

MAY

Zi Va

Mehlhorn

In autumn 1941, Staegemeir, stationed as forester in Ladorudz, told me that a Sonderkommando had arrived in Kulmhof, and that they have ordered wood for fire. Staegemeir telling me this, made a peculiar serious face, to which I did not pay special attention at that time. As the Reichsmarschall Göring was to come to Kolo for hunting, I assumed that the Kommando had arrived for his protection. I told the official he should hand over the wood.

Sometime later I drove from Chelmo to Kolo with the Landrat and Kreisleiter Becht. As we were passing the woods, Becht said, pointing at the unit with his hand: Soon your trees will grow better. When I looked at him questioningly he answered, that the Jews are good fertilizer. I wanted to know more, Becht however was very secretive and turned to another subject. I thought about the mysterious hints for a long time, but found no explanation to it.

I ignored the growing suspicion that a terrible Aktion against the Jews was going to be executed, as the healthy human mind could not cope with it. I remembered the behavior of the forester Staegemeir, but could find no explanation for it and tried to forget the matter. I was not familiar with the National Socialist regime with its brutality and cruelty.

Several weeks later, my youngest son came on vacations from school. I took him with me on a business trip, which passed Kolo, Kulmhof. At one place there was a large, closed truck, lying in a pit. A second truck was tied to it, trying to tow it out. The road was blocked by them. My son went out of the car and went to the men, dressed in police uniforms, who were busy with the vehicles. Shortly soon I heard that my son was harshly put off by the officials, and so I got out of the car and joined them. The truck in the pit was about 4 m. long and 2 m. high, closed at the back with an iron bar and a cover. A peculiar, unpleasant stench was coming from the truck and the men.

To my question whether the road would soon be free again, they gave me a hostile answer that they would take their car to the side and I should see to it that I pass.

Several days later my son was in Kolo. When he returned he told me that the Jews there are being gathered by the gendarmerie and driven away in trucks. I immediately remembered the words of Becht and had no doubt left, that in something terrible was happening in the woods of Ladorudz, something which I could not believe when the suspicion arose in me.

I immediately called the forester Staegemeir by telephone and asked him what was going on in his district. I was told that the area of Jaggen 77 was closed by the gendarmerie. When he had passed at their post on one of his duty rounds, he was ordered to leave the area immediately or else he could be shot on the spot.

The guards had the orders to shot any person who would approach unit 77.

Staegemeir could say nothing more on the phone. I told him to stay at home and immediately drove to his place.

On the road I saw some other closed trucks turning into unit 77. The woods there were a thick pines and young trees of 12-15 years.

Staegemeir explained to me that a strong gendarmerie unit was stationed in Kulmhof. The castle of Kulmhof had been surrounded with a high wooden fence. Gendarmes with rifles were standing at the entrance. Trucks with Jews are continuously going into the yard of the castle, and in the same order the high, completely closed trucks are leaving the castle to Jagen 77.

When I asked Staegemeir what this meant, he ~~xxx~~ just shrugged his shoulders and said he did not know. There was a rumour that the Jews are poisoned with gas in the castle and buried in Jagen 77. It is a rumour. He did not know whether it was true, but he asked me not to talk about it with anyone, as everybody who talks about it is being shot.

On my way back I drove through Kulmhof and found that Staegemeir's statement about the wooden fence and the guards was true. In Kulmhof itself, there was a line of several trucks, with improvised ~~xxx~~ cloth covers. On the trucks, heavily crowded, stood men, women and children. When I stopped there, a gendarme came and with a rude tone told me that stopping was prohibited, I should go on immediately. The officials did not leave a good impression, they looked rude and cruel.

On my short stop I saw the first truck approaching the fence and the guards opening the gate. The car disappeared in the yard of the castle and at the same time, a closed truck left the yard for the forrest. After that, the guards closed the gate.

There was no doubt anymore that something horrible that had never happened before was going on.

I could not sleep for many nights. I had no one I could talk with about it. I only knew that Becht was informed about the events. He would also be very important as a witness to it.

