



EUGENIA HALBREICH

On 27 April 1945 in Kraków, Regional Investigative Judge Jan Sehn, member of the Commission for the Investigation of German-Nazi Crimes in Oświęcim, at the request, in the presence and with the participation of Deputy Prosecutor at the Regional Court Dr. Wincenty Jaroński, member of the Commission, Helena Boguszevska-Kornacka and Jerzy Kornacki, members of the Commission and the State National Council, pursuant to Article 254 in connection with Article 107 and 115 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, interviewed former prisoner no. 29700 of the Auschwitz concentration camp as a witness, who testified as follows:

Name and surname	Eugenia Halbreich, <i>née</i> Sperber
Date and place of birth	20 September 1919 in Kraków
Parents' names	Gustaw Sperber and Suna, <i>née</i> Lewkowicz, owners of a trading company
Place of residence before the arrest	Kraków, Szymanowskiego Boczna Street 1
Occupation	bookkeeper
Religious affiliation	Jewish
Citizenship	Jewish
Nationality	Polish

From 1941 to August 1942, I resided in Wielka Wieś near Ojców. I was officially registered in the commune office as a Jewish woman. At the beginning of August 1942, I learned that an action against Jews was to be carried out in Wielka Wieś, which was the reason I came to Kraków, where my husband worked at that time. He worked as a disc specialist in the "Granit" company at Nadwiślańska Street 1. The manager of that company, representing the German authorities, was an Italian – Huberto Zuliani. Since at that time Jews were



not allowed to live outside the ghetto, my husband and I rented a flat in the ghetto at Krakusa Street 21. My parents and two brothers also lived in the ghetto. On 27 October, during a second action directed against Jews, about 10,000 Jews, including my brother, Henryk Sperber, were transported out of the ghetto. The entire transport was headed to Bełżec. On the way there, my brother managed to escape from the train and returned to Kraków. My brother, Henryk Sperber, and my husband, Jakub Halbreich, were members of a People's Army militia operating in the ghetto. I helped them with their work, writing down radio newsletters, filling in false *Kennkarte* [identity documents] and issuing false work certificates. Since I was employed outside the ghetto, I was able to leave its premises. This facilitated my work and helped me avoid being transported out of the ghetto. Apart from the People's Army militias, there were also Zionist groups in the ghetto.

On 4 December 1942, my brother was arrested in the ghetto. I wanted to save him, so I went to the house where the so-called *Ordnungsdienst* [police service] was located. I knew some important people and I wanted to get him out. However, I was not allowed inside the building, so I went to my parents' flat at Limanowskiego Street, if I remember correctly, 5. Before I entered my parents' flat, I met a certain Braw, a Jewish militiaman. Although he knew that the Gestapo were in the flat, he did not warn me. When I entered the flat, I was arrested and escorted to the *Ordnungsdienst* building, where I was kept for six weeks. Based on the content of the interrogations I was subjected to at that time by the Gestapo, I understood that I was being detained in connection with my brother's arrest. As a matter of fact, an order was issued on that day to arrest all people in the ghetto who bore the name Sperber. It was then that my brother Roman was arrested. Both my brothers were transferred to the Montelupich Prison on that same day. As we learned later on, Henryk was arrested because of a Jew, a certain Julek Apel, a Gestapo informer. Neither my parents nor I were interrogated that day. Only my brother was threatened that if he did not speak the truth, we would all die. At 6.00 p.m. the police received an order from the Gestapo to arrest my father and me. My mother had already been released earlier.

At 2 a.m. my mother was arrested again and, after two weeks, released once more. I was interrogated for the first time after a week in the *Ordnungsdienst* prison. They asked me if I knew anything about a broadcasting station, anything about leaflets being distributed and where weapons were stored in the ghetto. I answered all the questions negatively. After the interrogation, I was told to face the wall. The Gestapo who had interrogated me wrote the

words *verlogene Jüdin* in the report, i.e. a lying Jewess. Then, he covered the two words with his hand and instructed me to sign the report. My next interrogation took place at Pomorska Street in the Gestapo building. They asked me the same questions that I was asked in the *Ordnungsdienst* building, but also about my brother, and finally they showed me a text that I wrote myself, but in a disguised handwriting. It was a radio message. I denied that I had edited and written it. Then, the Gestapo officer who was interrogating me slapped me in the face. After the interrogation, I was escorted back to the *Ordnungsdienst* prison. On the same day, my mother was arrested for the third time – as I suppose, that arrest was caused by the testimony I gave at Pomorska Street. Three weeks after that arrest, I was transported, together with my mother and father, to the Auschwitz camp. Later on my brother's friends, who came to Auschwitz after they had been kept with my brothers at the Montelupich prison, told me that Henryk had been shot dead by the Gestapo in the Jewish cemetery in Kraków. My younger brother Roman and other prisoners were taken to a camp, but I do not know where and so far I have not received any information about him.

