

= Rudolf Vrba =

Rudolf " Rudi " Vrba (11 September 1924 ? 27 March 2006) escaped from the Auschwitz concentration camp in German Nazi @-@ occupied Poland on 10 April 1944 , at the height of the Holocaust , and co @-@ wrote a report containing the most detailed information available at the time about the mass murder taking place inside the camp .

Originally from Slovakia , Vrba and fellow escapee Alfréd Wetzler fled Auschwitz three weeks after German forces invaded Hungary and began deporting its Jewish population to the camp . The 60 pages of information the men dictated to Jewish officials when they arrived in Slovakia on 24 April , which included that arrivals were being gassed and not resettled as expected , became known as the Vrba ? Wetzler report . While it confirmed material in earlier reports from Polish and other escapees , historian Miroslav Kárný writes that it was unique in its " unflinching detail . "

There was a delay of several weeks before the report was distributed widely enough to gain the attention of governments . Mass transports of Hungary 's Jews to Auschwitz began on 15 May 1944 at a rate of 12 @,@ 000 people a day . Most went straight to the gas chambers . Vrba argued until the end of his life that the deportees would have refused to board the trains had they known they were not being resettled . His position is generally not accepted by Holocaust historians .

Throughout June and into July 1944 , material from the Vrba ? Wetzler and earlier reports appeared in newspapers and radio broadcasts in the United States and Europe , particularly in Switzerland , prompting world leaders to appeal to Hungarian regent Miklós Horthy to halt the deportations . On 7 July 1944 he ordered an end to them , possibly fearing he would be held responsible after the war . By then 437 @,@ 000 Jews had been deported , constituting almost the entire Jewish population of the Hungarian countryside , but another 200 @,@ 000 in Budapest were saved .

= = Early life and arrest = =

Vrba was born Walter Rosenberg in Topo??any , Czechoslovakia . (He took the name Rudolf Vrba in April 1944 after his escape , and changed his name legally after the war .) His parents , Elias Rosenberg and Helena Rosenberg (née Gruenfeldová) , the latter from Zbehy , Slovakia , owned a steam sawmill in Jaklovce , near Margecany , Slovakia .

Because he was a Jew , Vrba was excluded at age 15 from the gymnasium (high school) in Bratislava , and went to work as a labourer . There were restrictions in Slovakia on Jews ' education , housing and travel , and they were required to wear a yellow badge . Available jobs went first to non @-@ Jews .

In 1942 the Slovak authorities announced that Jews were to be sent to " reservations " in Poland , starting with the young men . Then aged 17 , Vrba decided instead to join the Czechoslovak Army in England . At the Hungarian border the guards handed him back to the Slovak authorities , who in turn sent him to the Nováky transition camp , a holding camp for Jews awaiting deportation . He managed to escape briefly , but was caught by a policeman who , Vrba wrote , became suspicious when he saw that Vrba was wearing two pairs of socks .

= = Auschwitz = =

= = = Auschwitz I = = =

Vrba was deported on 15 June 1942 to the Majdanek concentration camp , a Nazi @-@ German camp in Poland , and on 30 June was sent to Auschwitz I , the administrative centre of the Auschwitz camps , where he was housed in Block 4 . He was assigned to work in the Aufräumungskommando in Auschwitz II @-@ Birkenau , the extermination camp , which lay two @-@ and @-@ a @-@ half miles (4 km) away from the main camp . Property from new inmates was taken to storage facilities Effektenlager I and II there , and repackaged , much of it to be sent to Germany .

The facilities occupied several dozen barracks in the Big sector of Auschwitz II . The prisoners called the barracks Canada I and Canada II , because they contained food , clothes and medicine . It was thanks to this access that Vrba was able to stay healthy .

The work included sorting through the arrivals ' property on the Judenrampe at Auschwitz II , where trains carrying Jews arrived , and removing the dead from the trains . Some new prisoners were selected to work as slave labour , but most went straight to the gas chamber . Vrba worked there from 18 August 1942 until 7 June 1943 . In 1985 he told Claude Lanzmann , for the documentary film Shoah , that he had seen around 200 trains arrive during those 10 months .

