

Volume Five

The Ringelblum Archive

Underground Archive
of the Warsaw Ghetto

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This publication is part of the *Oneg Szabat* project carried out by *the Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute* and *the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute in Poland*. The aim of this project is to make available and popularise the Underground Archive of the Warsaw Ghetto (*the Ringelblum Archive*) and commemorate the members of the *Oneg Shabbat* group.

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THE JEWISH HISTORICAL
INSTITUTE OF POLAND

The Last Stage of Resettlement is Death, Pomiechówek, Chełmno on the Ner, Treblinka

Edited by

Barbara Engelking, Alina Skibińska, Ewa Wiatr

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Wydanie 1

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Preface to the English Edition

The Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw is proud to present to the English speaking public the 5th volume of documents from the Ringelblum Archive (The Underground Archive of the Warsaw Ghetto). The Polish-language version, on which this edition is based, consists of 38 volumes. The publishing process took 24 years, beginning in 1997, with the final volumes leaving the printing press in 2021.

The Ringelblum Archive contains testimonies and unique documents of universal value. They are a first-hand account on the events, recorded as they happened — or shortly after. Information contained in them was transmitted to **Oneg Shabbat** group by direct witnesses and victims themselves. Emanuel Ringelblum and other members of the Archive created a collection of unprecedented character, showing the magnitude of suffering of the Jewish people. They show involvement of bureaucrats, military forces and acts of “ordinary men” employed by the Third Reich to persecute Jews, singled out from other groups subjected to German occupation.

The documentation of the Ringelblum Archive, was used against war criminals in the post-war trials, and since then has been a priceless resource for researchers of the Holocaust. It is practically impossible to study the Holocaust in occupied Poland without referring to the documents of the Ringelblum Archive maintained by the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw.

The present volume is a collection of accounts of the first discoveries of the gravest atrocities: mass deaths taking place in Pomiechówek Fort, Chełmno on the Ner and Treblinka. The source of this information were people who managed to escape death, but alarming messages came also in letters

to relatives in Warsaw, where they were collected and studied by the **Oneg Shabbat**. The conspirators also undertook their own research efforts. These letters, postcards and protocols show unmeasurable pain, fear, loss, humiliation and lack of hope.

Much of the material is devoted to Pomiechówek, a transit camp for the Jews deported from the northern Mazovia region, at that point incorporated into the Third Reich. Pomiechówek served different aims to Chełmo or Treblinka, but at the initial stage of the Holocaust it drew the attention of the **Oneg Shabbat** members, and had been thoroughly documented by the group. Accounts on Chelmno and Treblinka also reached the Polish underground and Polish Government in Exile (and were known to Allied and Soviet intelligence), however counter-action was not undertaken.

Reading such moving testimonies and being able to view the original documents at the Institute's permanent exhibition, where some of them are displayed, is a unique yet difficult experience.

We hope that this documentation will be a memorial to the Holocaust, as well as serving further research on the period.

The Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute wishes to express the deepest gratitude to all people and institutions who contributed their resources to create this publication.

Monika Krawczyk
Director

June, 2021

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List of Abbreviations

AJDC, JDC	The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Joint
a.m.	before noon
ARG	Archiwum Getta (Ghetto archive = Underground Archive of the Warsaw Ghetto, Ringelblum Archive)
AŻIH	Archiwum Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego (Jewish Historical Institute Archive)
BŻIH	<i>Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego</i>
doc.	document
GG	General Government
KHŻ	<i>Kwartalnik Historii Żydów/Jewish History Quarterly</i>
km	kilometre(s)
min.	minute(s)
p., pp.	page, pages
p.m.	in the afternoon
s., ss.	sheet, sheets
v.	reverse side of a page
YIVO	Yidisher Visnshaftlekher Institut (Yiddish Scientific Institute, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research)
zł	zloty
ŻIH	Żydowski Instytut Historyczny (Jewish Historical Institute)

Abbreviations used for the authors of handwritten material

H*, LEG*	Eliyahu Gutkowski
H.W.*	Hersh Wasser
KK*	Salomea Ostrowska
POM*	Unknown (the author who was helping Hersh Wasser to record the testimonies of former prisoners of Pomiechówek)
Tr*	Unknown
TT*	Unknown (ARG copyist)
U*	Yekhiel Górny

Preface

The volume *The Final Stage of Resettlement Is Death* (the title taken from Gustawa Jarecka's essay „Ostatnim etapem przesiedlenia jest śmierć”, ARG II 272 (Ring. II/197)), consists of two separate parts. The first one deals with the transit camp in Pomiechówek. The other one contains testimonies about the death camps in Chełmno nad Nerem and Treblinka. Today it is difficult to compare the events which took place in the said camps. Nonetheless, Oyneg Shabes members devoted relatively much attention to Pomiechówek victims. In the summer of 1941, when witnesses of the events in the transit camp for the Jewish population of northern Mazovia arrived in the Warsaw ghetto, the death camps in Chełmno and Treblinka did not yet exist. It also seems that at that time Ringelblum's co-workers did not yet have first-hand testimonies about the fate of the Jews on the territories captured by the Germans after the invasion of the Soviet Union. Hence, the shocking testimonies about the treatment of the prisoners in Pomiechówek had to make a tremendous impression on Oyneg Shabes pollsters because they were the first to show such large-scale German ruthlessness. It is no wonder that in the documentation produced at that time Pomiechówek is referred to as a “death camp.” Direct access to the entire group of witnesses of the crime provided a unique opportunity to make a detailed description of the events. Such an opportunity did not reappear. Later, testimonies about the main death camps on Polish lands were collected from individual escapees or reached Warsaw through the agency of third parties. Jakub Grojnowski (Szlamek Winer), one of the six escapees from Chełmno, was the only one to reach Warsaw and give testimony. Treblinka had a few chroniclers who managed to escape from the camp, return to the

Warsaw ghetto and submit testimonies to the Ringelblum Archive about the actual course of the annihilation. There are few testimonies about Bełżec and Sobibór, and even fewer about Auschwitz-Birkenau. Mentions of these camps can be found in various documents included in the volumes of the Ringelblum Archive (for instance, *Letters on the Shoah* and *Accounts from the General Government* — both forthcoming).

There are significant differences between the death camps described in this volume, but the source material collected here share certain features. Both parts contain first-hand testimonies of witnesses recorded by Oyneg Shabes members. Testimonies of former prisoners of Pomiechówek, heard out and recorded by Salomea Ostrowska and signed by their authors, deserve special attention. These documents give us not only unique information about the transit camp in Fort III of the Modlin Fortress, but they are also an extremely important source of information on the Ringelblum group's work methods.

Tadeusz Epsztein

Editorial Note

This publication is based on Volume 13 of the Polish edition of the Ringelblum Archive *Ostatnim etapem przesiedlenia jest śmierć. Pomiechówek, Chełmno nad Nerem, Treblinka*, with some changes indicated below. The documents are translated into English from their original languages. The introductions to both chapters, footnotes and bibliography have been updated.

In Part One, the order of the texts is chronological, following the dates the testimonies of the Pomiechówek inmates were recorded. The documents are edited on the basis of the manuscripts which, when possible, were supplemented with duplicates (typescripts). In several instances, missing fragments of a text were restored on the basis of the quotations included in Salomea Ostrowska's study (doc. 8). The least legible of the documents included are the records of conversations with camp prisoners (doc. 6). This stems predominantly from the character of the notes, which consisted of key words, phrases, and writings both in the third and first person.

Part Two is divided into two chapters, each one concerning a different death camp: in Chełmno nad Nerem and in Treblinka II. The order of the documents in both chapters is chronological, however, the dates might not have been always established precisely. The legibility of documents varies, from loose notes in doc. 19 to a typewritten account in doc. 10 a. Except for three documents which will be included in the volume *Accounts from the Territories Incorporated into the Third Reich* (forthcoming) and are only mentioned here in the form of short abstracts (docs. 13, 14 and 15), documents are presented in their entirety, including docs. 16 and 17 (which in the Polish Vol. 13 are docs. 7 and 8 in the form of abstracts.).

Documents are preceded by headings and concluded with technical descriptions. Several associates of *Oyneg Shabes* were involved in taking and recording interviews included in this volume. If known, their names are mentioned in the headings, and basic biographical data are put in footnotes where they appear for the first time. In some cases, when the handwriting of a copyist can be identified, it is included in the technical description with the use of initials (see their list in Abbreviations).

Spelling of geographical names is usually standard Polish. Exceptions are made for localities or regions that have accepted English names, such as Warsaw or Pomerania. Towns smaller than county seats are footnoted, with their county given. Spelling of names of individuals depends on the language of a document. Transliteration from Yiddish is adopted from the YIVO system. Hebrew words and phrases are transcribed phonetically in accordance with modern Israeli pronunciation.

The translations are faithful to the texts as they are written, with necessary clarifications in footnotes or the glossaries. All originally underlined, spaced or otherwise highlighted fragments of documents have been retained. In some cases, paragraph breaks have been added to make the texts easier to read. Missing fragments of texts, due to physical or biological destruction, are marked [. . .]. For orientation, the original pagination is provided in square brackets; following that, in footnotes, numbers e.g. [1] refer to pages of original documents, while numbers without brackets — to pages in the book, including this volume. If the original pagination is lacking, we use scan numbers of a facsimile accessible on the www.cbj.jhi.pl.

Words or phrases crossed out by authors are marked [x] and footnoted; the removed text, if legible, is moved to footnotes. Words or phrases in other languages than the basic text which appear in documents are transcribed in italics and footnoted. If words or phrases are written in a different alphabet than the basic text, it is also indicated in footnotes, in addition to the translation. Sections inserted in the basic texts, following their authors' instructions, annotations written in a different handwriting, or interventions in the text are marked ^cc and footnoted. The list of abbreviations, bibliography, glossary of frequently used terms, indices of names and places have been edited jointly for both parts of this volume.

Editors of the English edition have updated footnotes and references. References in footnotes, to documents from the Ringelblum Archive which

have been translated and published (including in forthcoming volumes) in this series, cite the volume's title and the document number. References in footnotes to documents from the Archive which have not yet been included in this series cite the file number, according to *The Warsaw Ghetto Oyneg Shabes—Ringelblum Archive. Catalog and Guide*, ed. Robert Moses Shapiro and Tadeusz Epszstein, with the introduction of Samuel D. Kassow (Bloomington, 2009). The bibliography has been extended. Therefore, this volume provides the English-language reader with an enlarged editorial apparatus, taking into consideration current research in the field, especially on the Chełmno nad Nerem (Kulmhof) death camp.

The Nazi period generated a distinctive language, with new words coined and existing German — and Polish — words used in new ways. For example, *wysiedlenie*, resettlement, is employed as euphemisms for expulsion and deportation. The word “camper” (*obozowicz*, in Polish) denote concentration camp and/or forced labour camps inmates. Other expressions of the period, for example Christians when referring to ethnic Poles, have been retained as well. The specific terminology, acronyms, names of institutions, political parties, social organisations, and terms pertaining to Jewish religion, if they repeat in documents, they are included in two glossaries (if they appear just once, the explanation is in respective footnotes). We use the term **killling centre** in texts written by editors, however, in the documents we retain the original ones like death camp or extermination camp or execution site.

Part I

Children on the fate
of their families.
Questionnaires

Edited by

Ewa Wiatr

Introduction

The collection of documents presented in Part I of this volume consists of testimonies about the transit camp in Pomiechówek for the Jewish population from northern Mazovia, along with an analysis based on these testimonies. Homogenous in terms of topic, these materials describe the events preceding detainment in the Modlin Fortress' Fort III near Pomiechówek, their six-week stay in the camp, and the deportation of the survivors to the General Government. The authors of the testimonies came from towns in *Regierungsbezirk Zichenau*, but in the summer of 1941 they were in the ghettos in Płońsk or Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki, from where they were deported to the camp. All of these documents resulted from the initiative of Oyneg Shabes' associates during the former Pomiechówek prisoners' time in the Warsaw ghetto, either in quarantine at Leszno Street 109 or in a shelter at Stawki Street 9 (see doc. 10, Abram Błaszka's comprehensive testimony). The texts discuss a period of a few weeks from early July (the beginning of the delousing campaign in Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki) to late August 1941 (the arrival in Warsaw and the quarantine).

Five of the nine documents published here are the individual testimonies given by residents of Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki, Zakroczym, and Płońsk, respectively (docs. 11-14, 16b). The next two (docs. 15, 16a) are records of about a dozen conversations with former prisoners of Pomiechówek. In the case of Abram Błaszka's testimony and another given by an unidentified person from Zakroczym, it can be assumed that the manuscripts were written by their authors. The remaining documents are records of interviews conducted by Oyneg Shabes' associates. The collection ends with Salomea Ostrowska's study entitled "Obóz śmierci – Pomiechówek" ["Death camp — Pomiechówek"],

based on the testimonies collected by the author. A search query revealed that its author, who was an employee of the care section of the quarantine at Leszno Street 109, assumed this study to be a part of a larger one devoted to this institution, planned as a part of the Ringelblum Archive. This can be inferred from the table of contents, where “Death Camp — Pomiechówek” is the title of the last entry.¹

The documents include three lists of names of some of the victims killed in the Pomiechówek camp. The first constitutes an integral part of Miriam Fasa’s testimony (doc. 12), while the two other were drafted by Hersh Wasser and his co-worker(s). They are found at the end of this part of the volume (doc. 9).

Aside from the authors’ individual experiences, the information contained in the documents paints a uniform picture of the victims’ existence in the Pomiechówek camp. For scholars the consistency of these testimonies is irrefutable proof of their authenticity. The deportation to the Fort III was preceded by the Germans’ campaigns in each of the nearby small towns, aimed at separation of the unregistered population. Individuals lacking documents were deported to Pomiechówek. The living conditions in the camp were extremely bad. Suffering from hunger, shortages of drinking water, and great congestion, the prisoners also experienced bestiality at the hands of the SA-men, most of whom were local *Volksdeutsche*, and Jewish policeman Majloch (Majlech) Hoppenblum. Mortality among prisoners was very high. There were numerous instances of executions or death after the prisoner was tortured by the guards. Located in a separate room, the sick had a particularly low chance of survival.

These documents have never been published, though the information they contain has served as basis for several studies, predominantly that by Michał Grynberg,² which is most often cited.

Jews in Regierungsbezirk Zichenau

Approximately 80,000 Jews lived in *Regierungsbezirk Zichenau*, a region in northern Mazovia. The Jewish population had been persecuted since the

1 See *Warsaw Ghetto. Everyday Life*, doc. 17.

2 Michał Grynberg, *Żydzi w rejencji ciechanowskiej* (Warszawa, 1984).

beginning of the occupation, with local Jews expelled from their place of residence and concentrated in larger centres or in the General Government. A number of the Jews fled east, to the territories under the Soviet occupation, or to Warsaw. These resettlements are thoroughly documented in the volume *Accounts from the territories incorporated into the Third Reich* (forthcoming).

Beginning with the second quarter of 1941, the German authorities ceased to resettle the Jews from *Regierungsbezirk Zichenau* to the General Government, focussing instead on concentrating them in larger ghettos. Those plans must have been hindered by the congestion in the ghettos in larger localities, for instance, Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki or Płońsk, to which Jews from smaller localities had been resettled throughout 1940. A large number of Warsaw ghetto residents fled to the provinces because of the rapidly worsening living conditions and difficulty in obtaining food.

One way in which the Germans disposed of at least some residents was by eliminating those who had no proof of permanent residence. The document-checking campaign was launched at the same time in several localities in the first week of July 1941. In Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki it was preceded by a disinfection (steaming — *parówka*, in Polish) of clothes and homes, which lasted a week. That was followed by a compulsory bathing of men and women in the Vistula River, after which most of the residents of Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki were deported to the camp in Pomiechówek on 6 July. The number of the deportees is estimated at 2,000. After their documents had been checked, the Jews from Zakroczym and Płońsk had to go through 'gates', that is, two parallel rows of Gestapo functionaries and SA-men armed with truncheons. 107 residents of Zakroczym were transported to Pomiechówek immediately after this brutal beating. After a wait of 48 hours the same was done with 1,200 Jews from Płońsk.

The existing literature estimates that the number of Jews from Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki, Płońsk, Zakroczym, and nearby localities was about six thousand.³ It is apparent that this figure should be reviewed as it is probable that no additional Jews were deported to the camp from *Regierungsbezirk Zichenau*, while those from other localities were resettled in the ghetto in Płońsk or Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki. Many testimonies cite great congestion in the fort's 17 rooms, which accommodated 200 people each. This implies

3 Grynberg, *Żydzi w rejencji ciechanowskiej*, p. 83.

a maximum number of 3,200 prisoners, while in most recently published reference literature the number is estimated at 4,000.⁴ Determining the exact number of camp prisoners on the basis of the primary sources remains impossible.

The testimonies do not confirm the date 13 July as the day when the Jews from Płońsk reached the camp. It appears in an anonymous testimony but is not confirmed by the other.⁵ The date 9 July seems more probable. It finds ultimate confirmation in the fact that most authors of the testimonies speak of a six-week period they were held in the camp, which ended on 14 August.⁶

The *Judenrats* endeavoured to take care of residents of their respective towns, imprisoned in Pomiechówek. Aid sent to the prisoners, predominantly of food, was delivered mostly from Płońsk and Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki. The chairman of the Płońsk Judenrat, Jakub Ramek,⁷ particularly distinguished himself by not only organising regular food deliveries, but also the arrest of the infamous Jewish policeman Majloch Hoppenblum. According to the testimonies, Majloch's removal improved the prisoners' situation. Many of the testimonies also mention the help provided by the local peasants.

According to Ruta Sakowska, the *landsmanshaft*⁸ from Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki, Płońsk, and Zakroczym in the Warsaw ghetto "moved heaven and earth to bring to Warsaw the approximately two thousand of their compatriots who were living in horrible conditions in the camp near Modlin, on the territory incorporated into the Reich."⁹ Those efforts resulted in commissioner Heinz Auerswald's consent to the prisoners' arrival in the Warsaw ghetto. After six weeks in the camp, on 14 August, the Jews were transported to the Reich's border on horse-drawn carts. According to the testimonies, while they

4 *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos 1933–1945*, vol. 2: *Ghettos in German-Occupied Eastern Europe*, part A, edited by Geoffrey P. Megargee and Martin Dean. (Bloomington, 2012), p. 20.

5 Cf. docs. 1, 3, and 4.

6 According to Grynberg, *Żydzi w rejencji ciechanowskiej*, p. 85, this happened in early September

7 Abraham Jakub Ramek, chairman of the Płońsk Judenrat, a capmaker by occupation. Enjoyed the reputation of a person who was trying to help the Jews in the ghetto, mostly by bribing the Germans. On 16 August 1942, he was deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau in the last transport from Płońsk.

8 (Yiddish) organisation of former residents of a town or region.

9 Ruta Pups-Sakowska, "Opieka nad uchodźcami i przesiedleńcami żydowskimi w Warszawie w latach okupacji hitlerowskiej", *BŻIH* 65–66 (1968): 83.

were on the way the Germans burned the straw from the carts and pushed the weak and sick Jews into the fire. After crossing the border, now unescorted, the Jews reached the ghetto in Ludwisin, where they received first aid. Approximately 200 people, mostly from Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki, remained in that locality, while 1,200 reached Warsaw during 15–20 August.¹⁰ Of that group approximately 700 people were quarantined at Leszno Street 109. According to Salomea Ostrowska, ‘the Pomiechówek death camp brought an epidemic of typhus to the quarantined area. Five of the ten employees in the care section who worked in the quarantined area during that period contracted the disease.’¹¹

Camp prison at Fort III

In German documents the camp at Fort III is referred to as *Polizei-Gefängnis* (Police Prison) subordinate to the Security Police in Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki. In publications it is also called a concentration camp or a penal and investigative prison. During the period when Jews were detained there, the camp was called a Jewish ghetto or ghetto-camp,¹² while the resistance movement’s documents mention a ‘death camp in the forts of Pomiechówek’. This name also appears in the documents included in this volume.¹³ Other documents speak of a ‘concentration camp’ or a ‘transit camp’. Considering the portrayal of the experiences of the authors of the testimonies, the names ‘torture camp’ or ‘the largest Nazi place of torture in northern Mazovia’ do not seem exaggerated.¹⁴

The camp was organised in Fort III located near the village of Pomiechówek; this fort was one of about a dozen external forts of the Modlin Fortress. All were erected during 1878–1880 and modernised before World War I. The fort in Pomiechówek covered an area of about 5 hectares. It consisted of 17-chamber 1-story brick barracks with concrete floors covered with a layer of dirt. Built into an over 5-metre-high wall, the fort’s gate led onto a broad courtyard. On the right, next to the gate was the camp management

10 Ibidem.

11 *Warsaw Ghetto. Everyday Life*, doc. 17, p. [4] 156, p. [6] 156–157.

12 Michał Grynberg, “Obozy w rejeencji ciechanowskiej,” *BŻIH* 1 (117) (1981): 49; see also Marek Tadeusz Frankowski, *Tajemnice Fortu III w Pomiechówku* (Warszawa, 2002), p. 61.

13 See docs. 6 and 8.

14 Grynberg, “Obozy w rejeencji ciechanowskiej”, p. 51.

building, which housed the guards' lodgings, a storeroom, and a bathhouse. In the left wing of the building the Germans had cells for particularly dangerous prisoners. Before the war the fort was an ammunition depot.¹⁵ During the 1939 Polish-German war the fort in Pomiechówek constituted one of the defence sectors and both armies fought fiercely for it. The capitulation on 29 September included the entire Modlin Fortress. In March 1941 Fort III was turned into a prison. During the initial period, the detainees consisted of Polish farmers deported from the vicinity of Sochocin, Płońsk, and Nasielsk, and also clergy from the Mariavite church in Felicjanów. By June 1941 some of the prisoners had been released, while the remainder were deported as forced labour in Germany. The fort then became a place of detention for Jews from nearby small towns who lacked registration documents.

After the Jews were removed from the camp the Germans proceeded with constructing the fort to adapt it as a prison. This was the fort's function until practically the end of the war. Among prisoners were resistance movement members, local farmers accused of collaborating with the partisans, Jews who had fled from ghettos, and, during the final period, Soviet prisoners of war and German deserters.¹⁶

The camp-prison was supervised by Gestapo functionaries: commissioner Schaper from Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki and SS-*Sturmbannführer* Schultz from Ciechanów. The prison was managed by a commandant, but it remains unknown who held that position from March to the autumn of 1941. Aside from SS and Gestapo functionaries the camp staff included guards and administration employees. Most of them were *Volksdeutsche* and German colonists, with the majority of them characterised by their cruelty bordering on sadism.¹⁷ In the documents included in this part of the volume the camp guards are interchangeably called *Selbstschutz* or SA-men. It is also to be noted that the former prisoners differed in their assessment of the behaviour of the individual Germans. In many of the testimonies certain German guards were described in a much more favourable way than Majloch Hoppenblum, who is already mentioned several times.

Ewa Wiatr

15 Jerzy Dąbrowski, *Historia garnizonu Modlin w latach 1918–1939* (Pruszków, 2000), p. 38.

16 Frankowski, *Tajemnice Fortu III*, p. 114.

17 Ibidem, pp. 136–39.

Documents

1

After August 1941, Warsaw ghetto. Abram Błaszka (or Blaszkka), 'Wrażenia z pobytu w obozie koncentracyjnym w Pomiechówku' [Impressions of my stay in the concentration camp in Pomiechówek]. Situation of Jews in Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki the author's time in the camp in Pomiechówek and departure to Warsaw. Attached is the author's biography.

[16] Impressions of my stay in the concentration camp in Pomiechówek

Written by Abram Blaszkka

[1] A sensation in Nowy Dwór.¹

A steaming. Disinfection of all rooms and bathing of all Jews. That news caused great commotion across the ghetto. People did not know [. . .] burn all our property. They said: 'What shall we do afterwards? What will we sleep on? What will we wear?' My neighbour, a poor woman who had nothing except

1 Until 1937, the town's name was Nowy Dwór. Approximately eight thousand Jews lived in Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki until September 1939. After the outbreak of the war many of them fled, mostly to Warsaw. Throughout 1940 most of the refugees returned to their hometown, where the Germans established a ghetto in early 1941.

bedding and some underwear, was particularly worried. She ran about [x]² the town for days on end like a madwoman. I did everything I could to calm her down, saying that a steaming was nothing to fear, that people in Warsaw went through that all the time, but to no avail. Nothing worked. In the end they brought two steaming crews and got down to work. Bundles of bedding, clothes, and underwear were steamed. Homes were locked up and the people wandered at night in the courtyards. That lasted an entire week. Finally came Saturday,³ the day on which the bathing had been scheduled. At 10 o'clock in the morning a physician ordered all women to be assembled and escorted to the River Vistula. It was chilly even though it was summer. A cold wind had been blowing since early morning. But they paid that no mind and kept the women in the water until 5 o'clock in the afternoon. [x]⁴ Some fainted from the cold and had to be carried home on stretchers. That was quite some bathing. And that was supposed to be [x]⁵ a campaign to prevent diseases from spreading. The men's turn came before the evening. The sun was setting. The sky was clouded up. It was getting colder and colder. We reluctantly undressed and stepped into the water. The physician walked about with a club, [2] forcing every man to bath even though we were all standing there shivering from the cold. After bathing we had to wait naked for about an hour for the clothes from the steaming. Tired, we returned home after bathing and steaming. Everybody was happy to have all that behind them and happily lay down on the hard bed convinced that it was the last night of their suffering. Little did they know [. . .] the next days and nights would be even more difficult and frightening [. . .]

II

That same night I was awoken at 2 o'clock by cries and noise in town. I jumped out of bed, immediately opened the door from the hall and looked out onto the street. I saw a horrible sight. Crying, crowds of people were leaving their homes [x]⁶ and running in the direction of the ghetto gate, with the

2 [x] streets.

3 5 July 1941.

4 [x] And that was supposed to be.

5 [x] a step.

6 [x] go.

Jewish police constantly calling on the residents to leave their homes [x]⁷ and go out to the market square. My heart started pounding when I saw that. I went back inside as quickly as I could, woke up my siblings, and we went to the gate very quickly. Two customs officers were standing there, holding thick clubs, and they hit every individual on the head as the latter were leaving the ghetto. We finally arrived at the market square, where almost all Jews from the town were already assembled. Those who had not managed to leave their homes in time or tried to hide, burrowed in some safe place were shot dead during the search. A friend of mine had left his elderly mother-in-law and three-year-old daughter at home. A gendarme came in and shot them. An old gravedigger was called to bury [x]⁸ the corpses. He was then executed too, but I do not know why.

Apart from the Jews there were plenty of uniformed Germans on the market square, gendarmes and SA-men. The Germans arranged everybody into groups of four to check their *Ausweise*. The Jews with *Ausweise* were assembled on the street, those without — on the square. When the Germans saw that the number of Jews with *Ausweise* was large, they ordered the rest to disperse without checking their identity and took their *Ausweise* away. One Jew who had an *Ausweis* was initially convinced that he was safe and refused to accept that he was included in the group without *Ausweise*. He tried to offer resistance, for which he was severely beaten, with clubs landing on his head and body from all directions. He barely survived. The group kept growing. Finally came the order to depart. We set off in the direction of Modlin. Everyone was under the illusion that perhaps we would be escorted to Warsaw via Łomianki. But when we turned onto a bridge on the River Narew,⁹ everybody realised that we were being escorted to the forts in Pomiechówek. And indeed, we were. After an hour's march we arrived at the damned fort's gate. Upon entrance we were counted and escorted inside. An SA-man divided us into cells (about 200 people per cell) and ordered us to sit down on the asphalt.¹⁰

7 [x] the ghetto as soon as possible.

8 [x] the dead.

9 The railroad bridge on the River Narew named after the well-known constructor Feliks Pancer.

10 Asphalt is mentioned in several testimonies. According to all studies devoted to the Modlin forts, the floor was concrete, but it might have been covered with bituminous mass to facilitate cleaning.

There was silence in the cells. Everybody sat down on the spot, surrounded by their relatives, lost in thought. Everybody was pestered by the same thought: What now? What will they do with us? Will we ever get out of here alive? [x]¹¹ Hours passed in that atmosphere. We began to get hungry. There was no prospect of us receiving bread. The weeping sounds of children asking for bread came from every corner. Mothers were trying to calm them down any way they could, [x]¹² promising that bread and coffee would soon be issued. But nothing worked. The weeping and crying kept intensifying. And finally, amidst that weeping and lamentation an SA-man entered the cell and announced . . . a body search and said that everybody had to leave their cell and walk outside. In the courtyard stood a small table with a gendarme sitting at [3] it. On either side was a SA-man: Mr Netzel¹³ (nicknamed *Haver Nisn*¹⁴ by the Jews), who excelled at beating Jews, and another one, whose surname I do not know. The Jews were arranged into two rows and they approached the table one by one. Mr. Netzel demonstrated his sense of humour and military prowess. He skilfully hit every Jew in the face and took away even such small sums as five pfennigs. Every *Ausweis* was taken away. ‘You will never get out of here, so what do you need IDs for?’ asked Mr Netzel. The body search came to an end. A large heap of money lay on the table. We returned to our cells. It was getting dark. Tired and hungry, we stretched out on the asphalt and immediately sank into deep sleep.

III

The morning dawned bright and sunny. [x]¹⁵ Coming in between the bars in windows, rays of sunshine lit up our gloomy faces. I woke up. I sat up on the asphalt and watched what was happening in the cell. The people were lying on the floor side by side, without any space between them. Some were still snoring heavily, while others were [x]¹⁶ chatting. Of course, the conversations concerned bread and water.

11 [x] Will they release us?

12 [x] soon.

13 Wilhelm Netzel, born in 1920 in Nowy Dwór, a *Volksdeutscher*. An SA-man, probably from the year 1940. Functionary of the Fort III prison staff. See Frankowski, *Tajemnice Fortu III*, p. 147.

14 *Haver* (Hebrew) comrade, friend. ‘Nisn’ — probably instead of Netzel.

15 [x] The sun.

16 [x] already.

‘They will certainly give us bread today’, somebody said. ‘I guess they will not let us go hungry for several days. Why, they know that there are small children among us who have not eaten anything for a whole day. And a child cannot go hungry for long.’

‘Everything is possible as far as [their attitude to] Jews is concerned’, replied somebody else. ‘They know no mercy and they have brought us here precisely to make us die [5] of hunger.’

Gradually everybody woke up. Some went out into the courtyard, others remained in the cell. Everybody was constantly thinking about bread and water. They kept asking the SA-men who were watching us whether there was any hope of us receiving at least a little bread for the small children. An SA-man who sympathised with the suffering people replied that bread would probably be delivered in the afternoon. Everybody brimmed with joy. ‘We will get bread and satisfy our hunger’, everybody was saying.

Bread was delivered even before afternoon but from a different source. Jews from the town¹⁷ came to the gate [x]¹⁸ and threw the bread over the fence. Everybody tried to catch some to satisfy their hunger. But even when somebody managed to get hold of a loaf it brought them no advantage for the crowd flung itself at him and ripped the loaf into pieces. Sometimes the bread holders were left without even so much as a crumb.

The wagon with bread arrived in the afternoon. The bread was cut into small pieces and prepared for distribution. [x]¹⁹ All the *obozowicze*²⁰ were assembled on one side and arranged into a line outside the small police post building in the courtyard. Those who [x]²¹ received bread crossed to the other side. A few people made sure that nobody would creep back and, God forbid, receive another ration. We quickly swallowed the bread and then envied those who had not yet received it. The distribution of bread concluded before the evening and everybody returned to their cells. Commotion at midnight. Cries, noise, and tumult. Jews from Płońsk were brought in.²² Beaten up and with

17 The closest town is Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki.

18 [x] people [?].

19 [x] bread.

20 (Polish) literally, campers (sing.: *obozowicz*).

21 [x] got.

22 Approximately 6,000 Jews lived in Płońsk before the war. The local ghetto was established as early as in May or — according to other sources — September 1940. Inhabitants of

their heads bandaged, they came in making a lot of noise, and stretched out on their bundles. And so the number of prisoners has increased. The SA-men are going to have a harder time distributing bread.

[6] In the small hours of the morning we were visited by two camp commandants. One was tall, broad-shouldered, and had a sharp gaze — Mr Zydler. The other was short and had sunken eyes and black hair — Mr Szulc.²³ One could judge just by their appearance that they were evil and cruel. Everybody was gripped by fear when those two visitors walked through the cells, and we sighed with relief when they disappeared from the horizon. We expected a truly horrible day, but nothing bad happened. On the contrary, a barrel of water was delivered for the first time. All the camp prisoners filled with joy. One could hear cries ‘We’ve got water!’ coming from all directions. Those cries reminded me of a scene from *Sabra*,²⁴ where the *halutzim*²⁵ find water in the desert after long toil and jump and dance with joy.

A queue immediately formed by the barrel. Those who managed to win a spot near it were lucky. Everybody tried to get to it as fast as possible. The squeeze was dreadful. But the situation was brought under control by an SA-man with a rifle. However, there were bold individuals who tried to get to the barrel despite the looming danger. That cost a 16-year-old boy his life.

The water was distributed by a young man sitting on the barrel. The Jews who received some left happy. Those who were still in the long queue feared that there would not be enough for them. And indeed, there was not enough for everybody. The barrel quickly became empty and half of the people left with saddened faces [. . .] [7] nothing. Fifteen young men returned to the village for more water. They were happy for two reasons. First of all, they were quenching the thirst of their fellow sufferers. Second, the peasants aided them with bread, milk, potatoes, and other products. A few times a day we went

nearby localities were resettled there. See *Encyclopaedia of Camps and Ghettos*, pp. 24–26. Cf. Miriam Fasa’s testimony, doc. 3.

- 23 Schultz aka Szulc, a member of the Fort III Staff since March 1941. He became infamous as an exceptionally cruel and primitive man who killed prisoners for pleasure. See Frankowski, *Tajemnice Fortu III*, p. 150.
- 24 Title of Aleksander Ford’s 1933 film about a group of Polish emigrants who come to Palestine to cultivate land there, with lack of water proving their main every-day problem.
- 25 (Hebrew) pioneers; members of the Zionist socialist movement, preparing young people for the settlement in the Land of Israel and the work in agriculture.

back and forth to Pomiechówek²⁶ or Stanisławów²⁷ to fetch water. The number of people willing to perform that duty was increasing. Young men were simply dying to do that. Sometimes the SA-man [x]²⁸ who accompanied us was benevolent and let us go into a shop to buy some things. We bought sweets, biscuits, pretzels, cucumbers, cherries, currants, berries, and other things. We sometimes returned carrying loads of various products. We then sold those things to the *obozowicze* making a relatively good profit. After [x]²⁹ our return with the water the cells resembled a market. They were crowded with buyers who spent their last penny or even took off some of their clothes to get something to eat. For who could just sit waiting for a meal from Mr Szulc?! We tried to do all that in secret so that our guards would not find out about it. But we did not manage to hide it for long. ‘Why are the Jews so eager to fetch water?’ Mr Zydler was wondering. ‘And where do they get the money to buy those things when they had sums even as small as five pfennigs taken away from them during the search? They must have hidden the money during the search or been sent some by their family. I must put a definite end to that.’

And one day Mr Zydler ordered all the men to arrange themselves into groups of four in the courtyard. He then escorted all of them outside the gate and began to search them. He did find a few marks, but he soon grew tired of that job and the body search was discontinued. He told everybody to surrender their money voluntarily, for if he found any on anybody, he would shoot them. Apparently, the Jews were not scared of those [8] threats because nobody voluntarily surrendered even a pfennig. We kept delivering water and the trade after the search not only did not disappear like Mr Zydler wanted, but continued its rapid acceleration, finally turning into actual trade.

V

The activities of the Jewish militia should be included in the category of interesting yet painful facts about the camp. On their left arms the militiamen wore a white armband saying *Jüdischer Ordnungsdienst*³⁰ and in

26 Pomiechówek (Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki County) — a village located one kilometre from Fort III.

27 Stanisławów (Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki County) — a village located near Fort III.

28 [x] went with us.

29 [x] our arrival.

30 (German) Jewish Order Service; usually spelled: Ordnungsdienst.

their right hands they carried a rubber truncheon — a symbol of power, in which they imitated the Germans. Their duty was to keep order in the cells and in the courtyard and, first and foremost, to serve Mr Zydler in every possible way. The commandant of that band of nine men Hersz Tarnegol,³¹ Icek Sowiński, Abram Braun, Abram Goldbrach, Szmul Dobski, Abe Jarzabek, Abram Lejzerowicz, Icek Moszkowicz, and Moszek Fefer³² — was Majloch Hoppenblum.

Majloch Hoppenblum had been ‘famous’ since before the war. He played ‘tricks’ which made a whole lot of people laugh. [x]³³ Once I was with him on a train to Warsaw. Sitting next to us was a vendor selling [x]³⁴ oranges, sweets, and other confectioneries. Mr Majloch must have had an appetite for those as he immediately pretended to faint. Out of pity, the Jew gave him various sweets for free. Mr Majloch ‘recovered’ [x]³⁵ as soon as he received [9] the coveted products, laughing at the Jewish man’s ‘stupidity’. At the station he pinned fur ‘tails’ onto people’s coats, in the carriage he pretended to be a lunatic, and so on. In short, he was a dreg of society. That ‘ordinary man’ made a ‘career’ in the camp. Mr Zydler made him commandant, which gave him unlimited power. Majloch avoided conversations with other Jews so they he could manifest his superiority to them. But he tried to accompany Mr Zydler and aid him in his efforts to kill off the Jews concentrated in the camp. One morning Mr Zydler came to us. He was in a good mood. He felt like doing some ‘sport’. So he ordered Mr Majloch immediately to assemble all men in the courtyard. Those who did not quickly leave their cells were severely beaten [x]³⁶ with truncheons. Arranged into fours opposite Messrs Zydler and Majloch, we awaited the sentence like defendants in court. (It was supposed to be a punishment for four Jews’ failure to immediately report for work.) In the end, Mr Zydler ordered us to be escorted outside the gate. He then ordered the formation of a ‘gate’. He arranged [x]³⁷ a narrow passage

31 Other spelling appear in the documents: Tarnegold, Tarngojl, and Tarngoł.

32 Spelled Fejer in the typewritten duplicate.

33 [x] So, for instance.

34 [x] lemons.

35 [x] recuperated.

36 [x] [with] sticks.

37 [x] a small.

in the gate. The four SA-men were armed with thick rubber truncheons. [x]³⁸ And he stepped up with a whistle in his mouth so that he could have a good view. And the spectacle began. We were driven in between the two rows in the gate, with the SA-men brutally hitting each of us with the truncheons. But the men were squeezing together before the gate. Everybody wanted to cross to the other side as soon as possible to get that Gehenna over with. Suddenly, we heard Mr Zydler's whistle. A break. The truncheons broke. Thicker ones had to be brought. The rest of the men were then driven through the gate, but in fours and more quickly. [10] The crying and lament of the women and children coming from the courtyard apparently had some effect. Beaten up and covered in blood, we returned to our cells. That day we had good 'breakfast'.

VI

Joy in the camp. The Jews from Nowy Dwór are rejoicing. A cart with lunch has arrived. The Jews' families who had remained in Nowy Dwór sent food every day to their relatives in the camp. And the *Judenrat* sent a cauldron of food of its own accord too. The Jews from Nowy Dwór ran out to collect their parcels. The rest, the ones who had not been sent parcels, formed a line and waited for their turn to get some soup. A feast in the cells. Everybody is eating the soup with relish, quickly to empty [x]³⁹ the dishes and hand them to the wagoner. This was repeated daily. The *Judenrat* sometimes did not send food. A large percentage of the Nowy Dwór Jews returned to their cells. Envious, they watched those who were eating lunch. Eventually, some of those who did not receive lunch found a way to obtain it. They bought potatoes from those who went to fetch water, made a bonfire in the courtyard, and cooked some soup. Those stoves were popular. Their number increased every day. Not only soup, but also coffee was cooked on them. Some people who did not have bread [x]⁴⁰ brewed coffee to exchange it for bread. In the end those kitchens were prohibited.

The Płońsk Jews received an additional meal. Three wagons loaded with parcels arrived every week. [11] Płońsk sent provisions: bread, honey, and

38 [x] He had us let through one by one so that each of us could get a good whipping. And the show began. Mr Zydler.

39 [x] quickly.

40 [x] they did that for profit.

challah. But there were instances when some of the Jews did not receive the parcels sent by their families from Płońsk. The Jewish militia intercepted the parcels and split the loot. Those offences occurred relatively frequently and were repeated whenever a wagon arrived. Even when the women in confinement were given cookies and milk, Mr Majloch confiscated it all for himself and his gang.

VII

The brutal activity of Majloch's band was also revealed in its attitude towards the sick. There were many sick people in the camp. During the first days one could hear moaning coming from every cell. Mr Zydler was aware of that. And one day he inspected all cells with Mr Majloch and picked out the old and sick. That day those people were put in cell XVI, or 'the sixteenth' which had been specially prepared for them. In the evening they were escorted uphill⁴¹ and executed. I can remember that one evening I heard shots as I was lying on the asphalt clinging to my family. It was the execution of the sick. The people in all the cells shivered. For nobody knew what would happen to them tomorrow, whether their fate would change the next day. Then Mr Zydler entrusted Mr Majloch with isolating the sick in 'the sixteenth'. On his own initiative the commandant carried out inspections in the cells and selected the sick. Everybody was aware that isolation of a sick person was tantamount to their death. That was why everybody tried to ingratiate themselves with Mr Majloch so as to keep the sick in the cell. As the commandant wanted to use that to make a profit, he demanded a lot of money for letting [12] the sick stay in a cell. And the Jews did pay dearly. They put 30–50 marks in Mr Majloch's palm. Those who had no cash paid with golden watches, wedding rings, bracelets, or other valuables. The poor were at a disadvantage. They had nothing to pay with so Mr Majloch had no consideration for them. Majloch had to show Mr Zydler that he was isolating the sick, and most of his victims were poor. (It must be stressed that the executions of the sick lasted only on a few days, later, they were only isolated and left at the mercy of fate.)

41 The word 'hill' was used by the prisoners in reference to the camouflage embankment to which led an underground corridor from the centre of the courtyard. See Frankowski, *Tajemnice Fortu III*, p. 116.

Mr Majloch made a fortune. He wore nice clothes and his wife dressed elegantly too. They felt wonderful. They thought that this situation would last for a long time. They did not expect such a sudden [x]⁴² and tragic end. For one day a taxi from Płońsk arrived and took Mr commandant Majloch away. I do not know what happened to him. [x]⁴³ He never returned to the camp. I have heard various rumours about this. Some say that Mr Ramek from the Płońsk *Judenrat* influenced the German authorities to put an end to Mr Majloch's doings after it had learned about his activity. [x]⁴⁴ And it was Mr Ramek who took him by taxi to Płońsk, where the latter was executed. Others still claim that the Jews from Płońsk hanged him in the market square and paid two marks each to witness that spectacle.⁴⁵

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It should be noted that several women gave birth during the first days in the camp. [x]⁴⁶ The first one was Mrs Brandsztein. She was allocated a small room in a small building, with the floor covered with hay. A Jewish midwife, Mrs Berta Rozensztajn, who wore a *Jüdische Krankenschwester*⁴⁷ white armband, delivered the baby. Later, the number of the women who gave birth increased. They received better food. Mr Zydler ordered parcels be confiscated for them [. . .] through the gate.

[13] Finally the day came everybody had long been waiting for the day of liberation. The long-awaited Thursday.⁴⁸ I doubted the news about our release until the last moment, because there had been talk about it for a few days but nothing had happened. But when in the evening I saw a multitude of wagons outside the gate, I realised that we were saved. Indeed, we were ordered to leave our cells and walk to the courtyard with all our 'belongings'.

42 [x] end.

43 [x] It has been [rumoured?].

44 [x] and give him into his hands.

45 Józef Kazimierski provides different details in his testimony: 'Chairman Ramek made sure that that Jewish militiaman was sent to Płońsk, where the Jews interned him. They gouged his eyes out and everybody spit in his face as they passed him by.' See AŻIH, 301/23, p. 6.

46 [x] The woman in labour.

47 (German) Jewish nurse.

48 14 August 1941.

We then squeezed through the gate, got on the wagons, and departed. The wagons stopped in an open field. They were then arranged into rows. It was getting dark. Our hearts were filled with joy, but everybody was worried about what would happen next and where we would be taken. For as long as the gendarmerie and the SA-men were standing in front of us, we were not yet free.

The wagons had not yet pulled out. The SA-men walked from wagon to wagon distributing sausages. We ate them with relish even though we had no bread.

Our impatience continued to grow. The wagons eventually pulled out at 10 o'clock in the evening. The night was dark and perfectly quiet. We looked for the last time at those walls behind which we had spent 6 weeks. We looked for the last time at the hill where we had buried over 800 corpses (uncertain!).

The wagons do not stop, heading for Modlin. We cross a bridge on the River Narew and approach a crossroads. Everybody is curious about which direction will be taken. [14] We turn in the direction of Nowy Dwór. The wagons roll one after another, we go past Nowy Dwór and continue along the road to Zegrze. At midnight [. .] on the border between the Reich and the General Government. We turn [. .]. We stop. Order: empty the wagons. We get off. In that [. .] great fire. It was the Germans burning the straw on which [. .].

There are rumours that some of the sick were burned at the stake. And we were ordered to go left, finally unescorted by the gendarmerie and the SA-men. We headed for the Ludwisin ghetto.⁴⁹ We spent the entire night wandering in the forests and fallow fields. In the very early hours of the morning we reached the first village. The peasants went out and treated us to everything they had: bread, coffee, cucumbers, apples, etc.

We finally reach Ludwisin. We meet the first Jews. We can see that they sympathise with us. They share bread and coffee with us to welcome us. We walk on to the assembly point by the *Judenrat*. We receive more bread and coffee at the entrance. Soup in the afternoon. Medical assistance on the spot. The sick and injured are tended to. Next morning — breakfast and

49 Ludwisin, nowadays a part of Legionowo. During the war a ghetto was established at the Ludwisin grange and the local military barracks. At that time that terrain was in the General Government. In the documents one can also find the spelling 'Ludwiszyn.'

marching off to the railway station. And then Warsaw, the quarantine, and Stawki Street 9.

Written by Abram Błaszka

[15] ‘Abram Błaszka,
Son of Rubin Hersz and Cha[. . .]
Domiciled in Warsaw in the shelter [at Stawki Street 9/50]
Judaism teacher [in a Tarbut school]^{c50}

Curriculum vitae

I was born in Nowy Dwór on 22 October 1918. My father, a religious Jew, brought me up in the spirit of the Jewish tradition and when I was five years old he enrolled me at a *heder*, to the *melamed* who instructed beginners. When I was seven years old I started primary school. When [x]⁵¹ I was in the third grade I quit the *heder* and started a Hebrew course. At the age of fourteen I finished primary school and started attending the State Seminary for Teachers of Jewish Religion in Warsaw. I graduated five years later with a teaching degree. In 1938, one year after graduation, I got a job as a Judaism teacher at a Tarbut [school] in Nowy Dwór. I held [x]⁵² that position for only a year because the war broke out. We then left Nowy Dwór and went to Warsaw, where we survived the bombings. After the end of the military operations we returned to Nowy Dwór. The German persecution forced us to flee to Warsaw. We lived in Warsaw until March 1941. Unable to earn even a modest living, we were forced to return to Nowy Dwór. From Nowy Dwór we got to the camp in Pomiechówek on 7 July. My father died in the camp [x]⁵³ two days before our release. As is well known, after our release from the camp we got to Warsaw and we live in the shelter at Stawki Street 9.

Abram Błaszka

50 ^cPreserved only in the typewritten duplicate. A school run by the Tarbut Jewish Cultural Association was opened in Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki in 1932.

51 [x] I went to.

52 [x] had.

53 [x] in Pomiech. See doc. 3 p. [10], Rywen (i.e. Rubin) Hersz Błaszka was 54 years old, died of beating.

ARG I 1168 (Ring. I/417).

Description: original or duplicate (handwritten, pencil, 220×295 mm, substantial damage and missing fragments of the text), 16 sheets, 16 pages; duplicate (three copies, 13 sheets, 13 pages each, typewritten, 208×296, 100×240 mm, major damage), Polish, 45 sheets, 53 pages. Attached is Hersh Wasser's note in Polish: 'Testimony of Abram Blaszka's stay in the concentration camp in Pomiechówek, recorded by Salomea Ostrowska, 1941.'

Edition based on the handwritten original or duplicate, with the missing fragments supplemented basing on the typewritten copies.

2

After 16 August 1941, Warsaw ghetto. Unknown Zakroczym resident, Testimony on expulsion to the camp in Pomiechówek, living conditions in the camp, departure to Warsaw.

[1] Zakroczym⁵⁴ [. . .]

On Sunday [. . .]⁵⁵ a German's voice saying: 'Get up [. . .] in a hurry. [. . .] did not manage to [. . .] houses by the [. . .]. Several minutes later all of us were on the market square. [. . .] Scared, they ask [. . .] women and the weeping of the children. They escorted [. . .] families [. . .] in to the suburbs. And then their ceremony and our tragedy commenced. They arranged us and made us walk between two rows of Germans armed with sticks and truncheons, who beat us mercilessly, not sparing even the children. After that honorary welcome we underwent a selection. All of the selected people were ordered to form a separate group, while the remainder were sent back home after beating. The group of those unfortunates, to which I belonged, was waiting in silence, wondering what those heartless people would do with us. We were ordered to approach the commune commissioner one by one. The man asked everybody the same

54 Zakroczym (Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki County); before the war it was inhabited by approximately 2,000 Jews.

55 As the Jews from Zakroczym were brought more or less at the same time as those from Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki, it should be assumed that it was 6 July.

questions: 'What do you do? Where are you from?' The first Jews told the truth, that is, that they were from there and had been born there. But they were beaten up so severely that one of the Germans advised them to say that they were from Warsaw. Even though the remaining people stated that they were from Warsaw, they were brutally beaten up too. [1v] [. . .] on the ground, where we were ordered to sit. We sat down [. . .] a German approached [. . .] and ordered somebody [. . .] sit there. We were sitting on the market square not knowing [. . .] several times. [. . .] and the commissioner's wife was learning how to fire a revolver aiming above our [heads?]. [. . .] After we had waited for half an hour a lorry pulled up. [. . .] arranged themselves in two parallel rows before the lorry and we were ordered [. . .] passing between them. The Germans were armed with bats, clubs, and maces. As we were getting onto the lorry a few people collapsed dead after being clubbed, including two women and a child. On the way a few more [. . .] people died: three men and two women, and two people went insane from the beating. The Germans hit us only on the face and head. After several minutes the lorry pulled up in front of the fort near Pomiechówek. We were ordered to get off and they counted us before escorting us into the fort. There were 107 of us, not counting the dead. Guarded by an SA-man, the wide gate was opened. Inside were already many Jews from all the nearby villages and small towns. We were escorted into several cells. We [x]⁵⁶ took cell VI. The room we were escorted into used to be a gunpowder depot. Those were spacious cells with bare walls and asphalt floors. We were left alone for an hour. [2] An hour later, they started a search of the men and women. Everybody had to give something away and those who had nothing were beaten mercilessly until they lost their minds. In the evening we began to grow thirsty, particularly after such a day. One German after another came in and took whatever they wanted. At 3 o'clock at night a few trucks transporting people arrived and then 3,000 Jews from Płońsk were brought in. The cells became crowded, 180–220 people were put into each cell. At 2 o'clock in the afternoon the first barrel of water was brought, but how could one barrel serve such a large group of people? They started behaving like animals. They began pushing each other to get to the barrel. They were snatching the water obtained at such a great effort from one another, causing the precious liquid to spill. Unable to maintain order, the Germans opened fire at the crowd.

56 [x] have already.

An 18-year-old boy was shot in the collar bone. The wound was not lethal but people were forbidden to help him and he was buried while still alive. At night we had no place to sleep. We lay squeezed unable to move an arm or leg. There were more than 200 people in the cell good for no more than 60 people. On the third day carts arrived from Płońsk and the distribution of bread in the amount of 100 grams per person began. To our misfortune, the Order Service was formed of the worst scum of people; apart from that, every cell elected [zv] a cell commandant of sort.

On the third night sheer hell broke loose. Drunk, the Germans walked from cell to cell and picked out the prettiest [girls]. They took them and raped them. Making matters worse, they made them sing during that act of defilement. Shots sounded early in the morning — the girls who had tried to defend their dignity longer were executed. During the day the Germans said that they needed men for work and [x]⁵⁷ they selected the [. . .] men. But we quickly learned what kind of [. . .] that was [. . .] they had to dig graves for their brothers. And then they were executed one by one. One was forbidden from going to relieve oneself from dusk to morning. Those who went out did not return. And during the day those who went did not know if they would return. [. . .] the number of victims was increasing. The murderers were so brazen they would not waste more than one bullet on anybody. The unfortunate victim could be shot in the arm, ear, or just get a scratch, but was buried anyway. The people were dying of thirst and beatings. Food parcels began to be delivered, though irregularly. Parcels were brought from Zakroczym from families and so was soup, which was distributed to all prisoners. And bread was delivered from Płońsk. The receipt of the parcels and soup [3] was not conducted without [. . .] either. [x]⁵⁸ Making matters worse, [. . .] opposite hill and threw stones. [. . .] gave us a hard time, the commandant of the Order Service, [. . .] Germans a 'Jewish king'. He was a Jew from Nowy Dwór [. . .] known by the first name of Majloch. He went down in the camp's history under that name. As soon as he sensed that somebody still had some money left he came to them to claim it and when somebody refused to give it to him [. . .] put in the cell for convicts; and after their death he appropriated all their property. As that source quickly ran dry, he went down to take parcels away, and when

57 [x] they began.

58 [x] and the head.

a wagon arrived, it had to pay him a tribute. He walked from room to room with a club and hit people, who had to get out of his way, just like out of the Germans' way. [. . .] enough was enough. Once he slapped a *Judenrat* member from Płońsk who delivered the food. And that man made sure that he would be removed from there. After interventions made by all the *Judenrats* the executions discontinued, but the Germans allocated a room for the sick or doomed, if someone prefers to call them that because those who entered that room never returned. The people died there in agony because we were not allowed to give them water nor bread. During the last period [3v] began [. . .] guards [. . .] told in advance that they would release us soon [. . .] in a forest. Various officers arrived [. . .] when somebody complained to them [. . .] bestial smile on their face: 'We do not drink water either.' Instances of rape [. . .] increasingly often. Aside from that, Jewish boys were also forced to do that. They did such things that the people died from [. . .] alone. They forced one man to eat the excrement of another or they ordered [people] to jump into the cesspit, which [x]⁵⁹ was deeper than the average man's height. They had people run a distance of half a kilometre 10 times back and forth in 3 minutes and some of those who did not manage were shot. Few people were lucky enough [. . .] avoid death. After six weeks of this unbearable suffering, on 14 August at 7 o'clock in the evening carts arrived and, amidst beating, we began to be loaded onto them. [x]⁶⁰ About 2,800 of the 5,000 people were released, the rest had died, approximately 1,000 of them at Majloch's hand. The carts set out in the direction of the border between Nowy Dwór and Jabłonna.⁶¹ We were driven half a kilometre into the General Government and then they began to throw us off the carts. After we had got off, the SA-men threw the straw off and set it ablaze. [4] The sick and weak passengers who had not managed to flee were burned alive. [. . .] the way we [looked] when we finally dragged ourselves to [. . .] in Jabłonna. We were all completely exhausted and most of us were sick. The Ludwisin commune gave us quite a good welcome. Everybody received a cup of coffee and a piece of bread. The next day they began to send us in groups to Warsaw. Sick and poor,

59 [x] reached.

60 [x] some 6,000.

61 Jabłonna (Legionowo County).

I arrived at the new concentration camp to again fight for my life. Only that time it was a camp on a bigger scale which was called Warsaw.

(A refugee)

ARG I 1166 (Ring. I/415).

Description: original or duplicate, handwritten, ink, Polish, 157×196 mm, major damages and missing fragments, 4 sheets, 7 pages. Note in the old catalogue: 'Author unknown, text submitted by Salomea Ostrowska.'

Edition based on the manuscript, supplemented with the typescript in ARG I 1165b (Ring. I/956; I/374).

3

After 16 August 1941, Warsaw ghetto Miriam Fasa, testimony about the expulsion of the Jewish population from Płońsk to the camp in Pomiechówek, recorded by Hersh Wasser⁶² and unknown assistant(s) Description of the situation in the camp and the departure to Warsaw

[5⁶³] Record

of the account by Miriam Fasa — Sierpc⁶⁴ — Płońsk.

During the night between Saturday and Sunday 6 July 1941, we were woken up by the loud shouting of the soldiers ordering all inhabitants to leave their

62 Hersh Wasser (1912–1981), economist, member of Left Poalei Tsiyon, director of the party's library in Łódź. From December 1939 he was in Warsaw, together with his wife Bluma. Secretary of the ŻSS' s Central Commission of Refugees, one of Ringelblum's closest colleagues, he wrote many documents for the Archive and recorded testimonies. He was one of the only three surviving members of the group, and his role was crucial in the retrieval of the Archive's first part in September 1946. He helped to identify the authorship of documents. In 1950 he and Bluma settled in Israel. He founded the Emanuel Ringelblum Institute in Tel Aviv.

63 Original not paginated. Scan numbers are given instead.

64 Before the war Sierpc had a Jewish population of approximately 3,100. Most of the Jews were forced to leave the town shortly after the Germans had entered the town, with Warsaw as their main destination. A large group was deported to the ghetto in Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki. At the turn of March and April 1940 a ghetto was established for the remaining 500 Jews. See *Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos*, pp. 27–28.

homes — we were chased to a site behind the city where those who were legal⁶⁵ were separated from the so-called illegal. 1,200 illegal souls went through a first greeting right on the spot. They had to go through a human gate of *Volksdeutsche* and members of the Gestapo — for about 100m — where more than 100 people armed with wooden blocks, whips, bayonets, belts, and the like gave a treat to everyone who passed: true, nobody died, but many of us were terribly battered. After the execution, we were rounded up in a second site. We stayed there for 48 hours without a bite of bread — or water. On the way to this site, we were surrounded by soldiers, with rifles ready to shoot.

I was beaten so badly that I threw away my refugee-pack, which I did not get back afterwards. After the 48 hours, a body search took place. The search took place on the site, where men together with women had to undress completely, and everybody was searched in front of the others — with no consideration for women and children; menstruating or being seven, eight or nine months pregnant was not an excuse — ridicule, irony and sadism.

After the search, trucks came, which brought us to the forts of Pomiechówek. We arrived there on 9 July, and found the [people from] Nowy Dwór and Zakroczym already there (at the second gathering point, the [people of] Nowe Miasto⁶⁶ had also been rounded up). All the deportees were squeezed into 16 large cells. The guard consisted of about 50 members

[6] health — morality — committees, food, denunciations, beans, lice, escaping⁶⁷

of the *Selbstschutz* — only a few people had pillows (those who miraculously — via protection, bribe — managed [to acquire them]); the majority slept directly on the cement piling, with the wall to lean against. The cells were overcrowded with individual deportees, families, pressed together like herrings in a barrel. The cells were befouled with the excrement of children and elderly people. [The] problem of the latrine deserves special attention:

65 Probably holders of required documents.

66 Nowe Miasto (Płońsk County) — before the war approximately 1,500 Jews lived there. The ghetto was established in the Piaski quarter; Jews from Ciechanów and Drobin were resettled there. After the deportation to the camp in Pomiechówek 750 people remained in the ghetto. See *Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos*, pp. 19–20.

67 On top of the page are listed the topics covered below.

in the beginning, it was a long pit without any facilities. Men and women, girls and boys had to relieve themselves without any shame — besides this, everybody had to sing various songs at the latrine — any opportunity or poor excuse was enough to [justify] killing people. According to my estimation, definitely 10 people — men — were killed there by the *Volksdeutsche*. Part of the entertainment program was throwing men and women into the pits with excrement. Smearred with waste, they were chased through the courtyard to be put to shame and ridicule. Dirty clothes were washed in a clay pit with standing, stinking water, of which there was a lot due to rain and the clay soil. After about three weeks, the latrine became more or less suitable for usage (there were cases when people did not relieve themselves for two weeks).

Chapter: Water

During the first two weeks, it was hard to get water. 1) The water was dirty. 2) Everyone who wanted water, was beaten badly — during the first four weeks, we did not wash ourselves, at all.

Chapter: Food

The first three days there was absolute hunger — then they gave us 50 grams of bread a day (they distributed 100 grams for two days). The only favor was that food was allowed to be brought from Płońsk and Nowy Dwór. [People from] Nowy Dwór, Zakroczym, and Nowe Miasto brought cooked food every day or every second day; and Płońsk sent dry supplies once a week, usually on Saturday.

Between 10 am and 2 pm: a high military commission — a commission. There was a demonstration of several dozen mothers with children: shoot us or free us, the lice are eating us! Have mercy on us! Then the following incident took place: cooked food came from Nowy Dwór — the *Volksdeutsche*, out of sadism, poured the food over the wires — it was spilled.

[7] Health care — There was no medical help or medication at all. First, people died from typhus fever, dysentery, diseases of the stomach in general, and, very often, from exhaustion — people fell like flies. Only in the last two weeks was a quarantine station established in a separate cell. None of the sick ever came back. Until then, we did our utmost to hide the sick, because even if the Germans did not notice them, Majlech noticed: and this was enough to finish off the patient. About 200 people died immediately. Death became ordinary. It was men who died immediately.

Cleanliness — Colossal infestation of lice. Affected the powers-that-be not at all. The watchman comes into the cell and notices several lice-ridden old people — leads them to the water, into the filthy pit, and forces them to wash themselves.

Killing — fact — Friedlander from Żuromin⁶⁸ was summoned in the evening (1 cell) by a *Volksdeutscher* — and immediately killed by a rifle.

I estimate that about 400 people have been killed. Graves. Mass graves for 50 people each.

Beating — in my cell, there were often cases of beating with rubber truncheons, rifle butts and even kicking small children — this resulted in many deaths.

Informers — about 5 people, among them Majlech of Nowy Dwór — as a deportee — he dealt with sick people, squeezed money out of them. For 10 marks, one could buy oneself out. A woman bought herself out. He was short, blond, with blue eyes; round face, his nose turned up, Aryan look: a king.⁶⁹ [He] made deals.

Escaping — about 100 people escaped — one case of someone who did not manage to escape — he was shot. Majlech used to help with escapes for money.

[8] Liberation. Thursday, 14 August, in the morning — everyone was called out of their cells — into peasant carts. From 12 at night, a drive for about 3 hours. Then a fire — people say that 4 people were burned up in a fire.

8 am, to Legionowo. The *Judenrat* very welcoming. Several families stayed there (the Bursztyn family from Nasielsk⁷⁰ stayed there) — stayed for two days — Saturday evening by local railway to Warsaw.

68 Approximately two thousand Jews lived in Żuromin before the war. After the outbreak of the war some of them were deported to the General Government and later to the ghettos in Ciechanów and Mława.

69 His name means king, from Hebrew *melech*; Aryan (from German *Arier*) — term used in Nazi racial theory meaning mainly Germanic people; opposite of a Jew; a non-Jew.

70 Nasielsk (Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki county), before the war was inhabited by approximately 3,000 Jews, who were expelled as early as at the beginning of the war.

[Family name]	[Given name]	[Age]	[Town of residence]	[Cause of death]
[x] ⁷²				
Nachbin	Jojne	50 [years]	Raciąż	Shot
Szmorlak	Chaim	19 "	Zakroczym	Died as a result of beating.
Rzeszotko	Lemel	40 "	Sierpc	Shot [. . .]
Poznański	Abram	52 "	N[owy] Dwór	Died. Malnutrition.
Rzetelna	Tauba	50 "	Sierpc	Died. Hit.
Ruda	Ester	42 "	[Sierpc]	Bread. Shot
Herszfang	Dwora	5 weeks	Obóz Pomiech[ówek]	Died. Lack of feeding.
Morgensztern	Dawid	60 [years]	N[owy] Dwór	Died. Malnutrition
[Morgensztern]	Chawa Laja	50 "	[Nowy Dwór]	Died. Malnutrition
Tasimowicz[?]	Jankiel	70 "	Mława	Died. Malnutrition
Zylberberg	Chaim	19 "	Płońsk	Shot
Koziobrodski	Mendel	56 "	Płock-Płońsk	Died. Malnutrition
Wyszogród	Luzer	52 "	Bodzanów ⁷³ [Płońsk]	Died. Typhus
[Wyszogród]	Estera	50 "	Bodzanów [Płońsk]	[Died. Typhus]
Radzyner	Chaja Ita	60 "	N[owy] Dwór	Sick. Shot
Rozensztajn	Estera	70 "	[Nowy Dwór]	Died. Typhus
Grosman	Sala	40 "	[Nowy Dwór]	Died. Typhus
Motyl	Chana	45 "	Sierpc	[Died] Shot
Czarnaczapka	Jankiel	66 "	[Sierpc]	[Buried] Alive
Kohn	Pinkus	22 "	W[arsza]wa	[x] ⁷⁴ Sick. Sh[ot]

71 Handwritten in Polish 'Vocational schools, Delegates and their families,' indicating the reuse of the notebook.

72 [x] Furman Brajna, Raciąż, malnutrition.

73 Bodzanów (Płock County), approximately 2,000 Jews lived there before the war. In March 1941 they were deported to the camp in Działdowo and the ghetto in Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki.

74 [x] Died.

Dobski	Szmul	20	"	N[owy] Dwór	Sick. [. . .] Beating
Poznański	Abram Icek	50	"	[Nowy Dwór]	[Sick. [. . .] Beating]
Szymonowicz	Pinkus	14	"	[Nowy Dwór]	Shot (for water)
Frydman	Chil	48	"	[Nowy Dwór]	[Shot (for water)]
Górecka	Rywka	45	"	[Nowy Dwór]	[Shot (for water)]
Hirszbajn	Mojsze	55	"	[Nowy Dwór]	[Shot (for water)]
Gutkind	Icechok	38	"	N[owy] Dwór	Typhus.
Kohn	Moszek	40	"	Drobin. Płońsk	Beaten
Dancyg	Icek	55	"	[Drobin. Płońsk]	Shot.
Dancyg	Ita	23	"	[Drobin. Płońsk]	Died.
Altman	Ruchla	40	"	[Drobin. Płońsk]	[Died.]
Gutsztat	Izrael	44	"	[Drobin. Płońsk]	Shot. Weakened
Sokoł	Mojsze	48	"	Żuromin	Shot. (Scheissen ⁷⁵)
Prum	Mendel	43	"	Dobrzyń	Died.
[9] Taub	Sura	29	"	N[owy] Dwór	hunger
[Taub]	Etka	2 mon[ths]		[Nowy Dwór]	hunger
Top	Szeps	13 [years]		[Nowy Dwór]	Shot (for water)
Goldbroch	Fraj[d?]a	66	"	[Nowy Dwór]	Died. Hunger
Lipowicz	Fajwel	17	"	[Nowy Dwór]	Shot (in Nowy Dwór)
‘Inwentarz	Luba Cywja	31 y[ears]		[Nowy Dwór?]	Shot
Frank	Zalmen Jakub	37 y[ears]		[NowyDwór?]	Beaten to death ⁷⁶
From		36 [years]		Płońsk	[. . .] Bread. Shot
Michałowicz	Chaim Lejb	25	"	N[owy] Dwór	Shot by Mr Z.
Łokieć	Blima	45	"	[Nowy Dwór]	Nat[ural death]. Hunger
Łokieć	Ruchla	72	"	[Nowy Dwór]	[Shot]
Cytryn (son of the shoykhet ⁷⁷)		[around] 25 y[ears]		Sierpc	[Shot]

75 The man was probably going to the latrine.

76 ^c Two lines in pencil, in different handwriting.

