



## JAN KROKOWSKI

Kraków, 17 August 1946. Regional Investigative Judge Jan Sehn, acting in accordance with the Decree of 10 November 1945 (Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland No. 51, item 293) on the Main Commission and Regional Commissions for the Investigation of German Crimes in Poland, as a member of the Main Commission, pursuant to Article 255, in connection with Articles 107 and 115 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, interviewed the person specified below, who testified as follows:

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<b>Name and surname</b>	Jan Krokowski
<b>Date and place of birth</b>	8 May 1921, Nowy Sącz
<b>Parents' names</b>	Jan and Zofia Koeist [?]
<b>Religious affiliation</b>	Roman Catholic
<b>Citizenship and nationality</b>	Polish
<b>Occupation</b>	secondary school student
<b>Place of residence</b>	Nowy Sącz, Mickiewicza Street 14

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I was arrested by the Gestapo in Nowy Sącz on 18 January 1940, on charges of belonging to an illegal organization engaged in transporting Poles to Hungary. After an investigation by Hamann, the head of the Gestapo in Nowy Sącz, I was transferred on 10 May 1940 to the prison in Tarnów. From there, on 14 June 1940, I was sent by rail to the concentration camp in Auschwitz. I arrived in Auschwitz with the first transport of Poles and I was given the number 226 ([the witness] shows the number 226 tattooed on his left forearm).

I stayed in the Auschwitz camp until 28 October 1944, when I was deported to the Sachsenhausen camp and assigned to work at the Heincke plant. After I had undergone quarantine in the building of the Tobacco Monopoly, where I was tortured with sport activities,

I was assigned to a group who carried out earthworks with the use of wheelbarrows at the roll-call square of the main camp, which was then being built. Later on, I worked as a *Reiniger* [cleaner] in block 3, then as a *Läufer* [courier] in block 14, as a bricklayer expanding existing blocks and constructing new ones in the main camp, and as a *Reiniger* in the *Führerheim* [hotel and casino for SS men]. I also carried out earthworks during the construction of the DAW factory [Deutsche Ausrüstungswerke], and then, until the end of my stay in the Auschwitz camp, I was assigned to a unit called *Reinigerkommandantur*.

During the whole time I stayed in the Auschwitz camp, *Obersturmbannführer* Rudolf Höß was its commandant. The *Lagerführer*s were: *Hauptsturmführer* Fritzsche, *Hauptsturmführer* Aumeier, *Obersturmführer* Hoffman, *Hauptsturmführer* Schwarz, an *Obersturmführer* who came to Auschwitz from Majdanek (I do not remember his name), and the last one was *Obersturmführer* Hossler. The position of first *Rapportführer* was held by: Gerhard Palitzsch, Bruno Pfütze, Stiewitz and Claussen, whose deputies were Hertwig and Kaduk. Kaduk was then the head of the *Sonderkommando*, which dealt with the gassing. Maximilian Grabner was the head of the Political Department. His successor in this role was Schurz.

When I worked in the *Reinigerkommandantur* detail, I could freely move around the camp. I also worked, among others, in the building of the SS hospital located opposite crematorium I in Auschwitz. I remember that in June 1942 at noon, around 12.00, while I was working with Bolesław Brygalski, who is currently in Wrocław (I don't know his address), in the SS hospital building near the crematorium, in the building situated close to the house of commandant Höß, trucks loaded with men – Jews in civilian clothes – arrived from the guardhouse located near Höß's house. The vehicles stopped at the square behind the guardhouse. There were several of those vehicles and about 300 men got out (I do not remember exactly how many) and were surrounded by SS men led by Grabner. The SS officers divided them in groups of five and drove them to the crematorium through the door leading to the building facing the square, situated between the crematorium and Höß's house. After everyone was driven into the crematorium, the entrance door was closed, and then Grabner and Müller, who were standing at the top of the crematorium and were watching the whole operation, gave Quakernack and the other *Rottenführer* (I don't remember his name) a signal to start the gassing. Quakernack and the other SS man put on gas masks, took out tall tin cans with yellow stickers out of some backpacks that had been brought to the crematorium building by motorcycles, and placed four cans next to each hole in the roof of the crematorium.



