



## HENRYK POSWOLSKI

On 9 October 1945, in Łódź, Judge Z. Łukasziewicz, with the participation of Prosecutor J. Maciejewski, interviewed the person specified below as a witness, without swearing him in. Having been advised of the criminal liability for making false declarations, the witness testified as follows:

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Forename and surname	Henryk Poswolski
Age	35
Names of parents	Mariana
Place of residence	Łódź, Wólczańska Street 234
Occupation	factory finance and sales director
Religious affiliation	Judaism
Criminal record	none

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On 19 January 1943 I arrived in Treblinka in a transport from the Small Ghetto in Warsaw. The transport consisted of about 3,000 people. At the railway station in Małkinia, the transport had been divided and a few wagons (about nine) were moved onto the ramp of the Treblinka extermination camp.

I want to explain that at that time the people transported to the camp had no doubts that Treblinka was an extermination camp.

As soon as the doors of the wagons were opened, Germans and Ukrainians holding whips and guns rushed to throw people out onto the ramp. The ones that stood out, being extremely ruthless and cruel, were the Germans: Franz, Kuve and Mutte (I learnt their names later) and Ukrainians, who hit the women with their rifle butts and very often shot into the



crowd, so many people were killed already on the ramp. Next, everybody was herded into a courtyard between huts, where the people were divided; the women and children went to the left and the men to the right. We all had to strip naked in the courtyard. After they had undressed, the women were sent to a hut where their heads were shaved by barbers. As I heard, Ukrainians often committed rape on women in that hut.

After the shaving was over, the women and children were driven directly onto the pathway leading to the gas chambers; at the same time, specially trained dogs were used – St Bernard dogs – to make people walk faster. Simultaneously, the naked men piled clothes up behind a hut located on the right side; in addition, they had to walk in single file and were beaten by the Germans and Ukrainians on their way. When this was done, they were also sent to the gas chambers.

I want to explain that from the accounts of the laborers who had been in the camp before, I know that at first the Germans tried to make their victims believe that they were only going to have a bath. To this end, a number of tricks was prepared, whose aim was to maintain the above-mentioned belief. I heard that after money and papers had been taken away, each victim was told to keep one zloty, which was to be used to pay for a bath. These “fees” were collected by a Ukrainian, sitting in a wooden box whose window faced the pathway leading to the gas chambers. During my presence, such things had already fallen into disuse.

As for my survival, I owe it to a person from among the Jewish laborers, about 40 years old, who came up to me in the undressing courtyard and whispered: “You are a bricklayer and a stove-fitter.” The man was wearing an arm band with the inscription: *Aelteste der Juden*. Following his instruction, I came up to a fence, while he brought the SS-man Kuve, who asked me if I was really a bricklayer. I said that I was and then I was taken to a group of laborers. From that time on I worked as a bricklayer until I freed myself during the uprising.

As for the construction and arrangement of the gas chambers, my knowledge is based on the accounts of these laborers who, in the initial stage of the construction of the camp, were able to get into the courtyard where the gas chambers and graves were located.

The chambers were made of cement, tiled; I heard there were even sinks fitted in the walls, which were to imitate a real bath house. There were fake showers in the ceiling, not plumbed in.



I am certain that I was told that there were two gas chambers with sliding floors. There were small wagons that came up under the floor and they were used to take the corpses out.

The killing consisted of pumping air out and later pumping exhaust fumes in, which was done with a diesel motor that was located next to the chambers.

As for the so-called *lazarett* in the first part of the camp, I can tell the following details based on my own observations: the *lazarett* was used to exterminate all the people who were not able to walk to the gas chambers on their own, as well as Jewish laborers who either fell ill or committed some offence, or who became too weak after having been beaten up. The *lazarett* was located next to a plank storage area, where I often worked. There were two or three Jewish laborers working there under the supervision of a Kapo. They all wore arm bands with a red cross on them. The whole area of the *lazarett* was surrounded with a high fence, which was intertwined with branches. There was a hut next to the fence with a flag with a red cross. The Kapo stayed in this hut. There was an isolated room behind it with benches upholstered with red plush, where victims undressed believing that they would be examined by a doctor. Behind this room, there was an area for extermination, completely fenced off and partly surrounded with an embankment. There was a pit inside that looked like a crater, where the victim was positioned on a plank. A German or Ukrainian, deliberately hiding round the corner, shot the victim in the back of the head.

After the people had been killed, all corpses were cremated. During cremation they used some white powder (I suppose it facilitated the cremation).

When I arrived at the camp the frequency of transports was already low, since the main period of extermination was in the summer, autumn and winter of 1942. Anyway, I can remember (I think it was in February) two transports from Białystok, a few transports from the Warsaw Ghetto, and from Bulgaria and Greece. The last, small transports arrived in May 1943.

It seems that the camp was inspected by Himmler in March 1943. At 4 p.m., the personnel of the camp and the Jewish laborers were gathered in the courtyard, and a report was delivered to the SS-man Kuve. He, in turn, reported back to the commandant of the camp, who then reported back to Himmler.

I suppose that it was Himmler's visit that started the main operation whose purpose was to cover up any traces of the crime. From that time onwards, the corpses were extracted



from the pits with *Bagier* diggers and cremated. The ashes left by cremations were scattered around.

As for the Jewish laborers, there were about 1,000 of them all the time. If I am not mistaken, during the uprising, there were 1,100 of them; there were about 300 Ukrainians, whereas the number of the SS-men was 40–50.

In January 1943 transports of clothes and other possessions started to be sent to Germany in large numbers. I particularly remember a huge transport of overcoats, clothes and boots bound for Vienna. The loading of the wagons was done hastily while the laborers were constantly whipped by Ukrainians and the Germans. Those people who, as a result of the whipping, had blue circles around their eyes were selected by the SS-man Mutte as being ill and escorted to the *lazarett*, where Mutte killed them. Ill laborers (during the typhus epidemic in the winter of 1943) were put in the *Krankenstube*, which, however, could only hold 30 people. If there were more ill people, they were killed with injections.

Generally speaking, the treatment of laborers can be characterized as cruel, with individual laborers and even large groups of laborers being constantly killed.

As for gold and money, I can remember that in March 1943, two transports were sent away, each consisting of three, four vehicles loaded up with luggage.

The uprising in the camp broke out on 2 August 1943 and had been carefully prepared beforehand. About 300 Jewish laborers took an active part in it; they were armed with guns which they had obtained by forging the storehouse key. About fifteen Germans and fifty Ukrainians were killed during the uprising. The camp was burnt down.

The witness interview report was read out to the witness and he confirmed it by signing it on each page.