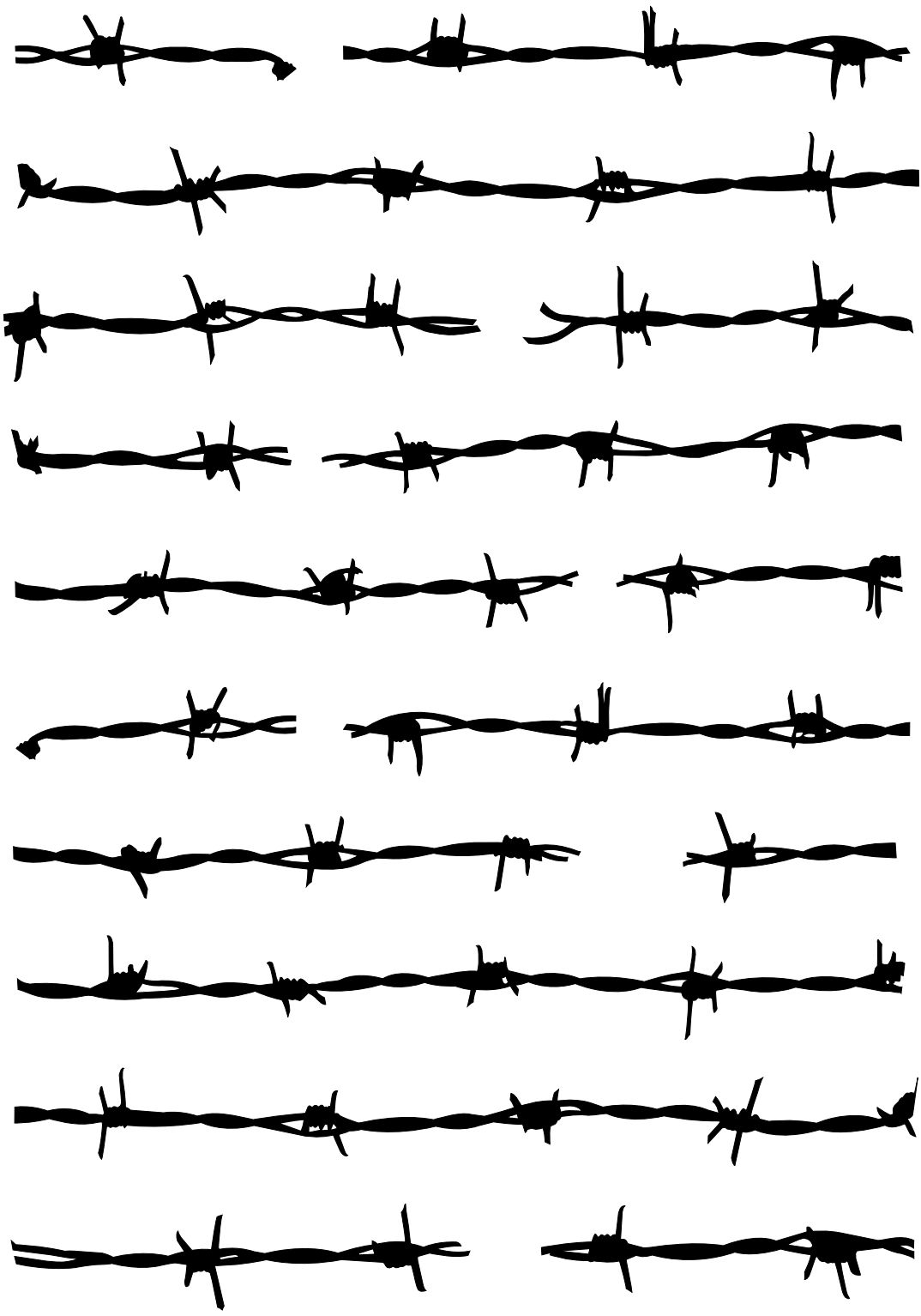
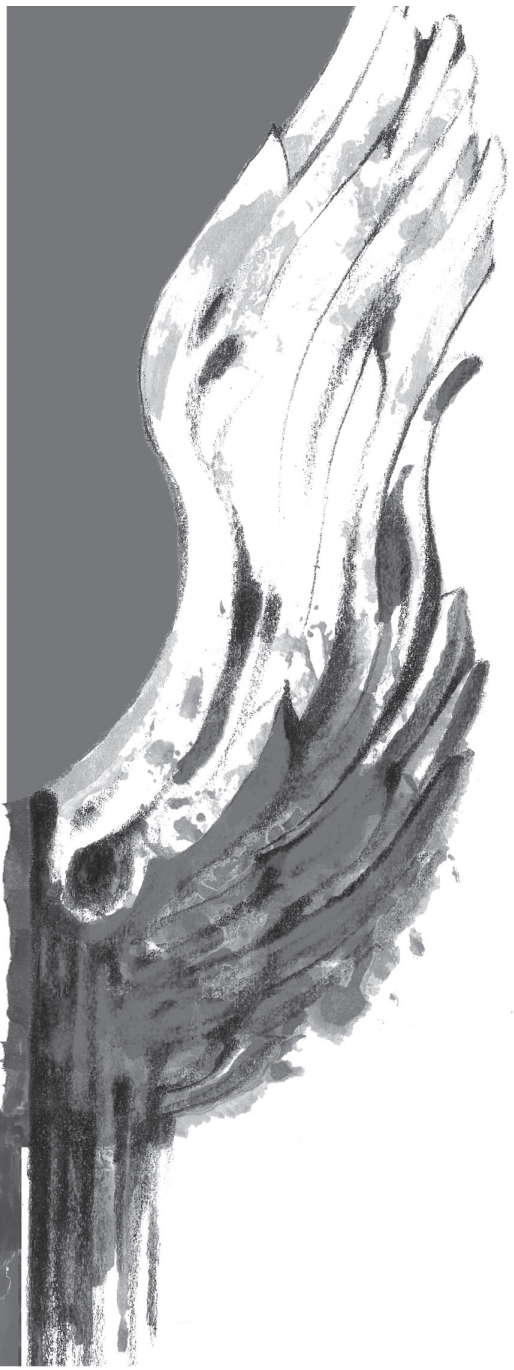


Witold's Report from Auschwitz

www.rtmpilecki.eu

The Honorary Patronage
of the President of the Republic of Poland
Mr. Andrzej Duda



13.05.1901 - 25.05.1948

WITOLD PILECKI

Captain Witold Pilecki

Witold's Report from Auschwitz

APOSTOLICUM

FOREWORD BY ANDRZEJ DUDA – THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF POLAND*

President of
the Republic of Poland

Warsaw, 29 November 2016

Foreword to
publication entitled *Witold's Report*
by the APOSTOLICUM Publishing House

Cavalry Captain Witold Pilecki was one of the greatest heroes of Poland, Europe and the entire free world in the 20th century. He belonged to the bravest soldiers of the Republic of Poland and gave countless examples of courage, fortitude and effectiveness. The services he rendered in the armed struggle for independence of his Homeland during the 1920 War with the Bolsheviks, the 1939 Defensive War and the Warsaw Uprising cannot be overestimated. His underground activity as 'a volunteer to Auschwitz' and a participant of the second conspiracy, aimed against the post-WWII communist regime creates both: a heroic and a tragic epic, which should be known by every person who holds dear such values as the freedom of nations and human dignity.

