

Neither Trace Nor Proof: The Seven Auschwitz “Gassing” Sites According to Jean-Claude Pressac

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The French author Jean-Claude Pressac has written a monumental work—564 pages in large format, with hundreds of photographs, plans, sketches, drawings and reproduced documents—on the creation, utilization and destruction of seven Auschwitz-Birkenau installations which supposedly once housed execution gas chambers.

J.C. Pressac carried out an exhaustive on-site investigation. During the course of fifteen visits between 1979 and 1987, he spent some three months in Oswiecim (the present name of Auschwitz). He had complete freedom of research in the State Museum of Auschwitz, as well as the full collaboration of the museum authorities, in particular that of the chief archivist, Tadeusz Iwaszko, to whom his book is dedicated. Pressac further obtained the support of Beate and Serge Klarsfeld, who wrote the introduction to his book and who conducted research for him in the archives of the USSR and the German Democratic Republic.

Pressac's book is ostensibly a “scientific rebuttal of those who deny the gas chambers” (p. 12) and is in effect directed against the Revisionists, whom he describes as “maniacs who spend their lives trying to demonstrate that something never existed” (p. 16). Despite his pretensions to cold objectivity, the author's animosity towards the Revisionists is in constant evidence throughout the book. He goes so far as to assert that the judicial actions brought against Revisionists, which he himself admits “smacked of witchhunting” (p. 556), are the only “defensive option open to the people who felt they were being ‘attacked’ by Faurisson's thesis” (p. 556).

The present piece does not pretend to be an exhaustive critique of Pressac's voluminous work; that would require a book of the same dimensions. This article will deal briefly with

the supposed execution gas chambers which, according to Pressac, were to be found in seven distinct locations in Auschwitz-Birkenau (Crematoria I, II, III, IV and V, and Bunkers 1 and 2) and which he claims killed a million Jews. My article focusses in particular on Pressac's arguments concerning the "technique" and "operation" of the gas chambers, which are precisely the aspects that figure in the title of his work.

In fine, the aim of my article has been to ascertain whether or not Pressac's book provides anything at all with which to shore up the faltering thesis that there were execution gas chambers at Auschwitz. We must emphasize the great importance of the French author's work in this connection, since if the answer to the above question is no, it would be clear that, 44 years after the war, and after examination of all available documentation, there exists no single solid or valid piece of evidence establishing the reality of any such homicidal installations.

Crematorium I of Auschwitz

Crematorium I was installed for the purpose of incinerating the corpses of inmates who died of natural causes, a matter, therefore, of a sanitary installation. According to the official thesis, at the end of 1941 the mortuary of this crematorium was transformed into an execution gas chamber.

Pressac acknowledges that there are very few German documents relating to Crematorium I and that none of them provides any formal proof of homicidal gassings in its mortuary. So that "as evidence to establish the reality of homicidal gassing there remain only the testimonies of the participants" (p. 123).

The testimonies selected by Pressac to prove the existence of a homicidal gas chamber in Crematorium I are as follows:

a) Alter Fajnzylberg, a former prisoner at Auschwitz and a member of the *Sonderkommando* (a group of prisoners charged with transporting and incinerating the corpses).

In his statement made in 1945, after the liberation of Auschwitz by the Soviets, this witness made no allusion to a gas chamber. According to Fajnzylberg, the place where it was supposedly to be found was a "mortuary" (*Leichenhalle*) which in fact served for storing corpses and also on occasion for the execution of prisoners by means of firearms.

Moreover, in the brief text reproduced by Pressac (p.124), there are two gross errors relating to the dimensions of the place and the capacity of the crematory ovens. These errors, as the French author himself admits, demonstrate "the general tendency to exaggerate at that time (in the years 1945-50)" (p. 126).

In a new statement made before a notary in 1980, Fajnzylberg declared that he "saw" a gassing in the *Leichenhalle* of the crematorium, even though a bit further on he contradicts himself by admitting that he and his companions had been locked up in a coke bunker (pp. 124-125). In this declaration, Fajnzylberg repeated exactly the same dimensions for the gas chamber that he had given in 1945, which for Pressac is "a proof of the sincerity and authenticity of his statements" (p. 126).

b) Filip Müller, former prisoner of Auschwitz and member of the *Sonderkommando*.

In the brief commentary that Pressac devotes to Müller's testimony (pp. 126-127), the supposed gas chamber is not even mentioned. Instead, what merits the author's attention is the statement of the witness regarding the cross-section of the crematorium chimney. Reading Pressac's text, we derive the following:

–F. Müller stated that the chimney was circular in cross-section.

–The German documents indicate that the chimney was square in cross-section.

–Despite that, F. Müller "is a valuable witness" (p. 127).

Most important to emphasize, however, are the opinions that Pressac himself holds with regard to F. Müller:

–"Filip Müller is an important witness, but in choosing to describe material and precise facts in a book and in 1979 (1st German edition) he has accumulated errors, thus making his account historically dubious. The best approach is to read it as a novel based on true history" (p. 181).

–". . . Filip Müller's account was recorded too late and included involuntary errors and embellishments, and perhaps even lies . . ." (p. 380).

After taking the foregoing into account, I find it incomprehensible that Pressac should have presented this

witness “as evidence to establish the reality of homicidal gassing.”

c) Rudolf Höss, the first commander of Auschwitz.

In the memoirs written during his captivity in Poland, R. Höss stated that he had been present at the gassing of 900 Russian war prisoners in the mortuary of Crematorium I. Höss explains that while the trucks were unloading, a number of holes were made in the stone and concrete walls of the morgue.¹ These details seem “unlikely” to Pressac (p. 127). Actually, to maintain that it was possible to put 900 people in the 78.2 square meters of the gas chamber and that holes for introducing poison gas were drilled at top speed through the 10-to-15-centimeter-thick concrete walls while the victims were getting off the trucks goes beyond rationality. But Pressac attempts to justify Höss’s statement in the following manner:

Höss participated in the “special actions” strictly in accordance with the almost insurmountable tasks imposed by the exponential growth of his camp, thus not allowing his conscience to dwell on the moral questions. He was present, *without seeing*. In the author’s opinion, this attitude explains the involuntary errors found throughout his autobiography (p. 128, emphasis in the original).

Against Pressac’s attempted justification, we may advance the following objections:

–Höss himself stated in his memoirs that:

the prisoners were killed by means of gas in the cells of block 11. I was present at the scene, protected by a gas mask. So great was the crowding in the cells that the gas had hardly entered before the victims died. A brief half-smothered scream and it was all over. I was perhaps too moved by this first sight of killing with gas to become clearly and fully aware of what I was seeing. On the other hand, I remember *with the greatest exactness* the way in which, a bit later, the nine hundred Russians were killed with gas [in Crematorium I]² (emphasis added).

