



## The Auschwitz II-Birkenau *Sonderkommando*

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**(total running time: 31 minutes)**

The prisoner units that were forced to work in the gas chambers and crematoria of death camps were known as *Sonderkommando*, German for “special units.” They were put to death at regular intervals, and few survived the war. On October 7, 1944, the *Sonderkommando* of the Auschwitz II-Birkenau death camp staged an organized uprising, setting fire to one of the camp crematoria. The SS camp personnel quelled the revolt and executed many of its participants.

In *The Auschwitz II-Birkenau Sonderkommando*, five survivors of the Auschwitz II-Birkenau death camp describe their perspectives of the *Sonderkommando* Uprising.

First, Dario Gabbai (b. 1922 in Salonika, Greece) describes the mass killings that took place in Auschwitz II-Birkenau’s gas chambers. He recounts his first day of work in the gas chambers and crematoria, when he estimates that between 2,500 and 3,000 prisoners were killed at one time. He also talks about the difficulties that the *Sonderkommando* prisoners faced in carrying out the uprising.

Second, Morris Kesselman (b. 1926 in Łódź, Poland) details the work that the *Sonderkommando* were forced to do in the gas chambers and crematoria of Auschwitz II-Birkenau. He describes the *Sonderkommando*’s attempts to rebel against the camp guards on several occasions prior to the October 7 uprising.

Morris Venezia (b. 1921 in Salonika, Greece) talks about the demise of the Hungarian Jews who arrived in Auschwitz II-Birkenau in 1944. He describes the way that he and other members of the *Sonderkommando* killed a German overseer who regularly beat them.

Linda Breder (b. 1924 in Stropkov, Czechoslovakia [as of 1993, Slovakia]), who worked in a section of the Auschwitz II-Birkenau death camp located near the crematoria, describes what she observed during the *Sonderkommando* Uprising on October 7, 1944.

Finally, Anna Heilman (b. 1928 in Warsaw, Poland) talks about the role that she and her sister, Roza Robota, played in the uprising by smuggling explosives to the *Sonderkommando* so that they could blow up the camp crematoria. Heilman explains that Roza was later executed for her participation in the uprising.