



HENRYK MANDELBAUM

Fifth day of the hearing, 28 November 1947

Presiding Judge: Please summon the next witness, Henryk Mandelbaum.

Witness Henryk Mandelbaum, 24 years old, a laborer by occupation, religion – Roman Catholic.

Presiding Judge: What is the witness' relationship to the accused?

Witness: None.

Presiding Judge: I hereby instruct the witness, pursuant to the provisions of Article 107 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, that you are required to speak the truth. The provision of false testimony is punishable by a term of imprisonment of up to five years. Do the parties want to submit any motions as to the procedure according to which the witness is to be interviewed?

Prosecutors: We release the witness from the obligation to take an oath.

Defense counsel: As do we.

Presiding Judge: What testimony can the witness provide concerning the goings-on at Auschwitz, and in particular as regards the accused?

Witness: I arrived in Auschwitz in 1944, towards the end of May, or possibly in the beginning of June. Initially, for some two months, I was in quarantine, while one day the *Arbeitsdienstführer* [head of the camp labor service] came up and assigned me to the *Sonderkommando* [special squad] at block 13.

When I first went to work, I immediately became aware where I was. I thought that I was in hell – there were bodies everywhere, fire, and the place was crawling with SS men who guarded the laborers and hurried them on to remove the corpses of the gassed victims, for new transports were arriving all the time. When I worked there, the burnings were carried



out in pits and on pyres. The pyres were some 30–35 meters long and approximately 15 meters wide.

Preparations for the incineration of gassing victims looked thus: large volumes of wood logs, so-called splinters, were brought in by rail and laid down in the pits. They were then covered with fir branches brought in from the forest, and the bodies were placed upon them. There was a railway track running from the gas chamber to the pits, and the bodies were conveyed on platforms and dumped into the pits. After some of the corpses had been thrown in, they were doused with petrol and the pyre was set alight at four corners, while later, as the bodies burned, fresh corpses and wood were brought up, so that the ditches burned without pause for 24 or even 48 hours. Once the incineration was finished, the ashes were gathered from the pit and taken to the courtyard in front of the crematorium. When there were no new transports and the Germans took prisoners from the camp to be killed, these people were not gassed, but shot dead; when I was there, these executions were performed by *Oberscharführer* Voss. They were killed using small caliber weapons, with a shot to the spine.

When larger transports were processed, the prisoners employed in the *kommando* were instructed to smash all physical remains into dust, which was then buried in the pit. And when a pit was full to the brim with ashes, it was leveled and covered with a few layers of gravel brought up from the Vistula; it had to be leveled perfectly and masked in such a way as to ensure that no one would ever find out what went on in Auschwitz. Voss was later replaced by *Oberscharführer* Otto Moll, and his instructions were extremely rigorous. Moll concentrated on improving the efficiency of work, hoping to curry favor with the camp command. He subsequently ordered that a fence of twigs and branches be put up around the crematorium. When it was ready, he ordered that the ashes were no longer to be buried on the grounds of the camp, but driven off in trucks to the Vistula and dumped there.

And now I will recount how transports were gassed during my period of incarceration. These transports were Hungarian, Slovakian, Greek, in part Dutch, Belgian, some were French, while once they even brought in more than one hundred American citizens from Warsaw, who were subsequently shot dead. In all probability, the gassing of small transports was uneconomical. Indeed, the more people were crowded into the gas chamber, the quicker the gassing progressed. III and IV were fitted with the smaller gas chambers, whereas I and II had more modern crematoria, which could process a transport of some 3,000 people.



These bunkers were some 50 meters long and were divided into two parts. Each contained a makeshift bath, complete with showers and taps, so that an average person could well believe that it was indeed a bath, especially if it was presented as such during the journey or after one's arrival at Auschwitz; the latter was the specialty of *Hauptscharführer* Moll, who would give speeches and tell people that they had come to perform well-paid work. And although they had left valuable property behind, they would be able to settle down here and earn new fortunes. Thereafter he instructed them to undress, saying that they would receive fresh clothes because – since they were going to a place where cleanliness must be maintained – it was necessary to prevent the spread of disease. The people – easily fooled – believed all that he said and proceeded to take off their clothes, thereafter entering the "bath". They were not allowed to take any valuables, only towels and soap. The Germans told them that they would be given back all the valuables that they had left in the changing-room. And when the gas chamber was full and the doors closed tightly shut, they would pour in the Zyklon B, which caused people to suffocate.

At the same time – since the transports included people who were elderly, sick and handicapped – a Red Cross ambulance would drive around, with a crew of two SS men, in order to deceive the prisoners. The sick would be put in the ambulance, and thereafter taken to be gassed.

There were two window vents in the gas chamber, covered with a layer of earth approximately one meter thick and a plate.

