



ALFRED FIDERKIEWICZ

On 31 July 1945, in Kraków, investigating judge Jan Sehn, member of the Chief Commission for Investigating German Crimes in Poland, upon the motion, in the presence and with the assistance of a member of the said Commission, prosecutor Edward Pęchalski, based on Art. 254, in connection with Art. 107 and 115, of the Code of Criminal Procedure, took deposition from a witness, a former prisoner of the Auschwitz concentration camp, no. 138 907, who testified as follows:

Full name	Dr. Alfred Fiderkiewicz
Date and place of birth	2 July 1886 in Horodeńce
Names of parents	Grzegorz and Rozalia Wielogórska
Occupation	medical doctor
Nationality and citizenship	Polish
Religion	Roman-Catholic
Martial status	married
Place of residence	Kraków, Straszewskiego 41 m. 8

During the war, I had medical practice in Milanówek near Warsaw, where I was arrested for the first time on 14 September 1940, and for the second time on 7 September 1942. On 26 August 1943, I was transported to Auschwitz from Pawiak prison in Warsaw, together with about 1400 other prisoners, and I remained there till the time when the camp was liberated by the victorious Red Army.

I wrote down my experiences from the Warsaw prisons and from the Auschwitz camp on 52 pages of typed manuscript, which I hereby produce to be annexed to the present



testimony as its integral part. (The witness produced typed manuscript consisting of 52 pages. The typed manuscript was made part of the record).

The particulars described by me in the typed manuscript are based on my personal experience and on my personal observations, and I take full responsibility for its content, as proved by my handwritten signature on the present testimony and on each and every page of the material produced by me.

Handwritten additions and corrections on pages 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 11, 13, 18, 21, 22, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, 31, 34, 37, 38, 39, 41, 45, 50, 51 and 52 of the typed manuscript were made by me.

At this point, the hearing and the testimony were concluded. The testimony was read out.



Deposition of the President [of Kraków, Alfred] Fiderkiewicz

For the first time, I was arrested on 14 September 1940. Two Gestapo men came to me by car and said that I was being arrested as a communist. At the time, the German-Soviet pact was still in force, but I wasn't surprised that they mentioned this kind of excuse for arresting me.

At the time, the writer Władysław Kowalski, presently the vice-president of the Temporary State National Council, was also in my house. When asked by the Gestapo men, he said he was a writer, so they arrested him together with me. We were transported to Pawiak prison.

In Pawiak, they took us to the second ward, that is, to the basement, where we were ordered to take off our clothes, and then we were beaten with hands and shaved. After a couple of days, we were transferred to different prison cells. My prison cell, originally intended for two persons, housed 13-14 people. We slept on straw mats on the floor in a terrible stench. For that reason, after a couple of days I got sick and was taken to the prison hospital by an assistant surgeon whom I knew and who worked in Pawiak prison [as a civilian].

After a couple of days, I got better and the chief surgeon, Dr. Babski, offered me a job in the hospital. My situation got instantly better and I could witness the bestiality of the Gestapo men toward prisoners.

Most of the hospital patients were people beaten and injured by Gestapo men from Szucha street in Warsaw, where they were taken from the prison in the morning and from where they came back in the evening. As I remember, one day a boy was brought to the hospital who was so severely beaten that none of us could recognize him: his back was bleeding from blows struck by a blunt weapon, presumably a rubber club – he said that he had got a hundred strokes. I was impressed by the boy, because when asked if he had said anything he replied: "I told them nothing, I denounced nobody and for sure they won't get any information from me, for you feel pain only with the first 20 blows". Another time, another boy of about 18 years of age, brought to the hospital on stretchers, was so beaten and maltreated, that first we couldn't get a word out of him. After a couple of hours, he finally said that he had been hanged on hooks, beaten on the head with a revolver butt and tortured by driving wooden pins into his soles for so long that he had finally denounced all his friends, numbering 17. When asked by me why he had done it, he started to weep terribly and cried out: "I couldn't stand it, I couldn't stand it! I'm very sorry, but I couldn't stand it!".



Still another time, a young woman aged about 28 years, a painter, was brought from the Gestapo so severely beaten and injured, mainly on her buttocks, that it was really hard to stitch up the torn flesh. The patient spit blood and it was evident that her chest and her lungs were injured from the beating, with damaged blood vessels, hence the repeated mouth and nosebleeds. The husband of the woman was a Polish army officer who had been taken prisoner of war, and she had joined the underground resistance movement, started underground work, and despite the beating denounced nobody, and she showed such fortitude that one could be sure that no tortures could induce her to disclose any information. Every day, I would see several or a dozen such cases, so in fact the hospital treated mainly people injured by Gestapo during their brutal interrogations rather than sick people.

The investigation in my case was typical. It was being led when the Soviet-German alliance was still in force. And it was being conducted [despite the fact]. On 28 September 1940, I was summoned or taken for interrogation to the Gestapo headquarters on Szucha street. They started to shout at me that I was a communist, that I had visited Russia, and that as an MP I had made communist speeches in Parliament. They showed me a pile of files that were supposed to contain evidence against me, that is, all the parliamentary records with my speeches. (This shows how they built records on every person – the German press correspondent in the Polish Parliament kept track of everything). Then, they showed me press releases from different papers, all of them being caricatures of me, wherever they were published, i.e. in “Illustrated Daily Messenger”, “Morning Messenger”. I didn’t even have all the caricatures myself at home, though I saw them when they were published. They interrogated me about my job and I answered that I was a doctor, I had a medical practice in Milanówek, I had numerous patients, including many German women, that I specialized in gynecology, [that] I had sufficient income from my medical practice and had no need to serve any foreign country. I had to recount all my life from the very first day when I was born, my trip to America where I worked in a coal mine, in metal factories, and on the docks in New York. I told them how I studied medicine and worked at the same time etc., and about my return to Poland and my activities here.

I presented my perspective on the agrarian reform in Poland and told them that I was and always had been [for] the agrarian reform, that I had worked for a democratic Poland and I believed that sooner or later such a Poland would come into existence. They persuaded me that Poland would never come back into existence. I replied that it could never be told for sure and that as a Pole I could not accept that Poland would never exist.



Then, they accused me of being a member of the Democratic Party and my activity on its executive board. They asked me who was the chairman of the party – I answered Prof. Michałowicz. I didn't try to conceal his name because I knew very well that they knew it. But I tried to downplay his role – I said that he was a fat gentleman who during the Democratic Club meetings had no interest in politics and only told funny jokes, and that the Democratic Club was a kind of association rather than a political organization. When asked what was our political agenda, I replied that there was no agenda and that we worked on it, but it had not been developed before the war started.

As for my trip to the Soviet Union, I also had to take a similar stance. I downplayed the whole trip and told them that I had travelled there together with other people because I was just curious, [that] I couldn't say anything about Russia because I didn't speak Russian and all their speeches seemed banal to me, and that in Russia they had shown us only what they wanted us [to know], so we hadn't been shown the true Russian reality. Then, their attitude towards me changed, and after three and a half hours of interrogation I was told that I would be released.

And indeed, on 11 October 1940 I was released from prison. Władysław Kowalski was also released. Only when I left the prison did I learn why I was treated in this way, without being beaten. My women-patients sent many petitions asking for my release, and one of them – a Polish woman from Poznańskie province, Ms. Aniela Kurka – had a distant cousin serving in the SS, an SS non-commissioned officer, who through his colleagues arranged that I wasn't beaten, and – as he put it – my clever defense helped him to secure my release.

For a second time, they came to me and searched my house on 7 September 1942. They told me that I was being arrested. During the search they looked for weapons, and they only found a Polish white and red flag, and they were surprised, because they expected to find a red one. They broke the wooden flagpole, and Gosłynowicz put the flag in his pocket as a *corpus delicti*. I tried to persuade them that arresting me was a mistake, that I had nothing to do with politics and only practiced my job as a doctor. I gave them couple of thousand zlotys and they left my home [telling me] that they would further investigate the case, and would either summon me or come for me again if they found that I worked in any organization, because they had no definite information on me. And they didn't come for me again until 28 June 1943, at about 3 o'clock in the morning.



