

8 Female Concentration Camp Guards

When the atrocities committed in the concentration camps became known, many people asked themselves how on earth someone could bring himself to do such things. But already the first concentration camp trial which took place under British auspices, the Belsen trial, proved that women, too, were capable of committing hair-raising cruelties.

Ten women were executed in the British zone of occupation at Hameln prison. One committed suicide having learnt that her death sentence had been confirmed and one was sentenced to death but reprieved. Below is the background to these cases, followed by a more detailed article on each individual.

Ravensbrück concentration camp.

Ravensbrück concentration camp near Fürstenberg/Havel in Germany, about 57 miles almost due north of Berlin, was the largest concentration camp exclusively for women and also served as the training camp for female guards. Some 3,500 women underwent training there. They then continued to work at Ravensbrück or were sent to other camps that had separated female compounds. Male SS members were forbidden to enter the female compounds, so it was necessary to train female guards to run them.

Initially women volunteered, but were later conscripted to work at Ravensbrück. The status of these women was "SS Gefolge" i.e. Reich employees, not members of the SS, but under their command. Accommodation, food and uniform was provided, plus a relatively generous salary. There were also Kapos, who were themselves prisoners at the camp, but who were used by the SS in various roles.

Ravensbrück was established in November 1938 and liberated on 30 April, 1945 by the Russian Army.

Sixteen members of staff fled into the British Zone as the Russians approached, where they were arrested and tried at the 1st Ravensbrück trial held between 5 December, 1946 and 3 February, 1947 at the Curiohaus in Hamburg on charges of murder and brutality. All were found guilty, except one, who died during the trial. Eleven were sentenced to death, including five women, head nurse Elisabeth Marschall, Aufseherin Greta Bösel, Oberaufseherin Dorothea Binz and Kapos Carmen Mory and Vera Salvequart. Mory committed suicide during the night of 9 April, after her death sentence had been confirmed. She is included because she would otherwise have been hanged. Marschall, Bösel and Binz were executed on 2 May, 1947 and Salvequart on 26 June, 1947.

The third Ravensbrück trial, the so called "Uckermark trial", was held between 14 April and 26 April, 1948 to hear the cases of five women officials from the Uckermark concentration camp and extermination complex. Two of the women were acquitted, two received prison terms but Ruth Closius was condemned to death. She was hanged on 29 July, 1948.

The fourth Ravensbrück trial, sometimes called the "Doctors and Nurses" trial, was held from 5 May to 8 June, 1948. The five accused were all members of the medical staff of the camp. They were convicted of carrying out experiments on prisoners and of murdering them by giving lethal injections.

Doctors Benno Orendi and Walter Sonntag together with Kapo nurse, 40 year old Gerda Ganzer, were sentenced to death. Two other female nurses were given prison sentences.

The two doctors were hanged on 17 September, 1948. Gerda Ganzer was reprieved on July 3, 1948 and her sentence reduced to life in prison. This was reduced to 21 years in 1950 and then to 12 years in 1954. She was finally released on June 6, 1961.

The 7th Ravensbrück trial took place between 2 July and 21 July, 1948 to hear the cases of six women accused of maltreatment of prisoners and making selections for the gas chambers. Two of the six were acquitted, two given prison terms and two sentenced to death. They were Emma Zimmer, and Ida Bertha Schreiter who were hanged on 20 September, 1948. No other woman was executed as result of the other Ravensbrück trials.

Belsen Concentration Camp staff

Bergen-Belsen had originally been a prisoner of war camp in Lower Saxony near the city of Celle, but was converted to a concentration camp, opening in April 1943 as a transit centre under commandant, SS-Hauptsturmführer (CPT) Josef Kramer. It was used to house prisoners of both sexes who had become too weak to work as forced labour in German factories. Belsen was liberated by the British army on 15 April, 1945. The British soldiers found 10,000 unburied corpses and 40,000 sick and dying prisoners of whom a staggering 28,000 subsequently died after liberation.

As a result of these atrocities, 45 former members of staff from Bergen-Belsen, including some inmates who had taken part in acts of brutality against other prisoners, were charged with being responsible for the murder or the suffering of Allied nationals in (first count) Bergen-Belsen in Germany or (second count) Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland (see below for details of this camp). Some defendants were charged with both counts.

The accused comprised 16 men and 16 women, including Josef Kramer, Belsen's commandant, plus 12 former prisoners (seven men and five women).

The Belsen Trial as it was known was conducted by the British Military Tribunal at No. 30 Lindenstraße, Lüneburg, in Germany from 17 September to 17 November, 1945 under court President Major-General H.M.P. Berney-Ficklin, sitting with five other officers. The prosecution was in the hands of a team of four military lawyers and each prisoner was represented by counsel. All the prisoners were tried together and sat in the large dock, each wearing a number on their chest.

On the afternoon of 16 November, 1945 the verdicts were delivered. Thirty one prisoners were convicted on one or both counts and 14 acquitted of all charges. Irma Grese and Elisabeth Volkenrath were found guilty on both counts, Johanna Bormann guilty only on the second charge. The following day the sentences were pronounced as follows by Major-General Berney-Ficklin: "No. 6) Bormann, 7) Volkenrath, 9) Grese. The sentence of this court is that you suffer death by being hanged." The sentence was translated for them into German as "Tod durch den Strang," literally death by the rope. All the prisoners were returned to Lüneburg prison. Of the three condemned women, only Irma Grese appealed to the convening officer, Field-Marshal Montgomery, who rejected it on Friday 7 December 1945 and signed the death warrants. The condemned were then transferred to Hameln jail the following day to await execution on Thursday, 13 December 1945.

