



KAZIMIERZ WDZIĘCZNY

On 26 March 1946, the Municipal Court in Warsaw, Sixth Department of Judicial Assistance, represented by Bronisław Hoffman, a Judge of the said court, on the motion of the Main Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes in Poland, Lublin district branch, interviewed the person named below as an unsworn witness. Having been advised of the criminal liability for making false declarations, pursuant to art. 107 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, the witness testified as follows:

Name and surname	Kazimierz Wdzięczny
Name of father	Piotr
Date and place of birth	19 January 1908, Warsaw
Place of residence	Warsaw, Bielany, [...]

I was arrested on 29 September 1942. Until 17 January 1943, I was detained at the Pawiak [prison] in Warsaw. On 17 January, I was transported to Majdanek.

The journey from Warsaw was a nightmare; day and night in cattle cars, minus 25 degrees Celsius outside. They told us we were being taken for labor. After arriving in Lublin (at night), we were chased out of the cars. There were corpses of those who had frozen to death. We were surrounded by a strong convoy, an important part of which were trained dogs. We carried the corpses and the sick on our backs. We were driven through fields, pits, and ditches, being beaten and screaming. Our transport comprised 4,500 people, including 1,500 women and a similar number of those rounded up from movie theaters, restaurants, cafes, and streets. We were rushed to Field III, and the women – to Field V. At the entrance, a kapo with a bullwhip told us to stay calm, telling us that our individual cases would be reviewed and that we would be released. In the morning, *kapos* barged into the barracks, which housed 600 people each. We had slept on bare soil, on planks covered with frost and

ice. They rushed us to a roll-call, beating us with sticks and driving us like cattle. They told us to take with us the first dead man – a prisoner who had died at night, one Stanisław Gajewski from Warsaw – and fit him in a row so he could be included in the block's count. We had seen the camp and what was happening there for the first time, and with our own eyes; the camp we had so far known from quietly told stories and had read about in underground papers.

The field was under quarantine. Barracks 17 and 19 were full of people suffering from typhus, out of whom a quota was regularly selected for gas chambers. Those who once had not believed in these atrocities could witness the terrible reality first-hand. In the middle of the field, there was a huge latrine, serving 20,000 people, and by it, on the snow, in freezing cold, dozens of the dead and the sick were lying, the latter squirming in unendurable torment. At blocks 17 and 19, the prisoners were carrying out their sick comrades, still alive, who were stripped naked on a *kapo's* order so to speed up their death and make it possible to prepare the bodies to be loaded on the carts transporting corpses to the crematorium. At the roll-call, standing idly and freezing terribly (some of us wore summer clothes), we watched as emaciated prisoners drew up in huge carts, onto which two fitter prisoners loaded first those alive and then the dead. Terrible things were happening. Some grabbed the edges of the cart or stuck their heads from under the corpses, begging for mercy or screaming out incomprehensible sentences in different languages. They were pushed back, new masses of bodies, dead and alive, heaped upon them. Slowly, the carts were driven off, pulled by the skeleton prisoners beaten by the *kapos*. We stood dumbfounded. This was reality, although we thought it was just a terrible nightmare that would pass. From afar, the whistling of departing trains could be heard. Here and there, in the rows, the sobs of our adolescent comrades were heard. Stasio Naderd was crying loudest; he had been arrested for singing songs in trains. This was our first roll-call and our first impression of the camp: the day of terror.

In the evening, after the second roll-call, during which a few of us had already been beaten and kicked, our hopes of making it alive rose afresh: we had a gulp of coffee and a slice of bread. And then Slovakian Jews, smiling snidely, brought blankets. The blankets were distributed among us, but each blanket was infested with hundreds of lice. We did not see it in the dark. We felt them on ourselves when we lay down. The blankets were inherited from the prisoners who had died of typhus. Some threw them off. Those wearing light clothing, shivering with cold as the snow and the wind squeezed through the slits, picked them at once to protect themselves from the cold. At one point, two "old" prisoners entered the

