



ERWIN BARTEL

On 27 August 1947 in Oświęcim, 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), 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), in connection with Articles 254, 107, 115 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, interviewed the former prisoner of the Auschwitz concentration camp specified below as a witness, who testified as follows:

Name and surname	Erwin Bartel
Age	24
Religious affiliation	Roman Catholic
Citizenship and nationality	Polish
Occupation	student
Place of residence	Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum in Oświęcim

I was detained in the Auschwitz concentration camp from 5 June 1941 until 26 October 1944 as political prisoner number 17044. From 1 August 1941 I was assigned to work in the *Aufnahme* [admissions] office, but from January 1942 the section of the office where I worked permanently was located in the *Blockführerstube* [*Blockführer's* guardhouse]. The rest of the prisoners whose task was to complete all formalities connected with receiving transports worked in block 25. The post that sent a new transport would announce its arrival several days in advance by telegraph or by letter. Trucks or trains were used for transports. The head of the truck transport would leave the prisoners whom he had delivered in front

of the *Blockführerstube*, where the head of our office would take over the prisoners and the documents. This function was held by: *SS-Unterscharführer* Stark, *SS-Unterscharführer* Klaus, *SS-Unterscharführer* Józef Hofer, and lastly *SS-Oberscharführer* Hustekerber. Besides that, several SS men always worked in our office. The railway transports were received at the station either by the head of the office or by one of his subordinate SS men along with a team of SS men from the camp crew.

The prisoners from the transports were first sent to the so-called *Effektenkammer* [personal effects storage], where prisoners from our office gave them numbers and where the newcomers left all of their belongings. The *Effektenkammer* was located in block 26. After a bath, the prisoners walked naked from there to the so-called *Bekleidungskammer* [clothing room], where they received their uniforms. *Bekleidungskammer* was located in block 27. Prisoners walked from there to block 25, to the *Aufnahme* office, where its workers would tattoo them, having written down the personal details of the newcomers in so-called *Fragebogens* [questionnaires]. Tattoos were introduced in Auschwitz when Aumeier was the *Schutzhaftlagerführer* [protective custody camp commandant]. At first they were meant for Jewish *Schutzhäftlings* [protective custody prisoners] who were no longer photographed, and then for all the other prisoners with the exception of Germans and so-called *Erziehungshäftlings* [reeducation prisoners] – to prevent them from escaping. *Fragebogens* prepared in the block were sent to our office in *Blockführerstube*, where we used them as a basis to devise a so-called *Zugangs-list* [list of admissions], separate for each transport and issued in 11 copies. Once the list was signed by the head of the office, it was sent to every department in the camp. In our office, all *Zugangs-lists* were arranged in chronological order. When the *Zugangs-list* was complete, the questionnaires were sent back to the *Aufnahme* office in block 25, where they were used as a basis to create each prisoner's file. These files were then sent to our office, where we would fill in the reason for the arrest, based on the documents delivered by the head of the transport or by post. The following arrest warrants would come for prisoners deported to the camp from all countries except the General Government: the so-called *Schutzhaftbefehls* [protective custody orders] for *Schutzhäftlings* or *Haftbefehls* for the so-called *Vorbeugungshäftlings* [preventive custody prisoners]. Until 1943 both kinds of arrest warrants were signed by the head of the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* [Reich Main Security Administration], that is by Heydrich and later Kaltenbrunner. From 1943 such warrants were also issued in minor cases

by the local branches of the RSHA [*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*], that is the appropriate local *Stapoleintelle* [Gestapo]. Prisoners deported to Auschwitz from the so-called General Government would arrive with collective lists, mostly supplemented by documents issued for individual prisoners by the local Gestapo units in the General Government. These documents stated the personal details of the prisoners and reasons for their arrest. *Schutzhaftbefehls* from *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* would often arrive a year and a half late. When the files of individual prisoners were complete, our office sent them to the central office of the political department, which was located in the same building as the commandant's office. This was the central office where records of all prisoners were held.