On 18 January 1943, we were loaded into cattle cars at the West Railway Station in Kraków. We were brought to the station by trucks. The transport, which consisted of about 500 people, prisoners from the Montelupich and the *Ordnungsdienst* prisons, joined another transport from Tarnów. We did not know where we were going. In the afternoon, we were brought to the station, as I found out later on, in Auschwitz. Some people dressed in striped uniforms were running around the cars and taking away our belongings. They made a deep impression on us. We found out later that they were prisoners employed in the so-called Canada detail. We were unloaded and immediately divided into groups of five – the men were separated from the women. Several prisoners had managed to escape during the train journey. At the station, the entire transport was surrounded by SS men. Then, they escorted us to Birkenau. On our way there, they were pushing us to move fast. Before entering the camp, we noticed some holes in the ground, and because we had previously heard about the mass killing of Jews, we assumed that these ditches might have been intended for burying prisoners' corpses. I was struck by a group of female prisoners returning to the camp from work. They were Russian women, dressed in striped uniforms, dirty, emaciated and cold. The SS counted us outside the camp gate and led us into the camp, into the so-called *Zugansgblock* [block for the newly-arrived]. All the women from our transport were placed in that block. There were about 2000 of us, including 160 Jewish women. We arrived in the



evening and until the following morning we were held in a closed barrack. That night was horrible. The barrack was dark and cold. There were only a few stools inside, so we had to stand all night.

Several times at night, we were visited by SS men accompanied by German female prisoners with black badges – prostitutes. Both the SS men and the women wanted us to give them our valuables, claiming that in the camp everything would be taken away from us anyway. If a prisoner made a bit too much noise or did not want to give up an item she was asked for, both the SS men and the women would beat her with their hands and with rubber truncheons. In the morning, a group of female prisoners, Jewish women from Slovakia, came to our barrack and distributed a smelly flour soup, the so-called mehlka. Then, they called out our names alphabetically and escorted us to the nearby bathhouse in groups of a hundred people. In the bathhouse, they lined us up in a corridor where two prisoners were working. There were also three SS men who were guarding these prisoners. Then, we were brought into a nearby room in groups of five, where we were told to quickly undress and put our clothes and underwear aside. Then, they shaved us. We had to do it all very quickly. The SS men and the assisting female prisoners beat those who lingered and fell behind. The items that had been listed were packed in separate bags with the names of the prisoners who had given them up. Next, we were rushed, completely naked, into the bathhouse, in front of the men. At the entrance to the bathhouse there was a female prisoner with a sprayer and some liquid, which she was using for the so-called delousing. After the delousing, we were beaten and driven into the steam room. They forced us to sit in the highest seats, where it was the hottest. We stayed in the steam room for over an hour. Then, we were driven straight from the heat into another room. The floor there was made of stone and the showers had ice-cold water. We left that room and went into another one, where we were given underwear and clothes. Jewish women were separated from those who were Aryan. The Jewish women were given only shirts, trousers, drill blouses left by the Russians, and civilian coats with a red cross on the back. We were also given thin headscarves and Dutch wooden clogs. The Aryan women received striped dresses, striped jackets – the so-called jakas – shirts, and knickers. All the clothes were very dirty, torn, damp, and covered with lice. After we had put on those uniforms, while being beaten and shouted at, we approached the table one by one and each of us had her number tattooed on her arm. Then, [in accordance with the numbers] we were asked for our personal data. Additionally, Jewish women had a triangle tattooed below their number. Next, we approached seamstresses



who sewed the numbers on the side of our coats and dresses. In the case of Jews, they also added a yellow star, in the case of Poles – a red badge with the letter “P” inscribed on it. From that moment on, every registered woman could only be called by her number. The bathing lasted until late evening.

In the evening, every person was given half a litre of soup, because we had not eaten anything all day. It was rutabaga soup with some powder added. Having eaten that soup, women would stop menstruating. I talked about it to prisoners who were doctors, and they confirmed this fact. In general, after the first six months to a year all female prisoners stopped menstruating. Newly arrived prisoners, i.e. *Zugangs*, were treated particularly badly, and this group was characterised by the highest mortality rate. For the Germans, the Auschwitz camp was an extermination camp, a death camp. Therefore, only if you were able to survive a few months in the camp were you were allowed to perform some function, to be assigned to better work units or a better block.

I had learned already in the bathhouse that Polish Jewish women were treated the worst. For that reason, I was told to pass myself off as a Czech woman. The next thing I learned was that the camp was surrounded by high-voltage wires, that there were crematoria and gas chambers in the camp, where large numbers of people were being poisoned, and that our transport was being treated relatively well, because Jewish women from previous transports had been treated atrociously. My fellow prisoners told me there were many young girls in previous transports of Slovak Jews. In addition to the normal methods used by the SS towards transports of prisoners, SS men would also artificially “devirginize” those girls.

