



Ashes from Belzec. Willie Glaser's travels in Poland 2008 Part IV: Belzec

Thanks to Dr. Kuwalek who until a couple of months ago was the director of the archives and the museum at Belzec, a lot has been written about the Belzec extermination camp in books and on the internet. He now is in charge of the archives and the museum at the site of Majdanek concentration camp.

Until a short time ago the accepted figure of people killed in Belzec stood at some 650,000. Dr. Kuwalek revised this figure downwards to some 500,000. He is basing his estimate on newly accessed German railway records. On a deportation train to any camp were always around 1000 people. Once you know how many trains, it is easy to add the numbers.

By its area Belzec was a very small camp (only 260 x 275 meters) because not many barracks were needed. There was no warehousing of people, just a few barracks for the SS and Ukrainian guards and a building for the "Sonderkommando" (special work detail) who burned all the bodies. The train arrived, people were directed to a building to get undressed, next their hair was cut. They were driven through the "Schlauch" (hose) into the gas chamber where an engine produced carbon monoxide gas.

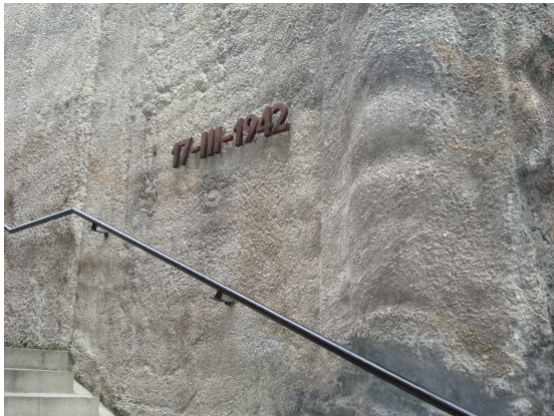
The bodies were stacked in burning pits. The burning pits were going day and night. Depending on weather conditions, windows of farm houses 5 - 8 km away were covered with an oily film.

After the war ended, the Polish government covered the whole area with rocks. In 2006 the Polish and German governments fixed the camp area, build a symbolic "Schlauch" and covered the area with 2 - 3 meters deep of slag.

Half way walking through the camp I asked Dr. Kuwalek if I could obtain a small amount of ashes? First he said no, because whatever little ashes they kept before the grounds were covered was going to Holocaust memorial centers in different countries.

After I lit two memorial candles and said Kaddish, he told me: "Willie, I will give you some ashes to take home." He went into the archives and came out with two plastic coffee cups full of ashes.

One third of the ashes went to Israel. The rest was buried at the Holocaust Memorial in the cemetery of my synagogue on Holocaust Memorial Day, Sunday October 5, 2008 (see part VI).





Willie Glaser pointing at the name of his birthplace Fürth at the Belzec memorial site



Memorial candles

