



MARIA BROEL-PLATER

Warsaw, 4 September 1945. Investigating Judge Mikołaj Halfter interviewed the person named below as a witness. Having been advised of the criminal liability for making false declarations, of the obligation to speak the truth and of the significance of the oath, the witness was sworn and testified as follows:

Name and surname	Maria Broel-Plater
Age	born on 18 December 1913 in Warsaw
Parents' names	Antoni and Helena
Place of residence	Warsaw, Grochowska Street 171, flat 9
Occupation	currently unemployed, before the War she worked as a hospital laboratory technician
Religion	Roman Catholic
Criminal record	none
Relationship to the parties	none

In 1941 I lived with my mother and brother (born in 1911) in Terespol near the river Bug. My brother worked off and on at the railway repair shops, in the bakery, etc., while my mother received a pension and I engaged occasionally in trade. On 13 June 1941 (it was Corpus Christi) at 8.30 a.m. two men appeared at our flat: a Gestapo officer dressed in civilian clothes, well known by sight to all the citizens of Terespol (I do not know his surname) and one Józef Poznański, a *Volksdeutscher* and interpreter (a former sergeant in the Polish Army). Poznański asked whether I was Maria Broel-Plater, and when I confirmed, he ordered me to get dressed, declaring that I was under arrest. While I was getting dressed, the Gestapo officer and Poznański performed a search in our flat. The search was rather casual and only my personal documents were looked through thoroughly.



They took just a few private letters that had been sent to me from abroad during wartime. I had received these letters legally (through the post) from Hungary and Switzerland; they were written in Polish. They contained nothing that could have been used by the Germans to incriminate me. They did not steal anything from us during the search. When they had finished, they instructed me to go with them, and at the same time ordered my brother, Marian Mieczysław Broel-Plater, to come along too. They did not take our mother.

They took us from the flat to the Polish police station, where they left me and my brother. After some time, the Gestapo officer and Poznański brought a few men, inhabitants of Terespol (I did not know these people), to the cell in which I had been detained with my brother. At around 11.00 a.m. the same Gestapo officer and Poznański took all of us arrestees to the Gestapo building, which was located on the outskirts of town. There the men were separated and placed in a different cell, while I (the sole woman in the group) was taken to a cell in which there sat some elderly countrywoman. An hour later, two men were pushed into the cell. Our cell was very dirty and small, with words written on the walls in red (I had the impression that it was blood) and red handprints on the wall, as if the hands that made them had been bloodied. I also saw splashes of blood on one of the walls. Around 12.00 p.m. I was summoned to the office for an interrogation. The Gestapo man who had carried out the arrest was waiting for me there, accompanied by Poznański. They were completely drunk.

The Gestapo officer asked me questions, while Poznański translated them into Polish. First and foremost, the Gestapo officer inquired whether I knew why I had been arrested. I responded in the negative, whereupon they both started hitting me in the face and beating me with fists around the head, chipping one of my teeth in the process (at this point the witness presented her lower front tooth, an incisor, of which only a fragment was left). They kept on hitting me until I lost consciousness. Since then I have had frequent headaches and earaches. Previously, I hardly ever had headaches, although I did experience ear pains, but after this beating my ears hurt more frequently.

I do not know how long I was unconscious. I came to in the same office and felt that I was lying on the floor. The Gestapo officer and Poznański were kicking me in the stomach, breasts and thighs.



When they saw that I had regained consciousness, they ordered me to get up. But I didn't have the strength. Seeing this, Poznański grabbed me by the hair and dragged me to my feet. They asked whether I was a member of the organization. I replied in the negative and on hearing this they started to beat me all over again, in the same way as before. In addition, I was hit once with a rubber truncheon (it was Poznański who administered the blow, bringing the truncheon down across my shoulders). Next they ordered me to undress. Since I did not comply, they tore off my clothes and, calling some 20 young Gestapo men into the office, started laughing at me. All of them were in uniform. Among others, they asked me whether I was not ashamed to stand naked before them. I replied that it was they who should be ashamed of torturing me. They then placed me face down on a table and started hitting me, mainly with rubber truncheons. The first to beat me was Poznański, and he enjoyed himself the longest; the Gestapo officer who had arrested me was second and afterwards the others took turns. I think they were irritated by the fact that I did not scream. Only when one of them grabbed my arm and twisted it did I start to scream, whereupon they hit me a few more times and let me be. Next they ordered me to dress and took me away to the cell.

