

Chapter 17

The Dachau Trial Continued, November 1945

In the courtroom, I sit behind the audience to determine how well the citizens can hear the testimony and see the exhibits. They can hear and see just fine. Today a crew from Munich is shooting movies, and the witnesses and defendants are instructed to speak slowly and loudly so everything they say will be picked up by the recording equipment. Klieg lights glare, and three cameras quietly grind away in strategic spots, lending a little action to the grim proceedings.

We hear from many witnesses about the torture of prisoners at Dachau by German guards. Among them is Chaim Sendowski, a tailor from Poland, 38. He came from Auschwitz to Dachau in October 1944. His detail was sorting rocks in a ditch. He testifies:

Six of us were throwing rocks through a screen, so we would only get the small rock. [SS defendant Wilhelm Tempel] said,

“If you bend the wire [of the screen], I’m going to beat you.” But we had to throw rocks against it, so naturally we had to bend the wire. So he beat us and we had to work. My comrade said maybe we should ask how we are supposed to do it without bending it. We were always afraid to ask . . . then my friend said, “I will ask him.” He said, “Mr. Rapportfuehrer, please show us how to do it.”

He used a [rubber-coated] cable and beat that man terribly, and later on . . . he also kicked him. And he beat the man until he didn’t have any strength to get up, and the blood was just pouring from his head. He said, “Take this dirt away.” I took him to the hospital, and he was very ill, and his arm was broken. And on the next morning . . . I went to see how he was doing. I brought him some soup. I couldn’t give him the soup because he was already dead.

Then there is Rudolf Wolf, a German engraver from Freiberg, 35. He was a prisoner in Dachau from September 1942 until its liberation in April 1945. He tells more about the tortures:

I saw [SS defendant Friedrich Ruppert] beating someone very often . . . He kicked the prisoners and also hit them with a whip . . . so hard that the men became unconscious. He was such a man who could beat people without changing expression. Just like a blacksmith striking cold iron.

The prisoner had to stand at attention in front of him, then [SS defendant Franz Trenkle] . . . would use the outer edge of his shoes and kick him in the lower part of his legs. He

did that to me personally, so that the blood would run. He scraped the skin off.

Whipping was done publicly at the formation place [gathering area]. The block was about the same height as this table. On the front part there were straps attached and [at the back end] a box. The prisoner had to step into the box and then had to lay across the block . . . Particularly strong prisoners . . . had to do the beating . . . one prisoner, Herman Folger, refused to do the beating . . . Trenkle walked over to him and [with a] cat-o-nine tails . . . hit him across the face twice, then did the beating himself . . . And then they had to go to the hospital, and across the posterior, which was mostly broken open, they received iodine. The men I saw beaten were Russian and Frenchmen. [They] received ten or 25 lashes according to orders. [Some] had to be carried to the hospital.

Next Riva Levy, 29, an office worker from Poland, testifies to the mistreatment of women prisoners:

[SS defendant Otto Foerschner] was very bad with food, [one] of the women did not work, so . . . we did not receive any food all day, and we were supposed to stand at attention from 6:00 A.M. to 2:00 P.M. And from 2:00 P.M. to 6:00 P.M., we worked at the carting of stone. Some of the women did not have any strength left for carrying stones, and they put a little less in that contraption for carrying the stones, and [for that] he beat them.

Franz Blaha testifies again, about the standing bunker, a cell used for punishment:

The standing bunker was of such dimensions that one could not sit down in it, but could just stand up. One could just possibly bend the knees a little.

I was not punished in the standing bunker, but I brought the dead bodies out of the bunkers several times. [They were] mostly Russians and Poles—during 1944 and 1945.

In a pretrial statement, defendant Emil Mahl backed Blaha: “Imprisonment in the standing cell [meant] eight to ten hours during the night, in several cases two to three nights without food or drink.”

Blaha also describes wrist-hanging, another common torture:

For instance, like in my case for not working properly, [prisoners] were hung up on a post . . . with their hands tied behind their backs . . . with a chain or sometimes a rope. They were hoisted up on a hook so their toes couldn’t touch the ground . . . sometimes one, two, three, sometimes even more hours. I was hung there for an hour—with a chain.

We couldn’t move [our] hands for at least three days, and we couldn’t work. I had blood clots on the hands, then swollen feet and great pain.

The Catholic priests who were anti-Nazi were also prisoners. Theodore Koch, a Polish priest since 1932 and Dachau prisoner from October 1941 to April 1945, testifies about punishment exercises:

There were jumps, knee-bends, and we had to do other gymnastics; that is, running on the knees. From Palm Sunday until Easter Sunday, we had to go through exercises on the formation place from 6:00 A.M. until 7:00 P.M. except for dinner. [During that week] many priests died during and after the exercises.

