

**FROM DRANCY
TO AUSCHWITZ**

**IN MEMORY OF MY FRIENDS WHO PERISHED
OR DISAPPEARED IN DEPORTATION**

André BAUR, his wife and
their four children

BELLIGREANU

Waldemar BERGER

Françoise BERNHEIM

Raymond BERR

BILTZ

Doctoresse BLASS

Rabbin BLOCH, his wife and
their little daughter

Jean-Charles BLOCH

Pier BLOCH

René BLUM

M-me BLUM and her
daughters Annette
and Lise

BRAININE

Arthur BRONSTEIN

Rose CHAPOCHNIK

Simon COHEN and his son
Michel

Moïse DOBIN

Irène ELBAZ

Dr. ELBERG

Simon EINOCH

Fanny EVSHEREFF

Dr. FEIGENBERG and his
daughter Annie

Jacques FELDBAU

Dr. FOY

Margueritte FRANCFORT

Ilija FUNDAMINSKY

Marie GARFUNKEL and her
two children

Lioubov GAVRONSKY

Rabbin GUINSBURGER

Janine GODCHAU

Grégoire GOLDRINE

Jacques GOTKOVSKY, his
mother and sister

Maurice HAUSER

Colette HECKER-DACOSTA
and her little daughter
Josette

Georges HELLBRONNER

Olga HODASSEVITCH

Lucien ISRAEL

Élizabeth KANNEGUISSE

Dora KAPLAN

Arman KATZ and his wife
Paulette

KLEINER

R.P. Dimitri KLÉPININE

Israel KOGAN

KRUMENZADIK

Marcel LATTÈS

Christian LAZARD
Pierre LAZARUS
LECZYNSKI
Armand LEDER, his wife and
their daughter Nicolle
Jean LÉON
Paul LÉON
Philippe LÉVI-ARTURO
Odette LÉVY
Walter LÉVY
Dr. William LÉVY, his wife
and their little daughter
Fabienne
Thérèse LÉVY-CAEN
Dr. LÉVY-COBLENTZ and his
wife
LIACHOVSKY and his wife
Jouri LOURIÉ and his wife
Marie
Ketty MALMOUD
Jouri MANDELSTAM
Pierre MASSE
Roger MASSE
MARGOULIS
Marcel MARTER
Jean MAYER
François MONTEL
Léon MOSÈS
Fernand MUSNIK
Dr. Albert NAVARRO, his wife
and their three children
OLSTEIN and his wife
Gérard and Jean-Louis
OPPENHEIMER
Dr. PECKER

Marcel PINTEL
PODOLSKY
David POLITI
RABINOVITCH (Ritch)
Jacques RAFFAEL
Sarah RAJCYN and her
daughter Nina
David RAPPOPORT and his
wife Rebecca
Alexandre ROSOVSKY and his
wife Tamara
Margueritte SAMUEL
Dr. SAZIAS
Dr. SCHMIERGUEL
Grégoire SÉGAL and his
children Ida и Jacques
Henri SICORA, his wife
and their sons
Pierre SIROTA
Marcel STORA and his wife
Yvonne
M-me SZYRGIK and her baby
TOCKMAN and his wife
Henri VALENSI
WALK
Ladislav WADASZ
Rémy WEIL
Roger WEIL
Alfred WEINBERG
Jacques WEISBREM and his
wife Anna
Dr. WITTMANN
Marc WOLFSON and his wife
Erna
Albert ULMO
ZOELLER

INTRODUCTION BY THE AUTHOR

We were destined to encounter the most unusual phenomenon of our sad epoch, the unleashing of human bestiality in its pure form as manifested in the persecution of the Jews.

Circumstances resulted in our spending almost two-and-a-half years in the tragic reality of the Drancy camp. Later, for almost a year, we experienced the horrors of Auschwitz and Buchenwald. Our observations are based on these personal experiences in France and Germany.

We benefited from advice and notes of some of our comrades in captivity. We hope that our work does not contain any serious mistakes, omissions or unjust assessments. In particular we are grateful to Mr. Jacques Fonseca, our comrade in captivity, whose prescient and balanced judgments have not been yet properly appreciated, as well as Mrs. Jeannette Hanau and Antoinette Nelson, and Mr. Gabriel Agi.

In writing these pages our main concern was exactitude, our only inspiration the memory of our unfortunate camp comrades, our only desire for such sad and shameful events never to happen again.

G. W.
Paris, October 1946

PART ONE

Drancy, Prologue to Auschwitz

*I returned, and saw under the sun, that
the race is not to the swift, nor the battle
to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise,
nor yet riches to men of understanding,
nor yet favour to men of skill;
but time and chance happeneth to them all.
For man also knoweth not his time:
as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as
the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons
of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth
suddenly upon them.*

Ecclesiastes, 9, 11–12

Chapter One

DRANCY UNDER DANNECKER

(August 20, 1941 — July 1, 1942)

General view—August 20, 1941—Administrative structure of the camp—Life in the camp (August–December, 1941)—First deportation; hostages—Deportations from April to June, 1942—Atmosphere in the camp during deportation—Atmosphere in the camp between deportations—Spiritual interests—The “yellow star” and “Friends of the Jews”.



The story of the Drancy camp starts on August 20, 1941. Prior to that date its buildings already had been used for imprisonment, but irregularly and without clear specialization. In the fall of 1940, however, the Germans had placed in Drancy some French prisoners of war before sending them elsewhere. Then, for several weeks the camp housed interned British civilians, who were later replaced by prisoners of war and civilian internees of Yugoslavian and Greek origin. These short-term stays at Drancy of people who were generally under the protection of wartime laws are significant in comparison to what Drancy became during the period from August 20, 1941, to August 17, 1944. Therefore, these dates can be justifiably considered the beginning and the end of Drancy's history.

Throughout its three years of existence, the Drancy camp housed over 70,000 persons: women, men, children, and the elderly. It saw

the birth of dozens of babies; it saw the miserable death of several hundred human beings of all ages. The camp, like theater, was the stage for innumerable tragedies that shocked the imagination of their witnesses. The fact that of the more than 70,000 persons who stayed at Drancy only 1,467 persons remained alive there at the time of liberation of the camp reflects the extraordinary scope of what had happened on its small territory.