I heard the gate bell ringing. They shouted at me through the window that they were police, and when I came out I met several SS men with revolvers in their hands. They told me to raise my hands up. Then I noticed that my whole property in Milanówek by Żwirowa street, now renamed as Dr. Fiderkiewicz street, was surrounded by a group of about 20 German and Ukrainian SS men. They searched the whole house, and then they took me, my brother-in-law engineer Tadeusz Urbański, and my gardener, Wojciech Adamczyk. They loaded us onto a truck. We made a couple of rounds in Milanówek where they arrested more people, and then they took us to barracks in Grodzisk Mazowiecki. They told us to crouch down and we had to stay like that till the evening came. All the time they were bringing more and more people from nearby towns [such] as Sochaczew, Żyrardów, Mszczonów, until they had gathered about 200 persons.

Before the night came, they loaded us onto trucks guarded by fully armed soldiers and gendarmes with machine guns; we were also [escorted] by cars in front and in the rear, and the whole column arrived in the inner courtyard of Pawiak prison. We were beaten with rubber clubs while they led us to the basement, where we were handed off to Ukrainian SS men who first robbed us of everything, and then beat each one of us. Then we were shaved, our hair was cut and we were put in a room normally intended for a couple of dozen people. There were about 400 of us in the room. All night we had to stand there, because it was impossible to lie down. Only in the morning were we taken to prison cells. I was put in the sixth ward, in a cell normally intended for four persons – there were 28 of us in that cell.

Among the prisoners, there were some political suspects and the rest were just thieves. In such a crowded place you could more or less survive during the daytime, but the nights were worse, because we had only a dozen or so worn straw mattresses. We had to lie practically one on top of another rather than one beside another. The bucket placed in the middle of the cell made the atmosphere even more stifling. In the morning, we waited for the moment when they would open the cell and let us go to the toilet and the bathroom. All of us, that is, the whole prison ward comprising more than twenty cells, had only ten minutes. During the "walk" to the toilet we were accompanied by shouting Germans, German or Ukrainian SS men. If someone was late, he was beaten and kicked. On the return from the toilet, there was even more beating, forced exercising, and when we reached the cell door almost everyone got a blow with a stick on their back. Such torment took place twice a day, in the morning and in the afternoon.



After a couple of days, four people were taken from our cell, and from the whole Pawiak, as we heard, they took about a hundred people. We knew they were executed. It happened almost every day. They brought new people to the cell, so the number stayed the same, once it even rose to 36 people, and after a couple of days again fell to twenty-something. People were executed every day. No one knew when they would take him and he would have to say goodbye to this world.

After a couple of weeks spent in the prison I got very sick. As I knew the assistant surgeon, Masłolarczyk, a Pole, and the prison surgeon, Śliwicki, also a Pole, they took me to the prison hospital and I stayed there till my departure. The patients in the hospital received no treatment, almost no drugs were prescribed, food was slightly better, and housing conditions were definitely better than in the cell. But sometimes SS men would come suddenly and beat even sick prisoners, and one thing didn't change – from the hospital people were taken for executions just as from the cells, some sick people were even taken on stretchers if they couldn't walk by themselves. From the hospital, we could watch all movements during the days and nights, hundreds of cars came with new prisoners, and hundreds of cars departed for different directions – to Majdanek, Auschwitz, Dachau etc.

On 25 August 1943, prisoners from all cells – approx. 1400 people – were taken out, registered, and put in a separate transport ward. At about 3 a.m., accompanied by SS men shouting and using clubs, sticks and whips, we were driven into trucks, and later, at the Gdański Railway Station, into a train consisting of barred boxcars, 75 to 85 persons per each boxcar.

The "Auschwitz Beast" (Auschwitz-Birkenau Camp)

Before my imprisonment, I used to wonder why families received a notice about the death of their arrested relatives [usually] after two-three months. Why exactly after two months?

Only when I was arrested in June 1943 and sent to Auschwitz in August 1943 did I learn that people could die there much sooner, and the two months was a time predefined by the camp commandant. His idea was: nobody should live here longer than two months, room was needed for the next prisoners.



In the night, we were taken from Pawiak and loaded onto a train – 75 to 85 people for each boxcar. The boxcars were closed and sealed, the windows were barred so tightly that fresh air was coming only [through] small gaps. We learned unofficially that we were being taken to Auschwitz. I saw two months of life before me. I was happy because I had thought that they would execute me in Pawiak, but they hadn't because I'd been lucky.

As noon was approaching, and the day was hot, the atmosphere in the boxcar became more and more stifling. Everyone was looking for gaps to catch some fresh air. I was standing by the door trying to catch some air through the gap, but people queued up for every smallest hole and one needed to yield it to the next ones. We were only halfway to our destination, and I already felt dizziness in my head and thought we wouldn't make it to Auschwitz. In the boxcar, people packed like sardines started to become spiteful and uneasy. The younger ones wanted to break the boxcar and escape, but the train was so strongly guarded that probably no one could escape from it alive. During the whole journey, we got no food or water, and people satisfied their bodily needs wherever they could. Our only hope was to get to the camp as soon as possible.

It was already dark when we saw the lights of the camp, our only hope for fresh air and some water. The train finally stopped and the door opened. We heard savage shouts: *Heraus! Heraus!*, and sticks fell on the backs of tired and weak people. No one dared to cry out or groan. We were ordered to form in fives, and people who were not quick enough to do so were beaten with sticks. 14 corpses were thrown out from the boxcars – they were people who had died from the lack of air. At the same time, a few meters from me I saw a man who was being beaten because he staggered. Finally, an SS man came and hit him with a stick directly on his neck, finishing his suffering. The man only groaned like an animal dealt a deathblow and was dead. Some people around me were ordered to take the bodies, including this last one, to a ditch. Thus, I found out that in Auschwitz people could and did die sooner than after two months.

We were standing in fives, about 1400 people, surrounded [by] armed bandits: SS men and kapos. They started to drive us, we only heard them shouting: *Schnell!* and felt the blows of the sticks. Everyone was running as fast as he could. I was in the middle, so the sticks couldn't reach me, but people around me were being beaten, and I don't know how many of them fell down on the way. Behind us a truck with corpses came, because with Germans the number must always be correct – dead or alive, nobody can be missing.



We were driven to a block, or a room intended for at maximum 500 people, but all of us had to go in there. One beside another or one on top of another, but no one complained, everybody was scared. It was a nightmare that I had never imagined. I saw a lot during the war when I was free, I saw a lot in Pawiak, I got a bit of it myself, but this kind of treatment of people, or animals, was unbelievable to me.

Soon, a block senior came, a Jew, as they said from Białystok, also a *Häftling* [prisoner], but already prominent, together with a couple of *Pflegers*, and he gave us a speech: "You bandits, remember – you are in a camp, you need to keep order here. When you were free, you wanted to mess around, but here you will get wiser, you will learn discipline!" – and he abused us verbally, spit out words that cannot be repeated in a written text. Finally, he said that in the morning we would get some coffee. We asked for water. But in reply, we heard only more abuses: „Bandits! You fancy getting water" – a frightful look in his eyes and rods in the hands of his assistants made the more cautious of us remain silent, but one man, an engineer, said that he would complain to the authorities, because he planned to go to work in the Todt organization. He was beaten on his head with a rod so severely that we managed to save him from the hands of the slaughterers only because the place was so crowded. In the morning I noticed that in exchange for boots, onions or lard you could get some coffee or water in a pot. I didn't have any of those things myself, but I had a spare handkerchief and socks and tried to exchange them for some water, but in reply I only heard: "You fool, I don't need your rags, get lost or you'll get kicked on your ass" – so I got lost and together with hundreds of others I could only watch the ones that were drinking water.

In the morning we were driven to a yard where they recorded our personal data and tattooed us. On the left forearm, I got a tattoo with the number 138 907. I ceased to be Fiderkiewicz and became a number. At the same time, a dozen steps from us an orchestra was playing in the FKL [*Frauenkonzentrationslager*], and though they played some merry melody, they also emitted some strange tones full of grievance, and it sounded as if someone was playing a barrel organ. It was a female orchestra, but instead of cheering people up it made them fearful. You could feel terror in the sounds.

