

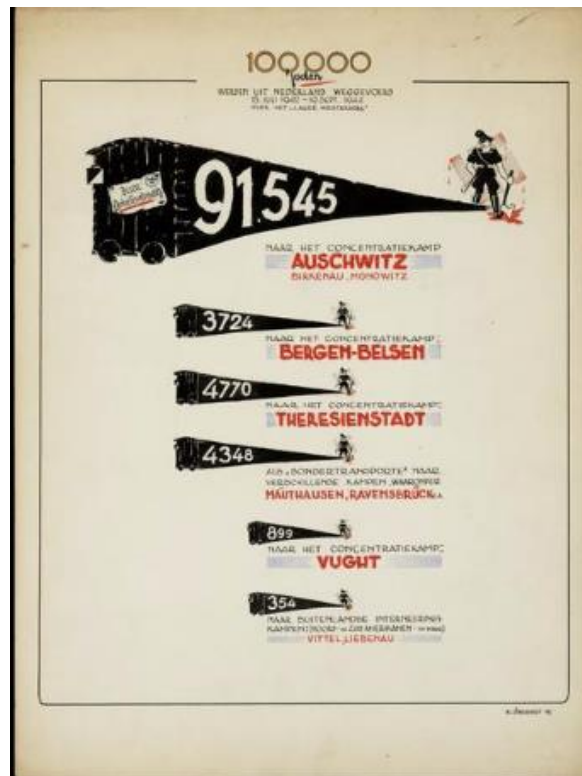
# Trains from Westerbork



About 104 trains left the transit Camp of Westerbork, between 15<sup>th</sup> July 1942 and 13<sup>th</sup> September 1944. The trains went east to Sobibor, Auschwitz-Birkenau, Bergen Belsen, Buchenwald, Ravensbruck and Theresienstadt.

Destination	Count
Auschwitz	64
Sobibor	19
Bergen Belsen	9
Theresienstadt	5
Ravensbruck	4
Buchenwald	3
Grand Total	104

They carried over 104,000 people to their intended deaths. Of these only 2,195 managed to survive. 76,297 had been murdered on arrival and 25,616 some time later through disease, malnutrition, suicide or murder. These people were from all over Europe but mainly the Netherlands and Germany. They were selected to fill the capacity of the train by the administration of the camp. The Jewish Council and Administration were given a number by the Camp Kommandant and it was their task to put names against the numbers. The number always had to be exact, there were forms to be filled in if extra people were placed up the train.



It didn't matter what their age or condition, from one day old baby to 100-year-old lady. At first, they were whipped onto the trains but later then went seemingly in a manner of calm acceptance. How was it calm? No resistance group leading riots or mass escapes? There was connection with the Dutch Resistance on the outside, which aided small escapes but it seems there wasn't an internal desire to bring together large numbers in resistance to the German administration. Even though the internal Jewish Police were disliked there was no open opposition.



Gemmeker second from right on the platform overseeing a departure

Why was this? Kommandant Gemmeker played not necessarily a clever game. It wasn't his original idea, he had seen the idea working in his previous posting. It was simply to give people the appearance of normality, to dupe them into accepting nothing bad was going to happen. He claimed to believe it himself but from attending high level meetings and from what he said to prisoners it is evident he knew what lay ahead for those departing on trains. So, what did he do? He provided work, which supported the Third Reich, food, laundry, health and dental care, Education, a café, leisure activities such as football or callisthenics, opportunities to celebrate their religion but also an orchestra and the "Best Cabaret in Europe" – Willy Rosen's Stage Group, the Jewel in Gemmeker's Crown of duplicity. All of this kept the

prisoners amenable and accepting of camp rules. Imagine, being able to see stars of film and Berlin Cabaret on a stage just a few meters from you and also walking around the camp.

Conditions on the trains were less than basic. At first transport was in 3<sup>rd</sup> Class Carriages and then by cattle truck without facilities but barrels for water and for human waste. No privacy whatsoever for anyone. Food was issued but generally seems to have been misappropriated by the guards. Escapes from the trains did happen but not in great numbers.

Trains left on various days of the week. But when Gemmeker was Kommandant it was usual for the trains to leave on Tuesday mornings. Those who were leaving to the East were told the night before with just time to pack a few belongings and dispose of other possessions that were not needed. Those departing cried, those not chosen to go danced with joy.



Throughout the time the camp was operational only one third of trains left on a Tuesday. During Gemmeker’s time as Kommandant when most trains left, nearly 80% of the total, less than half left on a Tuesday. The Cabarets came to an end in September 1944 when the group were split up and many sent to the East on the last but one train to leave Westerbork.

Total			Gemmeker	
Tuesday	37		Tuesday	36
Monday	25		Monday	14
Friday	24		Friday	13
Wednesday	11		Wednesday	10
Saturday	4		Saturday	3
Thursday	2		Sunday	1
Sunday	1		Thursday	1
	104			78

It is therefore wrong to say that it was Tuesdays that the trains left and that Willy Rosen’s performed Cabaret on the previous Monday evening.

Trains would wait on the platform until full and everyone accounted for. Gemmeker would then wave the train away. It would slowly proceed through the camp to the eastern end and then come to a halt where it was handed over to the Wehrmacht to escort all the way to their destinations.



Trains took days to arrive at the various camps in the east. It would be at the point of arrival that the fear became real and that the only escape from the misery was death.

