

# REPORT BY SALITTER AND MEMOIR OF HILDE SHERMAN



ECHOES & REFLECTIONS

TEACHING THE HOLOCAUST. INSPIRING THE CLASSROOM.

Report by Paul Salitter and  
Memoirs of the Survivor Hilde Sherman, née Zander (abridged)

Salitter's Report	Hilde Sherman's Testimony
I. Preparing the Transport	
<p>The Jew transport planned for 11 December 1941 included 1,007 Jews ... The transport was compiled of Jews of both sexes, of various ages – from babies to 65-year-olds...</p> <p>On the way from the slaughterhouse yard [the designated assembly point] to the platform, a male Jew attempted to commit suicide by throwing himself in front of the streetcar. But he was caught by the streetcar's bumper and only slightly injured. He recovered during the trip, and realized that he could not avoid sharing the fate of the evacuees. An elderly Jewish woman walked away from the platform without anyone noticing – it was raining and it was very dark – entered a neighboring house, took off her clothes and sat on a toilet. However a cleaning woman noticed her and she too was led back to the transport.</p>	<p>...According to the Gestapo's orders, we could take up to 50 Kg. of luggage and a bedroll 70 cm. long and 30 cm. wide with blankets etc. Of course, everyone tried to squeeze his best belongings into the suitcase, as no one knew how long they would have to last during this so-called 'resettlement'. ...And so we boarded the train on the 10th [of December 1941]. I said goodbye to my parents....</p> <p>My husband's name was Kurt Winter. I was deported with his family. We arrived at Dusseldorf at dawn. We had to disembark and walk to the slaughterhouse yard, where we were gathered together. I remember that even at that point the older people were unable to carry their baggage and simply threw it on the street. I saw how the people [of the town] were watching. They did not go out on the street, they were watching from behind the windows. I saw how the curtains were moving. No one can claim that they did not see. Of course they saw us. We were over one thousand people.</p> <p>We then arrived at the slaughterhouse yard [the assembly point] and stood there the entire night. Everything was deep in water. It was a terrible night. That was the beginning. It was the first time I was beaten. It was a high-ranking SS officer who stood at the entrance. There were steep stairs leading down into the yard and the people were not moving fast enough. So he pushed me and screamed: What are you waiting for, the streetcar? There will never again be a streetcar for you.... Shortly afterwards, we had to undress completely and our things were taken away....</p>

## II. Boarding the Train

Departure of the transport was planned for 9:30. The Jews were therefore brought to the loading ramp ready to board at 4:00 a.m. However, the Reichsbahn [The German Railway] could not have the train ready so early, allegedly due to lack of personnel. Subsequently the loading of the Jews did not begin until 9:00 a.m. The loading of the Jews into cars was carried out in great haste, as the Reichsbahn insisted that the train must depart on time. It is therefore no surprise that some cars were overloaded (60-65 persons) while others had only 35-40 passengers. This caused problems throughout the entire trip to Riga, since individual Jews repeatedly attempted to get into the less crowded cars. As much as time permitted, I allowed them, in some cases, to make changes, as there were also mothers who had been separated from their children.

...The loading of the train ended at 10:15 and the train left the Dusseldorf-Derendorf station at about 10:30....

The next morning at dawn we were forced to the ramp. The train had not arrived. It was bitterly cold. We stood there and stood there from 4 a.m. until 9 a.m. We were then called and the trip began on 11 December 1941.... Everything had been taken from us. One of the people asked one of the guards, an SS man, when the train was coming. They took out a club and beat him for so long that he remained there on the ground. He didn't get on the transport. That was our first dead. That was the beginning...

### ABOUT THE PHOTO

Left: Jews being led to the deportation train by German Police, Wiesbaden, Germany. Yad Vashem Photo Archive (1046/6)

Right: Jews boarding a deportation train, Bielefeld, Germany. Yad Vashem Photo Archive (1286/3)



### III. The Journey

I realized that the car reserved for the guards had not been put in the middle, but was at the end of the train, i.e. it was car no. 21... Due to a faulty heating system, the steam pressure did not reach the last cars of the train. Because of the cold, the guard squad's clothing did not dry. (It rained during the entire transport). Thus, I had to deal with guards who could not stand duty because of illness...

The commander of the transport could not see the whole train from his position. Whenever the train stopped, the Jews tried to contact the people at the railway stations, to have their letters mailed or to ask for water. As a result I had to put two guards in one of the cars at the front...

