



## JAN BOGDANOWICZ

Appendix to the witness' interview report of 6 June 1947.

In the second half of July 1944 the war began to unfold at a rapid pace. The new offensive of the Soviet troops caused a quick retreat of the Germans. The wave of retreating units was passing through Warsaw day and night, naturally generating excitement among the inhabitants. In the flurry of rumors circulating in the capital, there was also persistent talk about the upcoming uprising. On 1 August, the first shots were finally fired; in Wola, the uprising began at 4.40 p.m.

Many days before the outbreak of the uprising, the sanitary military authorities gave Karol and Maria Hospital some operational instructions in the case of planned military action. In accordance with these instructions, the hospital was to be a dressing point, from where the wounded and the sick, having received first aid, were to be sent to nearby hospitals for adults. Aside from this, the hospital was to house sanitary and food stocks for the groups fighting in Wola.

At the time, Dr Jan Bogdanowicz was the hospital director.

At the outbreak of the uprising, many hospital staff members found themselves in town. The reason for this was that although it had been agreed upon, the hospital was not notified about the date of the outbreak of the uprising. The majority of these people came to work sooner or later, often having made their way through town under fire, risking their lives. Those who did not manage to get to our hospital reported to the nearest [sanitary] posts and hospitals. Nobody was left unoccupied.

When the Warsaw Uprising broke out, there were four doctors in the hospital, but only two of them were surgeons. With time, the sanitary authorities assigned a few doctors to help, but most of them were not surgeons and despite their best intentions, the hospital did not benefit much from their help. For a long time, the whole burden of work was on the shoulders of in-house surgeons. Only a few days later Dr Kmicikiewicz arrived at the hospital, and as a seasoned surgeon he took over some responsibilities.

Almost from the first moments of the uprising, wounded people began to come to the hospital, and having received first aid, they were sent to the nearby St. Lazarus Hospital.



However, it soon turned out that this hospital did not have surgical staff, and therefore could not admit wounded people who needed more complex surgical treatment. This was discovered by accident by one of the female doctors, who went to St. Lazarus Hospital in order to enquire after the wounded people who had been sent there from our post. To her horror she saw that the wounded people who required immediate and sometimes extensive surgery had been placed in beds, and any surgeries were out of the question. There was an especially severe case of an abdominal gunshot wound, suffered by a 16-year-old boy, liaison "Witek." Some three hours had already passed since the beginning of the uprising, and the boy had been among the first to get wounded, so there was no time to spare.

Karol and Maria Hospital, as a hospital strictly for children, did not have the conditions to admit sick adults. Wolski Hospital, in turn, was cut off due to barricaded streets and heavy shelling. Faced with such a situation, we decided to admit wounded adults despite the difficulties it entailed. A few rooms in the surgical ward were emptied without delay, the children were moved to the internal medicine wards, the beds were collected from the staff and from some of the neighboring houses, thanks to the generosity of good-willed people, and the ward for adults was soon organized. With the influx of wounded people the ward was gradually expanding.

At the same time, work in the operating theaters began. The never-ending series of surgeries opened with the surgery of "Witek," the unwitting troublemaker, who was, by the way, among the few men who survived the massacre and managed to leave Warsaw. Two and sometimes even three surgery teams were working without break or respite. Nevertheless, the number of wounded people awaiting surgical treatment was increasing at an alarming rate.

Apart from the surgery teams, there was a separate group of nurses who were preparing surgery materials and sterilizing ready boxes. Sterilization was in progress day and night. The collective effort from all parts of the complex hospital machine ensured the continuity of its work.

The monotony of days of hard work was sometimes interrupted by unexpected events, such as tank shelling of the hospital or the bombardment of neighboring streets. The influx of patients was considerable, and gradually we ran out of beds and had to put the wounded people on mattresses spread on the ground.



On the fifth day of the uprising the situation, thus far bearable, deteriorated significantly. The units of the "Herman Göring" SS division began their well-known assault on Wola. This division, composed almost exclusively of "Kalmyks" and "Ukrainians," became infamous for its bestiality and the murders committed on the civilian populace, women and children included.

