



ALEKSANDRA STEUER

On 20 August 1947 in Kraków, a member of the Main Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes in Poland, Appellate Investigating Judge Jan Sehn, acting upon written request of the first prosecutor of the Supreme National Tribunal, this dated 25 April 1947 (file no. NTN 719/47), interviewed the Ravensbrück concentration camp prisoner specified below as a witness, in accordance with the provisions of and procedure provided for under the Decree of 10 November 1945 (Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland No. 51, item 293), with reference to Articles 254, 107, 115 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. The witness testified as follows:

Name and surname	Aleksandra Steuer
Age	32
Religious affiliation	Roman Catholic
Citizenship and nationality	Polish
Occupation	office clerk
Place of residence	Kraków, [...]

I was detained in the Ravensbrück concentration camp from September 1941 until the camp was shut down in 1945. I was deported to Ravensbrück in a group transport numbering 64 women from the Montelupich prison in Kraków. At the time of my arrival at the camp, Maria Mandl was the overseer of the bunker (*Bunkeraufseherin*). This was the camp prison, where prisoners were detained for minor, sometimes very trivial offences reported by the overseers, or on the orders of the political department, the *Schutzhaftlagerführer* [head of the "preventive detention camp"] or *Oberaufseherin* [head overseer]. As the overseer of the bunker, Mandl was notorious in the camp for her cruelty. Terrible screams of the prisoners being beaten by her could be heard from inside the bunker that she oversaw. She beat

them and kicked them until the abused prisoners grew weak and collapsed. She also had a habit of taking her gloves off before hitting. Under Mandl, the prisoners were starved to death in the bunker. Mandl herself did not hide this and when prisoners appeared before her, having been reported by a block leader for complaining about lousy food, she would say that they were going to swell up from hunger in the bunker. Under Mandl, instances of death from starvation in the bunker were very frequent. This was during an intensified campaign against the Bible Students (*Bibelforschers*) organized by camp commandant Koegel, *Schutzhaftlagerführer* Bräuning, and Mandl. They were using terror and starvation to force the Bible Students to submit to and obey the camp regulations. The Bible Students would rather have died than comply. Messages spread through the camp saying that prisoners were being hanged in the bunker.

In the early spring of 1942, Mandl became *Oberaufseherin*, replacing Joanna Langefeld, who had been transferred away from Ravensbrück. As a result, the regime rapidly tightened up. I would say that because of this, executions by firing squad began at this time. Polish prisoners of different ages who were detained in the camp for various offences were shot, so it was impossible to know what was going on and what was punishable by shooting. However, the selected prisoners always had numbers beginning with seven thousand. The prisoners whose numbers contained these digits were officially called a *Sondertransport* [special transport]. Those who were meant to be shot would be halted at the block, and would not go to work. They were then placed in the bunker. Barefoot, with shaved heads and no aprons, they were transported during evening roll call in a truck called the *Grüne Minna* [patrol wagon] to a forest located just beyond the camp wall and shot on the spot. Standing at roll call we could very distinctly hear a salvo followed by individual shots corresponding to the number of the prisoners in the transport.

When Mandl took command in the early spring of 1942, she prohibited wearing clogs, so we walked to work and around the camp barefoot. All transgressions against this rule, such as slipping a piece of paper under one's feet, were punished very harshly. She would even track down offenders by laying down on the ground and checking if they had placed a piece of cardboard underneath their feet. If this indeed had happened, she beat the victims until they collapsed. She ruthlessly exacted obedience to her rule prohibiting curls and partings in the hair. She considered cutting hair as one of the worst crimes and transgressions against the camp regulations – and punished it as such. Guilty prisoners who had been caught were

shaved and made to march during evening roll call with signs hanging on their backs and chests that read: *Scheitel und Wasserwellen sind verboten* [parting and curls are prohibited].

The worst period of starvation occurred when Mandl was in command – we were given overcooked, rotten potatoes. On top of that, in the span of several weeks, she starved us every Sunday, withholding even food of this kind. She would do this for the most trivial reasons, e.g. because drains had been blocked or too many windows had been broken, even though in many instances the prisoners were not to blame.

It was an open secret in the camp that Mandl was *Schutzhaftlagerführer* Bräuning's lover. She followed him always and everywhere. She would not leave him alone with a prisoner. Bräuning often kicked her out. When he received punitive reports, she was always present, dictating punishments to him. At first Bräuning submitted to her completely. By the end of Mandl's stay in the Ravensbrück camp their relationship had turned sour. Bräuning found himself another lover. This turn of events deeply affected the prisoners, on whom Mandl vented her anger. Shootings and punishments intensified at the time, and executions took place every Friday.

Mandl left Ravensbrück at the beginning of October 1942. This was a disciplinary transfer. The political office discovered that she had stolen valuables from prisoners' personal effects. She did not, however, keep the goods, but had turned them into a bar of gold which was found in her belongings. This information came from the prisoners who worked at personal effects storage, and who gave out these items on Mandl's demand. On top of that, a bag made out of human skin had been allegedly found in her belongings. This was also an offence, because only men were allowed to possess items of this sort.

When Mandl left, the camp regime became less strict, we were allowed to cut hair, which was a relief considering the lack of combs. Wearing shoes was allowed, the food improved. Admittedly, there was less food, but it was edible. Roll calls became shorter.

The report was read out. At this the hearing and the report were concluded.