



HELENA KAŁUSKA

Warsaw, 15 April 1946. The investigating judge Halina Wereńko, delegated to the Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes in Poland, heard as a witness the person specified below. Having been advised of the obligation to tell the truth, of the criminal liability for making false declarations and of the importance of the oath, the witness was sworn and testified as follows:

Name and surname	Helena Kałuska <i>née</i> Burakowska
Marital status	widow
Date of birth	25 September 1907 in Warsaw
Parents' names	Ludwik and Zofia <i>née</i> Ciemińska
Occupation	clerk of the Municipal Board in Pruszków
Education	secondary
Place of residence	Pruszków, 11 Listopada Street 72, flat 19
Religious affiliation	Roman Catholic
Criminal record	none

During the German occupation, I worked in the Central Welfare Council in Pruszków as a clerk in the social welfare section.

After the outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising, as soon as on 6 August 1944, the Pruszków society was alarmed by the news that the Germans were taking transports of civilians from Warsaw through Pruszków in an unknown direction. Groups of Warsawians, usually from Wola and makeshift transit camps in Warsaw, were being brought in trains or driven on foot along the Warsaw road to the railway workshops in Pruszków, where the trains were coming, as the workshops' premises had a connection with the railway.



In the workshops, people were being unloaded, segregated, and loaded on long distance trains, and the transports were then going either to Germany or to various places in the General Government. Later we learned that men and women who were able to work were usually being sent to a "Breslau" (Wrocław) *lager*; some Warsawians, especially from Starówka [Old Town] – to concentration camps. Women with children and the old and the sick were being unloaded in various Polish cities, such as Częstochowa, Piotrków, Jędrzejów and others.

To which cities in Germany the Polish people were being sent, I am not sure, I heard that from September, the Warsawians were being sent only to the concentration camps – men to Mauthausen and Gross Rosen, women to Ravensbrück.

The Pruszków railway workshops were shacks, some built of brick, some were ordinary wooden sheds, and there were seven of them, if I remember correctly, on 1 square kilometer of premises fenced with a wall. The trains, which were entering the workshops on the first level crossing from the direction of Warsaw, were thus standing behind the wall.

On the very first day when the transports came, people of goodwill from Pruszków tried to bring help individually, handing the Warsawians in the trains some food over the wall. People from Warsaw looked awful: packed like sardines, in various clothes, some barefoot and wearing underwear only, hungry, thirsty, terrified and utterly terrorized. Heading in an unknown direction, they were being told by some escorting gendarmes that they were going – as Jews – to crematories. People didn't know what was to become of them. They were being guarded by the gendarmes and the "Ukrainian" soldiers. Usually we were allowed to hand the people food, but it was done in an atmosphere of terror: shots were being fired every now and then, there was a lot of screaming and rifle-butting.

On the same day, as a result of the intervention of the Polish Red Cross I believe, the local organizations obtained from the German authorities permission to enter the camp in order to set up a kitchen and provide the evacuees with medical aid. As a result, as soon as on the following day, on 3 August, thanks to the efforts of the Polish Red Cross, the Central Welfare Council, the local shop owners and farmers from the neighboring villages, a kitchen was set up on the transit camp premises, and it was being supplied with food by the neighboring communes, shops, and the Central Welfare Council and "Społem" stores; soups were being cooked and distributed along with bread and coffee. All of this was not enough for such



masses of people who came in the transports. I would like to emphasize that the Germans did not allot any food for the Warsawians; they didn't give them anything.

A member of the SA (he had a yellow uniform), Polland, became the camp commander. It is the only name that I remember from the first period of the camp's existence. There were also other Germans, also from the SA. Then changes were introduced. The guard was kept by the German gendarmes and by the "Ukrainians".

Not only were the employees of the Central Welfare Council and the Polish Red Cross volunteering to work in the kitchen, but also many inhabitants of Pruszków. Later a number of men and women from Warsaw joined the kitchen staff, as they could be saved from deportation to Germany that way. People who were working in the kitchen, or when we were organizing it, and the supplies staff, had white armbands with "RGO"[Central Welfare Council] letters and the Red Cross badges, and they also had passes issued by the *lager* commander. Women were wearing white aprons.