From the bathhouse, I was taken together with other Jewish women to Jewish block 8. When we arrived, it was completely dark and the conditions were simply horrible. In a corner there was a fire, but only the prisoners who watched the block, the so-called “night watch,” could sit there. The block was filled with a terrible stench and we could hear the moaning of the women who were kept there. There were bunk beds by the walls. The bunks were double, open on one side, and they resembled rabbit cages. Prisoners slept inside those cages. They were damp and full of faeces. I would also like to add that at that time in the camp there was a massive outbreak of the so-called *Durchfall* [diarrhea], a disease similar to dysentery, which made people frequently visit the toilet. Since the block guards would not allow us to go to the latrine at night and there were no toilets in the block, sick people answered the calls of nature in the bunks. Because of such hygienic conditions, I did not go to bed that night, but



I waited for my mother who arrived at the barrack at 3.00 a.m. Around 4.00 a.m., the block leader and the *Stubedienst* [room orderly] called us over for a roll call. Soup was distributed before the roll call, but since the women in the *Zugang* had no bowls yet and they did not know how to push themselves through the crowd to get the soup, almost no one from the newly arrived prisoners had breakfast that day. When we were leaving the block, the block personnel, consisting of prisoners, were beating us with their hands and sticks. They were also kicking and pushing us. The roll call was held on the camp street. All prisoners gathered in front of their blocks. We stood there until the SS *Blockführerin* arrived, which sometimes took three to four hours, and it happened both in the morning and during evening roll calls. After an SS woman checked the number of prisoners in the block, *Kapos* (who were also prisoners) came to the *Zugang* block and took groups of women to work.

In the women's camp, there were different kinds of jobs and they were divided into two groups – those performed inside and outside the camp – in winter and in summer. Work units whose duties included cleaning streets, clearing away corpses, removing garbage, and cleaning latrines worked inside the camp, both in winter and in summer. There were also the details working in the *Effektenkammer* [room for personal effects] in the bathhouse, and the so-called better details who worked under a roof. In winter, our task outside was to remove stones, break them and dig them out from the ground. We also worked demolishing buildings formerly intended for the residents of Auschwitz – the so-called *Baubruchkommando* – we irrigated and drained land, and removed snow, while in summer we did gardening and agricultural work. Right away on the first day, I was assigned to the work unit whose task was to break stones – we called it the *Kiesgrube* [gravel pit]. I worked there for about two weeks. The *Kapo* in that detail was a German woman. She was a very bad person and she kicked or beat the prisoners for no reason, all over their bodies, with a stick, shovel handle, or a hand. My mother and I worked there, in the toughest conditions, until I met SS man Claussen for the second time.

I saw him for the first time when I was standing naked in the bathhouse. He was brought to the bathhouse by (*Aufseherin*) Pfaffenhofen. She was a painter, or rather she claimed to be a painter, and when she saw that I was a well-built woman, she told me she would draw me, that is, do my portrait. She asked me if I spoke German and if my handwriting was legible. When I gave positive answers to those questions, she said she would talk to her boss, who was, as I learned later on, *Unterscharführer* Claussen, and get me a job as an *Aufnahme*



Schreiberin. Thanks to these circumstances I was employed as a clerk in the *Politische Abteilung* [Political Department].

I would like to emphasise that already as I was being deported from the Kraków ghetto, I was planning to commit suicide, because I knew that no Jew could ever leave Auschwitz. Only my mother stopped me from taking my own life. Every day the *Aufseherinnen* would walk along the camp wires and find several dozen dead bodies of women who had committed suicide.

One day, my mother was assigned to do a different job – to demolish houses. When my mother returned from work, she told me that she had had dogs set on her and showed me bite marks on her thighs. Every evening, the prisoners would bring to the roll call several or a dozen corpses of women who had died or had been killed. The sight of them marching back to the camp was simply appalling. There were SS men standing at the gate. Almost every one of them had a dog on a leash. The dogs were howling and barking, and since we had seen at work that they attacked people, we were all trembling with fear.

Every Sunday in block 8, as well as in the entire women's camp, people were subject to the so-called selections for gas poisoning. The prisoners did not go to work then. I was subject to just one selection in block 8. In the camp, I survived 18 selections, but there were many more. People were selected for the gas chambers by *Rottenführer* Taube, who was accompanied by SS woman Drexler [Drechsel] and others. The procedure was the following: we were ordered to line up outside the block, and then Taube pointed at whoever he liked, completely at random. The numbers were written down and the prisoners were transported to block 25, where they awaited transportation to the gas chambers.

After I was assigned to the *Politische Abteilung*, I had the right to reside in a different block, an Aryan one, but since my mother was still in block 8, I had to continue spending nights with prisoners from that block. However, I actually lived in the *Politische Abteilung* block. On the following Sunday, so two weeks after my arrival at the camp, there was a second selection. During that selection, Taube chose my mother for gassing: therefore, she was transferred to block 25 as well. It consisted of two barracks, surrounded by a wall, and it was impossible to get inside. Despite these difficulties, I tried to see my mother. I wanted to save her, so I begged Pfaffenhofen to ask Claussen to release my mother. I also asked him for it myself. Claussen told me that it was pointless, because my mother was old and it did not matter if she died that day or the following, and that if I wanted to live, I had to forget