barrack to collect the coffee caldrons. We asked them about the living conditions. "This is where death is, this is where your end is", they replied. "You saw it in the morning". One of the prisoners ran up to them and shouted, "Shut your damn mouth! They were Jews. They won't do the same thing to us". "We're going", one of the "old" prisoners said. "Tomorrow you'll see for yourselves who they'll be loading". They left. The rest suddenly quietened down, as if terrified by their fate and what awaited them. The following morning confirmed these ominous predictions. Among the sick, who had been stripped naked and were squirming on the snow, were a lot of Poles, as well as persons of other nationalities. The allotted blankets, which seemed like a blessing, started to serve their purpose. After one week, there were people down with typhus and pneumonia everywhere.

People were starving, but it was still "good" because we wore our own clothes and often warm underwear, but this came to an end as well. After two weeks of internment, after a morning roll-call, the blocks marched to the bathhouse. We saw our prison bundles containing underwear and whatever our families had given us before we were taken away, removed from the barracks. In groups of 50, we were driven to the *Effektenkammer* barrack [storeroom for stolen belongings], where, stripped naked, one by one we relinquished our clothes. It was so cold that a thick layer of frost settled on the prisoners' beards and moustaches. We ran to the bathhouse naked, through snow banks. There, we had to wait a couple of minutes by the door since the first group of the prisoners had not finished showering. We were still strong. After showering, we grabbed the striped uniforms handed out to us on the run, hurried outside, and there, we put on light lousy shirts and torn rags of camp clothing. The day when I had a shower was very cold. Icy crusts formed on our wet hair, and we tried to rub them off with our numb hands. After the shower, and dressed in scanty clothes, we reported for roll-call, which lasted three and a half hours. Then, Dunin-Wąsowicz, our comrade, an elderly man of 67, died standing (because even kneeling was not allowed).

And so, day after day, life went by. Beatings, typhus, cold, and exhaustion saw long rows of corpses at every roll-call. Our comrades tried to "organize" fragments of planks for the sick so they would not sit on the frozen soil or in the mud, when they could no longer stand and we could not keep them up.

Drunken SS men often caused us great distress. They ran up to us as we stood in tight columns in the mud, beating us and scattering us in all directions. We were then left without

our shoes (clogs), which had been left in the thick mud. After the SS men calmed down, we came back to find our shoes, by grubbing around in the mud. Often, those who were weak could not find them and were left barefoot. They were saved by the fact that there were a lot of people in agony all around.

After the shower which I mentioned before, and after the selection of a few dozen craftsmen who were needed to ensure the camp's regular operations, we were transferred to Field IV, which we called among ourselves "the killing field". There, typhus had spread over all the barracks. Daily, the field saw 200 corpses and 200–300 new cases of the disease. The sick were moved to barracks 7 and 9, which we called *Gammelblocks*. All those who did not die there were transported to gas chambers once a week. One day, a heavy headache and shivers in my limbs made it impossible for me to remain on my feet until the end of the roll-call. I kneeled in the row. Although I was kicked by a *kapo*, I was too weak to stand up or drag myself to a *kommando* [work detail] forming up for labor. The *kommandos* left. The sick, who remained in the yard, some 150 people, were driven and dragged by the feet through mud to the *Gammelblock*. Among them, I spotted the following persons whom I knew: Józef Marszałek, director of the National Agricultural Bank in Warsaw; Łęcki, a young composer, also from Warsaw; Iłowiecki, chairman of the Warsaw branch of the Central Welfare Council; Zygmunt Krzyżanowski from Żolborz; Kazimierz Łęgowski (or maybe Łągowski or Łagowski), an Old Town attorney, and also many others, whose names I do not know or do not remember (all of the aforementioned died).

Inside the barrack, whose roof was leaky, there was plenty of mud, snow, and feces, on which dozens of prisoners, still alive, lay, squirming. By the wall, in a roll-call fashion, was the last night's harvest: four rows of corpses. After a while, they started to be loaded onto carts.

