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Wednesday, April 16, 1947, 8:00 AM, Oswiecim, Poland: The skies were gray and full of clouds as Rudolf Höss promptly arrived and was taken to the building that was once his office, only three years earlier. As per his request, Höss was given a cup of coffee and then escorted into the camp jail in Block 11, notoriously known as the "Death Block."

German POWs mounted the specially constructed gallows. Armed, uniformed guards stood everywhere. Everything was set and ready to go. More than two hundred people—consisting of former prisoners and high officials from the ministry of justice, the state prosecutor's office, and the Security Bureau— all gather to bear witness.

At precisely 10:00 AM, Höss was led out to the gallows, which was within feet from the crematorium of the former Auschwitz I concentration camp. He was calm, in almost a peaceful way. With his hands handcuffed behind his back, the executioners helped him climb onto the stool, as the prosecutor read out the sentence. Höss then speaks his final words: "I am very sorry for what I have done to the Polish people. I ask that they forgive me." Making this the last public execution in Poland, the noose was placed on Höss' neck.

At 10:08 AM, the hangman pulled the stool from under the former commandant of Auschwitz. Father Tadeusz Zaremba, a priest requested by Höss, began to recite the prayer for the dying.

Stanislaw Hantz, a guard within feet of the gallows, recalls the execution:

"When they were leading him to the gallows, Höss looked calm. I thought as he climbed to the gallows, up the steps—knowing him to be a Nazi, a hardened party member—that he would say something. Like make a statement to the



Höss immediately before his execution

glory of the Nazi ideology that he was dying for. But no. He didn't say a word.

And during the execution you thought: One life for so many millions of people; is that not too little?"

At 10:21 AM, at 47 years young, Rudolf Franz Ferdinand Höss, founder and first commandant of Auschwitz- Birkenau concentration camp, was pronounced dead. It is said that his body was cremated and delivered to his family.

Who was Rudolf Höss? Do you know? Don't worry, I didn't either. Aside from the few victims who survived the horrific days in the Auschwitz concentration camp and some others, a great majority of people have absolutely no idea who this man was and what kind of crimes he was responsible for; however, when a person hears the name Adolf Hitler, their eyes will fill with repulsion and disgust.

Little do they know that Rudolf Höss, history's greatest mass murderer, was not too far behind Hitler.

Since the greatest crime in history, hundreds of books and stories about the appalling life in Auschwitz have been published revealing prisoners' experiences, but merely one SS officer wrote at length about the camp from the perspective of the SS.

Between October 1946 through April 1947, at the suggestion of psychologist Professor Stanislaw Batawia and Professor Jen Sehn, Rudolf Höss narrates the development and administration of the largest killing center ever created. The memoirs were written in his death

cell, upon awaiting execution, with the intention to help Höss obtain any recollection of events that were brought up during his trial. Höss offers a compelling, yet gruesome description of the pogrom of genocide, allowing us to see the days of Auschwitz through the eyes of the Commandant's. It gives the Holocaust deniers out there a reason to reconsider their ideology.

The man responsible for the organized murder of an uncounted four million people should be researched and studied thoroughly. While he feels he was the victim, one must understand his philosophy, beliefs, and principles to fully grasp his standpoint and mentality. Before he will undoubtedly fade into history, I made it my duty to explore the mind of the greatest destroyer of human beings in history. I would do whatever it takes- even seeking out his progenies to shed some light on this "victim."

Early Life and World War I

Rudolf Franz Ferdinand Höss was born on November 25, 1900, the first child to Lina née Speck and Franz Xaver Höss. Growing up in Baden- Baden, Germany, with two younger sisters, Höss lived in a strictly Catholic home. On December 11, 1901, Höss was baptized, when his father decided he would become a Roman Catholic priest. His parents ran a tea and coffee business, which was inherited from Höss' grandparents. Franz Höss came from the military family and had been a Germany army officer in East Africa. He raised his son on strict religious principles, along with military discipline. He was assertive and had an overpowering influence on his son during his childhood.

Höss enjoyed horse-back riding and exploring in the forests whenever possible. With an obsessive love for animals, Höss was given Hans, a pony, in which Höss felt was the only one

who was faithful and honest to him. According to his autobiography, Höss was a lonely child, with no playmates his own age. He claims that although his parents cared for him, he refused to open up and show any kind of affection. The only one he would show fondness and entrust with was Hans. He was a fervent believer in the central role of duty in a moral life and stressed on the importance of sin, guilt, and repentance. He was well disciplined, with the expectation of becoming a priest.

