

MOSZEK GELBKRON

The fifteenth day of the trial, 25 January 1947.

Presiding judge: Would witness Maciejak please come forward.

Witness Józef Maciejak, prewar name Moszek Gelbkorn, 44 years of age, a Jewish Cemetery employee before the war and presently, sworn in, no relationship to the parties.

Presiding judge: Would you please tell the Tribunal what you know concerning the case. Please give a concise and clear account.

Witness: Your Honors, I will describe the situation at the Jewish cemetery in 1940, 1941, 1942, and 1943.

As you know, the Judenrat had to deliver quotas of forced laborers. Later, it turned out that many prisoners died in the hospital. They were transported to the cemetery. They took up a few hectares of land, designated specifically for the burial of these prisoners. This had continued up until the Russian-German war in June 1941, until two days before the conflict broke out. Then, already during the Russian-German war, there was a municipal bathing area on Spokojna Street, where various disinfections of Russian POWs took place. Apparently, they liked it so much that they scaled the fence from the direction of Spokojna Street, which was adjacent to the fence of the Jewish cemetery. After bathing, there were always some people missing, so they would come looking for them at the Jewish cemetery. They would look for them for a few hours. Some of them they caught, others had fled, and all of the people hid. After three or four days, it was the same thing all over again. They caught some of them, but after a few days, they gave them eternal rest. They would take them to the Pawiak prison, and then to the cemetery. In time, if they could not find the POWs, they captured Jews or Poles to meet the quota.

Then, we would drive carts to the Pawiak. We transported many Jews there and scores of Poles, we brought in many corpses, we brought in hanged people, and then we brought in those beaten up, bruised, and shot. The Russians were mostly hanged, the Jews were mostly beaten up, the Poles were mostly shot and wet. When we drew up at the Pawiak's yard, this Ukrainian who worked there and a Gestapo man told us that Jews were lying to the left and Catholics to the right.

Presiding judge: What does it mean, they were wet?

Witness: They were bruised and wet, they must have been trying to revive them with water, I guess. Once, we went to the Pawiak. We brought two naked women and one man, completely naked, but nobody knew who it was. The women had double uniforms, and we saw that one of them had something on her. It was a Russian passport. 1940 was the first time I had seen a Russian passport: red covers, hammer and sickle, and one of ours read, *Zubwrazcz*¹.

Presiding judge: Was it a man or a woman?

Witness: Two women and one man. It turned out they were Russian nationals.

Presiding judge: Did you inspect the corpses? Had they been shot or hanged?

Witness: They had been hanged.

I could talk for hours about these matters.

The management of the cemetery always received orders saying that exactly at 9:30 p.m. we were supposed to drive our cart to so-called Gęsiówka, that is Gęsia Street 24. The Judenrat had to build it at its own cost, but on orders from the Germans. It was swarming with prisoners, literally. We arrived at 9 p.m., when nobody was allowed in the streets. Our pass was gloves, aprons, and the plank, bloodstained most of the time. We would always pick a few men and a few women, some seven or eight people a day. They were mostly convicts, sentenced to death, because people would be also sentenced to death despite being based in the Aryan district.

Let me return to what it was in 1941. In 1941, when the typhus epidemic was raging, we worked two shifts. The first shift was official, and the other was as laborers because everybody wanted this job, thinking the cemetery was the only way out. We dug mass graves

¹ Russian for 'dentist'.

in the first street. The ground subsided there, some two meters deep. The graves were eight or ten meters deep.

Presiding judge: How large an area did these graves take up?

Witness: Some two morgens, but they ran very deep.

Presiding judge: How many layers?

Witness: The corpses were withered, just skin and bones, and we loaded as many layers as we could.

Presiding judge: Just give me an estimate.

Witness: It is hard to say. 22 or 32.

Presiding judge: And all this over two morgens?

Witness: Over one and a half morgen, more or less. As I said, the corpses were completely withered because of the typhus, various infectious diseases, dysentery, etc. People worked at night.

The Germans would come to the cemetery all the time, and you could say the cemetery was sort of a place of pilgrimage. We were visited by these ladies who bore the Red Cross, from the hospital; they did not only come in vans, but we had entire tours visiting. On Sundays, there were maybe five or six such tours, sometimes seven. Young airmen would also come. One more thing: we were visited by young boys from Germany who wore golden stripes on their sleeves, which read, "Jugend...", and something else, but I could not make it out. All of them came to watch our misery – mass graves in the cemetery.

