



TADEUSZ BAŁUT

On 18 August 1945 in Kraków, Investigative Judge Jan Sehn, a member of the Main Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes in Poland, at the request and in the presence of a member of that Commission, Prosecutor Edward Pęchalski, in accordance with Article 254, in connection with Articles 107 and 115 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, interviewed former prisoner no. 1259 of the concentration camp in Auschwitz as a witness, who testified as follows:

Name and surname	Tadeusz Bałut
Date and place of birth	14 August 1921, Żywiec
Parents' names	Antoni and Helena Gawin
Religious affiliation	Roman Catholic
Citizenship and nationality	Polish
Occupation	student
Place of residence	Żywiec, [illegible] Street 4
Criminal record	none

I was arrested on 9 May 1940 along with my brother Zbigniew, born 9 July 1919, in Mutne, Slovakia, where we were stopped by Slovak civilians on our way to Hungary.

They handed us over to the Slovak police, who took us to the border point in Korbielów and handed us over to the German police. [Then, we were transported] to Żywiec. The Bielsko Gestapo came there and carried out an investigation into our case. During the investigation, we were severely beaten but we did not plead guilty to anything. We explained to them that we were staying in Slovakia for matters of trade.



On 26 June 1940 I was transferred to Auschwitz, together with my brother, Franciszek Piela from Węgierska Górka, Michał Michordziński from Żywiec, and three other inmates.

There Piela received the number 1258, I – 1259, my brother – 1260, and Michordziński – 1261. On 3 July 1940, after all the formalities related to admission to the camp were settled and after we had completed a quarantine in the former monopoly building, my brother and I we transferred to the labor camp and placed in block 3a. The leader of that block was Hans Koprowiak from Silesia, who would beat prisoners and call Poles names, referring to them as “you Polish swine.” He was later transferred as a *Kapo* to the *Dachdecker* [roofers] detail. Thanks to that position he was employed in the bunker in block 11, and later on in Buna, where his work was allegedly recognized again and he was promoted once more.

My brother went right away to the HWL (*Hauptwirtschaftslager*), where he first worked in the potato room and then in the flour warehouse. I initially worked in the *Kiesgrube* [gravel pit] where I removed plaster from the walls of the blocks and cleaned the camp, and in March 1941 I was assigned to cart no. 1, which was the cart for transporting food in the camp. In November 1942, I got a job in the slaughterhouse, where I was employed until 16 November 1944, when I was placed in the hospital due to a hand infection. I stayed there until 21 January 1945 – that day I escaped from the camp along with other inmates.

On 5 July 1940, I suffered the consequences of the first escape from the camp. It was when a Pole named Wiejowski escaped. When that fact was confirmed during the evening roll-call, all prisoners in the camp – and there were about 1500 of us then – were gathered on the roll-call square and forced to remain in a squatting position all night until 2.00 p.m. on the following day, without any food. It was very tiring, many people fainted, the SS who guarded the prisoners were beating and mocking us, they made jokes, for example [illegible] who satisfied a bodily need in the square was ordered to bark at the feces. Those “sport activities” ended only at the request of the camp doctor, when almost half of the prisoners were unconscious. A lot of prisoners lost their lives then. I don’t know how many because

I was totally exhausted myself, I went to the block and I forgot that anything else existed. Later on, as punishment for the escape of that prisoner, ten prisoners from his block were selected and placed in bunkers in block 11. They were kept there without food until they died of starvation. The selection was performed by the then commandant of the camp, Fritzsich. It took place in the square outside the block. Fritzsich walked in front of the prisoners from



the block, who had lined up in a row, and pointed at those who were to be sent to the bunker. Those prisoners were told that they would stay in the bunker until the escapee was found. I know that the hostages died of starvation in the bunker within six or seven days. Then, the camp authorities increased the number of hostages for one fugitive prisoner to 15, and in 1942 they started bringing families of escapees to the camp. I saw with my own eyes that when my colleague Bronisław Staszekiewicz from Żywiec escaped, his elderly mother was brought to the camp and placed next to a gong by a sign with an inscription saying that she had been put in the camp in exchange for her fugitive son, and that she would stay there until the escapee was found. Staszekiewicz was not captured and his mother died in the camp. In the case of an unsuccessful escape, the escapee was publicly hanged.

Collective responsibility for an escape from the camp was abolished only by commandant Liebehenschel. I know that prisoners escaped from the Auschwitz camp through sewers, which were barred latter on, from units working outside the camp, and – after the abolition of collective responsibility for escapes – in an organized manner based on fake passes, civilian documents or disguised as SS men. Wiejowski escaped through sewers, Aleksander Martyniec and Jan Narapata escaped from the workplace of [illegible], and [illegible] Foltyn from Kraków – using false documents.

