

STATE MUSEUM
AT MAJDANEK

**80TH ANNIVERSARY
OF OPERATION
"REINHARDT"
1942-1943**



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1942–1943**

Państwowe Muzeum
na Majdanku

Lublin 2023

Edited and translated by

Łukasz Mrozik

Proofreading

Magdalena Petruk

Layout, typesetting

Ewelina Kruszewska

Photographs from the collections
of the State Museum at Majdanek

ISBN 978-83-62816-90-3

Publisher

Państwowe Muzeum na Majdanku
Droga Męczenników Majdanka 67
20-325 Lublin

Printed and bound by

Drukarnia Standruk
20-150 Lublin,
ul. Rapackiego 25



Państwowe Muzeum
na Majdanku



Ministerstwo Kultury
i Dziedzictwa Narodowego

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INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR OF THE STATE MUSEUM AT MAJDANEK, TOMASZ KRANZ

BY ŁUKASZ
MROZIK

Łukasz Mrozik: The years 2022–2023 were marked by the 80th anniversary of operation “Reinhardt.” Could you explain its objectives?

Tomasz Kranz: Let’s maybe begin with explaining its code-name first. There are several variants of its spelling in the scarcely preserved documents regarding this matter. “Einsatz Reinhardt” was the officially assigned name. Such spelling was applied in the seal used by the staff members as well as in the nondisclosure form that would be signed by each SS functionary engaged in that operation. Historians generally share the assumption that the codename was assigned as a tribute to Reinhard Heydrich, chief of the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA), who was fully engaged in planning and implementing the programme of exterminating the European Jews. It is partially confirmed by the documents preserved in the Archives of the State Museum at Majdanek. On 4 June 1942, Heydrich died of infection caused by the wounds he had suffered over a week earlier during an assassination attempt made by the Czecho-

slovak commandos. Two days later, the SS garrison administration in Lublin sent an official letter to its superior – Odilo Globocnik, the commander of the SS and police forces in the Lublin district – who coordinated the mass extermination of Jews in the General Government from March 1942. That letter had the word “Reinhardt” included in its headline. The scan of this document, together with a collection of other extremely valuable and interesting sources, can be found in the special issue of our “Varia” magazine devoted to “Einsatz Reinhardt.”

The aim of operation “Reinhardt” was, in fact, the extermination of the Polish Jews, particularly those residing within the area of the aforementioned General Government, though its geographic range was systematically extended over time. The Germans also expanded its course onto Bezirk Bialystok and the operation also affected approximately 150,000 Jews deported from other European countries – primarily Slovakia and the Netherlands. Their plans additionally assumed the deportations of Jews from Romania, though this idea never came to fruition.

“Einsatz Reinhardt” was the bloodiest stage of the Holocaust. It is estimated that this operation claimed the lives of around 2,000,000 Jewish women, children, and men. Approximately 1,500,000 of them perished in the gas chambers of the Betzec, Sobibór, Treblinka, and Majdanek camps. Tens of thousands were murdered in mass executions and during the so-called liquidation actions that were a part of displacements, or died in ghettos and forced labour camps.

Ł. M.: Why it was the occupied Polish territories that the Third Reich authorities selected to implement that genocidal operation?

T. K.: Several factors contributed towards that. First of all, it must be mentioned that the “final solution to the Jewish question” – as the Third Reich’s leaders euphemistically called the extermination of the European Jews – aimed at the planned murder of approximately 11,000,000 people from various countries. They were all meant to be “evacuated to the east,” which

proves that the murder was to take place far away from Germany itself. The authorities of the General Government insisted that it was there that the “evacuation operation” should begin, by which they meant the deportations of Jews to extermination camps.