At around 3.00 – 4.00 p.m. on the same day I was again summoned to the office. Poznański and the Gestapo officer were there, although they had sobered up somewhat. This time they started interrogating me more calmly and asked for my name, surname, date of birth, address, occupation, why I had gone to Hungary, and my education, and then inquired whether I belonged to the organization, who else belonged to the organization, etc. When I replied in the negative, saying that I did not know this, they would hit me with the rubber truncheon on my breasts or face, or kick me. This time the interrogation lasted some three hours. Towards the end I fainted, so they carried me out and threw me into the cell, where I was cared for by the woman who was locked up with me. During the interrogation they assured me that my brother had already confessed. Later I found out that they were lying. Next day in the morning I, my brother and a few other men were taken to Biała Podlaska. We traveled by train, all of us in one compartment. They gave me back my handbag, and so, while we were driving, I wrote a note to my brother, asking whether he had admitted to being a member of the organization, and if so, then why he had lied (for this was a falsehood). My brother wrote back that he had not been interrogated at all.

I wrote him a note (I had a pencil and a piece of paper in my handbag) because I did not want the other people who were with us on the train to hear what we would have been talking about.

Around 1.00 p.m., more or less, we arrived in Biała Podlaska, where we were led to some building near the station, near which the Germans separated the men from the women.

I sat in the office for a few hours, guarded by a Gestapo man, after which I was taken to the prison in Biała Podlaska. There were nearly no political prisoners there. I was placed in the "exemplary" cell (it was shown in the event of visitations), which was exceptionally clean. There were a number of women in the cell, and they had been sentenced to a few years of imprisonment for theft, banditry, etc. The food was terrible: in the morning they would give us water colored with chicory and 10 – 15 decagrams of wholemeal bread for the entire day. For lunch, we would receive boiled water – only slightly salted – with some weeds, while the evening meal was identical to breakfast: coffee, obviously without sugar, and now and then some soup, the same as for lunch. We were allowed to receive food and clothing parcels once a week. Letters could be written once a week, too. The correspondence sent to us and by us reached the respective addressees. After spending two weeks in the prison, I was summoned for an interrogation (this was the end of June 1941). They interrogated me in the same way as in Terespol, that is to say they asked the same questions and hit me, however not with rubber truncheons, but with canes. The questions were formed in a most unintelligent manner and in such a way that I was able to prepare myself for them – and get my answers ready – in advance. I was interrogated a few more times in Biała Podlaska, more or less every week or two. Every such examination was conducted in the Gestapo building, to which I was usually taken on foot, mainly in the morning hours. During the final interrogation in Biała Podlaska, I was questioned by a certain new Gestapo officer (I do not know his surname), while the interpreter was one Szymański (that is what they told me in prison), a stout, black-haired man. I later heard from friends in Terespol that he was killed in Biała Podlaska in the street. Szymański was also a *Volksdeutscher*. (I recently heard that, allegedly, Poznański died in Terespol in 1942). The last interrogation was very long, lasting a few hours. The Gestapo man alleged that I had taken part in the poisoning of wells in Terespol, which resulted in the mass deaths of horses. Finally, he declared that for this I should expect the death penalty.

When I replied that, clearly, there was no evidence against me, the Gestapo man responded that it was sufficient that I was a woman of education. During the interrogation Szymański, instructed by the Gestapo officer, hit me a few times with a cane. At some point the Gestapo man withdrew his revolver, placed the barrel against my breast and declared that if I did not admit to everything at once, he would shoot me right there. When I did not confess, he stated that in a few days' time I would be taken to Lublin, where I would see how a real interrogation – and real beatings – looked like.

When I asked what they intended to do with my brother, he said that my brother had been arrested in error and would be freed. After the interrogation I was taken back to the prison in an open carriage, while two days later I was conveyed to Lublin by truck, together with my brother and one other man. We did not talk with each other during the journey, for we were accompanied by Gestapo men. I noticed that my brother was very haggard and pale.