Presiding judge: How did they conduct themselves?

Witness: Some of them would laugh, others would say something, but I could not hear what it was. For example, a soldier would come to Skra, that is, the Workers Sport Club, whose grounds had been incorporated into the cemetery, he would spot a deep pit, take a brick, and throw it inside, as an addition.

All this happened in 1940 and had continued until the displacement. Then, they no longer came because the gendarmes at the junction of Przyokopowa Street and Gęsia Street would not let people in, unless they were officers.

I could go on talking about all this, but there was something worse.

Once, two German doctors came to the cemetery with a certain document. I do not know its contents because I was just an employee. They went to the office and asked for one hundred corpses for dissection. We had no choice but to supply the corpses. At that time, there were six coach houses filled to the brim with corpses. We opened them. We had to get them some bowls, water, soap, etc. They came with the instruments and we opened a coach house. There were huge stacks of bodies there. They were told to pick whichever they liked. I shudder at the very thought of what this dissection looked like. First of all, they made an incision below the ribs, reached inside, and squeezed the heart through the ribs, and only cut the heart later. The other doctor had a portable slide and he smeared it at three spots. If there was no blood in the heart, he would cut it with a knife, and there was this slimy water inside.

And so they smeared it on the slides, at three spots. They noted down the name and surname because each corpse had a tag with the surname attached to a leg. This lasted three days.

Presiding judge: How many corpses were there?

Witness: One hundred. The cemetery staff asked them, "Why do you need so many corpses of the old? Maybe take some children". "We don't need children, children are useless for typhus research". The job took three days. I poured water on their gloves myself because they washed their hands all the time.

Then, In 1942, some month before the displacement, Jews were brought in to the Skra grounds. The Germans told them to get into the pit and they wasted them all, I saw it myself.

Prosecutor Siewierski: When was that?

Witness: In 1942. Between 20,000 and 25,000 thousand people were executed on the Skra grounds, maybe more.

Presiding judge: Did the cemetery management record these corpses in some way?

Witness: I will get to that in a second. The management had only kept the records until the displacement. During the first displacement operation, the commotion was such that it

was impossible to count these bodies. Until the displacement, it was between 200 and 300 corpses daily.

Presiding judge: Were you an employee of the cemetery before the war?

Witness: Yes, until 31 March 1932 (?).

Presiding judge: How many corpses were buried daily, on average?

Witness: Four or five, but there were more on Sundays, because there were no burials on Saturdays. Sometimes, the number reached eight corpses, or 15 on Sundays. It was much more at the Praga cemetery. All those who had been executed had been shot in the back of the head. They were ordered to go down the ladder or jump in. If they were already moving in the direction of Okopowa Street and refused to head for the mass grave, they were killed on the spot – those who walked behind them killed them on the spot.

One day at the beginning of July 1942, it was exceptionally busy, as if it was some main artery. There was traffic up and down the street, the carts transported the bodies, one after another, and whenever a cart pulled up on Okopowa Street, blood was dripping down and into the drain. It all looked like a slaughterhouse. In the morning, around 9 or 10, some beautiful limo drove into the cemetery yard and headed in the direction of Skra. We started to tremble with fear, not knowing what it could mean because it was the first such case. And then these SS-men and a few gendarmes expelled everybody from the premises. Nothing like this had ever happened before.

Presiding judge: Were there a lot of staff?

Witness: There were around 500 official employees, and another 500 unofficial ones. And then there were stonemasons, painters, some 1,500 people altogether, excluding the families. All of them left the cemetery and the Skra grounds. The Germans demanded shovels. A few minutes later, we heard muffled shots. Hardly two minutes had passed, and another limo entered the cemetery, and then it returned some ten minutes later. On its way back, we spotted two children and one woman through the windows. After 12 or 15 minutes, everybody left. What did all this mean? Everybody wondered because nothing like that had ever happened before.

Prosecutor Siewierski: Where were these children?

Witness: Inside the limo. The Germans had poured in plenty of dirt because it was a deep pit, with plenty of dirt on top. Our boys were very curious and wanted to see who it was, who these people were. In the morning, the boys on the second shift dug up this pit and spotted signs on the sleeves of two men, which read "Made in England" and "Made in USA". It was after the outbreak of the American-German war.

