

AUSCHWITZ: THE FIRST GASSING

Auschwitz: The First Gassing

Rumor and Reality

Carlo Mattogno



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Auschwitz: The First Gassing. Rumor and Reality

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Cover Illustrations: Bottom: Part of a 1944 photo shows high-ranking SS officers gathered at Solahütte, the SS retreat outside of Auschwitz. Other photos (left to right; all © Carlo Mattogno): Block 11, inside, right side, door to cell no. 25; Block 11, outside, wall facing NE, entry door; Block 11, inside, Bunker, right side, cell no. 21.

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Preface to the Third Edition

This work is the first of a set of four studies which were prepared at different times yet which lay out the same general theme in a chronological and logical sequence: the genesis and development of the alleged homicidal gas chambers at Auschwitz-Birkenau.

The orthodox history of Auschwitz¹ is known to be based on an order to exterminate the Jews of Europe – allegedly sent by Hitler to Himmler in the spring of 1941 and from there to the Auschwitz camp commander Rudolf Höss. This order is said to have materialized in the construction of the alleged extermination camp of Birkenau. This order, according to the interpretation that has become canonical, was implemented progressively in four stages:

1. In September 1941 the first experimental homicidal gassing was allegedly carried out at Auschwitz using Zyklon B, which is said to represent the “discovery” of the chemical weapon for the subsequent mass extermination.
2. At the beginning of 1942 the activity of homicidal gassing is said to have been transferred to the morgue of the crematorium at the Auschwitz Main Camp.
3. In the following months, two houses located outside the Birkenau camp were purportedly converted into homicidal gas chambers (the so-called “Bunkers”) and began the mass extermination of Jews and sick prisoners.
4. In March 1943, finally, the extermination activities are claimed to have been moved into the four crematoria of Birkenau, all allegedly equipped with gas chambers.

I have investigated these four stages in four extensive studies as mentioned above, namely:

- *Auschwitz: The First Gassing*, the present study (the first Italian edition by Edizioni di Ar, Padua, 1992)

¹ By this I mean the version disseminated by the Auschwitz Museum, which is the repository of orthodox historiography on Auschwitz.

- *Auschwitz: Crematorium I and the Alleged Homicidal Gassing*. Theses & Dissertations Press, Chicago, December 2005
- *Debunking the Bunkers of Auschwitz: Black Propaganda versus History*. 2nd ed., Castle Hill Publishers, Uckfield, February 2016 (the first edition had appeared with the title *The Bunkers of Auschwitz*, Theses & Dissertations Press, Chicago, December 2004)
- *The Real Case for Auschwitz: Robert van Pelt's Evidence from the Irving Trial Critically Reviewed*," Castle Hill Publishers, Uckfield, April 2015 (the first edition had appeared in two volumes with the title *Auschwitz: The Case for Sanity: A Historical and Technical Study of Jean-Claude Pressac's "Criminal Traces" and Robert Jan van Pelt's "Convergence of Evidence*, The Barnes Review, Washington, D.C., September 2010)

The last entry in this list has 758 pages, which is five times as voluminous as any of the other three books, as it deals with the fourth, best documented and most important stage, the alleged gassings in the crematoria of Birkenau.

The first entry is herewith published in a third, slightly corrected edition.

Introduction

Since the original Italian version of this book was published in 1992, there have been numerous new developments in the subject's historiography, although none of them has been important enough to mandate a change of this book's conclusions.

Even today, 24 years later, official historiography has not only failed to produce a reply to this study, although it has been translated into French,² English³ and German,⁴ but in its obdurate historical dogmatism has not even found it necessary to address the topic in greater depth.⁵ It is, however, more important than ever before.

The first homicidal gassing in the Auschwitz concentration camp was allegedly carried out between September 3 and 5, 1941, in the basement of Building (Block) 13. This building was later named Block 11 because of an administrative change in the numbering of the buildings. This first gassing is said to have been the starting point of the alleged mass extermination process at Auschwitz. After having gone through the intermediate stages of the mortuary in Crematorium I of the *Stammlager* (Auschwitz Main Camp) and the so-called "Bunkers" at Birkenau, this claimed extermination process later led to the alleged homicidal gas chambers of the Birkenau Crematoria II through V. As such, the first homicidal gassing would therefore constitute the birth of the homicidal gas chambers and mark the "official" introduction of Zyklon B into the Auschwitz holocaust history. Moreover, it would also constitute the archetype of the alleged "selections" of registered detainees in the camp hospitals for the "gas chambers."

