 25 of 19 May 1944

Transport 25 of 19 May 1944 was yet another small Transport with 508 deportees, 257 men and 251 women. It took 45 days to form. The assembly camp registered an average of eleven entries a day. The daily entries practically doubled compared with the preceding Transport. Composed a month and a half after the preceding one, the assembly of this Transport was the result of the intensified 'Jew hunt', which occurred following instructions from Berlin in March, which demanded this effort from the *Sipo-SD*. However, the Military Administration had no illusions. Still responsible for the anti-Jewish action, it informed the higher authorities on 10 May, that because the majority of Jews were residing here illegally, the reinforced evacuation measures were difficult to implement. Nevertheless, children continued to be registered on the deportation lists. On Transport 25, there were still 41, i.e. 8%. The youngest, Jean Wach, was 6 months old. He was born in Uccle. His brother, Max, 3 years old, born in Antwerp, was also at Dossin. Their parents, Salomon Wach, a diamond trader, and his mother, Gonda Van Zorg, Antwerp Jews, were, like their sons, registered on the *Transportliste*. We are unaware on which date this family, protected until the summer of 1943 owing to the father's Belgian nationality, sought refuge in Brussels where the youngest child was born.

When they disembarked at the sidings at Birkenau, on 21 May 1944, this 29-year-old Jewish mother with a 6-month-old baby and a 3-year-old child, had no chance of survival. The father, aged 29,

also disappeared without a trace. The oldest person on Transport 25, Ruchla Crin, 66 years old, did not survive either.

The train stopped on the way and some 200 additional Jews, men and women, whose exact number and origin are unknown were put on board. This fact is confirmed by the examination of the numbers allocated upon the arrival of Transport 25 at Auschwitz. The registration numbers identify a higher number of detainees put to work than the number of detainees who were on board this Transport. This fact introduces an element of approximation which obliges the historian to establish an average. In the same way as the trains which stopped at Kosel, the numbers here are estimates.

During the selection, the SS killers condemned 40% of the deportees of Transport 25 to their immediate death in the gas chambers/crematoria of Birkenau. Once again, the women and girls were the most numerous victims of the Judeocide: 126 of them – half of the deportees – were eliminated as soon as they got out of the goods wagons, while 80 men – “only” 30% of them – were subjected to the same fate.

After this selection, the SS kept about 302 slave labourers for work inside the concentration camp. We assume that 177 men were identified by registration numbers A 2,546 to A 2,845 and that the 125 women were allocated the numbers between A 5,117 and A 5,270.

Of this group of *Häftlinge*, 58 men and 76 women were still alive after the Liberation.

Except for 4 of them, it would seem that almost none of the surviving men left the main Auschwitz camp before the great evacuations of January 1945. However, 8 of the men managed to avoid the Death Marches. Among these was the youngest of those from the Dossin Jewish Transports to be repatriated. The case of Friedel Reichmann was quite atypical. This child was deported at the age of nine. He was accompanied by his parents, Bernard Abraham Reichmann, a 57-year-old shopkeeper, and Esther Rifka Tannenhaus, a 43-year-old housewife. The whole family was considered fit for work by the SS doctors in charge of selection, and they were interned in the camp. The father died under unknown circumstances, while the mother and son survived until the arrival of the Soviet troops in January 1945.

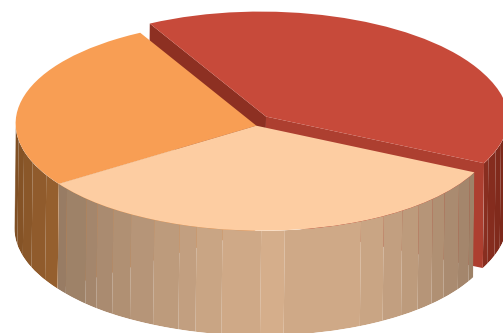
During the final evacuation of Auschwitz, 27 survivors ended up at Dachau, though they did not necessarily take the same route. The majority passed through the Gross-Rosen camp, while a smaller group passed via Sachsenhausen, and another via Flossenbürg. 9 other survivors passed directly from Auschwitz to Mauthausen, where they held out until their liberation by the American troops.