77 (Hebrew) ritual slaughterer.

Hendeles	Mojsze	[around] 47	[Sierpc]	Suddenly died
Elenberg, dayan ⁷⁸	Jankiel	[around] 78[?]	Zakliczyn ⁷⁹	[Shot], latrine
Bryl	Szlama	20 [years]	[Zakliczyn]	[Shot] [. . .]
Harcowicz	Szoel	30 "	[Zakliczyn]	Nat[ural death]
Harcowicz	Rojza	30 "	[Zakliczyn]	[Natural death], on the way back
Dobrowicz	Chana	39 "		Nat[ural death]
Rubin	Josef	35 "		[Shot]
Korensztajn	Mendel	68 "		[Shot]
Unrat	Brucha	45 "		In the forest when getting off the wagon
Całka	Herszel	57 "	N[owy] Dwór	a bayonet put into the rectum
Najman	Gołda	31 "		[Shot]
Błaszka	Rywen Hersz	54 "	N[owy] Dwór	Beating. Died.
Łoziński	Lajbusz	52 "	[Nowy Dwór]	S[hot]
[Łoziński]	Natan	8 "	[Nowy Dwór]	Hunger
Ostaszower	Hena-Łaja	48 "		S[hot]
Hochman	Chaja	18 "		Hunger
Głowicki	Lajb	40 "		S[hot]
Tuchendler	Dawid	40 "		S[hot]
[Tuchendler]	Sara	40 "		[Buried] Alive

ARG I 1170 (Ring. I/1155).

Description: original, handwritten (H.W.* and POM*), notebook, ink, pencil, Yiddish, 156×200 mm, 7 sheets, 7 pages. On the cover a stamp: 'Central Commission for Refugees, Warsaw, Tłomackie Street 13, 2nd floor, room 8', and the handwritten title in pencil in Polish: 'School system;' on the reverse Hersh

78 (Hebrew) judge at the rabbinical court.

79 It is rather a reference to Zakroczyń, the nearby town from which a certain number of Pomiechówek prisoners came, although Zakliczyn — located south west of Tarnów — appears also in doc. 6, most probably also by mistake, as Rabbi Lejzor Ajzenberg's place of residence.

Wasser's note in ink: 'Koplowicz — Sierpc.' Attached are two notes in Polish and Yiddish: '1941. Pomiechówek. Original. Testimony of Miriam Fasa from Sierpc on her experience in Pomiechówek. Recorded by Hersh Wasser' and '1941. Pomiechówek. Original. Incomplete list of people who were shot or died in the Pomiechówek camp, compiled by Hersh Wasser in the quarantine at Leszno Street 109.'

4

After September 1941, Warsaw ghetto. Unknown Płońsk resident, testimony of expulsion to the camp in Pomiechówek, the living conditions in the camp, and the departure to Warsaw.

Płońsk

[1] On the 13th of July⁸⁰ at two o'clock in the morning there was a round-up and everyone was taken to the square and we were surrounded by about 400 SA-men armed with clubs and they checked each person to see if they had a registration. Anyone who did not have a registration had to go to one side and the SA-men made a gate and everyone had to go through the gate while everyone was beaten brutally with sticks, tripped, and once on the ground they were beaten until the blood flowed like water. Afterwards we were led behind the wires and they kept us for 48 hours without giving us any food. On 15 July they took us by truck to Pomiechówek. Upon arrival at Pomiechówek 165 of us were put into one room. It was extremely cramped and stuffy and we didn't get any food for 3 days. People were collapsing with hunger. On the 4th day they brought us a keg of water, whereupon everyone rushed to get a drink of water, and so they shot several people. Afterwards they formed a militia in every room [and] set up a commandant. The leader of the Jewish militia was a man from Nowy Dwór by the name of Meylekh. He teamed up with the SA-men and lived it up at the expense of the Jews and alongside the SA-men he committed atrocities too terrible to describe. [2] From the torture and lack

80 The author uses Polish name of the month; it is changed to Yiddish in the duplicate. In Miriam Fasa's testimony the date is 6 July, cf. doc. 3.

of food and the great dirt many people fell ill with diarrhoea, and Meylekh handed over the sick to the SA-men and demanded money, whoever didn't have money was shot, in this manner the women Yente Frost, Dvoyre Baliban, Miriam Tans, Rokhl Heler, and a 17-year-old boy, Cytrynowski. They were all from Raciąż. After that they set up a building on the top of a hill and whoever had so much as a fever was put inside. Among those people were Gute Kalnersz [?] and Fayge Aronowicz.

They gave away everything they had and so they were let go. They had taken two children away from Hanelewicz, so he gave 10 marks and everything else he had and they were released. Miss Etke Iliart was given up to the SA-men by the commandant of the 9th room, a Jew named Tama, because she had a fever. But because she was able to justify herself — she said that she was not sick, but hungry, and that if they gave her some food she would be well again — they released her. Returning to the room she fainted from joy. That same night they brought out five girls and five boys and they forced the boys to rape the girls after which they beat them savagely.

[3] Every day the SA-man Schultz would lead all the men out into the yard and do various exercises. One day he demanded that fifteen men be brought to dig a hole, and when the fifteen men arrived he ordered them to dig a pit big large enough for fifty people, then for the slightest infraction people were shot and thrown into the pit, and he did not order them to cover the pit until fifty people had been shot. Among those executed were Itshe Dantsiger with his daughter, and Gutsztat from Drobin, Jare Top, Leybl Top, Khane Wrobel, Borensztajn, two Sosiński brothers from Nowy Dwór. This is how it was every day. The worst came when it was night; they entered, armed with sticks, and beat everyone after which they fired shots in through the windows. One night, a woman had to go to relieve herself and as she was going out a SA-man stopped her and asked her where she was going so late at night to which she responded that she was going to answer nature's call. He said: Fine, I'll show you where to go. And he led her into a dark room where he ordered two young people to dig a hole. One of the young people was Abraham Rozensztajn from Raciąż. When they finished digging the pit they were ordered to bury the woman alive. The woman wept and begged: Let me live! I have children. Why is this happening to me? But it was no use. The two young people had no choice but to carry out the order. The woman was Mrs Karash from Nowy Dwór. Every day various scenes played out while

the people went to relieve themselves. A trench was dug, 10 metres in length, where men and women sat together naked and were forced to sing and later to dance and had stones thrown at them. This lasted several hours every day.

[4] The SA-man Schultz called the Jews together and asked what was going on: Every night, when the guards are on duty, black dogs appear, very large ones. The guards fire shots but the dogs do not go away. The guards are afraid to stand watch. The man has enough people on his conscience, yet suddenly he's afraid of dogs and so he opens fire.

One time 2 trucks of food parcels came from Płońsk. Shloyme Fuks⁸¹ came to distribute the parcels. The militia commandant Meylekh took many of the parcels for himself. Fuks tried to stop him and Meylekh hit him so Fuks ordered the trucks to be turned around and did not distribute the parcels. When he returned to Płońsk there was uproar because he hadn't distributed the parcels. Fuks told us everything that was happening in the camp. The Gestapo from Płońsk and a *Judenrat* chairman by the name of Ramek set off immediately for Pomiechówek and they brought Meylekh back with them to Płońsk. They gave him a good beating and he told them the names of everyone who had been shot and everyone who was due to be shot. He was hanged for all this and from then on things got a little easier. Three days later a commission of Germans arrived and asked about everything. We approached them and demanded they either give us food or release us. Food consisted of 100 grams of bread a day with a bit of water, which was later reduced to 50 grams. The commission answered: You have enough to eat; the Jews also send you food, but we will release you soon enough. It took them another 2 weeks until one morning we were informed that we should clean the rooms [5] and the yard because we were being released that same day. At 6 in the evening 300 carts arrived. They ordered us all out into the yard, and everyone had to pass through a narrow gate where they were beaten savagely. It went on like this until 11 o'clock. Afterwards they sought out all the elderly people and gave them sausages to eat and asked them if they had anything against the Germans. They ordered the carts to move. We rode like this under the strictest supervision for 7 kilometres. At the sixth kilometre, near Legionowo, we saw a terrible fire and we could hear screams from the trucks

81 Szlomo Fuks, tailor from Płońsk and communist. During the war the director of the Labour Office subordinate to the *Judenrat*.

in front. The crying was intense. We thought that we would be all burned. When we got closer we were ordered off the carts and everything that was left on the carts was burned and we were beaten. They ordered us to run as fast as we could towards Warsaw and anyone who couldn't keep up was shot and burned. Mrs. H. Markiewicz from Warsaw was burned. Moyshe Shoel Krzyński and Mendl Sz wajger from Nowy Dwór were shot. Running like this through the fields at night we reached Legionowo. The *Judenrat* immediately gave us bread and coffee, and doctors and nurses bandaged our wounds. Afterwards the Jewish police in Legionowo drove us to Warsaw and handed us over to the Warsaw police who tormented us for a further 2 weeks in quarantine.

ARG I 1167 (Ring. I/1057, Ring. I/887).

Description: Ring. I/1057 — original or duplicate, handwritten, pencil, Yiddish, 190×276, 3 sheets, 5 pages; written on pages from a cashbook (printed, Polish); Ring. I/887 — duplicate (2 copies), handwritten (TT*), pencil, Yiddish, 145×185 mm, major damages and missing fragments, 22 sheets, 22 pages. Attached is Hersh Wasser's note in Polish: '1941. Pomiechówek. Testimony by an unknown Płońsk resident on the stay in the transit camp in Pomiechówek. Received by Hersh Wasser.' See also HWC, 23/1 (third duplicate, handwritten, 11 sheets). Edition based on the copy from ARG I 1167 (Ring. I/1057), 3 sheets, 5 pages.

5

After 16 August 1941, Warsaw ghetto. Unknown Sierpc resident, "פאַרטייעכונגען" [Pomiechówek], account on the expulsion of the Jewish population of Płońsk to the camp in Pomiechówek. Description of the situation in the camp and the departure to Warsaw.

[1] Pomiechówek

Delivered by a Jew, who lives in a shelter and comes from Sierpc. He left Warsaw for Płońsk during the summer months together with his 8-year-old child when great poverty set in in order to save himself from hunger. For a while, they felt comfortable in Płońsk, food was cheap and it was possible to make a living.

Afterwards, there were orders directed against the newly arrived ‘foreigners,’⁸² as they were called.

On a certain day, all Płońsk Jews were gathered on a square, and they began selecting ‘foreigners’. The *Judenrat* pointed them out, and then soldiers began to strike them. 100 soldiers strike 1 man. Then they were all gathered behind wires, together about 1,200 people — on a square [2] the size of a morgen.⁸³ They were held for two days without any food or water. On the second evening the *Judenrat* brought some bread. It was a farewell because soon afterwards trucks arrived and all 1,200 people were taken to Pomiechówek (45 kilometres from Płońsk), where they were led to the fort of the local citadel. ‘Foreigners’ from Nowe Miasto,⁸⁴ Nowy Dwór, and Zakroczym were taken there — together with Płońsk [Jews] there were more than 3,000 people.

On the first day of their arrival, they received 150 grams of bread per person; but it had to last for three days. They received three barrels of water per day for all 1,200 people. This is how they were maintained the entire 6 weeks they were there. But before they received the bread (on the first day) there was another kind of welcome reception: SS-men and *Volksdeutsche* thrashed them with crowbars.

It was a constant pastime for *Volksdeutsche* to chase hundreds of people while holding weapons in their hands, or holding [3] crowbars or rubber truncheons. When someone fell, they did not stop the pursuit, on the contrary, they chased them even faster, so that people fell onto a pile, one on top of the other, and then, finally, it was possible to strike them as much as their heart desired.

But the entertainment was much more serious. During the first 10 days that they were there, 600 men were shot. It happened in the following manner: whoever transgressed in some way or to whomever they took a liking was taken down to the basement. At night, he was taken upstairs and led to ditches that were dug during the day, and shot him. Entire families were shot this way, not even children 15–16 years old were spared. The next morning, the survivors were ordered to bury those who were shot. Thus, it happened many times that a father buried his son, [4] a son his father,

82 A reference to people who did not have documents confirming their permanent residence.

83 An obsolete land measure, approximately 1,4 acres.

84 In the orig., Nayshtot, the name of the town used by Jews.

one brother another brother, etc. In total, about 600 men were shot over the first 10 days.

After this period came a second one - killing people without wasting even a single bullet on them: when someone fell ill or became weak, had an abscess, a blistered leg, etc., he was taken downstairs to the basement, and was not given bread or water until he died. ‘Some bribed the guards and brought food.’⁸⁵ They ordered the dead to be taken upstairs and buried in freshly prepared graves. In this manner, about 400 people were murdered, all who had fallen at least a little ill.

At the same time there were conditions which could lead to illness. The daily bread ration was, as stated, 50 grams of bread per person. It was fortunate that food (mostly bread) was brought from several [5] towns, [from] each town for its internees; that is, it was brought from Płońsk, Nowe Miasto, Nowy Dwór, and Zakroczym. The distribution of the food, both that was brought and that issued by the authorities, was handled by the *Judenrat*⁸⁶ who had been chosen from among the prisoners. (One of the *Judenrat* members turned out to be a thief. He was taken away to Płońsk and murdered.) When fetching water, 15–30 people instead of those ordered would always bring back from the local peasants the following: bread, milk, fruit, at incredibly cheap prices or entirely for free, because the peasants did not want to take money.

Housing conditions: in 16 rooms of the fort a few thousand men, women, and children lay on a concrete floor.

[6] Pregnant women gave birth on the concrete floor with not even a bit of straw was placed for them to lie on.

After 6 weeks, 200 carts were brought in order to send people to the border of the General Government. As a farewell, bread and sausage were distributed and they were seated on the carts. But along the way they were thrown off, a fire was lit and they warmed up. Suddenly they started snatching people from the fire, shooting them on the spot. A wild pursuit began. They chased people straight into the fire, struck them, and trampled them to death. About

85 ^cText from the bottom of the page, inserted as indicated.

86 This is the only testimony that mentions the establishment of a *Judenrat* in the camp. It can be inferred from the later context that the author meant the Jewish police headed by Majloch Hoppenblum.

300 men were killed this way. Those who saved themselves during the chase were the only ones who remained alive.

They made their way to Warsaw on foot.

ARG I 1169 (Ring. I/418).

Description: original or duplicate, handwritten, ink, Yiddish, 156×220 mm, 6 sheets, 6 pages. On the reverse of the sheets the following numbers: 13926–13928, 13931–13933.

6

After 16 August 1941, Warsaw ghetto. Paweł Robota, Szmul Krzak, Majer Magid, Zelik Top, Azryel Górecki, Mordka Całka, Natan Ruda, Lejzor Ajzenberg, Róża Kapłan, and Szmul Łokieć. Testimonies ('Records') on their stay in the camp in Pomiechówek.

[1] Record no. 1

Paweł Robota, son of Zelik and Rojza, born in 1912 in Sierpc
Confirms the circumstances in which all the 'illegal' Jews were beaten until they bled by approximately 100 soldiers. Searches — thoroughly. The Jews received 25 kilograms [*sic*] of bread per week, but a lot of it had to be exchanged for boiled water.

Mrs. Tuchendler, aged 40, 10 July in the evening, with her own eyes, room no. 9 (since[?] 1 room — over 200 people). Beaten up twice. After the second time she was still alive. 3 other men and I buried [her?] by the latrine — the ground was levelled — he ordered to keep [our] mouths shut and say that she had died. Netzel [x]⁸⁷ — a blacksmith from Nowy Dwór. *Leutnant*⁸⁸ asked the husband, who also stated that she had died.

Tuchendler — shot in the forehead.

Motyl — [shot] in the stomach.

87 [x] Titzner.

88 (German) Second Lieutenant.

Sometimes during burial, the Germans ordered to sing *'Me hot enem in der'erd, me hot enem iberlebn.'*⁸⁹

The Jews often had to kneel and pray. Some were ordered to take off their clothes; to search for money.

One evening I was ordered to take 4 girls and rape them — I had to pretend to rape them.

Perelmutter[‘s]

Ruda Natan

Krzak

A lot of people were still alive as I was burying them.

Turn around⁹⁰ — for picking caterpillars — he called him and shot him dead after searching him.

[2] Record no. 2

Szmul Krzak, son of Lejb and Estera, born in 1905 in Nowy Dwór, domiciled in Nowy Dwór, plywood maker.

The gravediggers' commandant was Tarngojl Hersz (a thief).

Appropriated parcels; com[mandant] over the sick.

Icek Moszkowicz — commandant of the area.

The fort guards beat people with whatever they had at hand, even with bayonets. I was beaten up a few times too. They beat us for their own pleasure.

Record no. 3⁹¹

Majer Magid, son of Henoch and Cipa, born in 1901, born in Nowy Dwór, domiciled in Nowy Dwór, wagoner.

Commandant of room no. 12. Around 30 July Lajbuś Sosiński and (Szyja Aksamit, a carpenter) were called out in the early morning and shot.

89 (Yiddish in Latin characters) He goes into the ground, we shall outlive him.

90 Meaning uncertain.

91 '10/8' written on the margin. Perhaps 10 August [1941].

Szyja Aksamit, about 23 years old, a carpenter, was weeping because he would not receive a traditional Jewish funeral. — Paweł⁹² —

Around 1 August I was taken with 7 other men; a grave 4 metres long, 3 metres wide, and 5 metres deep. The Jews were weeping and begging us to save them. Lunch from the water barrel. Who[ever?] [. . .].

[3] Record no. 4

Zelik Top, son of Lejb and Hadasa, born in 1886 in Nowy Dwór, domiciled in Nowy Dwór, droshky driver.

On 7 August 1941 at 10 o'clock in the morning my 13-year-old son Szeps arrived from Nowy Dwór with 4 bottles of water and a bottle of berry juice for us. Gendarme Schultz — pushed him into the fort, crying: *Wenn dem Vater und Mutter hier sind, dass sollst du nicht sein.*⁹³ Szeps was weeping. Half an hour later they call me to Schultz, who asks me: *Willst du deinem Sohn besehen?*⁹⁴ I approached my shot son. I had to carry him on my back, dig him a grave and bury him.

Record no. 5

Azryel Górecki, son of Abram and Rywka, born in 1901 in Nowy Dwór, domiciled in Nowy Dwór, trader.

Mrs Prum from Płońsk, in her thirties, sick, unable to cross the border zone fast enough (in approx. [. . .] the road from Nowy Dwór to Legionowo), approx. 50 metres wide; she was thrown into the fire and on the ground by the (15-year-old) [x]⁹⁵ *Selbstschutz*-men.

Around 23 July due to the fact that 12 men had been too slow to report for work all men were escorted to the fort's gate and each one had to walk between 25 *Selbstschutz*-men arranged into 2 rows — many of them were mangled and beaten up.

92 Probably Paweł Robota.

93 (German) Your father and mother are here so why aren't you here too?

94 (German) Do you want to see your son?

95 [x] SA-men.

[4] Record no. 6

Mordka Całka, son of Hersz and Estera, born in 1912, Nowy Dwór, bootmaker. On Saturday, 9 August, sick father — release — at some point I brought [x]⁹⁶ berry juice. Schultz bayoneted in the rectum — released. On 10 August father died of loss of blood.

Gołda Najman — the circumstances in which [people] were escorted uphill from room 16, door wide open, Schultz, Majloch, I lay there alone. Majloch Hop[penblum]⁹⁷ appropriated people's possessions.

Food provisions gendarme — Schultz

Selbstschutz [:]

Fitzner (father); Fitzner (son); Holtz, a colonist from Wólka Górska;⁹⁸ Netzel — Nowy Dwór, a blacksmith; Paweł Węglarz, a labourer, Nowy Dwór; Auetz, a colonist from a German colony; Repsch,⁹⁹ a colonist from a German colony; Fredek Kelm, a shipyard labourer; Edek Wendt,¹⁰⁰ a carpenter, Nowy Dwór.

[5] Paweł Robota¹⁰¹

Nuta Ruda

Wolf Młynarski

Majer Magid

Szmul Krzak — Spec.

Chaskiel Karmiel

Josek Furman

Boruch Frydman

96 [x] tea.

97 In the orig.: Hopentreger.

98 Wólka Górska (Legionowo County). It was probably also a German colony, a settlement for newcomers from Prussia, established most probably in the early 19th century; hence the term 'colonists.'

99 Aleksander Repsch — born on 20 January 1920 in Nowy Modlin, a *Volksdeutscher*. In the SA since 1941. Active at Fort III since the beginning of the camp's existence. Derived particular pleasure from sadistic torture and harassment of the Jews.

100 Edward Wendt, served in the Nazi gendarmerie near Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki. His brother Antoni was an employee of a Gestapo station located in that town. His other brother, Benjamin, was a mayor of Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki and a Gestapo resident. See Frankowski, *Tajemnice Fortu III*, p. 152.

101 There are pencil annotations to several names, like 1 U, 2 U, 3 U, or numbers 5, 6, 8; their meaning has not been deciphered; some surnames are crossed out, perhaps after being included in other records.

Mordka Michałowicz
Pejsach Sargał
Szulim Rzetelny
Hersz Perelmutter
Zelig Top¹⁰²
Lejzor Ajzenberg (rabbi from Zakliczyn)¹⁰³
Lejb Towia [buried] alive
Moszek Korensztajn
Róża Kapłan¹⁰⁴

Fire¹⁰⁵
Mosze Dobrowicz
Azryel Górecki
Chaskiel Flajszhakiel¹⁰⁶

Special circumstances
Szmul Łokieć
Eliasz Rzeszotko

Majlech
Majlech Perelmutter
Iser Elbaum
Mordka Całka

[6] [Record] no. 8

Ruda Natan, [son of] Rubin and Chaja, 21, from Sierpc, no occupation
I was woken up [several times?] between 4 and 5 o'clock in the morning to bury 15–20 dead who were already lying in the grave. Confirms the information given by the previous witnesses.

102 Surname in pencil in different handwriting.

103 Most probably a reference to Zakroczym, see footnote 96.

104 Surname in pencil in different handwriting.

105 It remains unknown to whom this description pertains.

106 Reading uncertain.

Lejzor Ajzenberg, Zakliczyn¹⁰⁷

On Sunday, a week before [. .] everybody was assembled outside the house and those with documents were selected. Those who had were left, while 17 people (some with, some without documents) were escorted to Pomiechówek. The old and sick were removed from the barrack, I was [. .], the remaining people were locked, 5–6 people were shot. The rabbi returned. He went out in the morning and never came back. He was shot. Rabbi Jankiel Ewenberg.¹⁰⁸ The rabbi's wife is in Warsaw.

[Record] No. 9

Róża Kapłan, [daughter of] Abram Jeremiasz and Chaja, 21, Nowy Dwór

I lived in Nowy Dwór. Two months after the truce my parents and I returned to Nowy Dwór. We were deported on Sunday, 7 weeks ago.¹⁰⁹ On Saturday the whole town¹¹⁰ had to wash in the River Vistula. The conditions were bad. A Gestapo officer rescued us. From 7 o'clock in the morning till 9. All house contents were collected for steaming. The rest was burned. 'Gunshots woke us up at night. We could hear cries: 'Out!' The ghetto was on fire from all directions. 42 people. Because everybody had to walk^{c111} to the market square through the ghetto gate, by which stood SA-men who killed 14 [people]. They tore all our passports into pieces. They arranged us, beat us, and set dogs against us, including children and women. They counted approximately 1,700 people. We were escorted to the road to Modlin. The people saw the word *Tod-Lager* written on the camp.¹¹² There were Jewish police in the camp. At the beginning, the commandant was a German officer, who treated us well. At first there was hunger. There was no bread. The officer gave me 2 kilograms of bread, and when [more] was delivered he gave it to everybody. He released a number [of people]. After a week I was told that that benevolent officer had been killed by

107 Most probably a reference to Zakroczym; see footnote 96.

108 Jankiel Elenberg, a *dayan*, appears in doc. 3. It is probably the same person.

109 On this basis it should be assumed that the record was taken during the first week of her stay in Warsaw, after 16 August.

110 Reading uncertain.

111 ^c In a different handwriting.

112 (German) Death camp.

Poles near Kazuń.¹¹³ After 3 days we received 120 grams per 24 hours. We were beaten during the distribution. A lot of people died of thirst. We lay on the [7] asphalt. There was no place for us to wash ourselves. On the fourth day a barrel was procured and Jews were harnessed to it. They were brutally beaten on the way till they bled. The Poles wept and gave us food. We received bread from the officers when they arrived and from the *Reichsdeutsche*. They treated us well. When the SA-men went into the barracks at night they beat [my brother] and left him covered with blood [. . .].¹¹⁴ [x]¹¹⁵ Edek Wendt often gave us bread. Paweł Węglarz was very good too. *Sturmleiter*¹¹⁶ was very good too. He often consoled us. Fitzner brutally beat us up and killed about 14 people. Majloch Hopenblum was a haberdasher. He was in the camp with his wife. During the epidemic, which resulted from drinking dirty water from the lake, Majloch ordered people to stand up and run. He took uphill those who could not run. Once he took 15- and 18-year-old girls, who were pleading [. . .] for life, to not be taken away. They had to descend into the grave and were shot. Majloch had hurried them with a baton. One could buy oneself out for 20–25 marks. Once some woman's husband was taken uphill. The woman had golden teeth. Majloch ordered they be pulled out. The woman did not let them do that. Her husband was shot dead. [. . .] revenge. 'My blood shall call out.'¹¹⁷ Majloch separate accommodation [*sic*]. He took the most valuable possessions, rings, and money from the victims. He said that he had witnessed an execution. My brother 40 degrees fever; he saved him; a swollen finger.¹¹⁸ Thanks to Fuks and Ramek from Płońsk. An officer from Płońsk arrived during the third week and took [Majloch] to Płońsk. They say Majloch was killed. Szulc did the killing.

Later the sick were also taken to the infirmary, but they died due to the total lack of help. About 60 people died in our room. The death took about 10 minutes. It was better when Majloch was not there. We had to run every other day and Szulc selected the sick to be put in the infirmary. All of the sick have

113 Kazuń (Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki County).

114 Reading uncertain.

115 [x] Mr.

116 (German) commander of the SA-men.

117 ^c In Yiddish.

118 Reading uncertain.

recently been sent to Płońsk. The latrine was a pit with the trees. An SA-man would select boys and girls to do exercises and sing by the cesspit. They took away the body of a 20-year-old boy they shot. I saw the boy being shot for putting his hand up in the water queue. He was put in a sack right away. Officer Siedler also allowed¹¹⁹ shooting. The Jews were beaten with rubber truncheons. The SA-men pulled by the hair through water. The elderly were beaten up particularly brutally. Those from Płońsk did a lot of good. (From Nowy Dwór remained only the police and their families).

[8] A girl was shot in the leg when people were pushing their way during food distribution. The officer was trying to justify himself, claiming that he wanted to shoot in the air and that he would not be able to eat his meal that day. The military men were very good to us. The Jews beat one another also. The police fared very good. Deputy Tarnegol was no better; he also took people's money and possessions. Ruczasz Szulim also treated people very badly. During the final week a commission came every day. It included the officer who had saved us at the Vistula. The officers were drying their eyes with handkerchiefs. Women went out with children to beg them: 'Kill us.' Over the six weeks I washed my hair only once in drinking water. Netzel told me that everybody would be released that day. The officer ordered the yard cleared. Departure when [. . .] The owners of the carts were angels. They gave us bread. Before departure the SA-men gave us sausage. I received about 8 kilograms. We departed at 10 o'clock. The journey lasted 3 hours. The carts pulled up 5 kilometres before Ludwisin. A fire was lit and the straw and all our parcels were burned. The people ran amidst the fire. They were beaten. The weak were cast into the fire. My family and I were saved by the officer who was transporting us. M.'s¹²⁰ daughter [was] burned.

Szmul Łokieć

When my daughter was ill we were ordered to go out and run, while my daughter was taken uphill to the sick. Erbsztajn¹²¹ came and said that my little girl had been shot. I never saw her again. My wife died of indigence.

119 Reading uncertain.

120 Majloch's daughter; see doc. 16a, Pola Szpilman's testimony.

121 Reading uncertain.

Hersz Perelmuter

I dug graves for 50 people, many of whom were still alive. There was typhus and they said that also cholera. I buried only one man from Żuromin. He had a broken arm. People said that he went to get leaves to burn. He confirms the information on Majloch. I carried the sick out of the room. The Germans buried the killed ones themselves.

[11[?]] Gravedigger

Nuta [?] Ruda

Wolf Młynarski, interrogate [about] burying people alive

Magid Majer

Szmul Krzak, seaman

Lejzor Ajzenberg, Zakliczyn,¹²² rabbi

[x]¹²³

Chaskiel Karmel

Paweł Robota, for special interrogation

Josek Furman

Moszek Korensztajn (list of the dead)

Boruch Frydman

Mordka Michałowicz

Pejsach Sargał

Szulim Rzetelny

Josek Kapłan¹²⁴

Hersz Perelmuter

ARG I 1164 (Ring. I/301, Ring. I/956).

Description: original, handwritten (three styles of handwriting): a) H.W.*, b) POM*, c) unidentified; ink, pencil, Polish, 210×295, 210×255 mm, 7 sheets, 9 pages. Pp. 7–10 were in Ring. I/956. On p. 6 information: 'N. pk 27/13'. Attached is Hersh Wasser's note in Yiddish: 'Materials for the history of the camp in Pomiechówek, July-August 1941. Collected by Hersh Wasser in the quarantine at Lesz[no Street] 109.' Records 1–6 and the lists of names on pp. 4-5 handwritten by Wasser.

122 Probably a reference to Zakroczym. See footnote 96.

123 [x] Dan, Michalow; probably Icie Danciger and Chana Michałowicz, see doc. 16a.

124 Reading uncertain.

a) *After 8 September 1941, Warsaw ghetto. Testimonies of people expelled from various towns to the camp in Pomiechówek. Description of the situation in the camp and the circumstances of the departure to Warsaw, recorded by Salomea Ostrowska.*¹²⁵

[4]¹²⁶ Szyja Sokół, 33, tailor, bachelor, Płońsk

Mother died of hunger in quarantine.

He tells his story. Gendarmes came and took everybody away. They loaded them onto carts and sent to Pomiechówek. I was starving. I received [. . .] sometimes [I was treated to?] [. . .] We drank cold water which we fetched from the River Pomiechówka. We were beaten on the way. They ordered us to walk fast. But as the barrel was heavy, we were unable to keep up, which was why they hit us. 40 [people] were shot dead for no reason.

Chaim Srogal, 46, born in Sierpc, Płońsk

[. . .] sent me to the labour camp [. . .] sent to Kuchary.¹²⁷ Released from the camp in Kuchary. [. . .] to Płońsk, where my family was. On the way I was apprehended and brought to Pomiechówek, where I met with my [. . .].

[. . .] there were 16 rooms, which could fit 40–80 people each. Majloch Hoppenblum was a room commandant. He distributed the bread in such a way that he appropriated 5 loaves for himself, because he issued 125 grams per person instead of 250. He sent people to [. . .]. The people were constantly sick. When somebody was taken ill, they were escorted to the sixteen¹²⁸ [like] those who were unable to run.

Tuchendler from Warsaw, Stawki 42, flat 28, was shot dead even though he looked healthy.

125 Salomea (Shulamit) Ostrowska (dates unknown), a student[?], associate of Oyneg Shabes. She worked at the quarantine on Leszno Street 109; she conducted, recorded and edited interviews.

126 Scan numbers of the original.

127 Kuchary Żydowskie (Płońsk County). During the war a forced labour camp was organised there.

128 The room number; the sick people were left there without any help; see below.

[5] Militiaman Fuks Jojne from Płońsk delivered bread twice a week: on Saturday and Tuesday. Once, when he arrived, Majloch demanded bread from him. Fuks refused and Majloch hit him. Then Fuchs told everybody: 'Jews, from tomorrow things will be different.'

He went to Grójec,¹²⁹ where he complained to commissioner Rauch, and Majloch was taken away. The shootings decreased.

Icie Dancygier from Drobin had 8 grams of gold on himself and he was shot dead for he didn't hand it over. I had to say (I buried him myself) that he died of natural causes.

Endel from Sierpc went to report that he had not received his parcel because Majloch stole it and he [Endel] was shot too.

Laid down on the threshold, sick Sura Tuchendler from Nowy Dwór was kicked by a passing by SA-man and died.

There were mass graves. They held a few dozen bodies. They were not covered up until they were full.

[6] Pola Szpilman, 20, born in Żuromin, Płońsk

When I went to get water I had my head cut open with a butt. Brana Kersz from Nowe Miasto, who was sitting next to me, was wearing a nice jacket. Majloch's eighteenth-year-old daughter demanded that she give it to her and when Kersz refused, Majloch gave her up to be shot.

Majloch's daughter perished on the way.

Majloch stole everything he could.

These were shot: Mosiek Sokół, Mordcha Frydlender, Szifra Frydlender, Estera [. . .], and many other whose names I do not recall.

The hill was the shooting site.

Room 16 was the infirmary, from where the patients were escorted uphill.

All girls and young women were at times taken away at night and ordered to sing.

When we went to the latrine (8-metre-long rectangle) we never knew what trouble we would get into.

129 The name Grójec appears twice in the testimonies recorded by Salomea Ostrowska and in her later study (doc. 8), even though it is clear from the context that it was Płońsk. It is difficult to determine whether that was done intentionally to keep the actual name a secret or if it was a mistake.

There was an order to bow to the SA-men. Walking, we often could not see them. For failure to bow we had to do gymnastics in the latrine, the gymnastics meant jumping down.

Initially, four girls from Warsaw were shown favours during food distribution and then they were brought to the guard post at night.

[7] When 4 men refused to perform labour, all men were called and a large gate was made, that is, 2 groups of SA-men standing on two sides and hitting those passing through. Passage through that 'gate' led to 1-metre-deep puddle of mud. Because the men were driven [. . .] they fell on one another [. . .]

40 degrees fever.

[. . .] in the head.

[8] Chaskiel Rejbak, 28, from Płońsk

My mother and sister were sick with typhus and when Majloch came in, my brother and I helped them up so that he would not notice. They ate bread and drank unboiled water all the time. Ita Danzig, only slightly weakened, was taken uphill.

Icek Danzig from Drobin was killed because he had gold. Majloch denounced him.^{c130}

Izrael Icek [Gutzstadt] from Drobin, who was not right in the head, was one of the first to be shot dead because he went begging.

Moszek Kon, who was sick, was taken uphill and did not return.

Chana Michałowicz, 16, from Płońsk

When we were expelled we were sick with typhus. We had nothing to eat in the camp because there was nobody to give us any food.

Those in charge sometimes issued 100 grams of bread and then nothing for three days.

My father went out at dusk and was beaten up so severely for that [. . .] almost dead.

Srul Czarnoczapka from Sierpc left Płońsk and perished.

Every day a different one was ordered to bury the dead because there were a few dozen corpses every day.

130 ^{c-c} Only in the original.

[9] Małka Czarnoczapka, 60, from Raciąż, Płońsk

When we approached the fire, they ordered us to get off the carts and drove us into a forest and then to the village of Ludwiszyn. Many stayed there.

Pesa Ruchla Hiller from Raciąż was shot but I do not know why because she was healthy. Marjem, who was sick after beating, was shot.

Four women whose surnames I do not remember, were shot. Two of them were mentally ill, they had gone insane from hunger.

[10] Rafał Herckowicz, 52, from Płońsk

I was taken to Pomiechówek from Płońsk. All Jews were assembled in the square. We were ordered to show their *Ausweise*. The possessions we had with us were taken away. My wife had bread and a shirt and she was beaten up so severely that her fingers are still bruised. When the first group grew tired of beating, others came running to take their place. Then we, that is, those without *Ausweise*, were ordered to go through the gate made up of two groups of SA-men, each consisting of 40 men, who hit all of those passing through. Then we were driven beyond Płońsk onto a field surrounded with barbed wire, where we stayed for 48 hours. After two days we were subjected to a thorough body search during which we had to strip naked. They took everything we had, even when somebody had 10 pfennigs. Next, we were loaded onto trucks and transported to Pomiechówek. I received no food for the first 2 weeks, and then I was given a 100 grams of bread per day. Other Jews from other towns did receive parcels and they aided us. When we went to fetch water and we pushed our way to get it they fired at us.

Without a reason, they shot at us for singing.

They dragged us out at night for execution. One Jew did a lot of harm but Płońsk put an end to that. He approached people and said that unless he received money, he would tell on someone and who then would be shot.

[11] Once Fuks came from Płońsk with a wagonful of bread. Majloch demanded 25 loaves of bread from him. Then Fuks reported about that in Płońsk and Majloch was taken away.

After that the shootings decreased.

[. . .] carts. We figured it out [. . .] we thought [. . .] camp. They transported [. . .] fled, went to the ghetto in Ludwiszyn, [. . .] we arrived in Warsaw.

[12] Pejsach Sargał, 18, from Płońsk

Everybody was driven to the square called Crooked Square. There they began to check our *Ausweise*. Those who had them were ordered to stand on one side, those who did not were on the other side. Those without *Ausweise* were driven through a gate, that is, a passage between two groups of SA-men who beat the people passing through. We were taken away and put on a field 1 kilometre from Płońsk.

We spent 2 nights there and then we were transported by trucks to Pomiechówek. We slept on asphalt. We were given bread for 3–4 days. When we went to fetch water, they beat us. [. . .] led to the death of a few hundred people. Militiaman Majloch from Nowy Dwór reported the sick who were then executed. One's health was determined by whether one was able to stand. People from Płońsk sent bread and parcels. Police from Nowy Dwór, particularly Majloch, stole the parcels and bread. Policemen from Płońsk, [. . .] Jojne and Szloma Fuchs tried to obtain bread for us and did deliver it. On Saturday, I was present at that. They brought bread and the Jewish police from Nowy Dwór began to beat the *obozowicze* who were waiting for the food. Majloch hit Fuks because he reprimanded him for beating those who were already suffering enough. Fuks addressed those around him: 'Jews, from tomorrow things will be different!'

The next day Płońsk Landrat arrived and Majloch was taken away. After that the shootings decreased.

[13] The return. Everybody was loaded onto carts. Forty men were left in the camp to empty the cesspits. I was one of them. They hit us while we were working and threw us into the cesspits for fun.

Then we were ordered to run after the carts. An SA-man on a bicycle was hurrying us up. We caught up with the carts and got on. Everybody was given a piece of sausage. Between Ludwisin and Nowy Dwór everybody was ordered to get off. We walked to Ludwisin, where we were given some bread and soup.

On the very border straw was set ablaze and the carts were fumigated. We were ordered to go left. Those who were strong enough walked, while the weaker ones were pushed into the fire and shot at.

I was ordered to bury the corpses of the sick from room sixteenth. I was petrified when I saw that they were still alive and trying to wipe the sand off their face. The SA-man who was standing beside me with his rifle pointed at me

hurried me up, threatening that if I didn't carry out the order he would have me thrown into that grave.

[14] Rajza Końskowolska, 30, daughter of Frajda neé Surgał and Abram from Żuromin.

In the autumn of 1939 I was deported from Żuromin to Płońsk with my husband, who is still in Płońsk because he is registered. A week after my arrival in Pomiechówek I gave birth to a boy. When the labour pains began, militiaman Majloch took me to a special room. It differed from the other rooms in that there was hay on the asphalt. I gave birth at night in the dark. A woman named Hinda from Nowy Dwór delivered the baby. I stayed in that room for two weeks. I had no medical assistance. On the first day the cooks gave us, the three women in confinement, a baked potato which we shared. Then some food was sent to us from Zakroczym. We sometimes got a little soup, bread, or a bottle of milk. [. . .] camp at the beginning, perhaps [for?] 5 days, also cooked soup for us. I was on good terms with the other women in confinement. Mrs Szl[. . .] from Zakroczym received [. . .] and she shared that with me and the other women, and there were five of us.

[. . .] we were sent to [. . .] we lay [15] on the asphalt.

8 September [19]41

Rojza Końskowolska¹³¹

Tauba Rzetelna, 45, was taken uphill and did not return. She left six children. Recalls Hersz Blumert, brother [. . .]

[16] Szajndla Gutkowicz, 25, from Nowy Dwór, daughter of Chaim and Ita
My sister Frajda went to the hill but returned. She was lucky because Majloch had been taken away two days earlier. I had all my possessions stolen in the camp. After [. . .] busy tending to my three sick: my father, mother, and sister. [. . .] I was sent an old coat which they could put under their heads, [. . .] stolen. We had no outerwear. The coat I have was brought by my sister from a Polish woman. The local Poles brought [. . .] cherries, but the authorities would not let us approach them. We saw them standing beyond the wires. On our way back, each of us received [. . .] from the German police, while the peasants who arrived on their carts to transport us gave us [. . .] all the [. . .] they had.

131 Handwritten signature in the original.

The peasants said that if they had had bread then they would have [. .] good. All the SA-men were *Volksdeutsche* from the local villages. Handwritten signature: Szajndla Gutkowicz.

[17] Irka Grzebieniarz, 21, from Biežuń,¹³² daughter of Jakub and Łaja
Deported from Biežuń to Warsaw in 1939. At Easter 1941 I went to Płońsk. We were receiving parcels from Płońsk. It was also possible to buy food products from those who went to fetch water and, on their way, bought bread, cucumbers, onions, sweets, and other products at prices three times higher than the market price. Some people had money from selling their clothes and the parcels they received. The German police threw bread and sausage. But we did not receive anything. As we were getting on the wagon an SA-man began beating my father. An officer who was passing by asked the beating one why he was doing that. The SA-man responded that the carts were only for the sick. The officer said that he had no right to beat the Jews and that the wagons were for everybody. Handwritten signature: Grzebieniak [sic]

[18] Sala Gabler, 19, daughter of Marjem and Szachna, Nowy Dwór.
On Saturday they took us for steaming. I took my two-year-old brother and left my father, mother, and brother in hospital. A round-up began at two o'clock at night. I woke up, grabbed my little brother, and ran to the square. They arranged us there. There was beating and killing. Dogs were jumping at us. The SA-men were making the dogs snatch caps off the men's heads as a form of greeting. We were then loaded onto the carts and transported to Pomiechówek. While in the camp, I learned that my mother had been shot dead in hospital while lying in bed with a fever of over 40 degrees, my father had been wounded, and my seven-year-old brother had managed to hide under the quilt, thus avoiding death. In the camp the child and I were naked and barefoot because we had not been allowed to take anything with us. Some people were lucky because they had food parcels, I did not get anything. One night the child got fretful. I could see that he had diarrhoea. I stood with him in a queue for water and we waited from 7 o'clock in the morning until 4 in the afternoon, when I received it. The squeeze in the queue was dreadful and the child started crying. So, I asked those around me to let me out.

132 Biežuń (Żuromin County) was inhabited by more than 2,000 Jews before the war.

With the squeeze being so great, they could not let me [19] out. An SA-man noticed that I was having an argument and he severely beat me up with his rifle and hit the child on the head with a baton. At 7 o'clock in the evening a wagon from Zakroczym arrived and gruel was distributed. [. . .] Majloch Hoppenblum and I asked him to let me in because [. . .] severely beaten up. But he pushed me and so hard at that [. . .]. The child was injured [. . .] to such a degree [. . .] live. I went in [. . .] the child [. . .] suddenly [started] weeping and [. . .] [was?] thirsty. So [. . .] boil some water [. . .] when [. . .] an SA-man passing by [. . .] but [. . .] nobody. I [. . .] noticed [. . .] I gave the child the water to drink in a small hot pot and he burned himself so severely [. . .] an open wound by the mouth. The child [. . .] so terrified [. . .] became even sicker. There are no physicians here [. . .] nutritious. As he had an upset stomach I had to feed him only [. . .] once I carried the child to the latrine. Target practising, an SA-man fired and the bullet went over the child's shoulder, who ran off without relieving himself. That was when the child stopped walking, perhaps from fear or hunger, because I had some gruel [only] once every three days. He began to soil himself. Of course, others complained about that. [. . .] Szulc checked daily whether we were able to stand. Those who could not were taken uphill, shot or buried alive. Once I felt so weak that I could not stand. [. . .] Majloch took me uphill. As women were buried on top of men in the mass grave, I had to await my turn. There was silence. Nobody was allowed to say a word. Some [. . .] in their eyes. I saw some of them look at the sky and collapse under fire. We had to walk to death like to the dancefloor. Meanwhile, I turned to Majloch and started begging him to take pity on the child, who would have been left without a guardian. Later Majloch confessed that he knew that my mother had been shot, that she was already dead. He turned to the SA-man and stated that I did not have fever, that I was not sick but only weak from hunger. And he told him to send me back to cell sixteen. After nightfall with help from some woman I escaped from there to the child.

[21] Several days later a wagon arrived from Płońsk. I did everything I could to get to the bread. I received as many as 2 kilograms. My joy defied description. They then began to issue honey for the children. I approached the man from Płońsk who was distributing the honey and I asked for some, but in the dreadful squeeze, through carelessness, somebody pushed me at an SA-man. The SA-man beat me up for that and took me into the cell's entrance to execute me. The child noticed that the SA-man was readying his rifle to fire, grabbed

my face, and started weeping. The SA-man said: 'You are lucky that you have a child.' He beat me up and ordered me to go into the cell. I was so beaten up that I could neither sit, nor stand, nor lie down.

That night — I had been in Pomiechówek for as long as 5 weeks — I could not sleep because I was in so much pain. I fell asleep in the early hours of the morning. I dreamt that my mother was lying on a bed, while my father was sitting on a stool as if atoning, with my little brother next to him. I stormed in and flung myself at my mother, who pushed me off three times. That day I learned from Majloch that mother was dead. My father is in Nowy Dwór with my brother, but I have not heard from them. Three days later they transported us close to the [General] Government's border, shouting: 'Off to Warsaw. Go eat peels, *bobelech* and *ferfelech*.'¹³³ When I saw fire in the distance, I was certain that they would drive us into the fire. I grabbed the child and jumped off the rolling wagon and ran into the field and hid in potatoes. Early in the morning I reached Ludwisin on foot, where I was given bread and gruel for the child.

Sala Gabler.¹³⁴

[24] Szajna Frydlender, 18, from Żuromin, daughter of Brana and Mordka

A week after my arrival in Pomiechówek, on Thursday around 11 o'clock at night, an SA-man came and woke me up, because I was the first he saw lying there, and [he told me to find] 25 [people]. When they assembled, he escorted us uphill in twos but we did not know why. At first, he ordered us to kneel and pray like Arabs, with our hands up [. . .]. Next, five couples were selected to dance, while the rest were to sing. From those couples they took [. . .] we learned that the girls had been raped. Two boys singing in our presence were shot, while the rest had to sing. Around two o'clock we were told that everybody would get 5 whips and then go to sleep. Due to the fact that [. . .] arrived and the SA-men heard the auto pulling up, they ordered us to disperse in silence fearing [. . .] find out.¹³⁵ That saved us [. . .]. The SA-men had a plan. Girls on one side, boys on the other. The former were to be shot, while the latter were to live for one more week.

133 (Yiddish) Peas and noodles.

134 Handwritten signature in the original.

135 Cf. the text edited by Salomea Ostrowska, doc. 8.

[. . .] The night time singing repeated every other night; every time they were [. . .]. Having learned that the Jews working on their details were falling victim, gendarmes from Kroczewo¹³⁶ arrived daily to order [25] peace.

My father, Mordka Frydlender, was killed. Our German supervisor, a non-commissioned officer, sent us the money we should have been paid for our work and he aided us financially and in every other form. Having learned that my father had been shot in our presence, he slapped the killer thrice, who was then taken away from the camp.

[. . .] after arrival at the camp, on Wednesday, a day after the arrival of people with parcels. We had a large food parcel which we had received for my father from the owner of the German company Strobel. It was a hot day. In his pants and a shirt, my father stood outside the cell and lit a cigarette from the parcel. He noticed that I was carrying water and he wanted [. . .] to the water. An SA-man called him and told him to go to [. . .] the SA-man stood by the edge of the ditch, took his weapon, and aimed at my father. Seeing that, Daddy got scared and began pleading with him. He asked what he did wrong, said that he had children and a weak wife, and asked what he had done to deserve that. The SA-man did not respond but fired, wounding father in the arm. Father tried to run for his life. The SA-man fired again, shooting him dead. I heard that somebody was shot when I was washing my hair. [26] Not expecting such a blow, I ran in the direction from which the shot had come, asking who had been killed. Suddenly, somebody ran up to me, grabbed me by the hands and stopped me from walking any further. I freed myself because I could feel that everybody was looking at me and I could not see my father. I ran to the spot where my father had been lying but he was no longer there because the SA-man had taken him. I do not know what happened later because I fainted and after I came to I noticed that my leg was in a puddle of blood. It occurred that the same SA-man had beaten me up. I had not felt the blows because I had been lying unconscious on the ground. The next day a wagon arrived from Zakroczym. I wrote the following note: 'Dear Mr Strobel. I am writing to you with great pain in my heart to inform you that my father Mordka Frydlender has been innocently shot. Do whatever you find fit to remove this

136 Kroczewo (Płońsk County) was approximately 15 km from Pomiechówek. During the war a German military unit was stationed there, probably because of the back-up military airfield located there.

killer from here because otherwise our entire family is bound to fall victim.' I sent the letter written in German to Kroczewo along with the blood-stained shirt which I had removed from my father's corpse when it was already in the grave. I had to disguise myself for two days (I wore different clothes) because the SA-man learned that I had used his absence to take the shirt. I sent the card to Kroczewo to the owner of the Strobel company. 3 days later the owner, Mr Strobel, arrived at the guard post, asking [27] why my father had been killed. I was present at the interrogation. The SA-man dared say that he had descended into the pit to steal snuff even though going there was forbidden. He had to be punished for that. Then the cook said that he had been present when the SA-men had called my father and that he was defending himself and did not want to go [. .] descend. With the cook's statement the killer was [. .] the officer who arrived had been called as a result of Strobel's arrival, [. .] the main guard, slapped the SA-man thrice in the presence of [. .]. [. .] coincided with the removal of Majloch, the murderer of so many [. .] less shooting.

[. .] interrogation of my father's killer it occurred that the cook [. .] SA-man [. .] reprimanded him [. .] the SA-man says that the Jew [. .] as it turned out [. .] Jew. To that Strobel said [. .] 'Do not [. .] in German: '*Ja alle Volksdeutsche haben] Polen [. .] auch gut bekannt.*'¹³⁷ After Strobel's visit I was given a job [. .]

Szajna Frydlander.¹³⁸

[28] from [. .] hot weather [. .] give bread to Mummy. [. .] arrived from Zakroczym with lunch. The SA-man called me, gave me lunch, and told me not to go anywhere after eating it. Sensing what would happen, I went to room twelve to a woman I knew and I said [29] [. .] the other [woman?] [. .].

Szajna Frydlander¹³⁹

ARG I 1165 (Ring. I/956; I/374).

Description: original (handwritten by KK* with handwritten signatures of the authors of the testimonies, ink, substantial damages, 29 sheets and some small fragments, 29 pages); duplicate (typewritten, 3 incomplete copies, 83×154, 195×285 mm, major damage and missing parts of the text), Polish, 21 sheets,

137 (German) 'Yes, all Germans have also come to know Poles well [. .].'

138 Handwritten signature in the original.

139 Handwritten signature in the original.

21 pages. These testimonies were used to compile a study devoted to the camp in Pomiechówek, see doc. 8. Attached are Hersh Wasser's two notes in Yiddish: 'Pomiechówek. Testimonies recorded in quarantine at Lesz[no Street] 109'; 'Fragments. Camp Pomiechówek. Testimonies of camp prisoners, recorded by Shulamit Ostrowska.'

Edition based on the original, 29 sheets, 29 pages, supplemented with the typewritten duplicates.

b) After 16 August 1941, Warsaw ghetto. Unknown Zakroczym resident, testimony of expulsion to Pomiechówek, living conditions in the camp, and departure to Warsaw.

ARG I 1165 (Ring. I/956).

Description: duplicate (3 copies), typewritten, Polish, 195x232 mm, minor damages and missing fragments, 6 sheets, 6 pages. The manuscript of this document see ARG I 1166a (Ring. I/415); for edited version see doc. 2.

8

After 16 August 1941, Warsaw ghetto. Salomea Ostrowska, study 'Obóz śmierci – Pomiechówek' [Pomiechówek death camp]. The course of the deportation of Jews from Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki and Płońsk to the fort in Pomiechówek and the living conditions in the camp.

Pomiechówek death camp¹⁴⁰

[1] On 16 August 1941, approximately 700 Jews who returned from the camp in Pomiechówek arrived at the quarantine.

140 This text is based on interviews conducted with 18 former prisoners of the camp in Pomiechówek. Róża Kapłan's testimony see doc. 6; the following ones, see doc. 7. The testimony given by Abram Błaszka (Błaszka) was recorded separately; see doc. 1.

Built by the Polish authorities, the fort is an underground structure consisting of a series of halls with asphalt floors and a grassy roof for camouflage. Near the fort flows a small rivulet named Pomiechówka, from where water is drawn to meet the residents' needs.

Jews from the nearby towns of Nowy Dwór and Płońsk, among them former inhabitants of Sierpc, Drobin, Nowe Miasto, Biezuń, and Bodzanów were driven into the fort [2] and after having been deported from their hometowns back in the autumn of 1939 had settled in Płońsk and Nowy Dwór.

It is difficult for me to state the exact number of people who were in Pomiechówek and those who have returned. The number of people who died in the camp is estimated by its prisoners at 800. Asked about the victims' surnames and more detailed information, they were unable to provide either. In most cases the surnames repeat.

[3] Expulsion of the Jews from Nowy Dwór

A week before a steaming of all homes was ordered. The Jews were commanded to give all their possessions up for delousing. 'Bundles of bedding, clothes, and underwear were steamed. The flats were locked and the people wandered at night in the yards. That work continued for an entire week' (Abram Błaszka from Nowy Dwór).¹⁴¹ Saturday 5 July was to be the bathing day. At 10 o'clock in the morning a physician ordered all women to be assembled and escorted to the Vistula. 'It was a summer day, but it was rather cold. There had been cold wind since early morning.' The women were kept in the water until 5 o'clock in the afternoon. 'The physician drove a motorcycle into the water, by which means he forced [4] the reluctant women into the river. Finally, a German officer who assisted him harshly reprimanded him for this inappropriate behaviour. Some of the women fainted from weakness and had to be carried home on stretchers' (Rózia Kapłań, Nowy Dwór).¹⁴²

The men's turn came before evening. 'The sun was setting, the clouds had covered up the sky, and it was getting colder and colder.'¹⁴³ The physician

141 See the entire testimony, doc. 1.

142 The information about the testifying individual included only in the duplicate. This quoted sentence is also missing from the record of the interview with Rózia Kapłań (see doc. 6). But such a sentence appears in Abram Błaszka's testimony; see doc. 1.

143 This and the following quotations from Abram Błaszka's testimony; see doc. 1.

walked about with a club and forced everyone to wash even though they were all shivering from the cold. 'After bathing we had to wait naked for an hour to get back the clothes from the steaming.'

After returning they lay down to sleep on the hard surface but 'at two o'clock I was woken by shouts and noise. I immediately opened [5] the door and ran out onto the street. . . . Crying, crowds of people were leaving their flats and running towards the ghetto gate, with the Jewish police calling on the people to leave their flats and walk to the Market Square' (Abram Błaszka). Two customs officers stood by the gate, holding thick clubs with which they clubbed everybody on the head. Those who did not manage to get out on time or took shelter and were captured were shot. The gravedigger who had been ordered to come over to bury the corpses was also shot for an unknown reason.

Apart from the Jews there were plenty of uniformed Germans on the market square: gendarmes and SA-men. The Germans arranged all the families into fours to check their *Ausweise*. [6] *Ausweise* are certificates confirming one's permanent residence in a given locality. Many of the inhabitants came from Warsaw, from which they had escaped to avoid high prices. Many permanent residents of Nowy Dwór who were expelled in February 1941 and deported to Warsaw later returned to their hometown. They did not have *Ausweise*, which the authorities had issued during their absence.

The *Ausweis* control continued. Those who had the documents were ordered to stand on the street, those who did not — on the market square. When they realised that the number of *Ausweise* holders was too large, they drove everybody to the market square and destroyed their [7] *Ausweise*. Dogs were jumping at people, snatching off their hats. When everybody was assembled, the order to depart was given. They set off in the direction of Modlin. After an hour's march they reached the forts in Pomiechówek, where they were counted and put into cells; approximately 200 people per cell.

Hours passed. They got hungry and the weeping of children asking for bread was coming from every corner.

Frisking. Two SA-men by tables in the courtyard. One of them, Netzel, called 'Haver Nisen' by the *obozowicze*, is showing off his dexterity: 'he skillfully hits every approaching Jew in the face'. He takes away everything — even if somebody has 5 pfennigs. He destroys the *Ausweise* — [8] 'you have no

need for all those', he says, 'you will never leave this place anyway'. The next morning the unknown hands began to throw bread over the fence.

In the afternoon there was one slice for everyone.

That day Jews from Płońsk were brought at midnight. 'Beaten up and with their heads bandaged, they came in making a lot of noise and stretched out on their bundles.'

Expulsion of the Jews from Płońsk

All of the Jews were driven onto a square called Crooked. An *Ausweis* control was conducted. Those who had them were ordered to stand on one side, those who did not on the other. Those without *Ausweise* were driven through a gate, that is, a passage [9] made by two groups of SA-men who hit the people passing through. Then the people were taken away and put in a field fenced with barbed wire, 1 kilometre from Płońsk, from which they were transported by trucks to Pomiechówek.

Water

The next day after their arrival at Pomiechówek a joy-inspiring guest arrived — a barrel of water. All *obozowicze* were filled with joy and formed a line to the barrel. The squeeze was so dreadful that eventually an SA-man armed with a rifle began to instil order with his weapon. The people were so thirsty that despite the imminent danger some tried to get to the barrel. That cost an unidentified sixteen-year-old boy his life. [10] Twenty-year-old [Pola] Szpilman from Żuromin: 'When I went to get water I had my head cut open with a butt.' Sala Gabler from Nowy Dwór says that, with her baby in her arms, she stood in the line for water from seven o'clock in the morning to as late as four in the afternoon. There was dreadful squeeze in the line and the baby started crying. So she asked those around her to let her out, but she could not get out from the crowd. An SA-man noticed the commotion and hit her with his rifle and the baby on the head with a rubber club. 'We drank cold water which we took from the Pomiechówka rivulet. We were beaten on the way and ordered to walk fast. But as the barrel was heavy, we could not cope and that was why they hit us' (Szyja Sokół from Płońsk).

[11] But despite the harassment the people were eager to fetch water. The reason for that was that on their way and in the village, if the SA-man was benevolent, they could buy foodstuffs to then sell in the camp. The local

peasants supported [the Jews] with whatever they could: bread, potatoes, milk, and, according to Abram Błaszka, even various dishes. Sometimes the SA-men would let the Jews do some shopping in a shop. They bought sweets, biscuits, pretzels, cucumbers, currant, berries, and other products. 'Sometimes we returned carrying heavy bundles of products which we then sold to the *obozowicze*, making quite a profit. After their return the cells resembled a market. There were lots of buyers, [12] who spent their last penny or even took off some clothes to eat something.' (Abram Błaszka)

Even though the Jews were trying to trade in secret, Zydler, the camp commandant, saw what was happening and decided to put an end to it. For this reason, he ordered a search. Everybody was arranged into fours and Zydler began the search but found so little money that he gave up further steps and made do with a threat that if the Jews did not surrender their money to him, he would shoot everybody on whom he would find cash. 'And we kept on driving for water, and the trade after the search not only did not disappear, but gradually and rapidly accelerated, finally turning into actual trade.'

[13] Confinement

Life has its rules and order. The people were driven out without regard for their condition. Some of the Jewish Order Service functionaries with their families, the wealthiest citizens, and the hospital patients who had a fever below 40 degrees¹⁴⁴ were left in Nowy Dwór. Those with fever over 40 degrees were shot. The cripples were killed too. Hunchback Fiszal Lipsztein somehow succeeded to return and stayed in the camp, where he died of natural causes. He said that the victims had to step into the graves, where they were shot. Also pregnant women came to Pomiechówek. They gave birth in the camp. 30-year-old [14] Rojza Końskowolska from Żuromin told me about her delivery. When the labour pains began, militiaman Majloch escorted her to a special room for women in labour, which differed from other rooms in that there was straw on the asphalt. The delivery took place in the dark. A woman named Hinda from Nowy Dwór delivered the baby without any medical assistance. On the first day the cooks gave the three women in confinement a baked potato, which they shared. Then 'some food, sometimes bread, a little soup or a bottle of milk' were delivered from Zakroczym. The camp management also had soup cooked for

144 Celsius, here and below.

them for the first five days. The total number of women in confinement was five. Two weeks later they were all [15] sent back to the general hall.

Abram Błaszka describes that a little differently. He writes that in the camp there was the midwife Berta Rozensztajn from Nowy Dwór, who wore an armband saying *Jüdische Krankenschwester*.¹⁴⁵ The women in confinement received better food. Commandant Zydler ordered better parcels to be confiscated for them.

Song, dance, and other entertainment

Rafał Herckowicz, aged 52, from Płońsk, relates: ‘without a reason — they fired at us for singing’.

Sometimes, however, the Jews were ordered to sing. Pola Szpilman from Żuromin says that young girls and women were taken at night [16] and ordered to sing.

Szajna Frydlender, aged 18, from Żuromin A week after her arrival at Pomiechówek, on Thursday around eleven o'clock at night, an SA-man came and woke her up because she was the first one he saw. He demanded that she find 25 people, whom he then arranged in twos and escorted uphill. There they were ordered to kneel and ‘pray like Arabs’; that is, on their knees and with their hands up. Next, five couples were selected to dance, while the rest were to sing. Those couples were then taken away somewhere and the next day it was said that the girls had been raped. [17] The rest had to keep on singing. That night two boys from the singing group were shot dead. The rest had to keep on singing. Around two o'clock the SA-men announced that everybody would get five whips and then go to sleep. At that moment they heard director Szulc's car approaching. Fearing that he would discover how they were entertaining themselves, the SA-men ordered those gathered to disperse in silence. Szajna Frydlender claims that Szulc's arrival saved a few people's life, because the SA-men had arranged girls on one side and boys on the other and declared that some would be shot while others would live for one more week. The night-time singing repeated. Having learned about the harassment of the Jews who worked on their posts, gendarmes from Kroczew [18] arrived daily to order peace. The dancing took place at night. The party site was lit with floodlights. The Jewish youth were taught song lyrics, one of which went

145 (German) Jewish nurse.

as follows: 'Rydz-Śmigły was nothing, our darling Hitler taught Jews how to work, our troopers are even better, they show not only this world but also the underworld.' That tragic night the floodlights were switched on as those five couples were being driven uphill. That was done to blind the rest so that they would not see what happened with them. Only one of the girls cry was heard.

The dance nights that followed had more variety to them. The floodlights were multi-coloured now. There were no casualties. [19] There were but bruises, and one boy, whose surname remains unknown, had his arm twisted. A SA-man, a dwarf, excelled in seeking entertainment. On the whole, the SA-men could not complain about lack of fun. There was an order to bow to them. When at dusk the girls would go to the latrine (8-metre long rectangle), they often did not see the SA-men standing nearby, who forced them to do gymnastics in the latrine, which consisted in jumping down. (Pola Szpilman from Żuromin)

When Sala Gabler's two-year-old brother fell ill, she carried him to the latrine. Target practising, an SA-man fired a bullet in such a way that it swished right above the child's shoulder. The boy ran away without relieving himself and from then on did not communicate his natural needs and soiled himself.

[20] I met Sala Gabler in quarantine. I was curious about the large open wound, about one-and-a-half centimetres long, visible on the child's cheek, running from its mouth. Sala said that in the camp the child got some stomach or intestine problems and one night he started crying from thirst. Sala collected some paper, lit it, and began to boil water in a mug for the child. Passing by, an SA-man saw the flames in the cell and fired, but luckily nobody was wounded. Frightened, Gabler quickly put out the fire. Without checking in advance whether the mug was too hot, she did not notice that it was red hot and she burned the child so severely that a wound opened near its mouth.

[21] Four Jews did not report for work right away. Director Zydler ordered all men to assemble in the courtyard in fours, facing him and his assistant, Jewish militiaman Majloch Hoppenblum. He then ordered that a gate be made, that is, a narrow passage between two groups of SA-men armed with thick clubs. Every Jew had to walk through that 'gate', with each one hit by the SA-men. Zydler climbed uphill with his whistle to have a better view of the spectacle. Suddenly, the beating was interrupted by the whistle, as the clubs

had broken. 'New ones were procured.' The people were let through again, but that time fours instead of one by one (Abram Błaszka).

[22] External Aid

The local population took considerable interest in the Jews detained in the camp, both Jews and Poles. Abram Błaszka remembers that as soon as the next day after their arrival the locals threw loaves of bread over the fence. Szajndla Gutkowicz said that Poles assembled by the fence with bread and cherries, but the guards would not let one approach them. Those who drove for water were also generously presented by local peasants with bread, milk, and whatever else the latter could spare.

On the way back from Pomiechówek the peasants who were to transport the Jews to Ludwiszyn gave away all the bread they [23] had.

The local towns still inhabited by Jews delivered food on carts. Food was supplied from Płońsk twice a week, on Tuesdays and Saturdays.

Zakroczyrn also sent carts loaded with food.

Families from Nowy Dwór delivered lunches to their relatives daily and the *Judenrat* supplied a cauldron of soup. Those who did not receive lunch bought potatoes from those who went for water, made a bonfire in the courtyard, and cooked soup. The number of those 'kitchens' grew. With time, coffee was brewed there for sale, to be exchanged for bread. Eventually, those 'kitchens' were prohibited.

