

Primary Sources: Nazi Extermination of People with Mental Disabilities

All of the documents on this Web page were retrieved from the archives of Shamash: The Jewish Internet Consortium. The comments inside the square [. . .] brackets were written by Daniel Keren for the Shamash archives.

Letter from chief of institution for feeble-minded in Stetten to Reich Minister of justice Dr. Frank, September 6 1940.

Trials of War Criminals Before the Nuernberg Military Tribunals - Washington, U.S Govt. Print. Off., 1949-1953, Vol. I, p. 854.

Dear Reich Minister,

The measure being taken at present with mental patients of all kinds have caused a complete lack of confidence in justice among large groups of people. Without the consent of relatives and guardians, such patients are being transferred to different institutions. After a short time they are notified that the person concerned has died of some disease...

If the state really wants to carry out the extermination of these or at least of some mental patients, shouldn't a law be promulgated, which can be justified before the people - a law that would give everyone the assurance of careful examination as to whether he is due to die or entitled to live and which would also give the relatives a chance to be heard, in a similar way, as provided by the law for the prevention of Hereditarily affected Progeny?

Letter from Dr. Wurm, of the Wuerttemberg Evangelical Provincial Church, to Reich Minister of interior Dr. Frick, September 5 1940.

Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression - Washington, U.S Govt. Print. Off., 1946, Supp. A, p. 1223.

Dear Reich Minister,

On July 19th I sent you a letter about the systematic extermination of lunatics, feeble-minded and epileptic persons. Since then this practice has reached tremendous proportions: recently the inmates of old-age homes have also been included. The basis for this practice seems to be that in an efficient nation there should be no room for weak and frail people. It is evident from the many reports which we are receiving that the people's feelings are being badly hurt by the measures ordered and that the feeling of legal insecurity is spreading which is regrettable from the point of view of national and state interest.

Letter from Dr. Hilfrich, Bishop of Limburg, to the Reich Minister of Justice, August 13 1941.

Trials of War Criminals Before the Nuernberg Military Tribunals - Washington, U.S Govt. Print. Off., 1949-1953, Vol. I, p. 845-846.

Regarding the report submitted on July 16 by the Chairman of the Fulda Bishops' conference, Cardinal Dr. Bertram, I consider it my duty to present the following as a concrete illustration of destruction of so-called "useless life".

About 8 Kilometers from Limburg in the little town of Hadamar, on a hill overlooking the town, there is an institution which had formerly served various purposes and of late had been used as a nursing home. This institution was renovated and furnished as a place in which, by consensus of opinion, the above mentioned Euthanasia has been systematically practiced for months- approximately since February 1941. This fact is, of course, known beyond the administrative district of Wiesbaden...

Several times a week buses arrive in Hadamard with a considerable number of such victims. School children of the vicinity know this vehicle and say "here comes the murder-box again". After the arrival of the vehicle, the citizens of Hadamar watch the smoke rise out of the chimney...

The effect of the principles at work here that children call each other names and say "you're crazy; you'll be sent to the baking oven in Hadamar"...

All God-fearing men consider this destruction of helpless beings a crass injustice...

Officials of the State Police, it is said, are trying to suppress discussions of the Hadamar occurrences by means of severe threats...

I beg you most humbly, Herr Reich Minister, in the sense of the report of the Episcopate of 16 July of this year, to prevent further transgressions of the Fifth Commandment of God.

Letter from Reichsfuehrer-SS Himmler to SS-Oberfuehrer Brack, 19 December 1940.
Trials of War Criminals Before the Nuernberg Military Tribunals - Washington, U.S Govt. Print. Off., 1949-1953, Vol. I, p. 856.

Dear Brack,

I hear there is great excitement on the Alb because of the Grafeneck Institution.

The population recognizes the gray automobiles of the SS and think they know what is going on at the constantly smoking crematory. What happens there is a secret and yet is no longer one. Thus the worst feeling has arisen there, and in my opinion there remains only one thing, to discontinue the use of the institution in this place and in any event disseminate information in a clever and sensible manner by showing motion pictures on the subject of inherited and mental diseases in just that locality.

May I ask for a report as to how the difficult problem is solved?

Extract from the Diary of General Halder, September-November 1941.
Trials of War Criminals Before the Nuernberg Military Tribunals - Washington, U.S Govt. Print. Off., 1949-1953, Vol. X, p. 1195-1196.

26 September 1941:

h. Mental institutions in Army Group North. Russians regard the feeble-minded as sacred beings. Killing them is necessary, nonetheless.

Testimony of Brack, regarding gassing of insane people in Germany.
Quoted in "Trials of War Criminals Before the Nuernberg Military Tribunals" - Washington, U.S Govt. Print. Off., 1949-1953, Vol. I, p. 876-886.

Q: Witness, when adult persons were selected for euthanasia and sent by transport to euthanasia stations for that purpose, by what methods were the mercy deaths given?

A: The patients went to a euthanasia institution after the written formalities were concluded - I need not repeat these formalities here, they were physical examinations, comparison of the files, etc. The

patients were led to a gas chamber and were there killed by the doctors with carbon monoxide gas (CO).

Q: Where was that carbon monoxide obtained, by what process?

A: It was in a compressed gas container, like a steel oxygen container, such as is used for welding - a hollow steel container.

Q: And these people were placed in this chamber in groups, I suppose, and then the carbon monoxide was turned into the chambers?

A: Perhaps I had better explain this in some detail. Bouhler's basic requirement was that the killing should not only be painless, but also imperceptible. For this reason, the photographing of the patients, which was only done for scientific reasons, took place before they entered the chambers, and the patients were completely diverted thereby. Then they were led into the gas chamber which they were told was a shower room. They were in groups of perhaps 20 or 30. They were gassed by the doctor in charge.

Q. What was done with the bodies of these people after mercy deaths were given?

A. When the room had been cleared of gas again, stretchers were brought in and the bodies were carried into an adjoining room. There the doctor examined them to determine whether they were dead.

Q. Then what happened to the bodies?

A. After the doctor had determined death, he freed the bodies for cremation and they were cremated.

Q. After he had freed the bodies, had determined that they were dead, they were then cremated? Is that correct?

A. Yes.

Q. There was a crematory built for every one of these institutions?

A. Yes. Crematoriums were built in the institutions.

Q. And these people thought that they were going in to take a shower bath?

A. If any of them had any power of reasoning, they had no doubt thought that.

Q. Well now, were they taken into the shower rooms with their clothes on or were they nude?

A. No. They were nude.

Q. In every case?

A. Whenever I saw them, yes.