



## LUDWIK BANACH

On 18 July 1947 in Bydgoszcz, K. Gąsiorowski, Investigative Judge of the District Court in Bydgoszcz, with its seat in Bydgoszcz, interviewed the person specified below as an unsworn witness. Having been advised of the criminal liability for making false declarations, the witness testified as follows:

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Name and surname	Ludwik Banach
Age	30
Parents' names	Franciszek and Katarzyna
Place of residence	Bydgoszcz, [...]
Occupation	ship mechanic, tradesman
Criminal record	none
Relationship to the parties	none

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From 29 August 1941 to 30 April 1944, I was interned at the Auschwitz concentration camp, at different blocks: first at 11, then at 19a, 18a, 7, 24, 4a, 13a, and finally at block 25. I was transported to Auschwitz from Bydgoszcz, via Poznań, where I had been kept at a detention facility of the presidium of the police force. I was arrested in Bydgoszcz, suspected of sabotage and anti-German propaganda. I was interrogated by the Gestapo, but I was not put on trial and was only served a *Schutzhaftbefehl* [protective custody order].

I was delivered to the camp together with a group of 48 prisoners, some of whom were from Bydgoszcz, but I do not recall their names. After our arrival, I was assigned number 20317. The group which arrived with me was placed in different blocks; I was sent to block 11, to the so-called *Strafkolonie*, which is the penal unit. All members of this unit were distinguished by a black circle. At block 11, there were around 800 prisoners. My assignment to block

11 – the penal block – resulted, I presume, from the fact that I came from Bydgoszcz. I was assigned to block 11 by *Lagerführer* [camp leader] Fritz, who, after he reviewed my file moved me aside and started abusing me, beating me and threatening that my days there were numbered.

Additionally, having caught a glimpse of the file that the *Lagerführer* was holding, I noticed a sign in German, which read: *Rueckkar nicht erwünscht* [undesirable]. That was on Saturday. Next day, there was a general cleaning. On Monday, we worked in the sand, and one of the political prisoners from my group of twenty escaped, one Nowaczyk. As a result, the entire unit was sent to the block and went to labor in the afternoon, with just 19 of the group of 20 that the escaped prisoner had belonged to left at the block.

We were locked away in a bunker until the next day. On the next day, we were taken to the bathhouse, naked, and there, each of us had his number etched on one thigh with a blue pencil. My comrades, having been interned for some time now, had already caught the drift of things and concluded that we would be executed. We were stood in a row in the block's corridor, and then *Lagerführer* Fritz arrived for an inspection. I caught his attention because I stood out, looking well in comparison to the others. He asked me how long I had been at the camp. When I replied that only for two days, he said in German, "This one can work for a while yet". Then he took a while to think and said to the *Blockführer* who I know is dead now, having died of typhus, "This time we'll only take ten". Then, he selected nine relatively healthy-looking prisoners, including myself, and left us at the block. The remaining ten, naked, he sent to the bunker with their items. I also heard the *Lagerführer* tell the *Blockführer* that this time it would be done differently. After half a day, the nine of us and a few others from the penal unit that remained were ordered by Fritsch, the *Schutzhaftlagerführer* to move eleven beds from the block to the attic. Whilst I was working, I overheard a conversation between SS men, which suggested that about 800 Russian NKVD officers would be brought in to the camp. Additionally, I heard the older prisoners of the penal unit saying that these officers were to be starved to death. On that day, all block 11 prisoners were moved to block 5a, which was still under construction. We remained there for three days, during which we went to labor.

Around that time, myself and a dozen or so comrades of mine were taken to block 11 to clean it of the corpses. This assignment was supervised by *SS-Oberscharführer* Gehring, who resembled the person in the photograph presented to me (the witness was shown

a photograph sent by the Kraków District Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes in Poland, attached to the letter dated 7 July 1947, N.586/47), but the man in the photo seems younger, and additionally, this is an ordinary SS-man, while the person in question was an *Oberscharführer*. When I entered the block, a terrible view unfolded in front of my eyes. There were corpses of some 800 Russians in denim military uniforms, which bore no insignia, but many of the bodies had IDs on them. I do not speak Russian, but I was with my comrades, who knew this language and told me that the IDs suggested that these were officers in the rank of lieutenant, colonel etc. At the entrance, gas masks were issued to us. The corpses were blue, with traces of hemorrhaging from the mouth and the nose. Scattered on the floor at this block were as if pieces of ground cork and also pieces of something green, the shape and size of candies, so to speak. Finally, standing on the floor were tin or cardboard cans with a sign that read *Gas*. We moved the corpses outside, where other prisoners picked them up in carts and transported to the crematorium. After cleaning the block, the entire penal unit returned to their block. Let me add that the 800 gassed prisoners included 120 Polish political prisoners from the camp, among them the ten persons from the penalty unit that was punished for Nowaczyk's escape.