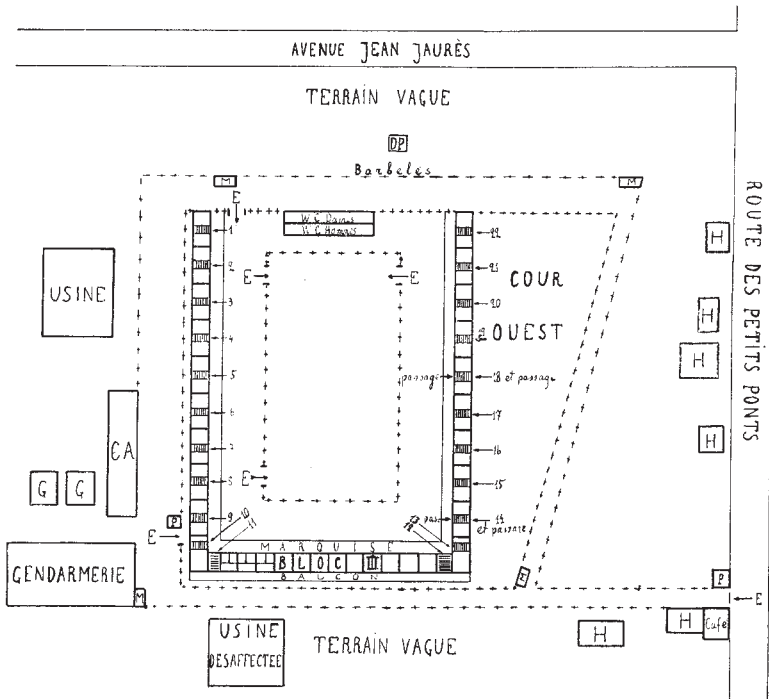
The camp was located at the center of the township of Drancy and could be spotted easily thanks to the five multi-story buildings that were well known in the area. These buildings had never been used as prisons. The camp was located next to them, and one of the camp buildings was facing Petit Pont Road.

It was a long U-shaped four-story building. The space between the two sides of the U was a court, about 200 meters long and 40 meters wide. The two wings of the building were oriented North-South. At the South end they were open, and the road was clearly seen from the court. The North end of the building was connected by a transverse building. The whole space was surrounded by a double row of barbed wire with towers at the four corners of the block. A path ran between the rows of barbed wire.

By the time the camp was created, the construction of the buildings had not yet been completed. They must have been intended to serve as small, cheap apartments. The building that housed the detainees had rather strange shapes on all four floors—wide at the ends and rather narrow in the middle. Each floor was 20 meters long, while the width was seven to eight meters at the ends and only about three meters in the middle. The cement floors were uneven, with sewer pipes exposed. Two large radiators were supposed to provide the heating. Each room had a tap that fed water to seven bent pipes through which the water ran into a long wooden trough lined with tin plates. Whenever the tap was turned on, the water ran simultaneously from the seven pipes. Since the trough was rather low, and the pipes were located rather high, each of the seven spouts would sprinkle the floor under the trough, leaving it constantly wet. The walls were cement, and the windows were large. They were of the sliding type. A wide gap was always present between the wall and the window, allowing constant drafts.

Each room had one door opening onto the landing. The staircases were narrow, the steps high and uncomfortable. The railings

PLAN SCHEMATIQUE DU CAMP DE DRANCY



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|--------------------|----------------|
| G—Highrise | P—Police Post |
| CA—"Aryan" Command | H—Houses |
| M—Watch Tower | 1—Staircase #1 |
| E—Entry | |

- Avenue Jean Jaures—Avenue Jean Jaures
- Terrain vague—Vacant Lot
- Barbeles—Barbed Wire
- Usine—Plant
- Gendarmerie—Gendarmerie
- Usine desaffectee—Abandoned Plant
- Route des Petit Ponds—Petit Ponds Road
- Cour Ouest—West Courtyard
- W. C. Dames—W. C. women
- W. C. Homes—W. C. men
- Marquise—Overhang
- Bloc 3—Block 3
- Balcon—Balcony

were of rough iron and unfinished. One staircase—for all four floors and 16 rooms—led to the court. Each of the two side wings of the building had ten staircases.

In the camp parlance the building connecting the two side wings was called Block 3. On both sides of this block there were two staircases—one on the North end of the West wing, and the other—on the East wing. One of these stairs was wide and easy to climb; its construction was almost completed by August, 1941. A long balcony with two staircases ran along the outside façade of each floor. Interiors of Block 3 were finished better than the side wings. Each floor there had small rooms, with floors covered with terrazolithe, and walls painted white or whitewashed. There were toilets, and some rooms had sinks with kitchen faucets. Other rooms were miniature copies of those in the side wings: uneven cement floors, troughs with taps supplying water to three or five pipes at a time.

Each room had large wooden bunk beds. These beds could not pass through the narrow staircases, and were delivered by ropes through the windows. Each bed had a feather mattress. These mattresses were never cleaned, repaired very seldom and superficially, and very soon became revoltingly dirty. A few small folding tables, two or three benches, several stools and usually a large wooden table completed the furnishings. No wardrobes, no shelves, which were forbidden.

The court was covered with broken pebbles, and the slightest wind would raise thick black clouds, and in winter it was covered with large dirty puddles. Late in 1943, the SS Captain and great builder Brunner covered the whole court with cement and built a cement driveway for cars. In the middle of the court there was a section surrounded by barbed wire which until July 16, 1942, was used for prisoners' walks, and later for assembling the deportees and new arrivals. Brunner eliminated the barbed wire and built a lawn in this place.

At the first floor level, along the interior façade, an overhang ran above an open gallery. Desperate people would crash on its iron spikes when throwing themselves out of the fourth floor windows. The southern end of the court was blocked by a long brick structure, parallel to Block 3. This was the latrine, called in the camp jargon "Le Chateaux Rouge" (Red Palace). In September, another similar structure was added to the single Red Palace. There were times

when these two Red Palaces could hardly satisfy the needs of the camp. The rear side of the eastern wing faced an empty lot which was dubbed the “Eastern court”. It would later become a children’s playground, and under Brunner this is where the deportees would be assembled.

