

Trawniki concentration camp

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Coordinates: 51°07′53″N 23°00′54″E﻿ / ﻿

Trawniki concentration camp was an *SS* labour camp which provided forced labourers for a nearby industrial plant. The Trawniki camp was commanded by *Hauptsturmführer* Theodor von Eupen.

It also trained Eastern European *Hiwi* (volunteers), for service with Nazi occupation forces in occupied Poland and neighbouring countries. The *Hiwi* included ethnic Germans from eastern Europe, Belarusians, Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians, Polish, Russians, Ukrainians, and others. Many "Trawniki" took part in Operation Reinhard, the Nazi plan for extermination of the Polish Jews, and/or served at extermination camps. The *Hiwi* trained there allegedly included SS suspect John Demjanjuk.

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Summary history

The SS camp at Trawniki underwent four changes of function and purpose in the three years of its existence, from July 1941 through July 1944. From July until September 1941, Trawniki served as a holding pen for Soviet civilians and soldiers. From September 1941 until July 1944, it was a training facility for police auxiliaries deployed in Operation Reinhard. From June 1942 until September 1943, it served as a forced-labour camp for Jews within the framework of Operation Reinhard. Between September 1943 and May 1944 it was a subcamp

of the Lublin/Majdanek concentration camp.

Establishment of camp

Less than two weeks after Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, German SS and police authorities in the Lublin district established a detention facility on the grounds of an abandoned sugar refinery outside of Trawniki (a town located just south of the Lublin-Chełm road, 20 miles east southeast of Lublin and about the same distance due east of Chełm). They were acting on the orders of the SS and Police Leader (SS- und Polizeiführer; SSPF) for Lublin District, SS Major General Odilo Globocnik. Managed by an officer on Globocnik's staff, SS Captain Hermann Höfle, the Trawniki camp originally was a holding center for refugees and Soviet prisoners of war (POWs), whom the Security Police and SD had designated either potential collaborators or dangerous persons. On July 9, 1941, 676 inmates were incarcerated there.

Training prisoners of war for Nazi work

In September 1941, pursuant to his July 17, 1941, appointment as Commissioner for the Establishment of SS and Police Bases (SS- und Polizeistützpunkte) in the New Eastern Territory, Globocnik transformed the facility into a training camp for auxiliary police personnel to maintain security for proposed German settlements in the occupied Soviet Union. Globocnik's staff recruited as auxiliaries captured Soviet soldiers, who, after being processed in Trawniki, entered the Guard Forces (Wachmannschaften) of the SSPF in the Lublin District. The first Soviet soldiers recruited from the prisoner-of-war camps arrived at Trawniki in early September 1941. On October 27, 1941, Globocnik appointed SS Captain Karl Streibel to command the newly christened Trawniki training camp, a position Streibel held until the evacuation of the camp in July 1944.

SS and police officials inducted, processed, and trained 2,500 auxiliary police guards (Wachmänner, also known as Trawniki men) at Trawniki training camp between September 1941 and September 1942. Virtually all of them had been Soviet prisoners of war. As German military reverses and the murderous treatment of the prisoners of war dried up the supply of suitable Soviet soldiers in the autumn of 1942, Streibel's men conscripted civilians. These civilians were primarily young Ukrainians, residing in Galicia, Wolhynia (Volhynia), Podolia, and the Lublin District. When Globocnik transferred out of Lublin in September 1943, he reported that 3,700 Wachmänner were serving in the Trawniki system. In fact, more than 4,750 identification numbers had been issued by this time. Between 1941 and 1944, SS and police officials trained approximately 5,082 men at Trawniki. The Trawniki men were organized into two battalions under the command of SS Second Lieutenant Willi Franz and SS First Lieutenant Johann Schwarzenbacher.

The recruits underwent courses by German SS/Police instructors in understanding basic military commands in German, singing German songs, small arms and marching drill, guard procedures and ghetto-clearance techniques. Each man was issued a captured Soviet rifle; the platoon commanders had pistols.

