

A 79-YEAR-OLD former Gestapo agent who has confessed to shooting 500

people at a Nazi concentration camp is heading to court for what could

be the last major war crimes trial in Germany.

Alfons Goetzfried is charged with assisting the murder of 17,000

people, mostly Jews, at the Majdanek concentration camp in Poland on

November 3, 1943.

Even though he confessed to the shootings while a witness at other war

crimes trials, prosecutors said they could not charge him with murder,

mainly because of the lack of supporting evidence.

Born in Ukraine, Goetzfried joined the Gestapo, Adolf Hitler's

security police, in 1941.

He was taken prisoner by the Soviets after the war, tried for war

crimes and sentenced to 20 years in prison. He was released after 13

years in a Siberian labor camp.

Goetzfried lived in Ukraine until 1991, when he moved to Germany.

Since then he has been called as a witness at several Nazi war crimes

trials in Russia and Britain. He incriminated himself under

questioning by British police.

Even if convicted, Goetzfried might not have to serve any of the

maximum 15-year jail sentence the charge carries.

Under German law, the time Goetzfried spent in Soviet prisons and work

camps may be credited toward any new sentence for the same crime.

However, Goetzfried also remains under investigation in connection

with 45,000 other killings near Lviv, Ukraine, and near Lublin,

Poland.