

"Sonderbehandlung" and Crematory II: The Typhus Epidemic of January 1943

by Carlo Mattogno

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Box 2145 PVP CA 90274 USA

<http://www.russgranata.com/>

[e-mail: info@russgranata.com](mailto:info@russgranata.com)

Regarding crematoria, the words "**Sonderbehandlung**" and "**Sondermassnahmen**" have analogous meanings. The Aktenvermerk of 29 January 1943 in reference to the electrical supply of Crematory II states:

"However, the start of operations [of the crematory, from 15 February 1943] can only be based on restricted use of the existing machines (whereby a cremation with simultaneous special treatment is made possible), because the [electric power] line feeding the crematory is too weak for its performance requirements."

("Diese Inbetriebsetzung kann sich jedoch nur auf beschränkten Gebrauch der vorhandenen Maschinen erstrecken (wobei eine Verbrennung mit gleichzeitiger Sonderbehandlung möglich gemacht wird), da die zum Krematorium führende Zuleitung für dessen Leistungsverbrauch zu schwach ist").^[1]

What does the expression "cremation simultaneously with special treatment" mean? D. Dwork and R.J. van Pelt answer this way:

"When Bischoff and Dejaco had modified the basement plan of Crematoria II and III to include a gas chamber, they had increased the anticipated electricity consumption of the building. The ventilation system was now simultaneously to extract the Zyklon B [sic] from the gas chamber and fan the flames of the incinerators. They had contacted AEG, the contractor for the electrical systems, but because of rationing, AEG had been unable to get the heavy-duty wiring and circuit-breakers which the system required. As a result, Crematory II was to be supplied with a temporary electrical system; nothing at all was available for use in Crematory III.

Furthermore, the AEG representative in Kattowitz, Engineer

Tomitscheck, warned the Auschwitz building office that the capacity of the temporary system would not allow for simultaneous 'special treatment' and incineration."[\[2\]](#)

In other words, the electric power line to the crematory was insufficient for cremation and homicidal gassing simultaneously. Actually,(setting aside the arbitrary allusion to a "gas chamber"), the text tells exactly the contrary: also a limited use of the "existing machines" allowed "cremation simultaneously with special treatment."

To understand the meaning of the aforementioned phrase, it is necessary to look at this document in its historical context. The electrical technician, SS-Unterscharführer Swoboda was the leader of the Technische Abteilung of the Zentralbauleitung. On 29 January 1943, Topf engineer Kurt Prüfer inspected the building sites of the four crematoria in Birkenau and compiled a "test report" (Prüfbericht) in which he wrote the following concerning Crematory II:

"The five three-muffled crematory ovens are ready and are presently being heat-dried. The delivery of the air intake and exhaust ventilation system for the underground mortuary is delayed because of railroad blockages, therefore the installation cannot be done until 10 days from now. So the starting of Crematory II on 15.2.43 is certainly possible."

("Die 5 Stück Dreimuffel-Einäschenungsöfen sind fertig und werden z.Zt. trockengeheizt. Die Anlieferung der Be- und Entlüftungsanlage für die Leichenkeller verzögerte sich im Folge der Waggon Sperre, sodass der Einbau voraussichtlich erst in 10 Tagen erfolgen kann. Somit ist die Inbetriebnahme des Krematoriums II bestimmt am 15.2.43 möglich.")[\[3\]](#)

Concerning this report, the Swoboda Aktenvermerk states:

(1) that the time which was pointed out by Prüfer to wait to activate the crematory (15 February 1943) could be respected only with a "limited use of the existing machines," and

(2) that this would have guaranteed "cremation simultaneously with special treatment" as well. Which were the "existing machines"? The answer to this question can be found in two important documents. The Kirschnek Aktenvermerk dated 29 January 1943, referring to Crematory II which states:

