



MARIA ADAMCZYK

On 17 May 1945 in Warsaw, the judge for the municipal court Antoni Knoll heard as a witness the person specified below; the witness did not swear an oath. Having been advised of the criminal liability for making false declarations, the witness testified as follows:

Name and surname	Maria Adamczyk
Date of birth	5 April 1922
Parents' names	Ignacy and Eugenia
Place of residence	Łódź, Mostowa Street 19C
Occupation	student, secretary of the District Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes in Łódź
Religious affiliation	Roman Catholic
Criminal record	none

During the occupation, I was arrested by the Germans on 29 April 1942 in Warsaw. Until deportation to the concentration camp, i.e. 12 November 1942, I remained in the Pawiak prison on Dzielna 26 (in 'Serbia', the female ward). During the first three weeks of the quarantine the daily schedule was as follows:

5.30 a.m.	waking bell;
6.00 a.m.	morning roll-call and calling of the names of those who were to give testimony that day in the Gestapo headquarters on aleja Szucha or else in Pawiak;
6.00–7.00 a.m.	breakfast: unsweetened black coffee, 20 decagrams of bread (daily ration; once or twice a week a spoon of marmalade);



- 12.00 p.m. dinner: soup, usually very thin and runny; in 1942, for the whole spring season up to the middle of July, pickled cabbage soup (sometimes thickened with a handful of barley groats) was prepared every day; sickwomen, for whom this kind of food was harmful to the health, were deprived of a hot meal during the day; potatoes were scarce;
- 3.30 p.m. supper: soup, usually the same as for dinner; pickled cabbage replaced with pickled beetroot, also with a handful of barley groats;
- 4.00 p.m. evening roll-call after the return of the interrogated prisoners.

During the day, between breakfast and dinner or in the afternoon, there was half an hour for a walk. Sometimes some women were too weak to walk the entire half hour due to exhaustion and starvation. Women from the solitary cells were each having their walks alone.

On the corridors of the women's ward the guard was kept by the Polish service (ward guards), ward leaders (2), a superintendent, and German sergeants, partially recruited from among the 'Ukrainians' and SS men. After the evening roll-call, the Polish service was under no circumstances allowed to open the cell doors. Cases of fainting and sudden indisposition were very frequent. By way of exception the SS man on guard was then brought to personally supervise the opening of the door.

The quarantine cells (ground floor of the building, damp walls) were usually the ones most filled with prisoners (not counting the Jewish one). A plaque on the door indicated that the cell was meant for two or three people. In reality, a single quarantine cell held on average from 15 to 22 people. Newcomers would spend their first 24 hours in the so-called transit cell and after an examination by a hygienist and a bath they would be assigned to the quarantine cells. After three weeks of quarantine the prisoner would be transferred to the so-called permanent cell. The daily schedule would not change.

From April to November of 1942 there were at least 500 women in the prison, and sometimes before deportations there were even more than 500 (twice there were more than 600 prisoners).

Packages from home could not weigh more than 2kg, and the official decree allowed for receiving one package per month. The packages were checked very carefully and the process



was closely observed. The family could send money to a deposit account (opened as the prisoner was placed on the list of inmates), which allowed the prisoner to buy the so-called *wypiska* [food ration] twice a month. This meant that for instance for PLN 8.50 one could get 0.25kg of sugar, 1kg of bread, an onion or radishes, a 0.5kg box of marmalade or artificial honey, sometimes a few sweets; for PLN 12.50 the number of products increased, for PLN 30 it was the same plus 10 decagrams of fat. This was an initiative of the Prison Patronage.

About 100 women (I do not remember the exact number) worked in the prison in various capacities. The mode and conditions of life of the “functional prisoners” were slightly different and better. Those who did the hard work (the “black” laundry – operating washing machines which washed the prisoners’ underwear, the “white” laundry – washing by hand the underwear of Gestapo men, the potato store) – I don’t remember whether the hospital workers were also included – got double rations and had the right to receive a 4kg package once a month and the right to buy cigarettes in the same manner as *wypiski* (one could smoke only in the workplace, e.g. the sewing room). The working hours were between 8.00 a.m. and 4.00 p.m. The food was the same as for the others.

After the deportation of women to the Ravensbrück concentration camp, at the end of May in 1942 (about 300 people), many “functions” were left unoccupied. From June until deportation to the camp, I was working in the “black” laundry. (The *Pawiak* laundry was not only for the prison on *Dzielna Street*, but we also received underwear from other prisons, for instance from *Daniłowiczowska Street*). Before washing, the underwear was to be first sterilized in a boiler, so all the blood stains remained. I very often saw underwear (usually male) stained all over with blood, which testifies to prisoner abuse during interrogations (mainly arms, back, buttocks, and legs).

