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THE SUMMARY OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH PROGRAM, SCHEDULED FOR 2011, ON THE SITE OF THE FORMER NAZI GERMAN EXTERMINATION CAMP IN SOBIBÓR,

WŁODAWA ADMINISTRATIVE DISTRICT, LUBLIN PROVINCE.

AUTUMN SEASON 26th October - 26th November 2011

The archaeological program scheduled for 2011, on the site of the Sobibór camp was originally aimed at reconstructing the topography of Lager III, where the extermination operations of "The Final Solution to the Jewish Question" took place. The field research was divided into 2 stages, i.e. the Spring expedition, whose field work was completed at the beginning of June 2011, and the Autumn expedition, which was scheduled from half-September, till the end of October 2011. The deadline for the Autumn excavation was postponed by the Steering Committee till October-November, and, despite the fear of possible bad weather conditions, the research was completed on schedule, i.e. 26th October - 26th November 2011.

The two expeditions are now followed by intensive post-field research. This is intended to analyse the collected data and interpret the archaeological and historical information. This is to be summed up in the form of a final documentation and a published research paper.

During the field studies in the Spring of 2011, the central and southern parts of Camp III (Lager III) were identified. This is where the gas chambers were located. As a result, most probably, the bigger part of Lager III was recognised. This was an area that is more than 1 hectare (about 10,175 square metres) in size. The total area of the open excavation pits was 31.5 ares, the vast majority of which were located within the borders of hectares XVIII (7,25 ares) and XXV (18 ares). Within hectare XXIV, the area of 5.5 ares was examined, which, above all, covered the continuation of object E/2001 in a southerly direction, as well as its surroundings from the north-east side. The area identified by means of geological drill sampling was about 7 ares, within hectares XVII and XVIII.

As a result of this field work, the ceilings of 710 immobile archaeological objects (subsequent numbers from 173 to 882) were uncovered. The vast majority of these were relics of post-holes and traces of old tree roots. Most post-holes relics form linear patterns. These were interpreted as the camp inner fences.

The excavation work uncovered a continuation of 2 rows of post-holes - two parallel lines of fence, which run along the north-south axis, along the western edge of the asphalt yard where the monument to the camp victims and the granite cuboid quadrangle tower, are located. Both lines of those post-holes run parallel to each other at a distance of approximately 1.75 metres. Their range in a northerly direction was not identified. The outermost posts were situated at a distance of 20 metres south of the memorial mound. In a southerly direction, on the other

hand, both rows of posts reach up to the outer line of post-holes supporting the fence of the road leading to the gas chambers, the so-called Himmelfahrtstrasse/Schlauch/Ascension Way. It consisted of a pattern of 2 ditches, about 30-50 cm wide (objects 250 and 266), running at a distance of 5 metres from each other, along the south-west - north-east axis, in the south-easterly direction of the asphalt yard corner. The above-mentioned rows of post-holes meet with the line of post-holes running on the outer side of object 250, parallel to it, at a distance of about 150 centimetres. In the inner space between these ditches, are rows of post-holes located just next to the ditches, mostly at the level of the outer post-holes. This is the outermost south-westerly part. Here, both ditches, together with the accompanying post-holes, turn south, beyond the area scheduled for the research of the Spring 2011.

In the area located south of the continuation of the alleged Himmelfahrtstrasse/Schlauch/Ascension Way, a few rows of smaller post-holes were found, which connected the break in the south-eastern ditch with the end of the asphalt road running from the main road to the mound. Tentatively, one might assume that these are the relics of the barbers' barrack which might have been built on a pile foundation structure.

North of the asphalt yard, not many immobile objects were found, but south of the yard, the excavation uncovered a collection of a few larger post-holes, which might have formed the line of entanglements around the camp inhabited by the Sonderkommando. Within the southern part of hectare XVIII, another 3 larger immobile objects (object 568 and the one in its proximity) were uncovered. This might be the remains of the root cellar structures (cellars? or half-dugout dwellings). Most probably, these objects were located in the north-western corner of this part of the camp. In the Autumn excavation, it is necessary to further examine the part of the camp which is situated east and north of the asphalt yard.

In the trenches between the asphalt yard and object E (uncovered in 2001), in the western part of the camp, no relics of the camp infrastructure were found. This confirms the hypothesis underlying the research of 2009, which assumed the existence of an area free of buildings, probably covered by a young forest at that time. Verification excavations of the anomalies in the boreholes, as well as geophysical research conducted to the south of object E, confirmed its continuation to be about 75 metres, in total. Its width is always 6 metres. Moreover, the side walls are sloping, with visible signs of wood boarding at times. At a distance of about 50 metres from the northern border of object E, from its western border up to its half-width, excavators found a 2-metre-wide sand embankment. It is possible to make a hypothesis that object E was a shooting range. During the Autumn expedition, it would be advisable to investigate the object further, in an attempt to verify this hypothesis.

To the north of object E, a south-eastern quoin of an object similar to object E (object 589) was found. On the basis of the boreholes that were drilled, its length in the western direction can be estimated at 15-20 metres, and its width, at about 5-6 metres. In the fill of this object, a few small iron items and pieces of vodka bottles were found. A similar collection of artefacts comes from the fill of the part of object E which was investigated in 2011.

The outermost trenches and the dense borehole drilling, additionally uncovered an area next to the mass grave, 2 metres from the south and from the east. In this area, the excavators found a hollow gradually sloping from the south in a northerly direction, changing further to the north into grave No 2. In the fill of this hollow, there was light-grey sand with tiny particles of charcoal. No remains of burnt human bones were found, however.

South of grave No 7, in the trenches and by means of the boreholes that were drilled, the excavators discovered and identified another mass grave (object 882). It is rectangular, about 25 metres by 5 metres in size. Its longer axis lies in a west-east direction. The object is about 190 - 210 centimetres deep. In its foot-wall, excavators found 3 layers of burnt-up bones, with the bone thickness of 10-15 centimetres, interlaced with layers of clear, light grey sand.

The excavation work in the Spring of 2011 also provided the researchers with many new artefacts. The biggest concentration of these was found in a sizeable rubbish tip located in the south-east corner of hectare XVIII (object 568). In regard to the archaeological finds of mobile objects, most of these were women's combs and hairpins, broken glass of different bottles, pieces of barbed wire, iron nails, iron nipples and other ironware items.

The conclusion drawn from the exploration results was that it would be necessary to continue research during the Autumn expedition in the area of the asphalt yard surrounding the monument. As mentioned above, the Steering Committee decided to change the area of the Autumn research.

As a result of this, the main task of the research leader was to recognise the continuation of the road to the gas chambers, the so-called, Himmelfahrtstrasse/Schlauch /Ascension Way, from the outermost southern portion, which had been uncovered during the Spring expedition, to where it meets Lager II. The Steering Committee is planning to build in that area, a museum building - a visitors centre.

