

# “The Good Old Days”

*The Holocaust as Seen by  
Its Perpetrators and Bystanders*

Edited by  
Ernst Klee  
Willi Dressen  
Volker Riess

Foreword by Hugh Trevor-Roper  
Translated by Deborah Burnstone



in the neck.' I refused to do this as did the other men. The girl must have been about eighteen or nineteen. The officer shot the people himself as the others refused. He swore at us and said we were cowards, but apart from that he did not do anything else.

The gas-van was used for the first time in Kiev. My job was simply to drive the van. The van was loaded at headquarters. About forty people were loaded in, men, women and children. I then had to tell the people they were being taken away for work detail. Some steps were put against the van and the people were pushed in. Then the door was bolted and the tube connected . . . I drove through the town and then out to the anti-tank ditches where the vehicle was opened. This was done by prisoners. The bodies were then thrown in the anti-tank ditches. . . .

### **A member of Sonderkommando 6 on the deployment of gas-vans in Stalino and Rostov:**

I was present at the first execution in Stalino. It took place on Easter Monday, 1942. I know for sure it was Easter Monday because I clearly remember discovering coloured eggs back at the quarters after the execution. This was a gassing of several hundred people in a gas-van. Men, women and children were loaded into it. By no means all of them were gassed that Easter Monday. I think that from the morning, it must have been about 7.00, until about 10.30, when the action ended for the day, I had to load and unload four vans. . . .

These were without a doubt Jews. There was such a range and number of people that they could only have been Jews. You did not get looters and saboteurs in these numbers. It was particularly the presence of children that led me to conclude that they were Jews.

The Jews had to climb into the van fully clothed. There was no sorting out. Men, women and children all had to get in together. I estimate that about sixty people had to get in each time. They had to climb up some steps to get into the van. It did not seem as if the Jews knew that they were about to be gassed. After the doors had been closed we then drove to a disused coal shaft. I do not remember whether the shaft was in front of the van or whether we had to turn round. The gas-van could not be driven right up to the shaft and we had to pull the bodies out of the vans and drag them to the shaft, which was about eight metres away, and then throw them in. . . .

When the doors were opened a cloud of smoke wafted out. After the smoke had cleared we could start our foul work. It was frightful. You could see that they had fought terribly for their lives. Some of them were holding their noses. The dead had to be dragged apart. It was while doing this that I first found out how heavy a human being can be.

There were two gas-vans in use. I saw them myself. They were driven into the prison yard and the Jews – men, women and children – had to get into the van directly from the cell. I also saw inside the gas-vans. They were lined with metal and there was a wooden grille on the floor. The exhaust gases were fed into the inside of the van. I can still today hear the Jews knocking and shouting, 'Dear Germans, let us out.'

Anton Lauer, Police Reserve Battalion 9

[Gas-van work in Rostov:]

The 'prison' was not far from the quarters so it must have been in the middle of Rostov. The gas-van drove up and we had to guard the area. . . .

The captive Jews then had to get into the van. They remained fully clothed. They were brought out [of the prison] by the militia. Men, women and children got in together. I should mention here that the Jews were almost dying of thirst. As far as I know they had only been rounded up the previous night. This was done by the militia. The cellar must have been badly ventilated; it must have also been very warm there. Hence the Jews' poor condition, despite the fact they had been down there only one night. I remember a distressing incident which happened during the loading; a Jewess cried out that her father had died of a heart attack. Nobody took any notice and the dead man was loaded into the van together with his relatives. The gas-van was as usual full, so forty to sixty people must have been loaded.

I also remember fetching two buckets of water and had them brought to the van. As there was almost a fight one of the Jews, an Austrian who spoke very good German, offered to distribute the water and so he handed each of the Jews in the van a mouthful of water. When everyone had had their water he had to get into the van. He was the last in and then the van was shut. The details of what happened then are somewhat blurred. I think that after quite a long drive to a shaft the van was unloaded.

I remember saying something like, 'Well, you're more advanced here and do the thing on the way.' Indeed the Jews had already been gassed when the van reached the shaft. In Stalino the gassing only started at the shaft.

The van, as had happened in Rostov, was opened, only with the difference that this happened immediately on reaching the shaft. We had to drag the dead in the usual way out of the van. It was the usual picture. Please spare me from having to keep giving you details.

That day I only had to participate in one loading – the one I have already described – but several unloadings, probably about four or five.

What happened was that we 'unloaders' stayed at the shaft and the gas-van went back to the 'prison' alone. Other men from the Kommando oversaw the loading.