The “Aryan” Commandant’s office and the police and gendarme offices were located on the other side of the West wing, in additions to the camp square. Some of the gendarmes were housed in the so-called “skyscrapers”, outside of the camp.

Early in 1942, the camp was overrun by countless bedbugs and fleas. They crawled out of the wooden bunks and cracks in the walls, and rained down from the ceiling. Often the new arrivals would become completely disfigured and unrecognizable within 10 to 12 days due to thousands of bedbug bites. Gradually, the detainees were becoming inured, and the bites no longer left any traces.

All the buildings were erected above deep cellars. Some of the cellars were used as punishment cells for “serious criminals”. Often the detainees would be kept there for days, in the dark, isolated and without even blankets. In 1943–1944, Brunner’s right hand, the “boxer” Bruckler, would often go down there to perform the sacred duty of justice. It was out of the cellars under the East wing that in November, 1943 a failed attempt was made to escape by digging a long tunnel.

Such was the general appearance of the camp.

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In October, 1940, all Jews in the occupied zone were ordered to present themselves at police commissariats where their names and addresses were registered. Minor children had to be registered by their parents. In the spring of 1941, everybody was obliged to appear again at the Prefecture of police for a new verification, and later all identity papers were stamped “JEW”. All these measures did not bode well, but nearly everybody concerned submitted to the order. Some were induced by fear of sanctions, others by reluctance to look cowardly. But both groups, reassured by declarations of Marshal Pétain and Admiral Darlan, believed they would be protected from arbitrary persecution and tried to live a legal life. Besides, everybody was convinced that some measures might be applied to men only:

in the twentieth century, in one of the most civilized countries of the continent, it was impossible to consider seriously the possibility of imposing severe inconveniences upon women, children and the elderly who strictly complied with the law. So, to provide them this legality, it was worth subjecting themselves to some risk which—my God!—did not seem really deadly.

On August 20, 1941, the Paris police conducted the first monstrous round-up of Jews. The 11th and 12th arrondissements were cordoned off. All men under the age of 60, French and foreign, were stopped, and all whose identity papers were stamped “JEW” were detained in their homes, in the streets, in the shops. In this way 5,000 people were arrested. In addition 12 members of the Paris bar association were detained separately in the Palais du Justice on the grounds of their prominent position in the law. All those arrested were brought to Drancy. They became the founders of the camp.

In the camp nothing was ready to receive them. There were no beds or mattresses in the rooms. The kitchens did not function. There were no blankets, no mess tins, no spoons. Upon arrival the people were filling the rooms and somehow getting settled on the uneven floors. However something was prepared ahead of time—rules and regulations. These rules—the creation of Dannecker, head of the German anti-Jewish administration in France, but signed by Admiral Bard, Prefect of Police and General of the Gendarmes of Paris—prohibited any contacts between the prisoners and the gendarmes, prohibited leaving the prisoners’ rooms at any time, except for authorized walks, prohibited correspondence and parcels, and prohibited smoking and looking out the windows whenever Dannecker was visiting the camp. The boss would pace the empty court and threaten the scared faces behind the windows with his revolver.

* * *

The camp was under the authority of the all-powerful Dannecker. As a pro forma, a French functionary was named Commandant of the camp. Appointed by the Prefecture of Police, he executed and applied all the conditions dictated by Dannecker. The external guard and internal surveillance were carried out by a detachment of the gendarmes. A group of inspectors from the judiciary police es-

established and guarded personal, very brief, cards for each prisoner. In October, a special service, called "Personnel Bureau" was created in the camp. The workers in this service, selected from the prisoners' ranks, and vigilantly supervised by the police inspectors, established and maintained these files. At the same time other bureaus were created that were entrusted to the Jewish administration: "Military Bureau" that attested old veterans, and later the wives of the prisoners. When correspondence was allowed, a bureau of "Mail Distribution" became necessary, and was run by a gendarme with an assistant from the ranks of the prisoners. Another service was established for food and linen parcels. Doctors and nurses provided medical services under the supervision of an "Aryan" doctor sent by the Prefecture of Police. The kitchens, warehouses, workshops that occupied some prisoners were run by a housekeeper appointed by the Prefecture of Police. The Social Service maintained contacts with the General Union of French Jews (U. G. I. F.). This organization was created by the Germans by the end of 1941 with the secret intention to facilitate the capture of the Jews and their property. The intentions were obvious, and this organization inspired no trust in those involved. But it was the only legal organization recognized by the Germans which maintained at least some rapport with them. As the German pressure kept increasing, more and more people were forced to resort to material and moral support from U. G. I. F. At Drancy the Social Service related numerous requests of the prisoners to U. G. I. F., and until mid-August, 1942, the woman representing U. G. I. F. visited the camp daily. She served as liaison agent with the outside world.

Nominally, the whole Jewish administration was under orders to the interior chief of the camp who was appointed by the French Commandant of the camp.

Such was the administrative structure of the camp, and the participation of prisoners was developing very gradually.

* * *

The very first concern of every prisoner was to get in touch with his family. Many were captured in such a way that their families knew nothing about their disappearance, and everyone was eager to calm them. Since there were no normal ways to do so, the gen-

darmes volunteered to take messages to the families. The prisoners would send a few words and then wait for “their” gendarme to bring back a reply, and sometimes even a parcel. This preoccupation would completely absorb one’s thoughts. The gendarmes were judged mostly by how they agreed to carry out a request and the comrades by how willingly they would help find a “good” gendarme. Ultimately, it was only a few who could and knew how to avail themselves of these dangerous liaisons. The camp Commandant, under the fierce orders of Dannecker, started taking measures against the gendarmes, as well as against the prisoners, in the form of disciplinary punishments, and by mid-September the ties to the outside world were almost completely severed.

Camp life started to get organized. By the third day they started doling out soup, coffee and 250 grams of bread. The soup had no nutritional value at all, nevertheless it was consumed avidly; hungry people were demanding it with persistence, and the distribution of its residue often caused great commotion. The same happened during the distribution of bread: each seventh part of a loaf had to be weighed to assure equal portions. The hunger was quite severe. On one October day, the prisoners, pushed to the extreme by hunger, staged a veritable protest demonstration against the conduct of the camp chief chanting in chorus after the morning roll-call: “Want to eat! Want to eat!”

