



MICHAŁ STEFAŃSKI

On 28 June 1954 in Trzebionka, Investigative Judge of the District Court Jan Sehn, member of the Main Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes in Poland, at the request, in the presence and with the participation of Deputy Prosecutor Dr. Wincenty Jarosiński, pursuant to Art. 254 and in connection with Art. 107 and 115 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, interviewed Michał Stefański, named below as a witness. Having been advised of the criminal liability for making false declarations, the witness testified as follows:

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| Name and surname | Michał Stefański |
| Date and place of birth | 22 September 1895, Książnica, Bochnia district |
| Parents' names | Jan and Katarzyna, <i>née</i> Malarz |
| Nationality and citizenship | Polish |
| Religious affiliation | Roman Catholic |
| Marital status | married |
| Occupation | mechanic |
| Place of residence | Trzebionka 52, Chrzanów district |

I have lived in Trzebionka at no. 52 since 1929. At a short distance from my house, on the other side of the road, there was a pasture. It existed until 1942. In 1942, I don't remember the exact date, the German occupation authorities ordered barracks to be built on the site of the pasture. Already at that time people said that the barracks would house prisoners of war of different nationalities. The process of building the barracks continued until 1944. There were 11 of them altogether. Apart from these barracks, there were also small farm buildings (the latter are still surviving). In 1944, a crematorium, in which Jews who were killed by the Germans, was built on the campgrounds.



Toward the end of 1942, groups of workers from Belgium started coming in the camp. Most of them were qualified workers – locksmiths and boilermakers. Lodged in the barracks, the Belgians were put to work assembling tanks in the oil refinery in Trzebinia. At that time these buildings weren't enclosed with wires, and the Belgians enjoyed a relative freedom of movement. During our conversations, they often complained about being hungry. Left unguarded in the camp, they could contact the local population. Their difficult work lasted from 10 to 12 hours a day.

Toward the end of November or at the beginning of December, the camp saw the arrival of the first transports of British prisoners of war. The first two transports arrived in 1942 and contained about 300 prisoners. In total, there were about 600 British prisoners in Trzebionka. Their arrival changed the character of the camp. The building complex, which consisted of six blocks, was enclosed with barbed wire. The fence was 4 meters tall and the wire was tight. Because my house is situated 15 meters away from the camp fence, I had the opportunity to observe what went on within the camp premises. Apart from the fence surrounding the camp, four sentry towers were erected in the campground corners in 1944. SS guards kept watch day and night to make sure that no British prisoner managed to escape or contact the local population.

The Germans threatened to arrest those who would contact British prisoners. Despite these threats, the local population contacted the English during their work, communicating with them either in German, which many of them spoke, or in Polish. One of these prisoners was from Lwów. While still a boy, he left the city and went to America where he learned English. There were also some English Jews who spoke Polish.

The English POWs were employed for different types of work. They had to unload train cars and carry bricks, sand and cement. They also worked at the Oil Refinery as ordinary laborers. Guarded by the Germans both within the camp and during their work, they got up at 5.00 a.m. and went to bed at 9.00 p.m. Their leisure hours were spent in cleaning, mending and washing their clothes and their underwear. Generally, English soldiers weren't beaten, but on a number of occasions it happened that one of the SS men hit an English prisoner. This provoked violent protests both from the one who had been hit and from his fellow countrymen.

Working in the factory, I had the opportunity to get in contact with, and talk to, the English prisoners-of-war. From the conversations we held I know that the food rations in the camp weren't good. They had coffee for breakfast and supper, soup and potatoes or kasha for



dinner. They were also given some amount of bread (I am unable to specify how much) and, sometimes, a piece of margarine, marmalade and sausage. They told me that the food they were given was so lousy and smelled so bad that it wasn't fit for consumption. For this reason they often threw it away. They ate what they received from their families and from the Red Cross. The packages they were sent contained dry foodstuffs, which they traded with the civilian population for bread, fat, and dairy products. They slept on three-story beds. Each of them was allotted a separate bed. The Germans checked their number during the roll-calls which were held three times a day: in the morning, in the afternoon, and in the evening.

They were very friendly towards the local population – an attitude which they showed at every turn, in their smiles and gestures or through the agency of other people. As they exchanged food with the locals, they often tried to help them. In saying the “civilian population”, I refer only to Poles. Immediately upon the arrival of the English soldiers in the camp in Trzebionka, the locals tried to get in touch with them. Living in the close vicinity of the camp, I would go out to see how the Germans treated the English prisoners.