Irma Grese

Irma Grese's childhood was unremarkable, she was born on 7th of October 1923 at Wrechen (Neubrandenburg county) in Germany, to Alfred Anton Albert Grese and Bertha Wilhelmine Auguste Grese née Winkler. It appears that they were a normal, hardworking, agricultural family. She left school in 1938 at the age of 15 and worked on a farm for six months, then in a shop, and later for two years in a hospital. She wanted to become a nurse but the Labour Exchange sent her to work at Ravensbrück Concentration Camp instead.

Like many other young people, she was swayed by Hitler's oratory and shocked by what she perceived as the corruption of the Weimar Republic government. She joined a Nazi youth group and wholeheartedly embraced their ideas. She was a volunteer concentration camp guard and had not been forced to work there.

At age 19, she found herself a supervisor at Ravensbrück, just at the time the Nazi anti-Jewish programmes were at their height in July 1942. In March 1943 she was transferred to Auschwitz. She later did a further spell at Ravensbrück and then went to Bergen-Belsen in March 1945. Irma rose to the rank of Oberaufseherin (Senior SS-Supervisor) in the autumn of 1943, in day to day control of around 30,000 women prisoners, mainly Polish and Hungarian Jews. She was the second most senior female guard there.

At trial Irma pleaded not guilty to the specific charges brought against her and was defended by Major L.S.W. Cranfield.



Belsen defendants in the dock. Grese is wearing no. 9

Many of the survivors of Belsen testified against Irma. They spoke of the beatings and the arbitrary shooting of prisoners, the savaging of prisoners by her trained and half starved dogs, of her selecting prisoners for the gas chambers and of her sexual pleasure at these acts of cruelty. She habitually wore heavy boots and carried a whip and a pistol.

She was alleged to have used both physical and emotional methods to torture the camp's inmates and seemed to enjoy shooting prisoners in cold blood. It was claimed that she beat some of the women to death and whipped others mercilessly using a plaited cellophane whip. Survivors reported that she seemed to derive great sexual pleasure from these acts of sadism.

It has been claimed that in her hut was found the skins of three inmates that she had had made into lamp shades, although this is now disputed.

She said in her defense that "Himmler is responsible for all that has happened but I suppose I have as much guilt as the others above me."

On the 54th day of the trial she was, not surprisingly, found guilty on both counts of the indictment and sentenced to death.

Irma Grese wrote the following letter to her siblings on 11 December, 1945. It is clear that she maintained her faith in Nazism to the end.

If I may entrust to you my last request – it is to remain proud Germans same as before, to never show your heart fickle or despairing, but to show defiance and unrelenting love towards our beloved fatherland. These have always been my fundamentals, and I take them to my death. I know, not every human is the same. But you are my beloved siblings, therefore, in this holy belief, I want to suffer my too hard fate in the same

proud and defiant manner.

Albert Pierrepoint was flown over specially to carry out the executions and their hangings were planned for Thursday, December the 13th, 1945. The women were to be hanged individually and the men in pairs to speed up the process.

In Pierrepoint's biography, he describes the events leading up to Irma's execution and the hanging itself as follows:

At last we finished noting the details of the men, and RSM O'Neil ordered "bring out Irma Grese". She walked out of her cell and came towards us laughing. She seemed as bonny a girl as one could ever wish to meet. She answered O'Neil's questions, but when he asked her age she paused and smiled. I found that we were both smiling with her, as if we realised the conventional embarrassment of a woman revealing her age. Eventually she said "twenty-one", which we knew to be correct. O'Neil asked her to step on to the scales. "Schnell!" she said - the German for quick.

In Britain prison warders and medical staff would have been responsible for weighing and measuring the condemned prior to execution but on this occasion Albert Pierrepoint and RSM O'Neill had to do it. Irma was 5 feet 5 ¼ inches tall and weighed 150 lbs. She was given a drop of 7 feet 4 inches.

According to Pierrepoint's biography it was decided that as Irma was the youngest of the three women, she would be the first to die. However in the press release from Field-Marshal Montgomery's office after the executions it was stated that she was the second to be hanged, after Elisabeth Volkenrath. This is born out by the entries on the return part of her death warrant. Her execution took place at 10.04 a.m. Brigadier Paton Walsh was the British officer in charge of the executions and with him was the deputy governor of Strangeways prison, Miss Wilson, to oversee the hanging of the three women.

Pierrepoint recorded the following: The next morning we climbed the stairs to the cells where the condemned were waiting. A German officer at the door leading to the corridor flung open the door and we filed past the row of faces and into the execution chamber. The officers stood at attention. Brigadier Paton-Walsh stood with his wristwatch raised. He gave me the signal, and a sigh of released breath was audible in the chamber, I walked into the corridor. "Irma Grese", I called.

