

BY SANTIAGO ALVAREZ

WITH MAJOR CONTRIBUTIONS BY PIERRE MARAIS

THE GAS VANS

A CRITICAL INVESTIGATION

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By SANTIAGO ALVAREZ with major contributions from PIERRE MARAIS

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ON THE COVER: Three types of German trucks produced during World War II that are alleged to have been used to exterminate mass numbers of prisoners with varying kinds of lethal gasses. Background below, a portion of the notorious “Becker Letter,” cited often by mainstream historians as proof that the Germans manufactured, and hence deployed, poison gas vans. (See Section 2.2, page 36, inside for more.)

2.2.9. Remarks about Document NO-365	94
2.3. German Special Vehicles.....	97
2.4. Producer Gas Vehicles.....	101
3. Court Files of the War and Postwar Period.....	105
3.1. Early Media Reports	105
3.2. The Krasnodar Trial.....	107
3.2.1. Prehistory: Soviet Gas Vans.....	107
3.2.2. Background and Conditions	110
3.2.3. Gas Van Claims during the Krasnodar Trial	114
3.3. The Kharkov Trial	118
3.4. The Psychological Framework of Postwar Confessions.....	125
3.5. Gas Vans during the IMT and NMTs	128
3.5.1. The Soviet Background	128
3.5.2. Walther Rauff's Affidavits	130
3.5.3. Otto Ohlendorf's Affidavit and Testimonies.....	135
3.5.4. Ernst Biberstein's Affidavit.....	136
3.5.5. Karl Braune's Testimony	137
3.5.6. Various Testimonies.....	137
3.5.7. Franz Ziereis' "Confession"	139
3.5.8. A Special Murder Vehicle	142
3.6. Gas Vans during Postwar Trials Outside of Germany	143
3.6.1. Yugoslavia.....	143
3.6.2. Poland.....	144
3.6.2.1. General Remarks	144
3.6.2.2. The Cases against Piller and Gielow	145
3.6.2.3. The Interrogation of Bronisław Falborski.....	146
3.6.2.4. The Interrogation of Szymon Srebrnik	154
3.6.2.5. The Interrogation of Michał Podchlebnik.....	156
3.6.2.6. The Interrogation of Mieczysław Żurawski.....	159
3.6.2.7. Investigative Judge Władysław Bednarz	162
3.6.3. Israel.....	167
3.6.3.1. Szymon Srebrnik	167
3.6.3.2. Michał Podchlebnik.....	169
3.6.3.3. Mieczysław Żurawski.....	169
3.6.4. Austria	170
3.7. Gas Vans during West-German Trials.....	171
3.7.1. Introduction	171
3.7.2. From 1949 to 1959 (4 trials).....	175
3.7.2.1. LG Stuttgart, Verdict of 8 Nov. 1949 & 15 Aug. 1950	175

3.7.2.2.	LG Karlsruhe, Verdicts of 15 Dec. 1949 & 7. Oct. 1951	178
3.7.2.3.	LG Wiesbaden, Verdict of 24 Mar. 1952	179
3.7.2.4.	LG Köln, Verdict of 20 June 1953	180
3.7.3.	From 1960 to 1964 (2 trials).....	184
3.7.3.1.	LG Karlsruhe, Verdict of 20 Dec. 1961 & 13 Dec. 1963.....	184
3.7.3.2.	LG Koblenz, Verdict of 21 May 1963 & 10 Nov. 1965	186
3.7.3.3.	Interrogations of August Becker.....	188
3.7.4.	From 1965 to 1969 (11 trials).....	191
3.7.4.1.	LG Bonn, Verdicts of 30 Mar. 1963 & 23 July 1965	191
3.7.4.2.	LG Kiel, Verdict of 26 Nov. 1965	203
3.7.4.3.	LG Wuppertal, Verdicts of 30 Dec. 1965 & 13 Dec. 1967.....	204
3.7.4.4.	LG Frankfurt/M., Verdict of 12 Mar. 1966	205
3.7.4.5.	LG Hannover, Verdict of 7 June 1966.....	207
3.7.4.6.	LG Stuttgart, Verdict of 15 Sep. 1967	215
3.7.4.7.	LG Stuttgart, Verdict of 11 June 1968.....	220
3.7.4.8.	LG Dortmund, Verdict of 16 Jan. 1969	221
3.7.4.9.	LG Kiel, Verdict of 11 Apr. 1969.....	223
3.7.4.10.	LG Darmstadt, Verdict of 18 Apr. 1969 & 23 Dec. 1971.....	226
3.7.4.11.	LG Kiel, Verdict of 28 Nov. 1969	228
3.7.5.	From 1970 to 1974 (6 trials).....	230
3.7.5.1.	LG Frankfurt/M., Verdict of 19 Mar. 1971	230
3.7.5.2.	LG München I, Verdict of 22 Mar. 1972.....	231
3.7.5.3.	LG München I, Verdict of 14 July 1972.....	231
3.7.5.4.	LG München I, Verdict of 29 Mar. 1974.....	232
3.7.5.5.	LG Kiel, Verdict of 14 June 1974.....	233
3.7.5.6.	LG München I, Verdict of 15 Nov. 1974.....	234
3.7.6.	From 1975 to now (1 trial)	236
3.7.6.1.	LG München I, Verdict of 19 Dec. 1980	236
3.8.	Gas Vans during Communist East German Trials.....	238
3.8.1.	General Remarks	238
3.8.2.	LG Berlin, Verdict of 14 Aug. 1978.....	241
3.8.3.	LG Karl-Marx-Stadt, Verdict of 11 June 1976.....	242
3.8.4.	LG Karl-Marx-Stadt, Verdict of 2 Dec. 1971.....	242
3.8.5.	LG Neubrandenburg, Verdict of 22 Feb. 1961.....	243
3.8.6.	LG Greifswald, Verdict of 3 July 1952	243
4.	Critical Summary of Witness Testimonies.....	245
4.1.	The Witness Problem.....	245
4.2.	Claimed Features of the Vehicles	253

