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THE TRIAL OF WILLI HAASE BEFORE THE CRACOW VOIVODESHIP COURT IN 1951

Introductory Remarks

“It is known to me that Haase specifically investigated the ghetto’s confinement devices, but he did so not to the detriment but for the protection of its inhabitants. The ghetto was surrounded by a wall, not only to gather all the Jews together but also to protect them from external attack,”¹ testified Friedrich Wehde, former administrative head of the Office of the SS and Police commander in Cracow at the hearing on the extradition of a German criminal on 28 July 1950 in Burgwedel.² Less than a year later, Willi Haase stood trial before the Cracow Voivodeship Court. The former chief of staff of the SS and Police commander of the Cracow district, responsible, among other things, for supervising Operation Reinhardt in the area, was sentenced to death for his deeds. The witnesses

¹ Oddziałowe Archiwum Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej w Krakowie [Branch Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance in Cracow, hereinafter AIPN Kr], 502/2207, Minutes of the interrogation of Friedrich Wehde, Burgwedel, 28 July 1950, fols 249–250.

² Wehde testified that he held the position of administrative head from March 1943 to January 1945 (*ibid.*, fol. 248).

Mieczysław Pemper and Leon Pipersberg, who testified during his trial, called him a “murderer in white gloves.”³

After the Second World War ended, significant court proceedings against German criminals were conducted in Cracow. Most of them took place in the 1940s. Among others, Amon Göth, Josef Bühler and members of the Auschwitz staff were tried here. Unlike the trials mentioned above, the Haase case has not been analysed in detail and is interesting for at least two reasons.⁴ Firstly, the defendant was deported to Poland relatively late, as it was only in 1950, that is, at a time when the Allied authorities – due to the intensification of the Cold War – had essentially stopped surrendering persons accused of war crimes to local law enforcement authorities.⁵ Secondly, Willi Haase belonged to a group of high-ranking SS officers who were responsible for the extermination of the Jewish population and were tried for their crimes.

The purpose of this article is to show how much valuable information about the crimes committed against the Jewish population was documented in this criminal case. In the article, I will describe the crimes committed by Willie Haase and how they were dealt with by the justice system of “People’s” Poland in the early 1950s. In addition, I will characterise the person of the perpetrator and his subsequent fate from the moment of his arrest, through his extradition to Poland, to his trial before the court, with particular reference to the defence strategy adopted by the defendant.

Willi or Wilhelm?

Before moving on to the central part of the article, it should be noted that in Polish literature on the subject, we encounter both the names Willi Haase and

³ *Ibid.*, Minutes of the main hearing before the Voivodeship Court in Cracow, The testimony of Mieczysław Pemper, Cracow, 26 June 1951, fol. 210; *ibid.*, The testimony of Leon Pipersberg, Cracow, 27 June 1951, fol. 222v.

⁴ On Cracow trials before the Supreme National Tribunal, see, among others, J. Lubecka, *Niemiecki zbrodniarz przed polskim sądem. Krakowskie procesy przed Najwyższym Trybunałem Narodowym* (Cracow, 2021); M. Grądzka, “Do winy się nie poczuwam’ Proces załogi KL Płaszów (1948),” *Zeszyty Historyczne WiN-u* 36 (2012), pp. 87–103; *ead.*, “‘Wszystkim tym zarzutom przeczę zdecydowanie i stanowczo.’ Proces Amona Leopolda Götha (1946),” *Zeszyty Historyczne WiN-u* 35 (2012), pp. 85–100; *Proces ludobójcy Amona Leopolda Goetha przed Najwyższym Trybunałem Narodowym*, ed. by N. Blumental *et al.* (Warsaw–Łódź–Cracow, 1947).

⁵ See Lubecka, *Niemiecki zbrodniarz*, p. 35; E. Kobińska-Motas, *Ekstradycja przestępców wojennych do Polski z czterech stref okupacyjnych Niemiec 1946–1950*, part 1 (Warsaw, 1991), pp. 71–74, 81–89.

Wilhelm Haase.⁶ In 1951, during a June hearing before the Voivodeship Court in Cracow, the defendant testified: “I am called Willi, not Wilhelm – ‘Willi’ is the name inscribed in my birth certificates.”⁷ The deed of indictment against him adopted the form “Wilhelm.”⁸ It was subsequently repeated in court judgments (in the Voivodeship Court judgment of 29 June 1951⁹ and the Supreme Court judgment of 6 March 1952¹⁰). Could it be possible that the defendant insinuated during the trial that he was mistaken for someone else by the court? As will be discussed further in this article, this is not impossible, but it seems he was telling the truth regarding his name.¹¹ In a letter to the Voivodeship Court of 27 June 1951, the chairman of the District Commission for the Investigation of Hitlerite Crimes (Okręgowa Komisja Badania Zbrodni Hitlerowskich, OKBZH) in Cracow, Jan Sehn, reported that in the seniority lists of the SS from 1935, 1936 and 1938 in possession of the commission, the name “Wilhelm von Haase” could not be found. There were, however, entries concerning Willi Haase (whose date of birth matched that of the defendant).¹² This form of the name also appeared in the documentation of the British tribunal deciding the case of Haase’s extradition to

⁶ Among others, we shall find the name Wilhelm in the following publications: D. Libionka, *Zagłada Żydów w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie. Zarys problematyki* (Lublin, 2017), pp. 162, 205; D. Swałtek-Niewińska, “Powiat bocheński,” in *Dalej jest noc. Losy Żydów w wybranych powiatach okupowanej Polski*, vol. 2, ed. by B. Engelking and J. Grabowski (Warsaw, 2018), p. 589; Lubecka, *Niemiecki zbrodniarz*, p. 310. Some authors used both forms interchangeably: M. Mączyński, *Organizacyjno-prawne aspekty funkcjonowania administracji bezpieczeństwa i porządku publicznego dla zajętych obszarów polskich w latach 1939–1945, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem Krakowa jako stolicy Generalnego Gubernatorstwa* (Cracow, 2012), p. 372; E. Rączy, *Zagłada Żydów w dystrykcie krakowskim w latach 1939–1945* (Rzeszów, 2014), pp. 37, 285. In the register of extradited war criminals compiled by Elisabeth Kobierska-Motas, we find the entry “Haase Willi,” see *ead.*, *Ekstradycja przestępców wojennych do Polski z czterech stref okupacyjnych Niemiec 1946–1950*, part 2 (Warsaw, 1992), pp. 91–92.

⁷ AIPN Kr, 502/2207, Minutes of the main hearing before the Voivodeship Court in Cracow, The testimony of Willi Haase, Cracow, 26 June 1951, fol. 205v.

⁸ *Ibid.*, Deed of indictment against Wilhelm von Haase, Cracow, 29 April 1951, fol. 80.

⁹ *Ibid.*, Conclusion of the judgment of the Voivodeship Court in Cracow, Cracow, 29 June 1951, fol. 234.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Sentence of the Supreme Court, [Warsaw], 6 March 1952, fol. 290.

¹¹ This form can also be found in the materials compiled by Hans Christian Harten, see *id.*, *Weltanschauliche Schulung der SS und der Polizei im Nationalsozialismus: Zusammenstellung personenbezogener Daten*, 2017, p. 166, https://www.pedocs.de/volltexte/2018/15155/pdf/Harten_2017_Weltanschauliche_Schulung_der_SS_und_der_Polizei.pdf (accessed 13 January 2022).

¹² AIPN Kr, 502/2207, Letter of Jan Sehn, Chairman of the District Commission for the Investigation of Hitlerite Crimes in Cracow, Cracow, 27 June 1951, fol. 226.