Furthermore, we must remember that in the plans of the Third Reich, the General Government was to serve as a future settlement area for German colonists. Thus, beginning the extermination of Jews in that region was crucial within the broader Nazi policy of remodelling Europe under the codename Generalplan Ost (Master Plan for the East) – an endeavour that Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler displayed great interest in. His Austrian protégé, Odilo Globocnik, was similarly obsessed with the mission of Germanising Europe and of purging Jews from its territories. He treated the Lublin district as a genuine testing ground for the Third Reich’s genocidal objectives. The members of his staff first established the extermination camp in Bełżec (launched in mid-March 1942), then SS-Sonderkommando Sobibor merely two months later, and in July the third death camp in Treblinka. Also by Globocnik’s initiative the gas chambers at the Majdanek concentration camp became operational in September 1942.

Another important reason for that decision was the fact that it was a place of residence for a large Jewish community within this part of Europe at that time. According to the German data presented during the Wannsee Conference, a total of around 2,300,000 Jews lived in the General Government, with 450,000 and 3,000,000 more in the nearby Belarus and Ukraine respectively.

Ł. M.: Two of the three extermination camps created during operation “Reinhardt” were built in the Lublin region. What was the role and significance of this area within its course?

T. K.: Globocnik resided and worked in Lublin from November 1939. Therefore, the police units subordinate to him – including the functionaries of operation “Reinhardt” – had their offices



Commemoration at the
Museum and Memorial
in Sobibór.



in the city. Himmler frequently visited Lublin too, e.g. on 18–19 July 1942, when he discussed the forthcoming measures within the subject of the mass extermination of Jews with Globocnik and his superior – Friedrich-Wilhelm Krüger, the higher SS and police forces commander in the General Government. It was during that visit when Himmler gave the order to accomplish the goals of “Einsatz Reinhardt” by the end of 1942. In the evening he dined at Globocnik’s villa – a house which still stands today in Lublin, just like many other buildings that the Germans incorporated into the infrastructure of operation “Reinhardt.”

In other words, Lublin housed the German centres of command and logistics operating within the framework of the Holocaust in the General Government. Since the physical extermination of Jews was tightly connected with the plunder and utilisation of their property and belongings, the city also played the role of the operation’s transshipment station and storage depot. Warehouses, workshops regarding various crafts, and even production plants were established in Lublin. The pursuit of those economic objectives was also closely associated with the creation of the Majdanek concentration camp as well as the enormous forced labour camps for Jews organised in Trawniki and Poniatowa, wherein thousands of Jews deported from Warsaw were detained.

The number of Jews living in the Lublin region varied between 250,000 and 300,000 before World War II. In the city of Lublin itself, every third inhabitant out of its 120,000 residents was of Jewish origin. Only a handful survived the Holocaust. The Jews from the Lublin region perished in all the operation’s camps: Bełżec, Sobibór, Treblinka, and Majdanek. The province itself also became a cemetery for thousands of Jews deported from other parts of the German-occupied Poland as well as from other European countries. Approximately 435,000 Jews were murdered in Bełżec, around 180,000 in Sobibór, and about 60,000 more at Majdanek. It must also be emphasised that Majdanek was the site of the largest mass execution in the history of all the German-Nazi concentration camps. During just a single day, the German policemen executed over 18,000 Jews near

the camp crematorium. That crime was a part of a larger mass murder scheme perpetrated on Himmler's command under the codename "Erntefest." Around 42,000 Jews were shot in KL Lublin and the labour camps in Trawniki and Poniatowa on 3–4 November 1943. That massacre did in fact conclude operation "Reinhardt."

Ł. M.: On the 80th anniversary of operation "Reinhardt," the State Museum at Majdanek played a particularly important role in its commemoration. What makes this memorial different from other institutions in this field?

