The selection of documents of the everyday life during the repression times

Historical background and formal characteristics

Based on the holdings of the Foundation for „Polish-German Reconciliation” Archive
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About the holdings of the Foundation for “Polish-German Reconciliation” Archive

The Foundation for “Polish-German Reconciliation” was founded on the 27th November 1991 as a consequence of the agreement between the governments of the Republic of Poland and the Federal Republic of Germany.

It is a non-profit organisation committed to the surviving victims of the Third Reich and to the German-Polish dialogue. It operates in social, humanitarian and educational fields. The Foundation for “Polish-German Reconciliation” has the mission of supporting the surviving Nazi victims, spreading knowledge about the 2nd World War and the German occupation of Poland and advocating the German-Polish Reconciliation.

During its recent activity, between 1992-2009, the Foundation has gathered documents from over one million people who applied for a financial compensation for being victims of Nazi repression during the 2nd World War.

These documents usually include a detailed description of the location and work conditions of the victims. In attachment there are additional witness reports and the originals or copies of the official documents. The file is complemented by photographs and other iconographic documents.

Typical documents (originals and photocopies) that are stored in the archives of the Foundation were issued during the war or afterwards, and include material transferred from different institutions that held documents from the wartime.

The first group of materials include documents issued by:
- German authorities during World War II
- German companies that benefited from the slave labor of citizens of different nationalities,
- Allied authorities during the war and afterwards.

The second group of materials is significantly larger, consisting of certificates issued for example by:
- The main (or the District) Commission for the Investigation of Crimes against the Polish Nation – Institute of National Remembrance,
- International Tracing Service in Arolsen,
- The Red Cross – International Committee or the national committees,
The files of the beneficiaries can also contain other materials from private collections, such as correspondence from the period of repression, diaries and memoirs.

The Archive stores thousands of memories of the repression victims. These documents were sent by the people in response to appeals from the Foundation.

The Foundation holds also records transferred by the Provincial Branch of the Association of Poles Repressed by the Third Reich.

Given the wide geographical proveniency of the collected materials, it can serve historical research both at European and regional level. These documents inform us on the fate of large groups of people displaced by the Third Reich and on the course of repression in each occupied territory.

At regional level there is unique information on the Nazi repression in various districts, towns and villages, which are often left out by historiography. It is even possible to research the fate of different social groups during the 2nd World War, such as intellectuals, peasants, and workers.

In this publication, we present a selection of typical documents of repression and testimonies of the everyday life of Polish slave and forced laborers, under the Third Reich. The material was collected from the archives of the Foundation “German-Polish reconciliation”. We hope that it will contribute to a better understanding of the fate of Polish citizens during World War II.

This publication was created in the framework of the project: “Internet archive of Nazi victims,” co-financed by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage.

Team
I. Census of the population by the Occupation authorities

ANMELDUNG ZUM POLIZEILICHEN EINWOHNERERFASSUNG – “registration of the population by the police”, also known as Einwohnererfassung or colloquially “palcówka” (fingerprint) – once instead of a photograph of the holder of the document, fingerprints were requested to serve as a proof of identification. “Palcówka”, was a two pages bilingual document, used in the Polish territories incorporated in the Nazi German Reich (Reichsgau Wartheland and Górny Śląsk Province). These documents included basic personal data as address, religion, nationality, language (used at home), profession, working place, if one served in the Polish Army and if so, his rank in the Army. It was also included for how long one had been living in...
the occupied territories, if one owned some lands, real estate, business, and the number of children under 12 years old that were part of the household. If one would provide false data, or incomplete information, he would suffer the consequences, according to regulations. The police officer had to be present during the registration procedure (signature and fingerprints) and would after that approve the document with a stamp. As there was too many people to register, there were not enough police officers to handle this procedure, which was solved by taking in other employees. In the backside of the form there were instructions on how to fill this document. In the point of the form about religion one was instructed to write down if he had religious belief or not. In the case of being Jewish, one was instructed to write down that he was Jewish even if he did not belong to the Jewish Community. Regarding languages one was not allowed to answer about a local language but had to specify one of these languages: Polish, German, Lithuanian, mazurskí, ślązackí, kaszubskí. The registration served as an identity card. Also, when a person got a “Arbeitsbuch” – “employment record book”, it would be notified in the “Palcówka”.

KENNKARTE – “identity card”, during Nazi occupation there was another type of identification document. There were two separate cards, one was attributed according to one’s nationality and other issued by the administrative region where one was living. The document had two pages and included personal data, photograph, fingerprint and the signature of the hold-
In the case of German nationality, or of being part of the Volksliste, the cover of the book had a vertical stripe and the classification of Reichsdeutscher, Volksdeutscher, and Deutsche Staatsangehörigkeit “German nationality” (German citizenship). In the General Government there was another type of this document. It was bilingual, it had three pages, and information about the local registration and the religion. This document had a validity date. To each registration was attributed an identity number. This kind of document was instituted in the General Government by the decree of the 26 of October of 1939 and it was mandatory until 1943. This law covered everyone over 15 years old. To obtain this document one should apply to the Census Office and attach the birth certificate, eventually the marriage certificate and the local registration document. In the case of (non-Jewish) Polish people or from other nationality, they should also attach a certificate of Aryan background. It was not required to take the old identification card to proceed with this registration because in the time of Second Republic of Poland (II Rzeczypospolita), it was not mandatory to have an identification card. In the beginning of the occupation it was required that these documents were issued in Polish and in German. One had to provide his fingerprint and sign the document when he received it, in the presence of Police authorities who confirmed the veracity of the data with a signature and a stamp.