There were four such holes. Quakernack dealt with two, and the other SS man had two more holes to handle. Using special tools (an iron ring the size of the bottom of a can, equipped with saw-like teeth) and a hammer, they opened the cans and emptied them into the crematorium building through the holes. Then, they closed the roof holes with cement covers and other SS men started the engines of two sanitary vehicles and motorcycles standing next to the crematorium. The vehicles stood still, and yet the engines were left on and deafened all the sounds. I would like to point out that sanitary vehicles with clear Red Cross signs were used for every gassing operation. The vehicles brought doctors, who pronounced the victims dead. After a short time, the fans were turned on, the inlets were opened and the contents of the cans were poured into the chamber. Then, camp commandant Rudolf Höß arrived from the direction of his house. He stopped his car next to the crematorium and talked to Grabner, Müller and others who participated in the gassing. When he heard a report on the progress of the operation, Höß drove off towards the camp. After his departure, the SS men dispersed, some guards arrived to watch the crematorium, and life continued its normal course. The gassing took place during the noon break, when all the work details were in the camp. Only Drygalski and I stayed in the hospital building because the SS men left us there by accident. Soon in the evening, dense smoke burst from the crematorium chimney. On the next day, a wagon from the *Bekleidungskammer* [clothing storehouse] arrived at the crematorium and took the clothes that had belonged to the gassed people. According to rumors that circulated at that time among the prisoners, 300 Jews from Silesia were gassed then. The gassing itself did not take long. I believe this was due to the fact that the gassed group consisted only of adult men and there were no children among them. Later on, Jews from the *Sonderkommando* who worked in the crematorium told us that children suffered the longest in the gas chambers. I think this was caused by the fact that Zyklon, which was used for killing people in the Auschwitz gas chambers, is a lighter-than-air gas and quickly escapes upwards.

I saw with my own eyes that one night in the autumn of 1941, a few hundred Russian prisoners were driven past block 24, where I lived at that time, towards block 11. I knew they were Russians because I heard them saying Russian words (*pozhaluysta*) while the SS men were rushing and beating them. The next day, I learned that the previous night 600 Russian prisoners of war and 400 sick Poles were gassed in the basement of block 11. At first, not enough gas was poured inside, so many people were still alive when the chamber was opened;

therefore, the dosage was increased and all of them were killed. According to my knowledge, this was the only time that people were gassed in block 11. From then on, it took place in the gas chamber of crematorium I. Russians, Poles and Jews transported by trucks straight from the town were gassed there. Those people never entered the camp and were not registered.

Höß participated in all operations aimed at exterminating people in the Auschwitz camp. He was present during all executions and watched them with an ironic smile. He also welcomed with the same smile the parade of “Muselmanns” [severely emaciated prisoners] returning from work. I remember that one day, a detail from the *Holzhof* [timber storage area], consisting of about 200 prisoners, passed by Höß. About a quarter of those prisoners were being carried and dragged by their colleagues who could still walk. Many prisoners, who were completely exhausted and dying, were being carried on carts. Höß stood there and smiled. When we saw this scene, we said to each other that Höß was the one man who, by saying a single word, could relieve the suffering of those people. But Höß never did it. On the contrary, he drove around the toughest commandos, personally supervised the work of prisoners, reproached them for being sluggish, which for the people who attracted his attention meant a death sentence, because *Kapos* killed them after Höß’s departure. Together with Himmler, who visited Auschwitz three times when Höß was commandant, they took part in gassing operations. Höß demonstrated to Himmler how prisoners were shot dead, hanged and beaten. Other prisoners told me that during Himmler’s last visit to Auschwitz (I believe it was in April 1944), Höß spent a whole night with Himmler watching the gassing and burning of Hungarian Jews in Birkenau. He hated Poles – even if a Polish prisoner spoke German, Höß never spoke to him directly, but through one of his German subordinates. Prisoners believed that he was a friend of Himmler, which seems to be true because Himmler appointed Höß to a high position in the Berlin headquarters. The head of the Political Department, Grabner, was Höß’s right-hand man and the two spoke very often.

Höß left Auschwitz in November 1943. He was replaced by *Obersturmbannführer* Liebehenschel. During the latter’s time in office, the situation changed significantly to the benefit of the prisoners. It meant that the existing regulations made it possible for SS men to treat prisoners better; therefore only Höß is responsible for the hell prisoners went through in Auschwitz.

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