Yet again, the other repatriated men were dispersed during the Death Marches. There were 3 survivors in Buchenwald, 2 in Gross-Rosen, 1 in Dora, 1 in Stutthof, 1 in Terezin, and the rest were

scattered across twenty or so camps or *Kommandos*.

The evacuations of the women were just as fragmented, although we can retrace some of them. The biggest group left for Ravensbrück, which definitely seems to have been the main destination for the women’s Death Marches from Auschwitz-Birkenau. In this camp and its *Kommandos* (Malchow, Leipzig, Neustadt, etc.), 33 deportees from Transport 25 were still alive when this camp was liberated by the Red Army. At Bergen-Belsen, the British troops, who liberated the camp on 15 April 1945, found 18 other survivors. But Bergen-Belsen was not the last stage of the Death March for at least 5 of the survivors of 31 July 1944. They had to continue the nightmare until Buchenwald, before being liberated by the US army. Symptomatic of the chaos which reigned during this period, which was without question one of the most deadly in the history of the camps, the Death Marches took around yet other women, in small groups, to camps as far away from Auschwitz as Salzwedel, Theresienstadt, or Buchenwald...

Transport 25 had 134 survivors and the women were more numerous than the men. Among them was even Friedel Reichmann, a small boy repatriated at the age of 10. Compared with the Transports of 1942 and even those of 1943, the 73.6% death rate, even though high, is lower than that of the previous Jewish and Gypsy Transports. It would seem that the SS killers were less interested in the small Transports from the *Kazern Dossin*. All in all, these Transports with fewer children and old people, i.e. those “unfit” for work, were less attractive targets for the perpetrators of the *Endlösung* than the trainloads arriving from Hungary, filled with a Jewish population swollen with women and children.



TRANSPORT 25 OF 19 MAY 1944

- Employed in Auschwitz and the adjacent sub camps: 302 deportees (59,8%)
- Of whom survived: 134 deportees (26,4%)
- Gassed upon arrival in Birkenau: 206 deportees (40,2%)

Transport destroyed at a rate of 73,6%

27 Transport 26 of 31 July 1944

The fourth and last Jewish Transport from occupied Belgium during 1944, the Transport of 31 July, had as few passengers as the previous ones. The hunt for those in hiding, maintained at this level, provided the maximum of what was still feasible, *on average, 80 to 100 Jews per week*, confirmed the *Sipo-SD*, on 15 June, reporting *great difficulties*. At the *Kazern Dossin*, 80 days were nevertheless needed to gather the 563 deportees of the 26 Transport. The average number of registrations was seven a day, and at most, 50 a week, well below the official number. Now, the Nazi police began attacking the 3 to 5,000 Jews who, benefiting from protection, were still within the law. Even the legal ghetto of the *AJB* in the capital was no longer a sanctuary. On 3 July, 52 people were rounded-up from the soup kitchen. On 5 July in Liège, the SS for local Jewish Affairs, SS Adjutant-Major Wilhelm Stade, proceeded with the arrest of some 60 Jews of Belgian nationality during the night. The mass of Jews within the law were mainly in Brussels, around the *AJB*, but Transport 26 left Mechelen before the final assault which, due to the precipitant fall of the Germans, did not take place. Although a small Transport, the 26 took 295 men and 268 women. There were still children, but only 31, barely 5.5%. The youngest, Mireille Lemel, was 4 months old. The oldest deportee, Jozefine Schosberger, was 77. These deportees were condemned to death as soon as they arrived at their destination.

Transport 26, which left on 31 July and was composed of goods wagons, followed the railway line into the Birkenau camp and unloaded its deportees at the sidings. The selection was nearly as deadly as the preceding Transport. The SS killers' special action sent 209 to their immediate death. The rate of immediate extermination was 37%, but the killings were nonetheless genocidal: more than half of the women and girls – 51% – were gassed.