At 11:10 [on 12 December] Konitz was reached. [Salitter wanted to rearrange the train so that the guards' car would be in the center of the train]. This was agreed upon at first, but then the station master declared that... it would not be possible...he told me that the train would have to leave right away. A rearrangement of the train would be impossible...The conduct of the stationmaster seemed strange to me, and I informed him that I would take the matter up with his superiors. He responded that I would be unable to reach his superior. He had his orders. The train would have to leave, as there were two other trains en route.

He suggested that I remove the Jews from the center car and put them in the guards' second-class car. Then I could move my guards to the empty car. I think someone from the upper echelons should see to it that this railway man is informed that members of the German police are to be treated differently than the Jews. I have the impression that this is a man who still speaks of 'those poor Jews' and for whom the term 'Jew' is totally unknown....

...At Tilsit: There...the car of the guards was put in the front of the train and they finally got some heating. The guards appreciated the warmth very much ...as their uniforms were soaked and they could finally dry them....

We were in a passenger car. This was before they started using cattle cars. We were so crowded that it was unbearably hot. In addition there was heating, which was unnecessary. In the other car, where the children were, there was no heating at all. They almost froze....

I remember we were suffering from terrible thirst. We had taken bread with us, but the thirst was terrible. Everyone in the car was running a fever because of the terrible heat. We arrived at Insterburg, right at the border, in what had been Poland. There the train stopped. The doors were opened and we were allowed to get off and gather the snow for drinking. We could drink it when it melted....

I had not taken off my boots because I knew that I would not be able to get them back on my swollen feet. I was the only one who was not running a fever and could get off the train. So I put as much snow as possible into dishes and even handed it to the adjacent cars through the windows. At the end of the ramp I saw a mailbox. I prepared a postcard for my parents and wrote that once their time comes, they should take only warm clothes. The postcard actually reached them, as an acquaintance later told me

We traveled for three days and four nights through Lithuania. I was deeply impressed by the houses of the peasants with their straw roofs. It was something we had not seen in Germany. They used wells. In Germany we had running water. The people were at the wells with felt boots and sheepskins. They looked so miserable. I thought: my God, these Lithuanians are all good Catholics, if this is what their life is like under German occupation, what will our fate as Jews, as deportees be...

#### IV. Journey's End

...We arrived in Riga at 21:50. The train was kept at the station for one and a half hours.... The train stood there without heat. The temperature outside was minus 12 centigrade.... At 1:45 a.m., we relinquished responsibility for the train over and six Latvian guards were charged with watching it. Because it was past midnight, dark and the platform was covered with a thick layer of ice, it was decided to transfer the Jews to the Sarnel ghetto only on Sunday morning....

...Riga has a population of about 360,000. Among them were approximately 35,000 Jews. As in other places, the Jews were very prominent in business. After the entry of the German army, their shops were closed and confiscated. The Jews were closed in a ghetto surrounded by barbed wire. At this time, there are only 2,500 male Jews who are being used for labor. The remaining Jews were used elsewhere or shot by the Latvians....The Latvians, as far as I can tell, are friendly to Germany and many of them speak German....Their hatred is directed mainly towards the Jews. Therefore, from the moment of their liberation, they have played an important part in the elimination of these parasites. However they seem to find it strange, as I have heard from the railway workers, that Germany brings the Jews to Latvia, instead of eliminating them in their own country.

Signed: Salitter, Hauptmann of the Schupo

At night, the train suddenly stopped. We had no idea where we were. At dawn we could see a sign saying Shirotawa. Where is Shirotawa? What is Shirotawa? It was terribly cold. Around 10 a.m. we heard dogs barking. SS troops arrived and circled the train. The doors were opened and the screaming began: Out, out, fast, fast. We had to get out, and the last people had to clean the cars with their hands. There were no tools. We had to stand in line on the ramp. A car arrived with two high-ranking SS officers. They got out of the car, and I remember that one of them started screaming: Line up in fives and off with you to the ghetto. A man called Meyer, he was from Gort, a small village near Dusseldorf, had two children on his arm, two small boys, and asked: Sir, is it very far to the ghetto? Instead of an answer, the officer took out a stick...and hit him in the face. He released a German shepherd, who attacked the man. The man fell to the ground, and the two children too. When he got up, his mouth was all bloody and his teeth broken. This was our first impression of Latvia, of Riga, of Shirotawa.... There was ice everywhere.... The ghetto was about 20-25 km. from Shirotawa. People threw away their bags. The Latvians were not only watching, they were looting. As soon as the train left, they stole everything that was on the ground. Then we went through a suburb and up a little hill. Then there was an iron gate. It opened and we were in the ghetto.

---

Source: Yad Vashem Archive 0.2/1145.

---

Source: Yad Vashem Archive 0.3/7337.