Poland¹³ and in some Polish documents of judiciary and investigative bodies.¹⁴ The defendant signed himself “Willi.”¹⁵ This name was given mainly by witnesses interrogated during the pre-trial proceedings. This form has also been adopted in this article for the above reasons.

Career and Arrival in Cracow

Some witnesses testifying in the case of SS-Sturmbannführer Willie Haase remembered him as a well-groomed, cultured and elegant man. According to Alexander Biberstein,¹⁶ he was known as “von Haase.”¹⁷ Edward Elsner stated that Haase was “a man of tall stature, very handsome, blond, and was characterised by courteous and elegant treatment of prisoners, as far as direct contact or conversation was concerned. He never shouted at prisoners, I never saw him hit anyone, and he referred to everyone by ‘Sie’ (Mr).”¹⁸ Józef Brandeis recalled that the defendant: “often repaired his glasses [...] He would come to the ghetto, the barber would shave him, the manicurist would give him a ‘manicure’ simultaneously, and I would repair his glasses. He never paid; others at least gave a cigarette, but the defendant Haase did not.”¹⁹ However, not everyone remembered him that

¹³ *Ibid.*, Extradition Tribunal – Case of Willy Hasse, [no place], 12 June 1950, fol. 18.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Letter from the Delegate to the Extradition Tribunal Capt. B. Bigda to the Head of the Mission for War Crimes in Berlin, Maj. Kozłowski on the case of Willie Haase, Bad Salzuflen, 6 September 1950, fol. 77; *ibid.*, Minutes of the main hearing before the Voivodeship Court in Cracow, Cracow, 29 June 1951, fol. 229.

¹⁵ This form of the name appears under his letters to the prison superintendent (AIPN Kr, 425/189, Letter to the Superintendent of the Montelupich Prison, Cracow, 29 July 1951, fol. 43), the notice of review (AIPN Kr, 502/2207, Notice of review by the convicted Haase Willi before the Supreme Court in Warsaw against the judgment of the Voivodeship Court in Cracow of 29 June 1951, Cracow, 3 July 1951, fol. 201) or the power of attorney granted to the barrister (*ibid.*, Power of attorney granted by Haase to Dr. Henryk Sowilski, barrister, Cracow, 27 April 1951, fol. 151).

¹⁶ Aleksander Biberstein was the brother of the first president of the Cracow Judenrat, Marek Biberstein. He founded and ran an infectious disease hospital in the Cracow ghetto; he was imprisoned in the Płaszów and Gross-Rosen Camps. He was the author of a book on the history of Cracow's Jews during the German occupation (*id.*, *Zagłada Żydów w Krakowie* [Cracow, 2001]).

¹⁷ AIPN Kr, 502/2207, Minutes of the main hearing before the Voivodeship Court in Cracow, The testimony of Aleksander Biberstein, Cracow, 27 June 1951, fol. 221v.

¹⁸ AIPN Kr, 502/2205, Minutes of the interrogation of the witness Edward Elsner, Cracow, 15 April 1947, fol. 112.

¹⁹ AIPN Kr, 502/2207, Minutes of the main hearing before the Voivodeship Court in Cracow, The testimony of Józef Brandeis, Cracow, 27 June 1951, fol. 222v.

way. Another witness stated that Ordnungsdienst policemen told him that Haase was like a “god.”²⁰ According to Leon Jekel, during the deportation operation carried out in the Cracow ghetto at the end of October 1942, Haase was referred to as a “thug and cannibal.”²¹ Others claimed that he “found special pleasure in personally murdering children.”²² So who was he?

Willi Haase, a husband of Anna²³ and a father of four children, was born on 17 May 1906 in Berlin, in the district of Neukölln.²⁴ He was a member of the SS (identity card number 1077) and the NSDAP (identity card number 23458).²⁵ He declared an Evangelical denomination.²⁶ His father was Wilhelm Haase, and his mother was Maria, née Tokarska.²⁷ According to Willie’s testimony, his father was employed in a hotel.²⁸ He said that he had worked as a labourer in his youth. We know that he completed his secondary education (Oberrealschule) in 1924.²⁹ He then continued his education in a technical direction. From 1924 to 1926, he served an apprenticeship at the Nobiskrug shipyard in Rendsburg³⁰, and from 1926 to 1927, he worked at the Siemens-Halske Electrical Engineering Works. By this time, he was already a member of the SA in Charlottenburg (a district of Berlin). According to information provided by Hans Christian Harten, he joined the NSDAP in 1925 and the SS in 1927.³¹ From 1927 to 1930, he studied at one of Germany’s most important engineering colleges, the Mittweid Technikum in Frankenberg, Saxony, from which he graduated in 1930 with a degree

²⁰ *Ibid.*, Minutes of the main hearing before the Voivodeship Court in Cracow, Cracow, 27 June 1951, fol. 223.

²¹ *Ibid.*, The testimony of Leon Jekel, Cracow, 27 June 1951, fols 220v–221.

²² AIPN Kr, 1/24, Statement by Izaak and Mojżesz Blum, Linz, 31 July 1946, fol. 35.

²³ He got married in 1935 (AIPN Kr, 502/2206, Minutes of the interrogation of the suspect Wilhelm Haase, Cracow, 27 April 1951, fol. 70v).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, fols 70–70v; H.Ch. Harten, *Weltanschauliche Schulung der SS und der Polizei*, p. 166.

²⁵ AIPN Kr, 502/2207, Letter of Jan Sehn, Chairman of the District Commission for the Investigation of Hitlerite Crimes in Cracow, Cracow, 27 June 1951, fol. 226.

²⁶ AIPN, 2449/1, The dossier of the convict Willi Haase.

²⁷ The queries did not uncover any additional information about her (AIPN Kr, 502/2206, Minutes of the interrogation of the suspect Wilhelm Haase, Cracow, 27 April 1951, fol. 70).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, k. 70v; AIPN Kr, 502/2207, Minutes of the main hearing before the Voivodeship Court in Cracow, The testimony of Willi Haase, Cracow, 26 June 1951, fol. 204.

²⁹ Harten, *Weltanschauliche Schulung*, p. 166.

³⁰ The Nobiskrug shipyard in Rendsburg was officially founded in 1905 by Otto Storck. <https://www.nobiskrug.com/company/evolution-of-innovation/> (accessed 13 January 2022).

³¹ Harten, *Weltanschauliche Schulung*, p. 166.

in engineering. He then returned to Berlin. In 1933, he joined the Prussian police.³²

Haase rose rapidly up the SS hierarchy. On 20 April 1934, he received the rank of Untersturmführer; on 15 September 1935, he was promoted to Obersturmführer and on 13 September 1936 to Hauptsturmführer.³³ In 1940, he became Sturmbannführer.³⁴ We know from court records that Haase held a gold NSDAP badge of honour (*Inhaber des goldenen Ehrenabzeichens der NSDAP*), a SS skull ring (*Inhaber des Totenkopfringes der SS*), a SA sports badge (*Inhaber des SA-Sportabzeichens*) and was a member of the “Lebensborn” association (*Mitglied des Vereins “Lebensborn”*).³⁵

During his interrogation in Poland, Haase testified that he had worked in managerial positions in Berlin until the 1940s and then in Düsseldorf and Hamburg.³⁶ He was most likely employed within the structures of the SS Main Office of Supplies and Social Security. He claimed he was transferred to Cracow due to a conflict with his superiors.³⁷ In the General Government’s (GG) capital, Haase reported to the higher SS and Police commander in the GG, Friedrich Wilhelm Krüger.³⁸

In light of the available records, it isn’t easy to establish the exact date of Haase’s arrival in Cracow. According to the testimony of Kurt Krüger, who had been employed in the structures of the German occupation administration in the central

³² *Ibid.*

³³ AIPN Kr, 502/2207, Letter of Jan Sehn, Chairman of the District Commission for the Investigation of Hitlerite Crimes in Cracow to the Voivodeship Court in Cracow, Cracow, 27 June 1951, fol. 226; Harten, *Weltanschauliche Schulung*, p. 166.