I was angry that a part of ~~my jurisdiction~~ the woods under my jurisdiction had been closed without even informing me, and told it to the inspector when he next visited my station. He also found this improper and advised me to complain to the Landrat. He himself would ask the chief forrester of the district in Posen.

I abstained from complaining to the Landrat, as I did not think it would accomplish anything after the conversation I had had. I waited for steps to be taken by the chief forrester. However I heard nothing from them. Then it became clear that what was going on was done by the instructions of the high authorities.

At my next visit to the forrester of Ladorudy, I had an exhaustive talk with Staegemeir about the matter and asked him whether he had learned something new.

Staegemeir told me that the secretary of the Amtskommissar of Kulmhof (the building was near the castle) had been arrested by the Kommando and had disappeared without traces. He was supposed to have written something about what was going on in a letter.

I again drove ~~thru~~ through Kulmhof on my way back, although this meant a detour. Passing by I saw that the doors of the Catholic church next to the castle were wide open and that it was filled with large piles of used clothes. The rest of the picture was the same as before. In Kulmhof itself a row of buses filled with people and big closed vans on the road to the woods. Everywhere there was this terrible smell I had noticed the first time at the turned over car. I later learned this was a substance against spotted fever.

Polish and German peasants were living around the castle, doing their work and daily watching the mysterious events.

The building of the Amtskommissar had meanwhile been evacuated and a part of the Sonderkommando had moved in.

At this second trip through Kulmhof I saw four young men, tied with thin steel chains at their ankles, and accompanied by a gendarme with a rifle. The four men were starved and marched in the street with expressionless faces. The population did not say one word about the happening inside the castle and in spite of that it had become a public secret.

The Sonderkommando ~~had~~ were drinking a lot. Schnaps and cognac were flowing. First the Jews of Kolo district were killed. Many escaped to other districts however few could escape from the terrible fate as one district after the other was combed. At the same time, the Jews crowded in the ghetto of Lodz who had spot typhoid or were suspected of having it were brought to Kulmhof.

When there were no Jews left in the villages around, the transports came with the railway till Kolo. From there they marched on foot to an old building at the forrest of Powierzy, from there they were taken to Kulmhof by trucks.

~~What~~ In the hard winter of 1941/2 there were horrible scenes. I saw one column of these miserable people marching through Kolo. Men, Women and children and old people. Behind the column there was a horse-driven cart, which apparently was for those who were unable to march. I saw how a woman, who had a little baby on her arm, slipped and fell. The child was probably half frozen, as I heard no crying. A man of the accompanying guards took the baby at one leg and threw it on the cart as if it were a ~~raw~~ piece of wood.

Those whose knees had given way out of cold and fear, and who were unable to maintain the pace of the column, were driven on with ~~truncheons~~ truncheons.

I saw two handsome, well-dressed girls, with a starved woman between them. It was probably their mother. The two girls were labouring hard to support her. When she could not walk anymore and fell down on the road, they tried to get her on her feet again. Doing it they were left behind. A guard jumped at them and yelled: "You dirty Jews, you probably want to be driven by car".

I tossed in my bed for nights, unable to sleep, with that horrible image in front of my eyes.

The people were silently standing on the streets watching this sad column. Germans and Poles. I simply cannot understand how they did not scream in bitter indignation or tear these beasts into shreds.

But do I have a right to wonder. I myself have not done anything. A wrong word means death. There was no trial in the Warthegau any longer. The concerned was taken by the Sonderkommando and would disappear forever.

I only know one thing. I will never believe in God any longer, if this regime will win the war.

Later, probably in order to hide these scenes from the public, the ~~men~~ people were taken from the railway station of Kolo with a small train to the farm Powierzy, unloaded and taken into the isolated house mentioned earlier.

Once I had a duty call at the farm administration of Powierzy. I went through the farm to the unloading point, and watched it hiding behind a bush. The people were lined up in a column behind the farm. Several sick people were lying in the grass near the rails of the small train. They were attended to by some others who gave them something to drink and who tried to make them feel better. When the column had been established, two gendarmes came and chased the sick with their truncheons. One of the people who had tried to help them shouted with indignation: "Even animals are not treated in such a manner. I heard ~~from~~ in his way of speaking that he was a German. One of the gendarmes raised his pistol. I thought he wanted to frighten him, but then there was a shot. The man fell down. He tried to rise again, but fell down and remained lying in the grass, his head on the rails. Dark blood came out of his mouth. The sick got up, ~~and~~ shocked, and dragged themselves to the column. One of them did not make it and fell down. ~~Another~~ shot, and he did not get up anymore.

