



HENRYK PORĘBSKI

On 28 February 1947 in Świdnica, Investigative Judge of the District Court of Świdnica, with its seat in Świdnica, Municipal Judge Fr. Korzeń, with the participation of reporter J. Szląkowska, heard the person named below as a witness. Having been advised of the criminal liability for making false statements and of the wording of Article 107 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, the witness testified as follows:

Name and surname	Henryk Porębski
Age	36
Parents' names	Ludwik and Maria
Place of residence	Świdnica, Równa Street 18
Occupation	office worker
Religious affiliation	Roman Catholic
Criminal record	none
Relationship to the parties	none

On 21 August 1940, I was arrested on the street in Gorlice. After a few days in jail in Gorlice, I was moved to the prison in Jasło. I stayed there for about 11 days and then I was moved to the prison in Tarnowo, where I stayed for about a month and a half. Then, I was transported along with about a thousand people to the concentration camp in Auschwitz.

On 8 October 1940, I arrived at the concentration camp in Auschwitz. As far as I know, there had been no more than 3,000–3,500 prisoners in Auschwitz prior to my arrival. However, I saw prisoners whose given numbers were higher than that. After the arrival of our transport, the number of prisoners at the camp went up to over 6,000.



After having arrived at the camp, being bathed and then stripped of all possessions we had brought with us, I was placed in block 11. The number of this block was later changed to 9. A German with a black triangle was our block leader. According to the camp authorities, he was too decent a man when it came to the way he treated prisoners, which is why he was soon removed from his post, appointed as a *kapo* and then relocated from Auschwitz.

During the first two weeks, the inhabitants of the above-mentioned block, in which I was staying, did not go to do any work. Instead, they were involved in the so-called sport. The "sport" took place from 6.00 a.m. to 5.30 p.m., with a one-hour break for dinner, [and] it included marching in a tight column, Swedish gymnastics, etc. Next, there was crawling, rolling on the ground (*Rolen*), squat jumps (*żabki*) and spinning around with both hands placed on the head. The "sport" was very debilitating to those with a weaker heart, so much so that a number of the prisoners with whom I had arrived at the camp died from exhaustion after only three days. After a two-week stay in the block, its inhabitants were taken for sporadic work at the camp, such as carrying bricks or wooden and concrete poles for building a fence around the camp, etc.

On 11 January 1941, I got into work in the *Porąbka*. There were about 50 prisoners working there with me – all of them Polish – and we all lived in a basement situated under some villa. *Unterscharführer* Hessler [Hössler] was the commandant of this working group. In the *Porąbka*, the prisoners would carry 50-kilogram bags up a steep hill; others would carry 80-kilogram cubes of pressed peat, buckets of sand, bricks, etc., and building materials such as roofing felt, beams.

I remember that on 31 October 1940, a prisoner had escaped from the camp. Because of that, the numbers did not add up during the roll call, so the entire camp had to remain standing from 12.00 p.m. to 9.00 p.m. 128 people died after that roll call. I remember the exact number, because I learned it from a hospital orderly – a Polish prisoner from Silesia. Besides that, I saw the bodies being carried out onto the car which was used for bringing bread to the camp.

From 2 February 1941, having returned from the *Porąbka*, I worked as a car locksmith and later as a blacksmith in the so-called Car Service (*Fahrbereischaft*). During the time when I was working as a blacksmith, SS men would come to the forge. They would bring gold in



secret and they would have me cast some objects from that gold. The gold brought by the SS men came from teeth. Most often, I used it to make buttons for the SS men's uniforms.

I remember that after the escape of that prisoner, which kept us standing at the roll call for so long, 41 people from the escaped prisoner's town were brought to the camp and executed. Who ordered their execution, I don't know.

I worked in the Car Service for an entire year, that is, until February 1942. In 1941, around autumn, there was an inspection in block 24, as a result of which prisoners were found in possession of large amounts of cash, cigarettes and gold. Rudolf Höß, who was the commandant of the camp at that time, ordered about 100 people from that block to be placed in the so-called bunker. After spending the night in the bunker, the majority of those 100 prisoners died from suffocation. Only 16 were left, mostly Germans.