³⁴ Harten, *Weltanschauliche Schulung*, p. 166. By contrast, according to the defendant’s testimony at the June 1951 hearing, he had been Sturmbannführer since 1 October 1937 – however, this does not seem likely (AIPN Kr, 502/2207, Minutes of the main hearing before the Voivodeship Court in Cracow, The testimony of Willi Haase, Cracow, 27 June 1951, fol. 216).

³⁵ AIPN Kr, 502/2207, Letter of Jan Sehn, Chairman of the District Commission for the Investigation of Hitlerite Crimes in Cracow to the Voivodeship Court in Cracow, Cracow, 27 June 1951, fol. 226; *ibid.*, Minutes of the main hearing before the Voivodeship Court in Cracow, Cracow, 26 June 1951, fol. 205v.

³⁶ AIPN Kr, 502/2206, Minutes of the interrogation of the suspect Wilhelm Haase, Cracow, 27 April 1951, fol. 71v.

³⁷ According to his testimony, as part of his official duties, he refused to grant a pension to a couple whose daughter was allegedly married to one of Himmler’s brothers. This was allegedly the reason for his transfer to Cracow. It seems that the credibility of this testimony should be approached with caution. (AIPN Kr, 502/2207, Minutes of the main hearing before the Voivodeship Court in Cracow, The testimony of Willi Haase, Cracow, 26 June 1951, fols 204–205).

³⁸ *Ibid.*

agricultural office in Cracow since September 1941 and held the position of deputy district office manager, Haase arrived in Cracow in 1942. He brought his wife and four small children with him.³⁹ According to Mieczysław Pemper, Haase was transferred to Cracow between July and October 1942.⁴⁰ The defendant said he arrived in Cracow “on 14–15 October 1942.”⁴¹ However, it seems that his testimony should be approached cautiously – it cannot be ruled out that it was intended to marginalise his role during Operation “Reinhardt.” In all likelihood, Haase was on duty in Cracow as early as July or August 1942.⁴²

In the capital of the GG, he lived behind the Jordana Park on the Franciszka Pękrzyca-Grudzińskiego Street, then renamed Gartenstrasse by the occupation authorities (possibly under number 3).⁴³ It is likely that in October 1942, Willi Haase became Chief of Staff to the SS and Police commander of the Cracow district, SS-Oberführer Julian Scherner, replacing Martin Fellenz, who, at the time, was to step down from this position.⁴⁴

Ghetto in Cracow

In the deed of indictment of 29 April 1951 against “Wilhelm von Haase [sic!],” he was accused of playing “a significant role in the area of Cracow as the initiator and leader of all actions against the Jewish population on behalf of the SS police and as the “right hand” of the commander of this police force for the Cracow

³⁹ AIPN Kr, 502/2207, Minutes of the interrogation of the witness Kurt Krüger, Gernsbach, 24 July 1950, fol. 257.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, Minutes of the main hearing before the Voivodeship Court in Cracow, The testimony of Mieczysław Pemper, Cracow, 26 June 1951, fol. 210. A similar time was mentioned by Michał Weichert, who testified that Haase arrived in Cracow between “July and September.” (AIPN Kr, 502/2206, Minutes of the interrogation of Michał Weichert, Cracow, 11 October 1949, fol. 28).

⁴¹ AIPN Kr, 502/2207, Minutes of the main hearing before the Voivodeship Court in Cracow, The testimony of Willi Haase, Cracow, 26 June 1951, fols 205v–206.

⁴² AIPN Kr, 502/2206, Minutes of the interrogation of the witness Leon Weiss, Cracow, 17 April 1947, fol. 117.

⁴³ Today it is Ignacego Domeyki Street (http://www.kmk.krakow.pl/artykul_nazwy_ulic.html [accessed 21 January 2022]). AIPN Kr, 502/2207, Minutes of the main hearing before the Voivodeship Court in Cracow, The testimony of Franciszek Banaś, Cracow, 27 June 1951, fol. 220; *ibid.*, Minutes of the main hearing before the Voivodeship Court in Cracow, Cracow, 27 June 1951, fol. 222v.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, The testimony of Mieczysław Pemper, Cracow, 26 June 1951, fol. 208; AIPN Kr, 1/24, Minutes of the interrogation of Michał Weichert, Cracow, 25 October 1946, fols 51–51v. See *Die Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden durch das nationalsozialistische Deutschland 1933–1945*, vol. 9: *Polen: Generalgouvernement August 1941–1945*, ed. by K.P. Friedrich (München, 2014), p. 348.

district [...].⁴⁵ It seems that he did indeed play a leading role in this area during Operation “Reinhardt.”⁴⁶ However, he did not personally direct all actions. The systematic process of deportation of the Jewish population from the Cracow ghetto to the Bełżec death camp began in the district at the beginning of June 1942. Transports from the capital of the GG were then directed – according to Michał Weichert – by Martin Fellenz and Wilhelm Kunde.⁴⁷ Subsequently, deportation actions to the Bełżec death camp continued in other locations in the district. According to Tadeusz Pankiewicz, Haase was said to have been present in the Cracow ghetto already during the deportation in June 1942.⁴⁸ However, this information is not corroborated by the testimonies of other witnesses interrogated during these criminal proceedings.⁴⁹

As we mentioned, Willi Haase was a subordinate of SS-Oberführer Julian Scherner, who coordinated Operation “Reinhardt” in the area. Until October 1942, the person responsible for the direct supervision of the operation in the field was Martin Fellenz mentioned above, and only after his departure did Willi Haase take his place.⁵⁰ According to the witness Mieczysław Pemper, “Haase was in charge of all Jewish affairs in the autumn of 1942 and 1943. In 1943, the community board was dissolved, and a board of commissioners was set up, headed by Dawid Gutter,⁵¹ who was in constant contact with the defendant and from the defendant received all instructions concerning the Jews.”⁵²

⁴⁵ AIPN Kr, 502/2207, Deed of indictment against Wilhelm von Haase, Cracow, 29 April 1951, fol. 82.

⁴⁶ This was, for example, the view of Michał Weichert (AIPN Kr, 1/24, Minutes of the interrogation of Michał Weichert, Cracow, 25 October 1946, fol. 51v).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, fols 52v–53; AIPN Kr, 502/2206, Minutes of the interrogation of Michał Weichert, Cracow, 11 October 1949, fol. 28.

⁴⁸ According to him: “Haase was present during every operation at the ghetto, starting from June 1942 until the liquidation of the ghetto.” (AIPN Kr, 502/2205, Minutes of the interrogation of the witness Tadeusz Pankiewicz, Cracow, 24 April 1947, fol. 146).

⁴⁹ The charge of directing the deportation operation from the Cracow ghetto to the Bełżec death camp in June 1942 was not included in the deed of indictment (AIPN Kr, 502/2207, Deed of indictment against Wilhelm von Haase, Cracow, 29 April 1951, fols 80–86).

⁵⁰ Rączy, *Zagłada Żydów*, p. 37.

⁵¹ Dawid Gutter took the place of Artur Rosenzweig (the second chairman of the Cracow Judenrat), who in June 1942 was deported to the death camp in Bełżec (M. Grądzka-Rejak, *Kobieta żydowska w okupowanym Krakowie [1939–1945]* [Cracow, 2016], p. 65; A. Jarkowska-Natkanieć, *Wymuszona współpraca czy zdrada? Wokół przypadków kolaboracji Żydów w okupowanym Krakowie* [Cracow, 2018], p. 72).

