

9 Civilians and Displaced Persons as Perpetrators

The Systematic Extermination of Infants.

It is estimated that between 100,000 and 200,000, mainly Polish and Russian babies and infants died from either forced abortion or wilful neglect during the years 1943 to 1945 in accordance with government policy, as directed by Heinrich Himmler, in some 130 Kinderheime (children's homes). Some of these pregnancies were the result of rape of the young slave labour women, by their "masters". Given the massive scale of these crimes it is surprising that only two successful prosecutions were mounted and only three people were ultimately hanged.

The Velpke Children's Home case

Velpke Children's Home was set up in May 1944 to house the children of Polish female forced labour who were working on nearby farms. Velpke is a municipality in the Helmstedt district of Lower Saxony, Germany. Looking after the infants was deemed to be too time consuming, while the mothers tended to them rather than the fields. Heinrich Gerike, then Kreisleiter (county leader of the Nazi party) of Helmstedt, was ordered to set up the home. This consisted of a corrugated steel hut without running water, medical facilities or any other services. The children also received totally inadequate food.

Valentina Bilien was appointed, against her will, to be matron of the home. She was not permitted to send sick children to hospital but was allowed to call in a physician, Dr. Demmerich.

During the first six months, at least 76 Polish and 15 Russian infants died, the three most frequent causes of death as certified by the doctors were general weakness, dysentery, and what was known as catarrh of the intestines, a form of chronic diarrhoea.

Georg Heßling was appointed as the administrator of the home. He also had no experience of running a children's home. He largely ignored Valentina Bilien's complaints about the state of the facility and did not seem to be bothered about the death rate.

After the War ended British authorities arrested eight people connected with the running of the home or who had turned a "blind eye" to what was happening there. On 20 March to 3 April, 1946, seven men and one woman stood trial before a British Military Court sitting at Brunswick. The accused were Heinrich Gerike, Georg Heßling, Werner Noth, Hermann Müller, Gustav Claus, Doctor Richard Demmerich, Fritz Flint and Frau Valentina Bilien. They were charged with committing a war crime

in that they at Velpke, Germany, between the months of May and December, 1944, in violation of the laws and usages of war, were concerned in the killing by wilful neglect of a number of children, Polish Nationals.

Gerike, Heßling, Demmerich and Frau Bilien were found guilty. Claus, Müller and Noth were found not guilty. Fritz Flint died during the trial.

Valentina Bilien was sentenced to fifteen years' imprisonment, Dr. Richard Demmerich to ten years' imprisonment, and Georg Heßling and Heinrich Gerike to death by hanging. The verdicts and sentences were later confirmed.

Gerike and Heßling were hanged at Hameln on 8 October 1946 at 14.47 and 15.10 hrs. respectively by Albert Pierrepont, RSM O'Neill and Alexander Hurry assisting.

It was not suggested at the trial that the children were deliberately murdered by the defendants, but rather suffered wilful neglect that was ignored by those in a position to prevent it.

The Wolfsburg and Rügen children's home case

Wolfsburg was the home of the Volkswagen factory set up to make the original VW "Beetle" from 1 July, 1938. Production was turned over to armaments during the War, but Volkswagen found itself short of labour, due to men and women being conscripted into military service.

Dr. Ferdinand Porsche, the designer of the Beetle, who was a member of the Nazi Party, made the suggestion to Hitler to use forced labour from Eastern Europe. Hitler concurred with the plan in a letter

dated January 11, 1942 and ordered authorities to “immediately provide the workforce from the concentration camps.”

Some 1,500 Polish and 4,000 to 5,000 Russian women were sent to Volkswagen.

Initially pregnant women were to be returned to their hometowns, but from March 1943, the policy was changed and a few days after a woman gave birth her child was taken to the Wolfsburg Kinderheim, (children's home) and she was sent back to work. The maternity hospital and Kinderheim were set up near the Eastern workers' camp at Wolfsburg. Mothers were allowed to visit and feed their babies after work.

