

Book Reviews . . .

Auschwitz: Technique and Operation of the Gas Chambers

By Jean-Claude Pressac

New York: Beme Klarsfeld Foundation, 1990. 660 pp. No price listed.

Reviewed by Charles R. Alien, Jr.

Once again, we are indebted to Beate and Serge Klarsfeld, generally best known as intrepid "Nazi hunters" (which indeed they are) but, actually, better perceived and appreciated as among the foremost, most prolific scholars and archivists of the Holocaust.

When the day comes to write the names of those who have honored memory at its highest levels, the Klarsfelds will appear *primus inter pares*.

To the already lengthy list of more than 40 invaluable volumes of documentation, archival matter and analyses of die Endlösung (final solution) they have published (some authored by the couple themselves, as well as others), they now come with an extraordinary work titled *Auschwitz: Technique and Operation of the Gas Chambers* by Jean-Claude Pressac, a 46-year-old French researcher and scientist of pharmacology and chemistry.

The volume is what librarians rightly call "oversized." Its 564 pages are each triple-columned making it actually a work exceeding 1,500 pages each measuring 17.33" x 11.75" and packed with sharply produced documents originating from the Nazi German political, engineering, technical perpetrators themselves. (A large proportion are published here for the first time, I am sure).

The author—after several false starts over years of agonizing as to whether the Holocaust ever actually took place (indeed, Pressac, as we shall see, even considered the merit of the Revisionists that die Endlösung and its subsequent genocide of the Jews were a hoax)—ultimately set out to prove to his own satisfaction that Auschwitz and its gas chamber did exist.

RESEARCH IN THE ARCHIVES

By digging up the Nazi archival materials and studying them painstakingly at the Auschwitz archives, Pressac has come forward with the documents that prove with utter objectivity: the Nazis and their accomplices conceived and planned down to the finest detail the creation of a concentration (slave labor)/death at the site of Auschwitz; that in fact—perforce of the German documents themselves on a multi-leveled range of evidentiary proof—that Auschwitz came into being; that the gas chambers and crematoria WPA conceived, worked up on drawing boards and infinitesimally down to the last screws, nails in place, and put to use as fully intended: to individual and mass murder in the gas chambers of Auschwitz and then consign bodies to the crematoria for reasons of efficiency of disposal and, in fact, further exploitation of the victims' bodies.

Does the author realize his startling ambition? As one who has read, studied and pondered this work, the answer is a resounding affirmation.

As the great scholar, Raul Hilberg, author of the definitive work on Nazi documentation of the German killing processes (see the revised updated volumes of *The Destruction of the European Jews*) summed up: "(Pressac) . . . gathered witness accounts, documents from German correspondence, blueprint after blueprint, and photographs some of them taken when construction was in progress, and some of his own. He dissects each item of evidence and weighs it against other information, distinguishing between disinfection (i.e. delousing of prisoners at Auschwitz) and homicidal chambers. . . ."

Here, for example, is how Pressac describes the first experiments with Zyklon-B at Block 11: "The victims were 250 sick prisoners and 600 Russians (i.e. Red Army POWs, CRA). The next day, an SS man wearing a gas mask went to see the results and saw that some of the guinea pigs were still alive. More Zyklon-B was introduced. On the evening of the 5th (48 hours later, CRA) nobody moved anymore. The corpses were then transported by a group of prisoners to K(C)rematorium I to be incinerated. Shortly afterwards [.] 900 Russian prisoners, according to former camp commandant Hoess (in fact between 500 and 700) were gassed directly in the morgue of Krematorium I which avoided the need to transport the bodies. Then in January, 1942, operations began at Birkenau Bunker I, which has two small gas chambers for the extermination of Jews."

Thus, does Pressac proceed to realize his goal: "Technically, I wanted to know exactly how the 'mills' of Auschwitz were organized and the details of their inner workings."

He hammers fact after fact at the reader. He presents document after document for the reader's own examination. He proves that Dr. Hilberg's original estimates of the killing processes on that killing field called Auschwitz were close to the verifiable fact: between 1,050,000 and 1,100,000 Jews were exterminated there; Pressac also cites another historian's estimate that 1,323,000 were gassed and 29,980 fell from "other causes," or of the total killings at Auschwitz (1,613,455), 94.6% were thus murdered: murdered solely because they were Jews.

The Pressac volume indeed is now a major weapon at hand to be used against the Revisionists; it is, I am happy to say, a deadly weapon. Use it!

In Part II of my review/article of the Pressac contribution to the literature of the Holocaust, I shall concentrate on Pressac's experiences with the Revisionists, led by the French professor, Robert Faurisson, a fascist and genocidist anti-Semite, and the corporations who built and profited from the construction of the universe called Auschwitz. •-

CHARLES R. ALLEN, JR., called by the media "America's preeminent authority on Nazi war criminals in the U.S.," has himself done research in the Polish war crimes document center, including Auschwitz. He is now finishing a large volume titled *From Hitler to Uncle Sam: How — Why—US Intelligence Used Nazi War Criminals and Collaborators. A Post-Cold War Perspective, History, Expose and Theoretical Analytic.*