The documents varied according to the particularities of the person. They had different colors and different classifications according to nationality. Green cover was for Poles, yellow for Jews and Gypsies and blue for Ukrainians, Russians, Belorussians and other minorities. Inside the document there was the mark that distinguished between Jewish “J”, Gypsies “Z”, Ukrainians “U”, Belorussians “W” and Russians “R”, etc. A copy of this document was made whilst registering and was filed in the Police Office for consultation in case of suspicion regarding the identity of the subject or the veracity of the data provided. This card was filled out by hand or typing machine. The type of paper was intended to prevent the forgery of the document, once the texture was spoiled if someone tried to erase the information. However, despite its characteristics, it was the most forged document in the General Government (GG).
ABMELDUNG BEI DER POLIZEILICHEN MELDEBEHÖRDE – application to annul the local registration in the Police Authorities when changing place of residence;

POLIZEILICHE ANMELDUNG – “Police registration”, the migration of the people was controlled by the police. The document consisted of two pages in Polish and German. These kinds of documents are of extreme importance because they prove the deportation of the population and the compulsory displacement to forced labor.
II. Forced Labor

ARBEITSBUCH – “employment record book” was issued by the Third Reich for employed adults, according to the decree of 26 of February of 1935. This proved the development of a totalitarian society in Germany since it shows mandatory employment of the population for military purposes. On the 26 of May of 1935 the German government issued a decree regarding compulsory work (Arbeitspflicht). Three years later, in June of 1938, two new decrees were issued in Germany. One limited the right to change the place of employment; the other allowed the relocation (displacement) of people to work in different regions from where they lived. This was called “service obligation” (Dienstverpflichtung). As of the 1st of September to revoke an employment contract one had to make an agreement with the Labor Office (Arbeitsamt). The population fit for employment was directed by the local labor offices (Landesarbeitsamtes). In 1943 these offices were turned into district employment offices. It should be noticed that even before the beginning of the war, branches of those offices were ready to be implemented in Poland. So, these labor offices became the first civil administration created by the German in Polish territories. On the 3rd of September the first one opened in Śląsk (Rybnik). By the end of September there were 70 labor offices (Arbeitsamt) functioning, and one month later it had reached 150. The basic employment legislation was changed, since the people were not free workers anymore, but forced laborers. The legislative changes were progressively implemented by the occupation against the Polish population, but were specially restraining towards the Jewish population. As a consequence, the fundamental principle of Political Legislation was Arbeitszwang employment (obligation to work).

In 1939, in the territories incorporated immediately into the Third Reich there was a registration of the population in the Labor Offices (Arbeitsamts). Separate databases were created: the employed population had Beschäftigungskarte – “employment card” (later Arbeitsbuch) and for the unemployed Meldekarte – “local registration card” or Ausweiskarte. Both the employed and the unemployed had other documents with precise data concerning age, residence and professional qualifications. This data was constantly verified. The labor offices summoned the workers to fill out their payments in the employment card (Beschäftigungskarte), and the employers were required to submit the lists of employees, so that the data could be compared.

Unemployed population was forced to go everyday or every other day to the labor offices, or their branches with their local registration card (Meldekarte). The branches of the labor
Arbeitsbuch – “employment record book”, an example of the model, from 1935 Leczyca, the Labor Office of Lodz, Kraj Warty. In the ‘Nicht Reichsdeutscher’ (non German citizen) entry field there is a stamp saying ‘Pole’ thus confirming the Polish nationality of the holder of this Arbeitsbuch.
offices gathered the data and send it to the GG. The Department of Employment which was under the Government Administration, was responsible for the Labor policies.

Arbeitsbuch was a formal document used to register a crossed communication between the three parties: the employer, the employee and the Office of Labor. It consisted of a dozen papers divided into sections, which contained personal data such as address, civil status, if one had children, former and current employment, occupational group, education, former work experience, etc. There were two kinds of Arbeitsbuch. A more detailed type (38 pages), introduced by the aforementioned law of 26 February 1935, was in use prior to September of 1939 as a normal document confirming employment in Germany. During the war it became a document issued for forced laborers. It became a mandatory document for the Poles sent to Germany as force laborers according to the decree of 22 May 1942. The regulation of 1st of May, 1943 introduced a simplified model of the book (36 pages for foreigners deported to forced labor in the Reich – Arbeitsbuch für Ausländer). In the Free City of Danzig (Pol: Gdansk) the Arbeitsbuch version of 1935 began to be issued from 1938. In this case the Arbeitsbuch had other graphic design: the national symbol of the German Reich was substituted by the arms of the Free City of Danzig. The obligation to possess an employment record book was imposed on Polish territory gradually. It started in October 1939, in Silesia; in July 1942 in Pomerania (Pol: Pomorze) and in Wielkopolska in December 1943. In the regions of the General Government the equivalent to the Arbeitsbuch was Arbeitskarte – “work card” (regulation of 20 December 1940), modeled on the existing Arbeitsbuch in the Reich. The Arbeitskarte, despite differences in the denomination was the same type of document and was structurally identical to Arbeitsbuch. The Arbeitskarte was successfully gradually introduced in the GG until 1942. First it was issued to the employees of industries which was important for military purposes, and in the end to the administrative personnel. German citizens within the Reich did not possessed a Arbeitskarte but instead a Arbeitsbuch. However, children in primary school, freely employed persons, as well as those employed in fisheries, forestry and agriculture did not have a Arbeitsbuch. The agricultural workers were handled as “resources” and were registered in the database for agricultural workers (Landwirtschaftliche Betriebskartei) in the Labor Offices. The workers were displaced from farm to farm in order to increase the efficiency of the agriculture production. The criteria for the transferences of the workers were based on the size of the farm, the type of production and the number of workers and residents of the farm.