T. K.: First and foremost, Majdanek is the world's oldest museum commemorating the victims of World War II. The memorial has been operating ever since November 1944. Moreover, today the institution protects three former camp areas – Majdanek, Bełżec (since 2004), and Sobibór (since 2012). These three museums constitute a unique triad of the Holocaust history and remembrance. In their interconnected coexistence they shape our institution's influence and functioning in the domains of commemoration, research, and education. This – combined with the aforementioned historical significance of Lublin within the framework of operation "Reinhardt" – causes the topic of the mass extermination of Jews to become one of our primary fields of interest. Therefore, historical research, publishing projects, and educational activities that focus on various aspects of that subject constitute an important part of our everyday work. It is greatly visible in the books that have been recently published by the Museum: *Destruction of Jews in the Generalgouvernement* – Dariusz Libionka's monograph that will soon be available not only in Polish and German but also in English; and the joint monograph of the Majdanek camp – *Więźniowie KL Lublin 1941–1944* (Eng. *The Prisoners of KL Lublin 1941–1944*) – that was released in early 2022.

Moreover, in the spring of 2021 we accomplished the general renovation and conservation of extremely important historical buildings within the Majdanek grounds – two bathhouse

barracks and the gas chambers. In the latter, during the first several months of their functioning, the SS-men murdered the prisoners of various origins; later – exclusively Jews deemed “unfit for labour” – particularly small children and adults that were over forty years old. Unlike in other extermination camps, the gas chambers at Majdanek were not destroyed by the perpetrators, which today makes them a unique object of enormous historical value.

Our exhibitions are also worth mentioning. Since October 2020 the new permanent exhibition has been presented at the Museum and Memorial in Sobibór. At its very core lies the collection of over 700 artefacts. The vast majority of them are the victims’ personal belongings – objects found at the crime scene that bear witness to the lives of the murdered. We also try to raise awareness about the tragic history of the Holocaust in the spaces that are outside the former camp areas. Our outdoor exhibition *The Extermination of Jews in the German Operation “Reinhardt”* has already been presented in several cities of Poland, including Warsaw, Przemyśl, Białystok, and Kielce. The choice of those locations was not accidental. Each of those cities used to house large communities of Polish Jews before World War II. Their lives, however, were abruptly ended with deportations to extermination camps held as part of operation “Reinhardt.”

Ł. M.: In what other ways did the Museum commemorate the 80th anniversary of “Einsatz Reinhardt”?

T. K.: We prepared a wide variety of projects. Besides commemorative ceremonies we organised numerous events that aimed at popularising the knowledge about operation “Reinhardt” – historical debates, seminars, academic conferences, as well as special displays of a documentary film created by the memorial’s employees – *The Traces of Operation “Reinhardt” in Lublin*. I have already mentioned our “Varia” magazine. We have published a special volume dedicated entirely to “Einsatz Reinhardt,” which includes historical outlines devoted to various aspects of that genocidal operation. The articles are

supplemented with a rich collection of photographs as well as an appendix with unique German documents and the list of the most important sources regarding this topic. Just like every other "Varia," this volume has been published in both Polish and English, and it can be found on our website.

During a conference held at the memorial in Lublin in May 2022, we discussed the current state and the future of research regarding the history of operation "Reinhardt." The presence of numerous scholars from various museums and institutions offered an insight into different perspectives on the topic of the Holocaust – both locally and within its broader European framework.

Just like browsing through the issue of our "Varia" entitled *The Holocaust in the Education of the State Museum at Majdanek* I highly recommend visiting the Museum's website and social media, where not only do we report all our past projects and undertakings, but – more importantly – we announce our future activities organised to commemorate the victims murdered in the German operation "Reinhardt." The English version of the book *Infrastruktura akcji "Reinhardt" (The Infrastructure of Operation "Reinhardt")* will be published as the final stage of our commemorative project in November 2023.



Exhibition
*The Extermination
of Jews in the German
Operation "Reinhardt"*
presented in Kielce
and Białystok.