Therefore, I am delighted that readers are now being introduced to the first critical edition of the *Witold's Report*. It is the most exhaustive account from the German Extermination Camp Auschwitz authored by Cavalry Captain Pilecki. The report describes one of the most horrific experiences in the history of mankind: slave labour and mass extermination executed by Nazi Germany. The cruelty of totalitarianism shows what man is capable of doing when Christian values and universal ethical rules are rejected. It reveals fruits of racially motivated hatred and disdain. But at the same time, the report proves that even amid such circumstances, it is up to our will whether we manage to save our humanity and demonstrate solidarity with our neighbours. It is a wonderful testimony of the triumph of the spirit of freedom and patriotism over brutal violence.

I am convinced that the *Witold's Report* constitutes not only an invaluable historical document but also that it sends an important message for the future. I believe that thanks to this publication, the contemporary Poles, in particular the young ones, will have a chance to get to know better the history of our nation during WWII. I also trust that they will be inspired by the attitude adopted by the author and many persons he described.

Andrzej Pilecki, son of the Cavalry Captain, repeatedly quoted the advice given by his father: 'Love your Homeland as much as your family. Love everyone, serve everyone.' May, thanks to this book, the timeless last will and testament of Witold Pilecki find heirs and followers for generations to come.

/-/ Andrzej Duda

* Formal translation of the letter.

Prezydent
Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej

Warszawa, 29 listopada 2016 roku

Wstęp
do publikacji *Raport Witolda*
Wydawnictwa Apostolicum

Rotmistrz Witold Pilecki to jeden z największych bohaterów Polski, Europy i całego wolnego świata w XX wieku. Należał do najdzielniejszych żołnierzy Rzeczypospolitej. Dał niezliczone dowody odwagi, męstwa i skuteczności. Nie sposób przecenić jego zasług, które położył w walce zbrojnej o niepodległość Ojczyzny podczas wojny z bolszewikami w 1920 roku, wojny obronnej 1939 roku i powstania warszawskiego. Jego działalność podziemna jako „ochotnika do Auschwitz" i uczestnika drugiej konspiracji przeciw powojennemu reżimowi komunistycznemu tworzy zaś heroiczną i tragiczną epopeję, którą powinien znać każdy, komu bliskie są takie wartości, jak wolność narodów i godność człowieka.

Dlatego bardzo się cieszę, że do rąk czytelników trafia pierwsza edycja krytyczna *Raportu Witolda*. To najobszerniejsza relacja rotmistrza Pileckiego z niemieckiego obozu zagłady w Oświęcimiu. Raport opowiada o jednym z najstraszniejszych doświadczeń w dziejach ludzkości: niewolniczej pracy i masowej eksterminacji przez nazistowską III Rzeszę. Okrucieństwo totalitaryzmu pokazuje, do czego zdolny jest człowiek, który odrzuca wartości chrześcijańskie i uniwersalne zasady etyki. Ukazuje owoce nienawiści i pogardy, motywowanych ideologią rasistowską. Ale jednocześnie jest on też dowodem, że nawet w tak nieludzkiej rzeczywistości od naszej wolnej woli zależy, czy zdołamy ocalić człowieczeństwo i solidarność z bliźnimi. To wspaniałe świadectwo triumfu ducha wolności i patriotyzmu nad brutalną przemocą.

Jestem przekonany, że *Raport Witolda* pozostaje nie tylko bezcennym dokumentem historycznym, ale też że jego lektura niesie istotne przesłanie dla przyszłości. Wierzę, że dzięki tej publikacji współcześni Polacy, zwłaszcza młodzi, będą mogli lepiej poznać losy naszego narodu podczas II wojny światowej. A także czerpać inspirację z postawy jego autora i wielu opisanych przezeń osób.

Syn rotmistrza, Andrzej Pilecki, wiele razy wspominał wskazania swojego ojca: „Kochaj Ojczyznę jak swoją rodzinę. Kochaj wszystkich, wszystkim służ". Niechaj dzięki tej książce ten ponadczasowy testament Witolda Pileckiego znajduje spadkobierców i kontynuatorów w kolejnych pokoleniach.

The Pilecki family:
Witold with his wife, Maria, and children, Zofia and Andrzej
1934

FOREWORD BY ZOFIA PILECKA-OPTUŁOWICZ – THE CAPTAIN'S DAUGHTER

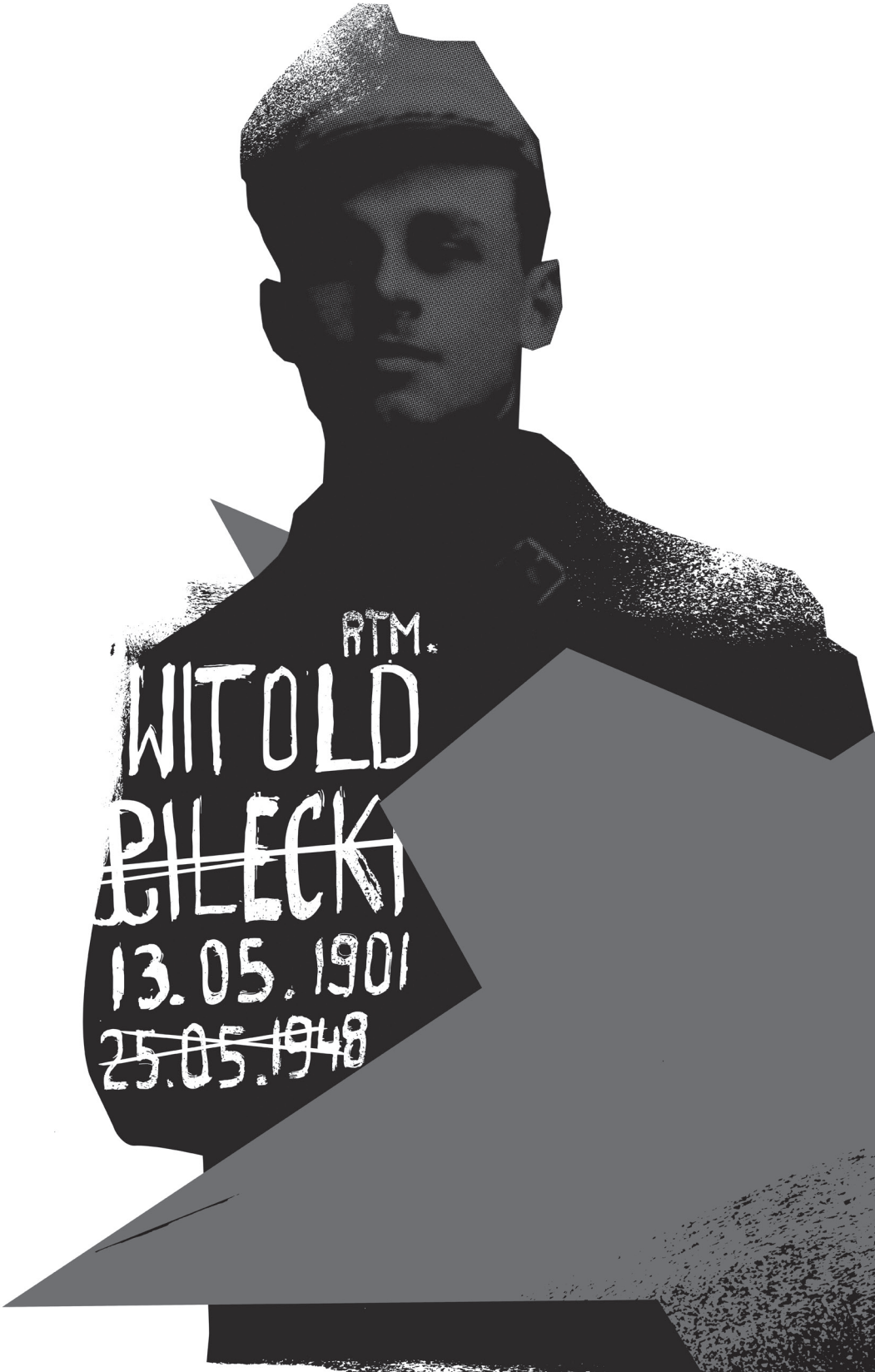
My parents, Maria and Witold, were real jewels for me; they were my biggest treasure. I think of my daddy as a daughter thinks of her caring father, her best friend, a missed family member, warm and close...