my mother. At that time, as I have already mentioned before, I was working in the *Politische Abteilung*. The office received lists of people who were to be poisoned in the gas chambers. The list included numbers, followed by the letters "SB." I did not know then what it meant, but I knew that Taube was the *Blockführer* in block 25. I found out later on that "SB" was the abbreviation for *Sonderbehandlung*, that is, people intended for gassing. One day, or rather, on the second day of my mother's stay in block 25, Taube came to the office where I worked. When he saw me crying, he said: *Was holst du blade Kuh?* And then he said, also in German, "Don't you like it here? You've just arrived at the camp and you're already crying? If you want, I'll show you what is like here!" Then I told him that my mother had been selected for gas poisoning. Taube laughed and disregarded my sorrow, but when I said, or rather asked, "Do you know what 'mother' means?" he changed his tone. I do not know why that "monster" let the conversation continue. He asked me to give him my mother's number and he went to block 25. When he returned from the block, he told me that my mother would stay and would not be included in the transport, that I could go to her and dress her properly, and that he would leave her there as the *Stubendienst*. At that time, it was a great bit of luck to be employed in block 25. I did not understand Taube's behaviour at all.

Taube was a man of medium height, slim, resembling a person suffering from consumption. He was about 19-20 years old, his face had the look of a ruffian, and he was a sadist with no human feelings. He showed particular brutality when he chose people from individual blocks to be transported to block 25 and loaded them into cars. He picked adequate personnel for himself. He often prohibited us from giving any water or food to prisoners from block 25 for several days. He beat them with no mercy, for no reason, and all over their bodies. When the prisoners were loaded into trucks in order to be transported to the gas chambers, he ordered the *Stubendiensts* to throw them in like packages, and did so himself. Older prisoners who worked in the block, particularly a 15-year-old Slovak Jewish girl named Cylke, at his command, would literally tear women apart, beat them all over their bodies, and often kill them. Taube trained her well and later on he made her the *Lagerälteste* [camp senior].

Taube allowed me to go to block 25. The block leader knew that I was coming. When I entered the yard I saw lots of corpses, because this was where dead bodies from all the blocks were gathered. I had to jump to avoid stepping on them. After I had looked for my mother for some time, she was brought to me. Although she was completely well and healthy before she was transferred to block 25, after a two-day stay she looked like



a decrepit old woman. She simply could not believe that she was talking to me and did not realize it at all. When she came to her senses, I could clearly see her face changing, as if she was coming back to life. And then she started talking to me. Taube kept his word and gave my mother a job as a guard in block 25. For me, it was the worst part of my stay in the camp, because I knew nobody left that block – it was the “block of death.” I was right, because already during the next selection my mother was chosen for the gas chambers. This time, and later on as well, it was Taube who saved my mother from being sent to the gas chamber. In the fourth week of my stay, I asked Taube to help my mother again. I found out from the block personnel that my mother had been selected for transport. When I got there, I asked Taube not to take her. Taube called my mother over and stated, in her presence, that she would not be transported to the gas chambers. Relieved by his statement, I returned to the block. That night, when I was going to work, the leader of block 25 told me that my mother had been poisoned with gas. Today, I regret the most that I tried to save my mother from death for those five weeks, because, according to Claussen, I should have understood that my mother had to die anyway, but as her daughter I wanted to save her. I saw with my own eyes that every time after people had been sent to the gas chambers, the courtyard of block 25 looked horrible. It was all covered in blood that had to be washed off by a special commando, the so-called *Reinigungskommando*. When I was approaching the block, I heard horrific screams of prisoners calling for help and water. Their screams could be heard throughout the camp. Since my mother tried to help the sick, she was often beaten by other *Stubendiensts*. After my mother’s death, I never went there again, and I did not even collect her belongings.

While my mother was still alive, I lost my job in the *Politische Abteilung* and only thanks to Taube’s intervention I was assigned to the *Effektenkammer*, the so-called Canada.

There were two work shifts in the *Effektenkammer*. The number of women working per shift exceeded 200. We had to walk about three kilometers from Birkenau to the *Effektenkammer*. The walk was terrible for us, not because we were beaten or particularly harassed, but because we had to pass the ramp. At that time, both by day and by night, the ramp was the destination of mass transports of Jews from different European countries. I saw with my own eyes how those Jews were treated. When the Jews left the train, they were loaded into trucks, accompanied by screaming, beating, kicking and inhumane treatment. Mothers were separated from their children, the men from the women, so



families were not able to see each other again. We were terrified by the unwitting faces of the newcomers because we knew those transports would go straight to the gas chambers, where they would be poisoned. When we came to Canada, we often saw huge piles of bundles, suitcases and prams that helped us figure out the number of people that had been brought to the camp, and subsequently poisoned, on a given day. In May or June 1944, one of the prisoners from the *Sonderkommando*, who had worked at the crematorium for several months, told me that at that time the number of people poisoned in the gas chambers amounted to over 1,700,000.

