

ABOUT FRANZ STANGL

Born in Austria in 1908, Franz Stangl joined the Austrian police in 1931 and became a criminal investigations officer in the political division. In 1940, Stangl joined the Euthanasia Program at its Hartheim castle institute—one of six centers where people with mental and physical disabilities and other “asocial” Germans were killed.

In March 1942, Stangl became commandant of the Sobibor extermination camp in Poland. Later that year he became commandant of Treblinka where he was responsible for the deaths of 870,000 Jews. After the prisoner revolt in Treblinka in September 1943, Stangl and his staff were transferred to Trieste, Italy to organize anti-partisan actions. He also spent time at the San Sabba concentration camp.

After the war Stangl returned to Austria, where he was arrested by the Americans for being an SS member (they did not know that he had participated in the extermination of Jews). However, Stangl was found out when the Americans began investigating the Euthanasia Program. About to be charged in May 1948, Stangl escaped to Rome, Syria, and eventually Brazil where he and his family lived under their own names until discovered in 1967. Stangl was tried in Germany and sentenced to life in prison, where he died in 1971.



Franz Stangl, Yad Vashem Photo Archive (5318/89)

INTERVIEW

While in prison Stangl was interviewed by Gitta Sereny, a British journalist. The interviews were published in a book entitled *Into That Darkness*. The following is an excerpt from one of their discussions in prison.

Q) Would it be true to say that you finally felt they weren't really human beings?

A) When I was on a trip once, years later in Brazil... my train stopped next to a slaughterhouse. The cattle in the pens, hearing the noise of the train, trotted up to the fence and stared at the train. They were very close to my window, one crowding the other, looking at me through the fence. I thought then, “look at this; this reminds me of Poland; that’s just how the people looked, trustingly, just before they were put in tins.”

Q) You said “tins.” What do you mean?

A) ...I couldn't eat tinned meat after that. Those big eyes... which looked at me... not knowing that in no time at all they'd all be dead...

Q) So you didn't feel they were human beings?

A) Cargo. They were cargo.

Q) When do you think you began to think of them as cargo?

A) I think it started the day I first saw Totenlager [the sub-camp where the gas chambers stood] in Treblinka. I remember Wirth [first commander of the camp] standing there, next to the pits full of blue-black corpses. It had nothing to do with humanity; it couldn't have; it was a mass—a mass of rotting flesh. Wirth said, "What shall we do with this garbage?" I think unconsciously that started me thinking of them as cargo.

Q) There were so many children, did they ever make you think of your children, of how you would feel in the position of those parents?

A) No... I can't say I ever thought that way... you see, I rarely saw them as individuals. It was always a huge mass. I sometimes stood on the wall and saw them in the tube [the passage leading to the gas chamber area]. But—how can I explain it—they were naked, packed together, running, being driven with whips like...

Q) Could you not have changed that?... In your position, could you not have stopped the nakedness, the whips, the horror of the cattle pens?

A) No, no, no. This was the system. Wirth had invented it. It worked. And because it worked, it was irreversible.

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