

## IBM's solutions for the Holocaust in Poland: [Daily Edition]

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### Abstract (summary)

When [Hitler] came to power, the world saw a menace to humanity. But IBM saw Nazi Germany as a lucrative trading partner. Quickly, its president Thomas J. Watson engineered a strategic business alliance between IBM and the Reich, beginning in the first days of the Hitler regime and continuing right through World War II. This alliance instantly catapulted Nazi Germany to become IBM's most important overseas customer. As part of that strategic alliance, IBM and the Nazis jointly designed, and IBM produced, technological solutions that enabled Hitler to accelerate and automate key aspects of the persecution of the Jews - from initial identification and social expulsion, to confiscation and ghettoization, to deportation and ultimate extermination.

That was the correct answer. In Poland, IBM NY's new subsidiary operated under the German legal name, [Watson Bromaschinen]. But the Polish machines proudly bore logo tags with the subsidiary's name in English, Watson Business Machines. Watson created several IBM subsidiaries named after himself, each one strictly confined to one national territory. Watson Belge was the Belgian subsidiary. Watson Italiana served as the Italian company. In Sweden, it was Svenska Watson. In many places, the business names Watson and IBM were synonymous and inseparable.

Hollerith-equipped Nazi offices had been operating across occupied Poland from the day of the invasion on September 1, 1939. America was not in the war. Hence, IBM maintained its complete commercial support for the Hitler regime throughout the initial rape of Poland. As part of this strategic commercial support, IBM NY agreed to an installation of Nazi statistical machines so massive it was not called a Hollerith Department, but a Hollerith Gruppe. This vital installation would permit the Nazis to organize the systematic looting and subjugation of Poland, as well as implement other plans for Polish citizens.

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### Full Text

Newly uncovered Nazi-era documents shed light on the role IBM played in helping Hitler to carry out the Holocaust in Poland, according to Edwin Black, the author of 'IBM and the Holocaust.' In this article, he puts forward further evidence to support his claims of IBM's knowledge and complicity in Nazi operations in wartime Poland.

When Hitler came to power, the world saw a menace to humanity. But IBM saw Nazi Germany as a lucrative trading partner. Quickly, its president Thomas J. Watson engineered a strategic business alliance between IBM and

the Reich, beginning in the first days of the Hitler regime and continuing right through World War II. This alliance instantly catapulted Nazi Germany to become IBM's most important overseas customer. As part of that strategic alliance, IBM and the Nazis jointly designed, and IBM produced, technological solutions that enabled Hitler to accelerate and automate key aspects of the persecution of the Jews - from initial identification and social expulsion, to confiscation and ghettoization, to deportation and ultimate extermination.

Recently discovered Nazi documents and Polish eyewitness testimony make clear that IBM's alliance with the Third Reich went far beyond its German subsidiary. IBM technology was a key factor in the Rape of Poland and the Polish Holocaust, in which millions were killed and a nation plundered. That custom-tailored technology was provided not through the German subsidiary, but directly through a special Polish subsidiary reporting to IBM New York.

And that's how the trains ran on time to Auschwitz.

Watson learned early on that a government in reorganization, a government tightly monitoring its society, was good news for IBM. More forms, more reports, more registrations, more statistics - IBM thrived on red tape.

Starting in 1933, the Third Reich offered Watson the opportunity to cater to intense Nazi government control, supervision, surveillance, and regimentation on a plane never before known. The fact that Hitler planned to expand the Reich to other nations only increased the prospective profits. The technology was almost exclusively IBM's to purvey as the firm controlled about 90 percent of the world market in punch cards and sorters.

As for any moral dilemma, it simply did not exist for IBM. Supplying the Nazis with the customized technology they needed was not even debated. In thousands of IBM- related documents reviewed, there were vigorous and on-going efforts to preserve IBM's monopoly in the Nazi market, exclude competitors and increase contracts to meet sales quotas. But not a single sentence has been found questioning the morality of automating the Third Reich, even as headlines proclaimed the mass murder of Jews.

When Hitler took power, Nazi Germany quickly became IBM's most valuable non-US client. IBM's German subsidiary was Deutsche Hollerith Maschinen Gesellschaft, known by its acronym, Dehomag. Watson tightly managed the lucrative German operations. Watson traveled to Berlin at least twice annually from 1933 until 1939, to personally supervise Dehomag. When German managers wanted to paint a hallway, they awaited his approval. All important correspondence was translated for review by the New York office, and often for Watson's personal comments. Watson had to approve major new accounts.

He insisted on giving direct verbal instructions to his German managers on most issues. Once, when German managers wanted to paint a hallway, they awaited his approval. Not infrequently Dehomag managers objected to his "domination," especially since the branch's by-laws gave him a personal veto over any action by the German subsidiary. Watson's auditors continuously tracked the source and status of every mark and pfennig - in one typical case exchanging numerous trans-Atlantic letters over the disposition of a few dollars. Understandably, IBM's lawyers and managers in Berlin updated Watson constantly, and generally signed their reports, "Awaiting your further instructions."