However, more often now I think of him as a hero, a champion, a role model and a person who is unshakable and honoured by his country. I am now less the 'Little Lady General,' as he called me, but like thousands and millions of Poles I am more the heiress of his duty for Poland. Like many Poles I owe him the passing of national values to our generation.

I am very pleased that more and more schools are named after Cavalry Captain Witold Pilecki; I am happy that many young people take part in marathons, peaceful marches and other projects in his memory.

I must admit, that sometimes I do not know whether I am just one of many, or still the 'Little Lady General,' who is honored and distinguished because of him. Cavalry Captain Witold Pilecki became a national treasure and an impressive dowry for Polish eagles in their duties for Poland. Ultimately, I think the more he is everyone's, then he becomes mine even more.

I would like to thank authors and publishers for the testimony to his memory which is presented in this publication.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WITOLD
PILECKI
13.05.1901
25.05.1948

FOREWORD BY WITOLD WASZCZYKOWSKI – MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE REPUBLIC OF POLAND

Dear Readers,

Witold's Report makes shocking reading as it shakes your conscience awake through stealing its peace and generating protesting thoughts; you will read in disbelief about the dreadful, dehumanizing things perpetrated in 20th century Europe. A full awareness of such atrocities as committed by the Germans during World War II exists in modern, contemporary societies. However, this awareness only seems to exist in the form of frequently unfair stereotypes, perpetuated by leading authorities on the subject, rather than as an event report verified at source and supported by historical analysis.

On September 1, 1939 Germany invaded Poland. The disproportion of strength between the two sides can be compared to the biblical struggle between David and Goliath – Goliath, the battle hardened, colossal and well-trained beast-soldier fighting a young boy – a shepherd, who had never taken up arms. The German army was double the size of Poland's, German tanks outnumbered Poland's four times and German planes were five times more numerous than Poland's. At the time of the invasion, Poland had existed as an independent country for only 21 years, having won its freedom after 123 years of partitions among three superpowers with the blood of the one-thousand year-old indomitable nation. The real-life struggle unfortunately did not end in a biblical victory – after World War II, Poland became a satellite state of the Soviet Union following a decision taken by the Allies.

Nazi Germany, with its ideology of the master race, turned the war machine into an instrument of extermination of other nations, and the concentration camps the Germans had built in Poland – conquered and abandoned in its struggle against the invader – became death factories. According to the most recent historical research, approximately 60 million people were killed during World War II and the number of victims of

Nazi Germany, which had taken measures to exterminate whole nations, ranged from over 10 million to over 13 million people, depending on the source, including 6 million Jews. The majority of the victims died in German concentration camps located in German-occupied Poland.

The heroism of Witold Pilecki, the author of reports from KL Auschwitz, is undeniable. Pilecki, a Polish Army officer, who fought bravely during the September Campaign, joined the resistance movement when the situation became hopeless and when regular struggle against the German occupier became pointless. The first pieces of information about KL Auschwitz reached Pilecki's underground organization in the second half of 1940. It soon became obvious that camps of this type were being established on a mass scale across German-occupied Poland and the reports that came from them were terrifying. Cavalry Captain Pilecki volunteered to collect intelligence about KL Auschwitz from the inside and on 19 September 1940 walked into a roundup under the false name of Tomasz Serafiński.

Pilecki spent over 2,5 years in the camp as a forced labourer, living in extreme conditions. In his own account, the situation has 'long since crossed the line of what people "on earth" call "danger."' He managed to establish a clandestine resistance organization that supported prisoners and was entirely made up of inmates. He always tried to lift their spirits while collecting information about the German genocide, finding ways to pass the intelligence outside the camp's barbed wire fence. He managed to make a daring escape on the night of April 26, 1943, an extraordinary feat considering that very few inmates attempted to escape and those who did so, were usually killed.

The testimony of bestial atrocities committed in the German concentration camp KL Auschwitz provided by Cavalry Captain Witold Pilecki, in addition to Jan Karski's account, represents an invaluable source of historical information about the German atrocities during World War II.

> *What can humanity possibly say today, the same humanity which wants to prove the progress of culture and puts itself, as being from the twentieth century, at a much higher level than the humanity of the centuries of yore?*
>
> *Can we, the people of the twentieth century, even look at the faces of those who lived before us and – a funny thing – argue our superiority?*
>
> *When, in our time, a 'cover' of the past has already been removed, an armed mass destroys not an enemy army, but entire nations, helpless*

societies, by means of the latest technologies. The progress of civilization – yes! But the progress of culture??? – ridiculous.

We have gone far too far, my friends, horribly so.

A dreadful thing indeed, there are no words to describe it...

I wanted to say: animal-like cruelty... But no! We are a whole level of hell worse than animals!

I have every right to make such a statement, especially after seeing all these things I had seen and after what started happening in Auschwitz a year later.

It is hard to comprehend the extent of brutality committed by the German Reich, especially when you read Witold Pilecki's report in a cozy, warm home, filled with the laughter of children playing in the next room.

Yours sincerely,

Witold Pilecki 13.05.1901 – 25.05.1948

FOREWORD BY MARIUSZ BŁASZCZAK – MINISTER OF INTERIOR AND ADMINISTRATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF POLAND

The occupation of Poland, invaded and annexed by its two neighbours: the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, is one of the most tragic chapters of World War II. Six million Polish citizens died in the result of the occupants' bestiality, which constituted almost 18% of the population of the country. Still, the scale of the sacrifice and heroism of its inhabitants were beyond compare in Europe. Many risked their own lives and the fate of their families by giving aid to the Jews, which threatened an irrevocable death sentence. That great volume of the Polish history should be known and remembered by all generations, as its exposure is for our current instruction, drawing the materials of future wisdom from the past errors and infirmities of mankind.