In order to obtain an Arbeitsbuch one had to apply for one. On the first page of the book, issued by the Arbeitsamt was a double number and the first part of this number identified the Arbeitsamt. The second part of the number was the registration-number entitled by the registry of the Office of Labor. Thus we present Arbeitsbuch for foreigners (Arbeitsbuch für Ausländer) of a female deportee which contains the number of employee, “65/2257”, where the figure “65” is the Labor Office in Prenzlau, and the figure “2257” is the personal registration-number of the Arbeitsbuch. At the commencement of the work the employee handed over the Arbeitsbuch (Arbeitskarte in GG) to the employer who should fill out the date of beginning of work, the type of tasks, residence, and any amendments thereto and the date of the end of the work. The employer should inform the Arbeitsamt about every amendments in the document, and this new data would be added to each worker’s file in the database. If the employee had been working in more than one location, the Arbeitsbuch would be at the first place of employment. During breaks of employment the Arbeitsbuch should be deposited in the Labor Office. It was not allowed to possess two Arbeitsbuch. However this rule did not apply if connecting the card with the GG employment book. In the case of deportation to forced labor outside the GG a normal Arbeitsbuch was issued. In the case of workers deported to Germany, the Arbeitsbuch would remain with the employer, and the whole procedure of deportation was handled by the employer and the Labor Office. In fact, the documents never passed through the forced laborer’s hands.
The documents were only acquired by the forced laborers after the end of the war, when they were free to leave their working places or when the German employers fled the occupied territories. A minimal number of Arbeitsbuch copies survived until today in fairly good conditions. The German wartime did not allow foreign workers to take any documentation regarding their employment when returning home. A special decree was issued on the 18 of November of 1941 regulating this matter for Poles. However Poles living in the areas incorporated into the Reich were exempted from this regulation.
ERSATZKARTE FÜR ARBEITSBUCH – a card that replaced the employment record book. Erzatzkarte had 4 pages and was issued by the Arbeitsamt. It contained less personal and employment data than Arbeitsbuch. It was a temporary document, issued for a limited period. At the return of an old document or when requesting a new one, it had to be immediately returned to the Labor Office. The employer should follow the same legislation with the Erzatzkarte as with the Arbeitsbuch. All annotations and records of card replacement were performed with the knowledge of the Labor Office. In GG, Arbeitsamt issued special certificates for forced laborers, (i.e. the Beschäftigungsnachweis), instead of Arbeitsbuch, which was usually kept by the employers. These certificates were a way of proving that the workers were holders of an Arbeitsbuch.
Arbeitskarte – “work card” was a document with a double function: it confirmed the employment of a foreign worker, and served also as passport or identity card. It was necessary to have your work card as of the 8 March 1940. When receiving this card, a collaboration of two offices was needed: the Arbeitsamt and the local police authority (the Department of Foreigners). A special permit was required to a foreign worker’s employment in Germany. In order to employ a foreigner, an employer had to apply for the permission at the local police authority. The foreign employee should also apply to the Local Police Authority, but in practice the employers applied for this permission. In 1942, due to the increase of foreign workers the Office of Labor was forced to simplify the procedure. The employer had to make a general request to the Office of Labor for the allocation of workers. Later they canceled this procedure, that you had to apply to the local police authority. It became the task of the Arbeitsamt, which, after allocation of the worker to a specific job sent a permission form which had to be filled. This ended the formalities of registration, combined with a photo of fingerprints, forwarded from the employee. The data obtained by the police while issuing work cards remained in the Police Office. Copies of this data were stored in the central records of the Reich Security Main Office which held the data on the forcibly recruited Poles and Ostdeutschen. This Main Office functioned until the end of 1943 or early 1944, when it was destroyed by Allied bombing raids. There were information about these raids in a circular (the circular informed Reichsführer SS on the 5th of February 1944 about these events). The worker was required to carry the Arbeitskarte with him. The Arbeitskarte was valid for a specific employment, which eased the process of catching the fugitives. Since the Arbeitskarte was issued for a limited period of time, the employer should take care about prolonging it.
In consisted in a two-sided card slip. On one side it contained a photograph, a fingerprint and the signature of the worker. This page was prepared by the police. In February 1944 provision was made for the necessity of inserting on this page a stamp that read: *kennzeichenpflichtig* – required to wear the identity emblem, namely the “P” in the case of the Poles or the “O” for eastern workers, so as to help the police authority of GG to distinct from the Belorussians and Ukrainians, who were exempted from the compulsory wearing of signs.

There was a sheet which contained personal data, and information about the employment of that forced laborer. If the validation date had expired but the worker was still working, the new sheet could be glued over the old one. In contrast to Arbeitsbuch, which was filled out by hand, this document was filled by typing. Similar to Arbeitsbuch, it contained information about action and interference the holder might have had with Allied authorities, and/or post-war Polish government, institution where he had received social support.

This card was also sometimes combined with a certificate of the deposits of their salary savings (*Bescheinigung über eingezahlte Lohnersparnisse*). However, in practice, this was seldom written down. Deducting various sums of money from the earnings of workers and their deposit from the employer was a way of bonding the worker with the employer. The plan of the German administration was to prevent escapes from the working places but in practice it turned out to be quite ineffective.

There are no notes on the function of the *Arbeitskarte* from the GG, due to its similarity with the *Arbeitsbuch*. Its worth noting though, that the *Arbeitskarte* was modeled on the *Arbeitsbuch*. (See above)
Arbeitskarte – “work card”, from the Office of Labor in Ornetta. An example of the form created specially for the foreign workforce.
AUSWEIS, WERKAUSWEIS, PERSONENAUSWEIS – these are different types of cards – identification documents related to the place of employment. These documents were issued by larger establishments that had the resources to keep self-employment records. They serve as an identity document – a pass in the workplace and its surroundings, in case of identity control by the Werkschutz – industrial security guards or police authority. This contained information about current job, nationality (for example, by placing the letter “P”) and the accommodation. Sometimes, in the absence of pictures of the bearer, the document was valid only after the presentation of another document with a photograph. Due to the fact that Ausweis card in the workplace could be quickly destroyed, it was sometimes secured by a cover or in a special metal cover. In GG the Ausweis card (or Arbeitskarte) protected the people from being deported for forced labor during the round-up or random police checks. In 1943, however, there was a large number of forged identity card with the consequence that the occupation authorities ceased to pay attention to this type of document during the inspection – Ausweis card no longer protected from deportation to the Reich. It was also easy to verify its correctness by checking the information contained in it in the database of the Labor Office. Ausweis card, like other documents relating to forced labor, carried sometimes annotations from the Allied authorities, the Polish administration or humanitarian organizations.
Personenausweis – Ostbahn

Herr Karl Gawlowski
Vor- und Zuname – Inabe (Kobenhavn)

Pamflet, 1914

Im Dienst der Ostbahn

Das Bild ist von dem Inhaber fotografiert.