No machines were sold - only leased. IBM was the sole source of all punch cards and spare parts, and serviced the machines on site, either directly or through its authorized dealer network or other field trainees. There were no universal punch cards. Each series was custom-designed by IBM engineers to collect data, and provide output required by the Nazis.

For example, one series of punch cards was designed to record religion, national origin, mother tongue, occupation, and residence. The cards created special columns and rows for Jew, Polish language, Polish nationality, and fur trade as an occupation, and Berlin as a residence. Nazis could quickly cross-tabulate, at the rate of 25,000 per hour, exactly how many Berlin furriers were Jews of Polish extraction. Railroad cars, which could take two weeks to locate and route, were dispatched in just 48 hours by means of a vast network of punch card machines. IBM services were part of German administration throughout Europe.

WORLD WAR II broke out on September 1, 1939 when Germany invaded Poland. Germany annexed northwestern Poland. The remaining Polish territory was treated as "occupied," and called the "General Government." That northwestern quadrant was serviced by IBM's German subsidiary, Dehomag. In annexed Poland, Dehomag mainly serviced the payroll of Silesian coal mines and heavy industry.

At about that time, IBM NY established a special new subsidiary, totally separate from its German subsidiary. IBM's new Polish company was called Watson Business Machines, and its sole purpose was to service the Nazi occupation during the rape of Poland.

The Polish subsidiary was also known as Watson Bromaschinen, the German equivalent of Watson Business Machines. The enterprise would require dozens of custom-wired punch card machines, and millions of proprietary punch cards especially designed and printed for each application. At the time, it was still completely legal for IBM to service the Third Reich - and it remained legal until just before America entered the war in December 1941.

The rape of Poland was no secret to IBM executives. From the outset, worldwide headlines reported barbarous massacres, rapes, inflicted starvation, systematic deportations, and the resulting unchecked epidemics.

As early as September 13, 1939, the New York Times reported the Reich's determination to make Polish Jewry disappear with a headline declaring, "Nazis Hint Purge of Jews in Poland." A subhead declared, "3,000,000 Population Involved." The article quoted the German government's plan for the "removal of the Polish Jewish population from the European domain." The New York Times added, "How the 'removal' of Jews from Poland [can be achieved] without their extermination is not explained."

But Germany had plans. Polish Jews, during a sequence of sudden relocations, were to be catalogued for further action, in a massive cascade of repetitive censuses and registrations, with up-to-date information being instantly available to various Nazi planning agencies and occupation offices.

How much usable forced labor for armament factories and useful skills could they provide? How many thousands would die from month to month under the new starvation regimen? A wide range of Nazi census, registration, and statistical tabulation was performed with custom-made IBM punch card programs and machinery.

At first, IBM's involvement with in the rape of Poland was managed through its German subsidiary, Dehomag. On September 9, 1939, Dehomag general manager Hermann Rottke wrote directly to Watson in New York asking for advanced alphabetizers. He reminded him, "During your last visit in Berlin at the beginning of July, you made the kind offer to me that you might be willing to furnish the German company machines from Endicott [New York] in order to shorten our long delivery terms ... You have complied with this request, for which I thank you very much, and have added that in cases of urgent need, I may make use of other American machines ... You will understand that under today's conditions a certain need has arisen for such machines, which we do not build as yet in Germany. Therefore, I should like to make use of your kind offer and ask you to leave with the German company ... the alphabetic tabulating machines ..."

On September 28, 1939, the day after a vanquished Warsaw formally capitulated, IBM's European general manager in Geneva, J. W. Schotte, telephoned Berlin to confirm Watson's permission. Company notes record the "friendly spirit" of the call.

Meanwhile, Reinhard Heydrich, chief of Himmler's Security Service, the SD, circulated a top secret Express Letter to the chiefs of his murderous Einsatzgruppen operating in the occupied territories. Heydrich's September 21, 1939 memo was captioned: "The Jewish Question in the Occupied Territory." It began, "I would like to point out once more that the total measures planned, [i.e., the final aim] are to be kept strictly secret."

The first step, the memo explained, was population control through a sequence of strategic censuses and registrations. First, Jews were to be relocated to so-called concentration towns which are "either at railroad junctions or at least lie on a railway." Regarding the zone covered by Einsatzgruppe I, from east of Krakow to the

former Slovak-Polish border, Heydrich directed, "Within this territory, only a temporary census of Jews need be taken."

Heydrich demanded that "the chiefs of the Einsatzgruppen report to me continually regarding ...the census of Jews in their districts ..."

