



## HENRYK TAUBER

Oświęcim, 24 May 1945, Investigating Judge Jan Sehn from Kraków, a member of the Commission for the Investigation of German-Nazi Crimes in Oświęcim, at the request, in the presence and with the participation of the Deputy Prosecutor of the Regional Court in Kraków, Edward Pęczalski, pursuant to Article 254 in connection with Articles 254, 107 and 115 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, interviewed a former Auschwitz concentration camp prisoner as a witness, who testified as follows:

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<b>Name and surname</b>	Henryk Tauber
<b>Date and place of birth</b>	8 July 1917 in Chrzanów
<b>Parents' names</b>	Abraham and Ninda, <i>née</i> Szajnowic
<b>Marital status</b>	single
<b>Religious affiliation</b>	Jewish
<b>Citizenship and nationality</b>	Polish
<b>Profession</b>	shoemaker (uppers)
<b>Place of residence</b>	Chrzanów, Grunwaldzka Street 1
<b>Criminal record</b>	none

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Until the outbreak of war in 1939, I lived in Chrzanów with my closest family consisting of 12 people. Only one of my brothers-in-law and I have survived from the whole family. I still do not have any information about the fate of one of my brothers who had emigrated to Russia. As a result of the mass displacement and deportation operations, our family was split up and I was placed in the Kraków Ghetto. There in November 1942, I was arrested and imprisoned in the Jewish Police Service prison at Józefińska Street 31.



On 19 January 1943, I was transferred to Auschwitz along with a transport of 400 Jews from the Kraków Ghetto and 800 Aryans from the Montelupich Prison. The transport consisted of about 800 men and 400 women. The women were immediately separated from the men at the Auschwitz station and were placed in the women's camp in Birkenau. My group, which consisted of 250 Jewish prisoners and about 550 Aryans, was sent to block 27 in section Blb. The block was unfinished; it had no windows, doors, or bunks.

Then, I lived in blocks 32 and 20 of the same camp section. I spent a few days in Buna, but due to the fact that prisoners in my unit were diagnosed with typhus, I was transferred back to Birkenau and placed in block 31 of section Blb. In the meantime, we were registered and I passed myself off as a qualified locksmith-mechanic.

At the beginning of February 1943, *Unterscharführer* Groll, from the *Arbeitsdienst* [labor service], and prisoner Mikusz from the *Arbeitseinsatz* [labor deployment], came to our block and chose prisoners who were professionals and who were supposed to work in the Auschwitz workshops. They chose 20 young Jews, including me. We were taken to block 4, where a doctor examined and deemed us all healthy. On the same day, we were transported by truck to Auschwitz, under the escort of SS men, and placed in block 11, in bunker 7. The following day, the 20 of us were escorted, under a strong escort of SS men, to a bunker which later turned out to be crematorium I. There, we met seven Jews, including Jankowski, and three Poles. The *kapo* was Mietek Morawa from Kraków. He was a tall, slim blonde man, and looked to be about 34 years old. One of his brothers was a boxer in Kraków. I heard that Morawa's family lived in Dębniaki. Initially, when we worked in crematorium I in Auschwitz, he was a very strict *kapo* who did the work demanded by the Germans and strictly followed their orders. Later on, he became the *Oberkapo* of crematoria II and III in Birkenau. He tried to get along with us because there were about 400 of us, we had worked in the crematoria for a long time, and we were resigned, ready to do anything, which is why we wouldn't have let anyone push us around.

On the first day after our arrival at the crematorium, an SS *Unterscharführer*, whose name I do not remember, gave us a speech. He told us that our job would not be pleasant, but we had to get used to it and, after some time, we would not find it difficult at all. He spoke in Polish. In his entire speech, he did not mention that we would assist in the burning of human corpses. He ended his speech with the command: "Los un die Arbeit" [get to work], hitting us with a whip on the head.



Together with Mietek Morawa, they drove us to the bunker of crematorium I, where we saw several hundred human corpses. They lay on piles, one on top of another, dirty and frozen. Many corpses were covered in blood and had broken skulls, while others had had their stomachs slit open, apparently during autopsies. The corpses were frozen, so we had to separate them with axes. Beaten and rushed by our *Unterscharführer* and *kapo* Morawa, we pulled the corpses out to the *hajcownia* [furnace room], a room with three furnaces, each with two dampers.

According to the nomenclature adopted by the Soviet Commission, the damper served as a retort for burning corpses. In the furnace room, we placed the corpses on a cart running on rails installed between the furnaces. The cart went from the door of the bunker where the corpses were kept, on a turntable, which rotated in all directions and ran across the furnace room on broad rails. Each retort was connected to the broad rails by narrow rails, on which the cart rolled towards the retorts. The cart had four small metal wheels. It had a solid metal frame in the shape of a crate. As ballast, we put stones and iron inside the crate. The upper part of the crate was extended by a metal trough over two meters long. On the trough, we would place five corpses. First, two corpses with the legs towards the furnace and the stomachs upwards, and then two other corpses in the opposite direction. Those corpses had their bellies upwards. The fifth corpse was placed with the legs towards the furnace and the back upwards. The arms of the fifth corpse would fall down as if they were embracing the corpses beneath them. Since the load sometimes weighted more than the ballast in the cart, we had to put a board under the trough to support it, preventing the cart from tilting and the corpses from slipping. We loaded the trough and pushed it into a retort.

When the corpses were already in the furnace, we held them down with a tin box that ran along the trough, while other prisoners pulled the cart out from under the bodies. There was a special handle at the end of the trough to operate the sliding box. Then, we closed the door.

In crematorium I, there were three furnaces, each with two retorts, as I have already mentioned. In each retort, five human corpses could be burned; therefore, it was possible to burn 30 human bodies at a time in the crematorium. When I worked in the crematorium, such a load took at most an hour and a half to burn. The corpses were emaciated, real skeletons, so they burned very slowly. I know, from my later work and observations of the burning of corpses in crematoria II and III, that the bodies of fat people burned much faster. Burning human fat, which produces additional heat, speeds up the incineration process.



