

EDWARD KOWALSKI

Warsaw, 20 March 1947. Member of the District Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes, Judge Halina Wereńko, interviewed the person specified below as an unsworn witness. Having been advised of the criminal liability for making false testimonies and of the wording of Art. 107 and 115 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, the witness testified as follows:

Name and surname	Edward Kowalski
Names of parents	Jerzy and Helena née Bleck
Date of birth	14 March 1914
Education	medical doctor and a Master of Pharmacy
Religion	Roman Catholic
Place of residence	[...]
Profession	doctor at the internal medicine ward of the Wolski Hospital, head of the dispensary of the Wolski Hospital and assistant at the Faculty of Physiological Chemistry of the University of Warsaw

From the beginning of the uprising I worked as a doctor in the 1st Home Army Military Hospital [I Szpital Wojskowy Armii Krajowej] in the Old Town area.

Our hospital was organized in the John of God Hospital in Bonifraterska Street. During the first days of the uprising, I had no detailed understanding of the balance of power between our troops and the Germans. I knew they were attacking from the direction of the Żoliborz district. At the beginning, our troops held Stawki Street, but after a few days the situation changed and our posts were shifted to the area a few houses away from the John of God Hospital.

Right away, during the first days of August 1944, the Germans bombarded the building of this hospital. Many wounded and mentally ill patients died during those terrible air raids.

Our hospital was moved to Długa Street 7, to the building of the former Ministry of Justice. The entire building was occupied by the Home Army. Headquarters of various battalions were located there. General Tadeusz "Bór" Komorowski was stationed there during the first days of August 1944, the "Wigry" Battalion of Major Trzaska [codename for Captain Eugeniusz "Trzaska" Konopacki] remained there until around 25 August 1944, etc.

From the very first day the Old Town was severely bombarded and under artillery fire. I am unable to determine the direction of the fire. Every house was on the front line. It was impossible to even wish for separate premises for the hospital. Anyway, this was actually of no importance, since while fighting the insurgents, the Germans did not observe any rules of warfare. Hospitals and the wounded did not have special rights. Houses with Red Cross flags put up were bombarded mercilessly.

The John of God Hospital was bombarded despite the fact that it had a Red Cross flag put up. A psychiatrist, Doctor Darkowska, who stayed with mentally ill patients, died in there, as well as others.

Our hospital consisted of an "operating theatre" and surgical wards. Any and all terms from the field of hospital organization are in this case totally inadequate and sound like a mockery. The operating theatre had no light, no running water, and was set up in a basement, above which floor after floor was tumbling down, so that plaster and shards of brick were falling from the ceiling. The surgical wards were located in the basements and on the ground floor. The wounded lay side by side on mattresses, on stretchers, or on the floor. Various parts of the house were falling to pieces due to the constant fire and bombardment. Sometimes the wounded patients brought to the hospital got injured a second time in the hospital itself. The administrative director was Associate Professor Falkowski (director of the John of God Hospital), Doctor Stroński was the head of the operating team.

The surgical team consisted of 8 to 10 doctors and two medical assistants [feldshers]. The names that I remember are: Professor Tomaszewski, Doctor Krauze, Doctor Kołaczkowski, Doctor Kalinowski, Doctor Jakimowicz, Doctor Tomaszewska, Doctor Mockało. The auxiliary staff were headed by Sister Marta, a nun of Saint Vincent de Paul [szarytka].

Hospital work was organized as follows. The wounded were brought to the first basement, which served as an admission room. In that basement, the doctor on duty triaged particular cases and decided whether a patient should be moved to the operating room. The mere process of qualifying each patient for care was overwhelming in its tragic aspect. The wounded were being brought incessantly, sometimes several at a time.

I remember a ghastly day, 13 August 1944, when our soldiers seized a German tank. The tank had been deliberately armed with a mine, so when the delighted boys were driving it along Kilińskiego Street, and a bunch of kids were swarming around it, there was a terrible explosion. We buried five hundred heads then, dismembered bodies.