Captain Witold Pilecki is known as 'one of the most brilliant diamonds' among Poland's heroes and 'the highest example of Polish patriotism.'* In 1940 he deliberately let himself get caught and imprisoned in the Nazi German death camp Auschwitz in order to organize a resistance movement and later escape to inform the world about the Nazi German ferocities. Voluntarily, the outstanding choice to became 'number 4859' was made within, and for, Poland's anti-German underground.

Pilecki smuggled out several brief reports from Auschwitz in 1940, 1941 and 1942, and after his escape in 1943. He describes his own entrance to Auschwitz as the moment when he 'left behind everything he was familiar with "on earth" and stepped into somewhere beyond it.' Our current generations' imagination is unable to recall such reality, thus to understand what it means that the cruel concentration camp became a death facility one should accept Pilecki's invitation for a walk into the past. By reading the *Witold's Report* we have an unprecedented possibility to knock on the death camp

* Embassy of the Republic of Poland in Washington, D.C., *Captain Witold Pilecki commemorated at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC*, www.waszyngton.msz.gov.pl/en/news/captain_witold_pilecki_commemorated_at_the_u_s_holocaust_memorial_museum_in_washington_dc (accessed September 26, 2017).

doors and through the author's lenses see that 'people were so crowded that they had no room to keel over upon dying.' He reported minutely on the slave labour and the mass extermination of prisoners by the Nazi Germans in Auschwitz. However, it is hard to believe that his insightful report could not change the course of history. Unfortunately, the Allies took for granted that Pilecki was exaggerating and refused to liberate Auschwitz. Thus, the *Witold's Report* remains in history both as a proof and a lesson that the opposite of life is not merely death, but also our human indifference.

'If ever there was an Allied hero who deserved to be remembered and celebrated, this was a person with few peers,' states Norman Davis, a British historian. Indeed, Witold Pilecki's portrait of life is so unique that every attempt to embrace its heritage and achievements in few lines certainly remains elusive. Pilecki died at the age of 47, after being falsely accused of treason, tortured and murdered by the Communists. He had a show trial. His grave has not been found until today. Still, he saved dignity.

The most effective way to destroy humanity is to deny and obliterate its own understanding of their past. Without words, without writing, there would be no history, no concept of humanity. Pilecki's report on Auschwitz, unpublishable for decades in Communist Poland, now is translated into English to reach the global audience as a historical document of the greatest importance. Let the timeless testament and legacy of Captain Pilecki be followed by a wide-ranging response to the successive generations who seek answers to today's dilemmas in the meanders of history.

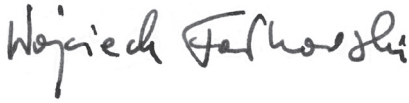
FOREWORD BY WOJCIECH FAŁKOWSKI – DEPUTY MINISTER OF NATIONAL DEFENSE OF THE REPUBLIC OF POLAND

We live in times when great and real heroes need to be rediscovered and remembered again. Their actions, demeanor and beliefs need to be seen again, but their suffering and oppression should be compensated by our admiration after all these years.

The report about what Cavalry Captain Witold Pilecki saw and went through is a dramatic testimony of inhumane times and violence. It is a warning against the reoccurrence of these crimes but also proves that there are always heroes among us capable of the greatest sacrifice.

Witold Pilecki proved by his martyrdom at the hands of Communist bandits that in all circumstances one can be a patriot faithful to the most important values.

We are reading his report with great agitation, the message which he left for the next generations. We are following his life story with great emotions. Standing to attention we show our respect for him.



Witold Pilecki

13.05.1901 - 25.05.1948

FOREWORD BY KRZYSZTOF KOSIOR – THE CAPTAIN'S GREAT-GRANDSON

The *Witold's Report* is an official Polish Underground State intelligence document which presents the resistance movement activities within the Auschwitz camp. Despite its military intelligence character, it is written in a relatively approachable manner, with many personal observations and emotions which complement the whole picture. The *Witold's Report* was also supposed to be a cry to the world, as it is one of the first reports on the Holocaust. The early version of the report was written by Witold Pilecki in 1943 and then smuggled out from Poland through Sweden to London. Unfortunately, it was not well received, as the Allied powers judged it as exaggerated and not fully trustworthy. Just as Jan Karski's report, the Pilecki's report was turned down. The proposed ideas of a military liberation of the camp or at least bombing the railroad tracks to hinder its operation were never executed.

The *Witold's Report* has already been published a few times – also in translations. This latest edition is the full version of the later, expanded report of 1945. The people involved in this edition, set their goal at providing the reader with the most accurate version, preserving the original arrangement of the words. Please bear in mind that this text is provided as it was written – not polished for publication by the author. It concerns the grimmest reality of a German concentration camp and was written without any influence of political correctness, therefore it might look shocking for today's reader.

As for Witold Pilecki, I am very glad that this character whom I have known for many years only from the family tales, is becoming more and more popular in the last years. I strongly believe that the life and deeds of Witold are truly worth knowing worldwide. This is a good opportunity for me to thank my grandmother and her brother who have fought for their father's good name and preserved his story through the darkest years of the Communist reign in Poland. I would also like to thank all the people and institutions involved in reminding us of Witold's story.

Witold was a truly unusual person. I know the family stories of Witold being a daring admirer of my great-grandmother, who threw elderberry bouquets through her window. I've heard the stories of Witold being a bit strict but always a fair father, who persuaded his children to always tell the truth, no matter how hard it might be. I'm impressed how Witold was able to show his little daughter the importance of the chain of life – by turning her attention to a little lady bug she almost trampled upon. It's incredible how much love and care he enclosed in the letters to his children during the war. In just a few years of direct contact with his children he managed to pass on to them the most important values and shaped their future postures. The thing that my grandmother has always emphasized was Witold's love for every living creature and the truth as the highest virtue. Both of his children carried these lessons throughout their lives.

I have also got to know Witold as a robust farmer and land owner, who was involved in numerous initiatives to develop and strengthen the local community and who took care of his neighbours. Probably because of this, our family was saved by the local countrymen in 1939, when the Red Army invaded.

Witold was a strong believer. Religion was his very important foundation which helped him on many occasions. It has strengthened him to survive not only the Auschwitz camp, but also the tortures of the communist prison in 1947. One of the last things Witold told his wife was to read *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas a Kempis – as the book which would give her and their children the strength in life.

I think Witold was partly an unfulfilled artist, who was studying fine arts at the University of Wilno, but due to financial problems he wasn't able to complete the studies. Nonetheless, he has drawn numerous sketches and pictures, especially for children. He has decorated his own home with paintings and also painted a few icons – images of saints for the local church in Krupa.

He was a soldier – a volunteer in the Polish-Soviet War of 1920. In the 1930s he has organized and equipped the local cavalry unit. He was not afraid to head straight to the front line to defend his homeland. He took active part in the fighting in September 1939, losing his beloved horse 'Bajka' ('Fairy Tale'). Five years later, once again he fought the Germans in the Warsaw Uprising.