The Kinderheim was later moved to a former prison camp at Rühren, consisting of two wooden buildings that lacked basic services, some five miles from the plant. This made it effectively impossible for mothers to breast feed their babies after work. Infants were permitted just a half-liter (approx. 1 pint) of milk and one and a half sugar cubes per day each, a wholly inadequate diet. If a baby was too sick to take a bottle it was just left to starve to death. Witnesses at the subsequent trial testified that the home was infested with insects and that their children suffered terribly from insect bites. Some 30 children were dying every month and this toll doubled to around 60 in some months. In all 350-400 infants under the age of 16 months died here of wilful neglect. 365 deaths were catalogued by US Army investigators.

Dr. Hans Körbel, who was the works doctor at the Volkswagen plant, only visited the homes once a week and never examined or treated sick children.

On 24 June 1946, Körbel was convicted of “wilful neglect” and sentenced to death by a British court sitting at Helmstedt. He was hanged at Hameln on 7 March 1947 by Albert Pierrepont, O'Neill and Alexander Hurry assisting. Körbel was the only member of Volkswagen management to be executed, although it is

clear that others were complicit. The death sentence was also passed on the Head Nurse, Ella Schmidt, née Nowka. She is thought to be of Polish extraction and was married to a German. She was reprieved to life in prison and released in 1954.

The Murder of those “Unworthy of Life”

From 8 – 15 October, 1945 a US Military Commission consisting of six colonels plus Col. Leon Jaworski as the Trial Judge Advocate sat in Wiesbaden to try the murder of 476 Soviet and Polish forced labourers at Hadamar in Germany during the time frame from July 1944 to April 1945.

The crime had not been committed in a concentration camp, nor came the perpetrators from the ranks of the usual SS types. They were doctors and nurses, the crime scene was a mental hospital, and the victims were slave labourers who had become too ill to work, either physically or mentally. Although this would have been serious enough, the matter tried in this trial was just sample from the proverbial tip of the iceberg. The accused had started to kill patients at



BERLIN. 1. Sept. 1939.

Reichsleiter B o u h l e r u n d
Dr. med. B r a n d t

sind unter Verantwortung beauftragt, die Befug -
nisse namentlich zu bestimmender Ärzte so zu er -
weitern, dass nach menschlichem Ermessen unheilbar
Kranken bei kritischster Beurteilung ihres Krank -
heitszustandes der Gnadentod gewährt werden kann.

*Das Bouchler mir
übergeben am 27.8.40
Dr. Gietzen*

Hadamar long before July 1944, and their victims numbered at least 14,494, the majority being German. Their justification was that Adolf Hitler had ordered it. Back in the day of the trial, this was just a rumour, but present-day historians know there is a sheet of paper, typed on Hitler's private stationery and signed by him, addressed to Reichsleiter Bouhler and Hitler's physician Dr. Brandt, empowering them *to extend the authority of physicians, to be designated by name, so that patients who, after a most critical diagnosis, on the basis of human judgment are considered incurable, can be granted mercy death.*

Hitler's euthanasia order. In a handwritten note, Reich minister of justice Dr. Gürtner wrote that the order had been handed him on 27 August 1940 by Reichsleiter Bouhler.

The "most critical" evaluation took the form that all hospitals, nursing homes, old-age homes and sanatoria were required to report all patients who had been institutionalised for five years or more, who had been committed as "criminally insane", who were of "non-Aryan race" or who had been diagnosed with any on a list of conditions. The conditions included schizophrenia, epilepsy, Huntington's chorea, advanced syphilis, senile dementia, paralysis, encephalitis and "terminal neurological conditions generally". These report sheets were submitted to a panel of experts who decided on life or death by marking with a cross the sheets of those who were to die.



These patients were then transported to one of six Euthanasia Centres where gas chambers and crematoria had been built, were stripped, led to the gas chambers which looked like communal showers, gassed with carbon monoxide, then checked for the presence of gold teeth (which were extracted when found), and finally cremated. Under the direction of the organization's center at Tiergartenstraße 4 in Berlin (hence the short name "T4" for this operation), these killing hospitals of which Hadamar was just one, murdered between them the staggering number of more than 70,000 persons until 1941.