The wounded were being brought incessantly. Already in the "admission" it was necessary to select patients with wounds that gave them a chance of survival after an operation. The rest of the wounded could not be operated on. The patients were segregated into two groups. The first one were those whose condition required serious interventions: opening of the abdomen, intestinal stitching, potentially intestinal resection or skull trepanation. As to interventions in the chest area, we only stitched open wounds. In those conditions it was impossible to carry out operations required in the cases of kidney, spleen or liver damage. The other group were patients who required smaller interventions, such as amputations and the disarticulation of limbs, original stitching, plaster dressings, splints. Each of the two "theatres" (for serious and smaller interventions) had its operating team who worked day and night without rest.

It is very difficult to imagine this work, the conditions were in breach of the minimum sanitary requirements. The "operating theatres" were located in two small basement rooms that shook from bomb explosions and artillery fire. Plaster from the ceiling would sometimes fall on the surgical field. The only lights we had were candles; it was often one candle held above the wound. Water was drawn at the risk of one's life (anything we did there was in fact at the risk of our lives) from some uncovered wells, and was brought in open buckets. Sister Marta undertook superhuman efforts to sterilize the surgical instruments and the surgical linen; knowing how important her role was, she would stubbornly and persistently prepare one set after another.

The hell of the war and the hopeless suffering of the people brought to the basements faded away in the operating room. Here there was room for nothing else but great effort,

achieved thanks to immense concentration. One did not think about air raids or barricades but only about what was happening in the surgical field, the opened abdomen or chest. The work was all the more difficult because the entire medical team knew that more wounded were waiting for treatment. A patient still under general anaesthesia was carried away from the operating room and had no further contact with the surgeon. He would be put on the ground in one of the rooms, in the care of other doctors and nurses. Operating-theatre doctors were designated to work at the operating table.

The doctors were half-awake with fatigue. It was difficult to get food, there was no time to sleep. The team was running out of physical strength fast. It is simply difficult for me to understand where our strength to even hold the instruments came from. And so, for example, I remember that at the end of September Professor Tomaszewski, while operating on a difficult case (a laparotomy), had a fever of more than 39 degrees Celsius.

The terrible defeats of this fight were played out all over the basements. Of the military operations we knew only that this patient was from the Mostowski Palace, and these patients were from the Security Printing Works [Wytwórnia Papierów Wartościowych]. Attacks fought off, barricades seized and lost – all this reached the hospital via a number of wounded, tattered boys, girls, women and children, a number that is as bloody in victory as in defeat.

Obviously, we held operating logs. They had been burnt before the Germans arrived. I remember that the number of surgeries in both rooms was equal to around one thousand during that month (up to 1 September 1944).

The sanitary head of the Old Town was Colonel Tarło, presently employed in the Ministry of National Defence in the health care department (or in the district hospital).

It was 1 September 1944. The Home Army troops made it to the City Centre [Śródmieście] in a nightmarish walk through sewage ducts, a small group managed to get there overground (from several dozen people almost 90 per cent died). From among our team I was the only doctor who remained on the spot. I had my nurses and two feldshers with me. Our priest, Father J. Roztworowski, also stayed with us. The weird silence wrenched our nerves even more than the clatter of fighting, which we were used to.

On Saturday morning the Germans entered the hospital. At that time there were more than five hundred patients and around fifty staff members in Długa Street. The entire staff were ordered to go out into the yard. Father Roztworowski was standing next to me. The Germans told us to kneel down. We were interrogated in this position. "Is this a bandit hospital?" – all questions revolved around this. It was impossible to conceal the facts, the wounded were wearing German "tigers", blouses that the Home Army seized for its soldiers during the attack on the warehouses in Stawki Street. Our line of defence was as simple as possible: as doctors and qualified hospital personnel, our sole duty had been to provide help to any wounded persons, irrespective of who this person was or what they had done. The Germans, having heard our defence (everything on our knees), ordered us to stay and continue our work.