All the registering and tattooing was performed by *Häftlings* – Poles and Jews, more intelligent people, usually polite, who quietly advised us to hardly ever use titles, because educated people got the worst treatment in the camp. So engineers were becoming



technicians, builders – carpenters or bricklayers, solicitors – writers, but doctors said they were doctors.

SS men showed up only here and there, from time to time. Their presence made not only us newcomers fearful, but also all the workers who at first pretended to be important persons. We couldn't even think about eating something or drinking water. There was a well not far from the place, but the few brave ones who grabbed a cup of water finished by being beaten on their backs with rods. Finally, we were taken to the bath. They took from us everything we possessed, clothes, food, and we were given denim clothes, we were only allowed to keep our shoes. After the bath we were given a bowl of some soup – one bowl for every five persons, without spoons, so that everyone could swallow only a little of it. I was fifth to the bowl, because the others were stronger than me, but they left me some soup and I was grateful to them for that. An hour later they took us to the quarantine camp (in Brzezinka).

The quarantine

The camp is comprised of 18 blocks, where the newcomers are put. Each block houses about 500 people. There are no straw mattresses or blankets, only bare wood planks. The roofs are full of holes, there are no seals on the ceilings, so rain and wind come inside easily. The chief of a block is a block senior – a *Häftling*. Some block seniors are better, and some are worse. In my block, it was some French Jew – they called him "Adek" – a despot who never came without a club. The sadist beat people indiscriminately for the smallest faults, and he also beat people when there was no fault. All day long, you could hear the moans of beaten people in the block, for work he also paid with rods. Every *Häftling* first of all had to be shaven and their hair had to be cut with electric shaver. To the 14 barbers from our group he gave 10-20 strokes with a rod on their buttocks for shaving us. He also beat people for distributing the soup. As food, they give you a greenish water in the morning. Five people drink from one bowl containing about one liter of the liquid. For dinner, they give us a soup made of potato peels, bran and turnip. In the evening, they were supposed to give every prisoner 300 g of bread and sometimes a bit of margarine, and occasionally marmalade. But the prisoners were robbed of their rations. They gave us only 200-250 g of bread, and only a dab of margarine or none at all instead of the prescribed 50 g portion, and the products that remained were taken by block seniors for the so-called organization – [they sold the



food for] gold, German money and dollars. With the money, they bought vodka from the "posts", or SS guards. The same was going on in every block, and there were 18 of them. Some of them housed Poles, others Greeks at the time, later Dutchmen etc. Block seniors were of different nationalities, including Polish. All of them were smaller or bigger murderers. Among the Poles, the worst were Franek in block no. 2 and Mietek in block no. 17. The whole of the quarantine camp was headed by *Lageraltester* Tim, a German. From this money, this whole company drank and caroused in the blocks. A couple of them used to come suddenly into a block, and they would start to beat with rods whomever they wished, and make a "sport" of tormenting people. The whole block groaned. Some people in desperation threw themselves onto the electrified wire fence – they were finished off with a shot, also for sport, by an SS man on guard duty on the tower.

Prisoners get up at 4.30 a.m. for so-called roll call, in other words counting. They are arranged in fives (we were taught to keep an even line), take off their shoes, and stand barefoot till 8 a.m or longer on wet ground in the mud, waiting [for] a big SS man who takes the report on the number of prisoners – healthy or dead – from a block senior. The drill is quick, [thanks to the use of] rods, then they give tea, and prisoners go to work on building roads, where beating, kicking and strokes with rods are a common thing. People are not afraid of work, only of the slaughterers from the SS and kapos, who according to German culture use rods for all purposes. After the return from work, prisoners are not allowed to leave the block, only after the meal can they go to the toilets where thousands of people try to clean or satisfy their bodily needs. And there again, sticks reign. People don't know what to do, where to hide, they beat you everywhere, they wait for you everywhere, they want to transform you into a stupefied lamb that will perish, if not today then tomorrow. Everyone wants to go to the camp, to work, because they say that by working you can somehow survive, that some details (groups assigned to particular tasks) are good there, that they have friends there who can help them. Thus some people wait, some of them die. Some people get sick from infections, exhaustion, hunger and cold, and are sent to the *Krankenbau* (a camp for sick people) and there they meet their fate. Others, after four or five weeks of this endurance test, finally go to the camp C, to work, and start a new life there.

As for me, after a couple of weeks of this endurance trial, I got to the *Krankenbau*. While we still remained in the quarantine, all of us doctors were summoned to perhaps the biggest



bandit – a medical doctor, a Pole, Mr. Zenteller [Zenktele]. He was an old number, a little higher than 20 000. Well, we had numbers 138–139 thousand, kids, as we were called: „Sons of b...ches millionaires“.

All of us have to stand to attention, and answer questions, and inquiries, whether we really are doctors. “From where are you? From Warsaw? You syphilitic, you complete blockhead! ... What can you do?” And he examines each of us in medicine. We answer like we were first-year students. When answering his questions I dared to say „dear colleague“ – and then I heard such a pack of insults that I will never forget them in my life. “Only I am a doctor here, and all of you are sleazy millionaires, and God forbid you should think otherwise“. Some of us he threw out, calling them idiots, and some he kept, among them me – I passed the exam. Later I will tell more about that man, but he saved my life.

After a dozen or so days in the quarantine, I swelled – mainly my legs were swollen – and then, out of pity, [Zenktele] told one of his assistants: “Take him to F (i.e. to the hospital), let him stay there for a while, and then he will start to work“.

In this way, I got to the hospital and escaped death in the „first death chamber“ of the camp A, or the quarantine.

The camp

Not everything in the camp was so good. Newcomers were given the hardest jobs. Kapos drove them to dig ditches in wooden clogs and denim uniforms. Every morning, to the rhythm of the music, the details marched out accompanied by kapos with rods, a couple of dozen or hundreds of people marching, accompanied by kapos, *vorarbeiters*, SS men and dogs. In the evening several of the prisoners would always be missing.

Everyone who managed to survive the hell of the quarantine was, after four, five or six weeks, sent to the work camp, that is, D, and began the life of a normal worker. Bunks, so-called buksy, were the same, only here they gave you footwear, usually wooden, but some were given leather shoes, clothes and blankets. The stealing of food was slightly less, soups, tea or coffee the same, slightly smaller rations of margarine, sausages and marmalade were given more often and in slightly bigger portions. The most important thing was to get to



a good detail and have a better kapo. The best ones were *Bauleitung*, *Zimmerei* (carpenters), *Sammlung* and *Luftwaffenlagerbetrieb*.

Roll calls in the morning were at 4.30, and already at 5 a.m. prisoners had to be ready to work. All the details were arranged in order and (ironically!) to the rhythm of brass band music went to work. Some of them to build roads, others to dig ditches, still others to build barracks, and some as painters. During work different things happened. A detail marches led by a kapo – *Häftling*, [escorted] by SS men with big dogs. They march to a defined place of work. No matter if it's cold, hot, dry or heavily raining – the detail has to go to work. During the work, prisoners are prodded by kapos and *vorarbeiters*, who in turn are prodded by SS men with whips, with the help of other SS men and dogs. The slightest inaccuracy or inefficiency in work is punished with beating, from which you might come out alive, injured or dead. It's not surprising for anyone when a detail comes back from work bringing with them several or a dozen or so dead corpses. The camp is hardest to endure for educated people who can't work with a shovel or a pickaxe. They die like flies. People who work in details as simple physical workers are not allowed to live in the camp longer than several weeks, nobody notices when they perish. No one is outraged by that, no one cries, sometimes someone misses them, but very rarely. [Death] is such a common thing that nobody cares. A terrible instinct for self-preservation reigns, no one can help anybody in anything, because no one has access to an SS man, no one can ask him for anything, no one dares to come close to him, everyone takes off his cap long before he meets him and puts it on long after meeting him. An SS man, when he comes in the field, to a workplace or into a block is feared by everyone, only the block senior or chief surgeon in the *Krankenbau* stands to attention and nervously calls *Achtung Block!* number so and so, and reports the number of people.