When a Jewish labor camp was constructed adjacent to the Trawniki training compound, the trainee guards were sent out on exercises, rounding up Jews in towns in the Lublin District and bringing them into the labor camp. The final part of the training course consisted of Jews selected from the labor camp being shot individually by each Trawniki man.

On completing their training, the bi-lingual Trawniki men were designated Oberwachmann and Zugwachmann and posted to various establishments. Others were simply designated as Wachmann and posted in groups to military establishments as armed auxiliaries to support the German security services.

Key role of Trawniki men in Final Solution

Deployment in the operations of the "Final Solution" became a key function of the Trawniki-trained guards. The Trawniki men provided the guard units for the Operation Reinhard killing centers at Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka II. Between 70 and 120 Trawniki men were selected to act as the guard unit at each of the three Reinhardt death camps and came under the jurisdiction of the relevant camp commandant.

In front of the Treblinka gas chambers Jews were beaten with clubs and iron bars by the gas chamber operators trained in Trawniki, Nikolay Shaleyev and Ivan Marchenko. Shaleyev had a cavalryman's sabre which he used to cut off the breasts of Jewish women and sever their noses and ears. He was capable of cutting a person in half with one stroke of the sabre. He enjoyed setting his dog on naked people walking to the gas chamber. Marchenko walked around the camp dispensing violence with a two-metre-long water pipe, with which he was expert at killing, and with one blow could slay a physically strong man.

The guards, who were given 10 Reichmarks a week for tobacco, had many other sources of income, including the warehouses containing the property of the Jewish victims, which they pilfered and bartered with the local population. Even within the confines of the camp, the Ukrainian guards supplied food and vodka to "work Jews" in exchange for cash or valuables. Delivering illegal messages from one part of the camp to the other was another source of enrichment.

The undisciplined behavior of the Ukrainians caused a lot of problems for the SS/Police in the camps. "We were a "pile of conspirators" ("verschworener Haufen") in a foreign land, surrounded by Ukrainian volunteers in whom we could not trust", so said SS-Scharführer Erich Bauer, the "Gasmeister" ('gassing expert') of Sobibór.

On many occasions the German camp commanders reacted to the excesses of these guards by beating, whipping and imprisoning them in a punishment bunker where they remained for several days without food or water. The leadership, however, were pragmatists and in return for their collaboration, turned a blind-eye on some occasions to the corruption and thefts committed by the Ukrainians, but on other occasions, for serious breaches of security, the leadership did not hesitate to shoot them on the spot, or return them to Trawniki to be executed. For loose talk to outsiders, two Ukrainians were arrested, dressed in clothing bearing the Jewish yellow star and then gassed with the Jewish victims of the next transport.

Sometimes the Trawniki men rebelled. There appears to have been one revolt planned by the Ukrainian guard unit Belzec. In early 1943, 50 guards mutinied and made an attempt to seize valuables and firearms from the garrison. One of the guards informed on his colleagues; as a result, the SS were waiting and arrested them. The guards were removed under close guard to Trawniki, where it is believed they were all shot.

On October 22, 1943, while accompanying 30 Ukrainians from Sobibór to Trawniki by train, SS-Oberscharführer Herbert Floss was murdered by the guard, Wasil Hetmaniec, with his own machine-pistol, between Chelm and the village of Zawadowska. The other 25 guards escaped but were hunted down by the SS, arrested in Rejowiec, disarmed, manacled, and returned to Trawniki. Their fate is not known.

Those Ukrainian guards who were trusted by the camp leadership were issued the black uniform of the German SS and allowed to carry arms. These favored individuals were also taken to northern Italy when Reinhardt was disbanded in late 1943.

At the conclusion of Reinhardt, the majority of the Ukrainians were transferred to the SS "Galizien" Division and fought until the division was defeated and destroyed by the Soviets at Brody in 1944.

