

WANDA LURIE

Warsaw, 10 December 1945. Acting Judge of the Warsaw District Court, Halina Wereńko, delegated to the District Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes, acting on the basis of the Decree of 10 November 1945 on the Main and District Commissions for the Investigation of German Crimes in Poland (JoL RP no. 51, pos. 293), interviewed the person named below as a witness in accordance with Art. 254 and in connection with Art. 107, 109, and 115 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. Having been advised of the criminal liability for making false declarations, the witness testified as follows:

Name and surname	Wanda Felicja Lurie née Podwysocka
Date of birth	23 May 1911
Names of parents	Marcin and Maria
Place of residence	[...]
Occupation	lives with her husband, a tradesman, pre-war agent for the company Sokół
Religion	Roman Catholic
Criminal Record	none

I lived with my family in Warsaw at Wawelberga Street 19, flat 30, from 1937.

On 1 August 1944 at 3 p.m., severe fighting began in our area. The insurgents constructed two barricades near our house, that is on the corner of Wolska and Górczewska streets. Machine guns, ammunition and grenades were stored in the neighboring house.

The situation was very difficult from the very beginning. The many Volksdeutsche living in our area shot at the insurgents from hiding and indicated Polish positions and conditions to

the Germans. "Tiger" tanks were used in the operation, a number of houses were demolished. German tanks were attacking from the direction of Górczewska and Wolska streets, and when they reached our area, the Germans started dragging men out of the houses and ordering them to take down barricades. At the same time a couple of buildings were set on fire with bottles filled with petrol that were thrown into the flats. The civilians who had not been ordered to leave their flats earlier were prevented from going into the street.

Until 5 August 1944, I stayed in the basement with my three children, aged 11, 6 and 3-and-a-half, myself being in the last month of pregnancy. On that day at 12 noon or 1 p.m. German gendarmes and "Ukrainians" entered our courtyard, ordering civilians to get out of the house immediately. When the residents in the basements on the courtyard side got out, the gendarmes threw incendiary grenades into the basements. People panicked and rushed out.

Without my husband, who had not come back from the city, I was reluctant to leave the house; I hoped that they would let me stay. But I was forced to leave. Together with my children and the Gul family, I got out onto Działdowska Street. The houses in the street were already burning. I initially tried to walk in the direction of Górczewska Street, but there were a lot of "Ukrainians" and gendarmes in Działdowska Street who wouldn't let me pass in that direction and who ordered me to go to Wolska Street.

The journey was difficult. A lot of cables, wires, remnants of barricades, tires and corpses lay in the streets. In Wolska and Skierniewicka streets, all the houses had already been burned down. On the corner of Działdowska and Wolska streets, I saw single corpses of young men in civilian clothes.

In Wolska Street, I approached a group of people from our house.

In total there were over 500 of us in front of the factory.

From the conversations of my companions I gathered that the residents of houses on Działdowska, Płocka, Sokołowska, Staszica, Wolska and Wawelberga streets had been gathered in the factory. We were standing in front of the gate of the Ursus factory at Wolska Street 55. This is the Warsaw unit of the state factory located in Ursus near Warsaw. We waited for about half an hour in front of the gate. We could hear shots, begging and cries from the courtyard.

The Germans were letting – or rather pushing – people in groups of 100 through the Wolska Street gate. A boy of about 12, seeing through the half-open gate that his parents and brother had been killed, went literally berserk, he started screaming, calling his mother and father. The Germans and “Ukrainians” beat and shoved him away as he tried to get inside. We had no doubts that they were killing people inside the factory grounds. We didn’t know if they killed everyone. I stayed behind, constantly retreating, in the hope that they would not kill a pregnant woman.

I was brought into the factory grounds in the last group. In the factory yard I saw piles of corpses as high as one meter. There were corpses lying in several places, all over the left and right side of the first courtyard. I recognized neighbors and acquaintances among the dead. Through the middle of the courtyard we were herded deeper inside, down a narrow passage leading into a second courtyard. Here, the “Ukrainians” and gendarmes lined us up in fours. The men walked with their hands in the air. There were around 20 people in this group, including a lot of children aged 10–12, many without parents. An inert old lady was carried by her son-in-law on his back the entire way, while her daughter, with two children, aged 4 and 7, walked beside him.

Corpses lay on the right and on the left, in various positions. Our group was herded towards a passage between the buildings. There were corpses there, too. When the first four reached the place where the corpses were, the Germans and Ukrainians shot them in the nape from behind. Those killed would collapse, and another four would step forward to die in the same way. The inert old lady was killed on her son-in-law’s back; he, too, died. As they were being lined up, people screamed, pleaded, and prayed.

