



BERTHE FALK

The seventeenth day of trial, 12 December 1947

(After the break.)

Presiding Judge: The next witness, Berthe Falk.

(Witness Berthe Falk stands up.)

Presiding Judge: Will the witness please state her personal data?

Witness Berthe Falk 36 years old, head of the medical analysis laboratory, Master of Science, non-religious, of Jewish descent, no relationship to the defendants, French citizenship and nationality.

Presiding Judge: I advise the witness to speak the truth in accordance with Article 107 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. Making false declarations is punishable with a prison term of up to five years. Do the parties submit any requests regarding the mode of hearing of the witness?

Prosecution: No.

Defense: No.

Presiding Judge: The witness will testify without taking the oath. Will the witness please say what she knows about the case itself, and particularly about the defendants? Which of them does the witness recognize and what facts can the witness provide?

Witness: Together with a friend and 500 other women, I was taken away from Paris on 27 July 1942. I will limit myself to presenting a few of my experiences during the 27 months of torture I went through in Auschwitz-Birkenau. We arrived at Auschwitz simultaneously with two transports of Dutch women. 1,500 people were gathered in a dark and wet basement under the supervision of *Aufseherin* [overseer] Brandl. She was particularly tough and strict towards us. At roll calls in the camp, we saw her very often with a whip in her hand,



which she used to carry around. She would often walk between the rows and beat our naked legs without a reason, probably in order to teach us that in the camp we would be treated badly right away from the start.

On 15 August, we were transferred to Birkenau. That camp had already been furnished, but there was still no light and water. In August and September, during extreme heat waves, hundreds of French and Dutch prisoners died of thirst. In that period, there was a typhus fever outbreak caused by the filthy conditions in the camp. The number of female prisoners was growing, so we had to make room for the newcomers. It was not enough that people were dying of typhus and other diseases, and that selections were performed right after people had got off the train.

At the beginning of October, one of the first selections in the camp was carried out. That was when I met defendant Aumeier. At that time, I worked as an orderly in the camp hospital. There were about 600 female prisoners – sick, healthy, often dying. The camp hospital did not have to participate in roll calls, but one Sunday at the beginning of October, the orderlies were ordered to select 50 (women) from among the most sick patients, and escort them onto a field. The nurses refused to do it, and an hour later we received an order to attend the roll call. We became suspicious, because it was unusual for the hospital. We gathered all the sick women in rows of ten in front of our block. However, we tried to hide a few prisoners who had already been cured. It was all for nothing, because Aumeier, accompanied by the head camp doctor and a retinue of SS men and SS women, performed an inspection in our block to reach the actual number.

He forced the nurses to make sure that the prisoners' were in chains and that they did not escape. Other nurses were supposed to help the sick get in the trucks that drove up to the block gate. Since it was taking us a lot of time and dinnertime was approaching, they started to beat us with gunstocks and sticks. Dead prisoners were thrown into the trucks together with the sick and healthy. It lasted three hours. When the last truck passed through the camp gate, Aumeier – accompanied by all the SS men – left, quite pleased. Only about ten [people] – from the personnel – were left in the block. Two days later, there was a big selection in work *kommandos*, and within three days, 3,000 female prisoners were selected. From that day on, selections took place every week. It is hard to forget the famous gesture by Aumeier who sent prisoners to gas chambers with his thumb... I believe that every prisoner who has survived still remembers that gesture.



In February 1942, the whole camp was subjected to selection in a very sophisticated manner. An order was issued to evacuate the camp into a nearby meadow. It happened between 3.00 a.m. and 6.00 p.m. All female prisoners were forced to stand still, without food, poorly clothed, in freezing cold. In the evening, the SS officers, including Mandl, forced all prisoners to run. Those who did not run fast enough or fell down were caught and escorted to block 25, the vestibule of crematorium furnaces. Maria Mandl, equipped with a bent stick, caught the prisoners, knocking them over, and escorted them to block 25.

When it comes to Maria Mandl, I met her in really extraordinary circumstances. Do you remember prisoner no. 14 184 whom you sent to die, because she described how she imagined the liberation of Paris by the Allies? I was then transferred from Rajsko, where I worked as a chemist, to the Birkenau camp, and I appeared before Mandl, who herself alone constituted the highest justice. She made me wait eight days before she agreed to see me. I would like to roughly present our conversation. When I entered the office, she told me in great anger, "How dare you write such things?! I know that you're dreaming of your homeland, but even though you have already stayed two years in the camp, you still don't understand that no prisoner will leave this place alive. We're letting you work for us". Then she asked me, "What would you do if you were me?" I said that I would probably understand that feeling and forgive. That made her furious and she told me, "We, the Germans, are too kind to you, you would hang us, but we're giving you a chance, we're letting you work for us". She sent me away, saying, "I hope you'll be hanged". Five days later, I came there again to hear my sentence. I was not hanged, probably because I worked in the laboratory, but instead I was assigned to a penal company. There, I had the pleasure to meet Bogusch, because he was in charge of penal companies. I had to work outside for 12–14 hours per day, and they were kind enough to let me work inside the camp once a week. There, we were guarded by Bogusch, and I assure you the work we did inside the camp, although it lasted fewer hours, was equally hard in terms of physical effort. We were really scared of Bogusch, and we tried to hide from him, but he would always find us in the toilets or bathrooms.

Presiding Judge: Does the witness recognize defendant Bogusch? Please, take a look at the defendants.

Witness: He recognizes me.

Defendant Bogusch: I never served in Birkenau. This is probably some kind of mistake.



Witness: He would come to Birkenau only from time to time, because the SK [penal company] consisted of two *kommandos*: external and internal. He guarded the internal *kommando*. He probably knows well his colleague Mokrus who guarded the external unit.

Presiding Judge: Is that everything the witness wanted to say?

Witness: Yes.

Presiding Judge: Does the witness remember if defendant Brandl participated in selections? Please, take a good look at her.

Witness: I saw defendant Brandl only for 15 days, when I stayed in Auschwitz. She guarded the newcomers who were squeezed in the basements, because there was no room for them.

Presiding Judge: The witness has mentioned that she worked in Rajsko. Does the witness remember defendant Münch?

Witness: Yes, I know Dr. Münch. I saw him several times in the Hygiene Institute. We would sometimes go to work to the Hygiene Institute.

Presiding Judge: Did the witness have any closer contact with Dr. Münch?

Witness: No, I had no contact with Dr. Münch.

Presiding Judge: Maybe the witness knows what Dr. Münch did?

Witness: I think he was the doctor who monitored the analyses that were carried out there, but I do not know exactly.

Presiding Judge: Are there any questions for the witness?

Prosecutor Kurowski: I have a question. The witness has mentioned the Hygiene Institute: was it the Hygiene Institute outside Auschwitz, in Rajsko?

Witness: Yes.

Presiding Judge: Does the defense have any questions?

Defense Attorney Minasowicz: In what year did the witness work in the SK?

Witness: From 14 July to 5 October 1944.

Presiding Judge: The witness is excused.