Companies of Trawniki-trained guards served for a time in the SS Death's-Head Units (*SS-Totenkopfverbände*) that guarded the concentration camps Lublin/Majdanek and Auschwitz. The Wachmänner also guarded forced-labor camps for Jews at Poniatowa, Budzyn, Treblinka I (the Treblinka labor camp), the Janów Street Camp in Lvov (L'viv), and other camps.

In Auschwitz, 15 Ukrainians fled the camp taking their weapons with them. In the following manhunt three German officers were shot. Soon after, all the Ukrainians in Auschwitz were dispersed to other concentration camps where it is presumed they were also shot.

German SS and police authorities deployed the Trawniki men in deportation operations from both large and small ghettos in German-occupied Poland and as escorts for the transport trains from ghetto to killing center. Among the ghettos in which Trawniki-trained guards were deployed were Warsaw (three times), Częstochowa, Lublin, Lvov, Radom, Kraków, and Białystok (twice). Globocnik's recommendation for Streibel's promotion reflected the satisfaction of the SS leadership at how diligently the Wachmänner implemented their hideous tasks: Globocnik wrote that Streibel had commanded the Trawniki training camp

"with the greatest discretion and understanding for the special leadership needs of this unit. These units have proved themselves in the best way in many anti-partisan missions, but especially in the framework of the resettlement of the Jews."

Transit camp for local Jews en route to death camps

In 1942, Trawniki served as a transit camp for local Jews. After an early April "selection" of those incapable of work in the ghetto-town Piaski, located about six miles from Trawniki, Trawniki Wachmänner escorted several hundred Polish, German, and Austrian Jews from

Piaski to Trawniki. Scheduled for deportation to the Belzec killing center the following day, many of the victims were locked up in a large barn-like structure overnight. Between 200 and 500 of the Jews died overnight from suffocation; their bodies were tossed the next morning into the freight cars destined for Belzec. During 1942, SS and police instructors also utilized the local Jewish population for "training purposes." The new recruits received practical training in roundups and escort duty. Some zealous instructors reportedly ordered recruits individually to shoot a Jew.

Forced labor camp for Jews

During the summer of 1942, Trawniki also began to serve as a forced-labor camp for Jews (*Zwangsarbeitslager für Juden*). Under the auspices of Operation "Reinhard", the SS and police constructed the labor camp adjacent to the training camp, separated only by the original stone wall that surrounded the abandoned sugar factory. The appearance of a Jewish workforce at Trawniki coincided with the establishment of procedures for disposing of the property of the Jews murdered in Operation "Reinhard." Globocnik selected Trawniki to be a storage depot for clothing flowing in from the killing centers. The so-called Clothing Depot (*Bekleidungslager*) was located just outside the fence of the training camp. In June 1942, three freight cars stocked with baggage taken from Viennese Jews bound for Sobibor were diverted to Trawniki. That same month the SS brought in a Jewish labor detachment of 20 to 40 women to sort, wash, and repair the clothing.

As his SS and police murdered the last of those Jews in the General Government considered "incapable of work," SS chief Heinrich Himmler grew increasingly fearful of resistance, yet was hopeful that the SS could better integrate the surviving Jewish forced laborers into the German armaments production process. On October 9, 1942, he ordered the transfer of all privately owned factories producing armaments and related goods, along with their Jewish forced laborers, from ghettos in the General Government to forced-labor camps, including Trawniki, where the Jews could be more easily guarded.

Forced labor exploited by private industry

In the late autumn of 1942, SS authorities moved a brush factory and its laborers from the Miedzyrzec-Podlaski ghetto, which the SS and police had just liquidated, to Trawniki. On February 8, 1943, Globocnik signed a contract with Fritz Emil Schultz of F.W. Schultz and Co.