More and more prisoners exhibited signs of weakness, and edema of the feet due to malnutrition was becoming more and more common. In early November prisoners in especially poor condition were examined by a doctor from the prefecture, and during the first week about 800 persons were released for health conditions. A happy time when one’s health condition could be a reason for liberating a Jew!

As of that time, correspondence and food parcels were allowed. One could send two postcards per month and receive the same number. Once a week one could receive a food parcel of under 3 kilos, and once every 15 days a linen parcel, and send back to the family one with dirty underwear. It was forbidden to receive tobacco, alcohol, medications and writing paper. In the linen parcels one could receive books, with the exception of prohibited publications and anything related to politics. Books on history, however, were permitted.

The parcels were searched severely, sometimes viciously: the gendarmes would puncture jam containers with their knives and break up bread looking for contraband.

Little by little wooden beds started appearing. They were placed in the rooms in a bizarre pattern accommodating the uneven floors that made any alignment impossible. The feather mattresses were of good quality, which was a surprise to everybody. Along with the beds wooden tables were placed in the rooms, as well as small folding tables, several benches and stools. With the advent of cold weather the heating system was turned on and provided a bare minimum of warmth. The camp was becoming habitable.

The day started at 6 a.m. with the strike of a gong that announced reveille and distribution of coffee at the kitchens. At 7 a.m. a whistle sent everybody to the court for a roll-call. This roll-call lasted about an hour, but a few times two hours and even longer. Beginning in November, due to foul weather, the roll-call was conducted in the rooms. After the roll call the inhabitants of each block had a half-hour walk in the court between the two rows of barbed wire. Each block had its own allotted time.

This timetable was not very strictly observed, and some people would go for a walk at different times and mix with the residents of other blocks. By 11 a.m. bread was distributed. At noon, the kitchens doled out soup. By 6 p.m. another strike of the gong called persons on duty from each group to the kitchen for the second portion of soup. By 9 p.m. everybody was supposed to be in bed.

* * *

Such monotonous life dragged on for about three months. On December 12, at around 6 p.m. Dannecker arrived in the camp. Everybody immediately was summoned to the court with his belongings. Nervous gendarmes pushed panicked people out with blows of fists and feet, rushing everybody and creating a terrible commotion. When everybody was assembled in the court, Dannecker selected 300 persons who were immediately removed from the camp with their belongings. Having settled down after the first shock, the camp sank into a deep gloom. By consensus, the 300 selected comrades were hostages who would have to pay with their lives for America's joining the war that was announced in the evening of December 11.

Two days later, on Sunday, December 14, around 10 a.m., a Wehrmacht detachment arrived in the camp with a list of 50 names. But there were only 47 of the 50 present at the camp; the rest were either among those released earlier as severely ill, or had died. The 47 present were taken away by the Germans, with their belongings.

In the afternoon of the same day, Dannecker's orderly, NCO Heinrichsohn, appeared with several SS men and took away another dozen prisoners who were considered "important persons." Among them were the attorneys Pierre Masse, Albert Ulmo and Paul Léon.

Only much later did we learn that the 300 comrades and the dozen "important persons" were not shot, but taken to Compiègne, along with 750 other French Jews arrested in Paris. The fate of most of them did not turn out any better because of that. Those who did not die in Compiègne of cold and hunger were deported on March 27, 1942, and perished at Auschwitz, with the exception of only four or five persons. A few elderly people returned to Drancy on March 19, 1942, and were deported in 1942–43.

All 47 people from the Wehrmacht list were shot on December 15 in Mont-Valérien, together with 50 other Jews from the Fresnes prison. That we learned on the same day from one of them who miraculously escaped execution. All the 47 were taken to Santé where it was announced that they would be executed the next day as "Judeo-communists". That night they were allowed to write letters to their families and were fed ample amounts of stewed cabbage. And that is when the Germans noticed a "mistake": the date of birth of one of the 47 differed from the one on their list. The victim of this mistake was returned to Drancy and replaced by his namesake whose date of birth was on the list. The latter was taken to Santé and shared the fate of his comrades.

By the end of January of 1942, Dannecker needed volunteers for farm work in the North of France. He promised them good food, comfortable housing and a salary. Fifty young men volunteered, went through a medical check-up and left Drancy. Later it became known that they were also sent to Compiègne where they shared the fate of other comrades: after two months of cold and hunger, they were deported to Auschwitz on March 27. On the same day another 500 people left Drancy. At the railway station in Compiègne they

were loaded into train cars, another 550 prisoners of that camp were added, and all of them were deported to Auschwitz. This was the first deportation of Jews from France.

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On April 29, 1942, the camp experienced agonizing hours again: a new deportation of 500 people was scheduled. They were supposed to be deported not right away, but first be moved to Compiègne, where another 1,000 prisoners from Pithiviers and Beaunela-Rolande camps would be added. Their journey to Auschwitz started only on June 5. For a Jew, this was almost always a journey without hope of return.

Here is how deportations were carried out at that time.

Some two to three days prior to the planned date, the Personnel Bureau would post a list of 1,000 names. In selecting the victims they considered the state of health. Those whom the “Aryan” camp medical staff considered unfit for labor were excluded. The medical exam was fast, superficial, riddled with numerous mistakes, but still was some guarantee of the group’s health. Beginning with the deportation of June 23, 1942, for the first time at Drancy “Aryan husbands” also were excluded from the list for deportation.

Also, to some extent, nationality was taken into account. Foreigners were selected rather than the French; naturalized French citizens rather than those born in France, and attempts were made to protect veterans and camp workers. All these considerations were at the discretion of interned “functionaries”, more or less approved by the police inspectors and not recognized by the Germans. Some categories, i.e. veterans of the 1939–1940 war, were not determined clearly enough; among the foreigners there were obviously veterans; some camp workers might be considered essential by some, but useless by others, so the selection was mostly arbitrary. Moreover, the police inspectors crossed out some names or added others without any explanation. Orders for deportations arrived unexpectedly, and lists were compiled in great haste and confusion.

Great nervousness would reign over the whole camp at these times. Some were trying to remind the authorities of their “rights”, always tenuous, others of their good-for-nothing merits, still others tried well ahead of time to find protection from a police inspector,

from a gendarme or somebody from outside who could be useful in “snaring” a German.

