

2017 Research Week Proposal

Title - Mechanized Mass Murder and Its Effects on the Jewish Sonderkommando in Auschwitz-Birkenau

Program of Study – History

Presentation Type – PowerPoint (and Print Poster if it is possible to do more than one type of presentation)

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Category – Textual or Investigative

Abstract:

This paper examines the role of the Sonderkommando of Auschwitz – Birkenau in the mechanized mass murder that took place in the gas chambers and the psychological effects that it had on them. The Sonderkommando was a squad created by the Nazis to help carry out the murder of millions of Jews and other people that the Nazis deemed inferior. This squad was made up of male prisoners who had little to no knowledge of what job they would be doing in the Sonderkommando prior to being put in the squad and, importantly, it was mainly made up of Jewish men. This study into the Sonderkommando sheds light on an often overlooked but vital aspect of the Holocaust. Their testimonies are imperative to understanding the systematic murders of millions of people. Most importantly, however, this paper seeks to evaluate the psychological effects that involuntarily taking part in these murders had on the men of the Sonderkommando and how it was a form of torture implemented by the Nazis. The Sonderkommando were forced to live in the most inhumane, atrocious, and nightmarish reality that required them not only to watch as their own people were sacrificed, but also to take part in it. They did this to survive, though most understood that their lives would eventually end with their people in the gas chambers. Their souls and minds were tortured daily as they were used as

tools by the Nazis to carry out the dirty work of the Holocaust. By evaluating the role of the Sonderkommando in the mechanized process of mass murder and the psychological effects this role had on the men, this paper shows that the creation of this squad was one of the most unique and dehumanizing forms of torture ever executed.