



DEBORA BRANDEL

Ludwigslust, Germany, 10 May 1945 [?]

Having appeared before the Court in person without a citation, Debora Brandel, sworn in, testified as follows:

In the first week of July 1942, a policeman brought a letter to my house, demanding that I, Debora Brandel, travel to Germany to work under the supervision of the German police. At night, packed my belongings and left the house of my beloved parents. I left the house on 20 July 1942 at 1.30 a.m. I had been warned that if I did not want to work, I would be severely punished. I had to walk in the rain, because we were not allowed to go by tram. When I arrived at the station, I recognized familiar faces there. They were all tired, surrounded by officers in SS uniforms. At the station, there were about a thousand Jews between 13 and 40 years of age and several small children with their parents.

I worked as a stenographer in the Dutch Bridge and Train Factories N.W., Werkspoor, Amsterdam. I lived at 10011 Christiaan de Wetsraat.

I have a younger brother who was sent to the Kremboong camp where the Germans would send all young Jewish boys.

The only reason I was summoned to Germany was that I am a Jew. I do not blame myself, because I was not guilty and I worked hard my whole life. At that time, my parents were very old.

The train was full and we arrived at the Westerbork camp in the Netherlands. The men were placed in one part of the camp, the women in another. We spent two days there and we were treated decently during that time. Then we were loaded again on a train. We, the youngest passengers, were packed into cattle cars, 70 people in each, which made them very crowded. We travelled for two and a half days, and we arrived in Auschwitz at midnight – men and women packed in train cars. After about two hours, the train stopped and we got off to satisfy natural needs. We were constantly guarded.

The Germans did not provide us with food during the journey, because we had been given



some by the Jewish committee in Westerbork. The Germans knew we had had something to eat. Before we arrived in Auschwitz, we were ordered to leave all personal belongings in the cars. The SS men had sticks, clubs and guns; some of them had dogs on leashes. They started screaming at us immediately and told us to get off. Some old women became really nervous and I saw SS men hit them on their heads and bodies with sticks and clubs.

We marched ahead and stopped after about three minutes. At that location, the men were gathered in one group, the women in another. The women were split into two groups. The first group consisted of women with children, old women, and women unable to walk who were not very strong. The second group, where I was, included women who were strong and able to work. At that time, it seemed it was better to belong to the first group. Then we saw the weaker ones get on a train. Later we found out that this was the "black train" headed to the crematorium. We never saw those people again.

We went forwards and after about half an hour we reached the concentration camp. We were placed in a block. There was a bit of straw on the ground. The next morning, I was registered and assigned the number 10084, which I got tattooed on my arm. All my clothes were taken away from me in the presence of men. Some of them were high-ranking German officers. My head was shaved bald. The men were laughing at us. Then, our whole bodies were shaved and we were sent to a different block. It was so crowded that we had no room to lie down on the ground, so we had to sleep on top of each other. The place was filled with fleas and lice, and it smelled bad. The privies were out of order and were so dirty that no one wanted to go there. Every day at 3.00 a.m., we were called out of the blocks and had to stand in the cold and darkness. If there was no work for us, we had to carry stones from one pile to another. I often saw SS men and women beat male and female prisoners to death with clubs and sticks. If somebody died while marching, we had to carry the dead to the barrack, from where they were then taken away. The guards always wanted to beat old and sick women to death because of their physical weakness and inability to work.

One morning, two weeks later, I left the camp. I was sent to Birkenau, which was known as Poland's worst hell. In this camp, I was placed in the best block, which was called the German Christians' block. I was placed there because I was assigned to office work. They used me as a Dutch documents translator. I also speak French, English, Spanish and German, and I began to understand Hungarian, Polish and Slovak when I was in the camp.



One morning in Birkenau, I saw two young girls throw themselves against the electrified barbed wire in order to commit suicide. The wire surrounded the camp and ran along the other side of a ditch. The girls wanted to reach the fence, but they fell into the ditch. When they started calling out, some SS women heard them. Everyone was called over and made to watch them drown. We were told that the same would happen to us if we tried to commit suicide. Many people tried to do it.

I started working in the office in August 1942. One of my tasks was to count the dead. Everyone knew that prisoners were gassed in the camp's gas chambers and five crematoria. Many thousands were gassed and I saw the lists. All the lists were destroyed after two months. The lists of gassed people were called SB, which meant *Sonderbehandlung* [special treatment]. It was not uncommon for the lists to contain 3–4 thousand names. All these lists contained always the same cause of death: typhus fever, heart disease, malaria, infection, TB, etc., which was not true. I also saw long lines of people entering the crematorium building. When they went inside, after some time we could see smoke and red light above the chimneys, and we smelled the odor of burnt flesh. The gassing and burning happened every day and there were thousands of corpses.

On the morning of 5 January 1945, four young Polish Jewish women were hanged. The whole camp was gathered to watch them. We were told that they had tried to provide men with explosives to destroy a crematorium.

The camp received orders from the Berlin *Reichsicherheits-Hauptamt* [Reich Main Security Office]. I know this, because I wrote the address on letters and I also saw incoming mail with that sender's address. My office cooperated with the Gestapo from the nearby towns, who would come to help us with work, and also vice versa. On many occasions, high-ranking German officials would come and visit our camp, performing an inspection.

The following are some of the names and functions of the camp's officials:

SS-Oberscharführer Kirchner (Kirchner)

SS-Oberscharführer Boger

SS-Oberscharführer Quakernack

SS-Oberscharführer Drasser

SS-Unterscharführer Broch

SS-Unterscharführer Bernhard Kristan (Berkaa/ d Werra)



SS-Unterscharführer Lachman

SS-Unterscharführer Schobert

SS-Unterscharführer Kamphuis

SS-Unterscharführer Jasper

SS-Unterscharführer Schurz (came from Vienna)

SS-Unterscharführer Hoessler – this man was a good man and did everything he could for us. He would throw away orders when they came.

I left Auschwitz on 18 January. The Russians were coming. All lists in all offices were destroyed, and we had to walk 50 kilometers to Loslau. Those who were unable to walk were shot dead on the way. We went in groups of 300 people. I saw many corpses of those shot during the walk.

When we arrived in Loslau, we were loaded onto cattle cars, 77 people in each, and taken to the Ravensbrück camp. It was very overcrowded: 1,600 people were placed in a building that was 100 feet long and 300 feet wide. It snowed. Many died in that camp.

A week later, again packed into train cars, 100 people in each, we arrived at Malchow, a camp near Berlin. Here, we were given some bread, watery soup and a cup of water. We left that camp as well and went to Neustadt. After two days of walking, I fell down by the side of the road. The Russians were approaching, and when I eventually reached Neustadt, they were already there. After several days, I arrived at the American line.

Now I am 26 years old. I was educated in a state school in the Netherlands where I received a university degree. Then I taught at a secret school, where I learnt to type and write in shorthand. I did an English trade course. My mother and father must have been gassed, and I do not know what happened to my brother.