"The electrical connection for the crematory motors of the compressed air blowers are being transferred/relocated. The three big

intake/suction installations which are located at the smokestacks/chimneys are installed and ready to function. Here also the electrical connections for the motors are being presently transferred/relocated. The cadaver elevator is being provisionally installed (as a plateau-lift/hoist). The intake and exhaust air ventilation equipment for the mortuary basement has not arrived because the railroad blockage was only lifted a few days ago. The [train] wagons are rolling and we are daily expecting the arrival of these materials. The installation can proceed in approximately 10 days." [4]

("Die elektrischen Anschlüsse für die zum Ofen gehörenden Motore für die Druckluftgebläse werden z.Zt. verlegt. Die 3 grossen Saugzuganlagen, an den Schornsteinen befindlich, sind eingebaut und betriebsfertig erstellt. Auch hier werden zur Zeit die elektrischen Anschlüsse für die Motoren verlegt. Der Leichenaufzug wird z.Zt. provisorisch eingebaut (als Plateauaufzug). Die Be- und Entlüftungsanlage für die Leichenkeller ist infolge der Waggon Sperre, die vor einigen Tagen erst aufgehoben wurde, noch nicht eingetroffen, die Waggon rollen und wird täglich mit dem Eintreffen dieser Materialien gerechnet. Der Einbau kann in ca. 10 Tagen erfolgen..") [4]

This report is fully confirmed by the forms which were filled out by the Topf installer Heinrich Messing in January 1943 regarding the duration of the jobs he performed on Crematory II:

"04/05.01: Travel.
 05/10.01: Installation of the air-intake facility in crematory.
 11/17.01: Transport and installation of the 3 air-intake facilities in Crematory I. (II)
 18/24.01: Air-intake facility installed in Crematory I. Prisoner of war camp. (Crematory II)
 25/31.01: Air-intake and exhaust installations. **5 secondary blowers** for the 5 three-muffled ovens installed. Transport of the material.
 01/07.02: Secondary blowers for the five three-muffled ovens installed." [5]

("04/05.01: Reise.
 05/10.01: Montagen d. Saugzug-Anlagen in Krematorium.
 11/17.01: Transport und Montage der 3 Saugzug-Anlagen im Krematorium I. (II)
 18/24.01: Saugzug-Anlagen im Krematorium I. K.G.L. montiert. (Kr II)
 25/31.01: Saugzug u. Be u. Entlüftungsanlagen. **5 Stück Sekundargebläse** für die 5 Dreimuffelöfen montiert. Transport

des Materials.

01/07.02 Sekundargebläse für die fünf Dreimuffelöfen montiert.")

[\[5\]](#)

The provisional elevator was still not installed; it was ordered by the Zentralbauleitung from the Häftlingsschlosserei on 26 January 1943 (Auftrag Nr. 2563/146), but its manufacture ceased on 13 March. [\[6\]](#)

In summary, the "**existing machines**" on 29 January 1943 were:

- The three draught/intake installations (Saugzug-Anlagen) of the chimney, equipped with a blower 625 D (Gebläse 625 D) [\[7\]](#) with a three-phase engine of 15 CV powered with 380 volts. [\[8\]](#)
- The five compressed air devices (Druckluft-Anlagen) for the ovens, equipped with a blower 290 M (Gebläse Nr. 275 M) with a three-phase engine of 3 CV, 1420 rpm, 380 volt (Drehstrommotor 3 PS, n=1420/Min. 380 Volt). [\[9\]](#)
- Machines scheduled but not yet existing, were:
- the air intake and exhaust installations for the "B-Raum" [Leichenkeller 1] (2 three-phase engines powered at 380 volts, 2 CV),
- the Entlüftungsanlage for the oven room (1 three-phase engine powered with 380 volts, 3.5 CV),
- the Entlüftungsanlage for Sezier-Aufbahrungs- u. Waschraum (one three-phase engine powered with 380 volts, 1 CV),
- the Entlüftungsanlage for the "L-Raum" [Leichenkeller 2] (one three-phase engine powered with 380 volts, 5.5 CV). [\[10\]](#)