An SS man is feared by every block senior, kapo, or doctor more than by their subordinates, because he is the „master of life and death“. He looks at the work, he looks at the block, and if the tiniest thing is not to his liking, he strikes [with his hand] or with any object he has with him.

The camp in Brzezinka was divided into eight parts. Camp A was the quarantine, [B] was the family camp (*Familienlager*), camp C – Czech one, D was the male work camp, E was the camp for Gypsies, camp F was the *Krankenbau*, or hospital, then the *Effektenkammer* camp,



and the eighth part was the crematorium. It is hard to say which of these camps was the easiest, for in each of them were prisoners and they suffered alike, beaten alike by SS men. In each camp there were blocks that people were frightened of and did everything possible to avoid.

In the camp D the most terrible was block SK – *Strafkommando*. People were sent there for slightest transgressions committed in any other camp. They could also be sent there even based on false accusations. The punishment had a defined time span, such as a couple of months or couple of years, or even *dauernd* SK, or indefinite SK. Everyone coming to the block received 25 welcome rods. They were beaten on a horse specially made for that purpose or just on a bunk. As usual, they got two or three strokes on the spine. In the SK, block seniors were mostly Germans, and the last block senior was a Pole, Bednarek. When someone went to SK, we considered him lost – the people either perished from very hard work and exhaustion, or left with punitive transports that usually went to quarries, and there most of them finished their lives.

The second most terrible part of the camp were the crematories where prisoners, or *Häftlings*, called *Sonderkommando*, performed work connected with gassing and burning people. According to crematorium camp regulations, people working in the *Sonderkommando* were not allowed to come out alive from there. After several months of work, the *Sonderkommando* workers were burned and new ones were employed. It was usually Jews who worked there.

In the camp people were very frightened of the *Krankenbau*. They were frightened by memories of the old *Krankenbau*, which could hardly be called a hospital, because it was block no. 7 where all people with a fever or exhausted people were given phenol injections, no matter what nationality they were. The phenol was injected into Jews and Aryans alike.

Krankenbau F was created only at the end of July 1943, on a muddy field where the roads between blocks were only marked out. In the beginning of September, I came to the *Krankenbau* as a patient, to the internal diseases ward. I was swollen and stayed there in bed for a couple of days, and then I started to work as a physical worker on the block. The *Krankenbau* had at the time 16 blocks. Block no. 1 was divided in two parts. The first one was an administrative office, or *Schreibstube*, where Poles were employed – Ordower from Kraków, the head of the office, and another, a *Rapportschreiber*, Zygmunt Horoszy, a Pole from Rzeszów. Horoszy had been brought to Auschwitz in the first transport of Poles from



Tarnów. He had, as far as I remember, the number 134. Both those *Schreibers* did a lot of good for the prisoners, both behaved in such a worthy manner that it can be said that they made their mark in the camp. Many Poles and numerous Jews are indebted to them for saving their lives or avoiding punishment.

A section of the first part of block no. 1 was occupied by the *Lagerarzt*, the chief officer of camp F, accompanied by one or two SDGs (*Sanitätsdienstgehilfe*). The Germans, [orderlies from] SS (SDG) came early in the morning, inspected blocks, gave instructions, railed at and beat people if in their opinion anything was wrong. The *Lagerarzt* came a bit later, did some office work, and then inspected the blocks.

In the second part of block no. 1 was a pharmacy where an apothecary named Gottlieb worked. He came from France, but he was born in Poland and spoke Polish very well. He was a bit eccentric, but no wonder, because he didn't have many drugs and every doctor wanted to get as many of them as possible for their blocks. At some point we had a lot of aspirin and schmerztablets [*Schmerztabletten* – painkiller tablets], and schmerztablets and aspirin were prescribed for every illness. Another time, we had more pyramidon – every patient got pyramidon. Sometimes Gottlieb got *folie digitalis* – then patients were given *digitalis*. Since drugs were never in abundance, patients were given a spoon of them, so that they thought they were being treated – everything available was given to everyone. Sometimes the situation with drugs was even not so bad, but it was only when big *zugangs* came with 5 or 10 thousand a day, and many drugs arrived at the pharmacy by different, legal or illegal ways. Then we had various drugs: French, Dutch, Hungarian, Italian, and even Polish. All the doctors were happy. Even nervous Gottlieb was getting calmer, more satisfied, because he had drugs to give away and every doctor in return would give him cigarettes, and if they had parcels from home they would bring him a piece of lard or fat. But it must be said that you couldn't bribe Gottlieb. The pharmacy had only paper bandages, often too few of them, and lignin, also in short supply. Gauze and canvas bandages were available only when mass *zugangs* (transports) came.

Next to the pharmacy there was a small room, a laboratory where Polish lab technicians worked. The laboratory was headed by one of the oldest prisoners in Auschwitz, Zygmunt, whose family name I have forgotten, and the second lab technician was Zasadzki. Both lab technicians worked very efficiently and helped our medical well-being a lot. Next to the



laboratory room, a room for the *Lagerältester*, that is, the prisoner who represented all other prisoners before the *Lagerarzt*, was organized. When I came to the *Krakenbau*, in the first days of my stay there the *Lagerältest* was a German – a communist named Hans, who had a very stern look, but was harmful. After him came a very intelligent German – Schuster, who organized roll calls all the time, but we never heard that he beat or denounced anyone before the *Lagerarzt* or the Political Division. Next, the function of *Lagerältester* was taken up by the already mentioned Dr. Zenkteler from the quarantine, well-known to us, a doctor from Poznań province.

He was a strange man. He was always in bad temper, always railed at people, he was never satisfied, he hated people, being an old bachelor of about 60 years of age, well-built, strong, everyone was afraid of him, his fist blow was so strong that it was hard to stand on your legs. Sometimes he used a club, beating upon any part of the body, he himself said that he hated people, that he liked best to stay in the woods without shaving or bathing. And indeed, no one ever saw him bathing. He [was] extremely servile towards the *Lagerarzt* and the SS men. He spread terror not only among the doctors and *Pflegers*, but also among the patients. Being an extremely diligent and busy person, at the earliest hours he used to suddenly come to the blocks, checking if everyone had gotten up; he also used to come suddenly during the night to check if everything was according to regulations. He always managed to find something unsatisfying to him, he always railed at or beat someone. He was feared more than the *Lagerarzt* or SS men. The doctors feared him most, and his shouting in the patients' room destroyed any authority we had among the patients, authority that was so important for a doctor in the block.

The block no. 2 was created in October 1943, first as an ambulant and surgical ward for men, and later in a part of the block a surgery was organized, a very primitive and very primitively equipped one. The second part was a post-surgery ward. The head doctor was at the time Helmersohn [Helmersen], a young man, less than 28-years old, the son of a police constable in Berlin, very suspicious, who hated Poles and openly showed his hostility towards Poles. He did very few surgeries because he wasn't very skilled, and the chief surgeon among prisoner-doctors was Dr. Hermann, a young but gifted surgeon from Warsaw. At that time, for the first time, the hospital started to do appendectomies, and once even a gastroenterostomy was done. Every day, Helmersen walked through the blocks, checked patients' records, yelled at doctors that they were unskilled; he did postmortems most willingly, and his satisfaction



was visible when he was selecting people to go to the crematorium. And there were a lot of them. In August, the whole camp was full of Frenchmen who were building a road by block F. All of the blocks were full of French Jews. After couple of days, a selection was made in the *Krankenbau* and in camp D, and the Frenchmen disappeared, poisoned with gas and burned. After a couple of days, a new wave of several or tens of thousands of prisoners came who filled the roads of camp F and all the hospital blocks.