² *Auschwitz: le premier gazage*, Stiftung Vrij Historisch Onderzoek, Berchem, 1999.

³ *Auschwitz: The First Gassing. Rumor and Reality*, 1st ed., Theses & Dissertations Press, Chicago, 2005; 2nd ed., The Barnes Review, Washington, DC, 2012.

⁴ *Auschwitz: Die Erste Vergasung. Gerüchte und Wirklichkeit*, Castle Hill Publishers, Hastings, 2007; 2nd ed., Castle Hill Publishers, Uckfield 2014.

⁵ This includes Sandra Holtermann's seminar paper, *Die erste Vergasung in Auschwitz im September 1941*, GRIN Verlag, Munich 2005, which, if printed, would hardly reach 20 pages of text (it is available only as an eBook). It thus had to remain superficial.

A book published in 2005 underlines the importance which this presumed event has for orthodox historiography:⁶

“This first mass gassing was no longer just a mere experiment in order to find out whether Zyklon B was really suited for the systematic mass murder of humans. During those September days the basic test run took place for mass extermination with gas in Auschwitz. During those moments the killing procedure was established, which was later refined and adjusted as needed.”

From this event the principle of the division of labor during the alleged mass extermination process is also claimed to have originated – that is, assigning specific tasks to various teams of prisoners – and the tactics of using a code language.⁷

The consequence of this notable inertia on the part of official historiography is that any scholarly literature on this topic is, as yet, practically non-existent. Up until 1992, only a single Polish article of 1972 had been dedicated to this subject,⁸ aside from my own contribution presented at the “Ninth International Revisionist Conference” of 1989,⁹ which I later expanded to the present study. Because the Polish article mentioned above had appeared in a Polish journal, it remained practically unnoticed by western specialists on Auschwitz until 1987, when an abridged translation became available in German.¹⁰ Hence, for decades – and practically even today – the main and almost sole historical source for this topic has been Danuta Czech’s *Kalendarium der Ereignisse im Konzentrationslager Auschwitz-Birkenau*.

Only an exceedingly small number of specialists of the camp’s history later looked into the first gassing at Auschwitz, and then only in a very perfunctory way, although the enormous documentation contained in the archives of the *Zentralbauleitung* (Central Construction Office) as preserved

⁶ Eric Friedler, Barbara Siebert, Andreas Kilian, *Zeugen aus der Todeszone. Das jüdische Sonderkommando in Auschwitz*. Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, Munich, 2005, p. 24.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁸ Stanisław Kłodziński, “Pierwsze zagazowanie więźniów i jeńców w obozie oświęcimskim” (The first gassing of detainees and prisoners of war in the Auschwitz camp), *Przeegląd Lekarski* (Medical review), No. 1, 1972.

⁹ C. Mattogno, “The First Gassing at Auschwitz: Genesis of a Myth,” *The Journal of Historical Review*, 9(2) (1989), pp. 193-222.

¹⁰ S. Kłodziński, “Die erste Vergasung von Häftlingen und Kriegsgefangenen im Konzentrationslager Auschwitz,” Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung (ed.), *Die Auschwitz-Hefte. Texte der polnischen Zeitschrift ‘Przeegląd Lekarski’ über historische, psychische und medizinische Aspekte des Lebens in Auschwitz.*, Beltz-Verlag, Weinheim/Basel 1987, Vol. 1, pp. 261-275.

in Moscow has meanwhile been studied extensively. There is a very simple explanation for this: this documentation does not contain even the vaguest indication in support of an alleged homicidal gassing in the basement of Block 11.

Having searched those archives, Jean-Claude Pressac devoted half a page to the topic in 1993, writing:¹¹

“Today, the first homicidal gassing in the Auschwitz camp is considered to have taken place in the basement of Block 11 between December 5 and the end of that month (earlier on, it was dated September 3 to 5).

Witnesses claim that it concerned 250 inmates judged to be terminally ill and some 600 Soviet prisoners who arrived at the camp on October 7. During the month of November, a special Gestapo commission from Kattowitz was in session in the concentration camp aiming to identify among the prisoners ‘fanatical’ communists for liquidation; by the end of November, 300 had been selected.

The openings of the basement having been covered with dirt, Zyklon B was introduced and the door was closed. According to Höss (who was not present) death is said to have occurred immediately. Others speak of a gassing that took two days, involving a second load of toxic [gas], the first not having killed all victims.