–Elsewhere in his memoirs, R. Höss repeats 900 as the number of Russians gassed.³

–No less untenable is the thesis that R. Höss was so occupied with the tasks deriving from expansion of the camp that he lost his capacity for observation. Höss himself says that it would be:

. . . a mistake to imagine that taking part in this extermination, with everything that it involved, was accepted as an ordinary happening, like any other. With very few exceptions, all those who took part in it, and I most of all, came away with indelible impressions and plenty of material for reflection.⁴

Furthermore, exterminating Jews was the most important of all the tasks entrusted to R. Höss, and it could scarcely take second place to work proceeding from expansion of the camp. As a matter of fact, it was Himmler in person who had given him the order: "It is you who will take over the task. It is a tough and painful job that awaits you: put your whole being into it and the difficulties that present themselves will be as nothing."⁵

Consequently, Pressac's justification of Höss's testimony, teeming as it is with these incongruities, is just not convincing.

In any event, the important thing here is that Pressac offers as, proof of the existence of a homicidal gas chamber in Crematorium I, testimony containing at least two obvious falsehoods. In the last analysis, it should suffice to point out that if R. Höss was in reality present "without seeing," why is he presented as a witness?

d) Pery Broad, former member of the SS garrison of Auschwitz.

Pressac acknowledges that the testimony of this one-time SS member "raises problems yet to be solved" (p. 128). Specifically, "the form and tone of his declaration sound false. His writings can not be the faithful reflection of the thoughts of an SS man and indeed reading them gives the impression that they were written by a former prisoner" (p. 128). It is Pressac's opinion that Pery Broad's declaration "has been 'slightly' reworked by the Poles" (p. 128, quotation marks in the original). Should any doubts remain, Pressac later on hammers home the point:

"Historically, this account is not exploitable in its present version [. . .] After assessing its reliability, no conscientious historian will be able to use it unless and until the 'declaration' has been stripped of the Polish influence, or in other words until the original is published" (p. 162, emphasis in the original).

Why Pressac, the above reservation notwithstanding, has offered this testimony as proof of the existence of a homicidal gas chamber, remains to this writer an enigma.

To sum up, Pressac acknowledges that there is no documentary evidence to establish a homicidal gassing in the supposed gas chamber of Crematorium I of Auschwitz. In lieu of that, the French author provides the testimonies of four witnesses. These testimonies, however, all either show "the general tendency to exaggerate at that time" (A. Fajnzylberg); include "involuntary errors and embellishments, and perhaps even lies" (F. Müller); come from someone who "was present, without seeing" (R. Höss); or "have been 'slightly' reworked by the Poles" so that they are not serviceable in their present version (P. Broad).

The conclusion follows that, insofar as concerns the sources provided by Pressac, the existence of a homicidal gas chamber in Crematorium I of Auschwitz must be considered historically unfounded.

Lastly, Pressac offers the results of the chemical analysis of samples taken by the American engineer Fred Leuchter⁶ in the supposed gas chamber of Crematorium I as proof of the practice of homicidal gassings (p. 133). Leuchter had found in 6 of the 7 samples a trace presence of cyanide.⁷ To be sure, our author ought to have pointed out that the report of the American engineer categorically denies the existence of any execution gas chamber either in Crematorium I of Auschwitz or in the four crematoria of Birkenau. The most important thing to be emphasized, however, is that Leuchter took one of his samples in an area that had been a washroom, which had never been part of the supposed gas chamber, and was separated from it by a gas-tight door. The partition wall that separated the washroom from the supposed gas chamber was eliminated by the Poles after the war. The analysis of this sample reveals a presence of cyanide *comparable* to that of most of the other samples. In short, the amount of cyanide found in a sample taken from a place that had never served as a gas chamber was *similar* to that detected in the samples taken from the supposed gas chamber. If the mortuary had really been a gas chamber, cyanide ought to have been detected in the samples taken from there, and by the same token nothing should have been detected in the sample obtained from the former washroom; or rather a minute amount of cyanide should have been found in the former

washroom (from contingent disinfestation with hydrocyanic acid) and a much larger quantity in the gas chamber. What proves to be inexplicable from the Exterminationist point of view is the finding of *similar* amounts of cyanide in both places.

Therefore, and contrary to what Pressac tells us, the results of the Leuchter report constitute solid evidence of the *nonexistence* of a gas chamber in Crematorium I of Auschwitz.

Bunker 1

As Pressac himself acknowledges, there remain no ruins, and neither documents nor plans of this supposed installation with its homicidal gas chamber. Consequently, the "information that has reached us on this provisional installation is scanty and based only on the testimonies of the few survivors" (p. 162).

Pressac cites six testimonies. Four of them come from former prisoners (Szlam Dragon, Maurice Benroubi, Milton Buki and Moshe Garbarz) and two from members of the SS (Pery Broad and Rudolf Höss).

Let us first look at the description of the supposed homicidal installation given us by the witnesses.

a) S. Dragon: "a small brick house divided into just two parts and able to contain altogether 2,000 naked persons. These rooms each had one entrance door and a small window" (p. 161).

b) P. Broad: according to Pressac, P. Broad never described Bunker 1 (p. 165).

c) M. Benroubi: "There were two big concrete blocks [the buildings known as 'Bunker 1'—Pressac's note] at least 20 m. wide and perhaps as many long [. . .] One morning, the doors of the Bunkers, as they called them, were open. I noticed that there were shower heads and along the wall clothes hooks" (p. 162).

Further on he indicates that the "Bunker was a brick-built house, with the windows filled in" (p. 163).

d) M. Buki: the Bunker was "a brick farmhouse" (p. 163). The lethal gas was introduced through "a little chimney" (p. 164).

e) M. Garbarz: "a sort of barn closed on three sides, identical to those where our farmers keep the hay" (p. 164).

f) R. Höss: "All the rooms—there were five in all—were filled at the same time; the airtight doors were locked with a key, and the contents of the cans of gas were put in through the skylights.

"At the end of half an hour, the doors were opened—there were two in each room—and the dead were removed and taken to the ditches."⁸

Bunker 1 could hold 800 persons.⁹

Contradictions abound in these testimonies. Thus, regarding its exterior aspect, Bunker 1 was:

- "a small brick house" (S. Dragon)
- "two [?] big concrete blocks" (M. Benroubi)
- "a sort of barn closed on three sides" (M. Garbarz).

And as for its capacity, it had room for:

- 2,000 persons (S. Dragon)
- 800 persons (R. Höss).

The lethal agent was introduced:

- through "a small window" in every gas chamber, according to S. Dragon, even though the plan of this installation made on the basis of his testimony has two windows in each chamber (p. 161).
- "through a little chimney" (M. Buki).

Bunker 1 had:

- two gas chambers (S. Dragon)
- five gas chambers (R. Höss).

The gas chambers had:

- one door each (S. Dragon)
- two doors each (R. Höss).

Pressac concludes by affirming that the purpose of Bunker 1, "the extermination of human beings by gassing, cannot be called into question, if only because of the constant repetition of an identical process in the accounts of former prisoners, unless like certain Revisionists of bad faith we claim that the witnesses were all lying, including the SS" (p. 165).

