

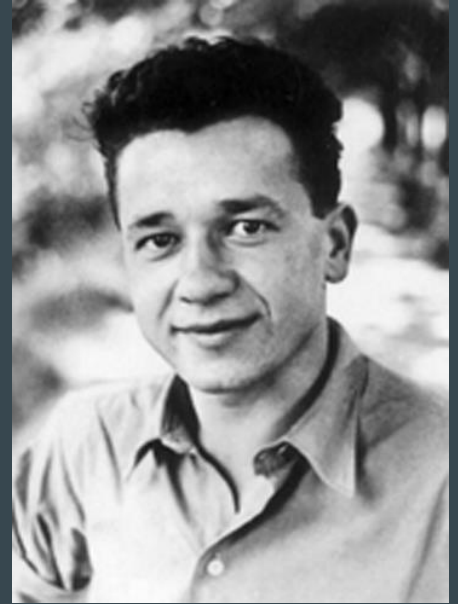


The Soccer Court of KL Auschwitz

By Francois Peloquin and Shai Ophelia Kehila

For this presentation, we draw from the words of Auschwitz Survivor Tadeusz Borowski, who describes his memories of the Soccer Court in his short story, *The People Who Walked On*. [1]

“It was early spring when we began building a soccer field on the broad clearing behind the hospital barracks.” (p. 82)



Tadeusz Borowski
(1922-1951)

“...The location was excellent: The gypsies to the left [...] to the rear—a barbed-wire fence, and behind it the loading ramp with the wide railway tracks and the endless coming and going of trains; and beyond the ramp, the women’s camp [...]. To the right of the field were the crematoria, some of them at the back of the ramp, next to the [women’s camp], others even closer, right by the fence. And in front of the crematoria, a small wood which had to be crossed on the way to the gas.” (p. 82)





“...I returned with the ball and kicked it back inside the field. It travelled from one foot to another and, in a wide arc, returned to the goal. Again it rolled into the grass. Once more I ran to retrieve it. But as I reached down, I stopped in amazement—the ramp was empty. Out of the whole colourful procession, not one person remained. [...] Between two throw ins in a soccer game, right behind my back, three thousand people had been put to death.” (p. 83)

“In the following months, the processions to the little wood moved along two roads: one leading straight from the ramp, the other past the hospital wall. Both led to the crematoria, but some of the people had the good fortune to walk beyond them and all the way to the Zauna, and this meant more than just a bath and a delousing, a barber’s shop and a new prison suit. It meant staying alive. In a concentration camp, true, but – alive.” (p. 84)

“When I sat down to dinner—and not a bad one, either—the people were walking. [...] Often, in the middle of the night, I walked outside [...] The roads were completely black, but I could distinctly hear the far-away hum of a thousand voices—the procession moved on and on. And then the entire sky would light up; there would be a burst of flames above the wood...and terrible human screams.” (p. 84)

- 420,000 Hungarian Jews brought to Auschwitz in the summer of 1944.
- 142 trains arrive at Auschwitz from Hungary through this time.[2]
- Those who walked to the crematoria and gas chambers from the trains, often did not know they were marching to their death.



Additional accounts – who used the soccer court?

Dr. Myklos Nyiszli, who had to work as a surgeon for SS Dr. Josef Mengele, narrated the following:

“I watch the Sonderkommando’s evening roll call. At the moment there is no change of shift for the night. Crematorium I is not in service today. I look across: the chimneys of Crematoria II, III and IV are spewing forth flames [lángot szórnak]... The Sonderkommando men bring out a regulation soccer ball. The teams take the field, ‘SS versus SK.’ The crematorium’s SS guards stand on one side, the Sonderkommando on the other. They kick the ball. The sound of hearty laughter fills the courtyard. The audience, made up of SS and Sonderkommando men, root for their sides, cheering the players on like they were at a peaceful small-town sports ground.” [4]

Primo Levi discussed this soccer game in *The Gray Zone*:

“Nothing of this kind ever took place, nor would it have been conceivable, with other categories of prisoners; but with them, with the “crematorium ravens,” the SS could enter the field on an equal footing, or almost. Behind this armistice one hears satanic laughter: it is consummated, we have succeeded, you no longer are the other race, the anti race, the prime enemy of the millennial Reich; you are no longer the people who reject idols. We have embraced you, corrupted you, dragged you to the bottom with us. You are like us, you proud people: dirtied with your own blood, as we are. You too, like us and like Cain, have killed the brother. Come, we can play together.” [3]

References

[1] Borowski, Tadeusz. "The People Who Walked On." *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*, Penguin, 1976, pp. 82-97.

[2] "The Deportation of the Hungarian Jews." *Auschwitz-Birkenau*, [auschwitz.org/en/museum/news/deportations-of-hungarian-jews-to-auschwitz-new-online-lesson,1089.html](https://www.auschwitz.org/en/museum/news/deportations-of-hungarian-jews-to-auschwitz-new-online-lesson,1089.html).

[3] Levi, Primo. "The Gray Zone." *The Drowned and the Saved*, Simon & Schuster, 2017, pp. 36-69.

[4] Nyiszli, Miklos, and Carlo Mattogno. *An Auschwitz Doctor's Eyewitness Account: The Tall Tales of Dr. Mengele's Assistant Analyzed*. 2018.

Images

[Slide 1] Transport of Hungarian Jews. Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum Archives, nr neg. 24 457-24 = 31.

[Slide 2] WIKIPEDIA, Public Domain: Unknown author - Wiesław Głębocki; Karol Móraski (1985) *Kultura Walcząca 1939-1945*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Interpress, pp. p.96.

[Slide 3] google maps, markings by Francois Peloquin and Shai Ophelia Kehila, 2019.

[Slide 4] photograph by Francois Peloquin and Shai Ophelia Kehila, Auschwitz-Birkenau 2019.

[Slide 7] Transport of Hungarian Jews. Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum Archives, nr neg. 24 457-58 = 78.