Train after train came with prisoners. They were Greek Jews. How many of them came, I can't say, but several tens of thousands. They swarmed in the quarantine, in camp D and, as I mentioned, in the *Krankenbau*, the hospital camp. Dark-skinned, busy, talkative, they were everywhere and all of them Greeks. I first came across them when they were building camp roads, digging ditches and canals. They were very awkward with working tools, and at first they took up the work with relatively good humor, but after a couple of days they started to show clear signs of exhaustion and fear. And their fear was not without reason, because here and there among them were kapos who hurried them to work with rods. It was visible that these people were not used to physical work, because their faces showed signs of terrible fatigue, their hands were swollen and full of blisters, they hardly could walk, would stop working, so the kapos had a field day. After a week, the hospital wards became full of sick Greeks. They expected the hospital to look like normal ones, but when they got hard beds in a crowded shed called a hospital, they started to despair. They didn't need to do anything. The hospital food was neither worse nor better than the camp food. Patients were given the same soup made of potato peels and turnips, the same green water called tea, and the same black water called coffee. The only difference was that they got less food than in the camp. So after a couple of days the whole block grew hostile towards the Greeks, because they were stealing heavily. No matter where you hid a piece of bread, the Greeks could always find it. The most elaborate methods of hiding food in beds, under the bed, protecting it with a night guard (*Nachtwache*) were futile, for every morning several or a dozen patients were missing bread or other foodstuff received in parcels from home. In block no. 5 there were about 40 of them, so stealing was very widespread. Every morning, block seniors searched all the beds of the Greeks looking for stolen bread, but they could find nothing. Some people lost whole ten-kilo parcels. Sometimes it was obvious who was the thief – you could tell when you saw them vomiting in the morning from enormous stomach flatulence, and when they went all the



time to the toilet. These were [symptoms] of excessive eating after starving. Through the entire *Krankenbau* (hospital) camp, attitudes among patients and workers were becoming hostile, not because of nationality, but because of the stealing. Beating applied by block seniors or *Pflegers* to people caught thieving didn't help. And it must be said that in the camp stealing, especially bread, was the worst offence. If someone beat or even killed someone else for stealing bread, it was generally seen as appropriate, and nobody reproached the killer.

When a Greek got a bit better and could go out, you could see him searching the garbage containers by the block where waste was thrown out, such as used bandages, rotten rags with pus, and rubbish from different hospital blocks. The Greeks searched and ate everything edible from the waste. They also went to the garden and ate raw beetroots, raw cabbage, and even all the weeds they could find. Nobody understood them, and even today I can't understand why they were so voracious and vulnerable to hunger. Each of us was given the same food portions, but only a few were as greedy for food as the Greeks. And they died like flies. They did not stay in the camp long. A couple of weeks after their arrival, *Lagerarzt* Helmersen made a selection throughout the whole camp, and for the next two days you could see black smoke and just a bit of fire coming from the chimneys. I say "black smoke", because when emaciated people – „muslims" – were burned, you could see only smoke, and fire was visible only when the fat ones were burned.

Coming back to the description of the blocks, block no. 2 was not only a block for major surgeries, but also a block [intended] for experimental purposes. Some experiments were not proper experiments, but rather murdering people. Thus, each day people were brought, from whom five to ten [cubic] centimeters of blood was taken. Other time, pregnant women starting their sixth month of pregnancy were brought and on all of them Caesarean sections were done. Fetuses were always taken out alive and then thrown into a big bucket, where the six-, seven-, eight- or even nine-month old babies cried and groaned till they died. It was hard to watch, but an order was an order, we had to do this, because an order had to be carried out, and it gave the women a chance to survive. A pregnant woman or a woman with a child meant certain death for them. I even think that some of the women were finally freed. In the block many laparotomies (surgical opening of the abdomen) were performed without any need. One day Helmersen disappeared, and his post was taken by *Obersturmführer* Tillo [Thilo].



Dr. Mengele, *Hauptsturmführer*, brought several dozen healthy children to our hospital, so-called *Zwillings*, or twins, and started experiments with differentiating blood. What the results of the research were, none of the doctors knew. We only knew that every couple of days five to ten [cubic] centimeters of blood was taken from them, the blood was sent to the laboratory, and the children got anemia because of malnutrition. Many of the children died, but several of them were finally freed.

In blocks no. 3 and 4 minor surgeries were performed. Patients with sores, injuries, boils, and most commonly abscesses came there. All surgeries were made without anaesthesia, often eight to ten cuts on one limb were made, torrents of pus were pouring out, patients were screaming aloud. In this way, all types of sores were cut, most commonly on buttocks – they resulted from festering haemorrhages after beating with rods. The surgeries were performed with unsterilized tools, a couple of drops of sagrotan in a bowl of water, and the whole sterilization process consisted of the tools being dipped in this solution. It seems strange and even unconceivable from a medical point of view that infections almost never developed in the wounds. As soon as the wounds healed a bit, the *Lagerarzt* would come and drive the people out to the camp for hard work, only for them to come back to the hospital after a couple of days. And this situation repeated itself till people ended their lives there.

Block no. 5. As I have already mentioned, in the quarantine I got sick, I had swollen legs and weakened heart muscle, so Dr. Zenkteler sent me to the hospital on the condition that when I got better I would start working. After a couple of days the swelling of the legs was gone, I felt a bit better, I got up from bed and started to work. I couldn't even dream about doing my medical work. I started with washing floors, and in the morning, even before the wake-up gong at 4.30 a.m., I was already bringing buckets of water, and then I brushed the black floor till it got whiter. A second *Pfleger* collected the dirty water from the floor with a rag, and another one took out the dirty water and washed the rags, and in this way the work progressed efficiently till the floor was clean. Next, we cleaned the beds, stools and sanitary containers. Then, I washed pots in the same buckets that were used in the morning for cleaning the floor, and at noon the soup bowls. In the evening, again pots. In the beginning, the work seemed to me difficult, but later I got so skilled in it that I beat the records of all other workers, even of the block senior who had showed us how to do [all] the work. I even earned the block senior's comment that „a university-educated man cleans the floor even better than uneducated people“. I must say that washing the soup bowls was the worst work



for me because the soup was disgusting not only to eat, but when it dried it became some kind of nasty grease, and so sticky that it was hard to clean with cold water.

I began to receive parcels. I got the first news from home. Though I never felt depressed, when I got the parcel I became more lively, I started to share my delicacies with the block senior, *Stubendiensts*, *Leitenderarzt*. They let me, in addition to cleaning the floors, take the temperatures of the patients. I performed the task very solemnly, and though I had already been a doctor for 30 years, when I got the thermometer in my hands I was as happy as if I had just finished my studies and got my first job in a hospital.

The *Leitenderarzt* was a doctor from Berlin, Dr. Cohen, a Jew who during the last war had been an officer in the German army. He complained all the time, asking why they had taken him to the camp, since he was very loyal, served Germany, always paid taxes, and to be honest he should rather have been an officer in the German army fighting on the front. He was 100-percent German, he had all their faults, as well as all the faults that can be found among Jews. He was an able doctor, very meticulous in describing the condition of every patient. Probably nowhere, not even in the best clinics, were descriptions of patients made so meticulously as they were made by him, and required from his subordinate doctors. Temperature charts and analyses were so conscientiously recorded that they could serve as an example for the best medical institutions. But he treated no one. He practically didn't know how to treat patients. The description of a patient was enough for him, because it was required by the *Lagerarzt*. Later, I learned from him why he was so meticulous – he used to be a railway doctor in the Berlin district. A man with influenza got a description of every tiny birthmark on his body, every trace from beating or cutting, no small epidermis injury could escape his attention. He was a Jew, so he got no parcels from home. I started to feed him a bit, being his subordinate, as I fed a bit the block senior, and I started to treat patients. I became, as it were, a therapist – I brought aspirin, *schmerztablets*. The last ones were very popular among patients, because they more or less helped sick people for all their ailments. Headaches – *schmerztablets*, *pleuritis* – *schmerztablets*, *ischias*, rheumatism, bladder pains, stomach pains, any pains – *schmerztablet* was the drug that more or less relieved all suffering. During some periods, more drugs would come to the pharmacy, and then we could sometimes use *pulmochine* [?], *camphochina* [?], sometimes camphor, and even from time to time we could get sulfonamides of good quality, such [as] *oleodron*. Conducted in this way, the block became an exemplary block for internal medicine in camp F. I was happy



that I could help people to some extent, and Cohen was proud that it was his block that was considered the best one. All that ended when Thilo found out from our patient cards that we used a lot of drugs: he railed at Cohen, and then even more at me that I used excessive amounts of drugs, that soldiers on the front were lacking them, and that I was unnecessarily wasting drugs. He told us to treat pneumonia only with rags soaked in cold water applied two times a day – in the morning and in the evening. Both of us said *jawohl*, and neither I nor Dr. Cohen followed his orders. I just wrote in the patient cards “cold wet-dressing in the morning and in the evening”. A couple of days later, Thilo checked whether we had followed the methods ordered by him, read several patient cards, and said: „Gut”.