[24] Dry food came from Płońsk: bread, *challahs*, and sometimes honey.

Those for whom those parcels were meant did not always receive them, because the Jewish militiamen kept some of them for themselves. Those offences were relatively frequent. Even when women in confinement were given cookies and milk, militiaman Majloch confiscated that food for himself.

[25] Epidemic in the Camp

The stay in Pomiechówek lasted six weeks.

Many people died there as a result of the epidemic. The authorities took radical steps to liquidate the disease. Everybody suspected of having typhus was isolated and shot. The test consisted in whether one could stand on their feet or not. Those who were able to run were healthy. Director Netzel often inspected the cells to make sure no sick people were there. 28-year-old Chaskiel Rejbak from Płońsk recounts that his mother and sister had

typhus and whenever an inspector walked in, he and his brother made [26] them stand up to conceal their condition. To facilitate control over the disease Netzel ordered one of the *obozowicze*, Majloch Hoppenblum, a militiaman from Nowy Dwór to report any new cases to him. Majloch Hoppenblum turned that duty into a source of income. He requested various things from people and when somebody refused, he reported them as sick.

Eventually, he got into a dispute with the Order Service [members] from Płońsk, brothers Szloma and Jojne Fuks, one of whom he hit in the face. After they had reported on his activity in the camp [27] to the German authorities, Hoppenblum was arrested.

Pejsach Surgał from Nowy Dwór recounts:

‘Militiaman Majloch from Nowy Dwór reported the sick who were then shot.

One Saturday I saw militiamen Jojne and Szloma Fuks deliver bread from Płońsk. The Jewish police from Nowy Dwór began to beat the *obozowicze*. Majloch hit Fuks because he reprimanded him for beating those who were suffering enough already.

Fuks addressed those around him: ‘Jews, from tomorrow things will be different!’

[28] The next day Płońsk Landrat¹⁴⁶ arrived and Majloch was taken away. Afterwards there was no more shooting.’

Rafał Herckowicz, aged 52, from Płońsk, recounts:

One Jew did a lot of harm but Płońsk put an end to that. He approached people and said that unless he was given money, he would tell on them and they would be shot.

Once Fuks arrived from Płońsk with a wagon with bread. Majloch demanded 25 loaves.

Then Fuks reported about that in Płońsk and Majloch was taken away.

[29] After there was no more shooting.

146 During that period the Płońsk *Landrat* and NSDAP *Kreisleiter* was Walther Moser. During the occupation Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki County with Pomiechówek and Modlin was incorporated into Płońsk County. See Danuta Skorwider, “Okupacja hitlerowska w powiecie płońskim”, in *Płońsk i ziemia płońska w XIX i XX wieku na tle dziejów Mazowsza Północnego*, ed. Adam Koseski, Janusz Szczepański (Płońsk, 1988), pp. 91–92.

Whatever Majloch set his eyes on had to be given away to him otherwise the owner was killed.

Pola Szpilman, aged 20, from Żuromin:

‘Brana Kersz, who was sitting next to me, was wearing a nice jacket. Majloch’s eighteen-year-old daughter demanded that she give her that jacket and when Kersz refused, Majloch took her to be shot.’

Majloch robbed people of parcels and bread allocated to the *obozowicze* by the camp management.

Chaim Srogal, a 46-year-old labourer, born in Sierpc:

[30] ‘Majloch Hoppenblum was a hall commandant. He distributed the bread in such a way that he appropriated 5 loaves as he issued 125 grams per person instead of 250.

The Jews were very relieved when Majloch was taken away.’

Szajndla Gutkowicz, aged 25, from Nowy Dwór:

‘My sister Frajda went uphill and returned. She was lucky, because Majloch had been taken away two days earlier.’

Majloch was highly influential with the SA-men. Nineteen-year-old Sala Gabler from Nowy Dwór was so emaciated that she was taken away as a sick person. The girl [31] was staying in the camp with her two-year-old brother. Their mother and father were being hospitalised for typhus when the Jews were expelled from the town. With the order to execute those who ran a temperature of more than 40 degrees, the mother had been shot, while the father had been wounded though not lethally. Sala’s brother, who was just a few years old, was in the hospital too. Frightened, he hid in the bedding and, unnoticed, avoided death. Thus, young Sala became the guardian of her youngest, two-year-old brother. As there was nobody who could take care of them and send them food parcels, the girl fainted from hunger and Majloch escorted her uphill, that is, [32] to the execution site.

‘I turned to Majloch’, Gabler relates, ‘and I began to ask him to take pity on the child, who would have been left without a guardian. As Majloch later admitted, he knew about my mother’s death. He turned to the SA-men and announced that I had no fever and that I was not sick but only weak from hunger and said that I should be sent back to cell sixteen. The SA-man consented.

After nightfall with help from some woman I escaped to the child.’

Cell sixteen was the infirmary, from where the sick were taken to be shot.

[33] From recollections of the teacher Abram Błaszka:

‘The shameful activity of Majloch’s band was revealed in its attitude towards the sick. The first days one could hear moaning in every cell. . . One day, director Zydler inspected every cell with Majloch, picking out the sick and elderly. During the day they were put in cell XVI, ‘the sixteen,’ which had been specially prepared for them. In the evening they were escorted uphill and shot. I can remember that one evening as I was lying on [34] the asphalt clinging to my family, I heard shots. The people in all the cells shivered. For nobody knew what would happen to them tomorrow, whether their fate would change the next day.

Zydler entrusted Majloch with the isolation of the sick in ‘the sixteen’. On his own initiative the commandant (Majloch) carried out an inspection and a selection in the cells. Everybody knew that isolation of a sick person was tantamount to their death. That was why everybody tried to ingratiate themselves with Mr Majloch so that he would leave the sick individual in the cell. The commandant wanted to use that to make a profit and he demanded a high price for leaving one in the cell.

[35] And the Jews paid.

They slipped thirty or fifty marks in Majloch’s palm. Those who had no cash paid with golden watches, wedding rings, bracelets, or other valuables. The poor were disadvantaged. They had nothing to pay with. Majloch had to show Zydler that he was isolating the sick. And most of his victims were poor.

The shooting of the sick took a few days and then they were only isolated and left at the mercy of fate.

[36] Majloch made a fortune.

One day a taxi from Płońsk arrived and took Majloch away.’

Various rumours are going around on Majloch’s death, which remain uncertain. Some have said that he was lynched by the Jews of Grójec¹⁴⁷ with consent from the German authorities. Others have said that the Germans tortured him to death.

Błaszka adds that some claim that the Jews from Płońsk hanged him in the market square and paid two marks each for witnessing that spectacle.

147 See doc. 7.

The Jewish Order Service, whose commandant in Pomiechówek was Majloch Hoppenblum, consisted of nine people. Those were: Hersz Tarnegold, about whose activity people say bad things also; Icek Sowiński, Szmul Dobski, Abe Jarzabek, Abram Lejzerowicz, Icek Moszkowicz, Moszek Fefer, and Majloch Hoppenblum.

Besides [the things said about] Hoppenblum and Tarnegold I have heard nothing to suggest that the remaining militiamen from Nowy Dwór conducted criminal activity.

[38] Death in Pomiechówek

‘We had to walk to our death like to the dancefloor’, says Sala Gabler, who was already to be shot because she was weak from hunger and was unable to stay on her feet. It was Majloch Hoppenblum’s intervention that led to her release. She told me that in the mass grave men were put on the bottom and women on top, and that that was why she had time to plead with Majloch and beg him into sparing her life.

I asked her how the Jews behaved in the face of death. She said that they were silent. Nobody was allowed [39] to say a word.

‘I saw people look at the sky and collapse under fire.’

Icko Herckowicz from Płońsk:

‘When we went to fetch water and pushed our way to get it, they fired at us.

Without a reason — they fired at us for singing.

They dragged us out at night for execution.’

Chaskiel Rejbak, aged 20, from Płońsk:

‘Icek Danzig from Drobin was killed because he had gold. Majloch denounced him.

Ita Danzig, only slightly weakened, was taken uphill.’

[40] Izrael Icek Gutsztadt from Drobin . . . was shot . . .

‘Moszek Kon, who was sick, was taken uphill and did not return.’

Chana Michałowicz, aged 16, from Płońsk:

‘Every day a different prisoner was ordered to bury the dead because there were a few dozen corpses each day.’Małka Czarnoczapka from Raciąż:

‘Pesa Ruchla Hiller from Raciąż was shot.

Marjem, sick after beating, was shot.

Four women whose surnames I do not know were shot. [41] Two of them were mentally ill; they went mad from hunger.'

Szyja Sokół, a tailor from Płońsk: 'My brother Moszek, aged 40, was shot without a reason. They took him away at night.'

Chaim Srogal, a 46-year-old labourer:

'Tuchendler from Warsaw, Stawki Street 42, flat 28, was shot.

Endel from Sierpc went to report that he had not received his parcel because Majloch stole it and he was shot too.

Sura Tuchendler, kicked by an SA-man when she was sitting in a corner, died.'

Hersz Blumert says that his sister [42] Toba Rzetelna, aged 45, was taken uphill and did not return. She orphaned six children.

Josek Kaplan from Nowy Dwór was ordered to bury corpses. He says that one of the last people he buried was still alive and wiped the dirt off his face.

Pejsach Sargał from Płońsk was called to bury a dead *obozowicz*. He was given an order to take the sick lying in room sixteen and bury them in one grave. He was petrified when he saw that they were still alive and that they were trying to wipe off the sand spilling in their face. An SA-man standing beside [43] with his rifle pointed at him threatened that unless he carried out the order, he would have him thrown into that grave.

Szajna Frydlender discusses the tragic death of her father.

Chaim Srogal, who worked as gravedigger, says that the mass graves held a few dozen bodies. The pits were not covered up until they were full.

[44] Departure from the camp

Everybody knew that an extended stay in the camp was equal to death.

Whenever the German commissions came for an inspection, they were approached and asked for release. The women faced the officers with weeping and lamentation, begging them to spare their husbands and children.

They were promised again and again, but their misfortune continued.

Eventually they ceased to believe.

An elderly Jew who had been in quarantine, a Pomiechówek *obozowicz*, relates: 'Jews,' I told everybody, 'until [45] I see carts I will not believe'. But once an officer said that we would be released that day. Several hours later I saw a number of carts and realised that salvation had finally come.'

It was on Thursday. In the evening the carts pulled up by the gate. We were ordered to leave the cells and walk to the courtyard with all our belongings. The people were then placed on the wagons, which were arranged into rows in a field.

We felt a mixture of joy and anxiety: 'for as long as the gendarmerie and the SA-men are keeping watch over us we are not yet free.'

[46] From among all those people, forty men were ordered to stay to empty the cesspits.

Pejsach Surgał from Płońsk relates:

'They hit us while we were working and they threw us into the cesspit for fun. And then we had to run after the carts. An SA-man on a bicycle was hurrying us up. We caught up with the wagons and got on.'

The Germans gave everybody some sausage for the road. The SA-men walked from wagon to wagon, throwing the sausages about. The peasants who owned the carts gave bread, whoever had it.

At ten o'clock in the evening the carts set out.

[47] 'The carts do not stop. The night is dark. They are heading for Modlin. We cross a bridge on the River Narew. We make a turn heading for Nowy Dwór. The wagons are rolling fast. We go past Nowy Dwór and carry on. We reach the border between the Reich and the General Government. We make a turn into a dirt road. We get off upon an order.' (Abram Błaszka)

Suddenly — fire!

'The fire was everywhere, below us, above us — everywhere', says Różia Kapłan. 'The sky was on fire. Suddenly, a German officer appears in front of me.

I run up to him and beg him [48] to show me the way, because I see fire wherever I turn. He pointed to a dark point to the left and said that it was a grove and that my folks had taken shelter there, and that I should go there.'

That fire was used to fumigate the carts.

People say that whoever was strong enough to walk escaped, while those too weak or old were burned with the straw.

However, nobody was able to give me a single name of a victim of that fire.

Pejsach Surgał says that the weak were shot at and pushed into the fire.

[49] The others say the same thing.

They wandered in the forests and fields throughout the night and then they finally reached the first village, where the peasants gave them food and drink.

From there they went to Ludwiszyn, where the local *Judenrat* organised aid for them.

They were then sent to Warsaw by train, where after quarantine they were accommodated in refugee centres, while those who had family there went to their relatives.

ARG I 1163 (Ring. I/374).

Description: original, handwritten (KK),* notebook, ink, 140×140, 140×200 mm, major damages and missing parts of the text, duplicate (2 copies, typewritten, 207×290 mm), Polish, 64 sheets, 85 pages. Attached is Hersh Wasser's note in Polish: 'Report based on the recorded testimonies of the *obozowicze*, compiled by Salomea Ostrowska, a co-worker of Dr Ringelblum's Archive.'

Edition based on the original, 49 sheets, 49 pages, supplemented with both copies of the duplicate.

9

a) After September 1941, Warsaw ghetto. Hersh Wasser and unknown person(s), list of Jews victims of the camp in Pomiechówek

[3] ¹⁴⁸ [Name]	[Year of birth or age]	[Cause of death]
Sura Asz	1877	Shot
Mojsze Herdlisz	1891	Died
Wolf Groper	1912	Died
Josek Rubin	1914	Died
Dawid Tuchendler	1901	Shot
Łemeł Rzeszotko	1900	Shot
Poze Kletczewski	1880	Shot
Ester Ruda	1890	Shot
Hena Ostaszewer	1890	Shot

148 Scan numbers.

Chaja Motyl	1894	Shot
Sura Tuchendler	1900	Shot
Tauba Rzetelna	1895	Shot
Frajda Lesman	1896	Shot
Rywka Blum	1914	Missing
Hersz Lesman	1894	Missing
DROBIN ¹⁴⁹		
Icek Dancyg(er)	54	Shot for gold possession
Ita Dancyger	28	Shot for gold possession
Mojsze Kohn	39	Shot
Rachela Borensztajn	36	Shot
Altman		
Izrael Icek Gutsztat	43	Shot

[4] Drobin

b) After September 1941, Warsaw ghetto. Author unknown, Lista poległych z Kikota w Pomiechówku¹⁵⁰ [List of people from Kikół who died at Pomiechówek].

List of people from Kikół¹⁵¹ who died at Pomiechówek.

Szyja Złotak	68	Shot
Dan Złotak	31	Shot

149 Drobin (Płock County) before the war inhabited by approximately 1,300 Jews. The ghetto was established in September 1940.

150 In the orig.: Ponichówki.

151 Kikół (Lipno County), see <https://sztetl.org.pl/pl/miejscowosci/k/366-kikol/107-listy-nazwisk/84063-lista-platnikow-skladki-z-kikola-na-rzecz-gminy-zydowskiej-w-lubiczu-na-rok-1938>; accessed 06.04.2021; the names Złotek (here Złotak), Chomont and Goldreich (here Goldrejch) are listed there.

Dawid Aron Złotak	35	Shot
Mordcha Chomont	42	Died
Ester Złotak	58	Died
Wolf Gropa[?] ¹⁵²	34	Died
Mojsze Goldrejch	42	Shot
Mania Goldrejch	41	Died
Sura Lipiec	32	Died

ARG I 1171 (Ring. I/1216).

Description:

a) original, handwritten, three styles of handwriting (H.W.* and two unknown, Polish, 95×151 mm and 117×198 mm, 1 sheet, 2 pages.

b) original, handwritten (minor supplementations by Hersh Wasser, ink), pencil, Polish, 97×152 mm, 1 sheet, 1 page.

152 Reading uncertain.

Part II

Death camps: Chełmno on the Ner and Treblinka

Edited by

Barbara Engelking and Alina Skibińska

Introduction

In Part Two of the volume we present twelve documents and abstracts of five others¹ concerning two of the death camps located on pre-war Polish territory: Chełmno on the Ner² (chapter I) and Treblinka II³ (chapter II). The text consists of testimonies of escapees from those camps,⁴ describing the first month of the functioning of camp machinery, and a report based on them (regarding Chełmno), several letters warning of the imminent destruction, testimonies of those who did not see the camp, but had first-hand knowledge of the basic facts, directly from the escapees, as well as an article published in an underground newspaper, not to mention sketches of the Treblinka camp. The Underground Archive of the Warsaw ghetto, similarly to the surviving Underground Białystok Ghetto Archive, contains only scant documents about the death camps. Neither holds any first-hand description of the Sobibór or Bełżec camps, and even the very names are rarely mentioned by the escapees.⁵

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- 1 One of them is included in the volume *Oyneg Shabes: People and Works*, doc. 65, and four — in the volume *Letters on the Shoah* (forthcoming).
 - 2 Chełmno on the Ner (Polish: Chełmno nad Nerem, German: Kulmhof am Nehr) (Koło County).
 - 3 Treblinka (Sokołów Podlaski County).
 - 4 See Lea Preis, *Żydzi przybyli z zaświatów. Pierwsze relacje uciekinierów z Chełmna nad Nerem i Trebłinki przedstawione w warszawskim getcie w latach 1942–1943*, trans. Krzysztof Środa, in: Abraham Jakub Krzepicki, *Człowiek uciekł z Treblinek ... Rozmowy z powracającym*, ed. Barbara Engelking and Alina Skibińska (Warszawa, 2017), pp. 5–47.
 - 5 For more, see Aleksandra Bańkowska, “Żydzi jako świadkowie Zagłady w relacjach z podziemnych archiwów gett warszawskiego i białostockiego” (unpublished paper delivered at a Warsaw conference “Być świadkiem Zagłady,” Warszawa, 2013); Maria Ferenc,

The Germans put into operation the first stationary death camp on 8 December 1941, locating it in *Warthegau*, the territory incorporated into the Reich, in the small village of Chełmno nad Nerem, and in the Rzuchów Forest several kilometres away. The Chełmno camp operated in two stages: from 8 December 1941 to 7 April 1943, and in June–July 1944. The precise number of victims is not known but it is accepted that the figure ranges from 152,000 (figures from German sources) to 225,000.⁶

This is where the Jews from a number of places of *Warthegau* perished, including Koło (transports from 7 to 11 December 1941), Dąbie (14 December 1941), Dobre, Kłodawa (10 and 12 January 1942), Bugaj (13 January 1942), Izbica Kujawska (14–15 January 1942). Most victims were from Łódź (about 80,000) and Zduńska Wola (10,900), from the collective rural ghetto in Czachulec (about 10,000), from Kutno, Pabianice, Łask, and other. Around 11,000 Jews from the Reich, Austria, Luxembourg, and the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia were killed there, as well as some 4,300 Roma deported in January 1942 from a camp within the Łódź ghetto, and also a number of Poles, probably Soviet POWs, and a group of Czech children from Lidice.⁷

A detachment made up of men experienced in the ‘Operation T4’ specialising in the ‘euthanasia’ of those mentally handicapped and with incurable genetic diseases⁸ under SS-*Hauptsturmführer* Herbert Lange⁹ (hence the name of the unit: *Sonderkommando* Lange), murdered people on a mass scale by means of truck exhaust fumes. Lange was the first camp commander,

„Każdy pyta, co z nami będzie”. *Mieszkańcy getta warszawskiego wobec wiadomości o wojnie i Zagładzie* (Warszawa, 2021).

- 6 Patrick Montague, *Chełmno and the Holocaust. The History of Hitler's First Death Camp* (Chapel Hill, N.C. 2012), pp. 185–87.
- 7 Andrzej Budziarek, “Polacy, jeńcy radzieccy i dzieci czeskie, zamordowani w Chełmnie nad Nerem”, in: *Ośrodek zagłady w Chełmnie nad Nerem i jego rola w hitlerowskiej polityce eksterminacyjnej. Materiały z sesji naukowej*, ed. Józef Kapustka e.a., (Konin, 1995), pp. 69–74.
- 8 Within the framework of ‘Operation T4,’ from September 1939 to July 1941, around 70,000 people were gassed in the Third Reich. The ‘experts’ in killing people on an industrial scale, experienced in Operation T4, were among the first to be involved in the program to murder the Jews.
- 9 In March 1942, Herbert Lange was delegated to the RSHA headquarters in Berlin, and died in April 1945 in the siege of Berlin.

and in March 1942 he was replaced by *SS-Hauptsturmführer* Hans Johann Bothmann¹⁰ (*Sonderkommando* Bothmann). The inhabitants of the nearby ghettos were transported to Chełmno and here, in the former palace and its vicinity,¹¹ after the victims had been robbed of all their belongings and once they stripped (under the pretext of mandatory shower and disinfection before transfer to a labour camp, as they were told), they were marched along a platform from which there was no way of escaping, to specially adapted vans.¹² The driver would drive off and stop in a clearing in the Rzuchów Forest, and now the exhaust fumes were directed inside, and the engine kept working as long as it was necessary to suffocate the people inside (around 15–20 minutes); such death was extremely excruciating. The corpses were taken out of the vans and buried on the spot in mass graves by Jews who had been forced to carry out the task, members of the so-called ‘forest kommando’ (German *Waldkommando*).

Each morning a group of Jewish gravediggers were brought from Chełmno to the Rzuchów Forest, where, battered and terrorised, they had to bury the bodies of their close ones. Each day, after the killing operation, they were transported back to Chełmno, where they would spend the night in the basement of the old palace. The SS-men would select a detail to work on a given day putting the corpses directly into the graves, and after the ‘day of work’ all of them were killed, and new gravediggers were selected among those brought in subsequent transports. Therefore, the prisoners were aware that they would be used for a short time, that they were all doomed, and that the only salvation was in escape. One of the first escapees from Chełmno was Szlamek (Szlama Winer), the author of the testimony published here (doc. 10a), the first known written testimony of an escapee from a death camp. His story ends with the information about meeting a ‘traveller from the other world’, as he calls himself, with rabbi Jakub Szulman in Grabów. We also

10 Hans Johann Bothmann hanged himself upon arrest on 4 April 1946 in a Heide (Schleswig-Holstein, Germany) prison cell.

11 In the first stage the Chełmno palace and the surrounding park were used to operate the camp. Before World War I, the property belonged to the Bistram family; after 1918 it became the Polish state property. On 7 April 1943, the Germans blew it up.

12 The platform and the entrance to the vans were camouflaged as an entrance to a bath house.

recall Rabbi Szulman's letter (doc. 13, abstract).¹³ Apart from the text of the testimony, the Ringelblum Archive contains the certificate of registration of Szlamek under the false name Jakub Grojnowski (doc. 10b) and his photograph with a dedication to Hersh and Bluma Wasser (doc. 10c).

Szlamek, whose true identity was established only several years ago,¹⁴ was Szlama Ber Winer from Izbica Kujawska.¹⁵ After his escape from Chełmno, he reached the Warsaw ghetto and there, Hersh Wasser, the secretary of Oyneg Shabes, and at the same time an employee of the Central Refugees Commission, recorded his shocking story. Thanks to several other ARG documents, we are aware of his fate. He left Warsaw for Zamość, where his brother's wife Fela Bajler lived, but he maintained correspondence with the Wassers. In a letter written in the end of March,¹⁶ Szlamek notified Hersh Wasser about another death camp, in Bełżec: "This is the same death as in Chełmno. [. . .] *das Baysolem ist in Belżyc*."¹⁷ He died, gassed, at Bełżec, where he was deported during the first *Aktion* in the Zamość ghetto, on 11 or 12 April 1942.¹⁸ Szlamek had a premonition of imminent death and deeply felt his helplessness about his cruel fate. In his last letter to Wasser, he said good-bye with the following words: "Probably I'm writing my last letter to you, and I shall probably go where my Parents have gone, and in the same manner."¹⁹

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- 13 Rabbi Szulman's letter will be published in *Letters on the Shoah* (forthcoming). Rabbi Szulman spoke with several Chełmno escapees and believed their stories; he tried to notify other ghettos of the danger by letter. For more on communication channels and spreading information about Chełmno see Adam Sitarek, "Zaprowiantowanie obozu jest podobno wzorowe...! Wiedza więźniów getta łódzkiego na temat ośrodka zagłady w Chełmnie nad Nerem", *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* 2017 (13): 325–41 and Adam Sitarek, "Nie myśl, że to pisze obłąkany". Listy rabina z Grabowa i jego misja informowania o Zagładzie." *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały*, 2019 (13): 419–513.
- 14 Apparently, Hersh Wasser did not know his real name. See Przemysław Nowicki, "Zanim 'przybył z zaświatów' nazywał się Winer. Krąg rodzinny i konspiracyjny Szlamka, uciekiniera z ośrodka zagłady w Chełmnie nad Nerem", *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* 2009 (5): 163–92.
- 15 For more biographical information about Winer, see footnote 1, chapt. I.
- 16 *Letters on the Shoah*.
- 17 (Yiddish) The cemetery is in Bełżec.
- 18 Hersz Wasser was informed of Szlamek's death by the letter of 24 April 1942. Abram Bajler, syn Feli (*Letters on the Shoah*).
- 19 *Letters on the Shoah*, see also: Maria Ferenc Piotrowska, "Czarna, ogromna chmura wisi nad nami i na pewno spadnie..." *Żydzi w miastach i miasteczkach Generalnego*

It is hard to overestimate Szlamek's eye-witness testimony; Hersh Wasser realised its unique importance, and it became the basis of the first OyNEG Shabes report of mid-March 1942 on the Chełmno events (doc. 18, abstract).²⁰ A copy of this report was sent to the Office for Jewish Affairs of the Information Department of the High Command of the Home Army, headed by Henryk Woliński, 'Wacław' and was in turn used to put together a Bureau of Information and Propaganda report by Antoni Szymanowski ('Borowski', 'Brzeski'), on the mass executions of Jews in Koło County.²¹ Information of the destruction of the Jews, which thanks to OyNEG Shabes people reached the Polish Underground State have now been thoroughly researched.²² The author of the report on Chełmno events, most likely Hersh Wasser, used knowledge obtained from other sources gathered by OyNEG Shabes, apart from Szlamek's account: the testimony of Uszer Taube of Kłodawa (doc. 16a), or Lajwe Wołkowicz, a refugee from Dąbie (doc. 17), and certainly also letters from Róża Kapłan (doc. 12, abstract), Fela of Kutno (doc. 14, abstract), and Gelbart (doc. 15, abstract)²³ whose originals or copies reached the members of OyNEG Shabes. Testimonies of Taube and Wołkowicz are significant because they were given by people who knew what was occurring in Chełmno, even though they had never been on the grounds of either the palace in the village nor Rzuchów forest. Uszer Taube of Kłodawa described the extermination of

Gubernatorstwa wobec wiadomości o Akcji Reinhardt," *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały*, 2017 (13), 295–324.

20 *OyNEG Shabes. People and Works*, doc. 65; for the origin of this report see *ibidem*, Introduction.

21 *Masowe egzekucje Żydów w pow. kolskim*, published in: Maria Tyszkowa, "Eksterminacja Żydów w latach 1941–1943 (Dokumenty Biura Informacji i Propagandy Komendy Głównej Armii Krajowej ze zbiorów oddziału rękopisów Biblioteki Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, BŻIH 1992, 2–3 (162–163), pp. 52–54. The same document can be found in the files of the Office of the Delegate of the Government in Exile; see AAN, 202/II/29, pp. 79–81.

22 Ruta Sakowska, "Biuro Informacji i Propagandy KG Armii Krajowej a Archiwum Ringelbluma," BŻIH 1992, 2–3 (162–163), pp. 19–34; Dariusz Libionka, "Polskie Państwo Podziemne wobec eksterminacji Żydów na ziemiach wcielonych do Rzeszy," in: *Zagłada Żydów na polskich terenach wcielonych do Rzeszy*, ed. Aleksandra Namysło (Warszawa, 2008), pp. 211–21; Adam Puławski, *W obliczu Zagłady. Rząd RP na uchodźstwie, Delegatura Rządu RP na Kraj, ZWZ-AK wobec deportacji Żydów do obozów zagłady (1941–1942)* (Lublin 2009).

23 See *Letters on the Shoah* (forthcoming).

Jews from Zagórow which immediately preceded the beginning of the death camp's operation as well as the first *Aktionen* in Koło County. He gave a very precise characterisation of the way victims were being murdered in Chełmno, mentioning the escape of Abram Rój, Szlama Winer, and Mechl (Mordechai) Podchlebnik in January 1942 and relating what they had told the inhabitants of Grabów. The chronology of Winer's journey to Warsaw (Szlamek was in Piotrków Trybunalski on 5 February, and since he was travelling undercover it probably took him a few days to reach Warsaw) informs us that it had rather been Taube who first reached the Warsaw ghetto and told underground activists about Chełmno²⁴.

The third witness to reach Warsaw was Lajwe Wołkowicz from Dąbie, a village just a few kilometres from Chełmno. On behalf of the Dąbie *Judenrat* Wołkowicz had been trying to investigate the fate of Jews deported from Koło and had gained information regarding Chełmno. Staying in Grabów for a few weeks, he had met escapees from the camp (Rój, Podchlebnik, and Winer), who provided him with even more details. On 21 February, he came to Warsaw and gave his account about Chełmno to Oyneg Shabes. What is striking in the testimonies of Taube and Wołkowicz is the involvement of Jewish communities from Chełmno's vicinity in inquiring about the fate of the deportees — these accounts mention Jewish and Polish emissaries gathering information on behalf of the *Judenrats*. The name 'Chełmno' also appears in some letters sent from the area to the Warsaw ghetto; these are preserved in ARG and will be published in the forthcoming volume, *Letters on the Shoah*.

The study published in this volume (doc. 11), is also primarily based on Winer's testimony and other above-mentioned documents, but it is not a translation of *Wypadki chełmińskie*. We also do not know who its author was, though it is likely that it, too, was composed by Hersh Wasser.

Chapter II includes eight documents. They concern the Treblinka death camp, known as Treblinka II, not to be confused with the penal labour camp Treblinka I, established in 1941 by the nearby gravel pit. The death camp was part of Operation Reinhardt, aimed at a physical destruction of Jews in the General Government; the first transport from the Warsaw ghetto arrived on 23 July 1942. The camp closed its operation in November 1943, when all the

24 Maria Ferenc, „Každy pyta, co z nami będzie”. *Mieszkańcy getta warszawskiego wobec wiadomości o wojnie i Zagładzie*.

buildings and installations were dismantled, and the operation to cover traces began. Before the camp's liquidation, on 2 August 1943, the inmates started an uprising, with several hundred prisoners escaping; several dozen survived the war. Further Treblinka II survivors escaped months before the uprising, chiefly in the second half of 1942, when it was easier to flee in cars loaded with clothes and when the prisoners were not yet subject to collective responsibility.

The first commandant of Treblinka II was Irmfried Eberl,²⁵ succeeded by Franz Stangl;²⁶ his deputy and the last commandant was Kurt Franz,²⁷ whom the prisoners called 'the doll'; they remembered him as a particularly sadistic individual. They commanded the camp crew of 30–40 SS-men, Germans or Austrians, and a 100–120 strong guards' detachment made up chiefly of Ukrainians, trained at the Trawniki camp.²⁸ Jews who perished in Treblinka originated from the General Government, as well as from Czechoslovakia, France, Greece, Yugoslavia, Soviet territories, Germany and Austria. Among the murdered were also Roma and Sinti from Poland and Germany. With more than 800,000 victims, Treblinka was second only to KL Auschwitz-Birkenau.²⁹ People were killed with exhaust fumes produced by the engine of Soviet tanks; the exhaust was passed through pipes to specially constructed gas chambers. As in Chełmno, the killing and burial process, and the subsequent cremation

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- 25 The first Treblinka commandant was Irmfried Eberl (1910–1948), an Austrian physician, who took part in the T4 operation. Captured after the war, he hanged himself in a prison cell.
- 26 Franz Paul Stangl (1908–1971), an Austrian, a T4 operation veteran, Sobibór death camp commandant, Treblinka commandant from September 1942 to August 1943. After the war, he managed to avoid arrest; captured in 1967, sentenced to life in 1970. Died one year later of cardiac arrest. See Gitta Sereny, *Into That Darkness: An Examination of Conscience* (New York, 1983).
- 27 The SS-Unterscharführer Kurt Franz (1914–1998), commandant Franz Stangl's deputy, between August and November 1943 the last commandant of the death camp in Treblinka. The prisoners nicknamed him 'doll' because he was handsome and well-groomed. In 1964 he was sentenced to life imprisonment, in 1993 was released due to his poor health.
- 28 Peter Black, "Prosty żołnierz 'akcji Reinhard'. Oddziały z Trawniki i eksterminacja polskich Żydów", in: *Akcja Reinhardt. Zagłada Żydów w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie*, ed. Dariusz Libionka, (Warszawa, 2004), pp. 103–31.
- 29 The exact number of Treblinka II victims is not known; different estimates can be found in the literature, with 800,000 being the most likely in the light of available source documents.

of corpses, was 'serviced' by the *Sonderkommando*, Jewish prisoners forced to carry it out by beatings, terror, and at the price of their own life.

Among the documents published in this volume are the first written escapee testimony of Dawid Nowodworski (doc. 19, the first recorded testimony from Treblinka)³⁰, two testimonies (docs. 20 and 21) written in September 1942 (one of them probably by Jakub Rabinowicz); the complete and the abbreviated versions of the testimony of Jakub (Yakov, Abram, Abraham) Krzepicki (docs. 22 and 23); as well as camp maps drawn by escapees, with their explanations (docs. 24 and 25); and an article on Treblinka from the Polish Workers' Party press organ (doc. 26). Krzepicki's testimony is echoed in a post-war essay by Rachel Auerbach.³¹ She was the only Oyneg Shabes member to have spoken with Krzepicki, and she recorded his detailed testimony of his time in the camp, stating how he escaped, roamed, and returned to the Warsaw ghetto. Neither he nor Dawid Nowodworski were the first to escape from Treblinka, but others, even if they indeed reached the Warsaw ghetto or other ghettos, left no first-hand testimony.³² The name Salbe is mentioned, who supposedly was the first to have brought the tragic news to Warsaw as early as 10 August.³³ Also in August, Azriel Wałach (Wallach) escaped, and in Sokołów near Małkinia he met with Zygmunt (Zelman) Frydrych, a Bund messenger. Wałach told Frydrych where the trains departing from the *Umschlagplatz*

30 It was never published before; we were able to decipher only fragments, see doc. 10.

31 Rachela Auerbach, *Treblinka. Reportaż*, trans. and footnotes Karolina Szymaniak, ed. Monika Polit, *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* 2012 (8): 25–75.

32 Information about the escapees and what they said about Treblinka can be found in post-war testimonies and recollections, for example, Cypora Jabłoń-Zonszajn about Maks Biegelman (AŻIH, Pamiętniki 302/313); Jakow (Kuba) Bałaban about Gecel 'Bekier' (AYV, Relacje, 03.2324); Henryk Bryskier about Krygier and one more unidentified escapee from Treblinka (AŻIH, Pamiętniki, 302/90); Łucja Stuczyńska about Neufinkels (AŻIH, Relacje, 301/304); Pola Puterman about an unidentified man from Strzegowo (AYV, Relacje 03/672); Leon Zelwer about two Jews from Częstochowa, who had escaped and later returned to their home ghetto (AYV, Relacje 0.3/1160); Leon Neuberg about Lejzor Szerszeń (AYV, Relacje 0.3/410); Samuel Puterman about 'Werkmeister' (AŻIH, Pamiętniki 302/27) and others.

33 Salbe appeared on 11 August 1942 in the shop where Abraham Lewin was employed, see A. Lewin, *A Cup of Tears, A Diary of the Warsaw Ghetto*, ed. A. Polonsky, transl. Ch. Hutton (London, 1990), p. 153. Another escapee from Treblinka got to the shop on 21 September; *ibidem*, p. 162. See more: Maria Ferenc, „Każdy pyta, co z nami będzie”. *Mieszkańcy getta warszawskiego wobec wiadomości o wojnie i Zagładzie*.

were really headed.³⁴ There were others as well: for example, the final Oyneg Shabes report contains a description of the first *Aktion* in the Warsaw ghetto³⁵ mentioning Sz. Knecht as the man who already on 23 July 1942 (the day the first transport arrived!) escaped and returned to Warsaw. As many as four of the five³⁶ testimonies of Treblinka escapees recorded in 1942 survived in ARG, confirming the formidable importance of the materials gathered by Oyneg Shabes members.

34 See Władka Meed, *Po obu stronach muru. Wspomnienia z warszawskiego getta*, trans. Katarzyna Krenz (Warszawa, 2003), p. 126. According to Meed, Azriel Wałach was a nephew of the Soviet diplomat Maxim Litvinov. On the basis of his testimony, Zygmunt Frydrych described Treblinka in the Bund newspaper: *Żydzi warszawscy są mordowani w Treblince*, "Oyf der Vakh", 20 September 1942 see ARG II 422 (Ring. II/329).

35 See *Oyneg Shabes. People and Works*, doc. 68.

36 Testimony of an unidentified man who arrived in Treblinka on 7 September 1942 in a transport from Warsaw, and escaped in a train loaded with belongings of the murdered, and the document survived among documents of the Polish underground, see Archiwum Akt Nowych, Delegatura Rządu, Biuro Prezydialne, 202/I-31, p. 137-140; publication: *Pro Memoria (1941-1944). Raporty Departamentu Informacji Delegatury Rządu RP na Kraj o zbrodniach na narodzie polskim*, selected and ed. Janusz Gmitruk, Arkadiusz Indraszczyk, Adam Koseski, (Warszawa-Pułtusk, 2004-2005), pp. 272-73.

Chapter I

Chełmno on the Ner (Kulmhof am Nehr)

10

a) 1942, Warsaw ghetto. Jakub Grojnowski (Shloyme Ber Winer¹), 'גבֿיִת-עֵדוּת פֿֿונעם צוואַנג-קברן גרוינאַווסקי יעקב' [*Testimony of the forced gravedigger Yankev Grojnowski*], Izbica Kujawska, Chełmno. Deportation from the author's hometown Izbica Kujawska to Chełmno on 5 January 1942. Description of digging graves and unloading corpses of Jews and Roma from the trucks/gas chambers, and the escape from the camp on 19 January 1942.

[1] Testimony of the forced gravedigger Grojnowski Yankev. Izbica Kuj[awska],² Chełmno

On Monday, 5 January, the Izbica gendarmerie summoned the board of the *Judenrat* and said that its orders had to be honoured. They are not the

1 Shloyme Ber Winer (Szlamek, Jakub Grojnowski) (1911–1942), son of Icek Wolf Winer and Srenca Bajle (Bajler), Izbica Kujawska resident; he succeeded to escape from Chełmno and to contact Hersh Wasser in the Warsaw ghetto. Winer's testimony served as a source of information in the Oyneg Shabes reports sent to the Polish government-in-exile in London. He perished in the Bełżec death camp, having been deported there from the Zamość ghetto.

2 Izbica Kujawska (Koło County) before the war had a population of approximately 1,400 Jews, a few hundred of whom managed to flee east in early September 1939. A transport of a 1,000 remaining Jewish residents was brought to Chełmno on 14–15 January 1942.

Arbeitsamt whose commands are not followed. They ordered everyone to go outside into the corridor and meanwhile compiled a list of roughly 40 men, among them old and sick. Afterwards, they called the Jews back in and also told the usher of the *kehilla* to come. They gave him a list of approximately 40 persons, commanding them to come to the gendarmerie that very day. From those who came they took away their passports and released them. They ordered them to return on Tuesday, the 6th, at 7 o'clock in the morning with a shovel or spade and to bring along enough bread for one day. They said that the work would take 1–2 days and that afterwards everyone would be sent back. I was among the 40 men.

Of the gendarmes, I know the following names: 1) Lieutenant Johanns, 2) Meister³ Plätzenieder, 3) the *Volksdeutscher* gendarme Schmalz.⁴ There were 7 gendarmes in total. I was absolutely sure that they knew full well the kind of work they needed us to do. I reiterate that they knew 100 per cent, but they still did not alert one of us Jews but cruelly deceived us instead.

In all honesty, I did not want to show up for work on Tuesday morning. My parents, however, strongly urged me to go and argued that it was better to go now since this way I would be doing my duty and wouldn't have to go to the *obóz*⁵ this year – since this, probably, is the *obóz*. You should know that I had managed to get out of the camps three times before this.

All in all, 15 men showed up on Tuesday morning. We waited until 8 o'clock in the morning but no one else arrived, so the gendarmes started to snatch up Jews. In the streets and homes 19 more men were caught but 5 of them were let go — some because they were old and others because they were still young children. The 14 remained, in other words, together with those who came by themselves it amounted to 29. Then they compiled a very precise list with all of our personal data. Meanwhile, a truck arrived with a gendarme. They counted us and put us on the truck afterwards. Every one of us carried a backpack with clothing. The truck, with us inside it, made a big impression on everyone. Our relatives were still absolutely certain that we were going to

3 (German in Hebrew characters; further on: German; when in Latin characters, it is duly noted) Master; it is the highest enlisted rank in *Ordnungspolizei*, Orpo (Order Police).

4 Correct spelling of the names on the basis of doc. 2

5 (Polish in Hebrew characters; further on: Polish; when in Latin characters, it is duly noted) camp; here it means a forced labour camp.

a labour camp. The Polish public acted this way: the young people laughed and mocked us; the older folks cried.

We drove in the direction of Koło (Koyl⁶). From Koło we took the Dąbie⁷ road to Chełmno. (This city was widely known throughout the whole area because the expulsion from Koło and Dąbie nad Nerem had taken place four weeks earlier. Various horrible rumours were circulating, saying that all of those who had been deported to Chełmno had not returned. What and how this exactly occurred we did not know in detail. Also, from the several messengers we only heard gruesome things, with no details whatsoever.)⁸

We waited for approximately half an hour on the road in Chełmno. Then we entered the palace. It is an abandoned ruin from the other World War. The palace is located on the right side of the road; on the left side the *tume*⁹ (church) is standing and the village proper. All buildings around the church were requisitioned by the Gestapo for its own use.

We arrived at half past noon. Gestapo men were standing at both gates to the palace, and gendarmes were keeping watch (*Feldgendarmen*).¹⁰ When we entered the second courtyard, the truck was opened and we were chased out, ordered to put aside our backpacks and assemble in rows of two. From this moment on, we were dealing with SS in black uniforms, i.e. *Reichsdeutsche*, upper charge. When we continued our way to go deeper into the courtyard,

6 Name of the town used by the Jews.

7 Dąbie nad Nerem (Koło County) had approximately 1,100 Jewish residents before the war. The ghetto was established in mid-July 1941. A transport of its 975 residents reached Chełmno on 14 December 1941.

8 According to Ruta Sakowska, *Dwa etapy. Hitlerowska polityka eksterminacji Żydów w oczach ofiar* (Wrocław, 1986), p. 132, footnote 3: 'When the first rumours about Chełmno began to reach Warthegau, the worried *Judenrats* began to send messengers to the towns threatened with the deportation. They were anxious to learn about the deportees' fate. According to the testimonies preserved in the ARG, there were Poles among the messengers and those who warned Jews about Chełmno. Some of them paid for that with their own life.'

A reference to the group of eight Poles, prisoners of Fort VII in Poznań, who were brought to Chełmno to carry out auxiliary work.

9 (Hebrew) ritual impurity; popular pejorative word for a church.

10 (German) literally, field gendarmen. It was a type of military police unit operative as occupational forces in territories directly under the control of the Wehrmacht. They assisted the SS in committing war crimes in the occupied territories.

they ordered us to hand over all our money and valuables. After that, they counted off 15 men (I was among them), surrounded them with *Feldgendarmen*, and discharged them into the basements of the palace. One of them told me that there were approximately 15 cells in the basement. We fifteen, we were locked up in one cell. The remaining fourteen were locked up in another cell in the basement.

Even though it was still the middle of the day, the basement was already pretty dark. Several *Volksdeutsche* of the domestic staff supplied us with straw.¹¹ For the night, they gave us a lantern. At approximately 8 o'clock at night, they handed us black unsweetened coffee and nothing else. The mood among us was crushed. We expected the worst. Almost all of us cried, we kissed and said good-bye to each other. It was very cold, so we clung to one another and made it through the bitterly cold night this way without getting a wink of sleep. [2] All we talked about were the Jews who had been deported from their former towns, Koło and Dąbie. Judging by what we saw around us, we assumed that we would never be able to get out of here.

On Wednesday, 7 January, at 7 o'clock in the morning, the gendarme on duty banged on the door and ordered us to get up. Due to the cold we, in any case, had not slept. Half an hour later, they brought bitter black coffee and bread which came from our bundles. We took a little comfort in this and said to each other that we have a great God in the heavens, and we will go to work.

At half past eight in the morning (since the day was a short one, it turned out to be so late), we were led out to the courtyard. They let go of six men and led them into the second basement from where they carried out two hanged individuals from Kłodawa¹² (I don't know their names). They had been forced gravediggers. The corpses were thrown onto a truck. There, we met the other 14 forced gravediggers from Izbica. As soon as we came out of the basement, we were surrounded by 12 gendarmes and Gestapo men with hand machine guns. Besides the 29 gravediggers and 2 dead bodies, 6 gendarmes

11 A reference to the group of eight Poles, prisoners of Fort VII in Poznań, who were brought to Chełmno to carry out auxiliary work.

12 Kłodawa (Koło County) had approximately 1,300 Jewish residents before the war (25 per cent of the population). Transports with 1,000 of them reached Chełmno on 10 and 12 January 1942.

with machine guns also got into the truck. Behind us, a passenger car was following with approximately 10 gendarmes and 2 civilians.

We drove towards Koło. After about 7 kilometres, the car suddenly made a left turn into the forest.¹³ There was already a trail for half a kilometre. There, they stopped the truck, ordered us to get off and to stand in twos. One of the SS-men ordered that we only keep our shoes, underwear, pants, and shirts on and that everyone take a shovel. The coats, hats, sweaters, gloves, and everything else we had to leave behind on the ground even though it was freezing cold. The two civilians took the shovels and picks down from the truck and distributed shovels to some and picks to others. Only eight of us did not receive anything. They were ordered to carry down the two corpses from the truck.

Driving up to the forest, we saw approximately 14 men, forced gravediggers from Kłodawa who had supposedly arrived before us. They were standing and working, barely dressed in shirts. It looked like the following: 21 men in pairs with picks and shovels, in the back 8 men with the two corpses, and around us Germans with machine guns. The people from Kłodawa were also guarded by roughly 12 gendarmes. All in all, in other words, we were encircled by 30 gendarmes.

As we approached the pit, those from Kłodawa encountered us with silent questions: 'Where are you from?' — So we replied: 'Izbica'. — So they asked: 'You see the kind of catastrophe here? How many are you?' — So we replied: '29'. The conversation took place while we worked. We threw both corpses into the pit. Those 8 individuals, who still had not gotten a shovel, had carried the corpses from the truck to the pit. They did not need to wait long until a new truck arrived with fresh victims. The truck was constructed in a special way and looked roughly like a regular grey van, hermetically sealed with two doors at the back. On the inside, the van was covered with sheet metal. There were no places to sit in the van. The floor was lined with wooden slats, like in a bathroom, and covered with a doormat. Between the interior of the van and the place where the driver was sitting were two little windows through which, using an electric lamp, he checked whether the victims were dead. Underneath the wooden slats were two 15-centimeters pipes coming from the driver's cabin. At the end, they had openings through which the gas

13 The Rzuchów Forest, approximately 4 km from Chełmno; the site of mass graves.

could enter. The gas apparatus was located inside the driver's cabin, where only the driver sat. It was the same driver the whole time, in the SS-uniform with the skull. He was probably around 40 years old. There were 2 vans of this type.

When the van arrived, it came to a halt 5 metres away from the grave. The head of the group of guards, a SS-man of a higher rank, was an extraordinary killer and sadist.¹⁴ He ordered the 8 men to open the doors of the van and a strong and sharp smell of gas immediately hit them. There were Gypsies¹⁵ from Łódź whom they had killed in the van. All of their things were lying around in the van, such as accordions, fiddles, bedding, and even watches and golden valuables. After the doors had stood open for roughly 5 minutes, he yelled: '*Na, ihr Juden, herein und schmeißt alle raus!*'¹⁶ — The Jews went to the van and started to remove the corpses. Since the work did not come easy to them in the beginning, the [3] SS chief took out the *bykowiec*¹⁷ and yelled: '*Hellblaue, ich komm sofort zu euch*'¹⁸ and started to whip the head, ears, and eyes, in a word, wherever he could, until everyone collapsed. Whoever of the group of 8 could not get up was shot on the spot with a machine gun. The rest, when seeing this, got up with their last strength and did the work.

Everyone was thrown from the van as if they were rubbish — on a heap, one on top of the other. They carried them by the feet or by the hair. On top, 2 men stood and threw the bodies inside the pit; in the pit, another 2 men stacked, i.e. arranged, the dead bodies with faces turned to the ground so that one's feet were at the other's head. The arrangement was managed by a special SS-man. He ordered what to do. If there was an empty spot somewhere, a dead child was pushed in. All of this was very brutal. He was standing high up with a pine branch, using it to point where this head had to go, where that

14 Probably a reference to *Polizeimeister* Willi Lenz, head of the detail of prisoners working in the forest where they buried the murdered victims' corpses (*Waldkommando*). During the early morning of 18 January 1945 Lenz was hanged in the granary at Chełmno by the last group of surviving Jewish prisoners.

15 In the original, *tsigayner*. Transports of 4,300 Roma from the Łódź Ghetto were brought to Chełmno and murdered from 5 to 12 January 1942.

16 (German) 'So, you Jews, get in and throw everyone out!'

17 (Polish) Cowhide.

18 (German) 'Light blues, I'll come to you right away.' The prisoner functionaries who worked at burial of the corpses wore blue patches on their clothing.

foot, where children, where the things. All of this was performed under clamour, anger, and beatings, with shouts: ‘*Du Sakrament.*’¹⁹ A layer consisted of 180–200 men. From every 3 trucks they took 20 men from the gravediggers who were burying the dead. Initially, we needed to bury them twice. Later, when the number of trucks increased to 9 (i.e. 9 times 60 corpses), we needed to bury them 3 times.

At 12 noon, the SS chief (*Bykowiec*)²⁰ commanded: ‘*Spaten stehen lassen!*’²¹ He ordered us to stand in twos and counted the number of people. Afterwards he ordered to get out of the pit. The guards surrounded us constantly. The guards generally did not withdraw for one minute. We even had to relieve ourselves right where we were working.

We approached the place where our things were lying. They ordered us to sit together closely, one next to the other, and ordered us to sit down on the bundles. Around us, the guards were still standing. They gave us cups with cold bitter coffee and a piece of frozen bread. That was our meal. We sat like that for half an hour. Afterwards we again stood in twos, they counted us, and led us to work.

What did the dead look like? They did not look at all singed, nor black. The colour of their faces remained unchanged. Almost all dead were covered in faeces.

Around 5 o’clock we finished working. The 8 men, who carried out the burial of the corpses, were ordered to lie down on top of the dead bodies, similarly facing the corpses. Then the SS-man shot each one in the head with a machine gun.

The *Bykowiec* yelled: ‘*Hellblaue, flink sich anziehen!*’²² We got dressed quickly and took the shovels with us. They counted us and led us to the trucks under the watchful eyes of gendarmes and SS-men. There they ordered us to put away the shovels. They once again counted us and chased us into the truck. We drove back into the palace. It took us approximately 15 minutes. We went back together with the people from Kłodawa. In the truck, we spoke amongst ourselves quietly. I said to my colleagues: My mother dreamed of

19 (German) ‘You scum.’

20 Probably *Polizeimeister* Willi Lenz.

21 (German) ‘Leave the shovels!’

22 (German) ‘Light blues, get dressed quickly!’

leading me under the white *khupe* and she won't even live to see me going to the black *khupe*.²³ We all got out of the truck with silent tears, so that the gendarmes who were sitting in the back would not hear what was going on among us. We talked very quietly.

On the first day, the following happened: At 10 o'clock in the morning a certain Bitter from Bydgoszcz, a fat person — during the war he had been living in Izbica, one of the 8 — he could not catch up with the speed of the work. The SS-man with the *bykowiec* ordered him to get fully undressed and, together with others, he hit him with rods and with the *bykowiec* in such a way that he fell unconscious. His body turned black like a spleen. After that they ordered him to lie down in the open grave and then they shot him dead.

It turns out that the palace had other rooms as well. In our basement cell, 20 individuals came in and 15 went into the second basement. There were no more forced gravediggers for now. Entering the cold and dark basement, we threw ourselves on the little bit of straw and burst out crying. Fathers cried over the sorrow of their babies, who would not be able to see them. One of us, Monyek Halter, a 15-year-old boy from Izbica, hugged and kissed me and cried. He said: 'Oy Shloyme, I'd rather die, but my mother and sister should at least stay alive.' [4] Meyer Piotrkowski, 40 years old, from Izbica, my bunk mate, embraced and hugged and kissed me and said: '. . . I left behind my dear wife with my 8 children. Who knows if I will see them again one day and what will become of them?' Gershon Praszker, 55 years old, from Izbica, said: 'We have a great God in heavens, and we have to pray to him. He will not leave us. But still we have to all recite *vidduy* in full.' We all gathered in a circle with Gershon Praszker in the middle and loudly recited *vidduy*. We all repeated after him with great lamentation and wailing. The mood was very plaintive. Since the *Wachtmeister*²⁴ was banging on the door and shouting: '*Hey, Juden, still bleiben, sonst schieße ich*'²⁵ — we finished saying *vidduy* silently with broken voices.

At half past 7 in the evening, they brought us a pot with unseasoned, cold swede soup. However, we were not able to gulp down the food, but silently

23 (Hebrew, *huppah*) wedding canopy; black *khupe* — here probably a reference to a traditional Jewish burial.

24 (German) Police sergeant.

25 (German) 'Hey, Jews, stay silent or I shoot.'

and bitterly cried. Half an hour later, they brought in black, bitter, lukewarm coffee and a little of our bread. And again, none of us was able to eat because of the misery and suffering. We lay down on the straw, but nobody was able to sleep. It was cold and there was nothing to use as a cover. One of us said: 'Who knows who will be missing from us tomorrow.' Finally, terribly worn-out, we clung to one another and fall into a sort of terrible sleep filled with dreams. So we slept for approximately four hours. Then we walked around the cell due to the cold and spoke amongst ourselves about the fate awaiting us.

On Thursday, on 8 January at 7 o'clock in the morning, the gendarme guard knocked on our cell and enquired with anger: '*Ihr Juden, habt ihr euch ausgeschlafen?*'²⁶ — So we replied: '*Wir konnten nicht schlafen wegen der Kälte.*'²⁷ At half past 7, the cook brought in warm, but bitter, black coffee with dry bread. The coffee was poured into a wide small bowl. We scooped the coffee from the bowl with cups. Some drank but the majority did not want to eat the breakfast, saying that death was imminent anyway. At 8 o'clock, we heard several people arriving in the corridor. They were higher SS-men. The gendarme presented himself to one of them and said that nothing had been going on with the Jews during the night. The SS-man was ordered to unlock our cell door (it was locked with three locks in addition to bolts). The officer yelled: '*Alle Juden raus!*'²⁸ — standing alone in the corridor (we assumed that the SS-men were afraid of some desperate step we might take), he counted us while we were stepping out of our cell. In the yard, he ordered us to stand in twos. The second SS officer again counted the number of gravediggers. Then he ordered us to enter the truck. (2 trucks in general brought us to and from work: one truck, covered with a tarpaulin, and a low passenger car with glass windows on the sides (motor coach), in addition to the private cars of the SS-men, of course). We stood in the truck. Behind us, 6 gendarmes were standing with machine guns in their hands, ready to shoot. The whole yard, where we found ourselves after exiting the basement, was heavily guarded by the *Feldgendarmarie* with machine guns in their hands the whole time I was in Chełmno. When we were driving to work, a truck with the SS followed us.

26 (German) 'You Jews, did you have a good night's rest?'

27 (German) 'We could not sleep because of the cold.'

28 (German) 'All Jews out!'

At the site, they treated us the same way as the day before. After getting out of the truck, they counted us, ordering us to line up and be counted again. Then they selected 8 men from among us — people who could not dig energetically enough. The 8 chosen ones left the line silently, with their heads down. Of course, before returning to yesterday's posts — everyone to their own — everyone had to get undressed and had to wear only one's shoes, underwear, pants, and shirt (one of us, who was wearing two shirts, was brutally beaten). We put all the clothes away in one spot. Half an hour later, the second transport of gravediggers arrived, i.e. those who had been in another basement cell. They, too, underwent the same procedure. The whole area, where we were, was surrounded by gendarmes with machine guns in their hands, ready to shoot. Additionally, the whole forest was filled with patrols of gendarmes. In general, the gendarmes remained constantly vigilant. The 8 *misaskim* were working approximately 20 steps away from us. One of them, Mechl Wilczyński from Izbica, 19 years old, said to me: '. . . goodbye. May you stay alive. We are leaving the world, but you should get out of this hell.' — The rest of the 8 said nothing but sighed plaintively.

[5] 2 hours later, the first van with Gypsies arrived. I can assert with all certainty that the executions take place in the forest. Usually, the gas-van parks approximately 100 metres away from the mass grave, but in 2 cases — once on this very Thursday for the first time and on Wednesday, the 14th, the second time with Jews — the van stopped approximately 20 metres from the grave. As the comrades among the *misaskim* told us, there is a special apparatus with buttons in the driver's cabin. From this apparatus 2 pipes entered the van. The driver (there were 2 gas-vans for executions and 2 drivers, always the same ones) pushed a button and got out of the truck. Simultaneously, one could hear clamour, plaintive cries, and a knocking on the walls of the van. It took approximately 15 minutes. Then the driver went back to the van, searched the inside with an electric lamp to see whether the people were dead, and then parked 5 metres away from the grave. Then it stood for another 5 minutes, and then the *bykowiec* (the SS chief) ordered 4 *misaskim* to open the doors. A sharp smell of gas came out. After roughly 5 minutes, he yelled: '*Oh, ihr Juden, geht Tefillin legen!*'²⁹ — i.e. throw out the dead bodies.

29 (German) 'Oh, you Jews, go put *tefillin* on!'

The dead bodies were piled up in great disarray. They were still warm and looked asleep. Their faces were not pale but still had their natural skin colour. As the *misaskim* told us, they themselves were warm because they were dealing with warm bodies. Let me recount the sequence of their work. 4 *misaskim* would throw out the dead bodies — constantly beating and yelling, of course. They would throw the bodies on a heap. 2 other *misaskim* would drag and throw the corpses into the pit, and the last 2, who stood inside the pit, would arrange the corpses in layers according to the instructions of the special SS-man. After emptying the van, the *misaskim* would turn to cleaning the van of excrement and other impurities. They would take out the doormat and the wooden slats and with shirts or something similar cleaned the van and afterwards returned the slats and doormat. They would close the 2 exterior double doors, which are hermetically sealed, with external latches. One needed a certain amount of practice to close the doors, and since other people were dealing with this every day, they would be beaten brutally by *Bykowiec*.

After the van departed and the dead bodies were arranged, the 8 *misaskim* put on colourful Gypsy garb due to the cold and sat down on the dead bodies in the pit. It looked tragically comical. In general, the 8 *misaskim* were not allowed to mingle with the other workers. At midday meal, they would usually be left behind in the pit and only get cold, bitter coffee to drink without any bread. It usually happened like this: with a long spoon, one of the gendarmes would fill up a cup with coffee. After one drank up the coffee, the gendarme would again fill up the same cup and ordered the next person to drink. The 8 *misaskim* were looked at as if they were leprous.

Half an hour later, a second van arrived with Gypsies. It stopped not 20 metres away from us but roughly 100 metres in order for us not to hear anything (the terrible screams destabilised us). By noon, we finished 3 vans, in the afternoon — 4 vans (we used to count the vans). Our food consisted of black, cold, and bitter coffee with frozen dry bread. At 5 o'clock in the afternoon, we finished our day's work. Before getting out of the pit, the 8 *misaskim* were ordered to lie on top of the Gypsies with their faces turned to the corpses and a gendarme shot everyone in the head with a machine gun.

Immediately after we would drive into the palace, which was located roughly 100 metres from the road, they would quickly close the gates so that nosy peasants would not be able to notice anything. 7 gendarmes drove with us in the front and 3 in the back. First the 7 gendarmes disembarked (in the

palace yard). They surrounded the truck with machine guns in their hands. After that, the remaining 3 disembarked and in the end, they ordered us to get out of the truck and to line up in twos. After they counted us, they led us to the same gloomy basement. In the basement, it was dark and cold. We said to one another: 'This is a true paradise' (we meant it in comparison to the terrible cemetery). At first, we sat around in the dark. Sitting on the straw, we again shuddered at the thought of our tragic fate. The 15-year-old Monyek Halter from Izbica, who clung to me the whole time, hugged and kissed me and said: '... we are all long lost!' — and he repeated that he preferred to already be dead as long as his mother and sister would stay alive. Another one said: 'Again 8 people, who left the world innocently.' With this wailing, sobbing, and deep moaning, time passed by.

[6] At approximately 7 o'clock in the evening, the cook brought in a bucket of swede soup and poured it into our bowl. A few who were very hungry took a bite, but the majority did not eat at all. In the cups, cold swede soup met bitter tears. Along with the food they brought in a kerosene lamp. Almost everyone said that they were ready to make peace with the thought that would probably be spending the rest of their life in this terrible prison, as long as they could thereby save their close ones and maybe even live to see the vengeance against the murderers. Sometime later, a gendarme ordered us to sing. We did not obey him. Only when he threatened to shoot us and even opened the door from the basement, my both bunk mates, Meyer Piotrkowski from Izbica and Yehuda Yakubowicz from Włocławek (he recently lived in Izbica), strongly urged me to get up and start singing. Even though I was very tired, I got up; I myself don't really know where the strength came from, and with a broken voice I turned to my friends: 'Friends and masters, get up and sing after me. We will first put on the hats.³⁰ — Everyone lines up.' With a white shirt, we shrouded the excrement bucket. The impatient gendarme, who was standing in the open door, angrily demanded us to sing once again. So, I began to sing: '*Shema Yisrael, Adonai Eloheynu, Adonai Ehad!*' When I finished the paragraph, the assembled repeated after me with melancholic voices. After them, I continued: '*Barukh shem k'vod malkhuto le'olam va'ed!*' After me, the rest cried and repeated it three times. We felt as if the ends of our lives were imminent. An extraordinary sadness and horror took

30 Judaism requires male followers to cover their heads, particularly during prayer.

hold of us. Everyone was sincere, as if we were standing in front of the celestial council of justice — but we made a bitter mistake in believing that we would get away with this. The gendarme demanded more. So, I said: ‘Friends and masters, we will now sing the *Hatikvah!*’ — with the hats on our heads, we sang the song which sounded like a prayer. After that, the gendarme exited and locked the door with 3 locks. We couldn’t contain ourselves and cried. We said that the world had never seen this kind of barbarism. To kill innocent Jews and Gypsies like that and then to force us to sing under such circumstances. Let us hope that it will end the way it did with Haman.³¹ If only God Almighty would turn His punishing hand away from us. So Moyshe Asz, a master from Izbica, said: ‘We are victims — nothing else. The times of the Messiah are here.’³²

Again, the guard opened the door and the civilian German cook brought in a bucket of black bitter coffee, which was poured into the bowl. (We poured the remaining swede soup into the excrement bucket.) Every one of us took a little piece of bread and some coffee.

15 minutes later, the gendarme again demanded singing. We tried to get us out of it due to our tiredness, but we were not successful. He ordered us to repeat after him: ‘*Wir Juden danken Adolf Hitler für diese Sache.*’³³ — We repeated it. Later he started: ‘*Wir Juden danken Adolf Hitler für das Essen.*’³⁴ — We also repeated this after him. After that, he demanded that we sing. We sang *Hatikvah* and after that *B’shuv Adonai*³⁵ (we wanted to respond to the horrible suffering with it). And again, he locked us in. We slept until deep into the night. Whether due to bad dreams or the cold, I got up in the middle of the night and began to think through the whole situation: ‘Help!’ I cried, ‘where is God in the heavens if he can watch our suffering and how they kill innocent people. He should perform a miracle.’ In the middle of this, I had the thought to escape from this prison. With a flickering light I went

31 Highest official of the Persian empire under King Ahasuerus; villain of the Book of Esther; enemy of the Jews.

32 In the Jewish tradition, the coming of the Messiah is preceded with terrible events.

33 (German) ‘We Jews thank Adolf Hitler for this thing.’

34 (German) ‘We Jews thank Adolf Hitler for the food.’

35 Beginning of Psalm 126: ‘When Adonai brought back those that returned to Zion, we were like unto them that dream.’ It is recited before the Grace after Meals on Shabbat and Jewish holidays.

up to the bricked-up little window and tried to crush a brick with a knife. My efforts were in vain. The frost, which was also inside, made the bricks stiff. After 2 hours of futile torment, I gave up and lay down on my lair again.

At 5 o'clock in the morning, everyone woke up due to the cold. We talked. Getsl Chrzastowski (Bund)³⁶ and Eyznshtab, both from Kłodawa (Eyznshtab owned a fur store in Włocławek), had completely lost all faith in a God that does not attend to the grievances of suffering people. Others, me among them, were strengthened in their faith, repeating after Moyshe Asz, that the times of Messiah are approaching.

On Friday, 9 January 1942, at 7 o'clock in the morning, they again brought us bitter coffee. To the question as to whether we had enough bread we responded in the affirmative because we had not finished our bread. At 8 o'clock, the SS-men arrived who had received the report in the corridor that everything was in order with the Jews. After opening the door, they ordered us to exit in order to be counted. The yard was already surrounded by approximately 20 gendarmes with machine guns in their hands. We were counted again. (On the first day when we saw the barrels pointed in our direction, [7] we were seized by mad fear, thinking that we would be shot.)

In the yard, we saw two big open trucks filled with Gypsies — men, women, and children, with their belongings. Quickly, we were boarded onto our truck so that we could not communicate with the Gypsies. This was just the only time that we ever saw a group of victims who were still alive. On the truck, we stood in the front and 7 gendarmes with machine guns in their hands stood in the back. A taxi with 8 SS-men followed us.

At the destination, we were again surrounded by gendarmes. We took off our clothes for work as we had done before, were counted afterwards, and then 8 individuals were ordered to come forth. We took picks and shovels in our hands and started to work. The bottom of the pit was about one and a half metre wide. It was slanting and approximately 5 metres deep and, on the surface, 5 metres wide. The grave was longish. If a tree blocked the way, it was cut down. On the third day of our tragic experiences, work was dealt in an especially severe and hard manner. After one hour, the first truck with Gypsies arrived and roughly 20 minutes later — the second truck.

36 He is also referred to as Chrzastowski or Czastkowski; see doc. 16. The Bund, in Yiddish literally: union, is a Jewish socialist party.