Along the way, in Radzyń, a larger transport of prisoners was loaded onto the truck, and I made use of the occasion to exchange a few words with my brother. He said that he had been interrogated only once, and also beaten, but not heavily. They had asked him mainly about me, where I went, what I did, and whom I met. In Radzyń the truck was loaded full with prisoners, and it became very cramped. The prisoners were extremely gaunt. The convoy was commanded by a Gestapo officer, one Jan Dietrich (he was around 30 years old, and spoke fluent Polish). During the transport he behaved with great cruelty and did not miss a single chance to hit someone; he also threatened the prisoners that they would be executed, etc. Later on, while in prison, I learned that he was one of the most bestial Gestapo men in Lublin. When I was in Ravensbrück, the women who came to the camp at a later date told me that, allegedly, Dietrich had been executed by the Lublin Gestapo – purportedly for cooperating with the British. I do not know whether this was true.

We arrived in Lublin at around 11.00 p.m. There, the men were separated from the women. The men were led to the Castle tower, where the conditions were horrendous (I was informed of this while in the Castle), while we were taken to the women's ward. I was placed in the so-called "corner cell". There were some 15 women there. The cell was very dirty and damp, and infested with insects. The food was such that we were constantly hungry. If not for the parcels that we received from the city, none of us would have made it.

On 30 July 1941 my brother, together with some other prisoners, was driven off to Oświęcim. I was informed of this by the senior female inmates, who were in contact with the prison guards. Thereafter I did not receive any information about my brother.

Presently, having returned home, I learned that my family had been informed by the Gestapo from Oświęcim that my brother had died in the camp. I was recently told by those who knew my brother from Oświęcim that while there he had fallen ill with influenza and died of exhaustion in 1942.

I remained in Lublin until 21 September 1941. I was not interrogated there. I was not beaten, but I fell ill, my entire back was suppurating, right down to my knees, as the dirt and filth in the prison contaminated the wounds that I had received while being interrogated in Terespol and Biała Podlaska.

On 23 September 1941 a group of 155 women from Lublin, myself amongst them, arrived in Ravensbrück. In Warsaw a transport of women from Pawiak, numbering 200 or so, was added to our train. The camp in Ravensbrück was located some 80 kilometers north-west of Berlin, in Mecklenburg. It was some four kilometers from the township of Fürstenberg. The camp was located in a densely forested valley. In 1941 it had 25 barracks, but was later expanded to include some 40 barracks (32 of which were for inmates).

The camp was surrounded by a high wall, topped with electrified wire. The food was clearly insufficient, and we would receive fat only once a week, on Saturdays, in the form of 5 decagrams of butter or cheese.

The women who did not receive any food parcels usually died of typhoid brought on by hunger. We were allowed to receive parcels only from November – December 1942. Everything depended on the mood of the overseers: sometimes you would be allowed to receive as many as three parcels per month, but sometimes not even one.

In the years 1941-1942 the inmates of the camp were mainly from Poland and Germany, including Polish or German Jewesses and Gypsies. In 1941 there were more German women in Ravensbrück than Poles. They had been imprisoned for being opposed to the Hitler regime, for shirking work, or for engaging in illegal trading. The prison guards did not treat the Germans better than us, for they were considered as enemies of Hitlerism. German prostitutes and women who had Polish friends would also be sent to the camp.

Women from Western Europe – French, Belgian, and later on even Italian – started arriving towards the end of 1942. As a matter of fact, there were even Turkish inmates. They were of different backgrounds: political prisoners constituted the majority, but there was also a criminal element.

It was a labor camp. Work was performed: a) outside the gate and b) within the camp. Work performed outside the gate included the cultivation of vegetables, loading of coal, wood, flour, etc., the construction of roads (if the building site was further away from the camp, prisoners would be driven there by trucks).

Within the camp there were mainly workshops that produced goods for the army. For example, we would make boots out of straw, sew uniforms and underwear, and also line military overcoats with furs, which were brought in – frayed – in large quantities.