His virtuous life took a turn, in his early teen years, during an incident with his priest and confessions. His confessor violated the secrecy of the confessional when disclosing an event at school, which Höss revealed during confession, to his father. Höss explains, "My faith in the holy profession of the priesthood was smashed and doubts began to stir within me . . . After this incident, I could no longer trust any priest." He gave up any expectations of becoming a priest and would never return to religion, until shortly before his execution. To make matter worse, the following year, his father died unexpectedly.

Following the death of Höss' father, and the outbreak of World War I, Höss began moving toward a military life. He started volunteering in a military hospital and immediately found himself fascinated by the military life. After multiple failed attempts to join the army, he finally succeeded before his fifteenth birthday in 1916. By the mere age of seventeen, while stationed in Turkey, Höss became the youngest *Feldwebel*, or sergeant in the German army. Within two years, he had command of his own cavalry and was awarded with the Iron Cross First Class. Furthermore, during this time, Höss lost his mother- a death that didn't have much of an effect on him.

Höss' wartime experiences affected him significantly. He recalls the first soldier he killed with enthusiasm and excitement: "I can still picture to this day a tall, broad Indian, with a distinct black beard, jumping from a pile of rocks . . . I fired and watched the Indian slump forward during his jump. He didn't move . . . He was my first kill!" Wounded several times on the battlefield and a victim of malaria, Höss was proud of this achievement and felt that he "went in as a school boy and came out as a man." During his time in the military, Höss not only learned of manhood, but he was taught the concept of leadership, which would reflect on his life as commander and SS officer.

On Trial for Murder- Round One

Three years later, in 1919, Höss was discharged from the army. Finding himself with nothing left to fight for, nothing to believe in, and without a home, the young Höss refused to accept any financial aid from his relatives and renounced his part of his inheritance in favor of his sisters. Höss then joined the *Freikorps Rossbach*, a fanatical, militant group. This group consisted of members from the German army who fought both for and against the German state and formed the frontline of the Nazi movement.

Shortly thereafter, Höss attended Adolf Hitler's speech in Munich. Within the next few years, he met with his future commander and role model, the leader of the *Schutzstaffel*, Heinrich Himmler. In November of 1922, Höss joined the Nazi Party and acquired the Nazi Party number 3240. He explains his motives for enlisting in the Nazi Party:

"Most of all my old comrades absolutely wanted to see me in the front ranks of the fighting organizations of the NSDAP (National Socialist German Workers

Party). I rejected both ideas . . . I agreed with and was convinced about the aims of the Party. I emphatically rejected the mass propaganda, the pandering for the favor of the masses, the appeal to the lowest mass instincts . . . Although I was inclined to remain a Party member, I didn't want any office, nor did I want to join the branch organizations. I had other plans."

His "other plans" he was referring to was his long life dream, since his days living on the farm as a child, which was to own a farm of his own and enjoy it with his large family. His dream would come true; albeit, I don't know if the largest concentration camp adjoined to his backyard was part of his plan.

Höss' life made a wrong turn when he got into trouble with the law. Being the loyal member he is to the *Freikorps*, he beat to death a man named Parchimer, who had been accused of being a communist spy. On June 28, 1923, Höss was arrested and put on trial for murder. In his defense, he was not the "ringleader", yet still took the blame for the reason that he is "firmly convinced that this traitor deserved to die." On March 15, 1924, he was sentenced to serve ten years in a Prussian prison.

During his time in prison, he suffered a severe mental and physical breakdown, also known as prison psychosis. While Höss served only six years in prison, he spent his time wisely. He used this opportunity to observe other prisoners, while learning several languages, including English. As time in prison went by, he became "more and more calm and clear-thinking." Eventually, he became a "model prisoner" and was released on July 14, 1928.

After his release, Höss joined an organization called the Artamans. This was a nationalistic back-to-the-land movement: youthful idealists who wished to escape immoral and

corrupting urban life through farming and healthy living. Here, he met his wife, Hedwig Hensel, and married her in the spring of 1929. They had five children together- two sons and three daughters, named Klaus, Ingebriggitt, Hans-Rudolf, Heidetraut, and Annegret.

Rising Through the Ranks

In June of 1934, *Reichsführer-SS* Heinrich Himmler personally invited Höss to join the SS. At first, Höss was torn. On one hand it was diverting his dreams of life on the farm with his family, while the idea of becoming a soldier once again seemed very appealing. Höss explains in his memoirs how his wife was indecisive as well:

“She agreed when she saw how very much I felt attracted to becoming a soldier again, even though I would have to deviate from our agreed course. I was confident that we would be able to hold on to our dream, since I was promised a quick promotion, and with all the financial advantages connected with it . . . After considering the facts for a long time, still full of doubts, I decided to join the General SS.”