This conclusion can not be defended. In the first place, the testimonies of the former prisoners all share a great vagueness. We can scarcely speak of "an identical process" when Pressac himself admits that it "is impossible to make a

synthesis of all these accounts" (p. 165). Secondly, the Revisionists do not say that the witnesses lie in every case. It is enough for them to observe that some testimonies, like that of P. Broad (as Pressac himself acknowledges), have been "slightly" reworked by the Poles."

In short, as authority for the existence and functioning of a gas chamber in Bunker 1, Pressac provides only six testimonies. These testimonies are generally very vague, and when by exception they are specific on some point or another, contradictions arise. Ergo, based on the sources provided by Pressac, it is not possible in the case of Bunker 1 to maintain the historic reality of any execution gas chambers.

Bunker 2

According to the official thesis, Bunker 2 was a farmhouse in which a number of homicidal gas chambers had been installed. It was in operation from the summer of 1942 until the spring of 1943. In the summer of 1944 it was again put into operation in order to assist in the extermination of the Hungarian Jews.

Pressac cites the following testimonies in his treatment of Bunker 2:

a) Szlam Dragon, considered the principal witness by the French author.

In 1945 Dragon described Bunker 2 as "a cottage covered with thatch, its windows bricked in [. . .] The interior of the cottage was divided into four parts by partition walls running across it, one of which could contain 1,200 naked people, the second 700, the third 400 and the fourth 200 to 250" (p. 171).

Two items in the testimony, the interior division and the capacity, are demolished by Pressac himself. With regard to the number of rooms, the French author exhibits a reconstruction of Bunker 2 based on the actual ruins which clearly shows eight of these rooms (pp. 174 and 175). With reference to the number of persons put into the Bunker, from 2,500 to 2,550, Pressac reckons that a physically impossible density of 28 persons per square meter (Bunker 2 had an area of 90 square meters) and thus believes that the witness was following "the tendency to exaggerate which seems to have been the general rule at the time of the liberation" (p. 171).

Nonetheless, 27 years later, in 1972, S. Dragon again testified in a celebrated trial against two former SS men, and

his declaration was so disordered (he confused the Bunker with a crematorium) that the session had to be interrupted. Pressac justifies this by saying that the “intervening time had done its work, a blessing for the witness, a disaster for justice and for History. I have added this anecdote to show the irreplaceable value of early testimony. Afterwards, witnesses constantly go over the same story, altering it as the years go by” (p. 172).

In short, Pressac finds it easy to justify the errors, falsehoods and absurdities of the testimonies. If the latter are from the immediate postwar period, they demonstrate “the tendency to exaggerate” characteristic of that era; but if they were given many years later, it turns out that time has altered the memory of the witnesses. Moreover, it is not to be understood that Pressac is alluding to the “irreplaceable value of early testimony” when he has just said that it suffers from a “tendency to exaggerate.”

b) Pery Broad.

Even though Pressac had made clear that the account of this former member of the SS “is not exploitable in its present version” (p. 162), he does not hesitate to “exploit it” now and again.

c) Rudolf Höss.

There is only one reference in the memoirs of R. Höss to Bunker 2: “Bunker 2 was the larger and could hold about 1200 people” (p. 174). This information is refuted by Pressac himself when he says that the stated capacity corresponded to 13 persons per square meter, “a physically impossible density” (p. 174).

d) Miklos Nyiszli, a Hungarian Jewish doctor deported to Auschwitz.

Dr. Nyiszli’s declaration makes reference to the functioning of Bunker 2 in its final stage, during the summer of 1944. In contradiction to all the other testimonies, Dr. Nyiszli affirms that there were no gas chambers in Bunker 2, but rather a dressing room where the people who were going to be shot and incinerated in an adjacent trench could leave their clothes (p. 177). Despite that, Pressac acknowledges the “validity” of Dr. Nyiszli’s account (p. 179).

e) David Olère, former prisoner of Auschwitz.

Pressac reproduces a sketch by D. Olère showing the

operation of Bunker 2 as a gas chamber in the summer of 1944.

Pressac admits that the little hill that appears in the sketch is fictitious and was introduced by the witness "for artistic reasons only" (p. 178). One notices as well that although this is supposedly a summer scene, the SS men are wearing overcoats. Nonetheless, for our author the scene is "of such remarkable precision as to be almost as good as a photograph" (p. 178).

We need to call attention to a contradiction that Pressac falls into here: the scene sketched by D. Olère, which represents, so to speak, the prolegomenon to a homicidal gassing, is of photographic fidelity; at the same time, Dr. Nyiszli's description, which is contemporaneous with that of Olère and yet reflects a totally different extermination procedure, is also valid.

f) Filip Müller.

Here it will suffice to reiterate Pressac's opinion of this witness: "Filip Müller is an important witness, but in choosing to describe material and precise facts in a book and in 1979 (1st German edition) he has accumulated errors, thus making his account historically dubious" (p. 181).

Conclusion: as in the two previous cases, it is not possible to establish historically the existence of a homicidal gas installation at Bunker 2 on the basis of the testimonies provided by author Pressac.

Crematoria II and III of Birkenau

The official thesis holds that an execution gas chamber was in operation in Crematorium II from March of 1943 until November of 1944, and that in Crematorium III, the former's twin, there was likewise a homicidal gas chamber, which operated from June of 1943 to November of 1944. According to Pressac, around 750,000 Jews, three fourths of the victims of Auschwitz, were murdered and cremated in these two installations.

The initial plan for one of these crematoria was laid out in November of 1941. A normal crematorium, with no criminal implications, was contemplated (p. 183). Later, the Germans presumably made the decision to construct two of these crematoria, but to modify them for criminal purposes by converting one of their underground mortuaries (*Leichenkeller*

2) into a dressing room where the victims would disrobe, and the other (*Leichenkeller 1*) into an execution gas chamber (p. 184). This decision was supposedly made at the end of June of 1942. According to Pressac:

30th June 1942 marks a turning point in the history of Birkenau, for while there may have been some extermination of Jews before this, it was on an ad hoc and totally improvised basis, whereas henceforth it was to be carried out on an industrial basis (p.184).

And yet the true “turning point” in the history of Auschwitz surely came about *a year before that*, on the 29th of July of 1941, when R. Höss, the first commander of Auschwitz, supposedly received the order to exterminate the Jews.¹⁰ Contrary to what Pressac says, the extermination of the Jews was not carried out in a makeshift way before June of 1942. Quite the contrary, after receiving the order to exterminate the Jews, R. Höss immediately set about planning the procedure to be followed together with a high SS functionary and specialist on the Jewish question, Adolf Eichmann. Höss had anticipated that “multitudes,” “considerable masses” and “massive convoys” of Jews would be annihilated in Auschwitz. It was agreed that a farmhouse near Birkenau (*Bunker 1*) would be “especially appropriate for the purpose in question.”¹¹ A little later Höss sent Himmler “a detailed plan of the site and an exact description of the projected installations.”¹² Himmler gave this his approval.¹³ All of this, according to the context, occurred between August and November of 1941.