In the afternoon of that day, Wolski Hospital, situated on the front line, was captured by the Germans. At the time we did not know anything about the fate that befell the wounded people and the staff from that hospital. Individual escapees assured us that the Germans had behaved "decently" there.

Unable to repel the Germans, the insurgent troops retreated slowly in the direction of Śródmieście. The sanitary board for this area, although it had its permanent "seat" in our hospital, left it without notifying the hospital authorities about the situation or leaving any instructions concerning the evacuation of the wounded people.

In the evening, a group of doctors and slightly wounded people from St. Lazarus Hospital passed through our hospital, announcing that the Germans had taken over theirs. Shortly afterwards that hospital began to burn, but as no voices were issuing from it and all was quiet, we assumed that the wounded and sick people must have been led out before the hospital had been set on fire.

The flames were threatening our hospital to such a degree that we were forced to undertake a rescue operation.

And so the hours of this dreadful night were passing, and although the entry of the Germans was expected any moment, the work was in full swing. At about 1.00 a.m., a Home Army soldier arrived with a piece of "kind" advice from his commandant to evacuate the wounded people, as the hospital premises would become a battleground. Dr Bogdanowicz, who went directly to the command for the area, received confirmation of the news and some more advice to the effect, "do as you think best." A meeting of doctors was promptly convened. The situation looked as follows: there were some 200 wounded and sick people in the hospital, including 60 children; we had a dozen or so stretchers at our disposal, and the wounded would have to be carried under fire to Śródmieście, some 2–3 kilometers away; there were only four hours until dawn. As evacuation proved impossible at that moment,



it was decided that we would stay, especially since we did not know about the [Germans'] method of murdering the wounded people. The redundant staff, which was coming in as the front was approaching, was sent to the rear. These were usually sanitary patrols. Only a sanitary ambulance remained in the hospital, and we loaded it with the uniforms of the wounded people and abandoned military equipment, and then it was pushed beyond the hospital premises in the direction of the insurgent positions. For the entire night, the boiler house was used for burning "compromising materials," such as sanitary military bags, uniforms, armbands, etc.

Then the dawn broke on 6 August. Before dawn, one of the oldest and most commendable nurses from the hospital, P. J. Sikorska, committed suicide as the result of a nervous breakdown caused by the course of events. The hospital was shelled and showered with grenades, all houses in the neighborhood were ablaze, the air raids occurred regularly every half an hour. The hospital was hit many times, especially the maintenance building. At that time Mrs. M. Stobierska, one of our nurses, was gravely wounded. She was operated on immediately, but unfortunately she was later finished off by the Germans on the hospital premises.

The number of people who got wounded as a result of bomb explosions greatly increased, and as there was no more space for them, they were lying on the floor on whatever they had been brought to the hospital on – blankets, coats, sheets, etc. The floor was soon full. The situation was getting more and more hopeless, as we could not provide assistance to all the people who required surgical treatment; we would have needed about two days of intensive work for that. Out of necessity, we limited ourselves to dressing wounds and to the most urgent procedures.

At about 3.00 p.m. the Germans stormed into the hospital, or rather SS units composed of "Kalmyks" and "Ukrainians" under the German command. The hospital was led out in three groups. First, the staff and civilians from the outpatient and maintenance buildings were removed. That group, comprising doctors and nurses, was marched to the Bem fort. Fortunately, all people from that group survived, although some of them were deported to Germany for forced labor.

In the second group, the surgical ward was led out, and there were some 150 wounded men, women, and a few children. An unruly bunch of soldiers stormed into the ward, threatening



people with guns and robbing them of valuables such as watches, rings, fountain pens, etc. One of the nurses was also raped then, but the others luckily managed to avoid this disgrace. Some time later we were ordered to take the gravely wounded people on stretchers, and the less seriously wounded people were to walk by themselves along Leszno and Górczewska streets in the direction of the railroad crossing. As there were few stretchers, anyone who could was getting up and walking as told, hoping to escape from that hell. Among those who walked there were people after serious abdominal surgeries, in plaster casts, splints, etc. The majority went barefoot and in underwear only. Due to the lack of stretchers, the staff took only some of the wounded people, so a few hundred gravely wounded people had to remain in the ward. Their fate is unknown, as nobody has heard of them since – probably they were all murdered.