The bunker was a jail composed of small concrete bricks, sealed so well that the airflow was almost completely obstructed. Even though the cells in those bunkers were built to fit four people, 18 prisoners would be placed in there. They were packed into the cell using violence and the door was closed forcefully, so that those huddled inside would die of suffocation.

Since there were instances of prisoners escaping from the camp at the end 1941 and beginning of 1942, commandant Rudolf Höß would order that the block whose inhabitant had escaped during work be decimated. When I saw such a decimation taking place, Rudolf Höß himself had the inhabitants of a given block stand in line and then would count them by tens. Whoever happened to be the tenth was taken aside and placed in the bunker, where they died of hunger. I firmly believe that I once saw Rudolf Höß perform this kind of decimation himself. The reason I saw it was because the block that was being decimated was situated opposite the one where I was standing at a roll call.

The next decimation in 1941 was performed by Höß's deputy, Frietsch [Fritzsich]. He was a bit more lenient than Höß, in that he agreed to an exchange: he didn't mind if someone physically weaker volunteered to take the place of the prisoner who ended up with the number ten. However, Fritzsich usually performed decimation differently, that is, he would choose the people who were to die and he would choose, say, 90 people out of a block of 900. He would choose 90 of the weakest prisoners, the so-called "Muslims," who were relatively old. Later, Fritzsich reduced the number of the people to be killed, say to ten from an entire block.



I know that Höß ordered an entire working group comprised of a hundred people, who worked on the railway leading from Auschwitz to Dziedzice, to be placed in a special penal company – the so-called SK [*Strafkompanie*] – because the prisoners had responded to greetings from the people on a passing train by waving. Those one hundred people died in less than two weeks. Höß gave the order that the number of people in the SK always had to amount to 600 – or some such number, I don't remember exactly. So, if the number of men was insufficient, prisoners guilty of no offence were sent to that group.

In the middle of the fall of 1941, one of the bunkers was converted into a gas chamber, and that's where the first attempt at gassing 300 Jews brought from Vienna took place. I don't know why this attempt proved unsuccessful. Those out of the 300 who remained alive were shot.

A month after the attempted gassing of the Jews, nine blocks in Auschwitz were separated from the rest with a high-powered electric fence. When the preparations for creating a kind of a new camp were complete, a small transport arrived, comprised of about 600 men. They were Ukrainian Jews, soldiers who had performed the function of war commissars in the Soviet Army. Those 600 Ukrainian Jews were placed in the gas chamber, the one where the Viennese Jews had been gassed. As I found out, this attempt wasn't successful either, since the Jewish commissars who remained alive were shot.

Soon after the above-mentioned nine blocks had been separated, transports with Russian prisoners of war arrived. They were placed in the nine blocks. The Russian prisoners didn't work anywhere, but I managed to observe that they were constantly standing at roll call. It turned out that the numbers didn't add up at the roll call, and that's why they were continuously counted. The numbers didn't add up, because the inhabitants of the nine blocks would be moved from one block to another, and so it took a long time before it could be determined that no one had escaped from the camp. That's when Höß came up with the idea to select the younger of the Russian prisoners of war and place them in a separate block. On his orders, each of them had to have a serial number tattooed on the left breast. All the inhabitants of the Russian camp (10,500 people) were then tattooed. In December 1941, these prisoners of war were for the first time engaged in levelling work during the construction of the new camp in Birkenau.

I observed that the Russian prisoners were especially harassed and beaten. Polish prisoners were used for that purpose. They were forcefully sent to the Russian camp. If any of the Poles assigned to the task did not beat or harass the Russian prisoners, they would receive



25 lashes on their buttocks. As I have testified above, these Polish prisoners were forcefully assigned to the Russian camp, where they performed the function of *kapos* and the so-called *Vorarbeiters* [foremen].