The fact that hydrogen cyanide has a vaporization point of 27°C, that it was used in an as yet unheated basement in the middle of the Silesian winter, and a lack of knowledge concerning the lethal dose might explain the overly long duration of this gassing.

The victims, somewhere between 550 and 850, were incinerated in the two double-muffle ovens of the crematorium over a period of one to two weeks of intensive work, which damaged the second oven.”

The change of date proposed by Jean-Claude Pressac has no foundation in documents. He has simply taken as a historical fact a hypothesis of mine, which appears on p. 159 of the Italian edition of the present study (cf. below, Chapter V.1.). The sources Pressac cites in note 110 on p. 101 – Jan Sehn and Kazimiersz Smoleń – are the very sources from which I drew the said conclusion.

Concerning the “overly long duration” of the gassing, I refer the reader to what I have written in Chapter IV.6.3. Here, I must point out another error of J.-C. Pressac’s which will deliver the *coup de grâce* to his explanation: it is not true that Block 11 was unheated in December 1941. In fact, a

¹¹ Jean-Claude Pressac, *Les crématoires d’Auschwitz. La machinerie du meurtre de masse*. CNRS Editions, Paris 1993, p. 34.

heating device had been installed in this building by the end of May 1941.¹²

Pressac's reference to the damage to the second furnace has no provable relationship with the cremation of the corpses of those allegedly gassed. In fact, in the letter of January 31, 1942, quoted by Pressac, Maximilian Grabner, the head of the Political Department at Auschwitz, did not mention in any way an "intensive load" on the oven. He merely requests the Construction Office to repair the second oven by making use of the presence of a Topf engineer, who was at that time installing the third oven.¹³

I will address the question of the "lack of knowledge about the lethal dose" of hydrogen cyanide in Chapter I.

J.-C. Pressac returned to the argument in an interview given by him in 1995, which, however, was obviously edited prior to its publication. Referring specifically to my study, he expressed a reasonable skepticism:¹⁴

"Mattogno has also looked into the first homicidal gassing at Auschwitz, which the Poles claim to have taken place between September 3 and 5 in the basement of Block 11 of the Main Camp. According to the Poles, this gassing is the direct consequence of the order given to commander Höss by Himmler himself in Berlin; in the summer of 1941 to be precise. Except that [the gassing] involved Russian prisoners and terminally ill patients, but not Jews. Initially, Mattogno concluded that this was a simple invention, later, that this incident did not have a historical basis. I have talked to the Poles about this question. Here is the somewhat off-handed reply: 'This gassing began on the anniversary of an inmate who was present and who therefore remembers the date precisely.' The inmate in question by the name of Michał Kula had declared to remember it very well, because it was the day of his arrival at the camp, August 15 ... and not September 3. It is now known that Höss did not receive the order to kill the Jews in the summer of 1941, but at the beginning of June, 1942.

If this gassing did take place, it was in December of 1941 or even in January of 1942 and had nothing to do with the massacre of the Jews." (Emp. added)

¹² "Block 13 (Zellengebäude) Heizungsanlage fertiggestellt," (Block 13 (cell building) heating installation completed). "Tätigkeitsbericht vom 5. bis 10. Mai 1941," RGVA, 502-1-214, p. 52. The numbering of the Blocks was later changed (Block 13 became Block 11).

¹³ RGVA, 512-1-312, p. 77.

¹⁴ "Entretien avec Jean-Claude Pressac réalisé par Valérie Igounet, à la Ville du Bois, le jeudi 15 juin 1995," in: V. Igounet, *Histoire du négationnisme en France*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris 2000, p. 644.

In the five-volume anthology *Auschwitz 1940-1945. Fundamental problems of the history of the camp*, which appeared in 1995 and which represents the authoritative history of the Auschwitz Museum, little more than four pages are devoted to the first homicidal gassing in the section written by Franciszek Piper titled “Gas chambers and crematoria.”¹⁵

An abridged version of this section, published a year earlier in English, deals with the question in half a page.¹⁶

The year 1995 also saw the publication of the three volumes of the *Sterbebücher von Auschwitz* (death books of A.),¹⁷ which made possible a more accurate analysis of the fate of those 135 inmates of Block 28 who are said to have been gassed in Block 11 (cf. below, Chapter V.2), but the historicity of the first homicidal gassing has not been strengthened in any appreciable way by this token. The first volume of this work contains, in fact, a long article by Kazimierz Smoleń on the “Soviet prisoners of war in concentration camp Auschwitz,”¹⁸ which also deals with the first homicidal gassing in Block 11, but without contributing an original idea – let alone new documents – to this topic. The author limits himself to the well-known sources of Danuta Czech’s *Kalendarium*, Rudolf Höss, and Wiesław Kielar.¹⁹

In his *summa holocaustica* on Auschwitz, Robert Jan van Pelt has treated the question of the first gassing with conspicuous brevity, making use only of an article dated July 1st, 1942, of a single eyewitness, Wojciech Barcz, and of a pamphlet published in 1943.²⁰ I shall analyze these sources in Chapter III.