On 2 August, 354 deportees were put to work: 223 men received a registration numbers B 3,450 to B 3,672 and the women, only 131, were given numbers B 24,041 to B 24,171. Proportionately greater in number to enter the concentration camp than their predecessors, the *Häftlinge* of Transport 26 from Mechelen were also proportionately greater in number to survive captivity.

The fact that 120 women survived deportation is remarkable, because, once again, many more women than men were repatriated after the liberation; however, it is especially remarkable because 90% of the women put to work survived. This can probably be explained by the brevity of their internment at Birkenau, due to the ongoing withdrawal to the camps within Germany. Nearly all of them only remained there a few weeks before being sent, generally in October, to other camps. Thus, a Transport of women, in which there were 71 survivors from Transport 26, arrived at Dachau on the 27th of that

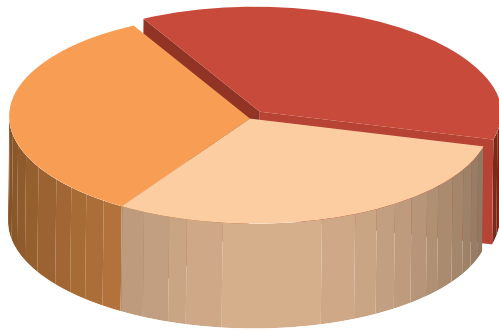
month. Marie Pinhas was among them. Deported with her parents, Isac Elie Pinhas and Regine Mallah, she was only 13 years old when she was selected with her mother to work within the concentration camp. Regine Mallah, 39 years old, and her daughter, Marie, were internees at the Birkenau camp. They only spent three months there before being sent to Dachau, then to Landsberg, Türkheim and Kaufering *Kommandos*. It was in this last camp, escaping the Death Marches, that they survived until the arrival of the American troops on 27 April 1945. When they got back to Belgium, they realised that the father, aged 45, would not be returning from the deportation. Marie Pinhas, identified by registration number A 24120, was the youngest survivor of Transport 26. Ten other survivors also managed to avoid the Death Marches. Transferred at the end of October 1944 to the Libau camp, on the banks of the Baltic, in Lithuania, they were used for manufacturing tank tracks, building a railroad or for farm work. These women survived forced labour and hardships for nearly ten months, until the arrival of the Soviet troops in May 1945. The majority of them were repatriated late, on 11 June.

Other detainees from Birkenau were put to work in Flossenburg, especially in its Willischthal annex as of 30 October 1944. But they went on the Death March to Theresienstadt, where they started to arrive on 20 April 1945. 16 deportees from the Transport of 31 July managed to hold out until 8 May 1945, when they were saved by the Soviet troops.

Besides these 3 major groups, the 20 or so other camps and *Kommandos* from which other women from this Transport were liberated, bear witness to the chaos which reigned in the Nazi concentration camp system and which presided over all the evacuations.

The same disorganisation occurred among the detained men. The survivors of Transport 26 found themselves alone, in groups of 2 or 3 in the 24 concentration camps or annexes. While a third of the 60 survivors spent their entire detention at Auschwitz, and were liberated on 27 January 1945, the rest of the group had been dispersed all over Germany and Austria. The camp where the greatest number of these men were still alive after the arrival of the allied troops was Mauthausen. There were 10 of them, dispersed between the main camp and the Ebensee and Gusen sub-camps, who resisted until the Liberation of 6 May 1945. The other were in Bergen-Belsen, Dachau, Natzweiler or Gross-Rosen,...

With its 186 survivors, with the women largely in the majority, the death rate had never been so low. Submerged by the mass arrival of Jewish deportees from Hungary, it would seem that the SS of the *Endlösung* paid less attention to this last small Transport from the *Kazern Dossin* in Mechelen. The percentage of deaths is considerable: 67%. However, it is well under the average for all the preceding Jewish and Gypsy Transports. The total for all 28 Transports is 95.2%.