One day, one of the English prisoners-of-war began to communicate with me in sign language. He even threw me a bar of chocolate. I often talked to him using sign language. At the beginning of January 1944, he tried to communicate through signs with my twenty-year-old daughter Maria. From the gestures he made, she understood that he wanted to see her at our home at 5.00 p.m. We didn't know if it was possible, and we were wondering how he was going to do it being so closely guarded by SS men. However, on that day we were waiting for him. At 5.00 p.m. he turned up at our place, alone. Having introduced himself to my family in German, he spoke to me in that language. At that time my daughter didn't speak German and, consequently, she couldn't communicate with him. From our conversation I learned that his name was Alexander Todd Wood and that he was Catholic. English by birth, he was the son of Robert and Elisabeth, born on 13 November 1916 in Greenock in Scotland. He told me that he had bribed the German who was keeping watch at the gate and was thus allowed to pay us a visit. A twenty-year-old man, the SS man took to Todd. Thanks to the relationship Todd established with the German, he could, when it was dark and when the German was on his guard duty, slip out of the camp and visit us. Leaving the camp required Todd to take painstaking measures of precaution. He put socks on his shoes in order to avoid leaving shoe prints on the snow. The German always escorted him through side paths to our house. Until 23 January 1944, he visited us almost every other day.



We discussed various topics. He described life in England and talked about the war and the Germans to whom he was hostile. He harbored warm feelings for the Poles. At one point he began to complain about his captivity and declared he had to escape from the camp. Some time after the conversation – and at that time the German whom he would bribe was on his leave and was absent from the camp – Todd arrived at our place. He had previously asked me in a letter he had thrown over the barbed wire to prepare some civilian clothes for him. It was on 23 January 1944. Upon his arrival, along with another English prisoner-of-war, he said that he and his friend had just escaped from the camp and he asked for civilian clothes which we gave them.

Todd told us how they had escaped. Because it was impossible for too many prisoners to escape at one time, it had been agreed that their fellow prisoners would divert SS men's attention from one section of the barbed wire. When the latter engaged SS men in conversation, Todd and his companion cut the wire with pincers and escaped. Afraid that they might be captured at my home – my family and I ran the risk of being executed for hiding them – I told my wife to go with them to Kraków. After a three-day stay in Kraków, they both returned to Trzebieńka. Todd stayed with us and his companion with our neighbor called Struzik. Because the Germans launched an extensive search for the fugitives we thought that our homes would be searched too and that is why we sent both of them to Frydrychowice, to our acquaintance, Stanisław Michalak. After one week Todd returned while, as I heard, his companion joined one of the partisan groups. We put down Todd's return to the fact that he was very fond of our daughter. Later, he even declared that he wanted to marry her. Todd was hiding with us until 1 June 1945. As an English soldier, he was under obligation to report back for duty. Before he left, he wanted to marry my daughter, but the church authorities refused to perform the wedding ceremony because he was a foreigner.

I think that the reason we were able to hide Todd was that the Germans assumed it was highly unlikely for someone who lived so close to the camp, just fifteen meters away, to risk severe punishment and offer shelter to the fugitive. We could also rely on the help of the SS man whom Todd had bribed and who informed us of impending searches and of any other danger we might be in. As Todd was with us, we took painstaking measures of precaution. The door and windows were kept shut and we told Todd to hide in the basement every time someone was coming to us. Todd paid no attention to the danger to which he was exposed and would walk through the fields and streets with my daughter. My family and I risked a lot,



because English prisoners-of-war knew that we were hiding Todd and those of them who decided to escape, which happened a couple of times, always passed through our house, taking advantage of our assistance.

The English prisoners-of-war weren't subjected to any severe harassment. This is at least what I learned from those of them with whom I got in touch. At the end of July or at the beginning of August, the English were transferred from Trzebionka to another camp. At that time the camp began to be enclosed with high-voltage wire and the English were replaced with Jews brought in from Auschwitz. The latter were brought in several transports, about 900 in number.

I saw how the Jews were treated both within the camp premises and during their work. They were given different types of work to do. They were put to work building up factories and unloading goods. They also worked within the campgrounds. All the tasks with which they were entrusted had to be done at a pace. They worked from dawn to dusk, and the food they were given was very poor. The Jews I met complained all the time that they were hungry. Wearing nothing but some thin cotton striped uniforms, they suffered great ill-treatment at the hands of SS men and *kapos*, which I saw with my own eyes. The *kapos* were Germans. I saw them kick and beat the Jews with their hands and sticks without paying any attention where they were beating them. The persecuted received serious wounds and some of them died. SS men maltreated Jews for no reason at all or for some minor offenses.

It seems to me that in October 1944 in Trzebionka the Germans built a crematorium in which they incinerated the corpses of the Jews who died or whom they killed. Before the crematorium was put into operation, the bodies of dead Jews were taken to Auschwitz and burnt there. I don't know what the crematorium looked like inside and I can't describe the way in which the bodies were burnt. The corpses to be burnt in the crematorium were first put onto some tin trough before the crematorium and inserted into the furnace. I know that before they left Trzebionka the Germans tried to blow up the camp but, for some reason, they failed to carry out the plan and destroyed only the crematorium.

At that the report was concluded, read out and deemed consistent with Michał Stefański's testimony.