I was in the last four. I begged the “Ukrainians” around me to save me and my children. One of them asked if I was able to bail myself out. I gave him three gold rings. Having taken them, he tried to lead me away, but the German in charge of the execution, a gendarmerie officer, who noticed what was happening, didn’t let him and ordered me to be put back in the group to be executed. I started begging him to spare my children’s lives and my own, I said something about an officer’s honor. He, however, shoved me back so hard that I fell to the ground. He also hit and pushed my older son, yelling: “Faster, faster, you Polish bandit.” In the meantime, a new group of Poles had been brought in.

I therefore approached the execution site in the last four together with my three children, holding in my right hand the hands of my younger children and in my left hand the hand of my eldest son. The children walked crying and praying. My oldest son, seeing the dead, was yelling that they would kill us, too. At one point a "Ukrainian" standing behind us shot my eldest son in the back of his head. The next shots hit my younger children and me. I fell on my right side. The shot I suffered was not fatal. The bullet hit the left side of my neck, went through the lower part of the skull, and out through my right cheek. I got a maternal hemorrhage. I spat out a few teeth together with the bullet. The left side of my head and body felt numb. But I remained conscious and was able to see almost everything that was happening around me.

I watched further executions. A new group of men was brought in, their corpses collapsed on top of me. I was crushed by about four bodies. Another group of women and children was brought in. In this fashion, group after group, the executions continued late into the night.

It was already dark when the executions ended. During breaks, the slaughterers would walk over the corpses, kicking, turning them over, killing those still alive and despoiling them. They touched the bodies through some kind of special cloths. They took away the watch from my wrist, but didn't notice that I was still alive. While doing these horrible things, they were drinking vodka, singing merry songs, and laughing. Beside me lay a corpulent man in a leather jacket who wheezed for a long time. The Germans shot him five times before he finally died. These shots injured my leg. I lay in a puddle of blood for a long time, crushed by corpses. I was only thinking of dying, how much longer I would have to endure. At night I pushed away the dead bodies lying on top of me.

The next day the executions ceased. The Germans came a couple of times with dogs, running over the corpses and checking whether anyone was still alive. I heard single shots, they were probably finishing off those still living.

I lay there for three days, that is until Monday (the execution took place on Saturday). On the third day I felt that the baby I was expecting was still alive. This gave me strength, the thought of rescue formed in my mind. I started thinking, examining possible ways of saving myself. When I tried to get up, I got nauseous and dizzy several times. Finally, I crawled on all fours over the bodies towards the wall. There were corpses lying everywhere, [in piles] that were at least as high as I am tall, and they were all over the yard.

My impression was that there could have been over 6000 dead there.

From the place where I had been lying I crawled to the wall and from there I started looking for a way to get out. The passage through the first yard, down which we had been brought in, was blocked by corpses. I could hear German voices behind the gate, I had to look for another way out. I crawled to the third yard, climbed up a ladder, and through an open window-vent I got into a hall. Fearing the Germans, I spent the entire night there. Throughout the night, "tigers" roared incessantly in Płocka Street, airplanes were dropping bombs. I was thinking that any minute the factory would burn together with the corpses. It got quieter in the morning. I climbed onto a window sill and in the yard I saw a living human being, a resident from our house, Zofia Staworzyńska. I joined her. A wounded man of about 60 crawled towards us, he was missing an eye, I don't know his name. Having searched for a long time and having made many attempts to get out, we finally found an exit onto Skierniewicka Street, and through there together with Staworzyńska we left the factory. The man, hearing the voices of "Ukrainians," stayed behind.

We went out onto Skierniewicka Street, wanting to get to Czyste suburb, where there was a hospital. There were "Ukrainians" on Wolska Street and initially they did not realize where we were coming from. We were detained, and despite our begging and pleading with them to let us go to the hospital as patients, they herded us in the direction of Wola, taking more and more people with them on the way.

Near Saint Stanislaus Church the young were separated from the old. The group of young men and women were taken inside a ruined house, from where, after a moment, we heard shots. I assume that they were executed.

The rest, including myself, were herded into Saint Adalbert Church on Wolska Street. On the way, I saw corpses and body parts scattered in the road and on the sidewalks. Groups of Poles under guard were removing the corpses. The German officers standing in front of the church greeted us with shoving, beating, and kicking.

The church was already full of Varsovians from various districts. I spent a couple of days lying next to the main altar. I received no help. The companions of my misery gave me a little water, that is all.