The German guards quickly closed all grills on twelve of the inspection holes and opened one door. Irma Grese stepped out. The cell was far too small for me to go inside, and I had to pinion her in the corridor. "Follow me," I said in English, and O'Neil repeated the order in German. At 9.34 a.m. she walked into the execution chamber, gazed for a moment at the officials standing round it, then walked on to the centre of the trap, where I had made a chalk mark. She stood on this mark very firmly, and as I placed the white cap over her head she said in her languid voice "Schnell". The drop crashed down, and the doctor followed me into the pit and pronounced her dead. After twenty minutes the body was taken down and placed in a coffin ready for burial.

It has recently been revealed that some of the prisoners were given pericardial injections of chloroform to stop their hearts beating and obviate the need to leave them suspended for an hour which was normal practice in England. It is not known whether this was done to the women although Irma's body was able to be removed from the rope after 20 minutes.

After the execution Irma's personal belongings were handed over to her sisters Helene and Lieschen. Among these there was 439.65 Reichsmarks in cash plus a bankbook showing a balance of 4,391.57 Reichsmarks. As a concentration camp guard, single and without children, she would have been paid 186.65 Reichsmarks per month plus 35 Reichsmarks overtime premium. To put this into perspective: an unskilled female working in the textile industry would receive just 76 Reichsmarks per month.

Elisabeth Volkenrath, née Mühlau, was born on 5 September, 1919, at Schönau in Silesia.

Before the war she worked as a hairdresser and was called up for National Service in 1939, to work in a munitions factory. In 1941 she was conscripted into the SS and sent to Ravensbrück, to be trained as an Aufseherin under Johanna Langefeld. Here she supervised outside Kommandos (prisoner work parties).

In March, 1942, she was sent to Auschwitz No. 1 where she worked in a tailoring shop supervising the mending of uniforms for the prisoners. Here she met SS-Rottenführer (Cpl) Heinz Volkenrath, who had worked there since 1941 as an SS-Blockführer. They married in 1943. In August 1942, the women's compound was transferred to Birkenau. She continued to work there until September 1944 running the parcel store, supervising some 25 prisoners. She was then transferred to Auschwitz No. 1 and promoted to Oberaufseherin (Senior Supervisor) for female prisoners there.

It is claimed that she oversaw the hangings of three prisoners here. When Auschwitz-Birkenau closed she was transferred to Bergen-Belsen and worked there from 5 February, 1945 until the camp was liberated on 16 April, 1945 and she was arrested by the British Army the following day.



Elisabeth Volkenrath

At the Belsen Trial, Elisabeth Volkenrath wore the number 7 on her chest. She was charged with having taken part in acts of brutality against other prisoners, and with either being responsible for the murder of Allied nationals or the suffering of those in Bergen-Belsen in Germany (first count) or Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland (second count). She was defended by Major Cranfield.

During pre-trial interviews and subsequent testimony, she admitted that she had held supervisory positions in these camps but denied selecting prisoners for the gas chambers or beating women prisoners. She did admit to slapping the faces of women to maintain discipline. The survivors of the camps described her as the most hated woman in the camp and a number gave evidence of the many atrocities she committed against inmates. Elisabeth denied all of their statements, basically saying that they were a pack of lies.

Elisabeth Volkenrath was found guilty on both counts. She was sentenced to "suffer death by being hanged". She chose not to appeal and on Friday 7 December her death warrant was signed by Field Marshal Montgomery in accordance with Army Order No. 81 of 1945. She was transferred with the other condemned prisoners to Hameln prison the following day to await execution.

Elisabeth Volkenrath was the first of the three women to die, being hanged at 9.34 a.m. on the morning of Thursday 13 December, 1945. Albert Pierrepoint set a drop of 7' 5" for her 151 lbs. body weight.

Johanna Bormann (or Juanna Bormann, the spelling shown on her death warrant) was born at Birkenfelde in East Prussia on 10 September, 1893. She was apparently deeply religious and had given up missionary work to join the SS. She went to work at Lichtenburg, the first women's concentration camp, as a civilian employee on 1 March, 1938 and initially worked in the kitchens. She and the rest of the staff and inmates were transferred to Ravensbrück concentration camp when it opened in May 1939. Here she was as an Aufseherin (overseer). In March 1942 she moved on to Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland and then in October of that year was transferred to Auschwitz-Birkenau. In 1944, she went to the satellite camp at Hindenburg, before returning to Ravensbrück in January 1945. In March of that year she was sent to Bergen-Belsen, where she served under its commandant Josef Kramer. Like most of the defendants who would later stand trial for war crimes at Belsen she was arrested at the camp on the day it was liberated. The staff were remanded to the prison at Celle to await trial.

At the Belsen Trial, Johanna wore the number 6 card. Like all the defendants she had the benefit of

counsel, in her case, Major A. S. Munro and pleaded not guilty to the charge of committing a war crime. She was to hear allegations from former inmates that she beat prisoners, set her dogs on them and selected them for the gas chambers.



Johanna Bormann

Jewish born Anni Jonas, from Breslau, accused Johanna of pointing out prisoners to Dr. Mengele who looked too weak for work. They were then sent to the gas chamber. Another Jewish woman, Dora Szafran, had been an inmate at Auschwitz since June 1943 and had witnessed Johanna at selections for gassing with Dr. Klein. She also related to the court how she had seen Johanna set her dog, which she thought was a German Shepherd, on a woman in a work detail who had a swollen leg and could not keep up on the march back from Auschwitz. The woman was badly savaged and was taken away on a stretcher. It is not known whether she survived. Dora stated to the court that Johanna seemed proud of what she had done.