As a conspirator and a secret agent of the state – right after the defeat of the Polish Army in October 1939, when the Germans and the Soviets have conquered Poland (as the result of the German-Soviet Boundary and Friendship Treaty signed on September 28, 1939) – Witold has co-founded the TAP (Secret Polish Army), one of the first

significant underground organizations plotting against the occupant. Also just after the Second World War Witold took up work as an intelligence agent of the rightful Polish government-in-exile – against the new Soviet occupation of Poland. It was for this activity he was soon to pay with his life. Unfortunately for the most Polish people, the Red Army, which banished the Germans, didn't bring peace and freedom to Poland, but a new occupation instead. Witold has fought two powerful totalitarian regimes but was tortured and killed in 1948 by the Polish Communists. The interesting thing is that the decision to stay in the after-war Communist Poland was made by both Witold and his wife Maria, who did not want to live in any other country than Poland – no matter how twisted life here may have become. Also after Witold's death Maria and both her children were persecuted as the family of the enemy of the state and any information on Witold was harshly censored until the fall of Communism in 1989. As a result of this, even today we still don't know where the remains of Witold are. He has only a symbolic grave...

But coming back to the Second World War, obviously the most important thing is Witold being the only known person who deliberately went to KL Auschwitz as a prisoner. This was his mission as the member of the Polish underground intelligence. And not only did he go there, he also succeeded in creating an active resistance movement, which provided self-help for the inmates, sent the first intelligence reports about the camp and about the Holocaust. Witold managed to persuade people of many different political options to join their forces for the common goal of opposing the inhuman actions of the Auschwitz-Birkenau German authorities.

In my opinion, all the accomplishments of Witold were possible, because he was always faithful to his principles. He always stressed that the truth is the most important virtue. He was friendly to very different people and was able to convince them to work together. He was also a deeply religious person – the Catholic faith helped him a lot in the camp. He must have believed in God and in 'good.' However laconic would that sound for us today – he loved other people and had a strong desire to help those in need.

All these virtues – truth, good, love – I find universal. Everyone can draw from them. As Witold's story shows us – no matter how dire the circumstances are, there is always hope and there is always something you can do. Obviously, not every time our efforts come to fruition. So many of Witold's fellow conspirators didn't make it. They have died, although they made their best efforts. Sometimes they died in vain, sometimes they died while helping their friends. It was the harsh reality of this killing-machine, called Auschwitz. I always tend to remind myself that behind the character of Witold Pilecki in Auschwitz, there was the whole organization – a well-oiled mechanism that made resistance possible and which holds stories of many people who gave their lives

and we will never know much about them. Their method was to never lose one's hope and always try to make a difference. Witold writes in his report very clearly that he observed situations in which people who came to the camp as noble and good, quickly degraded in the camp's conditions to selfish, self-centred, mean individuals. And also many people underwent the opposite change: from persons of dubious morality they evolved into crystal clear characters.

As Witold himself has managed to keep his humanity and did not break down morally, the 947 days (that's more than 2 and half years!) he has spent in the camp before his escape definitely left an imprint on him. When he was directly endangered with being exposed, he only escaped when the German authorities have finally lifted the collective responsibility for escapes.

The underground movement in Auschwitz managed to carry out some impressive actions. Apart from organizing additional food and clothes, makeshift medical support, they managed to send numerous short reports about the camp to the Polish Underground State and even prepared for the expected uprising in case of an external military help.

But when talking about KL Auschwitz-Birkenau, it is impossible not to remind that there were different categories of prisoners, introduced by the German authorities. There were special triangle tabs (so-called Winkels) on inmates' clothes. The colours meant different 'sins' against the Third Reich. Political, criminal, homosexuals, pacifists, Soviet prisoners of war and also Romani people and Jehovah's Witnesses. The letters on these coloured triangle badges meant different nations. All these categories had different consequences, but the most basic and serious division was the one targeting Jews.

The Jews' situation was the most tragic one. The official statistics from the camp, which still might be underestimated, say that out of more than a million Jews sent to the camp, 90% were killed, meanwhile out of 140 thousand Poles 46% were killed.

This is the reason why Witold's resistance organization could function in the camp in the first place. As the non-Jewish prisoners were to function until their slow death from malnutrition, poor weather conditions and brutal abuse while working for the Nazi German 'new race of lords,' they would have needed to somehow attract the guards' attention to be instantly interrogated or killed. But the Jews were intended to be killed as soon as possible.

If I may paraphrase the words of Pope John Paul II, who called the Jews 'our elder brothers in faith,' I would call all the non-Jewish camp inmates 'their younger brothers

in misery.' This does not downgrade the immensity of the Jewish people's suffering. It reminds the often omitted part of the history of KL Auschwitz and is the reason why Polish people and our diplomats react so lively to the term 'Polish death camps.' This is a simply untrue statement, as Polish authorities nor nationals did not organize or run these camps, and the Auschwitz camp was built on the land, occupied by Germany and officially incorporated into the Third Reich.

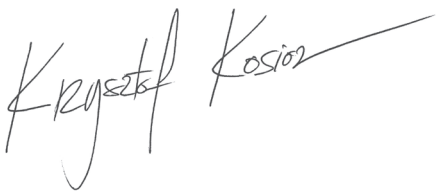
The massive destruction and people's suffering during the Second World War originates from Hitler's hatred toward the Jews and his obsession to create the new, 'clean' race on the conquered Slavic areas of his 'Lebensraum' dream. But it's obvious that Hitler did not appear out of thin air. The German nation has brought him to power in a democratic voting. It seems to me that Hitler has seduced the Germans with his promises of greatness and hatred appropriately directed at those 'guilty of all the problems.' And his ideas were backed not only in Germany and Austria. Hitler had numerous supporters in many nations.

I think it is our duty to remind everyone how much evil and suffering has been caused not so long ago because of the dazzled and thoughtless hatred directed at specific national, ethnic or religious groups. Let us always be led by thought and reason, not by hatred and disinformation.

I strongly believe that reading the Cavalry Captain's report on his work in KL Auschwitz will help to understand the human nature and will help to make mutual understanding and consolation between the Jews, Poles, Germans and other nations possible. The report brings us a story of great courage and sacrifice in the worst, apocalyptic conditions and may aid us in our understanding of the world today.

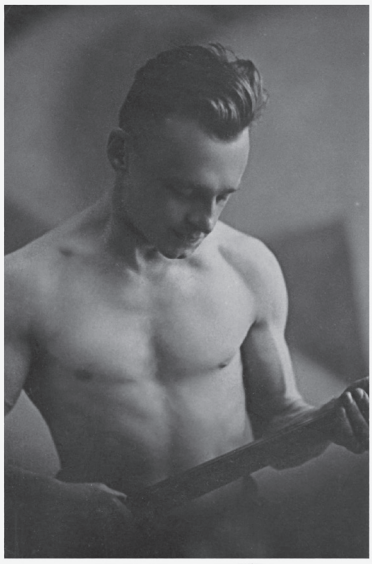
The willingness to help those in need, independently from their race, faith, beliefs or other divisions, never losing one's hope and always defending the truth while taking firm actions against the evident evil, are the lessons which I draw from Witold Pilecki's mission in the camp.

I hope that your feelings are, or will be, similar.



Witold
Pilecki
13.05.1901
25.05.1948

Introductory Materials



But if someone really gets out of here,
his duty will be to tell the world
how the real Poles were dying here.
He should also tell
how people were dying here in general...
murdered by people...
It sounds strange in the language of a Christian:
...murdered by their brethren,
just like centuries ago!...
This is why I wrote that...