We were satisfied. After all, all we wanted was to be with our patients and do our job. The wounded were pouring in in a ceaseless stream. I kept working without a minute of rest until noon. Then a German appeared again and ordered us to immediately get out to the yard. I showed him the patients waiting to be attended to, but that didn't help. We grabbed some instruments and we left our "operating theatres". Most of the medical personnel and around fifty patients with less severe wounds who were able to drag themselves out of the hospital were in the yard. In total, there were around one hundred people.

Waiting for the wounded, who were gathering around me, I heard salvos and single gunshots. I did not realize what they meant. Even the most horrid experiences of the occupation could not convince me that there existed people who would go from bed to bed and execute severely wounded patients.

We were formed into a marching column. We walked in a large group, already having a feeling about the fate of the wounded who had stayed in Długa Street. We, the healthy, carried and supported the wounded, believing that this way we might have a chance to save them. I had a wounded girl in my arms, and I looked at our nightmarish procession. I saw people exhausted to the last, with bandaged heads and limbs, dragging their bodies in spasms of pain with half-crazed expressions caused by fear on their faces. They dragged their plastered limbs and limbs in splints with their last effort. Being a doctor, I could not understand how these injured people were able to move. The Germans were beating and kicking them, wanting to speed up the march.

We walked down Podwale Street in the direction of Zamkowy Square. In Wąski Dunaj Street we were halted. An SS-man again addressed a speech to us, which consisted in calling us swine, bandits and the like in a horrible manner. This hideous speech ended in the selection of several seriously wounded persons. All the wounded who were not able to walk fast enough on their own were simply torn away from us. The same SS-man led the wounded into Wąski Dunaj Street. We heard a series of shots. At that time none of us had any doubts left as to what these shots meant. In 1945 I saw ashes in Wąski Dunaj Street.

We did not find out where they were taking us. We were certain of one thing – that we were going to be executed. In Zamkowy Square we were halted again. Again a speech, bandits and other horrible invectives, we listened indifferently. Then he turned to us with the accusation that Polish doctors had been mistreating the Germans captured by the insurgents. I felt a surge of fury. I remembered more than one German on our operating table. We treated them as we would treat any other patient. I stepped out of the line and told him so, emphatically, in German. The SS-man, surprised that I dared to speak out, looked at me in astonishment, and after a moment he approached me and kicked me with all his might. After a while another German officer appeared and gave another speech. This time it was very polite, its purpose was to get us to help our wounded. I lifted a seriously wounded woman and we went to Bednarska Street. I returned one more time to Zamkowy Square to pick up a seriously wounded man who was waiting for me there.

When I again reached Bednarska Street, my group was not there anymore. The same SS-man was waiting for me there. A two-hour interrogation began. The German was exceptionally intelligent and well-informed in the underground life of our country. His questions pertained to various areas. He therefore asked, of course: "How many troops were there in the Old Town? What command?". He questioned me thoroughly about the political background of the uprising, he had excellent information in all these fields anyway.

He described himself as Kutschera's friend. He was most interested in how the troops had left the Old Town, and where they had gone. The Germans thought that the army went to Praga through a tunnel under the Vistula river. Such a tunnel had been planned in 1905 and the Germans knew very well of this plan.

When after two hours the SS-man finally believed me that I did not know what had been going on, since my entire field of vision was limited to the surgical field, he let me be and ended the examination with a debate on ideological and philosophical topics.

As far as I was concerned, I did not care what they would do to me, I only wanted them to let me be a doctor in the concentration camp to which I was to be sent. The officer promised me that. I immediately organized a medical group of eight Home Army nurses and one feldsher. Our group was also joined by about ten civilians from the Old Town, and the entire group was led by the SS officer to the Field Gendarmerie Station in Ossolińskich Street 4.

We spent the night in a cold shed. Very early in the morning on 2 September 1944, people from various streets of the evacuated Old Town started to gather. There were about five hundred of us, we were again formed in a marching column and herded, being beaten and shoved, through Trębacka Street, Żelaznej Bramy Square and Chłodna Street to Wolska Street, to Saint Adalbert Church.