So we have the Germans on the one hand making preparations to annihilate great masses of Jews in an installation specifically got ready for the purpose (*Bunker 1*) and on the other hand designing a large crematorium without criminal intent. Pressac’s thesis thus brings us to the paradox that on June 30, 1942 the Germans decided to change over from a “makeshift” extermination, which they were carrying out in an installation specially set up for mass killing, to an “industrial” extermination that they would carry out in crematoria conceived with no criminal purpose.

Pressac’s thesis leads, moreover, to another paradox. It is known that the Germans built crematoria to incinerate corpses and thereby avoid the less hygienic burial process, which could facilitate the spread of epidemics. Yet they

envisioned burial for the victims of Bunker 1.¹⁴ Thus, the Germans had planned on a crematorium to incinerate the comparatively small number of prisoners who died of natural causes, and at the same time they omitted this hygienic measure for the presumably much larger number of corpses which would result from the extermination by poison gas.

On the other hand, Crematoria II and III had been planned with three basement mortuaries (*Leichenkeller*) each, in which the dead were kept prior to cremation. Pressac assumes these mortuaries were employed as follows:

- a) *Leichenkeller 3* was to be the reception morgue, where the prison numbers of the corpses would be recorded;
- b) *Leichenkeller 2* was to be temporary storage for newly arrived and recorded corpses awaiting cremation (delay of 3 or 4 days);
- c) *Leichenkeller 1* was to take corpses several days old, beginning to decompose and thus requiring the room to be well ventilated, to be incinerated as soon as possible (p. 284).

Pressac maintains that the crematoria were later modified for criminal purposes. As has already been indicated, the basement morgues were converted, one into a dressing room (*Leichenkeller 2*) and another into a homicidal gas chamber (*Leichenkeller 1*). *Leichenkeller 3* disappeared. So, according to the French author's thesis, the crematoria needed mortuaries for storing corpses until cremation only when they had to be concerned about natural deaths in the camp; and on the other hand, they didn't need them when they had to contend with the much greater number of corpses "produced" by the gas chamber. In other words, following Pressac, cremation was a slow process when it involved prisoners who died of natural causes, since space was lacking to store the corpses prior to cremation; and yet it was a super-fast process in the case of extermination, because then, despite a much larger number of corpses, there was no need to store them. Let us now take a look at the extermination process that was supposedly carried out in these crematoria.

The first thing that gives surprise is the scant space Pressac allots to this matter, since, according to the title of his work ("Technique and Operation of the Gas Chambers"), it ought to have received a much more extensive treatment. Of the 196 pages which Pressac devotes to the study of Crematoria I and II, there is less than half a page of text ("The use of the

Krematorien for the ‘resettlement’ of Jews unfit for work,” p. 253) and a page of drawings (p. 258) focussing specifically on the method of extermination.

Pressac indicates that the extermination proceeded in groups of 1,000 to 1,500 people at a time (p. 253). However, all the testimonies reproduced by the author cite much higher figures: 3,000 according to R. Höss¹⁵ and M. Nyiszli (p. 473), 2,500 according to H. Tauber (p. 494) and 2,000 according to C. S. Bendel (pp. 469 and 471). Pressac does not tell us on what sources he bases his own figures, so that they must be considered mere suppositions. And since he is making suppositions, why pick a figure of 1,000 to 1,500? Why couldn’t it be 500? Or 100? Or any other number?

According to the French author, the route followed by the victims within the crematorium was as follows: first they entered the dressing room, where they disrobed. Then they passed through a little vestibule and entered the gas chamber. Once the 1,000 or 1,500 persons were within the 210 square meters of the gas chamber, then came the introduction of the lethal agent, Zyklon B (an insecticide composed of hydrocyanic acid) through four holes in the roof. The amount of Zyklon B introduced was 40 times the lethal dose per person. In five minutes at most, the victims were dead (p. 253). Immediately thereafter the ventilation began:

The air extraction system was then switched on for at least 20 to 30 minutes, for there was a great deal of poisoned air still in the chamber, the amount absorbed by the victims being minimal. The gas-tight door was then unbolted and opened, and the work of extracting the corpses began immediately (p. 253).

Elsewhere Pressac states that after “15 minutes of ventilation the air in the room would be completely renewed” (p. 16).

It is my opinion that, on the contrary, not only would the supposed gas chamber be full of hydrocyanic acid even after 20 or 30 minutes of ventilation, but that even the structure itself presented such difficulties for carrying out mass homicidal gassings on a habitual basis, that the actual practice of such an operation would certainly have ended disastrously, for the following reasons:

– The ventilation system of the supposed gas chamber was in reality appropriate for a mortuary that needed to be aired out

in order to eliminate the bad odor produced by the decomposition of the corpses. But as Pressac acknowledges, the system was not the most appropriate for ventilating a gas chamber:

The ventilation system of Leichenkeller 1 had initially been designed for a morgue, with the fresh air entering near the ceiling and the cold unhealthy air being drawn out near the floor. Its use as a gas chamber really required the reverse situation, with the fresh air coming in near the floor and warm air saturated with hydrocyanic acid being drawn out near the ceiling (p. 224, emphasis in the original).

This system presented yet another difficulty. The poison gas had to exit through holes, located just above the floor, which led to a "ventilation conduit" (*Entlüftungskanal*). These holes were small according to the testimony of H. Tauber, former member of the *Sonderkommando* (p. 484). Given the crowding that existed in the gas chamber, with from 1,000 to 1,500 people in 210 square meters of space, the welter of corpses brought about by the gassing might easily have obstructed these little holes, so that the ventilation would have become difficult or impossible.

These two problems could easily have been avoided had the Germans merely reversed the intake and exhaust airflow when they converted the morgue into a gas chamber.

—*Leichenkeller* 1 and 2 were each equipped with a ventilation system powered by electric motors. *Leichenkeller* 2—the "dressing room"—with a volume of 902.7 cubic meters, was equipped with a 7.5 horsepower motor; *Leichenkeller* 1—the alleged gas chamber—with a volume of 506 cubic meters, had a 3.5 horsepower motor (pp. 286, 360 and 361). From this it follows that the dressing room had a ventilation system that was, actually as well as proportionately, faster and more powerful than that of the gas chamber. This situation would have been normal for morgues (or mortuaries), from which the odor of the decomposing bodies has to be removed. *Leichenkeller* 2, the larger of the two mortuaries, would have been equipped with a larger motor. What is not logical is that the Germans should have installed a faster and more powerful ventilation system in the dressing room, where it wouldn't have been strictly necessary, rather than in the gas chamber, where it would have been essential to eliminate rapidly—in 20 or 30 minutes—all traces of hydrocyanic acid in order to enable the removal of the bodies. Comparing the power of the

two motors thus gives a strong indication that the Germans did not convert *Leichenkeller 1* into a gas chamber.