During the first three years of my stay in the camp, at least once a week, and sometimes even more often, prisoners were selected for execution by firing squad. The selection was performed by Grabner and Wosnitza from the Political Department. Initially, they executed convicts in the *Kiesgrube*, outside the barbed wire, in the spot where the slaughterhouse is now located, and later on in the place where the new laundry now stands – in the pits behind the theater. This was where people were executed by shooting. In 1941, a “black wall” was built next to block 11 and the executions were organized there. It was there that Palitzsch, Stiewitz, Boger, [illegible], Kaduk, and others whose names I do not remember, shot people dead. They were all SS men. The camp commandant and officers of the Political Department were present at the executions. Prisoners were executed with a silent automatic rifle and a bolt gun used for stunning cattle.

The execution was carried out in the following manner: the prisoners selected for execution were gathered in block 11, where they stripped naked in the washroom, their hands were tied behind their backs with a wire and they were sent to the yard of block 11. In the doorway,



there was an interpreter – a Silesian from Katowice – Kurt; later on there were others. He instructed the convicts to go straight to the “black wall.” When a convict was walking in that direction, Palitzsch, or another of the SS men whom I have mentioned, put the barrel of a rifle or bolt gun to the base of the prisoner’s skull at the back of his head and fired shots. Shooting in the back of the head was the rule in block 11. We all knew about this in the camp, and we also knew that when a certain Polish colonel, whose name I do not know, was in that block, he asked them to shoot him, as a former military man, from the front. His wish was granted. This is the only exception I know from the rule of executing people in block 11 by shooting them in the base of the skull. I was personally interested in these matters because on 18 August 1942 my brother Zbigniew was executed there. On 17 August 1942, after the evening roll call, he was called over by the block leader, who ordered him to stay in the camp the following day. He was not allowed to go to work; instead he was supposed to go to the *Hauptschreibstube* [main office]. At that time, my brother and I slept in block 17. We knew that he would be executed the following day, we discussed what we could do and considered the possibilities of escaping, because I knew the way through the sewers, but since we were afraid that our parents would be held accountable, we gave up on that idea. The following day, after the morning roll call and after the details had marched off to work, my brother and other prisoners who had also been summoned were gathered in the *Hauptschreibstube*. On 18 August 1942, there were 56 of them. Shortly after 8.00 a.m., Palitzsch came to the *Schreibstube* with a list, read out the names of the prisoners gathered there and checked if everyone was present. Then, they were divided in groups of five and taken to block 11 by *Blockführers* under the supervision of Palitzsch. At that time, my job was to handle the cart, so I was able to stay in the camp, and after the whole group was driven into the block, I heard the words of the Polish national anthem, “Poland Is Not Yet Lost.” In the evening, the interpreter from block 11, Kurt, paid me a visit. He gave me the piece of paper that I am now presenting, described how the execution had been performed, and told me that my brother had remained brave until the very last moment, and that he not only had not broken down, but even had comforted his companions in distress. He literally told me that I could be proud of my brother. (The witness has presented a piece of paper with handwriting in pencil, with the following words: 18 August 1942. My beloved ones! I’m writing my last words to you; I’m devoting these last moments only to you, my dearest. But do not worry because it’s all for the Homeland, for Poland. Goodbye, my dearest ones, and may God be with you. One day God will see that we meet again. Zbyszek.) It is my brother’s handwriting.

I sent this card through a friend of mine, Adam Kaczyński, who worked in Auschwitz as a civilian worker, to my parents, who have now given it back to me. Apart from my brother, Franciszek Białek from Żywiec (no. 1255) was also shot dead. I do not know the rest of the executed prisoners. They all came from Silesia. The execution was reportedly related to the burning down of six mansions in Silesia. At that time, a barn containing agricultural tools burned down in Żywiec. We understood that execution as an act of collective responsibility for all those incidents, which were treated by the Germans as acts of sabotage. The principle of such collective responsibility was applied on a large scale in the camp. For example, on 28 October 1942 in block 11, about 300 prisoners from Lublin were executed for some riots that were taking place in that region at that time. All prisoners from Lublin were selected from the entire camp. Two prisoners from Lublin, who were working in the sauna [?] on that day, were shot the following day. Orderlies from the prison hospital transferred the corpses of the prisoners executed in block 11 to the crematorium, where they were burned.

My father, who lived in Tarnów at that time, was summoned to the local Gestapo, where he was told that his son, Zbigniew, had died of pneumonia in Auschwitz.

Other people whom I personally knew and who were executed by shooting in block 11 are: Dr. Józef Tomaszewski from Kraków, Stanisław Dobrowolski from Lublin, Professor Jan Namysłowski from Żywiec and Gara (I do not remember his first name), also from Żywiec. The last execution in block 11 took place on 11 November 1943. Generally, it was a rule that there were more executions on Polish national holidays. On 11 November 1943, a group of Polish officers and intelligentsia were shot dead. Commandant Liebehenschel, who assumed that position around the middle of November 1943 and held it for almost three months, put a stop to mass executions. In connection with the last execution, which took place before he became commandant, he removed Grabner and Wosnitza from Auschwitz.

The report was read out. At this point, the interview of the witness and the present report were concluded.