In the camp, working in Canada was essentially considered better, easier, and profitable. That is why the prisoners were trying to get assigned to that work detail. Our task was to sort out the items brought to the camp by the arrested people, primarily by Jews who were poisoned directly after their arrival. The sorting out consisted in separating different types of underwear and clothing from other items. The underwear and clothes had to be assembled in packages, which were in turn tied together in sets of 20. Jewelry and other items had to be deposited in a special department. These warehouses were enormous, so the prisoners often tried to “slough off” work. Such behaviour, as well as failure to perform the required amount of work, resulted in being dismissed from Canada. Regardless of this fact, the prisoners who committed such offenses, who tried to “organise” something for themselves, were beaten terribly by the *Kapos*. Those *Kapos* were particularly cruel. In Canada, apart from them, there was also the manager from the men’s commando – a prisoner named Bernard. He was a Pole from Silesia and he treated those female prisoners in a ruthless manner. He would beat them without any reason and until they died. He would finish off sick Jewish women, but he treated Poles much better. His behaviour was so horrible that the SS men who were present when the detail was working often intervened to stop him from being so brutal. He was a more zealous worker than the Germans themselves, as if he did it for his own good. After we finished work in the barrack, but before we returned to the blocks where we lived, the prisoners were searched. The search was performed by Bernard assisted by SS women and female *Kapos*. It consisted in touching the women, but they were also often ordered to strip naked. If something was found during such a search, the prisoner was beaten mercilessly and dismissed from the detail.

There were no lavatories in the block, and there was only one latrine next to the barrack. Both male and female prisoners used it. It was divided by a cracked wall. During the shift,



we had to ask for permission to go to the latrine, and we could do so only twice. Only three prisoners could wait at the entrance to the latrine. The entrance was guarded by a prisoner who was called *Schefsmeistranf* [?] in the camp. All female prisoners tried to go to the latrine as often as possible, because it was also used by men who worked in the food warehouses, so it was easier for them to “organize” something. Those men (prisoners) often threw “organized” food to the female prisoners. Generally, working night shifts was less strenuous, because for two hours we could sleep on the underwear that was stored there, and which sometimes was completely wet. However, the scenes that took place at night were really unpleasant. At night, we were visited in the barrack by SS men who were often drunk. They would pull whichever woman they liked into a corner and perform immoral acts on them. The same happened outside the barrack, where the belongings of newcomers were stored. Those things were guarded by particularly trusted prisoners. If a woman got close to the heap to take something for herself, they would catch her and have carnal relations with her. I would also like to add that during the inspections that took place before we left work, a female *Kapo* often searched female prisoners in a “gynecological” manner, looking for jewelry. This took place in the presence of SS men. The methods used to numb the female prisoners employed in Canada included killing off all their human feelings. It consisted in suggesting that in the following days a new transport of people destined for the gas chambers would arrive and that we would be able to benefit from it, especially in terms of food. The prisoners were not aware what would be the cost of them getting a bit of food, that it would happen at the expense of other people’s lives, and instead they were happy they would get something better to eat. I felt very bad at the time. First of all, I was tormented by the thought that my mother, who was then in block 25, could be taken to the gas chamber any day. Additionally, my health began to fail, I had a festering wound on my leg and ulcers on my arms, so it was more difficult for me to “organize” something for myself. I lost 49 pounds then. I worked in the Canada detail until 24 March 1943. The next day after the roll call I was instructed to go to the main *Schreibstube*. There I was told that the next morning I would go to the *Gärtnerei* [gardening work unit] in Rajsko with detail no. 8. In that detail, I occupied the position of a *Betrieb* clerk. To get to work, I had to walk about five kilometers every day. I worked there for four months. At that time, I survived several selections for gassing. The selections varied. One day, we were gathered for the so-called general roll call. Female prisoners from all blocks had to stand on a meadow in the *Postenkette* [guard line] area. We were told that a cleanliness inspection was being

performed in the blocks and that prisoners were being counted. It lasted from morning to evening. In the evening, when we were weak and hungry (we did not receive anything to eat all day), we were ordered to run to the barracks. There were SS women standing at the gate and they were selecting the weakest prisoners for the gas chambers.

Another selection method consisted in ordering us to put on our coats back to front so that they formed a type of apron. Since at that time sewer ditches were being dug in the camp, prisoners were told to fill their coats with dirt from the ditches and carry it outside the camp. We had to do it running and all day long. Prisoners carrying the dirt had to pass block 25, the "block of death," on their way and Taube was standing there. He would choose individual prisoners and tell them to go to block 25. The whole action was directed by *Arbeitsdienstführer* Emmerich. In the evening, before we returned to the blocks, Taube completed the entire selection by choosing prisoners who then formed groups of 25. Then, each prisoner was ordered to run fast forward, while he chased her and kicked her as long as he wanted. If a prisoner tripped while running, he sent her to the gas chambers. As a result of that selection, several thousand women were gassed. At that time, there was also the threat that prisoners would be sterilized. Everyone knew that such sterilization was carried out every day, that those with the highest numbers, that is the women who had only just arrived at the camp, were taken first. My fellow inmates told me that 20 women, both sick and healthy, were sterilized every day. I personally did not see where or how the sterilization was performed, or who did it. I know from other female prisoners that a total of 3000 women were sterilized and that sterilizations were also carried out in the men's camp. About 3000 people were sterilized from Canada alone. Panic spread throughout the whole camp for that reason.