The gendarmes took out four people out of the column. They had to load the two corpses onto the truck. I heard one of the gendarmes saying: dirty swine.

In the spring of 1942 I was transferred to the forrester station in Posen. There I was informed that I should ~~present~~ present myself to SS-Oberführer Dr. Mehlhorn at the Reichsstatthalterei. I went there. SS-Oberführer Dr. Mehlhorn told me he knew very well what was going on in Kulmhof. He also pointed out to me that one had to keep it absolutely secret, or else one

with death would be punished with death. He then told me that SS-Sturmführer-
bannführer Bothmann had been commissioned to get in touch with me regarding
the planting of trees in the grave fields of unit 77. Mehlhorn told me that
these graves had absolutely to be disguised. He also added: "If the worst
comes to the worst, we shall have to report them also as murdered Volksdeutsche".
From this I understand how Goebbels had come to the figure of 60,000 Volksdeutsche.
The pictures of the allegedly shot Volksdeutsche in papers, most of them were
probably Poles and Jews who had been shot in the forests.

Oberforstmeister Kranold of Posen told me once that in the woods within his
jurisdiction over 30,000 Jews had been shot.

Mehlhorn also told me that Jagd 77 was to be surrounded with a fence. The
act of disguise was urgent and was to be executed immediately.

The order had apparently come from a high authority. It might be connected
to Katyn. This however is only an assumption on my part.

After several days the head of the Sonderkommando, Bothmann came to me in
order to discuss the disguise operation with me. I saw that Bothmann was
wearing the Kriegsverdienstkreuz with swords.

I went together with Bothmann to the Jagd 77 and entered with horror
this awful place.

On a clearing, which had been widened by taking out the trees, I saw a
grave of about 200 m. length and 5 m. width. The grave was covered with an
earth mound, about 2 m. high. Rather near there was another grave, about
50 m. long. In another clearing, at a distance of about 50 m. there was
a similar grave of about 150 m. long. This grave was about three-quarters
of its length covered. The far end was open. I did not dare to go there
and look inside. Soon a closed van appeared, drove to the open end of
the grave and went approached it in reverse, until it came to the edge.
The van was opened and I saw a heap of naked human bodies toppling out.
I was about 80 meters from the van. Under the command of an official, a
number of busy workers, ~~some~~ their naked to the waist came to the grave in
order to throw the corpses into the grave. Bothmann told me that the
corpses were put in layers with precision, otherwise not enough would
have place. Close to the place there was a bagger working in the digging
of another grave. The closing of the graves was also done by motorized
machine-

There were about 30 people, young or middle aged working at that place. They
all were naked to the waist.

Bothmann told me that he changed the workers every week. He would "finish
them off" and choose new ones from the new transports. The workers were
tied with thin steel chains so that they could walk, but not run fast.

Bothmann said that it happened often that people would say after one or several days that they were unable to continue the work and would ask to be shot. He would paint a red cross on their back. ~~This would be the sign for the guards to shoot them in the evening. The people would have to lie down on the ground, face to the earth, and would be finished off from behind with a Genick shot in the head (does not say Genick). He would also make a cross on those who did not work industriously. I saw the workers eating dry bread during rest. They were chased back to work with sticks when the rest-time was over.~~ This would be the sign for the guards to shoot them in the evening. The people would have to lie down on the ground, face to the earth, and would be finished off from behind with a Genick shot in the head (does not say Genick). He would also make a cross on those who did not work industriously. I saw the workers eating dry bread during rest. They were chased back to work with sticks when the rest-time was over.

Another man in the uniform of a Hauptmann came to us and said his name. I do not remember what it was. He had the face of a drunkard and a brute. He also had the Kriegsverdienstkreuz first class with swords. Bothmann said to me ~~that man was in charge of the "work" at the castle. He, Bothmann, was in charge of it all.~~ that man was in charge of the "work" at the castle. He, Bothmann, was in charge of it all.