Energies, smarts, and abilities of hundreds of people were tested to their limits, hopes and disappointments switched fast and abruptly, gloomy despair descended onto the bleak square of the camp.

Finally, the lists would be posted, with the proviso that they could be changed at any moment, and those concerned were informed by the chief of each staircase. Each room listened to the chief’s announcement with agony: for one’s own destiny, for that of friends, for our collective future.

Remarkably, almost immediately after the announcement of the list the general tension dissipated. Upon the final decision, those listed would courageously visualize their future, and plunged into numerous chores in connection with their imminent departure. Others would try to cheer them up, often with sincere conviction, or console them by invoking the inevitability of fate: “Old man, today it’s you, tomorrow me. We’ll all be there!” Everybody was trying to do the departing some small favor: pack their belongings, pass onto the family something valuable or useless, warn a friend, help hide some money, a pencil or knife, spare some food. The brotherhood seemed incredible and touching, but always tinged with deep, unsurpassable grief and bitterness.

The next morning at 7 a.m. the ritual would begin. Called by the chief, each deportee had to go down to the court without his belongings, where between the two rows of barbed wire a team of prisoner barbers was waiting. The deportee’s head, beard and moustache were shaved off. Any whiff of air would carry the black dust mixed with grey, black and light hair through the court and into the rooms. By noon both the barbers and their shaving implements were showing signs of fatigue and by evening the hands were losing their flexibility and the shavers were tearing out clumps of hair.

After visiting the “beauty parlor”, everyone returned to his room and waited to be called by the chief. Upon this call he walked down, with his belongings, to the inspection block, and from there directly to the departure staircase, and could never return to his room or see his comrades.

The last farewells were rushed, as if accelerated by the embarrassment of some and the secret shame of others. Those departing shook hands with those staying behind, moved to the door where

the chief of the staircase was awaiting them. From both sides the same phrases would sound: "Well, it's not for long!" "Don't fret, in three months we'll be guarding the Boshes at Drancy!" Some would linger in front of a close relative or personal friend, would hold his hand a moment longer and embrace after a moment's hesitation. The deportee would continue on his way to the door along the outstretched hands, while the relative or friend stood still with eyes brimming with tears.

At that point an inspection was conducted by a group of police inspectors. The regulations prohibited having more than one suitcase and a knapsack with food, or a backpack and a bag with food. Blankets were counted as extra. It was prohibited to have money, valuables, tools and cutting implements. Writing paper, pens, pencils and narcotics also were prohibited. The strict adherence to this rule was carried to the absurd: needles, pins, pocket mirrors, metal tins with food and aspirin tubes, and trifles made of glass or metal were confiscated as "cutting implements".

Quinine and sedatives were treated as "narcotics"; toilet paper could be qualified as writing paper and banned; a cheap watch could be declared silver and confiscated, and a can opener could be considered either a tool or a cutting implement.

The fifteen minutes of inspection were a very bad time. Upon entering the inspection room the prisoner found himself face to face with an inspector who would push him, immediately cut the precious rope holding together his blanket and backpack, empty it onto the table, pawing every object, dropping to the dirty floor handkerchiefs and underwear, while the contents of the food bag would end up in the same pile; then he would turn out all pockets, paw the jacket shoulders, belt and pants hem, often ordered the deportee to take off his shoes, and without any explanation throw all the things that "failed to pass" into a large crate. Finally he would let his victim go—"buzz off, and fast"—and call the next man, so that the previous one ended up being pushed out by both the inspector and by his own comrade. The inspected one would do the only thing left to do—pick up hastily his meager treasures and reappear outside the door in unbuttoned clothes, with pockets turned out, shoes unlaced, clutching to his chest a pile of clothes and underwear with toothpaste squeezed onto them and shoe wax seeping from a box missing its lid.

If he was lucky, he had a few minutes left while the gendarmes were collecting his comrades in groups of ten by the departure staircase. He would use these few minutes to put his pitiful suitcase in a semblance of order. But if he happened to be the ninth or tenth in line, he was often forced to cross the court without packing his belongings and risking losing something precious during the very first steps of deportation.

Between two deportations the departure staircase was usually empty. It was the same as the others, but dirtier and smellier. The air in the rooms was heavy with old and stale odors. Several mattresses intended for the deportees were left on the crumbling beds due to their pitiful condition. There were fewer bedbugs in them, but the bedbugs that remained were hungry due to periodic fasts when there were no prisoners in the beds.

Each departure staircase was constantly patrolled by a gendarme who blocked the exit to those being deported and the entrance to all other prisoners, except the chief of the staircase and service personnel with special permits. Several gendarmes guarded the territory adjacent to the staircase, and entering it was prohibited. From time to time the doors to these staircases would open for a few minutes to let those in dire need to use the "Red Palace".

Throughout the day the departure staircases were always packed, and as soon as all stories of one staircase would fill up, the process would move to another. Each room housed about 50 people. The first concern of those entering was to find a better and cleaner corner, do some final packing, and get better acquainted with the neighbors. Everyone reflected on the inspection, worried about the quality of the expected food, and discussed the possible difficulties of the journey. The conversations were conducted in friendly, polite, calm tones, sometimes even animated and always optimistic, because at that time the deportee believed in his physical and moral strength, in an imminent end to Hitlerism, in the possibility to survive in the "labor camps" in Germany, and did not worry too much about his family: "What will happen even if the Germans want... No French government will allow any harm to women, children, the elderly and the infirm!" This was an absolutely universal conviction and not subject to debate.

At noon and at 6 p.m. they were given soup, usually of better quality than all the rest received. In the evening rations for the

DRANCY 1942



Deportation.
The deportees are leaving the inspection barracks and walk between two rows of barbed wire to the departure staircase.



Deportation.
The deportees are locked up in departure staircases # 1, 2, and 3.



After deportation.
The “Reserves” are leaving the barbed wire enclosure and return to Block 7.

