

2.3. The Diary of Johann Paul Kremer

On August 29, 1941, Johann Paul Kremer, a medical doctor who had joined the Wehrmacht (German) army on May 20, 1941, was ordered to Concentration Camp Auschwitz to replace another surgeon. Kremer kept a diary of many of his daily activities throughout the war. After his arrival at Auschwitz, oftentimes within the same entry Kremer speaks without emotion of “actions” he observed and the food he ate, as if these two activities are on the same plane. The footnotes to the diary contain important corroborating or clarifying information and should be read along with the primary text.

*Source: “Diary of Johann Paul Kremer,” translated from the German by Krystyna Michalik, in *KL Auschwitz Seen by the SS* by Rudolf Hoss, Pery Broad, and Johann Paul Kremer. The Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, Oswiecim, 1995, pp. 161–165.*

August 28, 1942	Was sent to Berlin to buy the cap. On leaving I was informed that the officer on duty wanted to speak to me. He told me, on behalf of <i>Ustuf</i> . Koebel, that I was not to go to Berlin.
August 29, 1942	Ordered according to F.S. ⁱ USSZ 2150 Aug. 28, 42, 1833, no. 1565 to Concentration Camp Auschwitz to replace a surgeon there who had been taken sick.
August 30, 1942 <i>Stabschef</i> Wilhemy ⁱⁱ Vide Virchow Director 1936!	Departure from Prague 8:15 a.m. through Bohmisch, Trubau, Olmutz, Prerau, Oderberg. Arrival at Concentration Camp Auschwitz 5.36 p.m. Quarantine in camp on account of numerous contagious diseases (typhus, malaria, dysentery). Received top secret order through the garrison physician <i>Hauptsturmfuhrer</i> Uhlenbrock ⁱⁱⁱ and accommodation in a room (no. 26) in the Waffen-SS club-house [Home]. ^{iv}
September 2, 1942	Was present for the first time at a special action ^v at 3 a.m. By comparison Dante’s inferno seems almost a comedy. ^{vi} Auschwitz is justly called an extermination camp!
September 3, 1942	Was for the first time taken ill with the diarrhea which attacks everybody in the camp here. Vomiting and colic-like paroxysmal pains. Water did not cause it as I had not drunk any. Neither was it the bread. People who take white bread only (diet) also fall ill. Most probably it is the unhealthy continental climate, very dry and tropically hot, with clouds of dust and insects (flies).
September 4, 1942	Against diarrhea—for 1 day gruel and mint tea, then on diet for a week. Took charcoal tablets and tannalbin. On the way to recovery.
September 5, 1942	At noon was present at a special action in the women’s

	<p>camp^{vii} (Moslems)^{viii}—the most horrible of all horrors. <i>Hscht.</i> Thilo,^{ix} military surgeon, was right when he said to me today that we are located here in the <i>anus mundi</i> [anus of the world]. In the evening at about 8 p.m. another special action with a draft from Holland.^x Men compete to take part in such actions as they get additional rations— 1/5 litre vodka, 5 cigarettes, 100 grammes of sausage and bread. Today and tomorrow (Sunday) on duty.</p>
September 6, 1942	<p>Today an excellent Sunday dinner: tomato soup, one half chicken with potatoes and red cabbage (20 grammes of fat), dessert and magnificent vanilla ice-cream. After dinner we welcomed the new garrison doctor, <i>Obersturmfuhrer</i> Wirths^{xi} from Waldbrol. <i>Sturmbannfuhrer</i> Fietsch in Prague has been his regimental surgeon.</p> <p>It has been a week since I came to camp and still I have not been able to get rid of fleas in my room in spite of using all kinds of insecticides, such as Flit (Cuprex) etc.</p> <p>I got a refreshing impression after visiting the commandant's aide-de-camp for the first time. Above his room I saw a big inscription on paper. "Cyclists, dismount!"^{xii} We have also verses worthy of notice hanging in the office of our SS hospital:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">"If you make a thousand lucky hits, People see them, they nod and pass. But even the smallest yelping dog Will never forget, should you miss but once!"^{xiii}</p> <p>In the evening at 8 o'clock attended another special action outdoors.^{xiv}</p>
September 7, 1942	<p>The second inoculation against typhus. Rainy and cool weather today.</p>
September 9, 1942 I see light again; the black curtain hanging over my life has been lifted!	<p>This morning I received most welcome news from my solicitor Professor Dr. Hallermann in Munster, that I was divorced from my wife from the 1st of this month. Later was present as physician at the flogging of 8 camp inmates^{xv} and at one execution by shooting with a small-calibre gun. Got soap flakes and 2 cakes of soap. At noon a civilian jumped out of the blue at my bicycle, just like an assassin, ran alongside and begged me to tell him whether I was State Councillor Heuner from Breslau to whom I bore a remarkable resemblance. He had fought in World War I side by side with that gentleman. How many doubles have I, then, running about in this world?^{xvi} In the evening present at a special action (4th time).^{xvii}</p>
September 10, 1942	<p>In the morning was present at a special action (5th time).^{xviii}^{xix}</p>