While in prison before his execution, Höss asserted that he sincerely regretted his decision.

Höss’ first assignment, as a soldier in the General SS, was a drill instructor at Dachau, Bavaria- the first crafted concentration camp. This camp was a training center for SS guards and was a model for other concentration camps. The earliest and primary inmates found at Dachau were mainly German communists. In addition, Dachau also had special barracks for religious people who opposed the Nazi state. Dachau was composed of thirty separate camps, containing gas chambers and a crematorium.

Höss' mentor at Dachau was creator of the concentration camps, SS General Theodore Eicke, who Höss describes as "hard, cruelly hard in his orders and against those who would not carry them out." He goes further to point out that "he had no human understanding for the prisoners as a whole." Nonetheless, Höss feels that Eicke was "clean and totally honorable."

Dachau is where Höss first experienced a prisoner undergoing corporal punishment- twenty seven lashes for stealing cigarettes- and he expressed himself as making his "skin crawl". He then goes on to explain that when he became a block leader and later camp commander, and had to order corporal punishment, he was "hardly ever present."

As much as it bothered Höss to witness prisoners undergo corporal punishment (or so he wishes us to think so), he never displayed any sort of emotions, for that would portray him as weak: "Even though I became accustomed to all the occurrence of the concentration camp, I never became insensitive to human suffering. I always saw it and felt it. But I always had to walk away from it because I was not allowed to be soft. I wanted to have the reputation of being hard. I did not want to be thought of as a weak person." (Mission accomplished!)

Höss' three and a half years at Dachau played a significant role in transforming his



Höss in 1936, promoted to SS-
Hauptsturmführer

mentality. There he learned camp administration and discipline. Höss became the model SS man and rose through the ranks, ultimately getting promoted to *Rapportführer*- chief assistant to the commander of Dachau. In September 1938, Höss was made a lieutenant and transferred to Sachsenhausen concentration camp in Oranienburg, Germany.

Sachsenhausen was a concentration camp located north of Berlin and was used primarily for political prisoners. In Sachsenhausen, Höss was, once again promoted to SS-*Hauptsturmführer*, or SS Captain, and given the job of adjutant to SS General Hermann Baranowski. Here is where he learned about the concentration camps, their inner workings and practices.

By September 1939, Höss became executive officer of Sachsenhausen. Less than one year later, he would become Commandant of Auschwitz- the largest Nazi camp and the only camp that served as an extermination camp, concentration camp, and forced-labor camp.

Commandant of Auschwitz

Around April 18, 1940, while still working at Sachsenhausen, Höss visited Oswiecim, a prison camp in western Poland, to investigate the possibility of turning this site into a concentration camp. Approximately two weeks later, after Höss' report was sent to Himmler, he ordered a concentration camp built at the location, with instructions to expand the camp using the prisoners to do the work.

By May 1, 1940, Höss was transferred to Oswiecim (its German name was Auschwitz), and would remain as Commandant for the next three and half years. Initially, the primary goal was for Höss to create a transition camp for ten thousand prisoners from the existing complex as soon as possible. Throughout the years in Auschwitz, Höss continually perfected the building and the development of the camp- which he considered was



Höss as Commandant of
Auschwitz

his main task. Eventually, Höss would expand the original campus into an extensive complex, known as Auschwitz-Birkenau.

One of Höss' noteworthy traits was determination. As a child, he was taught the importance of following orders. Being a good Nazi and following all of Himmler's demands, as if they were commandments, Höss acted with no thought or regard to moral consequences because "*Befehl ist Befehl*"- "orders are orders"- and they must be followed. Höss explains in his defense:

"Right from the beginning, I was completely absorbed by my new assignment and my orders; in fact, I was obsessed. Every new problem that appeared lashed me on to even greater intensity. I didn't want this situation to get the best of me. My ambition would not permit it. I lived only for my work . . . More and more I was withdrawing into myself. I buried myself in my work and became unapproachable and visibly hardened."

Höss always believed that he had to be constantly on duty and obey all orders from Hitler, for "Hitler's order was a firm fact and it was the duty of the SS to carry it out."

Höss lived in Auschwitz in a luxurious villa together with his wife and children. The two story stucco mansion stood in the North eastern corner of the concentration camp. Only 150



Map of Auschwitz main camp shows Commandant Höss' house on the far left

meters away, the crematorium chimneys were blowing out the ashes of the dead, day and night. Höss later realized that his family, particularly his wife, suffered on account of his aspiration and devotion to his work. In fact, he later admits that he deeply regretted putting his job before his family and

wished he spent more time with them.