All the furnaces of crematorium I were situated in a room that I have called the *hajcownia*. Near the entrance, there was a furnace whose hearth faced the entrance door, and whose retorts faced the room. The other two furnaces were situated in the opposite direction – the retorts faced the entrance door and the hearths faced the room – and were located at the other end of the room. We used coke to fire the furnaces. They were made, as evidenced by the inscriptions on the furnace doors and other metal parts, by a company called [J.A.] Topf & Söhne from Erfurt. The cart for transporting corpses was also built by that company.

Behind the furnace room, there was a small coke storeroom; then, there was a small *Schreibstube* [office], and, further to the right, there was a warehouse for storing human ashes. The entrance door, which now leads to the room that I call the *hajcownia*, was built later. At the time when I worked in the crematorium, that door did not exist. We entered the furnace room from the corridor through the door situated to the left of the entrance. There were two such doors. The first door to the right from the corridor led to an on-site storage room where spare grates were kept. This was where people from small transports undressed. When I worked in the bunker of crematorium I, those people were executed by shooting (the bunker was the part of the building where people were gassed). Such transports arrived once or twice a week and consisted of 30-40 people. There were people of all nationalities.

While the shooting was taking place, prisoners working in the *Sonderkommando* were sent to the coke storeroom. Later on, we would find the bodies of the people shot in the bunker. All the corpses had a gunshot wound in the back of the skull (*Genickschuss*). The shooting was always done by one SS man – always the same – from the Political Department, assisted by another SS man from the same department who certified the death of the executed people in writing. During the shooting, *kapo* Morawa was not in the coke storeroom with us. I do not know what he was doing during that time. We took the dead bodies from the bunker to the furnace room, while they were still quite warm and dripping with fresh blood.

The second door to the right from the corridor led to a room where human ashes were stored. You had to pass through that room to get to the bunker proper, where the victims were shot while I was working there; before that – they were gassed in there. In December 1942, 400 prisoners from the *Sonderkommando* were gassed in that bunker. I heard about this from prisoners who were working in crematorium I before I was assigned to work there.



I worked in crematorium I from the beginning of February 1943 to 4 March 1943, so for over a month. Throughout all that time, we were kept in bunker 7 of block 11. My group, which arrived from Birkenau at the beginning of February, consisted of 23 Jews, after two dentists, Czech Jews, joined us. Those seven Jews whom I met at work in crematorium I were also kept in block 11, but in a different cell. *Kapo* Morawa and the Poles who had already worked in crematorium I with him, Józek and Wacek, lived in block 15, which was an open block. Apart from those two Czech Jews, four Poles were assigned to our group that month: Staszek and Władek, whose surnames I don't remember, Władysław Biskup from Kraków, and Jan Agrestowski from the Pass Commune, near Warsaw. I remember their names perfectly because they asked me to write letters in German to their families. The four above-mentioned Poles lived in block 15. When we were setting off to work for the first time, the old *kommando* employed at crematorium I was called "Komando crematorium I." Our group, that is, 22 Jews from block 11 and those four Poles assigned to our group, was called "Komando crematorium II." At that time, we did not understand what those names meant. It was only later that we realized that we had been sent to crematorium I for a month of on-the-job training, which would prepare us for work in crematorium II.

I would like to point out that the crematoria and the work units who operated them were supervised by the Political Department. The files of prisoners working in those units were kept in the Political Department. The sick were not sent to the hospital, but to a separate infirmary set up for them in a closed-off block. The block where we lived was isolated, while in Auschwitz we were kept closed up in block 11. It was not up to the *Arbeitsdienst* to release a prisoner from that *kommando* or to transfer them to a different one. It could happen only by order of the Political Department. Our doctor was a French Jew, Pach. He was a good specialist who also treated SS men and, with their help, he managed to get out of the *Sonderkommando* block and was transferred to a different one. When the Political Department found out about this, Pach was reassigned to work in our infirmary, although he had been in the open block for several months.

When I worked in crematorium I, we were supervised, on behalf of the Political Department, by *Untersturmführer* Grabner and *Oberscharführer* Quakernack among others. I remember that *kapo* Mietek once asked Grabner to assign another prisoner to his unit, because one of us had died. Grabner told him that he could not give him just one *Zugang* [new arrival], but if Morawa killed another four Jews, then he would give him five *Zugangs*. He also asked Mietek



if he beat the prisoners. Mietek showed him his stick. Then Grabner seized an iron bar and told him he should use that to do the beating with.

After the first day of work in crematorium I, five men from my group declared that they were sick and stayed behind in the block. The next day, when we were pulling corpses out of the crematorium bunker, we found their naked bodies, without any gunshot wounds. I believe they had received a lethal injection. After a month of working in crematorium I, from the initial 22 Jews, only 12 were left. On 4 March 1943, our group, together with Władysław Tomiczek from Cieszyn and the four Poles I have already mentioned (Biskup and others), was transferred to Birkenau, where we were placed in block 2 of section BIb. It was a closed-off block. As I learned later on, Tomiczek had started working in the crematorium in 1941. He was an old prisoner – his prison number was 1400 and something. Before he was assigned to our group, which took place in March 1943, he had worked for some time in the mill and in the slaughterhouse, where he was arrested, with a group of 49 other prisoners, on charges of conspiracy. The entire group was placed in block 11 in Auschwitz and was sentenced to death by the SS. *Untersturmführer* Grabner recognized Tomiczek before the execution and assigned him to our group. Tomiczek worked in Birkenau as the *kapo* of a *kommando* working in crematorium II, and later in crematorium IV. I think it was in August 1943 when Tomiczek was summoned to the Political Department, from which *Oberscharführer* Quakernack brought us his body on the same day. We burned his corpse in crematorium V. Tomiczek had a sack on his head, but we all recognized him because he was a large man. Quakernack supervised us personally until Tomiczek's corpse was placed in the furnace, and then he immediately left. We opened the furnace door, pulled out the corpse, unwrapped the sack, and saw Tomiczek's face clearly. He was a very good man who treated us decently and we had told him about our conspiratorial activities.