As I have underlined above, the principal historiographic source for the topic of the first homicidal gassing is still the Auschwitz *Kalendarium*. In the first German edition of this work, its author Danuta Czech described the event as follows:²¹

¹⁵ W. Długoborski, F. Piper (eds.), *Auschwitz 1940-1945. Węzłowe zagadnienia z dziejów obozu*. Wydawnictwo Państowego Muzeum Oświęcim-Brzezinka, 1995, Vol. III, pp. 97-102.

¹⁶ F. Piper, “Gas Chambers and Crematoria,” in: Israel Gutman, Michael Berenbaum (eds.), *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington/Indianapolis 1994, pp. 157f.

¹⁷ Staatliches Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau (ed.), *Sterbebücher von Auschwitz*, K.G. Saur, Munich/New Providence/London/Paris 1995, 3 volumes.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, “Sowjetische Kriegsgefangene im KL Auschwitz,” Vol. I, pp. 127-161.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.132f.

²⁰ Robert Jan van Pelt, *The Case for Auschwitz. Evidence from the Irving Trial*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington/Indianapolis 2002, pp. 88, 144, 146.

²¹ D. Czech, “Kalendarium der Ereignisse im Konzentrationslager Auschwitz-Birkenau,”

“September 3. For the first time tests were done at concentration camp Auschwitz for the mass killing of human beings by means of gas – Zyklon B. Ordered to do so by the SS, paramedics moved 250 sick inmates from the inmate hospital into the basement cells of Block 11. Some 600 Soviet prisoners of war were herded into these cells as well. (In the POW camps, officers and political commissars had been singled out in accordance with order No. 8 of July 17, 1941). Once they had been lodged in the cells of the Bunker, the basement windows were closed by means of dirt, SS-men poured in the Zyklon-gas, and the doors were shut.

September 4. Section leader Palitzsch, wearing a gas mask, opened the doors of the Bunker cells and discovered that a number of inmates were still alive. Another load of Zyklon B was therefore introduced and the doors were shut once again.

September 5. In the evening, 20 inmates from the penal company (Block 5a) and paramedics from the inmate hospital were led to the yard of Block 11. Previously, they had been told that they were to do a special type of work and were not to speak to anyone about what they would see, under threat of death. They were also promised a suitably increased food ration once the work was done. The officers Fritzsich, Mayer, Palitzsch, camp surgeon Entress, and others were present in the yard of Block 11. The inmates were issued gas masks and were ordered to go into the basement and to carry the corpses of the gassed into the yard. The uniforms of the gassed Soviet prisoners were removed and the corpses thrown on wagons. The gassed inmates wore camp uniforms. The transfer of the corpses to the crematorium lasted well into the night. Among those gassed were the 10 inmates moved into the Bunker on account of the escape of detainee Nowaczyk.”

In the second German edition of the *Kalendarium*, Danuta Czech added new details to the account – many contradicting those of the previous edition – and indicated also the archive references (mostly testimony from the Höss trial):²²

“September 3. Now that the killing by gas, ordered a few days ago by Karl Fritzsich to be tested on a small group of Russian POWs, has succeeded, the camp directorate decides to repeat this test in the basement of Block 11. In all likelihood, this is linked to the news that the Gestapo was planning to bring in a major transport of officers, people’s commissars, and prisoners of war for liquidation. In this connection, camp surgeon SS-Hauptsturm-

Hefte von Auschwitz, Wydawnictwo Państwowego Muzeum w Oświęcimiu, no. 2, 1959, p. 109.