Polish born Hanka Rozencwajg (the trial documents spell her name, very probably erroneously, Rozenwayg) who had been in Belsen for some 18 months before liberation also told the court that Johanna had set her dog on prisoners and recounted an occasion when Johanna had beaten her and several other women for lighting a fire in her hut without permission. She told

the court that all the women inmates were afraid of Johanna.

Another Pole, Peter Makar, related how he recognized Johanna as the woman who had been in charge of the pigsties at Belsen and how he had twice witnessed her beating women in March 1945 whom she had caught stealing vegetables.

Dora Silberberg accused Johanna of beating her and a friend when she tried to stop her friend who was ill being forced to go to work. Johanna had allegedly punched her in the face hard enough to knock out two of Dora's teeth. Johanna then set the dog on Dora's friend and it knocked her down and dragged her round by the leg. Dora's friend died later from her injuries.

Alexandra Siwidowa accused Johanna of beating prisoners for wearing their better clothes and also stripping them and making them perform strenuous physical exercises. When they began to flag, he told the court that she beat them all over the body with a rubber or wooden stick. Johanna denied this outright.

Major Munro called Johanna to give evidence in her defence. She told the court that she was a single woman and related her history of work in the concentration camps. Major Munro specifically asked her about her involvement in the selection process for gassing to which she replied "No, I never have been present at these selections, I had to be present at morning roll-call and night roll-call, but at nothing else".

She admitted that she did have a dog at Belsen, which she claimed were her own pet rather than a camp guard dog, but denied that she had ever set it on prisoners, telling the court that this would have been against the camp rules and would have led to severe punishment for her. She also mentioned that another Aufseherin named Kuck, of whom there is no surviving record, resembled her and also had a dog. Johanna dismissed the statements of two witnesses regarding her use of a wolfhound dog, telling the court that she had never owned a wolfhound.

She dismissed the statements of some witnesses as untrue on the basis that she was not in the place they stated at the time of the alleged offence. One, Helena Kopper, had told the court that Johanna was the most hated guard in the camp and that she was in charge of the clothing store. She alleged that Johanna had again set her dog on a young woman at the store who died later. Johanna denied ever having been in charge of the clothing store or being at Birkenau at the time.

She denied that she went out outside the camps on work Kommandos but agreed that she oversaw prisoners working at the piggery in Belsen.

She accepted that she slapped prisoners who were cheeky or disobedient but denied beating them with sticks etc. She mentioned that the first time she had ever seen a rubber truncheon it was in the hands of a British military policemen guarding her in the prison at Celle.

She could offer no explanation to Major Munro for the witness allegations against her. He also asked her if she had tried to leave the SS. Johanna told him that she had applied in writing to her Oberaufseherin in 1943 but that her application had been turned down.

She was cross-examined by Colonel Backhouse who asked her if she was very much worse than all the other Aufseherinnen in her treatment of the internees? She replied that she did not know and only wanted to keep order. He questioned her further on her attendance at selections and she told him that "I did not have time to attend them, and I did not like the idea of attending them". She denied having even seen a selection or ever having seen the crematorium. Colonel Backhouse also pressed Johanna further on the dog issue. She insisted that the dog was a pet and her own property and that it had never been trained to attack prisoners. He pointed out to her the testimony of another of the accused, Herta Ehlert, who said in her statement: "From my own knowledge of Johanna Bormann and from working with her I believe that the stories about her brutality to prisoners are true, although I have not myself witnessed it. I have often seen the dog which she had and heard she used to let it loose on prisoners. Although I have not seen it I can well believe it to be true." Johanna insisted that this was a lie. Colonel Backhouse asked her about the pigs at Belsen, which she was in charge of when the camp was liberated. She told him that there were 52 pigs at the time and that were fed on a swill of potatoes and turnips. He pointed out to her that whilst the pigs were being fed reasonably well the prisoners were starving. She replied that she fed the pigs the food she was given for them.

The Judge Advocate questioned Johanna about Aufseherin Kuck, (who was also alleged to have a dog) and one gets the impression that he did not really believe that this woman existed.

Johanna was found not guilty on count one (crimes committed at Belsen) but guilty of count two of the indictment against her.

This was that the accused, At Auschwitz, Poland, between 1 October, 1942 and 30 April, 1945, when members of the staff at Auschwitz Concentration Camp responsible for the well-being of the persons interned there, in violation of the law and usages of war, were together concerned as parties to the ill-treatment of certain of such persons, causing the deaths of Rachella Silberstein (a Polish national), Allied nationals, and other Allied nationals whose names are unknown, and physical suffering to other persons interned there, Allied nationals, and particularly to Eva Gryka and Hanka Rosenwayg (both Polish nationals) and other Allied nationals whose names are unknown.

Prior to her sentencing a mitigation speech was made on her behalf by Major Munro. He painted a picture of a sad and lonely middle aged woman and invited the court "to take into account what the conditions in concentration camps could do to weak human nature".

