



## JAN DZIOPEK

On 16 September 1946, in Gorlice, the Investigating Judge in Gorlice, Stanisław Roja, with the participation of court reporter Józef Liana, heard the person named below as a witness without an oath. After informing the witness about the criminal liability for false testimony and about the content of art. 107 of the Criminal Code, the witness testified as follows:

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Name and surname	Jan Dziopek
Age	57
Parent's names	Józef and Antonina née Pękala
Place of Residence	Gorlice, Łęgi Street 10
Occupation	teacher in a state high and junior high school
Religious affiliation	Roman Catholic
Criminal record	none
Relation to parties	none

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After legal instruction and admonition, the witness testifies:

I was brought to the camp in Auschwitz on 8 October 1940, where I was given the number 5,635. After a few days of 'camp induction', called 'sport', which I describe in detail in my attached account on pages 11 and 12, I was assigned to the so-called *Industriehof 1*, where I was employed in earthworks. We were dressed in denim, without any caps, sweaters or coats. The harsh cold of the November days and frequent sleet decimated us on a daily basis. That's how I worked from 13 October until the first days of December 1940. From 5-6 December 1940 until 13 June 1941, I worked as a carpenter in the *Industriehof 1* carpentry shop. I got thrown out of there as punishment for making clogs and was sent



to the Deutsche-Ausrüstungs-Wärkstätte (DAW) factory on 16 June 1941. In that factory, I worked initially as a carpenter, and after two or three weeks I was given a warehouse with carpenter's gear, from where my fellow prisoners rented tools. Here I worked until 18 July 1942. I also got kicked out of this job for so-called *Schwarzarbeit* and was reported, as I describe in detail in my account on pages 54 and 55. From 19 July 1942 until the day of the final evacuation of the camp I worked without interruption—that is, until 19 January 1945—in the main camp office. During my stay in the Auschwitz camp, I lived in block 17a, 8 [according to] the old numbering, and 3, 10a, 15a, 6, 24a, 3a, and 15a, in the new numbering system. The housing, working, nutrition, sanitation and hygiene conditions are described in detail in the attached document, starting from page 9.

I personally wrote the attached work in the Ebensee camp after being released by the American army. This work was made much easier by the fact that while I was in the camp in Auschwitz I used to take notes, which I then had to destroy after arriving at the camp in Mauthausen, after the evacuation of Auschwitz. However, I remembered many things. The only things I don't really remember are the names of my colleagues who were hanged or shot. I've made manual corrections to the manuscript myself. In a few places I added some supplements. I also made the penciled correction in the description of the lethal injections. Next to Landau's name, I crossed out the word 'Jew' because, as I intend to publish my work, I didn't want to stigmatize a nation that had undergone a true Gehenna at Auschwitz. I don't have a clean copy. I attached some more sheets to page 157. After writing the entire work, I will send the final sheets to the Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes in Kraków. The whole thing [is] entitled 'In the Clutches of the Gestapo'.

Since I intend to publish this work, I extend the rights to this attached work for judicial use only.

I personally didn't come into contact with the former camp commander Rudolf Höß and I didn't even have an indirect contact with him.

I only emphasize that everything that I described in the attached memoirs happened under the command of Rudolf Höß.

After reading [the protocol], I have signed.

Concluded and signed.



## IMPRISONED

On 21 August 1940, some strange and completely unfamiliar guests arrived in Gorlice. They stood chatting at various points of the city, on all the streets, at their intersections, and even at the gates. They checked the ID of every passer-by, especially young people—some were released after a while, while others were escorted to the magistrate's building. These strangers were the Jasło Gestapo, who on this day organized an infamous round-up among the citizens of the town of Gorlice.

Around 9.00 a.m., a town policeman appeared at my house with a summons to appear immediately at the town hall. My questions as to who and why were met with an evasive answer. Without feeling particularly uneasy, and without saying goodbye to my family I went to the magistrate. Already from afar I noticed a stranger at the gate of the building, whom the policeman accompanying me explained was a Gestapo officer. He demanded to see my documents, which he kept, and after looking me over and with a scowl ordered me to enter the building. In the corridor stood a second stranger, who brutally pushed me into a small office, where the town's census office was located. This small room, measuring six by four meters, was already hosting about 30 people, citizens of Gorlice. I saw the anxiety on their faces, a certain nervousness, and everyone was asking each other: why did they bring you here? I found out from those present that the priest Kazimierz Litwin had been caught 'on special request' by the municipal police, whereas I, along with the rest, had been caught on the street. The number of detainees grew by the minute, because the Gestapo worked as tirelessly as dog-killers—new victims were being brought in all the time. The corridor slowly began to fill up with those arrested. In the room there was an incredible crush and we could hardly breathe—it seemed like any moment we would suffocate, because we couldn't open the windows.

At around 11.00 a.m. we were led out in front of the magistrate's building, lined up in three columns and, heavily escorted, were brought out to the prison yard. After lining up in five columns, I noticed that there were over 150 people. Ukrainians were summoned, who were then dismissed, having shown their ID, while we stood in the column and waited. We weren't allowed to break rank or sit down. One of the internees from the prison brought a chair for the priest, although he was reprimanded and told that he could stand just the same as the others. The heat on that day was unbearable. Between those prison walls we had a real



sunbath. Bravely, however, with our heads proudly held high, we endured this first induction into the Gestapo methods.

At around 1:00 p.m., they started to pull people from the ranks in twos, never to return to us. We suspected that they were looking for someone and that, after checking our documents, they would release us. My turn came. They brought me into a tiny room, where three Gestapo men sat at a table. They wrote down my personal details and without asking more, they gestured for me to leave. Relieved that this great uncertainty had finally come to an end, I headed towards the exit. Suddenly, one of the Gestapo men grabbed me and with a severe kick pushed me back towards a barred door. The warden opened the door and locked me in a cell. My freedom was over; they had separated me from my beloved family, my beloved work and my humble home. I didn't feel any guilt, I hadn't harmed anyone—what law had I broken for which they could put me in jail? I was overwhelmed by such reflections as well as by this German lawlessness. Our prison cell was getting more and more packed. Mostly young lads were locked in with me, coincidentally mostly my pupils from the Gorlice junior high school, namely: Andrzej Lewicki, Tadeusz Presz, Ludwik Bartusiak, Ignacy Sikora, Leszek Rusinek, Ignac Mielowski, Kazimierz Hałgas, Julian Tybor, Józef Węgrzyński, as well as Father Franciszek Herr, Professor Aleksander Pazurkiewicz from Gorlice, Jacek Delekta, Stanisław Kałuża, Wacław Cyl, Porębski, and some other people whom I didn't know. There were 27 of us all together.

The room in which we were imprisoned was a temporary cell, with large, heavily barred windows, absolutely filthy and ill-equipped. Big long benches and a bucket in the corner were the only facilities. We sat on these benches in silence, gloomily waiting to see what they would do to us next.

Suddenly, I heard the voice of my oldest daughter, Usieńka, who – I don't know how – climbed a two meters high fence and shouted in a loud voice, 'Daddy! Don't worry—we're doing everything we can to get you out.' Usieńka! If you had known that at that time I had already been secretly sentenced to detainment in the camps for the duration of the war, you would have probably cheered up your dad in a different way.

We carried on sitting in silence—none of us felt like talking. From time to time, you could hear a heavy sigh, or a quiet curse. We had been separated so suddenly and unexpectedly from our daily work and imprisoned. In prison for the first time in my life ... And for what?



This question was reverberating inside everyone's head. We were imprisoned—deprived of liberty. Tough! I would just have to sit it out until I got old ... The hours ran by quickly. It would soon be evening. Suddenly we heard the sound of the lock; the door opened and they called out my name. My heart leapt. I was probably going home. Thanks to you, my Usieńka! But alas it wasn't to be. It was our good old guard, Smoszna, from Gorlice, who gave me a package delivered from home—a loaf of bread, a pot of butter, a blanket, a coat and various toiletries. The sight of a large loaf of farm bread, as well as butter, which was already difficult to get hold of, lightened up our faces, because we were hungry. Many of us hadn't even had breakfast. The bread and butter disappeared immediately. Having eaten a bit, we started to come back to life and entertain ourselves. The night was drawing in—time to think about getting to sleep. 'Boys! We won't sleep on the bare floor—we have to try to get some straw.' But how? Of course, we needed to communicate with our guard. I started knocking shyly. Someone stirred behind the door, approached the door and asked: 'what's wrong?'. I knew from the voice that it was our good old Smoszna. 'On my behalf, could you possibly ask Mr. Laskoś, who lives opposite the court, for a few bales of straw.' 'Alright,' answered the guard. In a few minutes we got four large bales of straw. 'Boys! We'll get a grand night's sleep.' In a moment, we were lying comfortably, stretched out on the straw. Only then did we feel just how tired we were. Each of us had a raging headache, and some even had a fever.

Complete darkness in total silence. The younger ones were already falling asleep. I felt good, 'but I won't sleep, I'm too wound up. But it's no big deal. How many nights in my life have I gone without sleep? One more won't break me.' Suddenly, we heard a great commotion in the corridor—the door to our cell opened and we heard a loud, hoarse voice. 'Alles heraus!' [everyone out!] We tore ourselves away from our bedding. Some of us just about managed to get ourselves together, some had taken off their shoes. And there again, even louder and not one, but a few 'Heraus! Los! Los!' [Out! Out!]. Whoever could manage it got his things in order and we hurried out. In the corridor, all the side entrances and windows were blocked by the Gestapo so as not to let any of us escape. All the time we were being rushed towards the exit.

Two cars and a limousine stood in front of the courthouse. I recognized those cars, from Libusza, which had been transporting the younger ones from the factory to Gorlice. They loaded us into the cars with great haste, passers-by were stopped in their tracks. The motors fired up. Those of our acquaintances who had gathered there said goodbye to us.



However, they said goodbye to us in such a strange manner—as if to convicts. Some crossed themselves; others shook their heads. One lady raised her clenched fist and shook it at our tormentors; other ladies cried. We set off. In the car we were told that if anyone tried to escape, he would be shot, and if he managed to escape, ten hostages from our group would be shot. We couldn't talk. The Gestapo sat to the sides, at the front and back. If someone tried to light a cigarette, he was punished with a strong jab.

Where were we going? This question absorbed everyone. We passed Glinik Mariampolski, Libusze, on the way to Biecz. Here we were joined by some more of my students, namely Edzia Salomona, Młodecki, Muller. We drove on. The night was very dark. The car travelled at a speed of 20-25 km per hour—we could have made a run for it under those conditions, however, only if everyone did so. One wink and we could have rushed the Gestapo, overpowered them and broken free ... But how to risk one's life? Maybe they would hold our families accountable for us. I could read such thoughts preying on my friends' minds, because from time to time they would look at me—as if at their guardian or their father. I was the oldest amongst them. One word—'take them'—and we would be free ...

So lost in thought was I that I didn't realize that we had passed Siepietnica, Skołoszyn, Trzcínica, and had reached Jasło. Our cars came to a halt in front of the courthouse. We understood why. This was a jail. The second stage of our stay behind bars. We reached the prison bars through long corridors. A bell rang. The guard ran out, opened the gate and without asking or counting us precisely, he took in the 'new guests'. The Gestapo man slammed the jail door shut behind the last one. He looked at us once again, smiled mockingly, satisfied with his catch—so many trophies—and left.

There we were under the authority of another type of person—the prison guard. Now they conducted a thorough inspection. They took away all the knick-knacks we had with us, as well as knives, braces, belts, and even shoelaces. You could see that they wanted us alive and were afraid that someone might hang himself. After the inspection, they let us file into prison cell No. 4. This was a so-called transitional cell, relatively large, about nine by six meters with tiny, heavily barred windows high up, just next to the ceiling. The cell [contained] two beds, a few torn, almost empty mattresses, two long benches—all very worn out and dirty. That was how our cell was furnished. In the corner of the cell stood something like a telephone booth—that was the toilet in which a bucket stood. On the bed sat four



tenants who had been there for some time. Two of them had their arms chained to their feet with thick chains. From their appearance, one might conclude that these people were no strangers to that jail. 'Nice company,' I thought. The first thing [they said] to welcome us was the question: 'Got any smokes?'. Everybody had brought enough cigarettes, but they had been taken from us after the inspection. Some, however, had managed to sneak a few in their shoes under the insole, so they came in handy for making friends with our new comrades. As I have noted on more than one occasion, with people like this you should try to live as harmoniously and as amicably as possible, and then they will be like your best friends. Whoever goes against them, they will brutalize with words or even violence, so it is better not to start with them at all.

I sat on the bench next to Father Herr and silently, with our heads slumped, we reflected on our regrettable fate. It was after midnight—we should have been thinking about getting some sleep. Some of us picked a spot near the walls, others were concentrated in the middle, side by side, spreading their coats on the floor, if they had them, and jackets. Father Herr lay down next to the bed, on which two of our comrades lay—one of them clanking his shackles. Someone joked: 'Friends, we've got a parish here. There's a priest and it's just like a church because this one's ringing the bells.' It was a good joke. For the first time that day, we laughed heartily.

I lay down on one of the benches, but I couldn't sleep because of my nerves and because of the vermin. Millions of fleas, battalions of bedbugs and, as it turned out later, lice were our roommates. Not only did I not sleep but neither could my friends—tossing and turning, crushed on the bare boards. There was a commotion in the morning. They didn't want to let anyone into the 'phone booth', because ... the bucket was full, and those in the immediate vicinity were standing because the floor was flooded. Early in the morning, we got up around dawn. To wash, we got a bucket of water and a basin. We used a pot to pour each other some water for washing, because we had to be frugal. One bucket for 43 people. After the first sleepless night in the jail, we were still in reasonable spirits. We were waiting for breakfast, because the hunger after yesterday's fast had started to bother us. Around 8.00 a.m. we got a tiny cup of unsweetened black coffee, which we gulped down in one go. From 10.00 a.m. to 11.00 a.m. we had a walk in the prison yard. Here we walked in silence, with a distance of 1 m between us. We couldn't talk or walk in twos or threes. In the event of any breach of these regulations, the walk would be interrupted and we would be sent back prematurely



to the cell. Despite all this, during the walk we learned that Adam Kowalski from Gorlice, the director of a factory in Glinik Mariampolski, was imprisoned on the first floor, along with Gryboś, an official of the District Council in Gorlice.

For lunch we received some potato soup, but without potatoes. It was the leftover water in which potatoes had been boiled, totally devoid of any fat. For dinner we received 120 gr. of bread and again some unsweetened black coffee. We weren't allowed to receive food parcels in the prison, only underwear. Hunger began to strike. Under the lid of an underwear parcel, tiny packages of food were snuck into our cell. The prison governor, a very good man, looked the other way. Thanks to these modest parcels hidden in the underwear, the food operation began.

Although we were locked up and had no contact with anybody, the so-called 'grypsy'—prison slang for 'secret messages'—began to arrive. Someone from Jasło wrote that he saw the Gestapo with two lists—one was a list of those to be released and the other named those to be locked up further. On the fourth day in prison, one of our friends was set free. This cheered us up considerably. Maybe it would be our turn to be let out. On the fifth day, four Gestapo men came to the jail right after breakfast. They were, as it turned out later, our judges. They summoned us and wrote down a report that each of us had to sign. My turn came. I had to write down a curriculum vitae as never before. Where I had grown up as a child, the views of my parents, my brothers, sisters and their addresses, where I studied, my hobbies, affiliations to organizations, etc., etc. At the end of this report, the typist added a four-line annotation, which he obscured with a piece of paper, and then gave me the report to sign. I said that I wouldn't sign because I needed to know what I was signing. The chairman jumped towards me in fury and started to threaten me with his fists, but he didn't strike me. I asked for the report to be read once again, because I needed to know what I was signing. The furious Gestapo man read the report to me, covering the final four-line annotation with some paper and again gave it to me to sign. I didn't want to argue anymore, so as not to get hit, and I signed. However, I did ask, 'Could you please tell me what you've arrested me for?' The chairman shouted: 'Du bist Deutschen-fresser'. So I found out the reason for depriving me of my freedom—I was a German-eater.

Two days later, on 29 August 1940, they summoned us by name from early morning and put us in twos in the corridor. We didn't know for what purpose. What interested us was that they were dividing us into groups and taking each of these from the prison separately.





My turn came. We went out, heavily escorted, into the prison yard. Here we got into some police cars and they drove us to the street, where we waited for the rest of the prisoners. On the street quite an audience had gathered, interested in our departure, [people] stopped and searched for their friends amongst us. I looked and couldn't believe my eyes. In the distance I saw my wife. She had come from Gorlice, as if she had sensed that the next day she wouldn't find me in Jasło. She stood forlornly on the pavement, holding a package in her hand that she wanted to give to me, although the police wouldn't allow this. My Stefnia, however, approached another policeman and asked one more time. He was moved by her request, took the package and tossed it into my car. One long exchange of glances was our final farewell. The engines fired up, and we left Jasło, waving goodbye with our handkerchiefs which we then used to wipe away our tears. We drove along the road towards Tarnów. Again reflections and various bleak thoughts preyed on my mind ... Where were we going ...? What would they do with us ...? In prison we had heard about the multiple murders of innocent prisoners. Could they be taking us out of the city and into the forest to ... finish us off ...? But what for? We were completely innocent. Our only fault was that we were born Poles.

In such a hopeless mood was I that I didn't even realize that we had reached Tarnów. They took us along some side roads to the prison, into the prison courtyard. We quickly jumped out of the cars, stood in columns of five and after checking our number and then our names, we were taken in by a dozen or so prison guards. After a very detailed personal inspection, I was put in cell No. 58 of the 2nd wing accompanied by 11 friends. A tiny cell, basically designed for six prisoners, because that's how many beds there were—folded up and secured to the wall for the day. The cell had a small table attached to the wall and a toilet bowl with running water in the corner. We were very happy that we had water in the cell, and that we would be able to wash. To our great horror, we realized that there were a huge number of bedbugs in the cell, and lice in the blankets. We settled into our new room to start our third stage of prison life.

The nutrition we had here was similar to Jasło—unsweetened morning coffee, water with fodder beets at noon, and in the evening coffee again, or herbal tea, and 120 gr. of bread. Overall, as we saw, it wasn't enough to live on, but too much to starve to death in a short time. Not surprisingly, the prisoners were so weak after a few weeks that they clung to the walls while walking around the cell. We were allowed to receive food packages once every two weeks. Our nearest and dearest bombarded us with huge packages, so we didn't lack



for food in the Tarnów prison. It was harder with cigarettes because they weren't allowed to send us any. The smokers, however, got them via the custodians, who provided tobacco for food or underwear. Initially, we had a lot of problems with sending secret messages, but after establishing good relations, there was regular post between ourselves and home. Most often, we sent collective letters, which, via one of the priests in the Tarnów parish, were delivered to our homes.

Due to the fact that each new convict is extremely perturbed by inactivity, we tried to liven up the day together as well as we could. We had a wake-up call at 6:00 a.m. Until 7:00 a.m. we cleaned up and washed. Then we received breakfast. From 8:00 in the morning and all day, without a break, there were walks, but in the cells themselves. We organized ourselves in such a way that two friends would walk for two hours without a break, making six small steps in one direction. Others, meanwhile, slept or read smuggled books. Some learned German. We also played chess, with pieces which Leszek Rusinek had made for us from bread. At 6:00 p.m. there was a roll call. At the tolling of the bell, each of us had to be dressed and ready to leave. We stood in threes and waited for a guard, usually a senior, to receive the report. After opening the cell, our room's priest, Father Herr, reported: 'Achtung! Zimmer Nr.58 belegt mit 12 Schutzhäftlingen alles in Ordnung' ['Attention! Room no.58 with 12 inmates. Everything in order']. After the closing of the cell, we were free until the next morning. After praying together, we prepared our beds for the night. It was extremely difficult to make the bed, because there were five or six iron bars in the beds which held ripped and virtually empty straw mattresses. We slept two to a bed. Hałas with Lewicki, Sikora with Mielowski, Pazurkiewicz with Wegrzyński, Wójcik with Benisz, Rusinek with Presza, and myself with Father Herr.

After going to bed, each of us had to take part in the evening program until we were asleep. Father Herr most often entertained us, summarizing some novels he had read. The younger ones talked about the plots of movies. Our friend Pazurkiewicz specialized in mythology, while I recounted various adventures from the times of the First World War. Some of our friends weren't averse to joking around—something that Herr was sometimes angry with. On Sunday, we sang evensong. If we got very bored and couldn't find anything to do, we amused ourselves by playing 'dupaka' [ass-slapping], as it is known. It's a game widely known in prison. It goes like this: one person covers his eyes, and one of those taking part in the game slaps him across the buttocks. If he guesses who just hit him then it's the other guy's turn



next to get hit, and if not, the other guy hits him a second time. It sometimes happened that the victim took 10 strikes in a row. It started with some light strokes, but after some time there was a kind of rivalry as to who could beat the hardest. So our boys often had swollen 'seats' and hands from the beatings. We also played cards that we had made from cardboard. We mostly played bridge, but in other cells they mostly played 66. Because the prisoners didn't have any money they could play for, they played for 'snout', as it was called. This involved the winner beating the loser on the nose for as many times as points he had won. After the end of such a game, the players would have swollen noses (snouts), sometimes bleeding. That's how it went day after day and week after week. We didn't have walks like in Jasło, and so the lack of movement, sun, and fresh air was reflected in our appearance after just two weeks. Our faces grew yellowish, and despite the strengthening nutrition from our home packages, we felt that we were getting weaker.

Although we were locked up, we had organized excellent contact with the outside world. Various secret messages were sent to us every day. We even received newspapers. We had constant contact with the neighboring cells, and with the ground floor we communicated via the 'horse'. This was a letter tied to a thread, which we dropped down to the ground floor in the dark. If we wanted to contact the second floor, we knocked on the ceiling, and they immediately dropped us a thread to which we then attached the letter. We talked with the cells on the other side of the corridor via the 'Judas'. This was a small window in the doors through which the prison guards would check up on us. Contact with our neighbors to the left and right was more difficult. But we found a way. The beds were secured to the walls with long screws. When someone wanted to pass some kind of message to our neighbors, he pulled out the screw which, of course, was only provisionally inserted into the hole in the wall, and spoke through this opening. You could pass a cigarette through on a wire or a match to light the cigarette.

We also had a kind of sign language, but it was dangerous to communicate with it because the prison was monitored by the guards. Anyone caught in the act would get 'whips', or even locked into the bunker, where he would be starved. We were best friends with the Polish guards. On the other hand, the Ukrainian guards, who were relatively numerous, were dangerous for us, because they often denounced us. One evening some Gestapo men from Jasło came to the prison. We saw them, because we could spot every car, or even pedestrians, via our small window. This caused a commotion. Something new was about



to happen. In a few minutes they opened the door to our cell and took our friend Benisz. We learned later that Benisz had been released. In his place our friend Wieckowski came to our cell. Once some information was circulating that we were about to leave, but where and when, we didn't know. We now lived under the impression that we would be leaving the prison. Based on some information, we knew that we were going to a camp, but to which one no one knew. On 7 October 1940, at approx. 7:00 in the morning, we were ordered to pack up, as we really were leaving. Some time later, Bartusiak was summoned from a neighboring cell, and myself from ours. My heart stopped beating; I thought I was going to be freed. My suspicion was based on the fact that Bartusiak's release had been petitioned by his parents at the Consulate, as an American citizen.

When they read my name out, along with Bartusiak's, I was convinced. However, to my great disappointment, as I was leaving I noticed many friends from other cells gathered in the prison yard in order to be transported. We had been read out together because we were close alphabetically. About 320 prisoners were gathered in the prison yard, where we waited until the evening. Where would we be wandering off to next? This was the question on everyone's mind. In the evening we were put in the corridors and cells in the basements and were given food for two days. On the second day in the morning, we were again gathered in the prison yard, where after reading out [our names] we were loaded into police cars and led out to the train station under a strong escort. Here, 50 of us at a time were loaded into passenger wagons escorted by the police. We noticed that our escorts were favorably disposed towards us. They let us talk and smoke. We were extremely surprised, because they allowed cigarettes to be brought to us from some committee. We had quite a pleasant journey by train. In Bochnia, 30 friends joined our transport, making a total of 350 of us riding together. We learned from our escorts that we were heading to the Auschwitz concentration camp. A shudder of dread came over me because I had heard in the prison cell that things were very bad indeed in the Auschwitz camp.

## IN AUSCHWITZ

Around 1:00 p.m. on 13 October 1940, we arrived at *Konzentrationslager* Auschwitz. Our train didn't stop at the station in Auschwitz but entered the siding just before the camp. We were given a signal and we got off. SS men were waiting for us in front of the railcars



to take us off the hands of the police. We rushed out of the wagons. The police officers showed the SS men that they were no slouches by beating and kicking any slackers. We threw our luggage down so we could get out of the wagons as soon as possible. They lined us up in fives and we marched. We went around the so-called *Holzhof*. We could see our future colleagues, dressed in striped clothes, busy cutting and chopping trees. Finally, we reached the camp. We stood in front of a large iron gate bearing the inscription 'Arbeit macht frei' ['work sets you free']. After counting us, we were taken into the camp and lined up in tens in the big roll-call square. Although it was already October, it was an extremely hot day. Weighed down with a backpack loaded with food supplies and dressed for winter in a short sheepskin coat, with a coat and blanket in my hands as well, I trudged to the square summoning the last of my strength, gone because of the heat. At the same time, I had to be careful not to get hit by SS men, who were goading on the stragglers with rods and rubber batons, and I was as wet as if I had just left the bathhouse.

After an hour of standing, during which no one was allowed to sit down, Fritsch [Fritzs] – the *Lagerführer* at the time – came and gave us a speech. He told us that we had been sentenced to remain in the camp for the whole duration of the war for posing a danger to the great Germans. 'Forget who you were as a civilian because here you are just numbers. You must work for the great Reich, because only this will ensure you a future. Don't even dream about freedom. Freedom for you can only ever be through the 'chimney'. Here he pointed to the tall and smoky chimney of the crematorium. Then he told us a formula that we learned by heart over the next few weeks 'Es gibt nur einen Weg zur Freiheit und seine Meilensteine heißen: Gehorsam, Fleis Ordnung, Sauberkeit, Nuchtarbeit, Opferainn und Liebe zu Vaterland' ['There is only one way to freedom and its milestones are: Obedience, Urgency, Order, Purity, Sobriety, Sacrifice and Love for the Fatherland']. I didn't take the *Lagerführer's* words to heart because I didn't believe him. He was just saying that to scare us. Most of all, I resented his affirmation that 'the road to freedom can only ever be through the chimney'. No. That was out of the question. I would endure everything. You won't get me. I have to go home. I have to see my nearest and dearest again. I was trembling all over, because a rebellion was rising up in my soul—as if I was making an oath to myself that I was going to fight and that I would emerge victorious. After Fritzs's speech, we were split into groups of 50 and in these units we walked far from the camp to a large building with different floors. We approached in fives and were literally robbed. We put all the foodstuffs



into giant crates, knives and other such items separately, and we got a paper bag for our clothes. We could only hang on to our shoes, but without socks, belt, or braces, and only one handkerchief. The young ones, seeing that they were taking our food, ate what they could, in whatever order it came to hand. Butter with sugar, sausage with biscuits, honey with smoked meat, in a word, everything they had so as to give away nothing. They only gave away their bread, thinking it to be not important enough to bother with. The effects of this 'devouring' turned out to be catastrophic that night. So as not to give away my food, I gave it to the boys to eat.

Stripped naked, holding my shoes in one hand, and a bag with clothes in the other, I approached the table and received my No. 5636 written on cardboard. There I handed over the bag with clothing, and I was pushed back with a heavy kick towards the baths. Here, before bathing, they shaved everyone's hair. In order not to get hit, I followed my predecessors closely and did what they did. I stood in the queue for a haircut. The 'master hairdresser', who was a blacksmith by profession, or maybe a miner, but never a hairdresser, went across my head no more than ten times with a razor and handed me over to the next master, who cut my beard and mustache. With one cut he got rid of my mustache, and with two cuts I lost my beard, which I had grown in the Tarnów prison. I had been shaven terribly, but looking at my colleagues, it didn't bother me too much. Apparently, that was how it was to be. Shoddily shaved, I ran under the shower. My God! Cold well water, and me all sweaty—as if I had already gotten out of the bath. I stood for a moment under that shower and pretended to wash myself, and looked for the right moment to dash out from under it. I managed. Wet, I walked along the corridor. The door was open and the draft was terrible. In this corridor, I receive a shirt in one place, long johns in another and then trousers and a blue striped sweatshirt. All this was on the double and without any chance of trying anything on. I got a shirt without buttons, long johns without ties, the trousers were good, but my shirt was very small. We had about one minute to slip into those rags and then, like a plucked goose, stand in a separate office, where we gave our precise personal details. Here again, the question was asked of me: 'Who can be notified in case of death?' I gave the address, of course, but it made me think. Something in this camp must not be quite right if there is such a space to be filled in. After writing this all down, I left and stood before the block, where once again they lined us up in fives and we waited. Evening was already approaching and it was cold. I was afraid that after this fatigue, sweating, and the cold shower that I might catch



a cold or get pneumonia. However, from what I saw, [I realized that] the space regarding whom to notify in the event of death may well come in handy. As I learned, however, from my later everyday experiences in the camp, the human organism, and one's state of mind where you're at the mercy of fate, miraculously protects itself and adapts to the living conditions.