On 18 November 1942 I was summoned to the hospital, where I and some other women were kept under observation for two days. Apart from me, nine other women – all Poles – were put in the hospital. On the morning of 20 November I received an injection – of morphine, I think – and at noon, half drowsy, I was taken to the operating theater. There I was given a second injection and fell asleep. Of course no one had asked for my consent to the operation. I woke up in the theater; it was evening. Next to me stood the head doctor, whose surname was Oberheuser. I had strong chills. During the night my temperature rose considerably.

I felt a very strong pain in my right lower leg. I looked at my leg, but I did not notice any marks – apart from a needle prick some 3 – 4 centimeters below the knee. I had no wounds and no dressings. Only the spot of the needle prick looked as if someone had spread calcium over it. But when I rubbed off this white powder, I saw nothing. However, my whole leg hurt from my toes right up to the groin and it gradually started to swell. After two days, my ankle (of the right leg) was heavily swollen, so much so that my ankle bone could not be seen, while the skin around the spot was dark, nearly black. It was somewhat lighter in color, but also dark red, right up to the lower leg. Higher up – right up to the knee – it was reddish and swollen, however considerably less so than the ankle. I was also running a high temperature. I heard nurse Hanschen (her name) say that I had around 40 degrees in the morning and even more in the evening. This lasted for more or less six weeks. Starting on the day after the procedure,



I would receive five intravenous injections of some pinkish liquid every morning. These injections were large, some 20 cubic centimeters each.

I did not notice whether the liquid was oily.

The liquid was injected very slowly, and the whole procedure was very painful. Apart from this, a few hours after the injections (ampules, of 20 cm each, were injected one after the other), I would also receive intramuscular injections of one or two small ampules (maybe 1 – 2 cm each). I felt better after these shots. However, after the large morning injections I felt weakened. Throughout this period of six or so weeks I was fed in hospital with large quantities of sweets, including porridge and compotes (which resembled syrups). Apart from that, the food was better than in the barracks. I had no appetite. During this period my heart was weak and I experienced headaches. As a matter of fact, I felt completely ill.

I was unable to get up at all. On the third day after the first procedure some doctor dressed in a uniform and doctor's coat gripped my leg and seemed extremely pleased, telling one of the nurses in German that "she is ready, she can go for the operation". I had learned a bit of German by then. Two or three days after the first procedure I was operated on under general anesthesia. I was unconscious for three days after. I know this from friends who were lying with me in the hospital. When I regained consciousness I realized that my leg was bandaged from my toes right up to my knee. I think that my leg had not been put in plaster. My whole leg was in considerable pain and it was very swollen. Three or four days after the procedure I received my first dressing. The dressing was applied under anesthesia, too.

I know that it was a dressing because I overheard one nurse saying so to another.

I was told by my friends that the dressing was applied over a period of one hour and a half. A few days later I was given another dressing – as I was told. Again, it was applied under general anesthesia. My friends told me that the application of this dressing took half an hour. Pus was secreting intensely from under the bandages, so the dressing was soaked through only a few hours after it had been applied. In the evening I would usually be given morphine in liquid form (we drank it), while for the night we would be left without care. I received morphine for three weeks after the operation. Some time after the second dressing had been applied, I availed myself of the nurse's absence and unbandaged my leg in order to have a look. I saw two wounds: one from the ankle to the knee (at this point the witness



showed a scar with a length of approximately 15 cm and a width of approximately 3 cm on the right side of her calf, and a second scar at the front of the lower leg, with a length of approximately 10 cm) and a second at the front of the lower leg. I would like to add that these scars are smaller than the original wounds. Pus mixed with blood flowed profusely from these wounds.

I stayed in the hospital until Christmas 1942, all the time with a high temperature. After Christmas my temperature started to fall. Throughout our stay in the hospital Doctor Oberheuser was very interested in our legs and the state of our health. At some date during this time I had a strong heart attack, around noon, and I remember that Oberheuser ran up to me and gave me an injection of camphor. I assume that the attack occurred due to the weakening of my heart in connection with my high temperature. During the period between the operation and Christmas my temperature rose a few times, in irregular intervals (this happened three or four times), and my entire body swelled. Blisters would appear on my skin, as if I had been stung with nettles. My whole body would then burn and itch. These sensations would last for four – five days and thereafter rapidly disappear. I had the impression that Oberheuser was somewhat surprised and worried by these developments. However, I was not given any special treatment in such instances.