A supplementary aim was to determine the full outline of object E/2001, i.e. its range to the south of the research results in the Spring of 2011, as well as to understand its function. This has so far remained quite unclear, though the most plausible hypothesis forwarded by Andrzej Kola, and formulated in 2001, defined the object as the barrack which might have been used as the so-called Lazaret, i.e. for shooting sick and infirm people (pp. 120-121). However, Andrzej Kola did not preclude the possibility that object E might have been used as the camp's gas chambers. This use is what is presently reconstructed in the museum's literature (e.g. the plans of the camp on the information boards available to visitors at present).

In order to minimise the range of diggings, the principle was accepted to investigate the continuation of both objects, i.e. Himmelfahrtstrasse and object E, by way of trenching crosswise to their axes, preserving gaps 5 metres wide or, in special cases, 10 metres wide (the crossroads with the Remembrance Lane), to avoid destroying the road structure or removing young spruce trees. In total, an area of 18 ares was investigated. Most immobile objects were partly explored and mostly sieved to get the smallest artefacts. The same technique was applied to the horizontal layers, outside-of-the-object layers, beginning with the humus layers.

Altogether, 290 immobile objects were uncovered, most of which were the post-holes accompanying objects 250 and 266, i.e. two ditches which are probably the relics of the high fence of Himmelfahrtstrasse. These were similar in terms of the fill, and their function and chronology were well-known. Therefore, it was decided to give up, in most of the cases, the documentation of their profiles, especially in the context of preserving in the best possible state most of the post-camp relics. Because of this, accepting the proposal of the research leader, the archaeological inspector gave permission to stop the exploration of the objects, documenting them in plan only.

The other objects, i.e. elements of object E in the west and the first objects of the so-called Lager II, were documented both in plan and in profile. Most of the mobile relics come from outside the continuation of Himmelfahrtstrasse, mainly from the backfill of object E and the first objects of Lager II.

The research results can be summarised as follows:

1. At first, the so-called Himmelfahrtstrasse/Schlauch /Ascension Way, from the last turning before the gas chambers (the relics of which should be located under the asphalt yard surrounding the monument), runs in a southerly direction but only for 5 metres. This is followed by another turning in a south-easterly direction at an approximately 30° angle. This length continues for 90 metres up to the next turning. After meeting with Remembrance Lane, Ascension Way makes another turning to the south-east, this time at a 15-20° angle, and runs for about 55-60 metres. The road then makes its last turning, after which Himmelfahrtstrasse runs in a due easterly direction, reaching, after 40 metres, the gate of Camp II/Lager II. If all these lengths are added up, the total sum equals to about a 240-metre distance. This is the final journey the Sobibór camp victims had to tread before entering the gas chambers.

At the southern end of Himmelfahrtstrasse, the southern ditch (object 250) had two post-holes from the inner side. Moreover, at a distance of about 17 metres south of the east end of Himmelfahrtstrasse, the excavators found a regularly rectangular hollow, about 6 metres by 2 metres in size and 0,5 metre deep. This could be the relic of the so-called Cash Office, where a Jewish prisoner-labourer had to take valuables away from the victims (object 1124). South of the so-called Cash Office, at least 8 post-holes were found. These ran in two rows at a distance of 2 metres from each other. However, getting to know the relationship between the end of Himmelfahrtstrasse and the fence, as well as the infrastructure of Lager II requires further excavation research.

2. In the southern ditch of Himmelfahrtstrasse (object 266), about 10-12 metres before the last turning, there is a 4-metre-wide gap, similar to the one in are 84f of hectare XXV. This is directed towards a few rows of small post-holes running parallel to Himmelfahrtstrasse at a width of about 5 metres. This area, with two gaps in the Himmelfahrtstrasse fence, should have had something in common with the so-called barbers' barracks. Taking into account the fact that recognition of the southern part of Himmelfahrtstrasse was carried out by means of the probe drilling method, i.e. in which only a part of the continuation of the road was uncovered, we cannot exclude the existence of a bigger number of similar breaks in the linear continuation of both object 250 and object 266. In order to resolve this question, it is necessary to undertake further excavation research.

3. At the crossroads of Himmelfahrtstrasse with the presently-existing Remembrance Lane, on the western side of Himmelfahrtstrasse, excavators found the relic of a dirt road which, running from the south, turns at this point towards object E. Some traces of vehicles that had got bogged down there run from that point in a north-westerly direction, where in the south-western corner of the quarter of are 22d, on hectare XXXII, a tiny piece of a bigger object was found (which is implied by the bores from 2001, Andrzej Kola). It is about 1.5-1.6 metres deep. Its function can only be determined through further excavation research. Such research seems necessary in view of the similarity of its ceiling to the fill of object 882, which turned out to be another cremation mass grave (No 8).

4. The investigation of object E/2001 uncovered another 25 metres of its continuity. This amounts to 100 metres in total. This object is exactly 6 metres wide along its entire length. The walls are sloping, at times boarded with nowadays-decayed wood. At its southern end, object E was 8 metres in width, for 4 metres of its length. In its south-west quoin, excavators found the remains of wooden stairs (dark brown streaks after the steps had decayed were clearly evident in the western profile of the object). At the primary utility level, excavators found in this part of the object, numerous brass cartridge cases. In the eastern part, these were rifle cartridge cases, while in the western part, excavators found for the most part, machine gun cartridge cases. Most of these cases were strongly corroded, or rather were surrounded by ferruginous hardpan. From the north, the wider part of object E is bordered, almost for its entire width, by a natural sand embankment, 1 metre wide, with a passage of about 1 metre in width from the eastern side. Similar embankments, regularly quadrangular, 3 metres wide, up to the half mark of object E, were identified in the 50th metre (about 2 metres wide) and in about the 25th metre on the western side of object E. It is possible to define, with high probability, the function of object E of having been a shooting range. At the present stage of archaeological research, to confirm this hypothesis, it is necessary to launch a search for analogous objects in order to unambiguously determine its function. Roughly in its 50th metre of length, on the eastern side of object E, a pile of broken vodka bottles and Dutch bottles were excavated (object 574). At present, it is hard to say with certainty whether this was a sort of rubbish tip, or that it was a spot located near to the workplace of the German guards dealing with the gas chambers (who, during their 'work', were quite eager to resort to alcohol to ease their conscience).

The above-presented conclusions imply that the Autumn excavation on the site of the extermination camp in Sobibór has provided almost a full set of data concerning the continuation and function of objects 250 and 266, together with the accompanying post-holes, of Himmelfahrtstrasse/Schlauch/Ascension Way and object E. However, the list of the yet-unanswered questions is still long and the answers can only be found through further excavation. Above all, it is necessary to fully recognise the area of the graves and the so-called Camp III/Lager III. There, apart from locating other possible mass graves, it is necessary to pinpoint and identify the gas chamber area. Taking into account that Himmelfahrtstrasse/Schlauch/Ascension Way seems to extend in a northerly direction, the area beneath the asphalt yard surrounding the monument should be the first site investigated.

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A treatise on the German extermination centre in Sobibór: Himmelfahrtstrasse: the road to the gas chamber, from the railway ramp to the gas chamber.