TRANSPORT 26 OF 31 JULY 1944

- Employed in Auschwitz and the adjacent sub camps: 354 deportees (62,9%)
- Of whom survived: 186 deportees (33%)
- Gassed upon arrival in Birkenau: 209 deportees (37,1%)

Transport destroyed at a rate of 67%

28 Transport 27, which Never Left

The formation of Transport 27 began on 1 August 1944. The *Endlösung* was far from over. More than half the Jews of Belgium had still not been taken. In mid-August, Eichmann's special emissary, Anton Burger, was in Brussels to put an end to the enterprise he had come to launch during the summer of 1942. He had now come to liquidate the Jewish Question and carry out one final raid. From the beginning of the month, the Jewish section started to prepare it. It targeted the 'legal Jews', who had remained under the control, and therefore under the hand of the *Sipo-SD*: the directors and staff members of the *AJB*, the staff and children from the homes, the old people in homes. The 300 "workers" from the company Lustra, who manufactured tyres for the *Wehrmacht*, were also in the line of fire, as well as their families. Burger also planned to proceed with the arrest of 300 holders of Germano-Palestinian exchange certificates, and their families, "Zionist veterans" who were supposed to serve as an exchange for German prisoners of war detained by the British. In this programme, the rounded-up Jews were not deported to Auschwitz, but to Bergen-Belsen. The raid, planned for 29 August, never took place. The day before, the SS police began to withdraw to Hasselt in view of the rapid advance of the Allied Forces, and Anton Burger was unable to obtain the fuel for the trucks for the raid. Nevertheless, more than 520 detainees remained in Mechelen under the guard of the last SS who abandoned the barracks on 3 September 1944. The

next day, those registered on the list for Transport 27, who only just escaped deportation, were now free, as well as the staff interned at the *Kazern Dossin*.

29 The *Sondertransporten* for Jews of Particular nationalities

The letter Z, which designated the Gypsy Transport, was also used to designate three small Jewish Transports, which, for diplomatic reasons, were not covered by the *Endlösung* deportation to Auschwitz.

These small Transports, also called Z, were composed of Jews from countries who maintained friendly relations with the Greater German Reich, such as Hungary, or neutral countries such as Turkey. These Transports, which far from covered all those from these "protected" nationalities, were taken to Buchenwald and Ravensbrück or Bergen-Belsen, camps where arrivals were not immediately exterminated.

The first Transport of this type took 132 Turkish Jewish on 13 December 1943. The Transport was split along the way, and the men were sent to Buchenwald while the women and children went to Ravensbrück. Half of them – 69 – survived their captivity.

On 19 April 1944, another special Transport of 14 Hungarian Jews was taken to Bergen-Belsen. The 7 men perished as well as 3 of the women. Only 4 of them were still alive after the Liberation. Exceptionally in the case of the Jews, all the survivors from this transfer were women.

Two other small special Transports, identified by the letter E, included Jews from belligerent countries (Great Britain, the United States of America, the Soviet Union, etc.); however, it was in Germany's best diplomatic interest not to upset them. Two groups were taken to Vittel, an internment centre in France, the first with 29 people on 23 April 1944, the second, with 43 people on 20 June. Almost 80% of these Jews – 26 and 31 respectively –, placed under house arrest, survived.

All in all, this special deportation concerned 218 Jewish detainees at the *Kazern Dossin*. Compared with the deportees sent to Auschwitz, over half of them survived. Their global rate of survival was far higher than the Jews of the *Endlösung*, and it was even much higher than that of the last Transports of 1944, which were also less devastated.