In block no. 6 internal diseases were also treated, but rather less serious ones.

Block no. 7 was dedicated to special diseases. People with rare, rather chronic conditions were sent there. From every block, people with incurable or almost incurable diseases were chosen. Cancers and nomas were first in the line. Then came diseases concerning the brain, *spondilitis*, chronic kidney diseases, hypoplasia and arthritis. The block had special beds with more space between them, better food was often available there, sometimes patients were given milk, often white bread and drugs in relatively high quantities. The block existed for several months, then all the Jewish patients went to the crematorium, and the rest were divided between the other blocks, and I think that all of them died. Whether the *Lagerarzt* learned something from that, we don't know, but anyway he boasted that only Germans represented such a high scientific and humanitarian level. Later, the block was transformed into a hospital for German prisoners, and from then on it was really privileged, because they were fed better by far – they were given soup without limitations, two or three times a week they had so-called *Zulage*, or extra food in the form of one-third or even a half of a loaf of bread and two-four centimeters of a fat sausage. They were lords among patients, they were feared by all patients and convalescents from other blocks, and even block seniors or doctors of other nationalities tried to avoid them, because they were on friendly terms with the *Lagerarzt*, they could denounce anyone, they could say that someone is anti-German and it was enough for the *Lagerarzt* to send that person to a bunker or a coalmine. Some of them pretended to be friendly, even tried to have friendly relations with Poles or other nationalities, but anyone dealing with them had to pay for that later.

When Dr. Zenkteler offered me the job of head physician in block no. 7, I replied that I preferred to go to the camp for hard labor or even to a coalmine rather than to that



block. One doctor who worked there was Dr. Łaba, from Przemyśl, who, being in general a composed man, sometimes was so upset that he couldn't work. Several times he was in danger, because the Germans provoked him and treated their doctor as their servant.

Block no. 8, where I became the head physician, was the infectious block ZB (*zu beobachten* – observational). The block housed about 400 patients and there was only one doctor, a Jew named Goldberg, who naturally couldn't manage all the work that was needed there. All the patients were very seriously ill from different diseases. Zenkteler accused the doctor before the *Lagerarzt* of being careless and lazy, and as a result [Goldberg] was sent to *Kohlengrubau*, or heavy work in a coalmine. What happened to him later, I don't know. When I came to the block I had to start everything from scratch. Patients were undiagnosed, so they weren't being treated. I chose two doctors from among the patients in the block and began work. After a couple of days I had accurate descriptions of half of the patients, and the rest under preparation. Every day the block was visited by Zenkteler, who constantly railed at me that too little was done, and several times tried to question my diagnoses, so that all the time we had quarrels which I usually won. It was evident that he was looking for something that would give him an excuse to mistreat me. But he couldn't find anything, so once he came at me with his fists while he was examining a patient. I was just putting patient charts into the frames hanging on the beds. He rushed at me and started to pummel me, and as he was prone to do, he hit me several times on my stomach below ribs. I looked at him sharply, I saw that I could not win with such a bull, I didn't hit him back, but my look must have touched him deeply, and when I asked why he beat me, he replied: "You idiot, you're rustling papers when I examine a patient". News about the incident spread about the whole camp. I know that even his friends reproached him for his behavior. He never hit me again, but he often used to tell me that I was „too smart” or a “clever guy”, trying to persuade me that I should be more stupid than him and that only he was a doctor and no one else in the whole camp. I treated him as I would any SS man and assumed an attitude toward him as toward any SS man, because he behaved just like them, and he was even worse because he knew all the people, he spoke German and Polish, and with all of this he went to complain to the *Lagerarzt*. The latter considered him the most faithful of his servants, let him do whatever he wanted, accepted all his proposals, and enforced all punishments suggested by him.

After Zenkteller beat me I became bolder towards him and I demanded still more doctors from him. Soon there were seven of us in one block.

Several cases of scarlet fever, several cases of diphtheria, a dozen or so cases of German measles, several cases of *otitis media*, several cases of typhus and several dozen patients suspected of pulmonary tuberculosis. Detailed analyses of sputum in the first tests already showed 26 cases of "positive Koch". Those were the first tests for tuberculosis performed in our *Krackenbau*. Further tests showed more and more cases of tuberculosis. I told the *Lagerarzt* about it – at that time Zenkteler was already gone, he had taken on the function of head of the ambulance in camp D and the quarantine. Tests of sputum in other blocks were carried out and immediately showed about 80 positive results. Then the *Lagerarzt* – or even some higher authority – decided that a special block for consumptives would be built, no. 17. Until it was finished, all consumptives stayed in their blocks, the same with my block, no. 8, where the number of persons with positive test results had risen to 47. Besides this, patients came to my block with various contagious diseases, mainly German measles which at the time were common in the whole of our camp.

The results of the treatment for German measles depended on the means or drugs that I was able to organize. For some time I was getting ichthyol ointment, with which I smeared patients black, and when that was lacking I used *bolus alba*. We used it for *Durchfall*, and also to paint the walls and beds in the block. It is a loam substance and patients had to wear white masks. Pantosil and sulfonamides were very scarce in the pharmacy, so I used sulfonamides only for very seriously ill patients. Then, a transport came. In exchange for food, for white bread that was not good for seriously ill patients (and instead of giving it to the block personnel) I managed to get prontosil and oleodron from the *Sonderkommando*. I started treatment, and the results were immediately very good. Patients recovered, and then a fourth one came and they gave an order to prepare all the patients for an inspection. In the afternoon it was *alle Juden antreten*. I had 38 of them, and at least half of them absolutely healthy, a dozen of them very well built. *Lagerarzt* Thilo came and this time he made a total selection, that is, he took 36 of them to the crematorium, only two of them staying in the block – one Jewish doctor, dying, and a barber, whom I insisted that I needed very much in the block. I handed over two more doctors to him, expecting him to release them, but as usual he answered with his bass voice „Ja, ja“, from which it could be gathered that there was no chance of that. That was the first selection when almost all Jews from all blocks were taken, and the first selection when it became impossible to hide anyone, because the *Lagerarzt* was followed by two SS men and several civil officers who had lists of all Jews in each block. They were all burned.



Block no. 9 was a typhoid block, the same as blocks no. 10 and 11. In the *Krankenbau* typhoid was very common at the time. To fight it, Dr. Zenkteler was brought back, and he indeed eradicated typhoid in the whole camp. His method was this: *Pfleger*s and doctors had to completely undress all the patients in a block, linen, blankets, all such things from a block were sent to be disinfected, only beds and mattresses were left. All the people from the block went naked on foot, in a temperature of minus a dozen or so centigrade (it was January) to the bath. There, they were shaved all over their bodies. Then they took a bath, and were sprayed with some kind of fluid, probably kerosene mixed with some kind of disinfectant. At the same time, the block was gassed with zyklon or a similar substance (*Entlausungsaktion*). We waited in the *Waschraum* for a couple of hours. During that time, many people died because some of them were in a very serious condition. Then the block was opened and after a couple of hours our disinfected things and linen came. After that, there was no lice or fleas in the block, and even rats and mice were not so common. *Entlausungsaktion* in my block killed about 20 [people]. Mortality in every block was huge. At the cost of the lives of several hundred people, Zenkteler brought the typhoid under control and later, up to the end of the war, only sporadic cases of typhoid occurred in our camp.