The *Bykowiec* rampaged without ceasing. In the course of the work, we managed to come a little closer to the 8 *misaskim*, amongst whom were as follows: Avrom Zieliński from Izbica, 32-years old, Brawman from Izbica, 17-years old, Zalmen Jakubowski from Izbica, 55-years old, Gershon Praszker from Izbica. At around 3 o'clock, when there was not that much to do, they did not chase them as much, so Gershon Praszker, who was standing deep in the grave, took out a *Siddur* and prayed, covering his bare head with his hand. At 11 o'clock, they said to us: 'We are dying a tragic death. Let it be for our relatives, for all people of Israel.'³⁷ We will not see the world any longer!' That day, we ate the midday meal at half past one. It was [minus] 20 degrees. The gendarmes made a fire, on which they wanted to defrost our bread. The bread came out smoky and burnt. Our meal lasted only a very short time because a new truck with Gypsy victims arrived. In the afternoon, the *Bykowiec* went a little deeper into the forest and drank a bottle of liquor. After he came back to us, he started screaming: '*Oh, ihr Hellblaue, ihr wollt nicht arbeiten!*'³⁸ — and he let lose his whip. The victims were battered, blood was flowing from their heads, noses, foreheads, faces. Eyes were swelling up. On this day, we buried 8 or 9 Gypsy transports. We finished work at half past five. As always, the 8 were killed before this time. We were ordered to get dressed quickly and were chased into the truck. They counted us very strictly several times.

After entering the Chełmno palace, we saw to our big surprise a new group, probably gravediggers: 16 men from Izbica and 16 men from Bugit[t]en (Bugaj).³⁹ Among the Izbica locals were: 1) Moyshe Łepek, around 40 years

37 i.e. Jews.

38 (German) 'Oh, you light blues, you don't want to work!'

39 Bugaj (Koło County), called Bugitten in German. From the autumn of 1940 until January 1942, a rural ghetto existed in Bugaj and Nowiny Brdowskie, with approximately 300 hectares of surrounding land. On 2 October 1940, 150 families from the town of Koło and 50 families (approximately 800 people) from the village of Babiak (Koło County) were sent there and accommodated in 165 houses. The ghetto inmates carried out seasonal work in the fields and worked in the grange. From 12 to 14 January 1942 they were among the first victims murdered in Chełmno. Among the workers sent from Bugaj to bury the bodies was Mechl Podchlebnik. See Tomasz Kawski, Monika Opióła, *Gminy żydowskie pogranicza Wielkopolski, Mazowsza, Małopolski i Śląska w latach 1918–1942*, Toruń, 2008, p. 11 and *The Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos 1933–1945*, vol. 2, pp. 47–48.

old, 2) Avigdor Polański, around 20 years old, 3) Sztajer, around 55 years old, 4) Król, around 45 years old, 5) Yitskhok Prajs, around 45 years old, 6) Yehudah Lubiński, 31 years old, 7) Kalman Radziejewski, 32 years old, 8) Menakhem Arcichowski, around 40 years old, and from Bugit[t]en there was my comrade and friend Khaym-Ruven Izbicki, 35 years old.

20 individuals from the old gravediggers and 5 new ones, altogether 25 men, were chased into another basement, which was a little smaller than the one we had before. In it, we found bedsheets, pants, men's jackets, and food (bread, sugar, lard). These things belonged to the new gravediggers. Tired and broken, we sat down on top of the bundles. The first questions we posed to the newly arrived people was whether, God forbid, there were any of our relatives and close ones among them. The questions and information were mixed together with crying. From the adjacent room, we heard voices. Then I approached the wall and, on a spot where there was air and a brick was broken, I knocked on the wall and yelled to ask whether Khaym-Ruven Izbicki from Bugit[t]en is over there. He approached. Through the wall, I asked him whether at least his parents and sisters had managed to escape. The guard interrupted the conversation.

During supper, Sztajer portioned out lard and said whilst doing that: 'May God grant that I do not have to witness the suffering, that I will already be in the other world tomorrow.' (He was, indeed, murdered the next day.) Moyshe Łeppek, on the other hand, distributed sugar. After supper, we covered the excrement bucket and prayed *ma'ariv*. The prayer was blended with tears. After *ma'ariv*, the new arrivals told us a little about politics. They said that the Russians were already occupying Smoleńsk and Kiev and that they are approaching us. So, we wished that they would come to us and that they would destroy this terrible place with bombs. Some of us even pointed out places to hide during bombardments. Others said that it would take at least a month and by then we would no longer be in this world. Nobody [8] believed that he will get out of hell in a normal way. The discussion about divine justice showed that some of us, even older people, had completely lost faith. So, they said: 'These are fairy tales. There is no God if He is able to witness our suffering without sending us help.' The people who were strengthened in their faith, I among them, were of the opinion that it is not their responsibility to understand the events. Everything depends on God. In the end, we covered ourselves with our few clothes and fell asleep.

Another important remark: on Thursday and Friday, the last truck of the day was a Jewish transport. These were younger men, with Stars of David on the fronts and backs of their clothes, with suitcases. We supposed that they were sick *lageristn*⁴⁰ who had been killed in such a way. They were buried with everything they had with them. This completely shook us up since we had been hoping up to that point that the Jews in the camps will in whatever way survive these tragic times.

On Saturday, 10 January, at 7 o'clock in the morning, they brought in breakfast: bitter coffee with bread. After breakfast, Moyshe Łeppek said *vidduy*, followed by us, and then we got into the truck, after enduring the seven circles of hell of getting counted several times while guarded with rifles pointed at us. We told the 5 new ones to stay close to us. With the new ones, our group numbered 53 individuals. It was terribly crowded in the truck. Behind us stood 10 gendarmes with pointed machine rifles. A car with approximately 10 SS-men drove behind us. At the location, the older group prepared itself especially for the work like before, but the new ones had to go through all our tortures. This time, they did not single out 8 *misaskim* immediately. Around 11 o'clock, the first truck with Jewish victims arrived.

They treated Jewish victims in the following way. When they threw the Jews off the truck — men, women, and children dressed in nothing but underwear — two civilian Germans approached and inspected them to see if valuables were hidden anywhere. So, if they saw necklaces around necks, they ripped them off; rings around fingers, they took them off; golden teeth, they tore them out of the mouths. They even inspected the rectums of everyone and the women in the front (sexual organs). It was done very brutally. After the inspection, the procedure went on as usual. After the Jewish transport arrived, they selected 8 *misaskim*. The victims were exclusively from Kłodawa, as Getsl Chrzastowski, who himself came from Kłodawa, told us. After finishing the first truck, the *misaskim* went back to their earlier work, i.e. to burying. At half past one, the second truck arrived. At a certain moment, Eyznshtab, also from Kłodawa, started to cry quietly and said to us that he no longer had anything to live for because he saw how they buried his wife and his 15-year-old only daughter. He wanted to beg the Germans to kill him as

40 (Yiddish) literally, campers; the meaning is: camp inmates, prisoners; see also footnote 37.

well so that he could lie in the grave with his closest ones. We held him back, however, under the pretext that he could do that anytime and he could maybe manage to save himself and take revenge in the meantime.

At a quarter to two, while we were having midday meal (bitter, cold coffee and burnt bread) and the 8 *misaskim* kept doing their bitter work, 2 cars with higher SS officers arrived. They disembarked, observed with joy the place of the massacre, received the report by *Bykowiec*, and shook his hand with great appreciation and satisfaction. Later, they departed. In the afternoon, we buried people from 5 additional trucks in a great hurry. Around 6 o'clock in the evening, everyone started to fill up the grave. The grave was evened out with soil. In accordance with the well-rehearsed procedure, we returned to the palace. By coincidence, Khaym-Ruven Izbicki joined our group.

In our cell, we all started to cry bitterly. Regarding my mental state, most telling is probably the fact that I didn't even recognise my best friend Izbicki. We were so down both today and before, that crying came natural to us. The mourner Eyznshtab lamented the most. After supper, a quarter-litre of potato soup per person and black bitter coffee with bread, we carried the excrement bucket outside and, close to a burning lamp, we prayed *ma'ariv*. After that, Eyznshtab said *kaddish*. We only talked about the great misfortune that had befallen the Jewish people. We obviously had seen how they eradicated a whole Jewish settlement (Kłodawa) from its root. Nobody was able to close an eye. In a certain moment, Eyznshtab got up from his bunk and, agitated to the maximum, started to weep. He screamed that he didn't have any purpose to live, and all hopes had been [9] taken from him. He banged his head against the wall, but he was mostly crying because he couldn't take his own life. Exhausted, he lay down and fell asleep. I was awake the whole night. I embraced my bunk mates, Meyer Piotrkowski and Yehudah Jakubowicz, clung to them and cried quietly.

On Sunday, 11 January, at 7 o'clock in the morning, they brought us breakfast and notified us at the same time that since it was Sunday we wouldn't be working. After praying *shakharit*⁴¹ and *kaddish*, we stayed in our basement paradise. We didn't recite *vidduy*, though. And again, conversations about politics and God and us continued. Everyone wanted to hold on

41 (Hebrew) prayer at dawn; recollection of the morning sacrificial service from the Temple of Jerusalem.

to the moment of our liberation. But our concern for *klal-yisroel*⁴² outweighed everything. Everyone would have given up his life joyfully if only the people of Israel would continue to live. At 11 o'clock in the morning, a group of 10 men was chased outside to push a car which was stuck on an icy spot. A big gas van was standing on one side of the yard. When I was in the yard, I almost ran away but at the last moment I lost my courage. After the work, they chased us back into the basement. At 1 o'clock we ate midday meal — swede soup with bread. After the meal, we sat down and lay down on the bundles. Some took off their boots. Finally, we fell asleep for a few hours. During the guard change at 6 o'clock, the guard again ordered us to sing. We didn't sing, but with numb voices we yelled *Shema Yisrael*, as we had done the other day, as well as *Hatikvah*. After the singing, a higher SS-man entered and told him off, saying that Jews are not allowed to sing. At 7 o'clock, we ate our evening meal, then we carried out the excrement bucket, then prayed *ma'ariv* and recited *kaddish*, lay down, covered ourselves with coats, and fell into lethargy.

On Monday, 12 January, at 5 o'clock in the morning, 6 people gathered and recited psalms, crying and lamenting. The rest was lying down indifferently. Some literally made fun of our piety. They said that surely there is no God and all of our consolations amounted to nothing but childish nonsense to them. We, on the other hand, said that our lives were still in God's hand and if this is His will we would take it with devotion, after all, the time of the Messiah is coming. After reciting *shakharit* and saying *kaddish*, in which even Eyznshtab took part, we recited *vidduy*. At 7 o'clock, coffee with bread was brought in to us. Several people from Izbica (they recently lived in Kutno) took all of the coffee. All the rest strongly admonished this act and said that we, in any case, find ourselves in the face of death and have to behave respectably. We decided that from now on everyone would receive a little coffee. At half past eight, we were already working. At half past nine, the first gas-truck arrived. Among the 8 *misaskim* were: Arn Rozental, Shloyme Babiacki, and Shmuel Bibergal, all of them between 50 and 60 years old.

On this day, we were treated with particular bestiality and they didn't allow us to let the gas exit after opening the van. The screams of the flogged people were indescribable. Immediately after the first van, a second arrived

42 (Hebrew) the Jewish people as a whole, Jewry.

and at 12 noon a third van arrived. When we went to have something to eat, 8 stayed on to finish off the group and a black staff car arrived, from which 4 SS officers disembarked. They also received a report from *Bykowiec*, after which they squeezed his hand with great appreciation. Out of joy and satisfaction, *Bykowiec* once again battered the *misaskim*. After the SS-men had left, the 8 also had their poor meal: bitter coffee and burnt bread. Around 1 o'clock, the next truck had already arrived. This day — we worked until 6 o'clock — we emptied vans with 60 Jews from Kłodawa in each, over 500 in total.

At a certain moment, my friend Getsl Chrzastowski said that he recognised his 14-year-old son who was thrown into the pit.⁴³ He, too, we discouraged to ask the Germans to shoot him. We argued that for the sake of revenge one even has to endure suffering and later we will pay them back with their own methods.

After work, they killed the 3 older *misaskim* and ordered us to quickly fill up the grave. Due to the late hour (it was already pretty dark), the Germans quickly separated us and chased us into the truck — becoming afraid of some sort of resistance from us. 7 gendarmes drove with us. We entered our shelter by 7 o'clock in the evening. The sons of the two who were killed, Rozental and Bibergal, cried bitterly. We consoled them by saying that we will all die after all and in the end, it doesn't really matter who will be the first to meet that fate. This time both joined in reciting *kaddish*.

[10] After supper, which consisted of, as is well-known, swede soup and bitter, black coffee with dry bread and which was distributed fairly according to how we had agreed, Moyshe Łeppek said *vidduy*, because he wanted to take his life so that he no longer would have to watch the suffering of his closest people. He distributed everything that he owned, i.e. bread, artificial honey, and clothes. Meanwhile we heard a sound in the corridor. The second group from the adjacent basement communicated to us through the wall that the Germans had captured a Jew from Kłodawa. The next morning, they told

43 Several days earlier on the way to the forest, Chrzastowski had thrown a letter to his son out of the truck window. To the letter he attached a watch and a wedding ring, which were to be the founder's payment for delivering the letter. The letter was found by forester Aleksander Kamiński, who read it but did not deliver it to the addressee because all Jews from Kłodawa had already been deported. Information based on Kamiński's testimonies. See Patrick Montague, *Chełmno and the Holocaust. The History of Hitler's First Death Camp*, Chapel Hill N.C. 2012 footnote 15, pp. 241–42).

us the following details: Goldman from Kłodawa, who was captured by the Germans, told in detail how Jews are chased into the gas van. When they were brought into the palace, they were treated very politely. An older German of approximately 60 years old, smoking a pipe, helped the mothers to take their babies down from the truck. He held the infants himself so that the mothers could get off the truck more easily. He helped elderly men walking towards the palace. In short, he touched the wretched ones with his mildness and nicety. Everyone was led into a warm room where two ovens had been warmed up. The floor was covered with wooden slats like in a bath. In the room, they heard speeches from the old German and a SS officer. They assured them that they would be going to the *Litzmannstadt*“ ghetto where they would work and be productive. The women would lead the households and the children would go to school. In order to be admitted to *Litzmannstadt*, though, they have to undergo a delousing. For this, everyone had to get undressed except for their underwear. The clothes would be disinfected. All valuables and documents needed to be taken out and wrapped in a kerchief and handed over for safe-keeping. If anyone hid or had sewn in paper money in their clothes, they had to rip it out at all costs — otherwise they would burn in the oven. Those present would also have to undergo a bath. The old German asked everyone very politely to go to the bathroom and for this purpose opened the door, where 15–20 steps led down. It was already very cold. In response to the plea that it was cold the German mildly said that they should go on farther for they will get warm. This ‘farther’ was a longish corridor which at its exit led up to a stage with several steps. The truck drove up to the stage. The whole mildness disappeared. With mad fury, everyone was led into the truck. The Jews immediately saw that death was imminent and they gave a heart-rending cry of *Sh'ma Yisrael*. When they went downstairs from the warm room, there was a cell on the right-hand side. It was exactly there that Goldman hid away. But after staying there for 24 hours in the horrible cold, he decided, half-frozen, to look for some clothes and to save himself. He was captured, however, and was thrown in with the gravediggers. There, the comrades cheered him up, gave him something to eat, a pair of pants and a jacket. We were talking about this

44 The German name of Łódź, introduced on 11 April 1940 to honour Karl von Litzmann (1850–1936), Prussian general and Nazi politician, who became famous for the 1914 Battle of Łódź, which he commanded

very animated. Everyone imagined that, had they been in Goldman's shoes, they would have found a better solution.

At approximately 3 o'clock in the morning, Moyshe Łeppek woke everyone up, kissed everyone, and said goodbye and prepared a rope to hang himself. But when he put the rope around his neck, he lost all his strength. He was not able to take his life.

On Tuesday, 13 January, at 7 o'clock in the morning, we barely managed to say *vidduy* before they loaded us into the truck together with Goldman. At the site, we got ready for work; meanwhile they ordered Goldman to lay down in the grave and shot him. At 8 o'clock, a van arrived. On this day, all the vans were especially crowded, with 90 corpses on average in each one. We came to this conclusion since right after opening the van doors the corpses fell out by themselves and, despite the murderous pace, the unloading of the vans took longer than before. On this day, they liquidated the Jewish settlement of Bugit[t]en. One van came after the other. Reaching the fourth van, an infant was thrown out among others, wrapped in a pillow, it started to cry. The SS-men burst out laughing, shot the infant with a machine gun, and threw it into the pit.⁴⁵ Over the course of this Tuesday, we buried approximately 800 Jews from Bugit[t]en. We worked until 6 o'clock in the evening in the bitter cold and buried 9 cars. After work, they shot 5 of the *misaskim*.

After we entered the basement, Mechl Podchlebnik⁴⁶ from Bugit[t]en, who lost his wife, 2 children, and his parents, started crying bitterly. After dinner and after pouring out the excrement bucket, we prayed *ma'ariv* and afterwards talked about current issues, and again about the matter of escape: the desire for freedom for the sake of alerting the whole Jewish population was so large that nothing was too precious to achieve it for anyone. Some wanted to dig a tunnel of [11] approximately 50 metres long. The only

45 Abram Rój also discussed that event in his oral testimonies.

46 Michał (Mechl) Podchlebnik (1907–1985), son of Jakub and Sosia, née Widawska, a saddler by occupation; one of six escapees from Chełmno; he survived the war, returned to Koło and gave testimony on 9 June 1945 in the investigation conducted by judge Władysław Bednarz; see *Mówią świadkowie Chełmna*, ed. Łucja Pawlicka-Nowak, Konin-Łódź 2004, pp. 113–23. He left Poland, lived in Germany for several years, and arrived in Israel in 1949. In 1961 he testified at Eichmann's trial in Jerusalem and in 1963 in the trial of the Chełmno death camp's staff held in Bonn.

difficulty was that we did not know what to do with the dug-up soil. Others wanted to open the bricked-up window (one brick thick). Due to the severe cold we, though healthy boys, were not able to move a single brick. Resigned, we went to sleep.

On Wednesday, 14 January, they brought us bitter coffee with bread. Immediately after breakfast, Krzewacki⁴⁷ from Kłodawa, who had been thinking about committing suicide for a long time, quickly prepared a noose of rope and hung it around his neck. He asked Getsl Chrzastowski to remove the package from under his feet and gag his mouth so that he would lose his breath faster. And, indeed, Chrzastowski did it like that. Krzewacki's death was a very easy one. Krzewacki committed suicide because he told us that he couldn't find enough strength within himself to watch all these atrocities. We cut the rope and placed him in a corner. Immediately after him, Gershon Świątosławski from Izbica Kujawska decided to take his own life. He had been Krzewacki's work colleague during the digging. He said: I worked together with Krzewacki and I want to lie together in a grave with him. Because of the late hour — we expected the devils at any time — nobody wanted to help Świątosławski with the hanging. Then he himself quickly took the rope and made a noose, hung it around his neck and, standing with his feet on the ground, deliberately bent over his body in order to strangle himself faster. In the middle of his suffering, they knocked on the basement. The young Monyek Halter quickly cut the rope. Świątosławski fell on the floor and started to heavily wheeze because the air came back to him. When the guard went away, we urged Getsl Chrzastowski to put an end to this — because we didn't want to save him (for what?), on the one hand, and we couldn't watch his suffering, on the other. Chrzastowski made a noose, put it around his neck and held his body with his legs. This way he pulled the rope with all his strength so long until Świątosławski was strangled. We left both dead bodies behind in the room without covering them. They lay like that for several days.

At 8 o'clock in the morning, we were already in the pits. By 10 o'clock the first truck arrived with victims from Izbica. By 12 at noon, we had already processed 3 tightly packed vans. From one of these vans, we dragged out the

47 Nachman Krzewacki from Kłodawa, before the war member of the town council in Koło. See T. Kawski, M. Opióła, *Gminy żydowskie pogranicza Wielkopolski*, p. 78.

body of a dead German civilian. He was one of the cooks. He probably climbed into the van in the following way: he noticed that one of the Jews had a valuable object, so he went after him in order to rob it from him. But in this moment, the van door was closed. His screams and knocks were ignored, and he was suffocated with the others. Immediately after he was dragged out of the van, a special truck with a nurse arrived from the palace. The dead body was returned.⁴⁸ Some said that they poisoned him in a special way and that they will poison all Germans so that no witnesses of the atrocities remain.

At midday meal time, SS-men arrived in 2 trucks and felt like watching the massacre factory. In the afternoon another 5 truck loads were buried. From one truck, a young woman with an infant on her breast was thrown out. Whilst sucking the mother's milk, the child died. We worked until 7 o'clock in the evening that day with floodlights.

On this day, too, one of the vans was driven by mistake so close to the pit that we heard the dull cries and screams and knocks on the inner doors from the suffering people. Before finishing the work, 6 of the *misaskim* were shot. Entering the basement, we started crying bitterly. After supper we prayed *ma'ariv* and recited *kaddish*. We slept deeply until 7 o'clock in the morning.

On Thursday, on 15 January, we again drove to work very early. We drove in a coach. At a certain moment, Monyek Halter said to me that the window of the coach could be easily opened with a handle. The thought of escape drilled in my mind the whole time. With all I had, I wanted to see living Jews in order to impart the whole terror of Chełmno. We arrived at work by at 8 o'clock. At 10 o'clock, the first group of victims arrived, again from Izbica. By meal break, we had finished 4 fully loaded trucks. One truck after the other. I have to reiterate once more the mass barbarism and sadism of inspecting the Jewish corpses. Picture the following: from the piled-up heap of victims one German dragged a corpse to the side, the second to another side. They inspect the necks of the women to see if they were wearing golden necklaces. If so, they were ripped off immediately. Rings were taken from fingers. Golden

48 It was a Polish labourer employed in the camp, Marian Libelt. He was accidentally locked in the truck while urging others to get in. Libelt's body was transported to the camp and buried there. The corpse was probably exhumed and handed over to his family. Information from Henryk Maliczak, also a Pole employed in the camp (P. Montague, *Chełmno and the Holocaust*, footnote 17, p. 242).

teeth were torn out of mouths. After that, they set the corpse upright, they forced [12] their legs apart and put the hand into the rectum. With the women corpses, they did it in the front. Even though this happens every day and the whole time, it still makes our blood and brains boil every time.

By the time of the midday meal, I received the sad news that my dear parents and my brother had already been buried. At 1 o'clock we were working again. I tried to come closer to the corpses and to, at least, see my close ones for one last time. Once, the good-natured German with the pipe threw a frozen piece of soil at me and the second time *Bykowiec* shot in my direction. I don't know whether he wanted to hit me and didn't succeed but, in any case, I survived. Disregarding my suffering, I worked very fast in order to forget for at least one minute the terrible situation I was in. I remained as lonely as a stone. From my whole family, which consisted of 60 people, I was the only one who remained. In the evening, when we gravediggers helped bury the corpses, I put the spade aside at a certain moment and, after me, Mechl Podchlebnik and we recited *kaddish* quietly. Before leaving the pit, they shot 3 *misaskim*. At 7 o'clock in the evening, they drove us home. The ones from Izbica were all in despair. We all understood that we would not be seeing any of our close ones alive again. I was beside myself. Nothing mattered to me. After *ma'ariv*, everyone from Izbica joined in saying *kaddish*. Meanwhile we learned that there were 18 gravediggers from Łódź in the adjacent cell. Through the walls we got to know that 750 Jewish families were deported from the Łódź ghetto pursuant to an order by Rumkowski.⁴⁹ The night was filled with nightmares and wild images. During the night, the stronger ones among us again tried to break open the little window.

On Friday, 16 January, we got up at 5 o'clock in the morning. Again, we talked about our hopeless situation, what is left of our life without friends, without relatives, without a saviour, and how there would be no one to speak to. At work, the new gravediggers from Łódź were brutally beaten by

49 Mordechaj Chaim Rumkowski (1877–1944), merchant, social and Zionist activist; member of the board of the Łódź Jewish Community. From 13 October 1940 until August 1944 he held the position of the Łódź (Litzmannstadt) *Judenrat* chairman. Dictator of the Łódź ghetto, which he transformed into a huge enterprise, with the idea of proving it useful for Germans, and thus at least partly immune from destruction. However, he cooperated with Germans in the deportation process. Deported in the last transport, Rumkowski died in unclear circumstances at Auschwitz-Birkenau in August 1944.

Bykowiec. Apparently, they received instructions from him about how to work. Around 10 o'clock, the first truck arrived. Until 1 o'clock we buried 4 truck loads. All the victims came from Łódź.⁵⁰ Seeing their haggardness and how their bodies were covered with wounds and abscesses, we could grasp the true nature of the hunger in Łódź. We felt for them, saying that they suffered so long in the ghetto and had starved in order to make it through this hard time, and now their lives had ended with such a horrible death. The corpses were light. While earlier there had been 3 trucks per shift, now they put 4 trucks into one shift. In the afternoon, *Bykowiec* drank a bottle of liquor and brutally beat up everyone again. In the afternoon, we buried another 4 carloads. At the end, they shot 7 gravediggers.

From Friday onwards, we started to pour chloride over the graves for there was a strong smell of decaying bodies.

In our cell, there were also 3 people from Łódź, from whom we received additional details about the fate of the 750 Jewish families from the Łódź ghetto. They arrived by train in Koło on Thursday. There they were led into the *bet hamidrash*. They selected 18 strong individuals among them and deported them as gravediggers, separate from the rest. The people from Łódź were very hungry and ate the whole supper.

On Saturday, 17 January, we recited *vidduy* before we left. On that day, we buried people from 7 packed trucks with victims from Łódź. In the afternoon, 5 trucks arrived. SS officers watched the burial. At 5 o'clock in the evening, before we finished our work, a car arrived with an order to shoot 16 individuals. We supposed that this was the punishment for the escape of Avrom Rój (he escaped on Friday at 10 o'clock in the night).⁵¹ They selected 16 individu-

50 The first transports from the Łódź ghetto with 10,000 people arrived during 16–29 January 1942.

51 Abram Rój (1916–1975), the first escapee from Chełmno and one of six who survived the war. Son of Icek and Sura, born in Izbica Kujawska, a tailor. His father had died before the war. His mother, four sisters, and a brother, died at Chełmno. After his escape from there, he reached Krośniewice and then Wierzbnik (Starachowice). It is also known that he was in Auschwitz. In 1946 he registered with the Jewish Committee in Izbica Kujawska, stating that he lived in Łódź. Soon afterwards he left for Berlin, where he married Tauba Pakin, née Frajlich, who also came from Izbica Kujawska. In 1951 they emigrated to the United States, settled in Hartford, Connecticut, and changed their surname to Roy. A. Rój left no written testimony, but he did tell his closest family members and friends about his experiences. He was long thought to have died during

als and ordered them to lie down, 8 per layer with faces turned to the corpses, and with machine guns they were shot in the head. After arriving in the basement, we thought that on Sunday, just like a week ago, we would not work. The people from Łódź also told us that a newspaper in the Łódź ghetto costs 10 marks. After dinner we slept like stones.

On Sunday 18 January 1942, we figured out during our morning meal that we would be going to work that day. At 8 o'clock in the morning, we were already at the site. From the truck, we took 20 new shovels and 4 new picks. We deduced from this that the activity will not only not stop but would still increase. Probably all Jews from the *Warthegau* would be gassed. We based our opinion on the fact that this was [13] already happening to the Jews from Łódź. By noon, we had buried 5 truckloads. Because it was Sunday, and the unit of gendarmes was not complete and there were many workers, they threw all the items into the pit. We also had midday meal in the grave. Probably they weren't entirely convinced that we weren't going to attack them. Several times we wanted to throw ourselves on our hangmen but the machine gun barrels, which were pointed at us, terrorised and frightened us. In our nighttime conversations, we often accused each other of cowardice, but to this day I don't know why healthy people who had nothing to lose kept themselves from such actions. Maybe it was because we wanted not to simply die heroically, but to escape in order to alarm all Jews.

Some words about the gendarmes who guarded us. In general, they treated us with hostility or with indifference. Only one of them was continually gloomy; he neither screamed at us nor chased any of us to work. We said: Look, such a humane German. He cannot watch the atrocities they are doing to us.

In the afternoon, we buried 4 additional truckloads. This day, no one was murdered. After *ma'ariv* and *kaddish*, we decided to escape at all costs. Since I didn't have a penny to my name, I asked Kalman Radziejowski from Izbica to give me a few marks. He took out sewed-in 50 marks and gave them to me. At daybreak, I tried to tear out the brick — such a strong impression Rój had left on me, who escaped through a small basement window. But it didn't work again.

the war. See Przemysław Nowicki, "O Abramie Roju, pierwszym uciekinierze z obozu zagłady na polskich terenach wcielonych do Rzeszy", *Zapiski Kujawsko-Dobrzyńskie*, vol. 23 (2008): 185–200.

On Monday 19 January 1942, we got on the coach. I let everyone enter before me and I myself embarked last. The gendarmes sat in the front. No SS-men followed us from behind this day. On my right side, there was a small window, which easily opened. In the middle of the drive, I pushed open the small window. Cold air forcefully streamed in. I got really frightened and closed the window again. But my friends, and especially Monyek Halter, gave me the courage. After I made up my mind, I quietly asked my friends to position themselves in such a way that the draft wouldn't blow in the direction of the gendarmes. I quickly unscrewed the window, stuck my legs out, slid lower, gripped the frame with my hands, rested my feet on the door hinges, and I told my friends that, immediately after my jump, they should close the window — and I jumped. I did several somersaults and rubbed the skin off my hand. My only thought was not to break a leg. I didn't care if I broke a hand because it was essential to me to be able to walk and make it to the first Jewish settlement. I looked to see if the truck continued driving. It did drive on. I didn't wait long and started to run with all my strength across fields and through forests until I arrived one hour later at a Polish peasant's cottage. I entered with Polish greeting: *'Niech będzie pochwalony Jezus Chrystus!'*⁵² Whilst warming-up, I asked how far away we were from Chełmno. It was only 3 kilometres. I got a generous piece of bread and put it into my pocket. When I walked out, the peasant asked me whether I was a Jew. I denied it with everything I had but asked myself simultaneously why he suspected me. So, he said: *'W tym Chełmnie gazują Żydów i Cyganów.'*⁵³ I said good-bye with a Polish greeting and left. I walked for another hour and again arrived at a Polish cottage. There they offered me white, sweet coffee and a piece of bread. Meanwhile the people who were present said: *'W tym Chełmnie gazują Żydów i Cyganów, a jak z nimi skończą, to się do nas wezmą.'*⁵⁴ — I had a good laugh at that. After receiving the necessary information about the route onwards, I continued walking until I arrived in a German village. (German cottages were easily distinguishable from Polish ones because they were well equipped and had antennas on their roofs). I decided to boldly walk

52 (Polish) 'Praised be Jesus Christ!'

53 (Polish) 'In this Chełmno, they gas Jews and Gypsies.'

54 (Polish) 'In this Chełmno, they gas Jews and Gypsies and when they finish with them, they'll come to get us.'

through the whole village. Eventually I found a Polish cottage. And it turned out that I was 10 kilometres away from Grabów where there was a Jewish community.⁵⁵ I passed myself off as a Polish butcher worker who had to get to Grabów for work. The house owner sent me to another village to a certain Grabowski who had a horse and a cart and would take me to Grabów. In general, I stuck to detours but this time, in order to make it to the indicated village, I had to be on the road for some part of the way. At a certain moment, I noticed a military car. My heart stopped beating. I already imagined myself caught by the Germans. At the last second, I linked arms with a peasant woman and turned into another street, while asking her whether she had any butter to sell. The taxi passed by. I breathed more easily. The whole time, I called on God and my parents [p. 14] to assist me in rescuing the people Israel. To Grabowski I introduced myself as Wojciechowski who was travelling to Grabów for work. It turned out that he was going to Dąbie to the fair. Also, his neighbour, to whom he sent me, was no longer at home because he had driven away to Dąbie to the fair. So, I walked on for a little while and thought continuously about the great misfortunes that were following me. I asked passers-by for the way. The whole time I looked out for gendarmerie posts because I didn't have any documents on me. Finally, I arrived at a village, 7 kilometres from Grabów. I persuaded a Polish peasant to bring me to Grabów for 15 marks. I put on his fur coat and fur hat and we arrived in Grabów on Monday, at 2 o'clock. The Jews thought that I was a *Volksdeutscher* because I was without the mark of shame.⁵⁶ I ask for the rabbi. My beard was fully grown (in Chełmno, one not only did not wash oneself but also did not shave). So, I asked: 'Does the rabbi live here?' — 'Who are you?' — 'Rabbi, I am a Jew from the other world.' So he looked at me as if I was a madman. I said: 'Rabbi, don't think that I am insane or crazy. I am a Jew from the other world. They are killing the entire Jewish people. I myself buried a town of Jews and on top of that my parents, my brother, and the whole family. I remain as lonesome as a stone.' While telling him this, I cried bitterly. So, the rabbi asked: 'Where do they kill them?' — I said: 'Rabbi, in Chełmno. They gas them all in the forest and bury them in one grave.'

55 Grabów (Łęczyca County), a commune main town, with approximately 915 Jews before the war.

56 i.e. the Star of David, which by order of the Germans Jews on the territories incorporated into the Reich had to wear on their clothing on the left side of their chest.

His maid (the rabbi was a widower) brought me a bowl of water, and her eyes were swollen from tears. I started to wash my hands. The wound on my right hand started to hurt. When the Jews learned about this, masses of people came to the rabbi and I told them in detail about the horrible events. Everyone cried with me. I ate bread with butter and tea and recited *gomel*.⁵⁷

ARG I 1115a (Ring. I/412).

Description: duplicate (3 copies), typewritten, Yiddish, 207×142, 207×295 mm, minor damages and missing fragments, (third copy: substantial damages and missing fragments), 42 sheets, 42 pages. Attached is a fragment of Hersh Wasser's note in Yiddish: 'A document as [. .] from death [. .] Yakov Grojnowski.'

See HWC, 4/1 (copy 4, typewritten, 14 sheets).

b) 5 February 1942, Piotrków Trybunalski. Jewish Community in Piotrków Trybunalski, document confirming the temporary registered place of residence of Jakub Grojnowski (Szlama Ber Winer) at Grodzka Street 3 in Piotrków Trybunalski.

The Council of Elders of the Jewish Community
in Piotrków
Registration Office

Certificate

The individuals listed below were registered on 2 February 1942 in Piotrków, Grodzka Street no. 3 for temporary residence in the Jewish Community of Piotrków.

1. Grojnowski, Jakub	4. --
2. --	5. --
3. --	6. --

Piotrków, 5 February, 1942

Head of Administration
/-/ [illegible signature]

57 (Hebrew) literally, doer of good deeds; blessing recited in the synagogue after one escapes great danger.

ARG I 1115b (Ring. I/412).

Description: original, mimeographed, handwritten inserts(ink), Polish, 210×103 mm, minor damages and missing fragments, 1 sheet, 1 page.

c) *Before 18 March 1942, [Warsaw ghetto]. Szlamek (Szlama Ber Winer), photograph with dedication to the Wassers on the reverse.*

[1]



[2] I present this image of mine as gift and a token of remembrance to Mrs. and Mr. Wasser

Szlamek

Warsaw, 18 March 1942

ARG I 1115c (Ring. I/412).

Description: original, photograph, handwritten, Polish, 40×65 mm, 1 sheet, 2 pages.

11

After January 1942, Warsaw ghetto. Author unknown, 'Die Vorfälle in Kulmhof' [Events at Chełmno]. Organisation of the death camp and the course of mass execution of Jews from December 1941 to January 1942.

[1] Events at Chełmno on the Ner⁵⁸

In the second half of December 1941 and in January 1942, the village of Chełmno, Koło County⁵⁹ was the scene of events that are beyond any comprehension in terms of their cruelty and barbarism.

Within the space of 4 weeks before the so-called resettlement of the existing Jewish communities, the German authorities imposed a poll tax of 4 marks on the entire Jewish population. Moreover, all Jews (men aged 14–60 and women under 50) were to undergo medical examination, to determine if they were fit for physical labour. Those actions deeply worried the *Judenrats*, but all attempts at identifying the actual sense of these ordinances proved futile. Although this or that German official or SS-man assured that all the Jews from the Warthegau would be deported to Pińsk,⁶⁰ Galicia, or some other place, the information expressed the subjective opinion of the informants and did not stem from fact. They were not believed. People thought that in the third year of the existence of the Warthegau, with the reduction of Jewish population to the minimum, no one would consider such an option. Furthermore, the everyday hardships for Jews in the Warthegau, due to the lack of contacts with German decision-making centres, made all attempts futile.

58 Text based, among others, on Szlama Winer's testimony, doc. 10a; see also *OyNEG Shabes. People and Works*, docs. 65 and 66.

59 In the orig.: Dorf Kulmhof Kreis Warthebrücken. German names of towns, counties and provinces are used throughout the document; we only footnote them if they differ considerably from the Polish names; where both Polish and German names are used, we leave both in the main text.

60 Pińsk, voivodship of Polesie (today's Belarus).

Jews from Koło County knew about the resettlement of Jews from Zagórow⁶¹ in October, even though this was carried out in secret. In Zagórow the entire Jewish population of Konin County was concentrated, a total of 3,000 people. Official actions before the deportation were also implemented in Zagórow. The Jews paid the poll tax of 4 marks and underwent medical examination. After some time, the deportation began. The Jews were driven out in trucks in groups of 60, each entitled to take a one-kilogram package. The journey ended in the Lasy Kazimierzowskie⁶² near Zagórow. Everyone got out and went into the forest. No one has heard of them since. Neither messengers nor letters sent throughout the Reich and the General Government brought nothing new. The Lasy Kazimierzowskie hide the secret of the deported Jews from Zagórow.⁶³

In mid-December 1941, the entire Jewish population of Koło (2,000 souls) and Dąbie nad Nerem (1,000 souls) was taken to Chełmno. Literally, all the Jews were deported. Infants, children, old people, the infirm, and everyone else, with all their belongings, were loaded onto trucks in groups of 60 and deported to Chełmno. Chełmno is a village, some 12 kilometres from Koło, on the road from Koło to Dąbie nad Nerem.

The German authorities spread a false rumour that Chełmno would be the sole Jewish place of settlement in Koło County. Thanks to their productive work, the Jews would be provided with means of survival.

Members of the other communities in Koło Country were keenly interested in the fate of Jews from Koło and Dąbie nad Nerem. Jews of Kłodawa (1,200 Jewish inhabitants), Izbica Kujawska (1,300 Jewish inhabitants), Bugaj (Bugitten, 800 inhabitants), and Sompolno⁶⁴ (1,000) were right in thinking that they would meet the same fate. In order to learn about the living conditions in Chełmno, all the communities sent out Polish and German messengers. They were to bring back specific information about Chełmno. All the obtained information was the same: the Jews were placed in the Chełmno

61 Zagórow (Słupca County); in the orig. Hinterberg, the spelling is sometimes also 'Hintenberg' or 'Hinteberg'.

62 The woods at Kazimierz Biskupi near Konin.

63 The Jews of Zagórow were murdered with slaked lime in mid-November 1941. A witness was a Polish veterinarian Mieczysław Sękiewicz; see his testimony in: *Mówią świadkowie Chełmna*, pp. 88–91.

64 Sompolno (Konin County).

palace, and never returned. No food was ever sent to the palace. The local peasants often saw a grey van headed for the palace several times a day, and then returned towards the Lasy Lubardzkie⁶⁵ They considered that the Jews were gassed. No one believed it and the information was treated as a figment of the peasants' imaginations. Life went on. But a sombre mood set in, and the atmosphere became more dense.

[2] On 2 and 4 January 1942, 46 men (30 and 16) from Kłodawa, 6 and 9 January, 45 men (29 and 16) from Izbica Kujawska (Mühlental), 9 January, 16 men from Bugaj were captured and taken to Chełmno. In Bugaj at that time, there were 800 Jews resettled from Koło and Babiak,⁶⁶ where they created model farmsteads. The procedure consisted of paying the poll tax of 4 marks, the medical examination, and the previous deportation of some of the Jewish men to Chełmno from Koło and Dąbie and from the above-mentioned places.

To be sure, such an operation was prepared in detail and coordinated, and the local gendarmerie had received precise information about the fate awaiting the Jews. And so in Izbica Kuj[awska] no gendarme, including Lt. Johanns, Sergeant Plätzenieder, and private gendarme Schmalz,⁶⁷ informed any Jews about the true course of events; they all lied and claimed that they had no idea about any deportations of Jews.

The previously taken Jews did the job of gravediggers.

Between 2 and 9 January Gypsies from the Jewish ghetto at Łódź were killed (some thought that the Gypsies were political expulsees from Yugoslavia). On 10 and 12 January Jews from Kłodawa were killed, on 13 January — Jews from Bugaj, on 14 and 15 January — Jews from Izbica Kujawska, on 16 January — Jews from Łódź. The first group of Jews 'resettled' to Chełmno included 750 families, some 3,000 people. Informants (gravediggers, taken on 15 January from Łódź to Chełmno) claimed that 10,000 Jews were 'resettled' from Łódź.

The Jews were brought in in trucks, initially in groups of 60, later 90. Their baggage was left in the church located on the left of the street. The buildings around the church were surrounded by uniformed and plain-clothes Gestapo functionaries. Further left is the village. To the right of the street, some 100 metres away stands the Chełmno palace. The trucks with the victims

65 The reference is to woods near Ladorudz (Koło County).

66 Babiak (Koło County).

67 All three names were cited in Winer's testimony (Johanns as 'Johanne'), see doc. 10.

would always head there. An elderly German, about age 60, helped them get out, and was very cordial to them. He would hold infants so that the mothers could get out of the truck, and would assist the elderly and infirm. The infirm held onto his shoulder on the way to the palace. His cordial demeanour won general sympathy and confidence.

The palace in question is an old one-storey building, behind a small palace destroyed during the war of 1914–1918. The windows with no glass make a grim impression. The building proper is located in the other yard. The room where the victims were gathered was large and well heated. From there the stairs run to the ground floor. There is a corridor, and at its exit a platform, which can be reached down small stairs. In the basement are many rooms. The entry gate led to the first yard, the second gate to the second, the palace yard proper. The entire palace was guarded by many gendarmerie posts. At least 20 gendarmes were there. The Gestapo, who controlled the entire action, operated according to a precise plan. The basic rule of the entire operation was held in complete secrecy. The individual actions were so perfectly interconnected that two groups of ‘resettled’ never encountered each other.

An SS officer and the 60-year-old German would address the gathered people. They explained that everyone would be going to the Łódź ghetto where they would work in factories and shops, the women would do housework, and the children would go to school. However, before they were to depart for Łódź, they needed to enter a specially prepared steam bath where their clothes would be disinfected as well. Everyone was to strip, the men keeping their shirts and underpants on, and the women to wear gowns. IDs and valuables were to be wrapped in handkerchiefs. The money sewn into items of clothing was to be taken out so as to avoid destruction during disinfection.

[3] Following such preparations of those gathered inside, the doors were opened and the people were politely asked to climb down the small stairs to the bath. On their way out, the temperature fell steeply, because it was very cold outside, and the corridor was not heated at all. Hearing the complaints of those gathered, the 60-year-old German and the SS officer politely and cordially replied that they should remain calm and wait their turn to bathe. The ‘bath’ was the very platform where the victims were driven, whipped, and clubbed, and from which they were directed to the gas van. The politeness and the cordiality disappeared. The ill-fated people were swamped with despair and wild fright. They shouted, cried, and prayed out loud. The van to which they were

driven (one of two) was the size of a large truck, more or less. Grey, airtight, with well-fitted doors, with a slab on the outside. Inside there were no seats. The walls were covered with metal, and the floor was covered with battens, upon which was a straw mat. On either side of the van were 15-cm-wide gas pipes. Both pipes, whose inlets were inside the van, ran to the driver's cabin, where they were connected to the gas conduit, by which were several buttons.

When everyone was inside, and the van was hermetically sealed, it would cross both gates to the forest, some 7 km on the way to Koło. The journey took around 15 minutes. On the left side an even surface road ran for half a kilometre, to turn left and after around 200 metres one could see the guard post. There was a site on a meadow, surrounded by gendarmes, with machine guns at the ready. Along the site, all the way to the adjacent road, there was a rectangular ditch.

The ditch, or rather a common grave of the gassed victims, was 1.5 metres wide at the bottom, and 5 metres at the top. It was 5 metres deep.

There were some 20–50 gravediggers on the site, as well as an average of 30 gendarmes, SS-men and Gestapo functionaries in civilian clothes. Some of the gravediggers were digging the earth which hardened in the cold, while the others dealt with the corpses. The gravediggers, both the grown-ups, as well as 16-year-old boys and 60-year-old men, worked in scant clothing, namely in trousers, underpants, shirts, and boots. They had to take off other clothing.

The van stood some 100 metres away from the grave. The driver and at the same time the executioner, would activate the buttons in the gas apparatus installed in the driver's cabin and would leave the van. As I said, the drivers of both vans used for the executions were also the executioners. They were SS-men with the skulls on their caps. Inside the van there was muted screaming, noise, crying, and banging on the walls. After some time (more or less a quarter hour later) it was quiet again. Then the driver — executioner would re-enter the driver's cabin and using a flashlight would look inside the gas chamber (inside the van) to see if the people were dead. Between the gas chamber and the driver's cabin were two glass panels. When he established that they were dead he would pull up to the grave. Then he waited for 5 minutes until the so-called 'site officer', an exceptionally cruel and sadistic SS-man, ordered him to open the van door. A strong odour of gas emanated. After another 5 minutes, the officer would shout: 'Jews, put on the *tefillin*', that is throw the corpses out. The work was done by 8 Jews, with 4

carrying the corpses out, 2 throwing them into the grave, and the remaining 2 arranging them in the grave. The corpses inside the van were terribly intertwined, nearly all soiled with faeces, probably due to the fright or in reaction to the gas. The dead however preserved their natural skin colour and looked as if they were asleep. The corpses were thrown out of the van quickly and brutally. The officer shouted and whipped. The dead women were lifted by their hair, the others were grabbed by the hands and feet and thus thrown onto the pyre. Then 2 Germans in plain clothes examined the corpses with special care, searching for valuables. The entire procedure looked more or less as follows: one body at a time was taken out of the pile and carefully examined. Necklaces were torn off [4], wedding rings were taken off, golden fillings were extracted. Anuses and female organs were carefully checked for valuables or money. All that stirred enormous fright and rage among the terrorised gravediggers. (Unlike the Jews, the Gypsies were placed in the gassing van with all their belongings, and after the execution they were buried with them.) Then the desecrated and robbed corpses were thrown into the grave. This work was done by 2 Jews specially designated for this purpose. 2 other Jewish gravediggers worked in the same grave, following the SS-man's orders, who stood over the grave and with a stick pointed out how to arrange the corpses. They were placed face to the ground, with another corpse's feet next to the head of the next. The remaining space was filled with infants, children, and (in the case of Gypsies) the belongings.

After removing [the bodies] from the van, it was cleaned of human faeces and other refuse. Then it drove off.

6–9 transports were buried every day. One layer contained as many as 200 bodies. Each layer was covered with earth, and from 17 January — with chloride in order to neutralise the odour of decay.

In the Chełmno Forest,⁶⁸ the site of those incredible mass executions, a thick network of gendarmerie posts was set up. It was designed to make absolutely sure that the terrible secret of the diabolical murder of entire Jewish settlements would not be discovered. The gendarmes who were active on the murder site were charged with guarding the graves at every stage of the operation (from the grave to the van, during the midday meal break) and constantly threatened [the Jewish gravediggers] with machine guns.

68 The reference is to the Rzuchów Forest.

The gravediggers were quartered in the palace in two adjacent basements. They started their day at 7 in the morning. A civilian German cook would bring their breakfast and a bucket. It consisted of bitter, turbid black coffee and dry bread from the luggage of the Jewish victims. After breakfast the gendarme on duty reported to the SS officer. Then he would open the 3 locks on the door and order: 'Jews, out!' Not once did any SS officer climb down into the basement, as he was afraid of the desperate gravediggers, who were filled with hatred of the executioners. On their way out of the basement the gravediggers were counted several times. Each group was led into the yard. There was a 20-men-strong field gendarmerie guard, with machine guns pointed at the gathered men. After a recount, the gravediggers were placed in cars. Two cars, one truck, and one bus drove them to the execution site. They were followed by a staff car with uniformed and plain-clothes Gestapo functionaries.

On the short days of January, when they would drive off at 8 in the morning, it was still dark so they did not meet any strangers.

Work at the execution site began at 8.30 a.m. and went on until noon, that is until 12.30. Then the order was: 'Leave the spades!' The gravediggers would leave the ditch escorted by SS-men and gendarmes, and make their way to the place where their clothes were. They were ordered to come together and sit on the luggage. The midday meal consisted of bitter, cold black coffee and hard, frozen bread.

The 8 gravediggers who directly dealt with the corpses were not allowed to leave the grave. There they were given coffee without bread. Before the end of the working day, they were ordered to lie down in the grave facing the corpses and their heads were blasted off with machine guns. The others would cover the grave and in utmost hurry, escorted by the gendarmes, they would move to the assembly area. They were counted and recounted several times. After the order: 'Jews, clothes on!', everybody would get dressed. As a rule, the working day ended at 5 p.m. But on some days, especially when the Łódź Jews were executed, work continued under the floodlights until late evening.

As they worked in the grave, the gravediggers would often say the prayer for the dead, the *kaddish*. The workers often had to watch as their close relatives were being thrown into the grave.

To show any signs of exhaustion was punished by heavy beating on naked skin or by death.

The site commander was often drunk, and so he would beat the workers with particular brutality and cruelty.

Almost every day SS officers would come to monitor the 'work'. They were visibly satisfied watching the executions [5] and shook the hand of the commanding officer, congratulating him.

On 13 January, the following happened: after the corpses were thrown out of the gas chamber it turned out that an infant from Bugaj who was hidden in a pillow miraculously survived. It started crying, but a machine gun shot at the child's head ended the miraculously saved life. Nazi justice was done.

The palace basement was dark and cold. On the floor, there were scattered parcels with gravediggers' clothes. The walls were covered with ice. A small kerosene lamp was lit in the corner. In the other corner was a refuse bucket.

The nerves of the living victims were so strained that it was a common sight to see grown-up men crying. Some were kept by their survival instinct, others surrendered to despair and committed suicide. But above all, everyone wanted to get out of the trap so as to inform the still surviving Jewish communities and the whole world about the atrocities in the Chełmno forest.

Sometimes the guard would demand that the Jews sing. No begging against this was effective. The machine gun enforced compliance. They sang fragments of the prayer *Shema Yisrael* and the national song *Hatikvah* (hope). They all felt as if they were facing God's judgement. Gravity and perfect indifference towards worldly matters and passions filled their existence. But that was not enough for the brutal guard. The Jews had to repeat his sentence: 'We, Jews, thank Adolf Hitler for this' and then: 'We, Jews, thank Adolf Hitler for food.'

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The accuracy of this description is beyond doubt. It is based on a reliable source material.

ARG I 1117 (Ring. I/413).

Description: duplicate (3 copies, page 4 in 4 copies), typewritten with a few handwritten additions, (ink, pp. 2 and 3 from the third copy), German, 210×297 mm, damage and fragments missing (third copy), 16 sheets, 16 pages. In the third copy, pp. 3 and 5 from first copy.

Edition based on the first copy of the duplicate, 5 sheets, 5 pages.

12

After January 1942, Warsaw Ghetto. Róża [Kapłan's letters of 21, 22, 24, 27 and 30 January 1942 (postal stamp dates) to Szmuel [Kapłan], to Warsaw, Nowolipie 28 flat 18, on the destruction of the Jews from Turek, Koło, Dąbie, and Łódź; on search for escapees from Chełmno; and on the special tax deportation extracted from the Jewish population.

ARG I 829 (Ring. I/573/2)

Description: original, handwritten on 6 postcards, postal and Warsaw *Judenrat* stamps, in German and Polish, 147×104 mm; duplicates (2 copies) (typewritten, 208×295 mm, 4 sheets, 4 pages), 8 sheets, 14 pages.

Attached is Hersh Wasser's note in Yiddish: 'Letters from Krośniewice to Warsaw. Written by Róża Kapłan to her husband Shmuel Kapłan, a Bund activist from Kalisz and Warsawa respected CKU activist. His wife with their three sons sneaked away from Warsaw to Krośniewice, for material reasons.'

Forthcoming in: *Letters on the Shoah*.

13

21 January 1942, Grabów near Łęczyca. Rabbi Jakub Szulman[?],⁶⁹ Letter to relations in the Warsaw ghetto informing of the destruction of the Jews from Koło, Dąbie, Kłodawa, Izbica Kujawska and other towns in the area at Chełmno.

ARG I 748 (Ring. I/549).

Description: original, handwritten, ink, Yiddish, 144×210 mm, minor damages and missing text fragments; translation (3 copies, typewritten, Polish, 212×166 mm), 4 sheets, 5 pages.

Forthcoming in: *Letters on the Shoah*.

69 According to Ruta Sakowska the letter was written by Rabbi Jakub Szulman, see *Letters on the Shoah* (forthcoming).

14

After 27 January 1942, Warsaw ghetto. Fela [Mazierska?], letter to an unknown person in the Warsaw ghetto informing about the death camp at Chełmno, where 25,000 Jews had already perished.

ARG I 831 (Ring. I/573/4)

Description: duplicate (2 copies, typewritten in Polish, 212x280, 212x290 mm); the letter is on the same sheet of paper with duplicates of Fela Mazierska letters, their originals see ARG I 830 (Ring. I/573/3).

Forthcoming in: *Letters on the Shoah*.

15

January 1942, place unknown. [Family Gelbart], letter to Rywen [Gelbart] in the Warsaw ghetto on the mass murder of Jews (including Kłodawa inhabitants) with gas at the death camp in Chełmno.

ARG I 1116 (Ring. I/543/1)

Description: original, handwritten, ink, Polish, 146×203 mm, 1 sheet, 2 pages.

Forthcoming in: *Letters on the Shoah*.

After January 1942, Warsaw ghetto. *Uszer Taube*, resident of Kłodawa, "פּראָטאָקאָל וועגן די געשעענישן אין קוילער קרייז" [Account of events in the Koło County of the Jewish community of Zagórow in September — October 1941; the beginning of the selection process in November 1941; deportations from Izbica and Bugaj to an unknown destination on 12 January 1941; information about the death camp in Chełmno, gathered from three escapees: Shloyme Winer and Avrom Rój of Izbica Kujawska, and Mekhl Podchlebnik of Bugaj].⁷⁰

[1a] Account on the events in the Koło County⁷¹

A few general points: The Koło County (Warthbrücken in German) borders on the Konin County. Whereas in the Koło County the Jews lived in several towns, namely Koło, the Jewish settlement in Bugaj (Bugitten in German), Izbica, Sompolno, Dąbie, and Kłodawa (Tonningen in German), the Jews in the Konin County, numbering just under 3,000 souls, were concentrated exclusively in the shtetl of Zagórow (Hinterberg in German). The total liquidation of the Jewish community of Zagórow was a prelude to the tragic events in the Koło County at the end of December 1941 and January 1942. It happened under the following circumstances (I have taken all the following information from the letters which the chairman of the Zagórow *Judenrat*, Yitskhok Łaski, sent to us in Kłodawa). Around the time of the *Yamim Noraim*⁷² letters began to arrive informing us that a head tax of 4 marks had been imposed on the entire Jewish population, and that preparations were being made for the resettlement. The resettlement was supposed to proceed as follows: the Jews were to be sent to Koło in trucks, from there by train to Łódź, and from Łódź they

70 See Przemysław Nowicki and Tomasz Kuberczyk, *Z Archiwum Ringelbluma: Relacje Uszera Taube i Wołkowicza jako źródła do badań nad zagładą Żydów z powiatów konińskiego i kolskiego*, in: *Mniejszości narodowe w Wielkopolsce i ich dziedzictwo*, vol. 1: *Żydzi*, ed. Piotr Kwiatkiewicz, (Poznań, 2012) pp. 37–56.

71 Title only in the typewritten duplicate.

72 (Hebrew) literally, days of awe; the High Holy Days, from *Rosh Hashanah* through *Yom Kippur*; it was between 22 September and 1 October 1941.

were to travel for several days in an unknown direction. In fact, it took place as follows: the population was loaded onto trucks in groups of 50, each person being allowed to take 1 kilogram of baggage. They were promised that the rest of their luggage would be sent on by train. The journey lasted 2 hours. The Jews were very worried and, wishing to find out about the first stage of their expulsion, came up with the following idea: a member of a [1b] departing group was given a piece of red chalk and asked to write on the truck the name of the place where they got off. When the truck returned, it transpired that the stopping place was Kazimierz Forests,⁷³ not far from Zagórow. We received no more news about the fate of the Zagórow Jewish community, despite sending *shlikhim*,⁷⁴ both Polish and German, to all corners, as well as letters to all the towns of the Reich and General Government. Only a handful of families managed to flee to Koło, and the majority perished. The Kazimierz Forests are said to be guarded by the military to this day.

At the beginning of November 1941, a medical examination of all Jewish men aged 14 to 60 and all Jewish women aged 14 to 50 was carried out by county doctors throughout the Koło County. Although a similar examination had already taken place at the beginning of the summer for the purposes of labour camps, it must be assumed that the second medical examination was for quite different purposes. 2 weeks later, all Jews unfit for work in the whole county were required to pay a head tax of 4 marks, and after a further 2 days the tax was also imposed on the rest of the Jewish population. The residents of the towns of Koło County were precisely informed both about the head tax and its possible consequences. The exception was Kłodawa, where the *kehilla* commissioner, not wishing to cause panic, covered the entire amount of the tax out of the *kehilla* treasury without [2a] informing the residents.⁷⁵ A special *sheliekh*, Golde Tabaczyńska,⁷⁶ was sent from Kłodawa to Koło to gain infor-

73 In Polish, Lasy Kazimierzowskie, as used in doc. 2.

74 (Hebrew) scouts, messengers; sing. *sheliekh*.

75 In the original, this sentence appears twice, it was left where it fits better.

76 Gołda (Gucia) Tabaczyńska (-1916–1944) was a Kłodawa resident. In 1935 she went to Palestine where she married Joshua Reich and they came to her hometown for their honeymoon. In December 1941 she was one of the first *Judenrat* messengers. With a group of Jews she succeeded to leave the town in early January and thus avoided the deportation to Chełmno. She went to the Warsaw ghetto and was active in her *landsmanshaft*. She perished in the general Warsaw uprising in 1944.

mation about the fate, and that very day the Koło *Judenrat* was notified of the obligation to implement the head tax. In Koło, a certain SS *Hauptsturmführer* informed the representative of Bugaj that by 15 December 1941 no Jew would remain in the whole of the Koło County. They would all be resettled in the newly occupied territories.

At 11 a.m. on Saturday 5 December,⁷⁷ two SS-men from Poznań drove up to the *Landratura*⁷⁸ in Koło. Half an hour later they rounded up 30 able-bodied Jewish men in the street and drove them off immediately in a truck. At 2 p.m. the systematic deportation began. It was done as follows: using the census records from the Municipality and in alphabetical order, SS-men and gendarmes went from house to house, took the Jews out by families, and put them in the *bet hamidrash*. They remained there until Monday morning. Food was provided by the *kehilla*. The Jews were in despair, but their blackest thoughts were tied to the prospect of the expulsion. Early on the morning of Monday 7 December, a truck arrived and loaded the people from Koło in batches of 50. (I learned the details about Koło from a Bugaj resident named Podchlebnik, who happened to be in Koło that [zb] day and was later released on the basis of his certificate.) The people and their luggage were loaded separately. The gravely ill were laid on bed sheets and hoisted onto the trucks with the help of several people. The last transport left on Friday 11 December, and with it the leaders of the Jewish *kehilla*. People knew they were being taken to Chełmno (Kulmhof in German, a village between Koło and Dąbie). We in Kłodawa knew this from the following: the receivership administrator of *Vereinigte Holzhandlungen in Tonnigen*,⁷⁹ Gerardus Melchior, a Baltic German who had the reputation of being a friend of the Jews, told the *kehilla* commissioner, who worked in his firm, to go to Koło and find out where the Jews were being sent. He returned from Koło with the news that the Jews were being sent to Chełmno, where a Jewish village was being established in which all the Jews from the Koło County would live their lives. On that day there was joy and jubilation in the shtetl. The Zagórów tragedy was still fresh in everyone's mind, and now, with the prospect of a safe haven (the Jewish village of Chełmno),

77 Throughout the document, the author is one day of the week ahead; here it should be Friday.

78 (Polish) The *Landrat*'s headquarters building.

79 (German) 'Tonningen United Timber Merchants'.

they wanted to get the expulsion over as quickly as possible and settle into their new homes.

On Monday 14 December, the Dąbie Jews (approximately 900 souls) were rounded up for deportation. They were all locked up in the church. According to the records, however, quite a lot of Jews were missing, so they were all released after one day of confinement in the church, [3a] so that the same operation could be carried out again on Thursday 17 December. That time almost all the Jews were rounded up. From the church, just as in Koło, they were sent to Chełmno in trucks.

In the meantime, the Jews from the remaining communities did everything they could to find out what was happening to the people who had been taken to Chełmno. We were worried by the fact that no food was sent in that direction. From Polish *shlikhim* we learned that there were Jews in the Chełmno palace only, but that none were present in the village itself.

The palace was guarded by SS-men, and so was the adjoining forest. The *shlikhim* did not see any Jews come out of the palace, nor was it in any way possible for so many Jews to be living in one building (the palace). Our shtetl, Kłodawa, kept sending *shlikhim* to the palace to find out about the fate of the Jews. No one was able to get near the palace, but from conversations with Polish peasants in Chełmno it was clear that the Jews were being killed there. Some Polish peasants came to us to convey the information in person. They did so in great fear, wary of outsiders. According to them, the killing took place as follows: a specially constructed truck came to the palace several times a day and Jews were flung into it. Cries, wailing, and screaming were heard coming from the truck, [3b] which then drove off to the nearby Ladorudz forest.

When the *kehilla* commissioner communicated this information to Plew, the German mayor, the latter got highly agitated and threatened with death Polish peasants who spread atrocity propaganda. He reassured him that Chełmno was just a transit camp: the healthy were sent to work camps, while the sick were transported to Łódź.

On Friday 2 January, Kłodawa gendarmerie, using the Jewish population records, arrested 30 strong, healthy men and held them all day in the police station. In the evening, a truck with field gendarmes (known as 'white furs' because of their fur coats) arrived, collected the 30 men, and drove off in the direction of Chełmno. This incident made a huge impact on the town's

population and caused great anxiety. On the evening of Sunday 4 January, the same truck arrived and demanded another 20 men from the gendarmerie. They had to be content with 16 weak, sick, and elderly men because the others had hidden. It should be mentioned that, at the same time, trucks carrying groups of Gypsies were seen in Grabów and at Kłodawa railway station, coming from the direction of Łódź. At 2 at night on Friday 9 January 1942, Kłodawa gendarmes, assisted by the SA, locked the whole Jewish population in the church. Before nightfall, [4a] some Kłodawa Jews had already learned of the following incidents, which worried them greatly: (1) two Jewish tailors, Hersh Nosek and Avrom Myszkowski, who were working in the village of Zawadka⁸⁰ at the home of the commandant of the local SA, witnessed a gendarme from Kłodawa deliver an order to the commandant to present himself and his division in Kłodawa at 2 a.m. Why he was being ordered to Kłodawa, he did not know. (2) A former gendarme named Busse, while in the home of the Kłodawa Jew Yitskhok Lejzer, said that an expulsion of all Kłodawa Jews was being prepared for that night. Some 40 men, women, and children fled at the last moment (the curfew for Jews began at 8 p.m.). The trucks arrived on Saturday 10 January, and in the course of the day 750 people were taken to Chełmno in batches of 50. The remaining 250 or so were transported on Monday morning. Gerardus Melchior, by intervening personally with *Gauleiter* Greiser in Poznań, at the last moment saved 2 families who worked for him: Yankev Walrojch and his family, and his brother-in-law Peretz Kohn and his family. The expulsion from Izbica and Bugaj took place that same Monday, 12 January, and continued until Wednesday. There, too, healthy men had been taken earlier, as in our town.

On Sunday 18 January and Monday 19 January, 3 young men who had escaped from Chełmno came separately to Grabów, namely: Winer and Rój from Izbica and Mekhl [4b] Podchlebnik (a relative of the above-mentioned Podchlebnik) from Bugaj. They had been among the healthy men taken away before the others.

They reported the following: the *forpocztę*⁸¹ from each town (30 men) were taken to a nearby forest to dig large graves, narrow at the bottom and wide at the top. They were taken to work before daybreak when it was still

80 Zawadka (Koło County).

81 (Polish) vanguards, advance groups.

dark, and brought back to the palace after nightfall. Jews taken to the palace have their money and documents confiscated. One of the SS officers makes a speech to each new batch, informing them that, because they are being sent to a ghetto, they have to undergo delousing. For the purposes of the alleged delousing, the men are made to undress to their underwear and the women to their nightgowns. Then they are put in a cold cellar, from which shouts, screams, and groans, caused both by blows and by the cold are heard continuously. A squad of 150 SS-men are stationed in the palace. A specially constructed truck, which exactly fits into the cellar's door frame drives up to the cellar, and 50 people are packed into it with great brutality. The truck is then sealed hermetically, and the driver presses a button. [5a] The truck starts making a loud noise, while terrible wails and cries of *Shema Yisrael* are heard from inside. The truck stands like that for 15 minutes, and then drives with its load into the forest, where it stands for another 15 minutes or so. Then it ejects 50 dead bodies, which look heavenly beautiful, their faces luminous.