In relation to the archaeological research conducted in the area of the former German extermination centre in Sobibór. Expedition "Autumn 2001". Reconnaissance of Himmelfahrtstrasse and the so-called object E

Exhausted by their long train journey, all the newcomers felt greatly relieved that their odyssey was over and that now they were able to go down to the railway platform and breathe some fresh air. They were given some water to drink and were promised coffee and tea which they would get immediately after taking a shower and undergoing disinfection. The newcomers welcomed this announcement almost enthusiastically and they hurried to the "bath house" to quench their thirst. Such a well-thought-out announcement was one of the numerous methods that the Germans used to ensure that the newly-arrived Jews would enter the gas chambers peacefully, freely and quickly. The disembarkation, the parade on the ramp and the march towards the other parts of the camp, always looked the same. From the ramp, approximately at the end of the siding, the prisoners set off westwards, perpendicularly to the rail tracks and the main camp road, and entered a road lined by a high fence. This led them to a big barrack where they were made to leave their luggage. The barrack - a storage hut and two smaller barracks adjoined perpendicularly to it from the north, were built as early as in June 1942. In the luggage storage hut (most probably a huge military stable without the gable ends, which was perhaps built from the pieces of the demolished military barracks in Włodawa), the Jews left their suitcases, rucksacks and bundles.

Jozef Wins "[...] we arrived in Sobibór on 14th May 1943. They started beating us and they threw us out of the wagon filled up with the Jews who had earlier been detained in Holland. When we got there, quite a few of those Jews were selected for work. Next, they led us through some stable, in whose posts one could still see the hoops to which horses used to be fastened. The people from the transport kept cuddling up to each other. They searched us and afterwards we went further to a sort of Appellplatz (roll-call yard). From there we were led in a different direction. I looked around and saw some houses and barracks. The camp looked like a friendly place; the houses had red roofs, with gravel paths leading to them [...]"

In the two smaller barracks, the prisoners unpacked their bags and sorted out their contents. Thus, instead of leaving all their belongings on the ramp, the newly-arrived prisoners would take them to a special storage hut to hand over to Jewish labourers. Due to this, the Germans would save a lot of time and give their future victims false hope that, on handing over their belongings to these Jews, they would get them back later. Some of the Jews did not want to agree to that. They had doubts whether they could and should hand over what was important and valuable to them (like documents, money, jewellery and medicaments). At that point, the Germans tried to use gentle persuasion to convince them that they would get their things back later. The newly-arrived prisoners, while walking the short distance between the ramp and the sorting barracks and the luggage storage huts, could see the part of the camp called Vorlager which was inhabited by the Germans and Ukrainians, and the yard between Lager I and Lager II. This part of the camp was deliberately built in such a way as to make the best possible

impression. Such a pastoral view was meant to hide the true purpose of the camp and to instil in the prisoners, a false sense of safety. The camp personnel mastered to perfection, the techniques of deceiving their victims. However, whenever these hoaxes failed, the Germans resorted to the most brutal methods of pacifying the crowds at their first attempt at resistance. They used violence, but, at the same time, they gave the prisoners false hope: the brutality of the supervisors leading their victims onwards for “disinfection” could have been accounted for by the need for great haste and the necessity to deal with a huge group of people waiting for their turn to enter the bath house. The camp gave the impression of a neatly kept farmstead in the middle of a beautiful thick pine forest. The newcomers were welcomed by the sight of flowerbeds, stone paths and cottage houses. The sight of the young and quite healthy-looking people who greeted them kindly while doing their seemingly pleasant job, assured them that it was not going to be that bad.

Estera Raab: “[...] in Sobibór, the only advantage we enjoyed over the prisoners of other camps, though I know nothing about Bełżec or Treblinka, was that we didn’t have our hair sheared, we could also take clean clothes from new transports and we could wash. The fact that we could stay clean didn’t dehumanise us so much, as this was the case with other camps. The Germans did that for one reason only. For propaganda purpose. Firstly, when new transports arrived, they wanted us to look like human beings. Secondly, the Germans lived in close proximity to our barracks and were afraid of possible diseases. Clothes were abundant in the camp, so we could take different items for ourselves, which helped us stay clean [...]”.

Having left ‘the luggage barrack’ the prisoners entered, already deprived of their luggage, the yard of Lager II. Before the war, it used to be the farm of a forester from the Forest District of Sobibór. The Germans took over some of the farm buildings and made them part of the camp infrastructure. The dwelling house was turned into the camp administration office, the barn - into the sorting warehouse of the shoes left by the victims. The sty, stables and the other farm buildings preserved their original function. The whole area of Lager II was surrounded by a high board fence so that no one from outside could see what was going on inside. The central part of Lager II was a large yard where the prisoners leaving the “luggage barrack” were lined up. Train schedules plastered the walls of its fences and shelters adjoined to it, as did all sorts of posters appealing to people to keep things neat and tidy. Along the way from the ramp to Lager II, the newcomers could see the signs directing them to the bath houses.

Those entering the yard of Lager II were divided into two groups. The men stood separately from the women and their children. Approximately at the same time, the Germans brought the soldiers who had escorted the newly-arrived transport and Jews specially selected from that transport, in to Lager I or to the yard between Lager I and Lager II. There were some tables placed there and the transport guards were given sweet coffee and some bread with plum preserve. During their meal, the Germans beckoned different Jewish labourers over and asked them questions, e.g. “Have you been working here long?”, “Do they feed you well here?”, “Are you satisfied with your working conditions?”, “Do you want to go back home?”. The answers, of course, were such as to satisfy the Germans. The Germans held polite conversations with the future victims; they frequently took children up in their arms and gave them sweets. Next, the victims were handed postcards and were told to write something to their families and friends. The text was always practically the same: “We have arrived at a labour camp, have been given plenty of food and we’ll be given jobs suitable for us.” The escorting officers watched all that, took pictures and made notes. They said goodbye to the camp officers and left, reassured that the people they had brought in would stay there to live

and to labour. At this moment, one of the SS men would make a short speech to all those gathered on the yard of Lager II.

Most frequently it was Oberscharführer Hermann Michel. The camp prisoners called him 'the doctor' because, while giving his speeches, he was always dressed in a white coat. His welcoming speeches were very skilfully staged; therefore by some, he was called "the preacher". He talked in German, not caring too much whether his listeners understood him or not. Those who could not understand any German watched the reactions of those who knew the language. He talked in the most persuasive way possible. He told the people listening to him that, in light of the present wartime situation, they would be resettled in uninhabited places captured by the German army. He said everybody would have a job there. But first, he said, for sanitary reasons they would have to take a shower and undergo disinfection. Michel strongly encouraged all those gathered to write a postcard to their relatives to assure them that they were in good health and that they had been resettled in a decent place.

