

Hannah Arendt, one of the most influential philosophers of the 20th century wrote the following in reference to the Holocaust: “We have witnessed the total collapse of all established moral standards in public and private life during the thirties and forties... Without much notice all this collapsed almost overnight and then it was as though morality suddenly stood revealed... as a set of mores, customs, and manners that could be exchanged for another set with hardly more trouble than it would take to change the table manners of an individual or a people.

Can you find very specific examples of this in the document below?

Report on Use of Trucks to Kill Jews with Exhaust Gas in Soviet Union, 16 May 1942

Army Post Number 32704
B. Nr. 40/42

Secret Reich Matter!

To
SS-Obersturmbannführer Rauff

In Berlin
Prinz-Albrecht-Str. 8

The overhaul of the trucks of Groups D and C is completed. While the trucks of the first series could be utilized in weather conditions that are not very good, the trucks of the second series (Saurer) get stuck in the rain. If, for example, it has rained for only a half hour, the truck cannot be used, because it slides away. It is only usable in completely dry weather. The question arises whether one can use the truck only at the place of execution. First the truck has to be brought to this place, which is possible only in good weather. The place of execution, however, mainly lies 10-15 kilometers off traveled roads and is thus by its location already hard to reach, in damp or wet weather not at all. If one drives or has driven those to be executed to this place, then they notice immediately what is going on and become uneasy, which should be avoided if possible. The only way is to load them in at the collection place and then drive out.

I have had the trucks of Group D disguised as caravans by having window shutters put on, one on each side of the small trucks and two on each side of the large trucks, as one often sees on peasant houses in the countryside. The trucks became so

well-known, that not only the authorities, but also the civilian population named the trucks “death trucks”, as soon as one of these vehicles appeared. In my opinion, even camouflaged, they cannot be permanently kept a secret.

The Saurer trucks, which I transported from Simferopol to Taganrog, had brake damage on the way. At the Sonderkommando in Mariupol it was determined that the collar of the combined oil-air-pressure-brakes was broken in several places. By persuasion and bribery at the home motor pool, it was possible to get a form made, from which two collars were cast. When I arrived some days later at Stalino and Gorlovka, the drivers of the trucks complained about the same problems.....

Because of the uneven land and the indescribable conditions of the roads, the seals and rivets come loose over time. I was asked, whether in such cases the trucks should be transported to Berlin for repairs. Transport to Berlin would be much too expensive and would require too much fuel. In order to save this expense, I gave the order to solder the smaller holes, and if that could no longer be done, to inform Berlin by radio immediately, that truck numberis no longer in service. In addition, I ordered that during the gassing all men be kept as far as possible away from the trucks, so that their health won't be harmed by leaking gases.

I would like to take this opportunity to note that various Kommandos allow their own men to unload after the gassing. I pointed out to the commanders of these S.K.'s the tremendous psychic and physical injury this work can do to the men, if not immediately, then later. The men complained to me about headaches which appear after each unloading. Despite this, there is reluctance to change this arrangement, because of fear that prisoners brought in for such work would use an opportune moment to flee. In order to protect the men from such injuries, I request that appropriate orders be given.

The gassing is without exception not properly done. In order to finish the action as fast as possible, the drivers fully open the throttle. With this method those to be executed suffer death by suffocation and not, as planned, by being put to sleep. My instructions have shown that by proper use of the pedal, death comes more quickly and the prisoners fall asleep peacefully. The distorted faces and excretions, which have been seen previously, can no longer be noticed.

My continuing travel to Group B takes place today, where further reports can reach me.

(signature) Dr. Becker
SS-Untersturmführer

1. With another student, discuss what Becker means when he writes: “With this method those to be executed suffer death by suffocation and not, as planned, by being put to sleep.”
2. We have often seen how the Nazis employed euphemisms when writing about the killing of the Jews and “other enemies of the Nazi state.” How is this document different?

3. How might you use this document to disprove the fact the average person had no idea that the Nazis were conducting mass murder operations?