When 50 of us had gathered, the 'block leader' came and took us to block 17a. I write 'block leader' in quotation marks, because, as I found out over the next days of my stay in the camp, he was in fact the master of life and death. Our 'leader' was known by the pseudonym 'Bloody Alojz' and was a sailor by profession. He has been in prison since 1933, and now he was regarded as one of the camp champions. That's what we found out. At the beginning, as soon as he came in, he punched some of our friends in the face because they weren't standing in rank. He was strong and whenever he punched anyone, that person fell. After arriving on the first floor of the block, we entered the great long hall that we were to live in. Aside from the straw mattresses and blankets arranged in beautiful cubes, there were no facilities in the room. We were lined up in a column of 10 and ordered to stand again. Alojz handed us over to our room leader Ludwik (I don't remember his surname), from the Warsaw transport, who was his worthy acolyte. Ludwik, when he got angry, beat the guilty and innocent alike with whatever came to hand. We stood around idly until the evening, until the gong at 8:30 p.m. Then the straw mattresses were spread all over the floor and we were given one blanket each. The room grew dark from the clouds of dust. At 9:00 the second gong rang, at which the lights in the block went out, all the windows were shut and there was absolute silence. Due to the lack of space, we had to sleep three to a mattress. We were crammed in like sardines. I lay down next to Father Herr. The whole night was a nightmare, trying to fall asleep; the fleas bothered us tremendously as did the lack of fresh air. At 4:00 a.m. the gong went off as a wake-up call. We had a few minutes to get dressed, because they were herding us out of the block with rods and rubber truncheons. In the room, only the straw man remained, whose task was to arrange the straw mattresses and blankets into a beautiful, regular cube shape. There was also the floor man, whose task was to sweep and wash the floor. Since the previous day, since the moment we arrived at the camp, we hadn't had anything to eat, so we were as hungry as wolves. At 6:00 a.m. we went to the roll-call square, where all the blocks were already lined up. After the roll call and checking the official census against the actual numbers, the older prisoners went off to their work *kommandos*. We still hadn't been assigned to a particular work and we stayed on the parade ground. In the





camp, a prisoner wasn't allowed to be idle. No one could stay in the block except the room leaders—everyone had to work.

They also kept us newcomers busy—with 'sport'. Our coach was the block leader Alojz. The exercises began with running around the roll-call square, then falling down and rolling on the ground followed by frog-jumps. After that we had to get up again, put our hands in the air, close our eyes and twirl around in a circle. This program changed from time to time, and so it was that we exercised for one hour, two hours, three hours. We were pushed hard; the slackers were beaten with a rod, kicked and abused. Around us were gathered several SS men who helped him out and beat us mercilessly, especially the weaker ones and those unable to cope with these superhuman efforts. My heart had never beaten so fast. I felt as if it was in my throat, suffocating me—I was breathless. Jesus! Save me! This quiet lamentation was never far from my lips. One of my friends, Gaśienica from Zakopane, fainted. They brought a few buckets of cold water, which they poured on him. Gaśienica didn't regain consciousness and was taken away to the hospital. Due to this incident [there was] a short break, a little respite, but then the sport started up again. The word 'sport'—how beautiful the word had sounded to me, something which I had promoted and taught throughout my whole life. And today this 'sport' had fallen into the hands of a madman and become a form of torture and torment. Alojz was assisted not only by SS men, but also by some *kapos*, who, by beating the weak, intensified the horror of this 'infernal tournament'. On the road passing next to the camp, groups of people stopped and stared at these unusual capers.

As we found out later, they were told that the Germans had set up a circus in Auschwitz and in this way they were training us to be acrobats. The purpose of these exercises was different. Their main objective was to break the prisoner both physically and mentally. Through physical suffering, the prisoner's spirit would be sapped, his willpower broken and he would be transformed into someone meek and silent who would obediently put up with the worst possible harassment and the hardest work. These unusual gymnastics lasted until 11:00 a.m., thus about five hours. Alojz put us under the charge of one of our colleagues to practice donning and doffing our hats. We breathed a sigh of relief. We were left in peace, but not because we were barely alive, but because they were tired or hungry. Until 12:00 noon we rested under the charge of a colleague. At the sound of the gong, we lined up again for the afternoon roll call, which lasted only a few minutes because all the numbers added up. After the roll call, we received our first meal in the camp in 24 hours—three quarters





of a liter of soup. I drank my lunch because I didn't have a spoon, and I downed it quickly, because the bowl had to be passed on to someone else. Of course, lunch couldn't pass without cracking a few heads. This was carried out by room leader Ludwik, who dished it out on those who didn't keep order during the lunch. The amount of soup obtained only sharpened the appetite, but nothing more was given so I had to convince myself that I was full. The lunch break lasted until 12:00 noon. At that time, we had to have the roll call and eat lunch. So, the longer the roll call went on, the shorter the lunch break. It also happened that we didn't receive any dinner in the afternoon, not until the evening. In the afternoon we were divided into smaller groups and exercised until the evening roll call. We practiced about-turns, short marches in columns of five, as well as donning and doffing our hats. Those exercises with hats that we didn't have were hysterically funny. I was made instructor of one of the groups. In the afternoon we had a real rest. However, the morning exercises, this terrible torment, had worn us out so much that we could barely stay on our feet. Being in prison for a few weeks with insufficient nutrition had caused our muscles to waste away, and we felt generally weak, and this was the reason for our total exhaustion. From 6:00 p.m., the *kommandos* came back from work, and at 6:30 p.m. the evening roll call was held. All the prisoners lined up in designated places next to their blocks. Each block was assigned to an SS man, the so-called *Blockführer*. He received the roll call from the block leader, which he then submitted to the *Rapportführer*. The *Rapportführer* at the time was Palitsch [Palitzsch] who was famous for his murders. The number of prisoners lined up for the roll call had to match the number provided by the block clerks at the so-called briefing that took place two hours before the roll call in the camp's main office. At my first evening roll call everything was in order, so it only lasted for a short time. After the roll call, we marched off in columns of ten, then we went to our blocks one at a time, but on the double.

We lined up again into a column of ten and, as we approached one after another, we received a supper consisting of 400 gr. of bread, 20 gr. of margarine and a quarter of a liter of coffee. After dinner, we were allowed to sit down, and the room leader and his deputy instructed us as to how we were to behave in the camp, then one of the older prisoners taught us to sing in German: 'Im Lager Auschwitz war ich zwar – Hola – ria – hola – rio. So manche Monat, Tag und Jahr, Hola – ria – hola – rio So denkt ich froh, gemuth und gern, An meine Lieben in der Fern. An jeden Morgen in der Früh Hola – ria, hola – rio. Beginnt des Tages Last u. Müh Hola – ria – hola – rio. Ob. Arbeitsdienst, ob Sport uns zwingt. Doch stets ein frohes Lied erklingt.



Doch auch für uns kommt mal die Zeit Hola-ria, hola-rio. Wo aus der Schutzhaft wird befreit, Hola-ria, hola-rio. Dann werden froh wir heimwärts zieh Ganz gleich ob schneits, ob Rosen bluhn' ['In the Auschwitz camp was I - Hola - ria - hola - rio. So many months, days and years, Hola - ria - hola - rio So I think happily about my loved ones far away. Every morning - Hola - ria, hola - rio. Begins the day's burden. Moo - Hola - ria - hola - rio. Whether we go off to work, or to sport. But always singing a happy song. But also for us the time comes Hola-ria, hola-rio. When we are freed from custody, Hola-ria, hola-rio. Then we'll be happy, no matter if it's snowing or if the roses are blooming'].

After singing, we received our straw mattresses and blankets and I lay down to sleep next to Father Herr. The priest and I managed to get some towels, which we soaked in water and made compresses for our knees. After the morning sport, our legs were extremely swollen. One of my friends got hit by a block leader for kneeling to pray, and we learned the lesson from him that there was no God in the world—Hitler was now God. As a result of physical exhaustion and weakness, I slept perfectly. That night the fleas didn't bother me and I didn't notice the lack of fresh air. Weariness took precedence over all other ailments. At 4:00 the gong went off again to mark the start of my third day in the camp. Unwashed and undressed, we dashed out like wild animals from a cage and waited for the time to tidy up the room. After the roll call, we stayed where we were and the block leader began the second day of our sports. On this day, however, the pace of the exercises slackened. Alojz found himself some victims who, due to weakness, could not keep up. He punched them in the face, jabbed them in the stomach, and when the unfortunate fell over, he kicked him wherever he could. Many of my friends had black eyes, as well as broken and bloody lips. Dec, a friend from Jasło (released one year later), was the one from amongst us who suffered the most. They broke his glasses, cut him up, and we thought that he would be killed on the spot. After the evening roll call, once again we had our lesson on 'decent behavior in the camp' and again some singing. At the gong we made up the straw mattresses. At the second gong there was silence and then we woke up again, and so on and so forth. The experiences of one day in the camp were no different from the second, third, fourth and fifth days. Only as each day passed, the sporting exercises got milder. The sight of a dead man stopped bothering me—it seemed to me that I was alive in hell. A deep conviction that I would endure everything and a strong faith in victory strengthened my spirits, and although I sometimes felt weak, my spirit didn't break even for one moment – on the contrary, my resolve grew stronger all the



time. I put a brave face on all kinds of sufferings and hardships; even the heaviest work was no punishment for me, and I would carry it out with a smile and with satisfaction—indeed, I was happy that despite my advanced age I could keep up with the younger ones. I tried to fulfill my duties at every step so that I would not get caught. I focused all my strength, forgot about my family, struggled to stay alive. I didn't smoke cigarettes, which was easier for me than my fellow smokers who sold bread or some additional ration of fat for a cigarette. I told my friends who used to make this kind of transaction that [they] were committing suicide. But that didn't help—they sought solace for their physical suffering in some form of excitement, they were looking for a drug. The life had drained from their eyes and they died two or three weeks later. I remember when, after we had been in the camp for four weeks, we were allowed to write a letter home. I decided not to because I would have had to pay a piece of bread with some additional ration of fat for some paper to write the letter. I knew that I would hurt my family by not sending them any news, but I also knew that I would be hurting them ten times more if they knew that this letter had cost me so dearly. After that opportunity had passed, I bought some paper for a loaf of bread and kept it until the next date, which was usually every two weeks. Looking more closely at the whole camp set-up, I came to believe that we would not be spending the winter here in these conditions. The lack of wells—there were only two of them—and the fact that there was only one pump for the kitchen, the lack of appropriate facilities for water supply, the lack of heating stoves in the blocks, the lack of toilet facilities, [all] made us believe that they would let us out for the winter. We were also convinced that they would not be able to carry out construction work in the winter, so there would be nothing for us to do, and they wouldn't give us food for free.

Our camp induction only lasted five days, because after that we were assigned to various *kommandos*. We were really happy to have escaped from the hands of 'Bloody Alojz' even for a day. Not all the Gorlice crew were with me in block 17. A second group, starting with the letter 'M', was in block 14, and they didn't have a block leader like our bandits. Our bunch was assigned to work in the so-called *Industriehof I*. Here we did earthworks, leveling, road construction, and later were demolished the barracks. We had a very tough job because we were driven to work at the crack of the whip. Each *kapo* was armed with a thick rod, usually a pickaxe handle or a rubber truncheon, and he beat [whoever] was at hand. We had to run with empty wheelbarrows, with full ones we had to walk on the double. Shoveling was lighter work—and shovels were much sought after. In a few days of work at this *Industriehof*, Father



Herr became my group's *Vorarbeiter*. Then it all became a little lighter, but we still had to be on our guard so that one of us wouldn't be caught taking a rest and not working.

Basically, on cold and rainy days they didn't really have to force us to work hard, because we had to move so as not to freeze. Our garments, consisting of long johns, a shirt, denim trousers and a denim sweatshirt, without a sweater and without a hat, were inadequate. Rainy days were outright tragic for us. Even in the heaviest downpour, we weren't allowed to hide under a roof, so we would be shivering from the cold. After such days, many of our friends caught the stomach flu, the so-called *Durchfall*—diarrhea. This disease, as I am personally convinced, arose when the cold penetrated the whole organism—the internal organs, stomach, intestines and digestive system in general. The patient had to abstain from eating completely because otherwise he would often die within a week. Due to the inadequate amount of food, hard work, and lack of appropriate clothing on cold and rainy days, we deteriorated physically from day to day at an unusually accelerated pace. The amount of calories in our diet didn't cover the amount of calories necessary to perform hard physical work, as well as to maintain adequate body temperature. The organism had to compensate for such deficiencies by drawing on its own resources. Already after a week, we lost any body fat we might have had, so next our bodies began to consume their own musculature. From a vigorous, healthy individual living in freedom emerged a skeleton, commonly known in the camp as a 'Muslim'. The first symptom of this 'Muslim' syndrome was a swelling of the legs and inertia, along with a swelling of the face at night. After some time, such a person lost control of his legs and fell over. He was beaten, kicked, and most often killed in the *kommando*, and a corpse was brought back to the camp. If he was still alive, the 'collapsed' was dragged into the camp hospital, where he his life came to an end within a few hours. The first victim of Germanic banditry from our transport was the late Jacek Delekta, an assistant professor, who died due to emaciation.

One day, news was going round that on 15 November political prisoners who had been rounded up in the streets would be released. Only criminals who have been brought to the camp on the basis of convictions would remain. The source of this message was so certain that there was no way we could not enjoy this news. From then on, we counted down the weeks, then days. Unfortunately, it turned out to be a fairy tale, like many, many others. There was a handful of people in the camp, mainly the older prisoners, including myself, who deliberately disseminated various sensational messages among the prisoners, in order



to comfort their weaker, spiritually crushed colleagues. When the 15 November deadline passed, we were informed that the release had been postponed until Christmas. This message was 100% rock solid. And once again we counted the days and dreamt of freedom again. There were some people released from the camp. Some prisoners were released once or twice a week, mostly from the Warsaw transports. I remember that in the first days of November 1940, a few prisoners were released from our block 17. Their numbers were read out after the roll call, because in the evening they had to be shaved, showered and prepared for release. Our block leader Alojz lined them up in front of the block in one row and gave them a farewell speech, and finally asked: 'Which one of you hasn't received a beating from me?'. Several friends came forward who were very happy with the thought that the block leader would probably praise them for exemplary behavior in the camp. Alojz didn't like to praise or forgive anyone—he strode up to them and punched each of them in the face with such force that they fell down like rag dolls.

In the first days of November 1940, after a severe cold due to being wet, I fell ill with *Durchfall*. On the advice of my older fellow prisoners, I abstained from eating bread for a few days, which hurt me a lot, but after a week this terrible illness passed. As medicine I took some ordinary charcoal, which I collected from the fire. My legs began to swell up from this illness. It was a widespread illness among all the poorly nourished prisoners. At night, the swelling in the legs went down a little, but the face puffed up instead. Bags under the eyes and swollen cheeks: that was how 50 percent of the prisoners looked after a good night's sleep. The frosty and windy November mornings were terrible for us when we were herded out at dawn after 4:00 a.m. to the field in thin clothes, without sweaters, without coats or hats. We shivered from the cold. In order not to lose a lot of heat, we gathered together in a cluster, hugging each other to warm ourselves up with each other's body heat. Just like bees in a beehive gathered together in the wintertime. Those November days were terrible for us, when more often than not sleet fell, when we were soaked to the skin, frozen to the bone, and our cold fingers couldn't keep a grip on the shovels—we worked to keep warm and not to completely stiffen. Many of us could not survive, and so they fell where they worked. We weren't allowed to take care of them, take them to shelter in a warm place. They lay where they had fallen until the evening. After the work was over, the whole *kommando* gathered to go back to the camp. Now everybody had to be there, including those who were lying. If the poor man was alive, he was beaten and kicked to get up, but if they couldn't get



him moving, he was taken away by four of his fellow group of five—two had his arms around their shoulders and the other two held his legs. As a matter of fact, while he was being carried they took off his clothes and dragged him half-naked to the camp, to the roll call square. That was how the patient was carried when his companions from the group of five were healthy and had enough strength to lift him. If they were weak, they didn't carry the 'collapsed', but dragged him behind them. At the roll call square, he was simply finished off by a block leader after he had again beaten him to force him to stand in his column of ten.

Work under the open sky, the nagging cold of the November days and, on top of that, stomach flu had completely finished me off. I was already using up the last of my strength. However, I hadn't lost heart, and I hadn't lost hope that I wouldn't die here. I embarked on a vigorous quest to find work under a roof or in the block, [I tried to] get some side job, in addition of course to my all-day work in the *kommando*, and sometimes get some extra dinner soup. There were a lot of such activities in the block. In addition to the block leader, clerk, room leader and their deputies, there were barbers, floor-men, straw-men, toilet cleaners, hall cleaners, bowl cleaners, porters who carried food from the kitchen, and besides these there were, I can safely say, the dignitaries of these times—the block leader's favorites, sometimes the clerk's, but most often the *kapo's*. They were recruited from among the nice young boys and were used for everything, not just for work. They had the same major privileges in the block as their master. The dignitaries received double dinners, and some as many portions as they wanted. So the dinner had to be meted out to the ordinary prisoners so that the rest would be enough for all the block officials. To get some kind of job in the block or under a roof, it was not enough to have beautiful eyes or to put in a request; you had to buy it with bread, fat, cigarettes, or have friends, influential colleagues who got you a better job through protection. I didn't have any bread or food items. Nor had I met anybody I knew in the camp, so I had to look for other ways.

Being a passionate carpenter, I decided to take steps to get into the workshop. However, this was not an easy thing. You had to get the protection of a *kapo*, so that they would take an ordinary prisoner under their roof. However, I was helped out in this respect by a friend of mine, Józio Gramatyka from Zakopane, who was working as a carpenter, knew that there was a demand for work, and introduced me to the *kapo*. Asked how long I had worked as a carpenter, I answered without hesitation: more than ten years. The *kapo* told me to report to the carpentry workshop the next day. I forgot about hunger, I forgot about all the



suffering—I found new energy, a new lease of life. I would stop freezing, getting soaked in the rain, lunch would be served in the carpentry shop, I wouldn't be standing at a roll call at noon, because the carpenters were so-called *Kommandiert*. After lunch we rested until 1:00 p.m., I could sleep, clean myself, have time to search through the underwear because the lice were tormenting us. Really, my luck had turned. Reborn in spirit, rejuvenated, full of life with more energy than ever before, I went to the carpentry workshop the next morning. The *kapo* ordered all the newcomers to come forward and he assigned each of us to a carpentry workshop, where four carpenters were usually expected to work. I got workshop no. 5. There were three colleagues standing beside him, two younger ones around 22 and a third about 30 years old. They looked at me suspiciously, like I was an intruder, because maybe one of them had been coveting this place for a friend of his, and here comes some old guy they didn't know. I approached them, greeted them and felt a great wave of hatred towards me.

Each of them was chiseling away at something, so I asked for a job to do. 'You'll get one soon enough,' answered one of the youngest newcomers, 'but for now stand like a ...' He used a real colorful expression. After some time an older friend came up to me who, as I later learned, was the foreman in the carpentry workshop, and gave me two long boards to joint for gluing. With the skill of a master carpenter with ten years' experience, I turned the plank toward the workshop, cleaned the edges down and then began to plane in long strokes. I could feel all eyes on me—starting with the *kapo* who watched me from afar, as well as the foreman, my three companions, and other neighbors. Apparently I passed the test, because the *kapo* and foreman left, and I noticed that they looked satisfied, and then my companions stopped observing me. With this exam under my belt I was included not on the list of carpenters' assistants, but of foremen.

I started a new life on that memorable day of 12 December 1940. It was a very cold and rainy day. Ah! Overwhelmed with delight, I planed boards, warm, dry and not beaten. I'm not exaggerating, but I really felt at home. Here I should express my gratitude to Józiu Gramatyka from Zakopane, for the help he gave me in getting me admitted to the workshop. Perhaps I would have gotten into the workshop earlier if I had had my glasses—in the first days of my stay in the camp I lost them after I had tied them to the bottom of my long johns, because I didn't have any pockets. So I had to wait until they sent me new glass from home, when I wrote such a request in my second letter. We were generally allowed to write letters every two weeks, although sometimes we were restricted to one per month. Unfortunately, the





letter had to contain lies. We unfortunate souls had to write that we were healthy, feeling good, working lightly, etc., etc. Only positives, nothing negative. That's how we had to lie to our nearest and dearest during the whole of our stay in the camp. As a result, there were cases where a family received a letter with joyful contents on one day and news of their relative's death the next day. It sometimes happened that the notification of death came first, and a few days [later] a letter from him arrived. I am not surprised that the family didn't believe in the death of their close ones. It was most often explained in this way, that the Germans deliberately reported the deaths of some prisoners whom they had transferred to various jobs where they weren't allowed to write.

Notifications about deaths also contained the pertinent information that the ashes of the deceased could be bought after sending the appropriate fee. Here I must declare that these ashes weren't the remains of a particular person, but they were ashes shoveled out of the crematorium from under the grill and put in a small package. I remember that for some time, in the carpentry shop, we were making 2000 such packages to order, into which some amount of ash cleared from the crematorium was put, which would have otherwise served no purpose. Therefore, to the families who bought the remains of their beloved ones, let them honor them symbolically as an 'unknown martyr' of Germanic culture, and may they never venerate them as the remains of their beloved ones. In this way, the Germans made themselves a profitable enterprise. We should be honest and admit that the Germans' organizational skills in every field could be a model for other nations. A predetermined work plan, all-day activities to keep the prisoners busy, and predetermined food rations every day of the week, ensured that the prisoner received what he had been allocated. Of course, these food rations underwent great changes in this long, almost five-year, period and this got worse every year. In the first years from 1940 until the autumn of 1942, we had good lunches. And so on Sunday there was a meat soup with rice or millet, or possibly with pasta, and on other days with beans or peas, potato soup, 'Awo' [a kind of food extract] soup twice a week, to which potatoes in their skins were added. Three or four times a week the soup was cooked with meat, and the rest of the days with margarine. The soups were excellent, but unfortunately not enough. Each of us received three quarters of a liter but we could have eaten at least three times as much. For the evening meal, we received the prescribed amount of 350-400 gr. of bread, and from 1942 there were also bread supplements twice a week in the amount of 500-600 gr. We also received some additional ration of fat on





Sunday and on Wednesday 50-60 gr. of sausage, and on Monday a spoon of marmalade and cheese, margarine on Tuesday and Thursday, and very rarely 20 gr. of lard, margarine and marmalade on Friday, and cheese on Saturday. In addition, from 1942, twice a week we received an extra portion of sausage or some other cured meats up to 120 gr. In addition, a quarter of a liter of coffee or herbal tea, and on Tuesday and Friday for the evening meal we had a quarter of a liter of 'Awo' soup with four to five pieces of potatoes in their skins. As one might notice from this account, there was quite a large variety nutritionally, but the rations weren't enough for a hard working prisoner.

In the first days of December I was transferred to block 14. The block leader was a German with a black badge—a so-called *Aso*, *Asozial*—and his deputy was Ludwik Mrowiec from Radzionka. This robber proved to be a worthy successor to my former block leader from 17a. Ludwik beat and harassed us sometimes for no reason at all. More often than not, he gave us some schooling after the second gong. He went from room to room and in his hoarse, unpleasant voice, he wished us 'Gute Nacht'. Woe betide us if Ludwik wasn't in a good mood and if we answered him too quietly or not all at the same time. Then on our straw mattresses [there would be] some 'sport' and some beating with his rubber truncheon, with which he was always armed. This baton was a rubber tube with some iron wire inside that was as flexible as the rubber. The impact of this truncheon drew blood immediately, which sometimes gushed after a strong blow. Along with another block leader, he beat one of our friends, who through hunger had taken one potato from another prisoner's bowl, so severely that he died the next day. They took turns beating him—when one tired, the other took over. Together they finished off a gang that was stealing bread from their fellow prisoners. Of the eight gang members, seven were killed within three days, and only one was able to take everything they could mete out and survive. Typhus got him in the end—in 1942—and he died. Morawiec killed a prison governor from Lublin, and one landowner, neither of whose names I remember. Who Morawiec was, whom he killed, the words he used to abuse our homeland and his compatriots—maybe my friend Ludwik Kończał, who was my room senior at the time, could write about that. Towards me, Morawiec was lenient. He had a friend in Biecz, with whom he went to school and went to visit after the war. Because Biecz is located in Gorlice county, he said that he might pop into Gorlice too. To my friend Morawiec I say, now the war is over. I have returned home and I look forward to your arrival in Gorlice to visit me. As a physical education teacher, I will show you some better sporting methods.



At this point, I should devote a few words for my friend Kończał, whom I mention as being sometimes too harsh on us, but he was the only one who helped the 'Muslims'. For several months he gave me soup from time to time, and once even gave me a loaf of bread. (At this point, my friend, I would like to express my heartfelt thanks).

In the carpentry shop, I felt at home. The days passed quickly. We did various jobs necessary for the camp, but mostly for the SS men. I remember that once we made 12 bedside tables. My foreman at the workshop, a young lad, very unfriendly, talked to us, but only in prison talk. As a great enemy of this kind of language and one who tried to stamp out this form of expression, there was no way that I could have pleased this young man, so when I made these tables I had to take a certain amount of abuse. One day I was summoned by my *kapo*, who was a German named Artur Balke, BV prisoner No. 3. This guy drew out some information from me regarding these bedside tables. Here, I learned that we were supposed to have made ten items, but I hadn't known that two items were to be sold privately by my young foreman. The explanation that I didn't know anything about this didn't help, and Balke took all four of us out into the field and told us to roll in snow that was up to our knees for an hour. I got extremely tired and when I asked the *kapo* if I could be spared from this strenuous exercise, I felt the rod on my back and didn't ask for any more mercy. I must, however, point out that only in terms of this incident would I paint Balke in a bad light regarding myself, because he was among the most solid *kapos* in the camp. I can't blame him for not believing me, because in the camp, prisoners rarely told the truth, and I must mention that any other *kapo* might not only have beaten us, but he would also have reported us to the camp commander, for which we would have been punished with SK, the so-called *Strafkompanie*.

The Christmas season was approaching, and also our anticipated time of release. But somehow there weren't many people still talking about it, so we stopped deluding ourselves unnecessarily. We had a very severe winter. Friends working in the field got frostbite on their hands, toes, ears, noses—in a word, the cold troubled us greatly. Our authorities on the block were obsessed about our personal hygiene. Every morning after the gong at 4:00 a.m. each of us had to undress halfway, leaving our shirts in the block, and run to the field to the washing well. Here, however, we had to stand in line, because several hundred prisoners from other blocks had to wash themselves as well. At the well there were fights over who could get a little water to splash on his face, and show the block leader that he had washed. It was easier when it was snowing, but worse when there was no snow, and the stronger the cold,



the more closely we were guarded to make sure that none of us snuck away unwashed. I saw some poor blighters splashing themselves with their own urine, just to be able to return to the block as soon as possible and not freeze at the well.

As with our hygiene, care was taken to make sure that the blocks were clean. God forbid any dust should be found on the windows, the door, or the stove (if there was one). The room leader would get a whipping, and he would take it out on us. The floor was washed twice a day, in the morning after getting up and at noon after lunch. The washing involved pouring out several buckets of water, scrubbing with old brooms, and then getting rid of the water. In this way, the washed floor was often constantly wet, and even in the summertime it didn't dry completely, let alone in the winter. The damp was therefore indescribable, with water pouring down the walls; the individual windows weren't frozen up, but covered with a thick layer of frost. The mattresses laid down on the floor to sleep on were so wet that they were rotten from the damp after a few months.