The documents of prisoners sent to Auschwitz from the area of Silesia and the General Government would sometimes include comments from the Gestapo posts, such as: *Rückkehr in der Heimat unerwünscht* [return to the homeland not wanted], *Fluchtverdacht* [apprehension of absconding], *Im Lager* [in the camp], or "NN". Prisoners sent with the first comment (*Rückkehr unerwünscht* – return not wanted) stayed in the camp with other prisoners and were treated the same, apart from the fact that after a while they were summoned to the Political Department under some pretense and eliminated. The comment *Fluchtverdacht* meant that right after his arrival, the newcomer was to be placed in the penal company, where he was usually killed. The comment *Im Lager* (IL) meant that the prisoner was not allowed to work outside the camp and had to always remain inside the camp fence at the Gestapo's or the political department's disposal. The sign "NN" [*Nacht-und-Nebel-Häftlinge* – Night-and-Fog prisoners] resulted in the so-called *Postsperre* [mail ban] for the prisoner, and in isolation – just like in the case of those with the sign *Im Lager*, also possibly a detention in the bunker.

A transport of Russian prisoners of war numbering over 10,000 people arrived at the camp in the second half of October 1941. In November 1941 about 200 "political officers" from this transport were selected based on the materials gathered by the Political Department. They were tattooed with the signs "Au" and numbers from 1 to about 200. Prisoners marked in this manner were all locked up in a separate cell in block 24. They died along with the majority of the Russians. Only about 300 prisoners from this transport survived until February 1942. From time to time, Russians in Wehrmacht uniforms were transported to the camp. Sometimes they even had an officer's insignia from the so-called *Sonderkommando Zeppelin* [Special Squad Zeppelin]. They were assigned to work for the German air force and

every now and then they were eliminated in groups. Upon arrival at the camp, they were immediately put in the camp uniforms and shot.

From the second half of 1943, block 11 was an auxiliary prison (*Ersatzgefängnis*) for the Gestapo jail in Mysłowice. The detainees in this prison were registered as part of the group of the so-called *Polizeihäftlings* [police prisoners], abbreviated to "PH". Almost all of them were from Silesia and only a few from the General Government. The appropriate Gestapo units would conduct an inquiry against these prisoners. Based on its result, the prisoners were tried by a summary police court (*Polizei Standgericht*) in block 11. This court usually passed death sentences – otherwise the prisoners were released from block 11 back to the camp. For the German police in Silesia and police in Kraków, the camp in Auschwitz was the place where executions were carried out. The prisoners sentenced to death were transported to the camp in trucks and shot, at first in a gravel pit near the entrance to the camp, then in block 11, and later in the crematorium in Birkenau. These prisoners were not registered in the camp records.

Until the autumn of 1943, the post of the head of the political department was held by *SS-Untersturmführer* Grabner. His function in the Gestapo was *Kriminalsekretär* and then *Oberkriminalsekretär*. He was a member of the *Sicherheitsdienst* [Security Service] and wore the letters SD on the sleeve of his uniform. In my presence, in the *Blockführerstube*, he very calmly and dispassionately signed a document which had been submitted by Stark. On the basis of that document, some prisoner was executed in block 11. In the spring of 1942, while conducting an execution by firing squad in the courtyard of block 11, Stark and Palitzsch shot the wrong prisoner by mistake, on account of the similarity between the prisoners' names. As he came back from block 11, Stark was irritated and ranted on about Palitzsch. He then contacted Grabner who ordered that the condemned prisoner be shot, and Stark conducted the execution in block 11. Grabner participated in the execution of the prisoners in the *Kiesgrube* [gravel pit] and in block 11. I personally saw as he watched the victims in the gas chamber of crematorium I being killed with gas. He watched the gassing process from above, through the vents for Zyklon B. He was the mainspring of and the driving force behind the terror and destruction that occurred in the camp. In 1942, several transports of the mentally ill brought from various mental institutions were gassed in this camp.

