

## PIOTR JELEŃ

On 9 September 1947 in Kraków, a member of the Main Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes in Poland, Appellate Investigating Judge Jan Sehn, on the written application of the First Prosecutor of the Supreme National Tribunal dated 25 April 1947 (file no. NTN 719/47), in accordance with the provisions of and procedure provided for under the Decree of 10 November 1945 (Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland No. 51, item 293), in conjunction with article 254, 107, 115 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, heard as a witness the below mentioned former prisoner of the Auschwitz concentration camp, who testified as follows:

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Name and surname	Piotr Jeleń
Age	28
Religious affiliation	Roman Catholic
Citizenship and nationality	Polish
Occupation	plumber
Place of residence	Kraków, [...]

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I was imprisoned in the concentration camp in Auschwitz from the beginning of May 1942 until 15 January 1945. I was arrested as a Polish political prisoner. In Auschwitz, I received no. 40328.

From the beginning I was employed in the *Bauleitung* [building authority]. Initially, I worked on fitting the delousing area in block 1 and the baths between blocks 1 and 2 of the parent camp. For the insulation of the furnace in this bathhouse, ashes from the bodies of 280 Poles from the Lublin transport were used; they were shot in September 1942 in two installments at block 11 and then burnt in crematorium I. This was ordered by *Schutzhaftlagerführer* [head of the camp] Aumeier, who got the idea of using human ashes

as an insulation material from the then *Lagerältester* [camp elder] Bruno Brodniewicz. I carried these ashes together with other prisoners in person from the crematorium to the baths. They were still warm. That these were the remains of the Lublin transport, I heard from my friend Mietek Morawa from Kraków, whom I had known before we were incarcerated in the camp and who was working in crematorium I at the time (Morawa was shot by the Germans in the camp in Flossenbürg).

The bathhouse that I am describing was intended for the bathing of *Zugangs* [new arrivals] and *Abgangs* [those being deported elsewhere], and later prisoners from block 11 also bathed there as well as people brought in from outside the camp who were shot at block 11. Those destined to be shot were herded naked from the baths to block 11. In my opinion, this maneuver was aimed at misleading the victims so that they would not know what was going on and wouldn't resist.

Furthermore, this so-called *Baderaum*, or bathhouse, was where selections took place. They took place at various intervals, sometimes very often, depending on whether the crematoria and gas chambers were vacant – i.e. if transportations from outside the camp destined straight for the gas chamber hadn't arrived. This selection was directed by the *Schutzhaftlagerführer*, so from mid-1942 to mid-1943 that was *Hauptsturmführer* Hans Aumeier. Due to his small stature, we called him "Łokietek" [Elbow-high]. The selections of prisoners working outside the camp were carried out by Aumeier after the evening roll call, after all the *kommandos* had returned from work. The selections of prisoners who didn't work outside the camp, and therefore employed in various camp *kommandos*, as well as the sick, were carried out during the day.

Apart from Aumeier, those who took part in the selections include: *Rottenführer* Oswald Kaduk, *Rapportführer* Stiewitz, often the head of the Political Department Grabner, and in case of his absence, one of the officers of the Political Department, and – although not always – the *Lagerarzt* [camp doctor] SS. Aumeier, and often Kaduk, had the deciding voice. The *Lagerarzt* most often restricted himself to supervising whether the *Pfleger* [nurse] present at the prisoner selection had noted down all the numbers of those selected. Later, Kaduk himself conducted such selections. When he was picking people out, he would say to those destined for death: "Thunderbolt, you'll go to heaven, there it's good". He appointed me to hang 12 engineers from the measurement office (*Vermessers*). When I refused to do this, Kaduk beat me up and kicked me.

During the selection, no medical examinations were carried out; the life or death of a man was decided on a whim, with sometimes completely healthy people being sent to death. It happened that during the selection, a prisoner would be assigned to a group destined for death, after which one of the SS men drove him to the other side, saying: "Go there for a while".

Prisoners who were not selected for death would leave the *Baderaum* and go to camp. All the selected ones stopped by the *Baderaum*, after which vehicles were transported there, which then transported them to the gas chambers in Birkenau. There were horrible scenes in this group. People knew that they were going to their deaths and they were crying and begging for their lives. The SS men beat such people unconscious. After completing the selection, Aumeier left and [then] standing at the gate, watched the selected people being taken away to the gas.

The number of those selected at one time varied and depended on whether the selections were carried out more or less frequently. With more frequent selections, this number was smaller. In the early days, a lot of prisoners were chosen, so that only weaker ones who could not walk were transported by vehicles, and the rest were herded on foot to the crematorium. To mislead the victims, they were sometimes given bread and coffee before being loaded onto the vehicles. This was supposed to create the appearance that they were going to work. The food was then taken away from them at the crematorium and brought back to the camp.