This mitigation speech was not successful and when on the afternoon of 16 November, 1945 the verdicts were delivered, the President of the court passed the death sentence on Johanna. She reportedly left the court as if in a dream but later chose not to appeal her sentence. She was returned to Lüneburg prison and when the cases and sentences had been reviewed she was transferred to Hameln jail on Sunday 9 December to await execution with the other condemned. The hangings were set for Thursday, 13 December, 1945 and were to be carried out at half hour intervals starting at 9.34 a.m. with Elisabeth Volkenrath, followed by Irma Grese at 10.03 a.m. and Johanna at 10.38 a.m.

Albert Pierrepoint described Johanna during her last hours when he saw her on the afternoon prior to her execution. Each prisoner had to be weighed to allow him to calculate the correct drop. He wrote in his autobiography how she limped down the corridor looking old and haggard. He said she was forty two years old (actually fifty three), only a little over five feet high and 101 lbs. in weight. She was trembling as she was put on the scales. In German she said "I have my feelings". The drop was calculated at 8 feet 8 inches.

Dorothea Binz was born March 16, 1920 at the forester's lodge at "Düsterlake" near Templin in Germany (her father was an assistant forest official). At the age of 10, she joined the League of German Girls, the female wing of the Hitler Youth. At school, she was educated under the Nazis' anti-Semitic curriculum. In her teens she contracted tuberculosis and spent months in a clinic, thus missing out on some senior school. She left school at age 15 with minimal qualifications and worked as a kitchen maid, which was not a job she enjoyed.

At 19, despite her family's objections, she applied for a job at the local SS office on August 26, 1939 and was sent to Ravensbrück concentration camp for women on September 1, 1939. On completion of her training, she became an Aufseherin under Oberaufseherin Johanna Langefeld. Here she worked in the kitchen and laundry and it is claimed that she later worked in the bunker where inmates were tortured and murdered. In August 1943, she was promoted to acting Oberaufseherin (Deputy Chief Wardress). In this role she was in charge of some 100 female staff at any one time and was responsible for training and assigning duties to these women. One of her trainees is thought to have been Ruth Closius. Ravensbrück served as the training centre for Aufseherinnen who upon completion of their training would be assigned to other concentration camps in Germany, Poland, Austria and France.



Dorothea Binz

As Oberaufseherin she was responsible for some 50,000 women and child inmates. In 1944 there was an influx of women and children from concentration camps in Poland and it is alleged that Binz was responsible for large scale shootings and gassings of these prisoners. She also starved and abused prisoners and left them to die. She was accused of having beaten, slapped, kicked, shot, whipped, stomped and abused inmates on a frequent basis. French prisoners nicknamed her La Binz (The Binz).

Binz was in a relationship with SS-Obersturmführer (1LT) Edmund Bräuning, with whom she lived in a house outside the camp. They apparently both enjoyed watching women being flogged. Bräuning was transferred to Buchenwald in late 1944.

Binz fled Ravensbrück just before it was liberated at the end of April 1945, but was captured by the British on May 3, 1945 in Hamburg. She was remanded to the Recklinghausen camp, which had been a sub-camp of Buchenwald.

The first Ravensbrück trial was held from December 5, 1946 until February 3, 1947 at the Curiohaus in Hamburg. Binz wore the number 5 and was one of seven women on trial, five of whom would be condemned to death. She did admit to beating prisoners. Her defense counsel argued that she should not get the death sentence on the grounds that nobody died because of her mistreatments, she was basically only a young girl, and that she was honest enough to admit her guilt. The German news magazine "Der Spiegel" reported on 19 April 1947 that she had attempted suicide by cutting her wrists when she learned that the death sentence had been confirmed. She is also alleged to have said to an officer, immediately before her execution, "I hope you won't think that we were all evil people."

At 9.01 a.m. on Friday 2 May, 1947 she was hanged at Hameln prison by Albert Pierrepont, assisted by RSM Richard O'Neill.

Elisabeth Marschall was born in Meiningen (Thuringia), Germany, on 27 May, 1886 and trained as a nurse in her hometown in 1909, qualifying the following year. In 1914, she worked in Lausanne (Switzerland) where she became proficient in the French language. She joined the Nazi party on 1 January, 1931, believing that only Hitler could save Germany.

She was employed as the Head Nurse (Oberschwester) at the Hermann Göring Werke, an iron works in Braunschweig (Brunswick). At her trial, she said: "I was matron ... in the Hermann Goering works Hospital near Brunswick, and I had a couple of French P.O.W's who worked there, and to these P.O.W's I gave in the morning coffee and bread that was left from the sisters. I also used to use the French language when I

talked to them, and this got me the disliking of the people around me. One day the Gestapo asked me to appear before them.



Elisabeth Marschall

There I was told that what I had done was wrong and that I had kept food away from the German people. And there were proceedings in November 1942 which were stopped afterwards and I was transferred on punishment to Ravensbrück." Her nursing skills were quickly recognised and put to use there. She would rise to Oberschwester at Ravensbrück by April 1943.

Marschall came to trial at the 1st Ravensbrück trial at Hamburg in from December 1946 to February 1947, as defendant No. 11.