A particular form of harassment visited upon prisoners were the so-called *Entlausungs*. The prisoners in the block that was to be deloused were woken up at night. Each prisoner had to take her straw mattress and blanket and go to the bathhouse. There their clothes and underwear were taken away and sent to special chambers, where lice were poisoned with gas. Throughout this whole time females and males had to walk naked. Since it was often freezing outside, many prisoners got cold and fell seriously ill. This kind of delousing was practically ineffective, because afterwards we were often given underwear and clothes that were even more full of lice. Some prisoners told me that in early autumn 1943 a "general delousing" was performed in Birkenau. Each prisoner had to undress and throw

her clothes into a tank with some liquid. Those clothes were then retrieved from the tank and the prisoners had to dry them in the sun. Until the clothes and underwear were dry, the women had to walk naked around the camp, in the presence of the men who performed the delousing. The hospital was deloused every time prisoners left and returned to the camp. The sick left the bathhouse naked, covered only with blankets, so they caught a cold again. There were many German female prisoners in Birkenau who were sexual perverts. Those prisoners often occupied leading positions and used that to force women to engage in lewd acts with other females. It affected other prisoners and homosexuality began to spread also among Polish and Jewish women.

In Rajsko, I worked alone in the *Schreibstube*, but there were about 200 women in the Rajsko *Gärtnerei* detail. Their tasks included gardening work in the fields. The entire detail consisted mostly of German women with black badges. There were also several Russian and Polish women. I was the only Jew, so the Germans were hostile to me. The detail itself was one of the lighter ones. In Rajsko, in addition to that detail, there was also the *Pflanzenzucht* [plant growing] detail, which initially consisted of eight, and then up to 150 people.

I worked in the Rajsko *Gärtnerei* from 24 March 1943, and until 12 June 1944 I had to walk to Rajsko every day from Birkenau, because there was still no camp in Rajsko. At that time, there were about 300 women and 150 men working in that detail. They had to work an area of about 158 acres. We cultivated vegetables and flowers, but I still worked as a clerk. On 12 June 1944, after the construction of the barracks, the whole detail was moved to Rajsko. All products of the *Gärtnerei* commando were intended exclusively for the SS men. The prisoners' kitchen received only leaves, rotten vegetables and waste. The development of vegetable cultivation was at such a high level that food could be – and indeed was – grown exclusively for Himmler and other Nazi dignitaries. For example, cucumbers marked with the initials of the place of their origin were sent to Berlin, already in March and April. The cultivation of vegetables in Rajsko was generally very advanced. Since the whole of Rajsko resembled one big flowerbed, many SS men from the furthest locations would visit the camp and buy our products. This was beneficial for us because, for propaganda reasons, we were always given fresh underwear and clothing, we were allowed to shower, and the hygienic conditions in that detail were a lot better than in others. In Rajsko, apart from our work unit, there was also the *Pflanzenzucht* detail. Initially, it consisted of eight women but with time the number increased to 150.

This was an experimental station for the Kazakh dandelion, thus the commando consisted of prisoners who were specialists – engineers, farmers, chemists, and biologists. They were assisted by prisoners with at least a secondary education. The Kazakh dandelion was a plant normally grown in the Urals. Its roots contain a type of rubber. The Germans, who were in constant need of large amounts of rubber, wanted to cultivate that plant in Western Europe. In order to do so, they brought Russian professors and agronomists who were supporters of Germany to Rajsko. Their task was to grow the plant in Rajsko and carry out appropriate research. The experimental station was directed by *Obersturmführer* Joachim Caesar. Apart from him, there were also Russians working in the detail: agronomist Popow, Nikitin, Zasmurzec, Prof. Kramarsko, Prof. Łowczyn and others whose names I do not recall at the moment. The *Pflanzenzucht* detail, whose *Kapo* was Wanda Dudczycka from Warsaw, had two laboratories: chemical and botanical. They were very advanced and equipped with experimental instruments. Due to the high level of the experiments performed, Rajsko was often visited by various dignitaries from the German scientific world. During such visits, both Caesar and other superiors treated the prisoners in an unusually elegant manner. Female prisoners were referred to as “Mrs.” and the Germans behaved as if we were free people, not prisoners.

Although we lived in better conditions than other prisoners, we suffered twice as much. Our barrack was located close to a road which was frequented by free people, and when we looked at them, we realized that we might never leave the camp. Additionally, we could see the smoke coming from the crematoria chimneys and the shadows of prisoners meandering by them, which made a very unpleasant impression that contrasted sharply with our place among the flowers. The fact that we were treated slightly better in Rajsko does not mean that we were never beaten or punished. As a punishment for petty offences, we were beaten, kept in the bunker and threatened with being sent back to Birkenau. That threat was often made good on. Personal searches were carried out every day. We were even prohibited to wear underwear with an elastic waistband so that we could not hide anything in there. As I have mentioned earlier, apart from the women, there was also a group of men working in Rajsko. They walked to work from Birkenau. That was good for us, because we often received letters from outside and we could send them to Birkenau through the prisoners working in Rajsko. In addition, the men often brought us something to eat, and we sometimes gave them vegetables. It was risky, because if an SS men or *Kapo* saw this, the prisoners were

beaten mercilessly. I remember an incident when *Arbeitsdienstführer* Moll, who later became the *Führer* of the crematoria, beat a prisoner and his two companions mercilessly for handing a small package to one of the prisoners who was a doctor. Moll came to the office where I worked and told me to get out. Then, he brought the three prisoners in there and tortured them. When I entered the office after some time, I saw that all the items had been knocked over and broken, and the three prisoners were covered in bruises. One of the prisoners died following that beating.