Saint Adalbert Church was a transit camp. A part of the Gestapo staff from Szucha Avenue and Siecherheitsdienst der Kampfgruppe Reinefarth were stationed in the vicarage. A part of the Warsaw Gestapo staff with Geibel stayed outside of Warsaw, in Sochaczew, I believe. Hauptsturmführer Spielker was the commander, the Hauptsturmführer's deputy was named Vogt. Spielker reported to Geibel, SD men from Kampfgruppe Reinefarth also reported to Spielker, who was the main man in the Warsaw area. I later learned that a prison was located behind the vicarage.

A non-commissioned officer of the SS named Muller, previously employed in Lublin, was a specialist in extracting Jews from transports. He was a tall, slim man with dark hair and black eyes, who looked like a former police officer.

The church was a shot at freedom, outside of the church nothing good could happen to us. As a medical team, our ten, myself and eight persons from the medical group, were let into the church.

Normally, the procedure was as follows: everyone was herded to the front of the church, and so the young and the old, the sick and the wounded, as well as the children from various districts and various blocks, as street after street fell, were brought here. So they were coming in small groups from Wola, from September they were coming from the Old Town and from the streets adjacent to the Old Town, from Dobra, Ludna, Lipowa and other streets. A part of the city centre which was adjacent to Krakowskie Przedmieście Street, Czackiego Street, Świętokrzyska Street, Górskiego Street and Chmielna Street. During the last days

of September they were coming from the streets of Żoliborz and two days after Żoliborz, groups started to pour in from Mokotów. Most of Mokotów was sent directly to the West Railway Station [Dworzec Zachodni]. A couple of days later the city centre surrendered and civilians were displaced through the church.

In front of the church specialists were already standing, for example Muller (especially during the first period), who picked out young people that looked to them like insurgents. The same happened to people who were suspected of being of Jewish descent. The selection was supervised by a Pole in an SD uniform, whose name I don't remember. He was blond, average height, with a thick neck. The Jews were taken away, and I have not seen them since.

When a column entered the church grounds, men were separated from women, children, and elderly people. Men were left outside, the rest went into the church. The fates of the men varied. Generally, whoever was suspected of being in the Home Army was taken to prison, interrogated and then sent to camps. A part of the healthy and strong men were left in Warsaw for work, the rest were organized into transports and sent to Pruszków. Women, children and elderly people had a chance to rest a while, then two transports were daily organized to the West Railway Station [Dworzec Zachodni] (going on foot), and from there by train to Pruszków.

When we entered, we saw the following scene: the church was dirty and devastated, the stench and crush of people – awful, the wounded together with children and the elderly, people who were physically and mentally exhausted to the last. General panic and worry of what would happen to them. An SS-man bustled about this helpless and emaciated crowd, and was yelling frightfully, trying to be heard over the lamentations, cries, moans and children calling, he was also hitting everyone blindly with a whip. We immediately started to work. With the help of the people we cleared the chancel near the altar and we organized a makeshift infirmary there. People who had been driven out of their houses took whatever had fallen into their hands – these were the strangest things, both useful and useless. Having arrived at the church, the people were so tired of carrying their stuff that they left half of it in the church, and when they were herded on their way, they took only the items that seemed the most useful. We immediately found quilts and blankets, we spread them around the altar and moved the wounded. I collected some medicines from the people, some dressing materials, and I started to dress wounds.

Day after day and night after night the nightmare continued. An enormous city was being evacuated, people tired from a month of fighting and air raids were being displaced, a string of human tragedies were unfolding before our eyes. I saw scenes that could have been in the Bible.

The order of work was dictated by the situation: a transport arrived – I did my best to get men inside the church. I would say that this one was wounded, that one was sick, I made up various excuses or dragged the men in front of the altar without a pretext. Later, when the Germans got used to me and to my bustling about wherever I was needed or not, I succeeded in asking them for permission to contact my mother hospital, the Wolski Hospital in Płocka Street 26. (I had worked in that hospital before the outbreak of the uprising).