**JEWES AT MAJDANEK
IN THE VIEW OF
WIĘŹNIOWIE
KL LUBLIN 1941–1944
(THE PRISONERS OF
KL LUBLIN 1941–1944)**

JAKUB
CHMIELEWSKI

The mission of the State Museum at Majdanek is to preserve the memory of all the prisoners and victims of Konzentrationslager Lublin. We fulfil this duty across various fields of activity, including our research projects. The recent vital achievement within this domain, resulting from the work of scholars employed at the Majdanek memorial, took the form of the new monograph: *Więźniowie KL Lublin 1941–1944 (The Prisoners of KL Lublin 1941–1944)*. It is an attempt to provide a holistic analysis of the collective and individual experiences of the people of various nationalities that were deported to Majdanek (as the camp has been unofficially called ever since its creation). The studies included in the volume constitute both an expansion based on some new sources and a summary to the research that has been conducted across the last several decades.

The history of the German Nazi concentration camp in Lublin, that operated between October 1941 and July 1944, was inextricably connected with the persecution of Jews, who constituted



the majority among its over 130,000 prisoners deported from various parts of Europe. In the context of its Jewish inmates, Majdanek performed a variety of functions serving as a labour camp, reservoir of slave workforce, a place of extermination, and a site of plundering their property. The Jews were deported to the camp within several waves, which reflected the consecutive stages of its functioning. It also corresponded with different phases of operation “Reinhardt,” the primary goals of which included the mass extermination of Jews in the General Government combined with seizing their property and eradicating all evidence of their existence. Although the main sites of implementing that murderous programme were located in Bełżec, Sobibór, and Treblinka, Majdanek was also an important part of that operation.

When the building of KL Lublin began in the autumn of 1941, it were the Jewish prisoners – captured Polish Army soldiers kept as POWs in a separate facility, and the inhabitants of the



Majdanek, barracks
at the prisoner field I,
1944.

ghetto in Lublin – who were exploited in the construction works. The Nazis then imprisoned some several hundred Jews from Lublin and its surroundings at the turn of 1941 and 1942. Nearly all of them died or were murdered shortly afterwards. The role of the camp changed in late March 1942 with the arrival of Jews sent from Slovakia (an ally of the Third Reich), and later also from the ghettos around the Lublin region as well as from Germany (and Austria), and the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. The transports from outside the General Government were subjected to selections at the railway ramp of the nearby Flugplatz labour camp (the pre-war Plage-Laśkiewicz aircraft factory), where the SS-men handpicked some persons they considered “fit for work.” The remaining deportees were sent further to the extermination camps, either directly or via the so-called transit ghettos. The transports of Polish Jews were treated differently as they underwent selections mainly

One of the gas chambers at Majdanek.



during the displacements instead. It is also worth noting that only men were detained at Majdanek at that time.

During the summer of 1942, operation "Reinhardt" entered its decisive phase. Only the essential skilled labourers were to be left alive by order of the Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler. The so-called Great Action (Grossaktion) in Warsaw was already in progress. The overwhelming majority of Jews from the Warsaw ghetto were murdered in Treblinka, though several thousand men were also deported to Majdanek. Another wave of deportations, this time from the Lublin region, began in the autumn of 1942. For the very first time also females were among the deportees taken to the camp.

Throughout the spring and summer of 1943, when the final liquidation of the ghettos in Warsaw and Białystok together with the last Jewish communities in the Lublin region took place,



the logistics of the "Einsatz Reinhardt" staff directed massive transports of Jews to Majdanek. This time they included even the entire multigenerational families. Merely some of them were actually registered at the camp though.

