

UNITED STATES  
**HOLOCAUST**  
MEMORIAL  
**MUSEUM**

**WILLIAM LEVINE FAMILY INSTITUTE  
FOR HOLOCAUST EDUCATION**

# **Hoecker/Auschwitz Albums Photo Analysis**





# Auschwitz-Birkenau

Located in German-occupied Poland, Auschwitz consisted of three camps including a killing center. The camps were opened over the course of nearly two years, 1940-1942. Auschwitz closed in January 1945 with its liberation by the Soviet army. More than 1.1 million people died at Auschwitz, including nearly one million Jews. Those who were not sent directly to gas chambers were sentenced to forced labor. The Auschwitz complex differed from the other Nazi killing centers because it included a concentration camp and a labor camp as well as large gas chambers and crematoria at Birkenau constructed for the mass murder of European Jews.



















# Auschwitz Album

The "Auschwitz Album" specifically depicts the arrival of Hungarian Jews and the selection process that the SS imposed upon them. Lili Jacob (later Zelmanovic Meier), was deported with her family to Auschwitz in late May 1944 from Bilke (today: Bil'ki, Ukraine), a small town which was then part of Hungary. They arrived on May 26, 1944, the same day that professional SS photographers photographed the arrival of the train and the selection process. After surviving Auschwitz, forced labor in Morchenstern, and transfer to the Dora-Mittelbau camp where she was liberated, Lili Jacob discovered the album containing these photographs in a drawer of a bedside table in an abandoned SS barracks while she was recovering from typhus.

In the album, Lili Jacob first found a photograph of her rabbi but then also discovered a photo of herself, many of her neighbors, and relatives, including her two younger brothers, Yisrael and Zelig Jacob. She brought the original album with her when she immigrated to the United States. In 1983, Lili Jacob donated the album of photographs of her transport's arrival in Auschwitz to Yad Vashem, the Holocaust museum in Jerusalem.







*Handwritten note:*  
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Ankunft eines Transportzuges

Historians don't know why the album that Lili discovered was created; possibly, the original owner was SS officer Richard Baer. Baer was not only the commandant of Auschwitz when Hungarian Jews arrived but later became the commander of Dora-Mittelbau, where the album was discovered.



# Hoecker Album

In December 2006, a retired US Army Lieutenant Colonel and former member of the Counter Intelligence Corps (CIC) wrote to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) Archives. As one of its many tasks as a military intelligence agency, the CIC conducted investigations of Nazi perpetrators for US prosecutors in the Judge Advocate General's Office after World War II. While stationed in Germany in 1946, this officer had found a photograph album in an abandoned apartment in Frankfurt and had taken it home with him. Now elderly, he was ready to donate the album to the Museum, but wanted his donation to remain anonymous.

In January 2007, the USHMM received this photograph album. The inscription "Auschwitz 21.6.1944" (June 21, 1944) on its first page signaled the uniqueness of the album—there are very few wartime photographs of the Auschwitz concentration camp complex, which included Auschwitz-Birkenau, the largest Nazi killing center.





Though his name does not appear anywhere in the album, the dates of the photographs and various decorations on the uniform of the album's owner indicate that the album almost certainly belonged to and was created by *SS-Obersturmführer* Karl Hoecker, the adjutant (chief of staff) to the commandant of Auschwitz, *SS-Sturmbannführer* Richard Baer. Hoecker was stationed at Auschwitz from May 1944 until the evacuation of the camp in January 1945.

The photographs depict Hoecker with other SS officers in Auschwitz in the summer and fall of 1944 and provide us with a new understanding of their lives and activities in the camp. Even in the final months of the war, after Soviet troops had liberated concentration camps and labor camps to the east, SS officers stationed at Auschwitz enjoyed social functions and formal ceremonies.





Several pages are devoted to a day trip for *SS Helferinnen* (female auxiliaries, young women who worked for the SS as communications specialists) on July 22, 1944. Only miles away on the very same day, 150 prisoners (Jews and non-Jews) arrived on a transport to Auschwitz. The SS selected 21 men and 12 women for work, and killed the remaining members of the transport in the gas chambers.



The album shows Auschwitz at a pivotal time—the period during which the gas chambers were operating at maximum efficiency—as the Hungarian Jews arrived and during the last months before the evacuation of the camp.





Jewish women and children from Subcarpathian Rus await selection on the ramp at Auschwitz-Birkenau in May 1944. Pictured are Channah Weiss Goldberger (daughter of Zvi Weiss and wife of Rabbi Goldberger), her grandson, Chaya Weiss Halpert (daughter of Rabbi Leib Weiss), her sister Feige Weiss Neiman, Sara Moshkovics Rosenreich from Visk, Itzik Hershkovitz, his sister Frimid Hershkovitz and mother Pessil Hershkovitz from Kitesco. Also pictured are Chaya Kreitenberg and her daughter Suri (neither survived).



Nazi officers and female auxiliaries (Helferinnen) run down a wooden bridge in Solahuette on July 22, 1944. The man on the right carries an accordion. Karl Hoecker is pictured in the center. The original caption reads "*Regen aus heiteren Himmel*" [Suddenly, it started to rain.]



- **What might you think about these photographs if you didn't know the background?**
- **Why is it important to know the background (historical context) of Holocaust-era photographs?**
- **Why are these photographs important historical evidence?**