When the transport had been closed in the gas chamber, two SS men would don gas masks and start throwing in the Zyklon B. Those in the chamber suffered for some seven minutes, and some of them experienced severe bleeding. After the gassing had been carried out and the doors opened, some gas would seep out, affecting the prisoners who worked there, albeit not fatally. The chambers would be opened after some 15 minutes and ventilated. We would put on gas masks and pull the bodies out; nearby there was a lift for conveying the corpses to the furnaces. There were five crematoria, and every one was fitted with three furnaces. Each was operated by a team of three prisoners: two placed the bodies in the lift and one laid them out on the so-called frying pan. In the courtyard there was a spool on two specially milled wheels, and this made it easier to slide the bodies into the furnace. You would usually put four bodies into a furnace, or six if they were slimmer. The incineration



lasted 12, 13 or 15 minutes. As the *Kommandoführer* [work detail leader] used to say, a transport of 3,000 or so people had to be burned during one shift.

Presiding Judge: Please provide more general information. The witness was at the SD – did he encounter Muhsfeldt?

Witness: Yes, he used to come up there. I did not encounter him, although I heard that he was dangerous.

Presiding Judge: Why so?

Witness: When we worked there, the *Kommandoführer* was always eager to incinerate a transport as rapidly as possible.

Presiding Judge: Did the witness see Muhsfeldt taking part in the gassings?

Witness: As far as I know, every *Kommandoführer* had to take part – Otto Moll, Voss. We saw that every so often, more or less every six months, the prisoners who worked there would be killed, in order to ensure that there were no witnesses to what went on. Once, a transport of prisoners was supposed to leave the camp for Germany. Or so it was said. In the evening we heard trucks driving up, and they took those inmates.

Prosecutor Szewczyk: Did the witness observe the course of the gassing process in detail?

Witness: Yes, I did.

Prosecutor: What was the role of the doctor during the gassing?

Witness: After a selection had been carried out, a transport column – mainly trucks – would be sent from the camp. The doctor inspected the prisoners earmarked for gassing; some would go without a struggle, while others resisted. There were instances when inmates were informed beforehand that they would be going to the gas chamber, and they resisted. In these cases the SS men would come up with dogs or stand at either end of the path, and herd the prisoners into the chamber with sticks.

Prosecutor: Was the doctor interested in the course of the gassing itself, in the opening of the chamber doors?



Witness: A doctor – I do not know his surname – was present when prisoners were thrown into the gas chambers, and also when the doors were opened; whatever his official role was, he definitely kept an eye on the process of incineration. The gassed victims were then dragged out of the chambers and thrown into the fire.

Prosecutor: How did it happen that the witness managed to survive, knowing what fate befell the other *kommandos*?

Witness: In October they were to send a transport of one hundred people. Thus, they chose the elderly, who had already been in the camp for a year or a year and a half. At the time, I was still a newcomer. Some of the prisoners who worked in the gun powder factory in Birkenau smuggled powder into the camp, and we used it to make hand grenades. Some of us even had weapons. When this transport was to be dispatched, an uprising broke out. The prisoners who were to be deported were standing in the courtyard before the crematorium, and they threw themselves onto the SS men, while the crematorium itself was set alight and some of the soldiers disarmed; the SS men in the watchtowers were also disarmed, and a few were shot. 14 inmates managed to escape from the camp. The wire fence of the women's camp was cut open during the struggle, however none of the female prisoners wanted to escape. The SS men gave chase and all the prisoners were caught and shot dead – including all those who were to leave in the transport. At the time, we were lying with our faces to the ground.

Prosecutor Pęchalski: The witness has described the burning of bodies in open pits. Were corpses incinerated simultaneously in the crematorium?

Witness: Yes, they were.

Prosecutor: Were burnings carried out in the pits because the crematoria were overloaded?

Witness: Yes.

Prosecutor: Did the SS men drive up to the crematorium in the Red Cross ambulance?

Witness: Yes.

Prosecutor: Was Zyklon B also brought up in the ambulance?

Witness: Yes. I heard that it was located under one of the seats.



Prosecutor: Does the witness know whether the corpses of the gassed victims were desecrated by the cutting of hair and pulling out of teeth?

Witness: Yes, such facts are known to me.

Presiding Judge: May the accused rise in order for the witness to have a look at them. Whom of the accused does the witness recognize?

(The witness walks along the dock.)

Presiding Judge: Does the witness recognize Koch?

Witness: Yes, I recognize Koch, Muhsfeldt, Münch and Götz.

Presiding Judge: What were their roles?

Witness: I saw Muhsfeldt at the crematorium. He went there frequently. Others I know only from the camp, for they were in contact with our *Kommandoführers*. Thus, I know them only by sight.

Presiding Judge: Are there any further questions to the witness?

Prosecutors: No.

Defense counsel: No.

Presiding Judge: The witness may therefore step down, and I also order a recess until 4.00 p.m.