As head nurse at Ravensbrück, Marschall was in charge of the Kapo nurses and the ward orderlies. She is alleged, in conjunction with Dr. Percival Treite, to have taken part in experiments on prisoners and making selections of those to be sent to Auschwitz. Some 800 women were sent there and most, if not all, died in the gas chamber. She was also accused of having killed inmates by lethal injection, using a drug called Luminal, which is a trade name for the anti-seizure drug phenobarbital. In 1940, several German physicians had invented the so-called "Luminal scheme"

for inconspicuous killing: Slight overdoses of Luminal, given three times per day over several days, together with malnutrition, would develop pneumonia. This method had been first used elsewhere in Germany for the killing of around 5,000 mentally and physically handicapped children and youths up to age 16.

One prisoner-nurse testified that Marschall had 50 prisoners with newborn infants loaded into a cattle car without water, food, or milk, and that they all died.

Toward the end of March 1945, Marschall decided that all pregnant women and women with newborns still had to work. Every day she recorded the count of the number who went to work.

It would seem that Marschall had a "Jekyll and Hyde" character, caring for some inmates whilst at the same time mis-treating others. Odette Sansom, a British SOE operative who had been sent to Ravensbrück for execution, testified that she had become seriously ill and was given life saving treatment by Marschall.

In her defence, Marschall denied that she had ever given a lethal injection, nor had she selected anyone for extermination, and said that she tried to obtain extra food for the mothers and infants. When asked to respond to witnesses testimony of her as a cruel and indifferent nurse, she replied, "I was not always nice, but when you think of the people who came into the camp and who did not always behave properly, then it is very possible that I wasn't very nice. But I can say that I always listened to them and tried to be as fair as possible."

At 09.31 a.m. on Friday 2 May, 1947, 61-year-old Elisabeth Marschall was hanged at Hameln by Albert Pierrepoint and RSM O'Neill.

Greta Bösel was born on May 9th, 1908 in Wuppertal-Elberfeld, Germany as *Greta Müller*. She was a qualified nurse before the War and later married. Later she would get a job as an Aufseherin at Ravensbrück concentration camp.

By November 1944 she had risen to the post of "work input overseer" which meant that she was among those who decided which prisoners were too weak to work and should be immediately sent to the gas chamber and which "women who were sick, no longer efficient, or over 52 years old" could be sent to Uckermark concentration camp to die or be killed. She is supposed to have said: "Let them rot if they can't work." She was promoted to Report Overseer. In this capacity she had to organise daily roll calls



Greta Bösel

of all the prisoners and was responsible for general discipline.

As the Russian army closed in on Ravensbrück concentration camp, she and her husband, together with other senior staff, fled west towards the advancing British and US troops. She was arrested in April 1945 and tried at Hamburg by the British with the other members of staff from Ravensbrück between 5 December, 1946 and 3 February 1947. She wore the number 7. During her trial, she made contradictory statements about her role in selecting prisoners for the gas chamber. Various witnesses testified against her. She was found guilty of maltreatment of camp inmates, murder and taking part in the selections for gassing.

Greta Bösel was hanged by Albert Pierrepoint and RSM O'Neill at 9.55 a.m. on Friday, 2 May, 1947.



Vera Salvequart

28 year old **Vera Salvequart** had not been an SS guard, but rather a prisoner herself in Ravensbrück. She was born on the 26 November, 1919 in Wohontsch (today Ohnič), at that time part of Kremusch (today Křemýž in Czechia). At the time of Vera's birth, the region was Czechoslovakian but became part of the then German Reich when in 1938 Hitler annexed the Sudetenland. Vera was brought up by Czech and German parents and trained as a nurse.

According to her she served 10 months in Flossenbürg concentration camp for refusing to reveal to the Gestapo the identity of her Jewish boyfriend in 1941 and then two years commencing in 1942 for a similar offence, being released in April 1944. She was sent to Ravensbrück on December 6, 1944 after being arrested for helping five detained officers escape. Here she became a Kapo and worked as a nurse in the camp's hospital wing. In February 1945, she was said to have administered poison in the form of a sleeping powder to some 50 of the patients, of whom 12 died.

Salvequart was among 16 members of the staff who were arrested and were tried between 5 December, 1946 and 3 February, 1947 by a British military court at Hamburg. In the dock the accused wore identifying numbers, Vera Salvequart's being No. 10.

On Tuesday, 18 December 1946, the main prosecution witness against Vera Salvequart, Irene Ottelard, gave evidence. In court, she identified accused no. 10 as the ward nurse in camp Uckermark. Cross-examined by Major Stewart, Ottelard said that Salvequart had the sole responsibility for the camp because the SS-man in charge, Joseph Köhler, was rarely present. She never saw a physician in the ward. Salvequart gave injections and a "white powder" to sick women. Ottelard was present when her friend was given such a white powder by Salvequart, and saw her die subsequently. Salvequart used to tell the inmates on such occasions that they were to be sent on a transport, and that they needed to take this powder in order to gain strength. Should they refuse to take the powder, they would be given an injection by her. Irene Ottelard observed that the women who received the powder or an injection fell into a deep sleep. As soon as in the course of the next day they all stopped breathing and died. Salvequart did not look after them until they were dead. According to the witness Ottelard's evidence, Salvequart was never surprised to see that her patients had died. Ottelard observed this procedure more than once but could not remember how often. In every case several women were concerned, at least three to five, sometimes more.