Shortly thereafter, Heydrich's sent a follow-up cable to his occupying forces in Poland, Upper Silesia, and Czechoslovakia. This cable outlined how a new census scheduled for December 17, 1939 would escalate the process from mere identification and cataloging, to deportation and execution as people were rapidly moved into Polish ghettos to await the next step.

Heydrich's memo, entitled, "Evacuation of the New Eastern Provinces," decreed, "the evacuation of Poles and Jews in the new Eastern Provinces will be conducted by the Security Police ...The census documents provide the basis for the evacuation. All persons in the new provinces possess a copy. The census form is the temporary identification card giving permission to stay. Therefore, all persons have to hand over the card before deportation ...anyone caught without this card is subject to possible execution ...It is projected that the census will take place on December 17, 1939."

How long would it take to quantify and organize the deportation of millions from various regions across Eastern Europe? Using paper and pencil - it could take years. Relying upon the lightning speed of Hollerith machines, it took just days. Heydrich assured, "That means the large- scale evacuation can begin no sooner than around January 1, 1940." Nazi Germany employed only one method for conducting a census - IBM punch cards processes, each one custom- designed to the specific census.

IBM'S INVOLVEMENT in Nazi-occupied Poland continued, but now through a special New York-controlled subsidiary known as Watson Business Machines, newly headquartered at Kreuz 23 in Warsaw. An important Watson Business Machines customer site, newly discovered, was the Hollerith Department of Polish Railways, located at 22 Pawia Street in Krakow. This office kept tabs on all trains in the General Government, including those which sent Jews to their death in Treblinka and Auschwitz.

Leon Krzemieniecki is probably the only man still living who worked in that Hollerith Department. It must be emphasized that Krzemieniecki did not understand any of the details of the genocidal train destinations. His duties required tabulating information on all trains, from ordinary passenger to freight trains, but only after their arrival. The high-security five-room office, guarded by armed railway police, was equipped with fifteen punchers, two sorters, and a tabulator "bigger than a sofa."

Fifteen Polish women punched the cards and loaded the sorters. Three German nationals supervised the office, overseeing the final tabulations and summary statistics creation in great secrecy. Handfuls of print-outs were reduced to a small envelope of summary data, which was then delivered to a secret destination. Truckloads of the preliminary printouts were regularly burned, along with the spent cards, Krzemieniecki recalls.

As a forced laborer, Krzemieniecki was compelled to work as a "sorter and tabulator" 10 hours per day for two years. He never realized his work involved the transportation of Jews to gas chambers. "I only know that this very modern equipment made possible the control of all the railway traffic in the General Government," he has said. Krzemieniecki recounts that an "outside technician," who spoke German and Polish and "did not work for the railroad," was almost constantly on site to keep the machines running. The technician generally undertook major maintenance on the machines approximately once each month.

IBM's tailored railroad management programs, several million custom-designed punch cards printed at IBM's 6 Rymarska Street print shop, across from the Warsaw Ghetto, and the railway's leased machines, were not run by the German subsidiary, but by the New York- controlled subsidiary in Warsaw.

The distinction is important. Since the disclosures about IBM's involvement in the Holocaust first surfaced in

February 2001, the company has continually pointed to its supposed lack of control of its German subsidiary. But Watson Business Machines was established in Poland by IBM New York after the Nazi invasion, to profitably service the Reich's plunder and ethnic cleansing programs.

"I knew they were not German machines," recalled Krzemieniecki. "The labels were in English ... The person maintaining and repairing the machines sometimes spread the diagrams out sometimes. The language of the diagrams of those machines was only in English."

I asked Krzemieniecki if the machine logo plates were in German, Polish, or English. He answered "English. It said 'Business Machines.'" I asked, "Do you mean, 'International Business Machines?'" Krzemieniecki replied, "No, 'Watson Business Machines.'"

That was the correct answer. In Poland, IBM NY's new subsidiary operated under the German legal name, Watson Bromaschinen. But the Polish machines proudly bore logo tags with the subsidiary's name in English, Watson Business Machines. Watson created several IBM subsidiaries named after himself, each one strictly confined to one national territory. Watson Belge was the Belgian subsidiary. Watson Italiana served as the Italian company. In Sweden, it was Svenska Watson. In many places, the business names Watson and IBM were synonymous and inseparable.

DWARFING THE railroad operation in Poland was the massive Hollerith statistical center at 24 Murnerstrasse in Krakw, staffed by more than 500 punching and tabulating employees and dozens of machines. New research has discovered a previously unknown Berlin agency, the Central Office for Foreign Statistics and Foreign Country Research, which continuously received detailed data from the Statistics Office in Krakw. New discoveries about this office answer questions about where much of the data for all of Poland was processed.