Photos taken clandestinely.
Collection of M.G. Kohn

trip were distributed: a large sandwich with pate or cheese. Then Jews working in the mail distribution service entered all rooms and handed every deportee a postcard. An hour later they collected these cards filled with last farewells to the families. These messages from the grave, written in pencil, and seldom in ink, were a demonstration of the numerous ridiculous features of the camp: distribution of postcards to people who were prohibited from possessing pencils or pens. These postcards were written with pencils or pens secreted somehow during the search on the way to these rooms; three or four pencils might have been hidden somewhere, along with three or four knives. Although it hardly was possible to hide a pair of shoes or a crate of canned food, it was easier to slip past the inspector a pencil or a pocketknife. The gendarme who was distributing the mail evidently shared this view. This day dragged on, its poignant moments reflected in a postcard to loved ones, scribbled on the back of a neighbor with a pencil of a deft comrade, next to a friend waiting for the same pencil. Usually they wrote a few tender words, some words full of deep and sincere optimism, some advice to the children, a brief request to the wife to hang in there for a while, because there was nothing else left to do, closing with hope to soon report something good about himself. These were the last palpable signs of life from the deported Jews, because for a Jew deportation was death, almost certain and fast. But he did not know it, and his family even more so. And this was for the better.

The evening would pass in animated conversations, with occasional good-humored jokes, chorus singing, passing news about the latest defeats of the Germans in Russia (at that time, alas, almost always imaginary), with amazing courage and unshakable optimism demonstrated by the deportees.

Time drags on, here and there people start getting ready to go to bed. The conversation dies down. In the disconnect of this last night in France, in a room half-lit by a night lamp, one can hear a deep sigh, and then some noise from a comrade who keeps tossing and turning, nervous pacing by others who cannot calm down. One can see somebody sitting on the ground with his head in his hands, and clearly sense how the daytime optimism is waning, and how the anxiety for the family grows by the minute, bitterness and sorrow flooding the soul. So the night passes.

At dawn, even before the gong wakes the camp, the chief of the staircase comes in with an assistant and rouses everybody. Long faces, dull eyes, slow, clumsy movements. People wash up in the middle of the room. Others rush to the “Red Palace”, still others organize a team to go out into the heavily guarded court to bring in buckets of coffee supplied by prisoners working in the kitchens. The crisp morning air and cold water help dissipate the bad odors of the gloomy sleepless night. The warm coffee revives the bodies, the prospects of the unknown and hope captivate the thoughts, feed the anxiety. They talk loudly, move decisively, and assure each other that the night went well; all around friends keep repeating that they will stay together in the rail cars.

And here comes the command to go down to the court. Everybody starts moving towards the door. All of a sudden, without prearrangement, they start singing the “Marseillaise” and “Brothers, it’s only a goodbye”. Singing, they exit to the court, and there the song and conversation immediately die. The court is packed with gendarmes. At the far end, almost by the space encircled with barbed wire there is a small table with Chief Inspector Thibaudat sitting behind it, surrounded by other inspectors. Two steps from Thibaudat, also in a circle of inspectors and gendarmes, is the camp commandant Laurent. And all inspectors, all gendarmes, and even Laurent himself, are in total confusion.

The gendarmes want everybody to be calm, which means they must remain still and yet keep walking, keep quiet, yet reply, and all those with names starting with the letter A come forward. Since it is practically impossible, the gendarmes have to help the herd. It results in a scuffle, confusion, fists and kicks flying.

One way or another, all those with names beginning with A, worried and surprised (last time it was different; always something is done differently from the last time!) end up in the front, followed by those with names starting with B. The head of the column is placed at 15 paces from the small table, and the chief inspector calls out one name after another, loudly and angrily. The one called must immediately reply “Here” and quickly approach the table. There he is handed an ID and sent into the space between rows of barbed wire guarded by the gendarmes. This ends the modest plans of traveling with friends: you find yourself among As or Bs or Cs. Woe to a person who failed to hear his name, a heavy blow will teach him

move faster. Woe to a sneaky one who hopes to carry an extra package beyond the backpack and food bag into the barbed wire space: his package will be snatched away from him, and with the slightest resistance the same will happen to his backpack. Together with his blanket!

And here is Dannecker, with two or three uniformed Germans. For a moment everything falls quiet; Mr. Laurent, limping, runs to the Germans and shakes their hands for a long time, his back bent, and his face shining with servility. The inspectors and gendarmes are on alert, not a single face is seen behind the numerous windows, all of them firmly shut. The German scans over the merchandise and signals to continue the transfer. And the procedure goes on, but even more hastily, more brutally. The column beyond the barbed wire becomes shorter, and the column inside it accordingly longer. There the people are herded into groups of 50. The distance between the groups is two paces, and each is guarded by two or three gendarmes. Each such group is a rail car. It is forbidden to switch from one group to another, forbidden to talk, forbidden to go to the latrine. This crowd, this thousand people, immobile, silent, glum, emanates repressed hostility, and astonishing collective dignity.

Dannecker disappears, accompanied by a coterie of Germans supplemented by some French. His tour of the camp is unpredictable and always dangerous. The crowd of the deportees follows his figure with ironic and hateful eyes. Dannecker's long body with a constantly shaking head due to a nervous tic shows a poorly coordinated gait, like that of a drunk. Through invisible holes and cracks, thousands of eyes also follow this figure with great apprehension: one never knows what may happen. Having completed his inspection tour, Dannecker stops for a few moments at the head of the column of deportees, asks the camp bosses very amiably for permission to leave, and departs. Immediately the column begins to move towards the exit and, group after group, leaves the camp enclosure. Outside, buses already are waiting surrounded by police and gendarmes. Groups of 50 are quickly packed into buses, two policemen stand on the steps, the buses start, make a turn around the building, drive outside Block 3, past a police post, the bar is raised, and they accelerate down Petit Pont Road. Near the exit from the camp one can see a silent, serious group of people, evidently sympathizers. Pedestrians stop when the buses pass them, follow them with long

stares, unobtrusively greet them with restrained gestures, and ten minutes later the buses are already at the Bourget station.

Dannecker is waiting for them with a German detachment. Everybody disembarks from the buses quickly. Pushed by constant and typical German shouts, often accompanied by hits with rifle butts and fists, surrounded by grey-green uniforms, the deportees almost run (“Loss! Loss!”—“Go-Go”) to the cattle cars. Constantly pushed by the guards, the people fling themselves into the crush, seemingly created in the cars on purpose, and the doors are slammed shut behind the last person. The deportation that had started at Drancy two days earlier will go on for four more days that are left until the extermination, inevitable and immediate for the majority, and slower and more sophisticated murder for a minority. But the people do not know it yet.