The bodies are stiff. They are laid in the graves in layers of 5, and each layer is covered with lime. 750 people are killed in the course of a day. If any of the gravediggers pauses for a moment out of fatigue, he is shot immediately and thrown into the grave, even if still alive. In the period from 2 to 10 January, the Kłodawa gravediggers buried 3,300 (three thousand three hundred) Gypsies. Many Jewish gravediggers were also shot after burying the Gypsies on the pretext that the Gypsies were infected and the gravediggers could carry the infection back into the palace. Because of the shortness of the day, the Koło Jews were killed at a rate of only 500 daily, but that number was later increased to 750 a day. If the last transport of the day consisted of fewer than 50 people, they were killed in a different brutal manner: for example, with the help of planks studded with nails, rifle butts, and the like. In one case, one of seven Jews remaining in the cellar, trader Krzewacki's father, who was already badly beaten and felt that the next time the Germans [5b] came in they would beat him to death, asked his 28-year-old son Yehude to hang him, as he did not wish to give the Germans the pleasure. The son hanged his father, after those remaining had promised him that they would do the same to him.⁸²

82 See also doc. 10.

During the work the gravediggers were not allowed to display the slightest agitation. For merely blinking, they were immediately shot and flung into the grave. Ejzen, a forced gravedigger from Kłodawa, buried his own wife, sisters-in-law, and parents-in-law. Another forced gravedigger from Kłodawa, Getzl Cząstkowski, a sturdy man, buried his one and only son, 15 years old. Three forced gravediggers, Winer, Rój, and Mekhl Podchlebnik, escaped certain death in the following way: Mekhl Podchlebnik was sent together with 5 other men to fetch some straw from another cellar. He squeezed through a small window in the cellar, injuring himself badly in the process, went into an open barn belonging to a German peasant, and hid in the hay. The subsequent search for him was unsuccessful. Knowing the roads well, he managed to get to Grabów, where he arrived on Saturday 17 January. Winer and Rój arrived the next day. The former had escaped in the morning, the latter in the evening, by tearing open the clear windows of the truck that was taking them to work, with the help of [6] fellow gravediggers transported with them.

Each of the young escapees gave the same account of the horrific extermination operation conducted by the Germans against the Jewish population of the Koło County.

ARG I 1057 (Ring. I/394)

Description: original or duplicate (handwritten, notebook, ink, 142x200 mm); duplicate (typewritten, 208x295 mm, damage and fragments missing), Yiddish, 20 sheets, 16 pages. Apart from Yiddish manuscript, the notebook contains handwritten exercises (Polish, pencil) by a child (Miriam Bretsztejn) from Polish language lessons (5 and 12 January 19 . . . ?). Attached is a note by Hersh Wasser in Yiddish: 'Account on events in the Koło County, recorded by HershWasser from Osher Taube of Kłodawa.'

After 26 February 1942, Warsaw ghetto. [Laiwe] Wołkowicz, resident of Dąbie nad Nerem, account 'ד'בֿיִעַ' ['Dąbie']; situation of the town's Jewish population from September 1939 to deportation to the Chełmno death camp in December 1941.⁸³

[1] Dąbie

The first German troops marched into Dąbie on the Saturday after *Rosh Hashanah*, 1939.⁸⁴ The first patrol consisted of 20 men. Immediately after their arrival, they ordered that Jews be removed from the local government bodies and that Jews present themselves for work (filling in anti-air-raid trenches and other tasks). Large numbers of troops and gendarmerie arrived a few days later. They appointed a mayor (Nelter, a *Volksdeutscher* from Dąbie). Forced labour for Jews was promptly regulated: almost all Jews had to report for work each day. Then the persecution of Jews began. The gendarmerie started to requisition goods in Jewish shops. On the *Sukkot*⁸⁵ a group of troops arrived and proceeded to maltreat Jews severely. One night, almost all the Jews were forced out of their homes to the market square, where they were made to perform gymnastic exercises and were savagely beaten.

A few weeks later, the authorities appointed a different mayor, also a *Volksdeutscher* from Dąbie (Woltman), who immediately ordered the requisition of all goods in Jewish shops. Jews were subjected to harassment and persecution every day for a whole year.

After that, a new mayor arrived in Dąbie, this time from the 'Third Reich'. He immediately ordered all Jews to report for work, even old people (the work consisted in pulling up grass and clearing rubbish in the middle of the market).

83 See P. Nowicki, T. Kuberczyk, *Z Archiwum Ringelbluma: Relacje Uszera Taube i Wołkowicza...* pp. 37–56.

84 (Hebrew) literally, head of the year; Jewish New Year; it was 16 September 1939.

85 (Hebrew, sing. *sukkah*) literally, huts; festival also called Feast of Tabernacles, it commemorates the sheltering of the Jews in the wilderness on their way from Egypt to the Land of Israel.

At that time, they started carrying out house searches in Jewish homes, confiscating linen, clothes, and other valuable items, even furniture.

In the summer of 1940, all the Jews were moved into one street (*Kilińskiego*), so that as many as 10 people were living in one room. The streets were not closed off, but it was forbidden to leave the 'ghetto' without a *przepustka*.⁸⁶ The synagogue and *bet hamidrash* were first turned into [2] granaries and then into straw barns.

House searches and beatings continued incessantly until the very last day, i.e. 14 December 1941, when the tragic *wysiedlenie* began. That day, the mayor summoned the head of the *Judenrat*, Mr Yoysef Diament,⁸⁷ and informed him that all the Jews were being deported (this was in the morning). Later, SA men and gendarmerie went round all the flats and drove out the Jews (even the sick) into the theatre square.⁸⁸ The small *plecaki*⁸⁹ which the mayor allowed the deportees to take with them were confiscated by the gendarmes on the way (they had to walk past the gendarmerie station). In the square, all the Jews were summoned in alphabetical order and divided into two groups; one group was crammed into the theatre, the other into the church.⁹⁰ They stayed there overnight, savagely beaten and maltreated. During the night, they took the town rabbi, marched him through the streets and, pressing a revolver against his ear, fired into the air. Then they brought the rabbi to the church, stood him at the *ambona*⁹¹ and ordered him to shout that the war was the fault of the Jews.

At 7 a.m. the Jews were released. Their confiscated rucksacks were returned to them, as well as the keys to their rooms. They found their homes almost untouched. Soon afterwards, the mayor ordered 6 men to be supplied for work in Chełmno (a village 4 km from Dąbie). Those 6 (as it later turned out) worked there burying the corpses of gassed Jews from Koło. This took place on Saturday, 14 December 1941.⁹² On Sunday and Monday the men were

86 (Polish in Hebrew characters; later on: Polish) pass.

87 Yoysef (Józef) Diament (Diamant) was a town council member in 1927. See *Gminy żydowskie pogranicza Wielkopolski, Mazowsza i Pomorza*, p. 24.

88 Probably by the building of the fire brigade which might have had a theatre hall.

89 (Polish) rucksacks.

90 Throughout the text, the author refers to the church by the Polish word *kościół*.

91 (Polish) pulpit.

92 Throughout the text, the days of the week do not correspond with dates.

back at home. On Tuesday, 17 December 1941, another order was given for all Jews to [3] assemble in the theatre square, and they were again put in the theatre and the church. Once again, they were held there overnight, beaten and maltreated. On Wednesday, 18 December 1941, all those who had been confined in the theatre all day were taken in *samochody*⁹³ to Chełmno. The others, from the church, were deported on Thursday, 19 December 1941.

In Chełmno, all the Jews were gassed to death in *samochody* and their bodies taken to *the Rzuchów* Forest (on the left of the road from Dąbie to Koło).

On Sunday, 9 December 1941, the Dąbie Jews learned of the deportation from Koło. The *Judenrat* immediately sent a messenger (a Christian) with a letter to Koło to determine whether it was true. The Christian returned with a written confirmation. In its reply, the Koło *Judenrat* wrote that 30 strong Jews had been seized in the street on 7 December 1941 and sent to Chełmno. On Saturday, 8 December 1941, the SA and gendarmerie began confining Jews in the *bet hamidrash* (according to lists).

On Tuesday, 11 December, 1941, I (Wołkowicz, the author of these lines)⁹⁴ went to the Dąbie *Judenrat* and explained that I was prepared to go to Koło if they provided me with a *przepustka*. The *Judenrat* brought me one and I set out for Koło by cart. On the way out of Dąbie, I met a Christian acquaintance of mine (Mr Błachowski, a former Koło tax collector), who advised me not to go. I nevertheless took the risk and continued. On my way through Chełmno, I saw many SA men and gendarmes. Jewish baggage was lying in the church, [4] all mixed up and scattered (the church was open). I didn't see a single person inside, and I continued to Koło. In the town (Koło), there was no longer a Jew to be seen in the street. I drove into a courtyard, but the Christians were afraid to let a Jew into the house (it had been drummed into them that merely talking to a Jew was punishable by death). So, despite all the risks, I went back into the street, where I saw groups of Jews being taken from their homes by SA men and loaded on *samochody* to be sent to Chełmno. Two representatives of the *Judenrat* were helping in the 'sacred' task of cramming Jews into the *samochody* (Brenner, the chairman, and Engel). I waited for the *samochody* to drive off and called the two representatives into a house, where they told me that Jews were being deported to Chełmno according to an alphabetical list.

93 (Polish) motor cars; sing. *samochód*.

94 Probably the note of the copyist.

In turn, they asked me what was happening in Chełmno. I told to them what I had seen (as related above). They replied that they did not fear the matter of Zagórów (gassing). They took me outside town, where a Gestapo man detained them and took them into a house. They came out an hour later, looking pale and very frightened. The Gestapo man had let fall that in Chełmno the Jews had their money and other possessions taken from them. It looked as if they now realised what was happening there. I set off home. On the way I met tax collector Błachowski again. When I asked him what he had seen, he told me to flee because things were really bad. He had seen [5] closed *samochody* drive into the forest, from which loud cries were heard. I passed by the same place and also saw that the whole path into the forest had been cleared of *samochody*. I drove on. Near Chełmno, I did in fact encounter a *samochód* coming out of the wood. It drove into a house near the church. When I got home, I reported everything to the *Judenrat*.

On the day of the deportation, 14 December 1941, 2 hours before people were rounded up, I made my way to Grabów through the fields and on side roads.

On the way to Grabów, I saw two trucks with Gypsies who were also being taken to Chełmno. And two weeks later, the towns of Kłodawa, Izbica, Bugaj, and Sompolno were taken away in the same manner.

I stayed in Grabów for 5 weeks. 3 men arrived who had managed to escape from Chełmno and flee to Grabów (the three men were Rój and Fajner from Izbica⁹⁵ and Podchlebnik from Koło, who had lately been living in Bugaj). Mr Fajner is currently in Warsaw. They told me the following: they were seized on the street and driven to the forest every day to bury Jews brought there in trucks. The killing took place in the following manner: the Jews were led into a very warm room heated by several ovens, and ordered to undress down to their undershirts. While doing so, they heard an announcement that they were being sent to camps and therefore had to wash thoroughly. Then a door was opened to another room where it was terribly cold. A truck drove up to the room, [6] and its arrival was followed by screams from the people who were forced into the *samochód* with blows and were hermetically sealed inside. After this horrific 'ceremony', the trucks drove into the forest, where they stood closed for about 15 minutes. Then the SA men dragged out

95 i.e. Shloyme Winer.

the dead bodies, which looked as if they were fast asleep, pulled out teeth and pulled off rings. The 30 men had to bury them. Those who grew tired were shot on the spot and fresh strong men were quickly brought in to replace them to perform the 'sacred' mission. It happened that fathers buried their children, and vice versa. From Grabów, via Łowicz, where I was arrested and escaped by a miracle, I arrived in Warsaw on Saturday 21 February 1942.⁹⁶

Note. In July 1941, bread ration cards were introduced in Dąbie: 250 gram a day for Jews and 300 gram for Poles. For a time, 90 gram of butter a week were also distributed.

Membership of the Dąbie Judenrat:

- 1) Yoysef Diament, chairman
- 2) Leyb Strykowski
- 3) Pinkhes Elbojm⁹⁷
- 4) Moyshe Gostyński
- 5) Gershon Engel (sent away to work in the Poznań region)
- 6) Chaim-Elye Lewin

Warsaw, 26 February 1942

ARG I 720 (Ring. I/799)

Description: duplicate (2 copies), handwritten (U*), pencil, Yiddish, 148×210 mm, 12 sheets, 12 pages.

See HWC, 15/1 (third copy, handwritten, 6 sheets).

Edition based on the first copy of duplicate, 6 sheets, 6 pages.

96 See *Letters on the Shoah* (forthcoming), Wołkowicz's letter from Łowicz to Hinda Strykowska in the Warsaw ghetto, and the letter to Wołkowicz c/o H. Strykowska.

97 Pinkhes Elbojm was elected to the town council in the years 1931, 1935, 1939, see T. Kawski, M. Opiola, *Gminy żydowskie pogranicza Wielkopolski*, p. 24.

ARG I 25 (Ring. I/473, I/937)

Description: Ring. I/473 — original or duplicate (a) (typewritten, 195×290 mm, many minor damage and missing fragments); original or duplicate (b) (typewritten, 205×270 mm, major damage and missing fragments, beginning missing), Polish, 3 sheets, 3 pages; Ring. I/937 — original or duplicate (2 copies), (typewritten, 195×275 mm, major damage and missing fragments, 4 sheets, 4 pages.

Ring. I/473: documents (a) and (b) contain the same text. Surviving pagination in copy (a) (ink): '7' (p. 1) and '8' (p. 2), both sheets were paginated and stored (buried) together with p. 1 (1st copy — Ring. II/486) with surviving pagination (ink): '6', see ARG I 33 (Ring. I/261). Copy (b) was presumably a part of bulletin from ARG I 27 (Ring. I/469) (2nd copy), judging from the identical format and damages of the two documents.

Ring. I/937: document was stored together with the report on Vilnius and other localities, see ARG I 27 (Ring. I/937). Attached is Hersh Wasser's note in Polish: '1942. Events in Chełmno. H. Wasser, M.A., prepared a summarised description of Chełmno within the Underground Press Service Section.'

ARG I 26 (Ring. I/665).

Description: duplicate, typewritten, ink, in Polish, 207×290 mm, 2 sheets, 2 pages.

Attached is Hersh Wasser's note in Yiddish: 'At the beginning of 1942 (February/March) a decision was made in the Warsaw ghetto to send a report on the tragedy in Chełmno to the prominent political activists by the agency of Oyneg Shabes. Hersh Wasser prepared the materials.'

Published in: *Oyneg Shabes. People and Works*, doc. 65.

Chapter II

Treblinka

19

After 28 August 1942, Warsaw ghetto. Dawid Nowodworski,⁹⁸ testimony about his time at the death camp in Treblinka: deportation from the Umschlagplatz on 17 August 1942; journey, camp experiences, escape, time in Stoczek near Węgrów, and return to Warsaw; recorded by Eliahu Gutkowski.⁹⁹

[1a] 28 August — 26½ [years old] Nowodworski, Dovid — Leszno 6. With an SD¹⁰⁰ stamp. (Hashomer Hatzair).¹⁰¹

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- 98 Dawid Nowodworski (1916–1943), born in a Warsaw working-class family, active in Hashomer Hatzair. Deported on 17 August 1942 to Treblinka during the *Grossaktion* in the Warsaw ghetto. Managed to escape and return to the ghetto. On 28 August 1942 gave his testimony to Oyneg Shabes. Joined the Jewish Fighting Organisation and became a commander of a combat group during the uprising in the Warsaw ghetto at Nowolipie Street 67. On 29 April 1943 left the ghetto through sewers with a group of approximately 40 fighters. Fought in the Wyszaków forest. Probably denounced by a *Volksdeutscher*, he died during one of his returns to Warsaw. His life and combat partner, Rywka Szafirsztajn, and three other people died with him. Information based on Anka Grupańska, *Odczytanie listy. Opowieści o powstańcach żydowskich* (Kraków, 2003), p. 103; Meylekh Neustadt, *Khurbn un oyfshtand fun di yidn in Varshe* (Tel Aviv, 1948), pp. 524–525; Abraham Lewin, *A Cup of Tears. A Diary of the Warsaw Ghetto*, ed. Antony Polonsky, London 1990, p. 170.
- 99 Eliahu Gutkowski (1900–1943), before the war worked as a teacher in Łódź; politically associated with Right Poalei Tsiyon. In autumn 1939 he fled with his wife Luba and son Gabriel to Warsaw. One of the key members of Oyneg Shabes, he did cataloguing work, edited bulletins, prepared outlines of documentation works, recorded testimonies and copied documents. He also wrote his own texts on the economic life of the ghetto.
- 100 SD in Latin characters; abbreviation not deciphered.
- 101 (Hebrew) the young guard; a Zionist socialist youth movement, patterned on scouting.

Monday, 17 August, 11 before noon, also two f. d.¹⁰² (also r.¹⁰³)
 were caught — spoke Polish (*junacy*) — Dzielna[?] 9 — in the street — led
 a group of 12–15 people, later, by the time we arrived — enlarged to 30 people.
 At Umschlagplatz. Around 7 in the evening the mediator came — Karl
 Heinz¹⁰⁴ — he had identity card (all the way — he entered the ghetto with it).
 They set up a line — instead of to freedom, led [us] into freight wagons. In my
 wagon — ‘*zabijcie mnie raczej. . .*’¹⁰⁵ — 71 people of all backgrounds, classes, ages,
 small children aged 2–8 to 10 years, closed wagons. Key-locked wagon. Nobody
 believed it is to our deaths. Certainly — for life. ‘They were fetching a [new]
 place.’¹⁰⁶ A detail: joint luggage, a 4-year-old child with a woman of 32 years. She
 was supposed be his wife. Old people and children — lost, but grown-ups —
 for life. Journey takes 3–4 [1b] hours — but lasted 12 hours. *Jechało się ½ go-*
*dziny [...] 2–2 ½ jazdy.*¹⁰⁷ To the station: *obóz*¹⁰⁸ Treblinka. Arrived there at
 7 in the morning. *Załatwiali się w wagonie, garnek do jedzenia.*¹⁰⁹ Before get-
 ting out — spoke to a mechanic, a Pole and to the question: Do groups often
 go out for work? he answered:¹¹⁰ ‘*Tu się tylko zajeżdża, stąd nikt nie wyjeżdża.*’¹¹¹
 Escorted by Lithuanians, the last freight wagon, jumping out of the wagons
 through small windows — many Poles approached the wagons — 2 chal-
 lahs for 100 zł, 5 zł for a bottle of water (7–8 zł for [a loaf of] bread, milk 6 zł
 in villages).
 It pulled out after 5 min., stopped after 15 min. Get out, parcels on the spot,
 platform, parcels knocked out, permission to take bread with us,
 [2a] In the small square — 50x50, men [separated] from women, 3,000–5,000.
 Trebl[inka] A — Tr[eblinka] B.
 2 barracks: SS Officer. Exceptionally nice — speech — ‘You shall not return
 home — to work — by Kiev — . . . People were happy. . .

102 Possibly, *Volksdeutsche* (based on the Polish pronunciation).

103 Possibly, *Reichsdeutsche*.

104 Can be also spelled Heintz.

105 (Polish) ‘Kill me instead...’

106 ‘‘ Sentence inserted.

107 (Polish) We rode ½ hour — [. .] 2–2 ½ drive.

108 (Polish) camp.

109 (Polish) They relieved themselves in the wagon, pot for food.

110 The notes in Yiddish end here.

111 (Polish) ‘You only arrive here, nobody leaves from here.’

People in line — Ukrainians maintained order on the square. [. . .] wire entanglements on the square.

At 8 running for water — everybody's content. — 'Liebe Herr'¹¹² — [. . .] *selbst beim Wasser*¹¹³ —

It is difficult to describe — a woman flung herself at two men — Water — quite close.

To torment — lying in a row.

It lasted until eleven — The strongest ones [2b] to work — for segregation — sugar, stockings, butter, fatback, valuables. They go fetch water after all — a large barrel — they had a fight — the Ukrainians went berserk — on the rooftop — with a rifle and a machine gun 'give us the money' . . . 200 zl.

'Take off your shoes' — Cleaved heads of women, — he hit with a baton (a Jew brought it to him) — he ordered to lie down on the ground and they beat. — 'Diamond'¹¹⁴ — 500 dollar bills torn up (they were afraid to deposit them at the cashier's) — that lasted until 3 — He could smell the putrid smell — He was digging a 45-cm-deep grave.

He spoke with people — they believed — apathetic due to lack of water — he wanted to organise some [3a] self-defence — until 5. At 5 a car with an SS officer pulled up — a beast (he is an evil man — he killed a boy (16–17 years old)). — Bath at about 4 o'clock.

Before that [. . .] (he had been inquiring about washing).

A group of 300–400 people — till 7.

At 7½ — he hid in a pit.

[Poles who live [there], peasants — they know everything.] He received from an acquaintance. He hid in the pit.

Voices in Yiddish — ½ men were still, there were almost no women. 2 floodlights.

At 10, *kuda (idyosh?)*.¹¹⁵ Miracle — [. . .] — Radom since [the] 16[th] till Sunday — deportation.¹¹⁶ —

112 (German) 'Dear Sir.'

113 (German) On your own by the water.

114 ^cWord inserted.

115 (Russian, in Latin characters) 'Where are you going?'

116 Radom — city in central Poland, today in Mazovian voivodship. On the eve of World War II it had a population of approximately 30,000 Jews. The deportation of approximately 27,000 Jews from the Radom ghetto to Treblinka took place between 16 and 18 August 1942.

Fleeing, he approached a grove — whether [. . .] does not know [. . .]. [3b] [. . .] there was no Ukrainians — *Schneller laufen*¹¹⁷ — squeals, moans 2–5, whirring of tech[nical] devices — 10 to 12 minutes — Orders [. . .] to a Jew — Orders [. . .] Jews . . . [. . .]

2 executions after 15 minutes up to 40 minutes. People from Stoczek — 150 people. He could hear him reload the gun.

Rozkwitały jabłonie i grusze,¹¹⁸ *Yesli zavtra vayna*¹¹⁹ [. . .] — 2 Russian prisoners of war.

They talked with each other — [. . .] (half past midnight)

Give some water, bucket of water, [. . .] shoes into the well.

[4a] To Kosów Lacki¹²⁰ 7 km.

He walked the road until 4 in the morning (he knocked at every cottage). The village by Kosów. About the peasants [. . .] difficult [. . .] Stole some eggs [. . .]. Into a barn — he sat there until 8. 40 zł [. . .] 2 [. . .]. To Dęby near Siedlce¹²¹ — he came back to the countryside — To Sadowne¹²² (station before Małkinia¹²³). He had a deal with a peasant for 700 zł but he did not go. He was in: Dębe 4–5 km from Kosów, Maliszewo¹²⁴, [. . .] Sadowne. In Dębe [he met] good peasants. They took pity and sympathised, why do you let them kill you, are you a wise nation? [They gave] 3 × ½ quart¹²⁵ of milk, the others potato noodles with milk.

[4b] A woman with greyish hair — [. . .] she and the kids.

For 80 zł he was taken to the Sadowne railway station. He dropped by a peasant woman — He went elsewhere where he found [x]¹²⁶ a Polish merchant [. . .] bought a jacket — 5 \$. At dawn — on Thursday,¹²⁷ by the Sadowne

117 (German) Run faster.

118 (Polish) apple and pear trees were blooming. The opening line of the popular soldier's song, *Katiuszka* (1938).

119 (Russian, in Latin characters) if the war comes tomorrow. The opening line of the popular song from the Soviet movie under the same title (1938).

120 Kosów Lacki (Sokołów County); approximately 1,300 Jews lived here in 1939.

121 Probably Dębe close to Kosów Lacki (Sokołów County).

122 Sadowne (Węgrów County).

123 Małkinia Górna (Ostrów Mazowiecka County), the large railway and road junction where the trains to Treblinka went their separate way.

124 Maliszewo (Sokołów County).

125 A quarter of 1 litre, or 250 grams.

126 [x] a Jew.

127 Probably 20 August 1942.

railway station. He took advise from POW — ‘walk to Stoczek’ (6 km), ‘they are already familiar with Jews of your kind’ — He arrived in Stoczek at 8–9 in the evening. He got a warm welcome in Stoczek. ‘Nobody shall go hungry here.’ They are deporting 150 people from Stoczek. They flee — 50 people — [. . .] [5a] Things to Rembertów¹²⁸ (?) — or from Warsaw — whether they were to undergo a sorting (5 days in Stoczek [?]). From Falenica¹²⁹ (only those in the freight wagons survived) from Siedlce (12,000), Mordy,¹³⁰ Łosice,¹³¹ Dobre,¹³² Międzyrzec¹³³ — the Rembertów ‘line’ (1,500 entire Rembertów). ‘make good money.’^{c134} In Stoczek there were many deportees (from Mi[. . .]). — A detail from Rembertów[?] — he had a fight with gendarmes, they shot him, a policeman on the execution spot [. . .]

He sent 2 letters from Stoczek — He was fine there. — He was eager to go to Warsaw. On Tuesday¹³⁵ morning he went from Stoczek to Topór Wielgie,¹³⁶ vil- lage of Ogrodniki. The last train at 7.20 p.m., a Polish woman bought for 3 zł (5 zł). — [5b] 9.15 (20) — at the *Wschodni*¹³⁷ Railway Station.

[Szymek Kowal [?] from [. . .] — saved some people — entered the square under the pretext to get the healthy ones. ‘4’ — droshky (Biel[añska?]) — Nalewki [Street]) — 25–30 zł

[. . .] ‘By the bridge’. On Senatorska Street.

ARG II 379 (Ring. II/296)

Description: original, handwritten (LEG* and H*), notebook, pencil, Polish, Yiddish, German, Russian, 143x205 mm, 5 sheets, 10 pages.

128 Rembertów (Warsaw County).

129 Falenica (Warsaw County).

130 Mordy (Siedlce County).

131 Łosice (Konstantynów County); in 1939, approximately 2750 Jews lived here; they were deported to Treblinka during two days after 22 August 1942.

132 Dobre (Radzymin County); its around 300 Jewish residents were deported to Treblinka in September 1942.

133 Międzyrzec Podlaski (Radzyń County); in 1939, almost 80 per cent of the town resi- dents,14,000 were Jews. Most of them were deported to Treblinkastarting from 25 August 1942.

134 ^c Sentence inserted.

135 Probably 25 August 1942.

136 Topór (Wielgie Topór), Ogrodniki (Wielgie Ogrodniki) (Węgrów County).

137 (Polish) Eastern; on the right bank of the Vistula River.

20

After September 1942, Warsaw ghetto. Unknown Częstochowa resident, an escapee from Treblinka. Testimony on the deportation on 21 September 1942 to Treblinka, his work there of sorting clothes, the organisation of the camp labourers and their treatment by the Germans; his escape from the camp and return into the Warsaw ghetto. Attached are four sketches of the camp in Treblinka.

[1] A man from Częstochowa, born in 1922. 7 grades of elementary school

At 7 o'clock on the morning of *Yom Kippur* approximately 10 Ukrainians and the gendarmerie came to Dreszera Street and ordered everybody to walk downstairs. The houses were then searched and all the people escorted out were hurried with beatings to the freight wagons. Seeing that the wagons had locks, many of the people refused to get in but were forced inside. On the same day the testifying man's sister, who was being hospitalised for dysentery,¹³⁸ was shot dead. Similarly, all severely ill patients unable to get up were shot too. The train drove for two days and two nights. There was no water. People paid 100–200 zlotys to peasants for a bottle of water. The purchase was made when [2] the train stopped at night on the sidings for 10–15 minutes. The peasants knew about the regular transports and were waiting for the train. There were 80 people in the freight wagon. They were counted precisely. When the testifying man wanted to escape, the others did not let him. Most of the people in the wagon were young. The train was watched by the gendarmerie placed in the first and last wagon. In Małkinia the transport (approximately 5,000 people) was divided into 3 parts, each of which was delivered to Treblinka separately by a special locomotive that arrived from Treblinka. The testifying man, who was in the second group, waited for about half an hour to be transported to Treblinka. Many ones, practically [3] most of them, knew that they were about to die. Still before they reached Małkinia the peasants told them: 'What do you need water for when you are about to die anyway?' They also described the surrounding area.

138 Bloody diarrhoea — acute and contagious gastroenteritis.

After arrival the people were forced out of the freight wagons and beaten. The wagons were opened by Jews, who did not beat them. As the people were getting off, the Jews said that those who had not [x]¹³⁹ left their bundle in the freight wagons would be shot. The people were then escorted onto a square surrounded with barbed wire where there were 2 barracks. Right by the entrance the women were ordered to walk to one barrack, and the women and children¹⁴⁰ to the other one. Professionals were also selected right by the entrance to the barrack. [4] They were selected at the SS-men's whim. After they had selected the pre-determined number of professionals, everybody was ordered to take off their clothes. Holding sticks, the 'Kapos' were standing beside the people who were taking off their clothes. They wore yellow armbands with the word Kapo written in black. In return for gold and cigarettes they helped some individuals get into the groups selected for work. The Kapos hit the newcomers only in the presence of the SS-men or when somebody was taking off their clothes too slowly. Right after undressing everybody was escorted into the death chamber. On their way they passed the entrance to the clothes-sorting square. Everybody was told to return to carry their clothes back. The testifying man survived because he got dressed when they were ordered [5] to carry back their clothes. He pretended to be one of the Kapos and hurried the others. Although one of the Kapos wanted to undress him, another one managed to defend him. The men also carried back the clothes of the women who had been escorted first. They were then escorted to their torment. While leaving the freight wagons there was a certain number of people unable to get off — the weak, sick, elderly, and injured. The Jewish labourers escorted them or carried them in quilts into the grave, where the labourers were buried too. They knelt over the grave and the standing Ukrainian shot at them. Next to that Ukrainian stood an SS-man who often snatched [6] the rifle from the Ukrainian [x]¹⁴¹ and fired with great satisfaction. In the grave there were pine branches burning non-stop, which [x]¹⁴² were fetched by Jewish labourers who went with an SS-man to a forest outside the camp especially to collect them. By the grave stood 3 Jewish paramedics, 50–60 years

139 [x] takes out.

140 °° Inserted in the text.

141 [x] the SSm.

142 [x] word illegible.

old, with Red Cross armbands, but it remains unknown why they were there. They were seen arranging children by the edge of the grave so that they fell into the grave after being shot.

The testifying man was included in the group of people sorting the clothes. There were 15–25 men in the group plus 1 *Vorarbeiter*.¹⁴³ They sorted the clothes by separating complete suits, jackets, [7] trousers, linen, silk, and wool. Gold and valuables were put into specially prepared suitcases. That was done by tailors who knew where to look for sewn-in objects. The supervising SS-man ordered them to very closely examine the items of clothing no matter how long that took. [x]¹⁴⁴ When the camp commandant entered the square (he arrived on a bike) he selected 1–2 whom he did not like, ordered them to take off their clothes, escorted them to the burning grave,¹⁴⁵ and fired at them. A similar procedure repeated twice a day, after breakfast and midday meal. When somebody wanted to ask for something before execution, the commander whipped their face for as long as [8] the man was talking and then shot at him. There are no known instances of him releasing a person whom he had [x]¹⁴⁶ selected for death. There were very rare instances of the other SS-men releasing somebody walking for execution, at the Kapos' intercession. During the testifying man's time in the camp the Kapos were not executed. The *Vorarbeiter* wore a green armband with the word *Vorarbeiter* written in black. The midday meal was from 12 to 13. They received rice with meat and other delicacies. They could eat as much as they wanted. In the morning they were issued coffee with dry bread and the same for supper. At work they could eat as much as they wanted and whatever they wanted, though in hiding from the SS-men. [x]¹⁴⁷

[9] New transports walked to their torment every 15–30 minutes throughout the day. When the undressed victims carried the clothes to the sorting square, the SS-men standing along the path entertained themselves by trying to make the running people trip on a stick. The people had to jump over the stick and those who could not were beaten up. Many a time the

143 (German) prisoner-functionary supervising a group of prisoners working, a Kapo's helper.

144 [x] In the evening they went to the barrack to which came the camp commandant.'

145 It was called 'field hospital', see the explanations to the site map on p. [18], item No. 32.

146 [x] allocated.

147 [x] In the evening they went for supper and then straight into the barrack.

labourers sorting the clothes — mostly young people — saw their fathers running naked, carrying their clothes and shouting greetings. From the torment [chamber], particularly when there were women, came stifled cries for about 3–4 minutes.

In the evening, when they went into the barrack, the Ukrainians placed machine guns and floodlights on [10] the barracks. The labourers slept only in the barrack for men on the square which they had entered right after getting off the train. On the first day the commander came into the barrack and spoke in German, with his words being translated into Polish by *Lagerelster*¹⁴⁸ — a Jew, 36 years old, tall, handsome, and energetic.¹⁴⁹ The testifying man calls him a 'better man' — he spoke Polish. He wore a dark armband with a white inscription. They treated him much better and did not beat him. The commander told them: 'This is not a pension but a labour camp. As an SS-man, I guarantee that you will be fine, you will eat and sleep well. I went to school with Jews, I played football, and had Jewish friends. Do work, [11] because I am only a human too.' At the same time, he ordered them to be obedient and to work.

Wake up at 5 o'clock, breakfast, and off to work. On the second day Jews from Vienna arrived, who left pieces of paper with their names and a few words for their families. They knew that they were going to their death.

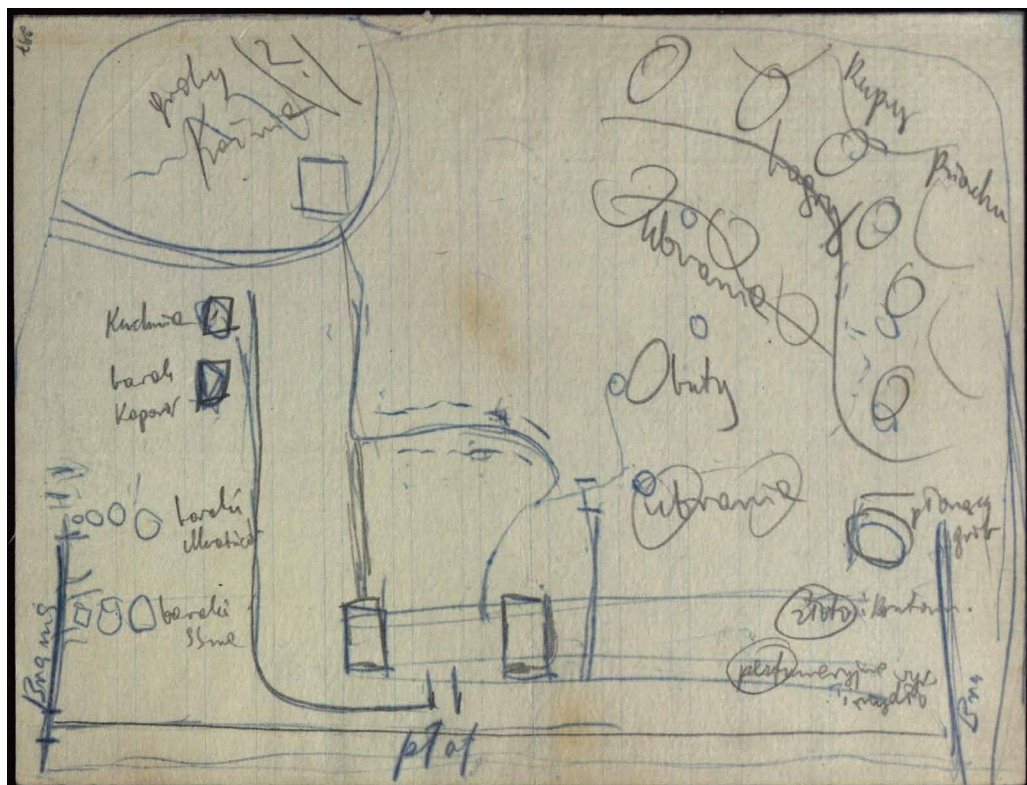
On the sixth day, seeing the work coming to a stop, the testifying man arranged for his transfer to the group of upholsterers who were insulating the SS-men's barracks with straw. The upholsterers left the camp to fetch sticks from the forest. During that time [x]¹⁵⁰ they were supervised by the SS-man and a Ukrainian. That day they were supervised only by the Ukrainian who was such a brute that the SS-man trusted him [12] and only 5 Jews went. In the forest, approximately 1–1 ½ kilometre from the camp, the Ukrainian bought vodka from shepherds and as he was drinking it the testifying man managed to escape.¹⁵¹

148 Actually, *Lagerältester* (German), camp elder.

149 The camp elder was engineer Marcell Galewski. He came from Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki, was a captain in the Polish Army, and in the camp was one of the leaders of the uprising. Died on 2 August 1943.

150 [x] that.

151 Explanations on the sketch on p. [12] in Polish: *kolej* [railway], *straż z KM* [guards with machine guns], *groby* [graves], *buty* [shoes], *sortownia ubrania* [sorting of clothes],



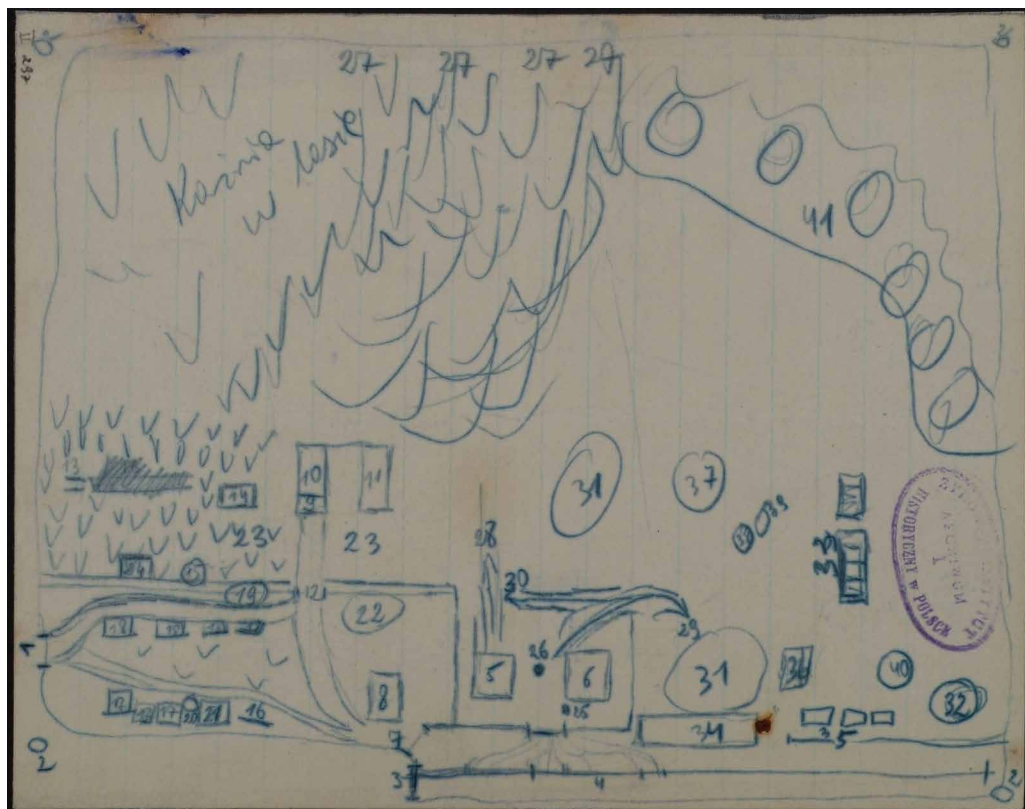
[13]¹⁵² Many labourers escaped by sorting clothes near the heaps of sand removed by the excavators and hiding in those clothes for the night. At night they climbed the heaps of the sand removed from the graves, which were as high as the fence, and they jumped to the other side.

kosztowności, złoto, medykamenty [valuables, gold, medicines], *żywoplot* [hedge], *płonący grób* [burning grave], *miejsce kaźni* [site of execution].

152 Numbers of pages [13-18] added by the editors. Probably together with the sketch map on the reverse [14] it is a supplement to the part of the account starting at the end of p. [6], see above.



- 153 Explanations on the sketch on p. [14] in Polish: *brama* [gate], *plot* [fence], *groby, kaźnia?* [graves, execution site?], *kuchnia* [kitchen], *barak* [barrack], *koparka* [excavator], *baraki Ukraińców* [Ukrainians' barracks], *baraki SS* [SS-men barracks], *kupy piachu* [mounds of sand], *bagry* [excavators], *ubrania* [clothes], *buty* [shoes], *płonący grób* [burning grave], *złoto i kosztowności* [gold and valuables], *perfumeryjne wyroby, mydło* [perfumery, soap].



- [17] 1. The gate through which entered the Germans — a Ukrainian keeps guard.
2. Watchtowers.
 3. Entryway for the trains — Ukrainian guards.
 4. Railway in a ditch.
 5. The barrack where the women undress.
 6. The barrack were the men undress and where the labourers are quartered.
 7. Ukrainian guards' post during unloading.
 8. Garage for cars (usually two cars).
 9. Kitchen.
 10. Barrack for *Vorarbeiters* and Kapos as well as for labourers who tend to the horses, who wear yellow patches on their knees. They had been working

154 Sketch map without any explanations on the reverse of p. [16].

there for as long as 13 weeks. They were from Warsaw. They were called *Hofjuden*.¹⁵⁵ Similar patches were worn by woodcutters by the kitchen. Strong and fed, approximately 50.

11. Barrack whose intended use remains unknown.
12. Gate — a Ukrainian guards it during meal breaks.
13. Latrine dug out in the ground.
14. Stable (2–3 horses).
15. Haystack.
16. Washroom for the Ukrainians.
17. 7–8 barracks for the Ukrainians (160 Ukrainians).
18. 6–7 barracks for the SS-men (16–20 SS-men).
19. Heap of unsorted footwear.
20. Well with a dungeon dug out in the ground for the Ukrainians, who were punished even for failures to salute.
21. Kitchen for the SS-men.
22. Heaps of unsorted clothes.
23. The place where the Jews ate their midday meals.
24. Hens, geese, ducks.
25. Well — it was difficult to approach.
26. Pole with a floodlight.
27. In the distance visible heaps of sand removed by an excavator.
28. The women's path to their execution.
29. The path the men walked with their clothes to the square.
30. The path [x]¹⁵⁶ the men walked to their execution from the square with clothes.
- [18] 31. Clothes.
32. Burning pit — it was called field hospital.
33. Clothes sorted put into neat piles with inscriptions: *Wohl, Seide Leine*,¹⁵⁷ as well as other items.

155 (German) court Jews; an ironic reference to absolute monarchy, where Jewish bankers held very important positions at the rulers' courts. Here the term pertains to a group of a few prisoners who lived in a separate, administrative-residential part of the camp and were its steady workforce.

156 [x] women.

157 (German, partly incorrect — should be *Wolle, Seide, Leinen*) wool, silk, linen.

34. Barrack with prepared items.
35. Piles of sorted items of clothing.
36. Bedding — when you climbed onto [x]¹⁵⁸ the bedding you were higher than the level of the barracks.
37. Footwear.
38. Umbrellas.
39. Walking sticks.
40. The pit where *tefillin*, *siddurim*, and damaged items were burned.
41. Pits made by the excavator and heaps of sand.

ARG II 38o (Ring. II/297)

Description: text: original or duplicate; maps and explanations: original handwritten, ink, Polish, 150x197 mm, 185x200 mm, 10 sheets, 18 pages.

21

September 1942, Warsaw ghetto. Jakub Rabinowicz[?],¹⁵⁹ testimony about the death camp in Treblinka (a fragment); arrival of new transports of people; the camp during preparations for a Soviet air raid.

[1] The freight wagons are standing by the platform which is adjacent to a small square, surrounded on three sides with a barbed-wire entanglements. On the fourth side is a large wooden barrack into which the Germans rush separated women and children, ordering them to take off their shoes first. At the side of the square is a board on a tall pole with the huge sign: ‘*Achtung Warschauer!*’¹⁶⁰ You have been resettled to [x]¹⁶¹ start working. Before being assigned work, you must take a bath. Everybody must strip naked. You must leave your valuables and money, but you must take with your documents and

158 [x] barracks.

159 The author of the testimony was probably Jakub Rabinowicz, who escaped from Treblinka and returned to the ghetto in late September 1942; see Abraham Lewin, *A Cup of Tears*, p. 183.

160 (German) ‘Attention, Varsovians.’ According to other testimonies the inscription was in Yiddish: *Akhtung varshever*.

161 [x] just.

soap.' On the right side of the square on a platform stands a Ukrainian with a sub machine gun and beside him is a floodlight.

When [x]¹⁶² the Jews appear in the square they are greeted by young Jews, known as Kapos. They are well clad and fed, and they have yellow triangular patches sewn onto the knees of their trousers. They give quick orders: 'Arrange yourself into rows of 10! Take off your shoes!' When the Jews ask them, what will happen to them, the Kapos beat them and hurry everybody to carry out their orders. After everybody is arranged into rows a German inspects the human material assembled, picking out the short, scrawny, and weak. This makes him look as if he is [x]¹⁶³ segregating people for work. After the¹⁶⁴
*hafokh!*¹⁶⁵

[2] To illustrate the perfidy and system of German trickery, one more fact that happened in Treblinka in late August. During that period in the General Government there were numerous night-time Soviet air raids. As mentioned above, the entire territory was lit with strong floodlights to prevent the Jews who had not yet been killed from escaping. One night an air raid was expected, so the floodlights were switched off. The commandant was afraid that [x]¹⁶⁶ Jews would take advantage of the darkness of the night and would try to flee the site of execution. To prevent this, the boss ordered all Jews to assemble in the square before switching off the floodlights and he gave a speech in which he most solemnly announced that Hitler had entered into an agreement with Roosevelt and that Polish Jews would be sent to Madagascar and that the next morning the first transports would leave Treblinka. The lights were switched off and the Diesel engines did not work until the bombers flew by. And then everything went back to the way it had been and the slaughter-house kept operating tirelessly.

ARG II 381 (Ring. II/298)

Description: duplicate, handwritten (H*), ink, Polish, 224x316 mm, 1 sheet,
2 pages.

Printed in *Selected Documents*, pp. 709–710.

162 [x] As.

163 [x] select.

164 Unfinished sentence.

165 (Hebrew) turn [the page] (in the bottom right page corner).

166 [x] in.

a) After 26 December 1942. Warsaw ghetto, [Jakub¹⁶⁷ (Jakow, Abram, Abraham) Krzepicki¹⁶⁸], testimony... פֿון טרעבלינקי... 'אָ מענטש איז אַנטלאָפֿן געשפּרעכט מיט צוריקגעקומענע' [A man has escaped from Treblinka . . . conversations with the returnee], recorded and edited by Rachel Auerbach and with her introduction.¹⁶⁹

[1] The Treblinka phenomenon must be not only described, but also understood. It's difficult to take up the task. My throat tightens. I am about to immerse myself in those poisoned, perhaps gas-saturated fumes, in those murderous vapours, in which so many of my loved ones, so many of others' dearest have perished.

I weep with all my heart over even the most trifling thief from Krochmalna Street and the worst thug of narrow Miła Street. For they too

167 On the back of the photograph attached to the testimony the name is spelled 'Jakób.' Rachela Auerbach, who mentioned Krzepicki in her other texts, provided various versions of his name in addition to Jakub: Jakow, Abram, and Abraham.

168 Little is known about Krzepicki aside what he said about himself in the testimony and on the back of the photograph attached to the testimony; see the description below. He was born 18 August 1915 in Praszka, Wieluń County, and he lived at Jopengasse 27 in Gdańsk. In 1939 fought in the Polish-German war, was taken captive, and escaped and came to Warsaw. He worked in the Palma artificial honey and sweets factory. On 25 August 1942 he was transported to Treblinka, escaped after several weeks and returned to Warsaw. He lived at Franciszkańska Street 30, was Rachela Auerbach's neighbour (see R. Auerbach, *Varshever tsavoets* (Tel Aviv, 1974), p. 278). It remains unknown when and how he died, purportedly in the April 1943 uprising in the Warsaw ghetto. On his return to Warsaw he spent some time in Stoczek Węgrowski (Węgrów County), from where a postcard from Hersz Manyszewicz was sent to Jankiel Goldsztejn, who lived in the Warsaw ghetto. The postcard showed a map of the Treblinka camp, see *Letters on the Shoah*, doc. 93 (forthcoming). It is highly probable that Jakub Krzepicki drew it.

169 Rachel Auerbach (1901–1976), writer, journalist associated with the *Chwila* periodical, translator from Yiddish into Polish. In the ghetto she ran the soup kitchen at Leszno Street 40, in the Ringelblum Archive she deposited her diary along with many studies. She left the ghetto in March 1943 and survived in hiding in the Warsaw Zoological Garden. After the war she worked in the Central Jewish Historical Commission (*Centralna Żydowska Komisja Historyczna*). In 1950 she emigrated to Israel, where she worked in Yad Vashem in Jerusalem.

were limbs of the living organism, the wonderfully rich play of light and shadow known as Warsaw Jewry.

[2]¹⁷⁰ Where are our artists today, where are our talented figures, our experienced experts in all sorts of other professions and fields? Where are the simple Jews and the sophisticated Jews, the reverential and the workaday everyday Jews and Jewesses¹⁷¹ who hustled down the Jewish streets of Polish cities, worked and lived with so much liveliness and character ‘without special permission to live. The mass murderers and executioners not only murdered millions of Jews, they murdered the foundations of Jewish life itself. The greatest enemies of life that humanity has borne. Where are the ordinary people who, as it were, sprouted, came up, bloomed, aged, and left generations [after them], generation after generation, who haggled and bargained, struggled for their lives until their last breath?’¹⁷² It is only now that we, who were previously discontented and critical — [3] only now that we have lost everything do we see how wonderfully rich we were in human material.

An organ playing dirge resounds ceaselessly in my ears. I lie awake at night, and when I do fall asleep, anguished sobs tear from my bowels. I wish I could cry out with a great cry, like Rowina¹⁷³ when, in the role of Mother Zion,¹⁷⁴ she laments the destruction of Jerusalem. [4] And would that a superhuman amplifier should carry that cry miles and miles into the void, apocalyptically, terrifyingly penetrating all territories of the earth, just like the archangel Gabriel’s trumpet on the day of the Christian Last Judgement. ‘I understand the root of the dream of the Christian angel’s trumpet: it awakens the dead!’ Perhaps, perhaps it will awaken all my dear, dead loved ones? At another moment, I have the impulse to walk down the dead streets, chanting Bialik’s anguish and anger [in] stanzas from *Mayse Nemirov*.¹⁷⁵ Why did mil-

170 Page [2] starts with a repetition of the previous paragraph, with its partly different last sentence: For they too were instruments in the wonderfully rich orchestra known as Warsaw Jewry.

171 Reference to Yoshue Perle’s novel of 1938, translated from Yiddish as *Everyday Jews: Scenes from a Vanished Life* (Yale University Press, 2007).

172 ‘‘ Added on the margin, marked this way throughout the text.

173 Hanna Rowina (1893–1980), Jewish actress, star of the Habima Theatre.

174 Reference to Isaiah 66:7,8.

175 (Hebrew/Yiddish) ‘Tale of Nemirov.’ Hayim Nahman Bialik’s poem was a response to the 1903 pogrom in Kishinev. It was titled that way to avoid problems with the censorship

lions of Jews go humbly to their deaths, worse than sheep led to the slaughter, with abandon, worse than mangy dogs massacred by dogcatchers?

But I don't cry out with a great cry, nor with the small, intimate, human, heartfelt cry of an individual — one [5] of the many, of almost all of the 'remnants' who lost most of their family and friends in the catastrophe.

It may yet be too early. Our survival is still far from assured, and just as we can't laugh or rejoice, we can't allow ourselves the luxury of crying or of being sad either . . .

The tangle of nightmares has not yet been untangled. It's like this: I am afraid of the topic 'Treblinka'. A strange paralysis constrains not only my will, but also my ability to think, even though the hysteria of pain does not yet have full control over me. Something chokes my throat. Something knots inside me and drains the strength from all my limbs. 'Our consciousness is spilled, cooled. Blood on the dead streets of a dead city.^c Is this not a spontaneous narcosis, which held [6] our senses, our will bound in those nightmarish days when the avalanche tumbled around us? Is this perhaps a remnant of the kindly paralysis of the nerves which in the most dangerous moments of the most dangerous blockades cast slumber upon our foreheads? As if turning off the light in the brain to avoid a short-circuit? In this way, our souls protected themselves from madness — then, in those moments when we sat in hiding places and heard the executioners' voices and the victims' cries coming from outside: they're coming closer, now it will be our turn.

[7] And now, when we know the whole truth, when we've heard out the beautiful, most quiet people, when we know exactly what the executioners did with those whom they bore away, the girls like flowers, and the most delicate children, and youths like young pines and men like oak trees, and the entire procession of people from Treblinka; today, when the word Treblinka sticks like a knife in a wound. [. . .] Before death, they made ash and scraps [out of us]. We, who survived accidentally, who are hidden for the time being, we are all escapees from Treblinka. We, who will perhaps be chosen as sacrifices tomorrow, we, who are probably also sentenced to death . . .^c*Dośmiertna rana*.¹⁷⁶ Dum-dum bullets in our flesh — a wound that will refuse to heal before

and was purportedly about pogrom of the Jews by Khmelnytsky in 1648. The poem's title was later changed to 'Town of slaughter.'

176 (Polish, in Latin characters) deadly wound.

it kills us. Can we, may we already begin now to make sense of these insane atrocities?^c [. . .] ‘Animals in the forest [. . .] the humiliation of the dead — the humiliation of the living.’^c

I had one, a second, a third friend in Warsaw . . . I had good friends who were a couple . . . I had my loved ones, a war family, a brother and sister who were like my own, and I had, I had, I had . . . my brother’s children, my brother’s orphan, a girl of about 15, like my own daughter. I did not even have the privilege of seeing how she blossomed in the war years.

[unnumbered page] Let me stop the memorial litany, because I feel my heart breaking.

The executioners killed not only our present and our future, but also the past. Now we’ll look back at everything that existed before as only a prologue — a prologue to the terrible catastrophe. The catastrophe is so enormous that it will cast a backwards shadow, the black glare (*czarna łuna*)¹⁷⁷ of a conflagration, over not only the deeds of our last generation, but for generations and generations backwards, the history of Jews of the last few centuries. The pogroms of Chmielnicki¹⁷⁸ were child’s play compared to what’s happened now. Every terrible pogrom, every slaughter discharges itself at the appointed time [. . .]. I knew a woman, I knew a man, how much time, how much human productivity they took¹⁷⁹ ‘There was once a king . . . Yes, yes, family traditions. Before they were in their [. . .], gathered light and then shone, [developed?], became what they were. Travel and education, professional skills that they brought with them, until life shaped such fruit — what spirit, what humour, what proficiency, [talents?] that the executioners first turned into [junk, they made mockery and shops], and then rotting meat. Teeth, [clothes, valuables?].^c Way of life — [pleasure?] for the person [. . .], [lie, and a man] [. . .].

177 (Polish, in Latin characters) black glare.

178 The 1648 great pogrom of Jews during the Cossack uprising commanded by Bohdan Khmelnytsky on the eastern borderlands of the Polish Commonwealth. Many thousands of Jews and Poles were murdered and a number of them were taken captive. That event (called *Gezerah/gzeyre* — ‘the great catastrophe’) is deemed as the symbolic date of the end of the favourable period in the history of Polish Jews.

179 Unfinished sentence.

[8] The Phenomenology of mass murder

Before the previous world war, the intelligentsia organised a campaign about the abolition of the death penalty — an extensive discussion. Even old Dostoyevsky presented the problem with his customary weight and depth: the experiences of one condemned to death. The novel *The Idiot*¹⁸⁰ begins with a discourse about this issue. For carrying out the death sentence upon a captive person, a person who was captured (the word ‘captured’ takes on quite a new meaning in our mouths today) is something completely different, [9] worse than simply killing a person. It adds the aspect of waiting for a moment that has been determined in advance, the gruesome eeriness of the organised execution of a person who has been abandoned and fettered one way or another. And the intellectuals went so far in their humanitarianism — the same type of intellectuals who in our time, ‘in the name of a national chimera,’ handed over the entire armoury of science and administration and used their knowledge to assist the greatest mass murderer and executioner in one that the world has ever produced — these intellectuals were so humane in their conception of justice that they did not even admit the legitimacy of inflicting the death penalty upon a murderer who had carried out a murder, who himself, however bestially, had murdered a person.

‘When a mass murderer becomes an executioner.’

‘The nation of executioners, the nation of mass murderers.’

And of course, no death penalty for political crimes, [10] for any other sort of serious offence against the penal code. The campaign and the agitation against the death penalty continued until the last war and in some countries had the effect of introducing a life prison sentence. Other [countries], however, have introduced the most extensive technical improvements and increases in the efficiency of executions, so to speak. Any form of execution, however gruesome it may be, included, perhaps in the old days for the purpose of the sadistic spectacle directed at the masses, a traditional black parade which in some way communicated a sort of respect for death and for the executed person. Even when the death penalty was combined with humiliation before death or with the dishonouring of the dead after death, it always and everywhere entailed a certain ceremony. Even medieval auto-da-fé, even all other executions by the [11] Holy Inquisition. And also: alongside the Christian

180 By Fyodor Dostoyevsky (first published in 1869).

stake and alongside the knife, the cross always [. . .], and the sentenced, the [. . .] character, always had the opportunity to choose . . .

No other nation has yet contrived such contempt for life and such a wanton relationship to death as the Hitlerite-German one, with their slaughter of Jews in the millions.

And for anyone looking for definitions and analogies, there is one more aspect to emphasise. People who were ‘normally’ condemned to death in various countries were, in one way or another, to a [12] certain degree predestined and prepared to endure the final experience of being executed — emotionally dulled, physically powerful people from the underworld, psychopaths with a beaten-down level of consciousness and, if they were political ‘criminals’, they were strengthened in their final trial by the activist’s beliefs, the ambition to remain brave and believe in the last [. . .] of their cause. And even so, and even so, how infinitely painful and terrible the topic of execution was and remained. It continuously and repeatedly ‘shook the conscience of legislators’ and attracted the curiosity and imagination of greater and lesser writers and artists.

[13] Movies were made. I remember an almost kitschy Czech film [. . .], in which there was nevertheless a splendid, wonderfully expressively rendered episode — about the final night of a man condemned to death.¹⁸¹ The atmosphere of fear, the echoes of hammers, a gallows, the black shadow of a dark gentleman in white gloves, with a small suitcase in hand. . . Or the various theatre performances and movies about Madame X, with the execution of the spy-lady as the main sensation. But no movies depicting executions and the final nights of sweet, sentenced-to-death [14] Shirley Temple¹⁸² — girls and Jacky Coogan¹⁸³ — boys existed prior to the last war.

181 Because the fragment of the text is illegible it is difficult to say which film Auerbach is referring to. A man sentenced to death is a character in the first Czech sound film *Tonka Šibenice* (Tonka of the Gallows; 1930). The last wish of the convict is to spend his last night with a beautiful woman. The only woman who agrees to grant his wish is the heroine from the title, a popular Prague prostitute. But her sacrifice ends badly: she becomes known as the Tonka of the Gallows, is rumoured to smell of a dead body, and loses her clients. We are grateful to Leszek Engelking for the information about Czech cinema.

182 Shirley Temple (1928–2014), American film actress, the biggest child star in the history of the cinema, during the 1930s starred in more than 40 films.

183 Jackie Coogan (1914–1984), American actor, known predominantly as the kid from Charlie Chaplin’s film *The Kid*.

For months and years, the worldwide press buzzed with the possibility that the perhaps unjustly charged Sacco and Vanzetti¹⁸⁴ would be executed by means of the electric chair. Meanwhile, under their noses, at the centre of the cultured world, a regime emerged that would set up death chambers for millions and millions of Jewish Saccos and Vanzettis, simple innocent people, masses of simple workers.^c After the previous world war, a world of readers read with a deep feeling of protest Zweig's book¹⁸⁵ about the captured Russian sergeant Grisha, about the tragic experiences of an individual who, as a result of a misunderstanding on the part of the German military justice system, was sentenced to death. I also remember that the most powerful moment in the Yiddish theatre production with Kurt Katch¹⁸⁶ in the leading role [15] was [. . .] the night before the execution, a depiction of how a simple person says goodbye to his simple life. And I read another war book which depicts the innocent death of simple civilians, the Romanian book by Rebreanu, if I'm not mistaken, *The Forest of the Hanged* (about peasants hanged by Germans under the suspicion of espionage).¹⁸⁷ During the current war too there has certainly been no shortage of cases of individual and collective murders on the part of the justice system, murders that Germany (in particular, considering that this is now their national specialty) has committed in various countries; but after this war, no Stefan Zweig¹⁸⁸ will [any longer] deal with such topics.

As a result of all the monstrous events, all the murders and violence of the war, one tall, gigantic mountain of corpses will protrude, one pyramid of millions of corpses, that will [16] (overshadow) block from view all others.

184 Ferdinando Sacco (1891–1927) and Bartolomeo Vanzetti (1888–1927), American anarchists and labourers of Italian origin. They took part in demonstrations and strikes. In 1920 they were apprehended and accused of a robbery and two murders. Despite weak evidence of the prosecution they were sentenced to death. The sentence was carried out in 1927. The two men were rehabilitated in 1977.

185 Arnold Zweig (1887–1968), German writer. His novel *The Case of Sergeant Grisha* is inspired by the author's front-line experiences and it shows the cruelty and the nonsense of the war.

186 Kurt Katsch (né Isser Kac or Katz) (1896–1958), German film actor, disciple of Max Reinhardt, came to Poland in 1933 and worked as an actor and film director, and then in 1939 left for the USA.

187 Liviu Rebreanu (1885–1944), Romanian writer, playwright, and journalist; his novel *Pădurea spânzuraților* (*Forest of the Hanged*) was published in 1922.

188 Stefan Zweig (1881–1942), Austrian poet, prosaist, playwright, and pacifist.

The story of Treblinka. An insanely well-organised murder operation, a machine of diabolically huge proportions, for murdering millions of people. A headquarters with branches. Each region has its branches. Chełmno, Zawiercie, Bełżec.¹⁸⁹ A local murder enterprise operates in distant Polessia in the area of Czerwony Bór.¹⁹⁰ Small, little-known places achieve an unexpected popularity. Never mind the future that awaits them — each of them has a ‘guaranteed place in the history of mankind’. ‘Peter Kürten¹⁹¹ is king of Europe, and every Haarmann¹⁹² and Denke¹⁹³ and [. . .] of the current German generation aids him. There was never a shortage of mass murderers among Germans.’ The only novelty now is that Germanic megalomania, Germanic chauvinism has armed them with the considerable might of the German ability to act and organise. At the same time, there is the matter of complicity and joint responsibility of the German nation for these deeds. Not at all an easy matter. I asked the returnee from T[reblinka], ‘Are all the Germans there sadists, inhuman?’ Not at all. An order. The German executes [17] an order no matter what. And it does not disturb his conscience or consciousness. Obtuse and phlegmatic. That is his strength and that is his sin. But how does that help us? If we ever have the opportunity to settle our accounts with them, we won’t rely on legal or moral analyses and deliberations anyway. Each of us would then have only one urge, like a wild animal: to discharge!

The Germans created a beautiful word: *Werterfassung*. ‘Here in the ghetto, it’s currently one of the main branches of industry. The most numerous and most important [. . .], nearly the most important justification for the

189 Chełmno, Bełżec — German death camps. It remains unknown why Auerbach mentions Zawiercie in this context. Perhaps she thought it was a branch of Auschwitz.

190 Czerwony Bór — locality and forest complex south of Łomża. During 1941–1944 the Germans conducted many executions there, mostly of Jews. The total number of the victims is estimated at 12,000, including residents of Łomża and Tykocin.

191 Peter Kürten (1883–1931), German serial killer, known as the Vampire of Düsseldorf; committed at least 9 murders; sentenced to death and beheaded.

192 Fritz (Friedrich) Haarmann (1879–1925), German serial killer, known as the Butcher of Hanover. Together with his partner and accomplice Hans Grans, Haarman killed approximately 40 adolescent boys. Sentenced to death and beheaded.

193 Karl Denke (1870–1924), German murderer and cannibal. He lured vagabonds, beggars, and prostitutes to his house in Münsterberg (now Ziębice), killed them, and pickled their flesh, which he then sold on a market in Breslau (now Wrocław). Captured, he hanged himself in the cell. He murdered at least 40 people.

existence of those Jews who are still alive. Cleaning out these.^c Valuables are collected also in Treblinka. The Poles have long said, ‘They’re making soap out of you.’ Maybe this too is true.¹⁹⁴ At this point we know about the chests¹⁹⁵ and the dentist who pulls the teeth of corpses taken out from the gas chamber. The other ‘valuables’ are collected before death. Adam and [18] Eve, Jews herded to their deaths naked. At the industrial scale, it would take too much work to remove the garments from the corpses.

How grand the Germans are in their cynicism. Naïvely, abysmally vile, crude. At the entrance to the barracks, where one undresses before going to ‘bathe’, there is a sign: ‘Achtung Warschauer.’ . . .¹⁹⁶

A group of workers are busy in the forest beyond the gas chamber cutting down trees to hide the burial field from the view of passing trains, and in part also from Jews who [19] still wander around the camp alive. The Germans call this area the ‘kindergarten’. And another trifle. Incomprehensible macabre humour, cynicism, or maybe simply madness. In one place, *‘zakręt, zagajnik’*¹⁹⁷ on the narrow road enclosed by barbed wire, down which naked people are driven to the baths by means of knouts, down which exposed women and children run their last race — at the point where the road curves to one side, is positioned a small . . . orchestra. A bass, a violin, a long trumpet, and Jewish musicians from Stoczek, promised safety, privileged, with yellow patches, stand there and provide accompaniment for the runners. They probably wear [20] happy expressions. Insane laughter overcomes the eyewitness when he tells me about it. He mimics the one who played the trumpet, how he stood with puffed-out cheeks, how he knocked himself out ‘catching the tunes’¹⁹⁸ with his fingers . . .

A friend from Kraków told me about a bit of creepy nonsense he once heard from an upper-level German official. *Wir sind die führende Nation auf dem Gebiet der Umsiedlung*,¹⁹⁹ the official said to him in full seriousness, and probably at the time it seemed to him that in fact he was saying something [sensible], that deportation was something like a new field of creative human activity, a new branch of production. [21] German music, German philosophy,

194 Rumours like this spread during the war, but there are no proofs to that point.

195 A reference to a chest for golden teeth, see p. [115].

196 See footnote 367 .

197 ^c(Polish, in Latin characters) a turn, a grove.

198 ^cThe same on the margin in Polish, in Latin characters: *łapiąc tony*.

199 (German in Latin characters) ‘We are a leading nation in the sphere of deportation.’

and German deportation. Hitler probably wrote somewhere that once you move a man from his residence four times, he's been dealt with. This method was extensively applied to Jews up until the last phase. Since the first day of the occupation, since the very day the war broke out, there have constantly been people with luggage, people with their belongings; homes have been wandering in the streets. Increasingly unfortunate souls carrying their bit of wealth or poverty from place to place. Living debris and non-living debris. But now the word 'deportation' has gained another [22] meaning. Because they — the Germans — also called leading millions of Jews to the murder factories 'deportation'. And regarding this aspect, that official really was right. The German nation actually has something to brag about in this arena. They are not only the leading nation, but also the original inventor, the creator of a new [custom?]. *Jetzt lachen die schön nicht mehr*,²⁰⁰ said the [head of the police?] after a few million Jews were annihilated at his command. *Jetzt lachen die schön nicht mehr*. But there will come a time when his laughter too will fade.