This mass murder did not go unnoticed. Residents at Hadamar started to talk about the amount of dark smoke which came from a chimney on the hospital's roof.

Smoke coming from the hospital chimney at Hadamar (photo taken clandestinely in 1941)

Family members of the patients wondered why their loved ones died so suddenly. One – just one – German guardianship judge, Lothar Kreyssig, who was responsible for several hundred mentally retarded children and adults, began to suspect the deaths were connected to large scale killing when an increasing number of death certificates of his wards began to accumulate on his desk. He wrote a letter of protest to the Minister of Justice, Franz Gürtner, and even filed a charge against Reichsleiter Philipp Bouhler for murder, along with an injunction against the institutions in which he had housed his wards, prohibiting them from transferring the wards without his consent. Kreyssig was summoned to the minister, and was shown that ominous Führer order. “The Führer's word does not create a right”, was Kreyssig's comment. Thereupon he was suspended and sent into retirement two years later.

While Kreyssig's courageous attempt achieved nothing, the killings were stopped following a sermon preached by Catholic bishop von Galen in Münster/Westphalia on 3 August 1941 in which he made public the suspicious transports taking away mental patients, spoke of a “suspicion bordering on certainty” that they were to be murdered, and announced that he had filed a charge of intended murder.

But the killing continued – not in centres anymore, but all over the country. Till the end of the war, almost 200,000 persons all in all fell victim to the doctrine that there are people unworthy of life who may be killed with impunity. Patients were not killed with gas anymore, but were allowed to starve or given poison. Victims now included slave labourers who were too ill to work (Action 14f13), and German soldiers and foreign Waffen-SS members suffering from incurable mental diseases.

While this was going on all over the Reich, about 100 specialists of Operation T4 were sent to Poland to take part in “Aktion Reinhard”: the murder of 1.7 to 1.9 million Jews in the extermination camps of Bełżec, Sobibór, and Treblinka. To name just one: Franz Stangl, commandant of Sobibór and Treblinka, was head of Hartheim Euthanasia Center before he went to the East. From today's point of view, T4 was the training ground for the Holocaust.

The first question the Military Commission sitting at Wiesbaden had to decide was whether it could assume jurisdiction despite the fact that the crime, committed by foreigners outside United States territory, had not affected United States nationals.

The Commission decided in the affirmative; first, because every independent State has, under International Law, jurisdiction to punish war criminals in its custody; second, because the United States did have a direct interest in punishing the perpetrators of the offence inasmuch as the victims were nationals of allies engaged in a common struggle against a common enemy; third, because the four great Powers had assumed supreme authority in Germany, the United States being the local sovereign in the United States zone of occupation and deriving jurisdiction both from the principle of territoriality and from the principle of personality, the accused being German nationals.

Remaining silent on the subject of anything not related to Allied nationals, the charge alleged that the accused were guilty of

the killing of human beings of Polish and Russian nationality, their exact names and number being unknown but aggregating in excess of 400, and who were then and there confined by the then German Reich as an exercise of belligerent control.

The evidence showed that these slave labourers were brought to Hadamar and were killed within one or two days after their arrival at the institution, either by hypodermic injections of morphine or scopolamine, or derivatives thereof, or by doses of veronal or chloral. Afterwards they were buried on the hospital cemetery. The paperwork relating to their deaths was faked. The death certificates gave wrong death dates, the cause of death – given as tuberculosis – was wrong as well (as proved by US pathologists who performed autopsies on exhumed patients).

Alfons Klein was the chief administrative officer of the institution in charge of records, food, housing and reports, and he knew of the deaths of the Poles and Russians, and in fact received the original orders requiring them to be received and to be put to death, and transmitted such orders to other institution personnel. In fact it seemed from some evidence that he was the de facto head of the institution, and that the nominal head and psychiatrist in charge, doctor Adolf Wahlmann, had little to say.



Administrative officer Alfons Klein and chief nurse Irmgard Huber (who is speaking to her counsel) during the trial



Bodies of Russians and Poles exhumed at Hadamar

Adolf Wahlmann was the only doctor at the hospital and worked there from August 1942. He determined the nature and the amount of the drug to be given to each prospective victim, although there was also some testimony that he left this task to his chief nurses. The pharmacy from which the drugs were obtained was in his office. He requisitioned the drugs which were used in the killings, entered the alleged cause of death on the patient's hospital card and signed the death certificate.