I was operated on in another group than Władysława Karolewska. The girlfriends who had been hospitalized along with me reacted to their operations differently than I did. I think that each one of us was treated distinctly, that is to say that we all underwent different procedures. For example, four of my friends received the "pin pricks" that I had experienced before my operation, but they were not operated on, instead being sent back to their blocks after a few days.

On 15 January 1943, I was transferred from the hospital to the block from which I had walked or been carried to the hospital for dressings. I stayed in the block nearly until June. Throughout this time I was exempt from work. I received the same food as the other women in the barracks, however with the difference that in the morning I would also be given porridge. Towards the end of June one of my scars (the one on the side of the calf), which had nearly healed, opened up and pus and blood started flowing from it. This lasted for more or less one week. My temperature rose to around 39 degrees. However, I did not want to go to the hospital. My dressings were applied by a nurse from our block.

After a week, my leg healed up and the wounds did not reopen again. Even today, my leg hurts from time to time with such intensity that I am unable to walk. I feel as if a current was passing through me. I cannot touch the scar on my leg without experiencing considerable pain. Walking is troublesome.

My ankle is the source of greatest bother.

In July 1943 I was summoned yet again to the hospital, for a fresh operation, but I did not go. No measures were taken against me. I was not sent to hard labor, instead working in the block, in the hose-weaving shop. The "rabbits", as we – the operatees – were called, were not allowed to leave the camp and work outside the gate, this because once one of the "rabbits" had gone to work outside the gate and some German gardener had seen the scars on her legs, whereupon she told him everything about the operations. This German (an old-fashioned person) was outraged. Clearly, the camp commandant was informed of this fact and decreed that we were not to be let out. In any case, both the overseers and the nurses kept on repeating to us that we would never be let out of the camp, so that no one would ever learn that these experiments had been carried out on us.

In February 1945 one of my friends, an inmate, told us that Gebhardt had notified that he was fleeing the Russian armies and in connection therewith had instructed the camp commandant to eliminate us, the "rabbits". Shortly thereafter the "rabbits" were summoned by name to appear before the camp authorities. However, we did not turn up; instead, making use of the disorder in the camp and the enormous number of prisoners (several dozen thousand at the time), we discarded our numbers and triangles and proceeded to conceal ourselves in other blocks. This lasted a few weeks, until the arrival of the Swedish Red Cross.

The report was read out.

Report

Warsaw, 14 September 1945. Investigating Judge Mikołaj Halfter, implementing the motion submitted by the Prosecutor of the District Court in Warsaw – through the agency of the following physicians and professors: Doctor Adam Gruza, son of Kazimierz and Dorota, director of the Central Institute of Traumatic Surgery, temporarily resident at the Child Jesus Hospital in Warsaw, present, not punished by any court decision, and Professor Wiktor Grzywo-Dąbrowski, director of the Institute of Forensic Medicine of Warsaw University, resident in Warsaw at Grochowska Street 246, both appointed in the capacity of court experts, with the latter having taken an oath – performed a medico-legal examination of Maria Broel-Plater, known in the case.

Medical history: the subject stated that as a child she had suffered inflammation of the bronchi and lungs. While detained in Ravensbrück, being in good health, she was directed to the camp hospital on 18 November 1942, where she remained under observation for two days. Thereafter she received an intravenous injection, following which she became semiconscious. Next, she was given another injection and fell asleep. She awoke on the general ward after three to four hours (she was told this by her friends, who were on the same ward). She felt a shooting, jagged pain in her right leg. When she looked at her leg, she noticed a tiny red hole just under her knee, as if a pin prick, around which there was some white, dried up powder. She had a high temperature. On the second day her leg started to swell intensely. There was strong ankle tumefaction and the ankle started to turn black. The greatest swelling occurred in the ankle and above it, up to the knee. Her leg hurt right up to the groin. Two days after the procedure the physician inspected her leg and stated that it was "good for operating". On the next day she was taken to the operating theater, where after receiving an unspecified injection she fell asleep. She awoke on the general ward with her leg bandaged from the groin right down to the knee, whereas she had stiff inserts of some sort under the bandage.