Drained, I am crawling between the sick, looking for a clean spot, where I am to die like an animal. My tongue is as dry as dust, but in Field IV, there is no water even for those who work. Even if you scooped up the thinnest layer of snow, it is polluted with feces, which is everywhere and aplenty. Even in this final hour, life is hard. I am nestling up to a third prisoner now, but each of them cools off momentarily. I am cold, although the snow falling down on me melts instantly. I do not understand why I am being punished so severely; why I cannot die while others are dying so easily. It is Wednesday. Am I about to become a record breaker and make it until Saturday to be suffocated with gas? This I do not want. It is too long.

Maybe I go earlier, maybe I will fall asleep forever. I crave death, slumber, and silence with my entire soul. Whatever is left in this world is unreal, and I do not think about it. I think about death: I yearn for it, and it does not come.

At night, among the groans, I fumble in the dark for the living, so I can use them to warm up my body which is jolted by febrile shivers. The prayers which my mother taught me stick in my throat. It is not my suffering but the screams of those in desperate agony that are unbearable. This is the *Gammelblock* – the nightmare.

Thursday morning. They are dragging in new ones. I greet my acquaintances with silence. They are silent as well. Nobody speaks anything around here anymore, nobody talks. Only half-insane thoughts assault your mind. In thoughts, you speak to the absent. One man whispers goodbyes to someone absent. Another curses those who ratted on him. I am still lying and waiting, and a thought occurs to me that Dante's impression was nothing in comparison with reality. He had no foundations for Hell. He was missing Majdanek and other camps.

No. It cannot go on like this. "Happiness" must come to me, too, the dream paradise, silence, and peace must be for me, too, with no murderers and no atrocities disfiguring the world and making it odious. I am on the point of cursing even my mother, though I revered her. It is worse, because I am feeling better. I am healthier – and this will prolong the torment until Saturday. Why am I feeling all this so acutely? Why am I not just like mindless cattle, who dumbly await their fate?

I summon whatever strength I have left. Among the corpses, I look for an item which can be of use to me. It is a long belt, which I tie up with mine. Lurching and crumpling a couple of times, fully aware of my actions, I step onto the latrine box. Calmly, meticulously and in a detached manner, I prepare a noose, which is going to free me from life, from being thrown alive under a car, from a gas chamber. The thought of my mother in my head, I jump down. But cruel fate has decided otherwise. One of the belts, the flimsier one, snaps. I look for a new one, though I am dead tired. All the corpses that I frisk look as if they are suffering in the next world. I am gradually overcome by emotion and the thought of living; the self-preservation instinct. No, all this is weakness. I have found a piece of thick wire. I tie it with the belt and this time I am really running away from life. I see some flashes, fire, and there is this heavy roar in my ears, as if of the sea. This is all I can remember.

I open my eyes, and I am at the *Gammelblock* again. Stefan Frydberg from Warsaw, a friend of mine from the Pawiak, is leaning over me. He asks me, "Have you lost your mind? Why are you so weak? Why are you giving up? Half an hour I've been trying to bring you back to the living". I give him a frenzied look and I resent him. "Stefan, why would you do this? I have typhus. I would've found peace of mind by now, and you're literally pushing me inside a gas chamber". "You have typhus? I didn't know. I thought you'd lost it. Too bad. Go hang yourself again, I won't interfere this time. Although a gas chamber is not so scary. It's scary for cowards only. Sooner or later, we're all going in. Hang on a few more hours until they take you away. Wanna drink? There's no clean snow anywhere. Maybe I can give you coffee tomorrow. But hey, you really can't walk at all? Jerzy Norton has typhus and he's still working. Give it a go. I'll get you out of here. If you can't walk, you'll come back here. Tomorrow's Friday, you'll be gone Saturday. I'll do anything for you. You'll take the john and you'll come as my helper. I'll give him a few fags. He'll let you in. There's a lot of sick in the field. They'll come here themselves because they're too weak to work. The Germans won't notice you're missing. Just don't lie down at the roll-call, tell them to support you. If the roll-call is short, then good for you. You may be feeling better tomorrow".

