



GUSTAWA KINSELEWSKA

Day 13 of the trial, 25 March 1947.

(After the recess).

Chairperson: Call the Belgian witness, please.

(The witness enters).

In what language do you want to testify?

Witness: In Polish.

The witness has provided information about herself as follows: Gustawa Kinselewska, 32 years old, nurse, single, nonbeliever, Belgian citizen. No relationship to the parties.

Chairperson: I am informing the witness that she must be completely truthful, due to the consequences of making false declarations. By the mutual agreement of the parties, the witness will testify without the oath.

Would you tell the Tribunal what you know about the case, in what circumstances you got into Auschwitz, and what you know about the accused Höß.

Witness: I was still a nurse in the international brigades in Spain. After coming back in 1938, and after Germans invaded Belgium, I took an active part in the resistance movement in Belgium. Having been denounced, I was arrested on 23 March 1944. After the arrest, I went to another temporary camp in Belgium, and then the transport was taken to Auschwitz. 56-60 people were packed into the carriage we were being transported in, which could only hold 20-30. Men, women, and children, travelled together for three days, with no food or drink, with only some provisions we had taken with us. Upon arriving in Auschwitz, we found SS men at the station. Thanks to the fact that we had been warned by some French and Belgian companions that only the young and healthy were admitted to the camp, and that we shouldn't use the cars offered by the Germans, I got among those who entered the camp. The others, who, tired or sick, went on the trucks, I never saw again in the camp.



From our transport, which consisted of 1200 people, 250 women entered the camp and perhaps the same number of men. In the camp, I underwent quarantine in block 19, where, even though we were not supposed to be working, we were being made to work for four weeks; we were seized and forced to work. We carried rock, sand, and so forth.

After that work, I got into a *kommando* consisting mainly of Russian women. This was a very hard *kommando*, for it worked in the marshes. The frequent lashes and blows delivered by the SS men and women who guarded us were merely a reward for our work.

Thanks to the solidarity that grew then in the camp, I got into a slightly better *kommando*, the *kanada kommando* [a *kommando* that sorted the personal belongings of the prisoners taken to the gas chambers], which was opposite the crematorium.

August and July 1944 was absolute hell in the crematorium. This was the era of the so-called Höß's operation. The transports that were coming to the camp were gassed immediately. 70-80 thousand people were burned every day at that time. Because the crematoria couldn't keep up, a few big pits were dug where people were thrown in, still half alive. There wasn't enough gas – people were suffering more and more, because the gassing took longer, since there was less gas being used as a result of the smaller supply of it. The under-gassed people were thrown into a pit, laid in layers, and the whole pile was set on fire.

We often heard screams of children and women, as well as men, from the *Gaskammer*, through that small window opposite our barrack. In a gas chamber there was a small barred window, through which an SS man, standing outside the gas chamber, would throw in an open gas can. When he closed the window from the outside, you could still hear the screaming for a minute or a minute and a half, then they grew more and more quiet, until the screaming inside the chamber had completely faded away and the people were pulled out and burned in the furnaces right next to the chamber. The fact that flames were escaping from the chimney, even though the chimney was surely around 20 meters high, is proof of just how big the number of corpses was.

From overhearing conversations the SS men were having among themselves, we knew that once the Hungarian transports were finished off, the time would come also for those prisoners who were in the camp. Of course, those who were in the resistance and had known how to fight for their freedom from their life before the camp, were organizing



and solidarizing within the camp. We, the women, were in constant contact with the men, and they had contacts outside the camp. For things we sold to the outside world, we got weapons. These weapons we kept underground. The men from our *kommando*, in particular, took care of that. As we knew, the women and men who worked in the Union ammunition factory were also hiding weapons and explosives. Thanks to this, as I will explain further, a certain uprising in the crematorium III *Sonderkommando* came about.

The situation was as follows. Every once in a while, the people from the *Sonderkommando* were taken supposedly to the transports. These were, of course, transports to death, for the Germans believed these people knew too much and that it was best to get rid of them from time to time.

When in October 1944 one of the *Sonderkommando* received an order to remain in the block, they understood this to be the prologue to the tragedy that was to follow, which would take place in their *kommando*. Making use of our organization, we agreed that when they came for the *Sonderkommando* to take them away for transport, they would give a signal by setting fire to the crematorium, and the signal would be taken up also in crematoria I and II, which were situated a little further away in Birkenau. But thanks to the perfidy of some of the SS men, who apparently guessed that the prisoners were up to something, instead of taking them for transport at night, as usual, they came for them at noon. The *Sonderkommando* didn't want to come out. Shooting broke out, the people of *Sonderkommando* set fire to the crematorium, staying inside and refusing to submit. Everyone in this *Sonderkommando* was wiped out. Six SS men were injured in this fight. The signal given by crematorium III – setting fire to the crematorium – was taken up by crematoria I and II, where *Sonderkommando* prisoners also tried to set fire to their crematoria, but failed. So they cut the wires of the women's camp and tried to run. Some of them managed to escape, but were caught and all were killed off and slaughtered.

Another result of the outbreak of the crematorium uprising was the hanging of four women at the beginning of January 1945. They had been accused of cooperating with the *Sonderkommando* prisoners by bringing them explosives and providing them with weapons from the same ammunition factory.

You can see what kind of a place this camp of ours was and just how depraved the SS men were by the fact that, during the biggest increase in the Hungarian transports, when fires



were burning all around us, our *Hauptscharführer* Hahn in Birkenau would call upon women to sing and dance for him while he was getting drunk, and when he'd had enough of that entertainment he would strip these women naked and hit them, then throw them out onto the *Lagerstrasse*, from which they would come back to the blocks bruised and sick.

I would also like to add that during this gassing we were being told that only the healthiest and prettiest of the women would remain, so they could be put in Auschwitz, which was to be a model for German camps.

They were supposed to introduce better hygiene there in case the Soviet armies came – this was to be proof that the prisoners of war were being treated decently. Yet as the Soviet armies began to approach, they were trying by all possible means to conceal what was going on in Birkenau. One way of doing this was that, as Birkenau was being closed down, a special team of women was taken to the political section in order to alter the whole file of those marked with SB (*Sonderbehandlung* – i.e., those who had been sent to the gas chamber), and to send these files out to different camps, so as to leave no trace of the fact that so many millions of people had died in the Auschwitz camp alone. Of course, these traces were partly covered up, and thanks to the fact that the Soviet Army was approaching Auschwitz too quickly, the Germans were forced to set everything on fire. We know that Birkenau, which held the biggest accumulation of riches, was set on fire. There were various warehouses of clothes, fur, and so forth there, which were later supposed to be taken to Germany. Not having managed to take everything away, to take everything out of the warehouses and cover their tracks, the Germans set all of that on fire.

That is all I wanted to say.

Chairperson: Are there any questions for the witness?

Prosecutor Cyprian: I have no questions for the witness, only for the accused.

Chairperson: The witness is free to go.