– Ventilation of the gas chamber within 15, 20, or 30 minutes is highly improbable. Pressac cites the testimony of a former prisoner of Auschwitz, A. Rablin, who participated in delousing with *Zyklon B*. This was done in an improvised gas chamber located in Block 3 of Auschwitz. The delousing chamber was approximately 300 cubic meters in volume and was equipped with an exhaust fan and seven windows for ventilation. The concentration of hydrocyanic acid used in the delousing process was from 0.05 to 0.1 per cent. Under these conditions the ventilation lasted *two hours* (p. 25).

Let us compare these circumstances with those of the supposed homicidal gas chamber of Crematoria II and III. In this case the area was larger, some 506 cubic meters, and the ventilation system, as we have seen, functioned in a way that was the opposite of what would have been desirable. The vents for exhausting the toxic agent were next to the floor, so that they could be partially or totally obstructed by the hodgepodge of corpses. There were no windows in the place. The concentration of hydrocyanic acid employed was 1 per cent (p.18), ten to twenty times stronger than that used in the delousing process.

The above comparison thus gives rise to another anomaly: the delousing chamber, of smaller volume, with an exhaust fan and seven windows, and contending with a far weaker concentration of hydrocyanic acid, presumably required *more time* to be ventilated than the supposed homicidal gas chamber, which was larger, which had an inadequate ventilation system, which lacked windows and which used a far higher concentration of hydrocyanic acid.

– The nature of the presumed toxic agent, *Zyklon B*, would have involved a grave problem when the time came to remove the corpses.

Zyklon B consists of pure hydrocyanic acid in liquid form, chemically stabilized and absorbed into a porous and inert base, generally in the form of disks or small cubes of wood pulp.¹⁶

The hydrocyanic acid evaporates from the porous base, its rate of evaporation varying under different conditions of temperature and humidity. The process is a relatively slow one. Exposure times for *Zyklon B* vary greatly. Its

manufacturers have established a *minimum of two hours* and a maximum of 72.¹⁷ Because of the possibility that the inert base containing the Zyklon may go on emitting hydrocyanic acid even after many hours of exposure, the manufacturers insist that the tins (Zyklon is marketed in tins) and all traces of base must be removed before the treated area can be reoccupied.¹⁸

Therefore, on opening the door of the gas chamber to remove the dead bodies, an operation that was carried out approximately 20 minutes (p. 16) or 30 minutes (p. 253) after the introduction of the Zyklon B, the base would go on emanating hydrocyanic acid, thereby contaminating the rest of the building. And if the Germans had wished to avoid this situation by removing the disks or little cubes of wood immediately after opening the door, they would have faced two more problems. In the first place, the jumble of corpses, from 5 to 7 bodies per square meter according to Pressac's estimate, would make access to the scattered residues very difficult. And in the second place, the porous base of the Zyklon B, which was supposedly thrown into the interior of four columns of wire mesh, could not be removed after the gassing anyway. Pressac's own reconstruction of one of these mesh columns includes no opening through which to extract the base (p. 487).

—After removal of the corpses from the gas chamber, the next procedure was hauling them to the crematory room for incineration. Given that *Leichenkeller 1* was below ground and the ovens were at ground level, a freight elevator had been installed. According to Pressac, at first a provisional elevator with a capacity of three or four corpses was used. Later the workers used a permanent elevator, capable of lifting 10 or 15 bodies at a time (p. 253). From that we may infer that in order to take 1,000 or 1,500 corpses up to the ovens with the provisional freight elevator, 67 to 100 trips would be required. If we consider hypothetically that the process of loading, ascending, and unloading the corpses and taking the freight elevator back down took five minutes, it would have required a half day's incessant labor to get all the corpses to the ovens. In any case, it is evident that the work of hoisting so many bodies in such a small freight elevator would have been most cumbersome, and that the Germans could easily have avoided such a nuisance by building the gas chamber at ground level. Besides, building a gas chamber below ground was harder work and more expense. The excavation and construction

took place in marshy ground, requiring that the floor, ceiling and walls all be waterproofed with a material which was both scarce and costly during the war.

Thus we are confronted by a train of evidence that gives very strong support to the hypothesis that the Germans not only designed *Leichenkeller 1* as a mortuary, but also constructed it and used it as for just that purpose.

Conclusions:

—The results that follow from Pressac's thesis are neither logical nor credible. According to the French author, the Germans designed Crematoria II and III with no criminal intent, even though they were later converted to carry out mass extermination. This criminal transformation was indeed peculiar, in that no modification was made in the ventilation system of the mortuary, although it was anything but adequate for a gas chamber. In spite of this, and notwithstanding that the Germans had conceived other installations expressly for extermination purposes, Crematoria II and III were used to annihilate and incinerate 750,000 Jews, three quarters of the alleged victims of Auschwitz.

—Several indications reinforce our hypothesis that not only was *Leichenkeller 1* conceived as a mortuary—which even Pressac admits—but that it was also constructed as such, and in a form that would have made its utilization as a homicidal gas chamber difficult, if not impossible.

The procedure for the ongoing mass extermination of human beings in Crematoria II and III, as described by Pressac, would have been impracticable.

Crematoria IV and V of Birkenau

Crematoria IV and V were twins. According to Pressac, three or four homicidal gas chambers functioned in each of them. Crematorium IV went into service in March of 1943 and operated until October of 1944, when it was set on fire during a prisoner revolt. Crematorium V was in operation from April of 1943 to January of 1945 (p. 379).

Unlike Crematoria II and II, Crematoria IV and V “were designed as criminal instruments,” although “modifications introduced in the course of their construction and operation made their operating sequence absurd” (p.447). This is an astonishing revelation. Accepting it would result in the

following paradox: Crematoria II and III were designed with no criminal aim, although modifications introduced during the course of their construction made them both into such efficient human slaughterhouses that they annihilated three quarters of the victims of Auschwitz. On the other hand, Crematoria IV and V were designed as criminal instruments, although the modifications introduced during the course of their construction transformed their sequence of operations into an absurdity. In other words, the architects and technicians of Auschwitz were simultaneously very stupid and very clever. Very clever when they transformed ordinary crematoria into prodigious instruments of mass extermination, and very stupid when they made alterations in facilities expressly for mass slaughter, rendering them unusable.

Moreover, if—as Pressac points out—the procedure followed in these crematoriums was “irrational and ridiculous,” and if the “natural ventilation was badly oriented and dangerous,” and if the introduction of the poison “resembled a circus act” (p. 386), then it is not difficult to imagine that the extermination process would have been, of necessity, a disaster.

The annihilation was carried out in groups of 2,400 people at a time (p. 384). Pressac does not explain why in these crematoria, with gas chambers 240 square meters in area and a crematory oven with eight muffle furnaces, the operation proceeded in groups of 2,400 people, whereas in Crematoria II and III, with gas chambers of similar dimensions (210 square meters) and practically twice the cremation capacity (15 muffle furnaces), it was carried out in groups of 1,000 to 1,500 victims.

According to Pressac, the extermination process followed this sequence: the Jews entered into a large hall and disrobed; once undressed, the 2,400 victims were directed to the three gas chambers, into which they were packed until there were 10 persons to each square meter.