Dr. Adolf Wahlmann (left), and male nurse Karl Willig, during the trial

Dr. Adolf Wahlmann (left), and male nurse Karl Willig, during the trial

The accused Heinrich Ruoff was working as chief male nurse at the asylum. He took an active part in administering the fatal injections. He estimated that Willig and he “gave injections to two or three hundred Poles and Russians, but it could have been four or five hundred too.”

The accused Karl Willig was a male nurse at Hadamar. He participated equally with Ruoff in the killings by means of administering hypodermic injections of the narcotics and also by orally given doses of veronal and chloral. He later helped in the burial of some of the dead. He attended the daily morning conferences with Dr. Wahlmann and chief female nurse Irmgard Huber when Ruoff did not; in these meetings plans were made for further disposal of inmates.



Irmgard Huber

Irmgard Huber carried out the orders of Dr. Wahlmann and oversaw the duties of the seven other female nurses. She knew beforehand of the arrival of the first transport and made preparations for housing the victims. There was some evidence that the female nurses actually gave injections. Huber obtained narcotics from the pharmacy in Dr. Wahlmann's office for Ruoff and Willig and she was actually present on at least one occasion when fatal injections or dosages were given to patients, and when false death certificates were made out.

The accused Adolf Merkle was primarily the institution's bookkeeper, both for the registering of incoming patients and for purposes of recording dates and causes of death. He

knowingly made false entries as to the dates and causes of death of all the victims. Merkle was said by Ruoff to have been thoroughly familiar with what went on at the institution which he denied on the witness stand.

After January 1943, the accused Philipp Blum became the chief caretaker of the cemetery until August 1944. Probably only the first batch of Poles and Russians arrived during his presence at Hadamar. Some bodies he buried without the approval of Dr. Wahlmann on his own belief that they were dead. He supervised the burial in mass graves of 100 bodies, “more or less,” of Russians and Poles. He knew

beforehand that the batch was to arrive and what was going to be done. He was in the ward in which the victims were put to bed, received injections, and died, and he waited for them to die knowing that he would then be required to bury them. There is also in the record one statement by Ruoff that Blum helped to administer the poisons which brought about the deaths. His own pre-trial statement indicates full knowledge on his part of what was intended and what actually did take place.

On 15 October, 1945, the Military Commission found all accused guilty and sentenced them as follows:
Alfons Klein, Heinrich Ruoff, and Karl Willig: death by hanging.

Dr. Adolf Wahlmann: imprisonment for life.

Adolf Merkle: 35 years imprisonment at hard labour.

Philipp Blum: 30 years imprisonment at hard labour.

Irmgard Huber: 25 years imprisonment at hard labour.

The review process failed to detect any reason for clemency.

On Ruoff, captains Samuel Sonnenfeld and James D. Murphy of the Deputy Theater Judge Advocate's Office wrote:

He knew what he did was wrong, and if he is not to pay the penalty for his terrible deeds, then there can be found in all Germany few men truly deserving of the gallows.

And their comment on Willig was:

It is probably true that of the three accused who were sentenced to die, Willig was the least guilty, if such an expression is a fitting one in an instance of such heinous mass murders as were perpetrated at Hadamar. It is impossible, however, for any person with a sense of justice to say that there is any proper punishment less than death for men who have stained their hands as these men have done.

On 14 March, 1946 Alfons Klein, Heinrich Ruoff, and Karl Willig mounted the steps of the gallows in the Bruchsal prison yard. Maybe it was the same one which had already been used in November 1945 for the execution of the Rüsselsheim murderers (see chapter 6) and in January 1946 for the hanging of four killers of US servicemen.



The image description says that this is Karl Willig about to be hanged. The fortress-like turret in the background proves that the location must be Bruchsal, in any case.