In December 1941, there was an outbreak of a typhus epidemic, which largely decimated the numbers of the Russian prisoners. Consequently, the camp command moved the whole camp to the unfinished barracks in Birkenau in order to stop the typhus epidemic from spreading. At the end of January 1942, the camp of the Russian prisoners, inhabiting nine blocks in Auschwitz, was completely liquidated. The nine blocks, deserted by the Russians, were sanitized and later occupied by the prisoners of the camp in Auschwitz.

Even though the camp was cleared of the Russian prisoners, who were moved to Birkenau, the typhus began to spread among the Auschwitz prisoners. In consequence, as ordered by the camp command, all sick prisoners, regardless of their illness, were relocated to the camp in Birkenau.

On 16 January 1942, or rather February, I was moved to Birkenau with the so-called *kommando* of electricians. This *kommando* was comprised of ten people, all of them Polish. When I arrived, a large number of Russians, that is, those who remained from the camp of the Russian prisoners, had been moved from Auschwitz to Birkenau. The number of people in the Russian camp did not exceed 2,000. Even though the first transports had started to arrive in Auschwitz only in October, just 2,000 people out of 10,500 were left by February 1942.

Hoffmann, an SS man with a military grade of officer, was the commandant of the camp in Birkenau. When I arrived in Birkenau, there were no crematoria or gas chambers yet. The gas chambers were built by the SK (*Strafkompanie*) during my stay in Birkenau. While I was in the camp in Birkenau, I observed that the typhus was killing all the Soviet prisoners, as well as those who had been moved from Auschwitz to Birkenau due to their illness. By the end of April 1942, all sick prisoners moved from Auschwitz to Birkenau had died. Their bodies were taken to the crematorium at the camp in Auschwitz. Those sick prisoners had no choice but to die in Birkenau, as there was no water, no clothes, no mattresses. They would lie on bricks or wooden boards. They had no medical care. They didn't even have blankets to cover themselves with – instead, they used the Russian war coats that they wore. They didn't get any spoons or bowls for their food in Birkenau and they didn't get any underwear either.



The end of April 1942 saw the completion of a gas chamber on the camp premises. The gas chamber was created from a brick housing facility in Birkenau (the other housing facilities were knocked down). It was sealed accordingly and prepared to serve the purpose of a gas chamber. Two barracks were built outside the gas chamber. At that time, men as well as women with children were brought by cars. Women and children were placed in one of the barracks, while men were placed in the other. People would get undressed in those barracks and then they would go to the gas chamber. Prior to entering, they were given towels and soap. At the entrance to the gas chamber, there was an inscription: *Zu Baderaum* [shower room]. After ten minutes, an SS man standing outside of the gas chamber would check through the window if everyone inside was dead. At the back of the gas chamber, there was a door through which Jewish prisoners with gas masks would take out the bodies and load them onto a narrow gauge railway. They would be taken some 200 to 300 meters away to a forest, where six holes [were dug], and the bodies would be prepared to be burned on fires, outdoors. The 20 prisoners tending to the gas chamber were Jews. Until the end of June 1942, they worked for two weeks at most, then they were gassed and new Jews were chosen in their place.

On 12 June 1942, I lost consciousness and I was carried to the so-called *rewir* [hospital]. I couldn't stay there, because I got infected with typhus and those with typhus were immediately sent to the gas chamber via the so-called death block (no. 7). With the help of a prisoner-doctor – Piasecki, later executed – and the block leader Wiktor Mordawski, formerly a prosecutor from Nowy Sącz, I managed to avoid gassing.

I would like to mention that in June 1942, a large transport of Czech Jews (about 14,000 people) arrived in Birkenau. These, by the order of the command, were murdered in a few hours by the German prisoners and by the forced Polish prisoners. They beat them with poles, kicked them and drowned them in the mire.

Having recovered from typhus, as a member of the so-called *kommando* of electricians, I walked around the camp a lot and observed what was happening in Birkenau. In July 1942, I observed that SS men walked around the camp three times a week and would catch prisoners remaining in the camp – regardless of their nationality – and place them in block 7, the so-called death block. It was occupied by the sick prisoners condemned to gassing. After the healthy prisoners were joined to the sick ones, they were all sent straight to the gas chamber. This was taking place until the fall of 1942.