Some of the Jews asked questions like, *"What is going to happen to our women, what are they going to do in those new places?"* His reply was that the women would have plenty of work in their new households but *"If a lady wants to go to work, who will stop her?"* In his speeches, Michel sometimes painted a rosy picture of the prisoners' future, saying that this camp was only a transit camp and that their resettlement to Ukraine was just a matter of time, and that they even had a chance to be granted autonomy there. On other occasions, he said that they would be deported to Riga. Sometimes it happened that his eloquent and witty speeches were received with enthusiastic applause. The moment the German saw that he had managed to persuade everybody and that the Jews believed his stories and were in a very good mood, he told them that now they had to undress, take a shower, leave all their belongings in one place, and arrange their bundles in perfect order. He promised them that they would easily be able to find their belongings later, but now all the items of clothing and different objects must be left in order. They were told to count their money and jewellery, which they had to deposit in the camp. They also had to mark their clothes to avoid any cases in which someone else might later take back the wrong ones. The prisoners were instructed to leave their gold and other valuables at the cash office. There was a small barrack there with the sign "Cash Office", and a German was sitting at the desk, the so-called "cashier". He instructed the prisoners to remember the number they were given so that they could take their things back without any problem later on. He warned them that if the guards found any valuables on them, they would be punished after their shower. He said that there was no need for them to take any soap or towels with them as they would be given all the necessary things in the bath house. Quite contrary to these instructions, many of the newcomers tried to hide their gold or money in the ground, hoping that they would dig them up some time later.

Next, Michel told the prisoners to undress. They did that in the open air, notwithstanding the time of year, even when the temperature was below zero. Only a small part of the yard was sheltered from the wind and rain, most probably, only by the roofs attached to the fence. There were hooks fixed in the fence on which the prisoners could hang their clothes to prevent them from getting dirty or soaked. Most men had to, for the first time in their lives, undress in the presence of their family members, not to mention all the other strangers all around. The women undressed in the other shelter. When they were too embarrassed to do so or they refused to undress, the German guards would shout at them. Soon afterwards, the order was given to go onto the 'Heavenly Way' (Himmelfahrtstrasse). It was a few-metre-wide road between two rows of a barbed wire fence which was intertwined with pine branches. It led to the gas chamber. It was about 250 metres long. The prisoners, coming

through the gate onto this road from the Lager II yard, first had to pass by the above-mentioned 'cash office' where an SS man was sitting. At first, Alfred Ittner worked there. After a few weeks, he was replaced by Herbert Floss. Finally, Hans-Heinz Schutt took over the post.

The Jews had to deposit here their money, jewellery and any other valuable things. They were never given any receipt for the deposited things. No lists of the newcomers were made, either. Most probably the cashier verbally gave them their appointed number which they had to remember. When the last victim passed through the gate of the 'Road to Heaven', Anton Nowak and the Wolf brothers together with their Jewish commandos came to the place where, just a minute ago, another 'transport' had been undressing. They quickly cleared the area of the clothes and took them through a special entrance to the nearby clothes sorting barracks in Lager II, which were situated behind its northern fence. Johann Klier's commando took the shoes to another barrack, where they were sorted by size and quality. As soon as they finished, Beckmann and Groth brought to Lager II, another commando, whose task was to collect the rest of the things left there. Things like documents, photos and letters were of special interest. All these things were carried to the incinerator to be burnt. Next, the whole area was raked up and levelled to remove all trace of what had been happening earlier. Everything was to be ready for the next 'batch' of prisoners.

At the end of Himmelfahrtstrasse, in front of the fence of Lager III and on the left-hand side, a path branched off this road towards three barracks joined to each other by means of their gables. In many accounts, this barrack is depicted as the place where women had their hair sheared just before entering the gas chamber. It was built in the late summer of 1942, probably at the same time when the original gas chamber was being restructured. In most of the accounts and testimonies of the camp witnesses (both the camp's survivors and German and Ukrainian staff), it is not explicitly implied that the building served solely for this particular purpose. Without doubt, from time to time, probably on particular order, women had their hair sheared in that barrack.

Richard Glucks's (Concentration Camps Inspector) letter sent on 6th August 1942, to the camp commandants:

"[...] all human hair obtained in every KL is utilised. Human hair is utilised in the production of industrial filters and yarn. Women's hair, after it has been cut and combed, is utilised in the production of slippers for submarine crews and socks for Reichsbahn employees. Therefore, after its disinfection, women's hair should be stored. Men's hair is useful only when it is longer than 20 mm. For this reason, SS-Obergruppenfuhrer Pohl gave his consent to, for a trial period, shear men's hair only in the cases when it is longer than 20 mm. In order to reduce the risk of escape attempts of men with longer hair, a camp commandant can, if they think it is necessary, mark those prisoners by shaving with a straight razor, a narrow strip in the middle of their head, which should improve the identification of those prisoners [...]"

A dozen or so young Jews (selected occasionally as there was no permanent commando doing this type of labour) were brought to this barrack. In the camp jargon, they were called 'barbers'. After the war, some of the survivors left their accounts in which they described the whole procedure. The barbers were brought to the third part of the barrack, where naked women would be sitting on benches, waiting for their turn. The young men standing behind them had no right to say a single word to them. They first removed hair pins, combs and hair clips, and then went on to shearing. The women with their hair sheared were next driven out

of the barrack. The exit path led straight to the gate of Lager III where it met with the end of Himmelfahrtstrasse, or it again joined Himmelfahrtstrasse just before the gate to Lager III. After all the women had left, the barbers had to collect the hair and clean the barrack. The hair was formed into bales which were later sent to Lublin, to SS-Standortverwaltung (Central Property Management), who sent these on further to Reimann's company, not far from Wrocław. The hair was processed there. The company paid half a Reichsmark for a kilo of hair.

It can be assumed that the three barracks at the end of Himmelfahrtstrasse, which were joined together and where the third barrack was used as the 'barber's', were mainly used as a place where women with their children were confined and where they were forced to undress. From the moment these barracks were built, the women and their children, after the 'speeches' in the yard of Lager II, were led into them. Now they did not have to undress in the men's presence. In my view, it is this aspect that decided on such a communication layout between Lager II and the gas chamber. Due to this, the Germans were able to minimize any situations inconvenient to the pace, effectiveness and control over the extermination process.

Iwan Karakas: *"[...] the people are driven from the embankment, down the passageway made from barbed wire. Here's the first barrack (cf. the sketch) where they drop all their belongings: outer garments, suitcases, bundles. Having left the barrack, they encounter a German with a whip in his hand, who directs the men to the left and the women to the right. The women are led down the passageway, alongside Lager II, to the last two barracks, where they are made to undress and to hand over their money, watches, gold, silver, diamonds. Next, the men are taken to barrack (3) where they, too, are made to undress and are then led down the same passageway to the same 'bath house' [...]"*.

Michail Raznogajew: *"[...] immediately after they arrived in the camp, the people got off the trains and were divided into groups according to the following criteria: all the men who could walk were taken to a separate barrack isolated from the other barracks by a barbed wire fence. As I testified before, many barracks, separated from each other, were made into 'changing rooms'. The women and their children who could walk, were sent to a separate barrack - 'changing room' [...]"*.

Estera Raab strongly emphasised the fact that for a Jewish woman, unaware of her imminent death, there was nothing more drastic than having her children taken away or being made to undress in public, especially in the presence of men who were complete strangers. During the first months of the camp's existence, when the women had to undress in the same yard with the men, the German and Ukrainian guards must have had a lot of trouble with the whole procedure. Obviously, they could not have economised either on time or on discipline through such a way of forming-up the groups of Jews in Lager II. Some of the accounts of former prisoners point out the moment when the men were made to stay on the yard, while the women disappeared behind a gate and made their way into an unknown direction. The Germans divided the new transports into smaller groups which were successively taken to the gas chamber. In this way they gained more comfort in keeping the prisoners in one place and exercising control over them.