In any case, these three were almost the only Euthanasia culprits to pay with their lives. After 1948, almost all Euthanasia trials arrived at sentences for no more serious crimes than “aiding and abetting”. Of 438 investigations started until 1999 into alleged Euthanasia crimes, only 6.8 % ended with a sentence, and there were numerous acquittals.

In Hadamar, there is still a mental hospital. But there’s also a memorial to the victims of the killings. The mayor of Hadamar is on the advisory board. His name is Michael Ruoff, and he is a grandson of Heinrich Ruoff.

In a March 2017 interview, he said:

I feel that I have a still greater responsibility to remember than others. The monstrous crimes which happened on the Mönchsberg must remain present to the mind, without repression or palliation. And anyone who comes to this place ought to visit the memorial.

The Zyklon B Case

Many of us will have heard of Zyklon B as the chemical used in the Nazi gas chambers.

However its origins were completely peaceful - it was originally developed as an insecticide in the 1920's and replaced the original Zyklon A. This was also a hydrocyanic acid based chemical that had been used as a pesticide. However it was used by the Germans for chemical warfare during World War I, after which it was banned.

In 1919 Deutsche Gesellschaft für Schädlingsbekämpfung mbH or Degesch was formed to manufacture Zyklon as a pesticide. This company was taken over by Degussa in 1922 where chemists, including Dr.

Bruno Tesch, further developed the chemical and marketed it as Zyklon B. They found a method of sealing hydrocyanic acid into canisters along with a warning eye irritant and absorbent stabiliser granules (diatomaceous earth). In this form it was widely used as an insecticide and fumigation agent. When exposed to air the open canister releases hydrocyanic gas.

In 1924 Dr. Bruno Tesch and Paul Stabenow formed a company named Tesch and Stabenow in Hamburg. Later Tesch became the sole owner of the company which traded as Testa. This company undertook pest control and were sales agents for the manufacturers of Zyklon B, for areas east of the river Elbe.

In about 1941, Testa started to sell Zyklon B to the SS. In that year, Dr. Tesch himself went to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp and trained SS personnel in the safe handling of Zyklon B. Also in 1941, Testa sold Zyklon B to Auschwitz, Majdanek, Sachsenhausen, Ravensbrück, Stutthof, Neuengamme, Groß Rosen and Dachau concentration camps in ever increasing quantities which amounted, in the early months of 1944, to nearly two tons a month for Auschwitz alone.

At Auschwitz the naked victims were forced into chambers that had been designed to look like communal showers, the Zyklon pellets were then released through openings in the ceiling. Upon contact with air the hydrocyanic acid would vapourise. Once inhaled the gas prevents the red blood cells from carrying oxygen thus causing death by asphyxiation.

On 3 September 1945 British authorities arrested Bruno Tesch and he was interrogated and then released on 1 October, only to be re-arrested on 6 October 1945. Also arrested were his second in command, Karl Weinbacher and the company's gassing technician Dr. Joachim Drosihn. All three were tried at the Curiohaus in Hamburg on 1-8 March, 1946, accused of "killing Allied nationals interned in concentration camps" by supplying Zyklon B, between 1 January 1941 and 31 March 1945, knowing the use to which it was to be put, in contravention to article 46 of the Hague Regulations regarding civilians in occupied territory. It did not matter that neither Tesch nor Weinbacher belonged to the occupying forces; the prosecution took the view that the provisions of the laws and customs of war are addressed not only to combatants but to anybody who is in a position to assist in their violation, thus any civilian who is an accessory to a violation of the laws and customs of war is himself also liable as a war criminal.

Emil Sehm had been a bookkeeper at Tesch and Stabenow and testified that he had seen a file where Tesch had recommended the use of Zyklon B as an alternative to shooting and that he had offered to train SS men in the use of the chemical. This was backed up by other workers' testimonies.

Wilhelm Bahr testified that he was a medical orderly at Neuengamme concentration camp and had attended a gassing course in 1942 run by Tesch. He also admitted to having gassed 200 Russians at the camp in 1942.