On 4 March 1943, SS guards took us to crematorium II, where *kapo* August, who in the meantime had been transferred from Buchenwald where he had worked in the local crematorium, explained to us what the structure of the crematorium was. Crematorium II had an underground undressing room (*Auskleideraum*) and a bunker, that is, a gas chamber (*Luickenkeller*). Between those two cellars, there was a corridor with stairs leading down from the outside and with a trough where we threw the bodies brought to the crematorium from the camp to be burned. The undressing room door led to the corridor, and from there you took the door to the right to get to the gas chamber. The corridor could be accessed by



another staircase situated by the entrance to the crematorium grounds. To the left of those stairs there was a small room in the corner, where we kept hair, glasses, and other things. To the right, there was another small room for spare cans of Zyklon B. In the right corner of the corridor, in the wall opposite to the entrance from the undressing room, there was an elevator for pulling corpses out.

You could enter the undressing room by stairs from the crematorium yard. The stairs were surrounded by iron banisters. Over the door, there was a sign with the inscription "Zum Baden und Desinfektion" [to bath and disinfection] written in several languages. In the undressing room, there were wooden benches along the walls and numbered wooden hooks. There were no windows and the light was always on. The undressing room had a water supply and sewers. From the undressing room, people went into the corridor through a door with the inscription "Zu Bade" [to the bath] above it, repeated in several languages. I remember that the word *banya* [bathhouse] was also written there.

From that corridor, you went through the door on the right to the gas chamber. It was a wooden door, made of two layers of short pieces of boards, resembling parquet. Between the layers, there was a sheet of material sealing the edges of the door, and the frame rabbets were also covered with felt seals. At the head level of a medium-height man, there was a round glass peephole. On the other side of the door, that is, on the gas chamber side, the peephole was covered with a grid in the shape of a hemisphere. That grid was installed because the people in the gas chamber used to knock the glass out before they died. Since the grid did not manage to prevent this and, despite its installation, such incidents still happened, the peephole was later covered with a sheet and a board. At this point, I would like to mention that people who were going to be gassed in the gas chamber would often damage the electrical wires, tearing them off, and destroy the ventilation devices. The door was closed from the corridor side with iron bolts, which were tightened and sealed with special handles after the door was closed.

The roof of the gas chamber was supported in the middle by concrete pillars. To the left and to the right of these pillars, there were four others. The outer sides of the pillars were covered with thick wire mesh, which ran up to the ceiling and above. Behind the wire mesh, there was another with smaller holes and a third, denser one inside it. Inside the third mesh, there was a movable box, which we emptied of powder, using a wire, when the gas had



already evaporated. Furthermore, there were electrical wires in the chamber running on both sides of the bearing beam that was supported on concrete pillars. The ventilation system was installed inside the gas chamber's walls. It could be accessed from the chamber through small holes covered with white perforated sheets, which were located in the upper part of the side walls, and through bottom openings, protected with iron muzzles of some kind. The ventilation system of the gas chamber was connected to ventilation pipes located in the undressing room. The system also extended to the dissecting room and was operated by electric motors located in the attic of the crematorium building. In the gas chamber, there was no water supply system. The water tap was located in the corridor and we had to use a rubber hose to rinse the chamber floor.

At the end of 1943, the gas chamber was divided with a brick wall and in this way adapted for the purpose of gassing smaller transports. That wall had the same door as the one leading from the corridor to the chamber. Smaller transports were gassed in the chamber located furthest from the entrance from the corridor. Both the undressing room and the gas chamber were covered by a concrete slab covered with soil and grass. Above the gas chamber, there were four small chimney-like openings for pouring the gas inside. The openings were covered with concrete slabs, which had two wooden handles.

The area above the undressing room was slightly elevated above the yard level and completely flat. Ventilation pipes led to ducts and chimneys in the building located above the corridor and the undressing room. I would like to note that, at the beginning, there were no benches or hooks in the undressing room, and there were no showers in the gas chamber. It was all installed there in the autumn of 1943 to camouflage the undressing room and the chamber as a bathhouse and disinfection building. The showers were attached to wooden blocks embedded into the concrete ceiling of the gas chamber. No water pipes were connected to the showers, so they never had water.

As I have already mentioned, there was an elevator in the corridor, which we used for taking corpses up to the ground floor level. At that level, there was another door leading to the furnace room, where the crematorium furnaces were located, and yet another door on the opposite side, leading to a storeroom where we kept corpses. Apart from that, there was a corridor, which could be accessed from the site of the entrance gate to the crematorium grounds. The door on the right from the corridor led to the dissecting room. Between the





dissecting room and the storeroom for corpses, there was a toilet, which could be entered through a door in the dissecting room. The door located on the left in the corridor led to the furnace room from the side of the crematorium furnaces' hearths. The furnaces were placed side by side with equal spaces between them. There were five of them and each one was fired with two hearths. On the other side, that is, from the side of the elevator door, the furnaces had three retorts each. Each retort could fit five corpses and was locked with an iron door with the inscription "Topf." Under each retort, there was an ashpit, also locked with an iron door made by the same company.

Behind the furnaces, from the side of the door leading to the crematorium yard, on the left-hand side, there was the coke storeroom. At the end of the room, behind the coke storeroom, there was a narrow corridor with a door leading to a small room for SS men. Inside, there was a window facing the furnace room, from the side of the retorts, and another one overlooking the back yard of the crematorium. Next to that room was the room of the *Kommandoführer*, with a window facing the back yard. Beyond the room, there was a toilet and a small washroom, and further on – the doctors' room with a window overlooking the women's camp. In the corridor were stairs, which led to the attic, where a room for people working in the *Sonderkommando* was located. In the attic there were also electric motors, run by a prisoner mechanic, for operating the elevator and the ventilation system.