Koproduktion durch den Inhaber.

Inspektor

ko 3 162 (Ostbahn) Personenausweis Nr. 889

Dowód osobisty

Niemieck, 1942

Telegraphist

Otto Engels

30.7.1942

Krakau – Warszow
Ausweis der Hirth Motoren GmbH – Stuttgart/ Zuffenhausen

Zur Beachtung!
1. Dieser Ausweis darf an keinen Unbefugten ausgehändigt werden. Zuwiderhandelnde werden strafrechtlich verfolgt.
2. Der Verlust des Ausweises ist sofort der WS (Ausweissstelle) zu melden.
3. Der Inhaber hat den Ausweis während der Dienstzeit stets bei sich zu tragen. Er berrechtigt zum Betreten des Werkes lediglich während der Dienstzeit.
Werks-Ausweis
Pertrix Werke GMBH

Werks-Ausweis
Nr. 4028
für
Baluta
Emilia
geb. 25.8.21.

Werks-Ausweis
Pertrix Werke GMBH
BAUDIENSTPASS – “pass for the construction service” functioning in the GG between May 1940 and thesummer of 1944, modeled on the German labor service (Reichsarbeitsdienst). In fact, the construction service was a kind of slave labor. It was regulated by a decree and it was in practice from 1 of December of 1940 to 22 of April of 1942. The construction service lasted for a year and involved the young men who were then employed in public works, works for the army, and also burying victims of mass executions, etc. At its peak the construction department numbered 45 thousand Baudienst employees (January 1944). The Baudienst employees were living in camps. This isolation had the goal of preventing involvement in underground activity. In case of offense or escape they could be deported to special camps, or to a penal services building near Krakow (quarries, “Lebanon”) or in Solec Vistula.
LAGERAUSWEIS – “camp pass.” Type of document issued for the workers deported to Germany to special camps – Gemeinschaftslager. The card from the camp included not only the identification information about their workplace but also on the back, their allocation of tobacco (Tabak), soap (Seife) and “special allocations” – Sonderzuteilung. The camp was often monitored by a person delegated by the German Labor Front – Deutsche Arbeits Front (DAF), which held a number of police functions. These barracks labor camps were located in large industrial areas or in urban centers. The camps were usually placed in unused public or industrial buildings. This could be old dance halls, cinemas, fire stations and closed factories. Alternatively, special barracks were created from scratch. Due to the original use of the buildings, most lacked a sufficient number of bathrooms, kitchens and laundries. The interior design was the most basic, included only simple furniture. They lacked a sufficient quantity of blankets, which caused suffering from the cold to the inhabitants of the camps. In the summer, living in the barracks added also heat and stuffy air. The progressive destruction caused by the war, the lack of repairment and construction, increased the demand for cheap labor which led to densely populated Gemeinschaftslager camps by the end of the war. These camps were often surrounded by barbed wire, which resembled to the penal camps. For these reasons, some administrations of camps refused to accept forced labor workers from Western Europe.
ARBEITSVERTRAG – “contract”. This document was a bilateral agreement between the Polish agricultural worker and the German employer, specifying the duties and commitments of this relation. It was implemented in the “Old Reich” in the city of Deimler, district of Soltau. In the case of a worker his responsibilities were described in detail. For example, if working on a farm it would be noted the number of equipment for which he was responsible, if there was additional support of other staff in cleaning the farm buildings, etc. The fourth article of this contract stated that, starting from 19th of December 1943, every third Saturday would be a day off for the worker. The subsequent point was about wages. The sixth point established that the employer should give a four weeks’ notice before firing the worker. An analysis of the content leads to the conclusion that the parties acted as equal partners, that there was a certain freedom shaping the employment relationship. The employers defined specifically the obligations of the workers and also their salary.

One of the fundamental laws that discriminated the workers was a regulation depriving them entirely the possibility of making a contract for themselves, of choosing the type of work, the duration of the work, or of rescinding a contract of employment. The Poles from the occupied areas did not have contracts. They were displaced of work according to the employers needs. And when the employee was to be released from work the employer would give a two weeks’ notice. (In this particular contract it was four weeks.) The termination of the contract had to be reported and accepted by the Labor Office. The Office was also able to reject the request for dismissal of workers or to suspend the deployment of new workers to the employers.
QUITTUNGSKARTE – “insurance card” receipts was used within the Reich and the incorporated territories as a compulsory accident insurance (Invalidversicherung). The receipts served as a confirmation of the insurance payment by the German and Polish employees. These receipts confirmed the discharge of the relevant insurance premiums. Special stamps were glued to the back of one’s card receipts once a week. Since July 1942, Quittungskarte should have contained information about the period of contribution, the amount, one’s health insurance’s company name which received the premiums and the employer. The agency responsible for the insurance scheme should send after a year, or after 3 years latest, a report to the governmental agency handling these affairs. In the early years of the war in the incorporated territories there were also used pre-war Polish ‘kwitowa’ card forms. It was possible to use this kind of ‘Quittungskarte’ because Polish and German social insurance systems were similar before 1939. On one side there was information about the social insurance company. On the other side there was information about the sickness fund of the holder (AOK here – Allgemeine Ortskrankenkasse), and stamp or some signature from employer. Card receipts were valid for two years from the date of issue. Stamps on this card also contained information about previous stamps on the previous card receipts. If one changed employers, his receipts could still be used and confirmed the continuation or renewed insurance. Insured workers could receive a summary of discharges by card receipts of contributions as a summary-book (Sammelbuch).
LOHNSTEUERKARTE – “income taxes card”. An essential characteristic of remuneration was the definition of a payroll system where a Polish forced laborer would receive in wages about 70-80% of what Germans would receive (in agriculture, even 65-60%) for the same kind of work. These social and financial policies were enforced from the 10th of February, and were regulated by the Reich Minister of Finance. They required the employers to base taxes on the salaries of Poles by the top two groups in the tax-table – for single persons and married couples without children. In addition, Polish workers were denied all benefits, both social and marital. On August the 5th, 1940 a special kind of tax of 15% of the salary, the Social-counterbalance (Sozialausgleich-abgabe, and Polengabe in Polish) was introduced in the Polish territories incorporated into the Reich. People employed in agriculture were excluded from this tax because of the dramatic low wages in this sector.
RATION CARDS – were introduced by the Germans at the beginning of the war and with time covered most of the basic food and non-food products. So there were cards for bread – Reichsbrotkarte, sugar and bread ointment – marmalade (with carrot and beet) – Zucker und Lebensmittelkarte für Brotaufstrich, cigarettes – Raucherkaarte, soap – Seifenkarte, spinning and textile products (clothing) – Spinnstoffkarte cards, etc. Ration cards were issued by the departments of municipalities and city councils. If such cards were issued on the territories incorporated in the “old Reich” they would have the endorsements of the relevant national headquarters office of insurance (LWA). From 1942, a regulation was forced which declared that ration cards could only be issued upon the proof of a certificate stating the person requesting vouchers had employment. The certificates were then transferred to Arbeitsamts in order to be completed with appropriate annotations.