This is how the deportation of Jews from the Drancy camp was conducted during the spring of 1942, with only minor differences in details.

* * *

The shock created at the camp by every deportation had several aspects. Each of the camp services had its own function. It would all start with the Personnel Bureau: compiling lists, taking into account, even if approximately, age, health, citizenship, prior merits (veterans, government awards) or current credits (work at the camp). Contradictory orders from the “Aryan” bosses complicated everything, and the selection was becoming more and more difficult as the number of prisoners was shrinking due to these very deportations. Always caught unawares, expected to do the whole job within a few hours, the people in the Personnel Bureau worked hard through the night and decided the fate of everyone concerned unfairly from his point of view. But what could be fair in an operation aimed at selecting one thousand persons for deportation?

The medical service, also in great haste, received, and more often than not declined, complaints from candidates for deportation. The social service managed to send out of the camp most urgent messages to obtain documents that might “save” their owners, to fix broken glasses or dentures, to find some underwear, clothing or food for those who did not have any, and all this by most primitive

means. The linen parcels service received and sent out hundreds of packages with belongings that the deportees could not take with them. The housekeeping service prepared food and additional bread rations. The cobbler service fixed hundreds of pairs of shoes, and from time to time would apply a cheap rubber sole on top of a good leather one to hide a 500 Fr. note between them. One had to work fast for “clients” who were under extreme and totally understandable pressure.

Chiefs of staircases and their assistants served as intermediaries because simple mortals were prohibited from freely moving about the court. It was these chiefs of staircases who received lists of those to be deported from the Personnel Bureau, it was they who became advocates in certain situations, and who passed on belongings needing repair. It was they who carried out requests from their inhabitants with the social service, parcels service and medical service.

All of the Jewish administration was overburdened by heavy, depressing work throughout the three or four days before and after the deportation. But everybody realized the strong camaraderie that developed during the long months of captivity. The deportees were accorded universal and deep sympathy. Goodwill was evident at all stages. Rare exceptions were glaring and created a reputation for which one would one day pay dearly.

* * *

Between two deportations the existence became less stressed, although a disquieting background was always present. Even though there were many reasons to believe that every deportation was the last one, the danger was always palpable, even to the greatest optimists, a feeling quite real, even if not acknowledged!

Everybody’s mind was on external events that were followed closely. In April it was a speech by Hitler about the war in Russia that announced an imminent and decisive offensive by the Germans. Then it was the reinstatement of Laval in power, and possible replacement of Xavier Vallant by Darquier de Pellepoix at the Commissariat on Jewish Affairs. In May it was the Russian offensive at Kursk and the first hints in the papers about the wearing of the yellow star. All events would be discussed in great detail, often childishly, almost

vorgeführt erscheint

G a i l l o t Camille

Personellen siehe anliegenden Personalbogen, mit dem
Gegenstand der Vernehmung vertraut gemacht und zur Wahr-
heit ermahnt, sagt sie folgendes aus:

„ Den Davidstern habe ich mir selbst angefer-
tigt und an meine Bluse geheftet. Es sollte dieses ein
Protest gegen die Anordnungen der Juden sein. “

Für die Richtigkeit
der Übersetzung:

Richard S. ...
Dolmetscher.

V. G. U.
Unterschrift im Original
gez.: Gaillot Camille.

G. M. G.
M. ...
Stabsfeldw. der Feldgenarmarie.

Document in German, with French translation.

Examined by the tribunal: Gaillot Camille.

Civic status: see attached questionnaire.

Required by the prosecution to tell the truth, she gave the following testimony: “I made a Star of David and attached it to my blouse in protest against anti-Jewish measures”.

always with optimism, and since there were few clandestine readers of papers and listeners to the gendarmes, and they were relating what they had heard rather poorly, everybody endlessly discussed distorted and often just imaginary events. The general consensus was that Hitler's speech was an amazingly clear admission of the approaching defeat of Germany, that Laval was preferable to Darlan because of his deftness, intelligence and experience in government work, although all this was greatly exaggerated. The preference for Laval was most obvious because he had never been considered an anti-Semite. They liked Darquier de Pellepoix more because he was corrupt and could be bought, and "that's why he accepted this post". The opposing view—that even if he was corrupt, he was bought long ago by the Germans who were more powerful and richer than all Jews taken together—did not have any effect. This quiet optimism was a protective mechanism of the brain against anxiety that was becoming unbearable. This anxiety was always present, and would take thousands of incarnations, depending on the temperament, education, self-control, and few were the people who were balanced enough, with a strong enough character, who could interpret the reality with genuinely sincere calm.

The events in the camp also caused vivid curiosity. In this respect the prisoners were even less informed, and most declarations would start with: "It seems that...", or "The guy in the kitchen said to his buddy...", and despite the skepticism that was confirmed in the past a thousand times, people listened to this and commented on the rumors.

At the end of June it turned out that Dannecker was removed from his post of chief of Jewish affairs in France. His replacement was Röthke. There were numerous rumors circulating as to why Dannecker was removed. The new "boss" was awaited with curiosity. The prisoners said: "He could not be more ferocious than Dannecker". And people believed in that!

* * *

People read a lot in the camp. Books arrived in linen parcels and circulated from hand to hand. The great tragedians—Corneille and Racine—were popular, as well as Stendhal and Balzac. Much less so Flaubert, Maupassant or Zola. In great demand were serious

contemporary books: “People of Good Will”, “The Thibault Family”, “Jean Barois”, “Mousson”, books by Aldous Huxley. “Life of Jesus” by François Mauriac was passed from hand to hand. Great interest was found in reading “Thoughts” by Pascal, and books by Renan, but the Bible was not coveted. Books on history were in great demand, and the book about the 1812 campaign by the Russian historian Tarlé, banned in France but available in the camp, provoked acute curiosity, especially as the forbidden fruit. Works dealing with sciences had fewer readers, but there were many interested in Jean Rostand and Marcel Boll, in the little red volume by Flammarion or the yellow one from the collection of Félix Alcan. Remarkably, police novels had no success at all. It must have been ridiculous to read them in a transit camp.