= = = Auschwitz II = = =

From 15 January 1943 Vrba was housed in Block 16 of Auschwitz II , where he continued to work in the " Canada " facility , now tattooed as prisoner no . 44070 . He tried to remember the numbers he saw arriving and the place of origin of each transport . Many had brought clothes for different seasons , as well as utensils , suggesting they believed the stories about resettlement . This strengthened Vrba 's conviction that he had to escape .

In June 1943 he was given the job of registrar in the quarantine section at Birkenau sector B II , which allowed him to speak to deportees selected as slave labour . He had his own office with a desk , chair and bunk bed . From the window he could see the lorries driving towards the gas chambers , and estimated that 10 percent of each transport was selected to work and the rest killed . By April 1944 he calculated that 1 @, @ 750 @, @ 000 Jews had been killed , a figure higher than that accepted by historians , but which decades later he insisted was accurate .

= = = Hungarian Jews = = =

On 15 January 1944 a Polish kapo told Vrba , according to the latter 's memoir , that a million Hungarian Jews would soon arrive at Auschwitz , and that a railway line was being built straight to the crematoria . Vrba said he also overheard SS guards discuss how they would soon have Hungarian salami . When Jews from the Netherlands arrived , he wrote , they brought cheese , French Jews halva and Greek Jews olives , and now it was Hungarian salami . Although Vrba is clear that he overheard these conversations , and that warning the Hungarian community was one of the motives for his escape , there is no mention of Hungarian Jews in the Vrba ? Wetzler report . The discrepancy has led several historians , including Miroslav Kárný and Randolph L. Braham , to dispute Vrba 's later recollections , though not the report itself .

= = = Escape = = =

In Birkenau Vrba found an acquaintance from Trnava , Alfréd Wetzler (prisoner no . 29162) , who was working in the mortuary . The men hatched an escape plan , and on 7 April 1944 , with the help of two other prisoners , they hid inside a pile of wood stacked between the inner and outer perimeter fences , sprinkling the area with tobacco soaked in gasoline to fool the dogs . According to Kárný , at 20 : 33 that evening SS @-@ Sturmbannführer Fritz Hartjenstein , the Birkenau commander , learned by teleprinter that two Jews were missing .

The men hid for three nights and throughout the fourth day . They knew from escape attempts by others that the guards would keep searching for three days . Wetzler wrote in his memoir that they tied strips of flannel across their mouths and tightened them whenever they felt a tickle in their throats . At 9 pm on 10 April , they crawled out of the wood pile and headed south toward Slovakia 80 miles (130 km) away , walking parallel to the So?a river .

= = Vrba ? Wetzler report = =

= = = Writing the report = = =

The men crossed the Polish @-@ Slovakian border on 21 April 1944 . They went to see a local doctor in ?adca , Dr. Pollack , someone Vrba knew from his time in the first transit camp . Pollack had a contact in the Slovak Judenrat (Jewish Council) , which was operating an underground group known as the " Working Group , " and arranged for them to send people from their headquarters in Bratislava to meet the men . Pollack was distressed to learn the probable fate of his parents and siblings , who had been deported in 1942 .

Vrba and Wetzler spent the night in ?adca in the home of a relative of the rabbi Leo Baeck , and the next day , 24 April , met the chairman of the Jewish Council , Dr. Oscar Neumann , a German @-@ speaking lawyer . Neumann placed the men in different rooms in a former old people 's home and interviewed them separately over three days . Vrba writes that he began by drawing the inner layout of Auschwitz I and II , and the position of the ramp in relation to the two camps . He described the internal organization of the camps , how Jews were being used as slave labour for Krupp , Siemens , IG Farben and D.A.W. , and the mass murder in gas chambers of those who had been chosen for Sonderbehandlung , or " special treatment . "

The report was written and re @-@ written several times . Wetzler wrote the first part , Vrba the third , and the two wrote the second part together . They then worked on the whole thing together , re @-@ writing it six times . Neumann 's aide , Oscar Krasniansky , an engineer and stenographer who later took the name Oskar Isaiah Karmiel , translated it from Slovak into German with the help of Gisela Steiner . They produced a 40 @-@ page report in German , which was completed by Thursday , 27 April 1944 . Vrba wrote that the report was also translated into Hungarian . The original Slovak version was not preserved .

