

CZESŁAW RYCHLIK

On 5 December 1946 in Olsztyn, Stefan Cislo, investigating judge of the District Court in Olsztyn, interviewed the person specified below as an unsworn witness. Having been advised of the criminal liability for making false declarations and of the wording of article 107 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, as well as of the significance of the oath, the witness testified as follows:

Name and surname	Czesław Rychlik
Date of birth	1 June 1909
Names of parents	Piotr and Helena
Place of residence	Olsztyn, [...]
Occupation	civil servant
Religious affiliation	Roman Catholic
Criminal record	none
Relationship to the parties	none

I was brought to Auschwitz on 7 January 1941 at 7 a.m. We were unloaded into a commotion which broke out as the tangled human masses were hit with rifle butts and pushed onto the snow.

Out of a transport – some 600 people strong – a few were killed and the rest seriously battered. In the yard, the camp commandant, surrounded by officers (Fritzsche, Seidler and others) gave a speech, which was translated by a *Dolmetscher* [interpreter], Count Baworowski from Lwów, and was as follows: "There is only one road to freedom. Do you see this chimney? This is your road to freedom". As we were being taken to a small room in block 17, a few SS men kicked us at the door, while the others watched, laughing. In the room there were a few metal wheelbarrows where we could relieve ourselves. After an hour,

SS men burst into the room with big wheelbarrows and, beating us, forced us aside and told us to remove all metal objects, which we then put in one of the barrows as we were walking past them.

We were frisked and beaten in the process. Only valuable items ended up in the wheelbarrows. Nickel and iron objects were returned to us. One of the prisoners [no text follows, a page missing].... I received number 7901 and after getting dressed in striped uniforms, without hats or socks, we were driven to block 2. Practicing the *Mützen ab* and *Mützen auf* [hats off and hats on] commands, we were punished for the slightest inaccuracies with beatings, which on two occasions resulted in fatalities. The room, which was 5 by 10 meters, accommodated 60 men, mostly injured and sick; the room leader got to fall in place by running on the chests of the lying prisoners until everyone had some room. We found 300 lice on average in every shirt. Scabies and pediculosis were widespread.

In the morning, we would run outside without shirts, into the freezing cold. Waiting at the door were the block elder and *Blockführer* [block leader]: they had rods and beat every prisoner who was dry on his return. Since there was only one pump per ten thousand prisoners, which was additionally frozen, cleaning – unless there was snow – consisted in one prisoner urinating on another and spreading the urine across his back.

One day, when we were being escorted to labor, which consisted of loading and moving rubble – at a run – among beating and shouting, and when, dazzled by all this, I was moving a wheelbarrow with brick, I heard a loud footfall and at that moment I felt the sharp fangs of huge police dogs plunging into my body. I ran for another two hours, hassled by the dogs. When, half-conscious from exhaustion and the injuries sustained, I was taken back to the block by my comrades, they explained to me that the main camp commandant and two officers had been training their dogs.

In 1941, out of 10,000 prisoners – a number which remained unchanged despite new incoming transports – the Auschwitz camp took 50 or 60 lives daily. I cannot tell how many were executed around that period because at that time executions were carried out outside the camp, by the pits from where sand was dug up. In spring 1941, more methodical killings commenced – there were regular purges in the *Revier* [camp hospital] as the sick were taken to the gas chamber at night. Between April and July 1941, *Blocksperr*e [block curfew] was imposed nine times during the day, during which transports arriving at block 11 were

sent directly to the gas chamber to be annihilated. In May 1941, a transport of 206 people arrived; they were taken to labor and ordered to dig up sand by the camp entrance. That day, I worked pulling the sand cart to the camp and I could watch what was going on there very closely.

Seidler and Palitzsch indicated particular prisoners, whom the kapos then dragged behind the tool shed, where they were undressed and murdered, beaten with rods and kicked.

During the lunch break, when we assembled in the roll-call square, in front of the camp authorities and with a lively march from the camp band playing in the background, around 25 terribly wounded people entered the camp; following them was a cart pulled by the prisoners, on which the corpses of the remaining prisoners from the transport lay, literally torn to pieces – a bloody stream flowing down the cart. The few survivors from this transport were murdered in the afternoon.

Next to the SS kitchen, the SK [*Strafkompanie*, penal company] dug up sand from huge pits. At that time, I was part of the group pulling a cart with this sand to the camp. We counted the passing time according to the corpses, which were placed on the bank. Sometimes, on colder days, we counted up to 30 bodies from this kommando (which never numbered more than 160 people) by the lunch break. I frequently saw as a beaten prisoner broke away from his tormentors and ran toward the line of outposts, where he was then shot dead.

Working with the *Buna-Werke* kommando, 10 kilometers from the camp, I became part of a group made up of 40 prisoners tasked with moving iron carts loaded with dirt. The kapo of this group, a so-called German communist – and in reality a chauvinist – set such a murderous tempo to the exhausted prisoners and beat them with a rod so hard that no more than 15 of us ever made it back to the camp. Every day, he selected one prisoner, beat him with a rod, pointed toward the outposts line, and ordered him to run in that direction. Sometimes, a stubborn prisoner would return. Then, he was beaten and stones were thrown at him until – hopeless – he was at the outposts line, from where a shot was fired. Sometimes, this game lasted a few hours.