In October 1942, transports of Russian prisoners started to arrive in Birkenau. They were sent to the gas chamber right away. The Russians who were already prisoners in the camp knew about this, and that's why they decided to either break free at any cost or get themselves executed. In addition, there were rumours that the SS men, together with the prisoners from the so-called *Sonderkommando* [special unit], were to murder all Birkenau prisoners who remained alive at night. At that time, there might have been around 1,200 prisoners in Birkenau.

There was a time when one of the prisoners did not show up for the roll call, and so he was suspected to have escaped. The Soviet prisoners were called to go to the so-called new lager to look for that prisoner. It turned out that 86 Soviet prisoners escaped during the search. They attacked the SS man in the sentry box, knocked him over along with the box, and all 86 of them escaped without a single shot from the SS man. From that time on, the commandant of the camp in Birkenau, Hoffmann, gave the order that Russians were not allowed to do any work beyond the camp's territory.

Throughout November 1942, Birkenau constantly received transports of people, most of whom got sent to the gas chambers right away. A small percentage of them went to the camp. During that time, a transport of Poles from the region of Zamość arrived in Birkenau. Children up to 14 were separated from that transport and sentenced to death. One part of them was sent to the gas chamber, the other part died as a result of experimental injections. On 8 December 1942, the whole *Sonderkommando*, counting over 400 prisoners, who handled the outdoor crematorium and the gas chamber, was sent to the gas chamber in Auschwitz. I must add that I know about all of this because, being an electrician, I could go around the entire camp under the guise of checking the electric wires.

In December 1942, the building of four crematoria commenced in Birkenau, one of which was finished in April 1943. In September 1942, women were moved from Auschwitz to Birkenau and placed in the neighbourhood of the camp where I lived, in the so-called lager A. In 1943, throughout the whole year, transports of Jews from the whole of Europe were coming to Birkenau, and were all gassed. Only a small percentage of them were sent to the camp. When the new crematoria and gas chambers were built, the old gas chamber converted from a peasant's house was completely closed down.

When the new gas chambers had been built, I was in one of them while Jews were being gassed for the first time. I noticed that the gas was put in from cans through holes in the ceiling. As it



turned out, during the first gassing in that chamber, the Jews would eat most of the gas pellets, wanting to save at least some of the people. That's why the first gassing took an hour and a half.

During the first gassing, the Jews, as if driven into a fury, destroyed all the electrical installations inside the gas chamber. That's why I and other electricians were called in, in order to repair the wires. In addition, a kind of safety net was built from the holes in the ceiling to the floor, ensuring that the gas pellets would not be eaten by those waiting to be gassed in the chambers.

Due to a range of measures, I occupied the position of an electrician and my task was to make sure that electrical matters in the camp were in order. Because of that, I would often go to the gas chambers or crematoria, even at night. Here I must add, that besides being gassed, people were also executed in massive numbers near the crematorium, so if I wanted to get to the crematorium, I had to walk ankle-deep in human blood.

In the second half of 1944, three transports of English prisoners of war were brought to the gas chamber. They were immediately sent to be gassed. As far as I know, about 1,200 English prisoners were gassed in total. During that time, transports of German soldiers were also arriving. The prisoners who handled the crematorium were then moved away and the SS men themselves gassed and burned those German soldiers. There were also transports of frozen German soldiers, whose bodies were burned in the crematorium. The crematorium in Birkenau also received headless bodies. I presume they were the remains of people whose heads had been cut off at an execution.

In the summer of 1944, the number of transports increased so that about 40,000 people were gassed per day. Most of them were Hungarian and Romanian Jews.

In November 1944, the gassing was stopped and all traces of those crimes were being destroyed. That is, the gas chamber was knocked down, the crematoria were dismantled, all documents connected with the crematorium and the camp were burned. I could quote many other facts and circumstances confirming the crimes committed by the Germans at the camp in Birkenau, but that would take a longer time and, above all, I would have to recall those circumstances.