In the middle of the building, from the side of the entrance to the crematorium yard, there was an annex. The annex protruded to the front and had a furnace for burning rubbish. It was the so-called *Müllverbrennung*. It was a separate coal-fired furnace, which could be accessed by going down the stairs, and was surrounded with an iron rail. The entrance to the *Müllverbrennung* annex was located on the side of the crematorium entrance gate. Apart from the door, the annex also had a front window, a window on the right, and another one on the left from the entrance. In the corner, to the left of the entrance, there was a hole through which things to be burned were thrown from the ashpit – situated in front of the hole – into the annex. The furnace for burning those items was situated on the left-hand side of the entrance to the annex, and the furnace hearth on the right. I would like to point out that documents from the Political Department were always burned in that furnace. From time to time, SS men would bring truckloads of papers there, documents and files, which were then burned under their supervision. While burning the papers, I noticed that there were piles of personal records of dead people and *Totemeldungs* [death notices]. Of course,



we could not take any of the documents because we burned them under the direct and strict supervision of SS men.

Behind the *Müllverbrennung* annex, at the end of the crematorium, there was a chimney connected to all crematorium furnaces and the *Müllverbrennung* furnace. Initially there were three electric motors around the chimney, which powered its draught. However, due to the high temperature near the furnace, the motors would break down. A fire even broke out once. Therefore, the motors were later dismantled and the smoke pipes of the crematorium furnaces were connected directly to the chimney. In the *Müllverbrennung* annex, there was a door leading to the part of the building with the chimney. That part was located on a higher level, so it could be reached by climbing stairs. After the motors were dismantled, a washroom for *Sonderkommando* workers was set up next to the chimney, and on the opposite side, that is, closer to the undressing room, they built a room, where *Oberkapo* August sometimes slept. He lived permanently in the block of *Reichsdeutschers*, initially in section Blb, and later in section Bllld. The attic of the *Müllverbrennung* annex was the place where the hair cut from victims' heads was dried – it was tossed and packed in sacks. The sacks were then taken away by trucks.

As I have already mentioned, crematorium II had five furnaces. Each furnace had three retorts for burning corpses and was fired by two coke hearths. The outlets of the fire pipes of the hearths were located above the ashpits of both side retorts, so the flame went first through both side retorts, then it reached the central retort, from where the combustion gases went down the duct into the chimney. The combustion gases duct went below the crematorium furnace from the side of the retort, in the middle between two hearths. Because of this structure, the process of cremating corpses in side retorts and in the central one differed. The corpses of "Muselmanns," which were emaciated and had no fat, burned faster in the side retorts and slower in the central one. On the other hand, the corpses of people who were sent to the gas chambers directly from transports, which were, therefore, not emaciated, burned better in the central retort. While burning such corpses, we used coke only to start the fire in the furnace. Fatty corpses burned on their own thanks to the burning of fat in the bodies. Sometimes when we ran out of coke to fire the hearths, we would place straw and wood in the ashpits under the retorts, so as soon as the corpse caught fire, the entire load burned on its own.

Inside, the retort had no iron parts – the bars were made of grog. Iron components would have melted in those temperatures, as they ranged from 1000 to 1200 degrees Celsius.



Inside the retort, grog bars were arranged transversely. The retort's hatch and opening were smaller, while the retort itself was about 3 m long, 80 cm wide, and about a meter high. Usually, we burned four or five corpses in one retort, but sometimes we loaded more bodies inside. We could squeeze even eight *Muselmans* in a single retort. We burned larger loads like that during air raid alarms, without the knowledge of the head of the crematorium. The idea was to make more fire come out of the chimney, which would attract the attention of pilots. We thought that in this way we might bring about a change in our fate.

The iron parts, especially the grates, which have been stored in the camp to this day, were components of the hearths. The grates in crematorium II were made of thick square iron. In crematoria IV and VI, the grate bars resembled lances or swords with handles.

On 4 March, we were instructed to fire up the hearths. We did so from the morning until about 4.00 p.m., when a commission from the Political Department and high-ranking SS officers from Berlin arrived at the crematorium. There were also civilians and engineers from the "Topf" company. I remember that *Hauptsturmführer Schwarz*, *Lagerkomendant Aumeier* and *Oberscharführer Quackernack* were present. When the commission arrived, we were ordered to take the corpses out of the storeroom and place them in the retorts. In the storeroom, we found about 45 corpses of men who were very well fed and fat. At the time, I didn't know when those corpses had been placed in the storeroom or where they had come from. Later on, I found out they had been selected from the people gassed in bunker 2 situated in the forest. An SS officer from the Political Department went there, gave an order to select well-fed and fat corpses and load them onto a truck, and then he took them away. The *Sonderkommando* prisoners who worked there did not know where the corpses had been taken. It turned out they were used to test and demonstrate, before the large commission, the efficiency of crematorium II, which was to be opened then.

We took the corpses out from the elevator and through the door leading to the furnace room, and placed them, two or three at a time, in a similar cart to the one I described when talking about crematorium I, and loaded them into individual retorts. When we had placed all the corpses in the retorts of all five furnaces, the members of the commission, with watches in their hands, watched the corpses burn. They opened the hatches, looked at their watches, talked to each other, and were surprised that the cremation took that long. Since the furnaces were new and not hot enough, despite the fact that we had been firing them



since the morning, the load took about 40 minutes to burn. When the crematorium operated continuously, we burned two loads per hour. According to regulations, we were supposed to put new corpses into the retort every half hour. *Oberkapo* August explained to us that, according to the calculations and plans for the crematorium, a single corpse should take five or seven minutes to burn in a retort. Generally, he did not allow us to place more than three corpses into one retort. With that quantity, we would have to work without a break because upon loading the last retort, the first one would have already burned up. We wanted to have a break, so we loaded four corpses into each retort. Since such a load took longer to burn, after we had loaded the last retort we had a few minutes' break until the load in the first retort burned up. We used that time to wash the floor in the furnace room, which freshened up the air a bit.