By June of 1940, the first transport- 728 Polish political prisoners- arrived from the Tarnow prison. Other transports of prisoners began arriving following that date. The largest group of inmates at Auschwitz concentration camp was the Jews, followed by the Russian prisoners of war, then the Gypsies.

In his memoir, Höss describes life for the prisoners at the camp. He closely observed each group of inmates in fascination and interest, and often compared each group of inmates to the other. He reports that he recognized the poor and terrible conditions at the camp, which he explains how the deprivation of food and necessities took a great toll on the inmates. Höss asserts that the death rate of most of his prisoners was "caused not only by the unaccustomed work, or the inadequate food, or the overcrowded living conditions, and all the other unpleasantness and poor conditions of the camp, but mainly and most importantly because of their psychological conditions." Höss fails to mention that hundreds of thousands of his inmates were killed by execution and most notably- the gas chambers.

The majority of the prisoners of the Auschwitz concentration camp were the Jews. After his observation on the Jews, Höss maintains that they often betrayed one another, in order to protect themselves. Each Jew tried to get an easy job for himself, even if that meant sabotaging members of their own race. He also mentions that in order to escape their suffering and out of desperation, Jews often threw themselves into the electrified barbed wire or attempted to escape with the hope of being shot. Höss then specifically comments: "I want to emphasize that I personally never hated the Jews. I considered them to be the enemy of our nation. However,

that was precisely the reason to treat them the same way as the other prisoners." Resenting the Jews or not, in his eyes, Höss simply saw them as the enemy of the state.

The second largest group, who were intended to build a POW camp at Birkenau, were the Russians prisoners of war. It is estimated that at least twenty thousand POWs arrived at Auschwitz. Höss describes, in vivid detail, the horrifying conditions he concluded on the Russian POWs:

"They were perfectly willing to work, but were unable to accomplish anything because of their weakened condition . . . Their emaciated bodies could not digest any food . . . They died like flies because of their weakened physical condition or from the slightest illness, which their bodies could no longer fight off . . . They could bear the cold, but not the dampness and wearing clothes which were always wet . . . They had become animals who looked for only one thing- food."

Despite the awful circumstances, Höss never showed any kind of emotion. He "had to be like steel- colder, harder, and even more merciless toward the misery of the prisoners."

The next largest prisoners were the Gypsies. Approximately sixteen thousand Gypsies were registered in Auschwitz. Höss believes that the Gypsies did not suffer psychologically; nonetheless, the overcrowded barracks, the inadequate hygienic conditions, the overflowing infirmaries speak for themselves. Furthermore, Höss asserts that the Gypsies never took anything seriously, for they "behaved like children." Even though at times Höss found them aggravating, he considered them to be open and trustworthy. After all, he did consider them his "favorite prisoners."

In his autobiography, Höss points out that all prisoners were well treated in his home. He had two older women, from the Jehovah's Witnesses, who took constant care of his children and maintained the household. His children valued the prisoners, often snatching cigarettes and food for them. Some inmates working in the household built toys and bicycles for the Höss children. One particular Polish survivor, Mieczyzlaw Koscielniak, reminisces working in the Höss home, stating that during his stay, he was regarded as a guest; he ate dinner with the Höss family, and was treated warmly by Commandant Höss, his wife, and children.

The Final Solution of the Jewish Question

On June 30, 1941, Commandant Höss was summoned to Berlin for a meeting with Heinrich Himmler and given the orders for the Final Solution. Himmler briefly explained that Hitler had given the order for the physical extermination of Europe's Jews and Himmler had chosen the Auschwitz camp for this purpose for two main reasons: "First of all, because of the advantageous transport facilities, and secondly, because it allows this area to be easily isolated and disguised." Höss was sworn to secrecy, forbidden to speak with anyone about these matters, including his superiors. Himmler informed Höss that he will be receiving details and operational orders through *SS Obersturmbannführer*, Major Adolf Eichmann of the RSHA (Reich Security Headquarters).

Within four weeks, Höss was to submit plans for the installations necessary for the mass killings. Höss would ultimately convert Auschwitz into an extermination camp, installing gas chambers and crematoriums. He continually explored various methods of improvement of the extermination, making Auschwitz the most productive killing center.

When he was later questioned about his compliance with this horrific order, Höss contended, "It was certainly an extraordinary and monstrous order . . . I did not reflect on it at the time: I had been given an order, and I had to carry it out. Whether this mass extermination of the Jews was necessary or not was something on which I could not allow myself to form an opinion, for I lacked the necessary breadth of view."