Afterwards, I was tasked with cleaning up after larger executions. Until 11 November 1941, executions by shooting had been carried out with salvos from firearms. These executions looked as follows: the convicts, their hands tied with wire behind their backs, were led to the so-called black wall. They were lined up facing the wall and six SS-men fired at them simultaneously. I watched such an execution from a window of the second floor of block 11, from room 3, where I had been staying as commandant of said room. They did not allow us to stay on this side of the building on these occasions, but I would sneak in there, violating the prohibition. The first execution with the use of small-caliber weapons took place on 11 November 1941. I watched it from the same spot. It was carried out in the following fashion: the prisoner was brought naked, his hands tied and a number etched on his thigh. He was then led toward the wall and *Rapportführer* [report leader] Palitzsch shot him in the back of the head with a small-caliber rifle. Such executions were performed individually, with a doctor, the camp leader, and the camp commandant in attendance. On 11 November 1941, 80 Silesians brought from Mysłowice, who had been previously locked away in the bunker, were exterminated that way. From that day, such executions took place daily, with three, four, or sometimes twenty prisoners shot dead.



In 1942, when Aumeier was already camp leader, small-caliber weapons were upgraded. A 25-shot magazine was added, so the executioner no longer had to load the bullet every single time and it was enough to just reload. As a result, two convicts at a time were led toward the wall, and the executioner, after shooting dead one prisoner, would reload the rifle and shoot at the other one instantly. Shots were fired from 20 cm out and the shot was barely audible. The bodies were removed by the prisoners from the camp hospital, who then transported them to the crematorium. Sometimes at the executions there were two rifles operating, and in such cases, four prisoners were brought to the wall.

Mass executions on the largest scale were performed on national holidays, such as 11 November or 3 May.

Also children and women were executed, and not only those from the camp, but also those brought from outside. A few times, I had an opportunity to speak to those awaiting execution – who, by the way, had no idea they had been convicted – and I asked them what they had been arrested for. Once, a woman to whom I asked this question said she had been arrested for giving her fiancé a pack of R6 cigarettes which she had taken from the shop she worked at. I later saw her executed.

On a number of occasions, I also saw the executions of the families of escaped camp prisoners: their fathers, mothers, wives, and children.

When a mother and a little child were executed, I noticed that they would first shoot the child that the mother was holding in her arms, and then, as the mother was screaming, they would shoot her.

All executions were carried out in the yard of block 11.

They took place either in the morning or in the afternoon, or even all day long, if the execution was particularly large. Typically, though, they selected hours when the prisoners were out working. I did not go to labor, having been assigned the function of block cleaner.

In March 1942, under camp leader Aumeier's reign, portable gallows were installed in the yard of block 11. They comprised a box with a trapdoor and the gallows themselves. Executions took place as follows: the convict had to climb the box, while another convict

had to tie the noose on his neck and press the jack-plane which opened the trapdoor, into which the convict slid. The SS men never tied the noose themselves, getting those to be hanged to do it.

Around November 1942, a couple dozen high-ranking Gestapo and SS officers arrived at Auschwitz, reportedly from Berlin, and then Höß and the camp leader showed them all the execution methods. It was around 9.00 p.m. The prisoners were at the block at that time, but they were pushed to the other side, with no one allowed to stay on the side of the yard. I was secretly watching the execution through a window, and I was not the only one; a couple other prisoners watched with me. I watched as twelve women and twenty four men in civilian clothes were brought in, probably from Mysłowice. Previously (as they had been already brought in in the afternoon), I had asked them as I was passing by, what they were charged with. They said it was espionage. First, they shot one of the women whom they addressed using the term *spion* [spy]. Earlier, in the presence of these officers, she had been beaten in the yard. Then, the remaining women were executed, whom they had previously undressed, leaving only their shirts. Then, the men were executed by hanging. At that time, there were poles set up in the yard which were used for hanging prisoners on the so-called post; two sets of gallows were used on that occasion. There were twelve poles prepared, but they were not used that day. The prisoners were hanged at the hands of one another, and the last one was hanged by *Oberscharführer* Gehring.