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By November 2, 1939, the Reich's Jewish population statistics wizard, Fritz Arlt, had been appointed head of the Population and Welfare Administration of the "General Government." Arlt, a Hollerith expert and a colleague of Eichmann, edited his own statistical publication, Political Information Service of the General Government. The publication featured such detailed data as Jewish population per square meter, with sliding projections of decrease resulting from such imposed conditions as forced labor and starvation.

One Arlt article asserted, "We can count on the mortality of some subjugated groups. These include babies and those over the age of 65, as well as those who are basically weak and ill in all other age groups." Quickly, the data-hungry Nazis quickly ordered a Central Statistics Office established in Krakw.

By April 1940 the Nazis formed a working group comprised of a single German statistics expert assisted by former employees of the Polish Statistical Service. This group, along with all previously supplied Hollerith machines and staff, were relocated from Warsaw to the new Nazi agency in Krakw. By September 1940 the Reich issued a Decree for Statistics in Poland, creating the new expanded "Statistics Office." Within a few months, the Krakw Statistics Office at 24 Murnerstrasse subsumed most other statistical operations in Poland.

The Statistics Office was divided into six distinct groups - Group I, Administration; Group II, Population and Culture; Group III, Food and Agriculture; Group IV, Economic Trade and Transportation; Group V, Social Statistics; and Group VI, Finance and Tax. A November 30, 1941 Statistics Office report explains, "The Hollerith Gruppe area of operation stretches across all subject areas," adding that a major expansion plan would see staffing rise to 500 persons within a month.

The expansion was dependent on more leased machines, spare parts, company technicians, and a guaranteed supply of millions of additional IBM cards. Because backlogged orders for Hollerith machines required a year or more to deliver, IBM's long-term supply commitment almost certainly dated to the first days of World War II.

Indeed, that November 30, 1941 Statistics Office report was written just weeks after IBM's European general manager Werner Lier visited Berlin, in early October 1941, to oversee IBM NY's deployment of machines in Poland and other countries. In two detailed reports about European operations, written from Berlin and sent to Watson personally as well as the senior staff in New York, Lier reported moving a small group of Polish machines into Romania for the Jewish census there. But other Holleriths took their place.

That Krakow Statistics Office's November 30, 1941 report assured Berlin, "the installation of the equipment necessary for the work of the Hollerith Gruppe has commenced. It is estimated that the equipment will be ready for use by the end of the year, and that training of the prospective employees can begin." The Statistics Office also assured Berlin that its Hollerith Gruppe would employ equipment more modern than the old IBM machinery found in most pre-war Polish data agencies, allowing the Nazi office to launch a plethora of "large-scale censuses." Everything would be counted - and often. "The most important and complex census, the population and occupational census, has been in preparation since the beginning of the year," the report specified.

In addition to special censuses, the report enumerated a long list of "continuous statistical surveys," including those for population, domestic migration, infectious disease, and causes of death. Moreover, regular food and agriculture surveys were "coupled with summary surveys of the population and ethnic groups."

Tabulating food supplies against ethnic numbers allowed the Nazis to ration caloric intake as they subjected the Jewish community to progressive starvation. The Statistics Office's November 30, 1941 report concluded with the statement, "Our work is just beginning to bear fruit." Once the US entered the war, the Reich appointed Hermann Fellinger, a Nazi devoted to IBM, as enemy property custodian. He maintained the original staff and managers, keeping Watson Business Machines productive for the Reich and profitable for IBM NY.

The Polish subsidiary continued to operate efficiently, but now reported to IBM's Geneva office, and from there to New York. The company was not looted, its leased machines were not seized. "Royalties" were remitted to IBM through Geneva. Lease payments and profits were preserved in special accounts. After the war, IBM recovered all its Polish profits and machines.

Contacted about IBM's Polish subsidiary's involvement in the Polish Holocaust, IBM spokesman Carol Makovich in New York repeated the statement she issued more than a year ago - "IBM does not have much information about this period." No matter how many times asked, Makovich simply repeated the phrase.

That phrase is the key assertion in IBM's six-paragraph sole statement on the topic, asserting total lack of information, issued more than a year ago and still on its website. Makovich's obfuscation is in line with IBM's long history since World War II of obstructing or otherwise not cooperating with virtually every major independent author writing about its history.

But 21st century silence cannot alter the historical documentation. A tangle of subsidiaries throughout Europe helped IBM reap the benefits of its partnership with Nazi Germany. It was never about the anti-Semitism, never about the Nazism. It was always about the money. As far as IBM was concerned, "business" was its middle name.

The writer is the author of the Pulitzer Prize-nominated international best-seller *IBM and the Holocaust: the Strategic Alliance IBM between Nazi Germany and America's Most Powerful Corporation* (Crown Books 2001 and Three Rivers Press 2002), just out in paperback.

### **Illustration**

Caption: IBM custom-made this punch card for the SS Race Office. IBM was the sole source of all punch cards and spare business-machine parts for Nazi Germany, and serviced the machines on site. Edwin Black.