There was a wide criteria (sex, age, nationality, occupation) on which and how many ration cards one could receive. The amount of allowances depended on: the nationality – the largest amount, of course, went to the Germans and the German people (in GG it was 2-3 times higher than for the Poles); the type of work – such as higher allowances were attributed to those working in the military industry. Annexed areas in the Reich, in the District Ciechanow and in Upper Silesia (Górny Śląsk), a higher allowance was given to the employed than to the unemployed.
It also depended on age – it was especially discriminating against children under 14 years of age performing the work of adults, on sex – e.g., in the ration cards for clothing, were different for men and women, boys and girls, children under 12 months. There were also some territorial differences not only between the provinces and Gaus, but also within a single administrative territory. Within the GG such allowances for food in Warsaw were quite higher than in other cities. In 1940, the amount of calories in food supplies had been unified. However, the differences in the amount and type of allowances have always remained and depended on local stocks, in a particular month, etc.

The ration card’s allowance in the GG covered only the people working in cities (or those deemed unable to work) and their families. The rural population did not receive any allowances for food and had to take care of itself. In order to receive clothing one had to obtain a special sort of ration cards. The Bezugscheine (ration card) could only be issued by district and city authorities. Another issue was the quality of the allocated products. The bread was dark, because in 1940 wheat flour was banned from being used in baking, the meat was often from horse, vile with bad quality, and soap was allocated in very small portions. Rations were gradually reduced, so that in 1943 some representatives of the GG noticed that workers in the GG had a harder time obtaining these rationed products than foreign workers in the Reich. This even occurred to the Polish and Soviet prisoners of war, which caused their low efficiency. An attempt to fix this situation was carried out in 1943, which only made it a little bit better. In this situation, the official shortages and rationing on a massive scale developed a black market in GG, where you could find almost anything: Dutch furniture, French perfumes, and other luxury goods from German soldiers returning from France. The scale of informal trade indicated that even German troops, to some extent, bought provisions on the black market, not to mention the profit that the illegal trade in goods gave the merchants and the German government.
FAHRRADESCHEIN – “bicycle card”, FÜHRERSCHEIN – “bicycle” license. Using transportation during the war was difficult, both because of the German segregation legislation when using public transport, as well as restrictions imposed by certain specific provisions. For example: in the territory of the Reich bike was forbidden for Polish nationals, e.g. police in Szczecin has banned its use. In the Warta (Kraj Warta) handling a bike would be allowed with a special police permission. In the case of the distance to work being less than 2 km, this permission could usually not be obtained. Bicycles owned by Poles had also sometimes special markings – for example, in Leszno the fenders had to be painted white at the frame and rear. Such restrictions were not enforced in the annexed lands of Silesia and Pomerania (Śląsk and Pomorze). In practice, the use of the bicycle was limited due to the small allowance of tires for the Poles. In the last year of the war it was possible to apply for the permission only if the road to work was 5-10 km. To be employed by a transportation company or another company which supplied transportation services it was required to hold a driving license. The employer could refer the employee to special professional courses (to obtain driving-license), which were organized by official bodies or companies qualified to do so. Often people were forced to participate in professional training in order to get additional qualifications. For example a driver assistant could become a driver after the training.
CORRESPONDENCE – for the entire duration of the war, correspondence of forced laborers deported to Germany, was subject to inspection. Until 1940, random checks were carried out by the Gestapo. In 1941, in each administrative district the Auslandsbriefprüfstelle – “control offices of foreign correspondence” were created and cooperated in this action with the police. It was meant especially to prevent that information on the army, objects under special protection and news on the morale of the people in the Reich would become known outside its territory. It was also forbidden to write about the conditions of forced labor. In practice, this rule was not enforced (that is why the Reich’s campaign which was meant to recruit people in the Eastern Territories did not work and the number of people volunteering to settle in annexed territories greatly reduced). The tone in many of the letters was quite liberal and in many of them there were quite a lot of sharp comments on the German employers. Freedom of correspondence was greater in the case of accommodation outside the camps or in workers’ housing. In these camps it was allowed to send only one letter per month. Special two-part postcards were issued, designed to produce simultaneously a response of the recipient’s card, which resembled a correspondence procedure used in POW camps and concentration camps. On the pages of this type of card a very limited number of words could be written. Poles were also forbidden to send postcards everywhere – although in practise this rule was not always followed. An additional measure was the destruction by German authorities of letters and postcards written vaguely or illegibly. As a result of this measure, many of the recipients did not receive any letters. Many of the deportees, who had just completed several classes of elementary school and did not use writing every day, did not have a very discerning handwriting. This meant a loss of contact with their loved ones. That was also the case with children.