Before Christmas, we were allowed to write home for warm clothing. Each of us had to send a letter home, in which he specified what was to be sent. We could be sent a sweater, shawl, gloves, socks or stockings. We were very happy because the cold was really getting to us. One week after this notification, we were allowed to write letters again, saying that we could be sent food packages up to one kilogram in weight. In this letter, we had to specify again what we could be sent. I was afraid that they would misunderstand the letter at home and send me everything in installments, but I was most of all concerned with the fat content. So I wrote a letter strictly according to the regulations, and in the sender's address I added, among others, 'Halb Kg Speck' ['half a kilo of bacon'].

The letters that we wrote home were, as I have already pointed out, lies—but they were something routine and interesting. As someone who knew a little German, I wrote letters for my friends whose content was often comical. One of my friends always wrote, every two weeks, a letter with such laconic content: 'Liebe Eltarn! Ich lebe noch - Herzliche Grüße' ['Dear Eltarn! I'm still alive - Best wishes'] and signed. One of my friends wrote to his wife: 'Liebe Frau! Es gibt nur eirsen Weg zur Freiheit und seine Meilensteine heissen: Gehorsam, Fleiss, Ordnung, Sauberlichkeit, Nüchtorheit, Opfersinn und Liebe zur Vaterland - Jetzt Hüpfе ich über diese Meilensteine' ['My dear wife! There is only one way to freedom and its milestones are: obedience, diligence, orderliness, cleanliness, devotion, sacrifice and love for



the Fatherland - now I am hoping for these milestones'] Signed. The letter must have been sent because it was not returned.

However much I enjoyed being in the carpentry shop, because I wasn't soaking in the rain or freezing in the field, as a result of standing on my feet all day from 4:00 a.m. until 8:00 p.m., or even longer, my legs were beginning to swell. During the night, the swelling abated slightly, but towards the evening it was the same as before. This ailment grew worse day by day, so that on 22 December 1940, two days before Christmas, my friends took me to the hospital. The duty doctor, also a prisoner, on seeing my swelling, admitted me to the hospital without any hesitation. Admission to the hospital at that time was extremely difficult. Your fever had to be over 39 degrees or you need to be literally half-dead. Apparently my state was worthy of concern, since I had been admitted to the hospital. I was assigned to a room where mainly '*Durchfall*' victims lay. Even though all the windows in the room were open, the stench was unbearable. Many of the sick were so weak that they relieved themselves where they lay. After two days of lying down, the swelling in my legs subsided and I felt a little better.

My first Christmas was approaching, and I spend it in the hospital. We thought that we would get better food rations for the holidays and we were looking forward to not being hungry. However, we were utterly disappointed. In the evening on Christmas Eve we received an ordinary portion of bread with an additional ration of fat. After the bread was distributed, our room leader began a carol: 'In the midst of the night's quiet'. In quiet, shaky and weak voices, we continue to sing 'a voice cries out ...' The number of singers decreased, as many stopped singing and began to cry softly while the rest continued the carol to this accompaniment; but in the end, the final words of 'welcome the Lord' were sung by only a few friends. There was not a single one among us who didn't cry. Our minds were a storm; our hearts beat faster, our breath came quicker, as if we'd made some extraordinary effort. That was our Christmas Eve mood. Finally, I interrupted this emotional moment. I sat on my straw mattress on the floor and, deeply moved, I calmly spoke: 'Friends! Why are we crying? We shouldn't be crying, or sad, but we must rejoice instead. We should be rejoicing because we're still alive, while many of our friends have already left us. We must rejoice that we suffer because we love our country dearly, and we were good sons to her, and for her we suffer. As a new era dawned on the day of Christ's birth, new times are coming for us too. Do you know that, due to their occupation of almost all of Europe, Germany has weakened itself so much that today they're like Napoleon outside Moscow? Do you know that Italy will withdraw



from the Axis any day now and, with its historical tradition, join the Allies and go against the Germans? Friends, heads up! Clear your minds, because we see only a bright future close up ahead of us. So let's not cry, but let's sing 'Lulajże Jezuniu' with joy. We sang a few carols in a cheerful spirit and nobody cried. I was flooded with questions about whether it was true about Italy and whether Germany was really so weak. 'Of course,' I replied because I had had news from a first-rate source from abroad. We ate supper, the weaker ones lying down, and the others sitting and chatting happily.

If news of my speech had reached *Lagerkommandant* Fritzsich or Boger from the Political Department, or Lachmann, I probably wouldn't have lived more than two days.

At my request to move me to another room because my stomach was healthy, I was assigned to a room in which people lay ill with various phlegmons. Out of the frying pan and into the fire. The smell was even worse, but what could one do? In the new room, at night, someone stole my bread, which I had saved for the next day. I should state here that in this time of famine, a portion of bread was of great value. The room leader here at the time (I don't remember his name) apparently had been a navy captain, robust, healthy and strong as an ox. Every evening he entertained us for hours with colorful stories about his experiences and various adventures at sea. He had a very unpleasant habit, namely in the evenings he would pass among the sick and, pointing with his finger, say: 'This one and that one will die tonight', which almost always turned out to be a correct assessment. One evening he included me among the virtually dead. I was indignant and extremely upset. I answered him flippantly: 'Like hell I'll die, you'll kick the bucket sooner'. In retaliation, the room leader worked to get me kicked out of the hospital in the New Year. Dressed in denim, hungry and weak, and above all fatigued, I returned to the block. Here I got a prisoner coat with blue stripes and a hat. God had been watching over me, because I received a package with some winter clothes from my home. Dressed in a coat, sweater and a warm shawl, with fur-lined ski gloves on my hands, and a camp cap on my head for the first time, I walked around to get a feel for marching to work the next day. Suddenly, one of my colleagues ran up to me and informed me that they were looking for me around the block because a food parcel had arrived for me. I hurried back to the block and received a kilo package, which held half a kilo of shortcrust pastry with jam and half a kilo of bacon. Bravo! At home they had read what I had written in the sender's address on the second letter. I ate the shortbread, but I put the pork rind under my shirt for fear that it would be stolen. I used it for almost two weeks, adding some of it to my soup.



1941 got off to a good start for me. I left the hospital dressed in warm clothes and was full. Christmas passed, along with the New Year's, and we hadn't been released from the camp.

Whoever wanted to survive the camp had to get nutrition. Two to three extra servings of bread, two to three soups, this was enough to keep you alive if you were in good health. Whoever wanted to live couldn't smoke, because he had to get cigarettes for bread or an additional ration of fat.

From the very founding of Auschwitz, the best jobs were taken by the Poles. They worked in various warehouses, offices, in the SS kitchen, in the prisoners' kitchen etc. The first transport that arrived in Auschwitz, in the first days of June 1940, comprised 23 Germans, transferred from another camp. The next transport, almost a thousand prisoners, were Poles who came from the Wiśnicz prison, and the third one was from Warsaw, with over 2,000 people. No wonder then that the founders and organizers of camp life in Auschwitz were the Poles. They helped their friends very generously and in this way saved their lives. A lot of wheeler-dealers managed to get some trade going. Between blocks 16 and 17 was the so-called *Karcelak*, where you could buy cigarettes, bread, fat—margarine, that is—or sausage, a bowl of soup, and so forth. Initially, the camp authorities turned a blind eye to this trade, and in later months they rushed the traders with sticks, taking away the goods they had earned or saved with their own blood. I tried my hand at trading, but without luck. I found out through bitter experience that to be able to trade here you had to have the mindset of a thief. For example, once I went to sell a pack of cigarettes, which I had received for my own homemade wooden clogs. I agreed on the sale price of 25 pfennigs per cigarette. The buyer, a prisoner unknown to me, put the cigarettes in his pocket, reached into his shirt for a purse with money that was hanging around his neck, took out one mark and, handing it to me as payment for my 20 cigarettes, said: 'I'll pay you the trade price of five pfennigs per item, and if you don't like it, you can file a complaint against me.' And he left. What should I have done? Crestfallen, I left the *Karcelak*, which I then avoided for a long time. Once again, I had an adventure that went like this. I got some kind of stomach sickness and couldn't eat bread, so I saved a whole half a loaf. I couldn't keep it, because I didn't have anywhere, and it was forbidden to take bread to work, so I could only sell it. So I went to the *Karcelak*. The sale price was 5 RM [Reichsmark]. Some guy I didn't know looked at the bread and agreed to the price. But then he told me: 'Listen, I don't have any money, so come with me to the hospital, and a friend of mine who's a paramedic will buy it there.' I took the bread in my



hand, wrapping it in paper from a cement bag and followed the buyer. At the hospital, he ran over to the paramedic who was to buy the bread. After a long moment a stranger came up to me, took the bread from me, weighed it in his hands and in the blink of an eye made a run for it with my goods. I tried to catch up with him, but unfortunately he was faster than me—he escaped. Depressed, with tears in my eyes, I passed the *Karcelak*, promising myself that I would not be so insolently robbed ever again.

In the first half of January, I received some cash sent to me from home for the first time. Initially, the money was paid out twice a month in installments of 10 RM, then 20 RM once a month, and in 1942 and thereafter it went up to 40 RM. Armed with cash, I could get some help with buying bread or soup. Here again you had to use your head and not buy food immediately after the payment, because the prices were often three times higher than normal, but it was better to wait a little time until the buyers were low on cash. This is easy to write about, but how did it work in practice? With hunger pangs on all sides and the money there in a purse around your neck? A bit of strong will and the logical argument that in two weeks I wouldn't die of hunger, and after that I would give my body three times as much as in the days just after the payment.

Regardless of the cash I regularly received every month (RM 20), I earned money on top. I usually made chess pieces in the carpentry workshop, and in the summer season I made wooden clogs. I fashioned the chess pieces from hardwood, painting them in black ink or black varnish. The first products were a bit clumsy, but after some time I gained such experience that people generally liked them a lot. Almost every week or two I had one set to sell. I received two portions of bread or three to four dinners for them. I also became highly skilled in making wooden clogs. They were very strong and aesthetically pleasing. I made them not only for fellow prisoners, but also I often had orders for SS men's wives or children. For the clogs, I also received two to three servings of bread from my fellow prisoners. The SS men paid me badly because they stealthily tossed me a few cigarettes. It was very strictly forbidden to make chess pieces and clogs in the workshop. This was called 'black work'—so-called *Schwarz Arbeit*—and if anyone got caught, his work was confiscated, he was beaten, or even thrown out of the workshop. God knows how much each chess piece or clog cost me in nerves. Despite my extraordinary caution, maybe even to the point of exaggeration, I got caught a few times. I was beaten twice, and one time I nearly got fired from the workshop. I was saved by Władziu Kupiec, a carpenter from Zakopane, who interceded with the *kapo* on my behalf.





My first winter in the camp was extremely cold. An enormous number of fellow prisoners working in the field got frostbite on their arms, legs, ears, noses, and for this reason a lot of sick people lay in the hospital. The three blocks that existed at that time weren't enough to house the sick, and therefore the next two blocks were allocated to the hospital. Due to the expansion of the hospital there was a great demand for doctors and paramedics. Having a great deal of interest in this area, I reported to the paramedic and after passing an exam I was admitted. In the first days of February 1941, I began a new career in the camp as a paramedic. One room was assigned to me for frostbitten patients. These people were in a terrible state. With poor nutrition, not only did the wounds not heal, but they grew larger by the day. These wounds were treated by pouring a large amount of oil on them. These poor wretches had badly damaged fingers and legs, with phlegmons all over their body. For dressings we used paper bandages, which didn't last long and after one night had to be changed. The stench in the room, despite opening the windows, was unbearable. For days my head ached and I felt very poor as a paramedic. I wanted to go back to the carpentry shop, but changing *kommando* wasn't so easy. It was only a very nasty case that helped me get out of this position. One of the *Durchfall* patients gave me his portion of bread on the condition that I would give him the same amount after he had recovered. However, he was advised by his friends to demand that I return the bread the next day. My explanation that I couldn't give it back to him immediately, that he would get it in the evening, fell on deaf ears. He began to shout at the top of his voice: 'Give me back my bread!' Someone reported this to the block leader, because I was called to the office, and here a certain Antoni Kowal, a block clerk, together with his friend (I don't know his name) struck me 25 times with a pickaxe handle. Half-conscious, with my buttocks badly beaten, I didn't go back to the hospital, but I was able to return to the carpentry workshop. I spent almost a month recovering from this beating, and I could neither sit nor lie down.

In the camp, you could never tell when suddenly, out of the blue, you would get attacked and beaten up. Two prisoners—so-called *Lageraltesters*—maintained order in the camp. Initially, they were No. 1 Bruno Brodniewicz and No. 23 Leon Wieczorek [Wietschorek], both Germans, but their names suggested that they were of Polish descent. Once, when passing by Wietschorek, I performed the prescribed greeting, but he called me over and punched me in the face.

Our nemesis was a German shepherd that, goaded by its master, one of the SS men, used to jump at the prisoners and bite them. It also went for me once. Knowing that I wasn't allowed





to shout or defend myself in spite of the enormous pain, because the dog had bit into my thighs, I didn't flinch and it let go. It once injured my friend Pazurkiewicz so much that he was treated for more than three months in the hospital. Some SS men used to harass us, beating us for no reason, just for sport. One of them was probably a boxer, because whoever he hit would fall to the ground like someone who had just been beheaded. The same SS man hit me with such strength in the chest once that I didn't realize how fast I was flying backwards, but fortunately I hit my head on the grass. More often than not, you could be attacked suddenly from behind, out of the blue. You might get a kick or a strong punch in the neck that would knock you down. The so-called Muslims were terrorized by SS man Storch. The 'Muslims' were the emaciated, weak individuals whose days were numbered. Storch caught hold of these poor wretches, grabbing them with both hands around their neck and then strangling them until the victim lost consciousness and fell to the ground. He would finish off the dying man with some kicking, and if that didn't work, he would jump landing both feet on his chest or stomach, and then the job was done. This Storch, commonly known as 'The Strangler', became famous once again during our evacuation from Auschwitz, as I will write about later.

I worked in the carpentry shop until 12 June 1941. I was caught doing 'black work'—making clogs—and as punishment I was thrown out of the carpentry shop, and I took five pairs of clogs as a farewell and payment for my half-year's work. I was officially transferred to another DAW carpentry shop [*Deutsche Ausrüstungswerke*]. It all turned out all right in the end, as the saying goes. I had only worked a few days in the workshop when I had a word with one SS man, a Viennese named Putzik, and he assigned me to the carpentry warehouse. From then on, I was a warehouseman at the DAW for over 13 months. All day long I rented out tools for carpenters. Now I had time to make chess pieces, clogs, boxes and various toys that were ordered by the SS men.

From October 1941 until February 1942, we were fed with rutabagas. We got them to eat five times a week. The prisoners began to suffer greatly from hunger diarrhea, the so-called *Durchfall*. Twice I got stomach sickness, but somehow I was able to dig myself out, helping myself out with my handiwork.

The ranks of my fellow Gorlice prisoners were diminishing. The first to die was Jacek Delekta. The next was Tadeusz Prasz, who died of diarrhea. Until December 1940, he was in



good shape. Before Christmas, he received a package of warm underwear from home. His beautiful fur gloves caused a stir around the block and various *kapos* wanted to buy them from Tadzik. He sold them for food. He was always quiet, calm and very polite. Tadzik, we will always remember you.

Wacław Cyl died—an agronomist engineer from the east of Lesser Poland, who temporarily lived in Biecz. He died from exhaustion at night in our room.

Ignacy Mielowski died tragically. At the time he lived in block 3, where Emil Bednarek was the acting deputy block leader, famous for his atrocities. He didn't like Ignas because he was supposedly dirty. He was stripped naked, put into a long basin in the washroom, all the taps with cold well water were unscrewed and he was scrubbed with rice brushes. Ignas died after three days, as I later found out, from meningitis. I honor you, our beloved martyr.

The late Ludwik Bartusiak from Biecz left our group. He used to attend Gorlice junior high school. Arrested during the first round-up in Gorlice, he always deluded himself that he would be freed as an American citizen. Ludwik Bartusiak had exceptional character traits, as evidenced by the fact that for almost two years during his studies he was the head student of Gorlice junior high school. He could not stand the difficulties of camp life. He fell ill with hunger diarrhea, the so-called *Durchfall*, and died in the winter of 1941.

The late Jędrzej Lewicki, student at the Lviv Polytechnic, finally left us forever. He was arrested on 21 August 1940 and, like all of us, was sentenced to stay in a camp until the end of the war. I had known Jędrus since he was a small child and stayed with him in the camp until his death. I had looked upon Jędrus, the pupil, as a teacher, I had watched Jędrusia, the scout, as a guardian and scout leader, I had looked upon Jędrusia as a prisoner, as his fellow prisoner, and I must say that the late J. Lewicki was a young man with remarkable character traits. In the toughest moments, when he should have been saving his own life, Jędrus was able to share his last piece of bread with his friends. Jędrus never lied and could not even lie at moments when it was a question of life or death. So this is what happened: he was working in the DAW factory as a leader and supervised eight fellow prisoners. They were cleaning the floors. One time an SS man saw them resting, and when asked why they weren't working, Jędrus replied: 'I gave these people some rest'. Jędrus was beaten and transferred to earthworks as a punishment. Jędrus had taken the scout law to heart and would put it into practice. Jędrzej Lewicki should be a model of scouting and his likeness should adorn



our Gorlice junior high school scouting club. Jędrus—watch over your young scouting friends from the afterlife so that they might be guided by your principles in life.

Aleksander Pazurkiewicz, a teacher at Gorlice junior high school, died. He was also arrested on 21 August 1940, on the street, with a verdict from the Gestapo court on the grounds of his professional position, and was sentenced to stay in a camp until the end of the war. On 8 October 1940, he and the whole of our transport crossed the iron gateway of Auschwitz. Physically very strong and resilient, he initially endured the hardships, the cold and hunger, cheerfully. Psychologically, however, he was too weak. He often broke down and gave in to everything. The culmination of such a psychological breakdown came in the winter of 1942, when an SS dog was deliberately set on him and bit him. He was transferred from the Auschwitz camp to the camp in Mauthausen. He went from one hell to another. He was assigned to work at the quarries in Gusen. He couldn't cope with the hardships there and died on 11 December 1942.

The commandant of the DAW factory, *Haupt Wagner*, was a remarkably stupid person, and that may have been why he did us no harm. Over 1,000 people worked at the factory at that time. Civilians also worked there, with whom we prisoners maintained commercial relations. In exchange for gold and expensive stones, which poured into the camp in large quantities with the new transports of Jews, they gave us bread, fat and cigarettes. The authorities found out about it and under strict penalties they forbade having food, tobacco and cigarettes, or lighters and matches at work. Unfortunately, a fire broke out in the DAW for unknown reasons, so the regulations were tightened even more in this respect. To inspire fear in us, they shot two prisoners, who were allegedly found guilty of arson. One day I almost got myself caught. I bought one tobacco package—the only time I ever did so—which I had to then transfer to the camp in order to sell it for a tidy profit. Unfortunately, *Lagerführer* Seidel [Seidler] was at the gate. He was picking out suspicious prisoners from the *kommandos* passing through the gate to the camp and handing them over to the SS men for a personal search. He pulled me out from the crowd. My heart sank, my legs shuddered, because I already saw myself in the bunker, and maybe in the SK. The only rescue, the only hope would be a quiet, pleading prayer to the Mother of God. The rather intimidating *Unterscharführer*, *Arbeitsdienst* Schoppe, inspected me. He began to frisk me on my back and stomach, so I pretended to laugh, like I had the tickles, so that when he came to the crotch, I jumped back, pretending I couldn't take it anymore. I got a heavy kick



and he let me go. I must write openly that in spite of my difficult experiences in the camp, I belonged to the group of those who were lucky enough, or perhaps cunning enough, to evade severe punishment.

One day, I got myself into trouble with Usch Keller, our *Blockführer*, because allegedly I wasn't in the column at the roll call. Keller ordered the block leader to note down my number and severely punish me. Having my number sewn on my jacket and trousers, I didn't wait for my block leader, the infamous Wierzbica, read it, but I shouted loudly in German: 'Funf u. Sechzig - drei u. Sechzig'. I gave the wrong number entirely on purpose, reading it in the reverse of its Polish version, and I could see the block leader writing 6563 instead of 5636. In the evening, in came Wierzbica—famous for his beating and incredible abuse of prisoners—to our room, holding a thick rubber truncheon and shouting loudly: 'No. 6363 come forward'. I was already lying down and, hearing this, I covered my head with a blanket and broke out in a cold sweat of fear. Wierzbica passed through the whole cell, in which there were about 200 prisoners, calling this number several times, but in vain. He hissed in anger and threw a barrage of terrible curses at his quarry, saying, 'I'll find him,' and left the room. On the second day immediately after the gong, Wierzbica repeated his search. Hearing this, I left the block, fearing he would recognize me. Then one of my friends informed me that Wierzbica would be looking for me during the roll call, and then, as he put it, he would 'kill the ...' (here he used a rather colorful expression). We had the roll call in half an hour. What to do in order not to be recognized? Because with Wierzbica it would be no piece of cake. I didn't have any time to lose ... I already had a plan. I ran to the hospital. From one of the blocks they were carrying a corpse to the hospital. Luckily, I managed to pull a large jacket from the body along with his number, which I proceeded to put on, without taking off my own, I wore my cap low on my forehead, put on my glasses, slouched a little and thus 'refashioned' I stood in a completely different place in the column of ten at the roll call. Wierzbica walked around, searching, comparing numbers, frothing with anger and hurling a heap of insults at the culprit, and finally ended his search. I exhaled. I felt so light in my heart, like I was the luckiest man on the planet. That was fortunate. I had missed out on at least fifty bloody lashes.

Soon after that I had a similar adventure once again. For the first time we got beds in the block. Oh the joy! Everyone would have their own bed to sleep in, although without a mattress, but he would be alone, and could cleanse himself of the bugs. The beds were in three-tier bunks. This was in October 1941. Tired, I went to bed one Sunday and started to



repair my clothes. I was noticed by a deputy block leader named Kremser, a *volksdeutsch*, and quietly, so as not to startle the others lying on their beds, he took every culprit out to the middle of the block in a flash. Seeing that there would be an execution, I slowly retreated imperceptibly backwards between the beds and waited so as not to be too far away, just in case I might have been suspected of trying to get away, because then I would get a penalty ten times worse. Franz Kremser, about 50 years old, was short, small, with drooping jowls, well fed—of course, at our expense. He was a worthy deputy of his block leader, Wierzbica. One by one, everyone got five lashes on the buttocks with a rubber truncheon. He finished number seven and asked where the eighth one had gone. Seeing that he didn't know who the eighth culprit was, I disappeared imperceptibly past the beds, leaving the block and thus avoiding a beating.

On another occasion, I was lucky enough to sneak out of the grasp of that executioner Wierzbica. This is what happened. Every Sunday afternoon we had a so-called uniform roll call, which involved the wretched prisoners being scrutinized by the *Lagerältester*, and also usually by the block leader, his deputy and the clerk. Three pairs of eyes bore down on the prisoner who, dressed as if for some important holiday, cleaned, washed, and most importantly, not in rags, stood in turn for inspection. Woe betide you if they noticed a button missing, or that your clothing hadn't been cleaned and patched—you would be beaten or punished. They found some breadcrumbs in my pocket. I never suspected that anyone would examine my pockets, turning them inside out. My number was noted down and singled out together with a few friends; we nervously waited until the end of the roll call to see what kind of penalty Wierzbica would dream up for us. His repertoire was rich, for he was a pervert who revelled in human suffering, a wild beast whom cries and supplication didn't soften but rather excited, and the more someone cried out and begged for mercy, the more he would beat. He ordered us to undress completely, put us under an open window right next to the wall. We had to stand there until the evening gong, so that meant more than six hours naked with the window open and in an unheated room. This was in December. I was trying to save myself. Living with me in the same block was the late Staś Dubicki, my student from Gorlice junior high school and, incidentally, one whom I liked due to his great sporting skills. Staś was very well liked around the block, and he even got on with Wierzbica. So I appealed to Staś and he effectively intervened with the block leader who had given me the penalty. I am truly grateful to Staś. Staś, in fact, fed me for two months, giving me his extras, which



he received daily due to the fact that he was the one who dished out the meals. Our beloved Staś died tragically. He was gassed along with one thousand fellow prisoners suffering from typhus fever. In spite of everything, twice I didn't manage to avoid the punishment of that monster Wierzbica. One time my number was read out along with a few of my friends, and he gave each of us, depending on his choice, five to eight or even ten heavy lashes. Because we were already in our underwear the punishment was all the more painful, because the body was only covered by thin long johns, often torn. My turn came. I had to bend over and grab my ankles. With all the pleasure a pervert can muster, Wierzbica meted out the blows, with the victim having to count out the number. Knowing that with Wierzbica pleas and crying only made him more excited, I counted up to five loudly, without pain. Wierzbica said: 'This old man has a hard ...'. And he stopped beating me. The marks left, in the shape of long black stripes, remained on my body for three or four weeks. Often there were cases where a poor wretch would have to go to the hospital, because after such a beating, phlegmons would appear and the body would rot up to the bones of the pelvis and sacrum. To this day I don't know why I received this beating, but I was not allowed to ask because I would have been hit twice as much.

The second time, while walking to the block after the roll call, I got it twice in the face from Wierzbica as he stood in the doorway, but with such force that I hit my head against the wall every time. It turned out that Wierzbica had issued an order that those who had wooden clogs should take them off and enter the block barefoot. This order had been issued on the quiet so that none of us still standing had heard of it and anyone who didn't know about it was beaten.

Wierzbica was a specialist in picking out victims. His favorite activity was to examine personal hygiene, especially the legs. Nobody would have particularly minded that he bothered about the cleanliness of the prisoners. But Wierzbica would do this when we stood for a long time at a roll call and hadn't had time to wash or even eat bread. That Mr. Wierzbica was a terrible man. We were scared to death of him, avoided him like the plague, because you never knew when and for what you might get a lashing. He dished out the punishments in the evening after the gong, and in the morning before the roll call. It was not uncommon for a poor wretch who had crossed him to get a hundred strokes. He beat the sculptor Józia Karpowicz—such a wonderfully outstanding artist—so badly that he died during the night. I no longer remember the names of my fellow prisoners who, after getting a thrashing from



Wierzbica, ended up in the hospital and died there. Wierzbica sometimes punished the prisoners with 'sport'. He invented a really bizarre exercise that no sports expert would ever do. Has anyone ever heard of crawling backwards, sideways, doing back flips on the stone floor, then walking on all fours, but backwards? Wierzbica officiated such exercises with a rubber truncheon in his hand, and made sure the exercise was performed correctly by beating. His favorite kind of fun was playing 'the sawyer'. This involved two prisoners holding another prisoner lying stretched between their shoulders who was ordered to bend his knees at which point the one holding him at the rear had to move forward so that his face came close to his buttocks.

Wierzbica didn't just beat the prisoners; he tortured them, not for any punishment which they deserved, but just in order to abuse us. He should stand among the ranks of the criminals and explain his actions in front of a court.

Franz Kremser was Wierzbica's deputy. In 1942 he became a block leader and held this function until the day Auschwitz was evacuated. I won't describe his exploits, because in my diary I only present my own experiences, and what I saw first hand. If I describe something in order to illustrate the life of a prisoner in Auschwitz, I usually refer to people. For me, Kremser, as an older man, was reasonable.

In block 10, and on Wierzbica's watch, I spent my second Christmas in a row there. On Christmas Eve we received, for the first time ever, a loaf of bread and 125 gr. of margarine. Due to our difficult living conditions and our daily struggle to stay alive, we were no longer inclined to cry, as I described during the first Christmas. The mood was extremely serious. After making a wish, we sang Christmas carols. At one moment Wierzbica entered our room. He greeted us with some general wishes and spoke to us in a patriotic spirit, emphasizing his Polishness several times. I note here that Wierzbica was a *Volksdeutsch* and was considered in Auschwitz to be German. During his speech you could hear frequent murmurs of protest. I also spoke on the theme of 'let's love ourselves'. It was a topic deliberately chosen for Wierzbica. In my speech, a few times I let him feel that my words were aimed at him. I was afraid that there would be consequences for me, but no—he gave me a break.

After the outbreak of conflict between the Soviet Union and Germany on 22 June 1941, immense joy prevailed in the camp. We were happy because we were convinced that the Germans would not defeat the Red Army, and this Germanic colossus must break down.