When the corpses were subsequently lying on the ground and there was nobody there, I went to the bathhouse and inspected the items of the woman who was shot first. Among her belongings, which lay in the bathhouse, I found a document which suggested that she was an American citizen residing in Munich. I do not recall her name very well presently; it sounded similar to Steinfeld, or something like that.

On the orders of block leader from block 11, I subsequently took these items to the *Efektenkammer* [property room], but I did not see any other evidence.

Additionally, Auschwitz prisoners were killed after being sentenced to starvation in the bunker. Usually, this happened in relation to some misdemeanors on the camp's premises, such as stealing food from SS storerooms. Also, torture was used on the camp grounds, solely at the hands of *SS-Unterscharführer* Lachman from the political division. These tortures consisted in hanging a prisoner on a pole with a chain, by his hands, which were

tied behind his back. Initially, he would hang over the ground, and then he would drop and touch the ground with the tips of his toes. Such hangings lasted an hour. I often heard the screams of the tortured, who, finding them unendurable, confessed to the charges and after they were taken off the pole, they often recanted. This led to their being hanged again, the situation additionally aggravated by the fact that the prisoner had his legs pulled with the chain so that he hanged almost horizontally.

Once, I saw 42 Jews brought to the camp. They were processed in by block leader Gehring, with *Unterscharführer* Kaduch also in attendance. I overheard part of their conversation that there was no use wasting paper on them since they would be going to the crematorium anyway. They were left in the yard of block 11, and then Kaduch brought two dogs (one, as far as I remember, was called Astra) and unleashed them on the Jews. A few of them died the next day from the bites.

These were all the murders and tortures I saw at Auschwitz. All were perpetrated in the yard of block 11 between August 1941 and February 1943.

Additionally, scores of prisoners died of intensive labor, lack of food, and injections performed at the camp hospital, as well as in the course of the selections of physically drained individuals, which were carried out in the roll call square, from where those selected were taken in vans to gas chambers.

I also watched as an SS man from the political division, whom I did not know by his name, shot two Dutchmen with a revolver. This was at the *Bauleitung* [camp expansion directorate]. The SS man in question used the skulls of the shot Dutchmen as paperweights. I saw these skulls when I went on to work at the SS kitchen and was accused of stealing 25 kilograms of sugar, and then sent to said political division.

Additionally, the SS men perpetrated murders in the course of labor by ordering a prisoner to proceed to a place outside the labor zone, for example to bring a stone. When the prisoner proceeded to carry out the order, the SS man shot at him under the pretext of escaping; if the prisoner refused to go, he was shot for disobeying an order.

On 30 April 1944, I was transferred to the Natzweiler concentration camp in Alsace. I remained there for three months, after which we were transported to another camp. During the transport, while in the wagons, we were bombarded by American planes. I got



seriously injured then. I was taken back to Natzweiler, and then, in 1945 in the course of the evacuation, transported to Dachau, where I was freed by American troops.

Aumeier had been camp leader at Auschwitz until January 1942. He participated in executions and dealt with the expansion of the gas chambers. I witnessed a situation when he only allowed a prisoner, a Russian, who before the execution shouted, "Long live Stalin", to be executed after he beat him with a spade.

His only merit was that he forbade the *kapos* to beat prisoners during work. Generally, among the prisoners, he had a reputation for being a sadist. During his time as camp leader, executions were maybe less spectacular, but they were carried out on a mass scale.

As for the photograph of Gehring (the witness was shown the photograph with a sign reading "Gehring Alb.Rud", sent together with the files), let me state that the Gehring about whom I testified was an *Oberscharführer*, while the person in the photograph is wearing a uniform of an ordinary private, and also appears to be a bit younger. If I could see him in person, I would definitely ascertain if this is the same man and clarify my doubts.

This is all I can testify regarding this case. The report was read out.