The following morning was strange. The *kommandos* were recalled from the gate. A rumor spread that there was going to be an outgoing transport. Go anywhere, just anywhere, if that means leaving this place. Nobody knew that if they were going, it was to the same hell like the one they were leaving behind. But hope started to wander around the heads burning with typhus fever. The rumor started by SS men spread across the zone: "the transport was going to free labor". This was done so the prisoners would not try to flee.

An odious comedy began, which was about looking for skilled workers. First, they called out for cattle herders. Almost the entire zone declared this profession, in the hope that they would be able to taste just a single drop of milk, a drink they might have once turned their noses up at. I saw an elderly man by the name of Konecki, from Warsaw, a former long-serving director of the Meteorological Institute in Yokohama, Japan, who was severely beaten by an SS man and expelled from the group. Too old.

Groups of different professions were forming up one after another and prisoners were volunteering, deluding themselves with the prospect of surviving. Stove fitters were called out. Lurching, I stepped forward. Frydberg and Józef Kowalski, a *Lagerältester* [camp elder],

recommended me as a good craftsman. One of the SS man, nicknamed the "Hawk", sensed a dead man in myself and shouted, "Du bist krank! Zum *Gammelblock!*" [You are sick! Off to the *Gammelblock!*]. Another one ordered me to run a couple yards. I ran on my last legs, in an uncoordinated manner. The Hawk dashed toward me, but he then noticed a prisoner without a number sewn on. He proceeded to abuse him. I took advantage of it and joined the group designated for the transport.

We left Field IV, the "killing field". We walked, beaten and shoved, toward the bathhouse. I immersed in a bath filled with Kuprex solution. I was thirsty and I drank the lousy water. A *kapo* noticed that and kicked me twice in the belly, which resulted in my vomiting the entire contents of my stomach. With my open mouth I caught water drops coming from the showers. Many prisoners did likewise. Not even in the Sahara surely is there thirst like that in the camp. (The transport went to Flossenbürg for extermination. None of the workers were utilized for the tasks promised. Half of them died of typhus in the wagons, in the course of the long, two-week journey. The rest was exterminated in Flossenbürg, kept outside at roll-calls long hours after cold showers. Out of 2,200 prisoners, we only met a few in Gross-Rosen in 1944).

From the bathhouse, we were taken to Field III, from where the aforementioned transport was supposed to depart. The sick who kept falling down, myself included, were rushed to an empty barrack 6. They took our clothes off us, which were needed to dress up those on the transport.

Again I found myself in a barrack with dying people. But at that time, the instinct to live prevailed in me, although a 42-degree fever was burning me up. It was the end of March 1943. Zone III was the zone of the *kommandos* building the *Wachbatalion* [guard battalion]. I knew that in order to increase work efficiency the sick were not taken to gas chambers. They died in a barrack at the camp hospital. I began to fight for life. It was unthinkable to repeat what I had intended to do to myself two days earlier. The human psyche is strange. I had malignant feelings toward my comrades – if someone would only die. In that event, I could take his shirt to cover myself, because it was indescribably cold. But all of them lived. When I wanted to take the shirt off a prisoner who was dying, he suddenly clasped my throat and tried to strangle me. We fought. He died soon afterward. I took his shirt off him. I was a bit warmer. Around midnight, I had a couple of shirts

already and I somehow made it until morning. In the morning, Stefan Zaborowski, my party colleague, appeared at the roll-call, gave me a blanket, and dashed off to fetch me some coffee (he worked in a kitchen). I kissed his hands. Then, he asked the Russian function prisoners not to drag me to the camp hospital, but they did.

After three days in Field III, all those suffering from typhus (280 people) were moved to Field I. We walked barefoot, in shirts, wading through the snow. The road was strewn with people in agony. The sick pulled one another. Those who crumpled to the snow had their blankets taken away. In Field I, we stood in rows in front of the ambulance, waiting for the corpse carriers to bring in the dead and the alive who had remained on the road, so the count would tally with the numbers passed by Field III to Field I. All this had lasted some four hours. Out of 280 people, 70 had remained after a couple of days.