= = = Content = = =

The report contained a detailed description of the geography and management of the camps , and of how the prisoners lived and died . It listed the transports that had arrived at Auschwitz since 1942 , their place of origin , and the numbers " selected " for work or the gas chambers . Kárný writes that the report provides details known only to prisoners , including , for example , that discharge forms were filled out for prisoners who were gassed , indicating that death rates in the camp were actively falsified .

It also contained sketches and information about the layout of the gas chambers . In a sworn deposition for the trial of SS @-@ Obersturmbannführer Adolf Eichmann in 1961 , and in his book I Cannot Forgive (1964) , Vrba said that he and Wetzler obtained the information about the gas chambers and crematoria from Sonderkommando Filip Müller and his colleagues who worked there . Müller confirmed this in his Eyewitness Auschwitz (1979) . Auschwitz scholar Robert Jan van Pelt wrote in 2002 that the description contains errors , but that " given the conditions under which information was obtained , the lack of architectural training of Vrba and Wetzlar [sic] , and the situation in which the report was compiled , one would become suspicious if it did not contain errors Given the circumstances , the composite ' crematorium ' reconstructed by two escapees without any architectural training is as good as one could expect . " The report offered the following description :

At present there are four crematoria in operation at BIRKENAU , two large ones , I and II , and two smaller ones , III and IV . Those of type I and II consist of 3 parts , i.e. , : (A) the furnace room ; (B) the large halls ; and (C) the gas chamber . A huge chimney rises from the furnace room around which are grouped nine furnaces , each having four openings . Each opening can take three normal corpses at once and after an hour and a half the bodies are completely burned . This corresponds to a daily capacity of about 2 @, @ 000 bodies . Next to this is a large " reception hall " which is arranged so as to give the impression of the antechamber of a bathing establishment . It holds 2 @, @ 000 people and apparently there is a similar waiting room of the floor below . From there a door and a few steps lead down into the very long and narrow gas chamber . The walls of this chamber are also camouflaged with simulated entries to shower rooms in order to mislead the victims . This roof is fitted with three traps which can be hermetically closed from the outside . A

track leads from the gas chamber to the furnace room .

The gassing takes place as follows : the unfortunate victims are brought into hall (B) where they are told to undress . To complete the fiction that they are going to bathe , each person receives a towel and a small piece of soap issued by two men clad in white coats . They are then crowded into the gas chamber (C) in such numbers there is , of course , only standing room . To compress this crowd into the narrow space , shots are often fired to induce those already at the far end to huddle still closer together .

When everybody is inside , the heavy doors are closed . Then there is a short pause , presumably to allow the room temperature to rise to a certain level , after which SS men with gas masks climb on the roof , open the traps , and shake down a preparation in powder form out of tin cans labeled " CYKLON " " For use against vermin , " which is manufactured by a Hamburg concern . It is presumed that this is a " CYANIDE " mixture of some sort which turns into gas at a certain temperature . After three minutes everyone in the chamber is dead . No one is known to have survived this ordeal , although it was not uncommon to discover signs of life after the primitive measures employed in the Birch Wood . The chamber is then opened , aired , and the " special squad " carts the bodies on flat trucks to the furnace rooms where the burning takes place . Crematoria III and IV work on nearly the same principle , but their capacity is only half as large . Thus the total capacity of the four cremating and gassing plants at BIRKENAU amounts to about 6 @, @ 000 daily .

= = = Distribution = = =

The dates on which the report was passed to certain individuals has become a matter of importance within Holocaust historiography . This is partly because there is a question as to what the Hungarian government knew about the gas chambers before it facilitated the mass deportations , which began on 15 May 1944 , and partly because Vrba alleged that lives were lost because the report was not distributed quickly enough by Jewish leaders , particularly Rudolf Kastner of the Budapest Aid and Rescue Committee .