Now that Höss was assigned to a new task for the installation for the mass killings, he had to discover an appropriate technique in achieving this order. At first, Höss experimented with various methods of gassing. He attempted using carbon monoxide, the recommended method, but that was an inadequate and unsatisfying procedure of human extermination. Höss then tested cotton filters soaked in sulfuric acid. But again, Höss found it lacking and insufficient.

It was Höss' deputy, Karl Fritzsche, who first thought of using the cyanide gas, Zyklon B, an insecticide often used in the camp to exterminate lice and vermin, to kill human beings. On

Empty cans of Zyklon B



September 3, 1941, Fritzsche tested the Zyklon B on six hundred Russian POWs and two hundred and fifty inmates. The gassing was carried out in the basement of Block 11, known as the "Death Block" in Auschwitz. Höss recalls his first experience attending the gassing experiment:

"I viewed the killings wearing a gas mask for protection. Death occurred in the crammed-full cells immediately after the gas was thrown in. Only a brief choking outcry and it was all over . . . There, for the first time, I saw gassed bodies in

mass. Even though I imagined death by gas to be much worse, I still was overcome by a sick feeling, a horror."

With Zyklon B, Höss said that it took from three to fifteen minutes for the victims to die.

So the aggravation and frustration for Höss was over. The applicable method has been found and Himmler agreed with the plan. All that was left was to create and install suitable sites for the gas chambers and crematoriums to carry out the Final Solution. Höss states that Himmler visited Auschwitz in the summer of 1942 as he "carefully observed the entire process of annihilation from beginning to end." According to Höss, Eichmann visited Auschwitz and observed its operations rather frequently and "was intimately acquainted with the proceedings."



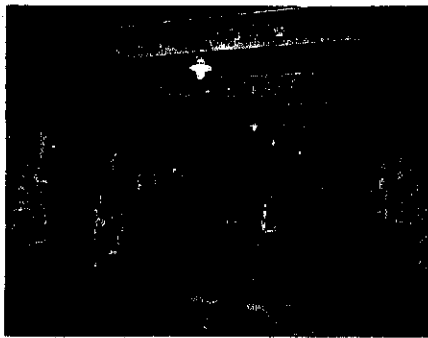
Höss (right) with Himmler, Auschwitz

In contrast to the discomfort Höss experienced during his first encounter with the gassings, he admits, "The gassings had a calming effect on me . . . I was always horrified of death by firing squads . . . Now I was at ease. We were all saved from these bloodbaths, and the victims would be spared until his last moment." (I guess Höss puts everyone's feelings into consideration. How sweet.)

In January 1942, the first transport of Jews brought from Upper Silesia arrived and were all to be exterminated. Höss believed that the strong and healthy Jews should be selected to work. The selection process went as follows: the railway cars were unloaded one after another. After depositing their baggage, the Jews had to individually pass in front of an SS doctor, who decided on their physical fitness. Those who were considered able-bodied were escorted into the camp. The remainders were sent to the gas chambers.

In front of "The Little Red House", a brick cottage converted into a gas chamber, everybody had to undress behind the wall made from branches. There was a sign on the door, which read "*Disinfectionsraum*", meaning "Bathhouse". The Sonderkommando, Jewish prisoners who were forced to help in the extermination process to keep the victims calm, then told the victims to pay attention to where they placed their clothes, fooling them into thinking they were returning after their "bath". (Höss believed this would prevent disturbances and keep them in doubt.)

Once they were undressed, they were escorted into the room. The doors were then



The gas chamber in the main Auschwitz camp

locked and a can of Zyklon B was thrown into the chamber through holes in the ceiling. Depending on the number of victims contained in the gas chamber, it took approximately three to fifteen minutes for the Zyklon B to take effect.

After a half hour, the doors were reopened and the bodies were taken out by the Sonderkommando. The Sonderkommando then inspected each corpse, removing valuables such as gold teeth and rings. Additionally, hair was cut from the cadavers and set aside. Subsequently, the Sonderkommando transported the bodies to the crematoriums and had them burned. According to Höss, ten thousand people were exterminated within a 24-hour period. Valuables were sent monthly to the *Riechsbank*, the central bank in Germany. The gold from the teeth were melted down and sent monthly to the medical department of the Waffen-SS in Berlin.