[23] Defining by analogy is out of the question. A peculiar synthesis of slaughterhouse plus inquisition — but no. The essential still remains elusive. The Mongols, when they annihilated *w pień*²⁰¹ the entire populations of the countries they occupied, also used to sort out those who were young, beautiful, and capable of working in order to sell them as slaves. But they let them live, in fact. They treated little boys well, raised them into Janissaries. And in particular, the method. The perfidy, the lie. Wild is wild — but it nevertheless wasn't execution.

The hunting of slaves in Black villages. As far as that, the method of deportation seems to me truly similar. Yet even if all these horrors were combined [24] and amplified a hundredfold, it still wouldn't amount to the same thing. Treblinka is something entirely new. A new invention, a giant death industry, organised according to the most modern techniques and psycho-sociological advancements.

As someone said in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, the blind are being led by the insane.²⁰² The most terrible tragedy of the German people, of all

200 (German) 'Now they have no reason to laugh.'

201 (Polish, in Latin characters) down to the last men.

202 William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, act IV, scene I. "'Tis the times' plague, when madmen lead the blind', said by Gloucester to the Old Man.

European peoples today, is that the wise are being led by the insane. Perhaps those wise, talented Germans, endowed with great knowledge and abilities, who carry out Hitler's insanities can also be called blind, or maybe they are just vulgar, cowardly, [25] egoistic in an individualistic or nationalist chauvinist sense. Maybe they fell under the powerful suggestive influence of his brilliant manias; maybe, along with the broad German masses, they were infected with the nationalist complex, the nationalist psychosis. What does it matter to us? Let them try to dig up the answer to this riddle themselves when the clock strikes the hour of accounting for the deeds they have done.

Let us briefly characterise the deportation operations, as we experienced them and know them from Warsaw and Treblinka.

From everything, it is clear that they want to avoid any sort of resistance; they know what they deserve, they are afraid; in fact they are very afraid.

[17a] The property of the expelled in their abandoned houses. The furniture, the feathers dumped out of torn-open bedding.

The method is so well-thought-out in every detail. The lies, the slow luring. Keeping people bridled, in a trance, every day the contingents²⁰³, the meaningless chase, truly almost like persistence hunting, for shops, stamps, for assurances, [merely] in order to thereafter, in the most cynical manner, obtain the most watertight, safe conduct, iron clad documents with their own stamps. At a strange tempo people are made living in barracks, people push forward, they rush, they try to save at least something of their property, at dawn the streets are full of handcarts, with luggage, an image of a mass tragedy [. . .], a tragic mass crisis. And here come the troops, already marching to 'work', there they go 'on a people-hunt, blockading, cleaning the small ghetto, the large ghetto, what's the difference, and people are trying to enter into negotiations with an elemental catastrophe, to emerge dry from among torrents of rain, whole from an earthquake. Adapting with human means to the inhuman and un-animal, to demonic situations. There they go lugging belongings and there they go in the evening after the *Aktion* through the fatally wounded street, seeing the discarded bundles — the people are [gathered?] at the *Umschlagplatz*.^c

203 Probably reference to numbers of deported people.

[17b] And then hunger, high prices, bribes. The only place where you can legally and easily get a loaf of bread is actually . . . the *Umschlagplatz*. People will do [. . .] anything in order to entice and cheat others — who does not remember how people were wheeled with dignity in wagons (as if on the way to the guillotine), in rickshaws. The Jewish police helped to load up the luggage. The more organised families had all their necessities so well packed, some bedding, some pots even . . . And last but not least, for God's sake don't forget to take your valuables with you, wolf in sheep's clothing²⁰⁴ gestured [to what was] written on the poster and placards. Rumours of the [. . .] spread by agents about [railway men], who brought greetings from Brześć, from . . . And Jews — like small children — so [. . .] gullible, so naïve, so optimistic, acquiescing to every reassurance, allowing themselves to be bargained down, consenting to everything. Anything in order to survive, anything in order to survive. Who did not see, already on the fourth, fifth day, the clouds of 'volunteers, how whole houses, streets went of their own accord to the *Umschlagplatz*. I saw two 'tourists', a mother with a daughter, probably from the assimilated, petty bureaucratic class, with women's backpacks on their hunched-over backs. I saw an old respectable married couple travelling in a rickshaw, it was a long distance, so for the pennies they had saved they rented a rickshaw and travelled [dressed up?] as if in their own funeral procession . . . Petty clerk existence.^c

[17c] Only afterwards, when [people] had been cleared out in this way, by means of benevolent assurances, empty promises, with the help of the Jewish police, contingents, headcounts²⁰⁵ — once several hundred thousand had been annihilated in this way — it was only afterwards, after all the delights of canine obedience on the part of Jewish middlemen, who are apparently led, very cleverly too, by the nose — that the *Aktion* ended. Today, tomorrow, the first, the fifteenth, the fortieth day, and other similar lies. 'At 70 thousand, at 150 [thousand], at 250 [thousand], at the point of leaving over 150 [thousand],^{c206} the Germans themselves tackle the work in their fashion. Now whole

204 Literally 'a pig's trotter' — something that seems good, but it's not.

205 Every Jewish policeman at a certain point during the *Aktion* had to deliver five people to the *Umschlagplatz*. Otherwise, the Germans threatened to deport his family. The captured Jews were called 'heads' (*główiki*). The policemen traded with one another to carry out the German orders.

206 ^cAnnotated over the line. These are numbers of subsequently deported Warsaw Jews.

streets are blockaded at once, no one travels in wagons anymore, now everyone goes on foot. . . The hunt begins in earnest, one feels now that the disaster has arrived at its [. . .], and no one enjoys protection anymore, no one, even the ‘family members of the collaborators, even the collaborators themselves — until it is time for the big, the grandiose slaughter — the selection. And everything has its logic, so that people have something to puzzle over, work [is prepared ahead?].’^c

[17d] In the train car, a new plague is added to hunger: thirst. And a shortage of air. We have no right even to breathe in this world without the agreement of a German [soldier].²⁰⁷ We are ashamed, very ashamed, over the fact that we — those of us brought to Treblinka — did not manage to rouse ourselves to some sort of struggle or resistance, an ambush on the small number of Germans and the not much larger number of Ukrainians. We are ashamed just as the Poles were in the first year of the war, over the fact that they collapsed so quickly. Immediately after the fall, over the course of a few weeks of a mightier destruction, Poland and Warsaw rehabilitated themselves. Who knows whether the Jews, with their handful of assassinations in Treblinka, their several attempts at resistance in Lithuanian cities — ‘whether they’ll also rehabilitate themselves when the time comes for other [acts of resistance?]. For the executioners have fallen into a trance, the machine continues to function, news arrives of the deportation of peasants . . . just as helpless against the mass executioners as are the Jewish masses . . .’ [17e] Entire transports die one by one while in transit, several thousand in each. And those who do arrive are weak as flies. Even an army would be incapacitated without water. Therein, the insane, clever mechanism continues to operate. Psychotechnique. Faster, faster — ceaseless provocation and knouts over their heads, the sharpest [. . .], ceaseless barrages of shots, a machine gun on the roof. Women separated from men, not for reasons of decency, obviously. Perhaps the sight of the humiliation and pain of one’s own wife, mother, child could provoke some act of desperation. [. . .] A son was not allowed to say goodbye to his mother, ‘so he threw himself with a knife upon the one who prevented him. A boy from Kielce. And the Germans, who are so infinitely gentle towards every human life, regret each of their own who falls victim. They protect themselves against death. They protect their’ [17f] own skins, they are quite afraid, they

207 In the original literally ‘boot.’

are even very afraid. The executioners know what they deserve, they know it well, and when [. .] carries out his assassination, they become quite disconcerted and crazy with fear. A Jew cannot walk past a German except with his hands up. They mow down ten thousand people with machine guns, they chop up the assassin with shovels, but what can they do that is worse than killing, and after all, they kill no matter what, and death by bullet is certainly easier than being suffocated by hot fumes . . .

They placate the Jews. On the one hand, terror; on the other, lie upon lie, sweet words. In the train car, a sermon, and even after arriving in Treblinka, more sermons, attempts to convince us that this is a labour camp — a special placard for that purpose, ‘with the regulations for those brought to the ‘labour camp’. Nothing will happen to you. What — if a Jew wants to work, is anyone going to treat him poorly? Righteousness — but Jews are simply a lazy people. [. .] luck [. .] good and bad are kept on a tight leash^c [17g] until they are led naked, armed only with their bare fists, to the baths. To these baths, the *Badeanstalt*.²⁰⁸ Eyewitnesses relate that the character of a *Badeanstalt* was [imitated] in great detail [. .]. The tiled walls, the floor, the showers in the ceiling. After all, Jews so often took steam baths — why would they think anything, why would they believe the truly unbelievable until the last, their last minute, until the steam turned out to be a little too thick, too hot . . . What, would they really kill so many people?

And everything is so well thought out, very smart people, certainly educated, with diplomas, with knowledge about [17h] modern technology and [. .] — sat and studied the plan, instructions for those who would carry it out.

Jews are indeed needed for labour. Digging and burial, registering valuables, heating the baths — in short, they are active in the industry. No more than 25 executioners, in fact they only perform a supervisory role, and the 200 Ukrainians, slaves (assistants) to the executioners, help only with murder and standing watch to prevent even one victim from escaping. . . The real labour, keeping the machine in motion, is performed by the Jews themselves, those who were selected for being young and able to work. For this work they buy themselves the right to spend time on God’s beautiful world for another week or two, or even three. [17i] But no longer than that. It would not be healthy if a group of a few hundred Jews hung around the camp for

208 (German) bathhouse.

so long, with opportunities to exploit their familiarity with the local conditions . . . It would also be wrong to allow Jews to enjoy the grace of deferred execution . . .

So the Jews are on their own. Just like in Warsaw, in the shops, to ‘live’ in eternal fear of selection, lest they be discarded — unable to work. They pinch their own cheeks to put colour in them. Shave every day to look as fresh as possible. Another way to fool them. An empty fantasy, that one will emerge dry from among the torrents of rain. A few young workers managed to escape. How many of them are there? ‘I’ll give a generous estimate: all in all, those from Warsaw together with those who are still wandering somewhere in the countryside — 200, a hundred, a tenth of a per mille.’^c

[unnumbered page]²⁰⁹ Contents:

Forward:

Introduction: What does it mean Treblinka?
Phenomenology of the death factory.

Part One: K[rzepicki] relates.

Chapter 1: Way to Treblinka

Chapter 2: In the camp Treblinka II.

Chapter 3: I am working with the dead.

Chapter 4: We work sorting rugs.

Chapter 5: I am working in the forest.

Chapter 6: I escape.

Part Two: [. . .] testimonies

Testimony of the unbathed

Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.

Afterword: Characteristics of testimonies from
Treblinka.²¹⁰

209 The new notebook starts here.

210 The table of contents shows Auerbach’s initial plan, of which only Part One has been completed (except for lack of the forward, and different titles of chapters) — or perhaps Part Two has not been preserved. As illegible [. . .] are marked probably initials of five people who gave testimonies, whom she called ‘unbathed’ (not gassed); hence planned chapters 1–5.

[1] Chapter One

The blockade

On 25 August, at about 6:30 in the evening, the artificial honey factory at Zamenhofa Street 19, where we workers were employed, was blockaded. SS-men entered the factory and drove out all the people. Entreaties and begging were of no help.²¹¹ With guns drawn, they threatened to shoot. We left everything behind and vacated the factory. We were lined up in rows. I went up to the *Scharführer* (‘I knew German’) and asked him to let me take some things with me. I had thought of [2] hiding, but I could see that it would be pointless. As I was gathering my belongings, a *junak* came up to me pointing his gun at me, but when I shouted *Scharführer!* he refrained from shooting. I spoke to the brother-in-law of Captain Flejszman²¹² who ran an office for Waldemar-Schmidt²¹³ near our factory. He was afraid there was insufficient room for two people to hide there. In the end he himself did not hide there either. When I was standing on the street Flejszman pulled me out of the line. But with us there were several hundred of his people at the *Umschlagplatz* — the entire staff of the Waldemar-Schmidt workshop along with their wives and children who had [3] taken refuge in our yard (making straw footwear).

As I left, the *Scharführer* gave me a kick to make me move faster. Several men who had been found hiding in the Toporol²¹⁴ garden had been shot at the courtyard. We were taken out to Zamenhofa Street. In the group outside in the street were several SS-men with their sleeves rolled up and carrying whips in their hands. They looked like butchers in a slaughterhouse; we didn’t like their look one bit. We could see Jews, covered in blood, coming

211 Author’s[?] note in the margin: some fervour.

212 Albin Flajszman (Fleischman, Flejszman) (1897–1943?), retired Captain of the Polish Army, a policeman in the ghetto, headed the Order Service Reserve, also the head of district III and then II of the Order Service.

213 Probably co-owner of the Schmidt & Münstermann company, which did business in the ghetto; in 1941 it built its wall. Straw footwear (slippers), mentioned later, were manufactured in the ghetto at Smocza Street 35.

214 Toporol, acronym for *Towarzystwo Popierania Rolnictwa* (Society for the Support of Agriculture); it was established in 1933; it prepared Jewish youth for farm work. In the Warsaw ghetto, it made its goal to plant vegetables at every piece of accessible land; playgrounds for children were organised there too.

from Wołyńska Street. [4] Gangs of Ukrainians were going around, looting the abandoned houses.

Brandt²¹⁵ arrives²¹⁶

Brandt came driving up, and one of us said to another: 'Look! Here comes Brandt! Maybe he'll get us released because we're workers.'

Then about two hundred more people arrived from one of the workshops. They walked along as if they hadn't a care in the world, because they were coming home from work. One of the Ukrainians asked Brandt what he should do with these people. '*Alles anschließen!*'²¹⁷ Brandt replied, and that whole crowd was taken into our ranks.

At that moment a Jewish policeman arrived with orders [5] from Lejkin²¹⁸, mentioning Captain Flajszman's brother-in-law by name. The message was passed from one person to the next until it reached the brother-in-law, who then stepped out of the group. Brandt gave an order to Lejkin: '*Alles abmarschieren!*'²¹⁹ And so we began to march off, five abreast.

The ghetto police and the Ukrainians formed a cordon on either side, with a Jewish policeman or a Ukrainian standing at intervals of twenty paces and an SS man at intervals of 40–50 metres. And so we marched. I was the last to move out because I was planning to escape. But it was impossible; there were too many Germans around.

I just [6] looked around the streets and told myself that I was now saying goodbye to Warsaw. As I arrived at the *Umschlagplatz*, I heard one of the ghetto policemen telling one of his relatives to 'go to the right'. I also wanted to go 'to the right', towards the hospital, where I thought I might be able to save myself. But this same policeman dragged me back and I went out into the *Umschlagplatz*. I could see that I was done for.

215 SS-*Untersturmführer* Karl Georg Brandt (1907–?), head of the Jewish desk in the Warsaw District Sipo and SD headquarters, and of the *Grossaktion* in the Warsaw ghetto.

216 All the subtitles written on the margin are inserted into the text as indicated.

217 (German) 'Take them all in!'

218 Jakub Lejkin (1906–1942), deputy head of the Jewish police in the Warsaw ghetto, assassinated by the Jewish underground on 29 October 1942.

219 (German) 'Everybody, march!'

At the *Umschlagplatz*

We still hoped that some kind of separation would take place at the *Umschlagplatz* and that we would be able to show our papers. But unfortunately, we never had that chance.

As we came closer, we saw the [7] freight wagons ready for us and we said to each other, 'Oh God, we've had it! We're in trouble!' And in fact, the *šauliai*²²⁰ came straight over to us and started hitting us over the head with whips; they did not let anyone go near the Germans. From the *Umschlagplatz* we were moved towards the open freight wagons. Only two *Werkschutz*²²¹ men from Waldemar Schmidt's shop managed to get through; they were wearing uniforms and army caps. They went up to the *Scharführer*, who was an old sadist, but something came over him. He looked them up and down for four minutes, then nodded and told them that they could go. This was how those two men got away, but nobody else was that lucky.

We were moving closer [8] to the wagons. Already we could see elderly people stretched out on the floor of the first car, half-unconscious. We didn't like the looks of this. Then steps were moved up to the freight wagons and the *šauliai* started driving us faster with their whips, up into the cars. We gave up all hope of being able to show our papers to somebody and so we got into the freight wagons.

In the freight wagon.

More than a hundred people were crammed into our freight wagon. The ghetto police closed the doors. When the door shut on me, I felt my whole world coming to an end [9]. Some pretty, young girls were still standing in front of the wagons, next to a German in a gendarme's uniform. The man was the commander of the *šauliai* and the escort for our train.

I'm young! I want to work!

The girls were screaming, weeping, stretching out their hands to the German and crying, 'But I'm still young! I want to work!' The German just looked at

220 Members of the paramilitary organisation called Lithuanian Riflemen, established in 1919; it cooperated with the Nazis and was defined as criminal after WWII.

221 (German) industrial security service, composed of German, Ukrainian and Jewish units; it functioned as police in German enterprises (shops) in the Warsaw ghetto.

them, and did not say a word. The girls were loaded into the freight wagon and they came with us. After the doors had closed on us, some of the people said, 'Jews, we're finished!' But I and some others [10] did not want to believe it. 'It can't be!' we argued. 'They won't kill so many people! Maybe the old people and the children, but not us. We're young. They're taking us to work.'

The Jews recite the *Kaddish*

The cars began to move. We were on the way. Where to? We didn't know. Perhaps we were going to work in Russia. But some of the old people didn't want to believe this and, as soon as the train started moving, they began to recite the mourners' *Kaddish*. 'Jews, we're done for!' they said. 'It's time to recite the *Kaddish*.'

It's impossible to imagine the horrors in that closed, airless freight wagon. It was all one big cesspool. Everybody was pushing towards the window, where there was a little [11] air, but it was impossible to get close to the window. Everybody was lying on the ground. I also lay down. I could feel a crack in the floor. I lay with my nose right up against that crack to grab some air. What a stench all over the car! It was unbearable. A real cesspool all over. Filth everywhere, human excrement piled up in every corner of the car. Every now and then someone would shout out: 'A pot! A pot! Give us a pot so we can pour it out the window.' But nobody had a pot. After the train had travelled [12] some distance, it suddenly stopped in the middle of nowhere.

The *šauliai* takes his share

A *šauliai*, revolver in hand, entered our wagon. He herded everyone over to one side of the carriage while he stood on the other side facing them with his revolver. I thought he had a *pocisk gazowy*²²² in his gun and that we were going to be gassed right there in the wagon. (K. had participated in military drills to prepare for gas attacks.)²²³ But then I remembered that there was a window and I couldn't understand what was going on. It turned out that the *šauliai* had come not to kill us but to rob us. Each of us had to approach him and show what we had. [13] Working quickly, the *šauliai* grabbed everything that was

222 (Polish) gas shell.

223 R. Auerbach inserts Krzepicki's comments, marking them with initial K., throughout the document.

not well hidden: money, watches, jewellery: no doubt he was in a hurry to get to the other freight wagons. After a while, the train moved on.

‘Let’s get out of here!’

I tried to talk to some of the young people. ‘Let’s get out of here! Let’s climb out through the windows!’ But many of them said, ‘There’s no point! If we jump, we’ll be killed anyway.’ But two people jumped down just the same. The Germans noticed and stopped the train to shoot after them. I don’t know what became of these two. I gave up the idea of jumping [14] and lay down on the floor with the others.

The train stopped at ‘some little depot. One by one, we dropped off to sleep, and’ we slept for a few hours. At about 5 a.m., we saw many other transports of Jews passing by our window.

Water!

Things got very bad in the freight wagons. ‘Water!’ we shouted through the window to the railroad men; we offered them a lot of money to bring us water. We were willing to pay a lot for a drink of water. It was very bad, but we couldn’t manage to get all the water we needed for all the money we had; we paid from 500 to 1,000 zlotys for a single portion of water. The railroad men [15] and the *šauliai* took the money. Those who have not experienced this will not believe what happened next. We were lying one on top of the other, *ohne*²²⁴ air. (K. uses a German word to make the description clear.) Those who had been able to get some water got no great pleasure from it. One person cried that his father had fainted; another, that his mother had passed out, and a third that his child was unconscious, and so the water was divided into such small portions that no one got much benefit from it, even though under such circumstances people are ordinarily quite selfish. There were also various important people, professors and doctors, riding in our car.

They took off their shirts and lay on the floor, gasping. ‘A little water for the doctor, he’s fainting!’ someone cried out. [16] I didn’t know the names of these people. (A few times K. indicates, through gestures and pantomime, the suffering of thirst, the mad urge for air and water, and the terrible pain

224 (German) without.

in the lungs and heart.) I paid 500 zlotys, more than half the money in my possession, for a potful (about half a litre) of water.

Leave some water for my child!

As I started to drink my water, a woman came up to me and said that her child had fainted. I was in the middle of drinking and simply couldn't tear the pot away from my lips. Then the woman sank her teeth into my hand with all her might, to get me to stop drinking and leave her some [17] of my water. The bite did not bother me; I would have gladly allowed myself to be bitten again if I could have had more water. (K. pointed out the four-month-old bite mark, still visible on his hand.) But I left some water in the pitcher and saw to it that the child got something to drink.

Things got worse in the freight wagons from one minute to the next. It was still only about 7 a.m., but the sun was already hot and the temperature kept climbing. All the men had taken off their shirts and were lying half-naked, dressed only in their trousers or underpants. Some of the women, too, had thrown off their clothes and were lying in their underwear. People lay on the floor groaning, tossing from one side to another, twisting [18] their heads and their whole bodies, this way and that, gasping for air. (K. once again demonstrates the suffering with gestures.) Others lay quietly, resigned, semi-conscious, no longer able to move. We were willing to pay the *šauliai* anything they wanted for a little water.

Fear not, everybody will get work!

A little later, at about 10 a.m., we could see through the window the German who was in command. One of us asked him through the window to give orders for us to get some water. The German replied that we should be patient, because in an hour's time we would arrive at our destination, Treblinka Camp, where everyone would get water. He also told us to be calm. In Treblinka, we would be divided into groups and [19] put to work. But our train did not move again until 4 p.m.

While the German officer had been speaking, everyone was satisfied. The Jew at the window who had been talking with the German consoled us and repeated what the officer had told him: that we wouldn't have to be afraid because everybody would be put to work according to their occupations. Some of the people applauded. Others tried to figure out what kind of work they

would be given. This one was a ditch digger, another a carpenter, a third, a locksmith. Everybody in the wagon was now in a good mood. [20] At 4 p.m., the train began to move again. We moved a short distance, and we soon saw Treblinka station. As the train moved on, we saw whole mountains of *shmates*²²⁵ (*shmates* or '*smates*' as he pronounces it, is what K. calls all manner of clothing, even the most expensive ones).

Mountains of rags. We approach Treblinka.

The Jew at the window who was the first to see the *shmates* again tried to calm the crowd, saying that we would be put to work sorting these rags. Others wanted to know where the rags could have come from. They were told that in Majdan near Lublin²²⁶ and in other camps the Jews had been given paper clothing and that the clothing with which they had come had been gathered together, sorted, and forwarded to Germany to be reconditioned. Others had [21] even heard that in Warsaw there was also a special shop at Nowolipki Street 52, known as Hoffmann's shop,²²⁷ where old clothes were reconditioned. Minutes before the train pulled into Treblinka station, we saw Jews being taken to work. This, too, was reported to the others, and everybody was glad. Everybody was told that Jews were being taken to work, led by a Ukrainian.

***Bocznica*²²⁸ in Treblinka**

After passing Treblinka station the train continued a few hundred metres to the camp. In the camp [22] there was a platform which the train arrived at through a separate gate guarded by a Ukrainian. He opened the gate for us, and closed it again after the train had passed. As I was later able to note, the

225 (Yiddish) rags.

226 Majdan Tatarski — district of Lublin, where on 16 April 1942 the Germans created a rump ghetto after liquidating the ghetto in the city centre. Approximately 7,000 Jews lived there. However, the author probably means the nearby camp at Majdanek — KL Lublin, which was established in July 1941. Initially, it was a penal camp for 50,000 Polish prisoners, and in October 1942 it became a death camp for Jews. The victims were murdered in gas chambers with the use of Zyklon B. According to estimates, approximately 80,000 people, including 60,000 Jews, had died at Majdanek by the spring of 1944.

227 According to other sources, Wilfried Hoffman's workshop was located at Nowolipki 51a; in the summer of 1942 approximately 800 people worked there sewing uniforms (Werk 1) and refreshing and darning civilian clothes (Werk 2).

228 (Polish) siding.

gate was made of wooden slats, interwoven with barbed wire, camouflaged by green branches.

When the train stopped, the doors of all the cars were suddenly flung open. We were now [23] on the grounds of the slaughterhouse of Treblinka.

Chapter Two

The doors of the freight wagons were opened by Ukrainians. With them were also German SS-men, standing around with whips in their hands. Many of the people in the wagons were still lying on the floor, unconscious; it's possible that some of them were no longer alive. We had been travelling for about 20 hours. If the trip had gone on for another half day, the number of dead would have been a great deal larger. We would have perished from heat and lack of air. As I later learned, there were transports that arrived at Treblinka from which only dead bodies were unloaded. [24] When the doors of our wagon were opened, some of the people who had been lying half-naked tried to put on some clothing. But not all of them managed to throw on their clothes. At the command of the SS-men, Ukrainians jumped into the cars and used their whips to drive the crowd out of the freight wagons as quickly as possible.

'So many clothes! But where are the people?'

We left the freight wagons exhausted. After travelling for so many hours in semi-darkness, we were momentarily blinded by the sun. It was 5 p.m., but the day's heat was still at full strength. The first thing we saw was an enormous mountain of rags in front of us. [25] The sight gave us pangs of grief. So many clothes! But where were the people? We began to recall stories we had heard of Lublin, Koło, Turek,²²⁹ and we said to each other, 'Jews, this is no good! They've got us!' They herded us faster, faster. Through another exit, guarded by a Ukrainian, we left the platform area and entered a fenced-off area where two barracks were located.

229 The information about the murder of Lublin Jews at Majdanek in April, and the Jews from Koło and Turek at Chełmno in December 1941.

Women and children to the left, men to the right!

One of the Germans rapped out a command: 'Women and children to the left! Men to the right!' A little later, two Jews were stationed there as interpreters to show the crowd where to go. We men were told to sit down outside along the length of the barrack on the right. The women all went into the barrack on the left and, as we later learned, they were told at once to strip naked and were driven out of the barrack [26] through another door, along a narrow path lined on either side with barbed wire. This path led through a small grove to the building that housed the gas chamber. After a mere few minutes, we could hear their terrible screams, but we could not see anything, because the grove of trees blocked our view.

In the sight of machine guns

As we sat there, tired and resigned — some of us lying stretched out on the sand — we could see a heavy machine gun being set up on the roof of the barrack on the left side, with three Ukrainian servicemen placed around it. We figured that any minute they would turn the machine gun on us and kill us all. [27] This fear put some new life into me, but then I again felt the terrible thirst which had been torturing me for so many hours. The Ukrainians on the barrack roof had opened an umbrella over their heads to shield themselves from the sun.

One more cup of water before I die

My sole thought at that moment was, 'A cup of water! Just one more cup of water before I die!' Some of the people I had known from the factory were sitting near me. Our bookkeeper K., our warehouseman D., and several other young people. 'It's no good', they said. 'They're going to shoot us! Let's try to get out of here!' We all thought that there was an open field beyond the fence which surrounded both barracks. We didn't know then that beyond the first fence [28] lay a second. When I had revived a little I followed some of the others through an open door to the barrack on the right. I planned to break down one of the boards in the wall and run away.

In the barrack full of corpses

But when we got into the barrack, we once again thought we were going to pass out. There were many dead bodies lying in the barrack, and we could see that they had all been shot. Through a chink in the barrack's wall we could

see a Ukrainian guard on the other side, holding a gun. There was nothing we could do. I went back outside.

Mother and son

As I later learned, the corpses were those of a transport of Jews from Kielce who had arrived in Treblinka that morning. Among them were a [29] mother and her son. When it came time to separate them — women to the left and men to the right — the son wanted to say goodbye to his mother one last time. When they tried to drive him away, he took out a pocket-knife and plunged it into the Ukrainian. As a punishment, they spent all that day shooting all the Jews from Kielce who were at the camp.

The Jew with the red patch

I sat down outside once more. After a while I noticed a Jew with a red triangular patch on his knee, driving a horse and wagon on the other side of the fence. I signalled to him and asked him with my eyes: 'What will they do with us?' He answered with a wave of his hand: 'Scrap!'

[30] Attention, Varsovians!

The area between the barracks where we were sitting was guarded on all sides. Leaning against a telephone pole stood two large signs, which I now read for the first time.

'Attention, Varsovians!' the signs announced in huge letters, followed by detailed instructions for people who had supposedly arrived at a regular labour camp. They were to hand in their clothes to be deloused and disinfected. There was also a note saying that our money and other belongings would be returned to us later on . . .

*'Euch wird gar nichts geschehen'*²³⁰ — they were misleading us with glib words.

A little later, an SS-man came over to us and delivered a speech. He spoke [31] very cold-bloodedly but here and there his oration was interspersed with humour. '*Habt keine Angst!*'²³¹ he repeated every minute, '*Euch wird gar nichts*

230 (German) 'Nothing is going to happen to you'

231 (German) 'Have no fear!'

geschehen.²³² ‘The dead bodies lying here’, he told us, ‘arrived in that condition. They died in the train from suffocation. *Keiner ist nicht schuldig in dem*.²³³ Everyone will be treated well here. Everyone will be employed at his own trade or occupation, tailors in the tailor workshops, cabinet makers in the furniture shop, shoemakers as shoemakers. Everyone will get work and bread.’

Some people began to list off their occupations. When they went up to the German, he laughed at them in a friendly way, felt their muscles, and patted them on the back. ‘*Ja, ja, es ist gut! Bist kräftig! Es geht mit!*’²³⁴ Some people began [32] to applaud the German. Most of the Jews who heard this sweet talk did indeed feel better and started to believe that they really were in a labour camp. ‘*Sitzt ruhig in Ordnung*,’²³⁵ the German gently urged them, and people sat up straight in their places, like children in a classroom.

Selection for work

Afterwards, a second SS-man appeared, with a rifle on his shoulder, and selected ten men from our group. He didn’t want the older ones, only younger people. He lined them up in a double column and marched them away. Meanwhile, I hung back. I didn’t push forward to be taken because I was afraid; it just might be that these people would be taken away and shot. Later on, I learned that the ten men were [33] needed to clear away rags from the railroad tracks.

Still later, a Ukrainian came over and took 5 more men away to work. At the time I didn’t know for what purpose they were being taken. But I started to think of joining those who were going off to work. Another Ukrainian, who came a little later, spoke to us in Russian. I didn’t understand what he was saying; I thought that he was going to take us for work. He took only three people and said that when they returned, he would take others in their place. It turned out that he was taking us to the outhouse behind the barrack and since I had come along by mistake, he dubbed me ‘The Speculator.’ [34] He was not the worst in that bunch. A little later, the SS-man who had taken the 10 men was back. This time he wanted 60 men, and I was one of them.

232 (German) ‘Nothing will happen to you.’

233 (German) ‘It’s nobody’s fault.’

234 (German) ‘Yes, yes, that’s good! You are strong, that’s what we need!’

235 (German) ‘Sit quietly, in order.’

The SS-man lined us up in double columns, and took us out of the fenced-off area between the two barracks into the wider yard through which we had passed when we were first unloaded from the train. The SS-man led us to the right, behind the narrower enclosure and from there into a large, open area.

The field of swollen bodies. Ten thousand corpses in one place

Here we beheld a horrible sight. Countless dead bodies lay there, piled upon each other. By my [35] estimate there were perhaps ten thousand bodies there. A terrible stench hovered in the air. Most of the bodies had horribly bloated bellies; they were covered with brown and black spots, swollen and the surfaces of their skin were already crawling with worms.

The lips of most of the dead were strangely twisted and the tips of their tongues could be seen protruding between the swollen lips. Their mouths resembled those of dead fish. I later learned that most of these people had died of suffocation in the freight wagon, and their mouths had remained open as if they were still struggling for air. (K. shows me the facial expressions of the dead, mimicking their final gasps for air). [36] Many of the dead still had their eyes open.

We, the new arrivals, were terror-stricken. We looked at each other to confirm that what we were seeing was real. But we were afraid to look around too much because the guards could start shooting at any minute. I still did not want to believe my eyes. I still thought that perhaps this was all just a nightmare.

The corpse processing plant at work

Five hundred metres farther away, there was a mechanical excavator at work digging ditches. The machine, together with its motor, was as large as a railroad carriage. Its mechanical shovels were [37] digging up piles of dirt. The machine loaded the dirt into trolleys, which turned away and dumped it onto the side. Things were humming out there on that big field. Many Jews were already working there. They were dragging corpses into the ditches which had been dug for them by the machine. We could also see Jews pushing carts piled with bodies towards the large ditches at the edge of the field.²³⁶

236 [Author's note] See the site map. Here and throughout this document, it is most probably the reference to the drawing attached to doc. 23, with numbers and explanations.

There was an extraordinary *ruch*.²³⁷ (I'll leave this incorrect but characteristic expression — R. A.) They were all running, pursued by Germans, Ukrainians, and even Jewish group leaders called Kapos ('*Kameraden-Polizei*'), who kept driving them on: '*Schneller! Schneller!*'²³⁸ All the while, we could hear the crack of pistols and rifles and the whine of bullets. But there [38] were no cries or groans from those who were shot because the Germans shot them in a particular spot at the nape of the neck that caused the person to drop dead, quick as lightning, never even having a chance to make his voice heard again.

There were various kinds of ditches in that place. At a distance, running parallel with the outermost camp fence, were three giant open mass graves, in which the dead were piled on top of each other. Closer to the barracks was a somewhat smaller ditch where our sixty men were put to work.²³⁹ A group of workers walked around the area, dusting [39] the corpses with chlorine powder, which they scooped up from large barrels with buckets. As I looked around and took in the scale of what was happening I was overcome by an even greater dread. I saw so many graves and so many bodies that I thought surely the war would come to an end soon. By what logic?

Because there were already so many dead Jews and so many graves. (As I recorded this for the second time, K. explained the connection in his mind between what he witnessed and his hypothesis of the war ending. Hitler had declared his intention to annihilate the Jews at five minutes to midnight, and seeing such huge masses of annihilated Jews led him to conclude that midnight would strike soon. The truth, I believe is that K., in wishing to describe something so extraordinary, is grasping for images to express [39a] the overwhelming impression of what he saw and can find no more artful expression, and so he substitutes it with a metaphor.)

[40] **The war should end in a few days**

I should point out here that no gassing victims were buried in this area; only those who had died in the transports or who had been shot on arrival at the camp, before entering the showers.

237 (Polish) commotion. The RA's note that follows most probably refers to the Yiddish word *yener*, literally: that, meaning: difficult to imagine; here translated as: extraordinary.

238 (German) 'Faster! Faster!'

239 [Author's note] See the site map.

Our team of 60 men was divided into three groups. Since I knew German, I became the leader of my group, and in fact I soon had to shout at my people and chase them. If I had not done so, I could have been whipped or shot at any time.

The young man with glasses and the SS-man

The SS-man who had brought us here had a chat with me. I asked him what the work would be like and he calmly and patiently answered all my questions. 'Whoever wants to work', he said, [41] 'will get work from us. As for the rest, when you've been here a while you'll be able to figure out everything for yourself.' As he was talking to me, he noticed a young man from Warsaw, wearing glasses, who was part of my group. He was standing in the ditch, receiving the bodies which others had been dragging over. It seemed to the German that he was not working fast enough.

'*Stehenbleiben, umdrehen!*'²⁴⁰ the SS-man ordered the young man. He took his rifle from his shoulder and before the young man could figure out what was expected from him, he lay dead among the bodies in the ditch. They [42] dragged him farther along and soon additional corpses were piled on top of him.

The German returned the rifle to his shoulder and resumed our conversation, as if nothing had happened.

A chill seized my heart. A few minutes later, when the German had gone away, something similar happened to another Jew. This man was shot by a Ukrainian. The Ukrainian had ordered him searched and had taken a bundle of money from his pocket. Before long our group was down [43] 10 men and we heard constant gunfire all around.

A nap among the rags

I could see at every turn that things were bad. I was dead tired and thirsty, barely able to remain on my feet. I was very unhappy about my situation. A little later, about 8 p.m., when it had become darker, I took advantage of the darkness to move closer to the railroad tracks where I had seen the piles of clothing. I no longer cared. I burrowed my whole body and my face into the rags. Unconscious of time and place, I fell asleep almost at once.

240 (German) 'Halt. Turn around!'

[44] When I woke up, it was already completely dark. By the light of the electric lamps hanging suspended from poles, I could see a group of Jews not far from me, with red patches on their knees. I recognised one of them with whom I had been a prisoner of war. I went over to him and asked him to do me a favour and let me join his group. He replied that this was impossible. While I was talking to this young man, a new transport rolled into the camp. We all went out to meet the freight wagons. I felt faint [45] as I looked into the wagons. I was stunned by what I saw there. The wagons contained only corpses. ‘They had all suffocated on the journey from lack of air.’ They were jam-packed and the corpses lay piled one on top of the other. ‘You cannot imagine the impact of the sight of these wagons full of dead bodies.’ I inquired where the transport had come from and I found out that it had come from Międzyrzec. About 6,000 souls: men, women, and children. A few individuals were not in fact dead; they had only fainted. They could have been saved with a little water. But nobody had any water for them. We ourselves had not yet received any water since our arrival in Treblinka.

[46] We were ordered to go over and help unload the dead. The work was very hard and the SS-men, as was their custom, kept urging us on with their whips and guns: ‘*Schneller! Schneller!*’

‘I’m still alive — give me some water!’

We simply had no place to lay out the bodies. The giant piles of clothing were right next to the railroad tracks; beneath them were still many unburied bodies left over from before. Meanwhile, we dumped the bodies next to the tracks and piled them up, one on top of the other. From time [47] to time, we heard groans. The sounds came from those who had merely fainted and were now regaining consciousness. These unfortunates were begging in faint voices for water, but we were unable to revive them because we ourselves were on the verge of passing out from thirst. We could only separate the ones still alive and put them down a little to the side, near the rags. The Germans didn’t notice this because it was so dark.

A child cries

Among the living I also found a tiny child, about a year or a year and a half old. (K. smiles, moved by the memory of the small child he held in his arms.) The baby had regained consciousness and was crying at the top of its voice.

I placed the baby down, apart from the others, next to the pile of rags. The next morning they found the child dead, and [48] threw its body into the pit.

We went on working like this until about 2 a.m. When we went up to the SS-man and asked for water, he promised us that we would all get water after we had finished our work. But we would have to hurry up to empty the wagons.

Under the wheels of the freight wagons

After we got through cleaning the freight wagons, we were ordered to move to one side and line up in double columns. The locomotive whistled and the train slowly pulled out of the camp. A Ukrainian and an SS-man stationed themselves at either side of the exit gate and shone flashlights under the wheels to see whether anyone was [49] hiding beneath the freight wagons. A few wagons pulled out in good order. But when he got to the third or fourth wagon, the German shouted, 'Halt!'²⁴¹ He had discovered two boys lying hunched up between the wheels. One of them got a bullet even before he could crawl out from under the wagon. The other was able to jump out and started running quick as lightning, trying to lose himself in the crowd of Jews. But the SS-man stopped him right away. 'The young man immediately took his papers out of his pocket and tried to prove that he was a worker. He shouted and pleaded, but this did not impress the German.'^c He started hitting him over the head as hard as he could with his rubber truncheon, until the boy collapsed. Then the Ukrainian came up, [50] turned his rifle upside down.

. . .As if chopping wood — murder at night

With great force, he hit his victim over the head with the rifle butt. Finally, they put a bullet in him. Then, at last, they left him alone. The train rolled out.

Now the SS-man turned his attention to us. Standing as we were in double columns, he ordered us to sit down in rows on the ground and took one of us with him to fetch water. Coming back with a bucket of water, the German gave [51] each of us a cupful and we drank it greedily. I literally didn't know how to start drinking. I held the cup in front of me with both hands and thought that this water was the most precious thing on earth.

241 (German) 'Stop!'

We have been watered

After we had drunk our water, the German led us over to the area between the two barracks and ordered us to sit down near the wall of the barrack at the left. The men from my transport were still sitting in front of the barrack on the right. Some of them wanted to slide over to our group, which had just returned from [52] work, but the SS-man would not let them.

Permission to sleep

The German went away to ask the commandant what to do with us. When he came back he led us into the barracks on the right side, which was divided down the middle by a partition. He led us into the smaller half and told us to go to sleep. Other Jews were already asleep in the barrack; among them were some whom we had seen at work earlier. We understood that we, too, had gained a temporary reprieve. The rest of the men from our transport were taken to the 'showers' that very night.

[53] **Chapter Three:**

I'm still working with corpses

The next morning we were put back to work with the corpses. Each of us received a cup of water for breakfast. We were not given any bread. None of us had any belongings with him. However, we could take as much as we wanted of the food we found in packages that the victims had thrown away. Packages, bundles, valises, and knapsacks were scattered at every turn. Some of these packages contained the finest foods, but none of us could even think of eating just then; all we wanted was water.

The Międzyrzec and Kielce bodies meet

The first task assigned to my group (20 people) was to clear away the murdered Jews from Kielce, who were still lying in our barrack on the other side of the partition [54] behind which we had spent the night.

Teams of four men each picked up one corpse after another, carried the bodies out to the other side of the fence, and laid them out next to the bodies which we had unloaded from the Międzyrzec transport. The Międzyrzec and Kielce corpses had an opportunity to meet. Here, in the area next to the

railroad tracks, a second group was at work, loading the bodies onto carts and pushing the carts to the big mass graves which I had seen the day before alongside the outermost fence of the camp. The people from the barrack who had been gunned down and [55] those who had suffocated inside the wagons were buried fully clothed. Apparently, it was considered too much trouble to undress Jews who were already dead. As a rule, the Germans tried as much as possible to see to it that the bodies of Jews were brought in naked, and if someone dropped dead with his clothes on, ‘they magnanimously forwent the *Werterfassung*. This may not have been in accordance with the regulations, but simply the result of daily practise, due to lack of time.’^c At this point we weren’t even ordered to search their pockets for money or jewellery. At about 12 noon we had finished clearing out the barrack, and were assigned to other work.

The 35 corpses in the well

Next to the watch tower in our fence,²⁴² there was a well. [56] Many corpses had accumulated in this well, and we had to pull them out that day. A Pole from penal camp Treblinka I was working with us. He stepped into a bucket which was attached to the well’s chain, and we lowered him into the well. He would tie the corpses to the bucket, one by one, and we would turn the crank and pull the bodies up. I counted a total of 35 corpses. I had no way of knowing who the people were or how they had gotten into the well. Some of them were [57] tied with ropes. Perhaps they had tried to get down into the well for a drink of water — who could tell? Others said that they might have taken their own lives.

People carry a bucket of water. I want to join them.

While I was working at the well, I saw a group of workers approaching, carrying a bucket filled with water. Hoping to get a chance for a drink of water, I tried to join them, but the German who was guarding our group spotted me and hit me across the face with his rubber truncheon. So I had to go back.

242 [Author’s note] see the site map.

What remains on earth when you go to the showers

When we had finished with the bodies in the well, we were taken to clear away the things in the barracks on the left, where the people undressed before entering the gas chamber. Here, piled up in huge mounds, were the garments, underwear, shoes, and all sorts of other items left by the men, women, and children who had undressed there the day before. [58] Various amounts of cash, large and small, were also lying around on the floor. There was Polish money as well as foreign currency, securities and jewellery. It was our job to pick up the rags as they were, without sorting them, and to add them to the piles of clothing near the railroad tracks.

Women also try to save themselves

Suddenly, we heard faint moans from beneath a pile of clothes. We discovered several women who had been hiding beneath the rags. They were alive and afraid to emerge into the light of day. When they saw us Jews, [59] they began to beg, 'Water, a little water!' But we had no water ourselves and there was nothing we could do for these women. One of the Ukrainians quickly came over and, seeing the women who had survived, he finished them off with a few bullets. We immediately took them away and added them to the other corpses.

In addition to the women whom we found in the barrack, I saw two women lying on the other side of the barracks. They had been killed. They had tried to slip out through the barbed wire fence, thinking, probably, that an open field lay on the other side.²⁴³ One of them had actually pushed through to [60] the other side, but the other had been caught between the wires, and the bullet hit her there. We took these two bodies also and added them to the pile of corpses.

The roll call

With that, at 7 p.m., my second day's work in Treblinka was over. At 7 o'clock, a roll call was held and an inmate count taken. Altogether, there were about 500 of us, and a Jewish commander (Kapo) was appointed to take charge of us. He was G[alewski], an engineer from Łódź, a convert to Christianity. The roll call that day (just as on all the days that followed) lasted about [61] two hours. Throughout that time, we had to stand at attention in our ranks; if we didn't, we were savagely beaten. Those who for some reason had fallen from grace had

243 [Author's note] see the site map.

to step out of line and had to lie down and receive 25 lashes right there in front of all the others. Nonetheless, some people were so tired that they sat down on the ground, because they could no longer stand up. After the roll call, we went into the barrack and went to sleep.

[62] Routine sets in

The next morning there was another roll call. After we had been counted, a routine was established in which we had regular roll calls three times a day. A steady meal schedule was also established. A field kitchen was set up near the well, where we got half a litre of soup three times a day. We received no bread, but we never missed it, because we could take provisions from the packages which new arrivals had brought in with them. We also took cooking ingredients from these packages. The field kitchen was manned by Jews who ladled out [63] the soup.

We wash ourselves with perfume — water is too precious

It was our third day in Treblinka. We badly wanted to wash ourselves, but there could be no question of using water for that purpose. All the time I was there, a drink of water was the most important thing there could be. So we used to wash ourselves only with the cologne and perfume which we found in the knapsacks.

After roll call, we were taken out to work in the big field with the mass graves, where I had worked on the first day. This time I had to carry the bodies out to the main pits near the fence.²⁴⁴

The large pits

[64] These graves were 60–70 metres long. They were also very deep, but I could not tell how deep they were because the ditches to which we had been assigned were already filled with many layers of corpses. The one thing I found surprising was that, deep though these ditches were, no water got to the corpses. The graves remained open through the night and the next day more bodies were piled into them. While I was in Treblinka, only the small pit to the left,²⁴⁵ where I had worked on the first day, was covered over.

244 [Author's note] see the site map.

245 [Author's note] see the site map.

[65] By the time we came out there in the morning, the excavator was already in operation, digging out new giant graves. A few days later, the excavation was stopped and a new system was instituted. They started burning the dead in the graves and we used to dump into the graves old clothes, valises, and trash which we had picked up in the yard. These articles were set on fire and continued burning day and night, filling the camp with billows of smoke and the odour of burning flesh.

Why the transports stopped coming

Many of the dead bodies I had seen a few days earlier were still lying in the yard and near the railroad tracks. Perhaps it was due [66] to the accumulation of so many unburied bodies that no new transports arrived in Treblinka between the 25th of August and the 2nd or 3rd of September. The remains of the earlier transports had to be cleared away first.

Limbs fall apart, we carry severed heads, entrails. 'Shirkers.'

As I'd seen on the day of my arrival, many of the corpses were decomposing, crawling with worms, and half-rotten. Today the scene was even more horrible and repulsive. Many of the bodies were already disintegrating and when we pulled them from the heaps where they had lain [67] piled atop one another, their limbs fell apart. Mostly, this happened with the corpses of young children, perhaps because their flesh was more delicate.

Nevertheless, there was no particular lack of 'shirkers' who looked precisely for these little corpses, because they were easier to carry. Others could be seen picking up heads, entrails, arms, and legs that had fallen from the corpses. Not everyone had the physical strength to carry the very heavy, monstrously bloated corpses of those who had died of suffocation in the freight wagons.

[68] 'The Doll' is coming

Suddenly I felt as if an electric current were passing through the place. Even the biggest loafers and shirkers threw themselves into their work with great haste. The word had flashed through the crowd: 'It's the Doll! The Doll is coming!'

A young SS-man with the rank of *Oberscharführer* appeared on the scene. He was extraordinarily handsome. I quickly learned that he was the worst

sadist in Treblinka. The commandant of Treblinka was a captain; he was in command of the camp. But it was the *Oberscharführer* who was [69] really in charge of the murder operations. He was nicknamed ‘The Doll’.²⁴⁶ The Jews had given him that nickname because of his handsome face. It was the habit of this murderer to kill several people every time he strolled through the camp. He would stand off at a distance and observe a group of workers; if by some chance somebody was not working fast enough, or simply happened not to please him, he would come over and beat him with a whip, which he always carried with him, until the blood flowed. Then he would order him to strip naked and would put a bullet in his neck. Sometimes, [70] to ‘change things up’, he would have a Ukrainian do the shooting. On this occasion, the murderer finished off several Jews and then coolly walked away.

We were working very hard. The heat was intense almost the entire time that I was in Treblinka. The terrible stench of the dead bodies settled in our nostrils. We were sick at heart, sweat poured from our bodies without cease, and we were plagued by thirst. We could not get enough water to quench our thirst. When a bucket of water did materialise there was such pushing and shoving that on more than one occasion the bucket was overturned and then nobody had any water. On such occasions [70a] one of the Ukrainians would come over, drive away the crowd with his rifle butt, and hand out the water himself. We did not drink our water; we sipped it as one would the most expensive beverage. [71] Not once in the three weeks that I was in Treblinka did I ever really manage to quench my thirst. Even now, I can still feel this craving for water in my gut. Even now when I start to drink a glass of cold water, I savour it doubly, and at the same time I can feel my fingers tremble; that’s how important this liquid has become for me.

Heaven and earth and bodies

Aside from the thirst and the backbreaking toil, we were plagued by the horror of it all. We could never have pictured the things we now experienced in the flesh. [72] They were worse than even the most lurid horror stories from our childhood about evil witches, robbers, and seven-headed vipers who dragged off people to their caves to suffocate among the corpses and bones of earlier victims.

246 See the Introduction.

There were corpses all over the place, corpses by the tens, hundreds, and thousands. Corpses of men, women, and children of all ages, in various postures and facial expressions, as if they had been frozen immediately after they had taken their last breath. Heaven, earth, and bodies! A gigantic enterprise which manufactured corpses. Only a German could get accustomed to a place like that. I could never get used to the sight of the dead.

We worked on the field of corpses until 7 o'clock at night. [73] Tired, thirsty, broken in body and soul, we returned to rest in the barrack, where the roll call and the associated beatings took place. There we lay down to sleep. We had lived through a third day in the murder centre of Treblinka. [74] The days that followed passed a little more quickly and began to fall into a pattern.

'The Doll' has his fun in the morning

On the fourth day, as I was at work at the graves with my group, the following incident took place involving several young fellows. They had not been working very fast. Suddenly, 'The Doll' appeared on the scene, marched them to the open ditch, and ordered them to undress. In no time at all, they too, were lying naked and dead with the other corpses.

I learned that before the war Lalke had been a prizefighter. Apparently, he also regarded shooting Jews as a kind of sport. Frequently he would appear on the field in excellent spirits. He would come [75] striding up, with light, springy steps, and give a Jew a few punches from behind with his fists. If the Jew fell down, he would give him a playful kick, like a football player. Then, continuing on his way, he would finish him off, either by himself or through one of the Ukrainians, with a bullet in the neck.

When one attracts the attention of a German

The most dangerous thing of all was to do anything that might attract the attention of a German. A certain elderly doctor from Warsaw had his hand bandaged. That was sufficient reason to order him to undress and lay him out dead in the ditch. . . . An invalid with an injured leg would sit while he was sorting out rags. As soon as 'the Doll' saw this, he was a dead man in the wink of an eye. A [76] Jew who worked in the field kitchen scalded himself. So he got a bullet in the neck because he was now unfit for work. As a result, those who got sick, hurt, or bruised kept it to themselves like the most dangerous secret, so that the Germans would not find out. A boy who slept next to me

in the barrack had swollen legs and went to great pains to keep it a secret. But he could not keep his legs covered up all the time, and he was soon cured with a bullet in the neck.

Naturally, the decimation of the people who had been working side by side with me left me stunned. [77] One minute a person would be standing there next to me, toiling by my side, dragging bodies into graves, and then, all of a sudden, he would be lying there, with glassy eyes, naked and dead in a grave where, a moment later, he would vanish from sight as other bodies were piled on top of him.

'I must get out of here. Corpses that give me strength'

Whenever I took a final glance at someone who had been killed I would think that the same fate awaited me, if not today, then tomorrow. I thought of my family across the ocean²⁴⁷ who would never even find out where my remains would be. Young though I was, I would soon lie dead and rot [78] or be cremated, and those who were still alive would be repelled by the sight of my body, just as I was repelled when I had to wrap my arms around the dead bodies of others.

I greatly regretted that I had not looked for ways to steal across borders and join my family while I was still free and able to do so. And as I gazed at the bodies in the open graves I began to think more and more intensely about ways to get out of this place. When I got back to other places in the camp, I would cool off and become resigned. Then I would see only the difficulties and the impossibility of escaping from that hell. But once I was back in the field of corpses I would always gather new energy to think up a way of escaping. The idea and the will to flee became stronger within me every time.

[79] Chapter Four:

Selection

At last, the number of bodies in the great field of corpses began to grow smaller and finally the day came when the field had been cleared. What would they do with us now? No new transports were coming in; what kind of work would

247 See doc. 22 b.

they give us, then? Frightened, we discussed this among ourselves and our hearts told us that our time was drawing near.

One day, in the afternoon, when we came back to the roll call area between the two barracks, they lined us up in fives and we sensed that something was about to happen.

[80] ‘First, a group of Ukrainians ran over to search the piles of rags to make sure that no one was hiding beneath them. They found a few men and stabbed them right then and there with the bayonets which some of the Ukrainians used to carry.’^c

50 men from Treblinka I penal camp worked with us. They wore red patches. The *Scharführer* ordered them to fall out and stationed them to one side. Then he started counting out in fives. He counted out 50 men at random and sent them over to join the red patches. There were a 100 men in all who were marched off to a special barrack. These men were supposed to remain; the others were supposed to go to the bath. I was not among the one hundred.

After the roll call, they let us go back to the barrack as usual, but they told us that we would be called that same night and then we would all have to come out. Finally, the *Scharführer* gave us a speech and took the opportunity [80a] to lecture us, saying that we were not a useful element, that we had only ourselves to blame for everything, and so forth. We understood very well what this meant and had no patience to listen to this tripe.

You can imagine the mood in our group after [81] we had been left alone in our barrack.

The final night of the selected

Was this our last night, or our last hour? We didn’t know, but it was obvious that the end was drawing near.

Different people behaved in different ways. The very young, who had probably never been pious, joined with young Hasidim in reciting the mourners’ *Kaddish*. There was no lack of moralists who interpreted our present misery as God’s way of punishing the Jewish people for its sins. And as they preached, some people did indeed feel sinful and guilty and they began to beat their breasts and recite the *Vidduy*. [82] Others tried to remember some prayer; they swayed and lulled their fears with a tune from the Psalms. Still others simply bawled like children.

'You ought to be ashamed of yourselves! You're crying like old women!' Those who had a better grip on themselves said such things to give the others some courage. They even tried to make us see things in a more cheerful light, saying that the situation wasn't necessarily as bad as all that and that a change could still come.

'If only I could have a drink!' a fat young man whom I knew from Pawia Street cried. Someone else wanted to [83] ease his despair with a cigarette, but it did not occur to anyone to think of ways of saving themselves or of putting up resistance. We were too weakened, too beaten down — and too thirsty.

A Ukrainian tries to cheer us up

The strangest thing of all was that a Ukrainian was among those who tried to cheer us up. He was on guard duty at the barrack and when he heard the commotion and weeping inside he walked in and spoke to us in Russian, telling us not to take things so hard. Nothing would happen, nothing would be done to us; we would go on working the same as before.

[84] A miracle occurs

And, wonder of wonders, his prediction came true. A rare miracle occurred. To this day, I don't know the reason. Some said that there had been a breakdown in the gas chamber. By morning, no one had come for us, and then we had a roll call as usual. It is true that 80 men had been taken out to be shot, but the remainder, a good few hundred people, were assigned new work.

***The Lumpenkommando*²⁴⁸**

Those of us who were left were classified again; some of the carpenters were taken out and sent to the wood-working shop in [85] the German sector of the camp. A group of Jews was assigned to chop down trees in the woods, another group to repair the road leading into the German camp; the largest group of Jews, including myself, was detailed to sort out the clothes and other belongings of those who had perished. Each group had its own designation, which was called out at roll calls.

248 (German) detail sorting the clothes left by the victims.

There was a *Strassenbaukommando*, a *Holzfällerkommando*, a *Maurerkommando*, a *Flaschensortiererkommando*.²⁴⁹ One of the details, the watchmakers, consisted of only 6 men, who were responsible for sorting out gold and valuables. [86] The most important and numerous detail was our *Lumpenkommando*, which had the job of sorting and packing clothing and linens. Each of the details had only one wish: that its job should last as long as possible. We persuaded ourselves that in the meantime help would come to us from somewhere — from overseas, or the war might end, or Russian airplanes . . . There was no lack of naïve people.

Clothes speak volumes

Lined up in double columns, we were led away through three gates to the far barracks, which were located in a separate enclosure on the other side of the German camp.²⁵⁰ These barracks were packed full of rags, which had been lying about unsorted for weeks, or even months. We picked up layer after layer. Apparently, these had been the belongings of Jews from Warsaw, which had been [87] deposited in layers, according to the various types of people who had been brought, one after the other, to Treblinka. First had come the poor, the beggars, the inmates of refugee shelters, followed by increasingly better-quality clothing. At first, we had to handle heavily soiled and lice-infested clothing and underwear. The starving lice crawled all over us from head to toe and there was nothing we could do about it. ‘Some said that we would get typhus; others said, ‘What’s the difference which way we die?’^c But when we had gotten through clearing half a barrack, the stuff got finer and more elegant. We found papers in their pockets, so that in every instance that seemed [88] interesting to us, we were able to establish the identity of the owner of the clothes. There were things also from German Jews, Jews from Vienna and Berlin, who apparently had been brought to Warsaw prior to the *Aktion*.

249 (German) road construction detail, woodcutters’ detail, bricklayers’ detail, bottles’ sorting detail.

250 [Author’s note] see the site map.

Werterfassung: sorting and packing the personal effects of the murdered Jews

But who had the stomach to investigate whose possessions these had been? The work would proceed in the following manner:

We would stand in groups next to piles of personal effects, guarded by a Ukrainian, with an SS-man at the head. ‘As usual, we were constantly hurried on as we worked. *‘Schneller! Schneller!’* They were always in a hurry. The SS-man would saunter through our ranks as we stood, bent over our work, and dish out quick blows left and right.’ [89] We would empty pockets and knapsacks and sort out things by categories: linens, clothing, outerwear, and tie them up in separate bundles. The smaller items, too, were carefully sorted and put in separate piles: soap, matches, toothbrushes, lighters, compacts, belts, flashlights, pencils, gold pens, purses, wallets, etc., etc. [88a] Later, the practise was introduced to have the Jewish Kapo beat us as much as possible while we worked. If he didn’t proceed with sufficient vigour and wasn’t beating someone new all the time, he himself would get lashes from the SS-man.

[89] ‘The Germans made good use of everything, and if a murdered Jew by some chance had happened to be a famous lawyer or an outstanding medical authority, or had talent and knowledge in some other field, they would inherit from him a finer pen, a nicer shirt, or a platinum watch instead of an ordinary gold one.’

Entire stores of haberdashery grew up around us as we worked. Everything was packed away in cases or baskets, which we carried over to a central area, where each case was listed, provided with shipping labels, and expedited to the railroad station for shipment to Germany. It was harder to process the clothes; these had accumulated in such masses that the Germans had to dispense with records and send off this part of the Jewish property without any accounting. ‘It was impossible to speed up the processing of the clothing and as long as I was in Treblinka, I constantly had before my eyes the same mountains of rags, which I had seen when I had first arrived.’ There were also quite a lot of tea kettles, flasks, hot-water bottles, and especially an abundance of bottles, all of which we sorted and packed away for shipping. As I have already mentioned, [90] there was a special bottle-sorting detail (*Flaschensortiererkommando*) and more than one Jew who happened to break a bottle paid for it with a bullet in the neck.

The 6 watchmakers and jewellers, who were employed at assessing, sorting, and packing the gold, the watches, the other jewellery, and the currency which had been found among the personal effects, were working in a corner of their own. ‘Like all the other work details, they, too, worked under a German supervisor, a portly, somewhat elderly SS-man who didn’t treat them badly. When it came time for a selection, he would keep them late at their work and thereby save their lives. You never know with a German! Perhaps his motive was that he wanted his charges to be efficient.’ [90a] Other German group commanders, too, didn’t like to change their personnel and sometimes would even protect their Jews when they learned that a selection was about to take place. I myself experienced this while I was working in the woods.

I should point out here that the selections were an eternal sword of Damocles hanging over our heads. We would get up every morning before the signal and wash and make ourselves look as youthful and vigorous as possible. Not even in my best days had I shaved so often as I did in Treblinka. Everybody shaved every morning and washed their faces with cologne taken from packages abandoned by Jewish prisoners. Some even put on powder or rouge. They would pinch their cheeks – so it was told – to give themselves a healthy complexion. ‘The prize at stake was a few more days, or perhaps even a few more weeks, of life.’

[90]²⁵¹ The initial, simpler stages of money-sorting were assigned to us. Only individual valises or boxes filled with valuables were taken straight to the jewellers. The money we found in pockets or purses was thrown into separate piles. Coins and banknotes were separated, as were dollars, pounds, tsarist gold roubles, and the ‘junk’, [91] as we called ordinary Polish currency. Everyone who was taken to the *Umschlagplatz*, no matter how poor, had brought with him some kind of money for a rainy day, whatever valuables he possessed, with which he might be able to save his life. In the very first poster the Germans put up in Warsaw, they did us the favour of announcing that we would be permitted to take our valuables with us . . .

251 The added page [90a] continues the issue raised on p. [90], while the other part of p. [90] is continued on p. [91], hence the repeated page number.

'For God's sake don't forget to take the valuables!'

We found whole fortunes sewn away in secret pockets, in ladies' corsets, in jacket linings. Valuables were often given to the women to conceal. 'They would bake diamonds into bread, or place them into little matchboxes and cover them with matches.' The foremen ordered us to search everything for valuables, and our so-called sabotage consisted of not putting too much effort into carrying out these orders. For this reason, plenty of hidden treasures probably remained in the clothing; [92] these may or may not turn up sometime in the future. In this way, huge fortunes were buried or incinerated together with those Jews who were dumped fully clothed into the special mass graves in the death field.

Jews tear up money

All over Treblinka we would find scattered bits and pieces of money: notes including dollar bills and other foreign currencies. These banknotes had been torn up and thrown away by Jews who finally understood what kind of place this was. This was their final protest and act of revenge before they disappeared forever in the ' *Bad[e]anstalt*²⁵² . . . [93] The bosses of Treblinka didn't worry too much about trying to prevent us from taking some of the gold and valuables for ourselves because they knew that eventually they would be able to get their hands on it – when they would send us naked to our deaths . . .

The millionaires of Treblinka

Some of the Germans were more concerned with finding and collecting treasures of their own. They made no effort to hide this from us, but amongst themselves the Germans were wary of each other. They would come right over to us and take away a nice gold watch, which they would immediately take to one of the six Jewish watchmakers, to put in working order. Or they would pick out a particularly unusual ring or some other item of women's jewellery, no doubt [94] as gifts for their sweethearts in the Fatherland. All of them – both Germans and Ukrainians — had so much money that they didn't even bother to touch it. I think that they all became millionaires in Treblinka.

We didn't bother about such things. There were few among us who even believed they would ever be able to get out. Nevertheless, temptation would come now and then and, without any specific plan, or intent, one or

252 (German) bathhouse.

another of us would hide a few items, and if someone managed to escape from Treblinka these things came in handy, because both Jews and peasants in the Treblinka area would ask huge sums from Treblinka escapees [95] for the smallest favour. If someone was noticed hiding something from among the valuables, his neighbour would say to him, 'What do you want that for? You're not going to get out of here alive anyway. These scoundrels won't leave any living witnesses.'

But I kept thinking all the time about escaping and every once in a while I used to take some of the money and valuables and bury it in certain places. Either I'll survive — I thought — [96] and I'll return here someday and take it out, or if not — at least those fiends will not get their hands on it.

When you recognise the possessions of your own people

From time to time, as we sorted out the clothing, it would happen that one or another of us might recognise items that had belonged to a relative or friends. If we looked at the documents found with these items, we would soon see whether our assumption had been correct. A few sighs or, more rarely, a few tears, were the only memorials to those who had perished.

After I had been working a few days at sorting personal effects, no new transports had yet arrived. I was assigned along with 14 other men to clean up [97] the road to the *gazownia*²⁵³, or, as they called it, the '*Bad[e]lanstalt*'. That area aroused the greatest fear among all of us. But I had never been there, so far.

The 'rubbish' on the last road

The road leading from the left-hand barracks on the assembly area to the building in the middle of the woods was concealed by trees. This was the path upon which hundreds of thousands of Jewish men, women, and children ran their last race, a narrow sandy winding path bordered on both sides with a barbed wire fence . . .²⁵⁴

[98] As we came closer to the path, we saw the 'trash' which they wanted us to clean up before new transports arrived. This 'trash' consisted of a veritable windfall of banknotes which people had torn up and thrown away before

253 (Polish) literally, gas factory; here: gas chamber.

254 [Author's note] see the site map.

they died. We were given special birch brooms and rakes for the job. With the rakes, we raked up gold coins, jewels, and diamonds from the sand. One of us picked up a gold twenty-dollar coin and took it over to the Ukrainian who was standing guard over us, to try to get him off our backs as we worked.

[99] ‘What good is this money to me?’ answered the Ukrainian. ‘Don’t you know that none of us will get out of here alive, either?’ This particular Ukrainian happened to be a fairly decent fellow. He didn’t rush us at our work and didn’t beat us. Only when a German showed up, he would put on an act and shout at us, ‘*Bystro, bystro!*’²⁵⁵ We kept busy this way, cleaning up the ground until the evening roll call and then we went to sleep.