Israeli historian Yehuda Bauer writes that Oscar Krasniansky of the Jewish Council , who translated the report into German from Slovak as Vrba and Wetzler were writing and dictating it , gave conflicting statements after the war . In the first , he said he had handed the report to Kastner on 26 April 1944 during the latter 's visit to Bratislava , but Bauer writes that the report was not finished until 27 April . In another statement , he said he had given it to Kastner on 28 April in Bratislava , but Hansi Brand , an Aid and Rescue Committee worker who was in a relationship with Kastner , said that Kastner was not in Bratislava until August . Bauer writes that it is nevertheless clear from Kastner 's post @-@ war statements that he had early access to the report , though perhaps not in April as Krasniansky claimed . Randolph L. Braham writes that Kastner had a copy by 3 May when he visited Kolozsvár (Cluj) , his home town . Kastner 's reasons for not making the document public are unknown , but Vrba believed until the end of his life that Kastner withheld it in order not to jeopardize negotiations between the Aid and Rescue Committee and Adolf Eichmann , the SS officer in charge of the transport of Jews out of Hungary .

= = = Deportations continue = = =

Arnold Rosin (prisoner no . 29858) and Czesław Mordowicz (prisoner no . 84216) escaped from Auschwitz on 27 May 1944 and arrived in Slovakia on 6 June , the day of the Normandy landings . Hearing about the invasion of Normandy and believing the war was over , they got drunk to celebrate , using dollars they had smuggled out of Auschwitz . They were promptly arrested for violating the currency laws , and spent eight days in prison before the Jewish Council paid their fines .

Rosin and Mordowicz already knew Vrba and Wetzler . Vrba wrote that anyone who survived more than a year in Auschwitz was a senior member of the " old hands Mafia , " and all were known to each other . On 15 June Rosin and Mordowicz were interviewed by Oscar Krasniansky , the

engineer who had translated the Vrba ? Wetzler report into German . They told him that , between 15 and 27 May 1944 , 100 @, @ 000 Hungarian Jews had arrived at Birkenau , and that most were killed on arrival , apparently with no knowledge of what was about to happen to them . Vrba concluded that the report had been suppressed .

= = = Deportations halted = = =

Braham writes that the report was taken to Switzerland by Florian Manoliu of the Romanian Legation in Bern and given to George Mantello , a Jewish businessman from Transylvania who was working as the first secretary of the El Salvador consulate in Geneva . It was thanks to Mantello that the report received , in the Swiss press , its first wide coverage . According to David Kranzler , Mantello asked for the help of the Swiss @-@ Hungarian Students ' League to make 50 mimeographed copies of the Vrba ? Wetzler and two shorter Auschwitz reports (jointly known as the Auschwitz Protocols , which by 23 June 1944 he had distributed to the Swiss government and Jewish groups . The students made thousands of other copies , which were passed to other students and MPs .

On 19 June Richard Lichtheim of the Jewish Agency in Geneva , who had received a copy of the report from Mantello , wrote to the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem to say that they knew " what has happened and where it has happened , " and reported the Vrba ? Wetzler figure that 90 per cent of Jews arriving at Birkenau were being killed . Vrba and Oscar Krasniasnky met Vatican Swiss legate Monsignor Mario Martilotti at the Svätý Jur monastery on 20 June . Martilotti had seen the report and questioned Vrba about it for six hours .

As a result of the coverage in the Swiss press , details began to appear elsewhere , including the New York Times and BBC World Service . Daniel Brigham , the New York Times correspondent in Geneva , published a story on 3 July 1944 , " Inquiry Confirms Nazi Death Camps , " and on 6 July a second , " Two Death Camps Places of Horror ; German Establishments for Mass Killings of Jews Described by Swiss . " Braham writes that several appeals were made to Horthy , including by the Swiss government , President Franklin D. Roosevelt , Gustaf V of Sweden and , on 25 June , Pope Pius XII , possibly after Martilotti passed on the report . On 26 June Richard Lichtheim of the Jewish Agency in Geneva sent a telegram to England calling on the Allies to hold members of the Hungarian government personally responsible for the killings . The cable was intercepted by the Hungarian government and shown to Prime Minister Döme Sztójay , who passed it to Horthy . Horthy ordered an end to the deportations on 7 July and they stopped two days later .