ⁱ This is probably the order transferring Kramer to the concentration camp of Auschwitz.

ⁱⁱ SS-Sturmbannführer Kurt Uhlenbrock was garrison physician (Standortarzt) in the concentration camp of Auschwitz.

ⁱⁱⁱ SS-Oberscharführer Anton Wilhelmy held the position of company chief, under the SS garrison surgeon (*Spiess bei der Dienststekte SS Stabdirarzt*) in KL Auschwitz.

^{iv} *Haus der Waffen-SS*—hotel building situated near the railway station in the town of Oswiecim (Auschwitz).

^v 957 Jews from the camp at Drancy (France) were brought that day to KL Auschwitz. Only 12 men and 27 women out of that number were sent to the camp, the rest were gassed in gas chambers. All data concerning transports are quoted after the *Kalendarium de Ereignissen im Konzentrationslager Auschwitz-Birkenau* compiled by Canuta Czech and published in *Hefte von Auschwitz*, nos. 2–7.

^{vi} Kremer was one of the defendants at the trial of the Auschwitz camp garrison. The trial took place before the Supreme National Tribunal in Cracow in the period from November 24 to December 22, 1947. During the interrogation Kremer was repeatedly questioned. It was then that he offered detailed information on the meaning of some of the entries in his diary. Excerpts from his explanations are quoted in this publication under the respective dates. In the official record of the interrogation of August 18, 1947, in Cracow, Kremer stated as follows: “By September 2, 1942, at 3 a.m. I had already been assigned to take part in the action of gassing people. These mass murders took place in small cottages situated outside the Birkenau camp in a wood. The cottages were called ‘bukers’ [Bunker] in the SS-men’s slang. All SS physicians on duty in the camp took turns to participate in the gassings, which were called *Sonderaktion* [special action]. My part as physician at the gassing consisted in remaining in readiness near the bunker. I was brought there by car. I sat in front with the driver and an SS hospital orderly [SDG] sat in the back of the car with oxygen apparatus to revive SS-men, employed in the gassing, in case any of them should succumb to the poisonous fumes. When the transport with people who were destined to be gassed arrived at the railway ramp, the SS officers selected from among the new arrivals persons fit to work, while the rest—old people, all children, women with children in their arms and other persons not deemed fit to work—were loaded onto lorries and driven to the gas chambers. I used to follow behind the transport till we reached the bunker. There people were driven into the barrack huts where the victims undressed and then went naked to the gas chambers. Very often no incidents occurred, as the SS-men kept people quiet, maintaining that they were to bathe and be deloused. After driving all of them into the gas chamber the door was closed and an SS-man in a gas mask threw the contents of a Cyclon tin through an opening in the side wall. The shouting and screaming of the victims could be heard through that opening and it was clear that they were fighting for their lives [*Lebenskampf*]. These shouts were heard for a very short while. I should say for some minutes, but I am unable to give the exact length of time.”