Trawniki men engaged in massacres in Warsaw Ghetto

The Schultz firm produced mattresses and furs, and repaired boots and uniforms. The contract provided that the Schultz fur production plant with its 4,000 Jewish workers and a brush-making plant with 1,500 more workers be transferred with all movable equipment and civilian personnel from the Warsaw ghetto to Trawniki. It named Streibel commander of the Trawniki labor camp with responsibility for distribution of labor, collection of fees for the forced laborers (five zlotys a day for men and four zlotys a day for women), and security. Day-to-day management

of the camp, however, was the duty of SS Master Sergeant Franz Bartetzko and his deputy, SS Staff Sergeant Josef Napieralla. To manage the provision of forced laborers to the Schultz firm and to other firms located at other labor camps, the SS leadership founded a holding company, Ostindustrie GmbH (East Industries, Ltd.--Osti) on March 12, 1943.

Initially, the SS encouraged the Jews who worked in the Schultz plant to relocate voluntarily. On February 16, 1943, transports began to leave the Warsaw ghetto for Trawniki. Despite threats to shoot those who ignored SS incentives, Schultz could only persuade 448 out of 1,500 workers scheduled for transfer by April 14 to board the trains. Losing patience, the SS decided to liquidate the Warsaw ghetto. At 3:00 a.m. on the morning of April 19, 1943, SS and police units, including a battalion of 350 Trawniki-trained guards, sealed off the ghetto, sparking the Warsaw ghetto uprising. Between February 15 and April 30, 1943, 2,848 men, 2,397 women, and 388 children were removed from Warsaw to Trawniki in 17 transports via truck and train. {Stroop's Report reports Trawniki Battalion as being 2 officers/355 men and lists 2 Trawiki killed and 11 wounded.}

By May 1, at least 5,633 Jews resided in the Trawniki labor camp. Most of them were Polish Jews, but some were German, Austrian, and Slovak Jews. Between May 27 and July 24, eight new barracks were constructed to accommodate the influx of prisoners. Barracks construction continued until September 1943. The number of prisoners who worked for the Schultz concern at Trawniki hovered around 6,000 from May 1943 until the liquidation of the camp in November. Small detachments of prisoners worked directly for the SS in barracks construction and general camp maintenance. Two transports of Jewish workers arrived in Trawniki from the Minsk ghetto after its liquidation in September 1943.

Brutality in the labor camp

In the interests of heightened production, Bartetzko initially maintained relatively decent conditions in Trawniki. He reportedly tolerated illicit trade in food and alcohol, permitted Jewish prisoners to form their own musical band, and even offered opportunities to play soccer. After August 1943, however, conditions deteriorated. Medical care after August was nonexistent and fear of sickness was endemic. Though the weather became cold in October, the workers received no winter clothing. Violations of camp regulations, such as theft or an attempt to escape, brought swift and brutal retribution.

One day in May or June 1943, Bartetzko shot a prisoner for attempting to escape. As a deterrent, the body was left where it fell for 24 hours. When three Jews were caught stealing equipment, Bartetzko assembled all available guards, prisoners, and Schultz firm executives to watch each of the three prisoners receive 25 lashes with a bullwhip. Frequent violators risked transfer to a subcamp located at Dorohucza, about two miles north of Trawniki. Under command of SS Sergeant Robert Jühns, Dorohucza's "industry" was digging peat—dangerous and difficult work for approximately 100 ill-clothed, ill-fed, and ill-equipped prisoners.

Transfer of authority

For a variety of reasons, including Globocnik's quarrels with the civilian District Governor in Lublin and Osti's failure to secure Wehrmacht contracts, the SS leadership transferred the Trawniki complex to the jurisdiction of the SS Economic-Administration Main Office (*SS-Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamt*) in September 1943. Trawniki thus became a subcamp of Lublin/Majdanek. In the following months, 1,000 Trawniki-trained guards were transferred to Death's-Head battalions guarding concentration camps in Germany, while 150 guards from the SS Death's Head guards arrived in Trawniki.