Perry Broad had been a Rottenführer (SS Cpl) at Auschwitz between June 1942 and early 1945. Broad was of Brazilian birth who had lived in Berlin from the age of five. He testified that those gassed there were deportees from Belgium, Holland, France, North Italy, Czechoslovakia, Poland and gypsies. Dr. Bendel was interned at Auschwitz and testified that around one million people had been gassed there.

Karl Weinbacher was deemed to be a "Prokurist" in German law. As such he was able to take full charge of the company and make decisions in the absence of the owner. This was important because Tesch travelled a great deal on business and was therefore often out of the office.

The defence for Tesch and Weinbacher raised three important questions. Did the defendants really know what their products were being used for? Was the Zyklon B used for gassing actually supplied by Tesch and Stabenow, or did it come from other sources, including directly from the manufacturer? Were any Allied nationals gassed (as against those nationalities specified by Perry Broad)?

All three defendants testified in their defence. Tesch denied that he had attended conferences on the subject of gassing or that he had recommended this procedure. He told the court that he was unaware of humans being killed with Zyklon B. He also felt that the quantities of the chemical supplied to Auschwitz were not excessive, given the size of the camp and its sub-camps, for use for their intended purpose as an insecticide.

He told the court that Dr. Drosihn was a technical specialist and was not concerned with the administration of Tesch and Stabenow.

Dr. Karl Weinbacher testified that his role was to look after the company when Tesch was away on business, simply undertaking routine administrative tasks. He also told the court that he had not read in any of Tesch's travel reports, or any reference to the gassing of human beings.

Dr. Drosihn claimed that he was simply a technical specialist and worked on projects such as the fumigation of ships in Hamburg docks to kill insects. He had no management role in Tesch and Stabenow and spent 150-200 days a year travelling on business.

The Judge Advocate, in summing up, told the court that "the real strength of the Prosecution in this case rests rather upon the general proposition that, when you realise what kind of man Dr. Tesch was, it inevitably follows that he must have known every little thing about his business." Therefore it was impossible that he (or Weinbacher for that matter, who shared his knowledge) could have honestly been of opinion that the huge amounts of Zyklon B they were selling were being used for innocent and legitimate purposes.

56 year old Bruno Tesch and 47 year old Karl Weinbacher were convicted of war crimes and sentenced to death. Dr. Drosihn was acquitted. The sentences were confirmed and the two condemned were hanged side by side at 11.23 a.m. within Hameln prison on May 16, 1946. Albert Pierrepont was the executioner, assisted by RSM O'Neill. Tesch weighed 166 lbs. and was given a drop of six feet nine inches. Weinbacher was lighter at just 122 lbs. and was given a drop of eight feet eight inches. They were two of seven executions carried out that day.

On 1 June, 1997, a plaque was unveiled at the "Meßberghof" house in Hamburg where Testa, Tesch's firm, used to have its offices. It shows the final lines from the poem *Dos lied vunem ojsgehargetn jidischn volk* (The Song of the murdered Jewish people) by the yiddish poet Jizchak Katzenelson who was murdered on 1 May, 1944 in Auschwitz.

The first three lines on this memorial are from the poem. They translate to: "...and don't destroy / the evil men on earth, / may they destroy themselves!"

„... un nit varnicht
die schlechte ojf der erd,
soln sej varnichtn sich alejn!"

Dieses Zitat stammt aus dem großen Poem
über das Sterben der Juden in der Shoah
von Jitzchak Katzenelson, der
- wie viele Menschen aus ganz Europa -
in Auschwitz mit dem Giftgas Zyklon B
ermordet worden ist.

Die Firma Tesch & Stabenow, die ihr Büro
im Kontorhaus Meßberghof hatte, lieferte das
Giftgas Zyklon B an die Konzentrationslager
Auschwitz, Majdanek, Sachsenhausen,
Ravensbrück, Stutthof und Neuengamme.

Inhaber und Geschäftsführer der Firma
sind 1946 von einem britischen Militärgericht
verurteilt und hingerichtet worden.

Displaced Persons

After the end of World War II, 43 Displaced Persons (DPs) were hanged under British authority at Hameln. This total comprised 25 Polish men, five Russians, five Yugoslavians, a Latvian, a Lithuanian, a Croat and a Ukrainian, plus four others whose nationality is unclear.