The men and women with their children were sent to the gas chambers separately. Each group was driven forwards by the Germans and the guards. The Germans had whips and the guards had clubs which they used to beat their victims any time they put up resistance or did not want to enter the gas chambers. On the outer side of Himmelfahrtstrasse stood armed sentries, who

kept watch over the passageway. Usually, just before entering the gas chambers, the people began putting up resistance and would refuse to enter the rooms, but the guards and the Germans forced them inside.

Karl Frenzel: “[...] *once I participated in such an Abfertigung (clearance) and assisted in ‘escorting’ a group of naked Jews through the so-called Schlauch (Heavenly Way) to the place which was the borderline of Lager III. The path led from Lager II to Lager III. It was 300 metres long and 3 or 4 metres wide. It was separated from the rest of the camp by barbed wire, which was additionally covered with tree branches so that the other camp prisoners couldn’t peep into it from any possible side. The group I ‘was leading’ was about a hundred naked Jews escorted by the Ukrainian guards. Some of the German guards headed the group, and I was at the back. When the prisoners entered the area of Lager III, they were taken to the gas chambers [...]*”.

It is practically impossible to conclude, on the basis of the accounts and testimonies that are so dissimilar to each other, how many people at a time were unloaded from the wagons, and so how many wagons at a time were rolled down into the siding. Taking into account the number of the camp personnel and their duty assignments, as well as the routine procedure of dealing with the prisoners from the moment they stepped out from the wagons to the moment they were shut inside the gas chamber, it can be assumed that one group was not bigger than 600 people. The siding inside the camp was 120 metres long. Therefore (assuming that each wagon was 10 metres long, plus the engine), no more than eleven wagons could at a time be brought inside the camp. It is equally difficult to determine the exact number of people that could be accommodated in one wagon.

A typical train from the General Government, the Annexed Eastern Territories, Reichskommissariat Ostland and Reichskommissariat Ukraina consisted of about 50 freight cars with 100 Jews in each, and two passenger cars in front and in the back of the train carrying 30 plus one transport guards. The armed escort was mainly made up of Germans - police officers and SS men, Ukrainians and Lithuanians. The train crew - the engine driver, his assistant and sometimes the stoker, were Polish. Trains from Western Europe were usually made up of cars from the rolling stock of local railways. Most frequently, each transport had 1000 people on board. A typical train consisted of 30-40 wagons, including two second class wagons for the escort (usually about 25 people), third (at times, fourth) class passenger cars for the Jews and 5-10 freight cars for the luggage. Assuming that the wagons from Holland and other Western European countries could accommodate 50-70 people, while in transports coming from Polish territories, one wagon could accommodate up to 90 people, such a number of wagons could be rolled to the siding in which there were about 600 people. This is in accordance with witnesses’ accounts which say that at a time, 5-10 wagons were rolled into the siding. Thus, the maximum number of people that could find themselves on the ramp and the undressing barrack would have amounted to 600. This corresponds with the number of people the gas chambers could accommodate (as some of the newcomers were taken out to the Lazaret, some were selected for labour).

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Treatise: (summary of the basic treatise)

The German extermination centre in Sobibór: Object 'E' (in accordance with the report of the archaeological expedition of Professor Andrzej Kola - Sobibór 2001) and its surroundings.

In relation to the archaeological research conducted in the area of the former German extermination centre in Sobibór:

Aleksander Peczerski, in July, 1974, at the request of the court in Frankfurt, made a rough sketch of the camp. It can undoubtedly be assumed that Peczerski (though he stayed in the camp for only 22 days) knew precisely the topography of Sobibór. After all, he had spent a considerable amount of time preparing the camp prisoners' revolt. Unfortunately, the sketch he drew does not contain any details since it is only an outline of the camp. Still, it is worth having a closer look at the two marked roads linking Lager II with Lager III. His is the only sketch where these two roads connect the two Lagers. All the remaining plans show Himmelfahrtstrasse [the "Road to Heaven"] alone. It is quite likely that on his plan, Peczerski, apart from the path leading to the gas chamber, marked the path leading from Lager II to a place which is also marked in some other plans (those by Bolender, Blatt and Schlevis, the plan from the court trial in Hagen). This is the path that also leads to what is most frequently referred to as "the fenced working yard" or "barrack." Regrettably, although they marked this object on their plans or sketches, none of the witnesses provided any details as to its function or the communication system between this place and the rest of the camp infrastructure.

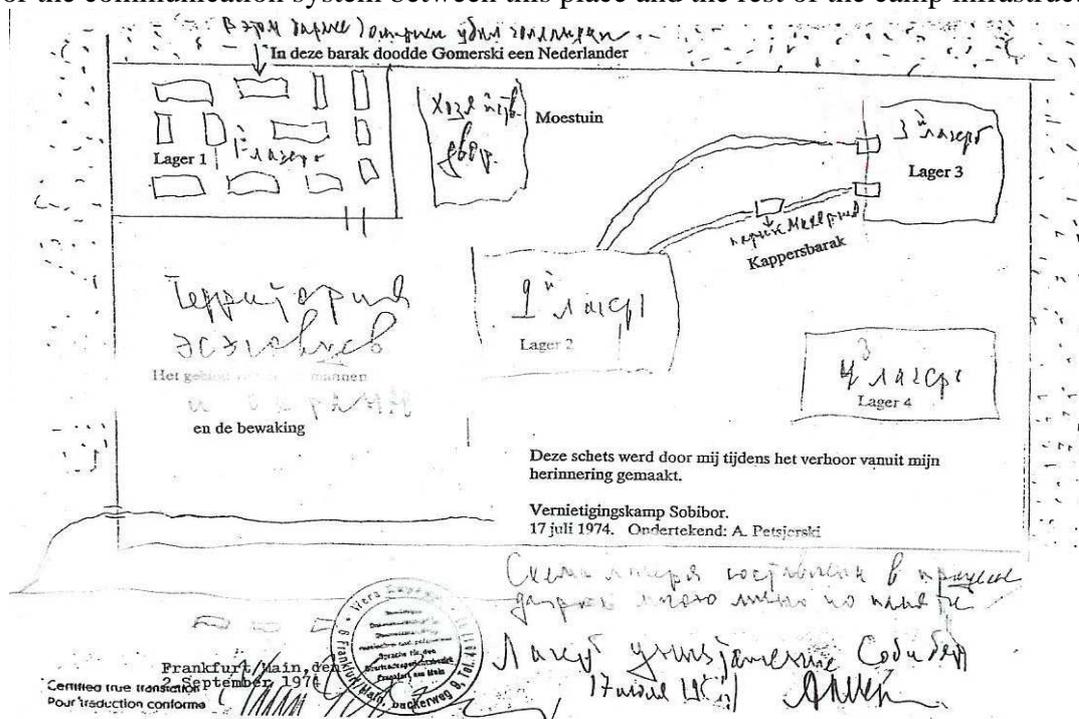


Photo: Plan sketched by former Sobibór camp prisoner, Aleksander Peczerski. Copy taken from MPLW's collection.