An interesting telegram is presented here. It was sent from the Ostrów Wielkopolski district (Kr. Ostrowo) to a forced laborer employed on the estate in Bonfeld, Heidenheim district. It informed the laborer about the death of her father, and the date of funeral (Thursday, 8 pm – 8 Nachmittags Donerstag). The sender was her mother. At the bottom appeared the words: Amt der Beglaubigte Komisar Görsch – Authenticated by the Commissioner of the Office Görsch. If a forced laborer would receive a telegraphic notice regarding the death of a close person, it could be a basis for granting leave. The telegram, however, had to be addressed to the residence of the recipient and had to be approved by the Gestapo police authority (in this situation, Commissioner Göscha). There were no fixed regulations how the police and the Gestapo were supposed to evaluate the telegram, other than to perform political assessment on the deceased and his family. In the case of an unfavorable evaluation, such approval was not issued. Likewise, if the person’s death was the result of German repression of the Wehrmacht, etc. Even with a positive opinion of the police, the on-site Labor Office could withhold leave – as a result, leaves of this type were rarely granted.
DOCUMENTATION BY POST-WAR ALLIED OCCUPATION AUTHORITIES – In the end of the war a lot of documents where issued in Germany, occupied by the Allied authorities. These documents generally ratified registration, entry cards, temporary identification documents, identity cards, etc. International institutions and countries of the Allied occupying army helped millions of people who at the end of the war were found in the German territories. On November 9, 1943 “Administration of the United Nations Relief and Reconstruction – in short, UNRRA was set up by the Allied Forces. It was partly concentrated on the most affected populations in countries that were on the Allied side and functioned until 1947 (from 1945 within the UN). UNRRA activities included minimal humanitarian-aid, helping with social and economic reconstruction, organization of special camps for the so-called “DPs” (displaced persons from the English). That is to say persons who as a result of the war found themselves outside their homeland and wanted to return or settle in a new place, and could not do that without help. Allied Documentation carried endorsements often marked by the PUR and social welfare institutions in the country.
The registration card issued for DPs

Certificate of registration and residence of a person in a camp for DPs, Karlsruhe

Temporary registration of a person issued by the Allied occupation authorities
NATIONAL OFFICE'S DOCUMENTATION FOR REPATRIATION (PUR) – The task of this office was to organize the repatriation of the Polish population to the country after the war (and other non-German territories), as well as the displacement of foreign people (to Germany and the USSR). It had to ensure food supplies, transportation, shelter, sanitary and medical care for those waiting to be repatriated and replaced people (refugees) until the date of their expatriation. PUR was set up by decree PKWN on October 7, 1944, and subordinate officers of PKWN, and from 7 May 1945, the Ministry of Public Administration. On December 13, 1945 it was incorporated into the Ministry of the Recovered Territories. After the liquidation of the ministry in January 1949, between April and the end of March 1951 (for its liquidation), PUR was subjected to the Prime Minister. External documentation was produced by PUR was linked to a list of people associated with the repatriate-office.

These documents issued by the PUR were the most common documents that enabled people to travel for free to their destination. These documents later became the basis for the identity card. Registration was provided by the check-points situated on the border of the state. The administration of PUR was on a district level (i.e. it was not ran directly by the government). Proof that a repatriate passed through the check-point was made by PUR with the usage of annotations and stamps on the documents held by the registered person. These documents were issued both by the occupation authorities, as well as Allies. General Government plenipotentiary Office for Repatriation, which acted with full authority was responsible to provide assistance to those who did not possess any documents of identification. Since its establishment, PUR task was limited to the organization of transport and immigration within the Polish territory.
PHOTOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTATION – in the case of forced laborers it is possible to divide the documents into institutional and non-institutional categories. The institutional documents were held by German Labor Offices and police authorities in the form of portrait photographs of identification (its characteristics discussed in the section in the document Arbeitsbuch) in identity documents and employment documents. The second category is an iconography of the “victims” – those photos document the daily life of forced workers, done mostly by German employers, supervisors, etc. Pictures made by “victims” were the exceptions because the forced laborers rarely had cameras during their deportation to Germany.
Labor at the construction company, Feldkirch

Forced laborer employed in steel plants, Linz, February 1944 – April 1945

Work for the German Railways, Ternopil region
III. The Prisoners of War

PERSONALKARTE – “Personal” card – confirmed the registration in a Stalag (POW camp). It contained, in addition to personal details and camp number (revised for the adoption to another camp), the date and place where the prisoner was taken, the allocation of military rank, health status and the address of relatives. Another sign of Prison Camps and camp numbers were marked in the upper right corner of the card.

The people were put in categories and this card “followed” a prisoner to another Stalag or camps. These cards were kept in a storage, thus a prisoner could obtain the card after the takeover of the camp by the Allies or after the escape of the German staff. In this particular case we are dealing with a “personal” card of a young person (Jugendlicher), an army soldier from the Warsaw Uprising, which first went to a POW camp in Łambinowicach Stammlager.
(344, 318), and then to Stalag IVB (Mühlberg-Elbe). On the back of the card there are indications of which work the prisoner should do within the working commandos (KD Chemnitz) and the name of his workplace. International law allowed that POWs could be use for labor with the condition that they were not to be used in any war-action e.g. soldiers should fit the physical capability of the person at hand. Nor should the men work in arms factories, the construction of fortifications on the ranges, the transport of ammunition, etc. In practise these rules were rarely followed. For example, in the case of the Warsaw insurgents, the Chemnitz factory recruited a group of akówek (women which were involved in the Polish underground movement) to make parts for missiles V1 and at Goslar where young prisoners arrived to, they were put in glass works, and produced glass coats, mines, aircraft fuselages, etc.

