

Harry J. Fransman

Title: *The Devil's Greed: Twelve Million Eyes and Trillions of Tears*

Author: Harry J Fransman

Publisher: Self-Published

Place of Publication: Sydney

Year of Publication: 2000

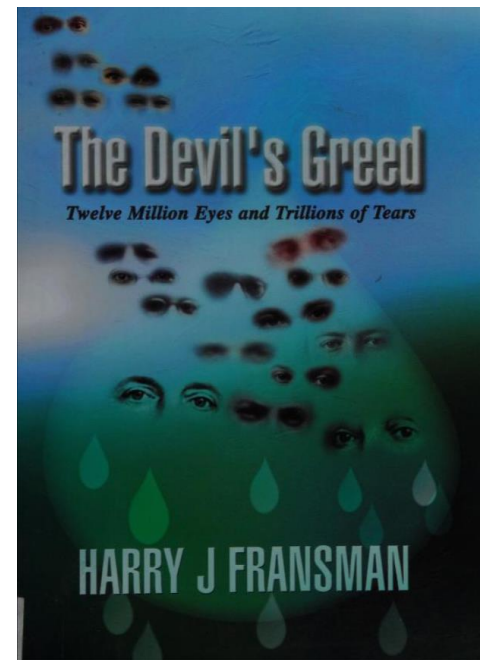
Location of Book: Melbourne Holocaust Museum, Sydney Jewish Museum and other public libraries.

Cities/towns/camps: Netherlands: Rotterdam, The Hague, IJbenheer (Ybenheer) labour camp, Westerbork transit camps; Poland: Annaberg, Blechhammer, Gross-Rosen; Germany: Leipzig, Mühlau, Wartburg-Eisenach; Indonesia; Australia: Sydney.

Note: those cities/towns/camps underlined are those which are most central to the narrative.

Genre: Memoir

Key events/experiences: concentration camp; death march; false identity.



The Devil's Greed is the 249-page memoir of Dutch survivor Harry Fransman. After surviving the bombardment of Rotterdam, Harry spent three years in the slave labour camp Blechhammer where he was worked and starved to the verge of death. In January 1945, he endured a 13-day death march to Gross-Rosen before escaping and hiding in Leipzig until liberation.

Pages 1-17 recount the author's upbringing in Rotterdam and trip to Switzerland in 1938. Pages 18-53 describe the bombing of Rotterdam and Nazi occupation, and offer reflections on the history of antisemitism. Pages 54-117 cover his deportation to Ybenheer, Westerbork and St Annaberg in 1942 and three-year internment in the Blechhammer. Pages 112-43 detail the death march to Gross-Rosen, his escape near Leipzig, and survival as a vagrant until liberation. Pages 144-82 recount his post-war recovery in Germany, return to the Netherlands, and psychological struggles. Pages 183-211 cover his service in the Dutch army and emigration to Australia in 1949. Pages 212-49 discuss Australian life and offer reflections on trauma and its legacy. The memoir includes 108 interspersed historical photographs and documents.

Harry Joseph Fransman was born 16 September 1922 in Rotterdam, the youngest of five children born to Paulina (née Goldstein) and Bernard Fransman. He had three older sisters (Bep, Bella and Caroline) and an older brother (Jonas). His father was a celebrated pastry chef who owned a bakery.

In May 1940, when Harry was seventeen, Nazi Germany invaded the Netherlands and Rotterdam fell under heavy German bombardment. Harry narrowly survived by sheltering in an elevator when the men's store where he worked was hit and collapsed,

killing all his colleagues. His father's bakery was also destroyed, and his brother-in-law was killed. The ruined city was soon occupied by German troops and the Fransman family relocated to The Hague, where they opened another bakery. Despite growing antisemitic restrictions, the bakery remained successful and was even frequented by German soldiers.

On 19 June 1942, Harry was arrested and sent to the Ybenheer labour camp in the northern Netherlands. He was soon transferred to Westerbork transit camp and then to St Annaberg, a forced labour camp in Silesia. In October 1942, he was deported to Blechhammer, an industrial slave labour camp in Upper Silesia.

