

THE FATE OF A JEWISH ENGINEER ON THE HEDJAZ RAILWAY.

Alfred Gottwaldt of Berlin has prepared a mini-biography of Paul Levy, from which the following is taken and translated:-

Paul Josef Levy was born on 17th. November 1876 in Stettin, second son of the businessman Julius Levy (1842-1920) and his wife Therese. Following training at a Technical High School Levy, like others of his generation (for example Julius Dormmüller, 1869-1945, the later Reichsbahn-Generaldirektor, who went to China) spent some time working abroad.

The Hedjaz Railway was constructed by the German engineer Heinrich August Meissner (Meissner Pasha) (1862 - 1940), who had been active in the Ottoman Empire since 1887. His activities strengthened the good relations between Sultan Abdülhamid II and the Kaiser and provided German manufacturers with work. The main line was 1,322km long from Damascus to Medina, and had over 1,500 bridges and culverts, two tunnels and a large number of stations. Officially the line was projected by the Ministry of Religious Foundations of Caliphs and Sultans of the Ottoman Empire, which at the same time wished to limit British influence on the Red Sea and the Suez Canal. In 1909 the Sultan was deposed and construction of the final 450km. to Mecca was abandoned.

Construction of this ambitious project began in 1900, and on 1st. Sept. 1908 almost the entire line could be taken into service. At an average speed of 30km/h a journey end-to-end took some three days, as opposed to six weeks by camel. A branch from Dar'a in Syria to the Mediterranean harbour at Haifa had been opened in 1904.

Paul Levy was a Machine Constructor, not a building engineer or an architect. Following his Abitur, probably in Danzig, he completed his studies in machinery construction in 1899. From 1904 he was presumably active in the depots and locomotive depots of the Hedjaz line. A proper main workshops at Damascus was only completed in July 1908. The low permitted axle loading of 10 tonnes, hefty gradients of up to 20 Promille and tight curves of 125m radius placed the builders under especially complex demands. The early locomotives came from the German builders of Hartmann, Henschel, Hohenzollern, Krauss and Jung, as well as Winterthur. Hermann Keller of Henschel & Sohn designed in 1908 a 2-4-6-0 Mallet tender locomotive. It took much effort to get a reasonable amount of standardisation of parts, and disagreements with the native

officials were also a daily occurrence. The passenger carriages came from Nürnberg and Werdau. In 1911 Paul Levy wrote a report in the 'Organ für die Fortschritte des Eisenbahnwesens', on the rolling stock and motive power of the Hedjaz Railway: "The plush upholstery of the 1st. Class was replaced by leather, and the back rests were made smooth, without folds, so as to make the accommodation for the vermin less attractive." Many bogie goods wagons were acquired from Belgian manufacturers and from the Gothaer Waggonfabrik.

Initially Paul Levy was 'placed on leave from the Königlichen Eisenbahndirektion Danzig' for 'secondment for service in the Near East.' On 19th. May 1906 he had married his cousin Ida Levy (1884-1974) in Bad Polzin. They continued to live in Damascus till 1908 during the continued construction of the Hedjaz Railway, and later also in Beirut. Following this, from 1910 to 1912 Levy was officially placed on leave by the KED Essen to work in German East Africa based at Dar-es-Salaam in modern Tanganyika. In Spring 1910 Heinrich August Meissner transferred to the Anatolian Railway Construction Co. (Anatolischen Bahnbaugesellschaft), which had taken over construction of the Bagdadbahn, but in 1912 Paul Levy returned to Germany.

From October 1910 he was appointed a 'beurlaubter Regierungsbaumeister' in the Prussian railway administration in Saarbrücken [i.e. he was officially on the staff lists there but on paid leave and sent to work abroad. This would be relevant also for seniority purposes. WLR] Later he was promoted to Baurat. In the First World War he served in railway service on the Russian Front, was wounded and was awarded the Iron Cross.

On 1st. October 1920, immediately on formation of the Deutsche Reichsbahn, Levy rose to Oberregierungs- und Baurat. From 1924 this position was renamed Oberreichsbahnrat. In 1923 he was divorced from his first wife Ida and moved to Bonn. In the following years we find references to him at the Reichsbahndirektion Altona, first as Dezernent for Workshop Operations in the department of Ernst Spiro (1873 - 1950), and he headed the section on Workshops Organisation until mid-1933. From 1930 he had been designated a 'Direktor bei der Reichsbahn' - the designation for directors outside the main headquarters staff.

From mid-1933 he was still Dezernent for Workshops and Heating Installations at the Wuppertal Direktion. This was a typical case of the demotion of 'Non-Aryan' railway officials during the early National Socialist period, for there were some thirty high

Reichsbahn officials of Jewish background who could not be dismissed in 1933 as they had been combatant soldiers in the World War.

Following the issuance of the 'Nürnberg Laws' Paul Levy, and the other last still-remaining Jewish Reichsbahn officials, were sent into early retirement at the end of 1935; He was 59 years old. Following his dismissal he moved – by 1937 at least – to Berlin to be in the anonymity of a major city, where he also had other family members and other Jewish Reichsbahn acquaintances. During the Pogrom night of 9th. November 1938 his uncle Leo Levy was shot in Polzin. In October 1941, only a few days before Himmler's prohibition of emigration, he spoke for the last time with the Ecuadorian Embassy about his planned emigration. In April 1939 his daughter had married in London and thenceforward she lived in Chile and then in the USA; here three grandchildren keep his memory alive.

Paul Levy's second wife Charlotte had been born 3rd. October 1882 in Berlin. Following his time in Wuppertal they lived in 1937 in Berlin-Zehlendorf, Albertinenstr. 31. From November 1940 the Levys had two rooms as sub-tenants in Wilmersdorf, Mestorstr. 54. At this period it was possible for Amtmann Berthold Stumpf to complain in the publication 'Die Reichsbahn' that Kurt Ewald's book "20,000 Textual Sources for Railway Information" ('200,000 Schriftquellen zur Eisenbankunde') displayed the appalling fault of still referring to articles written by Jewish authors. This referred to Paul Levy's article of 1911 on the rolling stock of the Hedjaz Railway.

Paul Levy described his last profession before his deportation as 'Machine Worker' – presumably as a Jewish Forced Worker at the age of 60. At least this is written in his own hand in the 'Vermögenserklärung' (List of Assets) that Paul and Charlotte Levy had to complete, dated 17th. February 1943. Together with around a thousand other people they were deported on 26th. February 1943 with the '30th. Osttransport' and there unloaded on the 'Old Jew Ramp'. They never lived to see the next day. At this point the Reichsbahndirektion Berlin had already paid his 'Retirement Money' to the sum of 418.07 Reichsmark for the month of March 1943, and in October 1943 it demanded from the Property Liquidation Office of the Oberfinanzpräsidenten Berlin-Brandenburg the repayment of this amount."