Now we can answer the second question: If a limited use of the existing machines with blowers and intake equipment for the ovens would have guaranteed "cremation simultaneously with Sonderbehandlung", it is clear that this "Sonderbehandlung" could not have had any relationship to an alleged homicidal gas chamber of Leichenkeller 1, however, Sonderbehandlung is connected to these installations, and particularly with cremation itself: **it refers to a treatment of dead bodies and not to a treatment of living people.** Considering the historical context - a typhus epidemic increase so dangerous in 1942 as to induce the chief of Amtsgruppe D of the SS-WVHA, SS-Brigadeführer und Generalmajor der Waffen-SS Glucks to command on 08 February 1943 the "vollständige Lagersperre" (the complete quarantine of the camp)[\[11\]](#) - the meaning of the term "Sonderbehandlung" in the Aktenvermerk of 29 January 1943 could only be an extension of the hygienic-sanitary meaning explained earlier, that is: from the hygienic-sanitary point of view, the "**existing**

machines" would have guaranteed unexceptionable cremation even with limited use. This is confirmed by a document traced back a couple of weeks earlier. On 13 January 1943, Bischoff wrote a letter to the Deutsche Ausrüstungswerke in Auschwitz with the subject, "Fulfillment of carpentry jobs for the Bauvorhaben room." In this document, Bischoff complained about the delay in receiving doors "for Crematory I in the KGL". He stated:

"Above all, the ordered doors of Bftgb. Nr. 17010/42/Ky/Pa of order letter dated 26.10.42 for Crematory I of the concentration camp is urgently needed for carrying out special precautions." [\[12\]](#)

("So sind vor allem die mit Auftragschreiben vom 26.10.42 Bftgb. Nr. 17010/42/Ky/Pa bestellten Türen für das Krematorium I im KGL, welches zur Durchführung der Sondermassnahmen dringend benötigt wird.")[\[12\]](#)

As we have shown, the "Durchführung der Sondermassnahmen" had no criminal meaning; on the contrary, it denoted the construction of hygienic-sanitary installations, including the hospital for the prisoners (Häftlingslazarett) projected in the BIII sector of Birkenau. Therefore, if the crematory was made for the "Durchführung der Sondermassnahmen", it means that it was a part of these installations and its hygienic-sanitary function was exclusively the cremation of dead bodies of deceased camp prisoners.

NOTES

NB: Since this is from a book in progress, the documents referenced in the notes are not included herein.

[1] VffG December 1997, p. 277 (citation by David Irving).

[2] Deborah Dwork, Robert Jan van Pelt, *Auschwitz 1270 to the Present*. W.W. Norton & Company, New York, London, 1996, p. 330.

[3] Prüfbericht des Ing. Prüfers of 29 January 1943. APMO, BW 30/34, p. 101.

[4] Kirschnek Aktenvermerk of 29 January 1943. BW 30/34, p. 105.

[5] J.C. Pressac, *Auschwitz*, p. 370.

[6] processo Höss, p. 83.

[7] doc. 190.

[8] Schluss-Rechnung of the Topf company to the ZBL regarding "BW 30 - Krematorium II." TCIDK, 502-2-26, p. 230.

[9] doc. 189.

[10] Topf Rechnung Nr. 171 of 22 February 1943 concerning the ventilation installations of Crematory II. TCIDK, 502-1-327, pp. 250-250a. I published a copy of this document in *Auschwitz: fine di una leggenda*. Edizioni di Ar, 1994, pp. 83-84.

[11] APMO, Standort-Befehl, D-Aul-1, p. 46.

[12] APMO, BW 30/34, p. 78.

<p>http://www.russgranata.com/ e-mail: info@russgranata.com POB 2145 PVP CA 90274 USA</p>