Apart from that, doctors were working in the camp in the following way: almost all doctors who did not manage to gain access to the camp were standing with the paramedics by a table or by the wall and were admitting the injured and the sick there. They had only those dressing materials and medicaments which they had brought themselves, as they were not receiving anything from the Germans. These doctors, among them Dr Kaczorowski, the head of the Polish Red Cross, Dr Pratówna from Tworki, Dr Bobrowska, Dr Bielecka, Dr Łabędzki, Dr Ryniewicz, and many others, were issuing leaves for the more seriously ill, and at the beginning the German authorities were honoring the leaves and would let the sick be taken to hospitals in Tworki, Pruszków, Komorów, Podkowa Leśna, Milanówek, and Grodzisk. A released sick person was being taken by the arms or on a stretcher by the paramedics and taken out of the camp. As the doctors were accommodating and were trying to release Polish people from the camp, the German authorities quickly began to harass them. I heard that Dr Łabędzki was punched in the face by a German gendarme for releasing the sick from the camp. On about 9 August (I don't remember the exact date), some restrictions were introduced: a colonel of – I believe – the SS was appointed as the new commander (I don't remember his name), and the SS seized control of the camp. A German, König, was appointed as chief physician of the camp, and his aids were also Germans: Dr Wener and another one whose name I don't know. Now the release depended on him, and the leaves



issued by the Polish physicians meant only that the sick person would be admitted to a German doctor. However, the German physicians, at the request of the Polish doctors and paramedics, were releasing Polish people quite willingly from deportation for forced labor to Germany. As a result, a decree was announced that the list of people who were being released by a German physician had to be approved by the Gestapo.

On 3 August 1944, with many other women, I went to the Pruszków camp wearing a white apron, thus as a paramedic, although I didn't have any pass then, as this was issued by the commander only in the evening. On that first day of the camp's existence, people were only in two shacks, men and women alike. After a few days, when a transport arrived from Warsaw, men would be put in separate shacks, as well as young women, women with children up to 15 years of age, old people, and the sick. Families were thus being separated. Due to terror, but also due to lack of space and commotion, mothers were losing small children, and then they were begging the sanitary staff to find them; it was impossible due to crowdedness and frequent transports to the West. And so solitary children were roaming the premises. When children or their mother were crying, the gendarmes and later the SS men who were guarding them, would scream at them and sometimes would even push them or hit them with their rifle butts. In my presence, a gendarme butted a woman with a baby so hard that she staggered. It happened while I was distributing milk for the babies, standing on the route of the Varsovians who were being driven from the road to the workshops' premises. When she received the milk, that woman gave it to the baby immediately, and asked me whether I was Polish, whether it was possible to get out of the camp and whether it was true that the Varsovians were going to be executed. During that conversation the gendarme approached us and hit the woman.

Transports from Warsaw were coming on foot, in the EKD [Electric Commuter Train] and trains. Trains were being packed so tightly that children were suffocating before arrival in the Pruszków camp. Near the first level crossing from the direction of Warsaw, before the entry to the workshops, that is, the camp, a number of bodies of suffocated babies were found – the corpses had simply been thrown out of the trains before the camp premises.

On about 10 August, some shacks, including the 6th, were fenced with barbed wire. Young men were being directed there, the ones who were being treated especially harshly. As the paramedics and Polish doctors were trying to free Polish people from the camp, both legally



(medical leaves for the sick) and illegally (dressing women in white aprons, taking healthy men out on stretchers, on wagons for food etc.), the camp authorities gave an order that only particularly assigned paramedics could enter the 6th shack, and the others were being driven away by the guarding SS men. As long as the "Ukrainians" were keeping guard in the camp, it was easy to bribe the sentries with gold things or vodka, and thus supposedly-ill Warsawians were being released from the camp. Some SS men could also be bribed, but they were more reluctant to release Polish people. In connection with releasing people from the camp, a camp activist, Dr Dreszerowa, was arrested.

As the shacks were very dirty, people were sitting directly on the earthen floor, or on a wooden board or a handful of straw at best; there were no toilets but only a separate place; water was undrinkable; food was not enough; diseases were spreading: dysentery, abdominal typhus. The mortality rate was high, but I cannot tell how many people died or give a percentage of deaths. Children and old people were dying most often.

On about 10 August, when the SS seized control of the camp, the so-called green carriage became the dread of the Warsawians; it was a train carriage painted green, the headquarters of the Gestapo which kept a firm grip on the camp. Interrogations were being carried out there. I heard that at the end of August a group of the Home Army members, all men, were brought from Warsaw. The Gestapo men loaded them on a truck, placing them lying one upon another. The truck was packed tightly, there were some 20 people there. They were taken to the so-called clays, halfway from Pruszków to Komorów near the EKD tracks, and executed there.

Many Warsawians were executed on the run, people were being shot at also for making contact with people from outside the wires.