After two days I was transported on a cart with other seriously wounded and sick people to the transit camp in Pruszków, and then to hospitals in Komorów and Podkowa Leśna.

Presently I do not feel well. I need to work, however, to provide for my child after these terrible experiences.

REPORT

Warsaw, 20 November 1946. Judge Halina Wereńko oversaw a court-medical examination of the victim, Wanda Felicja Lurie née Podwysocka, by a court expert, University of Warsaw Professor Wiktor Grzywo-Dąbrowski.

The results of the examination were as follows:

1. Medical history

Answering the relevant question, the victim explained that on 5 August 1944, she was driven out by German soldiers from the house at Wawelberga Street 18 in Warsaw together with all the other residents, and taken to the Ursus factory at Wolska Street 55, where a mass execution of Poles took place. During the execution, a German soldier shot the victim from a pistol in the neck in such a way that the bullet came out through her left cheek. Having collapsed on the ground, she was shot three times in her legs, one bullet to the left leg and two bullets to the right leg above the ankles. A couple of hours later, during a break between the executions of groups of Poles who were being brought in, a German or Ukrainian soldier, looking for valuables among the dead, stepped with a boot on the victim's left leg, which resulted in a sprained ankle.

The victim was nine months pregnant at the time of the execution; she suffered an obstetrical hemorrhage and was bleeding from her wounds. After she had managed to escape from the execution site, the victim was detained in Wolska Street by the German gendarmerie and herded into Saint Adalbert Church, where she spent two days lying in front of the altar without having her wounds dressed and without medical assistance. The wounds on the neck and chest became dark in color, her left hand was numb. Having been brought with a medical transport to the transit camp in Pruszków on 11 August 1944,

she was admitted, together with other patients in serious condition, into the Polish Red Cross Hospital in Podkowa Leśna, where her wounds were dressed for the first time. She remained in the hospital in Podkowa Leśna until 19 August 1944; afterwards she was in the county hospital in Pruszków, where on 20 August 1944 she gave birth to a son. On 29 August 1944, the victim was sent back to the Polish Red Cross Hospital in Podkowa Leśna, and from then on remained in a designated room in the care of Assistant Professor Rutkowski and Dr. Churski. The victim presents a Pruszków county hospital discharge sheet dated 29 August 1944, which indicates that Wanda Lurie stayed in the Pruszków county hospital from 19 August until 29 August 1944 due to parturition and gunshot wounds to the face and lower right leg. The discharge sheet bears the signature of the hospital director, Dr. Komorowski, and a round seal with the following wording around the rim: "County Division Hospital in Pruszków." To date, the victim remains under the medical supervision of the Polish Red Cross, she does not feel well, she suffers from headaches and pain in her jaw, in both her legs and liver, she is weak and prone to fatigue. The victim's son is restless and does not sleep well.

2. Present condition

The victim is tall, her physique is good, she is sufficiently nourished. In the center of her left cheek, the victim has a star-shaped, whitish scar, 15 millimeters in diameter, movable and slightly hardened. On the skin of the victim's neck, on the left side, above the hairline, right at the rim of the occipital bone, there is a small, clearly visible whitish scar a few millimeters in diameter. No objective changes have been ascertained with respect to the cranial nerves. The patient is short-sighted, she lost her left eyeball as a child and has a prosthesis. The right pupil is wide, it reacts to light slowly. On the right shin, more or less in the middle, from the inside, there are two scars, around 3 centimeters apart, oval in shape, up to 2 centimeters in diameter, of a brown-whitish color. On the left shin, in the lower section from the inside, there is a brown-whitish scar of around 10 millimeters in diameter. The functioning of the lower limbs is not impaired. Tendon reflexes are average, regular. The canine tooth and the second molar are missing from the upper jaw, on the left. The patient claims that she lost these teeth as a result of the abovementioned shot; she complains of stiffening and a feeling of cold in the left cheek. Heart sounds clean, rhythmical heart rate, pulse 68 per minute, degree of tension average.

Opinion

1. Bearing in mind the subject of this investigation, the testimony of the victim and the results of the examination, I conclude that the scars described in the report formed as a result of healing gunshot wounds suffered by the patient at the time indicated by her.

2. As a result of her injuries, the patient suffered incapacitation involving disturbance of bodily functions and the function of the right leg, as well as an impairment of chewing action, which continued for a period of over 20 days (Art. 236 of the Criminal Code).

The shot in the left leg resulted in impaired function of this limb, which continued for a period of under 20 days.