



FELICJAN LOTH

Warsaw, 3 August 1946. The Appellate Investigating Judge for Cases of Exceptional Significance, Józef Skorzyński, acting as a member of the Main Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes in Poland, heard as a witness the person specified below. The witness testified as follows:

My name is Felicjan Loth, son of Edward and Jadwiga, 32 years old, Roman Catholic, physician, domiciled in Zalesie near Piaseczno at Graniczna Street, relationship to the parties: none, criminal record: none

I was arrested by the Germans on the night of 19/20 February 1941 and transported directly to Pawiak prison, where I stayed until the Warsaw Uprising, so for almost three and a half years.

During that time, the behaviour of the Germans in the prison went through various stages. It is important to note that until October 1941, while I was under interrogation, I rarely had an opportunity to watch their conduct for myself. Only after the end of the interrogation, when I was appointed surgeon to the prison hospital, did I find myself in a position where it was both a privilege and a burden to know exactly what was going on in the prison, and often even what was going to happen the next day or in a few days. Therefore, I had the opportunity, better than many inmates of Pawiak – even those incarcerated longest – to observe all sorts of villainies, atrocities and sadistic acts of the prison staff, which consisted of Germans, various *Volksdeutsche* and the so-called Ukrainians.

The behaviour of the Germans was not consistent. At first, when the principal prison guard duties were being fulfilled by the pre-war Polish guards, and the Germans – few at that time – were only supervising those who were supervising us, their behaviour was quite mild. They



limited themselves to “minor” acts of violence, such as beating about the face, a few kicks or blows with a whip, a truncheon, or any other thing on hand.

They were beating prisoners for the slightest reason, but at that time they would still try to find pretexts for doing so, so it was usually a “punishment” for a given offence. A prisoner who was slow to draw himself up to his full height before the majesty of the sergeant would be struck on the face or head or receive a few pokes or kicks, depending on the situation and the sergeant’s mood. It was of course accompanied by inhuman yells and curses, which the culprit most often could not understand, which in turn was usually enough to prompt a new round of blows. If there was nothing amiss, a Wachmeister could always find a good reason. Their favourite method was the inspection of cleanliness and order in a cell. They would check whether the cell was carefully dusted, the bowls washed after a meal, and prisoners’ fingernails or shoes clean. In a cell three steps wide and eight steps long, where before the war, in times when the prison was most crowded, no more than three prisoners would be incarcerated, they would put even eleven people, and on average from seven to eight. Each cell had only one small basin and one jug which could be filled with water up to two times a day. Taking into account the fact that there were no toiletries, as these could be delivered only when the family had learned that the arrested person was doing time and had an opportunity to send them, and the fact that upon admission the prisoner was divested of literally everything he or she had in their pockets, except for a handkerchief at best, one can imagine how that strictly required cleanliness might look! Opportunity was plentiful.

I remember that on one of the first days of my stay in Pawiak, during an inspection of this kind, a Wachmeister found some soup bowl that was not wiped clean enough (with that wretched handkerchief). Indignant at such “slovenliness” (*so eine Schweinerei!*), the Wachmeister came at the prisoner like a raging bull, trampling on people in this cramped and crowded cell, and put the bowl like a hat on the poor man’s head, brought his fist down on it with all his might. The aluminium bowl cracked and stuck to the prisoner’s head so tightly that after the roll call we barely managed to take it off the poor man’s head. There was no chance of getting any dressing for his blood-covered head.

Exercise was another favourite method of abusing prisoners. At that time the prisoners were still being taken for walks “for health’s sake”, and exercise was also “for health’s sake”. Obviously it provided an infinite number of possibilities to “punish” prisoners. “Punishment”



would then begin with intricate and onerous exercises, including the infamous *zabki* (deep squat jumps). So, according to the sound logic of the *Übermenschen*, if someone was not able to do body twists swiftly enough due to age, illness, or simply weakness, he or she had to be punished by running indefinitely around the yard. And since after several laps the weak one could not run any more, they would punish him or her by frog jumps. When after two or three attempts at jumping the prisoner would fall, he or she had to be “punished” for disobedience with a truncheon. At that time, exercise was the torment of all prisoners, but especially of the unfit.

