



"JACEK DYZIO"

Lille, 15 September 1945

Dear Madam

Strangely enough, I got hold of the Polish daily "Rzeczpospolita" from 24 August 1945 – strangely, because Poles staying in France don't usually come across newspapers from our country.

I have read your announcement regarding the search for Ryszard Żywiecki. I don't remember the name, but I can perhaps describe him in a cursory fashion. A tall, well-built, handsome blonde man (his hair was naturally wavy or crinkle-cut). He was in ward 11, working in the prison bindery. If the above description matches the person you are looking for, then he was killed by SS men with a shot to the back of his head. I am one of the very few people who saw everything and who, miraculously, survived.

I would like to shed some light on a number of unclear details concerning the whole tragedy. I shall give an account of what I saw, asking that you have this account published in newspapers so that the families of those whom the Germans had murdered know where to look for their bodies.

The entire responsibility for the death of about 600 Polish prisoners lies exclusively with the Polish administration of the Mokotów prison, headed by Inspector Szperlak. As the victorious Soviet army was approaching Warsaw, the Germans, beginning in the afternoon of 23 July (Sunday), set about releasing all the German prisoners, including *Volksdeutchers*, and by the evening of 24 July they had released all of them, about 500 men in number.

The Poles began to be released the following day. Initially, the process ran smoothly and efficiently. The news of the release of prisoners quickly spread around the town and hundreds of mothers, fathers, wives, brothers and sisters arrived at the prison's front gate, waiting for their relatives to come out.

The prison's Polish administrators, realizing what was going on, took the path of last resort. Rather than releasing the prisoners in the order prescribed by law, they allowed the



procedure to be determined by the bribes they received from those who wanted to get their imprisoned relatives out of the hell of Mokotów as fast as possible. The *eminence grise* behind this operation was Inspector Szperlak, whom I have mentioned above. It is hardly surprising that the process of releasing the prisoners slowed. Those who had been given the highest sentences, from three to four years' imprisonment, and still had about two years to serve, were the first to be freed. Their families sold up everything, paying a huge amount of money to the Polish fraudsters. The poor, who had only a few months, weeks, or even days left to serve were still kept in prison because their families either paid too little or had no money and waited, filled with false expectations, for Polish prison administrators to finally come to their senses and free their relatives.

The Germans entrusted with the task of administering the prison were out in the town, getting ready to flee the city. Unfortunately the situation grew worse every day. The bribes were increasingly higher, while the number of the released prisoners grew smaller. The families of those who weren't well off began to press the prison administration to speed up the process of freeing prisoners.

As the whole thing began to attract attention and, consequently, became known to the German head of the prison, he ordered the prison administration to stop the release of prisoners on 27 July at 4 p.m. by way of punishment.

Over one day and a half the Poles had released more than 500 Germans (without taking bribes), while the number of Poles released during three days was lower than 300, although releasing the Germans required the same amount of work as releasing Poles. Where then does this huge difference come from? Not a single prisoner was released on 28, 29, 30 and 31 July 1944.

On 1 August at around 4 p.m. 11 men were freed, and Inspector Szperlak even deigned to address the prisoners who, sitting in the windows, were hurling curses at him, indicating that from 2 August on, all the prisoners would be gradually released. These 11 men were let out of the prison gate only to be greeted by the outbreak of the Uprising. I am deeply convinced that if it hadn't been for the Uprising, everyone would have been released. This four day interval, along with three days of taking bribes – during which we all could have been released – were crucial.



In the morning of 2 August 1944 the prison building was taken over by the SS troops. In the afternoon the soldiers led the prisoners from wards 1 and 2 out and ordered them to dig pits along pavilion X, on the side of the laundry. The pits – there were three of them – were 25 meters long, 30 meters wide and about 2 meters deep. The rest of the prisoners observed the work from their cell windows, unaware of the purpose for which the pits were to be used.

At 4 p.m., SS soldiers, armed with *stens* and pistols, and with grenades stuck behind their belts, drew up lists of prisoners from every cell. Soon, 10 SS men stood over one of the pits at a distance of 2–3 meters from each other with their sleeves rolled up and began to drink straight vodka from one-liter bottles without having a bite to eat. After a while other Germans started to lead out the prisoners, each with his arm twisted behind his back. Once brought to the edge of the pit, every prisoner was shot in the back of the head and fell down into the pit. Not all prisoners were killed by one shot. Those still alive were sprayed with bullets from above the pit.