I can also provide another example of the bestiality of the camp authorities. Once, one of my friends, Lili Tofler, wrote a letter to a prisoner she knew. She gave that letter to one of the prisoners working in Rajsko, and he was supposed to take it to Auschwitz I while transporting wreaths. The prisoner, whose name was Solarz, was accompanied by another man, whom I know only by name – Wacek. When they arrived at the *Politische Abteilung* where they were supposed to leave the wreaths, Solarz lost the letter. It was found by an SS man. The SS men immediately started an investigation and ordered Solarz and also Wacek, who did not know anything about the letter at all, to confess who the letter was addressed to and who had written it. Since neither of them said anything, they were immediately placed in the bunker. My friend was recognized as the author of the letter by her signature and she was ordered to confess who the addressee was. When she said that she did not know the name of the prisoner she had written to, that she only knew him by sight, she was shown around the lines of prisoners and told to point at the recipient. When she still pretended not to recognize the prisoner, she was stripped naked and put against the wall of death. After a few days, this woman and the two men who had smuggled the letter were executed by firing squad. Similar incidents happened almost every week.

The work of the *Pflanzenanzucht* commando in Rajsko was supervised by young German *Sonderführer* Christophersen. We called him “Dziurawiec” [from the Polish word “hole”], because he had a hole in the frontal bone. He was a very bad man and, above all, an informer. He was the first to investigate whether the women were hiding something they had “organized” in the camp in their brassieres. One day, a friend of mine, Frenchwoman named Béte, wrote the date 14 July 1944 on a piece of paper. It was the date when the French liberated Paris. The card was allegedly addressed to another female prisoner, but it fell into Christophersen’s hands. He did not speak French, so he asked the *Kapo* of the detail to translate it into German. When he heard the contents of the letter, he upbraided Béte and

reported her to the authorities. At the interrogation, Béerte tried to explain herself by saying that she had only written something she had dreamt about. She was punished for that act with six months in the SK [Strafkompanie]. We all assumed that she had escaped execution because she was writing a doctoral dissertation for Caesar's wife, so she was still needed. Indeed, Caesar's wife called Béerte over from time to time. During Béerte's stay in the SK, she completed the doctoral dissertation in Caesar's wife's laboratory. Soon after 14 July 1944, Christophersen met Béerte at work and told her that she was actually right – 14 July 1944 was the date when Paris was liberated by the French.

While we were in Rajsko, my friends and I could contact prisoners who worked in other facilities. I do not know why my friends did it and how they benefited from making contact with such prisoners. In any case, for my part I continued my underground activity. This is why, from spring of 1944, I had been contacting men whom I trusted, particularly those working in Buna. We made an escape plan together and informed our friends outside the camp, through civilians working inside, of the conditions we were being held in. We also gave them the names of our friends who were being kept in the camp. Actually, it was not me who initiated the contact. It was Zygfryd Helbreich, a man who was not related to me, although he had the same name. He had been in the camp for five years and worked in Buna. Generally, underground activity in the camp was very difficult. Given of the danger posed by the camp authorities, the greatest obstacle was the difficulty of making contact. Every message and every letter sent, if detected, would expose both the sender and the addressee, as well as the person who transported it and the person who received it. One of the easiest ways to transfer messages was to bury them in the ground in flower crates that were transported to the camp.

Apart from Rajsko, the prisoners employed in Birkenau also had contact with Buna. One of the prisoners who stayed permanently in Birkenau was Dusia Liebeskind. She always carried letters from Birkenau to Buna, and from there they were sent by civilians to the indicated address. One day, she agreed with some prisoners in Buna that she would leave the letters in a marked place. While she was leaving the letters, an SS man who was supervising the group noticed her and ordered an investigation. During the interrogation, she said she did not know to whom the letters were addressed, but the surnames of the addressees were ascertained by the names that were mentioned. All the letters were addressed to Helbreich, but he denied he was guilty and, additionally, he had some contacts in the camp, so nothing

happened to him. They only figured out one female surname, and the woman was punished with flogging. Liebeskind was in turn sentenced to six months in the SK, and then she was transported out of the camp, but I don't know where. We also met and contacted men for different purposes. For example, I was able to help a friend of mine, whose husband worked in Buna, and she herself had no way of contacting him. Since I knew some prisoners who occupied certain positions, I could ask them to assign a prisoner to a different job or for help in feeding the prisoners whom I mentioned, and vice versa – the prisoners working there, who knew people in other sections of the camp, did the same for others. We knew that none of us would leave Auschwitz alive and nobody would be able to tell what had happened there, so our goal was to make people remember and secretly send messages outside the camp.