She ran a temperature exceeding 40 degrees. The leg was very painful and heavy. Blood and pus seeped through the bandages.

Injections of some kind were given – maybe some 100 cm intravenously, at one go. After lunch the doctors gave her smaller intramuscular shots in the left leg. Two days after the operation she was anesthetized again, probably for the purpose of changing her dressing.

When she woke up, her leg was normally bandaged. A few days later, she received a fresh "dressing" under anesthesia. Injections – over a period of one to two weeks, every evening to drink – morphine (?). Large number of calcium shots (maybe 10). A high temperature until Christmas: 38 – 39 degrees, then it started to fall. A subfebrile temperature continues to the present day. Sometimes she experiences pain in the apex of her right lung. In January 1943 she felt better and started getting out of bed, while in the second half of January she began walking on crutches. The wounds to her leg had not yet healed up. Pus. Her leg tends to twist in the ankle, as if some tendon was missing. She lay in bed until spring of this year. In March – April 1943 the wounds cicatrized. In June the wound opened up again. Pus secreted therefrom for more or less a week, whereafter the wound healed. Her leg hurts to the present day. The pain becomes apparent both when she walks a lot and also while she is lying in bed at night.

Present condition: the subject is of medium height, well-built, poorly nourished, her knee reactions are lively, with the right knee being somewhat weaker, less lively than the left. The Achilles tendon reflex on the right side is weak and lively on the left. The lower extremities show no dysfunctions and their strength is normal. No objective changes have been found in the nervous system in addition to those described above. No distinct changes have been determined in the internal organs. On the front of the right shank, somewhat to the rear, there is a linear scar with a length of 11 cm, running from top to bottom, which ends 10 cm above the apex of the external ankle, with a width of 1 – 1.5 cm, smooth, white inside, and elsewhere grayish-yellowish in color, not coalesced with the base. To the rear, at a height of 1/3 of the shank, on the outside, there is a second scar, with a length of 16 cm and a width of 2 cm, linear, which runs longitudinally; its lower section is coalesced with the tendons, while the upper – solely with the fascia. In the upper end of the scar there is a palpable subcutaneous nodule the size of a small hazelnut, which when pressed induces a tingling sensation and a feeling of electrization, while the fibula at the level of the scar is irregularly enlarged and tender. It is the same below the scar. The circumference of the right calf is 12 cm, while of the left – 13 cm.

The subject walks with effort to spare her right leg.

When duly queried, the court experts gave the following, concordant and temporary opinion: on the basis of the subject's medical history and findings made, we have come to

the conclusion that the first procedure performed on Maria Broel-Plater consisted in the injection of infectious material in the vicinity of the fibula, while successive procedures consisted in performing incisions with the objective of releasing pus. These procedures constituted a serious threat to the life of the victim for a period of three to four months. Presently, dysfunctions of the lower extremities are slight.

In order to issue a final opinion, it would be necessary to analyze the radiograms that should have been taken when the operated extremity was x-rayed.

Additional opinion in the case of M. Broel-Plater

1. As we can see on the radiogram taken on 18 October, on the lateral surface of the right fibula – in the upper and central part thereof – there is a flat indentation (bone defects), most probably created by the chiseling of bone lamina.
2. Taking the above into consideration and also the findings of the medico-legal examination of the subject and the content of her medical history, I have come to the conclusion that the subject, without any medical indications, received some sort of injections, most probably of infectious material, after which the tissue was incised in order to release pus.
3. As a consequence of the said infection, the subject ran a high temperature, which lasted up to four months. During this period the subject's life was at risk.
4. The said procedures (injections to the right shank) brought about a disorder of health connected with the dysfunction of the right leg for a period of approximately six months.
5. It all looks as if the woman was subjected to experiments aimed at analyzing the impact of injections of infectious material on her body. Further, given the results of the x-ray examination, we have come to the tentative conclusion that bone lamina were cut off from the right fibula, this for a purpose unknown to us.

16 October 1945