The conquered peoples would take advantage of this, take up arms and pay them what was owed them. That was our reasoning in the camp at the time.

We were extremely disappointed and disheartened to hear the news of German successes. However, being absolutely convinced that victory must lie where the ideal of justice and the rule of law prevails, we optimists, including myself, never believed in Germany's victory. We believed that these wild Euns [Huns] of the 20th century, bringing destruction to all of Europe, torturing, murdering and ransacking, must meet a well-deserved punishment. There should be no place for them in Europe. The wild Congo, the land of yellow fever and mosquitoes, should now be the home of these murderers.

In the first days of October, some Red Army prisoners of war began to arrive in our camp. The first transport of about 500 people, including women and children, met a terrible fate. They were locked up in block 11, which was in the vicinity of our block 10. The windows of our block had been boarded up so that we couldn't see what was going on in this execution block. About 200 patients were brought there from the hospital. With great anxiety, we followed the news of what they were doing to these people, because there were various rumors spreading around the camp. We knew that whoever crossed the threshold of block 11 would never return. We didn't have to wait long, because in the evening of that day, one SS man was spotted entering block 11 with a gas mask at his side. For two days after this incident, block 11 was sealed off. No one entered or left the block. Now we knew what had happened to them. The entire transport of Red Army prisoners and about 200 patients had been poisoned to death by gas.

Knowing precisely the history of the camp, having taken an active interest in all aspects of its life, I must declare that this was the first use of gas in Auschwitz. After two days, the block was opened up and the corpses were taken away by trucks at night. Civilian workers were used for this job, who were reportedly shot in order to get rid of any evidence.

In November 1941, Red Army prisoners of war began to arrive in droves. They were treated brutally. Their heads were smashed in with rifle butts, ribs were broken, in a word, every SS man felt that it was his duty to abuse these people. The SS men who weren't on the front wanted to taste the blood of these innocent victims. I was an eyewitness to these deeds and what I am describing is not fantasy but pure fact. The Soviet prisoners of war, after they were unloaded from the railway wagons, were driven to the so-called *Entwesungskammer*,





or delousing, which was located about one and a half kilometers from the camp. There, every prisoner was stripped naked, shorn, shaved and bathed—all under the open sky. Next, the prisoners were kept there until the night, and at dusk, when the whole camp was asleep, they were driven naked to the courtyard of block 11. They waited until morning to be assigned to individual blocks. Because such baths took place in November, it is difficult to describe what happened to these people. We heard moaning and crying all night.

Every prisoner of war, regardless of his state of health, had to go to work. The effects of this ice bath, working in the open air regardless of their health and poor nutrition, meant that they didn't have to wait long. Their mortality rate was enormous. Sick people were finished off in the labor *kommandos* and only their corpses were carried back after work. On cold and rainy days, which in November are not in short supply, the mortality rate was so high that sometimes all available cars and motor vehicles were used to transport the corpses. I remember that over 300 dead people were transported on one day. Returning from work at the DAW, I saw such a scene. A dozen or so prisoners of war were lying on a truck. One of them was visibly lifting his head with the last of his strength. Then an SS man jumped up and hit him so hard in the head that he cracked his skull open. Because of the huge number of dead people, the crematorium could not keep up with the burning of bodies, and therefore they were stored in the cellars of blocks 3 and 6. It was a horrible scene when these corpses were pulled from the trucks. They just shifted the boards and ladders a little on the trucks and the corpses fell to the ground like logs, after which they were pulled by their legs to the basement, or thrown through the window.

The Soviet prisoners of war arrived in Auschwitz in October and November 1941—about 11,000 of them—and when Auschwitz was evacuated, about 300 remained.

Every evening we witnessed our dead friends being taken to the crematorium. Initially the [bodies] were carried out in coffins on the shoulders of prisoners. The dead bodies were left in the crematorium, and the coffins were brought back to transport others. When the number of deaths increased, the corpses were transported on a kind of platform made from the hearse of the Auschwitz funeral parlor. After some time the coffins were too damaged to use, and no new ones were made, but the dead were instead transported on carts lined with boards. Tens of corpses would be loaded onto such a cart, covered with blankets. They were carted out like meat from a slaughterhouse. When a cart like this left block 11, a trail



of blood dripped along its entire path from the bodies of those who had been shot. No one accompanied the deceased, no one cried or felt sorry for them, because death had wrested them from our company today, but tomorrow it might wrench us away too. We said goodbye to them in a quiet and secret whisper: 'Rest in peace'. We didn't, however, fold our hands as if in prayer, but clenched them into fists, vowing vengeance.

My duties in the DAW as a warehouseman took me at most half an hour every day. I had very little office work, so my free time, as I already mentioned, was devoted to making chess pieces, clogs, boxes, etc. I also did something else, but in secret, surreptitiously, for disclosure would have meant certain death. I was writing the story of Auschwitz on tiny pieces of paper. I did so discreetly, without telling anyone about it, because I was wary of even the closest friend, and I had good reason to be, as will be confirmed by the following fact. One day in September, a camp errand boy came to me to the DAW warehouse, summoning me immediately to the 'Political'. Such a summons had various purposes: release, being reported for something and receiving some fresh torment, the arrival of a letter with disloyal content, etc. I was called before the well-known Pole-killer—Lachmann. He was small in stature, almost boyish, with regular facial features, who looked fairly gentle, even nice. From external appearances you might think that he was a very good man, and yet he was a hyena who didn't sit still for one moment in the camp, but was always on the lookout for new victims, fresh blood. He was the right hand of the famous Grabner, who for many years ran the Political Department. In Poznań [Lachmann] attended high school and studied there; some said that he was at the Faculty of Law, and others that he graduated from the WSH [Higher School of Commerce].

He sat alone in the room in front of a typewriter. He checked my personal information without looking at me. He held several sheets of paper written in pencil, and after a while he asked me in Polish: 'Would you like to go home?'. I answered: 'Yes! My dream and greatest joy would be to go home.' 'Well,' said Lachmann 'You will go! But first you must tell the honest truth and hide nothing.' He spoke slowly, quietly, calmly, but extremely emphatically, through clenched teeth: 'Do you know that your two oldest daughters have helped a criminal who seriously injured a German soldier during his escape? That they dressed him up as a woman and thus enabled him to escape?' My heart sank, my legs shook, I shuddered and thought that my poor daughters were probably in prison, beaten and tortured; I felt utterly crushed, because this would be the end of me. However, this lasted a fraction of a second, because



right away, with my head raised proudly, and with a great deal of ease and confidence, I answer rather loudly: 'This is not true! I raised my daughters not to keep any secrets from me, to confide in me, and if they had done something, they would have probably told me about it. I repeat: I don't know anything about it!' At this Lachmann responded quietly and calmly, like the reverse of my boldness and confidence. 'Of course, you don't know anything, because you weren't at home; you were absent while your daughters acted!' After he said this, I was literally knocked off my feet and convinced that this scoundrel knew everything, because in fact, when that lad had been with us, I wasn't at home. I was breaking up inside, but I fought on and with all my effort not to collapse to the ground, I came up with an even more insolent response: 'This is not true and my daughters didn't do it!'. After a long moment of silence, Lachmann got up and spoke in a very confident and ironic tone: 'How is it not true, when you told your friends in the camp about it, and yet you deny it now?' He finished and looked at me like a wildcat at the prey clenched in his claws, happy that in a moment he would guzzle its warm blood. I was completely crushed and resigned. A father was a traitor to his own children and they would suffer because of him. No! I couldn't accept that! I felt that my hours were already numbered and I would not survive this. However, I pulled myself up like a wounded bird for its final flight and pretending to be an actor on the stage, coolly, calmly, in an even voice, I answered: 'Yes! I talked about it in the camp, because there are a dozen or so of us from Gorlice, and in our free time we tell each other different things. The fact that a German soldier was beaten by a former junior high school student was known throughout Gorlice and was no secret.' After this statement, Lachmann remained silent for a long time. This silence was a torture for me, because I wanted all this to end soon, because I could not fight with myself much longer in this state of nervous tension. It was all the same to me now whether it would be a yes or a no. After a few minutes, which seemed like hours, Lachmann began to speak calmly: 'I am appealing to you from the goodness of my heart to admit everything, because you are not guilty in this matter.' I replied firmly, 'Besides what I have already said, I have nothing further to add.' Here Lachmann jumped at me threateningly with his fists, but when he saw my unbending attitude, he didn't hit me, but controlled himself and hissing with anger he said: 'We'll take a different approach with you; then you'll tell us everything.'

He read my testimony to me and ordered me to sign. Here I argued with him again. He had written in the report that I didn't want to testify. I objected to this by saying, 'I want



to testify, but I don't know anything about it.' Angrily, he added my correction. I signed the report and left.

Now I felt [relieved]. Up until that moment, my willpower had been propping me up, but now, after leaving, I felt sapped. I was so weak that I could hardly stand on my feet. Fortunately, I came across some friends who took me back to the block. I was utterly despondent. I felt like a father who had just come back from his children's funeral. The fact that, against my will, I had contributed to the betrayal of my own children devastated me deeply. That's how it was. I had talked about this incident to two friends in the camp, but these were my close friends. Had they betrayed me and reported me to the camp authorities?! Could someone have overheard my story and betrayed me?! I knew who I had confided in; I remembered their names, but I didn't know who my traitor was. Was it them? Or a third party? This remains a mystery to me to this day. I supposed that my daughters had been arrested, and this supposition was compounded by the fact that I hadn't received a letter from home for six weeks. I fell into a dark depression and felt worse every day. From one day to the next I expected to be locked in the bunker and suffer further consequences. However, one week passed and another and the matter subsided. One day I received a letter from home, and in it were the genuine signatures of all my four daughters. So they were at home and at liberty! I calmed down. However, my attitude towards my fellow prisoners changed radically. In the past I had been honest and effusive towards them. I helped them as much as I could, but now I was withdrawn, avoiding my fellow prisoners more often than not.

This German soldier had indeed been beaten and wounded in Libusza. The German soldier had arrested a man named Krzyszkowski who, while the report was being retrieved, took advantage of that moment and hit the report writer with a heavy office inkstand, pushed the other with a bayonet, jumped from the first floor window and fled. One of the soldiers managed to shoot him and hurt him in the ear. Luckily, it was raining, and despite the pursuit with the help of police dogs, he was not caught. He did indeed come to our house, because one of my daughters was his school friend, but he was already in a woman's costume, so my daughters only completed his outfit and provided financial help. He sent a first message to us from Muszyna and a second from Hungary. As you can see from this, the young hero had managed to get himself abroad. For a long time, the Gestapo was looking for him, and many people from among Krzysztof Krzyszkowski's friends and family were arrested in connection with this case. As I later found out, members of the Home Army fished a drowned man



out of the Ropa river, whom they identified as Krzyszkowski, providing with appropriate documentation. Only then did the Gestapo, assured that the wanted criminal was dead, cease further search and discontinue the investigation.

In order to get to know the camp better and penetrate its innermost secrets, to be at the source, to be privy to the entire activity of the camp command, to get to know their various ruses, I dreamed of getting a job at the head camp office—no easy task. You had to be extremely fluent in German.

At the beginning of March 1942, large transports of Jews from various European countries began to arrive in Auschwitz, and thus the number of staff working in various offices had to be increased. Favored by extraordinary luck and a strange coincidence, I landed a job in the main camp office, and it happened like this: In my DAW magazine, it was going from bad to worse. One of the SS men had asked me to make him some wooden clogs. Due to the fact that making clogs was strictly forbidden, and I had already been caught several times doing this 'black work', I found myself a workshop in the attic, in a tiny barred cell. There, I moved all the necessary tools and in my free time I tinkered away. One of my young colleagues spotted this and, without telling me anything, started poking around in my studio. He was unlucky. One of the SS men caught him and took him to *Obersturmführer* Wagner, the DAW commander. At the same time he brought my near-finished clogs and carpentry tools as *corpus delicti*. To make matters worse, a piece of a strap was found, coming from skis that had been brought in entire wagonfuls to be painted white. So the argument was ready. The boy explained in tears that the clogs weren't his, nor the tools, but nothing helped. Wagner reported the boy—that is, a report was made to the camp commander. He would receive a penalty of at least three months of SK (*Strafkompanie*). Having learned this, without saying anything to anyone, I voluntarily went to Wagner's office and told him that the clogs and tools that had been found were mine. The commandant referred to me in terms of dogs, pigs, etc., and threatened to report me. My direct superior, *Rottenführer* Ostrowski, sprang to my defense. He intervened with Wagner and persuaded the SS man who had ordered the clogs to explain to the commander that I was making the clogs on his behalf. However, in spite of his insistence and that of other SS men, he didn't do so. The case escalated. Someone informed Wagner, because he didn't make a criminal report on me. However, to be consistent, he told me to give the warehouse to some other prisoners, and after two days he ordered me to report to him. Announcements were made in the camp about the need for



clerks. I applied for a trial and succeeded, and on 18 July 1942, I swapped Wagner's place for the camp office and began a new life. Here I found completely different working conditions. I found myself in a group of well-mannered people; I didn't hear any swearing and cursing here, no one beat anyone, no one stole, in a word, I was revived spiritually. There were only two or three German clerks out of 25, and the rest were Poles.

My new duties in the main camp office were extremely valuable to me, because now I was able to find out at the source what methods they were using to harass us and what fabrications they were making. In the main office, I wrote the so-called *Hauptbuch*, the main book, in which I wrote down all the prisoners who came to the camp. The last number that was entered in this book was 202,495. Apart from this, we entered the gypsies, of whom there were over 10,000, in a separate book, as well as the *Erziehungs Häftlinge*, whose number also amounted to 10,000 people. The name itself indicates that these prisoners had been sent for educational purposes. They were rounded up from among civilian workers who were sentenced to several weeks' stay in the camp for minor offenses.

Because of the enormous Jewish transports to the Auschwitz camp—not one, but even two to three trains a day sent by the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* police (RSHA)—in April 1944 an order was issued that the Jews, officially called 'transport Jews', should be entered into separate ledgers and they would receive numbers from A 1 to A 20,000. After completing this book, the numbers B 1 to B 20,000 would be entered, etc. At the time of the evacuation of Auschwitz, the A Jews had been filled, and there were 17,000 in the B numbering.

A great number of Jews whom they didn't manage to gas right away were assigned to the so-called *Durchgangstransport*, and they didn't receive numbers. They waited for death, which was to be carried out in the near future by gassing when the number of transports would decrease and the crematoriums and gas chambers could manage the load. The number of these people was on average over 60,000.

How many Jews came to Auschwitz and were gassed, and didn't receive numbers, we don't know exactly. Their number does not extend merely into the hundreds of thousands, but to about 3 million. This can only be accurately confirmed by future statistical data, because the prisoners who worked in the crematorium were murdered in Mauthausen. Moreover, the Jews who worked in the so-called *Sonderkommando*, numbering 200 people, who were used for the gassing and burning of corpses, were also changed and murdered every now



and then. The gassing issue was shrouded in great secrecy around the camp. The prisoners weren't allowed to talk about it under threat of the death penalty. The SS men who worked at the crematoria and on the gassing signed a special contract of obligation containing ten clauses that were to guard the secret of the murders committed.

The prisoners who received a number were also given a badge, which indicated the type of prisoner or his crimes. The badge was an equilateral triangle measuring three to five centimeters along the side, initially sewn onto the clothes, and then painted onto the material. The prisoner's number was painted in black or penciled in next to the badge. The prisoner was not really known by his last name. He was only known as a number, and in the camp his value was equivalent to that of a lifeless number.

Political prisoners—the so-called *Schutzhäftlinge*—had a red badge. They were mostly Poles, Czechs, Yugoslavs, Dutch, Belgians, Romanians and Greeks. They were the largest group in the camp.

The second category of prisoners were the so-called BV (*Berufsverbrecher*)—professional criminals. They bore a green badge, and for their crimes had received court sentences of a dozen or so years, or even life. They were mostly Germans. These people were our *kapos*, leaders, block leaders, etc.

The third category of prisoners were the PSV (*Polizei Sicherheitsverwahrung*). They wore a green badge as well, but with a pointed spike. They were convicts convicted of sentences which they were to serve after the war, but had been sent to the camp to work during the war.

The fourth category of prisoners were the so-called *Asoziale* (Aso). They wore black badges. These were antisocial individuals who had evaded work. Soviet citizens, who were sent to the camp in large transports from 1942, also received black badges.

The fifth category were the IBV (*Internationale Bibelforscher-Vereinigung*). They were prisoners who were arrested for belonging to the religious sect of the so-called Bible students.

Instead of badges, Jews wore yellow-red stars on the side on which their number was printed. Regardless of these symbols, some prisoners wore red points painted on the material, sewn





on the chest and back. They were so-called *Flucht Verdächtig*—those considered escape risks or arrested for belonging to resistance organizations. These prisoners were usually assigned to the so-called SK *Strafkompanie*, where they were quickly finished off and usually shot. Prisoners assigned to the SK wore the same points, but painted black.

Gypsies wore a black badge with a letter 'Z' painted besides the number. In the camp they had a separate numbering system. Like the Jews, the Germans murdered the gypsies too. They lived in the so-called Birkenau camp, in a separate section with their families. Their mortality rate was extremely high. Those who hadn't managed to die from typhus or various diseases were gassed in the spring of 1944. In total, the gypsies' numbering exceeded 10,000, of whom only about 500 German gypsies were sent to other camps. A part of the rest died, and the remaining 2,500 ended up being gassed during the course of one day. The news of their deaths had a terrible effect on us. It seemed to us that the constant failures on the battlefronts meant that they would change their tactics towards us, as we had already noticed since November 1943. Therefore, the news about the deaths of the gypsies augured that we might meet the same fate. I know that not only numbered gypsies were lost, but also entire transports were gassed without receiving numbers. So how many of them died is shrouded in mystery.

All the neighboring camps fell under the jurisdiction of Auschwitz—for example, Birkenau, Monowice, Jawiszowice, Sosnowiec, Gliwice, and so forth. Prisoners worked in almost all the coal mines and larger factories. At the beginning of 1944, the Auschwitz camp was divided into three, so that Auschwitz, Budy and Babice were marked No. 1, Birkenau No. 2, and the camp in Monowice along with all the camps in factories and mines—No. 3. The largest number of prisoners who stayed in all the camps in the later years, including women, was over 140,000.

In Birkenau there were six large, tall crematorium chimneys, in which 20,000 people could be burned in one day. Seeing as how two or even three trains of Jewish families pulled into the camp each day, the crematoria couldn't cope, so people were burned in ditches specially designed for this purpose. At night we saw an immense glow of burning bodies, and when the wind turned in our direction, we were assailed by the unbearable stench of burning corpses. We smelled this sometimes for days at a time, and it lingered in our noses, throats, food, and even while we slept, despite trying to cover our heads.

From March 1942, all of the transports of Jews from the various European countries began to arrive in Auschwitz. First, Slovakian Jews came, then Norwegian, Dutch, French, and so



forth. These people met a terrible fate. Men, and sometimes women were segregated into strong and healthy individuals who were sent to the camps, while the weak, elderly, and children were led off to the gas chambers and murdered. To avert the suspicion that these people were being sent to die, they were treated very well. The ladies and the elderly were given chairs after alighting; the children were carried in their arms and they were given milk and sweets. Then, under the pretext of bathing, they were ordered to undress and prepare towels, soap and toiletries. In the entrance corridor there was an inscription in all European languages: 'To the baths'. When these unfortunates sometimes realized where they were heading, 200 Jews from the so-called *Sonderkommando* would rush at them from the nearby barracks, armed with rods, batons, and with inhuman screaming and howling would herd the whole transport into the barrack where the alleged bath was to take place.

The first ranks realized that there were no baths there, but there was no turning back, because the rush from the back was such that people were pushing shoulder to shoulder to get into the barrack as quickly as possible, to avoid a beating. Behind the last one, a strong, air-tight door was slammed shut. Once everyone was locked in, one of the prisoners pushed a gas can of Zyklon through the tiny hole in the roof. The barrack filled with the sound of inhuman howling and crying, which eventually ceased, and finally complete silence would indicate that the work was over. They opened windows and doors, while electric fans purified the air. Carts pulled up and took the corpses to the crematoria. Those who were close to the gas died first, but there were still some left alive in the corners in agony; not enough gas, but the show had to go on, no time to hang around, no room for sentiment, so they burned them alive.

From some of the Jewish transports, numbering 4,000 to 5,000 people, 12, 15 or 20 Jews of mostly different professions were selected, and sometimes only doctors, who were given paper to write letters to their families. The letter was, of course, dated two to three weeks later. They explained to them that the letters would not be sent right away, but that they must be censored first. The content of the letter was arranged in advance. 'I am healthy; the work is light. I am well and I am earning money.'

The fact that the Germans had excellent propaganda, and how well they were able to hide their murders, is evidenced by the following fact: In May and June 1944, huge amounts of Hungarian Jews were brought to the camp. A small group of healthy and strong people selected for work came to the main camp in Auschwitz in good humor, saying that their



wives and children had remained in Birkenau, but they were doing very well over there. When we pointed out to them that their wives and children were no longer alive but had been murdered, they didn't believe it. In their country, they admitted, they had heard about the gassing of Jews, but they maintained that it was English propaganda. They only believed it when the weak and sick were chosen from their own ranks and gassed. Once, an entire transport of Italian Jews rebelled and refused to go to the gas. The fight was provoked by a beautiful artist, an Italian Jewess who first attacked SS-man Schilinger, who was drunkenly abusing the women. She snatched his revolver from him and shot him. Following her example, others rushed in to fight, but what could they do with their bare fists in the face of machine guns? There were many killed in the square, but one murderer also lay among them.

Extremely unpleasant selections were made of Jews who were weak and emaciated—the so-called Muslims—for gassing. Selections of this kind usually took place on Saturday. They were made in all the *kommandos*, mines, and factories under the pretext that these weak people would be sent to rest up in Birkenau. In our camp, Kläher [Klehr] made the selections for gassing in the hospital SDG (*Sanitätsdienstgehilfe*), and even independently of him, the *Rapportführers* would choose people all night long after the evening roll-call. The chosen ones were loaded onto trucks and driven straight to the gas. Twice we had a gas selection in the whole of the camp—that is, among the Aryans too. We ran naked in front of the drunken commission of the *Rapportführers*. After the prisoners were gassed, a list was sent to the main camp office, on which only the numbers were written along with a heading consisting of two modest letters—SB. We knew what that meant—it was called *Sonderbehandlung*, and in the books and in the record cards, they were recorded as dead. The biggest increase in gassing occurred in the second half of 1943 up until February 1944. At that time, officially over 10,000 prisoners died per month—that is, from amongst those who had numbers.

At the end of each month we drew up death statistics in the office, which went as follows:

in February there was a so-called <i>Abgang</i>	over 12 thousand
including SB ( <i>Sonderbehandlung</i> )	10,500
RSHA Jews deceased	500
deceased of various nationalities	993
died as a result of execution	7
Total:	12,000



These numbers are rounded to the nearest hundred, because today I don't remember the exact details. I only give them to illustrate the reports that were sent to Berlin. These 12,000 included 10,500 so-called SB, and Berlin understood them as being alive. We can see that the largest number of deaths were marked as SB, later called *Die gesondert unterbrachte Häftlinge* [separately accommodated prisoners]. How I should translate that into Polish, I don't know.

February 1944 was the last month with such a high intensity of gassing, as in March it had already subsided to 4,500 *Abgang*. In April it dropped to just above 2,000, and in the following months there were only hundreds. From Berlin a clear order came to stop gassing people and destroy all documents and objects that might testify to the terrible harvest of death in the camp. We had to search out all our deceased fellow prisoners among our files, hand over all the letters of the dead so that they could be burnt. The crematoria in Birkenau began to be demolished.

In addition to the so-called family camp for gypsies in Birkenau, there was another family camp for Jews from Teresienstadt. One day they were told that they would be transported the next day. They were told to pack and be ready to leave. Those people were given coffee for supper, exceptionally sweet and with a lot of bromine. As a result, they fell into a deep sleep and on the second day, half-conscious and bewildered, they were driven to the gas chamber.

## PUNISHMENTS

The rules of camp life were never printed or announced, but they were well known to every prisoner. The newcomer learned how to live in the camp from his older colleagues, and sometimes he learned the rules of the camp the hard way. These regulations were more or less strict, more or less adhered to, depending on the attitude of each camp commandant. The prisoner had to be clean, at least on Sunday, shaved and shorn to one millimeter every week. In Mauthausen, for example, where I ended up after the evacuation of Auschwitz, the prisoner did not have his entire head shaved, but only a path five centimeters wide from the forehead to the back of the neck. We called this path *Lausestraße* [Louse Street]. Clothes had to be clean and mended. The sweatshirt, coat and trousers had to be sewn with



a badge along with a clear number. You weren't allowed to carry a knife or any sharp tools. You weren't allowed to smoke or eat during work. A ban on cooking was observed rigorously. You weren't allowed to read books written in a foreign language, write songs, and on some *kommandos* you weren't even allowed to speak Polish. For carrying on with civilians and civilian workers you would be severely punished—even with death.

Rules were rules, rigor was rigor, and yet we did everything that was not allowed, just to stay alive, without getting caught.

I have given a brief outline of the prisoner's rules. But what were his rights? Unfortunately, the prisoner didn't have any. You could be killed, beaten until you passed out; they could break your arms and legs, no matter if you were guilty or innocent, and you had no one to complain to. This was in the period between 1940 and November 1943. Various punishments were allocated to crimes, whose mildness or severity depended on each commander and camp director. For one and the same offense—for example smoking a cigarette or eating while at work—you could get three months of SK in the early years of the camp, and later on just a kick.

The most common punishment was flogging, applied at the scene of the crime or officially, in public, during the roll call. The criminal was laid across a long vaulting horse, to which his legs were clamped, and a designated prisoner, or an SS man, meted out 25-50 or more lashes. It was rare for the poor blighter to remain on his feet after such a lashing, for streams of blood would be running down his entire body. The flogging punishment was only abolished in November 1943, and from then on a prisoner was, in principle, not allowed to be beaten. The prisoner was punished by sport on a casual basis. This type of punishment was most often applied to the whole *kommando*, and less often to individuals. How many times did we have to eat dinner in the squat position, do frog-jumps for hours at a stretch, or roll around in the mud? How many times did we see a prisoner standing in a squat position holding a huge rutabaga between his teeth and two in his raised hands? Punching in the face, flogging, tormenting with 'sport', most often applied mercilessly until the loss of consciousness by direct superiors, the block leader, his deputy, the clerk, his deputy, the entire swathe of room leaders, corridor men, toilet cleaners, straw handlers, floor cleaners, etc., etc. You didn't know where, for what, and who was beating you, because the blow was so strong that you just lost consciousness. If a crime was reported (*Strafmeldung*) to the camp authorities, the



camp manager recorded the punishment in writing. Such a penalty was read to the prisoner on Sunday. Very often, a false report had been made on a given prisoner. No amount of explanation or evidence helped, and the poor wretch had to be punished. The most severe punishment was the incarnation of a prisoner in the SK (*Strafkompanie*) for a period of four weeks to indefinitely. The assignment to SK was essentially tantamount to a death sentence. The hardest work was performed by the SK, during which time the prisoner would be beaten or killed. When the *kommando* returned after work, several or even a dozen or so were brought back dead. The SK *kapos* were degenerates—people who murdered not out of duty, but out of pleasure. They were encouraged by the SS men. I was a witness to one such incident. At the entrance gate to the camp there was an SS man on duty who noted down the *kommandos* as they left and crossed them off as they came back after the day's work. The SK *kapo* reported at the gate: 'Hundertdreiundfünfzig Häftlinge r.8 Tote' [One hundred and fifty-three, 8 prisoners dead]. 'Zu wenig,' [not enough] the SS man shouted. 'Jawohl,' answered the *kapo*. This conversation aroused my interest, and I noted that on the second day, 20 corpses were brought back. One of the biggest murderers in the SK *kommando* was *kapo* Heinz Zimmer. He said that after he killed his eight-hundredth prisoner, he told himself, 'Enough. I won't kill any more,' and he changed radically. Originally, the SK was located in the infamous block 11, and at the end of 1941 it was moved to Birkenau. In 1940, the SK *kommando* built a concrete barrier around the camp. We were witnesses to the terrible daily torment of these people. They carried five-meter-long concrete pillars from the cement plant over the Soła River to where the barrier was to be built. The pillars were very heavy and were carried by a dozen or so weak and battered prisoners barely clinging to life, over whom stood a *kapo* with a thick rod. Any prisoners too weak to lift the weight, he would smash their heads, break their limbs and kill them. It was a scene reminiscent of a real 'Golgotha'.