It was a very warm and sunny day, but the world had a grim aspect, as choking smoke was permeating the air, everything around was ablaze, and the heat was merciless. This fantastic procession, escorted by the SS men, proceeded slowly in the direction of Wolski Hospital, stopped on its way by sentry posts, set up every several dozen steps. The orders were constantly changing, one moment we were told to leave the wounded people and go on, the next – to return to the hospital. During these stops, preparations for an execution were being staged, with machine guns being placed in front of us. It was devilishly directed and the actors were also straight from the fiery pits of hell. It was so exhausting that when, during one of the stops, Dr Kmicikiewicz was told to step out and was executed, after a few words, before the eyes of all, someone involuntarily sighed with relief, "God be thanked, we go one by one." Everybody was prepared for the worst, there was no begging, screaming or crying, only a wish for all of it to come to an end. During another stop, already in the vicinity of Wolski Hospital, when the front of the column was turning towards the hospital on the order of a German doctor, *O sole mio* broke out somewhere in the ruins and smoldering debris. The Germans turned on a radio to make the moments of murder and crime more pleasant. Finally, the entire group had entered Wolski Hospital and the wounded people were already being placed in beds, when again out of the blue there came an order to send the wounded men with ten nurses and a doctor back to Karol and Maria Hospital. The Germans began to pull the wounded off the beds, but many managed to hide and avoid the fate of their friends. We were worried about our wounded patients for many more days, as the Germans were still roaming the hospital. The wounded people who got caught by the Germans (about



10 people) had to be carried away by the staff from Karol and Maria Hospital. They were ordered to leave the wounded people in front of the hospital and go inside, where there was still a group of children, some nurses and a doctor at the "S" internal medicine ward. The wounded people who had been left in front of the hospital were murdered.

The "S" internal medicine ward was located at the end of the hospital, just by Żytnia Street, and at first it had not been captured by the Germans. In that ward there were sick children (with both internal and surgical diseases) who had not been taken by their parents before the uprising. In total, there were some 50 of them, including eight babies. The "S" pavilion, just as the rest of Karol and Maria Hospital, was all glazed (large windows, glass partitions between small rooms). During the shooting and bombardment, and especially when the Germans placed a tank and grenade launchers immediately behind the hospital, the hail of shattering glass began to fall on the beds of the children. They were swiftly moved to the corridor and covered with everything that was at hand: blankets, duvets, sheets, etc.

Vibrations caused by explosions and shooting, which were so strong that it seemed that the building would collapse any moment, occurred every 3–5 minutes. Terrified children were screaming and crying, and the older ones began to pray in unison, first saying their daily prayers and then one "Ave Maria" after another. One of the nurses was breaking the remnants of windowpanes with a brush.

At that time nurse Stobierska left the ward and got seriously wounded in the leg in front of the pavilion. She was immediately brought to the surgical ward. The babies were fed with the rest of the mixtures, and the food was distributed among the children. We began to feel the lack of water. As the shelling continued, one of the German shells hit the autopsy pavilion situated just behind the "S" pavilion. A few insurgent groups retreated through the hospital, and the stock of bread was given to them.

Shortly afterwards, although the Germans had not yet entered the ward, we heard the words of the commander of the attackers. For the entire day this attack through the hospital was unsuccessful, despite the help of a tank, grenade launchers and medium machine guns. As has already been mentioned, the Germans came first to the outpatient pavilion, and then to the surgical and maintenance wards, throwing everyone out. In the evening, the group of people who had come with the wounded people from Wolski Hospital rushed into



the "S" ward and said that the surgical pavilion was burning with the sick people inside. Evacuation was undertaken without delay, but as soon as the third wounded person had been taken out, the Germans threw the staff out, forbidding them to rescue any more people. Even those wounded people who had already been taken out were saved from execution with much difficulty. A German officer was standing over them with a pointed gun, shouting *Alles banditen*, and we barely managed to convince him that these were "civilians," victims of air raids (which was not true). It is hard to say what happened to the rest of the wounded people. Shortly afterwards the Germans set fire to the maintenance, diphtheria, and observation pavilions. The Germans entered the "S" pavilion only when dusk fell. Seeing children crowded in the corridor and a small group of staff, they announced that "Hitler forbade the murder of any more people" and that therefore we could stop fearing for our lives. At our request for food, or rather permission to go and fetch it from the burning maintenance ward, they proposed that two young nurses be sent. As a result, we preferred to give up the idea.