(from the 'Witold's Report from Auschwitz')

WITOLD PILECKI 13.05.1901 — 25.05.1948

ABBREVIATIONS

ABSM	Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum (Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau)
adj.	adjective
BCh	Bataliony Chłopskie – Peasants' Battalions
C-in-C	Commander-in-Chief
DAK	Dywizjon Artylerii Konnej – Horse Artillery Battalion
DVL	Deutsche Volksliste – German People's List
Ger.	German
Gestapo	GEheime STAatsPOlizei – Secret State Police of Nazi Germany
HA	Home Army (Armia Krajowa)
HKB	Häflingskrankenbau – camp hospital for prisoners
HQ	Headquarters
Kedyw	KiErownictwo DYWersji – Directorate of Diversion
KL	Konzentrationslager – concentration camp
KN	Konfederacja Narodu – Confederation of the Nation
Kripo	Kriminalpolizei – Criminal Police of Nazi Germany
KT	Konfederacja Tatrzańska – Tatra Confederation
KZ	Konfederacja Zbrojna – Armed Confederation
KZN	Konfederacja Zbrojna Narodu – Armed Confederation of the Nation
Lat.	Latin
lit.	literally
MBP	Ministerstwo Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego – Stalinist Ministry of Public Security in Poland
MSWojsk	Ministerstwo Spraw Wojskowych – Ministry of Military Affairs
NIE	Niepodległość – Independence (anticommunist resistance organization)
NKVD	Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del – Soviet People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs
NOW	Narodowa Organizacja Wojskowa – National Military Organization

NSDAP	Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei – National Socialist German Workers' Party (Nazi Party)
NSZ	Narodowe Siły Zbrojne – National Armed Forces
ONR	Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny – National Radical Camp
OOB	Organizacja Orła Białego – White Eagle Organization
OWP	Obóz Wielkiej Polski – Camp of Great Poland
pl.	plural
Pol.	Polish
P.O.W.	Polska Organizacja Wojskowa – Polish Military Organization
POW	prisoner of war
PPS	Polska Partia Socjalistyczna – Polish Socialist Party
PUMST	Polish Underground Movement Study Trust in London
RSHA	Reichssicherheitshauptamt – Reich Main Security Office
SA	Sturmabteilung – stormtroopers
sing.	singular
SK	Strafkompanie – penal company
SN	Stronnictwo Narodowe – National Party
SS	Schutzstaffel der NSDAP – 'Protective Echelon,' elite troops of the NSDAP
SZP	Służba Zwycięstwu Polski – Service for Poland's Victory
TAP	Tajna Armia Polska – Secret Polish Army
UB	Urząd Bezpieczeństwa – Stalinist Office of Security in Poland
WRN	Wolność-Równość-Niepodległość – Freedom, Equality, Independence (war cryptonym of PPS)
WWII	World War II
ZBK	Związek Bezpieczeństwa Kraju – Union of National Security
ZCZ	Związek Czynu Zbrojnego – Union of Armed Action
ZOW	Związek Organizacji Wojskowej – Military Organization Union
ZWZ	Związek Walki Zbrojnej – Union of Armed Struggle

CALENDAR OF CAPTAIN WITOLD PILECKI'S LIFE AND ACTIVITIES

• 1901
born on May 13 in the Karelian town of Ołoniec (Olonets, Russia) into a noble family as the third of the five children of Julian Pilecki and Maria née Osiecimska

• 1910
the family, except father Julian, moves to Wilno (now in Lithuania); there Witold attends a school of commerce

• 1913
Witold joins the scouts' underground activities in Wilno

• 1916
he organizes the first platoon of the Polish scouts in Orzeł (Orel, Russia)

• 1918
he attends Joachim Lelewel Junior High School in Wilno

• 1918/1919
as a soldier of the P.O.W. (Polish Military Organization) and the member of the Self-defense Forces he fights the Germans occupying Wilno and protects it from the Bolsheviks, whose army is attacking the town

• 1919
as a member of the 13th Uhlan Regiment he walks the combat trail and until fall he fights with the Bolsheviks attacking Wilno, Lida, Baranowicze and Mińsk (the last three now in Belarus); then he returns to Wilno and continues his education in Joachim Lelewel Junior High School

• 1920
upon hearing of the Polish-Bolshevik War outbreak he voluntarily joins the Polish Army 201st Infantry Regiment of the Wilno Scout Troop; he participates in the defense of Grodno (now in Belarus); then in Warsaw he joins the 211th Niemen Uhlan Volunteer Platoon under the command of Captain Jerzy Dąmbrowski; he fights against the Soviets near Płock, Mława, Chorzele, Druskieniki (now in Lithuania), Stołpce and Kojdanów (both now in Belarus); then with General Lucjan Żeligowski's division he takes part in the operation of reclaiming the Wilno area, in August transferred to Lithuania by the Bolsheviks

• 1921
ends his army service and resumes his scouting activity; he joins the ZBK; he passes his Baccalaureate exam and becomes a student at the Faculty of Fine Arts at Stefan Batory University in Wilno

• 1922–1924
as an auditing student he attends Poznań University, Faculty of Agriculture

• 1926
he is appointed a Polish Army second lieutenant of the cavalry with seniority from 1923; he manages to retrieve his family estate in Sukurcze near Lida, which he rebuilds from rubble; he organizes the Fire Brigade, runs the local dairy cooperative, forms an agricultural group, participates in charity organizations, plays sports, runs the Military Horseman Training, writes poetry and paints pictures

• 1931
he marries Marianna (Maria) Ostrowska

• 1932
son Andrzej is born

• 1933
daughter Zofia is born

• 1938
he is awarded the Silver Cross of Merit

• 1939
the German attack on Poland begins the Second World War; Pilecki fights in the Polish defensive war; then – upon returning to Warsaw – together with his friends he

forms an underground organization, the TAP; their goal is to continue the fight for independence and lead Poland to the final victory; Pilecki is TAP's Chief of Staff and its commander's, Major Jan Włodarkiewicz, right-hand man

• 1940
he works actively for the underground, officially employed as a franchise owner of the cosmetic warehouse 'Raczyński i S-ka' in Warsaw; he voluntarily lets himself get caught by the Germans in a street roundup in order to get into the German concentration camp of Auschwitz; he remains in there from September 21 under the false name of Tomasz Serafiński (he adopted the name already in the fall of 1939, thinking it belonged to an already dead Polish Army lieutenant) and is given camp number 4859; in October he begins to form a military underground organization in the camp, the ZOW; its task is to keep up the spirit of his colleagues, help them with providing extra food and clothes, inform the outside world about the atrocities perpetrated in KL Auschwitz and, most importantly, prepare the ZOW's own troops to seize control of the camp at an opportune moment

• 1943
after spending 947 days in 'hell on earth' and after the camp's authorities abolished the collective responsibility for escaping, under the threat of exposure, he flees KL Auschwitz with two companions: Edward Ciesielski and Jan Redzej; he gets in touch with the HA and in Nowy Wiśnicz he meets the still alive Lieutenant Tomasz Serafiński, in whose house (the Koryznówka estate) he spends over three months; he reports to the HA HQ; he writes down two reports from Auschwitz: the *W Report* and *Teren S* ('S Area'); he gets promoted to the rank of captain, he starts service in the Kedyw's 3rd Department of the HA High Command, and joins the deeply clandestine organization NIE