VERPF LICHTUNGSSCHEIN – “release form”. This document has been linked with the action undertaken by the German authorities when releasing POWs, Privates in stalags and noncommissioned officers for civilian work. This document was formally introduced in May 1940 by decree of Hitler and lasted until the end of that year. Each released POW had to sign a document stating that, after leaving Stalag, he would remain in the Reich until the end of the war, and make himself available to the Labor Office. This was in theory a voluntary declaration, but in practice, it became compulsory. The German authorities tried to lure the prisoners to meet the obligations by promising higher wages, better food, holidays and the possibility to receive visitors. If the POW's resisted to sign this form, they were subjected to physical violence. Signing this document meant to comply with the terms proposed by the German. This implied the loss of the POWs rights i.e. they would no longer receive basic care from the Red Cross, nor aid in the form of packages, etc. However, the POWs refused to do it for patriotic reasons. The procedure of the German government by obliging POWs to register in the Arbeitsamt was against the Geneva Convention of 1929 which the Reich ratified in 1934. This procedure was a major support for the economy which was suffering from labor shortage. In addition, with this procedure the Reich also made it easier for their police, administrative control, and the Wehrmacht to manage the POW camps.
CORRESPONDENCE – in the case of POW's correspondence, there are two types of sources, institutional or mixed (institutional and private). The example Todesanzeige – death notice “ – a document of an official correspondence. It was addressed to the registry office in Wołowni in Suwałki district (then incorporated into East Prussia). In this particular case it informed on the death of a prisoner of war treated at a military hospital in Gżycko (Lötzen). The document concerns a soldier that died in September (it is worth adding that about 10 thousand of veterans died in POW camps and hospitals in the September campaign as result of inflicted wounds). In addition to personal information, cause of death (infection of a gunshot wound in the head) and the placement of the military prisoner it contained the names of his immediate family. In this case his placement was in the 41 Suwałki Infantry Regiment, 2nd company of Sanitation (29th Infantry Division Army “Prussia”).

The sources of historical personal correspondence are both institutional and private. Its institutional component formalized the rules and regulations which limited correspondence. After the first registration of the prisoners in Stalag, there was a special card issued, printed with bilingual (Polish and German) instruction. It was intended to inform the relatives of the fact that one was in captivity and on his health status. It contained his full name and his military rank.
This was the first letter from an imprisoned soldier. This was often the very first contact since the capture of a prisoner after he was put into a temporary camp, Durchgangslager. There was no possibility of correspondence. Then once a week a POW could receive a special card with only 25 lines. In 1940, the standardized form of correspondence was in a double-sheet with 21 lines, on which the addressee could also write a response. This sheet also contained information about the procedure of writing the letter and did not require the use of envelopes. The letters were made out of chalk paper, in order to make it easier to detect writing with invisible ink. The part for personal information was restricted to the third part of the letter. It was limited due to procedural rules. The personal part was the 3rd content of the letter, and was limited due to a procedural rule regarding how the format of the letter could be. In contrast to the correspondence of the concentration camps these letters were written in the native language, but were similarly subjected to censorship. The censorship was performed by native Germans, as well as Volksdeutsche (ethnic Germans) and sometimes Ukrainians. The letters and cards containing information on the situation in the camp, supplies, military affairs, were confiscated and destroyed. The prisoner who wrote these letters was held responsible and would be punished. Censored correspondence was marked with a stamp reading Geprüft – “verified”. A circular stamp on a letter meant that the letter had gone through additional censorship, where they made a research on the mood of the prisoner and work. Shipments that came from the outside were put through censorship. Letters from Oflags and Stalags were sent for free, being especially marked with a string which read Kriegsgefangenenpost – POW’s mail. When a prisoner was posted to a ‘Nebenlager’ (a “sub-camp”), correspondence went through the ‘general’ camp. The correspondence was guaranteed by the Geneva Convention of 1929.

A part of a correspondence card from a prisoner in a POW camp. – a reply to a prisoner staying in the camp (part of a letter from a prisoner in isolation, the feedback was left with the recipient)
DOCUMENTS OF POST-WAR ALLIED OCCUPATION AUTHORITIES – the POW documents, was partly similar to the documents issued for forced laborers. Military agents took care of the daily needs of POWs in occupied Germany. These POWs were hosted in special military camps. The typical document issued to former POW was called “Identity-card, ex-prisoner of war”. There were also other various types of documents.

DOCUMENTATION OF THE NATIONAL OFFICE FOR REPATRIATION (PUR) – a document was issued to provide an identification to the forced laborers (see above) and other repatriates in order to enable them to return to their country of origin. Those with a military past, that wanted to register, were subjected to a special interrogation at one of the registration points provided by the PUR. The interrogation was carried out by the officers from the Security Office. This was especially true for soldiers in the West and PSZ Polish Home Army (Armia Krajowa), those involved in the pre-war intelligence, etc. Polish military missions were associated with the preparation and repatriation of former Polish soldiers.
IV. Concentration camp prisoners

HÄFTLINGS-PERSONAL-KARTE – prisoner’s personal card. “It was used when entering or leaving the camp and was stored at the camp registry. The personal card had a standard model and the document went with the prisoner. In this case the card is from a prison camp in Gross-Rosen. It contained personal data, nationality, the prisoner number (which was changed when he went to another camp), the type of the triangle worn, his category (here: Sch from Schutzhaftbefehl, ie, “preventive custody”), the family address, a precise physical description, the police data about his stays in other camps (here we are dealing with a lack of entries). The prisoners could only attain their own documents during the pandemonium that followed the liberation of the camps.

