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Account concerning crimes committed in the Old Town. Warsaw Uprising 1944

To the attention of
District Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes
in Warsaw

In response to a letter from the District Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes, Ref. No. 1173/47, dated 12 December 1947 and addressed to myself, I hereby declare as follows:

I was actually in the Old Town from the beginning of the Uprising until and including 3 October, and witnessed the crimes enumerated below, perpetrated on both civilians and insurgents.

Background to the crimes

First and foremost, these criminal acts were firmly rooted in propaganda, for each and every German was imbued with the misconception that the Uprising was not a regular military campaign, but an act of wanton banditry. From this sprung the hatred and the readiness to carry out executions on the spot.

Secondly, the totalitarian Hitlerite education, which considered human life – and in particular the life of non-Germans – a mere trifle, and condemned extending the lives of invalids as oafs and a burden on humanity.

Thirdly, the Germans quelled the Uprising using penal troops, made up of military men from various units who were serving sentences in prison camps, and were sent from there to front line duty against the insurgents. I talked with two such soldiers who had been captured by the insurgents, and both admitted as much. They were wounded and were lying together with the

insurgents in the temporary hospital at Długa Street 7. On 1 October I also talked to a German sailor. Together with two infantrymen and one SS-man they had formed a patrol that was scouring the basements for schnapps on the day of the temporary ceasefire. They stumbled upon me in my hiding place in the basement at Źródłowa Street 10 in Mariensztat. Since a ceasefire had been agreed, they behaved correctly, while the units that occupied the Old Town on 2 September were, with small exceptions, full of hate and lusting for revenge on the bandits.

Crimes to which I was an eyewitness

On 2 September 1944, while I was distributing Holy Communion to the wounded people in the hospital at Długa Street 7, a tall SS-man shot eight of the wounded with his revolver – the younger men were killed because he suspected that they were insurgents and the elderly because he thought they were Jews.

On the same day, at around 3.00 p.m., commander Kotschke from the SS, a recipient of both classes of the Iron Cross, one-eyed, reddish-haired, with a bestial face, who commanded a unit that was surrounding the Old Town, entered the hospital premises and expressed surprise that the building was still standing, for an order had been given to set each and every structure on fire. He bellowed out an order that all of the wounded were to leave the hospital within fifteen minutes, after which the building would be burnt down.

When I pointed out that these people were gravely wounded and could not leave unaided, he told me to stand by the wall in the courtyard, together with the hospital personnel, and said, *"Kümmern Sie sich nicht um die Kranken, kümmern Sie sich um sich selbst!"* Those of the wounded people who could still move a limb dragged themselves off their beds and, helping each other, started to exit into Podwale Street. When the fifteen minutes had passed, Kotschke ordered, *"Alle enthunden!"* and right before my eyes sent a few SS non-commissioned officers to the basements where the majority of the wounded people were lying. The execution commenced soon afterwards. They shot each man in the head, and then doused the pallet or mattress with petrol and set it on fire with a revolver shot. When Kotschke left for a while, I ran to the basements to witness what was happening. Smoke was now belching and revolver shots could be heard. The soldiers died in silence, solemnly. All of them had taken Holy Communion in the morning. Judging by the number of communicants and discounting those who had left the hospital before the execution, I would say that the

number of people murdered in the hospital at Długa Street 7 did not exceed two hundred, but I remain firmly convinced that one hundred of them died at that time.

The abovementioned events were witnessed by Canon Pągowski (currently resident at the presbytery in Kutno), who at the time was lying in the last basement with his leg shattered by a bullet. When the Germans got to that basement and were about to continue the execution, they saw that the stairs were burning behind them, so they left the wounded people in the last basement to their own fate and withdrew. The wounded used blankets to beat back the flames, spending the whole night and two more days there before help arrived. They were rescued by a Red Cross team headed by Father Professor Jakubiec (currently resident in Warsaw, Krakowskie Przedmieście Street 64, the seminary).