Displaced Persons were mainly forced labourers who had been taken from occupied Eastern European countries and sent to work in German factories as slave labour. There were also prisoners of war, former concentration camp prisoners and those who had voluntarily taken work in Germany during the War, or who had fled from the Soviet Army as it took back Eastern Europe from the Nazis. Even after two years of large scale repatriation efforts by the Allies, it is estimated that there were still some 850,000 DPs in Germany in 1947. For many of these people there

was simply no home to return to.

Polish DPs particularly did not want to return to their home country as it was now under Communist rule by Stalin's Russia.

Little detail remains of most of these cases but a few individual ones follow:

On 26 June, 1947 **Longin Nowakowski, Wacław Winiarski and Kazmierc Bachor** were hanged. Nowakowski and Winiarski went to their deaths at 09.30 a.m. and Bachor followed at 10.02.

They had been sentenced to death on 8 April, 1947 by the High Court at Lübeck for illegal use of firearms and ammunition. On 3 October, 1946, the trio had killed a fellow Pole, one Skrzypowski, for his belongings which they took, breaking into his room, after they had killed him.

Franciszek Smok was sentenced to death on 2 May 1947 by the High Court at Osnabrück on three counts of plundering and illegal use of a firearm. He broke into the same house three times, and on the third occasion he shot a man to death. He was hanged on 5 September, 1947, at 09.37 a.m., beside fellow Pole, **Tadeusz Kun**. Kun was sentenced to death on 14 May, 1947 for the illegal use of a firearm and plundering, during which a man was also shot.

This execution was observed by a British police officer, Mr. George E. Whitcomb, who had been detailed to be present, with others, as a mandatory identification witness. Australian hanging historian Nick Short pointed these authors to a text in which Mr. Whitcomb had described his experiences in a magazine. Restricting our excerpt to the factual core of Mr. Whitcomb's report, we gratefully acknowledge the permission of www.truecrimelibrary.com to reprint. It is the only description of a hanging at Hameln that we know of.

My guide escorted me along dark corridors, passing through several sets of steel gates, which were unlocked and relocked behind us, until we reached an office. Here I was glad to meet some of the policemen who had stayed overnight with me. But conversation was very desultory. We all wanted to get the job done and be on our way from such a depressing atmosphere.

The tension was somewhat relieved when a major, who appeared to be in charge, called us together and, from a typewritten list, checked our names with those of the men to be hanged. [...]

I was rather surprised to learn that 2 men would be hanged every half-an-hour. It was also a relief to know that I would be called forward at 9.30 am - the inactivity was very trying. [...]

We all began to fidget as the minutes ticked slowly by, and I was glad when my name was called. Following my escort along dimly-lit corridors, I was dreading the action about to take place. But there was no time to daydream.

Perhaps seeing so much light after the darkness may well have accounted for the shock I experienced as I entered that death house. I was in a rectangular area, with a row of 10 cells jutting out from the walls on either side.

Uniformed prison guards patrolled the length of the room, passing each cell door to examine the occupant with monotonous regularity. [...] one occasionally heard gasps and weird cries [...]

A priest [...] paced up and down. He read from a Bible, occasionally chanting and singing. As the name of the prisoner appeared above the cell door it did not take me long to find the name I had come to see. I had his signature tucked away in my notebook, but I had no difficulty identifying the gipsy. Gone now was the arrogance, the defiance of authority, the little man with the big gun threatening old and defenceless people. What I now saw was a pathetic human being, who knew that he had but moments to live. [...]

My reverie was shattered by the sudden appearance of Albert Pierrepont, the official executioner. He greeted me with a smile and a request, and bearing in mind that everybody around us was speaking in German or Polish, it was very welcome to hear a warm, homely Yorkshire accent.

"If you recognise him, nod your head when I bring him out", he instructed me. Then he reassured me that

everything would be alright. The second or two that he spent in trying to put me at ease was very much appreciated. He was certainly a dedicated professional and carried out his duties efficiently and with dignity.