During my stay in prison, male SS guards of the female ward were working on two shifts, day and night. *Szulc* (allegedly an officer with the Polish Army before 1939 from *Grodno*), one called “*Smętek*” [the sad but dangerous devil from the Kashub legends] (I cannot recall his name), and one called “*Wyłup*” (he had bulging eyes). A man called *Bürkl* was the commander (he used to walk around the prison with a German Shepherd by his side).

One of *Bürkl*’s most sadistic practices were the so-called *udziwienia* [oddities] (prison slang). *Bürkl* very often carried out inspections for tidiness and cleanliness in the cells (always accompanied by the dog). Discovering in any cell a sloppily washed mess tin, a carelessly



rinsed toothbrush, or pots and mess tins crookedly placed on a shelf resulted in Bürkl bringing in a dozen Jewish prisoners from the male ward (most often drunk on vodka).

Women had to leave their cells and stand in the corridor while the Jews, on Bürkl's command, took a few or a dozen minutes to throw everything they found in the cell into the corridor: stools, clothes, blankets, food packages, mattresses. All they would leave inside were bare beds. Obviously, this caused great chaos and confusion. The mattresses were filled with very old, used straw, so the air would instantly be more permeated with particles of dust. The contents of food boxes would land on the floor or among other things (e.g. marmalade, sugar, fat). The Jewish prisoners were trampling on everything in panicked fear of the "master and commander", who would flog them mercilessly and at the same time command one of them to mount the highest pile of things and sing arias from some opera (I remember vividly that *Rigoletto* was sung during an *udziwienie* in August). The tossing of things from all the cells on a floor took around half an hour. Bürkl would then take the Jewish prisoners to the next floor and tell the women that another inspection was to take place in half an hour. If the perfect order was not restored, the whole thing would start all over again.

During an *udziwienie* in May, all the women (apart from those undergoing quarantine), floor by floor, were doing so-called sport, that is to say squats in the yard, each group for an hour.

We saw this all from a small window high up in the wall of our quarantine cell. After several days, when I was already in the permanent cell, I learned that cases of fainting were very frequent during sport; one woman (who suffered from joint pain) lost the use of her legs for several weeks.

From May to November, Bürkl organised several *udziwienia* (five or six). In the lives of the prisoners they were like the dates of deportations to the concentration camps – we used to measure time by them during the long weeks and months of waiting for an interrogation, deportation or release.

Three times a week several women, escorted by an SS man, were taking out the rubbish bins, as the rubbish had to be disposed of at the other end of the prison yard (viewed from the building of the women's prison). They had to cross the maintenance yard. One afternoon when they came back, the women (two from our cell were present there) told us how they had seen Bürkl making men exercise barefoot on red-hot cinders from the boiler house.



Another time I saw for myself (some of us were called to the administrative office) how one SS man (I don't remember his name) invented an exercise for men such that, with paper bags over their heads (so their eyes were covered and they could not breathe freely), they had to run fast while he would frequently interrupt them with commands of "down!" and "up!". The Pawiak yard on the side of the administrative office was paved with uneven stones, so the men often fell and could not get up. They were uttering inhuman screams, and some of them had blood stains on their body and clothes from knocking against the ground and from being beaten.

On 12 November 1942, the day of my deportation to the camp, there were among 52 women some old, grey-haired ones. It was difficult for them to climb the lorry which was taking us to the cargo station quickly, without the aid of stairs. The escorting SS men were beating them with sticks and shoving them, all the while using insulting words.

In this testimony, I recounted only several events most representative of the lives of prisoners and which I saw or experienced myself. Detailed testimonies concerning life in the Pawiak could be provided by: Adela Stadnicka (Rogów nr. Koluszki, Elementary School No.4), Urszula Zybert (Kielce, Jasna Street 28), Irena Wójcik (address to be found at the Association of Former Prisoners in Warsaw), Halina Fronczakowa (Warsaw, Cecylii Śniegockiej Street 5, flat16), Maria Jezierska (Kraków, Dom Akademicki [halls of residence], Reymonta Street 5), Joanna Muszkowska (Łódź, Trębacka Street 3) (1940 – 41), Urszula Wyrwicz (Kraków, Dom Akademicki, Reymonta Street 5), Dr Janina Węgierska (Łódź, Piotrkowska Street 20).

The report was read out.