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GLOSSARY

Abscheidung der Juden	Literally 'separation of Jews', their evacuation from the territory, the first phase in the <i>Endlösung</i> before they were killed upon arrival.
Militärverwaltung	In English: Military Administration; the administration of the occupying forces falls under the authority of the army or the <i>Wehrmacht</i> .
JVB	<i>Jodenvereeniging in België</i> or Jewish Organization in Belgium, established by order of the occupying forces and controlled by the SS by order of the department of Jewish Affairs of the <i>Sipo-SD</i> .
General-SS Flanders	Flemish political organization of the SS.
Alter Kämpfer	Veterans of the Nazi party and its organizations of before 1933.
Anschluss	Annexation of a Germanic territory by the German Third <i>Reich</i> to establish a large German Empire. In March 1938 Germany annexed Austria.
Arbeitseinsatz	Employment order for forced labour. Cryptogram used by the security services of the <i>Reich</i> to mask the evacuation of Jews from the West to the extermination camps of Auschwitz-Birkenau.
Aryan	Anti-Semitism does not attack Semites as members of a Semitic linguistic group, but rather from a racial point of view. Anti-Semitism does not even assign the statute of race to Jews, but less than that, an anti-race.
Auschwitz	German name of Oswiecim, a Polish town in Upper Silesia; Polish territory that had been annexed by the German <i>Reich</i> .
Auschwitz, extermination camp	Main camp of a network of several camps. The two largest sub-camps are Birkenau and Monowitz.
Auschwitz, Jewish victims	In addition to 865 000 Jewish deportees who were gassed upon arrival, 95 000 Jewish prisoners died in the camps of Auschwitz, 110 000 other Jewish prisoners were transferred or evacuated to camps in the German <i>Reich</i> .
Auschwitz, gentile victims	Of all 405 000 prisoners employed in Auschwitz, 126 000 died, for the most part Polish, Russian prisoners of war and Gypsies (21 000). Added to the 95 000 Jewish prisoners who died, giving a total of 221 000 prisoners, or 54%, who died during their imprisonment in the Auschwitz complex. The number of Jewish deportees gassed upon arrival is 4 times this figure.
Auschwitz-Birkenau	Sub-camp of Auschwitz, situated in Birkenau. It comprises several internment camps and one extermination centre for the <i>Endlösung</i> where 865 000 Jews, just barely off the train, were lead to the gas chambers without being interned in the camps of Auschwitz.
Auschwitz-Birkenau, gas chamber-crematorium	In 1942 the gas chambers of Birkenau consisted of two farms in the birch forest in the northwest of the concentration camp. They were not equipped with crematoria. In July and August the bodies of gassed deported Jews were buried. In the spring of 1943 the gas chambers were installed in the concrete constructions for the crematoria.
Breendonk (Fort of Breendonk)	Detention camp (<i>Auffanglager</i>) of the <i>Sipo-SD</i> in Belgium, located about 10 km from Mechelen.
Brüsseler Treuhandgesellschaft	Brussels trust company, established by the Military Administration to transfer 'enemy possessions' and 'Jewish goods' into Aryan hands or to simply liquidate them.

Dossin Barracks	The Barracks General Dossin de Saint-Georges, assembly camp for the deportation of Jews and Gypsies to Auschwitz-Birkenau, as well as for Gypsies; in German <i>Sammellager</i> . The camp falls under the authority of the <i>Sipo-SD</i> .
Dienststelle	In English 'department'. The department of the <i>Sipo-SD</i> was located at the Avenue Louise in Brussels.
Einsatzgruppe	Intervention group of the SS and the police charged with mass executions of Jews in occupied Russian territory eastern Poland, the Baltic States, Belarus, Ukraine and the Crimea. The <i>Einsatzgruppen</i> benefited from a competition between the reserve battalions of the police and the <i>Wehrmacht</i> , the German army. These squads form a significant part of the judeocide. More than a third of all murdered Jews, 1 500 000 people, were assassinated by bullets.
Feldkommandantur	Abbreviated to FK. Local military authority; e.g. FK of Antwerp.
Führer	German for 'leader', title of Adolf Hitler in the Nazi party. When he became president of the <i>Reich</i> in 1934, he retained the title of <i>Führer</i> .
Gestapo	Formerly the <i>Geheime StaatsPolizei</i> , police of state security. It will finally turn into Section IV of the <i>Sipo-SD</i> . Often used metonymically to mean the entire political Nazi police, i.e. the SS police.
Judenabteilung	Jewish department, the anti-Jewish department of the <i>Sipo-SD</i> .
Judenreferent	The delegate of Jewish Affairs, the reporter, the officer in charge of this matter.
Judenrein, Judenfrei	Free of Jews.
Judenverordnung	Ordinance related to Jews, Jewish Laws.
Kontrolle Auftrag	In English 'control assignment', permission authorizing its holder to invoke the help of order troops.
Kriminalsekretär	Secretary of the criminal police.
Kripo	<i>Kriminalpolizei</i> , criminal police, Department V of the <i>Sipo-SD</i> in Belgium.
<i>L'Ami du Peuple</i>	French speaking newspaper for the <i>People's Defence - Volksverwering - Défense du Peuple</i> .
Leutnant SS	The German <i>SS-Obersturmführer</i> .
Massnahmen gegen Juden	Measures against Jews.
Mecheln - Mechelen - Malines	Flemish city situated between Brussels and Antwerp.
Oberfeldkommandantur	Abbreviated to OFK, supreme command of a local military authority; e.g. the OFK of Brussels.
Oberkreigsverwaltungsrat	Main advisor to the military administration.
Osteinsatz	In English 'deportation to the East', the extermination of Jews in Eastern Europe.
Rex	Party founded by Léon Degrelle, originated from a catholic Action, united fascism with National Socialism from the start of the occupation, proclaiming the Germanic origins of the Walloons.
RSHA	<i>Reichssicherheitshauptamt</i> , Central Department for the security of the Reich, in other words the commanding body of the <i>Sipo-SD</i> .
Sipo-Sd	<i>Sicherheitspolizei und Sicherheitsdienst</i> , security police and the department of security.