When the first test load had burned up, the commission left, we cleaned up and washed the crematorium, and were escorted to camp Blb, block 2. For the next ten days we were escorted by SS guards to the crematorium every day and fired up the hearths. There were no new transports in those ten days, we did not burn any corpses, and the hearths were fired up only to heat up the furnaces.

Around the middle of March 1943, when we had finished working in the evening, Hirsch, at that time the *Hauptscharführer* of the crematoria, came and instructed us to stay in the crematorium because there was a job for us. At nightfall, the first trucks arrived, carrying people of different ages and both sexes. There were elderly men, women, and a lot of children. The trucks went back and forth to the train station for about an hour, bringing more and more people. When the trucks started arriving, the *Sonderkommando* was locked in the back room, where – as I have already mentioned – doctors who performed autopsies lived. From that room we could hear the people, who were being unloaded from the trucks in the yard, crying and shouting. They were being herded into a barrack that was situated perpendicular to the crematorium building, on the side of the entry gate to the yard of crematorium II. The people entered the barrack through a door facing the gate and went down the stairs to the right of the *Müllverbrennung*. At the time, that barrack served as an undressing room. However, it was used only for about a week and then it was dismantled. After that, people were driven into the underground part of the crematorium through the stairs leading to the underground undressing room, which I have already described.



After about two hours, they let us out of the doctors' room and sent us to the gas chamber, where we found piles of naked corpses in a sitting position. The corpses were pink, in some places red. Others were covered with greenish stains and had foam on their lips or were bleeding from the nose. In most cases, we saw feces. I remember that many of them had their eyes open. Many corpses sat closely together; the largest group crowded near the door. There were fewer corpses near the wire mesh pillars. The location of the bodies made it obvious that the people had wanted to get away from the pillars and to get to the door. It was very hot and stuffy in the chamber, and being there was unbearable. Later on, we found out that many people suffocated in the gas chamber before they were even gassed. Those people lay underneath, on the floor, and others trampled them. They did not sit like most of the victims, but lay on the bottom. It meant that they had died earlier than the rest, who had to walk over their corpses. When people were thrown into the gas chamber and locked inside, but before Zyklon B was poured in, the air was pumped out of the chamber. This was possible thanks to the ventilation system, which had suction and discharge modes. The undressing room had only suction ventilation. Although the ventilation system in the chamber was turned on as soon as the chamber was opened, when the inside was full of gassed people and we went in to take them out, we had to wear gas masks. However, we did not take out the corpses from that first transport, from the middle of March 1943, because we had to go back to the furnaces.

That job was assigned to 70 prisoners from block 2, who were also part of the *Sonderkommando*, but who burned corpses in pits near the bunkers. This group pulled the corpses out of the gas chamber to the corridor by the elevator, where the women had their hair cut by a barber. Then, the corpses were dragged down to the furnace room level, where they were placed in the storeroom for corpses or taken to the furnace room and laid in front of the furnaces. There, two dentists, supervised by SS men, pulled out metal and false teeth. They also took rings off the corpses' fingers and removed their earrings. The teeth were thrown into a box marked with the word "Zahnarztstation," while the valuables were placed in a separate box. That box had no inscription, but it was marked with a number. The dentists, who were recruited from among the prisoners, looked inside the mouth of each corpse, except for children. If the mouth was too tightly closed, they opened it with pincers, which were also used for pulling out teeth. As I have already mentioned, the dentists were closely supervised by SS men. From time to time, the SS would tell us to stop loading the



corpses that had already been inspected by the dentists into the furnaces. They would look into their mouths and if they found a gold tooth that the dentists had missed, they considered it sabotage and burned the culprit alive in a furnace. I witnessed this myself: a dentist, a French Jew, was burned alive in crematorium V. He fought and yelled, but several SS men jumped at him, overpowered him, and threw him alive into a furnace.

This punishment was quite often applied against members of the *Sonderkommando*, but there were also others, such as shooting on the spot, throwing into a pool with water, physical tortures, beating, rolling a prisoner naked on gravel, and others. The punishments were carried out in front of the entire *Sonderkommando* for the purposes of intimidation.

I also remember another incident that took place in crematorium V in August 1944. An ordinary laborer, a Jew from Wolbrom named Lejb, about 20 years old, a short, dark-haired man, with prison number one hundred eight thousand something, was caught during shift change with a gold ring and a watch. All the *Sonderkommando* prisoners were then summoned and the man was hung in front of them, by his hands tied behind his back, on an iron bar above the hearths. He hung in that position for about an hour, then his hands and legs were untied, and he was put into a cold furnace. Underneath, there was an ashpit, where gasoline was poured and flames went up to the retort in which Lejb was locked. After a few minutes, the furnace was opened and the convict, covered in burns, came out running. He was then ordered to run around the crematorium yard and shout that he was a thief. Then, he was told to climb the crematorium barbed wire fence, which was not electrified by day. When he got to the top of the fence, Moll, the head of the crematorium, shot him dead. Moll's first name was Otto.

On another occasion, SS men threw a prisoner into a pit with boiling human fat for working too slow in the crematorium. At that time, corpses were burned in open pits, from which the fat flowed into a separate tank in the ground. The fat was used to pour over the corpses in order to speed up the cremation process. That unfortunate man was pulled out from the fat alive and shot. To complete the formalities, his corpse was transported to the block where a *Totenschein* [death certificate] was issued, and the next day his body was taken back to the crematorium and burned in a pit.

During the burning of corpses from the first transport in the middle of March 1943, we worked for 48 hours without a break. However, we did not manage to burn all the



corpses because, in the meantime, a Greek transport arrived and was also gassed. We were overworked and completely exhausted, so they sent us to the block and a different *Sonderkommando* group, which at that time also worked in both bunkers, substituted for us at work. That group consisted of about 400 prisoners.