Aumeier was ruthless when conducting selections. The smallest affliction, such as a hernia, was enough for the prisoner to go to the gas. Aumeier used to constantly walk around the camp holding his revolver and beat the prisoners without any reason. I can't count [how many times, but] I was often beaten by him for no reason. The fact that I was taller than him made him furious. To reach my face, he had to jump and kick. To this day, on my right shin I have traces of the phlegmons caused by Aumeier kicking me.

At the beginning of April 1943, 830 people were transported from "Buna", covering the whole of so-called *Birkenalee* [walkway], from the 1st to the 11th block. In this group, including all nationalities, there were many healthy people, but they were finished off by hunger and overwork. They were prisoners who, about three months previously, passed through the *Baderaum* before being taken to "Buna" for work. At that time, they were completely healthy and full of strength. After three months, they were completely

exhausted and unfit for work. Both me, *Lagerkapo* Krahł and other function prisoners wanted to pick out those who were still healthy but just weakened. Aumeier refused, signed the list and ordered everyone to be taken to the gas chamber. We managed to save only two by sneaking them out from the group and tossing two corpses from the hospital in their place. The whole group was loaded onto vehicles and taken to Birkenau. During the transfer, there was so-called *Lagersperre* – no prisoner was allowed to leave their block and go to the camp.

When *Obersturmbannführer* Liebehenschel became the commandant after Höß, I was working in the *Baderaum*. This is why I know that in the first period of his rule in Auschwitz there was another selection there, which took place – as previously described – in the *Baderaum*. Liebehenschel was present at this selection. Only Poles and Germans were not selected for gas, except for one German professional criminal. After this German was selected, he reported to Liebehenschel as a *Reichsdeutsch*, told him that he had lived in the camp for 15 years, that he had merit, that he wanted to live and continue to work. Liebehenschel told him that he was the same dog as all the others, and directed him over to the group destined for gassing.

Later Liebehenschel used a different tactic. The block leaders and *kapos* were supposed to bring the weak, exhausted and sick prisoners from the blocks and send them to the hospital for treatment. To this end, Liebehenschel called a special roll call with all block leaders and *kapos*, during which he issued this order and said that those unfit for work were to be transferred to the hospital, or at least the numbers of such invalids should be reported to the hospital.

Since then, only people from the hospital were sent to the gas chambers; they were dressed in good clothes and told they were being sent to a hospital for convalescents, which was supposed to be in Rajsko. In fact, these patients were transported to crematorium II, where they went almost directly to the gas chamber down the so-called *Leichenrutsche*. From the winter of 1942/1943, I worked in the column of plumbers in Birkenau and as a work supervisor I had the opportunity to move freely around all sections of the camp, including the crematorium and bunkers. Working there, I saw prisoners being brought from the parent camp to the gas chambers and gassed there. Me and my men maintained the water supply installations in the crematoria and a gas chamber in the so-

called white house. Mietek Morawa, an acquaintance whom I mentioned earlier, was a *kapo* at that time in crematoria IV and V.

Erich Muhsfeldt, shown to me at present (Muhsfeldt, brought from prison, is shown) served in the summer of 1944 as the *Kommandoführer* in crematoria II and III. He came to Birkenau from Lublin with a *Sonderkommando* [special unit] made up of Russian prisoners of war. This was the period when the crematoria were running at their peak, because at that time Jews were being transported in from Hungary and burned. Because the gas chamber in crematorium II and all the fittings in this chamber were the most efficient, the largest numbers of transports ended up in the chamber of this crematorium. Even such transports were gassed here which were then burnt in the pits near crematorium V, where the corpses were transported by vehicles, and even the *Sonderkommando* carted them on the *rollwagens*. These *rollwagens* were pulled by the *Sonderkommando* and escorted by Muhsfeldt.

I also saw him on the ramp while the transports were being taken in. They were then taken to the crematorium area, where people undressed in the courtyard, and then the young and healthy people were taken down the steps to the underground gas chamber, and the old ones were herded to the *Leichenrutsche* which took them down. Muhsfeldt took part in herding such transports to the gas chambers. In addition, I saw him in the "Sauna" and in the so-called *Effektenlager* [warehouses]. During the gassing of the Hungarian transports – i.e. in the summer of 1944, the highest intensity of these transports being in June and July – crematoria II and III were working, although crematorium III had a damaged chimney for about three weeks. The damage was repaired by civilian workers who were then gassed as well.

The report was read out. At this the hearing and the report were concluded.