

D.P. Hospital/2004/A
Head of Department Dr. Z. Grinberg

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To the Jewish World Congress
Geneva

Report

On April 26, 1945, the sick prisoners of the outpost of the Dachau camp (this outpost consisted of 11 separate camps) were put into freight cars, allegedly for evacuation, but in reality for deportation into some extermination place. The prisoners were seriously ill, exhausted, emaciated and half-dead creatures. A number of them were infected by spotted fever, others by tuberculosis, and the rest suffered from acute feverish illnesses. The sick were actually in no way fit for transport, especially not in freight cars with 70 to 80 people in a car. The sick people were transported like lifeless beings and they lay in a miserable state in cars at a platform of the Holzmann Construction Company located between the cities of Landsberg and Kaufering in Upper Bavaria. In this transport were some Jews who had been employed as doctors or secretaries at the concentration camp.

The train departed at 12 midnight on April 26. It trudged along the whole night but often remained for hours at the same spot. There were air-raid alarms the whole night. We heard the gun fire of heavy artillery approach. We realized that we were close to the fighting zone. On the morning of April 28, we had only covered 12 kilometers. We were now near the small village of Schwabhausen that had a train station. At 8 o'clock in the morning, an anti-aircraft and provisions train of the German air force was standing there on the tracks. At 8:30 American reconnaissance was in this area and spotted this anti-aircraft train. As a consequence, the anti-aircraft train was withdrawn and replaced by the long prisoner train with about 3,500 prisoners, 95 percent of whom were lying on the floor of the train. The anti-aircraft train moved to another track and its position was hidden by the prisoner train. In this manner, those responsible intentionally wanted to screen the anti-aircraft and provisions train using the train with the prisoners. At about 10 o'clock, the first American fighter bombers were observed in the sky. The commander of the train, Obersturmführer Müller, ordered that no one was allowed to leave the train: "Whoever leaves the train will be shot, even if there is an air raid attack going on." At about 10:15, the fighter bombers came down on the train and began to fire on the engine and the first cars. Tremendous chaos and endless confusion ensued. The first who fled were the SS guards who ran for shelter in the neighboring woods. The prisoners observed this and since the bullets hammered into the cars from all sides, they also tried to flee after them into the woods. Those patients who were still able to walk hid themselves under the trees. After ten minutes the attack was finished. We had 136 dead and 80 severely wounded people. The wounded lay together with the dead in the cars. As the only doctors present, we tried with the few means at our disposal to give first aid to the wounded. It was, however, of no avail because we faced severely wounded people, with bullets lodged in the body or having passed through, with complicated fractures, and open, bleeding wounds, and we did not have the necessary means to help them. It was a miserable picture, but I do not have the time now to describe in more detail this tragic and shocking scene. After the attack the SS guards returned. They surrounded the

woods and shot into the groups to reestablish discipline and order. We had new victims. The ill and wounded lay partly in the railroad cars and partly in the forest. They cried and begged for water and bread. There was no water available and all the bread had already been eaten. We were left at the front line of attack for the whole day, but still the SS seemed not to have changed their old tactic. We were told that the train would continue on in the evening. And in fact, in the evening there came the sudden and quick order: "Enter the train!" Instantly after this order the train started to move and left. A large number of the sick were left in the nearby forest. I and my colleague Dr. Jochum Katz were among them. We were not sure how many sick people were actually present, because they had spread out in a large area. We were suddenly in a no man's land; the Germans were no longer there and the Americans were not to be seen. All around us everything was burning. We heard heavy explosions and the detonation of shells, and different kinds of gun shots were zipping through the air. Most of the sick lay listless on the ground without moving and waited for death to liberate them. We cared for the sick and carried water from the neighboring village where we observed that German air force units were still present. We spent the whole night in the forest. Eighteen people died during the night.

The following morning, I went to the mayor of the village of Schwabhausen to discuss the situation with him. He told me that first the dead should be buried. In the afternoon, a train would probably come to transport the sick that were still alive. I instantly had the feeling that the mayor wanted to get rid of as quickly as possible this human plague that had been left at the door of his village yesterday. He simply wanted to forward this sick human mass to another place. In other words, he wanted to send it away without means of transport, guards or provisions. I went to the station master and asked him to sabotage this order for a train because I knew that this would be our transport to death. The station master understood my meaning, but he told me he could not comply with my wish. In the meantime, the sick, limping and slowly dragging themselves, had spread out in the village and started to ask the farmers for food. The mayor ordered the *Volkssturm* (home guard) to round up the prisoners and to assemble them at the train station. This was done as the train was supposed to leave at 2:00 pm. I was at the end of my wits. Suddenly I saw in the distance a motorbike with the flag of the Red Cross. It carried a German female doctor who shouted to the villagers that soon American tanks would be on their way. I felt deeply relieved. It was now half past one. The train was supposed to leave Schwabhausen at 2:00 pm. Encouraged and boosted by the message of the German female doctor I again went to the mayor and informed him that if he did not place the prisoners found in his village under his protection and care for them and if he did not prevent the departure of the sick people, he would certainly be taken into custody by the American military authorities that could arrive at any time in the village and held accountable and that he would probably be shot, "Because you, Mister Mayor, will have the life of these prisoners on your conscience if they are to be deported." I hit the table with my fist and ordered him to sign the following document: "Since I do not have at my disposal guards or a competent commander for the prisoners left in the village of Schwabhausen or of any necessary provisions, it is impossible for me to have the foreign prisoners transported to another place and I will grant them the protection of my community." He stared at me and refused to sign the document. At that moment, he looked out of the window at the village road and observed a commotion among the local population. He went to the window, addressed one of the farmers, exchanged some hushed words with him and returned to the table. His face had suddenly become very polite. He asked me to sit down and without further ado signed the few lines which I had written

down. After he had stamped the document with the seal of the village, I hurried to the station master and told him that the train would remain in Schwabhausen. The German air force units in the village quickly left and the village remained without any soldiers.

I accommodated the sick in the barns where the air force units had formerly stayed. Some of the sick looked for shelter in the railroad cars that were left at the station, others acted on their own initiative, went to the farmers and occupied shacks and stables. Dr. Katz and myself went looking for the village physician, Dr. Arnold, and together we started to give the first medical treatment to the sick. The wounded were assembled at one place and for the first time we bandaged them. By evening, the Americans had still not arrived. The following day, I forced the mayor to organize food for the prisoners who numbered 400-500. For the first time after a long period they received milk and bread. The day passed, then the following night, and still the Americans did not arrive. Only on Sunday, April 29, 1945, were the first American tanks seen that passed through the village. The nearly lifeless and suffering creatures hardly mustered up the strength to realize that they had been liberated.

Since then, we, some Jews from Lithuania under my direction, assembled all the sick people in a military hospital situated at St. Ottilien. An American captain named Raymond assisted us with transport vehicles and with his people helped to gather the sick together and bring them to the hospital. He also helped us to establish the necessary authority among the German administration of the military hospital so that they offered us space and personnel. After a few days, however, this American captain had to leave us. What has been achieved until now was done through our own initiative which was supported by a palliative assistance of the military authorities. We now have a hospital with about 650 Jews from all over the world (from Lithuania, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and Greece). In the hospital, German doctors and nurses work under the supervision of three Jewish doctors. The German personnel are trying hard and seem to have good will. We actually brought 500 dying people into the hospital and 35 of those have died, but these in fact only during the first week. Now the death rate has gone down considerably. Last week, no one died.

During these seven weeks, most of the sick have overcome any fatal crisis and find themselves on the way to recovery.

(Translated from the German)