In my opinion, Höß undoubtedly knew about all the crimes which I have briefly mentioned above, and the murders by gassing took place on his orders, as he knew about the arrival of new transports at the camp. If he issued orders about victuals for those people, the number



of dinners and portions of bread at the camp was increased. Meanwhile, the transports were gassed right away instead of receiving the food. It got to the point where we were stepping on bread everywhere in the camp.

On 19 January 1945, the entire camp at Birkenau was moved to Auschwitz and from there the entire camp, or rather its remains, was driven off to Wodzisław, where the prisoners were loaded onto a train and transported to Mauthausen. In the spring of 1943, as the person responsible for electricity at the camp in Birkenau, I was still living at that camp, which was converted into a camp for women in the fall of 1943. Men were moved to a newly built camp.

In the summer of 1942, when I had recovered, I wanted to see as many crimes as possible, so I would seek jobs as an electrical technician and I would walk around the camp, observing. Walking around the camp, I gathered various documents, which I took from the clothes found in the crematorium. These were identity cards, photographs, memorabilia, etc. There was nothing for me to do with those objects, so I buried them in the ground.

In the fall of 1942, a prisoner named Ludwik Rajewski (currently residing in Warsaw, Małachowskiego Square 2) appeared in my camp. He said that he would put me in touch with someone who would be able to take the messages, as well as the documents, from the camp. And so, some time after that, a prisoner named Konstanty Jagiełło – who didn't survive the camp – came to me and he would collect all those items from me. I don't know what Jagiełło did with the things I gave him. I didn't want to know, for my own safety.

In 1943, Konstanty Jagiełło came to live at the camp in Birkenau. He had been staying in the camp in Auschwitz thus far. He and I would then send the documents via Feliks Buczyński and Józef Dyntar, who were occupied with roof-covering and worked beyond the camp's territory. Since Konstanty Jagiełło had escaped from the camp in the meantime, I started sending messages from the camp via Feliks Buczyński and then via Józef Dyntar. They were my links, through which I received an order from outside the camp – I didn't know from whom – telling me to try to send messages about the camp for women.

I walked around the camp for women and established connections with the *kapo* of the female Political Department, Ernestyna Lassok (currently residing in Wodzisław). Thanks to her, I received messages from Włodzimierz [Wladimir] Bilan, an SS man who spoke Polish.



Bilan noticed that I was wandering around the women's camp and staying in the building of the Political Department, however, he turned a blind eye to that. He even warned me not to loiter near the crematorium too much, otherwise I would be burned. In my presence, Bilan gave out lists of people who were to be burned via the gas chamber or the female transports that were to arrive and to be sent to the gas chamber. I wasn't the only one who thought Bilan to be a very decent man – all women working in his department, that is, the Political Department, were of the same opinion. Bilan only employed Polish women at his office and it was thanks to him that those women survived the camp. Bilan's humane treatment of women caught the attention of the camp authorities and so he was moved from the post of leader of the female Political Department to the so-called *Buna-Werke*.

Apart from the messages and documents I sent from the camp by the order of the prisoner Ludwik Rajewski, I also sent money, diamonds and gold, which I stole from the crematorium and which I sent via the same people through whom I sent the documents and messages. They told me that the camp organization needed the money and valuables in order to bribe the SS men, and by such means save some people from death or other forms of punishment. Around 1944, Feliks Buczyński, who was my link to the outside world, [told me] that after Konstanty Jagiełło had escaped from the camp, the prisoner nicknamed "Łysy" had taken charge of the whole underground organization that functioned in the camp.

On 18 January 1945, when I found myself in the camp in Auschwitz, during the preparations for the evacuation, I gave "Łysy" the last list of women sent to Birkenau and then from Birkenau to another camp. It turned out that "Łysy" was in fact Cyrankiewicz, the current Prime Minister of the Republic of Poland. Cyrankiewicz's number was 20 019, while mine was 5805. For now, that would be more or less all that I can say about my stay at the camp in Auschwitz and Birkenau.

The report was read out.