



## LEON FINKELSZTEIN

On 28 December 1945, in Siedlce, Judge Z. Łukaszewicz interviewed the person specified below as a witness, without swearing him in. Having been advised of the criminal liability for making false declarations, the witness testified as follows:

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<b>Forename and surname</b>	Leon Finkelsztein
<b>Age</b>	43
<b>Names of parents</b>	Abram
<b>Place of residence</b>	Warsaw, Jagiellońska Street 9-2
<b>Occupation</b>	butcher
<b>Religious affiliation</b>	Judaism
<b>Criminal record</b>	none

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I arrived at Treblinka on 22 July 1942 with a transport of Jews from Międzyrzec Podlaski. The transport consisted of about 7,000 people. Each wagon usually contained 200 men, women and children. Since the wagons had been sprinkled with chloride, many people died on the way; so after the arrival at Treblinka, 50 percent of the people in the wagons were dead. When the wagons were opened, people were herded out into a courtyard. I saw a great number of dressed corpses in this courtyard and I realized that we had been brought here for extermination. In the courtyard, the men were separated from the women and children, but the SS-man gave a speech in which he assured us that after our bath finished we would be sent to work, whereas our possessions, money and valuables, which he had ordered us to hand over to be stored away, would be returned to each person.

I want to add that during the arrival of the train there was an orchestra at the ramp playing so as to inspire trust among people.



When the men were separated, I was able to join a group of laborers, who had red marks on their trousers. I learnt from them that they were used to work in the camp and so I fixed the red mark on my trousers and this was how I survived. I did not know then what had happened to the group of people (where my family was) that had been transported with me. It was only later that I learnt from other laborers that there were operational chambers in the camp for killing victims.

When I arrived at the camp, the area had not yet been surrounded with a fence and straight away on the second day after arrival I was assigned to a group of laborers who were constructing fences. I worked like that for three weeks. After that, the SS-man Franz selected 200 of the strongest men out of our group and led us to the second part of the camp where the chambers were located. There I learnt from a cook that 200 laborers had been executed there the day before, because they had rioted and refused to work in the chambers. We were to replace them. At that time, three chambers were in operation in one building. The entrances to individual chambers ran from a corridor and were closed with a tightly fitting door. Outside, there were large hatches that could be lifted up, through which the corpses were removed. The walls of the chambers were tiled. Next to the chambers, in an extension, was a motor whose fumes were used to poison the victims. Death followed after about 20 minutes. Sometimes, when the motor was out of order, the chambers were sprinkled with chloride and then the victims suffered for a very long time. I can remember cases when after a whole night of being poisoned in such a way people were still alive and were thus buried.

It is not true that the chambers had sliding floors. Corpses were removed through the hatches, described above, and the laborers who were working there had to drag the victims out into the pits in a rush while being constantly beaten by the SS-men and Ukrainians. For a while, there was a short railway with little wagons to transport corpses, but it was soon dismantled since the loading of the wagons took too much time, according to our "butchers." Corpses were simply dragged into the pits by the laborers.

Some time after my arrival at this part of the camp, so-called dentists were introduced, i.e. laborers equipped with pincers with which they had to extract gold teeth from the oral cavities of corpses.



As I stressed earlier, at first the corpses were buried in pits. There were 21 pits like that in our part of the camp, with masses of corpses inside them. I think that individual pits could hold even 200,000 corpses each.

As for the cremation of corpses, initially (still in 1942), they tried cremating corpses in piles, but this did not yield good results; so, as early as 1943 they started to build furnaces in the pits, with special ventilation devices used to pump air in. The cremation in these furnaces was also unsuccessful, so eventually they constructed ordinary grates made of pieces of iron railway tracks resting on concrete foundations. Such grates could hold many corpses at once and the cremation produced good results. A grate was set on fire with a little amount of wood or rags soaked in petrol and then the corpses burnt by themselves.

The corpses were extracted from the pits with *Bagier* diggers (which were also used to dig pits), or they were removed by laborers with pitch forks. A large quantity of corpses still remained in the pits as the laborers tried to do small acts of sabotage in such a way that, when the Germans or Ukrainians weren't paying attention, they covered a large quantity of corpses with sand, thus avoiding cremation. As far as I can remember, in November 1942, a new building containing ten gas chambers was put into operation; the extermination was also conducted with exhaust fumes; the capacity of these chambers was considerably higher.

It seems that in the early spring of 1943 Himmler conducted an inspection of the camp. He was also shown the second part of the camp with all the details.

In the first part of the camp, Germans exterminated a considerable quantity of victims in the so-called *lazarett*. This was a place where all those who were not able to reach the chambers on their own (and so older people, the sick and little children) were killed with small-bore guns. I do not know if these corpses were cremated.

In our part of the camp, the cremation lasted until the uprising and I do not know what happened later. The ashes were mixed with sand and put in the pits for corpses.

As for the number of victims killed in Treblinka, it is difficult to determine it accurately. In my opinion, from my arrival to the camp until the uprising, there were constant transports of between 3,000 to 12,000 people. Treblinka was the final destination for the Jews from Poland, then from Germany, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Belgium and Greece.



The personnel of the camp consisted of SS-men and Ukrainians, who committed many atrocities and murders on their own. When the victims were being herded into the chambers, the Ukrainians – Iwan, Mikołaj and Woroskow – cut women’s breasts off with their sabres. There were Jewish laborers working in both parts of the camp who were also treated with extreme cruelty and constantly killed.

On 2 August 1943, Jewish laborers staged an uprising, which had been prepared for a long time, during which many Germans and Ukrainians were killed and a large number of laborers managed to escape. I took an active part in the preparations for the uprising and in the fighting. I escaped from the camp during the uprising after the fighting had stopped.

The witness interview report was read out to the witness and he confirmed it by signing it on each page.