



The one that got away: Samuel Kunz, the handyman of extermination - a surprising sequel

by Willie Glaser



Story about Samuel Kunz in a Spanish history blog

(source: <http://wikihistorias.blogspot.de/2011/02/samuel-kunz-muere-el-tecer-criminal.html>)

In January 2010 I was waiting in Ft. Lauderdale airport for a flight home to Montreal after returning from a cruise, when I picked up an email message on my laptop from the German ex-judge Dr. Thomas Walther. Dr. Walther was researching the extermination camp Belzec and contacted me because I had written a comprehensive story about Belzec, for my mother Adele Glaser, two sisters and one brother perished in Belzec.

When he called me on the phone, he explained to me that as a judge, he had to take mandatory retirement while attending the trial of John Demjanjuk. Dr. Walther was one of the key figures behind the decision to try Demjanjuk.

He conducted the pre-investigation against John Demjanjuk in his function as special prosecutor in the central institution for prosecuting Nazi crimes in Ludwigsburg. During this trial several interesting facts surfaced involving members of the Trawniki guards in the extermination camp Belzec.

One of the witnesses called to the trial was Samuel Kunz. The name Samuel Kunz had popped up in the files of John Demjanjuk.

These are the facts that emerged: The Germans offered Kunz a way out of the prisoner of war camp where life expectancy of a Russian POW was very low. The offer was to join a German auxiliary guard unit. Kunz accepted and was sent to the SS training facility in Trawniki. Here Kunz and hundreds of others were trained as concentration camp and ghetto guards. This auxiliary formation was part of the SS. They were commonly known as *Trawnikis*.

Samuel Kunz attended the SS training camp Trawniki at the same time as John Demjanjuk. Trawniki was a training facility for auxiliaries later deployed in the *Operation Reinhardt*. After completing their training, Kunz was sent to Belzec and Demjanjuk to Sobibor. Samuel Kunz was never prosecuted, even though he was questioned by the German authorities in

1969, 1975 and 1980.

It was only after Kunz was asked to testify in the Demjanjuk trial that the Central Office of the State Justice Administration for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes in Ludwigsburg started an inquiry into the life of Kunz in the extermination camp Belzec.

I can only surmise why there was this double standard of not prosecuting him and why he was never brought to justice in Germany at an earlier date. I am painfully aware of the failure of the German justice system during the early period of prosecution of war criminals in German courts.

I know that every local official involved in the deportation of my family from Fürth to Poland received astonishingly light sentences or was acquitted. The few SS men who stood trial for war crimes while stationed in Belzec also received light sentences.

It was during these court sessions that Dr. Walther started to look for families and descendants of victims who perished in the extermination camp Belzec. This is why he approached me with the idea that he would like to represent me in the upcoming trial of Samuel Kunz which was scheduled for November 2010.

The most surprising and for me very emotional fact was the emergence of the name Samuel Kunz who was an ethnic German, born in the Ukraine and serving in the Soviet army. He was captured by German forces.

In March of 1942 Kunz was assigned to the extermination Belzec. The camp was run by some two dozen SS men, supported by about 120 *Trawniki*.

It is mindboggling that this literally handful of SS men, supported by a small number of Trawniki guards were able to snuff out the lives of some 720,000 people.

Kunz must have been present in whatever routine action he had to handle, such as force marching the victims, including my mother and her family to be processed for the gas chamber. Every guard knew after a few days, after a week what is happening in Belzec. He too was complicit in making these murders possible through his activities as a guard in the extermination camp.

There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that the distinct possibility existed of Kunz being present while my mother and her children were taken from the train, brought to the hair cutting hut and from there forced through the *Schlauch* (tube) to the gas chamber.

Prosecuting authorities arrested Samuel Kunz; he was eighty-nine years old. He admitted his presence in Belzec and the shooting of Jews. He was indicted of murder. His passport was confiscated and he was released from custody. The reasoning for this decision was: There was no place for this old man to run and hide.

Samuel Kunz literally fell through the cracks of the German justice system: After the war he was repatriated as a German prisoner of war, probably because he was an ethnic German. He found work in the janitorial service for government buildings in Bonn. In 1960 and 1970 Kunz was heard as a witness in other proceedings. The fact that he *worked* in an extermination camp did not provoke the German authorities at all. I would say the German courts turned a blind eye to the issue.

He was married and owned a little house in the village of Wachtberg, a suburb of Bonn. He lived a quite life. His neighbors and co-workers had no idea that this simple man tending to his garden was deeply involved in crimes against humanity which took place in the extermination camp Belzec. In 2010 Samuel Kunz was the poster boy for the *banality of evil*.

I made plans to go to Germany and prepared myself to attend the trial of Samuel Kunz. I was informed by Dr. Walther that according German law, I was considered to be a *Nebenkläger* (co-

plaintiff). I had the right to question the accused, file motions and plead at the end of the trial.

The participation of a co-plaintiff is very important because it gives names and faces to the victims. It presents an opportunity to hold the accused responsible in the name of the co-plaintiff's murdered family.

It would have been a tremendous satisfaction for me to cross-examine Kunz, gaining important details of what had happened in Belzec. I was determined to make full use of this legal provision.

My preparations to attend the Kunz trial were going forward. I was on track to purchase airline tickets when I received an urgent message from Dr. Walther, informing me that Samuel Kunz had suddenly died. Kunz was eighty-nine years old.

Here I was, eighty-nine years old, the same age as the Ukrainian Trawniki guard. I am a veteran of the First Polish Armoured Division, a veteran of the Normandy landings. I was looking forward to come face to face with the participant in the killing of my family. Fate denied me this opportunity.

One would think Samuel Kunz went quietly to meet his maker but this was not the case. Circumstances of his death are very mysterious and troubling: The fact emerged that Kunz did not die a natural death. An autopsy revealed he did not die of a heart attack but of unnatural hypothermia.

Germany to probe death of suspected Nazi criminal

Autopsy finds Samuel Kunz did not die of heart attack

By Ofer Aderet | Apr. 05, 2011 | 2:52 AM



Clipping from Haaretz newspaper

(source: <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/germany-to-probe-death-of-suspected-nazi-criminal-1.354110>)

There is suspicion Kunz may have been assassinated, with the allegation somebody left Kunz *out in the cold*. Persistent rumor surfaced of an involvement of the shadowy figure of Gudrun Burwitz, nee Himmler, the daughter of *Reichsführer* (Reich's leader) SS and German police Heinrich Himmler. Burwitz is considered to be a leading figure in the sinister and shadowy support group *Stille Hilfe* (Silent Help). She is very much involved with the extreme right movement in Germany and helped Samuel Kunz with financial support, bank rolling his legal fight.

Written on board the good ship MS Noordam, somewhere in the Caribbean Sea, March 2013

Edited by Gerhard Jochem

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