In Field I at block 8, I came across Paul Hoffmann and Muhsfeldt, head of the executions department. They would come together with Thumann to carry out a weekly selection. Whoever was up to it would fall in the row themselves. Others, alive or dead, were dragged to the roll-call. Thumann walked with his German shepherd dog. We called this dog the "head doctor" because it often decided if a man would live or die. When the dog snarled with no apparent reason at a prisoner, Thumann would instantly sentence this man to death. Thumann, pacing along the rows in silence, pointed his whip at prisoners: sometimes five standing next to each other, and sometimes he picked them from different rows. Nobody knew where to stand to avoid it. Those pointed at with the bullwhip were sent to the gas chambers. During one selection, around 15 May 1943, he picked and then beat with his bullwhip a prisoner by the name of Hering – a political activist from Warsaw, a cripple who walked bent at a 75-degree angle – on grounds that he gave him a "vengeful" look (Hering was gassed). Here, at the hospital, I came across Wiktor Betlewski, a civilian worker from Warsaw (he was killed in Oranienburg), through whom I got in touch with my family (officially, we were denied the right to write until August 1943). Thanks to his help, having recovered from typhus, I went up from 27 kilograms of body weight to 55 kilograms.

Still feeble, I was allotted to the corpse carriers' *kommando*, whose task was to move bodies to the old crematorium. In the event of a significant number of the gassed, we also helped unload the gas chambers. I worked in this capacity for six weeks. This is where I had an opportunity to witness the greatest atrocities perpetrated by the SS men.

Toward the end of May, as I was carrying a corpse to the old crematorium, I watched as two prisoners, escorted by an SS man by the name of Grohmann, were carrying a woman from the direction of the Rose Field, on a stretcher used for moving grass. She was all covered with blood. This woman, exceptionally beautiful, had given birth an hour before and was holding the baby. The baby was not cleaned up and was covered in blood. The woman was clutching the baby to her body, sobbing. It was morning and it was still quiet around the crematorium. They put the woman on the stretcher by the windows. The morning was beautiful. Everything was covered with silvery glints of dew. The sun was stroking the woman's face and gave her a golden aura. She looked like Blessed Virgin Mary. Despite the pain, she had a kind of odd smile of maternity, of happiness even, on her face. She did not know what awaited her. She came in on a transport and she had not experienced the camp yet. Her labor had caught her in the Rose Field, where the transport stayed the night. We whizzed past her with the corpse. She looked in our direction, maybe expecting a doctor. When we went inside, Grohmann came out with Hoffmann the *kapo*, who snatched the baby off her hands and threw it into the crematorium through a window. The blows of his baton drowned out the woman's desperate screaming. And the day was still beautiful.

On 17 March 1944, I watched as an SS woman nicknamed (...) was leading two women. The younger of the two was the wife of a Lublin resident from Field III. The women were walking calmly along all the fields. When at Field V, being certain they were going to work, they wanted to enter through the gate. The SS woman ordered them to keep walking. When they went past the gate, the older woman, maybe suspecting they were going to the crematorium, started to cry. The younger woman, in her turn, threw a furious fit. Suddenly, she fell on the SS woman, grabbing her revolver. A scuffle ensued. At one point, the SS woman managed to throw the revolver behind the wires, and, seeing the woman's anger, she started to flee. Watching the entire scene, Thumann, arriving on a horse, unleashed a dog on the younger woman, who at one point also broke into a run. The escape was impossible – there was wire on all sides. The dog pounced on its prey and felled it to the ground. SS men sprang out of the *blockhaus* and at the same time the alarm siren sounded. The woman was captured and taken to a sentry box, where they beat her with bullwhips until a car with a red cross arrived, into which both women were loaded by force and then taken to the crematorium via a roundabout way. At that point, Hoffmann appeared and he dragged the younger woman, who was putting up a fight, to the furnace floor. The other went in

herself. He ordered both of them to undress. The older one, sobbing gently, carried out the order. Having been hit with a baton in the back of the head, she was thrown into a furnace, probably unconscious. The younger woman would not undress. They started to shake her and beat her, and threw her on the ground. On Thumann's order, Hoffmann addressed her, saying that if she did not undress voluntarily and relinquish her clothes, she would be burned alive. She refused again, crying hysterically, pleading, and threatening revenge on the part of the Soviet army. On Thumann's mark, Hoffmann shouted, "*Raus!*" Four stokers ran up to the woman, grabbed her, and threw her into the burning furnace, the victim screaming wildly.