Only the Jewish newcomers were subjected to preliminary selections. Those whom the SS-men sentenced to death were shot, and from September 1942 for the twelve consecutive months also murdered in the gas chambers. Initially, selections were conducted only occasionally since the Jews brought into the camp had previously been deemed fit for labour. This changed entirely in the spring of 1943 as proven by the survivors' testimonies: "Mothers were separated from their children. A few women managed to stick with their kids. Not for long though. They tear us away and herd us for bathing. We leave the crying children behind us." Also the people that had already

PERSONENBESCHREIBUNG
GÉNÉRALLEMENT

Staatsangehörigkeit: *Unbekannt*
Nationalité:

Beruf: *Kürschner*
Profession:

Geburtsort: *Przemysl*
Lieu de naissance:

Geburtstag: *23. 6. 1899*
Date de naissance:

Wohnsitz oder Aufenthaltsort: *Berlin*
Domicile ou résidence:

Gestalt: *mittel*
Taille:

Gesicht: *oval*
visage:

Farbe der Augen: *braun*
Couleur des yeux:

Farbe des Haares: *mittel*
Couleur des cheveux:

Besondere Kennzeichen:
Signes particuliers:

2

Passport of Israel Rubin, a furrier born in Przemysł, who perished at Majdanek.



been admitted into the camp as its registered prisoners were murdered in the aftermath of selections.

Unlike in the extermination camps, the main causes of death in KL Lublin included horrible living conditions, exhausting labour, starvation, diseases, and the regime built upon collective violence. Only a handful had the courage and strength to oppose it by helping other fellow inmates. Such was the case of a prisoner-doctor who did so despite the words "But doctor, it's a Jew!" being shouted around. Escapes were the utmost form of resistance. The first instance of escape undertaken by a Jewish inmate that is confirmed by sources was done by Dionyz Lénard, who managed to return to his native Slovakia. Other attempts were made though only a handful of fugitives survived.

The fate of Jews in Lublin was ultimately sealed on 3 November 1943, when the killing squads murdered approximately 18,000 prisoners of Majdanek and other camps around the city during action "Erntefest." Many of its victims had been deported from the ghettos in Warsaw and Białystok. That operation not only illustrates the overall tragic fate of Jews who were en masse sentenced to annihilation. It also displays the dominance of a racist and anti-Semitic ideology over humanity. Very few Jews remained at Majdanek after the "Bloody Wednesday" of November 3.

At least 76,000 of Jewish women and men went through the gates of KL Lublin. Approximately 63,000 of them (1/3 of them being women and children) were murdered in the camp. The remaining deportees were later transferred to KL Auschwitz and to other camps, which for some proved to be a chance for survival. In the overall memory of survivors, however, Majdanek was remembered as the worst concentration camp of all.

EVERY VICTIM HAS A NAME – THE ACTIVITIES OF THE MUSEUM AND MEMORIAL IN BEŁŻEC

EWA
KOPER

During the interwar period, the Bełżec settlement was a part of the Rawa Ruska county (Lwów voivodship), while under the German occupation it became a part of the Kreishauptmannschaft Zamosc. The shortest route between Warsaw and Lviv was running through the village while a nearby railway junction allowed a direct connection with Cracow. Those logistical aspects were among the key reasons for selecting this location as a site for the mass extermination of Jews within the framework of "Einsatz Reinhardt."

In mid-1940, the SS established an infamous labour camp in that area. The facility was operational for several months during which some Jews, Roma, and Sinti were imprisoned there. In early November 1941, a construction of a new camp was initiated, one that had the objective of holding the mass extermination in the gas chambers. Its first victims were the Jews from the nearby Lubycza Królewska, who were working there as forced labourers. The first railway transports with the Jewish deportees sent from Lublin and Lviv arrived on 17 March 1942. Directly after reaching the train station in Bełżec, the cars filled with victims were rolled into the camp area. The newcomers had