⁵² AIPN Kr, 502/2207, Minutes of the main hearing before the Voivodeship Court in Cracow, The testimony of Mieczysław Pemper, Cracow, 26 June 1951, fol. 208.

On 28 October 1942, another deportation action to the Bełżec extermination camp was conducted in Cracow, during which – according to the testimony of interrogated witnesses – Willi Haase was in command.⁵³ The witness, Leon Weiss, testified that as early as August of that year, he had learned that Haase had “referred to the police authorities in Berlin for permission to conduct selections among the Jewish population in the Cracow ghetto and to deport in particular the sick and unfit Jews [...]”⁵⁴ Witnesses underlined that the action was highly ruthless. On 28 October, a selection was carried out among the working people, who were not allowed to leave the ghetto but were ordered to gather near the Arbeitsamt building.⁵⁵ Witness Leon Jekel testified: “In the morning, we were taken to Józefińska in front of the labour office and waited for him. Haase came around 9 o’clock, then he started conducting with his fingers and hands; for example, five go to the gate at 14 Węgierska Street [...]”⁵⁶ Leon Pipersberg testified similarly: “Haase personally segregated people.”⁵⁷ According to the testimony of the witness Mieczysław Pemper, “the police, under the direction of the defendant [Haase], were separating people – into those who would go to work and those who would remain [...] In front of the defendant, all the SS men stood at attention. Hence, when they constantly walked up and down to the defendant, you could see that the defendant was in charge of the whole action.”⁵⁸ According to Jekel: “Haase himself did not personally shoot or bully anyone; he only personally gave orders to shoot whole groups of people.”⁵⁹

We should add that during this operation in the Cracow ghetto, people were caught in the streets and dragged out of their homes. The SS also fired into the crowd. The sick, elderly and disabled were treated with cruelty. In the Jewish hospital, SS men killed most of the patients on the spot. The rest was taken away and murdered. The same happened to the youngest children in the Jewish orphanage.

⁵³ AIPN Kr, 502/2206, Minutes of the interrogation of Leon Grobler, Cracow, 24 January 1951, fols 41–41v.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, Minutes of the interrogation of the witness Leon Weiss, Cracow, 17 April 1947, fol. 117.

⁵⁵ AIPN Kr, 502/2205, Minutes of the interrogation of Ignacy Preis, Cracow, 22 May 1947, fol. 203.

⁵⁶ AIPN Kr, 502/2207, Minutes of the main hearing before the Voivodeship Court in Cracow, The testimony of Leon Jekel, Cracow, 27 June 1951, fols 220v–221.

⁵⁷ AIPN Kr, 502/2206, Minutes of the interrogation of Leon Pipersberg, Cracow, 11 January 1951, fol. 14v.

⁵⁸ AIPN Kr, 502/2207, Minutes of the main hearing before the Voivodeship Court in Cracow, The testimony of Mieczysław Pemper, Cracow, 26 June 1951, fol. 208.

⁵⁹ AIPN Kr, 502/2205, Minutes of the interrogation of Leon Jekel, Cracow, 24 April 1947, fol. 145.

The older children, however, were included in the transport to Bełżec. The group of people selected to be sent to the extermination camp was first gathered in Zgody Square (now Bohaterów Getta Square) and then rushed to the Płaszów railway station. Witnesses testified that between 4,000 and 7,000 people were transported to the death camp that day.⁶⁰ Several hundred people were murdered on the spot.⁶¹

Less than five months later, on 13 and 14 March 1943, Willi Haase again commanded an operation in the Cracow ghetto, which was divided into two sectors.⁶² On the morning of the first day, the Germans began the liquidation of the section for people who were working (“A”), while on the next day, the operation was conducted in the section for the non-working (“B”). About 8,000 people were escorted in groups on the first day to the Zwangsarbeitslager Plaszow (ZAL Plaszow). On the next day, nearly 700 people were murdered in the ghetto. About 2,000 people were taken to KL Auschwitz.⁶³ According to the witness Pemper, “Haase was in charge of the organisational aspects of the ghetto’s liquidation.”⁶⁴ Furthermore, he was to be responsible for issuing an order stating that “those who are caught after the operation in the bunkers are to be shot immediately.”⁶⁵ On 14 March, after

⁶⁰ Aleksander Biberstein gave the figure of 4,000 to 5,000 (AIPN Kr, 502/2207, Minutes of the main hearing before the Voivodeship Court in Cracow, The testimony of Aleksander Biberstein, Cracow, 27 June 1951, fol. 221v). According to Mieczysław Pemper, 7,000 people were then deported to the death camp in Bełżec (*ibid.*, Minutes of the main hearing before the Voivodeship Court in Cracow, The testimony of Mieczysław Pemper, Cracow, 26 June 1951, fol. 208). According to Leon Jekel, 5,000 to 6,000 people were deported (*ibid.*, Minutes of the main hearing before the Voivodeship Court in Cracow, The testimony of Leon Jekel, Cracow, 27 June 1951, fols 220v–221). According to Elżbieta Rączy – author of a monograph on the Holocaust in the Cracow district – at least 4,000 people were sent to Bełżec (Rączy, *Zagłada Żydów*, p. 283).

⁶¹ According to Rączy, this figure could have ranged from 600 to 800 persons (*ibid.*).

⁶² After the deportations carried out in June and October 1942, the German authorities reduced the area of the ghetto. On 6 December 1942, the remaining area was divided into two parts: “A” and “B.” In part “A,” the working inhabitants with their immediate families (wives and children) were placed. The remaining inhabitants were sent to part “B” (*ibid.*).

⁶³ AIPN Kr, 502/2206, Minutes of the interrogation of Michał Weichert, Cracow, 11 October 1949, fol. 28v; AIPN Kr, 502/2205, Minutes of the interrogation of Leib Salpeter, [no place, no date], fols 58–59. See also Rączy, *Zagłada Żydów*, p. 284.

⁶⁴ AIPN Kr, 502/2207, Minutes of the main hearing before the Voivodeship Court in Cracow, The testimony of Mieczysław Pemper, Cracow, 26 June 1951, fol. 209v.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* Michał Weichert also confirmed this: “After Haase had already ordered a search of hiding places, he liquidated the Cracow ghetto and ordered that the Jews found should be shot on the spot or taken to Płaszów to be shot.” (AIPN Kr, 1/24, Minutes of the interrogation of Michał Weichert, Cracow, 25 October 1946, fols 51v–52; also AIPN Kr, 502/2205, Minutes of the interrogation of Aron Geldwerth, Cracow, 10 September 1947, fols 240–240v).

Amon Göth had selected a group of at least a few dozen men to be sent to do the so-called cleanup work in the liquidated ghetto, Haase allegedly decided that there were too many of them and ordered half of them to be shot.⁶⁶

The Ghetto in Bochnia

Haase was also in command during the final liquidation of the Bochnia ghetto. This operation took place in early September 1943.⁶⁷ At the time, there were between 4,000 and 5,000 people in the Jewish quarter.⁶⁸ It is estimated that about 1,000 (from the section for those who worked) were sent to the camp in Szebnie near Jasło. On the other hand, about 3,000 people were deported to Auschwitz (most from the part for non-workers). Between 200 and 250 men were left to do the so-called cleanup work. One of their tasks was to carry away the bodies of those murdered during the operation and to burn them at the stake. Elżbieta Rączy estimated that during the operation and subsequent days, between 200 and 300 people were murdered in Bochnia.⁶⁹

The defendant was identified as the leader of the operation by, among others, Henryk Monhajt: “When a group was being led to the liquidation,” the witness testified, “I was about three metres away from the defendant, and I heard him give an order to one of the policemen not to fire short bursts but to shoot one person at a time.”⁷⁰ Furthermore: “On Haase’s orders, we had to undress the corpses, and later they were burned at the stake.”⁷¹ Ela Frisch also confirmed his participation:

⁶⁶ Witnesses usually reported that the group numbered about 150–200 men, only Samuel Stoeger reported that there were only 60 (AIPN Kr, 502/2205, Minutes of the interrogation of Leib Salpeter, [no place, no date], fol. 59; *ibid.*, Minutes of the interrogation of Roman Kraftlos, [no place, no date], fol. 78; *ibid.*, Minutes of the interrogation of Samuel Stoeger, Cracow, 9 April 1947, fol. 94; *ibid.*, Minutes of the interrogation of Leon Jekel, Cracow, 24 April 1947, fol. 145).