That the Germans were using gas chambers was confirmed on 23 July , when the Majdanek concentration camp near Lublin , Poland , was captured by Soviet soldiers , with its gas chambers intact and 820 @, @ 000 shoes . Auschwitz itself was liberated by the 28th and 106th corps of the 1st Ukrainian Front of the Red Army on 27 January 1945 . Van Pelt writes that the SS learned the lesson of Majdanek and tried to destroy some of the evidence , but the Red Army nevertheless found what was left of four crematoria , as well as 5 @, @ 525 pairs of women 's shoes and 38 @, @ 000 pairs of men 's , 348 @, @ 820 men 's suits , 836 @, @ 225 items of women 's clothing , large numbers of toothbrushes , glasses and dentures , and seven tons of hair .

= = Vrba 's allegations = =

= = = " Blood for goods " proposals = = =

The timing of the report 's distribution remains a source of controversy . For reasons that remain unclear it was not distributed widely until several weeks after Vrba 's escape in April . Between 15 May and 7 July 1944 , 437 @, @ 000 Hungarian Jews (12 @, @ 000 a day) were sent by train to Auschwitz . Vrba believed they would have run or fought had they known they were being sent to their deaths .

He alleged that the report had been withheld deliberately by Rudolf Kastner and the Jewish @-@

Hungarian Aid and Rescue Committee in Budapest in order not to jeopardize complex , and ultimately futile , negotiations with Adolf Eichmann . Eichmann had suggested that the committee arrange an exchange of up to one million Jews for money and trucks from the US or UK , the so @-@ called " blood for goods " proposal . Vrba wrote later that the Jewish communities in Slovakia and Hungary had placed their trust either in secular Zionist leaders such as Kastner , or in Orthodox Jewish leaders . The Nazis were aware of this , Vrba wrote , which is why they lured those members of the community into negotiations , supposedly designed to lead to the release of Jews . He maintained that the Nazis intended only to placate the Jewish leadership to avoid panic , which would have slowed down the transports .

= = = Kastner train = = =

The Aid and Rescue Committee 's first meeting with Eichmann was on 25 April 1944 . On 28 April the first trainload of Hungarian Jews left for Auschwitz , although not as part of the mass transports . At around the same time Kastner is believed to have received a copy of the Vrba ? Wetzler report , though possibly in German and not yet translated .

Vrba alleged that Kastner failed to distribute the report in order not to jeopardize the Eichmann deal , but acted on it privately by arranging for a trainload of 1 @,@ 684 Hungarian Jews to escape to Switzerland on the Kastner train , which left Budapest on 30 June . According to John Conway , the escaping party consisted of " themselves , their relatives , a coterie of Zionists , some distinguished Jewish intellectuals , and a number of wealthy Jewish entrepreneurs . " Other scholars dispute this emphasis . Ladislaus Löb writes that the party also included over 200 children under 14 , many of them orphans , and hundreds of ordinary people such as teachers and nurses . Yehuda Bauer argues that Kastner put his own family on the train to show the other passengers that it was safe , and that in any event he could hardly be expected to exclude his family .

The allegations against Kastner became part of a libel case in Jerusalem in 1954 , after Malchiel Gruenwald , an Israeli hotelier , accused him in a self @-@ published pamphlet of being a Nazi collaborator . Because Kastner was by then a senior Israeli civil servant , the Israeli government sued Gruenwald . Although Kastner was later exonerated by the Supreme Court , the lower court ruled against the government , and Kastner was assassinated in March 1957 as a result of the ensuing publicity .

= = = Response = = =

Bauer writes that , by the time the Vrba ? Wetzler report was prepared , it was already too late for anything to alter the Nazis ' deportation plans . He cautions about the need to distinguish between the receipt of information and its " internalization " ? the point at which information is deemed worthy of action ? arguing that this is a complicated process : " During the Holocaust , countless individuals received information and rejected it , suppressed it , or rationalized about it , were thrown into despair without any possibility of acting on it , or seemingly internalized it and then behaved as though it had never reached them . " Bauer argues that Vrba 's " wild attacks on Kastner and on the Slovak underground are ahistorical and simply wrong from the start ... " Vrba , in response , alleged that Bauer was one of the Israeli historians who had downplayed Vrba 's role in Holocaust historiography in order to defend the Israeli establishment .