The police Hauptmann said that he had given strict orders to lock the cars before they left the castle. On the way, the back doors had opened and the "warm rolls" (warme Brötchen) had fallen on the road. The road had been blocked immediately, but the civil population had seen several things, which had become publically known.

Everyway in the clearings there were guards with rifles and machine guns. Bothmann told me that they were excellent snipers. He added that it happened several times that some had tried to escape. However they did not get far, the bullets of these snipers had reached them. Once, in the evening, while counting the workers before leaving, one was missing. ~~(under the wood)~~ The guards had claimed no one had run away. After a long search it was discovered that he was lying under a pile of wood. He was of course immediately killed.

[I ordered a large quantity of plants at the central agency in order to plant them at the place. In the middle we were going to plant pine-trees and birches.]

I could not keep from telling my wife about what had happened and what I had heard. The following day she asked me, why have you told me that, now I cannot sleep anymore at night. I was sorry that I had not kept silent. But I had to speak to someone about it.

There was another man in the uniform of a Hauptwachmeister with Bothmann. He was called Pläate. He made a very bad impression.

While constructing a fence in the sommer of 1942, ~~xxxxxxx~~ I saw the graves again in the company of Bothmann. There was a ^{terrible} strong sweetish smell in the air. I had to cover my nose with my hand and left the place as fast as possible. Bothmann showed me the long opening that had been created along the graves. If one looked closely ~~in~~ when the sun was out,

one could see a light evaporation coming out. Bothmann said that there were 250,000 buried there, but that there was place for at least another 100,000.

One day Bothmann arrived at my office and said he had orders from a high authority to burn all the corpses. He has already ordered some of the graves to be opened and tries to burn the corpses with Termit-bombs. He now wanted to try it with ~~wood~~ fires burning on wood and needed large quantities of it. During the attempts with Termit bombs, a large fire had spread in the woods and burned down a big part of the forrest surrounding the graves. It was not permitted to feel down the burnt ~~remnants~~ remnantats of the trees, otherwise one could see the graves from the road.

I applied to the central authority regarding the delivery of the wood, and was ordered to carry it out.

I first had as many as possible of the young, ~~trax~~ trees felled and deliver much of it. However this was not enough, and I had to supply other wood. They demanded so much that I finally had to use even the older trees. It seems that the highest authorities regarded it a speedy execution as very important, as they were burning day and night.

There was a terrible smell for months all around the area. ~~xxx~~ If there was a wind from the West, one could feel the smell till the forster station in Bilice, about 15 Km. ~~xx~~ from the graves.

During the construction of the fence I once talked to ~~xxx~~ a Gendarmerie Hauptwachtmeister. If I remember correctly, his name was Leny. He made ~~xx~~ the impression of a simple man. I was interested to know how he, who had been engaged in these terrible events since ~~xxx~~ months, felt about it. He spoke about his service as if he was making the most honest and decent work. He told me, among other things, that it had been very difficult during the hard winter of 1941/2, as the earth was deeply frozen and there were no machines yet for the digging. At that time the Sick were liquidated. These sick people could not be used for the unloading of the trucks - they had been too weak. There was no way left but to use boys of the age of 14 to 16. Because of the danger of contamination, they had to work without clothes. At that time the temperature was -20° or colder. When the cars were opened, the half frozen boys would climb into the cars and lie down on the corpses to warm up. He had to drive them out with a stick.

The layman might think he has the testimony of a madman in front of him. But I can only assure that I am ready to swear to all what is said here.

The second time I went to the graves, I took a little camera with me in order to secretly make some pictures. It was however impossible to do it as one was watched by a ~~sniper~~ everywhere, and doing it would have meant immediate death. I thought about the secretary of Chelmno (the

one who had been killed).

I believed for a long time that Hitler did not know about this horrible crime, until he boasted in a public speech that he had liquidated all the Jews of Europe. I believe that never in history has such a crime been carried out.