• 1944
he takes part in the Warsaw Uprising, firstly as a regular private, later on he commands the 2nd Company of the 1st Battalion in the NSZ-HA 'Chrobry II' Group (the area, defended by the Company was later called the 'Witold's Redoubt'); after the fall of the Uprising he ends up in the Lamsdorf stalag (Pol. Łambinowice) and an oflag in Murnau

• 1945
he is liberated from a German POW camp in Murnau; he reports to the 2nd Polish Corps in Italy, where he writes down the complete report of his stay in KL Auschwitz, known as the *Witold's Report*; in the town of San Giorgio he presents the report to General Tadeusz Pełczyński, the deputy commander of the HA; he returns to the Communist-occupied Poland on December 8 under the false name of Roman Jezierski

• 1945–1947
he conducts informative and intelligence work in Poland, collecting data on the Soviet NKVD and the Stalinist MBP terror in Poland, election rigging, Poland's economic cooperation with Soviet Russia; he fulfills the 2nd Corps' commands on moving out of the forests and dissolution of the partisan troops

• 1947
he gets arrested on May 8 in Warsaw by the officers of the MBP and is brutally interrogated for several months in the Mokotów prison on Rakowiecka Street, in the infamous X Pavilion

• 1948
on March 3 a show trial of the 'Witold's Group' commences; the Military District Court in Warsaw on March 15 sentences to death Maria Szelągowska, Tadeusz Płużański and Witold Pilecki; the death sentence of the first two is changed to long-term prison, and Witold Pilecki is murdered on May 25 with a shot to the back of his head; his remains have not been found since...

• 1990
after the fall of Communism in Poland, Witold Pilecki is rehabilitated

• 2006
Pilecki posthumously receives the highest Polish decoration, the Order of White Eagle

• 2013
he is posthumously promoted to the rank of colonel by the Minister of National Defense

Captain Witold Pilecki's stirring reports, and the *Witold's Report* of 1945 in particular, are documents of a great historical value and unique testimonies of barbaric actions of the German occupant on Polish lands during World War II. They are exceptional, being one of the first ever testimonies 'from behind the wires,' as well as due to the fact that they were written down by an eyewitness, who voluntarily put himself in this 'heart of darkness' to inform the world about the shocking iniquities perpetrated by the Germans and their helpers against countless innocent victims. That is why we decided to widen the traditional title of the *Witold's Report*, adding 'from Auschwitz' (and deliberately not just 'on Auschwitz'), although it was written down after the war.

In order not to miss anything from the Cavalry Captain's priceless message we endeavored to make this translation as faithful as possible to the text of the original Polish document, both in substantive as well as formal layers; one which would reflect its spirit and style.

The first to draw public attention to the *Witold's Report*, deposited in the PUMST in London, was Captain Dr. Józef Garliński, who was also an HA soldier and a KL Auschwitz prisoner, although in a later period than Pilecki. When he turned up in Auschwitz, he encountered a consolidated underground resistance movement there. After many years he decided to write a Ph.D. thesis on this subject at the London School of Economics and Political Science. Owing to his work the world found out about Witold Pilecki. What is more, Michael R.D. Foot, a prominent British historian, inspired by *Fighting Auschwitz: the resistance movement in the concentration camp* by Garliński (London 1975), devoted a chapter of his book *Six Faces of Courage* (London 1978) to Captain Pilecki's life, considering him to be one of the six bravest figures of the World War II resistance movement. Thus Pilecki's testimony is also one more strong bit of evidence of how much the Poles were determined to fight the enemy and that even in deadly dangerous circumstances they were able to form a resistance network and the Polish Underground State structures.

Information on the present edition

The *Witold' Report from Auschwitz* is a translation of an earlier Polish edition (APOSTOLICUM Publishing House, Ząbki 2017), which was based on two documents:

- the typescript's Xerox copy of *Witold's Report*, donated to the ABSM by the PUMST in London in 1979 (thanks to the courtesy of Dr. Piotr M.A. Cywiński, the Director of the ABSM);

- the electronic copy of the original typescript, kept in the PUMST in London, which is the holder and owner of it (thanks to the courtesy of its President, Ms. Eugenia Maresch, who has shown much kindness and together with her team has provided us with extensive assistance).

The contemporary electronic copy – obviously of a better quality than the Xerox copy of 1979 – has revealed that the original typescript, stored in the PUMST, has been meanwhile significantly damaged at least in one place and without referring to the ABSM's copy, made several years earlier, deciphering some of the words would be simply impossible. Therefore, working with both versions has helped the Polish edition (and in consequence the English one) immensely: not only were we able to recreate the original text, but also to avoid various kinds of deficiencies and alterations, encountered in some previous editions of the *Witold's Report*, which were based on one of these copies only.

A few words of explanation about the source text seems to be necessary to help the readers understand better the decisions undertaken and solutions applied in the process of translation and editing.

Pilecki wrote the report in a somewhat archaic Polish, not used any longer, rather characteristic for the interwar period, which may be even considered similar to the manner of expression of some of the writers of that time. This language is very vivid and interesting, as well as original. The author applied punctuation marks in a different manner to the way they are used today, in contemporary Polish. The ellipsis, dashes, hyphens and exclamation marks were to emphasize the significance of some expressions and underline Pilecki's very personal and emotional attitude towards the subject. All these features – for obvious reasons – could not be transferred to the English version.

However, it was possible to retain the original structure of the report, which consists of many separate paragraphs. Even paragraphs of several sentences in length are still very brief. This staccato form of narration causes the document to be very dynamic and expressive: we wanted to present this quality to the readers, instead of imposing nicely-shaped paragraphs, which would divide the text differently. Maybe the version

with a polished structure would not lose much from an informative point of view and maybe it would be easily absorbed by an average reader, but the text would lose the virtue of authenticity and the traits of its author's deep emotional involvement.

The other characteristic feature of the original text are numerous German words, incorporated into the Polish text: usually written properly as regards to the utterances of e.g. German personnel of KL Auschwitz, and written quite arbitrarily in other cases, including Polonization by adding Polish declension endings and disregard for the capitalization of the German nouns. The present translation mirrors Pilecki's idea in a measure. The plural of German nouns was artificially created by adding the 's' ending to the singular – as if they were English words (except for Muselmänner, Sterbebücher, Übermenschen and Untermenschen). We are aware that this is contrary to the rules, recommended by many editors' bibles, but we choose to break them in favour of those readers who are not familiar with German and – in some cases – would have trouble, for example, with distinction of the singular and plural forms of the nouns. As the German words are scattered throughout the text of the report, we added an *Index of selected non-English terms*, with the indication of the page number where they are explained. It can be found in the *Appendix*.

Finally, one has to realize that Pilecki drew up the report not for a wide audience, but for his political and Polish Army superiors; not as a novel, but as a military report. Furthermore, as it appears from his letter to General Tadeusz Pełczyński and from the report itself (see p. 91), Pilecki was working on it in haste, taking into account that the order regarding his return with a clandestine mission to the Communist regime-ruled Poland may come at an early date. There was simply no time for smoothing the text up...