Activating the crematoria, after the restructuring of the camp, dramatically changed the everyday character and appearance of Lager III. It can be assumed that the management of the camp decided to prepare a new site near Lager III, where the executions by shooting were to take place and from where the corpses had to be taken by the prisoners working in Lager III, to the crematorium zone. It is only from that moment onwards that those corpses underwent, together with the unending stream of bodies taken out of the gas chamber, subsequent procedures meant to cover up all trace of those crimes. Perhaps this place was the one marked on the schematic camp plans (made by both former prisoners and members of the camp staff) as the 'fenced working yard'. With the exception of this laconic note, I have not managed to find any information about this site. It is marked on various maps and is remembered, but in those times nobody knew exactly why it had been fenced-off. I cannot exclude the possibility that it played the role of a 'symbolic Lazaret'.

During the archaeological excavations conducted in that site, in 2001 (about 50 meters west of the possible location of the gas chamber, and 80 meters south-west from the place between the ash pits), the archaeologists came across the remnants of 'some' building. The archaeological works in 2001 were only preliminary in character; and only in 2011 was this resumed. Therefore, now it is difficult to unambiguously determine what kind of structure it used to be. Perhaps the object is the remains of an extended wooden barrack that was about 60 meters long and 6 meters wide. It could also have been a yard surrounded by a high fence. The longer axis of the structure is situated north-south. At its northern end, the object was bordered by another adjoining 'building', 14 meters by 4 meters in size. Both possible structures had been built of wood. In a few places, especially in the middle part of the bigger structure, traces of vertical wood foundation blocks or post holes were found. It can be assumed then, that if it were a barrack, the wooden floor of it was built upon some wood footings, raised up from the ground (60-70 cm).

At the site of the smaller structure, two huge wooden beams, 210 cm long, were discovered. In the upper part of these beams, a row of holes, 5-6 cm in diameter had been drilled, and in a few of these, some wooden pegs were still stuck. The beams, coming from the construction of the barrack, most probably found themselves there secondarily, perhaps as a result of the demolition of those buildings. In the neighbourhood of the beams, the archaeologists also discovered two vertical wooden bearing posts. In the so-called 'cultural layers' of that structure, many things were found which had undoubtedly belonged to the victims or the personnel of Lager III. These include hair pins and combs, underwear and clothes buttons, spectacle frames and cases, spoons, forks and table knives, scissors, belt buckles and pendants, clasps, lighters, metal boxes, parts of shavers and razors, watch cases, watch mechanisms, cuff links, empty little medicine bottles and packages, mirror fragments, pocket knives, etc. It is worth noting down that in the central part of the smaller barrack, within only a few square meters, a lot of Mauser and Mosin rifle bullets were found (about 1830 rounds) that had been shot into the ground and therefore were deformed. Mauser cartridge cases (9), Mosin cartridge cases (3) and one unexpended round, were also found. In light of the above mentioned findings, it is natural to ask what function such a huge barrack served. Undoubtedly, in its northern annexe (the smaller barrack), victims were shot. The accumulation of so many bullets in a small area implies that the victims were lying at the time of their shooting. Had they been they standing, the bullets (in horizontal shooting) would have become scattered after passing through their bodies. The distance from that barrack to the nearest mass grave is only 60 meters, and it is about 100 meters to the centre of the grave area.

Professor Andrzej Kola, archaeologist: “[...] it seems, in light of the present-day findings, that such a big barrack, whose remains – not yet completely discovered – are indicated as object E, could have functioned as an undressing room and a place for sorting the victims’ clothes and belongings. This working hypothesis should, however, be verified by further archaeological excavation research of the structures outside the grave area in Lager III [...]”

The air photos taken in 1940 and 1944 of the camp area, show clear signs of a road leading from the area of Lager II towards the place where those structures were found. It can be assumed that from the Autumn of 1942 to October 1943, the same procedure was followed in transporting the victims by narrow-gauge railway from the ramp to Lager III. This was that they were taken in narrow-gauge railway wagons to the area of the crematorium pits where they were shot and then burnt together with the other corpses brought from the gas chamber. We could assume then, that the promises the Germans made that all those present on the ramp would be taken to the Lazaret, were intended to effectively calm them down. However, from the moment the two wagons at a time left the loading ramp filled with the sick, the infirm and the disabled, as well as children and pregnant women, there was no need to continue the farce. Those dozen or so people were taken near to the crematorium pit, were forced to undress, shot and then their bodies were burnt.

The act of rolling only two narrow-gauge wagons at a time, filled with just a dozen or so victims to the place of their death, was the only means possible to guarantee the element of surprise, keep full control over the victims and maintain the speed of execution. The object discovered by the archaeologists in 2001, indicated in different descriptions by means of letter ‘E’ (located 50 meters away from the gas chambers), and presented in the former prisoners’ accounts in the form of a fenced yard, could have played the role of the ‘long-awaited Lazaret’. This was the place where the people sentenced to death by shooting were taken (they were either the people selected by the camp staff to be ‘cured and rested’ or they were those who had volunteered when the Germans had ‘informed them’ or ‘proposed to them’, usually during the roll-call, that there was a possibility for them to go to the Lazaret). Groups who arrived in the so-called ‘small transports’, i.e. transports of several dozen Jews, could have been sent there, as well. These were groups who had been force-marched to the camp or had arrived in carts or trucks. In accordance with the procedures imposed by the camp management, it did not pay to activate the gas chamber for such small numbers of people, so they were shot. These groups of Jews, just like all the others, were led through the transit barrack to Lager II, where they left their luggage, partially undressed and were led towards the barrack which might have been called the Lazaret or hospital.

Erich Bauer:

“[...] at first the corpses were thrown into big, previously dug-out pits, 50 metres by 50 metres in size, and covered by chloride. The resulting stench was simply unbearable; therefore, in the Winter of 1942/43, they were pulled out by means of a digger, and incinerated. The ashes were collected into barrels, later to be used as a fertilizer in the garden and farm areas of the camp. With time, the corpses were incinerated immediately after a gassing was over. In the case of smaller transports of just a few hundred newcomers, gassing “did not pay” so they were shot dead. All the prisoners knew about the gassings and the incineration as everyone could see the glow from the fire and could smell the permeating odour of incinerated bodies, which was floating in the air. After the prisoners’ revolt on 22nd October 1943, the camp was liquidated at the end of 1943 [...]”¹.

¹ Erich Bauer’s interrogation protocol, ZStL-251/59-8-1590, Berlin, 20th November 1962.

Moshe Bahir reports that just after the arrival of any new transport and the unloading of the Jews from the wagons, the healthy men, women and children were formed into a separate group. The weak and the sick were then ordered to get into the narrow-gauge railway wagons, whose rails began at the ramp and ran parallel to the main railway tracks. Those who were too exhausted due to the hardships of the journey, were thrown onto the wagons by the Bahnhofkommando crew. The Germans informed everybody that the people were being taken to the Lazaret, i.e. the “hospital”, where they would be given proper treatment. The Lazaret was about 200 meters away from the ramp.