Initially operated by civilian contractors, the camp served the Hydrierwerke synthetic fuel plant. Prisoners were forced to perform hard labour, including trench digging, cable-laying, unloading cement, and transporting heavy materials, all under harsh conditions and with inadequate clothing, tools, and nutrition.

Although not yet officially part of the Nazi camp system, life in Blechhammer was exceedingly brutal. Prisoners were subjected to beatings, public floggings, and executions for minor infractions. Sanitation was poor and epidemics of lice and dysentery were common. Harry suffered from malnutrition and developed painful sores on his legs. After forming a close relationship with a Polish-Jewish girl named Zosia who worked in the kitchen, Harry was able to secure extra food and warmer clothing, which significantly aided his survival. He remained in Blechhammer for over two years, making him one of the earliest and longest-serving prisoners there.

In April 1944, Blechhammer became a satellite camp of Auschwitz III-Monowitz after it was placed under SS administrative control and designated an official labour camp. Although beatings continued, material conditions improved slightly under SS administration. In mid-1944, the factories were subjected to Allied bombing raids, resulting in many prisoner casualties.

As Soviet troops approached in January 1945, Blechhammer was evacuated. The remaining prisoners were given a ration of bread and margarine and sent on a 13-day death march to Gross-Rosen where many died from cold, hunger, or execution. Three days after reaching Gross-Rosen, Harry and others were loaded onto open cattle wagons destined for Buchenwald. The carriage filled with corpses as prisoners perished during the journey. As the train neared Leipzig, Harry jumped from the slow-moving carriage and slipped away under cover of darkness.

Wearing civilian clothes supplied by Zosia, Harry pretended to be a foreign labourer who had escaped from the Russians. He sought refuge from local civilians, including members of the Hitler Youth, who provided food and shelter. After being issued temporary identity documents and a "Free Workers Passport," Harry was taken to Leipzig where he was given accommodation and work with other Dutch and Belgian foreign labourers. As Allied air raids intensified, Harry wandered the streets of Leipzig, living hand to mouth, sleeping in bombed-out buildings and relying on the aid of strangers.

In March 1945, sick with fever and typhoid, he was discovered by Red Cross workers and taken to hospital. After recovering, he travelled to the nearby town of Penig where a local woman brought him to her home in Mühlau to work as a farmhand. He remained there until the area was liberated by American forces a few weeks later.

Following liberation, Harry was taken to a US military hospital and DP camp in Wartburg-Eisenach. In late May, he was sent on a repatriation flight to Paris before journeying by train to The Hague. There, he learned that his parents and brother had been murdered, as had 40 members of his extended family. Only his sisters Bep and Caroline survived. Overcome with grief, he suffered a breakdown and was admitted to a convalescent home.

After his recovery, Harry joined the Dutch army and was briefly stationed in Indonesia. In 1949, he emigrated to Sydney where he eventually became a volunteer-guide at the Sydney Jewish Museum. In 1951, he married Hannie. They had two children, Paul and Anna.

The Devil's Greed offers a vivid and unflinching account of the author's life and wartime experiences that provides extensive description of daily life in Blechhammer from its early establishment to its evacuation. By contrast, less detail is given regarding Ybenheer, Westerbork, and St Annaberg. Boldly written, the author also candidly explores his personal life, relationships and psychological struggles.

Beyond his personal experiences, the narrative also ranges into broader Holocaust history. Drawing on a range of primary and secondary sources of varying reliability, the memoir alternates between autobiography and historical exegesis – offering commentary on the history of antisemitism and including dramatic second-hand descriptions of camps and ghettos, including Babi Yar, Sobibor and Majdanek. In so doing, the memoir often blends witness and historical interpretation, providing valuable insight into the relationship between private and shared memory. However, it incorporates some sensational, controversial, and unverified claims, and occasional historical errors.