



IZABELLA SOSNOWSKA

Eleventh day of the hearing, 5 December 1947

Presiding Judge: I would ask the next witness, Izabella Sosnowska, to approach.

Witness Izabella Sosnowska, 33 years old, a Professor at the State Music Conservatory in Kraków, religion – Roman Catholic, relationship to the accused – none.

Presiding Judge: I would like to remind the witness of the obligation to speak the truth. The provision of false declarations is punishable by a term of imprisonment of up to five years. Do the parties want to submit any motions as to the procedure according to which the witness is to be interviewed?

Prosecutors and defense attorneys: We release the witness from the obligation to take an oath.

Presiding Judge: The witness shall be interviewed without taking an oath. What can the witness say regarding the present case, and in particular about the accused who are in the courtroom today, about their behavior with respect to the prisoners?

Witness: I arrived at the camp in Auschwitz on 30 May 1942 and remained there until 18 January 1945, that is until it was evacuated. Next, in the course of the evacuation, I managed to escape from the transport. In Auschwitz I received number 7576. I was sent to the camp together with my sister, Dr. Laura Serafin, who died there within a few months. Ours was a transport of more than 50 women – the second transport of Polish female political prisoners from Montelupich prison. After we arrived, we underwent a series of procedures that were intended to [deprive us of our humanity and] turn us into numbers. I remember the bath particularly vividly. We were led to the *Waschküche*, that is to the laundry, which was located in a section of the male camp but during the first months of existence of the female camp was intended as an area for women. How did the bath look? In the laundry there was a vat some two meters long and one and a half meters wide, filled with water. We were stripped naked and ordered to get into the vat, in groups of five, and wash. But with what? All the soap had been

taken away from us. And so we had to make do without. Next we were told to dry ourselves. But using what? Our towels had been confiscated, and no new ones given. When our group of five, thus “bathed”, walked out of the vat, the next group stepped in, and so it lasted until the whole transport had gone through the procedure. I had heard a lot about German hygiene, but now I saw how it really looked with my own eyes. Three criminal arrestees – former prostitutes – were added to our transport, and they bathed with us in the same vat. Next we were told to dress in underwear of an indeterminate, white, brown and reddish color, and given clogs four numbers too big; they soon became a real bother. We walked to work barefooted, irrespective of the weather and temperature. At the time, I worked in the water *kommando*, which was made up solely of Polish female prisoners. We stood in water nearly up to our waists, scything bulrush and grass throughout the working day. Many of my companions fell seriously ill with kidney ailments, and died in short order. Thereafter I worked in the laundry. My work consisted in smearing dirt on the laundry, which we would then spread on a table and scrub with brushes, without any soap – only using water. It was then that I understood why the shirts that we wore for a few months at a stretch before they were sent in to be washed would be returned to us the same color as when we had handed them over.

Next, we were transferred to Birkenau. Since the number of female prisoners at the camp increased, we were allocated to that part which had previously housed 100,000 Russian prisoners of war. In the autumn of 1943, the accused Mandl arrived at Auschwitz. She became the head of the camp and from then on everything that occurred in Birkenau happened with her knowledge, with her participation, and on her command.

At the time, the blocks in Birkenau had no electricity, water or heating stoves. In fact, we were kept in stables that had been adapted into blocks. But there were lice – which shared our bunks (bricked into the wall) – and loads of rats, toilets without any sewage system, and heaps of mud. I remember the women’s camp vividly, how the women would die – one after the other – on their muddy beds, while the SS women kicked them, checking to see whether they were still alive. The orderlies tasked with removing the bodies simply could not keep up, such was the mortality rate at the camp, and it was frequently the case that the living slept on bunks side by side with the dead.

Next, I worked in the kitchen, but I was dismissed for giving coffee to one of my companions. Then I was sent, again, to work *außen* [outside], and thereafter in the *Entwesungskammer*



[disinfection hall]. My work there consisted in sorting the clothes of murdered Jews. We looked through the clothing and ripped out the valuables that had been sewed inside. These valuables were then handed over to our overseer, an SS man, who sent them on to enrich the coffers of the Third Reich, although he did not forget to enrich himself as well in the process.

It was at this time that a typhus fever epidemic broke out. There was no water in the camp, only in the kitchen, while the prisoners working there were not allowed to give even a cup of water to anyone from outside – under pain of being reported for punishment. There was, it is true, a so-called *Waschraum* [washroom] block, however due to the fact that its water installation had been badly laid, it had no water for months, and we were unable to bathe or wash anything; frequently, we had no water with which to moisten our lips or wash the bowls from which we had eaten our soup. In consequence, a terrible epidemic of typhus fever spread through the camp, decimating our ranks. At the time, the Germans did not have to resort to lethal phenol injections nor any special selections in order for the mortality rate at the camp to rise dramatically. I too fell ill with typhus fever and after running a fever of 40 degrees for a whole week, having received no drugs, I was by chance sent to the office of the *Revier* [hospital], where I worked from 15 November 1942 to May 1943.

While working in the various sections and offices, we were able to observe the techniques and methodology applied by the Germans in the camp. For it was well known to us that the camps were one of the main *Ausrotten* [extermination] centers, and that they also functioned as a veritable gold mine, supplying valuables and monies to the treasury of the Reich. The SS men observed the following motto: “You can do as you please, as long as you do not get yourself caught”. They stuck to this motto throughout the War, and continue to do so today.