Bahir remembered frequent cases when Wagner had spotted someone in a group of labourers ready to set off for work, whose appearance he didn't like for some reason. He then would immediately decide that person's fate. He would take the unfortunate out of the column and personally take that individual to the Lazaret. As soon as this was done, he would return after a few minutes in a cheerful mood. Eda Lichtman remembered it had been Paul Groth who, most often during roll-calls, selected the sick and exhausted prisoners and took them to the Lazaret. Tomasz Blatt recalls that individual persons, having been caught in the neighbouring area and brought to the camp, were also taken to the Lazaret. He stated that they were marched into the camp and shot in the Lazaret. The Lazaret, according to Tomasz Blatt was located at a small, wooden chapel where, when the camp first started up, the Nazis killed the disabled and infirm people, as well as all those who were not able to walk to the gas chamber on their own.

Later, when it was possible to transport the prisoners by means of the narrow-gauge railway, the execution of the victims was moved to the crematorium area in Lager III. Abraham Kohn stated in his accounts that the camp prisoners had known perfectly well there was no real Lazaret in the camp. When a decision was made to take somebody to that place, they knew at once the person would be taken to Lager III. According to Zeld Metz, when new transports showed up, the wagons were moved onto the siding. The newcomers got off their wagons, carrying all their belongings. The sick got to the Lazaret by narrow-gauge railway. There, ‘Dr Gomerski’ shot them down with his gun. Kurt Ticho recalls that those prisoners who fell ill or were caught red-handed committing a crime in the camp, were also taken to the so-called Lazaret and shot dead. The number of labourers was later made complete when new transports arrived. Margulies mentions Paul Groth, who often asked if anybody was tired or ill. He immediately sent those who had come forward away to the Lazaret, and he did so with ‘a kind of bestial satisfaction’, which was quite visible on his face. The area where ‘the sick and tired’ were shot was called the Lazaret. Accessibility to the Lazaret must have been an important element in deciding upon its location. On most of the plans sketched by former prisoners, as well as camp guards, it is quite evident that the alleged barrack which could have functioned as a Lazaret (and which was in fact a ‘waiting room’ before the execution), was easily accessible from Lager I, Lager II and the yard between both Lagers. The road to that barrack started at the western fence of Lager II and ran along the “Road to Heaven”. In the air photos from 1940 and the first half of 1944, the path is clearly visible.



Photo: Luftwaffe air photo from 1940. The area of the future extermination camp in Sobibór. Marked in the photo is the then existing road which could have functioned, later in the camp, as the road leading to the above-mentioned object 'E' (archaeological description from 2001) - the alleged place where prisoners were shot dead, the camp's 'Lazaret'. This is also referred to in the plans drawn by some witnesses as "the fenced working yard".

However, it appears (it seems so at least) somewhere in the middle of the "Road to Heaven" as if it were coming out of it, as if it were a 'branch' road. It cannot be excluded that it was actually connected to it and from that point onwards, it was not an ordinary path, but, similarly to the 'Road to Heaven', a passageway between the two walls of a high fence.

Most probably smaller transports of the prisoners who were not taken to the gas chamber were force-marched, after all the routine reception procedures, from Lager II, along the initial parts of the 'Road to Heaven' and directed left towards the double-fenced path running towards the Lazaret or 'the waiting room'. The path led the prisoners into a barrack or a fenced yard. In the same place, in which the road ran out of Himmelfatstrasse, the path could have been entered from the clearing which was easily accessible from Lager I, Lager II and the yard between the Lagers. It cannot be excluded that the access road to the waiting room barrack was not connected with the 'Road to Heaven'. This place might have been reached from Lager II through a separate exit, but not the one directly connected with it.

Such a communication layout inside the camp allowed the guards to easily lead to the Lazaret, the prisoners from smaller transports coming out from Lager II, as well as the Jews working in the camp who were to be killed because of poor health or because they had run afoul of some camp rule. Closed in a big barrack or inside a fenced yard, they were under full control. Before the promised 'disinfection', they undressed and were taken a few at a time to a place in front of the northern wall of the barrack. To this structure, as preliminary research has shown, another 'structure' was adjoined. Perhaps this was either a fenced-in area or a shelter, 14 metres by 4 metres in size. It is in that place that the prisoners were shot. First, it appears they were forced to lie down on the ground. The archaeologists found there 1830 rifle bullets

shot into the ground. The crew of the Jews working in Lager III then took the corpses to the crematoria, while the victims' clothes and other belongings were sent to the sorting place. Individual prisoners were shot in the same place and in the same way.

Verification excavations of the anomalies in the boreholes, as well as geophysical research conducted to the south of object 'E' in the Spring of 2011, confirmed its continuation to be about 75 metres long in total. Its width is always 6 metres, the side walls are sloping, with visible signs of wood boarding. Further research on object E/2001 carried out in the Autumn of 2001 uncovered another 25 metres in its length, which amounts to 100 metres in total (the total number being the sum of the measurement values of the excavations in 2001 and 2011 respectively). The object is exactly 6 metres wide along its entire length. The walls are sloping, at times boarded with nowadays-decayed wood. At its southern end, object 'E' was 8 metres in width in 4 metres of its length. In its south-west part, on the other hand, the archaeologists found something which was most probably the remains of wooden stairs. In its eastern part, numerous empty rifle cartridge cases were found, while in the western part – the excavators found mostly machine gun cartridge cases. At the 50th metre and the 25th metre of object 'E', the remains of sand embankments, 2 metres wide, were uncovered. The archaeologists' preliminary analysis led them to the conclusion that (with a high degree of probability, as they claim) object E used to be a shooting range. However, at the present-day stage of archaeological research, if we want to unambiguously determine the actual function which object E served, it is necessary to search for objects analogous to this one.

To the north of object 'E', during the same archaeological excavations, a south-eastern quoin of an object similar to object 'E' was found. On the basis of the boreholes, its length in the western direction can be estimated at 15-20 metres, and its width, at about 5-6 metres. In the fill of this object, a few small iron items and pieces of vodka bottles were found. Perhaps that was the place where the SS-men on duty in Lager III had their barrack – the one called the 'Tea Room'. Roughly in its 50th metre of length, on the eastern side of object E, a pile of broken vodka bottles and Dutch bottles were excavated. At present, it is hard to say with certainty whether this was a sort of rubbish tip or another object somehow connected with the barrack (guardroom) for the SS men supervising Lager III.

The barbed wire fence of Lager III was systematically interwoven with branches of coniferous trees because this ensured that nobody could see from the outside, what was happening inside. SS-Oberscharführer Kurt Bolender, Hubert Gomerski and Erich Bauer were in charge of Lager III. Bolender, wanting more comfortable working conditions in Lager III, had a wooden hut built at the edge of the crematorium pit. Bauer reports in his testimony that, "*from there, he could watch the cremations, enjoying himself at the same time by, e.g. baking potatoes over the flames arising from under the pit*". Bauer went on to claim that "*They had quite a comfortable life there*". The hut that Bauer mentions was probably a small barrack, a guardroom for the Germans on duty in Lager III. Later, one of the Ukrainian guards sketched a plan of the camp and marked the building as the one located at a small distance to the north of the gas chamber. He called it the "Tea Room."