Presiding judge: There were no documents?

Witness: No.

Presiding judge: How many bodies were there? Maybe ten?

Witness: It is hard to tell, the pit was some 12 meters.

Prosecutor Sawicki: Were these signs discovered on two bodies only?

Witness: That is correct.

Prosecutor: Would you be able to indicate this spot?

Witness: Of course, any time.

Judge Grudziński: How many bodies were clothed?

Witness: Only two had their clothes. We wanted to see what happened. And then, there is another very curious thing.

Prosecutor Sawicki: Were the non-Jews that you mentioned buried in separate graves or in collective ones?

Witness: The latter. Also English and Americans were buried there.

One evening, at 5 or 6 p.m., superintendent Abram Pozner was not at the cemetery; he had left for the ghetto. There were Jewish policemen, a few Gestapo men had come, too, already with plans. Everybody wondered what all this meant. They inspected the entire Skra grounds. They ordered that three meters from the fence on Mielecka Street, opposite Karolkowa Street, a pit be dug, three meters deep, two meters wide, and ten meters long. They gave us a few hours. The superintendent came in the evening, in a cart, and we appraised him of the situation. He telephoned Źelazna Street 101. Next morning, 50 workers arrived, on their

last legs. We had to put our guys on the job, too. They started to dig the pit. A hunchbacked German came on a bicycle to check the progress. We saw scores of Jews. He rode off and a gendarme arrived an hour later. There were a lot of Jews, too, and rumors spread in the ghetto: God only knows what is going on.

The pit was not used. Next day, we waited. In the evening, a German came and told the superintendent that 25 workers were needed for the next morning – *fleißige*, industrious – and if they were good, then 15 would do, and he promised they would get bread and marmalade. Nobody fell over themselves, but they were hungry people, so... Previously, they had dug pits in Bielański Forest. A couple of hundred people were buried there. Now, on the Skra grounds, rubble was dumped at the exact same spot. In a cobblestoned street, there were plenty of corpses, one atop another, hard to say how many.

In Gęsiówka, that is at Gęsia Street 24, the Judenrat was ordered to raise this building, and 50 Jews were executed. Hearses ceased to operate because you could load two or three boxes, tops, on a hearse. With a cart, you were looking at 20 or 30 boxes, and that was some business. Such carts would go to Gęsiówka. There, Jews were executed. There were ten poles, and the Jewish police would take the convicts to these poles and the Blue police fired at them, but all the time on German orders. The first group was calm, but those who followed were already scared. The smallest prisoner – pale and exhausted – was suddenly so energized that two policemen struggled to overpower him. When the first group was executed, I loaded the corpses on the cart and left; I could not watch all this.

In that prison, there was another type of prisoner: Jewish Catholic. They were kept separately. The policemen I knew told me that they were slightly better-off, being helped by the clergy. A lot of them died, too.

Before the operation, the Germans wanted to get rid of all the prisoners from Gęsiówka. In the ghetto, there was a company which had horsebuses, used for transporting Jews from the small ghetto. Around 50 percent of the Jews transported on those buses were executed on the Skra grounds. They told them to face the wall and shot them in the back of the head, one by one.

At the end of August, despite the fact I had documents saying I was not to be displaced, I was captured. My comrades rescued me the next day. I stayed in an attic. One hour felt

like a week. My friends loaded me onto the cart, covered me with corpses, and we set off immediately. We passed through the first gate, *Umsiedlung*, the second one, Dzielna Street, at the junction with Zamenhoffa Street, third, Zamenhofa Street, at the junction with Gęsia Street, and fourth, Okopowa Street near Gęsia Street. At this last post, there were two gendarmes on guard duty and two Jewish policemen. One of them wanted to go to the cemetery. I could hear everything and I thought I would suffocate. One German wanted to check it and followed the cart. Placed on the roof were two boxes with bodies, from which blood was dripping. It was not good, this German standing there. This helper – the carter. In the meantime, they slowly unloaded these two boxes. They feared for their own lives. One of them thought of something. He scurried to our office. Phone calls were made until the last moment. Later, this building was burned down and destroyed. In the meantime, they opened the door and pulled me out from under the bodies and I lost one shoe in the process. Then, I went out and wiped myself clean of the congealed blood. My friend Puterman arrived. He spoke good German. Shouting, he ordered everybody to stay quiet, and then he threw the receiver so it dropped to the table.