The list of such “nuisances” could go on and on. It was a method used to terrorise, oppress, and stupefy newcomers absolutely in order to prepare them for interrogation. The fact that all sergeants behaved in this way proves that such conduct was not a result of the sadistic tendencies of some *Wachmeister*, but an interrogation method. Even those who were quite mild while in the wards of older prisoners, when transferred to the quarantine ward, the infamous *siódemka* [7th ward], would always begin doing the same “feats”. One could see that the prison authorities were choosing sergeants for the newcomers’ ward very carefully. They would always select those who were the wildest, most brutal, and of decidedly sadistic tendencies.

A second proof that those “small” atrocities and abuses were a part of a plan devised in advance could be obtained by watching the entire process of interrogation by the Gestapo. The chief way to force statements was to terrorise the accused.

Only under exceptional circumstances of greatest importance would the case be handled by truly intelligent and competent clerks. It happened usually with espionage cases. Those clerks would use different methods: they would inundate the prisoner with tricky questions, show false declarations of co-defendants, give them news that suggested the prisoner had been followed etc. In a word, these were a sort of competition in psychological endurance and intelligence between the interrogator and the interrogated. But, as I have already emphasised, such cases were very rare.

In ninety-some per cent of all cases, the main and almost sole method of forcing statements was a truncheon. The interrogation would begin with wild yells, curses and threats, shaking guns and truncheons in the stupefied prisoner’s face, and then, if this was not effective, they would proceed to beat the prisoner. This would usually begin with blows about the face or a few pokes or kicks which would be followed by the truncheon. According to this assumption, the more



frightened and tormented the prisoner was on coming from Pawiak to aleja Szucha the better. It enhanced the possibility that the interrogation would be effective and the prisoner would start singing. To this end the prison sergeants were behaving in this particular way. And this is why those who could add their own new ideas to the methods of terrorising and tormenting prisoners already used were more than welcome and especially valued by their superiors.

When the Polish guards were removed from Pawiak, we had a chance to observe the training of rookie sergeants in this method of running the remand prison. It was also one of the most terrible periods of life in Pawiak.

The Polish guards, some of whom were transferred to other prisons, but the majority of whom were arrested and deported to Auschwitz or immediately executed, were replaced with the so-called Ukrainians. These were usually young boys, absolutely wild and primitive. They were selected in the POW camps by a special method. At first they were kept in such conditions that, let us simply say, during three months the number of captives diminished from six thousand to five hundred. Then some elegantly dressed officers, fluent in Russian, came to the camp and said that those who did not identify themselves as Russians, but as Ukrainians, and were not 'commies', may volunteer to join the German police. Then they listed all the innumerable privileges and benefits awaiting the candidates. A large number of prisoners proved to be Ukrainian when presented with such an opportunity. After a very short training, clad in new uniforms, heavy boots, and with guns in their belts, these new sergeants came to Pawiak. They were told that the prison was filled with bandits and murderers for whom they should have no mercy but should rather be on guard against them in order not to be attacked and killed. Such an introduction was followed by a "practical training" on site. The Germans began with object lessons in ensuring the obedience, cleanliness, and swiftness of the prisoners, and then proceeded to individual "feats".

It is impossible to describe here all these wild and sadistic ideas, so I will mention just a few to paint a picture of those lessons.

Oberscharführer Bürkl, one of the greatest sadists of Pawiak, told the Ukrainians to drive a group of some 40 Jews to the prison yard for "exercise". When they were exhausted enough, he told them to strip to the waist, and, "since you are tired", crawl very slowly on their stomachs over the pile of red-hot cinders and ashes from the boiler house. The reluctant ones were showered with blows and kicks, and when this was not enough,



enormous wild wolfdogs were brought. After this lesson there was not one prisoner left who had no burns or bites or was not beaten and bloody.