By November 1943, Auschwitz concentration camp was divided into three command groups: Auschwitz I, Auschwitz II/ Birkenau, and Auschwitz III/ Monowitz. Auschwitz I was the original camp, serving as the administrative center for the complex. On this site, brutal medical experiments by "camp doctors"- German physicians and scientists- have been conducted on inmates, torturing them by putting them into pressure chambers, tested with drugs, castration, frozen to death, to name a few. In addition, this camp had a gas chamber, in which thousands of prisoners were killed. Auschwitz II/ Birkenau, the largest of the three, was the extermination camp, where most of the killing took place. This camp was built in October 1941, in which a total of four crematoriums attached with gas chambers were installed. It is estimated that two million people, mostly Jews, were annihilated at this site. Auschwitz III/ Monowitz was the slave labor camp for Jews, non-Jew criminals and political prisoners. The Auschwitz complex became the killing center where the largest number of Jews were killed.

In his memoir, Höss described how he reacted to the mass annihilation:

"Everyone watched me. They all wanted to see what kind of impression this made on me, and how I reacted . . . I had to make a tremendous effort to pull myself together in order not to allow my inner doubts and depressions to come out in the open. I had to appear cold and heartless during these events which tear the heart apart in anyone who had any kind of human feelings."

Höss claims that he had to put up a front, in order that he showed no sign of weakness. He *did* have a reputation to uphold.

Höss goes further and explains how once the extermination began, he was no longer happy: "I became dissatisfied with myself, my main responsibility, the never-ending work, and

the undependability of my coworkers . . . And yet, everyone in Auschwitz believed the Commandant really had the good life." He believed that his work constantly conflicted with his family, realizing it a little too late.

In December 1943, Höss was appointed to Chief of the Department of Inspectors of Concentration Camps. With the problems that constantly arose at Auschwitz, Höss felt it was time to move on, gladly accepting the opportunity. As Chief Inspector, Höss worked extremely hard to progress the "efficiency" of the other extermination camps. Because he performed his job in an exceptional fashion, Höss was admired in a 1944 SS report that described him as "a true pioneer in this area because of his new ideas and educational methods."

On May 8, 1944, Chief Inspector Höss returned to Auschwitz to supervise the entire extermination process, by which 430,000 Hungarian Jews were transported to the camp and killed within 56 days. This would make Höss' final visit to Auschwitz.

Toward January 1945, the SS have been given orders from Berlin to begin burning all documents and dismantling and blowing up the crematoriums and gas chambers. They were instructed to destroy all evidence, in order to protect themselves from being tried and executed. Most of the crematoriums and gas chambers in Auschwitz were destroyed and on January 27, 1945, the Soviet troops entered Auschwitz, liberating an approximated 7,000 remaining prisoners- most of who were ill and dying.

A precise count of how many people were actually murdered at Auschwitz is undetermined, for the reason that those that marched off directly from the trains were usually not registered. However, one can deduce that, at minimum, two million men, women, and

children of almost every nationality and religion in Europe suffered and died in the manmade hell of Auschwitz from 1940 to 1945.

Escape, Trial, and Execution

Toward the end of the war, Höss was given direct orders by Himmler to conceal himself among the German Navy. For nearly a year, Höss went into hiding on a farm in northern Germany. He disguised himself as a farmer named Seaman Franz Lang. He continuously carried vials of poison with him, maintaining that he was not going to take the chance of being arrested.

On March 11, 1946, at 11 PM, two days after his vial of poison had broken, Höss was captured and arrested by British troops- some of whom were German Jews. After being interrogated and beaten brutally, Höss confessed to his true identity. He signed a confession three days later. Two months later, on May 25, 1946 (Höss' wedding anniversary), Höss was handed over to Polish authorities, where he gave detailed testimony of his crimes.



Höss after he was captured by the British

In 1947, the Supreme National Tribunal in Polish tried Höss with the murder of "around 300,000 people held at the camp as prisoners and entered into the camp's records and around 4,000,000 people, mainly Jews, who were brought to the camp in transports from other European countries for immediate extermination and thus not listed in the camp's records." He was sentenced to death by hanging on April 2, 1947, in the gallows that were specially designed

and constructed adjacent to the gas chambers in Auschwitz. Höss did not appeal for leniency and the sentence was carried out on April 16, 1947.

During his days in his death cell, Höss returned to the midst of the Catholic Church. Höss wrote his autobiography, at the suggestion of psychologist Professor Stanislaw Batawia and Professor Jen Sehn, while awaiting his death sentence. Before his execution, Höss only made one request- the permission to send a farewell letter and return his wedding ring to his family.