Prosecutor: After the liquidation of the ghetto, when they rounded up people in Warsaw to be executed in the ghetto, do you have any idea of where they were buried?

Witness: I have discussed that.

Prosecutor: Please tell me if after the liquidation of the ghetto they still brought people in and if you know any details in that respect.

Witness: After the liquidation of the ghetto, it was rare.

Prosecutor: I do not mean the Jews right now. Were they executed inside the walls of the ghetto and left there?

Witness: Corpses were strewn all over the ghetto. We would also pick up the bodies at the Mokotów prison, but the outgoing transports from there were sporadic. We mostly moved bodies from the Pawiak, where the so-called gate of death was located, at Orla Street 6.

Prosecutor: What was this place?

Witness: We got a phone call from there once and we went there. I found two right at the gate. In a while, it was the same again.

Prosecutor: Did the Germans make those phone calls?

Witness: At first, they called the ghetto, but then we got a phone call at the cemetery.

Prosecutor: Can you tell us what corpses were these? Were they Jewish or Polish? Please answer briefly.

Witness: There were different corpses. Later, they were Polish, trainmen, well-known personages – some of them had visiting cards – doctors, associate professors. It was mostly the upper class.

Prosecutor: And nobody was there when you picked up the bodies?

Witness: They had been executed and they lay there.

Prosecutor: Was that in the ghetto?

Witness: That is correct.

Prosecutor: After the liquidation?

Witness: Still before the liquidation.

Prosecutor: So in order to execute these people, the Germans had to bring them in first.

Witness: That is correct.

Prosecutor: And they were buried at the cemetery as well?

Witness: All of them were. Then, we would come and collect these corpses. On that occasion, we picked up these two.

Prosecutor: Was that house at Orla Street 6 burned down at that time?

Witness: No, it was fine.

Prosecutor: But did anyone live there?

Witness: Hardly anybody lived there.

Prosecutor: And you did not discuss between yourselves who had executed them, because everybody knew it was the Germans?

Witness: I want to get to that. Once, we had two corpses. We load them on the cart, then we turn from Elektoralna Street – and there is this car, and three of them are getting out. When we accessed the gate, they grabbed their weapons, “bang, bang” and down they went, job done. They just left, and that was that.

Prosecutor: The gate of death was at Orla Street 6, right?

Witness: That is right. That is not all, sir. At night, we went to Zamenhofa Street 12, it was a house adjacent to Dzika Street. We had a lot of work there, too. Russians were being brought in. That was at the end of 1941. At that time, we received phone calls. We went there, and there were two people, too.

Presiding judge: You said that Mr. Posner was superintendent at the cemetery. Who did Posner speak to concerning the cemetery? Which authority?

Witness: The Judenrat.

Presiding judge: And did he speak to the German authorities?

Witness: No, but there were constant inspections at the Jewish cemetery.

Presiding judge: Do you remember what military units came to the cemetery on official business, so to speak? Was it the SS or somebody else?

Witness: Nobody came on official business. They only came to beat and torture people. Other than that, nothing.

Presiding judge: Did they wear uniforms?

Witness: They only came to see the graves, they came to see Zamenhof’s grave. They were only interested in mass graves.

I wanted to mention the case of the Gypsies. After all the prisoners were eliminated at Gęsiówka, the Germans brought some Gypsies there. I do not know how many of them there were. In 1942, on 26 December, if memory serves me right, which was a Sunday, the Gypsies staged a mutiny. The next day, we had around 150 of those Gypsies because they had not been heading for Gęsia Street but were in other, more devastated districts, and we served around 150 Gypsies awaiting their eternal rest there.

Presiding judge: Were they men or women?

Witness: Men, women, and children, too. They had a German red "Z" on their sleeves and an armband on a white background.

Your Honors, the most important issue is precisely what happened at the end of October 1942, after the first action. This is very interesting. I have documents which say that I lived at the cemetery at that time. After the second action, I lived on Muranowska Street. Once, we are sitting together after supper, after a hard day's work, and suddenly I hear a window smashing. A blue policeman is trying to enter. They could not get inside. Then, I see yellow searchlights ripping through the cemetery. What is this, at night, at half past six? They will not let us rest for one second.