In the spring of 1942, mass transports of Jews meant for extermination began to arrive at Auschwitz sent by the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* and its field units. The arrival of such

transports was announced several days in advance. The notifications were sent via so-called *Fernschreiben* [teletype messages]. These documents, which were passed on to our office as well, announced the arrival of the evacuation transport of the Jews toward the east (*Evakuierung nach Osten*). Others stated from which country prisoners were to be currently evacuated toward the east. It began with the Slovak Jews. All general *Fernschreiben*, that is those which included a name of the country from which the Jews were currently being evacuated, were signed by Liebehenschel. Both the content of the document and the signature were written on a teletypewriter, so they were printed. The name Liebehenschel did not tell us much at the time. Not until November 1943, when Liebehenschel took over from Höß as camp commandant, did we connect these facts with him. It turned out that Liebehenschel who became camp commandant had previously held functions and posts at the central office in Berlin through which he orchestrated the destruction of the Jews. Here in Auschwitz, Liebehenschel's orders were realized by commandant Höß.

Transports with the Jews arrived here with the so-called *Transportlists*, where all the Jews who came in the transport were listed by the name, surname and occupation. The transports that arrived at the ramp were inspected there by a commission which included the camp commandant, *Lagerführer*, possibly his assistant, head of the Political Department Grabner and one of the functionaries from our office. Apart from that, the commission always included one of the SS camp doctors. From the new transport, the commission would select a number of people fit for work, depending on the needs signaled by the *Arbeitseinsatz* [work deployment]. The rest were directed from the railway ramp straight to the gas chambers. The SS functionaries from our office brought the *Transportliste* which we used along with the result of the selection to prepare teletype messages to the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt*, stating the total number of people who arrived in the transport, the number of those who were selected for work and those remaining, marked with letters "SB", meaning *Sonderbehandlung* [special treatment]. This was a code name for death in the gas chamber. In my opinion, those selected and kept for work constituted in overall terms no more than 15–20 percent of the total number of people in transports. Although this percentage would fluctuate between 0–50 percent depending on a given transport and in some cases was as high as 90 percent, very often only a few people were selected from transports which numbered 3,000 prisoners on average.

Liebehenschel's teletype messages (*Fernschreiben*) which passed through my hands included orders stating that Liebehenschel himself called for such and such action against

the Jews to be carried out. I specifically remember his order to evacuate the Slovak Jews toward the east. Since we knew about Liebehenschel's orders that got hundreds of thousands of Jewish people killed in Auschwitz, we assumed that his conduct as camp commandant at Auschwitz was a tactical move designed to create the appearance of moderation and some decency in his treatment of prisoners. In actual fact, Liebehenschel was much more clever and cunning – he would allow some minor comforts for prisoners, while the fundamental policies in the camp under his command remained the same. Also under his command, sick prisoners from the parent camp who were unlikely to come back to work were selected in the hospital to be gassed. I remember two such selections in the period of time between November 1943 and May 1944 in the hospital for prisoners at the parent camp. As the camp commandant at Auschwitz I and the garrison commandant (*Standortältester*), Liebehenschel supervised the commandants of the other two Auschwitz camps.

I know that Liebehenschel would go to Birkenau when the transports of the Jews were subjected to selections and the majority were sent to the gas chambers. I cannot give a total number of victims who died in the Auschwitz camp. According to my calculations, the number is about four million. I include in this number all parts of the camp, chiefly the victims of mass transports and all the other victims. The only materials which could be used for establishing the exact number of people from the mass transports who were gassed were the reports sent via teletype message (*Fernschreiben*) to Berlin. All these documents were burnt in Auschwitz in the autumn of 1944. The functionaries of the Political Department took them from our office, transported them to Birkenau, and burnt them in the crematoria.

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