ABA ABBE ABE ABEL ABNER ABRAHA
SZER AUGUSTA AUGUSTYNA AWIGAIL
BERTHOLD BERTOLD BERYL BERYSZ BE
CERLA CESIA CHAIM CHAJA CHAJE CH
DEBORA DEWORA DINA DOBA DOBRA
WA ELJA ELJASZ ELJUKIM ELKA ELKAN
FEIWEL FELA FELIA FELICJA FELIKS FE
GELA GELLA GENA GENANCIA GENENI
HANINA HANKA HANNA HANNI HAN
IA HIRSCH HIRSEL HIRSZ HONORATA H
JANKIEL JASZA JEANETTE JECHIEL JEC
JOSIL JOSIO JOSSEL JOSZKO JOSZUA JO
KUNA KUNIA KURT LAJB LAJBEL LAJBI
AR LOTI LOTTE LOUISE LOWI LUBA LU
M MARIETTA MARJA MARJEM MARKUS M
MINCHA MINDEL MINDLA MINIA MINIC
UMA NELLA NELLY NESIA NETKA NICH
PESACH PESCHA PESEL PESIA PESLA PESS
N RIWKA ROBERT ROCHMA RODA ROJZA
A SCHAJE SCHEINDEL SCHEINDLA SCHEI
EL SUSIA SUSIO SUSLA SÜSLA SUSSEL SÜS
ON TABCIA TADEUSZ TAMARA TANCHEN
OR WIKTORIA WILHELM WILHELMINA V



Victims' names engraved within the commemoration at the Museum and Memorial in Bełżec.



Olga Lowenthal (b. 1906)
from Przemyśl, she was murdered
in Bełżec in August 1942.

all of their belongings taken away, and then they were herded further – women and men separately – to a building with some hermetically sealed rooms. Exhaust fumes from a tank engine were pumped inside and all of the deportees were dead within the next quarter or so. The bodies were taken outside and laid layer by layer in mass graves. According to the reports compiled by the “Einsatz Reinhardt” staff, over 435,000 of Jewish women, children, and men were deported to Belżec and murdered in this way by the end of 1942. The victims primarily included the Polish Jews from the Galicia, Lublin, and Cracow districts of the General Government, as well as some Jewish deportees from Germany, Austria, Slovakia, and Czechia. By the summer of 1943, the extermination apparatus was dismantled and nearly all crime evidence was destroyed.

The German garrison of SS-Sonderkommando Belzec comprised over a dozen SS-men (37 were stationed throughout the camp’s functioning in total) under the command of Christian Wirth – the creator of the camp and the gas chambers – who was later replaced by Gottlieb Hering. They were aided by a company of watchmen employed as sentry guards – the former Soviet POWs who collaborated with the Germans.

Several hundred prisoners were simultaneously kept in the camp. They were selected from among the deportees brought in the consecutive transports, and then used as forced labourers in various work teams (Kommandos), including the one employed in the extermination zone, who were emptying the gas chambers and burying the corpses. The number of Jews who made escape attempts remains unknown. Only two male prisoners survived the war – Rudolf Reder, an entrepreneur from Lviv, and Chaim Hirszman from Janów Lubelski. Their testimonies constitute an important source of knowledge about the functioning of the camp, and the fates of the victims, though they include very few surnames. Hirszman mentioned his wife Sara, and their 1.5-year old son Sewek, both of whom were murdered in the gas chambers on the day of their arrival at Belżec. Reder mentioned several other inmates: a physician from Przemyśl named Jakubowicz, Zuker from Rzeszów, a merchant from Cra-

cow named Schlüssel, Ellbogen from Czechia, and a cook named Goldschmidt from the area of Karlsbad.

The majority of the victims remain anonymous. No name lists were compiled either prior to their deportation or after their arrival at the extermination camp. The personal documents, photographs, journals or notes of the people herded to the gas chambers were destroyed. The objective of the Nazis was also to erase any traces of both the individual persons and the entire Jewish communities.