The "Kalmyks" put machine guns in the windows, but as it was getting dark, they retreated to the outpatient pavilion. Upon leaving they took camphor oil in sterilized jars for gun lubrication.

The shooting ceased and only the burning buildings illuminated the hospital garden. The wounded people who had been saved were lying on stretchers along the walls of the "S" building. A few gravely wounded people arrived after the Wola massacre. One mother, seriously shot, brought a wounded girl, but they both died two hours later, still unconscious with fright, and their personal details were never determined. An old lady who had been shot in the leg crawled in. Some goat turned up from nowhere and closely followed the staff, as if afraid of solitude. At night, a Home Army soldier went through the pavilion, asking about German positions. From behind the fence on Żytnia Street we could hear the whispered conversations of insurgents.

As the fire intensified and there was a risk that it might spread to the "S" pavilion, the children were taken out to the garden, with great difficulty. At the same time an attempt was made to get to Wolski Hospital on Płocka Street. A sanitary patrol went there, but as they were shot at already on Żytnia Street, they had to retreat. As it was established that for the time being the "S" pavilion was not threatened by fire, the children were taken back inside.



In the morning, however, a window frame and a part of the pavilion door began to burn. Fearing that the Germans would not allow a rescue operation from the "S" ward (as they had not with the surgical ward), the children were again taken out. First some were placed in the garden on the right side of the hospital, and then, on the advice of one of the hospital employees, Stępień (he got killed by the Germans on the following day), the rest were placed on the other side. When all children had been taken out, an unexpected disaster struck.

The Germans resumed an attack through the hospital, placing machine guns between the wounded people. The worst fate befell the group in the garden on the right side of the hospital. A few children and adults from that group were killed. Nurse Dąbrowska, although she got wounded in the hand herself and although the Germans were trying to force her away, stayed with the children, calming them down and dressing their wounds. Only after many hours, when she was forced to go and fetch water for the wounded people, was she stopped by the Germans, threatened with execution and sent to Płocka Street. The following event reveals best how grave the situation of that group was: a child was killed on the stretcher of one of the wounded people, and just next to it a German operating the machine gun was also killed.

On the other side of the hospital building, where the rest of the staff and children had gone, the situation was slightly better. However, even there a nurse and a child suffered gunshot wounds. When two "Kalmyks" got killed with a round of automatic weapon fire, the Germans immediately ordered everyone out of the hospital and, having herded the staff with those children who could be carried in arms or put on the only stretcher available, marched them out of the hospital premises and escorted them to Wolski Hospital on Płocka Street. As not all children could be taken, the nurses came back several times, despite danger and fatigue, to save the rest. They transferred several wounded adults and some of the children. However, due to commotion, being forced away by the Germans, and constant shooting, some of the wounded adults and children could not be taken that day. On the next day and the following ones a few more children were brought, including an older boy. The boy, who could not walk due to chronic post-rheumatic limb deformities, buried himself in the bushes. A "Kalmyk" discovered him there and wanted to shoot him, having first thrown a cloth over his face. The child ripped the cloth off and then the murderer left him alone. Of the saved children, all the babies died later of pneumonia and diarrhea.





After these days of horror, Karol and Maria Hospital came to a standstill; that pride of Warsaw, a wonderful monument to the generosity of Zofia Szlenkierówna, the cradle of many pediatricians' careers. During a few months after it had been torn down, the hospital was operational as the children's ward in Wolski Hospital, and at the end of October that year, due to evacuation, it was moved to Włodzimierzów near Piotrków, where it continued functioning in very harsh conditions until January 1946.

Currently Karol and Maria Hospital organizes its work in the building on Działdowska Street in Wola, where it will have over 150 beds. The Ministry of Health and Social Services has set up a Karol and Maria nursery, fully equipped by the "Radda-Barnen" Swedish Society.