= = After the report = =

= = = Resistance activities = = =

After he handed his information to the Slovakian Jewish Council in April 1944 , Vrba said Krasniansky had assured him that the report was in the right hands . Vrba and Wetzler spent the next six weeks in Liptovský Mikuláš , and continued to make and distribute copies of their report

whenever they could . The Slovak Judenrat gave Vrba papers in the name of Rudolf Vrba , showing that he was a " pure Aryan " going back three generations , and supported him financially to the tune of 200 Slovak crowns a week , equivalent to an average worker 's salary , and as Vrba wrote , " sufficient to sustain me in an illegal life in Bratislava . " On 29 August 1944 the Slovak Army rose up against the Nazis and the reestablishment of Czechoslovakia was announced . Vrba joined the Czechoslovak partisan units in September 1944 , and was later awarded the Czechoslovak Medal of Bravery .

= = = After the war = = =

In the summer of 1944 he met a childhood friend Gerta ; they married (she took the surname Vrbová , the female version of Vrba) and had two daughters , though the marriage failed shortly thereafter . The couple moved to Prague in 1945 , where Vrba attended the Prague Technical University . In 1951 he received his doctorate in chemistry and biochemistry (Dr. Tech . Sc .) for a thesis entitled " On the metabolism of butyric acid . " This was followed by post @-@ doctoral research at the Czechoslovak Academy of Science , where he received his C.Sc. in 1956 .

In 1958 Vrba received an invitation to an international conference in Israel , and while there he defected . He worked for the next two years at the Weizmann Institute of Science in Rehovot . He said later that he could not continue to live in Israel because the same men who had , in his view , betrayed the Jewish community in Hungary were now in positions of power there . He decided in 1960 to move instead to England , and became a British citizen in 1966 . In England he worked for two years in the Neuropsychiatric Research Unit in Carshalton , Surrey , and seven years for the British Medical Research Council .

On 11 May 1960 Eichmann was captured by the Mossad in Buenos Aires and taken to Jerusalem to stand trial . Vrba contacted Alan Bestic of the Daily Herald in the UK , and his story was published in five installments over one week in March 1961 , on the eve of Eichmann 's trial . Vrba submitted a statement in evidence against Eichmann to the Israeli Embassy in London , and with Bestic 's help wrote his memoir , I Cannot Forgive (1964) , republished as Escape from Auschwitz (1964) and I Escaped from Auschwitz (2002) . He also gave evidence at one of the Frankfurt Auschwitz trials in 1964 .

= = = Move to Canada , Zündel trial and death = = =

Vrba moved to Canada in 1967 , where he worked for the Medical Research Council of Canada from 1967 to 1973 . He became a Canadian citizen in 1972 . From 1973 to 1975 he was a research fellow at Harvard Medical School , focusing on cancer research , where he met his second wife , Robin . They returned to Vancouver , where she became a real @-@ estate agent and he an associate professor of pharmacology at the University of British Columbia . He worked there until the early 1990s , publishing over 50 research papers on the chemistry of the brain , diabetes and cancer .

Vrba testified in January 1985 at the seven @-@ week trial in Toronto of Holocaust denier Ernst Zündel , which ended with Zündel 's conviction for knowingly publishing false material about the Holocaust . Vrba acknowledged that several passages in I Cannot Forgive (1964) were based on secondhand accounts . According to his deposition for Eichmann 's trial in 1961 , he obtained his information about the gas chambers and crematoria from Sonderkommando Filip Müller and others who worked there , something that Müller confirmed in 1979 . Zündel 's lawyer , Doug Christie , accused Vrba of lying about Auschwitz and asked whether he had seen anyone gassed . Vrba replied that he had watched people being taken into the buildings and had seen SS officers throw in gas canisters after them :

Therefore , I concluded it was not a kitchen or a bakery , but it was a gas chamber . It is possible they are still there or that there is a tunnel and they are now in China . Otherwise , they were gassed .