On April 16, 1947, just before his execution, Rudolf Höss signed the following Final Statement, in which he admitted his shame for committing Crimes Against Humanity and for participating in the genocide perpetrated by the Third Reich:

“My conscience is forcing me to make also the following assertion: In the isolation prison I have reached the bitter understanding of the terrible crimes I have committed against humanity. As a Commandant of the extermination camp at Auschwitz, I have realized my part in the monstrous genocide plans of the Third Reich. By this means, I caused humanity and mankind the greatest harm, and brought unspeakable suffering, particularly to the Polish nation. For my responsibility, I am now paying with my life. Oh, that God would forgive me my deeds! People of Poland, I beg you to forgive me! Just now in the Polish prisons have I recognized what humanity really is. In spite of everything that happened I have been treated humanely, which I had never expected, and this has made me feel deeply ashamed. Would to God . . . that the fact of disclosing and confirming those monstrous crimes against mankind and humanity may prevent for all future ages even the premises leading to such horrible events.”

The Descendants of Evil- Get the Inside Scoop

Rainer Höss was twelve years old when he first discovered his grandfather was history's greatest mass murder. The gardener at his boarding school, an Auschwitz survivor, beat him callously, after learning he was the grandson of Rudolf Höss, the architect and SS Commandant of the largest killing center ever created.

Rainer Höss, now well into his forties, recalls that brutal experience: "He beat me, because he projected on me all the horror he went through . . . Once a Höss, always a Höss. Whether you're the grandfather or the grandson- guilty is guilty."

Rainer Höss is still having trouble coming to terms with his family name. Born in 1965, Rainer grew up in Ludwigsburg, Germany, along with his older brother. During his middle school days, Rainer was banned from visiting Auschwitz because of his name. For some time, Rainer did not understand what the correlation was between his surname and Auschwitz concentration camp.

He decided to ask his grandmother, wife of the late Rudolf Höss, "What's going on with the name?" After no response, he felt compelled to dig into his family's Nazi past independently. "It was not spoken in my family . . . My father never talked about the crimes of his father, or the experience of Auschwitz. It was a taboo subject at home with us", said the 47-year-old chef and father of two boys and two girls. His family preferred that he not poke around in the past. Dauntless, he spent many hours examining archives and exploring the Internet, to find any information relating to his grandfather.

Every so often, his grandmother spoke of the exploits of her husband and how he had to leave his family for his country. She accentuated on the fact that her husband was a brave

solider and *"er nichts unrechtes getan hat, da sie Feinde des deutschen Reiches waren und somit den Tod verdient hatten"*, meaning he has done nothing dishonest, as these prisoners were enemies of the German Empire and thus deserved their deadly fate.

Rainer's only direct source of information about his family background was from the private driver of Rudolf Höss and the maid of honor of his grandparents. His father, Hans-Jürgen, the younger of Commandant Höss' two boys, spent most of his childhood years living in the aesthetic villa in Auschwitz. Oddly enough, his obstetrician was Dr. Carl Clauberg, the German physician at Auschwitz who performed vicious experiments on prisoners.

Born and raised in Auschwitz, he and his siblings played with toys built by prisoners. Playing and enjoying life in the serene backyard of the Höss home, Hans-Jürgen grew up with



The toy car Hans- Jürgen played in was made by inmates at Auschwitz

the constant smell and smoke of the ashes of the dead from the crematoria, which was only some yards away from the home. When the children ate the strawberries, picked from their garden, they were instructed to wash them thoroughly because "they smelled of ash from the concentration camp ovens."

Rainer says that his father had the same cold nature as his grandfather. "He said what to do, and we obeyed . . . He set the rules, and we must obey." Rainer's father forbade his children from showing any sign of weakness or emotion. If they cried, they were beaten. As a child, Rainer reveals, there was "never any sense of warmth between him and his children." Although Hans-Jürgen was only ten years old when his father was executed, he never abandoned the

ideology he grew up with. To this day, Rainer is no longer in contact with his father or brother, who call him a traitor.

Presently, Rainer inherited his grandfather's fireproof chest, a personal gift given to Rudolf Höss from Nazi leader, Heinrich Himmler. The old-wooden box, with a large swastika on the lid, contains a series of family photos and slides, documenting the private life of the Höss children. They featured his father as a young child, playing with his brothers and sisters in their pool with a slide, in the garden of their lavish family home; however, there are no photos that show any sign of a concentration camp, which was adjoined by the garden gate, which Rainer referred to as the "gate to hell". He couldn't help but wonder what their innocent minds knew. "They must have looked through the gate. What did they see?"