There were several parties for the Sonderkommando carried out in the inn "Riga" of Kolo, in some Greiser was present. Alcohol flowed in rivers. Tobacco was ~~xxx~~ free. Greiser gave special leave and larger sums of money ~~fra~~ to everyone for their holidays.

After several trials, the burning of the corpses was conducted in ~~xxx~~ round holes in the earth, 3 m. deep and 4 m. diameter. The holes were surrounded with stones. A big fire was lit in the holes and the corpses were simply thrown inside. The big bones that did not burn were taken out and ground in a special wooden barrack with a mill, run by motor. I do not know what was done with the bone-dust. These must have been large quantities.

On my last stay in the gravesfield, Bothmann showed me the bone mill. There were several full sacks in the barrack. Bothmann said to one of the men working there: "Izig, take a handful of dust out of the sack". The older man rushed to one of the sacks and brought two hands full with snow-white dust. Bothmann said to him: "Do you also know what it is?" The man was silent and Bothmann said to him: "These are your fellow race fellows" (Rassengenossen) The man said, resigned and quiet: "Well, what can one do". I heard from his voice that he was also a German.

During this conversation I heard several shots from the place where the fire was. When I later passed there, there were 5 people who had just been shot lying near the hole. Their faces were turned up. There was a thin line of blood running down their faces. They had been killed by a shot in the head.

During the burning of the corpses one man, perhaps gone crazy, jumped into the pit. One of the officials standing around screamed "shoot, shoot". Perhaps it was one who had still some spark of humanity left. Another one yelled: "Don't shoot, we want to see how long he screams". They took the time he screamed with a watch in their hand.

All these beastly brutes, one cannot call them anything different, had probably once been decent people. They must have prayed with their mother to God when they had been children, must have had religion classes and took their confirmation.

What had National Socialism made out of them: In the castle of Helmhof 250,000 people of the German and Polish state have been killed. It goes as follows:

The people were separated according to sexes and taken into a room covered with wooden boards. They were told to undress and prepare for a bath.

After they undressed, they were chased into a small room nearby, in which there was light from a small electric bulb. They were crowded into the small room. Then the two doors of the room were closed and the electric light went out. This small room was nothing else but the trucks, specially built for that purpose. In the cars there were bottles with monoxide gas, which after a valve was opened the gas streamed into the van.

The first people to enter this small place were probably still believing that they had ~~xxxxx~~ come into some primitive kind of bathroom. Those who came later must have known already what was going to happen to them. According to a statement of Plaate, one had in some cases to chase them into the room with sticks.

Bothmann once said that in times of high activity they had liquidated 3,000 people daily. No one can tell whether all these people were really dead when they were put in the graves.

Once the graves were empty and the worker Jews had planted all the trees, they were also killed and burned. The Sonderkommando, with the exception of several, withdrew. The old castle of Kulmhof was blown up and the ground made even. The stones were taken ~~xx~~ away and the rubble distributed evenly all over the place, so that no one could have seen that there was once a big building. Maybe one will once construct a memorial on these place where a quarter of a million of innocent people had been killed, to remind one of the most horrible crime in human history.

In spring 1944, Bothmann reappeared with the Sonderkommando and again made a demand for large quantities of wood. The victims were again taken with a small train, after a bridge had been reconstructed, and brought to the vicinity of the graves. The gassing was carried out ~~xxxxx~~ in the place itself. I do not know details about it, as I was not permitted to enter. The ~~Sonder Kommando~~, as I have learned from the heading of the letters, was not called Sonderkommado Kulmhof any longer, but Sonderkommando Bothmann.

I want to describe one more incident, which had happened during the gassing in the grave field in the year 1944, in order to show the beastliness of Bothmann:

A young woman who was to enter the gassing room started screaming wildly and repeatedly:

"I don't want to suffocate. I'd rather be shot."

"You can have that, girl", said Bothmann, takes out his pistol and shoots her.

An elder woman with a daughter, ~~withxxx~~ with a grey face out of terror and fear, asks to be permitted to kill herself. She asked for a rope. Bothmann threw her a bra, which he had taken out from a clothes pile that was lying there. The daughter lay down on the ground while the mother tied the stipes around her neck. When the mother fastened the knot the daughter cried out