Our solidarity led to exchanging ideas, and we were often deeply depressed when we saw the constantly smoking crematoria chimneys. Sometimes when the crematoria were closed, we felt comforted in a way. When we saw smoke coming from the crematoria while we were living in relatively good conditions, compared with the rest of the camp, among the flowers that we had to cultivate, we noted the irony and we realized how many people were dying in there. Right at that moment, when Hungarian transports were being gassed, we decided to organize a rebellion in Rajsko in case they attempted to "exterminate" us. My friends and I could not officially or even secretly rely on the support of all the prisoners, because we did not trust them. We did not suggest anything to Aryan women, because they did not show any interest, since their life was not as directly in danger as the life of Jewish women. But neither could we offer specific plans to Jewish women, because we did not have the materials or weapons needed for resistance in the case of danger. Basically, we could get only three revolvers from Buna, where all of the prisoners involved in underground activities had only 80 revolvers. We also did not have any money. With such limited possibilities, we formed a core group of four: Rachela Wróblewska, Sonia Barbel, French Mart and I. Rachela Wróblewska lived in Warsaw before the war, Sonia Barbel came from Białystok, Mart from Paris. Each of us had a group of ten Jewish women whom we were supposed to educate towards this end, without revealing all the details, and tell them what we should do if the Germans tried to exterminate us. The aim of our underground work was only to resist gassing, because we were not afraid of death as such. We were all ready to die and to defend ourselves, even if our efforts proved futile.



In order to defend ourselves, we organized two test tubes for each participant. We filled the test tubes with hydrochloric acid, which was relatively easily accessible in our laboratory. However, it was difficult for us to transport the test tubes, because we were afraid of inspection, and by placing the acid in our underwear we could get seriously burnt. Taking it openly out of the laboratory was out of the question. We decided to bury the hydrochloric acid in the ground, which we actually did, and, if necessary, pour it into the eyes of SS men who wanted to take us to the gas chambers. Each of us knew where the test tubes were buried, or rather each of the four women who were in charge of their own groups knew. I can provide the exact location of the tubes in Rajsko. Our underground activities also took a different tactic. We assumed that we would all be killed, so we decided to burn down the camp before we died. The Frenchwoman, Mart, who worked as a chemist in the laboratory, had the most difficult task. She was supposed to prepare a liquid, which, when thrown several or a dozen meters away, would destroy and burn everything it covered. She made two bottles of that liquid, but unfortunately we did not manage to bury them. She was able to prepare them, because she was the laboratory manager and she could do experiments in there. We had to get some of the ingredients ourselves. I also had to ask my friends from Buna to provide us with the chemicals she needed. In order to burn down the camp, we planned to throw the bottles with the liquid prepared by Mart in the direction of the SS cars and to cut the wires surrounding the camp with scissors prepared beforehand, and run away wherever we could. Basically, none of us took the danger we faced into account and we were all prepared to die. We found it very difficult to get the scissors. We received them from prisoners working in the ironworks. We did not implement this plan only because we were unable to get the chemicals we needed at the right moment, and, in the meantime, the mass gassings stopped.

I lived in such conditions until 17 January 1945. During that period I fell sick, because I had broken my right arm. I can move my arm now only thanks to the help of Polish prisoners who were also doctors, Dr. Orzeszko from Kielce and Dr. Sobieszczański from Warsaw. On 18 January, the evacuation of the camp began. We were ordered to pack the belongings of the SS men, and we were allowed to take only such personal items that would be needed during the journey. From early in the morning of that day, we saw transports of prisoners marching towards Bielsko. I decided not to go and I hid in the basement located next to the house of the SS man who was in charge of our group. The SS men realized that I was missing

and tried to find me, but they failed. I stayed there for four days, and then, when I realized there were no more SS men in Rajsko, I decided to leave the hiding place and escaped from the camp towards the village of Rajsko. There, a peasant named Bajon gave me food and let me stay for seven days, during which the Soviet troops occupied Rajsko and allowed me to return to Kraków.

I would like to add one thing concerning my testimony regarding the devirginizing of young girls. Some female prisoners told me that it was done using a medical speculum. I cannot provide more specific information on this subject.

As for the differences between Jews who were suspected of a specific political crime and those coming from mass arrests, the mass transports were sent directly to the gas chambers and poisoned, and only a small percentage of them were assigned to work in the camp, while the Jews who were political prisoners were all sent to work in the camp, regardless of their age, gender, or possible disability. All of these Jews were the so-called *Karteimessig* [?], that is, they were registered in the Political Department, which kept files sent by the appropriate Gestapo station. Until June or July 1943, there were basically no differences between the two groups of Jews. Political prisoners and those from mass transports were taken to the gas chambers and poisoned. However, in the summer of 1943, when it turned out that a Jew who was supposed to give some testimony important to the German authorities was gassed, and who was previously a political suspect, Berlin issued an order to treat Jewish political prisoners differently and not to send them to gas chambers. Thanks to that, a group of Jewish political prisoners was once even allowed to write a letter to their families.

After the Soviet troops entered Rajsko, I went to Kraków, where I have stayed until now, working in the Union of Former Ideological and Political Prisoners. I live permanently in Kraków at Szymanowskiego Boczna Street 1.

At this point, on 2 June 1945, the report and the hearing were concluded. The report was read out and signed.