Cross-examined by Salvequart's defence counsel, whether she did not have to admit that Salvequart, with her behaviour, had saved the lives of many inmates, Ottelard replied: "I have to say that the behaviour or the attitude of Vera Salvequart was very ambivalent. It is true that she saved the lives of some women, but it is also a fact that she murdered quite a number of them."

Salvequart's defence was further seriously compromised by the testimony of a Viennese witness, Lotti Sonntag, who told the court that Salvequart had provided some of the prisoners with shoes from people who had been poisoned. She also testified that Salvequart admitted to having given inmates a poisonous white powder under the guise of medication, because they would not take it from the SS staff. Vera

Salvequart was found guilty on Monday, 3 February, 1947. She was among five women who were sentenced to hang.

As related above, Elisabeth Marschall, Greta Bösel and Dorothea Binz were hanged at Hameln on 2 May, 1947. Vera Salvequart was scheduled to hang with them but she petitioned King George VI for a reprieve, claiming to have stolen plans for the V2 rocket and passed these to British Intelligence. She was granted a stay of execution while this was considered.

Lord Russell of Liverpool, the Deputy Judge Advocate General, wrote in his recommendation against her plea for a reprieve:

Vera Salvequart, until now, has made seven absurd and inconsistent statements; three during the trial, one in her own defence and in the two petitions made since the trial. It seems clear that one can rely neither on her written nor on her spoken word.

Thus the Royal prerogative of mercy was withheld and on Thursday 26 June, 1947 she followed the other three women to the gallows. She was the first of thirteen prisoners to be hanged that day by Albert Pierrepont, assisted by RSM O'Neill, her execution being carried out at 9.03 am. Her body was later buried in the Wehl cemetery in Hameln.

Ruth Closius was born *Ruth Hartmann* in Breslau in Germany on 5 July, 1920. Growing up it is probable that she was influenced by the propaganda of Hitler's National Socialist Party.

She married a man named Neudeck and in some accounts is called Ruth Closius-Neudeck. He later died and she told British authorities that she was a widow.

Prior to going to Ravensbrück she had worked as a wages clerk.

In her signed deposition dated 20 April, 1948, she told British authorities that she was conscripted to the staff of Ravensbrück on 3 July, 1944 and worked there as an office clerk until November 1944. On 5 January 1945 she became block leader in Block 27 and refused a post back in the office. Five days later she transferred with five other *Aufseherin* to the nearby satellite camp at Uckermark, which had formerly been a camp for criminal/difficult girls but that now had become an extermination camp for women who were too sick or too old to work. After six weeks as *Oberaufseherin* at Uckermark, she was transferred at her request to be chief supervisor of the KL Barth-Ostsee camp, until the end of the war, which housed slave labour for Heinkel Aircraft Works.

She was given a cane with a silver handle by *Sturmbannführer* (SS MAJ) Saue at Ravensbrück, an item that she always kept with her until she left the camp.



Ruth Closius

The third Ravensbrück trial, also known as the "Uckermark trial", was held at the British Military Court in Hamburg between April 14 and April 26, 1948 to hear the cases of five women officials from the Uckermark concentration camp and extermination complex. Two of the women were acquitted as they had only worked there when it was a camp for girls, two received prison terms but Ruth Closius was condemned to death on 26 April 1948, having confessed to selecting prisoners for the gas chambers. She testified:

As I took over the Uckermark Camp, there were approximately 4,000 prisoners of all nationalities present. When I was reposted approximately six weeks later, only 1,000 prisoners were remaining. During my activity, approximately 3,000 women were selected for the gas chamber accordingly.

She further testified:

When the vans were completely filled, both SS men and I drove in the direction of the crematory. There we had to unload the prisoners at a toolshed. In my function as *Oberaufseherin* I ordered them to undress

completely. When all women were undressed, a disguised SS man in a white coat brought the women, one after the other, to another toolshed. When this shed was filled, it was locked. Then two male prisoners were ordered to enter the roof. I have seen how they dropped something there. Then the opening on the roof was closed. After the two prisoners had climbed down from the roof, the motors of the lorries were switched on so that the screaming of the victims could not be heard.

The murdered women were told that they were being transported to a better camp named "Mittweida". This did not exist and was simply a code name for gassing in one of the three mobile gassing vans or the static gas chamber in the "tool shed".

Unlike many of the Nazi women tried by the British, Closius largely admitted her crimes and seemed almost proud of what she had done.

She was hanged at 9.00 a.m. on Thursday 29 July, 1948 by Albert Pierrepoint who had arrived in the British Zone by air on the 26th of July 1948 and left again by air on the 29th of July 1948.

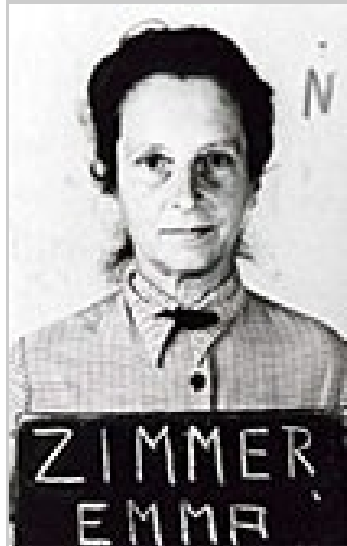
Ida Bertha Gertrud Schreiter was born on 27 December 1912.