ENTLASSUNGSSCHEIN – “discharge certificate”. Release procedure from a concentration camp seldom took place. This could be done in two cases, i.e. if a POW was sent by the Gestapo into protective custody in a concentration camp – “Schutzhaftbefehl” or by Kripo into preventive detention – “Vorbeugungshaft”. If the police institution, (the Gestapo or Kripo), decided on the repeal to issue a discharge certificate, the bureaucratic procedure for releasing the prisoner was done in the camp. This procedure was done by a secretary (Referat), and the files regarding this certificate were put in the prisoner’s folder. The appropriate agency informed the
police about the release date in order to keep surveillance on the prisoners place of residence and he was obliged register at the designated Gestapo Office. In this case, a prisoner released from Mauthausen had to report to the Gestapo Office in Gniezno. Often the prisoner did not know the reasons for his dismissal. Sometimes this was due to the efforts of the family outside the camp, who attempted to access the relevant officers of the Gestapo or Kripo and bribed them in order to “convince” them to appeal an order of protection or preventive detention. Sometimes international organization attempted to get prisoners free from the camps. Before leaving the camp the prisoners had to go through quarantine, where they were treated more gently. They had to undergo a medical examination, which could delay the release if they were too exhausted or injured. Then they received clothing and had to sign a statement promising not to tell what they witnessed in the camp. After release the Gestapo would visit their place of residence and remind them of their statement. The severity of the police surveillance became slightly less brutal after the prisoner got a permanent job, which they were also obliged to do. Dismissal was a normal procedure in the case of the prisoners categorized as Erziehungsäftlinge: “i.e. prisoners that were in the camps for re-education, after violating rules at work and were dismissed after serving a sentence of 56 days in a camp”. (After serving a sentence they had to return to the workplace or register at the Labor Office).

STERBUERKUNDE – “death certificate” issued by the registrar’s office at Auschwitz camp, confirming the death of a prisoner in isolation. In order to maintain the confidentiality about the actual purpose of the concentration camps, the German administrative authorities began to take over the power of institutions operating in those areas. The office of the Camp Registry was one of those institutions. In the beginning, as can be noticed in the civil records of Auschwitz prisoners worked in the Civil Status Registry in Bielsko. The registry informed people about deaths of their relatives, that had died in the camp. In 1941, however, a separate registry office was created on the site. This office was led by a non-commissioned SS officer which was also a civil servant and held the official title of – Der Standesbeamte. The most extensive role of the civil status office of the camp was death notifications. This records were kept in chronological order in Todesbuch – “death registry” and files on deceased prisoners, and this book was the basis for informing the family of the deceased, state administration and church-registry. The role of the Todesbuch was also to verify the incorrect documentation of prisoners’ death (as the most common cause of death was given natural causes). They did not register people that were led directly to the gas chambers on their arrival to the camp.
CORRESPONDENCE – just as in the case of the correspondence sent to some camps and POW camps, there are two types of sources, institutional and mixed. The institutional sources of historical personal correspondence, were carried out by the camp authorities and were usually about the prisoners death. The mixed sources were institutional and private and consisted mainly in the POW correspondence. The correspondence was restricted by regulations of the camp, i.e. there was a standard formal character which the letter had to be written in. The camps had separated post offices. Registered prisoners were allowed to send and receive a letter or a postcard every two weeks (a total of 4 postcards). The exception were re-incarcerated prisoners who were entitled to only one letter a month. Restrictions also affected the Jews. Covered by the ban of correspondence were also Soviet POWs, those incarcerated as a result of special SS and Gestapo raids against the Underground movement and those whose families lived in the areas already liberated from German occupation. Such a prohibition could also be introduced by the head office of the camp or by the camp authorities as punishment. Addresses that had been authorized to be the place of recipient could not be altered without the consent of the camp director. To send a letter the prisoner should purchase the paper form and postage in the camp canteen. For this purpose the prisoner could extract money from his deposits – provided of course that had the money on arrival at the camp. If not, he would need a blank form and he could buy a stamp, mostly for bread, from the other prisoners. It occasionally occurred, and so that older prisoners organized form and stamps for the newly arrived prisoners, so they could notify their families of their fate. The correspondence was only allowed in German. The prisoners who did not know German language limited themselves to simple phrases, or depended on the assistance of their German-speaking colleagues. The prisoners were reminded to end their letters with the sentence: “Ich bin gesund und fühle mich gut – “I’m healthy and feel good.”

The camps used various forms and sheets, and until 1943, in principle, any camp could have its own procedure. Despite their difference, they had several features in common. They all had rules on how to write the letters and the name of the camp. The letters written on a lined paper also featured a rule stating how many words there could be per line. The family’s response
had to comply with these guidelines. In 1942, a response to a letter from the camp was filled with clear 15 lines of the letter in German. In 1943, under the uniformed system of letter forms used in the camps was a two-form, ‘sekretnik’. After the submission of half of external sites entered address and the recipient’s name and prisoner of the camp, and the measure was spent on the content of the letter. After folding the ‘sekretnik’ the address of the recipient had to be written on the front page, and also address of the sender and the name of the camp. The content of the letter was written inside the ‘sekretnik’. The ‘sekretnik’ did not have the name of the camp printed on it, it was also half the size of the previously applied form, and had to be filled out with ink, in contrast to the previous form, where the prisoner could use a pencil. If the form was legibly filled out, and did not have any alterations, it was taken by the staff of the block to the office of censorship. Depending on the form, the censors could cut out or cross the suspicious parts and then stamped it with Geprüft ("verified"). Ticking censored words or sentences were the rule in the procedure of 1943. The amount of correspondence sent and received was recorded in the camp’s record. Posting content deemed dangerous could be investigated and the prisoner punished. The camp’s post office dealt with expedition letters.
DOCUMENTATION OF POST-WAR ALLIED OCCUPATION AUTHORITIES – see above documentation of forced laborers and prisoners of war. In occupied Germany, concentration camp prisoners often tried to point out their distinctiveness in relation to other deportees. Prisoners were under special care because they had been severely inflicted. Remnants of a documentation of that period are presented in the identities of the concentration camp prisoners.

Identity cards issued to former prisoners of German concentration camps – a mother, imprisoned at Ravensbrück and Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, and her daughter, who was born in Bergen-Belsen camp, just before its liberation. (source: Polish Association of the former concentration camp prisoners)

DOCUMENTATION OF THE NATIONAL OFFICE FOR REPATRIATION (PUR) – see above discussion of documents PUR forced laborers and prisoners of war.
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