



JAN PILECKI

(Following a recess)

Presiding Judge: Witness Jan Pilecki.

Witness: Jan Pilecki, 35 years old, an electrical engineer by profession, religion – Roman Catholic, married, resident in Łódź, relationship to the accused – none.

Presiding Judge: I hereby instruct the witness, pursuant to the provisions of Article 107 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, that you are required to speak the truth. The provision of false testimony is punishable by a term of imprisonment of up to five years. Do the parties want to submit any motions as to the procedure according to which the witness is to be interviewed?

Prosecutors: We release the witness from the obligation to take an oath.

Defense counsel: We likewise.

Presiding Judge: I would ask the witness to state what he knows regarding the present case, and in particular as concerns the accused.

Witness: It would be difficult for me to talk about all of the accused, even though I was one of the longest-serving prisoners at the camp. I would prefer to sum them up collectively and state what became known to us after only a short period of incarceration, namely that everyone who wore an SS uniform was, for us, an “ambassador” – to a lesser or greater degree – of suffering, if not death.

I will focus on block 11, which I knew best, and on those who were associated with it – the accused Aumeier and Grabner, and also the direct commanders of this block: *Oberscharführer* Seufert, Gehring, the SS man Müller, and Lätsch. Maybe I should begin with the year 1941, when I encountered some of the accused directly. At the time, Jewish transports arrived at the camp infrequently, and their numbers were small. They were sent to the penal companies on the specific orders of the camp command and the head of the political department, who was always interested in their fate. The Jews were exterminated systematically, with only the basic appearances being kept up – in other words, they were murdered in such a way as to ensure that



no traces remained. But this was not altogether possible, for [we soon learned that] no Jews from one transport could possibly survive the arrival of a fresh transport. And thus, when a new transport was announced, we all knew full-well that the previous group was as good as dead.

I am sure that everyone remembers the tragic scenes accompanying the return of the penal company, with its half-dead survivors carrying the bodies of those who had perished. As regards the penal companies, the work itself was not the worst; much worse was the moment when a company returned from work, when the aforementioned leaders of block 11: Seufert, Gehring and their assistants, always in threes, would maltreat the prisoners with great cruelty. Apart from the penal company, block 11 also had the so-called bunkers. Everything was forbidden in the camp, literally everything, so if you were insufficiently careful the SS men would readily send you to the bunker for the slightest transgression. For this reason the bunkers were quickly filled to overflowing – after a week or at most 10 days they were overcrowded, and so the SS men had to do something with the people. This matter was of immediate interest to the political department and its head, Grabner. The clearing out of the bunker was carried out in such a way that Grabner and a dozen or so accomplices of the political department, chief amongst them a *Lagerführer* [camp leader], a *Rapportführer* [report leader], and the block leaders, would go down to the bunkers, pass through all the cells, and read out the surnames of the detainees, whom they then either pulled out or left in the bunker. They usually left behind those who in their opinion could still provide some useful information, whereas the rest were led out into the corridor and organized into groups. Grabner and the *Lagerführer* held administrative positions, and the SS men turned to them only when they were in doubt as to the proper course of procedure. I remember what Grabner would say when one of the SS men turned to him with a question as to what he was supposed to do with a prisoner. The prisoner lists contained information about their nationality, so Grabner – having first determined that the man was a Pole – would say: “weg mit diesem” [get rid of him].

Having passed through all the male cells, and then the female cells, they led the prisoners out, naked, to the ground floor – the men to one shower room and the women to another – whereafter the prisoners were hurried in twos into the courtyard, and there, by the now famous wall, executed with a shot to the nape of the neck. There, the “hero” was Grabner, who finished his task in the cellar, assisted by the commander of the bunker, Gehring, and before him Seufert and the others who officiated at block 11, together with people from the



political department, headed by Palitzsch and Lachman. Apart from these executions, which in SS parlance were known as “bunker clearing”, there were also individual killings, which were conducted in the shower room of block 11; one of Grabner’s cronies would come round with his orders, and Gehring would finish off the prisoner himself.