According to the testimony of a survivor, Dr. Bendel, the process was somewhat different. The victims disrobed outside the crematorium and entered the large hall (for what purpose?). Later they turned and went back the way they had come and were directed to the gas chambers. The 2,400 victims traversed the narrow passageway between the large

hall and the gas chambers amidst an “indescribable chaos,” since they had a premonition of “the death that awaited them” (p. 470).

Once the victims were in the gas chambers and the doors locked, the SS men flung in Zyklon B through windows that were reached with a stepladder. The SS on duty would open the window with one hand and throw in the contents of the tin with the other, which, in Pressac’s words, constituted a “circus act.” This operation had to be repeated six times for each gas chamber, since each one had six windows (p. 386). Notwithstanding that the installations were conceived for criminal purposes, no such devices as the wire-mesh columns of Crematoria II and III had been provided.

About 30 minutes after the Zyklon B was dropped in, the doors were opened, Pressac says, for ventilation (p. 384). Inexplicably, these gas chambers had only natural ventilation (p. 16), which means that they ought to have been aired out for a period of at least 10 hours.¹⁹ Nevertheless, the removal of the corpses followed *immediately*, since, according to Dr. Bendel’s testimony, they were still warm (p. 470).

Under these conditions, however, a catastrophe would have taken place. 30 minutes after the Zyklon B had been thrown in, there would still have been a high concentration of hydrocyanic acid in the gas chambers. On an average, the amount of Zyklon B that the Germans employed was 40 times the fatal human dosage (p. 18). Accordingly, when the *Sonderkommando* opened the door to remove the dead bodies, dispersion of the hydrocyanic acid and contamination of the entire building would have occurred inevitably. In short, under the stated conditions the extermination process in Crematoria IV and V would have been impossible.

Furthermore, Pressac points out that the delousing chambers of Auschwitz and Birkenau, which also functioned with Zyklon B, had at least one fan for ventilation (pp. 24, 25, 27, 31, 41 and 53), making it even more incomprehensible that the SS failed to equip the gas chambers of Crematoria IV and V with the same.

As if it didn’t matter, although natural ventilation was all that was available, in their construction the Germans had taken no account of the prevailing winds, so that, as Pressac acknowledges, ventilation “was slow and inefficient, with the attendant risk of contaminating the rooms giving onto the

vestibule if there should be a sudden gust of wind from the west" (p. 386).

From all the foregoing, two conclusions may be drawn:

– Pressac's thesis that the SS made so many clumsy mistakes in designing and constructing these crematoriums that the extermination process became absurd and ridiculous lacks credibility. The evidence indicates, on the contrary, that the Germans did not design these installations for a criminal purpose and did not provide them with gas chambers of any kind.

– The habitual mass extermination of human beings in Crematoria IV and V, as Pressac presents it, would have proven completely impracticable.

The Cremation Capacity of the Crematoria

On the momentous question of the cremation of the corpses, Pressac states the following:

The real throughput of a type II/III Krematorium was from 1,000 to 1,100 corpses per 24 hours and the maximum for a type IV/V was about 500 a day. The total capacity for the four Krematorien was therefore about 3,000 a day (P. 244).

Pressac indicates no source as a basis for his estimate, which is purely hypothetical. To begin with, the figures given by the French author can not be reconciled with those of *all* the testimonies cited in his work. Thus, according to Dr. Bendel, the daily incineration capacity of Crematoria II and III was 2,000 corpses each, with a corresponding figure of 1,000 each for Crematoria IV and V (p. 469); for Dr. Nyiszli, the total capacity of all the crematoria together was 20,000 corpses per day (p. 474); for H. Tauber, the capacity of Crematorium II was 2,500 per day (p. 494); according to the War Refugee Board report (a secret report on Auschwitz drafted in 1944), the four crematoria were able to consume 6,000 bodies a day (p. 461); according to a report ascribed to SS officer Franke-Gricksch, who visited Auschwitz in 1943, the total capacity was 10,000 corpses a day (p. 238).

Pressac's estimate does not square with the data given in a document of the "Headquarters Construction Office" (*Zentralbauleitung*) of the Auschwitz SS, which establishes the capacity of the crematoria as follows:

Crematoria II and III: 1,440 corpses each in 24 hours

Crematoria IV and V: 768 corpses each in 24 hours (p.247).

Pressac's estimate is likewise irreconcilable with the "revision" which he himself makes in the document cited. According to the author, the figure in this document "had no basis in practice, and probably has to be divided by two or three to arrive at the true figure" (p. 244). This means that a crematorium of type II-III would have had an incineration capacity of 480 to 720 corpses in 24 hours and one of type IV-V a capacity of 256 to 384.

One conclusion which can be drawn from the above is that the cremation figures reflected in the testimonies, as well as those in the *Zentralbauleitung* document, strike Pressac as greatly exaggerated. He has thus estimated a hypothetical cremation capacity which, as we shall see, bears no relationship to the capacity which can be inferred from evidence he himself publishes in his work.

From documents published by Pressac, we derive an incineration capacity that is greatly reduced and assuredly much closer to the true figure. Thus, a German document which provides operating instructions for the crematory ovens indicates that the corpses had to be inserted in the individual cremation chambers or muffles "one after another" (*hintereinander*) (p. 136). This detail is in explicit contradiction to those testimonies which affirm that several corpses were put into a muffle furnace at the same time, with the number varying between three and twelve.

Another German document, which tabulates the consumption of coke by the crematory ovens, starts from the assumption that they operate twelve hours per day (p. 224), in disagreement with various testimonies stating that they functioned continuously, without interruption.

Pressac also reproduces a patent, registered in 1953, of an oven made by the Topf company—the same one that made the ovens of Auschwitz—which incorporated "much of the experience gained by Topf in the concentration camps" (p. 105). The estimated time for incinerating a body in this oven was from 30 to 45 minutes (p.105).²⁰

If we assume, then, that the Birkenau ovens were as fast as that of the 1953 patent, that the corpses were incinerated one

after another and not several at a time, and that the ovens operated twelve hours a day, we get the following result:

–Crematoria II and III (with 15 muffles each) could have incinerated from 128 to 360 corpses a day.

–Crematoria IV and V (with 8 muffles each) could have incinerated from 128 to 192 corpses a day.

–In total, the Birkenau crematoria could have incinerated 736 to 1,104 corpses per day.

Therefore, by using of the information which Pressac himself has provided, we arrive at an estimate of the capacity of the Birkenau crematoria which is three or four times inferior to that indicated by the French author.

Pressac also publishes data on the capacity of certain crematory ovens constructed by the Topf company and installed in other concentration camps. Thus, in the Buchenwald crematory, an average of six or seven corpses per muffle were incinerated each day (p. 106). At Gusen (a subsidiary camp of Mauthausen), according to prisoner notes, 600 corpses were incinerated in twelve days, which means an average of 25 corpses per muffle furnace per day (p. 110).