Endlösung der Judenfrage	In English 'Final Solution for the Jewish Question'. This wording is used as of 1935, but its programme was modified as time went by. It has always related to the departure of Jews out of German territory or the territories occupied by the German <i>Reich</i> , but from the autumn of 1941 the destination of evacuated Jews is to their death, often just a few kilometres from where they lived.
Sonderbehandlung	Special treatment, cryptogram used by SS to refer to the killing.
Sonderkommando	Special commando of the SS and the police in charge of killing Jews. The extermination centres for Jews on former Polish territory are permanent <i>Sonderkommandos</i> equipped with gas chambers for the destruction of Jews.
SS	<i>Schutzstaffel</i> , protection squad, the department of security in the Nazi party.
SS-Brigadeführer	Rank within the SS, the equivalent of a brigadier.
SS-Freiwilligen-Standard NordWest	In English 'SS-standard of volunteers from Northern and Western Europe', the first formation of non-German Germanic SS.
SS-Oberscharführer	Rank within the SS, equivalent to an adjutant.
SS-Reichsführer	Leader of the SS in the Reich, Heinrich Himmler.
SS-Standard Flanders	A group of Flemish SS.
SS-Sturmbannführer	Rank within the SS, equivalent to a major.
SS-Sturmscharführer	Rank within the SS, equivalent to an adjutant leader.
SS-Sturmscharführer	Rank within the SS, equivalent to an adjutant major.
SS-Untersturmführer	Rank within the SS, equivalent to a sub lieutenant.
Stormban Antwerp	Group of the Flemish SS, in this case for Antwerp and its metropolitan area.
Sturmabteilung	Literally Storm department, abbreviated to SA, militia of the Nazi party. Originally, the SS is an organization of the SA. Hitler breaks away from it during the 'night of long knives' on 30 June 1934, when he orders the SS to eliminate the most important leaders of the SA.
<i>Flemish Legion</i>	A military unit of Flemish volunteers recruited by the <i>Wehrmacht</i> to fight at the Eastern front as of July 1941. In 1943 it was incorporated in the <i>Waffen SS</i> . A Walloon legion functioned in a similar fashion.
VNV - Vlaams Nationaal Verbond	Flemish National Union, an extreme right Flemish nationalist party, supporting the New Order and the National Socialism.
<i>Volksche Aanval</i>	Dutch speaking newspaper of <i>People's Defence - Volksverwering-Défense du Peuple</i> .
People's Defence	Extreme right racist and anti-Semitic splinter group which was active even before the war.
Wachgruppe	Alternative name for <i>Wachzug</i> .
Wachzug	Security service for the seat of the <i>Sipo-SD</i> in Brussels, formed by Flemish SS.
Waffen-SS	Army of the SS consisting of voluntary political soldiers.
Wehrmacht	German army including a land force responsible for the occupation of Belgium and the North of France.