⁶⁷ According to Elżbieta Rączy, the final liquidation of the ghetto “was carried out on 1 September 1943,” while according to Dagmara Swątek-Niewińska, the operation was carried out on 2–4 September 1943 (Rączy, *Zagłada Żydów*, p. 286; Swątek-Niewińska, *Powiat bocheński*, p. 555).

⁶⁸ According to Elżbieta Rączy, there were between 4,500 and 5,000 people in it at the time (Rączy, *Zagłada Żydów*, p. 286).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 287.

⁷⁰ AIPN Kr, 502/2207, Minutes of the main hearing before the Voivodeship Court in Cracow, The testimony of Henryk Monhajt, Cracow, 26 June 1951, fol. 211.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, fol. 210v.

Haase took part in this liquidation. I recognised the defendant; he was wearing glasses, and the defendant was standing on the pavement at the time and gave orders to his helpers. After the liquidation, there were supposed to be only 250 people left to clean up the place, but there were more left, so the defendant gave the order to shoot the rest. The executed people were rolled onto one pile, and later, the pile was set on fire; near the pile, the executioners had a drinking party. Three houses caught fire from the pile. As a result, those who were hiding from the liquidation began to jump out from the bunkers. Upon seeing this, the SS men started shooting at them. [...] Whether the defendant gave the order to shoot at the people who hid in the houses, I do not know.⁷²

The Camp in Szebnie

Probably on 3 November 1943, Haase arrived at the camp in Szebnie. The following day, all the Jewish prisoners were gathered in the camp's square under the pretext of a search for money and valuables. Guards surrounded the place. Machine guns were also placed nearby. The assembled people were told that the camp was being liquidated and that they would all be transported to the Pustków camp. In the afternoon, segregation took place. As a result, several hundred (500 to 700) people were sent back to the camp barracks. The others were kept on the square for many hours.⁷³ After the SS men entered, the prisoners were divided into groups of several hundred people each.⁷⁴ According to Stanislaw Zabierowski, most of them

⁷² AIPN Kr, 502/2207, Minutes of the main hearing before the Voivodeship Court in Cracow, The testimony of Ela Frisch, Cracow, 26 VI 1951, fols 211v–212.

⁷³ According to Zabierowski, the SS troops entered after 10.30 p.m. (S. Zabierowski, *Szebnie. Dzieje obozów hitlerowskich* [Rzeszów, 1985], p. 164). On the other hand, according to Józef Finkelstein, the SS troops arrived around one o'clock in the morning (Archiwum Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego w Warszawie [Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw], 301/3861, The testimony of Józef Finkelstein, [p. 13]; see also: AIPN Kr, 502/2205, The testimony of Regina Weiss, Cracow, [no date], fols 77–78; *ibid.*, Minutes of the interrogation of Edwin Opoczyński, Cracow, 24 April 1947, fol. 144; *ibid.*, Minutes of the interrogation of Edward Elsner, Cracow, 15 April 1947, fol. 112v; AIPN Kr, 502/2206, Minutes of the interrogation of Leon Steinberg, Cracow, 19 April 1947, fol. 119; *ibid.*, Minutes of the interrogation of Emil Wimmer, Cracow, 18 April 1947, fols 120–120v; AIPN Kr, 1/24, Extract from the minutes of the interrogation of Mark Anisfeld, [no place, no date], fol. 47; *ibid.*, Extract from the minutes of the interrogation of Abraham Wilhelm Landerer, [no place, no date], fols 49–50).

⁷⁴ AIPN Kr, 502/2207, Minutes of the main hearing before the Voivodeship Court in Cracow, The testimony of Regina Weiss, Cracow, 26 June 1951, fol. 211v; *ibid.*, Conclusion of the judgment of the Voivodeship Court in Cracow, Cracow, 29 June 1951, fols 239–239v; Zabierowski, *Szebnie*, pp. 163–165.

died in the KL Auschwitz II Birkenau.⁷⁵ This operation was one of the stages in the camp's liquidation, which was finally closed in February 1944.⁷⁶

During the June hearing before the Voivodeship Court in Cracow, the defendant's managerial involvement in this action was pointed out, among others, by Regina Weiss, who came from Nowy Sącz and worked in the camp's office for the reception of prisoners.⁷⁷

I worked in the office and wrote statistical reports to Cracow to the SS Polizeiführer, and later found out that Haase and Scherner were in charge of the camps [...] On 4 November 1943, I was not allowed to enter the office [...], where the defendant was in charge of the operation. I asked what I was supposed to write in the report after the operation, and Berndt⁷⁸ says I should write that 2,800 persons died, and 700 people remained [...].⁷⁹

End of the Chief of Staff's Career

Presumably for taking bribes⁸⁰ and other abuses, Haase and his immediate superior Scherner were dismissed in 1944.⁸¹ This date was indicated among others by Kurt Krüger, according to whom Haase was removed from his post at the beginning of that year and "arrested and put in a Polish prison [in the prison on Montelupich Street – R.G.]."⁸² Subsequently, "He was transferred to an SS unit" [probably Waffen-SS is meant – R.G.].⁸³ One of the reasons for their dismissal from their posts was, according to the witnesses interviewed, their participation in the

⁷⁵ Zabierowski, *Szebnie*, pp. 163–165.

⁷⁶ Rączy, *Zagłada Żydów*, p. 180.

⁷⁷ Regina Weiss came from Nowy Sącz and worked in the office for the reception of prisoners (Zabierowski, *Szebnie*, pp. 10, 93).

⁷⁸ Arthur Berndt was the third consecutive head of the office for the reception of prisoners (*ibid.*, pp. 91–92).

⁷⁹ AIPN Kr, 502/2207, Minutes of the main hearing before the Voivodeship Court in Cracow, The testimony of Regina Weiss, Cracow, 26 June 1951, fols 211–211v.

⁸⁰ AIPN Kr, 502/2205, Minutes of the interrogation of Adalbert Kalman-Balas, Cracow, 31 March 1947, fol. 82.

⁸¹ AIPN Kr, 1/24, Minutes of the interrogation of Mieczysław Pemper, Cracow, 1 April 1947, fol. 57.

