



HELENA HEGIER

Warsaw, 19 October 1945. Investigating Judge Mikołaj Halfter interviewed the person named below as a witness. Having been advised of the criminal liability for making false declarations, of the obligation to speak the truth and of the significance of the oath, the witness was sworn and testified as follows:

My name and surname	Helena Hegier
Age	29 years
Parents' names	Franciszek and Anna
Place of residence	Warsaw, Kawęczyńska Street 16, flat 15
Occupation	clerk
Religion	Roman Catholic
Criminal record	none
Relationship to the parties	aggrieved party

In January 1941 I was arrested by the Gestapo in Międzyrzec Podlaski. From there I was taken to the Gestapo offices in Radzyń, but they released me after two weeks. However, four days later I was rearrested in Międzyrzec and again transported to Radzyń, and from there I was taken to the prison at the Castle in Lublin. I was beaten only during the interrogations held in Radzyń, being hit in the face with a whip.

During my detention in the Gestapo building in Radzyń, some man was killed in the course of an examination. When I was taken out for a walk, I looked through the peephole into the men's cell and saw a man stretched out on the table. He could not have been more than 20 years old. At the time, other men were transferred from this cell to another. Later in the evening I heard

the sound of planks being nailed together and then I heard a few people carrying something out. I was later told by one of my co-prisoners that the man in question had been killed in the course of an interrogation. While I was detained at the Gestapo building, I would frequently see Polish men, arrestees, with heavily bruised faces; some of them could barely walk. In order to get to the interrogation room, you had to pass through another room, the one in which the beatings took place. In the center of this room there was a rather tall crate (upon which, as I heard, people would be laid down during beatings), and also whips and boxing gloves. While there, I was also threatened with being beaten, and the Gestapo men showed me the crate, saying that "like many others, I would also get beaten up there".

I did not admit to any of the charges but one, namely that I had called one of the Gestapo men a "goatherd". However, under threat of beating, I was forced to sign a report that they did not want to read out to me. Later, when I was in Lublin (where I demanded a repeat interrogation), they told me that this was out of the question, for I had already admitted to everything and signed the report. However, the report in question was not read out to me in Lublin, either.

I was kept in Lublin until 21 September 1941, when together with some other women – our group numbered around 150 in total – I was transported to Ravensbrück. As a matter of fact, they assured us in Lublin that we would be taken to work on farms.

In Ravensbrück I was given number 7898. I think that by the time I left the camp in April 1945 inmates were receiving numbers above 18,000 or maybe 180,000, I do not remember. Each inmate was given a number. When I arrived there, there were some 10 living barracks. On average, there would be 200 prisoners per block. By April 1945 the number of living barracks had risen to 32. I think that at that time there were 1,500 prisoners in each block (that is to say barrack). During the first few years, a few thousand inmates were sent from the camp to factories. Towards the end of 1944 and in 1945, a great number of women were taken away from the camp. In total, at least a dozen or so thousand people were taken away during this time; a great many would be brought in and transported away. Indeed, by that date some groups of inmates would spend only a few days in Ravensbrück.

I was taken for an operation on 21 November 1942. Before that I was completely healthy. First, they ordered me to wash myself in the hospital bathroom. Obviously, I was not asked for my consent to the procedure. Before the operation the doctor, Oberheuser, only measured

my temperature and inquired whether I was healthy. It was determined that my temperature was normal, while I declared that I was healthy. And that was all – no medical examination was performed. Before the operation a German nurse shaved both my legs up to the knees. Next, I received an intramuscular injection that stupefied me. I was also given some colorless and odorless liquid to drink. Then – stupefied but still conscious – I was wheeled on a gurney up to the door of the operating theater, where I received an intravenous injection and had a mask placed over my face. At that moment I lost consciousness.

I would like to stress that I did not put up any resistance, although I knew that I was at risk of being operated on, for at the time the camp punishments for any instance of opposition were extremely harsh and I was therefore afraid that they might shoot or hang me.

I was told by friends who were with me in the same hospital hall that my operation lasted more than half an hour.

I regained consciousness in my bed in the general hall. I felt that both my legs were paralyzed from the groin down. They were heavy, like logs of wood. I looked at my legs and saw that I had gauze fixed with strips of plaster to each thigh and shank. Blood was seeping through the gauze. Each wound was about 15 cm long. I think that more or less half an hour after the operation I was already running a temperature of some 39° (it was measured at the time and I had a look at the thermometer). The fever remained unabated for five or six days.

During this time I felt considerable pain in my wounds; it was a pain similar to the one you experience when an ulcer forms. I also felt the wound. No dressings were applied throughout this period. Neither the gauze nor the strips of plaster which I observed immediately after the operation were changed during these five or six days. Instead, I was only given morphine in liquid form. I did not receive any injections. My organism did not tolerate morphine and I would always get an attack of vomiting after drinking it.

After five or six days of lying in bed I was finally given a dressing. I observed the course of the procedure. It consisted in the removal of stitches and the placement of strips of plaster smeared with some yellow ointment.

Two weeks after the operation, when the wounds had healed up, I was taken for another operation; before the procedure I was given some colorless liquid to drink (approximately 10 cm) and received an intravenous injection, and a mask was once again placed over my head.

I lost consciousness. I came to in my bed. I discovered that I had some fresh gauze on my left thigh, through which blood was seeping. The plasters covering my other wounds had been changed. Only the wound on the left thigh was painful. Yet again, I was running a high temperature – around 39° – for a few days, while when I pressed down on this wound, some greenish pus would rise up through the gauze. I had a look at the wound a few days after the procedure, for I removed the plaster and determined that the whole wound was inflamed and suppurative. My friends provided me with medical materials and I made a dressing on my own, applying some fresh gauze smeared with boric ointment. After two weeks I underwent a third operation, which consisted among other things of opening the wound on the other (right) thigh. The course of events was more or less similar to that which followed the second operation.