The next morning, fifteen men, [100] including myself, were taken out of our group and escorted once again to the gas chamber area. This time we were given a different job; we were ordered to help put up the walls of a new building.²⁵⁶

I already know the whole camp

Some said that this would be a crematorium for the bodies of those who had been asphyxiated in the gas chamber because burying them took up too much space. I came to a new area with a separate barrack for the workers — a kingdom unto itself. In this way, I got an opportunity [101] to acquaint myself with the most secret and important part of the camp — the part where the mechanical murder factory itself was located, and also the separate field for the dead where those who were murdered there were buried. One after another, I was able to learn about all the parts of the *Vernichtungslager*,²⁵⁷ Treblinka II.

Inside the camp as a whole were five smaller barbed wire enclosures within the area of one large enclosure.²⁵⁸ [102] The area where I had been working on the rags was the centre of the *Werterfassung*, that is, the place where the loot taken from those who had perished was gathered and picked over.²⁵⁹ Two barracks there were packed with the personal effects of Jews. Later, when some of the items had been sent away so that there was more room,

255 (Russian) ‘Quickly, quickly!’

256 [Author’s note] see the site map.

257 (German) extermination camp, i.e. death camp.

258 [Author’s note] see the site map.

259 [Author’s note] see the site map.

the workers employed in the *Werterfassung* were moved in also. I only spent one night in this new place, but I'll get to that later.

Near this area the so-called 'German camp' was located, through which our column [103] would march every day on the way to work. There were two long barracks which stood facing each other.²⁶⁰ The bedrooms, kitchen, and mess hall of the SS-men was located in one of the barracks. In the barrack facing it was the commandant's apartment and the food storehouse, where the Germans kept the best groceries they had found inside the baggage of the Jews. There was no shortage there of wines, sardines, candy, and imported delicacies from food packages which Jews used to receive from overseas, and so forth. We too, would find more than one fine snack or drink there. But as time went by, [104] the food supply from the packages began to dwindle, and, because no new transports were coming in, we began to get hungry.

Behind the food storehouse stood a little house where a special category of Jews lived. These individuals wore yellow patches. They were a few dozen Jews from the neighbouring towns, who had been put to work several months earlier to build the camp. In recognition of their services, some of them were allowed to remain alive with the special job of waiting on the Germans and Ukrainians who were quartered here. Most of them were artisans [105] in various fields, and they had been joined by some skilled workers from Warsaw with various trades. Together, they groomed, shaved, barbered, dressed, and shod the gang of murderers. Several girls were working in the kitchens. They were the only females who walked the earth of Treblinka for more than twenty-four hours. Those same barracks also housed the workshop for the Jewish artisans. The yellow patches — they can really be called the yellow survival badges — were worn by the Jews on their right knee. As I have already mentioned, there was one other class of Jews in the camp [106] with a longer life span. These were the privileged characters from the Treblinka I penal camp; they wore a red patch on their knee as their own badge of survival.

The most horrifying of horrors

Step by step I got to know four distinct parts of the camp, including the large, five-sided field of corpses, which was fenced off next to the railroad tracks,²⁶¹

260 [Author's note] see the site map.

261 [Author's note] see the site map.

and the roll-call square between the two barracks. But I had not yet become acquainted with the most terrible of all parts of the camp — the gas chambers. [107] That day, I was to come quite close to this, the fifth and final part of the camp.

I forgot to say that there were towers at all four corners of the camp, each of them three stories high, in which Ukrainian guards constantly paced back and forth. These were the watchtowers which served as observation posts to make sure that no one could escape from the camp. At the top of the watchtowers were machine guns, searchlights which sent out broad beacons every few minutes to every part of the camp, making the night as bright [108] as midday. Only on nights when Warsaw was bombed were the searchlights off.

Most of the buildings in the camp were constructed of wood. The gas chamber and the new building — which was in the process of being built at the time and to which we were assigned as construction helpers — were made of brick.

We were put to work slaking lime in the pits which had been dug. Barrels of water, drawn from a special well, stood nearby. It was from these barrels [109] that, for the only time while I was in Treblinka, I was able to satisfy my thirst a little more. ‘But it did not do me any good. Just like others who finally got a chance to grab a little more water, I was seized by diarrhoea that same day. It was very debilitating.’^c Apart from that little amount of water, the workers were no better off in this area than elsewhere in the camp. On the contrary, here in the ‘death camp’, as that place was known, the treatment the workers received was even harsher, if that was possible.

Towards noon, when the sun was burning at its strongest, I witnessed a scene which had the most terrible impression on me.

How an SS-Man treated a worker

On my way back from the kitchen, I happened to pass by the barrack which housed those who were regularly employed in that area. In general, these people had no contact [110] with the workers in the rest of the camp. There, I came upon three Jews lying on the ground. I didn’t know how they got there. Perhaps they hadn’t been able to persist in working, or perhaps they had collapsed from exhaustion, and wanted to rest a little, and had been caught by an SS-man. Now that sadist was standing over them with a thick whip in his hand, laying into one of them. The man was lying naked and totally unconscious.

But the German still refused to leave him alone and kept whipping him with all his might on his naked belly. The others, it seems, had already received their share, [111] since they were lying there bloody and unconscious. As I looked at this scene, I thought to myself that compared to this, the place where I had worked before had been much better, and I resolved to get out of here no matter what the consequences and go back to the old place.

But the longish, not too large brick building standing in the middle of the 'death camp' had a strange fascination for me: this was the gas chamber. Before I left the area, I felt I had to catch a glimpse of this, the most terrible part of the camp where the sinister crime was perpetrated on the Jews.

I had already come quite close to it several times, [112] when I and others had been carrying water for the lime and clay from the well which stood right next to the building.²⁶² But it had not occurred to me to leave my group and move a little closer to see. Only as we were returning from our mid-day meal and our column halted for a while, did I sneak away from them and move towards the open door of the gas chamber.

'Bathhouse' in the middle of the green grove. What can one see through the open door

I think I have already noted that this building was surrounded by a wooded area. Now I noticed that, spread over the flat roof of the building, was a [113] green wire net whose edges extended slightly beyond the building's walls. This may have been for protection against air attacks. Beneath the net, on top of the roof, I could see a tangle of pipes. . .

The walls of the building were covered with concrete. The gas chamber had not been operating for a week. I was able to look inside through one of the two strong white-washed iron exits which happened to be open.

I saw before me a room which was not too large. It looked like a regular shower room with all the facilities of a public bathhouse. [114] The walls of the room were covered with small, white tiles. It was very fine, clean work. The floor was covered with orange terracotta tiles. Metal faucets were set into the ceiling.

And . . . nothing more. A comfortable, neat little bathhouse set in the middle of a wooded area. There was nothing more to see. But as one stood

262 [Author's note] see the site map.

in front of the entrance to this 'bathhouse' one could see hills of lime, and beneath them the giant, still open mass graves where tens, perhaps hundreds of thousands of 'bathers' lay in eternal rest. Later on, I was told that here, too, they had begun to cremate the bodies in the ditches.

[115] A further technical improvement for destroying the bodies of the dead Jews — and who knows if it was only dead bodies — would no doubt be introduced in the building on whose construction we were working. People said that it would be a crematorium.

The chest for golden teeth

Standing next to the 'bathhouse' was a large chest. As I later learned, this chest was used 'for a special kind of *Werterfassung*. When the machine was in operation and batches of corpses at a time were dragged out from the 'bathhouse,' a Jewish 'dentist' would stand there with forceps, examine the mouth of each corpse and extract any gold teeth or platinum caps which he found there. More than one chest full of gold had been accumulated in this manner. The Germans are good housekeepers.^c

As I stood before the door of the Treblinka *Bad[e]anstalt*, I made a new discovery. Earlier, it had seemed to me that I heard sounds of music. I had thought it came from a radio loudspeaker which the Germans had installed in order not to be isolated — God forbid — from the culture of their Fatherland out here in the middle of nowhere.

[116] The open-air concert at the death camp

I was now to learn that their concern for musical culture went even further. Under a tree, about 40 metres from the *Bad[e]anstalt*, not far from the path on which the Jews were driven into the 'bath', was a small orchestra consisting of three Jews with yellow patches and three Jewish musicians from Stoczek (who were later joined by another, better musician from Warsaw). There they stood, playing their instruments. I don't know why, but what particularly caught my eye was [117] a long reed instrument, a sort of fife or flute. (K. demonstrates with a morbid laugh how the Jew stood with puffed-up cheeks, fingers moving in a blur, playing up a storm on the instrument). In addition, there was a violin and, I believe, a mandolin. The musicians were standing there and raising a ruckus for all they were worth. They were probably playing the latest hits which were popular with the Germans and Ukrainians, for whom they also

used to play at shindigs in the guard stations. The Jews would play while the gentiles danced. ‘A musical people, those Ukrainians.’^c

Later on, when I made more detailed inquiries, I found out that this sort of Jewish open-air concert was also held whenever new transports arrived. No doubt the Jewish tunes [118] merged with the shouts and screams of the Jewish men, women, and children who were being driven into the death bath.

There they would stand and play all the time, the Jewish musicians, near the narrow path along which other Jews ran their last race, opposite the open ditches where tens of thousands of Jews lay in their eternal repose. There, they stood and played. They were playing for the right to remain alive a few weeks longer.

The anniversary of the outbreak of war

[117a] On the eve of the anniversary of the outbreak of the war — the night between 31 August and 1 September — the SS-men arranged a musical entertainment for the Jews. The musicians were taken to the roll-call square and ordered to play Jewish tunes. Several young Jews were ordered to come forward and start to dance. An elderly Ukrainian corporal directed the show. The Germans thoroughly enjoyed the show; they were clapping and rolling with laughter . . .

[118]²⁶³ I returned to my group and continued to work, my mind bent on getting out of the death camp as soon as possible. An opportunity to do this soon materialised. Early one afternoon, I noticed a group [119] of people coming in from the woods, carrying on their shoulders saplings which they had cut down.

The ‘kindergarten’ of Treblinka

These little trees were supposed to be planted in front of the big mass graves of the death field, near the railroad tracks, to conceal the graves from the eyes of outsiders. The sadists of Treblinka, with their heavy-handed humour, referred to them as the ‘kindergarten’. Seeing the people carrying the saplings, I picked up a branch from the ground and yelled, ‘Hello there!’ as if I had lagged behind and was now running to catch up with them.

263 The issue raised on p. [117] is continued on p. [118] and the added page [117a], while the other part of p. [118] is continued on p. [119], hence the repeated page number.

I escaped the death camp

As I ran, I kept looking behind me to see whether by chance a bullet was flying after me. But I got out all right and after I [120] had made my way through the fence of the death camp I threw away the branch and re-joined my *Lumpenkommando*, which happened to be working that day along the railroad tracks preparing the bundles of rags for transportation.

Awaiting new transports

Late that afternoon, preparations were begun for the reception of new transports, which were to start arriving again the next day. During the roll call 40 people who could speak German were taken out of line. I, too, reported for duty. We thought we would be assigned as interpreters in the penal camp,²⁶⁴ where were the Poles. One of the SS-men even gave us a speech [121] with the usual sweet talk, telling us that we were among the chosen few, that nothing would happen to us, and so forth. We had nothing to lose, so we easily let ourselves be convinced to believe that something good was about to happen. We were glad that we were the most fortunate prisoners in the whole camp, because we had hopes of getting out alive. Why, we would be able to leave the camp the very next morning! We listened until the end of the speech and then went to sleep. At roll call the next morning, our group was called out and told to line up separately from the others. 'The Doll' then performed a special small-scale selection with us. He asked each of us our names. If the person asked gave his name in a firm, loud voice, that was good. But if, by chance, he hesitated for a second and called out his name in a somewhat less hearty fashion, he was rejected and sent back to the rest of the group. In this way only about 35 remained of the original 40, and now it turned out that we weren't being sent out anywhere, but that we would remain in camp to help receive and process the new transports. We were given assignments, some to open the freight wagons, some to [123] separate the new arrivals — men to the right, women to the left — and so forth. I was assigned to take away the shoes taken off by the new arrivals as they undressed before going to the 'showers'.

We expected the new transport from Warsaw to arrive at any minute.

264 Treblinka I.

New transports

What would the new transport bring us? We had already been in Treblinka more than a week, living in terror of the selections all the while. We knew well that the execution of our death sentences had been put off only for a short time. ‘Perhaps it’ll be our turn today’, we would think to ourselves as we got into our clothes in the morning. And we groomed ourselves and shaved as thoroughly as we could in order to look sufficiently young and vigorous to pass the selection.

After roll call, our group of 35 men was placed in our new work stations, ready to meet the incoming transport. In the meantime, the rest of the workers had gone back to their old jobs.

About 8 a.m., the train [125] arrived from Warsaw. We saw the camp gates open and close, and in a minute or so the black wedding²⁶⁵ was played out with great fanfare.

All the doors of the freight wagons were thrown open at once. The Ukrainians and SS-men leaped into action with their whips and the hot pursuit of the new arrivals was under way. Whoever had the strength to do so raced out of the dark wagons into the bright light of the day. The people felt like stretching their legs, restoring circulation to limbs that had gone to sleep from sitting or lying down so long in cramped positions, but this was not the place where they would be allowed to recover from the ordeal they had endured. ‘*Schneller, schneller!*’ the tormentors shouted. We, the ‘old-timers’, who had gone through the death gauntlet only a [126] week earlier, looked into the frightened faces of the Jews and understood their feelings. As they ran past, they tried to communicate with us. ‘What’s going to happen to us? What should we do? Tell us, Jews, what should we do?’ Some of them recognised among us relatives or neighbours who waved or gestured to them, trying to make them understand that it was impossible to talk now because the Germans were watching. Some tried to signal the newcomers to mingle with us, the workers. A few young people did indeed try to get lost in our crowd of ‘old-timers’, acting as if they were helping receive the new transport.

265 Probably an association with a Jewish custom of a wedding at a cemetery.

In this way they saved themselves for the time being. But the question was, for how long?

[127] This time, the leader of the killers, the commandant of Treblinka, had also turned out to welcome the new transport. He was a captain, 50 years old, stout and of medium height. He had puffed-up red cheeks and a black moustache; he was the very image of the active soldier. He was always full of anger; it is hard to tell whether it was only towards Jews. He used to carry a rubber truncheon in his hand, and never failed to vent his anger when he passed some Jews. '*Idioten!*' was his favourite term of insult, and he would utter it in a squeaking voice. Whenever you heard that squeak, you could be sure that someone had received his portion, [128] because he let out the squeak at the same moment that he started hitting his victim with all the strength and rage of a well-fed man of action. '*Verdammtes Volk!*' he used to scream, '*Verfluchte Judenbande! Verflucht! Gewitter nocheinmal!*'²⁶⁶ After each blow, he would almost bend down to the ground, like a man cutting grain. And again and again he would squeak, '*Ihr Idioten! Idio-o-o-ten!!!!*'²⁶⁷

On that particular day, the captain was dressed all in white — a white uniform and a white cap, and his aide-de-camp, a tall, fair-haired lieutenant of about his age, was wearing a brand-new white jacket. As I looked at them, [128a] I thought to myself that they ought to be wearing white gloves, too, because hangmen always used to wear white gloves when they performed their duties.

This couple of sedate old Germans always went about together, strolling around the camp and beating up Jews.

This particular day seemed to be a sort of holiday for them. The death carnival had begun again. [129] Not all the Jews had left the freight wagons. Just as in all the other transports, the new arrivals included many who had passed out or died during the journey due to the terrible crowding, filth and lack of air. We had to drag both kinds directly over to the open, always ready, mass graves and throw them in. Frequently those who had only fainted woke up along the way and begged for water and help, but there was nothing we could do for them. The only help we could give them so they wouldn't

266 (German) 'Cursed nation! Damn bunch of Jews, be cursed again!'

267 (German) 'You idiots! Idio-o-o-ts!'

be tossed into the grave alive was to call over one of the Ukrainians and ask him to put an end to their misery [130] with a well-aimed bullet.

Now the multitude of Jews was standing at the second gate of this hell and they were separated: men to the right, women and children to the left. Families tried to say goodbye to each other, but the tormentors had no time. 'Faster! faster!' Wives were torn away from their husbands, children from their fathers, mothers from their sons, and most had no chance even for one last hug, look, or kiss. '*Schneller! Schneller!*' — Because time didn't stand still, the busy season was underway, and more trains were on their way, awaiting their turn . . .

The women and children were chased into the barracks on the left to undress. I had been assigned to gather and remove the shoes of those who undressed and I stationed myself at the open side entrance of the [131] barrack.

'Jew, what are they going to do with us?'

It is hard to describe the scene inside the barrack — the confusion of the women, the terror of the children, the tumult, the weeping. I began to think that perhaps it was better that the murder operations at Treblinka were performed with such haste. Perhaps, if the processing of these doomed people, who already sensed the sinister character of this place from whose terrible grip there would be no escape, would have been allowed to proceed at a slower pace, their pain, anxiety and misery would have been even worse. But as things were, the people had no time even to consider what was happening to them, or to catch their breath. But I doubt that the hangmen were motivated by a desire to cut short [132] the pain of the Jews. They proceeded in this manner primarily because they were afraid to have too large masses of Jews assembled at any one time, lest the Jews have a chance to talk, plan, or act. The Jews were not to be given a chance to realise in full what was going to be done with them. It was, therefore, better to confuse and befuddle the new arrivals as much as possible.

Suddenly, as I stood by the open door, watching the wild scene before me, a girl, a pretty, burgeoning young flower, came running over to me and asked me in great haste:

'Jew, what are they going to do with us?'

It was hard for me to tell her the truth. I hesitated and [133] tried to answer her with a look, to calm her fears. But my bearing filled the girl with even more terror and she cried out:

'So tell me right now, what are they going to do with us? Maybe I can still get out of here!'

I had no choice but to say something, and so I answered her with one brief word:

'Scrap!'

The girl left me and started running all over the barrack like a mouse caught in a trap. She was looking for loose boards, doors, and windows. Back and forth she ran, until her turn came to hand in her clothes and an SS-man began to [134] hit her with his whip so she would strip naked.

The older women were calmer. Some tried to find consolation with God and prepared to die with the name of God on their lips. Others prayed for a miracle, for a last minute rescue, while others had given up all hope. I saw one tall woman, wearing a ritual wig, standing with arms raised like a *balt-file*²⁶⁸ at his lectern. Behind her, a group of women had gathered, raising their arms and repeating after her, word for word:

'*Shema Yisroel, Adonay Eloheynu!*' 'O God, my one and only God!' the woman cried to a *Yom Kippur* melody, [135] stretching out her arms as if toward some sort of heaven which Jews never look upon when they say their prayers. 'God, You One and Only God, take revenge on our enemies for their crimes! We are going to die for *Kiddush Hashem*.²⁶⁹ Let our sacrifice not be in vain! Avenge our blood and the blood of our children, *venomar, amen!*²⁷⁰

This, more or less, is what the Jewish woman cried in a loud voice, and the other women repeated it after her. They took a few steps back, as one does on concluding the recitation of the *Shmoayne esre*,²⁷¹ and it so happened that the soldiers did not pay any attention to these women until they had fallen silent and had gotten lost in the rest of the crowd.

Some children had come here with their [136] mothers; others had arrived without their mothers, and it's hard to say which of the two represented the greater tragedy. Mothers had to lead their grown daughters to their death,

268 (Hebrew, *baal-tefila*) prayer leader.

269 (Hebrew) sanctification of the Name [of God]) — willingness to accept martyrdom and death for the faith.

270 (Hebrew) and let us say amen.

271 (Hebrew, *shemone esre*) literally, eighteen; the eighteen benedictions said in the three daily prayers.

much as in normal times they would have led them to the *khupe*,²⁷² and they sent them off with words of love, as one would bid farewell to someone who had already died. The moans of the Jewish women in the barrack sounded like the moans you get to hear at funerals. Here, the people were the mourners at their own funeral.

*'Ja chcę się pożegnać z tatusiem!'*²⁷³ a little boy of about eight cried. He had come here with his father, and he didn't want to undress before saying goodbye to him. The father stood [137] at the other side of the door and could not go to him anymore. He was being watched by one guard and his son by another. But a miracle happened. A Ukrainian corporal who was on duty in the barrack was somehow moved. He understood the Polish words and he complied with the child's request. He took the boy outside to his father, who picked him up in his arms, kissed his downy cheeks and then set him back down on the ground. Pacified, the little delinquent returned to the barrack with the Ukrainian and got undressed. His last wish had been carried out.

Actually, I could not observe things closely. I [138] had neither the time nor the heart for it; I did not want it to affect me too deeply. Something inside kept telling me, 'Spare your nerves! You mustn't break down!'

I heeded this warning. As I watched the scene in the barrack and heard the words and the cries, I suffered greatly. I saw beautiful children who looked like little angels, young girls in their first bloom, and my heart almost burst with pain and anger at how such beauty could be turned into ashes, but this also taught me one lesson: 'Get out, get out of here, so you'll live to see revenge, to see something else with those eyes which had to look upon scenes like these!'

[139] I took away the women's shoes, tied them in pairs and put them down outside on a pile, to be carried away to the assembly point.

'Idioten!' I suddenly heard the familiar squeak right next to me and that very minute I felt a sharp pain in my face. At first I thought that one of my eyes had been knocked out. The commandant himself was honouring me with his attention; he started to belabour my head with his rubber truncheon. My offence was that I had been losing too much time from my work. I wasn't supposed to be tying the [140] shoes together; this was their job, as they got

272 (Hebrew, *huppah*) wedding canopy, marriage ceremony, wedding; see footnote 229.

273 (Polish, in Latin characters) 'I want to say goodbye to Daddy!'

ready for their bath. They were supposed to tie their own shoes neatly together and hand them over in perfect order. The women at the barrack door looked on in fear and sorrow as this bastard tortured me, and they quickly started tying their shoes together, just to get rid of the mad German dog.

Someone said very correctly that the Jews were more afraid of the Germans than they were of death. They ran right into the arms of the Angel of Death just so they did not have to look into the faces of any more Germans.

When the captain finally got tired of beating me and, exhausted, left me alone, I had to start shouting at the women to hand me their shoes. A few minutes later, after the captain had rested, [141] he again felt like beating up somebody, and so he started 'helping me out' in teaching the women how to hand in their shoes. With the same strength that he had used on me, and with the same squeak, '*Idioten!*' he burst into the barrack, fell upon the women and children like a hawk upon a chicken coop, and started to beat them all mercilessly with his truncheon. There was a lot of pushing as everyone tried to get as far away as possible from the killer with the red cheeks and the black moustache . . .

Meanwhile, work went on as usual. Somewhere, deep in the woods, the boilers had already been heated and the pipes filled.

The Germans and [142] Ukrainians began to chase the first batch of naked women and children along the path to the bath.

Now there was a new outburst of screams and cries. The last chase had begun and instinctively, perhaps like animals in the slaughterhouse, they sensed what was in store for themselves. But among the women there was also no lack of naivety and the credulous creatures who really believed that they were going to be given a shower, and they took with them a towel and a piece of soap . . .

Before the men were taken to the bath, they were selected. The entire group was separated and about 500 (143) younger men were chosen and were told to move off to the side. The older men were told to move into the barrack which the women had just vacated. They were ordered to undress and to hand over their shoes, and so the whole procedure was set in motion. The only difference was that the men were much calmer than the women, more composed and resigned. If someone wept, he did so quietly, to himself. Some of the more religious people recited the *kaddish* or the *Vidduy* and told each other that they were dying for *Kiddush Hashem*. When the doors of the barrack were

shut behind them, after they had been driven out naked to their last walk, no weeping, no shouting was heard coming from the wood . . .

[144] The first transport from Warsaw had already been dealt with, but what was going to happen to us? We had seen another group of 500 people being selected . . .

Suddenly, a rumour spread that a Jew had told the authorities about the inmates plotting an uprising against the German and Ukrainian crew at the camp. We understood that there would be real trouble now. And before we knew it we realised that we, the long-term inmates, were now beyond the barbed wire fence that surrounded the two barracks and the roll-call square. It was noon but we had not been given any soup from the field kitchen. Our soup [145] had been given to the newly selected ones. We all grew tired and weak: how would we be able to save ourselves? There seemed to be no way out.

Spurred on by my constant, stubborn idea that I had to get out alive, I began to explore every possibility, determined not to give up hope. First I went over to the *Scharführer* who was hanging around our area, and told him that I had accidentally been left behind outside the fence and I really belonged to the group that was inside. The answer was a flick of the whip: ‘*Halt die Schnauze, Jude!*’²⁷⁴ There was nothing I could do. But a few minutes later, when the *Scharführer* had wandered off, I tried again. I went over to the Ukrainian guard at the entrance [146] to the enclosure. I picked up a gold twenty-dollar coin from the sand and pressed it into his hand so that he would let me through. ‘*Na shto mne dengi?*’²⁷⁵ he growled, but I was in luck anyway. I don’t know whether it was on account of the bribe or not, but he let me through. I went into the area farthest inside and joined the group of workers with red patches who had separate quarters in our barrack.²⁷⁶ Reluctantly, they allowed me to join them. I found a piece of red rag, cut out a red triangle patch for myself, and acted as though I was doing the same work as they were. I was already glad that I had managed to save myself [147] for the time being.

It wasn’t long until we heard heavy gunfire over to the right, from the big field of mass graves. The shooting continued for about half an hour. We knew

274 (German) ‘Shut your trap, Jew!’

275 (Russian) ‘What do I need money for?’

276 [Author’s note] see the site map.

very well what it meant. They were finishing off the five hundred men from the previous shift. I had been able to slip away from them.

'*Was machst du hier, du verfluchter Sauhund?*'²⁷⁷ I suddenly heard the familiar squeak beside me, and felt his whip coming down on my head. I was still hurting badly from the whipping I had received that morning from the commandant; now this new heavy blow almost knocked me unconscious. [148] But my will, my determination to remain alive, constantly gave me new strength. This was the same *Scharführer* whom I had previously told that I belonged to the group working inside the fence. He had recognised me and remembered that he had forbidden me to come here. Now I could already feel his paw dragging me away by the collar to be shot.

Mustering my very best German, I answered him.

'*Ich habe mich meine Gruppe ausgeschliessen, ich arbeite mit diesen Leuten. Fragen Sie den Kapo.*'²⁷⁸

The trick with the Kapo worked.

A few days earlier, I had had a little chat with the Jewish head of the group with the [149] red patches. It turned out that, like myself, he had relatives in Mauritius, and he knew me.

'*Kapo, komm mal her!*' The *Scharführer* barked at him, without relinquishing his grip on my collar. '*Arbeit der Mann mit Euch zusammen?*'²⁷⁹ '*Jawohl, Herr Scharführer, er arbeit sehr gut*',²⁸⁰ the Kapo replied. Once again, I was saved.

As we cleaned up the roll-call square we were deeply depressed. The new setup wasn't clear as yet. The new group of workers selected from the Warsaw transport was also in the roll-call square, but they hadn't yet received any assignments. A little later, [150] the lieutenant showed up in the yard, called over the Jewish Kapo, and officially notified him that the five hundred people had been shot because they had been plotting a revolt.

Clearly, this communication was no accident. It was only another link in the chain of lies and terror in which the bosses of the camp kept us enmeshed.

277 (German) 'What are you doing here, you bloody bastard?'

278 (German) 'All I did was join my own group. I am supposed to be working with these people. Please ask the Kapo.'

279 (German) 'Kapo, come over here.' 'Is this man working with you?'

280 (German). 'Yes, Mr *Scharführer*, he is a very good worker.'

The fact is that the Germans really were afraid that the Jews might commit some act of revenge or make attempts at self-defence, and so their entire policy was designed to forestall any possible chance of danger to their own people, no matter how remote. That was why they didn't allow those who had become familiar with the camp to remain alive too long. But at the same time they kept these people captive with false hopes that they would remain alive [151] if only they would do their work, keep quiet, and not try to plot anything. This strategy did indeed sow defeatism and demoralisation among the young workers, who in their desperation might otherwise have been able to unite for some concerted action. Actually, this was just a continuation of the strategy which had been employed during the *Aktionen* in the larger cities. The people were led by the nose so that each one of them would be fully occupied with his own problem and cherish the illusion that he could be able to avoid the worst as long as he conformed to each day's new demands. And, just as in the workshops in Warsaw, everyone saw the spectre of a selection before his eyes.

[152] As far as I know, there was no effort at collective action by the Jews in Treblinka.²⁸¹ There were only some isolated attempts, as I will have occasion to tell later on. Perhaps the plotters had been given away by an informer. It was rumoured that a young man from the provinces — he was even pointed out to me among the workers — had wanted to get into the good graces of the Germans and had run to them with the tale that the Jews were plotting an uprising.

This is the sad truth.

I spent that night in the barrack with the red-patch workers, who occupied a separate section there. Not a trace remained of my former comrades. [153] They were already sleeping that night on the other side of the wall, on the other side of the fence, in the mass graves. I was to meet only one of them the next day — but what a meeting it was! This was quite a young man, perhaps 17–18 years old; I think he hailed from Kielce County. This is what had happened to him: The execution of the 500 was underway, with 10 men being taken at a time, ordered to strip naked, positioned next to the open ditch, and getting a bullet in the neck. After a while, the executioners saw that this was

281 On 2 August 1943 Treblinka prisoners staged a revolt. They attacked the guards, set the camp ablaze, and a few hundred prisoners escaped. Approximately 100 people managed to survive the war.

taking too long, so they finished off the slaughter with the aid of a machine gun. This young man had been part of the first group and it just so happened that in his case the bullet [153] had missed its mark. It had only grazed his cheek. But the young man had enough sense to pretend that he had been shot. (K. imitates roughly how one's head slumps forward after being hit by a bullet in the neck.) He remained lying in the ditch until that evening. He then crawled out, found something to wear among the rags and remained in the pile of rags until the next morning. That's where we found him — I, and a young man from the red-patch group. He had developed a fever from his wound, but otherwise he was ready to fight for his life no matter what he felt. As soon as he saw us he started to beg us pitifully for a little water to [155] wash the blood from his cheek so that nobody would see he had been hit. His cheek was quite swollen. I can still see his face before me and his plea still rings in my ears. 'Have pity on me, dear Jews . . . Water . . . Some water!'

There could be no question of getting any water. It was impossible to go to the well for water, and we had no cologne or any other liquid on hand. We tried to look through the packages and bags, but before we could find anything there, one of the chief sadists in the camp, the *Scharführer* whom I had encountered [156] on my first day there, noticed that something unusual was going on. He came over to us, led the youth to the ditch, and ordered him to undress once again. This time the bullet did not miss its mark. . . .

Meanwhile, on that day, the uproar really began at the camp. Transport after transport arrived. So as not to have too many people at a time in one place, some of the wagons were detained at Małkinia, and whenever one batch had been finished off, the next one was brought on.

I am neither able nor willing to dwell on the horrible scenes [157] I watched. The yellowed faces, the eyes, the bent backs of children who looked like little old people . . . I don't want to dredge up the nightmare. The wound will never heal, anyway . . . All I want to tell is how one young girl tried to save herself.

Women had it much harder in Treblinka than men. If some men, young men, succeeded in remaining alive, in a few isolated cases even managing to escape from the murder establishment, I believe that not one woman survived here for more than a day.

One young girl from Warsaw had a bright idea. She would put on men's clothes and mingle with the men working here. Somehow, she got hold of

a suit and had [158] actually managed to leave the barrack, but the masquerade did not last long. She was found out, beaten, and forced to strip naked once again. And so she vanished along with the others.

I avoided the barrack that day. I was still sore from the blows I had received from the commandant the day before, in the incident with the shoes. I tried to keep away as far as possible from the commotion. I spent my time baling rags; I could not bear to watch all that suffering. I became more determined than ever and strained every nerve to find a way to get out of there.

That same evening, I had a pleasant meeting — if meeting a friend in Treblinka can be called pleasant. As I stood in the ranks at roll call, [159] I heard a familiar voice behind me whispering. I turned around as soon as I could, and there, to my joy and sorrow, I saw Żelechower, an old acquaintance from my hometown, Gdańsk. He had arrived the day before, had joined the new labour crew, and now was in the woodcutters' group which was working in the woods. This group consisted of 30 men. Half of them were cutting down saplings in the woods, and the other half were carrying the saplings to the railroad tracks, where they were used to make a hedge around the barbed-wire fence, to camouflage the camp from the eyes of outsiders travelling past. [160] I asked Żelechower what the work in the woods was like, and learned from him that they were guarded only by a few Ukrainians and one SS-man who was not very strict. The only problem was food, because they received nothing except their daily ration of soup, and couldn't find anything on their own because, naturally, there were no packages left there by Jewish deportees where additional food could have been found. I gave Żelechower some bread and sugar which I happened to have on me, and we got to talking about how to find a way to escape from Treblinka. He tried to persuade me to join the workers in the woods; it might be easier to think up something if we were together. Żelechower told me that Warsaw had been heavily bombed the week before and about how weak the German defences were, and we told each other that deliverance might be closer than we had thought.²⁸²

I let Żelechower persuade me to go into the woods. [161] But it took a few days before I was able to join his group.

282 This remark pertained probably to the Soviet bombing of Warsaw in the end of August 1942.

The next day, the following incident occurred: several hundred men from a transport had been selected and sent somewhere outside the camp. As I watched the people being selected, I didn't know whether this would be good or bad, for us, and so I passed up the opportunity to mingle with them. About an hour later, a horde of tattered, worn-out, starving and beaten young men arrived at the camp on foot. They were immediately taken to the bath with the next shift of men. It had been a sort of exchange between Treblinka I and Treblinka II. The Jews over there also were put through selection. New human material was taken from our group and we received the rejects from the penal camp, [162] who were ready to be turned into scrap, as the saying went.²⁸³

That night, I had another meeting with my friend from Gdańsk. He could speak German well and from time to time had a chance to talk with one of the SS-men. He told me that in his opinion neither the Germans nor the Ukrainians in the woods were as wild and dangerous as those inside the camp. One of the SS-men had confided to Żelechower that he was sick and tired of this work and that he would have run away long ago if only he could have spoken Polish. He would have changed into civilian clothes and fled.

I now wanted to get into the woods as soon as possible. But no opportunity offered itself the next day, either. [163] I was still working among the rags at the very hub of the murder orgy. Dozens of times a day I almost collapsed at the sight of so much human suffering and fear. My heart burned with pain and anger when I saw the confusion, the terror, the disarray of these thousands, the helplessness of weak souls quivering in the clutches of the devil —the women, the little children, men who were as strong as oak trees and yet as helpless as little children. They were not able to use their brains, their experience, their strength. They felt abandoned by God and man alike.

'*Verdammtes Volk!*'²⁸⁴ squeaked the [164] the captain and brought his club down on the heads nearest him. Damned people, indeed, pushed down in the caverns of hell, and this was one of the devils, a minion of hell with red cheeks and a black moustache. This SS-man had no horns, he merely used fire and brimstone, heat and steam . . .

'Away! Away! Let me out of here before I go crazy! I'm getting into a state where I'd be ready to jump into the death cauldron on my own!' I thought.

283 Annotated on the margin: 'add description of death camp and barrack for Ukrainians'.

284 (German) 'Cursed nation'.

I tried to calm my nerves and to allow myself not to become so upset. Just one more time in my life I wanted to see people with calm faces, with other things to do than running beneath the whip in a death chase. Herds of human beings like herds of oxen, herds of sheep, driven to the slaughter, with the only difference that oxen and sheep don't know what will happen to them until the last minute, while in the case of humans even the youngest children understand the situation sooner and can see and understand what's coming. [165] Even animals sometimes have feelings, and a human being who sees their suffering will sympathise with them. But many, many Germans have hard, cold nerves; they are capable of looking at men just like themselves without noticing or feeling anything. They don't feel the pain of others; they have never felt pity or sympathy, although the German language has words for such emotions. They are born material for murderers and hangmen.

They are only capable of fear for their own lives. It's really a pleasure to see how good these executioners are at looking out for themselves.

Before I left the German *Mordbetrieb*²⁸⁵ in Treblinka, I was fated to see just how afraid Germans can be, how the murderers of millions can tremble when danger comes too close to their own vile skins. If only I could see many [166] more such images, they might blur the memory of other scenes.

Twice in Treblinka did I have occasion to see how frightened Germans can get, but I'll talk about that later.

Meanwhile, I was still working at sorting clothes. Every day I would march through the German camp to the barracks of the *Werterfassung*. When transports arrived, they would take us away from the work we were doing and draft us for the extra duty of taking away the clothes of the new arrivals. Something new was now introduced when the men got undressed. To prevent them from getting lost among the workers in the confusion of arrival, the new arrivals were ordered to take off their shoes as soon as they were separated from the women and to stand in line, holding their shoes, tied together, in their hands. Nevertheless, a few young people [167] managed to sneak in among us from each transport and, at roll call a few days later, a curious thing happened. Five hundred had grown to five hundred and fifty-six. When this total was counted, it became unnaturally quiet in the square. About a minute

285 (German) murder factory

later, the *Scharführer's* voice was heard: '*Alle neue heraustreten. Habt keine Angst — es wird euch garnischt geschehen.*'²⁸⁶

We knew from experience that German promises were never to be believed. The *Scharführer* did not threaten to punish us if his orders were not obeyed, but it would have been impossible to hide because the Germans knew the faces of the previous group of workers and would have recognised the new people anyway. The young men stepped out of our ranks and stood off to one side. We watched these youngsters with sorrow and our hearts froze at the thought of what was about to happen to them. We believed these people to be as good as dead. [168] After all, they had taken unto themselves the right to live a few days longer without permission from the Germans. Every moment we expected to hear the command: '*Umdrehen!*'²⁸⁷ and then, bullet after bullet in the back of the head.

But then, wonder of wonders! The *Scharführer* counted them, fifty-six individuals, and divided them among the various groups of workers.

He said, '*Na, ihr wollen arbeiten, da habt ihr arbeit!*'²⁸⁸

The way he handled the situation was so unexpected that everyone wanted to know who he was.

'What's his name? What's his name?' We all asked each other, and eventually we learned the name of this *tov shebagoyim*.²⁸⁹ Maks Biela.

I made a mental note of this name. [169] I had already observed previously that this particular SS-man was not the worst in the lot; that is, he didn't shoot or beat anyone on his own initiative. He only did what he was ordered to do.²⁹⁰

Additional transports from Warsaw brought in some more people whom I had known from before. Together with other workers, I stood near the railroad tracks sorting out clothing and looking at the people who were getting up out of the freight wagons. In the line which was close to the entrance of the square between the two barracks, I suddenly recognised a friend of mine from my kibbutz of *halutzim* and I shouted: '*Moyshe Blanket!*'

286 (German) 'All new arrivals, fall out! Don't be afraid; nothing will happen to you'

287 (German) 'Turn around!'

288 (German) 'Bah, so you want to work? Well, now there's work for you to do!'

289 (Hebrew) the best of gentiles — see footnote 513.

290 For the continuation on Biela, see pp. [203–206a] and footnote 514.

Pale, beaten, parched from heat and thirst, the boy²⁹¹ [170] gave a glance in my direction and joy suddenly flickered in his eyes. He almost leaped up in surprise.

‘Ah! Krzepicki is here!’ he called out in a voice full of hope.

Alas, he was happy to see me for the wrong reason. Seeing that I had been given work, and aware that I had arrived here from Warsaw a good two weeks earlier [and was still around], he probably thought that this was really just a labour camp. Secondly, he no doubt thought that since I was an old-timer by now, I would be able to help him in some way. But I couldn’t even get closer to him because that would have meant joining the new crowd and going along with them into the bath. In the midst of this commotion no argument would have swayed the Germans or Ukrainians. [171] I thought that I would be able to see him once more while they were taking off their shoes. But our group was not drafted for this work today and so I never had a chance to say goodbye to my friend.

Another one of my encounters was with Samek Kaplan, the well-known youth leader, who had been the head of the *halutzim* organisation in Poland. When I caught sight of him, he was in a very bad way. He was already bare-foot, holding his shoes in his hands not far from the well near the Ukrainian guard. Bent all the way over the well with his head hanging down, with eyes half-closed and lips parted, he looked as if he were trying to breathe in the very smell of the water. It was a picture of horrible thirst and prostration. At that time the Jewish workers were under orders to form a cordon along the length of the disrobing barrack so that men from the new transport would not be able to mingle with the workers who had arrived earlier. I found myself in the yard, [172] with some Ukrainians and SS-men standing behind me guarding us. I very much wanted to walk over to Kaplan, to give him something to drink, but it was the same story all over again: to go to him would have meant joining those who were going into the bath. As I later learned, they had taken away Kaplan’s wife and his wonderful little boy who had been the pet of the whole organisation, and he had gone to the *Umschlagplatz* of his own accord

291 Note on unnumbered page between pages [169] and [170]: ‘Such a beautiful sky and the forest with trees in it. The world is too small for me. I analyse whether I am happy or unhappy. Either way, I must live. I want to die of natural causes.’ Perhaps it is a draft for the description on p. [195].

in the hope of joining them. Maybe I should have sacrificed myself to help my comrade and leader in his last hour; or perhaps I should have died with him. But I admit that I was too weak to do that. Or maybe the voice within me which said I must get out alive was too strong.

On the last day I was at work sorting clothes. I discovered something odd in the German camp. [173] I had gone with one of the Ukrainians to get a bucket of water for our *Lumpenkommando*, which was working that day at the *Werterfassungstelle*. The well was located inside the German camp.²⁹² Next to the well was a tiny trap door with a glass window stuck in the ground.²⁹³ I had never noticed the tiny door when I had passed by before. Imagine my amazement now when I looked through the window and saw a Ukrainian sitting beneath it. It turned out to be a kind of dungeon for Ukrainians who had been found guilty of some offence. While I was at Treblinka it happened once that a Ukrainian had escaped; another one was shot. In general, the Germans treated the Ukrainians as second-class citizens. When they thought the Germans weren't looking, some of them would start conversations with us. They spoke Russian, [174] and some of them knew some Polish; but actually they were Soviet prisoners of war who, if they did not want to die of starvation, had no alternative but to join the special Ukrainian formations which the Germans had set up for political reasons. The Ukrainians felt just as much a part of these formations as they felt part of the Soviet army. One of the 'Ukrainians' with whom I had a conversation was the son of a schoolteacher in Moscow. These 'Ukrainians' had the feeling that, one way or another, they would come to a bad end, and that they would be spared from ever having to give an account for their treason because the Germans would shoot them all as [175] soon as they no longer needed them to do their dirty work. I hope that they are right.

That same evening, at roll call, the following scene took place. As usual, the Jewish Kapo, Engineer G[alewski], stepped forward in front of the assembled ranks and reported the numbers of the day's roll call to 'The Doll'. '*Melde gehrosam: 525 Juden angetreten, darunter 10 kranke.*'²⁹⁴ He had the 10 sick men move off to one side.

292 [Author's note] see the site map.

293 [Author's note] see the site map.

294 (German). 'Report 525 Jews present, including ten sick.'

‘The Doll’ and another *Scharführer* strolled between the ranks with notebook and pencil in hand. ‘The Doll’ quickly and neatly counted off the ranks with a gesture of his outstretched hand, like sticking roasted meat on a long spit, counting, noting down numbers, counting, noting down numbers, and when they got through counting, and as they were about to leave the roll-call square, they pointed — as if by way of parentheses — to the group of sick inmates who were standing on one side, and they said: ‘*Hans, nimm sie mit!*’²⁹⁵ [176] Hans took them along. Their destination was clear. The path led through the opening in our fence leading to the large field of open mass graves. Before long, we heard a volley of pistol shots coming from that direction.

[177] Chapter Six

I work in the woods

That evening, I spoke again with Żelechower about moving to the woods. I was anxious to get to the new place of work because there I would have hopes of finding a way to escape. We waited for an opening to appear in the group of men working in the woods. There were 30 men, but constant selections and incidents like these which had occurred at the last roll call often created openings for new workers. And that is exactly what happened. At the next day’s roll call Żelechower gave me a signal that the moment had come and that now I could join [178] his group. When the *Scharführer* Biela (it was he or ‘The Doll’ who always conducted our roll calls now) called out, ‘*Waldkommando heraustrreten!*’²⁹⁶ I slipped to the side and a moment later I was standing among the thirty as if I had always been one of them.

[179] ‘*Hände vorstrecken!*’²⁹⁷ came the next command, and I turned sideways and placed my hands on the shoulders of the man in front of me. This was the Germans’ latest device, making the workers stand in line with each man’s hands on the shoulders of the man in front of him. It made it easier for them to count us.

295 (German). ‘Hans, take them with you!’

296 (German). ‘Woods detail, fall out!’

297 (German). ‘Extend arms!’

A few blows were struck right and left because our line was not straight enough and we had been too slow in forming it. We were counted once again, the command 'Ab!'²⁹⁸ was given, and off we marched, four abreast, into the woods. I was in the second row.

We left barbed-wire enclosures behind us, entered new enclosures, marched through the German camp, [180] near the barracks, where only the day before I had been working at sorting the rags. And then, lo and behold, I found myself beyond all the wires and fences, on a sandy forest path. I allowed myself a look at the clear sky above and the green, rustling foliage around me. Would this be my way to freedom?

One half of our group of thirty had the job of cutting down trees — the other half carried the trees into the camp to the railroad tracks, where German Jews of the *Zaunkommando*²⁹⁹ were employed to reinforce and increase the height of the wooden fence along the tracks, to make it harder for the passengers on the passing trains to look into the camp and become unduly curious about what was going on at Treblinka II. The group which cut down the trees was given [181] three saws and several axes to do their job. I walked along with a saw over my shoulder and felt as if something were breathing down my neck. We were escorted by four or five Ukrainians and one SS-man. But then the SS-man went off and stayed behind, and we were left alone — just Jews and Ukrainians.

We marched about a kilometre 'from the camp and arrived at a clearing, where we stopped.' I quickly observed that there was a close understanding between the Ukrainians and the Jews who were working there. The days when the workers in the woods were hungry and I had to get Żelechower something to eat were a thing of the past. Now they were dining like kings in the woods. A Ukrainian went around whispering to the workers, and money was counted out. Then the Ukrainian went deeper into the woods and there was still more whispering. [182] It seemed to me that a peasant couple was somewhere off in the distance, passing among the trees, and then another peasant. By and by, the Ukrainian came back with two heavy baskets in his hands. Somebody gave us a sign that the German guard was coming our way and that we should hide the baskets. The baskets promptly vanished beneath

298 (German). 'March off!'

299 (German) fence detail.

a pile of moss, and the workers smoothly went into action and started working. The German disappeared; now the baskets came out into the open again, and the crowd took the food they had ordered.

A meal in Treblinka was always like *sudes mitzve* after a funeral.³⁰⁰ Its purpose was to keep up our strength and above all, to keep up our spirits. And if there was a shot of brandy, too, so much the better. [183] I myself shared feasts like that in Treblinka. When two or three relatively peaceful days had gone by, our appetites would improve and when the people returned to the barrack to sleep, lively barter trade would begin among the workers. 'I'll trade you your sausage for some sugar', or, 'I'll give you some cocoa for your sugar and ham.' Cognac, rum, and good wines, sardines, rice, chocolate, and raisins — whatever anyone had in his possession, whatever he had saved up from before the war, whatever anyone had received in packages from relatives and friends overseas — the finest, the best, the nicest — he had packed it into his knapsack and taken it along to Treblinka. Even the poorest pack contained something which had been put aside for a rainy day, but when the hour of need arrived, the people had to strip naked and nobody had a mind to reach into their packs. Most of the people threw away their packs as soon as they set foot on the soil of Treblinka. There was more sugar and tea in Treblinka than in the Warsaw ghetto today. There was no barter trade in the woods, no regular cash transactions, although these, too, were done with goods left behind by those who had perished. Each Jewish worker had money to burn; they had picked up the money that could be found underfoot wherever you went in the camp. [185] The peasants in the county knew this well and understood that nowhere else in the world would they be able to beat the prices for their products that they could obtain in Treblinka. They had learned about the workers in the woods and very quickly perceived the opportunities for doing business. They made arrangements with the Ukrainians, who acted as middlemen. And so it came to pass that baskets filled with white rolls, roasted chickens, cheese, butter, cream, and so forth began to arrive each day at Treblinka. The young men gave money to one of the Ukrainians and afterwards he brought back the food that the workers had ordered. The Ukrainians' profits also included foodstuffs. The Ukrainians were quite ready to have friendly chats with the

300 (Hebrew, *seudat mitzvah*) literally, feast of commandment; festive meal accompanying a religious ceremony.

Jewish workers, but they ate separately from them because they were afraid of the Germans. They didn't rush us too much at our work, and so, gradually, we were able to rest up in the woods, catch our breath, [186] and even talk to each other.

But what was there to chat about in Treblinka during *sudes-havroe*,³⁰¹ when the wind now and then brought us echoes of screams just like from a slaughterhouse, from that little 'bathhouse' in the middle of the woods . . . ?

'Friends, how do we get out of here?'

Most of the young men were strangely dependent and passive when it came to discussing that question, as if there were some other way to escape the sure death which lay in wait for everyone, if not today, then certainly tomorrow. It was amazing how people could become accustomed so quickly to living not just from day to day, but from hour to hour and literally from minute to minute, and how skilfully they could blank out the thoughts of certain death. Others were earnestly hoping [187] for deliverance, which they expected to come from the air, from the fields, or with an early end to the war . . . It was really heart-breaking to see how the urge to survive had made men childish, feeding on hopes which weren't worth an empty eggshell. The conditions which the Germans had so ingeniously created at the camp resulted in most of the healthy young people walking around in a sort of daze, incapable of any action or decision . . .

'Maybe we could attack the Ukrainians in the woods? They often put down their guns. We could grab a few of their guns and run off into the woods.'

'All right, supposing it works — where would we go? [188] In Warsaw, the *Aktionen* are still going on in and in all the other cities and towns too. The woods are surrounded, the Poles are against us. There's nothing we can do.'

Such discussions always left me with a very heavy heart. I could never resign myself to the idea that I would have to die here. The conviction that we must do something, that at any moment it might become too late to act, gave me no rest day and night. Am I really made of different stuff than these young men? I wondered. What are they fooling themselves with? What are they waiting for?

301 (Hebrew, *seudat havra'a*) literally, feast of consolation, meal prepared by friends for the mourner after the return from the funeral.

But later it became clear that I was far from alone in my planning. On the third day after my arrival in the woods, two workers suddenly disappeared. [189] At noon, our *Scharführer* discovered that two men were missing and he began alarming. Our Kapo, whose name was Posner, had a bright idea. He said that the men were sleeping in their barracks. He figured that there were always some reserves around, the figures would get confused and everything would turn out all right. Meanwhile, several Ukrainians went searching deeper in the woods and an hour later returned with the two missing men. They had found them sitting high up in the branches of a tree. Probably they had figured that they could sit on the branches until nightfall and then continue on their way. But alas, they had been out of luck. They were ordered to undress and got their punishment on the spot. [190] Posner, the Kapo, received 25 lashes in front of all of us, because he had 'lied.'

But inside me, a voice kept crying, 'I must get out! I must!'

We would return from work in the woods at about 5 p.m., when it was still daylight and we'd find the uproar going on full steam. Transport followed upon transport. Freight wagons stood waiting, not yet opened. A crowd of people would be standing in the large square. Meanwhile, in the smaller enclosure inside, an earlier transport of women, men, and children was being finished off. Other trains were being detained at the Małkinia station, waiting their turn [191] to enter Treblinka.

We would be ordered to put down our axes and saws and to help out in the work, taking away the shoes and clothing of the newcomers, forming a cordon, dragging the dead and unconscious to the mass graves, running here and there, joining in the demons' dance which was in full swing.

The 6th of September had already passed. The great slaughter had already begun in Warsaw, and the number of victims was growing day by day. Jews from the newly arrived transports told us about the giant 'deadly trap' which had been set up in an area of four square blocks in Warsaw.³⁰² The great murder operation in Treblinka was working at full speed. [192] The air was

302 Round-up on Niska Street turned out to be the great selection conducted between 6 and 12 September 1942 among all surviving ghetto residents. They had to concentrate in the area surrounded by Smocza, Gęsia, Zamenhofa, and Szcześliwa Streets, and Paryowski Square. 'Life numbers' were distributed and those who received them were allowed to stay in the ghetto and work. Approximately 50,000 were deported to Treblinka. That was the last stage of the *Grossaktion* in the Warsaw ghetto.

filled with shouts and smells. A heavy stench of rotting bodies and burning flesh spread for miles around. The workers in the woods could hear the cries of the women and children, like the squeaking of chickens or of pigs in a slaughterhouse. At times we thought we could hear deeper voices, the voices of men bellowing like oxen in a slaughterhouse. Was this, perhaps, because the doors of the bathhouse in the woods had been unsealed a minute too soon?

Nor were we forgotten in the great commotion, in the great race [?]. [193] The Germans knew how to organise each job perfectly. Every man did his duty to perfection. The workers must not be given a chance to rest too long from their terror and fear. Not a day passed when they didn't lay out a few boys at their work with bullets in the back of the head. Not a day passed when the dreaded selection wasn't carried out while everyone else watched.

If not today, then certainly tomorrow, it'll be your turn. While we had our meals and talked to each other in the woods, I made the acquaintance of a Jew from Warsaw named Berliner.³⁰³

Berliner was about 45 years old and had lived in Argentina for years. He had served in the Argentinian army and was an Argentine citizen. It would be a long story to relate how he had happened [194] to be stranded in Poland, unable to enjoy the protection of his foreign citizenship, and how he, his wife, and his daughter had come to Treblinka.

By the time I met him his family was no longer alive. They had entered the bath a week earlier, as soon as they had gotten out of the freight wagon. He, a dark-complexioned, broad-shouldered, healthy man, happened to be among the lucky ones; he was one of the workers who had had their death sentences postponed for a week or two — perhaps even three. Berliner was a man of real integrity, a true friend. At every opportunity he would share a bite to eat, a cigarette, or a drink of water; if there was any chance to help somebody out, he would come running. As a result, he had become well known and well liked.

But in our talks in the woods [195] about finding a way to escape, Berliner would not go along with us. 'We'd be killed! We'd be killed!' he would say. 'But there is one thing I want: revenge.' He did like the idea of

303 His name was Meir Berliner (1898–1942), see Yitzhak Arad, *Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka. The Operation Reinhard Death Camps*. Bloomington, 1999, pp. 98–99.

jumping the Ukrainians and disarming them, but since most of the workers were opposed to this plan and no consensus could be reached, nothing came of it.

As we passed through the patch of open area into the woods, we would often see from a distance peasants working their fields. I looked at them and would feel a furious jealousy eating away at my heart. These were human beings, and I was a human being too. But they were free and I was under guard all the time. The sky and trees were beautiful, and this world was not large enough for me. [196] However on my way to work one day, I realised that no one could be free under Nazi rule — not even Poles. We met up with a group of about 60 Poles who were being led through the woods with their hands up. They were followed by ‘several gendarmes with rifles on their shoulders and canes in their hands, driving them on like a herd of cattle.’ They looked like intellectual types, who had probably been arrested because they had been betrayed by informers. There were also some women in the group. As they passed by, we exchanged glances, Jews doomed to death giving a last salute to Poles condemned to a similar fate. When we got back to the camp that evening, we learned that the 60 Poles had been shot in our own field of corpses, next to the open graves . . .

[197] As we marched back to camp each night, our hearts grew heavy on the way. Would we be able to sleep through the night? Would our eyes still be open at this time tomorrow? Would we still be among the living? I was even more nervous than the others because I had been in Treblinka more than two weeks now and I constantly felt that my turn would soon come.

We arrived at the guard station. The gate closed behind us. In the woods we felt a little more free than in the camp. We didn’t have the dog-catchers before us all the time. But as soon as we passed through the camp fence, we felt as if our world had come to an end. Once again we were on the territory of the Treblinka murder factory.

[198] And so the 11th of September arrived. That day, as usual, we bought food in the woods from the peasants. The Ukrainians came dragging two big baskets and everything was divided up according to the orders placed by the workers. Some of the young men brought brandy. Berliner, too, bought a bottle of brandy that day.

When we got back to camp at about 6 o’clock that evening, our whole world turned black. Even from some distance away, we could see something

new going on in the roll-call square. This was the selection which we had been expecting for so long and with such great fear.

The groups of workers were standing in rows, as usual, [199] but the *Scharführer* was not following the usual procedure of counting them. They were ready to do anything, any kind of work, to submit to any kind of degradation, but the hangman no longer needed their work. They were cheap and worn out, their whole lives and skins not worth a broken penny. They were nothing but human junk – scrap.

‘Friends, this is trouble! This is it!’

I felt a great chasm opening up inside my heart: Oh, woe, why had I waited so long? Why had I dithered so long about escaping; now it looked as though all was lost.

‘Oh, God, my God!’ I prayed silently, [200] ‘Let me come out of this mess in one piece just this one more time, and I won’t wait another day!’

A few individuals, and then the whole group, tried to pull a fast one and slip away into the barracks, to crawl into some hole, but it was impossible. The earth refused to open up beneath our feet and there was no other hiding place. ‘*Antreten! Anschliessen!*’³⁰⁴ We were driven forward, and here we were, like little lambs ready to let themselves be chewed up by the wild wolf. Several hundred healthy young Jewish men stood there, as meek as little children, and two Germans plus several Ukrainians, arrogant and insolent, [201] had their way with us. A finger pointed at this one, then at that one. A couple of idlers, a few spoiled *shkotzim*, were the masters of life and death, ready to finish off a man with just a wink, to finish off a whole world represented by the soul of one human being.

Sometimes we didn’t even know where danger or death was lurking. The *Scharführer* divided us with his whip — this one to the right, that one to the left. I was put with those who were sent to the left — to the bath.

Terror shackled our hands and legs. We stood like statues and though we had nothing left to lose, meekly obeyed, still trembling [202] before the wrath of the hangman, as if a man had more than one life to lose and the hangman could do more than take away that one life. Would it really have made such a big difference whether we died from a bullet in the back of the head or were asphyxiated in hot vapour a few minutes later?

304 (German). ‘Line up! Fall in!’

‘Who will avenge all these lives that have been cut off?’ something cried out within me. ‘Why aren’t these shameless murderers afraid of us? How did they manage to break our spirits, so that there was not even so much as one shout, one scream of protest, no resistance worth the bite of a drowning cat?’

No! No! It couldn’t be. Not all of us were [203] such cowards. What had gone wrong? What had gone wrong?’

I was standing right next to Berliner. I didn’t notice anything. I never saw when, or from where, he pulled his knife. I looked at him only after he had leaped out of our line and with all his strength had plunged his knife into the back of the *Scharführer* who was doing the selection.

The German groaned and turned deathly pale. Two men rushed to the scene and carried him away half-unconscious.

[204] It would be hard to describe the turmoil which ensued in the roll-call square. Jews, Germans, and Ukrainians alike were plunged into utter confusion.

SS-men came running. ‘*Was ist los, was ist los?*’³⁰⁵ They seemed to be terrified. They drew their revolvers from their holsters and didn’t know in which direction to shoot, upon whom to throw themselves like wild animals, or from whom to defend themselves. It was a real pleasure to see how they lost their heads.

Berliner made no attempt to flee or to hide. He just stood there, cold-blooded and calm, with a strange little smile on his lips, his hands opening the flaps of his jacket, leaving his chest bare.

‘*Bitte*’ he said, ‘*Ich habe keine Angst. Ihr konnt mir töten.*’³⁰⁶

[205] His death was terrible. I don’t know how the shovels had come to be on the roll-call square, or who had ordered these tools to be used, but the Ukrainians and SS-men used them to attack Berliner. Minutes later, he was stretched out on the ground, his face terribly mutilated, blood gushing from his mouth. [206] The SS-man whom Berliner had stabbed was perhaps the most decent — if such an adjective can be used — of the Treblinka Germans: *Scharführer* Maks Biela . . .

305 (German) ‘What’s the matter? What’s the matter?’

306 (German). ‘Please. I am not afraid. You can kill me.’

Berliner, through his assassination, fulfilled the verdict: *tov shebagoyim harog*.³⁰⁷

Biela died of the stab wound only a few days later.³⁰⁸ But by that time I was no longer in Treblinka.

[206a] Two other Jews fell beneath the shovels along with Berliner. The Ukrainians and SS-men struck out to the left and right without knowing what they were doing. They drove us up against the fences with their whips and the fences were flattened.

We who had been destined for the bath immediately wanted to take advantage of the confusion and mingle among the remaining crowd. But the other Jews were afraid to have us mingle with them. Only after the chaos had spread did everybody else break ranks so that it all became one tangle of terrified people, like a herd of frightened cattle during a fire. The commandant was shouting at the SS-men for having remained idle in their barracks; then he started whipping the Kapo, the engineer Galewski, in the face with all his might. 'The Doll' started choking [207] a Jew from Prague, who had served as a captain in the Czech army before the war, and who was now the Kapo's deputy. In short, everybody was having a merry old time. After the two Germans had finally blown off some steam, they apparently decided to act with 'moderation' for the time being, and the captain ordered 'The Doll' to shoot 10 men. Naturally, the latter carried out this order with pleasure; together with another SS-man he took his victims out of the ranks, lined them up, and, after keeping them on the rack for a while by pulling the trigger without the gun going off, he gunned them all down. Actually, the two Germans divided the job between themselves: the first one shot the first, third, and fifth Jew, while the second one shot the second, fourth, sixth, and so on.

I was standing right there; however, 'fate so willed it that the two Germans took out one man at my right and one man at my left, but I was

307 (Hebrew) 'The best of the gentiles you should kill,' words from teachings of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai (~100–160 C.E.), in reference to Exodus 9:20. It is usually understood to refer only to enemies in wartime, or still more narrowly to Egyptians of the time of Exodus. This phrase was often cited against the Jews. It is not clear if this is a comment by Krzepicki or by Auerbach. Many thanks to Batya Donner and Yale Reisner for their help in explaining the subject.

308 Maks Biela (Biehla, Biehler) (1905–1942), SS-*Rottenführer*; he died in hospital in Ostrów Mazowiecka.

left behind.^c For the moment, we did not think about the selectees being sent to the ‘bath’, but we asked ourselves what the consequences would be for us. ‘The Doll’ gave a speech, in which he said, ‘*Es wird euch teuer kosten!*’³⁰⁹ We got no supper that night.

[208] It was another execution eve: we recited the *kaddish*, there were calls for repentance, and all the rest. The next morning there was no *pobudka*.³¹⁰ 6 o’clock went by, then 7 and half past seven. At half past seven, we were driven outside and another selection began. But they took only 60 men. It seemed as if the hangmen were continuing their policy of circumspection.

[209] I remained rooted to the spot, stupefied; Żelechower was standing on my left in my row. The boxer pointed his finger at the man on my right and the one on my left. Before long, 60 men had been set aside in a separate group, and I remained standing, wondering what to do with myself. Were they selecting people to remain behind, or were they selecting people to be shot? Both cases had occurred also in the past. Should I, then, try to join Żelechower’s group? In the end, I remained in my place; to this day, I don’t know what held me back. Perhaps it was a feeling of paralysis, [210] or maybe it was instinct that told me not to mingle anywhere this time. Be that as it may, I remained alive for the time being, while Żelechower and the others were all gunned down within 20 minutes.

Berliner, too, was dead. His body was thrown along with the others into one of the huge mass graves at the edge of the great field of corpses. But Berliner did not die like a mouse caught in a trap, or like a lamb slaughtered for meat, for skins, for some old rags or a gold tooth. He had died only half a day before Żelechower, but he died like a hero. He told the hangmen that the day would come when they would have to pay for their crimes, [211] that someday they would be called to a strict accounting for their mass murder and mass robbery and that on that day their heads and their lives would not be worth any more than the life of the most humble among their victims, of the Jewish paupers and beggars whom they had cleared from the streets of the Jewish ghettos.

The hangmen and murderers sensed this. Somehow the terror, no less great than their crime, had settled into their bones. They trembled before the

309 (German) ‘You’ll pay the price!’

310 (Polish) wake up.

hands of the Jews. I still spent an entire day in Treblinka after Berliner's act, and until I left I saw Jews passing [212] near Germans with their hands up. That's what the Germans had commanded: '*Hände hoch!*'³¹¹ And whenever the Germans came near a Jew they looked closely at his hands. They were afraid of what the Jews might do to them with those hands.

[213] Night came to the newly-cleared barracks — execution night. No air, no food. At 5 the next morning — 5:30–7:30 — there was still no *pobudka*. Everyone was sure we'd be going to the bath. Meanwhile, people called out, 'Line up five abreast! Selection! Control yourselves! Don't give in!' Commands were called out. I went along with the *Waldkommando*. Today I must get out of here, no matter what befalls, to clear my conscience. Then, even if I'm killed, I'll know why. I decided that when it got dark, I would move away from my group. I was restless at work. This went on until 4 p.m. The cries from the murder site continued that day as usual. I was happy to be here in the woods, away from the voices.³¹²

[214] At about 4 o'clock in the afternoon, we learned that freight wagons had arrived to take away the rags from the camp. I wanted to flee, climbing into one of those wagons as quickly as I could to try my luck, but unfortunately it wasn't up to me. We continued working until 7 and I became very impatient. By the time we went back to the camp I was very nervous and determined to run away.

Near the railroad tracks I met another old acquaintance, Yankev Lichtensztern of the *Ha-Tehiyah*³¹³ movement. He cried bitterly and told me that he was hungry. I ran over to the pile of rags and got him some bread and honey. The Germans ordered us to join in and help load the rags into the wagons. But most of the wagons were already loaded to capacity [215] and I was sorry I had not come here from the woods any sooner. Now it was too late. The Germans were urging us on — '*Schneller! Schneller!*' — and dealing out

311 (German) 'Hands up!'

312 The page is signed with the letter *aleph*; at the bottom left corner it is written: 'Kapo Mirek Galewski.'

313 (Hebrew) literally: revival, resurrection; Zionist organisation promoting Hebrew culture, established in 1903 in Warsaw by Yitzhak Grünbaum, Jan Kirsztrot, and Yosef Szprincak. It relatively quickly split into the Zionist-Democratic faction (Grünbaum), Poale Zion (Tabenkin), and Tseirei Zion (Szprincak). Co-operating, those factions laid the foundations for the development of liberal-socialist Zionism in Poland.

blows with their whips. They ordered us to place packs of the rags along the tracks. A little later twelve additional freight wagons arrived. I went through all the wagons, looking for a place to hide, and when I saw the Kapo I went over to him and begged him to save me by letting me into one of them. He categorically refused to do that. I tried gentle persuasion, but I could see that it was a waste of time. I went to one of the other wagons and started to talk to Lichtensztern — ‘Do you have any money on you?’ I asked him. He had 600 dollars, and also some Polish currency. [215a] I tried hard to persuade him to run away, but at the last moment he disappeared. I got hold of a bottle of water — money didn’t interest me. I only took a bottle of water and some foreign currency. I noticed a whole suitcase full of money, and valuables, but I didn’t have the mind to take any of the stuff, although all I would have needed to do was cover it with a blanket and pick it up.