Vrba died of cancer on 27 March 2006 in Vancouver . He was survived by his first wife , Gerta , his

second wife , Robin , his daughter , Zuza Vrbová Jackson , and his grandchildren , Hannah and Jan. He was pre -deceased by his elder daughter , Dr. Helena Vrbová . His wife made a gift of his papers to the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library in New York . Vrba 's fellow escapee , Alfréd Wetzler , died in Bratislava , Slovakia , on 8 February 1988 . Wetzler was the author of *Escape From Hell : The True Story of the Auschwitz Protocol* (2007) , first published as *o Dante nevidel* (1963) under the pseudonym Jozef Lánik .

== Reception ==

=== Documentaries , books ===

Several documentaries have told Vrba 's story , including *Genocide* (1973) , directed by Michael Darlow for ITV in the UK ; *Auschwitz and the Allies* (1982) , directed by Rex Bloomstein and Martin Gilbert for the BBC ; and *Shoah* (1985) , directed by Claude Lanzmann . He was featured in *Witness to Auschwitz* (1990) , directed by Robin Taylor for the CBC in Canada ; *Auschwitz : The Great Escape* (2007) for the UK 's Channel Five ; and *Escape From Auschwitz* (2008) for PBS in the United States .

Vrba featured in an essay by George Klein , the Hungarian -Swedish biologist , " The Ultimate Fear of the Traveller Returning from Hell , " in Klein 's *Pietà* (1992) , and was the focus of Ruth Linn 's *Escaping Auschwitz* (2004) . An academic conference was held in New York in April 2011 to discuss the impact of the Vrba -Wetzler and other Auschwitz reports , resulting in a book , *The Auschwitz Reports and the Holocaust in Hungary* (2011) , edited by Randolph L. Braham and William vanden Heuvel and published by Columbia University Press .

=== Awards ===

In 1998 , at the instigation of Ruth Linn , the University of Haifa awarded Vrba an honorary doctorate . He received the Order of the White Double Cross , 1st class , from the Slovakian government in 2007 . British historian Martin Gilbert supported an unsuccessful campaign in 1992 to have Vrba awarded the Order of Canada .

The Czech One World festival annually presents the " Rudolf Vrba Award " for original documentaries that draw attention to an unknown theme about human rights . The award was established in Vrba 's name by Mary Robinson , then United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights , and Václav Havel , then President of the Czech Republic .

=== Discrepancies ===

Several historians have argued that Vrba embellished his later accounts , though not the Vrba -Wetzler report itself . He wrote in his memoir in 1963 that he had overheard SS officers in Auschwitz discuss how a new area was being constructed and that they would soon have " Hungarian salami ... by the ton , " allegedly a reference to the imminent arrival of Hungarian Jews , but he did not mention this in his report in April 1944 . Although Vrba maintained that warning the Hungarian community was one of the motives for his escape , the report said : " Work is now proceeding on a still larger compound which is to be added later on to the already existing camp . The purpose of this extensive planning is not known to us . " It also stated : " When we left on April 7 , 1944 we heard that large convoys of Greek Jews were expected . "

Miroslav Kárný wrote in 1998 :

It is generally accepted that at the time Vrba and Wetzler were preparing their escape , it was known in Auschwitz that annihilation mechanisms were being perfected in order to kill hundreds of thousands of Hungary 's Jews . It was this knowledge , according to Vrba , that became the main motive for their escape But in fact , there is no mention in the Vrba and Wetzler report that preparations were under way for the annihilation of Hungary 's Jews If Vrba and Wetzler

considered it necessary to record rumors about the expected arrival of Greece 's Jewish transports , then why wouldn 't they have recorded a rumor ? had they known it ? about the expected transports of hundreds of thousands of Hungary 's Jews ?

Kárný argues that , long after the war was over , Vrba wanted to testify about the deportations out of a sense of longing , to force the world to face the magnitude of the Nazis ' crimes . The suspicion is that this led to a degree of embellishment in later accounts . In a later edition of his memoirs , Vrba responded that he is certain the reference to the imminent Hungarian deportations was in the original Slovakian version of the Vrba ? Wetzler report , some of which he wrote by hand , but which did not survive . He wrote that he recalled Oscar Krasniansky of the Slovakian Jewish Council , who translated the report into German , arguing that only actual deaths should be recorded , and not speculation , to lend the report maximum credibility . Vrba speculated that this was the reason Krasniansky omitted the references to Hungary from the German translation , which was the version that was copied around the world .