Block no. 12 was a block for Jews, the so-called terminally ill ones. Normally it housed about 500 people, and during selections a couple hundred more people were driven there, [so] sometimes the number reached 1200. Burning was carried out on Sabbath nights or on other big Jewish holidays. But the biggest burning took place on the judgment day.

Blocks no. 13, 14 and 15 were at different periods of time [dedicated] to different diseases. A canteen was also there where you could buy mustard, sometimes some disgusting mineral water nobody wanted to drink, and sometimes half-rotten snails that when eaten made people sick. Toilet paper and tooth-cleaning powder could always be bought there.

In February, I was told to gather all patients with pulmonary diseases from the hospital and transfer them to block no. 17. I gathered over a hundred of the most seriously ill patients from my block and from other blocks. A couple of days later, blocks no. 10 and 11, which had previously been typhoid blocks, were transformed into tuberculosis blocks. Thus, our three blocks housed over 400 patients. Patients were divided amongst those with open tuberculosis and those with clinical tuberculosis. Mortality in those blocks was very high. Every day, from each of our blocks five to ten dead corpses were taken. But still new patients



came, so we were rather lacking in free space. On the *Lagerarzt's* order, every week we made analyses of sputum and every eight days we took blood to check blood sedimentation. We treated the patients by giving them, in the morning and in the evening – if we had it – a tablespoon of aqua calcis (lime water). I did all that I could to transform my block into a treatment block and move the terminally ill patients to block no. 10 or no 11.

The very ingenious Dr. Hermann from the block no. 3 prepared a drawing of a device for artificial pneumothorax. From the pharmacy we got bottles for salt solutions, from the laboratory we got pipes, and carpenters built the rest of the device. The rubber from stethoscopes and needles for pneumothorax we got in the Gypsy camp, and thus in block 17 a device for artificial pneumothorax was built. We worked with all the doctors from all the tuberculosis blocks and selected cases suitable for artificial pneumothorax. In my block, there were about 40 patients treated with artificial pneumothorax, and in addition, about 20 outpatients came for the treatment. In some cases we had very good therapy results. In the block headed by me I had several doctors, including Dr. Juliusz Epstein from Prague, and also Dr. Wasilewski from the Wilno region who, after several months of work in my block, was transferred as a doctor to the sauna. From the spring till late autumn, huge transports were coming to the gas chambers, on some days 15–20 thousand people. They brought a lot of things with them, not only food but also plenty of drugs. Dr. Wasilewski had relatively good access to the materials, and first he brought in his pockets *calcium* injections and other drugs, and later he passed on to us whole suitcases of drugs through the wires. We had plenty of syringes, a dozen or so of them in different sizes, and needles for injections, we got these also from Wasilewski. We made intravenous injections of calcium, we gave patients a lot of vitamins in tablets and solutions, calcium tablets and many other medicines. Thus, it can be said that in my block I had almost all the medicines that I needed in all quantities, so long as the transports “to the crematorium” came and Wasilewski worked as a doctor in the sauna. I kept the drugs under the roof in the attic, for, according to the regulations, I couldn't have even one bit of a drug more than I was officially given. It was forbidden to take them from the sauna or organize it in any other way. So in the locker I had some official tablets, and the rest were hidden, and every doctor tried to organize more or less efficiently at least some materials that were needed in his block. In general, it can be said that all the doctors did what they could to help and treat their patients.

The biggest obstacle was nutrition, because in the tuberculosis blocks patients were given the same food as anywhere else, i.e. green herbs in the morning, a soup from potato



peels at noon, and the black water they called coffee in the evening. 250 g of black bread, a tiny piece of margarine or dry bread. In our block as in all the other blocks, hunger was widespread. The Hungarian transports that brought a lot of lard, and even sardines and other luxury products, helped a bit, but usually only those who had friends in the sauna. In general, they didn't help patients much. Those who got parcels from home could eat better and quite often they more or less recovered, even returned to the camp to work. Other died [most often from] diarrhoea (*Durchfall*), so the death cards signed by me almost all looked the same: *Durchfall, Herzschwäche, Lungentuberkulose*.

The Warsaw uprising brought parcels to a stop, and till the end of the war we remained dependent on the food given to us in the camp. Then, in all three of our blocks the mortality rate visible rose. Each of us head doctors compared notes between our blocks as to how many dead corpses lay by their blocks. New patients came all the time, the blocks were overcrowded all the time, and tuberculosis was widespread. In my block, like in any other, I had several or a dozen patients who had only small, clinical symptoms of tuberculosis. We kept them because they were needed and we expected that the war would end some time soon. We didn't send them back to the camp and we kept them till the end of the war, and some of them survived only for that reason. We often risked our own heads, but so be it, in the camp there were bandits, killers, but also many people who risked their lives to save other people. Several times during my work I was in really deep water and I thought that I would go to the bunker or for hard labor in a coalmine. But I was lucky.

Once in block no. 16, that is, in the *Waschraum*, I presented my patients for inspection to the camp doctor. He saw one well-looking patient and started to yell at me that I was keeping a man who was healthy as an ox, that I was sabotaging regulations. Luckily, the patient had a nice cavern under his right collarbone and an evident wet rattle under his shoulder blade, [so] I could confidently say that he had a very serious case of tuberculosis despite how he looked. The *Lagerarzt* looked at me, but didn't want to personally examine the patient. He only indicated to me very sharply that if he ever caught me keeping patients that were overstaying their time, and he had already heard something about it, then he would send me to *Kohlengrub*. Usually, the *Lagerarzt* was well disposed towards me [because of my work] in block no. 8, but his mood depended on victories or defeats on the front. If he came to the block just after some victory, he always said that the block was well run by me and asked if he could help patients in anything. Then I would propose better food etc. and he



would agree, but nothing ever came out of it. If the Germans were defeated in any battle, he would come suddenly to the blocks, including mine, and everything would be wrong for him, walls were dirty, beds not cleaned, the floor not washed properly, patients examined in the wrong way, everything was *schweinerei*. To all this you had to answer: „Jawohl Herr Obersturmführer“, and that was all.

In December 1944, he came to my block and started to ask clearly provocative questions: „Does the fat man over there have tuberculosis?“, I said: “Yes sir”. “And the other one?” – I said „Yes sir“. He pointed to several more still, and I always replied loudly, with conviction: “Jawohl”, because he couldn’t check it by himself, he never touched patients, and I doubt if he could verify what I said using only a stethoscope. So before leaving he told me to select as many patients as possible for the camp, because they need people for work, and said that he didn’t want to see those fatties in the block anymore. He slammed the door and was gone. And indeed, I had to send several people to work. Many others stayed, but they started to watch every movement of the *Lagerarzt*. When he was coming to block no. 17, the last one, they would leave the block and hide wherever they could till he left.

Opposite to block no. 17 stood block no. 18, where 300–400 sick people stayed – they were mostly exhausted, disabled, elderly people, and some people were just hiding there. The block was called *Schonungsblock*. Almost every day they took 20–30 people to the camp from that block. But still new ones came, the most numerous being inhabitants of Warsaw brought through Pruszków after the Warsaw uprising. The people from Warsaw usually couldn’t understand us, they called us – prisoners who had spent years [in the camp] – bandits and said that they were sent here because of some idiots and rascals who had organized an uprising in Warsaw and who had spoilt the businesses they depended on. [They thought] that they were different from us, and in the beginning they even demanded different treatment from other prisoners. It took quite some time to grow closer to them and make them realize that they were also victims of the German terror, and that the Warsaw uprising, whatever else might be said about it, was organized by a group of political gamblers, but that people fighting in Warsaw had to be seen as heroes, and those sent to the camp were victims of German bestiality. Later, we lived with them on good terms. Some of them were taken by SS men in transports during the evacuation of the camp, while the weaker ones stayed in the camp till it was liberated by the Red Army.