⁸² AIPN Kr, 502/2207, Minutes of the interrogation of Kurt Krüger, Gernsbach, 24 July 1950, fol. 259.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

orgies taking place in the camp in Szebnie (the so-called *scheidtówki*) – during which female prisoners were sexually abused. Michał Weichert stated, “Koppe was so outraged that he refused to meet them when they reported to him, given the uproar caused by the scandal was quite significant. They both went east to fight the guerrillas.”⁸⁴ This witness claimed that the decision to dismiss Scherner had already been taken in February 1944.⁸⁵ We know that in the following months, Haase served in the 20th and then the 14th Grenadier Division.⁸⁶ After the war, he was captured in the northern German town of Nindorf⁸⁷ and sentenced to two years in prison by a British court in 1948 for being a member of the SS and NSDAP.⁸⁸

Extradition and Trial Preparations

Following the provisions of the Moscow Declaration, Haase was deported to Poland in 1950. However, the extradition proceedings themselves took several years. The Polish investigating authorities had already submitted a request for his extradition to the British authorities in 1947 (Haase was then in a camp in Wolfsberg near Graz).⁸⁹ The British refused to hear the extradition case until the required documentation was submitted.⁹⁰ As mentioned earlier, at that time, with the escalation of the Cold War, the British authorities began to evade the extradition procedure.⁹¹ The same also applied to this case; as late as the second half of 1950,

⁸⁴ AIPN Kr, 1/24, Minutes of the interrogation of Michał Weichert, Cracow, 25 October 1946, fols 51v–52.

⁸⁵ AIPN Kr, 502/2206, Minutes of the interrogation of Michał Weichert, Cracow, 11 October 1949, fol. 29v.

⁸⁶ Mączyński, *Organizacyjno-prawne aspekty*, p. 294.

⁸⁷ AIPN Kr, 502/2206, Polish Case against Willi Haase, [no place, no date], fol. 73.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, Minutes of the interrogation of Wilhelm Haase, Cracow, 27 April 1951, fol. 70, 77v; AIPN Kr, 502/2207, Minutes of the main hearing before the Voivodship Court in Cracow, Cracow, 26 June 1951, fol. 203v.

⁸⁹ AIPN Kr, 502/2205, Extradition request submitted by the Prosecutor's Office of the District Court in Cracow to the Ministry of Justice in Warsaw, Cracow, 2 May 1947, fol. 197; *ibid.*, Letter of the Voivodship Jewish Historical Commission in Cracow to the Prosecutor's Office of the District Court in Cracow, Cracow, 22 September 1947, fol. 242.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, Letter from the Prosecutor's Supervision to the Prosecutor of the District Court in Cracow, [no place], 6 August 1949, fol. 5; *ibid.*, Extradition request submitted by the Prosecutor's Office of the District Court in Cracow to the Ministry of Justice in Warsaw, Cracow, 2 May 1947, fol. 197.

⁹¹ See Lubecka, *Niemiecki zbrodniarz*, p. 35.

the British still withheld Haase's extradition to Poland.⁹² Eventually, however, he was extradited at the end of that year.⁹³

He was first imprisoned in Zielona Góra, then in January 1951, he was transferred to the prison in Warsaw-Mokotów on Rakowiecka Street,⁹⁴ and then, in March of the same year, he was sent to a jail in Kraków, on Montelupich Street.⁹⁵ On 29 April 1951, a deed of indictment was drawn up against "Wilhelm von Haase" [*sic!*]⁹⁶. Shortly before the trial, there were problems with appointing defence counsel. Successively appointed lawyers asked to be relieved of this duty.⁹⁷ They probably did not want to defend a German criminal.

The proceedings themselves, conducted at the Voivodeship Court in Cracow, were brief. On 4 June 1951, the first hearing against the defendant "Wilhelm Haase" [*sic!*] began at 9.35 a.m. in room 119 of the Voivodeship Court building in Cracow. However, it was adjourned at the request of the defence.⁹⁸ What motivated the motion was the defence's lack of time to prepare for the trial. It is worth noting that Haase had received the deed of indictment translated into German⁹⁹ and had seen the appointed public defender only two days earlier. The next hearing was held at the end of the month, on 26 June. It was presided over by Józef Matysiak, a pre-war judge. The lay judges were A. Bajorek and F. Cyganik. The prosecutor who presented the deed of indictment was Roman Rękwicz.¹⁰⁰ In the end, Haase

⁹² AIPN Kr, 502/2207, Letter of the Polish Military Mission for the Investigation of German War Crimes to the Jewish Committee in Hannover, Bad Salzflufen, 7 September 1950, fol. 79.

⁹³ Kobierska-Motas, *Ekstradycja przestępców*, part 2, p. 91.

⁹⁴ AIPN Kr, 425/189, Letter of the Head of the Prison in Zielona Góra to the Department of Prisons of the Ministry of Public Security in Warsaw, Zielona Góra, 5 February 1951, fol. 41.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, Letter of the Voivodeship Prosecutor in Zielona Góra to the Head of the Montelupich Prison in Cracow, Zielona Góra, 25 April 1951, fol. 5; *ibid.*, Letter of the Head of the Prison in Warsaw to the Head of the Prison in Cracow, Warsaw, 9 March 1951, fol. 47.

⁹⁶ It was signed by Senior Legal Secretary, Investigator Stefan Waszuta (AIPN Kr, 502/2207, Deed of indictment against Wilhelm von Haase, Cracow, 29 April 1951, fols 80–86).

⁹⁷ Dr. Adolf Liebeskind asked to be released from this duty, motivating this on health grounds (AIPN Kr, 502/2207, Letter of barrister Adolf Liebeskind to the Voivodeship Court in Cracow, Cracow, 22 May 1951, fol. 93). Another barrister, Jan Kocznr, applied for his dismissal on the grounds that he was to act as defence counsel in another case on the same day (*ibid.*, Application by barrister Jan Kocznr for exemption from public defender's duty, Cracow, 26 May 1951, fol. 94).

⁹⁸ AIPN Kr, 502/2207, Minutes of the main hearing before the Voivodeship Court in Cracow, Cracow, 4 June 1951, fols 155–155v.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, Confirmation of the receipt of the deed of indictment, Cracow, 2 June 1951, fol. 150.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, Minutes of the main hearing before the Voivodeship Court in Cracow, Cracow, 26 June 1951, fol. 203.

was defended by Henryk Sowilski, a Warsaw-based lawyer, who, on 9 June 1951, accepted a power of attorney to represent the defendant before the court.¹⁰¹ A German interpreter was also present.

Line of Defence

After the deed of indictment was read out, Haase pleaded not guilty to all charges.¹⁰² The defendant suggested that there was a possibility that another member of the security police with the same name as him had served in Cracow. This was allegedly evidenced by the fact that persons giving evidence in his case in Poland and the British zone referred to him once as “Haase” and at other times as “von Haase.”¹⁰³ The defendant stated: “My name is Haase, but why they write von Haase, I don’t know – I was also arrested as von Haase.”¹⁰⁴ It should be added that the witnesses who testified at the trial did not report any doubts that the defendant was the one whose acts they were testifying about – some of them only pointed out that during the German occupation, he did not have a moustache and wore glasses.¹⁰⁵

During the trial, Haase tried to demonstrate that he was not an active and zealous party member. Before the court, he stated that joining the NSDAP was a “moral duty of public servants.”¹⁰⁶ He testified that he joined the party in 1935.¹⁰⁷ He departed from the truth. We know that he entered its ranks as early as the 1920s.