The need to restore the identities to the victims became a root for the special project – *Every Victim Has a Name* – that was launched together with the new Museum and Memorial in Betžec in 2004. It was not possible to introduce such a programme earlier, because prior to the new memorial construction the former camp grounds included merely a small commemorative monument built in 1963. The project is based on special forms wherein personal data of deportees can be entered. The relatives of the victims fill in those forms during their visit at the memorial or send them later upon returning home. Sometimes they also send additional materials like photographs, letters, or documents. Every year more and more relatives visit the site where their kin were murdered during World War II. Through their contributions, the register of the camp's victims is systematically expanded and currently includes over 3,000 entries. Thanks to the cooperation with the victims' families, the Museum released an album in 2014. It bears the same title as the project – *Every Victim Has a Name*. While preparing that special book, a collection of 114 family stories were analysed and written down, supplemented with 260 photographs. In this way over 750 victims were commemorated both on the album's pages and online.

The project allowed us to discover the history of Sima Finkelman, a physician, born in Czortków in 1899. Together with her mother, she was deported from the local ghetto to Betžec in October 1942. The form regarding her fate was filled in by Sima's nephew. Similarly, we learned about the tragic deaths of Berta and Abraham Leserkiewicz, and their daughter Greta,

who were deported from the Cracow ghetto. Their history was told by their sons who had managed to survive by jumping off the train cars. Testimonies given by the deportations' direct witnesses are among the most valuable sources of information about the victims. The second generation accounts are also very important.

Such family stories are the anchor for the Museum's educational activities and projects aiming at popularising the knowledge about SS-Sonderkommando Belzec. For several decades there was no possibility to hold any substantial programmes within the former camp grounds, which perpetuated the belief that Belzec is one of the most forgotten sites related to the Holocaust history. The creation of the new Museum and Memorial in 2004, and then a modern educational and research facility in the former camp commandant headquarters building in 2021 offers new opportunities to raise awareness about the history of SS-Sonderkommando Belzec. While over 600,000 visitors from all over the world have already confronted themselves with the actual crime scene in Belzec, the place and primarily its around 450,000 victims deserve more attention with the broader scope of the Holocaust history.



Commemoration at the
Museum and Memorial
in Betžec.



SS-SONDERKOMMANDO SOBIBOR – HISTORY HIDDEN IN ARTEFACTS

TOMASZ
OLEKSY-ZBOROWSKI

SS-Sonderkommando Sobibor was the second German Nazi extermination camp established during operation "Reinhardt." Approximately 180,000 Jews were murdered there within the span of eighteen months. At least half of the victims were the Polish Jews, around 34,000 were from the Netherlands, and over 24,000 from Slovakia. Other nationalities among the murdered included those deported in the groups of several thousand – Austrian, Czech, French, German, Belarusian, and Russian Jews.

One of the first preserved documents describing the crimes committed in Sobibór is the 19 August 1944 report compiled by an NKVD officer who was inspecting the former camp area. The supplemented materials included a few photographs showing some ruined buildings, fragments of the barbed wire fences, and a large clearing in the middle of the forest – a glade planted with pines. These were all the remnants of the camp, which together with its structures and extermination facilities covered approximately sixty hectares.

The camp was constructed near a small Sobibór railway station in the early spring of 1942. The facility was divided into four zones: camp foreground (Vorlager) with the unloading railway ramp and the garrison members' quarters, Lager I with work-



shops and barracks for the prisoners, Lager II with the transport reception square and the warehouses for the belongings confiscated from the victims, and Lager III. That final part was entirely isolated from other sections as it contained the building with the gas chambers and the mass graves. The camp was directly managed by the commandant, who had the garrison of 20–30 German and Austrian SS-men, as well as the sentry unit of 120 watchmen trained in Trawniki (former Soviet POWs) at his disposal.



Camp foreground
(Vorlager)
with the SS quarters
in Sobibór, 1943.

Around 600–700 prisoners, both women and men, were selected from among the incoming transports and exploited in the camp for labour, e.g. as servants to the SS-men and the sentry guards, in the plundered property sorting facility, or in the burial of the victims.

In May 1942, the Nazis commenced the systematic extermination of Jews in the gas chambers of Sobibór. Carbon monoxide generated by an engine was used to murder the victims. The bodies were initially buried in mass graves, though from late

autumn of 1942 they were burnt on special grills made from rail tracks.