From then on, I not only had dressing materials and medicines at my disposal, but I also had the possibility to officially move the seriously wounded and smuggle them out. This was extremely important, since the hospital had the right to evacuate its patients while bypassing the selection in Pruszków. This way, many young insurgents were able to avoid going to the camps. I then went to the church where the daily work awaited me. I had to attend to the wounded, distribute the necessary medicines to the sick, calm them after the men had been taken away, and order them to prepare and pack wisely for their further journey.

With the help of the displaced people, the nurses managed to construct a kitchen from bricks in front of the church. We cooked some soup – people were hungry, cold and thirsty. The Germans would turn a blind eye more and more often; anyway, it suited them that we somehow managed to bring order to the crowd of people who were constantly flooding in.

I was obtaining food in various ways: from the Wolski Hospital supplies, from the prison behind the vicarage, from the displaced people themselves, from German soldiers, from the municipal icehouse workers, and so on. We made trips for water and tomatoes. I was allowed to move around within the most immediate area and I was able to take several people with me, although obviously I was responsible for their return.

Having attended to and fed one group, I would return to the front of the altar to the people who were more seriously sick or wounded. Occasionally there were childbirths. Here I waited for the next crowd brought to the church. My "domain" ended with the church; I could do little for the people in the prison or in the vicarage. Sometimes they would call for me to carry out some medical procedure, but I was always going there under strict guard.

The Germans' attitudes varied. Sometimes they would grant my requests, sometimes they would beat me mercilessly. On Sunday, around 10 September 1944, we had a sudden visit of a commission of the International Red Cross from Geneva, who wanted to examine the conditions of the evacuation of Warsaw. They asked me detailed questions about everything and then they left with only a curt "Courage, doctor" as a goodbye. After the commission's visit I officially became the doctor of the transition camp in Saint Adalbert Church, who was recognized and accepted by German military and police authorities. From that time on, those who had beat me a couple of days previously now made my work easier.

I remained in Saint Adalbert Church until the end of the evacuation, and thereafter I was permitted to return to my mother hospital in Płocka Street 26, with which I left Warsaw at the end of October.

In conclusion, I would like to add a few general remarks on the conduct of the Germans, which I had the chance to witness personally.

Attitude towards the Home Army – at the beginning the Germans were putting all of their efforts into picking out Home Army soldiers from the crowd of people driven to the church. Since our soldiers knew what would happen to them, they tried to look as much like civilians as possible. Already in Wolska Street the Germans would put out specialists (among others one specialist from the criminal police, whose name I do not know) and they would select the suspects based on appearance (posture and bearing, long boots, facial expression). Their fate was sealed: they either got executed or sent to a concentration camp. That continued until the evacuation of the part of the Czerniaków district closer to the centre.

Probably on Wilanowska Street, a Home Army division (a couple of dozen people) were taken captive after severe fighting. This was the first Home Army division that officially arrived at the church. This was around 20 September 1944. The Germans took them to the prison and held them there for two days, not allowing us even to send them some food. After two days, Vogt sent for me and ordered me to explain to them that they had to confess what military division they were from, and that he declared on his honour that they would be taken, all together, to a normal POW camp and would be treated as prisoners of war. And so it happened. From that time on, wilful abuse of the insurgents ended, and the Polish troops would go in an ordinary battalion formation to the West Railway Station [Dworzec Zachodni], from where they were sent to camps.

The Germans did not allow Home Army soldiers to make contact with civilians. They were not detained in the church any more. Neither I nor the nurses were allowed to get close to them. This is how a part of Czerniaków and Żoliborz were transported.

One day, the Germans brought Berling's men [berlingowcy] from Czerniaków. The condition of the Polish soldiers was heartbreaking. We immediately wanted to attend to their wounds. The Germans did not even let us get near them. They treated them awfully, tormenting and starving them. For a short while they kept them in prison, I don't know what happened to them after that.

At that the report was concluded and read out.