Remarkable also was the purity of conversations. In the camp, among men in their prime, there were no conversations about “women”. Usually the talk was about wives, mothers, sisters and fiancées, but never about sex. Funny stories were hardly ever indecent, and this strikingly distinguished the camp from the barracks.

However, a more important place belonged to quite prosaic concerns. Predominantly those were related to food. Nutrition in the camp was very poor, and the value of food exceeded everything else. It was sought persistently and constantly. The week began with the arrival of parcels. The reason was not only material. For a prisoner, a parcel sent from *home* was of immeasurable emotional value: the familiar handwriting in the address, the familiar box, favorite foods, a thousand details, insignificant, but so exciting! One had to consume the perishables right away, stretching the rest of it throughout the remaining seven days, supplementing the camp rations. But these additions were still not enough, and one had to find means of receiving contraband parcels, or to yield to the temptations of the black market. And if neither of these solutions was achievable, one tried to at least stay optimistic.

Another important concern, even though much less common, was tobacco. The strict prohibition on smoking forced many people to abandon their habit outright, which proved rather easy. But undoubtedly there are many who were never able to quit, despite their good intentions, so daily scouring for a cigarette was a major preoccupation of many prisoners. Of course, cigarettes could be obtained only on the black market where prices fluctuated widely even within

one day. At times a Gauloise cigarette cost 10 to 30 Fr., and the day before each deportation the prices would skyrocket. One would buy only two or three cigarettes at a time due to the personal and room searches. If a cigarette was found, the rule breaker lost his treasure, which the gendarmes would often smoke right in front of him, and he would be subjected to interrogation as to the source of the prohibited item. The situation was rather delicate: it was pretended that nobody, including the interrogators, knew that the cigarette market was run by the gendarmes themselves, whether merciful or greedy.

And finally, there were concerns for the general and personal comfort. Chores for cleaning the rooms or delivering bread and soup often created great difficulties for the chiefs of the rooms. An open or closed window often caused heated debates with arguments of health reasons, real or imagined. Arguments would arise about the position of a bed against the window, and about personal preferences. Despite the constantly elevated nervousness, despite the often heated tone of these arguments, they very seldom became dangerous.

* * *

In early June 1942 two interrelated events shook up the camp. The first was an order to sew a yellow star onto the clothing, in accordance with the May 29 order. The ridiculousness of this measure requiring attaching such a distinctive sign in a camp intended for Jews only was lost on the authorities. As far as the psychological effect was concerned, it obviously was not achieved: the prisoners mostly reacted to it humorously, but the police and the gendarmes were not joking and followed the order scrupulously.

But with reference to the families it caused great uncertainty: how would they endure this humiliation? What dangers would this measure impose on them, living among people already brainwashed by anti-Semitic propaganda? What would happen to the children who had not yet found a proper behavior style, when even the adults had difficulty with it? The majority trusted the nature and finesse of long-term and profound civic education of the French, but many others feared the effect of rude and deafening propaganda and the awful spirit of obedience among the French, examples of which could be seen in the camp daily. The answer arrived quickly and in

Paris, 8. Juni 1942.

Beitrag Die Franz. Staatsangeh.

Planeix

wegen Tragen des David-
sterns, obwohl sie keine
Jodin ist.

Bezug: Ohne

Festgenommen

An 8. Juni 1942, gegen
11.45 Uhr, auf dem Bv.
St. Michel (5. Arr.)

Einlieferung

An 8. Juni 1942, gegen
19.10 Uhr in das Gefang-
nis „Le Santé“.

Verfahrensmittel, Geständnis

Haftenschein

An 8. Juni 1942, gegen 11.45 Uhr
wurde die in beiliegendem Ver-
fahrensbogen näher bezeichnete

Planeix

während einer Durchgeführten Juden-
kontrolle mit einem Davidstern an-
getroffen, obwohl sie keine Jodin
ist. Derselbe war aus Papier an-
gefertigt.

Sie wurde festgenommen und in
das Gefängnis „Le Santé“ ein-
geliefert.

Der von der Festgenommenen
angefertigte Davidstern ist der
Haftenschein beigelegt.

Vernehmung der Planeix zur
Sache unseitig.

Mantel
Offiz. der Feldgend.

Feldgendarmarie, group 923 Paris, June 8, 1942

Subject: French citizen Planeix, for wearing the Star of David,
while being a non-Jew.

Reference: none.

Arrested: June 8, 1942, at 11:45 a.m., on Boulevard Saint-Michel (5 Arr.).

Delivered: June 8, 1942, at 7:15 p.m., to “Le Sante” prison.

Grounds: confession.

Record of arrest: On June 8, 1942, during inspection of the Jews, the woman Planeix was noticed with a Star of David, even though she is not a Jew. The star was made of paper. She was arrested and delivered to the “Sante” prison. The star made by arrestee is attached to this Record. PTO for the interrogation of said woman Planeix.

Signed: Mantel, NCO, Feldgendarmarie.

an unexpected way. In the first few days of June a dozen “Aryan” youths were brought to Drancy; they were mostly students who tried to bury this measure in different ways, but often very wittily and mockingly, and always courageously. Later, in August, several women were brought to camp who had been arrested for the same reason. The youths were kept in the camp like all the Jews, with only one distinction: above the yellow star with the word “JEW” written in Gothic script they were supposed to sew on a white strip with the words “FRIEND OF JEWS”. In reality the actions of these brave youths were beyond their “friendship with the Jews”. In their behavior there was often nothing specifically “pro-Jewish”, but it was provoked by a noble revolt against base and vile persecution of people who could be only accused of their birth, of the beauty or ugliness of their noses, and of a monstrous number of faults invented by a morbid and dirty imagination. The appearance of “FRIENDS OF JEWS” in the camp caused a restrained, but great and deep gratitude. All of them were released on August 30, after three months at Drancy.

Soon after that letters delivered through official or clandestine channels brought news from the outside. They dealt with innumerable manifestations of sympathy in the streets, in the metro, in shops on the part of French strangers. On this occasion the optimists won without any doubt. But, my God, how seldom did it happen!

So, the month of June 1942 ended.