I stayed in block no. 17 from February 1944 on, and, though several times they tried to transfer me to another block, I did what I could to stay there and I did. Block no. 17 was the last one, [located] in the vicinity of the crematorium and the railway line used to bring victims taken directly to the gas chambers. On some days, when several trains came full of people, men, women, children led by the hand, children in prams, all of them were standing on the road close to the railway line. Between the railway line and the road to the crematorium I always saw *Lagerarzt* Thilo standing with a couple of SS men, and they made the selection, sending about 80 percent of the people to the crematorium and the remaining 20 percent to the camp. People walking to the camp were healthy men and young, childless women. To the crematorium were sent all the older, disabled, weaker people, and all women with smaller or bigger kids or showing signs of pregnancy. People from some transports didn't even realize what was going on, other times you could see great anxiety among the people on the road, and we heard that sometimes mothers, to save their own lives, left their children in the crowd. The child lost in the crowd grabbed the dress of any woman.

Thus, train after train came with sick people, so that day and night a line of people hundreds of meters long, sent to the gas chambers, was heading towards crematoria II, III, IV and V. When a dozen or more trains came, a great column of people arranged in fives went farther, past the crematoriums, to a ditch close to a small forest, and then, accompanied by screams, terrible screams heard by all of us in the hospital camp, a huge fire blazed several dozen meters high. A small gas chamber was close to the ditch. They hastily gassed a couple of hundred people there in turn, who many times only half-gassed were then thrown into the ditches, and many children were thrown alive directly into the flames. The last statement is based on accounts of quite reliable persons and on the screams and cries that we could distinctly hear. These kinds of cries could only come from people who were being killed or thrown into the flames. All of us watched this with a terrible pain, or even terror, we couldn't believe that it was true, in spite of the fact that we watched and we saw with our own eyes the terrible flames, heard the terrible cries, and saw the terrible lines of people who never came back – nobody saw them again.

In the ditch people were burned in this way: first they put layers of wood there, then sprinkled these with inflammable liquid, and then the victims were thrown onto the wood. The stench of burned human corpses coming from the chimneys and ditches was suffocating not only in camp F, but even in more distantly located camps. On such days, I personally had a cough from the terrible smell. My patients and patients in other



tuberculosis blocks were coughing all the time, day and night, suffocating from [the stench of] burning corpses. It lasted for months, they were going there day after day. Close to block no. 17, as if in irony, the Germans allowed us to organize a sports field where on Sundays, and even on some weekdays, football players came, mainly block seniors, *kapos*, *vorarbeiters*, and they played football, and the prisoner spectators watched, wiping tears coming from their eyes because of the smoke and applauding when a goal was scored.

In this way, the Germans managed to corrupt even the best people. But in the camp it was impossible to spend all our time mourning what was going on around us, for in this way all chances for seeking freedom would be lost. Only in the late autumn were selections and transports of sick people stopped. The Germans began more systematically to carry away all the materials left by the murdered people. Whole trains departed with the best men's, women's and children clothes, whole thousands of baby prams, hundreds of thousands of silk stockings. The *Effektenkammer* was being cleared. It was about 30 blocks full of clothes and belongings of the murdered people, worth many millions or maybe billions of dollars. They carried them away day and night, and later it was clear that they lacked trains for the transports.

January came. The rumble of artillery could be heard. More and more often, the factories located around our camp were bombarded, usually by American planes coming several dozen at a time, or sometimes even over a hundred of them. There was great joy in our camp, bombs were falling on the German factories around us, and especially, as we learned, on Buna-Werke. Air raids also happened during the nights, probably Soviet ones. The whole surroundings were lit with flares looking like wonderful lanterns to us, and a real joy filled our hearts when we heard the explosions of bombs and the sound of anti-aircraft guns. I must say that we saw a lot of American air raids. Shrapnel from anti-aircraft shells came down on our roof and on the road, so all the patients had to be driven into the blocks, but we never saw even one aircraft going down. How well-planned the air-raids were is proven by the fact that never did any bomb fall into our camp, while the SS men's barracks located very close to the camp were flattened by American, English or Soviet bombs. Day after day passed in this way. The Germans sent transport after transport from the work camps, both from our camp and from other camps. In Birkenau only ten or so thousand were left out of several tens of thousands.

On the night of January 18, in the *Krankenbau*, the gong started to sound the alarm – *alle Ärzte, alle Pfleger antreten*, and we gathered by block no. 1. There we were met by the



Lagerarzt and several dozen SS men who immediately told us to form in fours. A moment later, the *Lagerarzt* told us to hurry to the blocks and bring all registers and case histories. We packed them to an ambulance that took [them] just outside of the camp, where groups of SS men were burning everything from the blocks and everything from the *Schreibstube*, pharmacy or laboratory. I and several other doctors, together with the head doctor, Prof. Epstein from Prague, were left to look after the patients. The rest were taken to Oświęcim for a transport on foot. In the morning, again all the doctors and patients who could walk were summoned, and those who reported before block no. 1 were marched out on foot in a transport. The *Reinigungskommando* came, they spilled some inflammable liquid on all the blocks of the *Effektenkammer* and a terrible fire [started]. It seemed as if in a moment our blocks would catch fire. A rumor spread in the camp that in a moment they would also burn our blocks with patients inside. Many people were afraid to stay, they told everyone around that anyone who could walk should go out in the transport. Many people went. I hid in the camp with several dozen others. Besides us, seriously ill people stayed, more than a thousand of them.

A couple of times the SS men hunted for us, each time they would catch someone, but I decided not to move anywhere, because I didn't believe that they would burn our blocks, I even thought that they would have no time for that. The sound of the gunfire came closer and closer, and machine guns could be heard. A group of SS men came again and they guarded the roads between the hospital blocks and chose from the patients those who were less seriously ill. I and my brother-in-law, engineer Urbański, ran away toward the crematorium II and stayed there for a couple of hours till the situation improved. Even before this we used to go there when SS men came to the camp.

The situation grew quieter. Already for two or three days, no SS men could be seen, the sound of the artillery fire got louder and louder. In the air, more and more – usually Soviet – planes could be seen, the anti-aircraft battery moved a bit farther from the camp, but it was most probably destroyed, because bombs fell behind the forest on their new positions and from then on the anti-aircraft guns couldn't be heard anymore. Machine guns started to rattle.

At that time the kitchen stopped operating. No food was brought to us. Less seriously ill patients from camp F and less seriously ill women patients from camp E stormed the storehouses and broke into them, and then blocks became full of bags of sugar, different



groats, tens of kilos of margarine, canned food etc. In my block I organized a kind of commune – everything had to be brought to one place. The ones that brought the food didn't give up everything they had, but the food was in such abundance that even seriously ill patients who couldn't get off their beds could be properly fed. At the same time women from camp E took care of our kitchen and started to cook soup for patients in the men's hospital and for the women's hospital. The food was tasty and in abundance. Obviously, it couldn't last for a very long time. A lot of it was spoiled. What was captured could last only for several days. We worried a lot what we would do if it took longer for the Soviet Army to come to the camp.

But it happened as we hoped it would – on 28 January 1945 someone hurriedly came to me in the block saying that he had seen a Soviet soldier between the blocks. I went out towards the women's blocks and I saw women coming from different directions shouting that they saw the Red Army soldiers. And after less than five minutes many Soviet soldiers were coming asking "Haven't you seen any Germans?" We answered that there were none. Those were the first patrols. Within half an hour in the whole camp all the roads were full of soldiers. All of us welcomed them. Not only men, but also women were embracing soldiers to thank them for liberation. The Soviet soldiers were very friendly toward us and they advised everyone who could walk to go home. They let us take everything we wanted to take, so sledges full of blankets, clothes, food were advancing towards Oświęcim and farther on the road to Kraków.

On 29 January 1945 I took my backpack, packed some bread and some margarine in it, and went on foot to Kraków where I arrived three days later. I walked over 20 kilometers a day in spite of the fact that I was emaciated – skin and bones. I was a "muslim", as such people were called in the camp. But the joy of being finally free strengthened me. On January 31 in the evening I was already in the city. A couple of days later the City Council of Kraków elected me as president of the city, and I began my duties in clothes with a red stripe on my trousers and a red cross on my back. Only after a couple of weeks did my wife bring me my normal clothes.