Haase tried to give the impression of a person who shows remorse; he said: “It is difficult for me to speak about the conduct of the Germans in Poland, for I find that the Germans have made great mistakes.”¹⁰⁸ On the other hand, he tried to convince the court that he did not know about the extermination of the Jewish

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, Power of attorney granted by Haase to barrister Dr. Henryk Sowilski, Cracow, 27 April 1951, fol. 151.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, Minutes of the main hearing before the Voivodeship Court in Cracow, The testimony of Willi Haase, Cracow, 26 June 1951, fol. 204.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, fol. 205v.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ AIPN Kr, 502/2207, Minutes of the main hearing before the Voivodeship Court in Cracow, The testimony of Wilhelm Machauf, Cracow, 27 June 1951, fol. 222.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, Minutes of the main hearing before the Voivodeship Court in Cracow, The testimony of Willi Haase, Cracow, 26 June 1951, fol. 205v.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, fol. 204.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, fol. 205.

population: “I know that the Jewish population was gathered in ghettos, but that 70% of the population was shot [*sic!*] I don’t know.”¹⁰⁹ Reading these testimonies, it is hard to believe that senior SS officers were unaware of the scale and circumstances of the crime.¹¹⁰

The defendant denied that he had been a desk officer for Jewish affairs under the SS and Police commander for the Cracow district and had taken an active part in any operations to liquidate Jews. Like other German criminals tried (before him) in the 1940s in Cracow, he strove to show that, despite holding a high position, he had no authority to give orders.¹¹¹ He stated, for example, that he possessed no function during the operation carried out in the Cracow ghetto at the end of October 1942: “I was not in charge of the extermination operation, I was only in the company of my boss Scherner [...] The head of the SS ordered me to go with him, and as the junior rank, I had to go with him. [...] I had no authority in the ghetto liquidation; I was only the most senior officer in rank, and above me, there was Scherner.”¹¹² Haase went on to deny that he had ordered the liquidation of the Cracow ghetto on 13 and 14 March 1943. He said he had not been authorised to give orders: “I could not give orders because I was not authorised.”¹¹³ He admitted, however, that he was in Bochnia at the time of the liquidation of the ghetto and heard the shots:

I was in Bochnia – I do not remember the date, and I cannot say that this corresponds to the date of the deed of the indictment; I was then only once with Scherner during the relocation of the inhabitants of the ghetto in Bochnia, and I did not have any insight into the whole operation, I was not even present the entire day, because I was in the office of the commander. I saw people in the streets with packages; I came to Bochnia in my boss’s company. I heard

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, fol. 206.

¹¹⁰ See Lubecka, *Niemiecki zbrodniarz*, p. 257.

¹¹¹ *Ead.*, “Konieczność wykonania rozkazu jako instrument obrony w procesach przed Najwyższym Trybunałem Narodowym,” in *Pola wolności*, ed. by A. Bartuś (Oświęcim–Poznań, 2020), pp. 217–236; *ead.*, *Niemiecki zbrodniarz*, p. 260.

¹¹² AIPN Kr, 502/2207, Minutes of the main hearing before the Voivodeship Court in Cracow, The testimony of Willi Haase, Cracow, 26 June 1951, fols 205v–206.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, fol. 206.

that shots were fired, but what they were about, I do not know. I was there for 2–3 hours [...] why shots were fired – it seems to me that maybe someone was trying to escape.¹¹⁴

Speaking about the camp in Szebnie, he said he had been there only one night.¹¹⁵

Witnesses

Most of the witnesses who testified after the defendant were Holocaust survivors. It is likely that even before the first trial began, emotions among them must have been running high. They were to testify about their torturer – the person responsible for the deaths of their loved ones. According to Haase's testimony, on 4 June in the court building, one of the witnesses approached him and said: "This c... must be dealt with and executed."¹¹⁶

It is worth noting that, due to the passage of time since efforts to extradite Haase began, some of the witnesses with knowledge of the acts committed by him left Poland and were unable to testify in person during his trial. During the hearing in June, the court agreed, at the prosecutor's request, to read several testimonies of witnesses who had emigrated to Israel and had previously testified in the pre-trial proceedings. These were: Leon Przechadzki, Sandel Mejtliś, Szyja Wolf Abramczyk, Leon Steinberg, Emil Wimmer, Leon Grobler and Franciszek Monhajt.¹¹⁷ Among the witnesses for the prosecution were also Poles, such as Tadeusz Pankiewicz, who ran a pharmacy in the Cracow ghetto with the permission of the Germans, and Franciszek Banaś, a functionary of the so-called Blue Police and a Home Army soldier.¹¹⁸ The witnesses' testimonies were extensive and comprehensive.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ AIPN Kr, 502/2207, Minutes of the main hearing before the Voivodeship Court in Cracow, The testimony of Willi Haase, Cracow, 27 June 1951, fol. 217. While still under interrogation, Haase testified as a suspect: "During the liquidation of the camp in Szebnia, I first went there alone, and the next day Scherner arrived. I gave the commander a secret order in a sealed envelope which, as far as I knew at the time, concerned only the liquidation." (AIPN Kr, 502/2206, Minutes of the interrogation of suspect Wilhelm Haase, Cracow, 27 April 1951, fols 77–77v).

¹¹⁶ AIPN Kr, 502/2207, Minutes of the main hearing before the Voivodeship Court in Cracow, The testimony of Willi Haase, Cracow, 27 June 1951, fol. 221.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, fol. 224.

¹¹⁸ In the 1980s, both were awarded the titles of Righteous Among the Nations by the Yad Vashem Institute in Jerusalem. (See "Banaś Franciszek," in *Księga Sprawiedliwych wśród Narodów Świata. Ratujący*

Notably, the defendant took the opportunity to speak during the trial after the witnesses testified. He asked them questions and made statements. He was very active. It seems that the same cannot be said of his defence counsel. The acting lawyer, probably due to the very short time to prepare for the trial – several days, in fact – did not have many witnesses at his disposal. He attempted to call as witnesses two prisoners who, like the defendant, were incarcerated in the Montelupich prison – Müller and Maurer, who were to testify that the defendant had not given orders.¹¹⁹ Probably in an attempt to gain additional time, the application was also made for the admission of evidence from the testimony of the “other chauffeur of the defendant who drove with him in Cracow.”¹²⁰ The defence counsel added that his name is: “unknown, but will possibly be determined by the defendant’s Hamburg counsel.”¹²¹ The court refused to hear these witnesses because they considered that the circumstances they were to testify had already been clarified during the trial.¹²² The court only agreed to read (at the request of the defence) the testimony of several witnesses: Karl Hess, Wilhelm Kunde, Thilde Bosch-Chur, and copies of the transcripts of the testimonies witnesses gave during the extradition proceedings in Burgwedel and Rastatt.¹²³ In these testimonies, we find opinions that the defendant could not have been the perpetrator of the crimes he was accused of, as he was always correct and had no dealings with Jewish matters. As the court emphasised in the statement of reasons for the judgment, it is noteworthy that the defence witnesses were not eyewitnesses to Haase’s deeds but only “made positive statements about him based on personal contacts.”¹²⁴

At the end of the trial, during a concise (even perfunctory) defence speech, Henryk Sowilski stated only that “Haase did not give orders; he was only an executor of

Żydów podczas Holocaustu. Polska, ed. by I. Gutman, S. Bender, and S. Krakowski, vol. 1 [Cracow, 2009], p. 20; “Pankiewicz Tadeusz,” in *Księga Sprawiedliwych*, vol. 2, p. 528).

¹¹⁹ AIPN Kr, 502/2207, Minutes of the main hearing before the Voivodeship Court in Cracow, Cracow, 27 June 1951, fol. 223v.

¹²⁰ AIPN Kr, 502/2207, Minutes of the main hearing before the Voivodeship Court in Cracow, Cracow, 27 June 1951, fol. 212v.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, fol. 213.

¹²² AIPN Kr, 502/2207, Minutes of the main hearing before the Voivodeship Court in Cracow, Cracow, 27 June 1951, fol. 224.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, fol. 223v.