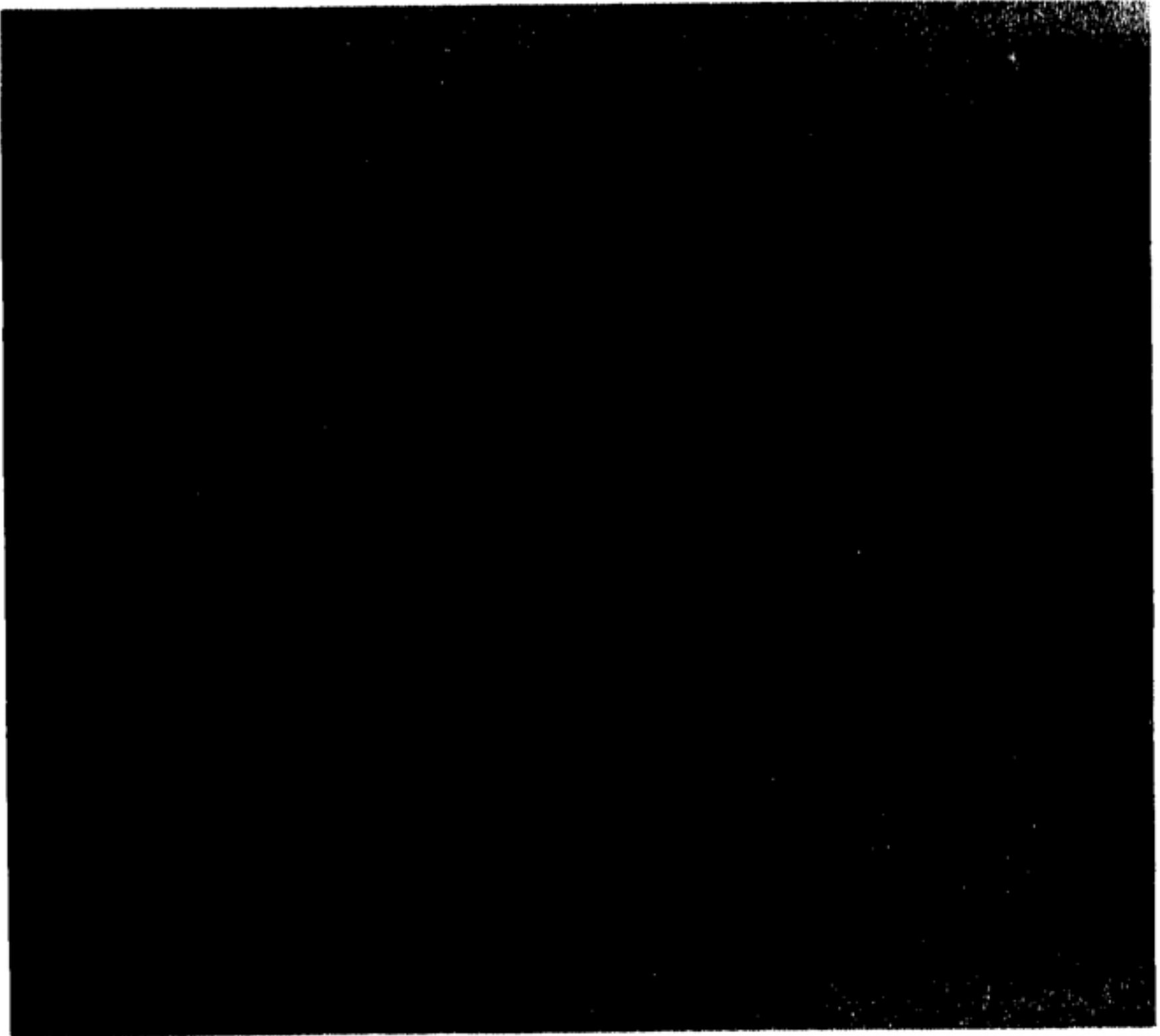
I know that in between each loading the driver of the van had a lot of work to do in order to clean the interior of the vehicle because the people that had been gassed in it had emptied their bowels. Unloading a gas-van was from this point of view not very pleasant. I think that that day executions ended around midday.

Whether there were further gassings that day I do not know. I also think that the cellar was cleaned up when gassing stopped for the day.

*In reply to a question:* I know for certain that I came to Rostov on 19 September 1942. I do not know today why this date is so clear in my mind since I am certain that nothing special happened to me that day.

# **'Quite happy to take part in shootings'**

Forced to obey orders – the myth



Jews have to undress before they are murdered