²² D. Czech, *Kalendarium der Ereignisse im Konzentrationslager Auschwitz-Birkenau 1939-1945*. Rowohlt Verlag, Reinbek 1989, pp. 117-119.

führer Dr. Siegfried Schwela orders a selection to be carried out in the inmate hospital, resulting in the singling out of some 250 inmates. The paramedics are ordered to take the selected inmates into the Bunker of Block 11, by means of stretchers if necessary. In the Bunker, they are herded into a few cells. The basement windows are closed by means of dirt. Then 600 Russian POWs, officers and people's commissars, are herded into the cells, they have been selected by a special Gestapo command in the POW camps. Once the POWs have been lodged in the cells and the SS-men have thrown in the Zyklon B gas, the doors are shut and made gas-tight. This action takes place after the evening roll-call, during the curfew, i.e., the inmates are prohibited from leaving their blocks and moving around in the camp. September 4. In the morning, section leader Gerhard Palitzsch, protected by a gas mask, opens the cell doors and notes that some of the POWs are still alive. As a consequence, more Zyklon B is thrown in and the doors are closed once more.

In the afternoon, all doors of Bunker 11 are opened and the gaskets are removed, as it has been ascertained that the second dose of Zyklon B has killed the Russian POWs and the Polish inmates. One waits for the gas to dissipate. After the evening roll call, curfew is again ordered.

During the night, section leader Palitzsch calls in 20 inmates from the penal company, as well as all the paramedics from the sickbay and the inmates Eugeniusz Obojski and Teofil Banasiuk, who are corpse carriers operating two carts for the transportation of corpses in the mortuary and the crematorium. All of them are taken to the yard of Block 11. Prior to that they have been told that they are to do special work and have been informed not to mention to anyone what they would get to see, under pain of death. At the same time they are promised better food rations once the work is done. SS officers Fritzsich, Maier, Palitzsch, as well as SS-surgeon Schwela and SS personnel acting as block leaders in the camp are already waiting in the yard of Block 11. Inmates Obojski and Banasiuk are issued gas masks and accompany Palitzsch and other SS personnel, also wearing gas masks, down into the cellars of Block 11.

They return from the cellars without gas masks, thus showing that the gas has dissipated. The inmates are divided into four groups. One group, with gas masks, brings the corpses of those killed from the cellars up to the ground floor, a second one removes the clothing of those killed. A third group carries the corpses into the yard of Block 11 where they are loaded onto carts by the fourth group. The dead Russian POWs are in uniform; their pockets contain documents, family photographs, money, miscellaneous objects, and cigarettes. In the yard, dental surgeons supervised by SS personnel remove gold crowns and gold teeth. The inmates drag the carts, fully loaded with the corpses of the POWs and the Polish inmates, from the yard of Block 11 to the crematorium; they are led by Obojski and Banasiuk

and supervised by SS personnel. Among the dead are the corpses of ten inmates, who had been sent to the Bunker on September 1st as punishment for the escape of the inmate Jan Nowaczek and condemned to death by camp commander Fritzsch. The corpses of those selected in the camp hospital are in their underwear. Bringing up the corpses, undressing them, searching them, and removing them takes until morning and is not yet finished by then.

September 5. After the evening roll-call, curfew is ordered. The same group of inmates active the night before marches into the yard of Block 11 in order to finish removing the corpses to the crematorium. Once there, the corpses are placed into a large and long hall, which is already half full. The crematorium command cannot keep up with the incineration of the corpses. Several more days are needed for the incineration of all corpses.”

As we will see in the following chapters, this version was produced by the investigating judge Jan Sehn in 1946 on the basis of Michał Kula’s testimony.

The aim of this study is to verify the historiographical soundness and historical reliability of this account and, in so doing, to verify the reality of the first homicidal gassing in the basement of Block 11 of Auschwitz.

The text presented here in English is an updated, corrected and enhanced version of the original Italian edition, augmented by new sources, which I have discovered over the last 24 years.

Some arguments, which had a novel character in 1992 (in particular the critique of Rudolf Höss’s declarations), can now be regarded as having been accepted at least by revisionist historiography and known to all. I have therefore decided to leave them aside.²³

In addition, several hypothetical arguments have been omitted in this revised text that have not been sufficiently confirmed.

Carlo Mattogno
Rome, March 2016

²³ See in this regard my studies *The Real Case for Auschwitz*, Castle Hill Publishers, Uckfield 2015, Chapter 11, “Critical Analysis of the Testimonies of Rudolf Höss,” pp. 417-431, and *Raul Hilberg e i “centri di sterminio” nazionalsocialisti. Fonti e metodologia*, Rome 2008, in: <http://vho.org/aaargh/fran/livres8/CMhilberg.pdf>, Chap. III, 4-5, pp. 105-112.