I worked in crematorium II until around the middle of April. Greek, French and Dutch transports were coming at that time. Besides these, we burned the corpses of people who had been sent to the gas chambers as a result of selections carried out in the camp. We worked in two shifts, day and night. I cannot tell you how many people were gassed and burned during that period. On average, about 2,500 corpses were burned within 24 hours. At that time, I had no chance to see how the victims were driven into the undressing room, and then from the undressing room into the gas chambers. When the transports arrived, we, the *Sonderkommando*, were locked in the coke storeroom. Two of us, however, stayed in the furnace room to operate the hearths.

I was once selected to do that job. Through a window in the furnace room, I saw how Zyklon B was poured into the gas chamber. Every transport was followed by a Red Cross truck which carried camp doctor Mengele and *Rottenführer* Scheimetz to the crematorium. They would take Zyklon B cans out of that Red Cross truck and place them near the chimneys through which the gas was poured into the chamber. Scheimetz would open them with a special chisel and hammer, pour the cans' contents into the chamber, and cover the opening with a concrete slab. As I have mentioned earlier, there were four such chimneys. Scheimetz poured the contents of one small can of Zyklon B into each of them. The cans had a yellow label. Before opening the cans, Scheimetz put on a gas mask. Wearing the mask, he opened the cans of Zyklon B and poured their contents through the openings into the gas chamber. Besides Scheimetz, there were also other specially designated SS men who did that job. They belonged to the *Gesundheitswesen* [?] unit, but I do not remember their names. A camp doctor was always present at the gassing. I mentioned Mengele because I met him very often at work. Apart from him, other camp doctors also assisted in the gassing, for example König, Thilo, and another thin and tall young man, whose name I cannot recall right now. He was the one who would send everyone to the gas chambers at selections. I remember that Mengele once told Scheimetz to quickly feed the officers who were in the gas chamber so that the two of them could leave for Katowice. He literally said, "Scheimetz, gib ihnen das Fressen, sie sollen direkt nach Kattowitz fahren." He meant that Scheimetz



should hurry up and pour the Zyklon B into the chamber. When I worked in crematorium II, I also noticed that the SS men who escorted transports to the crematorium grounds had dogs on leashes and whips in their hands.

The cart in which we loaded corpses was used in crematorium II only for a short time. Afterwards, it was replaced with iron stretchers (in German they were called *Leichenbrett*) which we slid into the retort on iron rollers installed on the bottom edge of the retort door. The reason for the change was that we did not load the corpses into the furnace fast enough using the cart. I believe it was *Oberkapo* August who invented the new devices. Later on, they were introduced in all the crematoria. In crematoria II and III, there were two rollers for all three retorts of a furnace. The rollers moved along an iron bar installed in front of the retort door. In crematoria IV and V, each retort had separate rollers, which were permanently installed in front of its door. Each crematorium had two iron stretchers to load bodies into the furnaces. We would place a stretcher in front of a retort and two prisoners would put corpses on it. The first body was placed with the legs towards the retort, their back down and their face up. On top of the first one, another body was placed, also with the face up, but with the head towards the retort. The reason for doing so was that, in this way, the body on top held the legs of the corpse below, and the legs of the corpse on top did not have to be pushed into the furnace, but just slipped inside.

Corpses were placed on a stretcher by two prisoners, while two others stood by the bar which we placed underneath the stretcher at its end closest to the retort. While the corpses were being loaded on the stretcher, one of them opened the retort door and the other got the rollers ready. They lifted the stretcher and placed it on the rollers, while a fifth prisoner lifted it by the handles and pushed it into the retort. When the bodies were inside, a sixth prisoner held them there with an iron poker, while the fifth man pulled the stretcher out. The sixth prisoner also had to pour water over the stretcher after removing it from the furnace to cool it, because otherwise new bodies would stick to the stretcher. He would dissolve soap in the water so that the corpses slid smoothly on the stretcher.

The second load was placed inside the same retort and in the same way, but the difference was that we had to hurry up because the first two corpses were already burning, their hands and legs were going up, and if we didn't do it quickly enough, we would have problems loading the second pair in. While loading the second pair of corpses into the furnace, I had





a chance to see how the corpses burned. The trunk seemed to stretch, while the hands and legs rose up and shrank. Blisters formed on the bodies and, in the case of old swollen corpses, which after the gassing had been kept in the storeroom sometimes even for two days, the diaphragms would burst and the intestines would pop out. I also observed the cremation process while digging about in the furnace with a poker, which I did to speed up the cremation. After each loading, the *SS-Kommandoführer* checked if the furnaces were properly charged. We had to open the door of each retort and we could see what was happening inside.

We burned children's corpses with the bodies of the elderly and adults. First, we would place the bodies of two adults into the furnace, and then as many children as we could fit – usually five or six. We did it this way because the bodies of children could not be placed directly on the grates, the bars of which were so widely spaced that the corpses could fall through them into the ashpit. Women's bodies burned much better and faster than the corpses of men. Therefore, if a load was burning poorly, we would search for women's corpses and put them in the furnace to speed up the cremation.

During the burning of the first loads, when only the hearths heated the furnaces, the cremation took longer. Later on, however, as we continued with the next loads, the furnaces became so hot due to the heat produced by the burned corpses that the hearths were turned off altogether. If we put corpses inside a furnace when it was that hot, fat immediately started leaking down from the bodies into the ashpit, where it lit up and burned the load. When we burned *Muselmans*, we had to constantly fire up the hearths. The *Vorarbeiter* would write the number of corpses burned in each load in a notebook, while the *SS Kommandoführer* checked his notes and took them away when the whole transport had been burned.