"[...] they take the stripped corpses to the pyre, throw them onto the ground and quickly place them on the rail tracks (about 1000-1500 people at a time). Then they light a small fire and the bodies start burning. Only one "Mr." German is sitting in the restaurant over a glass of rum, giving out orders, "That one is working badly, shoot him. Look at that one! He's not laughing, drown him in a barrel of water. Oh, yet another! He is too weak – hang him."

*What remains after the bodies of those people, who an hour or so ago were still alive, was white burnt-out bones, which are now turning into ashes and will be thrown into the pits. This process is going on night and day. People die and the Germans take all their belongings, making themselves richer and richer [...]*².

In Lager III, alcohol was drunk by the litre. Gomerski made no secret of the fact that the personnel drank a lot. He even admitted that he himself would drink a litre of vodka and lots of beer each day.⁵ Bauer drank so much that Commandant Reichleitner threatened to send him away from the camp, which was exactly what had earlier happened to Gromer³. Lager III was perfectly isolated from the rest of the camp and anything that concerned it was kept absolutely hushed-up.

The archaeologists' hypothesis, which tentatively assumes that the whole of the uncovered object 'E' is the remains of a former shooting range, raises some doubts. It is possible, though, that object 'E' was not a coherent whole, but rather consisted of two independent and different parts, each serving a completely dissimilar function. The natural sand embankment pinpointed in its half length, might have been the borderline between those parts. There is also a possibility that a barbed wire fence ran there on both sides of the 2-metre-wide path, which was the inner fence isolating Lager III from the remaining parts of this extermination centre. The vast majority of the accounts given and plans drawn by some witnesses (former prisoners, camp staff members and Ukrainian guards) mark this place as the fence surrounding Lager III.

Due to such a division of object 'E', it is possible to make a distinction between the two parts: northern and southern. In all probability, the excavation of Professor Andrzej Kola in the 2001 field season pinpointed almost the whole of the northern part, while the one in 2011 – brought to the fore, the information found within the southern part of object 'E'. The reports on the two expeditions imply that the remains of construction elements and the artefacts found in those two parts differ from each other. The existence of such a division can also be implied by the road (independent of Himmelfahrtstrasse), clearly visible in the air photos of the camp, which connected Lager II with the southern end of the northern part of object 'E'. At the crossroads of Himmelfahrtstrasse and the presently-existing road (the so-called Remembrance Alley), the archaeologists found, in the Autumn of 2011 (located on the western side of Himmelfahrtstrasse), the remains of a dirt road which, running from the south, turns at that point towards object 'E'. Conceivably, this is the road which linked Lager II with the possible Lazaret - the northern part of object 'E'.

Some of the camp survivors marked on their own sketches an object which, without specifying its function, they called the 'fenced working yard' or 'barrack'. Each of them marked it behind the fence, within Lager III. Assuming that it is actually two independent camp objects, it is possible to hypothesize that the northern one was the alleged Lazaret (the site where shootings took place), while the southern might have been connected with the so-called Lager V (the Ukrainian guards' barracks, the reserve camp of the camp guards). It cannot be precluded that it could have been, according to the archaeologists, a training shooting range for the soldiers living in Lager V. At present, information on this particular subject is very scarce.

Sector V of the camp functioned for no longer than two or three months. It was a separate part of the camp and was not structurally connected with the extermination centre as such. The

² Zachar Filipowicz Popławski's memo to the Plenipotentiary for the Communist Party of Byelorussia in Brest Oblast, 7th October 1943, author's private collection

³ Hubert Gomerski's interrogation protocol, Frankfurt am Main, 28th November 1973.

soldiers stationed in that sector might, however, have been assigned the task of providing the external protection of Lager IV which, under construction, was just becoming operational.

The protection of the entire camp was strengthened most probably because Lager IV (the northern Lager) was under construction at that time. The German air photos of the former camp in Sobibór, taken in March and May 1944, depict very clear contours of an unknown object neighbouring the western fence of the extermination centre. The surface archaeological research (carried out in 2010 and 2011) confirmed the existence of pieces of concrete debris, barbed wire, personal belongings and objects of everyday use. Even nowadays, there exists a road leading down to this place. This coincides with the road visible in the air photos. It starts at the site where, while the camp was in operation, there was free space between Lager I and Lager II. Jan Biskupicz⁴ and Hersz Cukierman⁵ both mentioned this place in their accounts. Biskupicz claims that in the final stage of the extermination camp's existence, yet another Lager was built in his neighbourhood, and that Wehrmacht soldiers were accommodated there. He believes that the place had nothing to do with the extermination centre. Cukierman states, however, that there was also a big reserve camp for the Ukrainians there. Iwan Karakas, a Ukrainian guard, marked this object on his plan, calling it *“the fifth Lager” meant for the 60 ‘western Ukrainians’ sent over to Sobibór to protect this new part of the camp. He claims that the soldiers had no contact with the “general camp”*⁶. Kurt Bolender marked on his plan (in the “area” convergent with its location in the above mentioned air photos) that this was the barracks area of the “Ukrainian commando”. Supposedly, Bolender could have seen and recognised the object just after the revolt and escape of prisoners. That was when he was posted to Sobibór for his second tour. For the first one, he had served there from April till July 1942.

Jakub Biskupicz: *“[...] finally, there was one more Lager, the one in which Wehrmacht soldiers lived. It had nothing in common with the Sobibór camp, and we knew about it [...]”*⁷.

Hersz Cukierman: *“[...] not far from the forest was a big reserve camp for the Ukrainians, who tried to catch some of the Jews, but failed. About 350 Jews had escaped from Sobibór then. Running towards the forest, I came across my son [...]”*⁸.

Iwan Karakas: *“[...] Lager V accommodated up to 60 people, they were western Ukrainians sent here, allegedly, to protect the newly built (part of the camp?). They had no contact with the general camp [...]”*⁹.

⁴ Jakub Biskupicz, transcript of the DVD recording/DVD No 1-8, USHMM archives/RG – 50.120 0016, 20th March 1992, translation from Hebrew - Małgorzata Lipska; Jakub Biskupicz's interrogation protocol (the Bolender trial), sign. 13/112, Tel - Aviv/Israel, 17th May 1961; Jakub Biskupicz's interrogation protocol, sign. 13/97, Tel - Aviv/Israel, 6th June 1962.

⁵ Hersz Cukierman's account, ŻIH archives, sign. 301/14, 17th September 1944.

⁶ Zachar Filipowicz Popławski's memo to the Plenipotentiary for the Communist Party of Byelorussia in Brest Oblast, concerning Iwan Michajłowicz Karakas's account on the death camp in Sobibór, 7th October 1943.

⁷ Jakub Biskupicz, transcript of the DVD recording/DVD No 1-8, USHMM archives/RG – 50.120 0016, 20th March 1992, translation from Hebrew - Małgorzata Lipska.

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⁹ Zachar Filipowicz Popławski's memo to the Plenipotentiary for the Communist Party of Byelorussia in Brest Oblast, concerning Iwan Michajłowicz Karakas's account on the death camp in Sobibór, 7th October 1943.