

Documents on Real History

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# Letters to David Irving on this Website

Unless correspondents ask us not to, this Website will post selected letters that it receives, and invite open debate.

**Hugo Haig-Thomas** of Richmond, England, draws attention Sunday, May 18, 2008 to the German colonel punished by modern Germany for revealing what he witnessed as a prisoner of the Soviets in Sachsenhausen camp: the faking of a gas chamber

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Photo : THE GATE TO AUSCHWITZ-BIRKENAU

## I was held by the Russians in Sachsen-hausen, and made to build a gas chamber there; this is what I saw

HAVE YOU heard of the case concerning **Gerhart Schirmer**, a retired Bundeswehr officer who was prosecuted a few years ago for contravening the law, this time in Germany, which makes any denial or diminution of the 'Holocaust' a criminal offence?

As a young officer, Schirmer was captured in 1945 by the Russians and held in Sachsenhausen which the Russians continued to use as a prison. Although the War and Nazism were over, Schirmer and a few fellow-prisoners were forced to construct a gas chamber and execution room, to show the world what the Nazis had done. He described his experiences in a booklet entitled '*Sachsenhausen - Workuta, Zehn Jahre in den Fängen der Sowjets*' (Grabert Verlag, Tübingen, 1992).

When 'certain groups' drew the attention of the authorities to the booklet's contents, it was seized and banned in Germany. This is described by Schirmer below (my translation). I understand Schirmer was given the choice of a fine or prison and he chose the fine because, being over ninety, he did not relish spending his last few years behind bars, especially as he had already spent eleven years of his life in prison.

## Hugo Haig-Thomas

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Col (retd) Gerhart Schirmer, *Sachsenhausen - Workuta. Zehn Jahre in den Fängen der Sowjets* (published by the right-wing and independent firm, Grabert Verlag, Tübingen, 1992).

Following a decision by the County Court in Tübingen of 21.8.2002-12.9.2002, this booklet was withdrawn and prohibited on the grounds of racial incitement (file reference 4 Gs 937/02).

*Extracts from pages 10, 13 and 37.*

There exists a notarized, sworn affidavit about the construction of a gas chamber and a shooting facility [at Sachsenhausen concentration camp] in October/November 1945 by eight prisoners, of whom I was one. Briefly described, this 'gas chamber' was a shower room with 25 showerheads in the ceiling. This was supposed to give the impression that the gassing was conducted in it. Adjoining this, we erected a separate chamber with an opening, in front of which the offender would sit facing the opposite side in order to receive a shot in the back of his neck. At least this was what the guide had to explain [to Soviet visitors]. This [guide] was our Fritz Dörbeck who, as a translator, had to act out this piece of theatre because - born in Russia - he spoke perfect Russian. [...]

*Concerning the falsifications in Sachsenhausen (autumn 1945):*

*At the beginning of October 1945 Schirmer arrived at the former concentration camp, Sachsenhausen, which the Red Army had occupied since the end of April and which had been taken over by the NKVD [the much feared Soviet secret police that was responsible for political repression during the Stalinist era, akin to the Nazi Gestapo] who continued to run it as Special Camp No. 7. He describes some of his experiences from this time in his booklet 'Sachsenhausen-Vorkuta'. Of special interest is his statement concerning the alterations made to the former camp crematorium by German internees, including Schirmer, on the orders from the NKVD. Schirmer later made a statement under oath about it in which he said:*

... in early October 1945 I was placed in Oranienburg [ie Sachsenhausen] concentration camp (barrack room 19) which continued to be used by the Soviets. After about fourteen days I was brought into the 'Steinbau' (stone buildings) and there, together with seven other prisoners, presented to the political officer of the camp, Lieutenant-Colonel **Kolowantienkow**. From him we received an order to carry out certain

construction work in the so-called Front Zone (Vorzone) of the camp.

Among the seven other prisoners was Dipl.-Ing. **Fritz Dörbeck**. He was the son of a German geologist who in about 1905 had been tasked by the Tsarist administration to carry out some geological research in the region of Vladivostok. Dörbeck grew up there and spoke fluent Russian. In 1918 the Dörbeck family returned to Germany via China. After his release in 1956, Fritz Dörbeck became the sales director of AEG-Telefunken in Ulm and I remained a close friend of his till his death in 1982.

The seven prisoners also included one **Emil Klein**, a Sudeten German who also spoke fluent Czech and some Russian. He supervised our construction work and then disappeared from the camp after its completion. We suspected at the time that this Klein was the intermediary [*Vertrauensmann*] for the Soviets. The seven also included four construction workers and a plumber. I no longer remember their names.