The Herszkowicz, father and son, helped me and wanted to come along with me into the freight wagon. I saw a little later that someone had thrown a coat into the wagon. It turned out to be my own coat and I took this as a good omen. But I didn’t take it along with me. Instead, I grabbed a long Hasidic coat in the dark. [216] There was a fourth person in the wagon who was covered up together with the others. We sat in fear and trembling as we waited for the train to start moving. Perhaps, God forbid, it would not leave until the morning. About 15 minutes later a German came by to do an inspection. He passed us by without incident. Then we heard somebody running beneath the wheels of our wagon, and German and Ukrainian voices. Again, we got by all right. The train started to move. We were riding along. We passed the first station about two kilometres away. We wanted to jump off the train after that station, but we heard Ukrainian voices and agreed to wait for another 3 kilometres. We agreed that the last to jump would wait for the others. Only 3 jumped out. I don’t know until this day what became of the fourth one. Perhaps he was smothered by the rags.

1 a.m. My first feeling — I had freed myself from Treblinka. [217] The others were with me. Where should we go? I led them to the left, towards Warsaw. We walked along for a few kilometres through gardens . . . Terror . . . We turned to the right. Until morning. Along the way, we refreshed ourselves with a can of sprats. At 6 a.m. we reached a small village 12 kilometres from Kosów.³¹⁴

314 It was Kosów Lacki.

We knocked on the door of a house and offered to pay 300 zlotys for a place to sleep and some food. The peasant didn't want to take us in; this was a border point, he said, and there were German guards. We knocked on a second door and got the same answer. I suggested that we leave the village. We ought to hide out in the bushes and wait out the day. We should proceed only at night. That's what we did, and we lay down on the ground. Two peasant women came by and we bought bread from them for 20 zlotys a loaf. [218] Later in the day another peasant came along and agreed to take us in, but said he would have to talk it over first with his wife. Herszkowicz gave him a watch. After a while, he came back with another man and said he would take us to his house one by one; I would be the first to go. They took 5,000 zlotys, other valuables, and a watch. Then they left me by myself. I asked them to tell me where I was, but they didn't want to say. Now I was all alone, you may determine for yourself whether happily or unhappily. I went back to the bushes, but no one was there.

A beautiful sky, a big world, but there seemed to be no room in it for me. I gathered all my strength, reminded myself of the motto 'Revenge!' and marched off on my own. [219] In another village, I saw a cottage, knocked on the door, and tried to buy bread, but they didn't want to sell me any. I was thirsty and went to a well to drink my fill. I went on. More fields. Late that afternoon, I came upon a peasant pasturing horses in a meadow. I struck a bargain with him for 2,000 zlotys. He asked where I had come from. I replied that I had been resettled from Jędrzejów. The peasant said that if he were not afraid of the Germans he would help me free of charge, but it just couldn't be done; the risk was too great. The peasant took me with him; he was on horseback and I ran behind his horse. He told me [220] to stay outside his house so his large family wouldn't know what was happening. He said that after they all had gone to bed he would take me into his barn, spread some hay, and bring me some bread and milk. He kept his promise. At about 3 a.m., the peasant awakened me to drive me to Stoczek. When I learned that we would have to pass by Treblinka, I didn't want to do it, but I had no other choice. And so I got to see the original village of Treblinka,³¹⁵ where there was not a trace of the murder factory. It was a village just like any other.

315 Approximately 3 km north-west of the death camp.

We arrived at Stoczek on market day, [221] at 7 a.m. Life here was normal; there were Jews doing business. When the people learned that someone from Treblinka had come to town, they started bringing me photographs and asking whether I recognised any of their loved ones. I did indeed see some *stolarze*.³¹⁶ [There were] also other people from Treblinka in town. I talked with them. 'What should I do? Where should I go?' They answered, 'Don't rush to Warsaw because it's dangerous there.' Two men had returned from there and said that you could neither get into the ghetto nor out of it. They had run afoul of a Polish policeman, who called them [222] over and said that he too wanted to live, and asked them for 100 zlotys. They had given him only 50. They described labour service in the ghetto and selections. They had returned to Stoczek on the day when 800 had been killed in the ghetto. They had travelled on the train, passing as gentiles. I made arrangements for myself; I rented a place to sleep from a woman called Freyde-Dvoyre, a butcher's daughter. She treated me well and told me to pay tomorrow. It really would be proper to stop here and describe the little town and the troubles one had there from the local *Judenrat* and police, who were afraid that if they helped any of the escapees from Treblinka [223] they would be deported themselves. I was dying of thirst, but the water there was disgustingly bitter. In the synagogue that Sabbath, I was called upon to recite the prayer by one who has narrowly escaped a great danger. The Jewish population there actually did want to become acquainted with escapees from Treblinka, because they knew that Treblinka people had a lot of money, and so they could charge them prices ten times the usual charge. From time to time a certain gendarme would come to that town from the county [town], killing a few Jews [224] each time. They used to call him the 'Little Black Head'. The terror in the town was very great. Nevertheless, they actually believed the women's and children's prattle that nobody would harm them; the commandant of Treblinka, they insisted, had said so because the Jews from Stoczek had built the camp. Wherever I went in that town, I reproached them for having known about the camp but not telling the Warsaw Jewish community what was really going on in Treblinka. Some of them claimed that they had in fact written letters to Warsaw.

316 (Polish) carpenters; it might refer to members of one the *Kommandos* in the camp, see p. [85].

The population tried to milk Treblinka for all it was worth and some brisk trading was done. They bought everything from the people of Treblinka: gold and securities.

[225] I tried to get out of that town as soon as I could because there were more and more rumours about an impending *wysiedlenie* and I did not want to take any chances. Some people didn't want to face this possibility, but I didn't want to let myself be fooled. On *Yom Kippur* eve,³¹⁷ I heard a commotion some distance away. When I came closer, I saw a Christian beating up a Jew in the street where the Jews lived. People were so scared that at first they did not want to attend *Kol Nidre*³¹⁸ at the synagogue. [226] But things quieted down and everybody flocked to the synagogue. They returned home and the weather was so nice that people were not eager to go to their beds full of fleas. I was standing with a certain Dr Halpern from Lwów and another man named Heniek and we discussed ways of saving ourselves. Suddenly we heard footsteps. A fireman opened the door and called us over to the police precinct to present our documents. We bought our way out with 50 zlotys. This whetted the fireman's appetite and he grabbed a young man in the street and asked him to point out the escapees from Treblinka. The young man, frightened, pointed us out and the fireman used the opportunity to [227] squeeze more money out of us. I thought of going back to Warsaw but was afraid and decided to put it off until after *Yom Kippur*. There was a commotion at the *Yom Kippur* services: 'Little Black Head' had arrived and all the Jews ran home from the synagogue.

The day after *Yom Kippur*, I got up as usual. At about 10 or 11 a.m. a panic broke out. Węgrów³¹⁹ was surrounded. One person telephoned here, another person telephoned there, but none of the calls went through. A little later, extreme panic set in and everyone started running. I was running together [228] with a young man from Stoczek. We wanted to go to Ostrówek,³²⁰ because from there you could take a train to Warsaw. On the way Christians told us that a big manhunt was going on because a gendarme had been killed. It was

317 20 September 1942.

318 (Aramaic) all vows; prayer immediately preceding the evening service on *Yom Kippur*.

319 Węgrów — county town in Mazovia, 20 km from Stoczek; in 1939 it was inhabited by over 5,000 Jews.

320 Ostrówek (Węgrów County) — a station on the railway line Warsaw–Białystok.

said that this had been done by partisans, who were supposedly operating out of the Sadowne woods. I had already thought on several occasions about joining them, but I heard that they didn't take in Jews.

Arrive a Brzózka,³²¹ 5 kilometres from Treblinka. [The] Story of the woman, they kill her husband and son. [229] Graves under the window. A Pole denounces [us], those from Treblinka flee, 'Little Black Head' [. . .] Then I met someone from Treblinka on the way [. . .] told me to wait there (sawmill) and to make my way from Kołodziąż³²² back to Stoczek that evening at about 7 in the evening. That's what I did. They said that no deportations took place, they let everyone leave. I sneak back into the town, but I don't want to risk it. The consensus is: the young should save themselves, into the woods, some want to go and some don't. I take [230] the young man from Treblinka with me — Winer, a Hasid. That was the first night I slept in the woods. In the morning, it was over, we heard gunfire: an *Aktion* in Stoczek. Scenes in the forest. We run deeper. Nothing to eat except raw potatoes, we walk in the direction of Ostrówek. A peasant warns us to run away. Along the way we encounter a group of 10 Stoczek residents, we spot some Christians and flee deeper [into the woods]. We dig pits to live in. We come out in the evenings. One of us goes to try to find food (expensive), Christians spotted, [231] we move again. All in all we live in the woods for two weeks. After that we parted ways. I didn't want my Hasid on account of the issue of working on the Sabbath. I gave him money to tide him over. My new companion turned out to be a figure from the underworld. Exhausted, wanted to go to a Christian, who asked for 100 zlotys. Went back to sleep in the woods. In the morning an old Christian woman came, I wanted to give her 50 zlotys to lead us to the station. [232] She did not want our money and took us to the village of Wielga.³²³ She kept us in her place for 8 days, the first act of human compassion. She kept us hidden, gave us food and blankets, and after 8 days, a guide to Warsaw. We paid her 50 zlotys a day each. The guide bought us tickets and accompanied us to Warsaw. He brought us to his wife who had dealings with [233] Jews. They kept us for several days before taking us to the ghetto. The Christian charged us 50 zlotys for each day and 450 zlotys for transporting us.

321 Brzózka (Węgrów County), a village.

322 Kołodziąż (Węgrów County), a village.

323 Wielgie (Węgrów County) — former separate village, today part of the Ogrodniki village.

If needed we could call on him again. It was early October by the time I arrived in the ghetto.³²⁴

[1] Treblinka — Supplement³²⁵

Stoczek. People brought me photographs to see whether the people in the pictures were still in Treblinka. I did recognise several men from the group with the yellow patches.

I was robbed of 50,000 zlotys in Polish currency and foreign currency. One of the robbers pinned back my arms while the other one searched me and also took a gold watch. Since I saw that it would do no good to resist them, I let them take what they wanted.

As I travelled through the villages, people stared at me. I tried to hide in hay; the peasant didn't let me, I could easily be a thief, he said. As we walked along, I saw that he took off his cap as he passed a cross by the roadside. (K. saw this as a sign that the peasant was a decent man.) I was afraid to ride into Stoczek [2] and got off a kilometre outside of town. I asked a peasant whether there were Jews in Stoczek. He answered, 'Yes, they are all in one *dzielnica*.'³²⁶

The woods

The first night I slept near the Hasid. At 4 a.m. I heard shooting and screams. I realised that the *Aktion* in Stoczek had begun. So we went deeper into the woods. Soon we began to see groups of people, mainly young people, who had fled from the town and were looking for a place to hide. We also heard screams and pitiful weeping. Children who had lost their parents in the turmoil ran around crying, 'Mama!' The two of us were joined by a third [3] person, a boy from Warsaw who was working as a shepherd for a peasant. He was from the Warsaw kibbutz on Dzielna Street.³²⁷ We stayed together that day. As we moved through the woods, we met some shepherds from whom we bought food, bread,

324 Pp. [229–33] contain notes on the events most of which are included in 'Treblinka — supplement'.

325 In a separate notebook.

326 (Polish) literally: quarter, neighbourhood; here it suggests the ghetto.

327 Reference to the several dozen people strong Dror kibbutz or commune on Dzielna Street 34.

milk, and potatoes. The shepherds charged us a lot of money. We made a fire and roasted the potatoes. That's how we got through the day. Looking out from among the bushes along the road leading to the Sadowne station, we saw groups of Jews a few hundred metres from us being chased to the station; from there they would probably [4] be taken to Treblinka. The Jews were walking four abreast, tied to each other by their hands.

The cries in the woods didn't cease. We kept on hearing the echoes of children's voices; the children were still searching and crying for their parents who were now, perhaps, marching in the columns we had seen from a distance.

The day passed like this. Towards evening we waited until the peasants had left the fields and then we went into a meadow where there were haystacks. We burrowed into the hay and slept until 4 in the morning. [5] We got up at 4 a.m. I decided to go to the Ostrówiek station in order to get closer to Warsaw. The third member of our group, the *halutz*, said that we shouldn't go. It would be better if we waited in the woods until the *Aktion* was over before going back to town. I refused to allow myself to be persuaded, and so we separated. The *halutz* remained on the spot, and the two of us (the Hasid and I) proceeded to the station. We walked through fields and meadows. On our way, we came to a little stream. So we took off our shoes and waded to the other side. It was worse when we had to cut across a busy road [6] that had continuous truck and car traffic. We decided to crawl up to the road, lie down in a ditch, and wait for a quiet moment to run over to the other side. On top of everything else, the behaviour of my companion, the Hasid, made me very nervous. Instead of watching to see if there were any Germans around, he prayed all the time and didn't seem to care about his own safety.

After crossing the road, we went to a cottage to buy some bread. The peasant would not sell us any. We went on to another cottage. I saw that we wouldn't be able to buy anything, so we tried begging. [7] Somebody told us that there was no bread around, but that he could spare some potatoes. I didn't want to take any, and we resumed our journey towards Ostrówiek. Along the way, we met a very decent Christian, who told us what had happened during the *wysiedlenie* in Stoczek. A great number of Jews had been killed right on the spot and the rest had been sent via the Sadowne station to Treblinka. He told us that we should try to save ourselves; we should never use roads but only fields because we could run afoul of gendarmes. We had earlier talked to a Christian woman

at this place who had told us that we [8] had nowhere to run. The Jews had been deported from everywhere; besides, the Germans would kill us anyway.

We went on and came to a thick stretch of woodland. Suddenly, I saw something moving in the woods. As we came closer, we noticed a group of 10 people and saw that these were Jews from Stoczek with a few escapees from Treblinka. They started to question us about Stoczek and in fact we did know a little more than they did. We described for them the *wysiedlenie* of Stoczek.

It was now 7 a.m. [9] We had remained together with the Stoczek people. We were very hungry, so they gave us something to eat from the supplies which they had bought and which had already cost them 800 zlotys, because, as always, the peasants charged the escapees very high prices for food. We remained stretched out in the thicket, where it was extremely still. We became very thirsty, but were afraid to go out and look for water. At about 6 p.m., we saw a Christian pass by, and soon someone began to throw rocks at our little hideout. [10] We were terror-stricken because we were expecting the Germans, helped by Poles, to carry out manhunts in the woods for Jews who were hiding out there. We decided to leave the place and waited only until it got dark. When night fell, we started off for another wooded area. Some of the Jews from Stoczek knew the area well.

At night, we walked single file, cautiously and in great terror lest someone hear us. Everything was still. The calm in the fields was almost unnatural, [11] despite the herd of homeless, frightened, hounded souls blundering through the night. And then we arrived in another forest, crawled into a thicket, and lay down to sleep. It was the holiday season³²⁸, towards the end of September, and the nights were already quite cold. We really couldn't find a good place to bed down because of the cold. There was nothing to lie down on and nothing to cover ourselves with, and we couldn't even fall asleep because of the cold. Some of those among us were ready to give up. 'Look, fellows', they argued, [12] 'there's no way out. The world had no room for us. It's no good. We'll all get killed!' Two of us went away to search for provisions, and towards 1 a.m. they came back carrying 12 kilos of bread, some small pears, and some bottles of water. They had spent several hundred zlotys.

328 The reference is to Jewish High Holy Days, see footnote 278.

At last the night was over. We became a little more lively and enterprising. Since it had become a little warmer, we gradually dropped off to sleep and slept until noon. At around noon some more Jews appeared. They told us that there were raids in the woods. [13] Several men who had been found in the woods had already been shot. We lay in great fear until nightfall. We decided to build hideouts for ourselves. We borrowed a spade from the Christian who had sold us provisions and we dug two pits, each one big enough to hide 6 men. They were one and a half metres in depth and width and about two metres long. We worked very hard and with great care to leave no visible trace. We gathered the soil we had dug up, wrapped it in our coats, and carried it some distance away. In order to camouflage the pits, we cut down some saplings [14] with a couple of butcher knives which the Stoczek people had with them. We laid the saplings across the pits and covered them with sods of turf which we had brought from some distance away. But as we worked, we literally dropped to the ground because lack of food and sleep had left us too weak for hard work. We left a small hole in the top of the pit for getting in and out, and camouflaged it with another sapling. And so our difficult job was done. We finished late that night, and dropped off to sleep. Some of us crawled into the pits to sleep. We were too exhausted [15] even to feel the cold, and we slept until the next morning.

I had more trouble with my Hasid. While everybody was hard at work digging the hideout, I asked him, 'How come you're not doing anything?' He answered that this was the Sabbath, so he wouldn't work. This was on Friday night.

We spent quite a few days in the pits in the thicket. Our lives became very tedious and boring. We had nothing to wash with, so we became filthy and unkempt. Some of us, having nothing to do, sat in the sun and searched our bodies for lice. Fortunately, there was never any need for us to take cover in the pits. [16] The days and nights passed quietly, except for the fear which made us gasp for breath every time we heard the noise of a bird or a squirrel in the branches. Every night, two men went out for provisions, but our money was running out because of the high prices which we had to pay for even the smallest piece of bread.

We stayed where we were until our hiding place was discovered by a Pole. Early one morning, [17] a *sheygetz* suddenly appeared before us. He tried to reassure us, telling us not to be afraid of him, and when we asked him to

get us some bread and water, he promised to do so. We gave him a few dozen zlotys; he was supposed to be back in about an hour. The *sheygetz* did return an hour later with a bucket of water; he said he'd get the bread later, when he went back into town. That town was our own Stoczek.

I and another [18] Treblinka man asked the Christian how to get to Warsaw. By now the life here was grating on our nerves and we wanted to move on to Warsaw no matter what befell us. Our friend quickly agreed to help us. He said he would take us into his house at night, buy us train tickets, and see us off to Warsaw.

After he had left, other Christians appeared, including the peasant Klimek, from whom we used to buy food. He had never visited us before [19] and hadn't known where we were holding out. We could see now that our hide-out had been discovered and was no longer good for us. We discussed what to do next; we decided not to remain together as a group, but to split up and let each man look out for himself. I decided to part from my Hasid (he had run naked through the barbed wire on the path to the gas chamber; there were wounds all over his skin, and he didn't have a penny to his name). I had been glad to help him out [20] but his fanaticism had repelled me and I decided to choose another friend. I asked him how much money he needed and he answered 4 zlotys. I gave him 10 zlotys and we parted. His name was Winer. The name of my new friend was Anshel Mędrzycki, a bigshot and a loudmouth. He turned out to be a nicer guy than the Hasid and we decided to stay together. He, too, had run away naked from Treblinka, and I undertook [21] to finance his trip. In order to get some cash, I proposed selling a gold watch to the peasant Klimek. Mędrzycki agreed to come along, and we struck a bargain for 500 zlotys and 5 kilos of corn which I wanted to take along so I could create the impression that I was a smuggler. I went with Klimek to get the corn, so we would be ready when the *sheygetz* came back.

I returned with Klimek at about 4 p.m. [22] and just then I heard shouts from the woods and I recognised Mędrzycki's voice. As I approached, the shouting stopped. I found Mędrzycki confused and bewildered. He had been robbed. The *sheygetz*, our supposed benefactor, had returned with a friend, held up my travelling companion, and robbed him of 200 zlotys which he had on him. Other Jews had come running up, and it was my luck to arrive 5 minutes after this had happened. [23] My partner was in despair and kept asking me and the other Jews whom we met to chip in 50 zlotys each to make up for

his loss. I later learned he still had some money hidden away, but he was an exploiter, a creature without a moral sense, who had come from the Warsaw underworld, and he tried to take advantage of me as much as he could.

After the incident with the *sheygetz*, we went back to Klimek to spend the night at his place, but he asked 100 zlotys from each of us. So we only ate supper with him and went off to sleep [24] in bushes which the money-grubber pointed out to us after charging us 20 zlotys for lending us an old rag quilt to cover ourselves with.

The next morning we went to other bushes to hide out for the day and wait for a chance to set out for Warsaw. At about 10 a.m. Klimek came to us and we talked about getting a ride to the station. He wanted 500 zlotys for each of us, in addition to 100 zlotys for buying railroad tickets. He suspected that I still had some money on me, so he tried to persuade us not to go to Warsaw, telling us that the trip was dangerous and that some men had just been shot. [25] Manhunts for Jews were going on everywhere. But I refused to give up the idea of going to Warsaw. Since we couldn't come to terms with Klimek, we remained in the bushes.

At about 1 p.m. I saw an older Christian woman passing by. My partner didn't want to let me make a move, but my heart told me that I must get hold of this woman, that she might be the one sent by fate to save us. With utter disregard for possible consequences, I ran over to the Christian woman.

As I came near, I saw before me a friendly face with kind eyes. I briefly told her who we were [26] and what we wanted, and I must say I was amazed when the woman told us without hesitation to come along with her. She didn't ask us for any money; on the contrary, when I handed her 50 zlotys, she replied that one doesn't take money for doing a thing like this. This was the first time since my escape from Treblinka that anyone, Jew or Christian, helped me get to safety without trying to extort money from me. I called Mędrzycki and the next thing we knew we were walking along as a threesome, with the Christian woman in the lead, toward her village. Klimek lived in the village of Mała Wielgie, and the peasant woman lived a few kilometres further on, in [27] Wielkie Wielgie,³²⁹ which was only 3 kilometres from the Ostrówek station.

After we had walked some distance we were overtaken by a man on a bicycle. We both heard him coming and hid on the side of the road. The man

329 In the orig., Mała Wielga, Wielka Wielga; see footnote 530.

on the bicycle turned out to be the head of the village of Wielgie. Our peasant woman chatted with him for over half an hour while we waited very impatiently for the conversation to end. At long last, they bade each other goodbye. The head of the village rode away and we and our Christian woman continued on our way. Farther along on the road, we encountered a [28] truck full of Germans. Once again, we hid on the side of the road. Afterwards, everything went well until we got to Wielgie. The Christian woman's house was one of the first as we entered the village. She went on ahead and told us to sneak in a little later. That's how we did it; we walked into her yard and lay down in the garden behind the house so that no one would see us. It wasn't long before the Christian woman came out together with her husband. They led us to a potato cellar in the yard. They told us to get into the cellar and stay [29] there until they came for us. Soon the woman also brought us some food, beans, and bread and a pot of boiled warm milk. After I finished eating, I took out 25 zlotys and wanted to pay for the food. The peasant woman said that this was too much, she didn't want to derive profit from us unfortunates. But I refused to take the money back. After we had eaten, the husband came out and advised us not to be in a hurry to get to Warsaw, but to be careful and wait until he got us a guide. Meanwhile, it had grown dark outside [30] and he led us from the cellar to the barn, brought us a warm blanket to cover ourselves, and we went to sleep in the barn.

We slept long and quietly, a deep and healthy sleep. Even as we slept, we sensed that we were at the home of good people.

We started a whole new life in that barn. The peasant had instructed us not to show our faces outside the barn. We were supposed to wait until some of his relatives would come visiting from Warsaw; these people would take us back with them. These relatives were smugglers who travelled back and forth all the time with merchandise.

[31] Food was delivered to the barn three times a day — potato soup, noodles with milk, and similar village foods. We were getting bored, but we slept most of the time. We got enough sleep and rest to last us a lifetime.

A few days later, a Christian woman arrived from Warsaw and was asked to take us back with her. She promised to do so, and showed us great compassion. When we told her about Treblinka, she sighed and wept. She had worked for Jews all her life and was truly upset at what was happening to the Jews. Nevertheless, nothing came of the proposal that we should travel with her.

She promised to come back for us, [32] and she remained in the village for several days, but we never saw her again. Our host tried to cheer us up and promised that when his brother-in-law came from Warsaw he would certainly take us back with him. And so it really was. A week later the brother-in-law arrived, a middle-aged Christian whose business was trading and smuggling. We paid him 450 zlotys to take us to Warsaw. He confirmed the reports we had heard that the *Aktion* in Warsaw was over and that we could go back there.

At 7:30 that evening, the train left Ostrówek station for Warsaw. We said goodbye to our hosts and thanked them for their genuine [33] humanity and goodness. Then we were on our way. I've forgotten to add that not even the children of this peasant were aware that we were in the barn; that's how closely those old folks kept our secret and watched over us.

I had exchanged my package of corn for bread, and had outfitted myself like a smuggler. When I arrived at the railroad station, a German stopped us for an inspection. I pulled the brim of my hat down over my eyes, positioned myself in such a way that the shadows of the early autumn evening covered my Jewish face, and pretended that I didn't understand a word of German. I kept repeating '*Chleb, chleb!*'³³⁰ [34] until the German³³¹ let me move on.

This was my last encounter on the journey from Warsaw to Treblinka and back. We took our tickets, we got on the train, and about 2 hours later we arrived at the *Główny*³³² railway station in Warsaw. Our guide lived on Żłota Street. He took us with him into his house and put us up for three days. On the third day, just before dark, he took us to the corner of Żelazna and Leszno. We joined a group of workers and entered the ghetto.

The Christians from Żłota Street were decent people too. They took next to nothing for keeping us for three days and when we parted they promised us that we had a standing invitation at their home if we ever would have to flee from the ghetto and look for a place to hide. After meeting so many exploiters and other mean characters, these fine Christians from the village of Wielga and their relatives in Warsaw became our helpers and saviours at our hour of great need and danger. May they in future receive as much goodness as they gave us!

330 (Polish) 'Bread, bread!'

331 In the orig., *yoke*, usually meaning a German Jew, also a German.

332 (Polish) Main [Railway Station].

b) (1) *Date unknown, Warsaw, A.J. Krzepicki's photograph;* (2) *Date unknown, place unknown, note with Krzepicki's relatives' address;* (3) *Date unknown, Warsaw ghetto[?], A.J. Krzepicki[?], site map of the Treblinka death camp.*



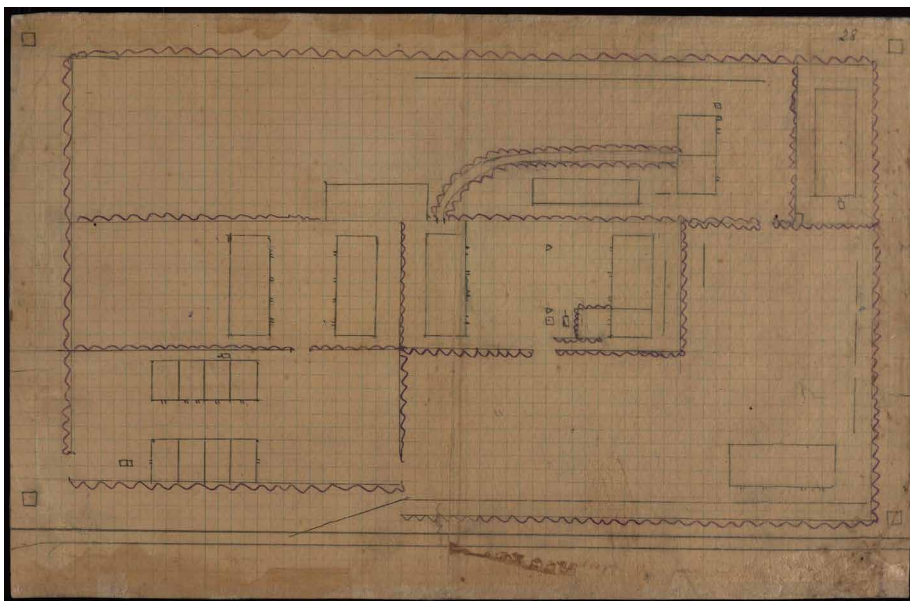
Re (1): Photograph; on the reverse a stamp: '8154 Foto 'Dager', Zamenhofa Street 3 and name 'Jakób Krzepicki'

Re (2): 'Jakób Krzepicki, Gdańsk, Jopengasse Street 27, born on 14 August 1915 in Praszka, Wieluń County;

Roza Krzepicka, Palestine, Tel Aviv, Michaelstrasse Street 4;

Abram Krzepicki, Mauritius, Port Louis, POB 1,000;'

'In case of my death please notify about my lot'



Re (3): Site map of the Treblinka death camp, without explanations.

ARG II 382 (Ring. II/299).

Description:

a) duplicate, handwritten (RA*), notebooks, pencil, Yiddish, German, Polish, Hebrew, 152×197, 160×197, 286 sheets, 323 pages.

b) (1) original, photograph, stamp, handwritten note (RA*, ink, Polish, traces of rust, 59x85 mm, 1 sheet, 2 pages); (2) original, note (handwritten — two hands?, pencil, ink, Polish, Yiddish, traces of rust, 118x68 mm, 1 sheet, 1 page); originally, the photograph was clipped with the note; (3) original or duplicate, drawing (handwritten, pencil, 223×344 mm, 1 sheet, 1 page).

After December 1942, Warsaw ghetto. [Abram Jakub Krzepicki], an abridged and slightly altered, unfinished testimony from Treblinka, with a map of the site attached.³³³

[1] During the deportation I worked in the Palma artificial honey factory³³⁴ as a night watchman. Labouring under the illusion that a job in the factory would protect me from the deportation, I moved out of my flat on Nowolipie Street and spent all my time at the factory.

On 25 August the factory courtyard became surrounded and blocked. In our courtyard was the Waldemar Schmidt workshop, which manufactured straw products. We did not stop our work. Suddenly, an SS-man accompanied by Ukrainians stormed into our factory. We heard a cry: *'Alle heraus.'*³³⁵

Workers from the Waldemar Schmidt workshop were already standing in groups in the courtyard. We joined them and were escorted by the Ukrainians to the *Umschlagplatz*.

Before entering the square I tried to sneak out from the row and flee. A Jewish policeman saw that and forced me to return.

Our group was immediately driven towards the freight wagons. There was no selection. Everybody was loaded into the wagons. A few minutes later the train pulled out.

The freight wagon I was in was packed with people and incredibly stuffy. The stuffiness grew worse by the minute.

When the train pulled out the people in the wagon³³⁶ became very depressed. The thought of near death consumed and frightened everybody. All around me I heard the words of the *kaddish* prayer for the dead.

[2] The train came to a halt after two hours and stayed in place for the whole night. Around midnight a Latvian entered the wagon holding a revolver. He had everybody stand on one side of the wagon. Under threat of execution

333 Original testimony see doc. 22.

334 On Zamenhofa Street 19, see doc. 22, p. [1].

335 (German) 'Everybody out.'

336 The document is handwritten by two copyists, interchangingly, until the middle of p. [4].

he demanded money and valuables. After the robbery, the Latvian left the wagon, shutting the door tightly behind him.

The train stayed in place. Two men forced their way to the small open window and jumped out onto the railway track. Several shots rang at the same time.

I considered escaping that way but the unbearable heat in the wagon deprived me of the strength and energy needed to force my way to the small window.

The people in the wagon were fainting and growing weak from thirst and stuffiness.

Torrents of sweat were dripping off the undressed bodies.

In the morning the train pulled out. We rode for a long time. We had no idea in what direction the train was going.

After several hours of travel an SS-man entered the wagon. He politely and convincingly assured us that we were heading for the village of Treblinka for a stopover and that after segregation we would be transported to our workplace. He appealed for obedience and diligence. At the end of his speech he stated that we were close to our destination.

The German left the wagon. The mood improved. Exhausted and thirsty, we awaited the end of the journey.

[3] At last.

The train came to a halt. The freight wagon door opened rapidly and we found ourselves in a square surrounded in all directions by barbed wire. We could see nearby buildings and various-sized barracks. An SS-man came and arranged us into two groups. On the one side were women and children and on the other exclusively men. After crossing the square we entered a courtyard surrounded with barbed-wire entanglements. There were barracks along both sides of the courtyard. Beside us were boards saying: '*Achtung Warschauer*'.³³⁷ Below them were the camp's rules and regulations.

Despite our insistent pleading, we did not get anything to drink. The women were escorted to the barrack on the left side of the courtyard, while the men were ordered to assemble in the centre of the square.

In the courtyard we noticed corpses and heaps of rags and clothes. Everybody was terrified. The premonition of death hung in the air.

337 See footnote 367.

But nobody dared do anything. We were paralysed by fear, exhaustion, and hunger.

At some point an SS-man appeared. He spoke to us. He announced that all of us would be given work and food and urged us not to be afraid.

‘They died, because they were rebels’, he said pointing at the corpses.

He picked out ten people for work and left. The rest had to wait. Several minutes later a different SS-man came and stated that he needed 60 people for work. Everybody volunteered in spite of being exhausted. Seeing that, the German started a selection of the volunteers.

[4] I was among those he picked out. We were escorted out of the courtyard and to the square beyond the buildings.

There were tangled-up heaps of corpses with terrifying faces. Those were people who had suffocated in the freight cars.

Our work consisted in carrying those bodies to a nearby pit. Our work was horrible. The corpses’ masks were purple and black, their popped-out eyes gazing wildly, and their bodies were tangled up and heavy. We were so tired that we could barely stand. But even so we were not allowed even a minute’s rest. When a German noticed somebody’s work pace slow down, a shot was fired and another corpse hit the dirt.³³⁸

The number of people working began to dwindle. I was feeling increasingly worse. At some point I could feel that I was about to faint. I looked for rescue.

Taking advantage of a moment of the German’s inattention, I approached the nearby barrack, beside which lay enormous heaps of clothing. I hid inside them. I heard the German’s cries and the sound of shots. And then it was quiet. An hour went by. I saw a commotion near my hideout. I made a small hole in the rags and peaked out. In the square stood a group of a few dozen people. Those I had worked with were not in it. I slowly got out from inside the heap and approached them.

They were a new group selected from a fresh transport. Nobody knew anything about the people who had worked there. Our conversation was interrupted by the appearance [5] of an SS-man and several Ukrainians. We were ordered to get going. We were escorted to the siding. A train with huge Russian wagons was standing on the tracks. The transport was from

338 The handwriting of the second copyist continues from here on.

Międzyrzecz.³³⁹ The wagons were filled with bodies of people who had suffocated. The corpses' tongues stuck out, their lips were white, and their eyeballs were popping out.

We were ordered to empty the wagons. In one of them was a few-years-old living child.

'Water!' it begged in a nightmarish voice. But nobody had any water. We were extremely thirsty. The Germans promised us that we would get water and soup after work.

There were still long hours of torment and [x]³⁴⁰ thirst ahead of us. I put my last ounce of strength into carrying on. My back was killing me at the slightest move of my trunk, and my mouth and intestines were one wound yearning for a drop of refreshment.

Our work finally comes to an end.

We arrange ourselves into a row. Buckets of water are brought. Everybody gets a mug of water. I can feel life surging inside me. I slowly realise that I am a human being, that I live, feel, and think.

That was followed by a realisation of the horrible reality, which had been suppressed by the temporary relief. We all knew that after finishing work the given group of labourers would be killed, 'binned', as the tragic end of the thousands of people was dubbed. Indeed, after some time a new group of labourers was formed. I was frantically thinking about how to get out of my group, which was already doomed. I was trying to join the people who had come to work from the Treblinka I penal camp (not to be confused with the death camp called Treblinka II).

[6] But the labourers feared for their life so much that they did not agree and mercilessly pushed me out of the rows. As I was walking back to the square I saw a golden twenty-dollar coin on the ground. I picked it up and approached a Ukrainian guard. He agreed to let me into the nearby outhouse in return for the gold I gave him. I sat there long hours. Meanwhile, a selection was conducted in the square — some of the people were to immediately die of a bullet, while the rest were escorted to the bathhouse. I could hear shots, the Ukrainians' cursing, and the horrifying cries of the people who

339 It was Międzyrzec Podlaski.

340 [x] terror.

were being murdered. My entire body was shivering as if I had a fever even though I had become less sensitive to the sight of blood and corpses. Hearing the shots, you were inadvertently happy that you were still alive and that that bullet had not been meant for you.

The execution in the square finally came to an end. I waited some more and went out. Scattered corpses in blood on the ground. The people who were to go to the bath were waiting for their turn — most stood motionless and stunned, in apathy and inhumane, unbearable horror. Another group of labourers, formed from a freshly arrived transport, was waiting to be transported to the workplace.

Unnoticed, I approached it. It was led by a Jew from Vienna. I talked with him in German. The deadly fear had not yet replaced his other feelings such as compassion and a sense of solidarity for the situation in which we all found ourselves. He let me join his group. I joined them but at that moment a German recognised me, grabbed me by the collar, and, kicking me, wanted to escort me to the group of people sentenced to death. I was saved by my knowledge of the German language and the Viennese [7] man's intercession. I yet again had miraculously avoided death.

We were to work in the storehouses. Our duty was to go through a huge heap of clothes and sort the valuables we found. We spent 8 days working there. No new transports of people arrived at the camp during that time. Our life as camp labourers stabilised for a while. During that time I became familiar with the camp and learned some details I had not known before.

In the enormous square surrounded with barbed-wire entanglements were clothing storehouses, barracks for the camp staff and labourers, empty spaces for assembling people, and places allocated for executions by a firing squad. But the pits seemed to take up most space. Before people began to be brought over, excavators had worked here day and night, digging in the dirt, preparing graves for millions of people.

A passage leads from the central square to the bathhouse. It is a small building hidden in the bushes, with the roof camouflaged by a green net. While being driven to the bathhouse, the people take off all their clothes and surrender the individual items of clothing to the labourers placed on the way to that end. The escort beats them mercilessly for tardiness or sloppiness, for instance, in the way they fold their clothes; in special cases the Ukrainians, at a signal given by the German, shoot. These bodies, which mark the path

to the place of death, are quickly removed by the labourers. Such instances are rare — the people driven here are so resigned, stupefied, and terrorised that acts of resistance are few and far [8] between.

From 800 to 1,000 people are let into the bathhouse at one time. None of us, labourers, knew exactly how death was dealt out. But we thought we could smell a barely perceptible trace of chlorine near the bathhouse. I never worked at removing bodies from the chamber but I knew that they were carried to the nearby pits, where they were then cremated along with all the refuse from the camp. But before that, in a small hut [x]³⁴¹ next to the bathhouse, gold teeth were pulled out of the corpses' mouth. That was done by labourers with special privileges — the gravediggers, who nevertheless were doomed to die in the same way as the victims at whose deaths they had assisted. We all knew that the work which was our last resort only prolonged the torment of waiting for death amidst the full horror of the camp. The hope of rescue, of an escape was very faint.

In the camp are labourers marked with yellow and red patches. They get better board and live in a better barrack and have a fallible hope for a longer life. The women who work in the barracks for the staff have worked there ever since the camp's establishment. All work in the camp is performed by Jews. The camp staff is composed of a few dozen Germans and a hundred and a hundred and a few dozen Ukrainians.

We were a group of ordinary labourers. We slept on bare ground and got three bowls of poor soup per day.

We could amass great sums of money and lots of the valuables left by the victims in their clothes. I buried about a kilogram of gold in the camp so that it would not fall into the Germans' hands.

[9] But there was no point in collecting treasures. We knew that time would come when we would leave our clothing on our way through the green grove to our death.

Eight days passed. A new transport of deportees arrived from Warsaw. A new selection was conducted in the group on the square: two of my companions standing on both my sides were taken away with the others. I remained once again. I once again avoided death.

341 [x] nearby.

The new group of labourers was to [x]³⁴² collect specific items of clothing. I took away footwear from the women who were sent to the bathhouse immediately after arrival. I was beaten when I accepted untied footwear. The women who did not tie the shoelaces were beaten too. We were beaten by a German — sadistically and long.

A second selection was to be conducted shortly. I was convinced that this was the end, that this time I could not trust blind fate, which had saved me until then. That evening, that is, on the eve of the possible execution, all of us, convicts, stayed up late even though we were tired from work. I wept. I had miraculously avoided death so many times that I could not bear the thought of giving up. I was immune to resignation and apathy, but was gripped by bleak and hopeless despair. One of my companions was consoling me. He had accepted his death as an individual among the millions of prisoners. I could not. I did not want to.

The next day we reported for selection on the camp's central square. But when [10] the first group of people who were to die was put aside, an extraordinary incident took place: one of my companions (he was an Argentinean citizen who had been illegally deported with his entire family) separated from the group and quickly approached the German who was conducting the selection and sank a knife in his back in one swift motion.³⁴³ The German collapsed, but the infuriated Ukrainians beat our companion into a bloody pulp with spades.

What followed was horrible. Frightened, the Germans hid in the barracks but only after having ordered the degenerate Ukrainians to conduct pogroms. A slaughter began. Groups of labourers were executed every evening. The blood flowed in torrents.

As soon as that incident took place I used the great commotion and hid inside a heap of clothes. I then managed to join a group of labourers who were loading the clothes into the freight wagons. I already knew that there was no time to hesitate, that these were the final days or even hours of those who were still alive in the camp and I was determined to try to escape no matter what.

I intended to hide in the clothing wagon. This was not an easy task. The labourers working by the wagons were counted and when one was missing all the remaining ones were held accountable. I eventually managed to

342 [x] consist in.

343 See doc. 22, pp. [203–206a].

convince my companions to help me cover myself in the wagon with a multitude of items of clothing. Two men, a father and son, hid with me. We managed to find substitutes³⁴⁴ — men fetched from the square joined the group in our stead.

[11] Buried in the heap of clothes and deeply anxious, I waited to see what would happen. The door was soon pulled open. We could feel somebody's hand rummage through the clothes to see if anybody was hiding there. We saw bright flashes of a reflector. We were waiting with sunken hearts but were ready for anything.

The crack of the door being shut told us that our torment was over. After a while we heard a shot — apparently the search in the next wagon [x]³⁴⁵ did have the desired effect. The train did not pull out for a while. Shots were fired.

Finally, we felt a strong pull: the train had pulled out. We cooled down — we were saved. But what now?

We did not know which direction the train was going, but we knew that we could not reach its destination. I waited for a moment when the train slowed down and I jumped out through the window into the unknown. The cool night air intoxicated me. I took a moment to revel in the rapidly recovered sense of freedom. The nightmare of the past days disappeared only to quickly return along with another one — the nightmare of the future.

—

Our gruelling and long wandering began. We received no help on the way. The peasants would not give us shelter and food, and not even directions. We walked at night and during the day we slept without a roof over our head in roadside ditches. I parted with my two companions in a sad [12] way: the peasant at whose place we wanted to spend the night insidiously separated us after he had sensed that we had money. He said he was afraid and for that he had to escort us separately to his cottage. I went first. He robbed me in the forest — I lost approximately 50,000 zlotys taken from the camp. He did not take the securities because he did not understand their value (I also saved some precious stones hidden in a matchbox). He let me go.

344 Information lacking in doc. 22.

345 [x] did bring.

I reached the small town of Stoczek, where I lived for a month off the valuables. When rumours about a nearing resettlement started going round Stoczek, I left one evening and we ran³⁴⁶ into a forest.

In the morning I was woken by a sound of a fusillade, which meant that the town was surrounded.

In the forest I met many people who had fled from the nearby small towns. We lived in the forest, hiding during manhunts in holes we had dug and camouflaged. And we paid dearly for the food delivered to us. But we remained there as the inhabitants, particularly the commune heads and village reeves, did not know about us. We lived like nomads — but when we found ourselves with no way out, I decided to return to Warsaw. I returned safe, that time without any adventures, which I owe to a peasant and his family — that was the only time I encountered a peasant helping a Jew.

After my arrival in Warsaw I stayed for some time at that man's relatives' place on Żłota Street, but, unwilling to overstay my welcome (they were strangers after all), I bid my farewell and on the day³⁴⁷

***** [7a]³⁴⁸ barbed-wire entanglements

↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ forest

- 1 railway track
- 2 siding — Treblinka station
- 3 clothes barrack
- 4 arrack for Jewish labourers
- 5 boards
- 6 undressing barrack
- 7 the road to the place of death
- 8 bathhouse
- 9 building intended as crematorium
- 10 pits
- 11 gravediggers' barrack

346 Plural form as in the original.

347 The testimony's end is missing.

348 The text is written on six sheets; the site map and explanations are on sheet numbered 7.

1[2]³⁴⁹ Ukrainians' barrack

13 privileged Jewish labourers' barrack

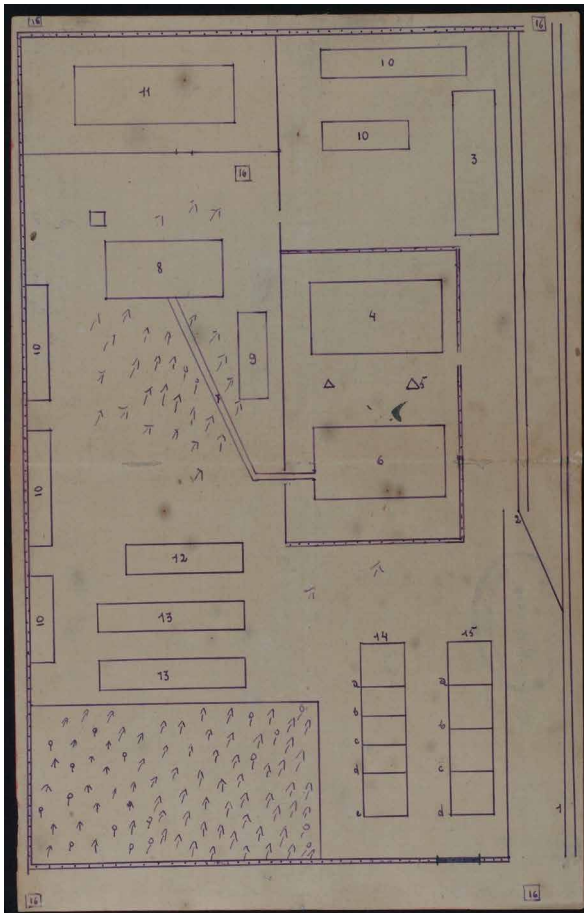
14 staff barracks: a) craftsmen workroom; b) --- c) Jewish kitchen; d) ---
e) ---

15 German staff's barrack: a) Ukrainian guardhouse; b) Germans'
bedroom;

c) Germans' bedroom; d) Germans' kitchen

16 watchtowers

[7b]



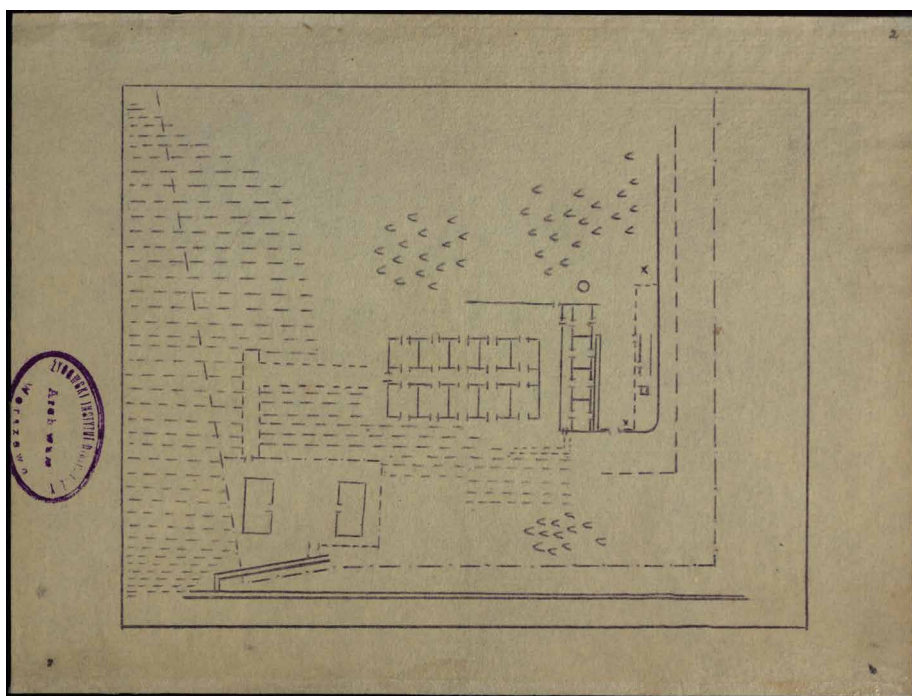
349 In the original, number 11 is repeated, likely the author's mistake.

ARG II 378 (Ring. II/295).

Description: duplicate, handwritten (two hands), ink, Polish, 152×191 (text), 196×310 mm (site map), 7 sheets, 14 pages.

Published in *Selected Documents*, pp. 710–16; *Guide*, p. 692 (photocopy).

24 Late 1942, Warsaw ghetto. Author unknown, map of the Treblinka death camp, without explanations.³⁵⁰



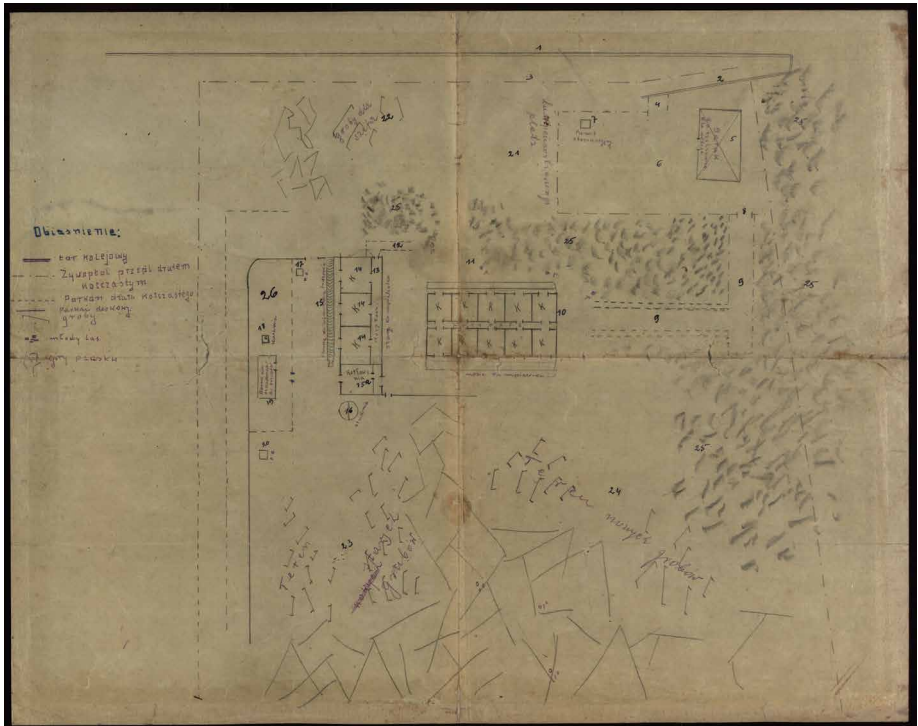
ARG II 384 (Ring. I/300/1).

Description: technical drawing of the site map (4 copies probably made with carbon paper); on the reverse of the fourth copy, the site outline by hand (similar sketches see doc. 11); pencil, 220x290 mm, 4 sheets, 5 pages.

350 It is a less detailed version of a map in doc. 16.

25

Late 1942, Warsaw ghetto. Author unknown, map of the Treblinka death camp, with some explanations; the new gas chamber is marked as 'nowe kompieliska' [sic] ('new bath.')



ARG II 385 (Ring. II/488).

Description: original, technical drawing and drawing by hand, handwritten explanations, pencil, ink, Polish, 440×352 mm, 1 sheet, 1 page.

26 *After November 1942, Warsaw. Author unknown, press article 'Obóz śmierci w Treblince' [Death camp in Treblinka]. Reprinted from "Głos Warszawy", an organ of the Warsaw Committee of the Polish Workers' Party.*

[1] Reprinted from 'Głos Warszawy',
organ of the Warsaw Committee of the Polish Workers' Party.³⁵¹

Death camp in Treblinka

The description of the death camp in Treblinka is based on recorded eyewitness testimonies, mostly from gravediggers who had escaped from it.

The village of Treblinka is located a few kilometres from Małkinia. In 1940, the Germans set up a concentration camp in the vicinity of that village. In March 1942, they began to build a new camp in the vicinity of that concentration camp. As with Bełżec and Sobibór near Włodawa, the goal was to murder large numbers of people, but that camp was to be much larger. The construction of that horrible murder site was concluded after two months, when the roof was put on house of death³⁵² no. 1. It is a masonry windowless building, consisting of a corridor, 3 chambers, and a boiler room. A door leads from the corridor to the chambers. From the outside the chambers have trapdoors, which open up onto a concave loading platform of a large boiler. Pipes go from the boiler room to the chamber. They have holes through which water vapour comes into the chambers after the boiler runs hot.³⁵³ The door and trapdoors in the chambers are airtight.

351 (Polish) 'Voice of Warsaw,' a periodical published by the Warsaw Committee of the Polish Workers' Party (Polska Partia Robotnicza, PPR), see *Centralny katalog polskiej prasy konspiracyjnej 1939–1945*, ed. Lucjan Dobroszycki (Warszawa, 1962), pp. 79–80.

352 Gas chamber.

353 Wrong information. In Treblinka victims were suffocated with exhaust fumes (carbon dioxide) produced by a tank engine. Initially, there were three gas chambers; additional ones were constructed in the autumn of 1942.

The death camp in Treblinka is a rectangle measuring 600 by 800 metres. The land is sandy, covered in part with forest, and in part with groves. The entire square is surrounded with barbed-wire entanglements. In the corners of the square are watchtowers equipped with machine guns and floodlights. Similar watchtowers have also been erected in several places inside the camp. The western border of the camp is the railway embankment, to which leads a specially constructed siding. Trains roll along the siding onto the unloading square, which can hold from 2 to 3 thousand people. There is a large barrack where clothes are sorted. A 100-metre-long forest road, fenced in with barbed wire, leads from the unloading square to the place of murder. Walking down that road on the right-hand side you go past a one-storey building, which is several times larger than the house of death used until now. This building is house of death no. 2, the construction of which the Germans began this August, but which was still unfinished in September. House of death no. 2 is to have 10 chambers. House of death no. 1 is located more to the south. During the last 5 months the Germans killed 2 million people there,³⁵⁴ mostly Jews from various parts of Poland, Germany, and France. But not only Jews. Eyewitnesses say that in late August a group of Poles was killed in house of death no. 1.

The entire eastern part of the camp is taken up by graves of the murdered. Initially, the graves were dug by Poles employed in the camp. Later, special digging machines were brought over. Powered by diesel engines, their clatter is a sound typical of the Treblinka death camp.

The camp commandant is an SS-man who holds the rank of gendarmerie captain by the name of Sauer [?].³⁵⁵ The staff is composed of 10 SS-men and 30 [?] Ukrainians.³⁵⁶ From among the people brought there to be killed the camp commandant selects auxiliary labourers to sort the clothes and bury the corpses. Due to emaciation and the inhuman treatment by the Germans hardly anybody from this auxiliary workforce survives more than 2 weeks. Every day there is a roll call of those unable to work, after which the camp commandant personally murders the gravediggers

354 According to latest estimates, approximately 800,000 Jews were murdered in Treblinka. See Introduction.

355 Wrong information, see Introduction.

356 Wrong information, see Introduction.

or clothing sorters who cannot work by shooting them in the back of the head from a revolver or rifle. He then selects their replacements from the arriving transports.

As a rule, Treblinka received two transports: in the morning and in the evening. Some of the freight wagons were put on the siding opposite the reception square and the maltreated and anxious human mass would spill onto the square, breathing with relief in the open space of the square. The people were welcomed with the following inscription on a high pole: 'Do not worry about your fate. You are all going east to work. You are going to work and your wives will be busy running the household. But before departure you must wash yourselves and your clothes must be deloused. Valuables and money must be deposited at the local safe upon receipt. After shower and delousing all your property shall be returned to you intact.'

[2] The order service escorts the women and children to the barrack. The men stay in the square. They are arranged into rows of 10 and ordered to take off their shoes, strip naked, and prepare for the bath. Each man is allowed to take a piece of soap and documents. Meanwhile, the women and children undress too, with the auxiliary labourers taking the folded clothes into the sorting barrack.

Then comes the final act of the Treblinka tragedy — the terrorised mass of men, women, and children begins to walk their final path to death. A group of women and children walks first, incessantly rushed forward with blows and nudges dealt by the escorting Germans, who are holding whips. The escort rushes the group faster and faster. The blows falling on the women, who are mad from fear and pain, are increasingly powerful. The screams and moans of the women and the curses of the Germans pierce the silence of the forest. The people finally realise they are walking to death. But it is too late now because the boss himself is standing by the entrance to house of death no. 1, a whip in hand, and he drives the women inside. The floor in the chambers is slippery. The people slip and fall but are unable to get up as a mass of new victims falls on them, pushed inside by force. The executioners throw little children inside, over the women's heads. The chambers finally fill up. The airtight door closes and the slow suffocation of the living people with water vapour begins.³⁵⁷ At first stifled screams come out from the inside, but

357 Wrong information, see footnote 560 above.

they slowly die down, and after 15 minutes the execution is finished. The execution of the men proceeds in the same way.

The gravediggers stand by and opposite the hatches. The hatches open up, but not a single body falls out. The vapour has glued all of the corpses into something like one solid mass. In their premortal agony, before breathing their last, the people became interlocked in one big macabre tangle of arms, legs, and trunks. To enable the gravediggers to remove individual corpses, the mass is splashed with buckets of cold water. Constantly beaten and hurried by the Germans, the gravediggers put the corpses on the concave platform until the chambers become empty. Now comes the burial of the corpses. Not long ago (in early August) the Jewish gravediggers had hand carts at their disposal to transport the corpses to the pits, which had to be done at a frantic pace. Recently, however, that convenience has been cancelled by the boss. *Ein Mann — zwei Leichen*.³⁵⁸ One gravedigger — two corpses. The gravediggers tie the corpses' arms or legs with trousers belts, drag them from the platform to the pits, and then have to run back for another burden. But with the increasing number of the victims the border of the graves gradually moves further and further away from the house of death and the dragging of corpses to their eternal resting place is becoming increasingly time-consuming. After filling [29] the grave, the gravediggers quickly cover up the bodies, while a digging machine digs another grave nearby. The diesel engine never falls silent.

The new house, four times larger than the one operating now, is calculated to fit from 8 to 10 thousand victims. If we take into consideration that until late September, when the new house of death was still not operative, 2,000,000 (two million) Jews from Poland and other countries had already been buried at Treblinka, that is, at least three-fourths of the surviving European Jews,³⁵⁹ then an alarming question arises — whom do the SS-men intend to kill in this new house of death no. 2 [?]

In all probability the Germans do not want to limit themselves to murder of the Jews. Once put into motion, the machine of death does not want to stop. It can be stopped by an external force, a decisive [x]³⁶⁰ and organised resistance of the conquered nations, an organised struggle, beginning with

358 (German) One man, two corpses.

359 Wrong information, see the Introduction.

360 [x] resistance.

forming self-defence groups, through partisan detachments, and all the way to a national armed uprising. This is the time to realise this truth, now when the occupier has commenced the mass deportation of Poles from the Lublin and Zamość regions³⁶¹ in an unknown direction.

ARG II 432b (Ring. II/319).

Description: original, mimeographed copy, Polish, 207x294 mm, 1 sheet, 2 pages.

361 The first deportations were conducted on 27 November 1942.

Glossaries

Glossary 1 — General Terms and Organisations

AKTION (German, pl. **AKTIONEN**, literally, action) — a term belonging to the Nazi occupation newspeak; a German operation aimed at total or partial destruction of a Jewish population of a town, ghetto or camp, linked with terror, tortures, pillage, confiscation of belongings, mass murder on the spot and/or in death camps.

ARBEITSAMT (German: Labour Office) — department of the Head of the District Office managing Jewish forced labour.

AUSWEIS (German, pl. **AUSWEISE**) — identity card; sometimes a certificate of employment.

DEATH CAMPS — camps established by Nazi Germans with its primary goal of mass murder of the Jews and Roma, by the use of poison gas. The first death camp was in Chełmno nad Nerem (Kulmhof) where the exhaust fumes and special vans were used. The other death camps had specially built gas chambers, in Bełżec, Sobibór, Treblinka, Majdanek and Auschwitz-Birkenau.

FORCED LABOUR CAMPS — as of 12 October 1939 all Jews between 14 and 60 years of age became subject to forced labour. The *Judenrats* were responsible for providing workers. The camps, mostly dealing with road construction or drainage projects, were established from August 1940 in the GG districts of Lublin and Kraków, and from the spring of 1941 also in the district of Warsaw. Camps' inmates were often beaten; in some camps, executions were carried out. The returnees were in very poor shape, both physically and mentally.

GENERAL GOVERNMENT (German: *Generalgouvernement für die besetzten polnischen Gebiete*, GG) — central part of Poland occupied by the Third Reich, established as an administrative unit following Hitler's decree of 26 October 1939 and existed until the end of WWII. GG was divided into four districts, with their authorities in Kraków, Lublin, Radom and Warsaw. The fifth District, Galicia, i.e. mostly former Polish voivodships of Stanisławów, Tarnopol and Lwów (in USSR from 17 September 1939), was included in GG from 1 August 1941. The central authority was governor general Hans Frank, residing in Kraków.

GESTAPO (German, acronym for *Geheime Staatspolizei*) — the secret political police of the Third Reich.

GROSZ (Polish, pl. GROSZES) — Polish currency, 1/100 of a zloty.

HATIKVAH (Hebrew: hope) — popular Zionist song, now the anthem of the State of Israel.

JEWISH ORDER SERVICE (German: *Jüdischer Ordnungsdienst*), also known as the Jewish police — uniformed service staffed by Jews, established in the ghettos in occupied Poland, officially accountable to the *Judenrats*, in fact subordinated to the German authorities. Its tasks included guarding the gates of the ghetto, carrying out forced labour, and participation in the prevention of epidemics.

JUDENRAT (German: literally, Jewish Council) — German-appointed authorities for Jews of a given town or labour camp; sometimes referred to as *gmina* or *kehillah*, also as Council of Elders. Its duties included implementation of German decrees, especially providing forced labourers. It was responsible for the administration of a ghetto, with the help of the Jewish Order Service. For ghettos' inmates it was emblem of German occupation, however, some members used their role to help the Jewish population.

JUNAK (Polish; pl. JUNACY, literally, brave young man) — popular term for the workers of the Construction Service (*Baudienst*). They worked at road construction, laying railway tracks, and river engineering, and participated in the German police actions.

KAPO — functionary in German concentration camps; despite being inmates, Kapos had considerable privileges; sadists and criminals were often selected for the function. The term possibly derived from *Kameraden-Polizei*, as explained in doc. 13, p. [37].

MARK, RM (German, from *Reichsmark*) — German currency.

OYNEG SHABES (Hebrew) — Joy of Sabbath; code name of the underground archive of the Warsaw ghetto, also called the Ringelblum Archive, from the name of its organizer and leader, Polish-Jewish historian Emanuel Ringelblum.

REICHSDEUTSCHE (German) — ethnic German(s) living in the Reich, on its territory after 1871; also refers to Germans from the Free City of Danzig at the outbreak of the war.

RESETTLEMENT see WYSIEDLENIE.

SA, die STURMABTEILUNGEN der NSDAP (German: literally, Storm Detachment) — the Nazi party paramilitary wing. It played a significant role in Hitler's rise to power in 1920s and 1930s. Its primary purposes were providing protection for Nazi rallies and assemblies; disrupting the meetings of opposing parties; and intimidating Romani, and especially Jews. SA-men, mentioned in the documents, might have been members of *Selbstschutz*.

SCHARFÜHRER (German) — paramilitary rank of non-commissioned officer, in the SS equivalent of *Unterfeldwebel*, in the SA equivalent of *Unteroffizier* in *Wehrmacht*.

SELBSTSCHUTZ (German: literally, self-protection) — paramilitary units composed of ethnic Germans and serving as auxiliary units of the Gestapo, SD and SS during early stages of the occupation of Poland.

SHEYGETZ, (Yiddish, from Hebrew *sheketz* — unclean animal; pl. SHKOTZIM) — non-Jewish young man (derogatory).

SHOP (from English: workshop) — a German company that had taken over smaller Jewish companies and manufactured products for the Germans. The first workshops were opened in the Warsaw ghetto in 1941. The largest of these, Walther Többens's workshop, employed 18,000 people.

SS (German, abbr. *Die Schutzstaffel*) — defense echelons of NSDAP; elite quasi-military units that served first as Hitler's personal guard and a special security force; they took part in the *Aktionen*, also provided guards and staff of concentration camps and death camps.

UMSCHLAGPLATZ (German: literally, reloading site) — railway siding and warehouses at Stawki and Dzika Streets in Warsaw. In the summer of 1942 it served as a gathering point for Jews who were to be deported to Treblinka death camp.

VOLKSDEUTSCHE (German: ethnic Germans, those belonging to the German nation) — a term used during World War II to identify persons of German origin living outside the German state before 1939, who declared their German nationality after the Nazi seizure of power and who signed the German nationality register — the *Volkliste*.

WERTERFASSUNG OR WERTERFASSUNGSTELLE (German) — company set up by the SS in the Warsaw ghetto which since the fall of 1942 amassed and sold property of deported Jews; similar establishment in Nazi camps.

WYSIEDLENIE (Polish: resettlement, deportation) — at the beginning of the German occupation, it meant expulsion of large ethnic groups of people, Polish and Jewish, sometimes entire communities, from the territories incorporated into the Third Reich, to the General Government, and then Jews from small towns of the Warsaw District to the Warsaw ghetto. Later on, it was a synonym for deportation to the death camp.

ZŁOTY (Polish; pl., ZŁOTYS) — Polish currency. See also: grosz.

Glossary 2 — Terms Pertaining to Jewish Religion and customs

BET HAMIDRASH (Hebrew: house of study) — place for studying religious texts, often a place of prayer as well.

KADDISH — one of the oldest, most important, and frequently repeated prayers, praising God, his greatness and holiness; traditionally regarded as a prayer for the dead.

KEHILLA(H) (Hebrew: community) — traditional self-government organisation of Jews of a given town.

MA'ARIV (Hebrew) — evening prayer.

MISASEK (Hebrew, pl. MISASKIM) — member of a volunteer Jewish burial society, carrying out the burial rites; here used in a highly ironic way.

SHEMA YISRAEL (Hebrew: Hear, O Israel) — the most important Jewish profession of faith in God, recited daily. The first two lines are: *Shema Israel adonai eloheinu*

adonai echad: baruch shem kevod malchuto le'olam va'ed (Hear, o Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one: Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom for ever and ever.)

SIDDUR (Hebrew, pl. SIDDURIM) — prayer book containing order of daily prayers.

TEFILLIN (Hebrew, from *tefilla*: prayer) — a set of black leather boxes containing scrolls with verses from the Torah, worn by observant Jews during morning prayers.

VIDDUY (Hebrew) — final confession.

YOM KIPPUR (Hebrew: Day of Atonement) — day of fasting and prayer on the 10th day of the month of *Tishrei* (September/October), concluding the celebration of the Jewish New Year; in Poland often called a Day of Judgement (*Sądny Dzień*).

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