How terrible were the experiences of people sent to SK will be best illustrated by this letter written by my friend Józef Kreta, a junior high school teacher, whom I shall quote word for word:

Staromieście, 7 October 1945.

[...] When it comes to the fragments of SK life in which you mention myself, let me introduce them as how they appear to me, engrained in my memory, whose details may differ slightly from those described by yourself, or may complement



them. Well, while working during the ungodly famine, at the beginning of 1942, a lady who was passing by our living skeletons laid four slices of bread and two packets of cigarettes wrapped in paper next to a tree near us. This was in a forest where we were making measurements. There were four prisoners and two SS men watching over us. One of us quickly took the bread and put it under his sweatshirt. One of these SS men spotted this, took the bread, and arrested that lady. Meanwhile, he ordered us to stop work immediately. They beat us up, kicked us mercilessly and herded us to the camp together with this lady. Here in the *Wachstuba* they arrested this woman and put her in the Auschwitz camp at once, while they ushered us with rifle butts towards block 11, called the 'block of death'. Here, by accident, we stumbled upon Aumeier, at that time the *Lagerführer*, who made sure that we got a good beating for the morning, and then gave us 25 lashes. In the presence of Aumeier and Bruno, the *Lagerältester*, they spliced our flesh until our blood flowed. In this state, they shoved us into the bunker, each separately, where we stayed for 15 days. One day they shot more than the usual number of prisoners (over 170) in the courtyard of block 11. They summoned the four of us from the bunker upstairs. We thought we were going to be shot, because they would shoot four at a time. However, they let us live, stating that before we died we had to suffer, and thus sent us to the SK in Birkenau. This was tantamount to a death sentence.

At that time, terrible conditions prevailed in the SK. In addition to being killed at the workplace, prisoners were also killed in the block. Notwithstanding this, they would summon a couple of us every day to the Political Branch in Auschwitz, and those people didn't come back to us again (they went up the chimney). In this desperation, one day, on 10 June 1942, a group of prisoners tried to escape while at work. Some of the fugitives were shot, a dozen were rounded up, but 20 managed to escape. The rest were told to lie down in the mud (after heavy rain) facing the ground, and a furious bunch of *kapos*—about 30 of them—and SS men beat us mercilessly with sticks. Then they lined us up in fives and herded us into the camp, beating us all the way. There were a lot of corpses. Here we squatted hungry until late into the night, and they beat everyone who moved with a stick. On the second day the prisoners marked with red circles—numbering 330—were left hungry squatting in the courtyard, while the rest, about 160





including myself, with black circles, were rushed off to work. Unexpectedly, at noon we were also herded into a block. Here, we found our friends squatting since the morning, and next to them lay the 20 corpses of their freshly murdered colleagues. Beating us, they herded us to the block, and those 330 who had fainted from the beatings and the heat, their hands tied behind their backs with wire, accompanied by the raging of the *kapos*, were driven barefoot to their deaths. We didn't know whether they were gassed or shot. Later, we found out that they had ended their lives in a nearby gas chamber.

What happened next with those who remained is hard to describe. Amidst the most extreme torture, the most terrible torment, a certain number of us crossed the Valley of Lament every day. The gaps they left behind were filled by groups of delinquents who were constantly being sent to the camp. The methods of killing varied. Most were drowned in pools, mud, liquid excrement or latrines. At the same time, some jolly performances were put on: 'Swim like a crayfish, like a frog, like a fish, like a dog, dive' etc. Whoever found himself wallowing in the mud was beaten across the head with a stick. Then again the 'Muslims' might be laid next to each other on the ground, with a rod placed on their necks, on which the 'green *kapos*' bounced around gleefully until they choked everyone (the green *kapos* were the Germans who had green badges). The weakest were killed on the spot with a stick. The patients weren't taken to the hospital but were killed in the block. The *kapos* were the murderers. There was a disproportionate number of them in the SK, because *Kommandoführer* Moll gave every German sentenced to the SK the right to become a *kapo*. They were all professional criminals, recidivists, sadistic and degenerate types. At that time, there were around 25 of them. Most of all, they tortured those who tried to put an end to their own lives in any way they could. More than once, entire groups were on their knees begging the (SS men) to shoot them, which they declined to do. Apparently in the SK everyone had to end their lives in cruel torment. The greatest form of cruelty was the brainchild of *kapo* Dachdecker (the fat one, because there were two of them). On several occasions he beat me till I bled and said he would finish me off soon. 'Why?' I asked. 'Du hast scharfe Augen.' [you have sharp eyes] he replied. 'Du musst krepieren' [you have to die]. He hated the intelligentsia, and when



he sniffed one out, he would kill them in cold blood. He particularly tormented the priests and finished them off with extreme prejudice. One day especially sticks in my mind, when the deaths were more abundant than usual. The *kapo* ordered some of my poor friends to be put into a huge, bottomless barrel lying on its side that served as a kennel for the dogs guarding us. This was during the lunch break. They ordered them to bark. Whoever still had a little bit of life left in them tried to imitate barking. They poured soup on the ground and told them to lick it up. One of the *kapos* said that there was a priest among them, so he should give them a blessing to send them to heaven. Among the scoffs and laughter they brought over a muddy, tormented figure barely resembling a human being—a Salesian priest named Józef Kowalski. He climbed into the barrel and, crushed, muddy, half-naked, with a loud, animated voice, recited 'Our Father', kneeling over the martyrs who languished in the barrel. It is impossible to describe our emotions. The *kapos* mocked and roared with bestial laughter. At some point, just before the end of the lunch break, the *kapo* Dachdecker ran down from the causeway looking for the one *mit scharfen Augen*. On the advice of Tadzik Kokesz (from Jasło), I hid my head in the lush grass where we lay. I was saved by the whistle that marked the end of the lunch break. In the afternoon, he didn't finish me off because I was working on a different section than he. That was Saturday. Sunday was free from work at the time. Death therefore awaited me on Monday. Death was small potatoes; the torment was worse. On Sunday, something happened that is difficult for me to explain given the usual order of things. For the first time a paramedic from the hospital came to the SK to investigate whether there were any typhus patients among us. A fever had been eating away at me for a few days, but there were a lot of people like me. The paramedic could only admit three, at most four, of the feverish to the hospital. The block leader adjudicated, and from the many patients he indicated four who would go to the hospital, including myself. I owe this to my friend Zygmunt Szczepanek from Łódź who, as the main food warehouseman, tried to win the block leader over for me. If this *kapo* Dachdecker had been present during this selection, I would not only have not gone to the hospital, but he would have surely made a corpse out of me that Sunday. When the four of us were taken to the hospital, the *kapos* who were in the yard rushed at the remaining patients



and began to beat them cruelly. I don't know if any of them lived to see Monday. After a few days, in the hospital already, I learned that Father Kowalski had been murdered.

After this escape on 10 June 1942, apparently there had been some *Befehl* [command] in advance regarding the murder, because when less than 10 percent were brought back on the wagon as corpses, there was usually some argument at the gate that not enough had been killed.

Forgive me for writing so much, but that's because I can see that you care about it. So I wanted to expose this bottom-most pit of despair that was the SK, to depict how it was there ...

Józef Kret

I include this letter from my friend Jozef in the original and without comment.

One of the most severe punishments applied from 1940 to 1942 was hanging on the pole for one, one and a half, or even two hours, once, twice, and even five times. This punishment involved having your hands tied behind your back and then being hoisted so high up that you barely touched the ground with the tips of your toes. This punishment was extremely painful. The condemned would faint, in which case he would be doused with water, and often he would be taken down as a corpse.

The most severe penalties included the so-called *Stehzelle* (standing cell). The prisoner was shut up for the night in a tiny cell measuring a square meter, in which three or even four prisoners were forced to stand all night. It should be mentioned that the cell was extremely damp, with water pouring down the walls. Depending on the offense, the prisoner would be given three, five or ten nights in the standing cell, and then he had to go to work during the day. I remember that *Lagerführer* Aumeier sentenced five prisoners to *Stehzelle* for six weeks. Four of them died, only one made it through. The sentence could not be divided up arbitrarily, but had to be served in one period.

If any incident occurred whereby they wanted to isolate and punish a prisoner, he would be locked in a bunker. The bunker was a small cell in which there was one blanket and where



the prisoner could lie, although this depended on the number of people locked in there. In March 1942, the entire *Feldmesser kommando* was locked in a bunker—over 40 people in one tiny cell. The result was that during the night, 32 prisoners died of suffocation. Józik Grabowski, a friend from our transport, was among the dead. They died for receiving a little bread from civilians.

The lighter penalties included work on Sunday, the so-called *Sontagsstrafarbeit*. This meant that the prisoner had to go to work for several Sundays. The less-official penalties applied casually included the so-called *Blocksperrre* or *Lagersperrre*. In the first case, you weren't allowed to leave the block, and during a *Lagersperrre* all the prisoners had to stay in their blocks.

## ROLL CALLS

One of the most unpleasant prisoner duties was standing at the roll call. In 1940 and 1941, we had three roll calls per day; in 1942 and 1943 they were twice a day—that is, in the morning and in the evening—and in 1944 we had only one roll call in the evening. The roll call was unpleasant because we had to stand outside regardless of the weather and the cold. During the strongest downpour and the most extreme cold, we had to stand as long as it took to correlate the actual state of affairs with the numerical census of the ledger. If someone had escaped, was hiding or overslept, or had drowned himself in a ditch or hanged himself somewhere in a secluded place, we stood as long as it took to establish why a given prisoner was absent. Normally, we stood for about 20 minutes, but if the roll call didn't tally, more than once we stood one, two or three hours, and we even had two roll calls that went down in history as one of the worst experiences the prisoners had ever had.

The first of them took place on 7 July 1940, which my friends told me about because I wasn't in the camp at the time. This roll call was one of the great murderous feats of the then *Lagerführer* Fritzsich. On this day, a certain Wiejowski from Kołacze (Jasło county) had escaped from the camp, as it turned out later. Therefore, the evening roll call didn't tally. After finding out who was missing, the block leaders, various *kapos* and room leaders searched the whole camp for the absentee. Fritzsich issued a decree that the prisoners



would remain in that position until the missing prisoner was brought back dead or alive. The prisoners stood the whole time from Friday evening until 3:00 p.m. on Sunday. I must mention that the prisoners were only in shirts, because they had been leaving for work, and most of them were even without shoes. While standing, they weren't allowed to leave the ranks, sit, kneel or change posture. They relieved their bodily needs into their trousers. The position was varied from time to time by squatting with their hands raised up. The night was extremely cold. At night, an investigation was conducted involving the prisoners who lived or worked with Wiejowski. From time to time you could hear the moans of the victims who were beaten to give testimony. An unusually cold night was followed by a scorching hot day. Some prisoners fell down from exhaustion and were forced to stand up. Next to the roll-call square, the SS men stood in the blocks watching the prisoners through the windows, and from time to time they would rush out and beat those who weren't standing properly. The following night was also cold and snatched some new victims. On Sunday morning, a heap of corpses lay along with those who had fainted on the roll call square. As a result of the camp doctor's intervention, Fritzsich withdrew his order and the prisoners were released to their blocks. In the aftermath of this extraordinary feat by Fritzsich, over a hundred dead and weakened men were gathered from the roll call square. It should be noted that the entire camp at that time contained about 1,500 prisoners, so this was an extremely high percentage.

I personally experienced the second such roll call in November 1940, also because of an escape. We stood through a sleet storm from noon until 9:00 p.m.—about nine hours—dressed only in denim, without hats, coats or sweaters. The prisoners were freezing to death. Due to the nagging cold, the SS men hid themselves in the blocks, so we had more freedom and managed to keep up our body temperature with various gymnastic movements. After the roll call, over 120 dead, fainted and sick were gathered up.

Woe betide any prisoner who was late for the roll call. He would not make it to the roll call square alive because he would be killed on the way and his corpse brought in. Prisoners would hide themselves from work and from the cold in various holes, and there they often fell asleep from weakness. Once, after a two-hour search, a prisoner was found in a coffin that lay next to the hospital and used to transport the dead to the crematorium. The poor wretch lay down and fell asleep, not realizing that in a few hours he would be lying in it in eternal sleep as a dead man. They killed him before bringing him to the roll call square.



## ESCAPES

In spite of the extremely draconian methods used, both for the fugitives and for the prisoners left behind in the camp, escape attempts were a fairly common occurrence. At the long piercing scream of the siren that announced an escape, we trembled with terror. By a strange coincidence, escapes usually happened on Tuesdays, and so this became an unlucky day for us.

To deter prisoners from escaping, our oppressors invented all sorts of cruelties to such an extent that, in our opinion, any prisoner who ran away from the camp was a madman. Unfortunately, the desire for freedom prevailed over everything.

Initially, after an escape they oppressed us by making us stand in the roll call square, a procedure which took dozens of human victims; and then in 1941 and 1942, 12 or 15 prisoners were selected from the block or *kommando* in which the escapee lived or worked, who were then locked up in a bunker. They were detained until the escapee was found. Of course, this happened very rarely, so these people died of starvation or were shot along with other victims.

Notwithstanding, they announced that if any prisoner escaped, they would apply the most severe punishment to his family. They would shoot the father, mother, brothers and sisters, and even their neighbors. Unfortunately, this proved to be ineffective. A fugitive would risk everything. The escape of four prisoners during Whitsun in 1942 was unusual. With three of them dressed as officers and the fourth shackled like a dangerous criminal, they drove the camp commander's luxury car from the TWL garage [*Truppenwirtschaftslagers*] and left the camp. They destroyed the car and left it in a ditch 80 km from the camp.

From Warsaw they sent a letter to the *Lagerkommandant*, in which they apologized for having deprived him of his car, but it just wouldn't have been appropriate to leave the camp on foot. I knew them all, but can remember the name of only one of them—Władysław Bender.

The consequences of the escape from Birkenau organized by the prisoners in the SK were terrible. This escape is accurately described by my friend Kret in his letter. At that time, several Gorlice men died: scoutmaster Edmund Chrzęścik, an excellent organizer and scout activist; Michał Lech; Władysław Smędowski, a lumberjack from Siar; as well as Białoń from Libusza.



The escape of four prominent prisoners, including the esteemed and popular German *Arbeitsdienst* Otto Kussel [Küsel], was extremely imaginative. Along with him, Mietek Januszewski—another *Arbeitsdienst*—also escaped, together with Kuczbara the dentist and Banaś. They rode through the *Postenkette* in a cart loaded with old wardrobes that they were allegedly taking to the Birkenau camp. Kuczbara, disguised as an SS man, was in charge. The soldier standing on the gate knew Otto well [Otto], so he didn't ask for a pass. They left for the village of Budy, where they left the horses in a barn, while they took off. Unfortunately, a year later, Kuchma and Otto were caught in Warsaw in a café during a round-up. Kuczbara defended himself with a revolver, but he was overpowered from the rear and executed in prison. Otto Küsel was brought to Auschwitz for the second time and put in a bunker. He was ashamed of his countrymen and their murders, and said he was a 'Polish Volksdeutsche'.

When Poles escaped from the Auschwitz camp it was almost always successful. They were usually extremely well prepared and were assisted by SS men whom they bribed with gold, diamonds, or precious stones. In 1943, a prisoner's escape cost 500 US dollars. For that amount, you could get an ID card and be taken out through the *Postenkette*. When I worked at the DAW, one SS man offered me the chance to escape. I thanked him, but I could not expose my family and friends to death.

Saved by the bell—that's how you might describe the case of one of my friends from Birkenau, who worked as a so-called *kalifaktor* [prison officer] in the *Blockführerstub*, and who came earlier than usual to make sure the room was in order. The telephone rang and he grabbed the receiver ... it was a phone call from the Auschwitz camp. This friend knew what the phone call and the dictated numbers meant. The prisoners who were to be executed today and brought from Birkenau to Auschwitz were being summoned. He often received such phone calls. He took a pencil and wrote down the numbers that were slowly and clearly dictated to him. He had already jotted down four, when 'Oh Jesus! My number!'. He wanted to write it, but he could no longer grip the pencil as he lost control of his limbs. So he would be shot today along with the rest of them! This was what he could now expect! He had a heavy burden on his conscience. However, this didn't break his spirit, and he didn't crack. He kicked off his flat shoes and put on a pair of SS boots. He donned an SS overcoat on top of his striped clothes, belted up, got on a bicycle and passed through the *Postenkette* as a soldier and escaped... God bless you, young man!





Roman Cieliczka and Jurek Wesołowski's escape from Birkenau was particularly daring and heroic. Their escape plan was betrayed and the *Lagerältester* from the hospital, where they worked as paramedics, was ordered to bring them to the *Blockführerstube*. Due to the coming evening roll call, the *Lagerältester* had other things to do, so he locked them both in the room where they lived with the intention of dealing with them after the roll call. The boys sensed why they were being locked in. With no time to lose, they took everything they needed, and Romek put on some long rubber gloves, took some wire cutters, jumped out the window and ran straight on to the wires surrounding the camp. There was already a light on the wires, which had high voltage current coursing through them. Romek, however, insulated by the rubber gloves, with inhuman strength and incredible technique managed to cut through them. The light went out. Before the guards realized what was going on, they had already cut through the wires on the second fence. They started shooting at them from the two neighboring watchtowers. Dodging a hail of bullets they reached the third fence and, cutting through it, ran away. The approaching darkness was in their favor, and despite the bullets they remained unscathed. They fled. There was great consternation in the entire camp among the SS and the commandant. The cutting of the wires had caused a blackout in the whole of the camp, and then such a barrage of gunfire. Pure rebellion. The *Lagerführer* gathered a group of SS men and, armed with grenades, they moved about throughout the camp. Here they found out about the daring escape. The SS men conducted an all-night search to no avail, accompanied by a group of police dogs to track the fugitives. The lads took advantage of the confusion in the camp, went far away and managed to escape.

On 31 December 1942, four friends working in the SS kitchen escaped from the camp. They were the Kluz brothers from Łańcut as well as two of their friends whose names I don't remember. At that time, we were no longer punished for escape attempts, and we thought that there were no consequences in this respect either for us or our families. This, however, turned out not to be true. The Germans began using other methods. And so in March 1943, they brought the brothers' father and mother to the camp and put them in public view next to a large plaque with the inscription: 'Here are the parents of the Kluz brothers who fled from the camp. They will be locked up in the camp until the fugitives give themselves up or we catch them'. The camp authorities resorted to such draconian methods to deter prisoners from escaping. We witnessed this kind of exhibition three times in the camp. Once a father stood beside his son, and once a mother with his fiancée. Despite this measure, the number of escapes didn't diminish. Mostly Poles, Soviet citizens and sometimes Jews ran



away and fled. These, however, were more often than not caught, escorted to the camp and hanged without exception.

Because of the more and more frequent escapes, the camp authorities decided to take all Poles and Russians deep into Germany to other camps. We tried to forestall this kind of trip as much as we could, because a prisoner arriving at another camp was treated like a newcomer—he was stripped of everything and assigned the hardest work. The camp authorities were pursuing a policy of continuous resettlement of prisoners from one camp to another, claiming that a prisoner who had been in one camp for a long time had made connections and was difficult to finish off.

Daring—such was the feat accomplished by members of the Home Army who, disguised as German officers, managed to get inside the Birkenau camp, demanding the release of several prisoners, whose numbers they knew by heart and whom they were supposed to smuggle out of the camp under the pretense of being deported. The camp authorities didn't catch on, and in this way a few friends found themselves at liberty. Once several fellow prisoners escaped disguised as SS men and, passing near the village of Budy, they demanded the release of two friends working there. The *Komandoführers* didn't catch on, and they all took off happily.

In November 1944, seven prisoners planned a large-scale escape. They bribed an SS man, a *Volksdeutsche* chauffeur of Romanian nationality, who was to drive them beyond the *Postenkette* in crates. This monstrous traitor, instead of taking them beyond the wires, handed them over to the camp authorities. Seven young boys, instead of finding themselves free, found themselves in the bunker beaten and tortured. Two of them, namely Czesiek Dużel and Zbyszek Reinoch, an artist sculptor, both from Kraków, poisoned themselves in prison, and five were sentenced to death by hanging. They began building the gallows on 29 December 1944, and for unknown reasons, before the roll call, it was dismantled in front of us all. We thought the condemned had been pardoned. Then, on the second day, just before the roll call, it was put back up again and the execution began. In front of the entire camp, *Rapportführer* Kaduk led the condemned out of the bunker and, beating them with a stick, herded them towards the gallows. When the *Lagerführer* at that time, Hessler [Hössler], read out the death sentence, Bernard Świerczyna shouted at the top of his voice: 'Long live Poland! May our families live on!' Piotr Piąty from Kraków repeated the same thing, and we heard it for a second and a third time: 'Long may it live! Long live Poland!!!'



Inspired by the cries of these three, the other condemned men, who were Germans, began to shout: 'Nieder mit braunem Terror!!! Nieder mit dem Hitlermorder!!! Es lebe Stalin!!! Es lebe Komunismus!' ["Down with the brown terror!!! Down with Hitler the murderer!!! Long live Stalin!!! Long live communism!"].

That beast Kaduk jumped between them and pistol-whipped the condemned about the head. Hössler urged the executioners—some Jews who had been assigned to this task—to carry out the sentence as quickly as possible. The condemned defended themselves. The whole camp heard: 'Long may it live! Nieder! Nieder...! Es lebe...!'. Even as the convicts were hanging, an unintelligible voice still came from their mouths ...

It was the voice of vengeance calling to heaven ...!

Five victims of Nazi nationalism, five idealists, were hanged on the gallows. The only blood ran from their heads—the handiwork of that monster Kaduk. These three Germans were called: Ludwig Vesely, Ernst Burger, Heinz Frymel [Rudolf Friemel].

That Friemel had got married half a year earlier as a prisoner. His wife was a beautiful brunette, a Spanish woman. This was the one and only case where a camp prisoner would get married. On the wedding day, he was given his civilian clothes and under guard he escorted his future spouse to the office in the town of Oświęcim. After the wedding, the young couple were brought back to the camp and accommodated in the apartments of block 24, which held the rooms of the most vulgar house of debauchery that could possibly exist in the world. The sweethearts from that house had been kicked out the day before. The young couple stayed there until the next day. The prisoners bade a rapturous farewell to the wife as she left her husband and, at the same time, the camp. The married couple lived together for just a short time. After 24 hours of their lives together, the camp separated them, and in less than half a year a tragic death broke this unusual marriage apart forever.

At the end of November, when only a handful of Poles were left in the camp, again four prisoners took off. Piwiorotto from Rzeszów, Władysław Kokoszyński, and I don't remember the names of the last two.

In total, from the first days of the camp in Auschwitz, 400 prisoners escaped, of whom about 180 were caught and the rest enjoyed freedom.



## EXECUTIONS

We were terrorized by executions, known in the camp terminology as 'shoot-outs'. In 1940 and 1941, the condemned were taken from the block in the morning and after their personal details were checked, they were moved to block 11. In the evening, before the roll call, they were led into a huge pit, where sand and gravel had been excavated for the so-called *Kiesgrube*. Along the bottom, SS men were lined up around the edges, and on the command filled the condemned with a volley of lead. After this round, we heard only single shots. This was when the *Rapportführer* at that time, Palitzsch, was finishing off those who were still alive with his revolver. Such executions took place several times a week in larger or smaller groups. Typically, on the occasion of national celebrations, such as the 3rd of May, 11th of November, and even the 29th of June, on the occasion of General Władysław Sikorski's name-day, several dozen Poles were lost to us. As I later learned from the documentation, almost all executions were carried out on the orders of the Gestapo. The death sentences were dictated by the then head of the Political Department, Grabner, together with his assistants Woźnica [Wosnitza], Lachmann and Boger. Those four murderers were drenched in the blood of innocent men condemned to death. That these criminals acted on their own is proven by fact that prisoners destroyed by them between 1940 and February 1942 were entered in the register as so-called *Überstellt*, rather than *Gestorben*. *Überstellt* meant moving a prisoner to another camp. All those lost at that time were given such an attribution in the general ledger and in the files. Reports with the same content were even sent to Berlin.

In August 1941, all the invalids in Auschwitz were gathered up – that is, people with handicaps, without arms and legs, chronically ill, suffering from tuberculosis etc. – under the guise of sending them to another camp where they would be treated and used for lighter work. A fair number of people signed up for this transport, even healthy people, hoping for lighter work. 300 prisoners left the camp, among whom there was one man from Gorlice from my transport—Józef Węgrzyński, who was ill at the time with nephritis. As we learned later, they were taken to Dresden, where they were gassed.

Due to the fact that the executions, being carried out in pits and by a large group of SS men, were too loud and widely commented on by foreign radio, the murderers decided to act more surreptitiously. From September or October 1941, the condemned were only murdered in the courtyard of block 11, and not with firearms, but with a bolt gun like the ones used in



a slaughterhouse for slaughtering cattle. On command, the condemned had to strip naked in the corridor and wait until their numbers were read out. A certain Jakub would approach the condemned whose numbers had been read out, grabbing one, and sometimes two or even four, and leading them out to the yard. Here, whichever *Rapportführer* it was then, or his deputy, would shoot the condemned in the back of the head. The bolt gun was only used for half a year, because it often broke down and had to be repaired at the locksmith workshops. Working next-door in the carpentry, I had the chance to look this murder weapon over. In later times, right up to the final days of Auschwitz, the executions were carried out exclusively with Flobert guns. They were carried out in block 11 until October 1944, and then the condemned were murdered exclusively in Birkenau, where they were taken from us in a prison ambulance. These kinds of ambulances were very tightly sealed and had a device for gassing those who had been locked inside. The gassing device was made in the *Fahrbereitschaft-Kommando* automobile workshop.

That Jakub, the execution assistant, whose surname was Kozielczyk or Kozolczyk, was an illiterate Jew with extraordinary strength. If the condemned tried to resist before the execution, while in Jakub's vice-like grip he couldn't even think about it, because in an instant he would have his arm broken or his joints twisted. The fact that Jakub was strong is shown by the fact that he was coach to Schmerling [Schmeling]—the world-class boxer. On the one hand, this Jakub was relentless with regard to the condemned man, but on the other hand he did a lot of good for his colleagues in the bunkers of block 11. Through Jakub, they could get bread, cigarettes or messages. Block 11 was always closely guarded by the SS men day and night, so that there were great difficulties in contacting any friends who had been sent there. It was only through Jakub that they could communicate with them. Jakub served on block 11 until the final days of Auschwitz. They say that this prisoner was taken to Wrocław and gassed on the way. Jakub could sense that he would be killed because, as he said, he had seen too much: but he said that they wouldn't take him by force, only by trickery perhaps.

Every kind of execution fell into two categories, namely: official, approved by Berlin, and unofficial, carried out by the Gestapo or the camp authorities on their own initiative. We knew exactly what kind of execution we were witnessing, because the list of people executed at the behest of Berlin was drafted by the camp head office, and those executed unofficially, on their own initiative, were put on the list of those who had died of natural



causes in the hospital. False death reports were drawn up in which various diseases were invented as the direct cause of death. I remember that in the report for Smędowski from Siar, who was gassed, twisted bowels was cited as the cause of death. As the widow informed me recently, the same report was sent to the Gorlice Gestapo, who summoned her to sign it as confirmation of this notification. Such falsifications were carried out throughout the existence of the Auschwitz camp.

In the last days, when the ground was burning under the Germans' feet, great disagreements arose between the head doctor and the camp's command, because the doctor didn't want to make such false reports. The fact that such falsifications existed was also testified by the fact that in the monthly reports, only official executions were reported to Berlin, and the rest of the murdered were listed amongst those who had died of natural causes or—as already mentioned above—*Überstellt*. The ratio of these executions was one to a thousand—that is to say, one died officially to every thousand that died in secret. These murders weren't only perpetrated upon prisoners of nationalities considered to be hostile, but they also killed their own countrymen. In this way, on the orders of Grabner, a block leader named Reinhold from 22a died without any official verdict given, as well as a warehouseman from DAW called Walter (I don't remember the surname) and a *kapo* from the carpentry workshop, whose surname I also don't remember. Isn't that how it was, *Rapportschreiberze* Hermann Diestel? Do you remember how you took my red ink and then surreptitiously, so that I wouldn't see it, marked those people in the general ledger as having died?

In the autumn of 1941, some reserve officers from Kraków, who had been brought to the camp as hostages, were shot. At the time, Lt. Drzewicki from Gorlice and Engineer Wielgus, son of the vice-president of the city of Kraków died. They were entered in the books as *Überstellt*.