^{vii} A selection took place that day in the women’s camp at Birkenau, resulting in the killing in gas chambers of about 800 women prisoners. In the formal record of the interrogation of July 18, 1947 (Cracow) Kremer explains this entry as follows: “The gassing of emaciated women from the women’s camp was particularly unpleasant. Such individuals were generally called *Muselmanner* [Moslems]. I remember taking part in the

gassing of such women in daylight. I am unable to state how numerous that group was. When I came to the bunker they sat clothed on the grounds. As the clothes were in fact worn out camp clothes, they were not let into the undressing barracks but undressed in the open. I could deduce from the behaviour of these women that they realized what was awaiting them. They begged the SS-men to be allowed to live, they wept, but all of them were driven into the gas chamber and gassed. Being an anatomist I had seen many horrors, had dealt with corpses, but what I then saw was not to be compared with anything ever seen before. It was under the influence of these impressions that I noted in my diary, under the date of September 5, 1942: 'The most horrible of all horrors. *Hauptsturmführer* Thilo was right when he said to me today that we were located here in the *anus mundi*.' I used this expression because I could not imagine anything more sickening and more horrible."

^{viii} Prisoners in a state of acute starvation were called Moslems in camp slang. A Moslem was like a walking skeleton. The bones were barely covered with skin, the eyes had a far-away look. Apathy and somnolence were typical symptoms of starvation disease. Complete psychological exhaustion went together with general physical emaciation.

^{ix} *SS-Obersturmführer* Heniz Thilo, Doctor of Medicine, was a camp physician in KL Auschwitz.

^x 714 Jews were brought in a draft from Wedterbork (Holland) to KL Auschwitz. Only 53 women were sent to the camp, the rest were killed in gas chambers. In the official record of the interrogation of July 18, 1947 (Cracow) Kremer explained: "An SS physician was always present at such gassings. The physicians took turns in being on duty. Among the physicians of the period when I was in the camp I remember the following names: Thilo, Kitt, Uhlenbrock, Wirths, Meyer, Entress. The special actions mentioned in my diary were only part of the actions, which were taking place during the time covered by my diary. There were, of course, many more, only other physicians participated in these."

^{xi} *SS-Sturmbannführer* Eduard Wirths, Doctor of Medicine, was a camp physician at KL Auschwitz.

^{xii} In the original *Radfahrer absteigen*, an ironical allusion to persons who bow their heads (a cyclist's position) in front of their superiors, while treading (the movement when pedaling) on their inferiors.

^{xiii} The text in the original is as follows:

Has Du im Leben tausend Treffer,
Man sieht's, man nickt, man geht vorbei.
Doch nie vergisst der kleinste Klaffer,
Schießt due ein einzig Mal vorbei.

^{xiv} That day 981 Jews were brought from the camp at Drancy (France) to KL Auschwitz. 16 men and 38 women out of this number were admitted to the camp as prisoners. The rest were killed in gas chambers.

^{xv} In the printed form of a punishment order (*Strafvergugung*) there was the notice that a prisoner sentenced to be flogged should be examined by an SS doctor before the punishment. The doctor was also to be present at the punishment. The doctor signed the form, thus recording his examination and his presence. But this was a mere formality. SS doctors never examined prisoners sentenced to be flogged nor was there ever a case recorded of a doctor opposing the inflicting of that punishment. Henry Kuszaj: Strafen,

die von der SS an Haftlingen des Konzentrationslagers Auschwitz vollzogen wurden.
Hefte von Auschwitz. Oswiecim 1960, no. 3, pp. 14, 40 and 41.

^{xvi} This question is asked by Kremer in connection with the entry of April 14, 1942, when he related a similar occurrence.

^{xvii} That evening 893 Jews were brought to KL Auschwitz in a transport from Westerbork (Holland). 59 men and 52 women were sent to the camp as prisoners, the rest were killed in gas chambers.

^{xviii} That day 1,001 Jews were brought to KL Auschwitz from the camp at Malines (Belgium). 21 men and 64 women were sent to the camp, the rest were killed in gas chambers.