Each *Sonderkommando* shift was guarded by different SS men and *Kommandoführers*. I remember the following *SS Kommandoführers*: Gorges, Knaus, Kurschuss, Schultz, Köln, and Keller. For some time, Scheimetz, whom I have already mentioned earlier, was also *Kommandoführer* in crematorium IV. All *Kommandoführers* mercilessly abused prisoners from the *Sonderkommando* who worked in the crematorium. For example, Voss, the head of the crematorium, who was later on transferred to a different post, reprimanded *Kommandoführer* Gorges for brutally abusing us for the sole reason that there was nothing



to do in the crematorium because there were no new transports. Gorges told him, "Wenn du hast nicht was zu umlegen, dann bist du wild. Ich habe das schon genug" [When there's no one to kill, you go mad. I've had enough]. Apart from Voss, the heads of the crematorium in different periods were: *Unterscharführer* Steinberg, *Hauptscharführer*s Hirsch and Moll, *Scharführer* Puch, and *Oberscharführer* Muhsfeldt, who came to Birkenau from Lublin after the liquidation of the local crematorium there.

The greatest scoundrel of them all was *Hauptscharführer* Otto Moll. Even before my arrival at the camp, he was supervising the work in the bunkers, where gassed people were burned in pits. Later on, he was transferred for some time to a different unit. He became the head of all the crematoria as part of the preparations for the arrival of the mass Hungarian transports in 1944. He was the one who prepared the whole operation of mass destruction of the people from those transports. Even before the Hungarian transports arrived, he ordered us to dig pits next to crematorium V and he reopened bunker 2 and its pits. In the crematorium yard, he put up signs, which said that people from transports would go to the camp, where they would be assigned work, but that first they had to have a shower and undergo disinfection. For that reason, they were instructed to undress and leave all valuable items in baskets, which were specially placed in the yard for that purpose. He also repeated these instructions during his speeches addressed to the people who arrived with the transports. The transports were numerous and sometimes the chambers of crematorium V could not accommodate all people who had arrived. The rest, who did not fit into the gas chambers, were personally shot dead by Moll. In many cases he would throw people alive into burning pits. He practiced shooting at people from a distance. He abused and beat prisoners from the *Sonderkommando* and treated them like animals. Female prisoners who were assigned to work for him told us that he would take gold items out from the box where the valuables stolen from people from transports were stored. He removed them using a wire and took them for himself in his briefcase. From the things that were left by gassed people, he took furs and lots of food, especially fats. With a smile on his face, he would then say to the SS men around him that one should store up on food supplies because lean times would come someday.

Under his rule, the *Sonderkommando* grew to about a thousand prisoners. Initially, when I was assigned to the *Sonderkommando* it consisted of about 400 prisoners. That number did not change until January or February 1944, when about 300 prisoners were



transported to Lublin. In the meantime, about 50 prisoners were being assigned to the *Sonderkommando* each week. However, when I was just beginning to work there, so many of us were being killed that despite those weekly supplies, the *Sonderkommando* had no more than 400 members. Following that transport to Lublin, only about a hundred of us were left. Twenty Russians and a German *kapo* named Karol were sent and assigned to our group. Additionally, another several dozen prisoners were assigned to the *Sonderkommando*, including *Goldgiessers* and stokers from crematorium I in Auschwitz. In April 1944, the *Sonderkommando* consisted of about 150 prisoners. At the end of that month, due to the Hungarian transports, that number grew to a thousand.

Moll and his SS men made our lives a misery in the way they acted and treated us, and with the tasks they made us perform while burning the mass Hungarian transports. As soon as we established contact with the camp and the outside world, we decided we had to either organize a revolt and escape or die. We set the date for the revolt for June 1944. I do not remember the exact day. However, the revolt did not take place, although we prepared everything and we even revealed our plans to people from whom we had kept the revolt secret during the preparations. We got into a lot of trouble because of it, and when the plans came to light many people lost their lives. The first man to be shot was our *kapo*, Kamiński. It happened shortly after the date when the revolt was to take place. Then we were transferred to crematorium IV so that we had no contact at all with the outside world. About 300 prisoners who lived there were selected and sent to the gas chambers. They were gassed in the Canada weighing room in Auschwitz and burned in crematorium II by the SS men working there.

Our situation was becoming more and more difficult, so we decided to escape from the camp at whatever cost, even though we were closely guarded and controlled. In September 1944, following preparations, a revolt broke out in crematorium IV and spread also to crematorium II. During the revolt, we killed 25-30 SS men in crematorium IV and we scattered. Before that, we set crematorium IV on fire and blew it up. An alarm was raised in the camp; the SS surrounded all the crematoria and captured almost all of the scattered prisoners. As a result of the revolt, only about 190 of us, out of a thousand, remained alive. We were all placed in crematorium III, and then transferred to block 11, section BIIId. From there, a hundred prisoners were sent by transport, 30 were assigned to burn corpses in crematorium V, and 50 stayed in block 11 and worked in the *Abbruchkommando* [demolition



unit]. That *kommando* worked at the demolition of crematoria II and III, which were to be transported to Groß-Rosen. After some time, 30 prisoners who burned corpses in crematorium V were placed in block 11, so that when the camp was being liquidated, there were about 90 *Sonderkommando* prisoners in block 11. On 18 January 1945, we were taken to Auschwitz, together with prisoners from other blocks, and driven towards the Reich. After walking about 20 km, I escaped and saved my life.

As I have already mentioned, there were also doctors who were performing dissections in the *Sonderkommando*. Initially, they lived in our block with us, and later on they were placed in the room next to the coke storeroom in crematorium II. These doctors performed autopsies in rooms located on the ground floor of crematoria II and III. In these rooms, there were large stone tables, which the doctors used for autopsies. They did autopsies of prisoners who had died in the hospital and of some people who had been shot in the corridor between the undressing room and the gas chamber. The executions by shooting were usually performed by Moll himself. It happened to prisoners brought from the bunkers of block 11 or from outside of Auschwitz. When prisoners were brought there to be executed by shooting, an *Unterscharführer*, whose name I don't know, very often came to the crematorium and cut out large pieces of prisoners' bodies. He put pieces of human thighs and buttocks into crates or buckets, and took them away by car. I do not know why he did this. The doctors-prisoners made reports of the autopsies, which were then taken away by an SS doctor.