An unbelievable gloom descended on us when in the summer of 1942 we read the names of Tęпка, an attorney from Kraków, and Engineer Szczepaniak, also from Krakow—both from our group and neither of whom would return. They had been shot.

We were terribly affected by the news that in February 1943, two transports of boys under the age of 16 were murdered by lethal injection. 96 of them were sent from Birkenau, and another 85 a week later.



The camp authorities committed an unprecedented crime when on 6 January 1943, they gathered together prisoners from four *kommandos*, namely *Effektenkammer*, *Bekleidungskammer*, *Erkennungsdienst* and *Entwesungskammer*, totaling over 400 people. They divided them into three groups, of whom one-third, about 150 completely innocent fellow prisoners, were shot. Of the remaining two-thirds, those who were Germans or *volksdeutscher* were released, and the rest were shot in the following days. As for the reason for this mass execution, it was reported that these prisoners allegedly had large amounts of gold, money, and various 'organized' (obtained) valuables from a Jewish transport that had recently arrived in the camp.

We lived through an extremely tragic day on 19 July 1943. On this day, 12 Poles were executed by hanging because three prisoners had escaped from their *Feldmesser kommando*, taking advantage of the fact that their escorts had been drunk. The camp commander sent a false report to Berlin stating that the prisoners had poisoned their SS men with vodka and fled while they slept. At that time, 30 prisoners lost their lives, because 18 were shot in block 11, and 12, as I mentioned, were officially hanged. At that time mainly engineers were being killed. The cream of Polish intelligentsia was killed. I remember the names of some of my fellow prisoners: Jan Wójtowicz from Nowy Sącz, Skrzetuski from Poznań, Tadeusz Kokesz from Jasło, and Spławiński. The executions were carried out in front of all the prisoners during the evening roll call, under the direction of the *Lagerführer* at that time, Aumeier. He read the death sentence to the condemned, which was the result, as I have already mentioned, of a false report.

The camp authorities couldn't hide anything from us, because there were prisoners working everywhere and they knew precisely what the orders were.

A sword of Damocles was constantly hanging over the prisoners' heads in the form of more and more frequent executions without any real reason. The Polish intelligentsia was rooted out block by block, locked in the bunker at block 11 and killed. They died out in the fall of 1943. Woźniakowski, a lawyer from Kraków, the licensed Colonel Dziama from Warsaw, Lieutenant Lisiwski, the generally highly regarded and well-liked Mosdorf, 20-year-old Margrave Potocki from Warsaw (due to his birth), who was a youth organizer there, and Kozioł-Poklewski, who was a landowner from the Vilnius region. Over 60 Poles were shot at that time, mostly people who had occupied highly regarded positions.





During this period, the gassing of the Jews hit its most intensified peak. All the crematoria burned day and night, and when they couldn't keep up with the burning of corpses, long ditches were dug and the corpses burned in them. The great glow of bodies burning in the open air and the unbearably suffocating and acrid smoke called out to heaven for vengeance. What were the Huns' invasions of Europe, what were the Tatar invasions and slaughter in comparison with these terrible crimes?

### SDG KLEHR MURDERS BY LETHAL INJECTION

In addition to the executions I have described above, about which all the prisoners knew down to the smallest details, there were still other silent executions in the camp, known only to some fellow prisoners working in the hospital. This was the killing of people using the so-called needle. This was used for the first time at the end of 1941. With the help of this needle, the *Sanitätsdienstgehilfe* (SDG) committed murder. This position was occupied the entire time by a certain Klehr, assisted by former prisoners Mieczysław Pańszczyk, No. 607, Jerzy Szymkowiak, called 'Little Pearl' or the 'Arab from the Foreign Legion', and a French doctor named Landau. Klehr took those condemned to death by injection from two sources. The first was the sick people whom the SDG chose arbitrarily in the hospital. One unpleasant look, a bad appearance, or a high temperature was enough for Klehr to prescribe death to an individual. The prisoners who knew about Klehr and his murders, upon hearing that he was walking through the rooms, would flee from their beds and hide lest they fall into his hands. The individuals that he took note of were forcibly delivered to his office, usually on Sunday from noon until 3:00 p.m., where they received an injection to send them off on the path of eternity.

Klehr obtained the second source of needle material during admissions to the hospital. Each patient received a diagnosis made by the doctor on duty, referring a given patient to the hospital. These admission cards, with an established diagnosis, were received by the German doctor, *Obersturmführer* Entress. This doctor, presented with an individual with an established diagnosis, referred him to the appropriate ward, depending on the type of disease. Entress would refer those suffering from tuberculosis or syphilis, and the Muslims, to Block 20. These people were showered and then brought into a small, warm waiting room, where they awaited the arrival of Klehr. He worked in a separate room with a notice on the

door inscribed: 'Laboratorium nur für Lagerarzt. Eintritt streng verboten'. Behind the door of this room was a heavy curtain that slid sideways. Every movement could be heard by the prisoners through the characteristic rustling and the grating of metal rings across iron rails. Behind this curtain the prisoners would be taken in fours to be injected. The prisoner whose number had been read out sat on a chair, and the assisting executioner, who was one of the above-mentioned prisoners, clasped the poor wretch's arms behind the back of the chair, and with his other hand grasped him hard under the chin and forced his head back. At the same moment, Klehr, his fingers moving from the collarbone down, felt the ribs, and between the fifth and the sixth he stuck a needle into his heart. The needle was long, about ten centimeters, and the ampoule could fit up to 20 cubic centimeters of liquid, which was usually carbolic acid or various gasoline compounds. After the injection, the condemned had enough strength to get up from the chair, but he couldn't straighten his head anymore, and in this state the executioner escorted him to the so-called *Wachsraum* where, already dead, he was thrown onto the pile of corpses. The other comrades behind the curtain saw this method of injecting this 'treatment', but usually didn't realize that it was a lethal injection, so they didn't react. Anyway, someone sick or feverish is not able to make such a great effort to react, all the more so since the sick usually preferred to die, rather than live in these terrible camp conditions.

One unfortunate incident happened to Klehr. One of the condemned got the needle, but outside the heart, and when he was thrown into the washroom he began to shout. When Klehr heard this, he ran out of the lab with the needle in his hand and tried to give him a second jab by means of force. While struggling, the condemned pushed the executioner's arm with such force that the syringe flew out of his hand and stuck into the forearm of his colleague, Misztal Kostek, a paramedic in the block who, screaming terribly, then ran into the washroom with some others. After a short time, this Misztal's arm began to swell and it hurt a lot, even though Klehr immediately applied an antidote to the injection.

The prisoner Mieczysław Pańszczyk began his career with the needle by giving lethal injections to Jews, whom he injected with noticeable pleasure. In 1943, as I have already described elsewhere, he jabbed about 200 boys under 16 years old. For these deeds his fellow prisoners turned their backs on him, refused to shake his hand and shunned him. This hurt him so much that he volunteered for transport and left for Neuengamu [Neuengamme], where he was killed by fellow prisoners who knew of his deeds.



Panszczyk, as he himself had told us, was an orphan brought up on the street, but he was a nice child and those on the street called him 'Paniczyk' [Earl], out of which came Pańszczyk.

A similar fate befell the prisoner Jerzy 'Perełka'. He was taken to the neighboring camp in Birkenau, where his closest friends beat him to death with sticks. The French doctor Landau traveled to an unknown camp on a transport. My friends who worked in the hospital calculate that Klehr personally injected tens of thousands of prisoners.

Klehr did not serve these functions only in the hospital, but twice chose his victims from among the prisoners of the entire camp. This was done in such a way that, block by block, we were sent down naked to the baths, and there each of us had to pass one by one before this murderer. Whoever had a major wound on his body—and here I must point out that with poor nutrition, after the slightest injury we would develop phlegmons that were difficult to heal, and so the number of such patients was considerable—and those who didn't look good or whom for some unknown reason Klehr didn't like, these numbers were entered and on the following day they were referred to the hospital, from where they never returned. Klehr murdered them with the needle.

## INFORMERS

All the mass murders that were committed on defenseless and innocent prisoners were carried out by order and on the command of the Political Department, under the leadership of Grabner, and his assistants: Wosnitz, Lachmann and Boger. Like hunting dogs, they sniffed around the camp and searched for new victims. They were aided and abetted by a whole legion of informers known in camp jargon as 'kapusiowie'.

Their king in the camp was Ołpiński. He was a well-known journalist in the Warsaw area, a renegade and traitor to his homeland who, due to conflicts before the war, fled to Berlin, took German citizenship and was the head of the intelligence service. In the first days of the war he spoke on the radio from Berlin, giving false and harmful information.

Thanks to his denunciation, hundreds of prisoners in the camp died. He was an extremely dangerous thug who masterfully approached his victim, gained his confidence, extracted information and then denounced him. I will give you a few examples. To his friend Józef Skorupa he said, 'I sympathize with you, Józef. You've got sons in the army, and here they harass you in



the camp. How terribly ungrateful this nation is. Or take me—for the colossal services I've given them, they imprison me in the camp! You know what—I'm planning to escape. Run away with me! I've got contacts; they won't catch us.' Jozek knew this monster, made his excuses and refused. Another time, Ołpiński approached his fellow prisoner Antek Klimczak, a school headmaster in Poręba Wielka (the Biała district), working in the DAW wood warehouse, and asked for a piece of pear board, because he wanted to make a sculpture for an SS man. Who would refuse such an innocent request? Antek, however, knew what he was up to and very politely turned him down.

I might have become his victim one time if I had not been informed about the activities of this villain. He told me how he regretted that he had not received mail for three months, so perhaps I could help him send a letter 'on the sly' without any censorship. However, knowing this hyena, I refused.

One day, my good friend Hieronim Kurczewski from Poznań told me, 'Today I gave Ołpiński what for. I told him to his face who he really is and what he's really doing in the camp.' I must point out that they both worked in the DAW office. On the following day, my dear 'Tierek' (this is what we called Kurczewski) was locked up in the bunker and shot within the week.

A lot of Jews were informers, and it was very difficult for us to fish them out. Most of the informers were *volksdeutsch* and I'm even sad to say that there were also some Poles amongst them.

A sad end befell these people. Ołpiński came down with typhus. Some fellow-prisoners had tossed him a louse from a man suffering from typhus, and thus they infected him with this terrible disease. Ołpiński was afraid to go to the hospital and lay in his room, hidden by a block leader. The prisoners found out about it and reported to a German doctor that someone suffering from typhus was lying in the block and spreading this terrible disease. Ołpiński was referred by the authorities to the hospital and placed on a ward for the infected. He was put in a separate room on the order of the Political Department and placed under the special care of doctor Władek Fejkla, on the understanding that he was personally responsible for his life. Władek forbade the hospital staff to approach the patient and took special care of him personally. He gave him all the medicines, injections, but he didn't give him any fluids, and that helped that traitor Ołpiński because of the mad thirst that comes with typhus, leading one to give up the ghost sooner. In order to cover his own back, Władek demanded an autopsy which, of course, showed that *Fleckfieber* was the cause of death.

The story of the other informers ended badly too.



One day in 1944, an informer named Deresiewicz escaped from the camp along with one Jew, also an informer. They arranged the escape in a very clever way. They supposedly went to 'work' outside the camp. So that they would not be recognized, they were given civilian clothes, and the Gestapo man accompanying them was also in civilian attire. On the way, they murdered their escort and took off. You can imagine what happened with our political authorities. They raged with fury towards all the informers in the camp. One night, they were all rounded up in the camp, locked in the bunker and taken to Flossenbürg after a few days on a criminal transport. *Dolmetscher* Lachmann, *Arbeitsdienst* Kuk [?], both from Łódź, Kowalski from Warsaw, the *kapo* Malorny, about 50 of them in total whose names I don't remember, all left. Thank you, Stanisław Deresiewicz, for cleaning the air in the camp through your deeds. From that moment on, we breathed easier.

### PUFF

Imprisonment in the camp deprived the prisoner of his freedom. The rules of camp life corrupted his personal dignity. The lack of proper nutrition along with the hard work destroyed his health and took his life. What the prisoner was left with was his pure and undefiled soul. In order to bring this under attack, professional criminals and sexual perverts were sent to the camp who attacked young boys with impunity. I knew one such pervert—Fr. Langekert from East Prussia—who spread unprecedented depravation amongst the youngsters, assaulting them shamelessly and not even hiding it.

Occasionally, the camp authorities took action against such individuals, applying draconian and bestial terror. I knew several such corpulent eunuchs, who were always sad and languished from day to day without any aim in life.

An unprecedented commotion in the camp was provoked by the news that a brothel would be opened in the camp—the *Puff*. We suspected that our friends who were talking this nonsense had gone 'round the bend'. Unfortunately, it actually happened. In the autumn of 1943 this sanctuary was opened.

For moral reasons, I will limit myself to this small mention, despite the fact that I could have lots to write in this section. It is with genuine joy that I can emphasize that this idea of the German devil's didn't catch on with the Poles, who had more respect for their personal dignity.



## CANNIBALISM

In order to describe the whole of camp life in all its manifestations and present faithfully the darkest days of its misery, I must describe three known cases of eating human flesh. The first came in 1942. Boger and Lachmann locked two prisoners in the bunker, took the keys with them and forbade anyone to give them any help. It is not known whether the prisoners were then forgotten, or if it was deliberate, because their cell was only opened after three weeks. Only one was alive, but he had been feeding on the body of his companion who had been in a state of complete decomposition for a long time. The living one was led out in front of the block and shot dead.

The second incident happened in the Rajska laboratory. For scientific purposes, a corpse was cooked. One of the French Jews working there took a piece of human meat from the pot and wolfed it down with pleasure. The third incident was in the last days of my stay in the Ebensee camp. Hundreds of prisoners died of hunger every day. The crematorium could not keep up with the burning of the bodies, so the piles of corpses lay beneath the open sky. Hungry prisoners cut pieces of meat from the deceased, cooked them, and sold them in the camp at a high price to their fellow prisoners as a goulash.

Hunger is the ally of all evil. Hunger respects no boundaries. Hunger overwhelms all human desires and sometimes turns one into a monster. Hunger weakens the willpower and inflames the senses. I've been hungry twice in my life. The first time was during the First World War in 1914-1916, while in Russian captivity in the camps in Turkestan, in the Troytski camp, and in Tashkent. The second time, of course – incomparably more severe – was when I suffered from hunger in the German camps. I was very hungry in the Auschwitz camp in 1940-1942, and I nearly starved to death in the camp in Ebensee between 20 April and 6 May 1945. Today I understand anyone who is hungry and thirsty, and I truly sympathize with him.

## THE CAMP ORCHESTRA

From the beginning of its existence, the Auschwitz camp sought to realize its mission and fulfill its duties to the best of its abilities. The committees, the *Besuch*, who came down to the camp from time to time, recognized that the Auschwitz camp could be a model



for others. The blocks were immaculately clean, all the beds in a perfectly straight line, made and covered with blankets. In the windows there were flowers in vases. Between the blocks, roads as smooth as tables were occasionally gritted with sand. Next to the road, the greenery and flowers were supposed to 'please the eye' of the blind *Häftling* who—beaten and battered, hungry and ragged—wasn't much able to enjoy the sight. In order to make his life pleasurable and give him some enjoyment in his free time from work, music was organized for him. All this, however, was for the sake of appearances, because lurking beneath there was rottenness, banditry and murder.

The orchestra was organized in 1941 in this way: some of the musical instruments were brought by prisoners from their homes with the permission of the camp authorities, and some were bought from our own contributions that we donated. The orchestra played marches as the *kommandos* left the camp and during their return to the camp after finishing work. They played perfectly, because these weren't just musicians but artists. On Sundays and holidays, we reveled in their concerts, which were held under the open sky in summer and in the hall in wintertime. The orchestra's bandmaster was hated by his fellow musicians; he was a *volksdeutsch* kitchen *kapo* named Franz Nierychlo, a Krakovian. To illustrate the sympathy he inspired in the camp, it is enough to mention that when he was released in May 1944, while leaving the camp, his colleagues bade him farewell with whistles, whereas other colleagues, even Germans, were sometimes bidden farewell by the camp orchestra.

After his departure, the orchestra was led by Adam Kopyciński from Krakow, a real artist, a maestro at the piano, extremely appreciated and well-liked by his colleagues. 'Under the whip' of Franz (I cannot call him Franciszek, because a Pole who sold his soul to the German devil by signing the *volkslist* must be called Franz), the musicians didn't play like artists, but like prisoners, just to get through the day, and often they would play badly just to annoy him.

Under the baton of Adaś our orchestra was revived. The concerts organized under his direction were a real musical feast, because our artists would then show off their talents. Franz didn't like big artists for fear that his star would not shine. I will never forget one such picture. After a concert, one of the prisoners was carrying a beautiful bouquet of flowers. We were convinced that he was bringing them to Franz, who was already bowing away, thanking them for it. What a terrible disappointment, because this friend passed him by and handed the flowers to Kopyciński, who on this day had played a thrilling solo, with Franz's exceptional permission.





On 25 October 1944, the remaining Poles were taken away on a transport. The musicians left too. At the special request of *Lagerführer* Hössler, only one Polish bandmaster was left out of all the musicians, along with a group of several Germans. Adam mobilized all the Jewish musicians present in the camp and began to audition them. Various percussionists and pianists came, but not for the brass band. No one knew their way around a trumpet, except for a few Polish Jews who had once played in the military orchestra. The camp was silent and mute. The orchestra didn't accompany the marches, but it practiced for whole days and evenings. After a week of compulsory silence, a new orchestra gathered in its square and welcomed the prisoners going out to work with a march. To our surprise, after three weeks the orchestra performed a concert. Adam literally trained the young musicians throughout the whole day without giving them a break. He only spared the oboist so that he didn't blow his lungs out, while the rest were split into two rooms to learn to play. In one they practiced marches on wind instruments, while the others practiced the program for the next concert. If any stranger had been at this orchestra's first concert, and then after two months around Christmas time, he would never have believed that these were the same musicians. We admired Adam for the results he had achieved in such a short time.

We will never forget the secret musical evenings that Adam gave us in a closed circle on the occasion of national holidays. One weak bulb burned in the room, with our friends gathered in the corners and Adam sitting at the piano and staring into the distance. You didn't hear the key strokes, or the pianist—the sounds came straight from the master's hands, wonderful melodies, our beloved Polish songs. 'Witaj majowa jutrzeńko' ['Hello, May dawn'] and then 'Nie rzucim ziemi' ['We won't forsake the land'], and finally 'Jeszcze Polska nie zginęła' ['Poland Is Not Yet Lost'—the national anthem]. Adam didn't know that we were crying, that with his music he poured freedom into our souls, that we forgot where and who we were. Once, the notorious Boger—commonly known as 'Tiger', who worked in the Political Department—came into the room. Adam didn't see him and continued playing 'Polish-style'. Boger, although he was no musician, took over the show and since then often visited the music room, ordering him to play 'on demand'. Adam played for him, but only so that Boger would stop hounding him.

We often asked our 'master' (I intentionally omit the first part of the word 'band', because this title is not for our Adam) to play during a concert. As polite and kind as Adam always was, he was also stubborn and couldn't be persuaded. However, something happened that made Adam play for us. And it happened like this. A renowned virtuoso, the Hungarian



pianist Paul Kiss, a student of Prof. Thoman, with whom Kopyciński had also studied, came to the camp. One time, the *Lagerführer* at that time, Hössler, came to the concert and told Kiss to play the piano. With great bravado and great technique, Kiss played Liszt and Chopin's *Polonaise in A flat major*. He played Liszt splendidly, but he 'fluffed' the Chopin. After the concert we didn't leave Adam alone, especially his everlasting companion, the master of the brush, the artist Mieczysław Kościelniak from Kalisz, explaining to him that Chopin can only be played by a Pole. Finally, Adam gave in and on that Sunday he played for us Chopin's ballad, lullaby and the *Polonaise in A flat major*. The very first keystrokes gave the impression that a Pole was sitting at the instrument, someone who understood the soul of Chopin. As a camp, this was the first time we heard Polish songs played officially. The concert made a deep impression on us and left unforgettable memories. Thank you, Maestro, for the true musical feast you bestowed upon us with your concert.

### A BATH TODAY

Each of us, living in normal conditions, enjoys the opportunity to have a bath. Unfortunately, in the camp the prospect of a bath horrified us, especially in the winter. After the evening roll call, we had to undress completely, leave our clothes in the square and in the cold, line up once again in fives and march to the bathing barrack. Here, in groups of 50 at a time we were let inside. No one had soap or a towel. It was good when we managed catch some hot water, but we often had to go under a cold shower, otherwise we would get a rod across the head.

Meanwhile, the block authorities were free to search through your clothes and bed. They took everything they found—food, underwear, a towel, soap, toothbrush, literally everything. We weren't allowed to stock food, because a prisoner was supposed to eat what he received straight away. We weren't allowed to keep a second change of underwear under the strictest of penalties. Soap and toothbrushes were considered valuable objects, and those who carried out the search took such items for themselves. After finishing the bath, which lasted no longer than five minutes, we were marched back to our blocks naked. If the block leader was in a good mood, then we got dressed right away, otherwise he would keep us naked for up to an hour.

In the camp in Melek, baths were done at night. The men were usually awakened after midnight and, shaken from their sleep, they had to go to the baths naked in tight ranks.



You had to be as healthy as a horse not to catch a cold, the flu, or pneumonia with this type of bath. So many times I had chills and a high fever at night, but in the morning I still had to get up and go to work.

## GENERAL DELOUSING

How the prisoners were plagued by the lice and fleas is hard to describe. In the beginning of the Auschwitz camp, we lacked underwear. I remember that the shirt I had received in October was only changed at Christmas. The lice bothered us a great deal, because there was no time to wash underwear and, moreover, there was nowhere to do so. There was no time to go through underwear, because if a prisoner was caught doing so during work he would be 'reported' and sent to SK. Then, in the evening, the block was dark and there was no time. The lice gnawed at us day and night, and it was so itchy that we used to scratch ourselves until we bled. To make matters worse, we suffered from scabies. I remember that I rubbed myself 15 times (so my hospital record states) with tar ointment for scabies, but it was hopeless because I didn't receive a change of underwear or blanket. The most painful time was during sleep after the body warmed up. The skin on my chest and legs was ulcerated, and phlegmons formed.

In 1942, the authorities began to carry out a systematic general delousing and defleaing every few months. The prisoners were temporarily moved from such a block to another block. This gave them the opportunity to take away everything he possessed.

Clothes and underwear were taken for disinfection and we were left naked overnight.

Lice were the reason for the outbreak of the terrible typhus epidemic in the camp. The first fatal incidents were recorded as early as December 1941.

From then on, the severity of the epidemic steadily increased. This was not helped by the thorough delousing, the extermination of lice by the daily half-hour of so-called *Läuseappel*—that is, search for lice—the ban on visiting friends living in other blocks, and so on. The worst typhus occurred in the summer months of 1942. The typhus was decimating us. Not a single day went by without someone who had come down with typhus leaving our ranks. The room where I lived thinned out. In the course of a few months the following



workmates died: Czajkowski, Walenta from Kraków, Słupiński, Ludwik Stec from Glinik Mariampolski. Hoffman also died, but he was shot.

When typhus began to claim victims among the SS men too, at the end of August 1942, the camp commander ordered the gassing of all the patients in the hospital, along with the doctors and orderlies. The hospital at the time had over 2,000 patients. The *Standarzt* didn't want to carry this out and handed the job over to the *Lagerarzt*, who was Entress. Finally, doctors, orderlies and prisoners of German nationality were left alone, and the rest, numbering about 1,600 prisoners, were sent to Birkenau and gassed there. At that time, Staś Dubicki, from Gorlice, Zdzisław Langer from Kraków, and many, many friends, whose surnames I unfortunately no longer remember today, died.

## THE CAMP'S ORGANIZATION AND AUTHORITIES

The administration of the camp was a very detailed process and was carried out thoroughly. Right from its establishment, the camp was cleverly organized by the Poles who came from Wiśnicz in June 1940. Each prisoner was entered in numerical order in the general ledger. His number, surname and first name, date and place of birth, occupation, the authority who had arrested him, when he arrived in the camp, his family address and other remarks were entered there. In addition, there was a library of files kept in alphabetical order. A housing book was kept separately, the so-called *Numerbuch*, in which the numbers of all the prisoners in the camp were written, along with an appropriate annotation indicating in which block they lived or what had happened to them.

The administration was so efficient that in a brief moment, with just the prisoner's number or surname, one could determine his closest details, where he lived, where he worked and where he was at that time. Our camp authorities liked this efficiency; hence, the Auschwitz camp was considered a model for other camps. Poles were considered to be the best and most talented employees, so all the highest and best positions were in our hands.

The official administrative language was German. We were reminded of this by a large panel with the inscription: 'Hier wird nur deutsche gesprochen' ['Here only German is spoken']. Unfortunately, that was not the case. The administrative language, of course unofficially, was Polish. We would speak in German to an individual who didn't understand Polish, or to an SS man.



As for the hierarchy of the camp authorities, the main position was occupied by the *Lagerkommandant*, and Höß served the longest in this position, as he was in Auschwitz until the autumn of 1943. During his command, the Auschwitz camp was a hell on earth, as I have described in detail in other chapters. The responsibility for what happened in Auschwitz falls on this rogue.

For a very brief time there was Liebenhenscher [Liebehenschel], who was very good to the prisoners, and the last one was Baer, a former Field Adjutant. The next in command in the camp was the *Lagerführer*. The first *Lagerführer* was the cruel Fritzsch, and after him a bloody murderer named Seidler, who was then transferred from us to Gusen. After him, the notorious drunkard Aumeier took power, called 'Elbow' due to his short stature. This drunkard tormented the vulnerable prisoners. Under his leadership, almost every week the gallows were active and hundreds of prisoners were murdered in block 11. He hanged those 12 defenseless Polish engineers, sending false reports about them. It was he who caused 400 prisoners from four *kommandos* to be gathered up together, of whom more than half were then shot.

Brief periods of command were exercised by Thumann [Thumann], who came from the Lublin camp, then the brutal Schwartz [Schwarz], the very stupid and haughty Hoffman [Hofmann], and finally Hössler.

After the *Lagerführer* there was the *Rapportführer*, of whom there were usually two. These two personally carried out all the death sentences. The first *Rapportführer* was Hössler, who would later become *Lagerführer*. After him, Palitzsch took over command. Whoever was in the camp in Auschwitz would have known this name well. When Palitzsch entered the camp, we would tremble with fear, because no one escaped his clutches alive. His look would strike fear into us. I don't know if there is a man in this world who has slaughtered as many animals with a bolt gun or a Flobert as Palitzsch did people. He carried on his assault until a woman derailed his career. He fell in love with a beautiful Jewish woman, a prisoner – he was literally crazy about her. He changed beyond recognition in how he treated the prisoners, and from then on really looked out for them. This love affair ended with the bunker for him, degradation, and the front.

Stiewitz took over from him, then Klausen [Claussen], Hartwik [Hertwig], and the last one was Kaduk. This one was a real scoundrel and a villain. We were scared to death of Palitzsch, but we hated Kaduk like a loathsome dog.



## THE FINAL AUSCHWITZ CHRISTMAS EVE—1944

I will never forget the last Christmas Eve that we organized during what would in fact be the 'last' Christmas spent in the camp.

A few weeks before we had asked our artist friend, the painter Mieczysław Kościelniak, to take care of decorating our room. Everyone who worked in the camp main office lived there along with the bandmaster, Adam Kopyciński, and the aforementioned Mieciu. Other friends agreed to take up the culinary duties for the Christmas Eve feast, promising an excellent bigos [hunter's stew], while others said: 'We want a competition among the chefs, and we'll give you a true Lithuanian bigos'. The first of the 'committees' to get down to work was our artist, who painted my caricature. He captured me during a moment when I was playing bridge, extremely calmly. He got my snub nose, drooping lips, big glasses on the nose, and the four aces in my hand. Here is my likeness. Because I was the first to 'fall' under the artist's brush, my portrait got a lot of laughs. Mieciu didn't like showing his works to anyone, so he hid me in a folder and said he would hang me up, but in company.

