

## Refining The Killing Techniques

Excerpt from interview with Professor Christopher Browning

Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, Washington

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Interviewer: Ephraim Kaye

Q- How do you explain the escalation and the different methods of killing that evolved from the shootings, the first use on September 9 of Zyklon B at Auschwitz, the gas vans, September and October 1941, when Chelmno was in the process of being built, operable in December 1941. Why were the Nazis moving from one type of killing method to another?

B- The experience of the firing squads in the Soviet Union was that they had encountered some difficulties. One was simply that the manpower needed was greater than they wished to expend. Shooting people one by one takes time. There is also the problem of secrecy, since these open air executions were very public and we know that the Germans worried about what soldiers said when they went back on leave, or in letters they sent home. There were strict orders to confiscate film and pictures, and to forbid the taking of pictures at these kinds of executions. We know those rules were not always obeyed, and also that there was some psychological cost to being involved in these ongoing kinds of executions. At least some of the Einsatzgruppen and commanders called this to Himmler's attention. Moreover, in terms of how to extend mass killing to the rest of European Jewry, you can't—or rather you could, but obviously it would be relatively counter-productive—line up all the Jews of Amsterdam and shoot them down in the middle of Amsterdam, or of Paris. So different techniques had to be developed that would give greater secrecy, would provide for greater efficiency in terms of manpower, and would have less psychological cost. So, after the Goering mandate, a feasibility study had to be done, with lots of experiments.

There were the gas van experiment, the Zyklon B experiment in Auschwitz, and the transfer of some of the euthanasia personnel (who had used carbon monoxide gas at the euthanasia institutes) to set up, first the Belzec camp (which would be the prototype of the camps in the Generalgouvernement), also in October 1941. The personnel of a euthanasia group that had used an earlier model of gas van for killing mentally ill in eastern Germany in 1939–40 were then sent to set up the Chelmno Camp. Euthanasia personnel from the institutes in Germany itself helped set up Belzec; they would later staff Sobibor and Treblinka. Auschwitz, which already was a concentration camp, then took on the extra task of testing Zyklon B. I think all this is evidence of a search for the most efficient way to deal with some of the problems that they encountered in the open air mass shootings in the Soviet Union, and that would make it easier to carry out the mass murder of European Jewry.

**Taken From The Multimedia CD 'Eclipse Of Humanity', Yad Vashem, 2000.**