



IZRAEL MANDELBAUM

PRO JUSTITIA

On 26 October 1945, I, Warnant, deputy Military Judge, assisted by André Portaels, deputy court clerk, began the trial in the absence of the defendant, and interviewed the witness who expressed the desire to testify in French. The witness notified us about the testimony he had given and was asked to provide his surname, name, age, marital status, occupation, place of residence, and to inform us as to whether he was employed by, or related to the parties by blood or marriage, and if so – to what degree.

Izrael Majer Mandelbaum, born on 16 November 1913 in Lublin (Poland), a chemistry technician and bacteriologist, residing at rue Jolly 130 in Schaerbeek, declares that he has no relation to the parties as a house mate or relative by blood or marriage, and swears the following oath: "I swear to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help me God". He then testifies as follows:

I left Malines [Mechelen] on 4 April 1944 and arrived at the Auschwitz camp in the morning on 7 April. I stayed there until 18 January 1945 – the day of the evacuation brought on by the approach of the Soviet army.

Established in 1940, the camp was meant for Poles at first. It was built by prisoners with the use of materials provided by various German companies. At the beginning, a transport of German political and ordinary prisoners was sent to Auschwitz. They held management positions in the camp's internal hierarchy (as *kapos*, block elders, administrative clerks) until the very end, working with some Poles, who later also performed said functions. These German prisoners did not have identification numbers tattooed on their forearms. The first Russian prisoners arrived in 1941. No Jews were yet imprisoned in Auschwitz until that point.

The first transports of Jews arrived at the beginning of 1942 from Slovakia and France. At that time, the camp regime was already very harsh on account of insufficient food, hard and long labor (lasting 11–12 hours a day), and practically non-existent hygiene standards. According to the testimonies of my Polish colleagues, prisoners were crowded into barracks, where they slept on the floor, unable to move around.



When Jews started arriving in 1942, the crematorium ovens were moved from Auschwitz to Birkenau or – strictly speaking – huge crematorium ovens and gas chambers were built in Birkenau. They functioned until the end of the camp's existence. A new, very large camp was established on the other side, in Buna. Prisoners from there worked in the neighboring synthetic rubber factories.

Auschwitz was a camp for men, with the exception of one block meant for women who were subjected to medical experiments there. Birkenau (Auschwitz II) was a complex of camps for men and women, who were housed separately. It also consisted of the additional Gypsy camp. The camp Birkenau ["Canada"] located near Birkenau was said to be the largest storage of collected items and belongings confiscated from prisoners.

It should also be noted that many *kommandos* in which the number of prisoners would vary to a considerable degree (from 500 to even 4,000–5,000) were scattered around Upper Silesia. They were subordinate to the central camp in Auschwitz. Prisoners in these *kommandos* had to labor horrifically hard. This is why prisoners working in a *kommando* in the village Golischau [Golleschau] had to be changed, that is replaced by people from new transports every six weeks.

We arrived in a group of 600 people at the train station in Birkenau, crowded in wagons: men, women and children. We stepped out of the wagons, leaving our belongings behind. They were taken straight to the central storage of the prisoners' belongings in Birkenau mentioned above. Upon leaving the train, men and women were separated by the SS. Then the selections began: sick and exhausted prisoners, as well as women with children aged below 13–14, so those who were unfit for work, were immediately loaded onto vehicles. A camp doctor and *Arbeitsdienstführer* [head of the labor service] conducted selections among the rest of the men and women, moving those who were thought to be unfit for work to the side. They were to join the first group that had departed in vehicles. Many witnesses claim that these people were marched to the gas chambers in Birkenau. In my opinion, about a third of the people from my group numbering 600 were immediately selected for gassing in the manner described above.

Since the time of my arrival at Auschwitz, selections were conducted by *Untersturmführer* [illegible], whom I frequently saw in the company of the camp staff elite. When we got to



the camp, our clothes were taken away, and after disinfection we received prisoner uniforms. Once the formalities regarding admission were completed in the camp office, we were divided into groups of 40 and placed in the block intended for this reason.

Due to a prisoner in our group being sick with scarlet fever, we were locked in one room in this block for almost four weeks, with no opportunity to leave. Afterwards, we were sent in groups to *kommandos* outside the camp, with the exception of 20 prisoners who stayed in Auschwitz. I was sent to a *kommando* in the city of Laurahütte, near Katowice. The day before I left for this *kommando*, I met Dr. Samuel in Auschwitz. He worked in the block used for medical experiments (he was in fact killed several weeks later, because he had seen too much in that respect). He informed [the camp staff] about my background in bacteriology. Consequently, two weeks later I was dismissed from the *kommando* in Laurahütte and assigned to work in the laboratory at the Institute of Hygiene.

At first, my task was to provide medical analyses – bacteriological and serological. This allowed me to realize during breaks that the bouillon used for growing bacteria cultures was made not only from beef but also from human flesh. If need be, I can present physical evidence to prove this statement. It was provided by members of the staff who did not work with me and who prepared this “bouillon of bacterial cultures”. I would like to add that in the course of the experiments, the SS doctors often took blood samples from us.

We were tasked with cleaning blocks in which we worked. We frequently suffered beatings for being sloppy – according to the SS. On top of that, we were often forced to undergo certain experiments, which we naturally could not refuse. I cannot tell what serious effects could have occurred, had I stayed in the laboratory at Auschwitz, or more precisely at the Institute of Hygiene, for longer than seven or eight months.

