



THIS VIDEO CONTAINS RECREATIONS OF AN UPRISING AT AUSCHWITZ, IN OCTOBER OF 1944, FROM A FILM CALLED *THE GREY ZONE*. IT DEPICTS UNSETTLING EVENTS. PROCEED WITH CAUTION.

Sonderkommandos were young, strong and healthy Jewish men who were themselves prisoners at Auschwitz-Birkenau. They were assigned jobs in the camp's assembly lines of death.

A book about their work—*We Wept Without Tears*—sheds light on how the Auschwitz prisoners were treated. Of his work, one *Sonderkommando* says:

I ceased belonging to the human race.

Although the *Sonderkommandos* did not gas the victims, they were part of the process of death:

- Some of them greeted new arrivals, assuring those who would be gassed that they would be reunited with their families after taking a shower.
- Others processed the bodies of gassed people (including cutting hair and removing gold teeth) before taking them to be burned in the crematoria.

In October of 1944, a group of *Sonderkommandos* rebelled against the SS officers at the camp, taking them completely by surprise. Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial museum in Jerusalem, provides [information about the uprising](#) at its web site:

On October 7, prisoners assigned to the Sonderkommando staged a rebellion destroying one of the crematoria (Crematoria IV) and killing some of their German guards. The Sonderkommando, a squad of Jewish forced laborers who incinerated the bodies of gas-chamber victims in the crematoria, discovered that the Germans were about to murder them, too. They contacted the international resistance that had coalesced in Auschwitz and sought to launch a joint uprising.

When the international resistance refused to collaborate for various reasons, the Sonderkommando people decided to go ahead on their own. All the participants in the uprising fell in combat. In their investigation of the affair, the Germans discovered that the explosives used in the uprising had been smuggled by a group of young Jewish women elsewhere in Auschwitz. On January 6, 1945, four of these women were executed.

The SS, who ran the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp, did not intend for any of the *Sonderkommandos* to survive—including those who did not participate in the uprising. Although most were killed, just like the victims whose bodies they had processed, some were alive at liberation (in January of 1945).

Because they were so despised by camp prisoners, and so ashamed of what they had done to survive the horrors of Auschwitz, it was not easy for surviving *Sonderkommandos* to reveal their roles. Notwithstanding, the Shoah Foundation (at the University of Southern California) contains video testimony of five *Sonderkommandos* and the book, *We Wept Without Tears*, contains the stories of six men.

This video clip is from *The Grey Zone*, a film about the Auschwitz *Sonderkommando* uprising. The movie is based on a [play of the same name](#) which, in turn, is based on the [account of Miklos Nyiszli](#) (a Jewish doctor who, as a prisoner at Auschwitz during the relevant time frame, worked with the infamous [Josef Mengele](#), a German doctor who [behaved like a monster](#)).

Credits:

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See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Auschwitz-Uprising-Sonderkommandos-Revolt>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Auschwitz-Uprising-Sonderkommandos-Revolt>