Recently, Rainer Höss decided to visit the Auschwitz main camp, for the very first time. He was constantly tormented by the thought that he might be recognized as the grandson of the "Death Dealer", given that the resemblance between himself and his grandfather is uncanny. He travelled together with his friend and a third-generation survivor, Eldad Beck, who likewise has avoided the camp. At last, Rainer looks through the "gate to hell" himself. He was in disbelief, gazing at the luxurious villa his own father grew up in. With only a wall separating the pleasant life in the Höss home from the Auschwitz crematorium, Rainer can't comprehend what a normal day for his grandfather would be like:

"He'd put on his uniform, put on his belt, stick his pistol in it, and put on his beret. A kiss on the right and a kiss on the left. 'I'm going to kill a few thousand people now. We'll meet afterward for coffee and dinner. And tomorrow, children, we'll go on a field trip.'"

During the course of their trip to Auschwitz, Rainer met a group of young Israeli students, who are descendants of Auschwitz's survivors. He related to the group that the reason for his visit was "to see the horror my grandfather made and all the lies the family made." One student asked Rainer what would he do or say if he could meet his grandfather. His response? "I would kill him myself."

Rainer described that day as "the most difficult and intense day" in his life, but it was also somewhat comforting and reinforcing because he realized that the third generation Jews did not hold him responsible for his grandfather's viscous actions.

Although Rainer never met his grandfather, he is still haunted by information he learns continuously. He explains, "When I investigate and read about my grandfather's crimes, it tears me apart every single time." Rainer also disclosed that, to his knowledge, his grandfather never expressed



Rainer Höss holding a photo of the Höss family
circa 1943

any remorse for his actions. Until his last dying breath, Rudolf Höss considered himself the victim. He was a loyal soldier and a fanatical member of the NSDAP with an allegiance to his country- *treue, Ehre und das Vaterland!* (Loyalty, honor, and the fatherland!) His infamous and defensive alibi still stands, as we know today- "orders are orders"- and there are no exceptions.

Rainer Höss says it is hard to explain the guilt he carries in his mind. He still feels responsible and ashamed for what his grandfather did to thousands of other families- how people lived and died under his grandfather's command. Rainer now makes it his duty to reach out to people and offers lectures to children in schools about the Nazi era and anti-Semitism:

"My grandfather was a mass murderer - something that I can only be ashamed and sad about. However, I do not want to close my eyes and pretend nothing ever happened, like the rest of my family still does. I want to stop the curse that's been haunting my family ever since, for the sake of myself and that of my own children."

Man or Monster?

After much analysis, I came up with the following two conclusions: (1) Rudolf Höss had only one thing on his mind- his love for his country and everything that went along with it and (2) Rudolf Höss was a coward, who needed to be told what to do.

Loyalty and honor to the Fatherland was all that Höss commended. His primary and main goal in life was his responsibility and duty as a soldier. His love for his country is what drove him into becoming history's greatest mass murderer. Everything else, including his role as a husband and father, came in second. Höss, in fact, admits to it when he states, "My tremendous love for my country and my feeling for everything German brought me into the NSDAP and into the SS . . . My family was the second thing that was sacred to me."

Because of his beliefs and principles, Höss paid a price. His actions and obligations to his country put not only himself in a repentant situation, but his family suffered as well. Höss mentions in his memoirs several times that he deeply regretted putting his country before his family. And till this very day, his dishonorable legacy continues to haunt his family.

Höss was a man who needed someone to tell him what to do. Based on his stringent upbringing, he would carry out orders without thought and obey without question. He had

abandoned traditional morality for ideological morality. Höss was a coward who could not think for himself. His inability to address his own action reflects the course that he would follow and explain how he could order the millions of murders in Auschwitz. As a fanatical believer to the NSDAP, Höss was capable of carrying out his actions with true detachment and moral indifference. In his defense, Höss claims, "I had to obey, because, after all, wasn't I a soldier? And didn't I choose this course?"

During his assignment in Auschwitz, Höss became apathetic to his surroundings, in an almost inhumane manner. He never let the horrible and terrible conditions of the concentration camp affect his life or the life of his family. After watching millions of innocent human beings wasting away in the gas chambers, Höss went home each night to the loving embrace of his family. Although he enjoyed playing with his children in the backyard, despite the smell of the burning bodies within yards away, Höss wrote poetry about the beauty of Auschwitz.

I can't help but wonder- is he a person like you and I, or is he some kind of monster? As much as I researched and explored the mind of Rudolf Höss, I still cannot fathom how it is possible for a person to go out during the day ordering the annihilation millions of innocent people, to come home at night in time to kiss and tuck his children into bed? In his autobiography, Höss stresses on the fact that he was simply acting under orders, and he had been victimized throughout his time as an SS soldier. This is his attempt to make us inadvertently think he was a good man. While he felt no remorse until his last dying breath, perhaps it may be easier to presume Rudolf Höss, participant of the greatest crime in history, as both as a man and a monster.

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