The Germans were drunk throughout the execution. They shouted, kicked the prisoners, and one of them even jumped into the pit to take the jackboots off of one of the dead. Wards 1 and 2, known as the “investigative” wards, were the first to be executed. Among those killed were a few boys between 12 and 14 years old. These wards were followed by the infirmary. When the execution started, the prisoners burst into screams, calling for the insurgents to come to their rescue. The sick, who were staying in a separate building, heard the screaming. Those who were only slightly sick clambered into the attic by means of sheets and escaped at night, scaling the wall. The seriously ill were forced by the Germans to come out and were killed by the pit.

The prisoners from ward 8 – “repeat offenders”, lodged in pavilion X, came next. They were followed by ward 10 – “high sentences” – and ward 11. Among those killed from ward 10 was Czesław Wilk. He lived by the Vistula River in Stanisław Uziębło’s bathroom. From ward 11 the Germans killed, among others, Żywiecki, whom I mentioned above, Lewandowski, a type-setter, and Maryont’s lodger, Miętus from Żyrardów or Skierniewice, (he worked in the bindery), and the Łukasiewicz brothers, railwaymen. Then the Germans set out to annihilate ward 3, the “sanitary” ward, and ward 5 – the *bromverke*. All were killed. Ward 6, my ward (cell 32), was to be next.



Seeing what was going on, we decided to either escape or die fighting. While the execution was under way, we battered down the cell door with benches (cells 32 and 34, I don't remember exactly). In the corridor we set straw mattresses alight, creating a fiery barricade. When the Germans saw that the whole corridor was engulfed in flames, they opened fire into the corridor from their stens. As it was impossible to open all the cell doors, the prisoners punched holes in the walls between the cells, thus making it possible to move very fast along the whole of ward 6. The Germans, unable to get through the fire, entered ward 7. Only one man from cell 36 survived, having managed to hide in the straw mattress. Cell 37 behaved very heroically. When three Germans got into the cell, one of the boys put up resistance. When, after being hit by a bullet, he fell down on the ground, a furious German pounced on him. This was a sign to other prisoners, who grabbed cups, bowls, knives and whatever was on hand, and advanced on the Germans. Two Germans escaped into the corridor. In the meantime one of the prisoners snatched the grenades from behind the belt of the German whom we had already killed and threw them after the running Germans. After the explosion the Germans ran down to get assistance (wards 6, 7 and 9 were on the third floor), but the prisoners from ward 6, taking advantage of the Germans' confusion, erected a huge barricade of iron beds (ripped from the walls), tables and benches, making it impossible to get from downstairs up to wards 6, 7 and 9. Straw mattresses, to be set alight during the German attack, were laid around the barricade. At the same time the German who had been killed in cell 37 was put head first into a big barrel of water in the corridor, after taking his grenades and a pistol. The remaining doors in ward 7 were rapidly battered down. Then we set about breaking down the doors in ward 9, where teens of up to 17 years of age were locked. Dusk fell. After removing all the doors that were still in the way and punching holes in the walls and the roof, we escaped over the roof and the walls into Aleja Niepodległości in the heavy rain during the night of 2 to 3 August 1944. So, theoretically, the whole of wards no. 6 and 9 and ward 7, except for cell 36, survived. I write "theoretically" because many prisoners were killed during the escape or later during the Uprising, such as Aleksy Kretkowski, a student from cell 32, Bienias from cell 32, executed by the Poles after 11 people identified him as a Gestapo informer, Bolesław Krakowski from cell 32, a streetcar driver, killed in the sewers after Warsaw's surrender, and many others whose names I don't remember. So the families of those who stayed in prison wards nos. 6, 7 and 9 have a 50% chance of seeing their relatives return.



I have described the whole thing because it hurts me as a Pole that the rapacity of the prison's Polish administration resulted in the death of so many prisoners. Someone may say that there is no need to feel sorry for the prisoners. To this, however, I reply that except for the prisoners from ward 8, all the others were put behind bars for the first time in their lives, having been convicted of illegal trade, producing moonshine or dealing in contraband, and everyone wanted to live and survive the occupation. There were many political prisoners who, for bribes, were treated as ordinary criminals in order to avoid being thrown into Pawiak prison and Auschwitz. I am sure there will be many people ready to confirm my testimony regarding the conduct of the prison's Polish administration in the first days of July 1944. Others will add some details to the general account that I have just given.

Jacek Dyzio

Cell 32

I am not giving my name because it is now irrelevant. My acquaintances didn't know that I was in prison and I don't want them to learn this now from the newspapers. After returning to Poland I am going to raise this matter again. The signature I wrote above is known to the prisoners who were with me in cell 24 and later cell 32, and so they know my name. Due to the lack of any means of transportation it is now impossible for me to return to Poland. It will probably be possible in the spring of next year.