In April 1943, in the middle of the month, I was transferred to work in crematorium IV, which was then the second one to be opened. Then, also in the first half of 1943, crematorium V was opened, and finally crematorium III. Crematorium III was constructed in the same way as crematorium II, the only difference being that in that crematorium we never used a cart to load corpses into the furnace. In crematorium III, the room next to the coke storeroom, which in crematorium II was intended for doctors, was occupied by *Goldarbeiter*s who melted false teeth into bars of gold.

Crematoria IV and V were built according to the same plans and were situated symmetrically on either side of the road which ran between camp BII and Mexico towards the new bathhouse. Each crematorium had two four-retort furnaces. Each furnace had two retorts on either side. In a furnace, there was a hearth, which fired two retorts, situated in the middle. Each furnace had its own chimney. In crematoria IV and V, the



undressing room and the gas chambers were located above the ground. The building where they were kept was much lower than the furnace room, so it looked like an annex to the crematorium. Next to the furnace room, on the side of the undressing room, there was a narrow corridor with four doors, two at each end of the corridor, leading to the furnace room and the undressing room. In the undressing room, there were four small windows covered from the outside with iron bars.

The door situated further along led from the undressing room into a corridor, which could be accessed by the entrance door from the crematorium yard. In the same wall, there was an entrance door and two windows. In front of the entrance door to the corridor, there was a second door leading to a room with one window, which was a kitchen for SS men working in the crematoria. The meals were prepared by prisoners from the *Sonderkommando*. Next to that room, there was a room for the *Sonderkommando* prisoners. In crematorium V, it was occupied by shoemakers, tailors, and carpenters from the *Sonderkommando*, while in crematorium II, it was where hair cut off the bodies of gassed people was stored.

The third door in the corridor led to a smaller corridor, which also had a door to the crematorium yard and a barred window. From that corridor, you could enter the first chamber through the door on the right or take the door in front of the entrance and enter a smaller chamber, through which you could access the last and the largest chamber. That corridor, as well as the three other rooms, was used as a gas chamber. They all had gas-tight doors, windows barred from the inside and gas-tight shutters closed from the outside. Through those windows, which you could reach from the outside of the building if you stretched your arm up, they poured the contents of Zyklon B cans into the gas chambers full of people.

The gas chambers were about two meters high and had electric lighting on the walls, but there was no ventilation system. The *Sonderkommando* prisoners whose task was to take corpses out of the gas chambers worked in gas masks. They dragged corpses on the floor through the entrance corridor, where barbers cut off the corpses' hair, and then through the undressing room, which in those crematoria served as a store room for corpses. It was a large hall, where corpses were stored after the gas chambers were cleared. From the undressing room, the corpses were dragged through that narrow corridor between the furnace room and the undressing room. At each end of the corridor, there was a dentist who pulled out the corpses' gold teeth. We transported the corpses from the furnace room to the retorts, using



the iron stretchers which I have already described. Behind the furnace room, there was the room of the *Kommandoführer*, and next to it – a smaller room for other SS men, a corridor, a washroom and a lavatory for SS men, and a coke storeroom.

The whole building was made of brick and had a wooden roof covered with asbestos boards and roofing felt. The yards of all the crematoria were separated from the outside world by a dense wicker fence and a hedge, which were additionally covered with straw mats. In the yard, there were watchtowers with SS men armed with machine guns. The whole area was surrounded by electrified barbed wire and the yards were illuminated with strong floodlights.

In May 1944, we were instructed by the SS to dig five pits in the yard of crematorium V, between the drainage ditch and the crematorium building. Then, the corpses of people gassed from mass Hungarian transports were burned inside those pits. There were cart rails between the pits, but we did not use carts. The SS men believed they were uncomfortable to use, so the *Sonderkommando* prisoners dragged the gassed corpses from the gas chambers straight into the pits. In the meantime, the old bunker number 2 and its pits for burning corpses were also reopened. I myself did not work in bunker 2.

Since it was believed that pits were better for burning corpses, after we started burning people in the pits, the crematoria were closed one by one. First, crematorium IV was closed in June 1944, I believe. Then, around October 1944 – crematoria II and III. Crematorium V was operating up until the Germans escaped. In the final period, it was used for cremating corpses of prisoners who died or were killed. The gassing of people stopped in October 1944.

Today, I cannot provide the exact number of all the people who were gassed and burned in the crematoria and pits. People who worked in the crematoria secretly wrote down the numbers and recorded the most violent incidents concerning gassed people. Their notes were buried in various spots near the crematoria. Some of the notes were retrieved and taken away when the Soviet Commission was there. A large majority must still be hidden in the ground, and it would be good to look for it. Among other things that were buried, there are photographs of people who had been gassed in the gas chambers and of transports brought to the crematorium to be gassed. I assume that the total number of people gassed in the Auschwitz crematoria throughout the period when I worked there, as a member of the *Sonderkommando*, is about two million. During my stay in Auschwitz, I had an opportunity to talk with various prisoners who had worked in the Auschwitz crematoria and bunkers before



I was brought there. They told me that before I started working in the crematoria, about two million people had already been gassed in bunkers 1 and 2, and in crematorium I. Therefore, I estimate that the total number of people who were gassed in Auschwitz amounts to about four million. This number includes different transports from various European countries, both Jews and Aryans, as well as camp prisoners who were sent to the gas chambers as a result of selections.

The dismantling of the Auschwitz crematoria began in the autumn of 1944. The dismantled parts were taken to the train siding, where they were loaded onto trains. Some of the crematorium parts have stayed in Auschwitz and are currently stored on the construction site, the so-called *Bauhaus*, in Auschwitz I. The Germans did not have time to take the materials with them. There is a cart, which I have mentioned, parts of the ventilation device, frames of furnaces from crematoria IV and V, iron doors from those crematoria, ashpits, scaffoldings, iron window grates, furnace pokers, sealing doors from gas chambers, hooks and benches from the undressing room, and other metal and wooden parts.

At this point, the interview and the present report were concluded. The report was read out.