¹²⁴ AIPN Kr, 502/2207, Conclusion of the judgment of the Voivodeship Court of Cracow, Cracow, 29 June 1951, fol. 240v.

orders.”¹²⁵ The lawyer also requested the extraordinary mitigation of punishment. The defendant stated that he had not asked to be transferred to Cracow but had been forcibly transferred there. He pleaded not guilty and asked for acquittal. The prosecutor, however, demanded the death penalty.¹²⁶

Sentence

On 29 June 1951, Haase was sentenced. For directing the deportation of the Jewish population from the ghettos in Cracow and Bochnia to extermination camps, to the camp in Szebnie, and for other crimes (including those committed in ZAL Plaszw), the Voivodeship Court in Cracow sentenced Haase to death.¹²⁷

In the absence of evidence of guilt, the court acquitted Haase of the charges of “personally firing into a crowd and killing the Brands,¹²⁸ extorting valuables from the Jewish population,”¹²⁹ as well as the charge of being a member of the SS and NSDAP criminal organisations because the defendant had already been punished for this offence with a two-year prison term by a British court.¹³⁰ In addition, under Article 7 of the so-called August Decree, the court ordered the loss of public and civil rights and the forfeiture of property.¹³¹

Although the acts described in the deed of indictment mainly concerned crimes committed against the Jewish population,¹³² the court stated that: “By directing acts of extermination of the Jewish and Polish population [...] the defendant Haase went along with the authorities of the German state, whose aim was the final biological extermination of the Jews and Poles.”¹³³ Among the

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, Minutes of the main hearing before the Voivodeship Court in Cracow, Cracow, 27 June 1951, fol. 225.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ AIPN Kr, 502/2207, Conclusion of the judgment of the Voivodeship Court of Cracow, Cracow, 29 June 1951, fol. 234.

¹²⁸ The deed of indictment charged Haase with the murder of Abraham and Natalia Brand during the liquidation of the Cracow ghetto in March 1943, when he fired into a crowd of assembled people. (AIPN Kr, 502/2207, Deed of indictment against Wilhelm von Haase, Cracow, 29 April 1951, fol. 80v).

¹²⁹ AIPN Kr, 502/2207, Conclusion of the judgment of the Voivodeship Court of Cracow, Cracow, 29 June 1951, fol. 237v.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, fol. 241v.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, fol. 238.

¹³² According to the court’s findings, in November 1943, during the visitation of the camp in Szebnie, Haase ordered the execution of Stanisław Brzeziński (*ibid.*, fol. 239v).

¹³³ *Ibid.*, fol. 241.

aggravating circumstances, the court pointed out “the immense material and moral damage inflicted on the Jewish and Polish populations, the immeasurable amount of harm and suffering inflicted on these populations, and all of this for the sole purpose of realising the insane imperialist-fascist aspirations of the rulers of the Third Reich, possessed of a racial hatred of everything that is not fascist-German.”¹³⁴ In the conclusion of the judgment, the court also stated that it found no grounds to apply Article 5 of the August Decree (extraordinary mitigation of punishment) to the convict: “For the defendant, Haase cannot plead that he acted under orders since he joined the SS criminal organisation voluntarily.”¹³⁵ This was a characteristic line of jurisprudence also adopted by the judges of the Supreme National Tribunal.¹³⁶

Both the defence counsel and the prosecutor filed a review with the Supreme Court. This led to part of the judgment being overturned and amended. On the one hand, the Supreme Court stated that the final decisions of foreign courts did not bind the Polish courts and, therefore, imposed an eight-year prison sentence on Haase for his participation in a criminal organisation.¹³⁷ On the other hand, it acquitted the defendant of the charge that he had abused and tormented the camp prisoners and “by exploiting the critical position of the female prisoners, had led them to submit to acts of lewdness.”¹³⁸ According to the Supreme Court, the mere fact that the defendant participated in carousals organised by the camp authorities in Szebnie was not sufficient proof that he committed the acts he was charged with at the time.¹³⁹ Haase filed a petition for pardon.¹⁴⁰ Both the Voivodeship Court of Cracow and the Supreme Court gave a negative opinion on this petition.¹⁴¹ The President of the Republic of Poland, Bolesław Bierut, did not exercise his right of

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ Lubecka, “Konicznosc wykonania rozkazu,” p. 234.

¹³⁷ AIPN Kr, 502/2207, Sentence of the Supreme Court, [Warsaw], 6 March 1952, fol. 290.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, fol. 295.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ AIPN Kr, 502/2207, A request for clemency to the President of the Republic of Poland, Bolesław Bierut, [date of receipt by the Supreme Court: 24 March 1952], fols 302–304.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, Opinion of the Voivodeship Court in Cracow on granting clemency to Wilhelm Haase, Cracow, 26 March 1952, fols 297–297v; *ibid.*, Opinion of the Supreme Court on granting clemency to Wilhelm Haase, [Warsaw], 2 April 1952, fol. 307.

pardon.¹⁴² The sentence was carried out by hanging on 23 May 1952 in the prison on Montelupich Street in Cracow.¹⁴³

The criminal prosecution results of those involved in implementing Operation “Reinhardt” have been described in the relevant literature on the subject as unsatisfactory to the highest degree.¹⁴⁴ Willi Haase belonged to a small group of perpetrators, given the scale of the crime, who were responsible for the extermination of the Jewish population and were tried for their actions. His defence was not atypical. Although he was a high-ranking SS officer, he argued that he had acted under orders and that he did not have full knowledge of the Holocaust. He also tried to show that he was not a zealous party functionary.¹⁴⁵ Neither the Voivodeship Court in Cracow nor the Supreme Court recognised his arguments. He was sentenced to death.

Compared to other trials of German criminals in Poland, this trial took place relatively late. Its proceedings were not publicised in the early 1950s, neither in the local nor in the central press of the time. Nonetheless, it should be noted that the criminal proceedings conducted, apart from bringing Haase’s actions to account, made it possible to document a specific fragment of the criminal activities of those who carried out Operation “Reinhardt” on the territory of the Cracow district.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, Letter of the Director of the Clemency Office to the Voivodeship Court in Cracow, Warsaw, 10 May 1952, fol. 329.

¹⁴³ AIPN Kr, 425/189, Report on the execution of the sentence of the Voivodeship Court in Cracow of 29 June 1951, No. K.170/51, partially overturned and amended by the sentence of the Supreme Court in Warsaw of 6 March 1952, No. II.K.886/51, by which Wilhelm Haase was validly sentenced to death, Cracow, 23 May 1952, fol. 135; R. Kotarba, *Niemiecki obóz w Płaszowie 1942–1945* (Warsaw–Cracow, 2009), pp. 52–53.

¹⁴⁴ See, for instance, H.Ch. Jasch, “Karanie zbrodni akcji ‘Reinhardt’ przez sądy RFN,” in *Akcja „Reinhardt.” Historia i upamiętnienie*, ed. by S. Lehnstaed and R. Traba (Warsaw, 2019), p. 251.

¹⁴⁵ See J. Lubecka, “Joseph Bühler – urzędnik uwikłany czy świadomy uczestnik zbrodni? Rozważania w świetle procesu Josepha Bühlera (17 czerwca – 10 lipca 1948 r.),” *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość* 36/1 (2020), p. 350; *ead.*, *Niemiecki zbrodniarz*, pp. 254–262.

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SUMMARY

In June 1951, Willi Haase, the former chief of staff of the SS and Police commander of the Cracow district, who was responsible for supervising Operation “Reinhardt” in this area, was tried before the Voivodeship Court in Cracow. The article characterises the person of the criminal and then his fate from the moment of his arrest, through his extradition to Poland, until his trial, with particular emphasis on the defence strategy adopted by the defendant. Both Haase’s crimes and the way they were handled by the justice system of “People’s” Poland in the early 1950s are described. The article shows how much valuable information about the crimes committed against the Jewish population was documented during these proceedings.

KEYWORDS

Willi (Wilhelm) Haase • trials of German war criminals in Poland
• Voivodeship Court in Cracow • Operation “Reinhardt” • Holocaust