4.2.1. Introduction	253
4.2.2. Vehicle Models.....	254
4.2.3. General Appearance	255
4.2.4. Capacity.....	259
4.2.5. Duration of the Gassing Procedure.....	260
4.2.6. Poison Source	261
4.2.7. Gassing Procedure.....	262
4.2.8. The When, Where, and How Many.....	264
4.2.9. Conclusion.....	266
4.3. A Hypothesis on the Origin of “Gas Van” Claims	268
5. Conclusions	271
6. Appendices	275
Appendix 1: Images of Alleged “Gas Vans”.....	275
Appendix 2: The Becker Letter	281
Version A.....	281
Version B.....	285
Version C.....	287
Version D.....	288
Appendix 3: The Telegrams of Document 501-PS	289
Appendix 4: Dossier R 58/871 f°1, BAK	295
Letter of 26 March [194]2	296
Translation & Remarks	297
Memo of 27 April 1942	299
Translation & Remarks	306
Letter of 30 April 1942.....	312
Translation & Remarks	314
Letter of 14 May 1942	316
Translation.....	317
Memo of 5 June 1942 (Just document).....	318
Memo and Letter of 23 June 1942	323
Translation & Remarks	326
Juxtaposition of Two Documents.....	328
Letter of 18 September 1942	330
Translation.....	331
Letter of 24 September 1942	332
Translation.....	333
Appendix 5: Published Versions of the Just Document	334
Appendix 6: The Turner Letter	339
Translation.....	341
Appendix 7: <i>Einsatzgruppen</i> Report February 1942.....	343
Appendix 8: Special Vehicles of the German Army	346

Appendix 9: Interrogation Protocol of Witness Falborski..... 349
 Translation.....351

Appendix 10: Correspondence 354

 Letter on the “Gas Vans” of Mauthausen 354
 Translation and Comments by P. Marais.....355

 Letter by Mathias Beer to Pierre Marais..... 362
 Translation and Comments by P. Marais.....364

 Letter by the Town of Konin to P. Marais 370
 Translation.....370

 Letter by Auschwitz Museum (Poland) 371
 Translation.....372

 Two Letters by Yad Vashem, Jerusalem 373

 Photograph of the Chelmno Memorial 375

 Letter by Steyr-Daimler-Puch to P. Marais 376
 Translation.....377

Appendix 11: Drawings of “Gas Vans” 378

Bibliography 381

Index of Names..... 387

Preface

The present study is the result of a confluence of a number of coincidences. As a matter of fact, its author never intended to write a book on the topic. He merely wanted to translate the book written by another author, and maybe edit it and update it a little where required. But that was not meant to be.

At the beginning there was the idea in early 2010 of translating into English Pierre Marais' French study *Les camions à gaz en question* (*The gas trucks scrutinized*), which had been published as early as 1994. This was meant to fill a gap in the *Holocaust Handbooks Series*, which so far did not have a monograph on the topic of the elusive "gas vans." Marais' study had appeared in a slightly revised German edition in 2009, and the current author was supplied with both the German translation as well as the French original. The text part itself had only some 100 generously formatted pages, and together with the recent updates prepared for the German edition, it looked like a project which could be accomplished swiftly, or so I thought.

Although initially by far no expert regarding the "gas vans" of the Third Reich, I had read several papers about this issue in the past permitting me to have a fairly good grasp of the state of the art. Hence, while translating Marais' work, I noticed numerous errors of facts, flawed and missing arguments, and, worse still, so many omissions of important documentary and anecdotal material, a great deal of which had become generally accessible only during the past 15 years, that I decided to give it a complete work over. Well, the more I worked on it, the more material turned up, so I ended up both increasing the book's volume by at least 100%, and rewriting, replacing or even deleting sizeable sections of Pierre's own text, which had become in need of revision and updating due to the added content and the many corrections.