I could not get closer to see that searchlight, and we could not open the padlock. I was so scared that I did not know what was going on with me. The car must have hit the gate and the padlock got broken. So I took a hammer and started to hit it. There was a Ukrainian and some SS-men, and they said I was not hitting hard enough. Finally, we opened it and they drove into the yard. They headed for the Skra grounds. The guys from the first and second shift are there, while they are dragging out 24 men, with their hands tied behind their backs. It was a grave that could take another 20 bodies or so, but it was prohibited to bury anyone there. The Germans were still unhappy with us because they had had to wait at the gate for so long. They said that they would be back in half an hour and that those men had better be in the ground by then, otherwise we would be shot. We waited for half an hour, an hour, an hour and a half, and finally, at 10 o'clock, we saw the searchlight – the car drove in and pulled over. There was no room on the Skra grounds, so we directed them toward the main alley, next to the fourth street. We told the officer that the burial could take place over there, but in reality there were no empty graves there, just the bunkers we had dug for ourselves in case we had to run and hide. We had no choice but to show this spot to the Germans. So they dropped 30 people there. Who were they? I saw two Jews with Stars of David, so I asked them what were these corpses. They said they were 50 hostages from outside Warsaw.

Prosecutor Sawicki: When was that?

Witness: At the end of October 1942.

Prosecutor Siewierski: What hostages were they?

Witness: I just told you: the fifty who were hanged as hostages. The Polish underground did something and they hanged them.

Prosecutor: Were they those they hanged from balconies?

Witness: It was outside Warsaw, at the turnpikes. That is what these two told me.

Prosecutor Sawicki: Were they already dead?

Witness: As dead as they come. The Germans also had a new ladder with them, probably because these guys had been hanged high. They told us that unless they were in the ground by morning, they would come back.

It was this spot where the car turned right, and this Gestapo man, the officer, asked if the graves were ready. They are ready, I say. Good, he says. I can swear it again. They were our bunkers.

Prosecutor: So the first time around, they brought only some of the bodies, and these had been hanged, too?

Witness: Yes, those buried on the Skra grounds.

Prosecutor: Do you remember this spot?

Witness: Yes, I can show you these graves.

Witness: Were the posters hung in town on that occasion?

Witness: I do not know what was going on in town at that time; I know what was brought to us.

Presiding judge: Are there any further questions?

Witness: If you allow me, I would like to finish. When they told us to dig, it was the middle of the night and it was raining. We buried everybody by 2 a.m. We saw a lot of various notes on the bodies. Under the light from the lampposts, we could discern this. One of them was a Russian legation employee. The next day, the Polish guys came who delivered the food, so we gave these to them and said, "You take these notes, and you give them to someone". They took all this. Everything was written in pencil. I do not know where they took it.

So 30 of them are buried at the Jewish cemetery, field 20, the others on the Skra grounds.

Prosecutor Sawicki: Apart from the gates at Zamenhofa Street 12 and Orla Street 6, was there some other special "gate of death"?

Witness: I do not know, I was not the only one doing duty in the field.

Prosecutor: Do you know that in Warsaw, in a certain hotel, Jews who were foreign nationals were arrested? It was on Długa Street, at Hotel Polski. Do you know if such foreigners were brought to the cemetery?

Witness: Długa Street, Hotel Polski? Yes, it rings a bell.

Prosecutor: Did the staff maybe discuss it? Do you know anything about it?

Witness: No, I do not know anything about it.

Presiding judge: Do you know anything about incinerating corpses in the ghetto?

Witness: I do.

Presiding judge: Then please tell us.

Witness: The five of us who were on the cemetery staff fled in May 1943, when the district had been already exterminated. We started looking for shelter, somewhere we could run to. We dug the bunkers, which reached under the Polish cemetery. I do not know what was happening around that time, but when I later bumped into a friend, he told me that when there were no grave diggers, they hired people who worked in the sheds, and these would take corpses from the Pawiak and from other locations to Skra, and he also said that they would incinerate corpses.

Presiding judge: But you only know this from second-hand accounts, right?

Witness: Yes. We had been hiding in the bunker at the Polish cemetery for a few months. Nobody knew about us. We only fed on rabbits, grass, and berries.

Presiding judge: Are there no further questions? (There are none). The witness is excused.