The second Oberscharführer, Zander, demonstrated his creativity shortly afterwards. While a group of prisoners were taking baths, he stood by the hot and cold taps and began to turn the latter off one by one. The Ukrainians were to take care, with truncheons and clubs, that no one escaped the scorching shower.

The Ukrainians proved apt pupils, and trying to earn recognition from their benefactors, they were striving to outdo one another in zeal.

The results were soon visible. Apart from a number of smaller wounds and injuries, of which only some could be attended to by the emergency room staff, some more serious accidents occurred. One of the prisoners, who was walking too slowly down the corridor when the prisoners were allowed to go to the toilet, was kicked so hard on the side of his body that his spleen burst and he had to be operated on immediately. A second one was fatally shot in the head for having looked out of the window. A Third one had a broken arm, a fourth had broken his thigh while getting in or out of the "shack" [tarpaulin-covered truck]. Another one who, as a "Ukrainian" claimed, was trying to come at him in the cell, got shot in the thigh, etc.

All day and often all night long we could hear the wild screams of the tormentors and the groaning of their victims. People in the cells were also greatly tormented, awaiting their turn all the time. Each turn of the key was literally blood-freezing, and screams and groans were setting prisoners' already tense nerves on edge.

Fortunately, after a few months the atmosphere gradually "relaxed." The Germans decided that their alumni had "mastered the material", and besides they had had enough and were tired of such hard pedagogical work.

The Ukrainians, in turn, soon began to see that something was amiss. The bandits were not so murderous, and the protectors were not so benevolent. At the same time many of them got over the gruesome experience of the POW camp, took a look at the political situation and arrived at the conclusion that a German victory was not so sure, so it was perhaps better to behave with more caution. The effect was that their enthusiasm to murder prisoners was dampened significantly, and with time prisoners began to receive many tokens of kindness and sympathy from the Ukrainians. The daily life in Pawiak became quieter.



The activities aimed at the extermination of Polish people, however, became more pronounced at that time. Transports to camps became more frequent and with greater numbers, and on-site executions began to take place regularly. Until the burning of the Ghetto, executions in Warsaw or in the immediate vicinity (Palmiry) were rare. Generally executions were taking place in the camps. With the complete burning of the Ghetto, however, the Germans obtained a large and comfortable area around Pawiak, so, as the difficulties of transporting and escorting were mounting, it was easier to carry out an execution on site. And if the prisoners were not to be deported, why bother to lead them a few streets away! As a result, the sites of mass executions were getting closer to the prison. At the end, the Germans would even execute prisoners in the nearest gateway at Dzielna Street, opposite the main exit of Pawiak.

At the same time the Germans at aleja Szucha were beside themselves with fury. The Germans were always beating prisoners during interrogation, but at that time the number of prisoners tortured and the extent of their torment reached its peak. The hospital was crowded with people of all ages, from teenage boys and girls to quite old people who lost literally whole patches of skin and subcutaneous tissue on their buttocks. Knocked-out teeth or a cut head made no impression on anyone. Hospital admission was not possible unless the person in question was not able not only to get up, but also to roll over unaided.

Many of these poor souls lay on pallets in overcrowded cells, suffering greatly and poisoning both the air and the life of fellow inmates with their stinking wounds. More and more people died in the hospital due to beating, deaths during interrogation become more frequent. The Germans very often forbade taking those prisoners who were cruelly tortured during interrogation to the hospital, condemning them to dying in solitude and without any help on the concrete floor of the 'dark cell' (called *karc*).