All of those killed on Grabner’s direct orders, or on those of the commandant of block 11, were murdered exclusively on their initiative. These were not instructions from outside. I am referring to those who were murdered during the “bunker clearing” procedure. And all of the victims were hidden in the reports sent in to Berlin. In the records, they were transferred to the hospital as patients who after a dozen or so days died away of natural causes, that is of pneumonia and other diseases. But not all the prisoners who died at block 11 were masked in this way in the files. There were instances of death at block 11 that were recorded and presented truthfully to the outside world – in other words, the death certificates of these prisoners gave the actual cause of death. There were, indeed, instances of “natural death” at block 11 – and hunger was one of the causes. I am sure that the accused Grabner and the *Blockführers* [block leaders] who served at block 11 know all about this. Just by way of a reminder, I would like to give two surnames: Lätsch and Gehring. Grabner, by virtue of his office (for he was as I think the only Gestapo member in the Auschwitz garrison), and also the leaders of block 11, conducted an investigation amongst the approximately 200 inmates incarcerated there (only a part of them were politicals, and the others had been arrested for petty offenses, such as trading in butter) and had them all put before a “court”, which sentenced the whole lot to death. The proceedings of this sham court and the execution itself took just a few hours, and all of the 200 were killed. This would be all.

Presiding Judge: What specific information does the witness possess concerning the accused and their behavior?

Witness: As regards Grabner, I have already stated what is known to me. Concerning Aumeier, I remember only one small fact – but I find it difficult to precise the date, although the incident happened in 1942, immediately after the penal company was transferred to Birkenau following the unsuccessful escape attempt of the so-called “red points” [prisoners with a red circle on the front and back of their shirts]. Aumeier and the other SS men burst into the courtyard of the penal company in Birkenau and shot dead all the “red points” they found there.



The accused Seufert would torment prisoners for no reason whatsoever. After we returned from work, following afternoon roll call, we were ordered to maintain silence. Those guilty of the slightest infringement would be tormented by Seufert in the course of “sports” activities, during which he trampled and kicked prisoners, acting either alone or with the assistance of the other SS men.

Presiding Judge: And as regards Gehring?

Witness: As regards Gehring, he was a sadist through and through, and he happily beat any prisoner who, when the bunker door was opened, was unable to jump to attention. Indeed, he made use of every occasion to make one’s life a misery. He deprived prisoners of their blankets and meager rations. He also maltreated inmates locked up in the bunker of block 11, focusing his attention on the “crème de la crème”, that is on people who had been approved for release, although actually getting released was problematic in the extreme.

From time to time he would drive them out into the courtyard, where they would be kicked, have water poured over them, and generally become the objects of “games”. He also took part in mass and individual executions.

Presiding Judge: And what about Lätsch?

Witness: Lätsch served at block 11 for a relatively short time, and in fact arrived at a time that for him was somewhat inopportune – he was a latecomer, although I do not remember when exactly he appeared. Lätsch looked stupid and dull, he had a dumb smile and loved to set his dog on the prisoners; a dog that he had stolen someplace, as he himself said.

Presiding Judge: And concerning Müller.

Witness: Müller worked at block 11 together with Gehring. Müller was an impossible stickler for discipline, and he always carried out his orders to the letter – irrespective of whether they were good or bad. If he had been ordered to gas the whole block, he would have done so without thinking. He took part in selections and was present at the shootings carried out at block 11, however I did not see him beating anyone.

Prosecutor: The witness has also mentioned Seufert, saying that he took part in the gassing of Soviet prisoners in the autumn of 1941 – the witness mentioned this.



Witness: Concerning the first gassing at block 11, I must state that that is where the penal company was housed. It was later transferred to block 5a. The Soviet prisoners were left at block 11 together with a handful of Poles. If I remember correctly, all of them were gassed. Since Seufert was the *Blockführer*, he must have known about this.

Prosecutor: The witness worked as a clerk. From when?