= = = Survivor versus expert discourse = = =

Vrba was criticized in 2001 in a collection of articles in Hebrew , *Leadership under Duress : The Working Group in Slovakia , 1942 ? 1944* , by a group of leading Israeli historians with ties to the Slovak community , including Yehuda Bauer , Hanna Yablonka , Gila Fatran and Livia Rothkirchen . The introduction by Giora Amir describes as " a bunch of mockers , pseudo @-@ historians and historians " those who , like Vrba , argue that the Slovakian Jewish Council may have collaborated with the Nazis by concealing what was happening in Auschwitz . Amir writes that the " baseless " accusation was given credence when the University of Haifa awarded an honorary doctorate " to the head of these mockers , Peter [sic] Vrba . " Amir continues :

The heroism of this person , who together with the late Alfréd Wetzler , was among the first to escape from Auschwitz , is beyond doubt . But the fact that , just because he was an Auschwitz prisoner endowed with personal heroism , he has crowned himself as knowledgeable to judge all those involved in the noble work of rescue , and accuse them falsely , deeply disturbs us , the Czech community .

The criticism of Vrba stems from the tension between what Ruth Linn calls survivor and expert discourse . Bauer referred to Vrba 's memoir as " not a memoir in the usual sense , " alleging that it " contains excerpts of conversations of which there is no chance that they are accurate and it has elements of a second @-@ hand story that does not necessarily correspond with reality . " When writing about himself and his personal experiences , Vrba 's account is an important and true one , Bauer wrote , but he also argued that Vrba was not justified in seeing himself as an expert on Holocaust history . Vrba often dismissed the opinion of historians . Regarding the numbers killed at Auschwitz , he said that Bauer and historian Raul Hilberg did not know enough about the history of Auschwitz .

Linn argued in 2004 that certain Israeli historians had misrepresented Vrba 's story . Vrba believed they had sought to erase his story from Holocaust historiography because of his views about Kastner and the Hungarian Judenrat , some of whom went on to hold prominent positions in Israel . Linn wrote that Vrba 's and Wetzler 's names are omitted or their contribution minimized in Hebrew textbooks : standard histories refer to the escape by " two young Slovak Jews , " " two chaps , " or " two young people , " and represent Vrba and Wetzler as emissaries of the Polish underground in Auschwitz . Vrba 's book was not translated into Hebrew until 1998 , 35 years after its publication in English . Ruth Linn arranged for the first publication of Vrba ' memoirs and the Vrba @-@ Wetzler Report in Hebrew by the Haifa University Press , after it was rejected by Yad Vashem . Prior to this date , there was no English or Hebrew version there of the Vrba ? Wetzler report , an issue the museum attributed to lack of funding . There was a Hungarian translation , but it did not note the names of its authors and , Linn wrote , could be found only in a file that dealt with Rudolf Kastner .

In 2005 Uri Dromi of the Israel Democracy Institute responded that there were at least four Israeli books on the Holocaust that mention Vrba , and that Wetzler 's testimony is recounted at length in Livia Rothkirchen 's *Hurban yahadut Slovakia (" The Destruction of Slovakian Jewry ")* , published

by Yad Vashem in 1961 . Linn , who cites Rothkirchen his her book , responded that most books mentioning Vrba were published after the publication of his memoirs in 1998 (Linn 's response to Dromi) , and that earlier mentions were minimal and failed to relate to the Hebrew version of the Vrba @-@ Wetzler report . Robert Rozett , head librarian at Yad Vashem and author of the entry on the " Auschwitz Report " in Encyclopedia of the Holocaust , said of the Vrba controversy in 2005 : " There are people who come into the subject from a certain angle and think that they 've uncovered the truth . A historian who deals seriously with the subject understands that the truth is complex and multifaceted . "

= = Selected works = =