

## EDWARD LECHMAN

On 14 January 1947 in Łódź, S. Krzyżanowska, Investigative Judge of the District Court in Łódź, Third Branch, interviewed the person named below as a witness. Having been advised of the criminal liability for making false declarations and of the provisions of Art. 107 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, the witness testified as follows:

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Name and surname	Edward Lechman
Age	52 years old
Parents' names	Edward and Emma
Place of residence	Łódź, [...]
Occupation	trader
Religious affiliation	Roman Catholic
Criminal record	none
Relationship to the parties	none

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I was sent to the concentration camp in Auschwitz in July 1942. At first I was put to work unloading potatoes brought to the camp. I noticed that out of the group of about 2,000 people performing this work, 20 or more people died each day. Those who stopped working for a moment or simply fell down to the ground because of their exhaustion were finished off by *kapos*.

For the next few days I was part of the labor unit carrying grain sacks up to the fifth floor. Fortunately for me, on the tenth day of my detention, a block leader designated me to serve as an interpreter. I was selected from among all candidates representing all blocks and assigned to Aumeier, Höß's first deputy. The commandant of the whole Auschwitz complex, Höß, didn't carry out selections personally, nor was he directly involved in any other form of

exterminating prisoners, but he gave the extermination orders. I remember the speech he gave regarding the hanging of 12 officers who were executed for their alleged attempt to form an underground organization. He said they had been sentenced in compliance with the orders he had received from Berlin. However, his reference to the high level authorities to justify the sentence was unfounded: I know of a great number of sentences which were carried out without Berlin's approval. For example, I remember a Soviet officer accused of trying to escape. When he asked about the court [by which he was to be tried], Aumeier replied: "I am the court". The officer was shot to death.

Höß didn't consider the cases of individual prisoners. These were dealt with by Aumeier. Those who were reported as disobedient were brought before him. Not only did he pass sentences, but he often carried them out. On a number of occasions I saw him kill prisoners in the course of their interrogations. It wasn't even necessary to be guilty of any offence. A *kapo's* accusations of an escape attempt sufficed for Aumeier, who didn't bother to investigate the validity of these accusations, to kill the accused with a shot to the back of his head. Close relatives of those who had managed to escape were brought to the camp by way of retaliation. I remember two elderly people, about 80 years of age each, who were imprisoned in the camp because of their son's escape. Such "replacements" were shown during the roll-calls or at the front gate. In this way, the Germans pressured prisoners to give up all thought of escape.

The latter's helplessness was complete. To show their power and to enhance the terror of their victims, the camp's authorities didn't refrain from committing crimes in full view of the multitude of people. I remember the Jews, about a thousand in number, whom the Germans took to the crematorium in Birkenau during one roll-call in the spring of 1943. Kept naked in the bathhouse for almost the whole day, the Jews were then ostentatiously carried in cars, one hundred per car, along the main road of the camp during that roll-call. While they were being taken to the crematorium, block leaders were collecting reports from particular blocks. The reports were passed along until Aumeier finally reported to Höß that everything was all right.

I can distinctly remember prisoners of the so-called Myślenice group. The picture I have in mind stands out even against the background of all the torments and suffering to which people in Auschwitz were subjected. A group of 2,200 prisoners, both men and women,

was kept for two months in an empty barrack devoid of any cots. Forbidden to get up from the ground and move, they could only lie. Those who dared to stand up were beaten. Their sentences, it is believed, were announced by Gestapo men who arrived from Katowice after two months. Twelve people were hanged. More than 30 women and 60 men were shot in block 11. The victims were ordered to strip naked and watch their co-prisoners being killed. The execution took place in the evening in block 11, and its carrying out was strongly illuminated by car headlights.

With regard to the finishing off of those who were sick, I know that lethal injections were administered by SS men serving in the sick room, and a doctor carried out the task of selecting those who were going to be killed in this way. The latter's decisions were final and block leaders struck those whom he had indicated off their lists. In the summer of 1943, *Schreibstube* [administrative office] received an order from the camp commandant Höß to draw up lists and to prepare all the children who were in the camp. There were 88 of them, from the age of 9 to the age of 12. They were loaded into a car. We learned later that they had been gassed in Birkenau. Many of them had been captured as hostages while trading on the street.

No prisoner was allowed to contact Höß. After all, he wouldn't talk to prisoners. However, he received reports regarding everything that went on in the camp and had a good knowledge of every aspect of the camp life. I heard Hößler (the women's camp commandant) reporting to Höß over the phone that "today we are going to reach 12,000". The report was submitted at the height of the Jewish transports from France, when the crematorium was in operation day and night. I don't recognize anyone in the photographs that I am shown (the witness is shown ten photographs representing the camp functionaries). At the same time I am enclosing a photo of Klausen who was the last *Rapportführer* in Auschwitz and who replaced Palitzsch in the position of the camp executioner.

The report was read out.