She is the least well known of any of the female guards who worked at Ravensbrück concentration camp for women. It is thought that she was an Aufseherin there from 1939 to 1945. There is very little information available on her case and she is the only one of the ten women hanged at Hameln for whom no photo exists.

After the camp was liberated Schreiter was arrested and tried by the British at the 7th Ravensbrück trial that took place in Hamburg between July 2 and July 21, 1948. She stood accused of having taken part in the selection of prisoners for the gas chamber and of causing the deaths of inmates by deliberate overwork and/or neglect.

She was hanged at Hameln on Monday, 20 September, 1948 by Albert Pierrepoint and RSM O'Neill.

Emma Anna Maria Zimmer née Mezel was born on August 14, 1888 at Schlüchtern in Germany.



In 1938, Zimmer became an Aufseherin (guard) at Lichtenburg concentration camp at Prettin, near Wittenberg in Saxony, which housed female prisoners from 1937 to 1939, when they and she were transferred to the new camp at Ravensbrück. In 1941 Zimmer selected mentally ill prisoners for euthanasia at the Bernberg Euthanasia Center, where they were gassed with carbon monoxide. In October 1942 she became assistant camp leader (Stellvertretende Oberaufseherin) at Auschwitz II (Birkenau).

Normally Aufseherinnen had to retire at 45 but Zimmer was allowed to stay on until January 1945, when she was dismissed, either due to her age or her alcoholism.

Zimmer was convicted of maltreating prisoners and making selections for the gas chamber at the 7th Ravensbrück trial of six Aufseherinnen, held at Hamburg between July 2 and July 21, 1948. A survivor from Auschwitz testified:

Our supervisor was an old and mean SS-woman called Emma Zimmer. She was vicious and dangerous and frightening us constantly with threats, proclaiming in a sadistic voice, "I will report you and then you will go away, you know where? Just one way-up the chimney." We hated her and were scared of her.

She was hanged by Albert Pierrepoint and RSM O'Neill on the same day as Ida Schreiter, 20 September 1948.

Carmen Maria Mory was born on 2 July, 1906 in Berne, Switzerland to a spa doctor, Ernest Emil Mory, and his wife Leona née Bischoff who was half Filipino.

Mory originally wanted to be a singer but this aspiration was thwarted by a throat operation.

In 1932 Mory travelled to Berlin in German. From early years she had a penchant for a somewhat affluent lifestyle, but had no training of any kind that would have earned her the corresponding means. She drew small sums from her work as a journalist, socializing in the Berlin salons. Her predominant talent, in addition to a terrific memory for details, was for intrigue, deception and lies which she used to get money from strangers as well as family and friends, and to set them up against each other. This talent was noticed and exploited, too, by the Gestapo who used her, starting in February 1937 at the latest, as “agent S11” in department II A 2, charged with observation of the activities of Social Democratic circles home and abroad. Her Gestapo handler sent her to Switzerland on espionage jobs while at the same time trying to strike down charges of fraud and embezzlement brought against her. In late 1937 Mory left Berlin for Paris on Gestapo business while criminal proceedings against her accumulated.

Her first job in France was spying on German Socialist emigrants, Max Braun and Helmuth Klotz. In summer 1938, she was charged with exploring French defence readiness and especially a fuel pipeline supplying the Maginot line. Together with two German men, she was arrested on 5 November, 1938 by the Sûreté. The French were not in a tremendous hurry to try her, but finally on 28 April, 1940 a Military Court condemned her to death for espionage. On 6 June, 1940 she was pardoned by the French President under the condition to remain at the disposal of the French intelligence service. One of her co-accused was shot the next day, the other had died in prison.

She used the chaos of the German occupation of France in June, 1940, to escape from confinement, made her way to an Abwehr post and reported there.

The chief of Amt IV, “Gestapo”-Müller, ordered to seize all French court and police files on her because he suspected her of the betrayal of her co-defendants, in other words: of being a double agent. In August 1940 she was arrested by the Gestapo and brought to Berlin where Reinhard Heydrich himself interrogated her. In February 1941 she was sent to Ravensbrück concentration camp. She became a Block Senior, perhaps not before 1944, and worked as an inmate nurse in Block 10, housing women with tuberculosis and insane inmates.

In November 1945, Mory was arrested by the British and tried at the first Ravensbrück trial (December 1946 – February 1947). Wearing the number 9, she was accused, among other crimes, of the murder of 60 inmates and of making selections for the gas chamber. The evidence of fellow inmates on her was divided. According to some, she was a victim of SS atrocities herself, receiving 28 whip lashes, while others accused her of teaming up with the camp leaders, and spying on fellow inmates. In the end, the court was satisfied that she was a perpetrator rather than a victim, and that the allegations of killing inmates by injections and making selections for the gas chamber were true.

She was sentenced to death on 3 February, 1947. The sentence was confirmed and she was scheduled for execution on Friday 2 May, 1947, along with Dorothea Binz, Greta Bösel and Elisabeth Marschall. On 9 April, 1947, having learnt that no reprieve was forthcoming and her execution was inevitable, she slashed her wrists and jugular vein with a razor blade that she had concealed in her shoe. She was dead by the time she was discovered by guards.