Murder of surviving Jews in late 1943

Stunned by the prisoner uprising in the Sobibor killing center, Himmler ordered the murder of the remaining Polish Jews in the Lublin District in late October 1943. As part of the cynically christened Operation "Harvest Festival" (*Aktion Erntefest*), SS and police units shot at least 6,000 Jewish inmates of Trawniki and Dorohucza on November 3, 1943, eliminating virtually the entire workforce. After the massacre, the Trawniki SS and police staff imported a small detachment of Jewish laborers from Milejow to burn the corpses on massive grills made from rail track, and then to disperse the ashes and bone fragments into trenches, which they covered with dirt. After completing this dreadful work, the Jewish laborers were shot and their bodies burned.

For weeks after the massacre, Trawniki-trained guards searched the camp grounds for hidden Jews. Those who were found within the first few weeks were shot. Zina Czapnik and her niece, Raja Mileczina, were able to hide for nearly two months before the *Wachmänner* discovered them. To Czapnik's astonishment, both women were permitted to live. They joined a detachment of approximately 40 Jewish women of Austrian and Dutch origin who had been brought to Trawniki after the massacre to perform domestic tasks inside the camp complex, such as laundry and cleaning the barracks for the SS staff and the *Wachmänner*. They also sorted and recycled Operation "Reinhard" booty and the clothing of the recently murdered Trawniki inmates. In May 1944, the SS transferred this small detachment to Lublin/Majdanek and the Trawniki labor camp was dissolved.

Last operations before Soviet conquest

The *Wachmänner* continued to train at Trawniki until late July 1944, when the rapid Soviet advance forced the Germans to abandon Trawniki and Lublin itself. On July 23, 1944, Soviet troops overran both Trawniki and Lublin. The remaining *Wachmänner*, numbering around 1,000 men, fled in chaos to regroup west of the Vistula River.

Later careers of Trawniki personnel

Some key officials at Trawniki did not survive the war or its immediate aftermath. Globocnik committed suicide upon capture by the British in Carinthia on May 31, 1945. Höfle was arrested by Austrian authorities in 1961 and committed suicide in his cell on August 21, 1962. Neither Trawniki battalion commander survived the war: SS Second Lieutenant Willi Franz

went missing on July 31, 1944. SS First Lieutenant Schwarzenbacher was killed by partisans near Trieste on June 2, 1944. Bartetzko was killed at the front in January 1945.

Other Trawniki officials faced prosecution in the postwar decades. A West German court in Hamburg indicted Streibel, Napieralla, and four Trawniki company commanders in 1970, but acquitted all six defendants in 1976. Soviet military tribunals or Soviet civilian courts prosecuted hundreds, possibly as many as a thousand, of Trawniki-trained guards after the war: virtually all were convicted, some were executed. A handful of Trawniki-trained guards were tried in the West. A German court in Düsseldorf sentenced Franz Swidersky, a Treblinka labor camp guard, to life imprisonment in 1971.

The United States initiated successful denaturalization proceedings against 16 former Trawniki guards, including three who served at killing centers, and virtually all of whom guarded Jewish prisoners at Trawniki itself^[*citation needed*]. In 1984 Feodor Fedorenko was extradited to the USSR where he was sentenced to death and executed. In March 2009 Josias Kumpf, an Austrian who served as a guard in Trawniki, was deported from the US to Austria. In May 2009 John Demjanjuk was deported from the US to Germany.

See also: Vladas Zajanckauskas

External links

- United States Holocaust Memorial Museum - Trawniki (<http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/article.php?lang=en&ModuleId=10007397>)
- In depth overview of the Trawniki Camp, Trawniki Staff, Photos. - All about Trawniki (<http://www.holocaustresearchproject.net/ar/Trawniki/trawniki.html>)
- Belzec: Stepping Stone to Genocide, Sources of Manpower (<http://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/belzec1/bel040.html>)

Notes

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