When I left the basement I saw that the Germans were checking identity papers of hospital personnel in the courtyard, stopping some of them and ordering the others to proceed along Podwale Street in the direction of Castle Square. I grabbed the arms of two of the wounded people who were barely crawling over the ruins of the barricade at the corner of Kilińskiego and Podwale streets, and thus we progressed towards Wąski Dunaj Street. Here we were stopped by "Ukrainians" (recognizable by their speech and the yellow insignia on their uniforms), who yanked me forward by the chest, thus tearing the wounded away from me, and pushed them in the direction of Wąski Dunaj Street. Seeing this, the sister of one of the wounded ran after them, but rejoined me soon after, pushed by the "Ukrainians" and crying terribly, screaming with despair, "They have executed my brother!"

I think that this explains the group of dead people in the intermural space at Wąski Dunaj Street. The number should not be too great, some twenty people at most, for the wounded who could walk just a bit better managed to reach Castle Square. There, we were separated once again (at the corner, near St. Ann's Church). A dozen or so people remained, while the others, myself among them, were directed to Mariensztat Street.

I know nothing specific about the execution of the group that was separated in Castle Square. I only know that the fundamental criterion for segregation was whether or not one had any medical knowledge. Those who did were left behind.

I also witnessed how in Castle Square an SS-man set fire to the body of a woman who had just died or had been finished off.

Generally speaking, my passage through Podwale Street and right up to Castle Square was accompanied by the incessant sound of revolver shots coming from the neighboring streets and cellars.

Crimes which I know for sure were committed

In St. Hyacinth's Church and in the neighboring buildings at Freta Street 10 the Germans murdered the majority of the wounded people, just as they had done at Długa Street 7. An eyewitness to the crime was Father Franciszek Kulesza SJ (his exact address can be obtained from the Jesuits in Warsaw, Rakowiecka Street 61).

The fate of the wounded [who were at the] "Pod Krzywą Latarnią" (Podwale Street 25/7) and the "Pod Czarnym Łabędziem" was, in my opinion, identical to that of those at Długa Street 7, for on 2 September 1944 the German units at both locations were commanded by Kotschke.

Facts that I would call into question

The Germans demanded an immediate evacuation of the Maltański Hospital following the capture of the area by German forces. The Maltański Hospital was evacuated in agreement with the Germans in that the administrators of the hospital explained to them that the sole location to which the hospital could be moved was the Ujazdowski Hospital (!). The Germans consented to a roundabout route through Wolska, Żelazna, Pole Mokotowskie streets etc. But once formed, the column took all of the wounded people and, having reached Żelaznej Bramy Square, turned in the direction of Królewska Street and got through to the insurgents. It remained in the Śródmieście district until the capitulation. I therefore think that no wounded people were executed on the premises of the Maltański Hospital.

Comments

1. The fate of the civilians who left the Old Town before 2 September (these were small groups from individual houses that had been captured by the Germans) is unknown to me. The Franciscans (based on the corner of Freta and Zakroczymskiej streets) will know more.
2. The Germans murdered one of the Michaelite Fathers from the township of Płudy as he was leading a group of several dozen children (who had been evacuated from Płudy) along



the route from Kierbedzia Bridge to the Saski Square and Saski Garden, in the direction of the Mirowskie Market. They shot him when he was taking his group through the Saski Garden. They were shot at from behind. Another priest also received a bullet wound to the neck, but he survived and lives to this day (more detailed information may be obtained at the St. Andrzej Bobola Center in Płudy, run by the Michaelites).

3. From 2 September, 4.00 p.m., I was in hiding in a basement at Źródłowa Street 10, having detached myself, unseen, from the poorly guarded convoy of the wounded and the medical personnel. I remained there until and including 3 October. During this time, and to put it more precisely on 1 October at 4.00 p.m., by chance the Germans found me and ordered me to get lost, which I did two days later.

Father Tomasz Rostworowski