I would like to stress that when I was being operated on for the third time, I still had a temperature of around 39°. Before the third operation I was injected with "Prontosil". I know that this was "Prontosil" because I was told so by the doctor, Oberheuser. Following this procedure the wound festered, too. Two weeks after the third operation I underwent a fourth, during which – among other things – they opened up my uncicatrized wound on the left shank. The course of healing was more or less the same as after the previous operation, although this time the edges of the wound were open in its lower part, as if lifted upwards; it seemed as if something had been inserted into my leg. Blood continued to seep from this point of the wound. The spot itself was without sensation. It did not hurt any more than the other post-operative wounds. I looked at the wound more or less an hour after the fourth operation, when I uncovered it myself. But there was a burning pain in the wound, and in this it differed from the pain in my other wounds. After the fourth operation I was unable to move my toes for a month and a half, as this would cause severe pain in the wounds.

I did not undergo any further operations. Officially, I received dressings once every two weeks. Apart from this, however, I made them myself.

I would like to add that after the first operation Oberheuser came round and ordered us to move from the lower to the upper beds (the hospital had double-decker beds). We started to protest, but to no avail; the nurses dragged us from our beds and tried to stand us on our feet. I was accompanied by the following prisoners: Maria Cabaj, Grabowska, and one other

woman. We felt such terrible pain (Cabaj and I, for only we were being forced to change beds) that we literally screamed in agony. Finally, we were placed on the upper beds.

The lower beds were readied for the other inmates who were to be operated on.

However, due to the fact that both I and Cabaj started running very high temperatures, the next day we were moved back to the lower beds.

In all, I was kept in the hospital for three months (then I was able to stand on my legs for a moment or two, but I had to hold something to support myself). I was then sent back to the block, where I lay in bed for three months. In the block I started to learn how to walk. Six months after the first operation I regained the ability to walk – more or less – but I was still unable, for example, to squat or bend down. I regained the ability to walk comfortably only nine months after the first operation, but it was only a year or so after the first operation that I started walking with greater intensity. I have not fully regained the use of my legs to date, for I experience pain in my muscles when I walk longer distances and my thighs hurt when I squat or press down on the scars even slightly. I cannot run, or even walk quickly.

I heard from Poles – inmates working in the camp hospital – that the first operations were performed, and the first dressings applied, by Gebhardt personally. Other operations and some of the first dressings were handled by Gebhardt's assistants, Fischer and another man, whose surname I do not remember.

Later, the dressings were applied by the regular physicians: Schiedlausky, Rosenthal and Oberheuser. I do not know whether experimental operations were performed while Trommer, Treite and Klimek worked at the camp hospital.

Schiedlausky – although he would make ironic remarks to the inmates – applied dressings with relative gentleness. Rosenthal on the other hand acted with brutality. I know this from some of my friends. My dressings were replaced only by Oberheuser. I heard from my friends that Treite was the best, that he treated the inmates like a doctor should, as patients. I cannot say anything about Trommer.

Klimek worked at the hospital briefly and, as I recall, behaved more or less properly with respect to the prisoners. I do not remember the surname of the doctor who sat on the

committee that in March – April 1945 carried out a selection at the camp, that is segregated the inmates into those who were to be killed and those that were to remain alive.

I do not know how many inmates were killed at the time.

I took part in one selection, which I luckily passed. At the time, the Germans took elderly inmates and those who were more physically exhausted to the *Jugendlager* (to be executed).

The selection was carried out by blocks, whereas the selection in any one block would be repeated a few times, this because the prisoners would run away and conceal themselves in other blocks, or be absent, toiling in the workshops or outside the camp.

Just before the evacuation of the camp (some three weeks prior) our legs were inspected. The Germans said that the *Lager* would be moved and that the evacuees had to have healthy legs; those with infirm legs were to be transported on trucks. They proceeded to separate inmates with leg problems and ailments – those with ulcers or ulcer blotches, those who limped or walked indolently, etc. They too were taken to the *Jugendlager*. The majority of them was executed there. Not everyone would be immediately put to death in the *Jugendlager*. However, they received minimal food and the greater part of their clothing would be confiscated, so they were left only in dresses and shirts. They would have constant roll-calls, during which the healthier women were picked out and forced to work. Groups of women were driven out of the *Jugendlager* in trucks every day. It was said that they were killed in the gas chambers and incinerated in the crematorium.

During the selection convalescents who were returning from the hospital to the camp were directed not to their original blocks, but to blocks 23 and 24. From there, the majority were loaded onto trucks and conveyed out of the *Lager*. I saw how the *Aufseherins* of these blocks and the SS-men literally dragged out the extremely exhausted women and forced them onto the vehicles. If any resisted, they were kicked. I saw how the *Aufseherin* in charge of the selection (I do not know her surname) used the rounded handle of a cane, as if it were a hook, to grab women by the neck and force them to walk towards the groups intended for the *Jugendlager*.

The crematorium was built near the camp in 1942. Initially, it had only one chimney. In 1944 a second chimney was erected. It was located next to the camp, adjoining the wall. We could not see the furnaces from the camp.



In 1942 a great many bodies, both of the victims of executions and those who died of natural causes, were incinerated there. Towards the end of 1944 and in the beginning of 1945 the crematorium worked around the clock. The chimneys belched fire more than two meters into the air. The smoke was intensely black, and had a sweetish smell. The fires would be extinguished only in the event of air raids.

I heard that the crematorium was operated by German criminal prisoners. I do not know how many furnaces there were in the crematorium.

The report was read out.