At what I thought was the end of my editing efforts, I had in front of me a book that by 80% of its content was no longer Pierre's, but mine, and in which the parts that still were Pierre's at times read like alien remnants clearly written in the style of a different author and sometimes

awkwardly misplaced by the book's new structure. There could be no doubt that this would have to be smoothed out as well.

Under these circumstances, could the book still be presented to the author – or the public – as a translation of his work? Hardly. Would he accept all the changes made? Well, I was afraid to ask, and when getting in touch with Pierre's literary agent, he balked and suggested to not even submit this typescript to the then 90 year old Monsieur Marais, as he might have a hard time getting over this unscrupulous gutting and rewriting of his work. So the decision was made to make the rewrite complete and publish it under my name instead.

Yet in spite of all the rewriting done, this present book still owes a lot to Pierre's original work. First it is the very reason for its existence. Next, some of the basic structure of this book still follows Pierre's lead, and many of his arguments can still be found in it, even if they have been rearranged, rephrased, and at times reevaluated. And last but not least, Pierre's book was a trail blazer at its time, a foundation upon which the present study erects its larger, more thoroughly argued edifice. Pierre's book has been my stepping stone to the present study; his tome is the giant, the pioneer work of the first hour, without which this present book would not be.

Although this book may be regarded as a clear improvement in comparison to Pierre's work – a natural progress to be expected after almost two decades have passed – it is still far from complete, as much archival material held by the *Zentrale Stelle* in Ludwigsburg, Germany, is currently difficult, if not impossible, to access by critical researchers due to German censorship laws. Hence any of this study's conclusions must necessarily be considered provisional in character, and the discussion will remain open.

In addition to Pierre Marais, the present study owes much to the support by Thomas Kues, who tirelessly supplied me with all kinds of documents, some of them on my requested, but also many which had been hitherto unknown to me.

Carlo Mattogno helped to improve the book as well by critically reading an earlier version of it and indirectly by his own research for his book on the Chelmno camp, from which the present book profited considerably.

I also thank all my other helpers, who for safety reasons will remain unnamed.

Introduction

When it comes to the “Holocaust,” the alleged mass murder of European Jews by the Third Reich, most people think they “know.” Of course we all “know” that it happened. We “know” that six million died. We “know” that the Nazis pushed the Jews into the gas chambers and gas ovens, that they burned them, dead or alive, in gigantic crematories and on huge pyres. Our knowledge is so certain that anyone uttering disbelief is swiftly ostracized. In many countries people even call the police and have doubters arrested, prosecuted, and sent to prison. He who doubts what everybody knows to be true must be evil, indeed.

Most readers perusing the above sentences might not even notice that it contains a typical error, a falsehood even acknowledged by orthodox historians. This error has to such a degree become a fixed part of the cliché which we consider to be “knowledge” that it passes unnoticed.

There were no gas ovens.

The term makes no sense.

Mainstream historians claim that there were gas chambers on the one hand, designed to quickly asphyxiate hundreds, if not thousands of people at a time within mere minutes.¹ On the other hand everybody agrees that there were crematory ovens, designed to reduce deceased camp inmates to ashes (although the inmates’ cause of death and the crematories’ capacities are disputed²). In the mind of the public at large, though, gas chambers and crematory ovens have merged to some ominously sounding “gas ovens.” The public discourse about the Holocaust is replete with that nonsensical term, even though what it describes never existed.

So much about “we know.”

¹ Revisionists contest that notion, though, see for instance: Mattogno/Graf 2005, Mattogno 2004a&b; Mattogno 2005a&b, Graf/Kues/Mattogno 2010; Rudolf 2011; Mattogno 2010, 2011a.

² On the only existing scientific-technical study of the crematories in Auschwitz see Mattogno 2011b.

Listing and explaining all the false clichés prevailing in the public about the “Holocaust” would fill a separate book, so I will abstain from doing it here. The point I was trying to make is that, although we all have some basic grasp about what is meant by “the Holocaust,” most people are quite unfamiliar with even general aspects of the topic.

While gas chambers dominate the public’s mind when the specter of the “Holocaust” is raised, “gas vans” are usually absent from the discourse. What percentage of the general populace has ever heard that the Nazis are said to have deployed mobile gas chambers as well, which historians usually call “gas vans”?

