



JÓZEF WALAS

On 16 September 1947 in Kraków, a member of the Main Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes in Poland, Municipal Judge Dr. Stanisław Żmuda, at the written request of the First Prosecutor of the Supreme National Tribunal dated 25 April 1947 (file no. NTN 719/47), and 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 connection with Articles 254, 107 and 115 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, interviewed the former prisoner of the concentration camp in Auschwitz named below as a witness.

The witness testified as follows:

| | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Name and surname | Józef Walas |
| Place and date of birth | 23 February 1898 |
| Parents' names | Jan and Tekla, <i>née</i> Rachwał |
| Nationality | Polish |
| Religious affiliation | Roman Catholic |
| Marital status | unmarried |
| Occupation | miner |
| Place of residence | Bochnia, Przeduzbornia Street 780 |

On 3 August 1940 I was arrested by Gestapo in Bochnia and taken to Tarnów from where, on 8 October 1940, I was sent to the concentration camp in Auschwitz. As a Polish political prisoner I was given number 5853. My detention lasted until 10 March 1943.

In the Auschwitz camp I worked in different labor units: *Kiesgrube* [gravel pit], DAW [*Deutsche Ausrüstungswerke*, armament factories] and *SS-Küche* (as a waiter in the canteen). On 28 February 1943, seven out of 25 prisoners who made up the *SS-Küche* unit



escaped, including Włodek Turczyniak, Roman Lechner and the brothers Kłusy from Sanok. The escape was successful. Only the Kłusy brothers' parents were brought to the camp [in retaliation for their sons' escape].

Long in preparation, the escape had been well organized. It took place between 7 and 8.00 p.m. while the milk and bread supply for *SS-Küche*, situated outside the camp fence, was being unloaded. Shortly after work, two SS guards noticed that there were seven prisoners missing. They informed the *SS-Küche* chief, Paschke, of what had happened. The latter's first response was to beat the whole *kommando*. The camp sirens immediately began to sound an alarm and the leading SS men, including Aumeier and Grabner, burst into *SS-Küche*. The whole *kommando* was ordered to gather. Aumeier took a gun in his hand and hit every prisoner several times in the face with the gun's butt. Then he kicked everyone from behind in the spine, yelling abuse at his victims – "You Polish dogs, you will all go to the gallows". *Rapportführer* [report leader], whose name I don't know, was the next to beat us with a rifle butt. After the beating, we were taken, 18 prisoners, to the bunker in block 11 where we were put in several cells. On the same night, at 12.00 a.m., we were all taken for the initial interrogation at the Political Department. After this brief interrogation, five prisoners, considered indispensable at work, were released, including a prisoner Augustyn who stood out by his corpulence. I wasn't interrogated. Along with the other 11 prisoners I was taken back to the bunker. There were five of us in the cell in which I was put. Two of us were from *SS-Küche*.

On 2 March 1943, at 9.00 a.m., we were again led out of the bunker and taken to the political department where we were lined up along the corridor, facing the wall at a distance of one step from each other. We were standing there until 6.00 p.m. and each of the SS men who walked down the corridor either kicked us or beat our heads against the wall. Throughout the time we took turns being interrogated. The first to be interrogated was the youngest prisoner whose name I don't remember and whom the Germans took to the torture booth where he had his hands and ankles cuffed at his feet and a stick placed between his legs and hands. Then the immobilized victim was lifted up, beaten with a whip and doused with water. Having suffered this torture, the victim was dragged out into the corridor, and we were told that either we would reveal the names of those who had a hand in preparing and facilitating the escape or we would end up looking like the prisoner lying on the ground. However, in the course of the interrogation, none of us named any names and we didn't avoid being beaten



all over the body. Finally, we were ordered to take the beaten colleague and get back to the bunker. I don't know the names of the SS men conducting the interrogations.

On the following day, we were again interrogated in *Blockführer's* office in block 11. This interrogation had nothing to do with the escape, constituting a kind of harassment. As old prisoners, we knew that the imprisonment in the bunker meant death and that it was only by chance that one could get out of it alive. On the fifth day of my detention in the bunker, a "committee" including Aumeier, Grabner, Lachmann, Wosnitz and a *Rapportführer*, whom I don't know by name, appeared in the bunker. The cell doors were opened one by one and Aumeier could be heard shouting "Alles raus!" All the prisoners had to jump like springs out of the bunker into the corridor. Those who were selected by the committee were led to the ground floor where they were ordered to strip naked. Then they were taken to the death wall and shot. The remaining prisoners returned to their cells. Every cell had the number of prisoners and of the *kommando* they were from written on its door. As my cell door opened, Aumeier also shouted "Alles raus"! We jumped into the corridor. Then he shouted again, "SS-Küche zurück!". At this shout, my friend from *SS-Küche* and I jumped back into the cell. There were three prisoners from our cell left in the corridor whom the Germans took for execution. One of them was a young Czech, about 20 years of age. An intelligent boy, he complained that he had been put in the bunker without any fault of his and that it was lawlessness. He asked us if and in what form he could file a complaint. The second prisoner was put in the bunker for stealing a piece of bread from a fellow prisoner and the third one, I believe, was also guilty of stealing food, especially that he was a professional thief. That day 74 people imprisoned in the bunker were killed. Shots continued to be heard for a long time.

On the ninth day of my detention in the bunker, the "committee" made up of the same people appeared again in block 11. This time 50 prisoners were selected to die. There were only two of us in the cell and Aumeier, after calling us out, shouted again, "SS-Küche zurück!".

On the eleventh day of my detention in the bunker, I was called out of my cell, sent to a doctor for examination and designated to join those who were about to be sent to Buchenwald. It turned out that the transports for Buchenwald were envisaged to contain 1,000 people each. Those who were selected to go to Buchenwald were healthy, strong prisoners whom the Germans wanted to use for building some concrete halls. All the



prisoners remaining in the bunker and forming part of the *SS-Küche kommando*, 11 in number, were selected to go to Buchenwald.

Before our departure from Auschwitz, Grabner gave us a speech in which he stressed that we had been selected to perform better work under better conditions and that we shouldn't bring shame upon ourselves as Auschwitz prisoners.

The bunker in which I was imprisoned had a concrete floor and was swarming with bedbugs. There was a wooden bunk on the concrete floor. The food we were given was insufficient and of the worst quality. The nervous tension was so great that one of my colleagues grew gray during his eleven-day detention in the bunker. Aware of what happened to those who were put in the bunker, we expected to be sent to death at any moment.

Often, prisoners who ended up in the bunker were guilty of no misconduct, having been imprisoned as a result of the penal report written by a *Blockführer*. And it sufficed for the latter to dislike a prisoner's face to write such a report. Sometimes prisoners were caught stealing a potato or a slice of bread, and these prisoners were among those who were called out of the bunker and shot.

Once, during Aumeier's tenure, four Polish engineers employed to measure parcels of land were served tea by the local population. When a guard reported this fact, the whole group was imprisoned in the bunker where, as I heard, all of them died.

Aumeier, whom I met during my detention in the camp and whom I recognize in the photo, had a reputation of a sadist. He simply couldn't pass by a prisoner without beating him. Sometimes he jumped up to prisoners and kicked them. He must have enjoyed beating people because he smiled as he did it. At the time when women were still in the camp, I saw him beating and kicking defenseless female prisoners. With him on the staff, the camp saw the introduction of interim penalties and penal reports, as well as the proliferation of informants. He took part in the shootings carried out in block 11 and assisted in all the public executions. Prisoners tried to keep out of his way. Because of his small height, he was known as "Łokietek" (Elbow-high).

The report was read out. At this the report was concluded.