Leaving me with the request to nod my head in recognition, he walked towards the cell where my man was held captive. Then he and his assistant, who had been standing nearby, entered the cell. With quiet efficiency they prepared the man for the scaffold by securing his arms behind his back with a short leather strap. There was no resistance. The pitiful creature was in fact so helpless that the two officials had to half carry him to the execution chamber, which was approached by a door at the far end of the cell area.

Having nodded to Pierrepont, I fell in behind the gruesome procession. The stillness and mystery of the execution chamber came as a blessed relief as the moans, the crying and chanting faded away behind us. It was a very plain room. The only furniture was a small table and two chairs being used by two men in civilian clothes. Without waiting for an invitation, I stood behind these two officials, who acknowledged my presence by nodding, then carried on with their paperwork.

We were at one end of the room and ahead of us was the area where the drama was to take place. My eyes raced everywhere, trying to see everything at once. I was astounded to see three ropes dangling from a huge beam across the ceiling. There was no mistaking their sinister purpose, for the nooses at the ends were all too obvious.

The executioner and his colleague, still supporting their very frightened captive, paused near the first rope. A large white hood was quickly produced and placed over the man's head, followed by the noose around the neck. The legs were secured with a strap and the whole operation was over in seconds. Then the executioner and assistant left their moaning prisoner, trussed and helpless, to go away, only to return a few moments later with another condemned man. He was dealt with as speedily as the first one.

The two hangmen moved away and I saw Pierrepont go to a lever in the side wall and depress it. There was an awesome click as it operated. The trap-doors on which the trussed men had been standing fell away beneath them and they both dropped to the full extremity of the rope into merciful oblivion.

I had been standing so close that it was impossible not to avoid glancing into the room below. I edged cautiously forward and saw the two men hanging at the end of their ropes. A doctor was already examining the bodies and pronounced life extinct. Two coffins were placed nearby and some military policemen and prison officials were setting about the grim task of burial.

My signature was required on the appropriate forms. Then I was free to go. And as Albert Pierrepont was preparing for the next two executions, I managed to catch his eye and wave a farewell. I did not want to stay in that place one second longer than necessary. [...]

Edward Kubik was condemned to death on 16 June, 1947 by the High Court at Osnabrück for illegal use of firearms and ammunition. He had murdered an unnamed man whose belongings were found in Kubik's possession. Kubik was hanged on 5 September, 1947, at 10.08, beside Karl Paul Schwanz (see chapter 6, "Tilburg Lynching" case).

Manojlo Nikolic, Miloslaw Pavkovic, Mihaylo Kordic, and Pasaka Mehmedovic were four young Yugoslavian men. They were sentenced to death for murder by the High Court in Cologne. They had broken into a house and beaten up one of the residents, afterwards throwing him in the Rhine, where he drowned.

Kordic was also sentenced for an additional count of murder which had not been committed by him, but he had been taking part in a hold-up in which three others were armed, and one victim was shot dead. It was the Common Design (Doctrine of Common Purpose) that earned him the death sentence in this case. All four were hanged on 30 January, 1948, together with another Yugoslavian man, Stojadin Mitrasinovic. Mitrasinovic had been sentenced to death by the High Court at Braunschweig on 25 November, 1947 for the illegal use of a firearm. In fact he had shot dead his fiancée whose 12 year old son was an eyewitness to the crime and testified in court.

Polish born 22 year old **Jerzy Andziak** became the last person to be hanged at Hameln, when he was

executed by Albert Pierrepoint on 6 December, 1949. On 26 July, 1948, he and several accomplices went on an expedition to burgle several farms. The gang were spotted and challenged by German policeman Bruno W. in Bockholt (today part of Soltendieck, Uelzen county). Andziak pulled a gun and threatened the policeman. As Bruno W. tried to disarm Andziak, he shot the policeman dead. On 23 July, 1949 the High Court at Braunschweig sentenced him to death.

Two months before the execution, on 23 May 1949, the Basic Law had come into force in the Federal Republic of Germany. The Basic Law abolished the death penalty, but it could not save Andziak. As a DP, he was outside of German criminal jurisdiction and had to answer to the Occupying Power. He was tried, convicted and condemned by a British Control Commission court.