At first, the groups working with this kommando were housed in block 6, next to the canteen. They got up at 3 a.m. and returned to the camp after 8 p.m., and frequently after 10 p.m. Cleaning yourself was not an option.

Sometimes, prisoners escaped. For each attempted escape, 10 prisoners from the escapee's block were selected and locked in the standing bunker until they had died of exhaustion.

Small infractions were punished with a "post", meaning that in the attic of block 11 (the penal company) the victim had his hands tied behind his back and was pulled up on a rope so that only his tiptoes touched the floor. After two hours of this punishment, the prisoner very often became a cripple, which was tantamount to death because being unfit for work meant that the prisoner was liquidated immediately.

Another punishment was the bench, on which the victim lay, putting his legs under the plank purposely fixed to the rear part, while his hands were tied against the front part, and then it was typically *Rapportführer* [report leader] Palitzsch, either himself or – if there were more victims – assisted by others, that dealt the statutory 25 blows with a bullwhip. The victim had to count the blows in German: *Ein, Zwei, Drei*, etc. If he made a mistake, they would start over. Said punishments were often handed out in public, in the presence of all the prisoners and the camp authorities.

In the fall of 1941, together with another 102 prisoners, I was sent to confinement block 11, which housed the penal company, standing bunkers, and the gas chamber. I remained at that block from December 1941 to 3 May 1942.

Over that period, I witnessed daily executions at the chipboard wall, which we called the screen. Executions, which always involved groups, often took place two or three times a day. They usually unfolded in a dramatic fashion.

Frequently, they executed prisoners who had been at the camp for a long time and knew full well why they were at block 11.

Those brought in directly from a transport were tricked in that they were ordered to undress and told that they were going outdoors to be cleaned, and there, utterly confused, they were stood on the sand scattered by the screen and executed. The bodies were assembled in a pile next to the screen and then moved to the crematorium. In January 1942, 60 Soviet soldiers were executed that way. When the seventh one entered the yard and spotted a pile of bloodstained corpses, he managed to push aside deputy camp commandant Seidler, who was standing at the door, and escaped to the corridor, shouting, "Comrades,

they're murdering us!" Terrible clamor broke out and then the SS men murdered the others, shooting them or using the butts of their rifles.

Once, in February, we were told to report at the gas chamber in order to remove the bodies, which, as I learned, had been there for three days. I was hardened and not easily moved, but great fear overcame me when I saw the tangled bodies with bitten fingers, mouths, and noses – the bodies of people who had died in different positions, apparently suffering a terrible ordeal before they could finally go.

Toward the end of March 1942, they put around 40 people in one of the standing bunkers, 20 of whom then suffocated in the same way as those in the gas chamber, due to lack of air. The survivors were kept in one of the rooms of the penal company on the first floor, in complete isolation.

Jews were mass-murdered. One method of killing them was strangling in the bathroom of block 11 at the hands of a specialist, a convicted prisoner from Silesia. I saw as they tried to send 30 Jews to sleep at block 11, beating them and cramming them into a three-story bed. In the morning, only five of them woke up, who were then strangled anyway.

Toward the end of April, mass transports of between 2,000 and 3,000 people daily started to arrive.

Some of these people were brought in with children and all their belongings. Passing through the camp, I saw an SS man snatch a crying baby and throw it against the wall.

During that period, that is on 3 May, I was sent to the Mauthausen camp, so I didn't witness firsthand the subsequent developments at Auschwitz. It needs to be said that there were snitches among us, who had been promised parole for reporting to the SS on the conversations between prisoners. I, too, was told to report to the political department in connection with such conversations and was interrogated, being beaten with a bullwhip and a rope. I was dealt around 75 blows but, standing with my face to the wall, I had an opportunity to have a hushed conversation with a prisoner from my block, block 2, who told me that there must have been a snitch in our room, room 9, because he too had been interrogated for four days now, being taken from one room to another and beaten.

This young boy had terribly frostbitten ears and hands, and blood was soaking through his ragged clothes. He never returned to the camp.

Standing out for being expert butchers at the camp around that time were the following persons:

SS man Zajdler [Seidler?] – deputy camp commandant; Palitzsch – *Rapportführer*, and the two SS men who were *Blockführers* at block 2 between December 1940 and June 1941.

I only know a few prisoners by their names.

August – an *Oberkapo* [senior kapo] at *Industriehof II*

Fleiszman [Fleischmann?] – a kapo at *Industriehof II*, and later at the *BW*

Krankenmann – block elder at block 4.

As regards Polish renegades, there was Neuban Globus, a kapo, who bestially murdered a number of people in my presence.

Bednarek – block elder at block 8.

It needs to be said that in the fall of 1941, in the fenced-off part of the premises, a camp was set up for Soviet POWs. Most Soviet transports were taken directly to the gas chamber but, nevertheless, some 8,000 captives ended up at that camp. By February 1942, still alive were exactly three of them, while the others had died of starvation and freezing cold temperatures. Every evening, carts filled with half-alive people were unloaded onto the ground. The three survivors were hired at block 11, where they served meals to the SS men in the bunkers. The fence was dismantled and the camp for Soviet POWs ceased to exist.

Obviously, these are just fragments of my memories of what was unspeakable horror.

I confirm the veracity of this account, for which I take full responsibility, with my signature.