He caught Jaś Olszewski – a middle school teacher from Zakopane, commonly known as 'Góral' ['Highlander'] – by surprise. He got our 'Góral' just right, against a background of Tatra peaks, with his cheerful and pleasant smile. Mieciu approached Edwin Kuffel from Gdańsk, engrossed in reading, and immortalized him lost in thought while poring over the prisoners' census. Mieciu went right up to Romek Wiessala, who liked to lie in bed, and drew him half-asleep with heavy eyes, adding angel wings to his shoulders. The caricatures came out fabulously. Our Mieciu didn't omit Stefan Ajdukiewicz, a forestry engineer from Muszyna, popularly known as Stefan from Bor, and presented him in lost in a game of bridge, with his characteristic drooping lip. Leon Kuźmierczak, Poldek Paździora from Działoszyn, Stefan Łukasz from Żółkiewka, Michał Preisler from Częstochowa – jokingly known as fat Macius – were all splendidly caricatured by our artist.

Mieciu perfectly captured our Tadek Miciukiewicz, an editor from Warsaw, always to be found in the company of the butchers (because of their sausages) – an excellent organizer. Nor did our caricaturist forget about our master chef Rudek Hajduk from Działoszyn, painting him with a ladle in his hand. He painted Kaziu Mrozowski from Kraków with the face of 'Antek from Krowodrza'—'What will you do to me?' He created quite good likenesses of Tadek Sztaba, twice sentenced to death and by some miracle surviving, and Zygmunt Rządowski



from Bydgoszcz, called 'Globus' because of his big head. There was also Zygmunt Goldberg, who was unhappy with his family name, finding around 320 of his namesakes, but as he said: 'Lucky me to be of the Jewish faith'. Our only German, Ernst Woop, a well-known glutton who could wolf down five bowls of soup, was painted with the Iron Cross around his neck, given to him some time ago by some friends as a joke for his eating records. This was one of the best caricatures. Meciú completed the set with a caricature of himself and his ever-present companion Adam Kopyciński.

A week before every Christmas a huge Christmas tree was placed in the middle of the camp, with a dozen light bulbs burning every evening. All of the blocks together also decorated their own Christmas tree, whose size and decorative beauty was unrivaled. Furthermore, each room had its own tiny Christmas tree, placed on a table or closet due to the lack of space. With the hosts of decorations and sweets sent to us in food packages, we dressed our Christmas tree beautifully.

Our master chef Rudek decided that there must be donuts for Christmas Eve. We didn't eat margarine for two weeks before Christmas, but put it away for frying donuts. Our youngest comrade—17-year-old Bronek Miernik from Bydgoszcz (who had a burning hatred for his aunt for signing the *Volkslist*), organized five kilos of the finest flour. Tadek Miciukiewicz—the 'King of the organizers'—managed to get hold of some yeast.

The day before Christmas Eve, Rudek set to work. He made some dough in a huge bowl, to which he added condensed milk, eight eggs, margarine and, of course, yeast. He lit up the iron stove, put the bowl in and waited for the dough to rise. One hour passed and then two without any change—the dough just wouldn't budge. Rudek was in despair. Seeing this, I ask Rudek whether the yeast hadn't frozen by any change. 'Oh, yes,' said Rudek, 'I kept it outside the window, but yesterday it was minus 20.' 'Don't worry, Rudek,' I said, 'we'll add some bicarbonate of soda to the dough, and you'll see, the donuts will come out like poetry'. To speed up the process, we added half a glass of this bicarbonate. We didn't have to wait long. The dough rose: Rudek turned red with joy, put his hands in his pockets and counted how many donuts he could make from this dough. The bicarbonate worked, the dough rose in the bowl and another pot was needed to hold it.

Rudek cleaned his hands thoroughly and began the most important activity—that is, kneading the donuts, putting a spoonful of marmalade in each. He made a few pieces to try,





immersed them in some hot margarine, and with baited breath waited for the first attempt. To my mind, the first editions of this 'poetry' didn't turn out too well. The marmalade seeped out of the donuts, burned and floated on the boiling fat. The donuts turned out to be too big because they were ten centimeters in diameter. The 'Family Council' established some improvements and Rudek went back to work. Then... Hellfire and damnation! A loud siren! An air raid... The lights went out, while our saucepan contained five ruddy donuts ready to be taken out of the fat. 'Blankets on the windows,' our Rudek cried out in a loud and furious voice. We jumped to our work and in a few minutes the windows were covered. Unfortunately, this second edition of the 'poetry' failed. Further frying took place by candlelight. Seeing that Rudek couldn't handle this job on his own, I rolled up my sleeves and got to work. The two of us were ready with the donuts at midnight. Not counting the trial run, we fried 250 of them.

Two large tables, arranged in a T, covered with white tablecloths like snow, set with bowls and plates, which we had managed to procure, and a beautifully decorated Christmas tree, contributed to a serious pre-Christmas mood. In the afternoon we had the rest of the day off from work, so there was time to prepare everything.

Evening approached. In the sky, not one, but millions of stars proclaimed that it was time to start Christmas Eve. Something was missing. Instead of enjoying and rejoicing, we walked from corner to corner, heads lowered, deep in thought ... I knew ... I could sense ... what we were missing.

We noted that everyone was present and sat down for our last Christmas Eve in the camp. As the senior member of the gathering, I had to kick off this great evening with a short speech, after which we broke the wafer, cheerfully wished each other all the best, one hundred percent certain that this sixth Christmas in a row would be the last. After eating the Christmas Eve dinner, consisting of pea soup, bigos, donuts and tea, we sang carols in high spirits.

Our friends Tadek Miciukiewicz and Jaś Olszewski recited a poetic concoction that rather aptly and masterfully summed up all our friends against the background of their camp adventures, experiences, and weaknesses that we knew about. The lights were allowed until midnight, so we also had a lot of time to spend this last Christmas Eve together happily. We enjoyed ourselves all the more freely since the *Lagerführer* had forbidden all SS men from entering the camp that evening. So, the prisoners did what they wanted.

## THE EVACUATION OF THE CAMP

We noticed that they were preparing to evacuate already in March 1944. The camp was being visited by special commissions. They were preparing a plan to transport huge warehouses containing building materials, a large amount of furniture and household appliances, clothing, underwear, etc. All these things were the spoils of pillage and looting from Polish territories.

Moreover, they began sending prisoners to other camps located deep in Germany, so that over March, April and May about 25,000 prisoners were sent.

As a part of the evacuation, they decided to cover up the traces of their murders. As a result, block 11 – known as the ‘block of death’ – was rebuilt. The thick wall, where executions were carried out, was demolished; all the walls of the bunkers were pulled down, and all the crematoria in Birkenau were destroyed. In November, all the files in the Political Department were incinerated, and two weeks later the documents and files of the deceased were destroyed. The rest of the Aryan prisoners were sent by transport on 25 October 1944, so that there were only a few dozen left in the camp while we trained some Jews to replace them in my department. Only Jews were to remain in Auschwitz.

With the beginning of the Soviet offensive on 12 January 1945 and the subsequent retreat of the German army, the evacuation fever increased with each passing day. It was said that the SS men had got themselves some prisoners’ clothes ready in order to escape in disguise if necessary. There was an unbearable tension between us. Hour by hour, we awaited our moment of salvation. We were convinced that we would be taken by surprised and the Germans wouldn’t be able to take us away, because all together there were 50,000 of us in all the neighboring camps. When news reached us about the fall of Kraków, we were overjoyed. Day and night they evacuated the camp. 18 January 1945 was a day of feverish activity. In groups of 100 and columns of five, the prisoners piled out through the large gate. They were leaving this hell for the last time and were wandering off again into the ‘unknown’. The camp was extraordinarily busy. In all the offices, books and camp documents were being destroyed and incinerated. All the clothing warehouses were opened and they were giving away whatever the prisoners wanted. It was mandatory for each of us to take with us two blankets and food. We got two loaves of bread, 330 gr. of margarine and a tin of pickles (for three people).



19 January 1945, at about 1:00 a.m. I crossed the gate of the Auschwitz camp for the last time. The night was clear and cold. There were millions of stars in the sky, and the moon was full, as if it were smiling at us, asking: 'Where are you wanderers off to?' The stars were shining for us, but for many of us it would be for the last time, as so many would never reach that final destination called freedom.

The snow – compacted on the road by the feet of the thousands before us – hindered our march, because the road was very slippery. Sensing that it would be so I had taken my cane with me, and with its support I managed to keep up with my younger friends. I walked in deep depression, because I knew that every step that moved us away from the camp took us further from our dream of freedom. I was walking because I had to, or I'd get a bullet in the head. The pace of the march was very slow, because we were walking in a column of 2,500 people. Gaps would open up, which we have to close by running, or sometimes we got too close to one another, forcing us to stop. Such a pace would tire even the fittest walker, let alone weak and exhausted prisoners who weren't used to such hardships after a long stay in the camp. We were driven forward by SS men who were spaced every few steps on both sides of the road. *Obersturmführer* Reichenbach was the commandant of the whole transport.

Many of us couldn't stand such a pace, so they stopped and were herded on with rifle butts and sticks courtesy of the SS men. From time to time, a revolver was fired. At first, we didn't realize why they were shooting. Soon, however, we found out, when next to us, one of our friends who couldn't keep up with the pace was shot and murdered by Storch 'The Strangler'. The further we went, the more frequent the shots, and the more lives were lost. In one day of walking, on one side of the road, one of our friends counted 107 corpses, the majority of whom were from the women marching in front of us.

We passed the famous Rajsko laboratory and went towards Brzeszcz. In some places the way was so slippery that it was like walking on ice. Dawn broke. A beautiful day was awakening. Not one cloud in the sky, nor the slightest breeze. The temperature was about minus six degrees, but we didn't feel the cold during the walk. We were warmly dressed and the hard pace of the march warmed us up, while our backpacks, loaded with bread, pushed us towards the ground.

Jawiszowice was up ahead of us. Suddenly, a burst of machine gun fire rang out from the train station and bullets whistled over our heads. Without being ordered to, we ran off the



road and ducked our heads down in the roadside ditches. The SS men lost their heads, and their faces were a picture of fear and helplessness. We, on the other hand, felt revived and could hardly conceal our joy. Perhaps it was the Soviets' armored division, or maybe the partisans whose activities we had been hearing a lot about. Maybe they would surround us. Maybe they would take us and then our dream would come true—our longed-for freedom.

The transport commandant rode forward on his motorcycle and after a halt of a dozen minutes or so, we moved on. We walked on without any obstacles. The hope of freedom burst like a soap bubble. We had a half-hour stop after Jawiszowice. We ate breakfast – dry, unfortunately, because we weren't given any water, even for medicinal purposes. We were tormented by thirst. Each of us had sweated large amounts, and our dry provisions made us want to drink and drink. Please, we begged our escorts, give us some water, but our supplications fell on deaf ears. We quenched our thirst with snow, which we secretly collected from the sides of the road. We put it into mugs, mixed it with sugar, added a few drops of hydrochloric acid, and indulged in these refreshing ices. Unfortunately, this kind of drink does not quench thirst but merely exacerbates it.

We passed Miedźna and went further towards Pszczyna. Southbound. We had nearly 12 hours of walk behind us. The fatigue of the road and the ravage of thirst reflected on our faces. We looked seriously ill.

We entered Pszczyna. They led us through the city along side roads. We passed the magnificent castle of the Pszczyna princes. Compassion was plain to see on the faces of the passers-by, and many were in tears. They brought us to a large sports stadium with covered stands. For our escorts this was the perfect place. The stadium was fenced off, so only a handful of SS men stood on guard. The stadium was covered with a 20-cm layer of melting snow. Only in the stands were there were any dry benches, so every single place was occupied by my friends who were resting comfortably. As long as the stands could hold the prisoners, the SS didn't bother them, but the moment the stands were full, they came down from above and began to drive everyone down, beating us mercilessly with rifle butts and rods. What happened next was like a scene from Dante. Those down below couldn't get out of the stands so quickly because of the high fence, so there was a terrible surge and crush, during which many prisoners broke arms and legs. Everyone had to rest on the wet snow. We weren't given any water.



Around 5:00 p.m. we were informed that we would be pressing on further. We were going, the SS men told us, to Poreba, a town two kilometers away from Pszczyna. So we walked 29 km on the first day. In Poreba we got accommodations in buildings belonging to a manor. One barn and a stable, together with the cattle, were to host 2,500 people. Only some of these were accommodated in the buildings, while the rest wandered helplessly around the large yard, looking hopelessly for some shelter under a roof. I found myself in the group that was looking for shelter. Seeing the impossibility of getting a spot under a roof, I sat down against the stable wall and prepared myself for a night's rest. Suddenly, I jumped as I heard someone call my name—it was Jureczek Michnol who had a place in the cattle shed. He was already inside and wanted to get me in there. I passed him my luggage through a small stable window, but I couldn't climb up there or crawl through because it was quite high up and very small. However, my friends helped me, pulling me from the inside by my hands and head, and pushing me up from the outside. With no breath left, like a log, they dragged me inside, where I found several friends resting after the day's toil. I was very tired: I had barely enough strength to spread my blanket and, without undressing, I lay down to sleep. Even though I hadn't slept a wink the night before, and despite the enormous fatigue, I couldn't fall asleep. My friends were already asleep, I could hear their loud snoring. I felt ill. I got the shivers, and felt cold. I covered myself with the blanket almost over my head and I felt my pulse quicken, because a fever was overcoming me, and my throat began to ache. I supposed that it was the onset of laryngitis caused by consuming snow. I know this disease. I know how it knocks down even the strongest of organisms. I felt that things were looking bad for me. I wouldn't be able to cope with strenuous marching with a fever. What to do? Before my eyes lay the corpses in roadside ditches, shot through the head. I broke out in a cold sweat at the very thought. No! It's not possible! To cross the whole stormy sea and die at the shore? I wrapped myself even more tightly in the blanket and the delirium continued. The silence of the night was interrupted by the frightful cry of my neighbor, Stefan Ajdukiewicz, when a heifer fell on him. He won his duel with her and pushed her off with his legs, with the result that the beast fell on me and stood on my stomach. I howled in pain and the frightened creature fled. In the morning we noticed that the cattle in this shed were unshackled, and that was why we suffered this nocturnal assault. Around midnight, the shivers subsided. It started to feel unbearably hot. I was sweating. Water flowed down me like a bath, but I didn't uncover myself. I knew my body. The only medicine for me, especially for laryngitis, was to sweat it out. Despite great weakness, thirst, and shortness of breath, I kept myself together and lay in my sweat until the morning.



With great joy I realized that my throat didn't hurt. I changed into dry underwear and when dawn began to break, I went out into the yard. After the fever, my lips burned and my mouth was dry. At all costs, I had to get a little water or something to drink. Almost the entire camp was still asleep. My friends slept in the snow, bundled in clusters and covered head to toe with blankets. I walked in the yard looking for a well. I came to the conclusion that there were water supply facilities here, but they were frozen and my search would be useless. I washed my hands and face with snow, but I didn't put any to my mouth, having been taught my lesson by that unpleasant experience. Then I saw one of my colleagues leaving the house where the SS men slept, carrying a whole pot of hot coffee, steaming in the cold. 'My friend! I'm dying of thirst. Give me a sip!', I gave him a bowl. He looked at me and probably saw that I was telling the truth, so he poured me half a liter of this nectar. I repaid him with a packet of cigarettes and refreshed myself with this life-giving liquid, whose exquisite taste I cannot describe today. Only someone who has experienced such thirst in his life could truly understand.

Around 6:00 a.m. we set off further. We were heading towards Pawłowice. The road was good. The sun was shining beautifully. Despite my illness, I felt relatively well. Along the way once again there was a struggle for water. When our pleading didn't help, we tried to bribe the SS men with cigarettes to get a mess-tin of water from them. For 40 cigarettes they gave us a liter of water. At the intersection with the Katowice-Cieszyn road, in the direction of Jastrzębie, we were forced to make a longer stop of around three hours because the way was blocked. After our rest, we pressed on further and in the evening arrived in Jastrzębie-Zdrój. They brought us into the courtyard of a large farm belonging to a manor house and, just like in Poręba, only a small handful of lucky people found themselves accommodation under a roof.

I got a little straw and made a bed on top of the snow, spread out the blankets, took off my shoes, and tucked my legs into my backpack. I covered myself with my blanket, leaned my back against the garden fence and decided to spend the night under the open sky. I was enormously fatigued and having just been through two sleepless nights, I fell asleep immediately. Around midnight, however, I woke up, because I just couldn't stay asleep in this nagging cold. So I stood up and walked around until morning so as not to freeze. We spent two nights in Jastrzębie.

Early in the morning of the third day, the signal was given to leave. We headed in the direction of Wodzisław. Marching was hard this day because of strong wind and a snowstorm. Finally, we reached the railway station, where they were to load us onto wagons and continue



our journey by train. We were happy that our hardships and nights in the open air were about to end, and by train it would be easier for us to endure the discomfort of traveling. They loaded us into ordinary coal wagons. However, it took several hours before our group's turn came, and by chance we witnessed a nasty execution. Three young prisoners were brought out, heavily escorted, and before our eyes, on the orders of Reichenbach, the transport commandant, they were shot in the fields next to the train station. They had hidden in the barn in the straw while we were spending the night in Jastrzeb, but some police dogs had tracked them down. Three young men died for wanting freedom.

After we were finally loaded onto the open coal wagons, a hundred people at a time, we waited at the station 24 hours before the train finally set off. We were heading towards Bogumin. We sometimes stood for hours at a time at the stations. The train dragged on and terrible conditions prevailed in the coal wagons. There was no space to sleep, let alone anywhere to sit. One night passed, then another, and we were in the same standing position and in the same conditions without food or water. We were tormented by the cold and thirst. During the day the sun warmed us and we poked our heads out from under our blankets, and before our eyes we saw the same weary faces of our friends, nothing more, because the high walls of the wagons blocked our view of the surroundings.

Late in the evening we reached Moravian Ostrava. With great pleasure I would like to emphasize that the local people came out to help us. Water, tea, coffee, bread, bread rolls, sweets, cigarettes, etc. began to be distributed. Nourishing 2,500 people without being prepared was simply impossible. At first, the SS men paid no attention to it. However, when more and more people rushed out to help us, they forbade any contact with civilians under the threat of being shot. We stood under a viaduct, where there was a large crowd of civilians. Despite the ban, groups of civilians joined us and talked to us. Suddenly, a few shots rang out without warning, and from the bridge we heard the moan of a man who had been shot. A father died, asking about his son who had been deported to Auschwitz. Even here our executioners found a victim. This incident brought us down greatly.

We skirted Vienna along a side route. We saw and admired the destruction [caused] by the bombing. Everything stood in rubble and not one single factory was left standing. In the suburbs of Vienna all the factories lay in one heap of debris, connected by a network of strangely broken and bent iron.





On the fourth day, the morning of Thursday, 25 January 1945, we arrived at the notorious Mauthausen. The camp was located about two kilometers outside the city, on a hill, and was made of stone. We were taken in as newcomers and they completely stripped us of everything. They even took my glasses. Now I had to destroy all the notes that I had made in Auschwitz. My arduous and valuable work was gone forever. Once again there was a bath, a haircut, a shave and a walk, naked in the frost over to our designated block. The camp was enormously overcrowded. We slept four to one normal sized bed. I was assigned to the lower bunk with three other companions. There was no question of sleep. It was not for nothing, however, that I had almost five years of camp experience. At my instigation, we broke up the bed: the boards fell to the floor and we slept under the beds, thus acquiring more space.

I was in Mauthausen until 29 January 1945, from where we were taken to the camp in Melk. Here we found ourselves in terrible conditions—wooden barracks, covered with roofing felt, without a ceiling. There was a thick layer of frost on the inside of the roof, which warmed up during the day and melted, causing actual rain to fall inside the barrack. The damp was indescribable. We received little food, and our block authorities robbed us. The camp in Melk finished us off quickly. We were pushed to our limits in quarries, with poor nutrition. *Lagerführer* Ludloff [Ludolf], however, was all in favor of this, saying: 'Not one single prisoner will come out of the Melk camp alive.' We worked in the adits in three shifts. Basically, the work lasted eight hours on site, but getting ready to leave, waiting at the roll call square, waiting on the ramp until the train arrived and then marching out to the adits took around six hours. I worked for the Majerder Kraus company. Despite the beatings, both from the *kapo* as well as the civilian foremen, the prisoners worked very slowly, because they were weak and extremely exhausted.

The adits were tunnels with concrete walls carved into the mountainside. They were about 15 m high and wide, and they varied in length, from 80 to 100 m one way, and then changing direction. It was said that in Melk there were about four kilometers of these tunnels. The tunnel was divided into one or two floors. The entire war industry was focused on the adits in Melk. As far as the eye could see there were machines stacked side by side, in motion day and night. Various types and sizes of bearings were made here. The machines were operated by civilian workers and girls, grouped in civilian camps. Along the entire tunnel was a moving rubber conveyor belt onto which the prisoners threw stones, sand, and earth, digging deeper tunnels. The belt ran outside the tunnels, where it came up and mechanically dumped the



earth into wooden containers situated beneath trapdoors. Some narrow-gauge railway carriages came up to these tanks, and after a few minutes, loaded with earth, they moved on, and the prisoners manually poured the earth out of them. In the adit area—both inside and out—it was incredibly busy. At night, thousands of light bulbs illuminated the area. They worked day by day, week after week. Only every second Sunday was there a break in the work and we stayed in the block.

Hard working conditions, poor nutrition and inadequate clothing finished us off extremely quickly. These weren't people going to work, but skeletons. Sunken cheeks, extremely puffy eyes, loss of mobility in the legs and unusual slowness in movement characterized such a wretch. We couldn't be admitted to the hospital, because there lay only our friends who could no longer stand on their feet. On the cold rainy days, dozens of people were brought in and admitted to the hospital, but only for a few hours, because they were dying. Every day I felt worse, because the hunger was getting to me. I worked for the whole month of February under the open sky. On 8 March 1945, I had a very unpleasant misadventure. While getting onto the railway car, I fell down and under the wagon due to my own weakness. I cut my head and injured my torso. I lost consciousness temporarily, and one of the SS men flew into a rage and wanted to kill me. My colleagues, however, dragged me into the wagon. I worked with the remainder of my strength until the evening. Thanks to Mieciu Kościelniak's support, I was admitted to the hospital. For three days and three nights I lay still—I was so exhausted. The hospital was hugely overflowing. We were lying three to a bed. After three days of rest, I didn't want to go back to my old work, because I knew that certain death awaited me there. I went through the procedures to be accepted as a paramedic, and thanks to the support of one of the doctors I managed to get this job. I made sure the rooms were in order, measured fevers, took out corpses, handed out medicines, such were my duties throughout the day. As a paramedic I officially received a second bowl of soup. I worked in this role until 11 April 1945—that is, until Melk was evacuated. We were divided into two groups and, at a wharf on the Danube, we were loaded onto four small cargo ships. The ship was loaded up with old iron, but regardless of this the so-called *Laderaum* was loaded up with 300 people. Cramped conditions and dirt, heat and stuffiness, hunger and thirst accompanied us on this final journey. However, these were the harassments of the notorious murderer Ludolf. Our journey by boat lasted from Friday afternoon until Monday morning. On 16 April 1945, we reached Linz. We were dropped on the left bank of the Danube and after forming columns of five we walked towards Wels. The journey was good. After a few days of traveling by boat without movement



or air, the march in the sunshine revived us and improved our moods. We went slowly. They didn't push us, but they didn't give us food or drink either. These were the same escorts who had transported us from Auschwitz to Mauthausen. These people had changed beyond recognition. They didn't beat us but talked to us, they could feel now that the end of their reign was nigh. They wanted us to bless them with the grace of reconciliation. We followed a road planted with fruit trees that were in full bloom and looked like one giant bouquet. We arrived in Wels late in the evening. For the night we were allocated old wet sheds without a stalk of straw. We didn't sleep all night, especially since it was cold. In the morning, hungry, we went on our way to Lambach. On the way we received 250 gr. of bread. In comparison with our other accommodations, in Lambach we slept like royalty.

After a wonderful night's sleep, we set off on our way to Gmunden in the morning. Along the way we passed thousands of vehicles, whose appearance led us to conclude that they were wrecks from the nearby front. This view gave us strength and the comfort that our torment would soon be over. The route we marched down ran along the right bank of the River Traun. It flows into places with deep ravines. Its edges are lined and maintained with stones. Thanks to its fast current, it is used a great deal by industry. Along the way we saw several dams, the largest of which is located in Traunfall, where one of the largest power plants is located. We arrived in Gmunden before the evening. For the night we were put in a huge, disused brewery in the yard, under the open sky. Despite the cold and damp, I slept perfectly.

The next day, with a piece of dry bread, we awaited the last stage of our thorny path towards the camp in Ebensee. The town of Gmunden presents a beautiful summer panorama. It lies on the banks of Lake Traun. The road to Ebensee leads along the lakeshore for six kilometers. On one side, there is the emerald path of the lake, from which a cold chill blows, and on the other the rays of the sun are reflected off the bare gray rocks and give off a real heat. Here, these two currents fight each other, causing some strange sensations—icy cold from the left side and a hot furnace from the right. Halfway up, on the other side of the lake, there is the naked alpine peak of Traumstejn [Traunstein]. We admired the magnificent views of the Alpine foothills and bare gray rocks, but didn't become intoxicated by these views, because we looked at them through the eyes of hungry, thirsty, imprisoned people.

It was noon. For almost 24 hours we hadn't had anything in our mouths. Many were weakening, unable to cope with the hardships, but they weren't shot at anymore, but



gathered into larger units and driven to Ebensee. We still had three kilometers ahead of us, but we didn't have the strength anymore. Seeing this, our commandant let us rest and sent a car to the camp for bread. We rested in the beautiful summer resort of Traumkirchen [Traunkirchen]. An hour later a cart arrived with bread. We were so hungry that it was only thanks to the superhuman efforts of some friends that there was no robbery. The prisoners weren't scared of revolver shots. Death is lighter than hunger.

Finally, we reached the town of Ebensee, built on the southern shore of the lake, in a basin closed in on all sides by high alpine foothills, from which almost vertical bare alpine peaks towered. On the west side, the Hölleberge rose up with the Höllen [Höllkogel] peak (1862 m above sea level). A cable car leads upwards. On the eastern side rises the bare peak of Erlakogel (1570 m above sea level).

### THE CAMP IN EBENSEE

On a small hill one and a half kilometers outside the town, in a spruce forest on damp and marshy ground, a prisoner camp had been built. Through a large wooden gate we entered the roll call square. Around it were low wooden barracks, among which the head office, warehouses and kitchen were located. On the side of the roll call square, water gushed high from a fountain and collected in a round stone tank around which short, trimmed greenery grew. A little further there was a concrete swimming pool, filled to the brim with water. At the moment we entered this square, we prisoners rushed to the pool to get a gulp of water to quench our terrible thirst. Blows from rubber truncheons or bullets from the SS men didn't stop us—these were trifles compared to the thirst. Oh, if only you rascals could have known that in two weeks those very prisoners whom you were keeping from the water would be drowning you like rats in the very same pool, your response to us would have probably been quite different.

After a traditional bath and being stripped of everything we had, we were given torn and smelly rags. Many of us didn't get any underwear, so we were half naked. Criminal relations prevailed in the blocks, with people being beaten and murdered without any reason. We slept three to a bed. Robberies and thefts were the order of the day. Whenever you left the bed for a moment, blankets were stolen, and even the straw mattress, leaving bare boards behind.



You had to eat your bread in secret or you would be attacked, robbed and beaten. They would even snatch a bowl of soup from your hands.

The reason for these abnormal relations was terrible starvation. At breakfast we received a quarter of a liter of unsweetened coffee, for lunch warm water with boiled potato skins. The potatoes were eaten by the SS men, and we were fed the scraps—the skins and the rotten potatoes. We got 220 gr. of bread and a cup of warm water for supper. An incredible hunger prevailed after this kind of nutrition. We were all sentenced to starvation. People moved like shadows, walking skeletons. The number of deaths per day was about 600. The crematorium was overloaded with corpses and couldn't keep up with their incineration. Beside the crematorium, enormous pits were dug in which the dead were buried en masse. We were exhausted by the camp at Melk, drained by the journey to Ebensee, so we flinched at the thought of this horrible final struggle for life. We knew well that this fight was in its final stage. What we didn't know, however, was when it would end. Each day brought with it hundreds of victims, so we expected the end to come as a salvation. Although newspapers didn't reach here at all, and we knew nothing of any radio messages, the behavior of our civilian foremen – and especially the SS men – revealed that it was already close to the end for German rule. The SS men stopped being interested in us; they thought only about themselves and deserted their ranks.