On 25 July 1943, on the order of Thumann, the camp commandant, it was ruled that the children from the pacified Hrubieszów district and the Zamość area would be gassed and their mothers sent for forced labor in Germany. Previously, false rumors were spread that the children would be placed in the custody of the Red Cross or sent to nurseries or Jordan gardens, but the truth came out. When the vans drew up to collect the children, the mothers, sensing what awaited their offspring, would not let them be taken away. SS men and SS women, through *Dolmetschers* [interpreters], were allaying the women and trying to convince them to release the children. When persuasion failed, they proceeded to remove the children by force and then threw them into the vans. Crying and lamentation broke out in the zone. The mothers, mad with grief, were running away with their children. SS men and kapos would catch them one by one. I saw Hoffmann, wearing an SS uniform, scuffle with a peasant, who was holding her infant baby tight and would not let it go. She was a young, well-built woman. I watched as Hoffmann finally got hold of the baby and threw the poor little thing, covered with blood and probably dead already, onto a van. I was watching from a distance and I thought that the baby's head remained in the mother's hands. I might be wrong, I may have been hallucinating. I know that Hoffmann was standing at the crematorium's door and lured the passing children in with sweets and dolls. There, he killed them and burned them.

One more characteristic incident stuck in my mind. It was in August 1943. At that time, I was in Field IV at block 6. A transport came in from the Stanisławów area, on which, among others, two bible students, or Baptists, arrived. They were assigned to block 6. Leon Weiman was block leader. For the evening roll-call, they had to report with the prison numbers and camp badges indicating the nature of their offense. The students failed to comply with that order, for which the block leader issued 25 regulation lashes to them, indicating that

the badges and numbers were to be sewn on by the morning. Despite the whip blows received and the pain, the students refused to obey the order. The block leader threatened reporting them to Lipiński, a camp elder, which he did in view of their decided persistence. At 10.00 p.m., Lipiński (a German) came to the block with Wojtek Sznajderowicz, his assistant butcher. In accordance with the relevant regulation, the prisoners in the block were on their pallets. Only a single covered lamp was on, by which Lipiński sat on a stool. He ordered that the offenders be brought before him and asked them why they were being such troublemakers and refused to comply with the camp-wide regulations. "God will not let us", they replied. "What you order us to sew on is the Devil's mark, who thus labels those who are destined for Hell". Lipiński sprang to his feet, grabbed the stool, and shouted: "What, God? You're talking about God? Thousands and millions perish, suffering everywhere, and this is supposed to be God's work? A lousy hooker would have more mercy than the God you're talking about. You came to fool us with your God, in the name of whom this war is being fought and camps like this one are set up. You're talking about God in a place where everybody knows He does not exist. Hiding behind him, you go against order. Do you even believe in Him yourself?" "Yes, sir. We believe in Him and we fulfill His commandments". "And you think this God will save you? So here's the deal: confess that this is your trick, that you want to evade the rules. You're sewing on the badges or not?" After they replied in the negative, Lipiński threw the stool at the students and Wojtek proceeded to beat them with a baton. When they were lying on the floor, covered with blood, it was once again demanded that they disown God. One of them did it. The other begged for mercy, but kept saying that God exists. He was beaten to death. At one point, Sznajderowicz addressed all the prisoners at the block, saying, "Disown your f... God. *Lagerältester* [camp elder] is a good father and he will forgive you anything". It is difficult for me to recreate the sheer monstrosity of this "trial" at the moment. In the future, I will provide fuller details.

I remained at the Majdanek camp until 6 April 1944. Then, I was transported to Gross-Rosen, and then to the Leitmeritz subcamp, B5 *kommando*, at the Flossenbürg camp.

I gave an identical deposition on 14 November 1945, in front of Stanisław Brodziak, Director of the Information and Propaganda Department at the Majdanek State Museum.

The report was read out.