This lack of knowledge is excusable, because even in orthodox historiography the “gas vans” have played only a minor role. To this date no monograph has appeared on the topic written by a mainstream historian. Mere articles published in journals or anthologies exist, and most of them do not even focus on the gas vans themselves but instead on some location like the Chełmno camp in Poland or the Semlin camp in Serbia, on certain German armed units, in particular the German anti-partisan *Einsatzgruppen* behind the Russian front, or events where they are said to have been used, like the euthanasia action, to name a few. We will encounter many of these papers in the present study. But before doing this, I want to discuss the one mainstream paper which comes closest to a study of the gas vans as such. By so doing we will recognize the dire need for a much more thorough and critical study.

In 1987 German historian Mathias Beer published a paper whose German title translates to “The development of the gas vans for the murder of the Jews.” In it he tries to describe, based on 14 documents and many more testimonies, how National Socialist Germany developed this murder weapon. Right at the beginning of his paper he admits that all extant documents are from a late phase of these vans’ deployment, hence could elucidate little about their development. To remedy this, he resorts to verbal claims made by various persons asserting to have witnessed something, most of whom were interrogated during some criminal investigation or trial. Knowing that by relying on such statements Beer enters shaky territory, he declares that “due to their peculiarities testimonies” need to always be linked to, that is to say, supported by some documents, and that those documents themselves need to be “subject to thorough source criticism” (all on p. 404).

I agree with this, as this is a standard method of historiography. Yet Beer has missed two important issues here: first of all, each testimony,

whether supported by a document or not, needs to be subjected to criticism as well. A medieval testimony claiming that the devil rode by on a broom stick having sex with a witch, supported by a medieval document claiming to document that very “fact,” might fulfill Beer’s criteria, but it does not constitute truth. The creator of a document can err and lie just as much as a witness. Next, Beer completely omits the most important group of evidence: physical, tangible evidence. Where is the flying broomstick? Where is the devil? Did the devil leave his semen in the witch?, etc. are all very important questions to be asked.

In our context these questions would be: Where are the vans? Where are the corpses? Where is the poison in their body?

Beer is completely mute on all accounts: no scrutiny of the witness testimony performed, no material traces requested, no questions asked about the construction and operational mode of these vehicles. And worse still: he fails his own criterion that document criticism is pivotal, because his paper does not contain any critical discussion of any of the documents he cites or at least a reference to such a discussion (which does not exist among orthodox historians, I may add).

Hence Beer’s paper is a complete failure already on formal grounds. But that is not the end. His self-defined goal to trace the development of the gas vans within the framework of documents falls flat as well. As Mattogno has shown (2011a, chapter 1), Beer’s lengthy “reconstruction” of how the gas vans allegedly came into being is not based on any documents, as Beer himself admitted. What remains are the testimonies on which Beer relies heavily. We will encounter most of them in this study, where we will subject their statements to critical scrutiny. The result is shocking: many of the important witness statements used by Beer can be demonstrated to be highly implausible (see, for instance, two of the persons allegedly responsible for the vans’ development: August Becker, chapter 3.7.3.3., and Albert Widmann, chapter 3.7.4.7).

While doing his research for his own 1994 study on the gas vans, Pierre Marais had noticed Beer’s complete lack of a critical attitude, as a result of which he wrote him a letter with several questions, to which Beer responded accordingly. I have reproduced this exchange with Marais’ comments in Appendix 10 (p. 362). Although Marais’s questions to Beer weren’t as hard-hitting as I would have formulated them, Beer’s subsequent refusal to continue the exchange shows who of the two is a dogmatic ideologue and who a critical freethinker.

Any decent researcher would have taken such critical inquiry as a reason to look into his own research again and to amend it where necessary. But such an open-minded approach does not seem to be Beer's cup of tea, for when he had a slightly abridged and updated version of his 1987 paper published in a 2011 anthology (Morsch/Perz/Ley, pp. 154-165), it exhibited the same deficiencies of superficiality. Here again, Beer's references to documents and witness accounts serve only to once more uncritically repeat what he has read. In addition, this new version of Beer's paper also lacks any reference to – and discussion of – any topical criticism made during the past two decades (mainly Marais 1994 and Weckert 2003). Hence Beer, like most mainstream Holocaust authors, has proved to be impervious to critique, which means that he is unsusceptible to the scientific method.³

In view of the total failure of orthodox historiography to appropriately address the issue of the “gas vans,” Pierre Marais 1994 monograph on the “gas vans” was a sorely needed study indeed. Unfortunately it remained without any reaction from the historiographic establishment.

The present study will start by including and summarizing what Marais has already revealed and by carrying the topic farther and deeper.

³ Beer has added an inconspicuous deception to this paper which is common among mainstream Holocaust authors: He quoted Becker's letter to Rauff with “since December 1941, for example, 97,000 were processed with 3 deployed vehicles” (Morsch/Perz/Ley, p. 164), *i.e.* with a lower case “since,” thus giving the false impression that this statement is to be found somewhere in the middle of the letter, whereas it is actually its very (absurd) beginning. See chapter 2.2.4.1.