He also testifies about threats that prisoners would be made to leave camp on the invalid transports: “[This was considered a form of punishment] because it was the opinion that all of those who went on the invalid transport were to go to a gas chamber.”

The witnesses continue along these lines, establishing a clear pattern of sadistic torture in the main camp and subcamps.

The defendants who choose to testify, upon cross-examination by Colonel Denson, admit only to occasional handslaps to the faces of some prisoners. When reminded of their voluntary and signed pretrial statements about beatings, they become evasive, saying they were mistaken in making the statements. They say these incidents could not have occurred at the stated times or places. A few say the handslaps were to remind the prisoners of rule violations.

And two defendants testify to beatings of prisoners by other defendants, apparently to gain leniency.

Hitler's Appeal to the German People to Repel Polish Terrorization.

Reichstag Speech on the 1st of September 1939

Members of the German Reichstag!

For months we have been tormented by a problem once set us by the dictated Treaty of Versailles and which has now assumed such a character as to become utterly intolerable.

Danzig was and is a German city!

The Corridor was and is German!

All these districts owe their cultural development exclusively to the German people, without whom absolute barbarism would prevail in these eastern tracts of country.

Danzig was separated from us! The Corridor was annexed by Poland! The German minorities living there were ill-treated in the most appalling manner! More than a million persons with German blood in their veins were compelled to leave their homes as early as 1919/1920.

Use — always I have attempted to improve the intolerable condition of things by means of peaceful proposals for a revision. It is a lie when the world alleges that we always used pressure in attempting to carry out any revision. There was ample opportunity for fifteen years before National Socialism assumed power to carry through revisions by means of a peaceful understanding. This was not done! I myself then took the initiative in every single case, not only once, but many times, to bring forward proposals for the revision of absolutely intolerable conditions. As you know, all these proposals have been rejected. I need not enumerate them in detail: those proposals for a limitation of armaments, if necessary even for the abolition of armaments, those for restrictions on methods of warfare, those for eliminating methods of modern warfare, which in my opinion, are scarcely compatible with International Law. You know the proposals which I made as to the necessity of restoring German sovereign rights in certain territories of the Reich, those countless attempts I made to bring about a peaceful solution of the Austrian problem, and later on that of the Sudetenland, Bohemia and Moravia. It was all in vain!

One thing, however, is impossible: to demand that a peaceful revision should be made of an intolerable state of affairs — and then obstinately refuse such a peaceful revision!

And it is just impossible to assert that in such a situation to act on one's own initiative in making a revision is to violate a law. To Germans the dictated Treaty of Versailles is not a law! It won't do to blackmail a person at the point of a pistol with the threat of starvation for millions of people into signing a document and afterwards

proclaim that this document with its forced signature was a solemn law!

In the case of Danzig and the Corridor I have again tried to solve the problems by means of peaceful proposals suggesting a discussion. One thing was obvious: they had to be solved!

That the date of this solution may perhaps be of little interest to the Western Powers is conceivable. But this date is not a matter of indifference to us. First and foremost, however, it was not and could not be a matter of indifference to the suffering victims.

In conversations with Polish statesmen, I have discussed the ideas which you have heard me express here in my last speech to the Reichstag. No one can maintain that this was an unjust procedure or even unreasonable pressure. I then had the German proposals clearly formulated and I feel bound to repeat once more that nothing could be fairer or more modest than those proposals submitted by me. And I now wish to declare to the whole world that I, and I alone, was in a position to make such proposals. For I know quite definitely that I was thereby acting contrary to the opinion of millions of Germans. Those proposals were rejected! But more than that! They were replied to by mobilization, increased terrorism, intensified pressure on the German minorities in those areas and by a gradual economic and political strangulation of the Free City of Danzig which, during the past few weeks, found its expression in military measures and traffic restrictions. Poland virtually began a war against the Free City of Danzig. Furthermore it was not prepared to settle the problem of the Corridor in a fair manner satisfying the interests of both parties. And lastly, Poland has never been willing to fulfill her obligations with regard to the minorities.

In this connection I feel it necessary to state that Germany has fulfilled her obligations in this respect! Minorities domiciled in Germany are not subjected to persecution. Dare any Frenchman get up and declare that French citizens living in the Saar territory are oppressed, ill-treated or deprived of their rights? No one can make such an assertion!

For four months I have watched these developments without taking actions but not without issuing repeated warnings. Recently I have made these warnings more and more emphatic. Over three weeks ago the Polish Ambassador was, at my request, informed that if Poland persisted in sending further notes in the nature of an ultimatum to Danzig and in further oppressing the German minorities, or if attempts were made to bring about the economic ruin of Danzig by means of customs restrictions, Germany would no longer stand aside and remain inactive.