In the middle of October 1945 we were taken to the construction site. There, in the so-called Front Zone of the Camp, was a large shower room with an ante-room. The shower room was about 8x10 square metres and contained about twenty-five shower heads. In the ante-room were about fifty coat hooks.

When we arrived, the material required for the construction work was already there. Under the directions of Klein, we now connected pipes from outside the building to the water supply pipes [*Wassernetz*]. Outside, on the outside of the wall, taps were attached. Only now was Dipl.-Ing. Dörbeck the first to understand what this work was apparently about.

We built an additional concrete cell adjoining the bathroom measuring about 4x2 square metres with an opening into the ante-room of the shower room. The new opening from the ante-room to the newly built so-called 'execution room' [*Erschießungsraum*] was about 20 cms wide. It was made to look as if the offender who was to be shot would have stood at the entrance facing the concrete wall enabling the person with the gun to fire a shot into the back of his head.

The construction works went on for about 14 days. When Dipl.-Ing. Dörbeck and I realised what was being built, we went to the political officer and told him that we refused to undertake any further work. The political officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Kolowantienkow, spoke - often heatedly - with Dörbeck for about fifteen minutes in Russian. Dörbeck later told me that the political officer had said that we would be summarily shot if we ceased to do any further work or let slip one word about it. The political officer said furthermore that we were receiving good rations (which was true) and that he - Dörbeck - would later be required to explain the installation to groups of Soviet visitors. The political officer also said that we would be well-treated in the future and receive good rations. As we were unable to prevent the construction of the installation, it seemed to make sense to us that we should continue the work and, in this way, learn what was being made there.

After completion, at about the end of October 1945, Dipl.-Ing. Dörbeck was brought before the political officer alone and received precise instructions about the explanations he was to give to Soviet groups of visitors. He had to say the following: This installation, which was built by the Nazis, served to kill [*Vernichtung*] Jews and Soviet officer prisoners.

Each day some 200 people were gassed and about twenty-five were shot. This went on from 1943 till 1945 (April).

From about December 1945 until the end of 1947 an average of two tours a week, each consisting of some thirty to forty Soviet men, mostly soldiers and people from the GPU, and women, were escorted by Dörbeck round the installation. There were often officers amongst them who quite openly expressed doubts about the age of the installation because they saw that the concrete was new, that there were no bullet holes from the executions in the concrete wall and that the blood stains (red paint) were very meagre and unconvincing.

Dörbeck reported to me after each tour. ... After Oranienburg concentration camp was closed down in January 1950, Dörbeck and I were sent first to Lichtenberg (Berlin) Prison and then in September 1950 to Vorkuta in the northern Urals.

*Signed* Gerhart Schirmer  
Rastatt, 16.12.86

*Schirmer placed this declaration, in the same wording, with a notary in 1988.*

*Concerning the detention in Sachsenhausen and Vorkuta.*

*In the Soviet Special Camp No 7 (Sachsenhausen) Schirmer was first barrack room leader and then worked as an 'appointment assistant' for the Jewish prisoners' doctor, Dr Hirschfeld, whose surgery was situated in the pathology building. Schirmer 'enjoyed' the privilege of being permitted to sleep in Hirschfeld's surgery. In this way it was possible for him to go into the mortuary at night and count the bodies of people who had died during the day. In this way secret body counts were carried out over the years, alternating or working with fellow prisoners. When Schirmer was sentenced to a whole year's solitary confinement in 1948, the secret counts were carried out in his absence by **Artur Andres**. In this way, the number of victims of the NKVD camp Sachsenhausen is known quite precisely. Schirmer reckons they amounted to about 24,600 ('give or take a hundred').*




*When the NKVD camp was closed in January 1950, Schirmer, like many others, was still not free but was sent via Berlin-Lichtenberg and Brest-Litovsk to Vorkuta. Only when the last 'war criminals' were released early in 1956 after Adenauer's negotiations in Moscow in 1955 was Schirmer able to return home. The fact that he survived four years of starvation in Sachsenhausen and the 6 years in Vorkuta borders on a miracle.*


*Schirmer then entered the Bundeswehr [Federal German Army] and retired as a Lieutenant-Colonel.*

*Gerhart Schirmer was rehabilitated by the Russian state. Without him the conversion work on the crematorium in the*

*former concentration camp of Sachsenhausen might never have been known.*

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 Friedrich Stelzel of Munich relates April 22, 2008 that he witnessed similar fakery as a Soviet prisoner in Auschwitz after the war

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