Pressac acknowledges that these ovens and those of Birkenau "must have had roughly the same performance," since they "were virtually identical as regards design and construction" (p. 110). In consequence, if we apply the Buchenwald and Gusen references to the four crematoria of Birkenau, which had a total of 46 muffle furnaces, we arrive at a capacity of 322 corpses per day according to the Buchenwald ratio and of 1,150 according to that of Gusen. Figures, therefore, that are also much lower than those given by Pressac.

It is necessary to bear in mind that the incineration capacity was further limited due to breakdowns. Crematorium II was out of service for two or three months in the second half of 1943 for various repairs. Crematorium IV was soon closed for good, and Crematorium V operated only intermittently (p. 247).

Moreover, there are indications that at least during certain periods of time the Birkenau crematoria operated at low capacity. For example, Pressac states that, according to German documents, the coke consumption of the crematoria from April to October of 1943 was only a third or fourth of

what one would expect if they had been operating at full capacity twelve hours per day (pp. 224-227).

In short, the cremation capacity given by Pressac:

–is reconcilable neither with the testimonies of former prisoners nor with the information contained in available German documents;

–is arbitrary, inasmuch as he cites no reference in its support;

–and, finally, is highly exaggerated, since all the evidence points strongly in the direction of a substantially lower cremation capacity.

The “Indirect” Proofs

At the end of his investigation, Pressac is forced to acknowledge the lack of proof of the existence of homicidal gas chambers in the Birkenau crematoria. Nevertheless, he says, that in:

the absence of any “direct,” i.e. palpable, indisputable and evident proof (lacking so far as we know at present) such as a photograph of people killed by a toxic gas in an enclosed space that can be perfectly located and identified, or of a label on a Krematorium drawing of a “Gaskammer um Juden zu vergiften/gas chamber for poisoning Jews,” an “indirect” proof may suffice and be valid (p. 429).

And so, after having done research for some years in the principal archives—to which generously access was given him—and after having examined hundreds of documents, photographs and plans, Pressac admits to not having encountered a single “palpable, indisputable and evident” proof—that is to say, a real proof—of the existence of homicidal gas chambers in the crematoria of Birkenau. In other words, Pressac—and with him, all the Exterminationist authors—has been unable up to now, 44 years after the war, to find one single proof of the criminal character of installations which supposedly brought about the destruction of hundreds of thousands of people during a 21-month period of operation (the greatest crime in history); installations whose design and construction gave rise to an enormous amount of documentation. This is a fact of great significance.

Nevertheless, Pressac reckons that in the absence of real proof, an “indirect” proof may suffice. His argument is invalid,

for with "indirect proofs" it would be possible to prove the existence of almost anything. Let us imagine, for example, the case of someone who intended to demonstrate that centaurs really existed in antiquity. Naturally it would not be possible for him to present any real proof, such as a skeleton or fossil remains, but he would still be able to argue that the artistic representations of centaurs found in archaeological excavations in Greece, Cyprus and Italy constituted an "indirect" proof of their existence.

Let us examine Pressac's "indirect" proofs of the homicidal gas chambers:

In the final analysis, there remain only the various items of correspondence and official documents of German origin. Through the "slips" that can be found in them, they form a convincing body of presumptive evidence and clearly indicate the presence in the four Birkenau Krematorien (II, III, IV and V) of gas chambers using a prussic acid disinfection agent sold under the name of "Zyklon-B" (p. 429, emphasis in the original).

Or rather, in the final analysis, the "indirect proofs" would seem to be—according to Pressac—lapses committed by the civilian workers who built the crematoria (a dozen civil firms participated in their construction) and by SS personnel when they drafted their notes and documents. In other words, both the civilian workers and technicians and the SS knew the real, homicidal purpose of the crematoria, but had reached a tacit agreement to omit all "criminal" references in their correspondence and documents in order to keep up appearances (for whom?). The Germans from time to time, however, committed indiscretions, mentioning in their letters and on their worksheets such things as "gas-tight doors," "gas detectors" and "basement disrobing rooms." Still, the Germans were prudent even in their lapses, for although though they could use the term "Auskleidekeller" for the place where the victims supposedly disrobed, on the other hand they did not have "the courage, or perhaps the desire or the occasion to write that Leichenkeller 1 was a gas chamber" (p.434).

Let's turn now to enumerating the different expressions found in the German documents and which, according to Pressac, constitute "indirect" proofs or, as he also likes to call them, "criminal traces" of the existence of homicidal gas chambers.

a) In Crematoria II and III.

–“Vergasungskeller/gassing cellar” (“trace” No. 1, p. 432). The German word “Vergasung” has several meanings, such as “gasification” or “carburetion.” I do not know which of these would be applicable in this context. Neither do I know the exact location of the place. Contrary to what Pressac believes, there is no document that expressly establishes that the *Vergasungskeller* is *Leichenkeller 1*.

–“10 Gasprüfer/gas detectors” (“trace” No. 2, p. 432). Pressac himself allows a non-sinister interpretation: they could have served to detect gases produced by the combustion in the ovens, such as carbon monoxide or carbon dioxide (p. 371).

–“Auskleideraum/undressing room” and “Auskleidekeller/undressing cellar” (“traces” Nos. 4, 5, 10 and 12; pp. 432, 434 and 438). Why do these terms necessarily have to be given a criminal interpretation? They could refer to the place in which clothes were removed from the corpses.

–“Gastür 100/192 für Leichenkeller 1/gas door 100 by 192 for underground morgue 1” (“traces” No. 6 and 11, pp. 434 and 438). The document is dated 6 March 1943. However, in a plan of the crematorium of a later date, No. 2197 of 19 March of the same year (p. 311), the door of *Leichenkeller 1* has the dimensions of 1.90 x 1.90 meters. How is this discrepancy to be explained?

–“4 Drahtnetzeinschiebvorrichtung/4 wire mesh introduction devices” and “4 Holzblenden/4 wooden covers” (“traces” Nos. 8 and 9, p. 436). Supposedly they served for the introduction of the *Zyklon B*, although according to the German document they were to be found in *Leichenkeller 2* and not in the gas chamber, as one would expect. This was an “error” according to Pressac.

–“Criminal traces” connected with “gastight doors” (*Gasdichttüre*) and accessories for the latter (Nos. 3, 7, 13, 14 and 15; pp. 432, 436, 438 and 439). Pressac thinks that a gastight door necessarily has a criminal connotation. However, these doors could have been installed, for example, to prevent the stench coming from the decomposing corpses from going clear through the whole crematorium. Pressac himself makes mention of the existence of hermetic doors in a crematorium without sinister implications. These doors were

in Crematoria IV and V, in an area was intended to isolate the crematory room from the mortuary.²¹

–“14 Brausen/14 showers” (“trace” No. 16, p. 439). As ordinary showers, their presence would not have a criminal character, so Pressac claims that they were dummy showers, installed for the purpose of fooling the victims, who believed that they were entering into the gas chamber to take a shower. The French author considers that the presence of these showers *together with* a gastight door is the definitive proof of the existence of a homicidal gas chamber. However, Pressac does not prove that the showers were actually sham. Besides, the installation of showers could have been counterproductive in effect, inasmuch as the victims might have asked themselves what was the need of a gastight door in a room in which they were simply going to take a shower.