At Auschwitz, all prisoners alike were forced to work. In the summer, roll call was at 5.00 a.m., work started at about 6.00 and lasted until 17.30 p.m., with a one-hour dinner break, which near the end was reduced to half an hour, because time at work was wasted whenever the Allies bombed the camp. The discipline was similar in the winter, but prisoners finished work a bit earlier, that is at nightfall.

Food consisted of: a quarter of a loaf of bread, a liter of soup, half a liter of unsweetened liquid which was supposed to be tea. In addition to the bread, we alternately got some margarine,



a bit of sausage or some fruit preserve. This food provided a minimum of a thousand calories a day, while a working man needs food which provides at least 3,000 calories.

Many completely exhausted and emaciated people called "Muslims" in the camp served as a pretext for conducting new selections. I participated in one such selection at the end of September or at the beginning of October 1944. It was conducted over two nights by the SS men, such as Kaddock [Kaduk] – the second *Rapportführer* [report leader], and Hössler. Personally, I only saw that Kaduk was there, but my colleagues testified that Hössler took Kaduk's place at some point. Hundreds of prisoners (800?), including Belgians, were selected and sent to the gas chambers in Birkenau.

It is clear that firstly, Hössler gave permission for the selection and secondly, due to his important function in the camp, he signed the permit for the transport of the prisoners to Birkenau. It must be said that every time that a group of prisoners went outside the camp, the person responsible for the camp or his assistant had to sign an official permit. At this time Hössler was also *Lagerführer* [camp leader] at the camp for men and women in Auschwitz.

I will provide one more fact incriminating Hössler. Four women were hanged in Auschwitz at the end of October or November 1944. They belonged to a *kommando* working at the Union-Werke factory. According to the testimonies given by prisoners who worked there with them, Hössler very frequently visited the factory, probably in order to gather information concerning this case. These four women were accused of supplying explosives which were [to be] used by prisoners to blow up crematorium oven no. 3 in Birkenau. They were hanged in the camp, in the presence of Hössler, who personally read out the verdict. Some time after that, five other prisoners were hanged: two Germans and three Poles. On this occasion, Hössler was present and he read out the verdict as well. In September and October 1944, selections were conducted in the Auschwitz camp hospital. These would not have been possible without permission from the camp physician, Dr. Fischer. The selected prisoners were sent to the crematorium oven in Birkenau. I should add here that they also could not have left the camp without Hössler's signature and permission.

Two *Rapportführers* at the camp, Claussen and Kaduk, were particularly brutal.

As for the selections of prisoners for the gas chambers, it should be noted that orders in this regard could have come from higher authorities who supervised the Auschwitz camp. I would

like to express my personal opinion on this matter which reflects what I have observed. It is possible that general instructions to eliminate all prisoners who were unfit for work came from Berlin. Locally at the Auschwitz camp, however, decisions were made by the camp command – especially by those who conducted selections of these people who were to be sent to the gas chambers. It can be said that the camp command was given a lot of freedom as regards selecting prisoners for extermination. I believe that Hössler bears a significant responsibility among those who played an important role in selections. I do not think that orders from outside the camp determined the number or percent of the people meant for annihilation. Arbitrariness of these selections is evident from the fact that some people chosen in the selection process were later saved thanks to this or that *Kommandoführer* [squad leader] intervening on their behalf. This means that *Lagerführer* could spare some people or, to be more precise, significantly decrease the number of victims.

I would like to provide some clarification with regards to the personnel of the Auschwitz camp – both the command and its subordinates, comprised exclusively of members of the SS working there voluntarily. They cannot say that they were forced to do so. Each of them individually could decide about a prisoner's life or death. Prisoners had no chance to complain let alone defend themselves. No *Lagerführer* ever prohibited his subordinates from beating or abusing them. I was therefore a witness to prisoners being brutally beaten by the SS and *Lagerführer* Hössler.

The Auschwitz camp was an extermination camp in the full sense of the word, because while prisoners unfit for work were immediately killed, working prisoners were subjected to conditions which slowly led them to death from exhaustion. No member of the SS present in the Auschwitz camp can deny their role in the extermination of prisoners for the simple reason that having participated in the camp life, they must have been aware of the horrible conditions suffered by the prisoners. No explanation provided by SS men – especially Hössler, claiming that they were just following orders should be taken into account.

A few things must be said about the evacuation of the Auschwitz camp which occurred on 18 January 1945. The order to evacuate the camp clearly came from outside. At that point about 13,000 prisoners were detained in Auschwitz. Hössler, who was tasked with conducting the evacuation, could have left more prisoners in the camp amidst the chaos, consequently saving their lives. It would have been enough to schedule the departures of prisoners in such a way as to delay the evacuation as much as possible.



I would like to emphasize that the Russians entered the camp in some places on 18 January 1945. Because of that, a group of 3,000 prisoners was hastily evacuated from the camp between 8.00 a.m. and midnight. Several hundred people stayed behind in the camp after midnight, as they had not managed to depart. They were then liberated by the Russians a few days later.

The evacuation was carried out in horrible conditions and claimed many lives. Marching very fast at night, prisoners covered 48 kilometers. Acting on orders, the SS killed those who were or seemed exhausted. I can add that on the first night, about 200 people from the group that I belonged to were shot by the SS with automatic rifles.

In my opinion, no member of the SS who was at the Auschwitz camp, even if he only passively witnessed these crimes, can justify his presence there by saying that he did not participate. He should be held accountable for his very presence during this extermination of at least 3 million people and for his lack of a humane reaction to it.

The report was confirmed and signed, 21 words have been crossed out.