The climate here was very harsh and [it was] uncomfortably cold, especially in the early morning frost. We were dressed very lightly and we were short of underwear. Every day at 3:00 a.m. we left for Attnang-Puchheim, a town 35 km from Ebensee, to clean up the rubble after the train station had been bombed. In order to have an idea of the destruction caused by the raid, you had to see it in person. I cannot describe this terrible destruction caused by air bombing. As far as the eye could see, everything lay in ruins. In one place I saw a 15 m deep crater, and as I was told that a two-story tenement house had once stood there. The train track rails were twisted like thin wires. It was hard to imagine what devilish power could have twisted them so much. Railway cars lay overturned far from the railway track. I saw one railway wagon, lying upside down with its wheels in the air, on top of the roof of another wagon, standing normally on its wheels. What power had lifted it so high? Our task was to clean up enough space to lay two railway tracks.

In the last days of April, the weather in Ebensee changed tremendously. Every day there was sleet, and the shocking cold took away the last of our strength and hope for life. The



final days reminded me of the first weeks I had spent in the Auschwitz camp, but just as I had been there, I was supported by my faith that I would survive and arrive back home safe and sound. This faith, my great optimism, didn't allow me even one moment of mental breakdown, and in the hardest hours I was able to spur myself and my colleagues on to fight to stay alive. My slogan was 'heads high', and the sun will shine for us in the sky and we will live as we used to in freedom. Some strange feeling told me that May the 6th would be the last day of our suffering and this day would bring us freedom. I confided in my young companions, and so our slavery shortened day by day.

On 29 April 1945, I fell ill. At night I had strong shivers and a fever. After many attempts and negotiations, I managed to get excused from work so that I could go to the hospital. Here I found my friends from Melk, and when they saw me, they took care of me with all their hearts. Thanks to them I got three days of so-called *Blockschonung*, so I could stay in the block and not go to work.

I spent two days in bed and those two days saved my life, because I was on the verge of death from the terrible hunger. I was extremely lucky, because in those days the weather was terrible; there was constantly either rain or sleet. The surrounding mountains were once again covered with a thick layer of snow and there was a nagging cold. After two days of lying hungry, I was so weak that I didn't have the strength to stay on my feet, let alone go to work. I risked it, and on the third day I simply slipped away from the roll call square, where the *kommando* was gathered for work. The next day, however, I was caught, beaten and assigned to the so-called *Planierungskommando*. We gathered up turf in the meadow, which we carried in our hands and arranged in regular cubes. Around 9:00 a.m. a civilian foreman came and gave the order not to rip up any more turf, but to bring the ripped-up turf back to the meadow and level the surface. For over two weeks, 50 people had ripped up over a dozen or so hectares of this turf every day, until there was a sudden change of plan—to fix what had been spoiled. We were used to this type of German economy. How many times had we dug huge holes only in order to fill them in again some time later. In Auschwitz, we had built three large concrete barriers for fencing and three times we had dismantled them. On this day, they drove us to work mercilessly. They probably wanted us to cover the whole meadow on which we had worked for two weeks in just one day. In the evening, when we returned from work, one SS man told us in secret that the next day we would stay in the blocks and that we wouldn't work. And indeed, on May the 3rd, on the day of our national holiday, we stayed in the camp. We were surprised by this fact,



unprecedented in the history of the camp, and this made us sure that the end of German rule was close. We just had to persevere—survive just a few days more.

Suddenly, the news broke: the end of the war! Germany has capitulated! We went mad with joy. Friends threw themselves into each others' arms, congratulating each other that they had lived to see such a great historical moment. Our Lady of Grace—Queen of the Polish Crown—had brought us freedom on her holy day! But was our joy not premature? Was it truly possible for our suffering to end? Was it possible that we would witness the moment when we would be free? This was the case. Our joy was indeed premature.

The next day, we didn't go to work either. The camp reverberated with various bits of news that we were extremely excited about. We learned that the SS men were leaving the camp, and the *Volkssturm* would stand guard over us. However, this news wasn't confirmed, because in the watchtowers we still saw the SS men on duty. We got through this day fraught with nerves in the expectation of our saviors. The night passed quietly. For the first time, we didn't hear any siren announcing an air raid. For the first time, we didn't hear any detonation thundering over the mountains, caused by dynamite charges for rock blasting.

The day was dawning on the 5th of May. The whole camp [was] quiet and peaceful. We didn't hear the wake-up gong, nobody from the block went out, and for the first time no one yanked us out of bed and drove us to work. We learnt that the SS men had ordered the prisoners to prepare a white banner to hang on a high mast. So our heroes would surrender without putting up a fight. We were extremely happy at this prospect. At around 9:00 a.m., all the prisoners were summoned to the roll call square. We learned that the camp commandant would speak to us. Indeed, *Lagerführer* Gans [Ganz] stood on a podium and spoke to us, urging us to remain calm, obedient and disciplined. The smallest offenses would be punishable by death, the Americans weren't far away, they could come here at any moment—the camp could be bombarded and he advised us to go to the underground tunnels in a column, because there we would be out of danger. When asked whether we agreed with his proposal, we responded spontaneously and unanimously: 'Nein.' We were afraid that they would take us by force, because we felt that in the tunnel we would be poisoned by gas or blown up.

Clearly, they didn't have time to carry out their plan for us, because the SS men surreptitiously left the camp. Only about 150 volunteers stayed, deciding to remain in the





camp at their posts. The fantastic news excited us; we walked like madmen aimlessly from block to block, seeking out any fresh news. We didn't sleep at night, nor did we undress, but we were on the lookout—to be ready to welcome our dear saviors. We expected them to appear any time. Meanwhile, our thoughts wandered far away—to our nearest and dearest, to our homeland. A joyous moment was approaching. After many years of horrible, nightmarish days, we were to return as if from the grave, from a second world. What would we do when we returned to our homes? Each of us had plans about what we would do when we got back, surrounded by our dearest family members and friends from the past ... But would we find them there? These kinds of thoughts overwhelmed us and prevented our eyes from closing. We lay awake all night. The day dawned on the 6th of May. I went to the roll call square early in the morning. A white banner fluttered happily on the high mast to warn our saviors: 'Don't shoot us! Here warm hearts are beating for you! Here, hands are held up pleading: Come to us quicker! Sooner! Hurry up, because every moment is a journey for us, paid for by hundreds of human lives.' The sun was still hidden behind the lofty alpine peaks, but you could see from the blue sky that a beautiful day lay ahead. Here the sun came up three hours later than on the plains. Its life-giving rays were blocked from the east by the Erlakogel mountain range (1570 m above sea level) and Eibenberg (1598 m above sea level).

We had a wonderful sunny Sunday. We walked in small groups and talked freely. The Germans and the various *kapos* who had oppressed us sat in the corners and packed, waiting to get out of the camp as soon as possible. They had an uneasy conscience towards us and were afraid of being lynched.

Poland was well represented. Of the 18,000 prisoners of various nationalities we numbered about 4,000. We secretly prepared a flag with our national colors. Our fellow prisoners of other nationalities did likewise. They also prepared a huge banner for the gate with the inscription: 'Welcome, our saviors.' They made wreaths from fir-trees to decorate the entrance gate. Everything was being prepared as if for the greatest national holiday. Around 2:00 p.m., one of our companions came to us and shouted that the Americans were coming! We poured out of the barracks and heard indescribable, joyful yelling and cheering coming from the roll call square and the entrance gate. We ran there to see tanks and armored American cars entering the camp. The prisoners were bursting with joy, throwing themselves into each others' arms, tears flowing down their cheeks, congratulating each other. It seemed that these people had gone mad with joy. Amidst this indescribable uproar, a welcoming



chant rang out: 'Long live the Americans! Long live our saviors!' The prisoners came out and stood on the tanks and cars, shoulder to shoulder next to their saviors, kissing them on their hands. American soldiers, with stoic calm and American phlegmaticness, chewing gum, looked at our skeletons and pointed to the gate, saying: 'You are free! You can leave now!' The prisoners standing on the cars and tanks held their banners high. The prisoners gathered together alongside their banners and sung their national anthems. Probably for the first time for centuries this land resounded with a loud chorus of 'Poland Is Not Yet Lost'. We were singing, but something was pressing against our throats so that the vocal cords didn't make a sound. It was joy, a feeling of happiness tugging on us that could not be controlled. Here and there on the square, in front of our saviors, there were lynchings. They killed various *kapos*, block leaders and those who had previously killed us. It was enough to say a word, and dozens of prisoners would throw themselves at the victims with rods, iron bars, stones, etc. The prisoners dealt with their tyrants with savage pleasure. I saw a few Germans being thrown into the swimming pool, the same one from which we weren't allowed to drink water when we arrived at the camp. I saw them being stoned, prevented from swimming. On that day they were drowned in the water that they had forbidden us to drink to quench our thirst.

I saw one of the drowning men raise both hands and clasp them together, shaking them tenaciously, begging for mercy, for forgiveness. There is no mercy in lynching, no forgiveness, and the sight of blood only arouses the avengers.

Unable to look at this kind of lynching, I went to my barracks to rest after such an overwhelming experience. On my way, I came across prisoners laden with loaves of bread and carrying whole sacks of flour. I found out that the hungry prisoners had smashed open a bakery and a storeroom with bread. They took everything, including even flour and dough. After some time, some prisoners who had gone to the town hungry, pouncing on the local residents, began to return to the camp. As I found out later, the attack on them was so dangerous that they fled from their homes to the nearby forests. The prisoners were mainly after food. All night long fires burned in the camp and food was cooked.

Full of impressions from this magnificent day, having not slept the night before and physically very weak, I lay down in bed. My neighbor, sleeping above me, had two loaves of bread. Timidly I asked him to give me a piece of bread for cigarettes. As a non-smoker, I had put away 15 cigarettes for a rainy day to buy bread. My companion, 'Ruski' (this is what we



called our Soviet friends, while they called us 'Polski'), replied: 'Kharasho, Polski' ['Ok, Polski']. 'A skoliko imiejesz sztuk cigaretów?' ['And how many cigarettes have you got?']. I told him 15. My neighbor took a knife made from a spoon, cut half a loaf of bread and handed it to me. I swear that in all my life nothing has ever tasted as good as that half a loaf of bread.

Because of the damage to the electrical wiring, the entire camp was in darkness. It was illuminated only by the glow of the burning SS barrack. Due to this lack of electricity, the water pumps had stopped. The camp was deprived of water.

#### MONDAY, 7 MAY 1945

Even though it was already around 8:00, I didn't get out of bed. As a free citizen, I wanted to lie about as much as I wished without fear of beating. We didn't receive any breakfast because there was nothing to cook, and in addition there was no water. Thanks to the tireless work of many of our healthy companions, a truck delivery of water was organized for the kitchen. Some food items were found in one of the adits, and so we had something to eat for the first few days. Around noon, we got half a loaf of bread and a generous portion of margarine.

A committee was chosen to stay in contact with the American authorities. The camp was explored in full by the American soldiers who looked into every corner, made photographs and films of anything of interest to them. The hospital proved to be the most popular, with about 2,000 patients lying there. It wasn't unusual to see a completely naked skeleton still living, filthy, caked in feces and lying on the ground under the open sky, next to a hospital barrack.

The American authorities decided to divide the camp according to nationality. The disposition of the American authorities toward our Polish group is extremely favorable and we have been assigned a camp near Lake Traum, where some civilian workers are staying. Around noon, all the Poles gathered on the roll call square and after grouping ourselves in columns of four numbering a hundred people, with songs on our lips, off we went to our newly assigned camp. We have barracks here, but with a room system. We have been divided into small groups according to our friendships and we are staying in this new camp a few to a room, depending on its size. Thanks to the efforts of some of our friends, typewriters



and radio equipment have been organized, and a decision was made to publish a camp newsletter. It is meant to provide information about camp life and pass on news from radio messages. An editorial board was organized and the radio apparatus is manned by day and night shifts. In this way, we have established contact with the outside world. It was with great pleasure and pride that I listened to a Polish radio message for the first time in five years.

### TUESDAY, 8 MAY 1945

In the early morning, the first issue of 'Nasza gazetka' ['Our Newsletter'] appeared on three typewriter sheets, informing us about the surrender of Germany and the end of the war in Europe. Due to the fact that the 8th of May is a holiday for us, a large group of us gathered in the morning, about 300 people, and in a marching column, singing songs, we went to the church of St. Joseph in Ebensee for a thanksgiving Mass. It was difficult to refrain from tears when, for the first time in five years, we knelt before the great altar to thank the supreme Creator for saving us and keeping us alive. Instead of silent prayer, we offered tears of affection to God in sacrifice. Not only did we cry, but tears of emotion also flowed down the cheeks of the public gathered in the church. Thanks to the kindness of the local parish priest, we took confession and received a general absolution, and then we began Holy Communion. After the service, local nuns visited us with tea, rusks and cigarettes. Around noon, we returned to our camp, singing songs again.

We are at the beginning of a new life, the life of a free man. Admittedly, the barracks remind us of our life as camp prisoners, but being aware of freedom, the ability to move around freely in the town gives us tremendous joy. In our new camp we have transformed the former dining room into a beautiful chapel in which morning mass is celebrated, and in the evening, May services.

The biggest problem with the camp is the difficulty in getting hold of food. The American authorities have given us permission to requisition foodstuffs and have put at our disposal several trucks and passenger cars. We have a camp office in which each of us has had to register. This required the former prisoners, about 4,000 people, to form some kind of organizational structure.



## 9 MAY 1945

Today one of our friends recognized the former commandant of the Melk camp, the notorious murderer Julius X. Ludolf. He was driving dressed in civilian attire in the company of his mistress, whom he had brought with him from Melk with the intention of escaping to Switzerland. At the time of his arrest, he resisted, for which he was punished with several solid punches to the face and then handed over to the American authorities. He explained that he had been very good to the prisoners, and then his goodness was mathematically proven to him: Approximately 14,000 prisoners had arrived in Melk, of whom only 7,401 were evacuated to Ebensee; the rest had died in Melk due to overwork, poor nutrition, sparse bedding, beatings and bestial treatment.

A second 'dirty little rascal' was shot in the forest near Ebensee—*Obersturmführer* Reichenbach, who was famous for having commanded us during the evacuation march from Auschwitz to Włodziszław, and then for transporting us in temperatures of minus 24 in open wagons for four days and nights. This criminal was guilty of murdering about 800 people, including more than half of the women who could not keep up with the marching column. The *Lagerführer* from Ebensee, Gans, met a similar fate—shot by his own friend. This murderer had special methods of finishing off prisoners. The SS men knew about this and had appropriate directives in this regard. This secret was betrayed by one of the *Blockführers*, who wouldn't let a prisoner friend of his go to Ebensee, claiming that no prisoner would come out of this camp alive. I can confirm from my own experience that this was an accurate assessment, because after only three weeks of staying in this camp I was close to death.

A cart pulled by a pair of horses, laden with the corpses of dead prisoners in Ebensee, made a shocking impression on the Americans. This cart traveled across the town as it headed toward the cemetery. The Americans photographed and filmed it from all sides, clearly expressing their indignation. One of them shouted out loud, 'Here are the victims of German civilization and culture.' This macabre platform even made a big impression on the Germans from Ebensee. If so far they had been pretending that they didn't know what was happening in the camp, they had now been given tangible proof.

At first, the Americans had the idea that every prisoner who died in the camp would be carried by SS men on their shoulders in coffins, and that the ceremonial funerals would take place at



the cost of the town. Clearly, this project had been abandoned and now, as I described it, they were transporting the corpses on this cart in coffins to be buried at the local cemetery.

In the evening, four SS men were brought to the American authorities from the Ebensee camp, dressed in elegant civilian clothes. At first, they didn't want to admit that they had been *Blockführers* in the camp, but unfortunately the prisoners recognized them and even remembered their heroic deeds towards defenseless inmates.

### 10 MAY 1945

Today I took part in a solemn service that took place in the church of St. Józef in Ebensee. We marched in a tight group, more briskly and confidently than two days ago, having regained our strength after two days of good nutrition.

News from the newsletter: London, 9 May 1945 'News has come in about the capture of Field Marshal Göring, the organizer of the German air force, the contractor of the four-year plan and Hitler's closest collaborator. He testified that on 24 April this year he went to Hitler and resigned. On 28 April SS troops arrived at Göring's villa and arrested the marshal and imprisoned him. The air force learned about it – Göring was released and held in secret, thanks to which he avoided the death sentence given to him by Hitler. It was not known whether this was a fairy tale or a real story. In either case, it would not lessen the punishment that the criminal deserves.

### 11 MAY 1945

Borman's body— Hitler's deputy—was found in the ruins of Berlin. In addition, four bodies were found in the rubble and it was not out of the question that one of them may be Hitler's corpse. So far, however, the corpse had not been identified.

Thanks to the efforts of our committee, nowadays sick people and mostly young boys were being transported to a spa town in Ischl [Bad Ischl], 15 km from Ebensee.

Life in this new civilian camp passes quickly and steadily. We have relatively good nutrition. Sometimes it's monotonous—for example, a whole week of pea soup—but despite this we



have gained weight and feel stronger. Our only concern is that we are anxious to return to our homeland as soon as possible. In this regard our management have made concerted efforts, but the American authorities haven't given us much support and have delayed our departure date.

#### 22 MAY 1945

One of the major murderers, the head commandant of the Buchenwald camp, *Sturmbannführer* Fortner [?], has fallen into the hands of the British forces. He'll face a special court, accused of causing the death of about 100,000 people imprisoned in Buchenwald.

A representative of the Soviet Union visited our camp today. He took part in a meeting called in honor of his arrival. This representative of the Soviet Union discussed in detail the joint struggle for the liberation of Poland by the Red Army and the Polish People's Guard. He also brought up the matter of an alliance concluded between the Soviet Union and Poland for 20 years.

Then he informed us that he was doing everything in his power to speed up the date of our departure to our homeland.

#### 26 MAY 1945

Today, posters with photos taken in the Auschwitz, Buchenwald and Dachau concentration camps were posted all over Germany. The posters bore the inscription 'Wer ist schuld?' ['Who is to blame?']. We assumed that the Germans would understand who is responsible for this barbarity.

#### 30 MAY 1945

Today, our friends S. Madej and Garczyński were received by a colonel of the Soviet Union. The colonel told them that the Poles could not leave the camp for the next four weeks, because at that time a commission from Poland was expected to prepare the transport of





Poles to their homeland. An evening of fun organized for the evening, entitled 'camp bigos', has aroused great interest among our friends. We'll see.

### 1 JUNE 1945

'Camp Bigos' went extremely well. The program consisted of performances by the camp choir, recitations, monologues and solo songs. Our friends A. Kopyciński and M. Rusinek deserve recognition and thanks for organizing the event and making sure it ran smoothly.

Today, for the first time in the camp, there will be English and French lessons.

Three Polish representatives—Dr. Cynaj, Dr. Laks [Lachs] and Dr. Witawski—are to sit at the International Tribunal to try war criminals. The Tribunal includes representatives from 16 countries. The Soviet Union has no representative, because it has its own Tribunal and a commission to collect material. Yesterday, the Tribunal met for its first briefing, and on 6 June it is due to begin intensive work. The first list of war criminals includes the names of 2,524 Germans, 110 Italians, 17 Bulgarians, 2 Albanians, 2 Hungarians and 2 Romanians. In addition, a second list is being drawn up containing another 560 German names and 800 names of other nationalities as yet unknown.

### 2 JUNE 1945

In recent times there have been more and more frequent suicides among members of the Nazi party. Our newsletter mentions entire lists of names of persons from the Salzburg district who have committed suicide. Among others, the mayor of Salzburg, Anton Gigier, shot his wife along with himself.

Our newsletter reads: "The diaries describe the look of Hitler's apartment, found in one of the government buildings in Berlin. A large number of paintings have been discovered in the rooms, bearing the signature 'A. Hitler' with the date of the painting. The Russian journals emphasize with irony that this terrible murderer showed gentleness and calm in his paintings. He liked to paint lunar landscapes, meadows with grazing cows, a small river with trees growing on its banks, etc. The paintings do not show even the slightest artistic



value. The rooms were also full of photos. Thousands of copies of Hitler's portrait with his own signature were found in his office. They were ready to be handed out on the day of the national-socialist holiday—that is, on 1 May 1945—in the immediate vicinity of the criminal chancellor and they bore this date. In the drawers of the desk, on the library shelves, and in the bedroom, piles of photo albums have been found depicting Hitler in various periods of his reign. In these pictures he is mostly visible in Napoleonic poses. A thick volume of Hitler's family history was found on the desk, in which the author tried to show that the Schickelgruber family [Schicklgruber], from which his Hitler family came, originated from the most famous German statesmen. A huge five-floor edifice concealed the personal anti-aircraft shelters of Hitler and Goebbels. The lowest apartment contained Hitler's two-story apartment, built so that it would be protected even from five-ton aerial bombs. In the dining room there was a table still set for breakfast and there was a bottle of red wine, half-drunk, as well as four chairs. This room was adjoined by a bedroom and a luxuriously equipped bathroom. The Goebbels' rooms adjacent to this apartment had been abandoned by its owners in a mad panic. This is indicated by the great disorder that prevails within.

The US Division's reporter writes from Dachau. Many prisoners in the concentration camp died as a result of freezing. To be precise, the supreme command of the German air force demanded that the camp management carry out experiments on prisoners to see how much time a person can remain in ice-cold water. The camp physicians experimented on the prisoners on a daily basis, ordering them to stay in very cold water for a long time. From time to time blood samples were taken from them and the water temperature was measured. As a result of these experiences, thousands of prisoners died.

In addition, hundreds of prisoners in the camp received malaria injections. The prisoners were tested to see how their body could fight against malaria. Not one of these prisoners lived to see freedom; they all died."

Today, we learned that the American authorities have allocated our camp as a space for SS men, numbering several thousand, who are to work in the local adits. They intend to move us to the civil camp in Steinkogel, where the Russians have been staying until now. So, we'll be moving out again. We regret the work we put into setting up the camp, but we won't be sorry to see the last of the bugs, which swarm around and bite us while we sleep. Even a light bulb with the strength of 200 candles, which we had on all night, didn't help.



#### 4 JUNE 1945

The Office of the Control Commission for Germany is calculating the number of former prisoners of concentration camps, prisoners of war, and civilian workers from all European countries currently located in Germany and other countries that were occupied by the Germans. They calculate that around 15.5 million people must return to their native countries. A repatriation program is under way. Unfortunately, as we found out, the American authorities have issued a ban on leaving the camp and departing to our homeland. Strict checkpoints stand on the roads, highways and railways, and persons without relevant documents are sent to nearby camps.

#### EBENSEE, 7 JUNE 1945

The Americans have set about fencing off our camp with barbed wire. The mood in the camp is bad. They don't want to let us go back to our homeland, but they're throwing us out from the camp that we spent so much effort organizing; in a word, the second stage of our camp experience is underway. We'll see how long it will last.

The Russians are leaving. A delegation of compatriots came to them and organized their trip. Unfortunately, no one came for us.

#### EBENSEE, 8 JUNE 1945

The entire Polish camp has been liquidated. We have been placed in five different points, [about] two kilometers away from each other. Most of our friends have been placed in the camp abandoned by the Russians in Steinkogel. The conditions in this camp are mediocre. Bedbugs, dirt, lack of water and mud—such are the general characteristics of our rooms there. Along with a group of 1,420 Poles, I have been accommodated in the camp where the SS men lived. The barracks are somewhat more comfortable, with running water and sewage facilities, and it is better compared to others. We found the rooms empty. We need to organize beds, wardrobes, tables, chairs—basically, the whole lot. We're bringing it all in by cars from the previous camp. I must mention that my friends chose me as the 'room leader'.



For the first time in five years of camp life, I have some kind of authority. As a room leader, I have to take care of the furnishing of our room.

#### **EBENSEE, 9 JUNE 1945**

Today I was offered a new position in the camp, namely as the clerk in my block—number 14. Because I don't like being idle, because when you're engaged in something the time passes quickly, I accepted the above duty. My room was designated as the departmental office, to be staffed by the three of us who lived there, with the department leader being Staś Pałatko from Kraków, my former neighbor from the bunk bed in which the two of us slept in the Ebensee camp, and with Maximilian Laufer as the provisions manager. There were about 150 of us in 12 rooms in this department.

#### **EBENSEE, 10 JUNE 1945**

I have a lot of work in my new position as clerk. Receiving new arrivals, crossing out those who have been transferred, making reports, distributing food, etc. But I am happy because I don't like idleness. Reports are coming in from Munich that Burchard, the commandant of the Buchenwald concentration camp, and Hoffer, the head doctor of the camp, were captured while trying to cross the Swiss border. They were dressed and disguised as women, and in this disguise they intended to escape from the hands of justice.

#### **EBENSEE, 12 JUNE 1945**

Our camp currently numbers 3,622 people. I must emphasize with great satisfaction that the Americans show a keen interest in the Polish camp. The food improves with each passing day as we have shifted over to receiving supplies from the UNRRA [United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration]—we feel stronger and healthier every day. The wolf-like appetite that we had in the early days after starvation is slowly subsiding. I must admit with embarrassment that at the beginning I would eat three full bowls of soup—that



is, about four liters—and now one bowl is enough for me, and sometimes I can't even finish that. Within five weeks, the body has made up for its loss.

The radio from London reports on a new crime committed by the Neuengamme camp authorities. They loaded 7,000 Poles onto three ships and led them out into the open sea without fuel or food, thinking that the Americans would sink them. And indeed, English ships, not knowing what cargo was in the ships, sank them. And there we have another great crime committed by the Germans against defenseless victims. Today we received some Red Cross food packages—one five-kilo pack for three people.

A 24-year-old Norwegian student, Braun, a former prisoner of the Auschwitz concentration camp, spoke on the radio in Oslo. He discussed the relations that prevailed in the camp. He spoke flatteringly about the Polish prisoners who, with their attitude in these terrible conditions, impressed all the Norwegians imprisoned there.

#### **EBENSEE, 13 JUNE 1945**

From the Warsaw radio we learned some interesting details about the camp in Wiśnicz, which was set up by the Gestapo in a historic monastery from the 16th century. The drunken soldiers organized orgies in front of the Great Altar, pretending to be celebrating a church service, while the prisoners were ordered to kneel and watch. Around 20,000 people were murdered there.

#### **EBENSEE, 14 JUNE 1945**

Our camp is being visited by numerous guests from other camps almost every day. Visitors come in from Gmunden, Lambach, Linz and other smaller Polish centers. Today, representatives of the Polish army – Lieutenant Colonel Henryk Malhomme, deputy chief of Polish liaison officers at the Supreme Command of the Allied Forces; Major Stefan Gașiorowski, head of Polish liaison officers at the command of the 3rd American Army; and Officer Cadet Stanisław Chybalski – all paid a visit. The number of Poles staying in our center in Ebensee recently increased to 4,240 people.



Our camp (formerly belonging to the SS) currently looks like a villa estate, located in a beautiful park. We have cleared all the paths and created new ones. We've put everything in order all around. We don't have any clocks in the entire camp. One of my colleagues has a pocket watch and in order to keep everyone informed of the time, we've set up a rota, and every hour we strike the proper number on the gong. Today, for the first time, we wrote a letter to our families via the American Red Cross. I'm only sorry that we're restricted to 25 words, and writing the first letter in my native language after such a long separation, I would like to write as much as possible.

#### EBENSEE, 16 JUNE 1945

News from 'Our newsletter': A delegation from Gdańsk that was investigating German war crimes has returned. The delegation visited, *inter alia*, the famous concentration camp of Sztutthof [Stutthof] near Gdansk. It was confirmed on the basis of authentic documents that the camp had had a total of 107,000 prisoners of various nationalities, including a large number of Poles. Of the total number of prisoners, 80,000 people died, of whom 40,000 were gassed and the rest were tortured in various ways. The most common method of killing prisoners was drowning them in the Baltic Sea. Among other things, numerous personal documents of the prisoners sent there were found, featuring the handwritten signature of Greiser – the bloody hangman from Gdańsk – with the note: 'Not to return'.

The news of the arrest of the long-sought-for foreign minister of Nazi Germany, von Ribbentrop, has caused a great sensation. The search for him covered all of Europe, and the suspicion was that he had used his contacts and was hiding in Switzerland or even Spain. The police of these countries had also taken part in the search, because under the respective agreements these states were obliged to hand over von Ribbentrop. One of the English intelligence services, familiar with von Ribbentrop's pre-war relations, concluded that he had extensive contacts with wine merchants, because he himself was for ...

To be continued.

Gorlice, 10 September 1946.