–One German document speaks of *Leichenkeller 1* as having to be “preheated” (*vorgewärmt*) and of an installation for that purpose (“traces” Nos. 30 and 31, p. 454). Pressac affirms, with reason, that the preheating of the *Leichenkeller* can not be reconciled with the existence of a “cold room” created to retard the decomposition of the corpses. The preheating, according to Pressac, would have been for the purpose of speeding up the evaporation of hydrocyanic acid.

At present I am unable to give an explanation of these “traces,” but I do wish to point out that the document in question refers to a letter from Prüfer, the engineer who designed the ovens, in which he suggested preheating the room. This letter has disappeared. It is curious that a civilian, a cremation expert, should have given the SS a suggestion on how to make a gassing more effective. In any case, Pressac must know that this system of preheating was never put into practice (p. 227).

b) In Crematoria IV and V.

–“betonieren im Gasskammer [sic]/concrete in gas chamber” (“traces” Nos. 19 and 21, pp. 446 and 447).

The document is a civilian employee’s work slip and is dated 2 March 1943. The following day the same worker notes: “level and flatten in both rooms” (*planieren und stampfen in beiden Kammern*), and on 4 March: “concrete and finish the floor in both rooms and anteroom” (*Fussboden betonieren und reiben in beiden Kammern u. Vorraum*).²² According to

Pressac, the worker was referring by these “Kammern” to the rooms at the extreme west of Crematorium IV, that is, to the gas chambers. From that we deduce that either the “Gasskammer” was not in either of those two rooms or that it was concreted twice. Moreover, a later document suggests that in the two rooms where the gas chambers were supposedly to be found, there were “installations for water” (Wasserinstallations).²³

–The rest of the “criminal traces” (Nos. 17, 18, 20 and 22 to 29; pp. 443-454) are references to gastight doors and windows and accessories for them. In this regard, see my prior comments on the gastight doors.

c) Other “traces.”

–“Beschlage fur gasdichte Tur/fitting for gas-tight door” (“trace” No. 32, p. 456).

Use unknown. See comments on gastight doors.

–“1 Schlussel fur Gaskammer/1 key for gas chamber” (“trace” No. 33, p. 456).

According to Pressac, this is a dubious type of “trace.” The ordering of this item, the author says, is “incomprehensible with our present state of knowledge.”

–“Die Beschlage zu 1 Tur mit Rahmen, luftdicht mit Spion fur Gaskammer/The fittings for 1 door with frame, air-tight with peephole for gas chamber” (“trace” No. 34, p. 456).

According to Pressac, this order has nothing to do with the Birkenau crematoria, but was intended for one of the delousing chambers.

It is important to emphasize that Pressac has presented the documents he cites out of context. In my opinion, in order satisfactorily to explain the commonplace character of these “criminal traces,” meticulous study of *all* the documents relating to the construction of the crematoria is essential. It is very possible that with a wider perspective we should then obtain an answer to the questions raised by these “traces.” An isolated knife can be a criminal weapon, but a knife together with a spoon and fork is simply a place setting.

Pressac concludes this fundamental part of his work as follows:

Summarizing, a study of the files concerning the construction of the four Birkenau Krematorien reveals 39

(THIRTY NINE) "slips" or "criminal traces" of different sorts, the majority of which constitute material proof of the intention to make certain rooms IN THE FOUR KREMATORIEN "Gasdichte" or gas-tight. The incompatibility between a gas-tight door and 14 shower heads indirectly proves the use of one of these rooms as a HOMICIDAL GAS CHAMBER (p. 456, capitals in the original).

As Pressac acknowledges, the majority of the "criminal traces" only demonstrate the Germans' intention to make certain parts of the crematoria airtight. This fact, by itself, proves nothing. Nor do the rest of the "traces," by themselves, prove the criminal character of the crematoria. It is only the combination of two or more of these "traces" that lets Pressac say that they "indirectly" prove the utilization of homicidal gas chambers.

The fact is that after his monumental investigation into these crematoria, which supposedly exterminated around a million persons over a period of nearly two years, crematoria the design and construction of which left behind hundreds of plans, notes, records of meetings, contracts, work orders, bills and photographs—in short, an immense documentation—Pressac can present *not a single proof* of their criminal nature. In the last analysis, the French author can only allege a presumed incompatibility between a gastight door and 14 supposedly fake showerheads that, according to him, would prove—even though only "indirectly"—the existence of gas chambers.

In sum, Pressac's work not only fails to refute the Revisionist thesis, as he intended, but on the contrary makes clear how very justified are the criticism and skepticism of the Revisionists with regard to the supposed homicidal gas chambers of Auschwitz.

Notes

1. Höss, Rudolf: *Yo, comandante de Auschwitz* (Autobiografía) (I, Commandant of Auschwitz [Autobiography]) (Muchnik, Barcelona, 1979, p. 148.
2. Rudolf Höss, *op. cit.*, pp. 147-148.
3. Höss, *op. cit.*, p. 193.
4. Höss, *op. cit.*, p. 155.
5. Höss, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

6. Fred A. Leuchter, *An Engineering Report on the Alleged Execution Gas Chambers at Auschwitz, Birkenau and Majdanek—Poland* (Boston: Fred A. Leuchter Associates, 1988). Unpublished in the complete version, which is the one cited.
7. Fred A. Leuchter, *op. cit.*, p. 35 (my own numbering).
8. Höss, *op. cit.*, p. 194.
9. Höss, *op. cit.*, p. 191.
10. Czech, Danuta: *Kalendarium der Ereignisse im Konzentrationslager Auschwitz-Birkenau* (Rowohlt, Reinbek 1989), pp. 106f.
11. Höss: *op. cit.* p. 191.
12. Höss: *op. cit.*, p. 192.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Höss: *op. cit.*, p. 191.
15. Höss: *op. cit.*, p. 200.
16. Degesch: *Zyklon for Pest Control* (Frankfurt am Main), p. 11.
17. Degesch: *op. cit.*, p. 17.
18. "It is imperative that not a single tin be left about!" (Degesch: *op. cit.*, p. 21).
19. Degesch: *op. cit.*, p. 21.
20. I accept this with reservations. During the '60s, cremation of a cadaver took 50 to 80 minutes (*Gran Enciclopedia del Mundo*, Durvan, Bilbao 1966, article "Incineration," vol. 10, p. 852).
21. Pressac, Jean-Claude: Les 'Krematorien' IV et V de Birkenau et leurs chambres à gaz. Construction et fonctionnement, "*Le Monde Juif*" (Paris), No. 107 (1982), pp. 119-120.
22. Pressac: *loc. cit.*, p. 111.
23. Pressac: *loc. cit.*, p. 118.