The horrifying reality of the camp inspired the spirit of revolt among the prisoners. A resistance group under the leadership of Leon Felhendler was formed in the summer of 1943. They were later joined by Soviet POWs of Jewish origin, who were led by Alexander Pechersky. The escape plan was set in motion on 14 October 1943. After secretly killing nine SS-men and two sentry guards, a group of around 300 prisoners broke out of the camp. Around 60 of them managed to survive until the end of the German occupation. All the prisoners that had remained in the camp were murdered. Shortly after the uprising, the SS-men began the compound's liquidation, using the prisoners transferred from the extermination camp in Treblinka. They were all shot once that task was accomplished.

Following the end of World War II, the former camp grounds were left without proper protection and supervision for over twenty years. The first commemorative initiative took place in the early 1960s, when a monument depicting a mother cuddling her child was erected near a column referring to the gas chamber building. A symbolic mound was also built in the graves area, where the bodies of the victims had been buried and burnt.

The knowledge about the history of the Sobibór camp was significantly expanded through the archaeological research conducted by an international team from 2000. The items recovered from the ground allow us to restore the memory of their original owners – women, children, and men that were murdered in such a swift and merciless way.

In the woods, at the spot where a barracks for the prisoners that would empty the gas chambers building used to stand, a metal plate was discovered. A plaster label has been preserved at its back with a writing: S. MOCK-HAKKER/DEN HAAG HOLLAND/18-9-1883. It used to belong to a sixty-year-old Sara who was deported to Sobibór from the Westerbork camp on 5 March 1943. It is one of the few items that allow us to precisely identify some of the victims by their surnames and names. Some of the unearthed artefacts document the tragic history of

the entire families. Such is the case of a small identification tag of the six-year-old Lea Judith de la Penha, who was murdered with her parents in the gas chambers of Sobibór on 9 July 1943. Tags of other children were discovered: one used to be worn by an eight-year-old David (Deddie) Zak, another by a twelve-year-old Annie Kapper from Amsterdam. A pendant that used to belong to a fourteen-year-old Karoline Cohn from Frankfurt am Main was also found on the former camp grounds. Most of the unearthed items, however, remain anonymous and offer no information about their owners.

Over 700 from among the thousands of objects that were unearthed during the archaeological excavations are now displayed at the permanent exhibition of the Museum and Memorial in Sobibór that was opened in October 2020. They are supplemented with a collection of over one hundred documents and archival photographs. Those items are a medium for micro-stories and play a vital role in the educational projects conducted at the memorial within the framework of the pedagogy of remembrance. This concept is based upon the active learning of history, personal interpretation of the available sources through experiencing the actual site, as well as reflecting on the current condition of humanity. Over 80,000 visitors from all over the world came to the Sobibór memorial since its opening to learn about the history of the camp and its victims.



Identification tag of Lea Judith de la Penha.

...
on May 11, 1937, ...
...ndup, she was se...
...vid, to the transit ...
...ily was sent to So...
...s was 6 years old...
...they died in the ga...



Permanent exhibition at the Museum and Memorial in Sobibór.





Lublin region.

INFORMATION FOR VISITORS



State Museum at Majdanek
Droga Męczenników Majdanka 67
20-325 Lublin
(+48) 81 710 28 21
www.majdanek.eu

**Branches of the State
Museum at Majdanek:**



Museum and Memorial in Sobibór
Żłobek 101
22-200 Włodawa
(+48) 82 572 60 31
www.sobibor-memorial.eu



Museum and Memorial in Bełżec
Ofiar Obozu Zagłady 4
22-670 Bełżec
(+48) 84 665 25 10
www.belzec.eu



80. **ROCZNICA**
AKCJI „REINHARDT”
1942–1943

 **Państwowe Muzeum
na Majdanku**



Ministerstwo Kultury
i Dziedzictwa Narodowego