Presiding Judge: Can the witness provide specific data about the accused Mandl with reference to the selections?

Witness: In 1942 I looked through the window of the *Schreibstube* [office] and saw a general roll call during which the accused, Mandl, conducted a selection in the company of the other *Aufseherins* [overseers]. There was complete chaos in the camp. Due to errors and the high mortality rate, it was sometimes the case that the *Schreiber* [office clerk] reported a dead prisoner as being alive. Thus, the records contained “unidentified” bodies.



As a result, a general roll call was ordered. The female prisoners were led out into the meadow, outside the camp gate, and forced to stand there in the cold from dawn to 3.00 p.m. Thereafter, shivering with cold, they were taken back to the camp.

The accused Mandl and the other *Aufseherins* took up positions along the road. They were brandishing canes, and if any of the inmates were unable to walk in step, the *Aufseherins* would point out these women with their canes and have them taken aside, whereas the hapless women – knowing what lay in store for them – tried to resist.

The selection encompassed more than 4,000 women of different nationalities. The list even included two Germans, but they were transferred at the last moment on the order of the *Lagerführung* [camp administration].

All those selected were sent to block 25, where after the formalities were taken care of and an SB [*Sonderbehandlung*, special treatment] list drawn up, they were loaded naked onto trucks. I saw this from the window of the *Lagerarzt* [camp doctor]. The women were herded onto the trucks naked and, screaming, driven off in the direction of the crematorium.

Presiding Judge: Are there any questions?

Prosecutor Szewczyk: Were there any doctors present at the general roll call?

Witness: I do not recollect any doctors being present at the general roll call. I only saw the accused, Mandl, and all the *Aufseherins*.

Prosecutor Szewczyk: So it would appear that the decision as to who was to be sent to block 25 would be taken by the accused, Mandl, and the *Aufseherins*?

Witness: I did not see a doctor present during the selection.

Prosecutor Szewczyk: Did the witness see any of the other accused: Brandl, Danz? Please take a look.

Witness: Brandl, one of the accused, was the head of the *Bekleidungskammer* [clothing storeroom]. But I do not know any details regarding the other accused, Danz. I do not remember whether or not they took part in the general roll call.

Prosecutor Szewczyk: When you worked in the *Entwesungskammer*, what type of articles were gathered there and what would happen with them?

Witness: The man in charge of our *kommando* stated explicitly that he had to hand over these articles to the authorities, and that they would be sent to Germany.

Prosecutor Szewczyk: Did the witness see these transports being sent and could she provide some information about the quantity of articles?

Witness: I did not work at the *Entwesungskammer* for long; I was soon transferred to the *Schreibstube*.

Prosecutor Szewczyk: While working at the *Schreibstube*, was the witness involved in the process of drawing up lists of persons intended for gassing?

Witness: There were two types of lists. One was kept at the camp, and the other at the *Schreibstube*. If the selection was carried out at the camp, we would receive the [camp] list, while if it took place at the *Revier*, we would be given the other list by our *Lagerarzt*.

Prosecutor Szewczyk: And people would be sent to the gas chamber on the basis of these lists?

Witness: On the basis of these lists people were sent to block 25.

Prosecutor Szewczyk: Was the witness present during the selections carried out in the camp?

Witness: I did not see any other selections apart from [the one at] the general roll call.

Prosecutor Szewczyk: And what about the accused Brandl?

Witness: Brandl was the head of the *Bekleidungskammer*. I did not have any direct contact with her. Whenever I went to fetch underwear for the patients, Brandl would be negatively inclined to the prisoners. Although the shelves were filled with underwear, she refused to issue it out in the necessary quantities. I wish to state categorically that the *kapo* of the accused Brandl, one Schmidt, would always find all the necessary items, clothes, coats and underwear if she was given something from the food parcels.



Prosecutor Szewczyk: You mean to say that there were clothes, but the prisoners still had to lie naked?

Witness: A certain quantity of underwear was issued, but this matter was settled during the final period of the camp's existence. For initially all the prisoners had to lie naked.

Prosecutor Szewczyk: Does the witness know of the accused Danz?

Witness: I know of her, but I did not encounter her directly.

Prosecutor Szewczyk: And does the witness know of the accused Brandl?

Witness: I was told that she beat the prisoners, however I did not see this myself.

Prosecutor Szewczyk: Does the witness know of the accused Orlowski?

Witness: I have heard a lot about her, but I did not see her do anything myself.

Prosecutor Szewczyk: What was her reputation?

Witness: The prisoners were adamant that she beat them. For a time she was an *Aufseherin* in the subcamp of Budy.

Presiding Judge: Are there any further questions to the witness?

Defense attorney Rymar: Could the witness describe what happened between the day when 4,000 women were selected and the day they were driven off to the crematorium? How much time elapsed between these two events, more or less?

Witness: I cannot provide the exact timespan. The time was sufficient for all of the administrative formalities to be taken care of.

Defense attorney Rymar: More or less how many days?

Witness: A few days.

Defense attorney Rymar: What happened after the roll call during which these women were selected?

Witness: All were sent to block 25 and remained there until they were gassed to death.



Defense attorney Rymar: Did you receive a list of these inmates?

Witness: I was instructed to draw up a list according to the numbers of prisoners earmarked for the so-called *Sonderbehandlung*.

Defense attorney Rymar: Who received all documents of this type?

Witness: All the documents sent to the *Revier* were addressed to the doctor.