Witness: From September 1941.

Prosecutor: Why were people locked up in the bunker?

Witness: The prisoners were forbidden to do anything, and thus they would be locked up in the bunker for even the slightest infringement of regulations.

Prosecutor: During the investigation, the witness mentioned a small piece of leather.

Witness: Yes. Inmates working at block E wore wooden clogs. One of the prisoners found a small piece of leather in the scrap heap and wanted to use it to make himself a strap that would hold his clogs in place, and for this he was sent to the political department, which referred him to block 11, where he was shot.

Prosecutor Brandys: Who was in charge of block 11?

Witness: As one of the camp blocks, it was subordinate to department III and the camp command, but it was also supervised by the *Lagerführer* and the political department, for the majority of prisoners incarcerated at block 11 were still being investigated. In any case, the accused Grabner was the supreme authority in the camp.

Prosecutor: Was this block supervised by the accused Aumeier?

Witness: Indeed it was.

Prosecutor: Did the accused Aumeier hang prisoners?

Witness: Yes.

Prosecutor: Did the prisoners incarcerated by Aumeier perish?

Witness: Yes. And if a case was complicated, it would be referred to the political department.



Prosecutor: Was the accused Aumeier aware of the prisoners' living conditions?

Witness: Of course, for he was nearly always present at the so-called selections.

Presiding Judge: Are there any other questions for the witness?

Defense attorney Kruh: The witness has testified that Gehring carried out individual executions.

Witness: Some of the prisoners – whom the Germans, for reasons unknown to myself, did not want to dispatch in groups – would receive an order from the political department, be taken to the shower room, and shot.

Defense attorney Kruh: Did the witness see him [do this] directly?

Witness: Yes.

Presiding Judge: Does the accused Grabner have any questions?

The accused Grabner: The witness has accused me of giving orders condemning various people to be executed. I would like to ask the witness how he can make such statements – that these people were executed on my order?

Witness: The explanation is simple – namely, the selections carried out in the bunker were performed on Grabner's instruction. They were taken care of by his people, but whenever they had a problem, they turned to him. I will again cite his expression: "weg mit dem Dreck" [do away with this shit].

The accused Grabner: The witness should know that there was a camp command, and that orders concerning prisoners which were received by individual units and departments came from that command. It was from there that they reached the political department, in order to be attached to the prisoners' files, and were sent back to the camp command. When a prisoner was to be executed, the camp commandant or his deputy would single such people out for execution. The political department had to report for each execution together with the necessary execution documents. There is, undoubtedly, a difference between one's own order, and an order received from outside. And the witness could never have known from where an order came.



Witness: I am aware of the fact that there were worse criminals than Grabner both inside and outside the camp. Nevertheless, there were instances of people being shot not on the orders of the SS, which was located outside the camp. For why else would we have had this comedy of failing to report the deaths of people, and these various machinations in the files?

The accused Grabner: I would like to point out to the witness that each and every deceased prisoner was entered in the files, and the witness could not have known this, for he was not employed at the political department. I myself would have some difficulty informing where reports concerning the deaths of prisoners were sent in individual instances. I can demonstrate at any time, with the help of witness testimony, that reports concerning the deaths of prisoners were entered in the register that was also kept by the prisoners under the supervision of SS functionaries. Everyone had access to these reports and could see for himself. No secret was made of these things. I divided up the work in such a way that each prisoner had access to information about what went on in the camp. Had I limited myself to giving out orders, I could not have ensured such access.

Witness: As regards the reports, these were written by the prisoners in the main *Schreibstube* [office] or in the hospital. As for the issue of the transferral of the deceased or killed and the gradual striking off of a few dozen people daily as deceased, this may be confirmed by the testimony of persons who worked in the main *Schreibstube* and in the hospitals. I am not unduly surprised by what Grabner is saying, namely that he does not remember these things, for none of the Germans were excessively intelligent, while those who were members of the SS were particularly dim. I was able to ascertain this on many occasions during my incarceration at the camp.