At the same time, the fury and malice of the clerks during interrogations also reached its peak. Again, I will give just a few examples. One evening they brought on stretchers a young, heavily built boy of twenty-something years of age, straight from the car which brought prisoners after interrogation from aleja Szucha. He was lying naked, covered only with some cloth. Wild-eyed, tightly clenched teeth, foaming at the mouth. He looked markedly different from "ordinarily" tortured prisoners even on first sight. When the cloth was removed we saw that his entire body was covered with round spots. Neck, chest, arms, stomach, thighs, and even his penis and scrotum were riddled, at intervals of several centimetres, with dark



spots, more or less round, of one centimetre in diameter. At first I could not understand what it might be. I had never seen a disease like this one. On closer examination I realised these were burns. I could not learn anything from the patient, as he answered all attempts at communication with a cavernous groan. Only the following day was he able to tell me that when he said during interrogation that he did not know anything more, he was told to strip naked, and was then put on a table, and while four bullyboys were holding his arms and legs the other two began to burn him with cigarettes! Imagine how many times they had to light a cigarette in order to cover a whole body of a grown-up man in this way, and how much time it must have taken!

Another time they took a young boy from the hospital, who had been seriously wounded in some action the previous day, for interrogation. The torturers quickly realised that they could not touch him because he would die immediately and they would not learn anything from him. So they went to his flat instead and arrested his mother. They were beating and torturing the 50-year-old woman in full view of the dying boy to force him to speak!

Another time, also during interrogation, they tried to intimidate and terrorise a young girl, 16 years old, by forcing her to strip naked in front of several clerks and testify standing before them without clothes.

Yet another time they brought an old man with the fingers of both hands smashed. They were smashing his fingers between the door and the frame.

I would also like to single out several sergeants who were especially cruel and sadistic. At first they were just ordinary SS men, but during my stay in Pawiak they were promoted to scharführers, in other words up three ranks. These were: Wippenbech, Muller, Oberscharführer Bürkl and Zander. Each of them was a specimen of degeneracy in his own way. These people were torturing prisoners not only because they were obliged to do so, but also to satisfy their perverted instincts. Such a Wachmeister would just enter the first cell on his path and pick a victim. Then he would take his victim to another ward, usually the eighth one, as it was in the basement and hence was the most isolated. There he would choose an empty cell and the "fun" would begin.

It is difficult to describe everything those degenerates could do to their victims, especially since no other prisoner would witness these things. They would end, however, in hanging or shooting the victim. Several times the clerks from aleja Szucha, who had lost some



important prisoner this way when the interrogation was not yet finished, submitted a complaint to the prison commander. But the torturers would laugh it off. It was enough for them to report that the prisoner came at them to disarm them, or attempted escape so they were forced to shoot, and the case would be dismissed.

Finally I would like to describe briefly the behaviour of the Germans towards sick prisoners, thus their attitude towards the "hospital".

The Gestapo was not a bit concerned with the prisoners' health. They did not care, and in accordance with the rule of the extermination of the Polish people, everything that was detrimental to their health suited their purpose very well. Nevertheless, there was a male and female hospital, and it was even expanded and fitted with new instruments. This was due to several reasons. Primo, the Germans were terribly afraid of an epidemic of infectious diseases, especially of spotted typhus; secundo, during the period of interrogation they often wanted the prisoner to live in order to extract more information from him or her; tertio, the ambition of the German chief doctors to have the best hospital and the smallest number of epidemics in their catchment area also came into play.

But at the moment when the prisoner was no longer needed for further interrogation, any interest in or regard for the suffering of a sick person would cease. This is why they could carry away on a stretcher a person who had had a hernia repair surgery the previous day, take for execution women even in the last month of pregnancy, or order people out of traction even though they had their thigh or a leg broken.

There was no illness or suffering which could change their behaviour in the slightest. On the contrary, there were many cases where being diagnosed with dementia or an infectious disease (syphilis, trachoma etc.) would expedite or even bring about the execution or hanging of the unfortunate prisoner. Some sergeants would show some compassion or a willingness to alleviate the suffering of the sick. But as for the Gestapo administration, their attitude to the hospital in Pawiak testified most strongly to the fact that the most basic human feelings were completely foreign to the Germans.

The report was read out.