All the above mentioned factors, sometimes combined with an insufficient historical background, could make certain passages or even full paragraphs of the report quite demanding to understand. Keeping that in mind, we decided to furnish this edition with footnotes in order to explain as accurately as possible, inter alia, the numerous German words as well as terms that are specific for the occupation period and life in the concentration camp.

The brief biographical notes of most individuals, mentioned by Pilecki in the report, are located in the *Appendix* at the end of the book. Above all, this data refers to those members of the ZOW resistance movement, who have been possible to identify, and whose names and surnames – as all the other editor's interpolations – are put in square brackets next to their code numbers (see footnote 64). The KL Auschwitz SS staff and SS-appointed prisoner functionaries of this crime conglomerate have also been covered.

Pilecki's report is a ready-to-use material for an action movie screenplay. The author himself was aware of this fact, as in 1945 he was offered generous royalties for publishing his story in the U.S. Yet, in the face of his return to Poland with a special mission,

he left this document with one of his superiors, a man equally idealistic and subscribing to similar values – General Tadeusz Pełczyński, a prominent officer, expert on intelligence and information issues, the HA Chief of Staff. Pilecki was aware that the document was not only sensational in terms of its content, but also of value for Poland, its history and the historical memory of Poles. That is why the GDZIE Foundation – the organizer of the 'Cavalry Captain Pilecki: the Invincible Hero' Project, in cooperation with many institutions and private individuals, as well as under the patronage of distinguished personalities, including the President of the Republic of Poland Andrzej Duda – has developed the *Witold's Report from Auschwitz* and undertook the distribution of this book on a noncommercial basis.*

We would like to express our gratitude to all those who have contributed to this book in many ways. Some of them were already mentioned in this section and on the copyright page at the end of the book. Special thanks should be given to all the authors of the forewords; and to Janusz Kołton from FFPX.com for his full commitment to the project.

But we are indebted to a vast number of other people for their assistance at various stages of the project: Marta Bniński, Ben Collins, Paweł Bohater Dróżdż, Justyna Jarzębska, Paweł Kudzia, Leszek Kuliński (FONTE Translation Agency), Paweł Kupiszewski, James Malcolm, Katarzyna Rosłan, Aneta Wiśniewska-Sołtykiewicz, Nuna Staniaszek, Krzysztof Tracki, Joanna Kaliniecka-Williamson and Artur Wołoch.

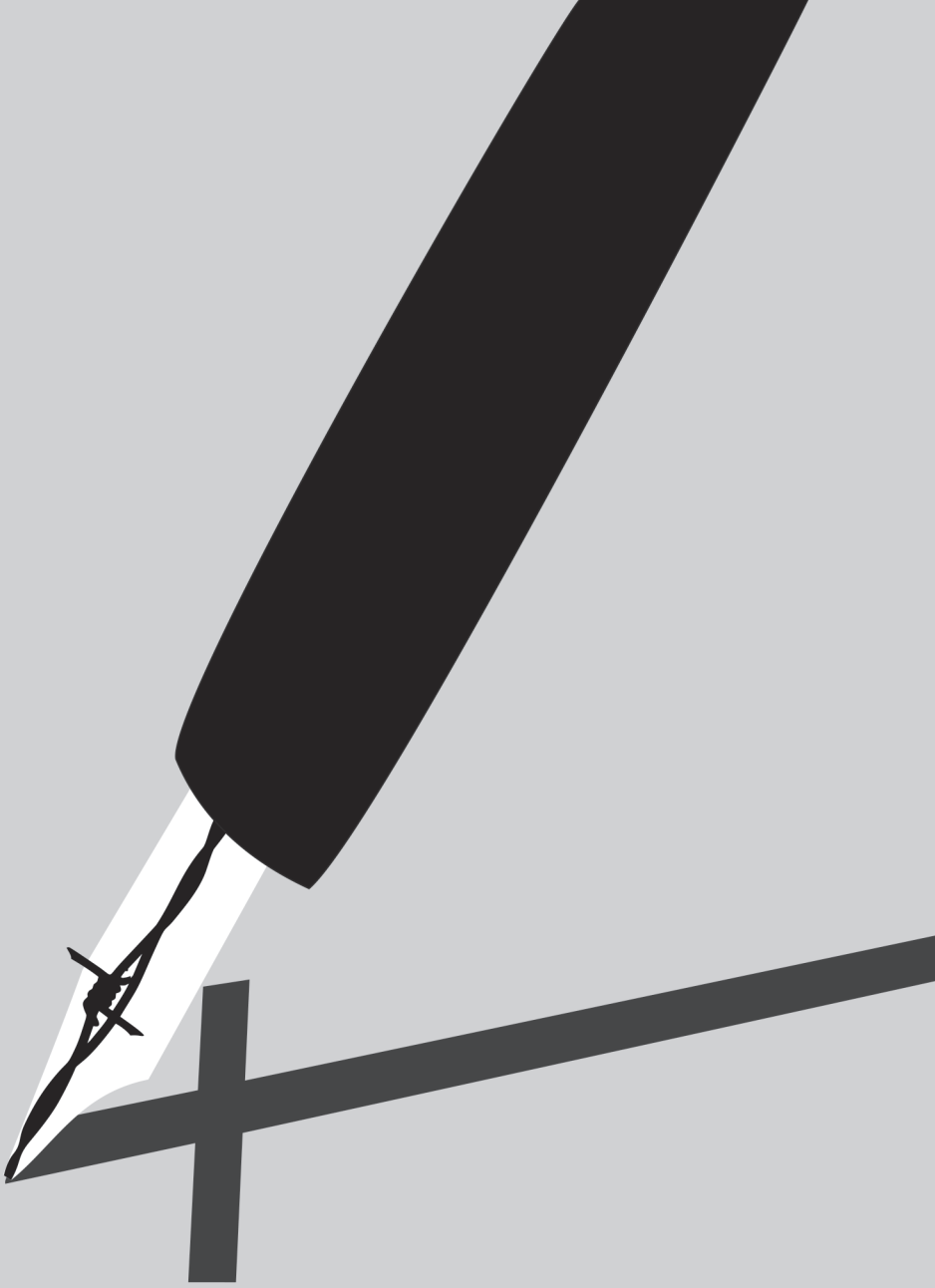
This project could not have been accomplished without the financial support of the institutions listed on p. 255: we are enormously grateful especially to Małgorzata Głębicka, the President of the PKO BP Foundation, and Jolanta Zabarnik-Nowakowska, the President of the PZU Foundation, as well as Karol Nawrocki, the Director of the WWII Museum in Gdańsk. Media support of the project has been rendered by the partners listed on the same page: we would like to thank all of you very much .

Finally, our special thanks are extended to those engaged in the 'Cavalry Captain Pilecki: the Invincible Hero' Project and popularization of Witold Pillecki's life and the reports: volunteers, schools, libraries, Polish diplomatic missions abroad and many more...

Everyone, who considers firsthand knowledge a valuable asset should find the present edition satisfying – despite the terrible facts it describes. We hope that the book will popularize one of the most prominent Poles of the twentieth century – Calvary Captain Witold Pilecki and his legacy to the world.

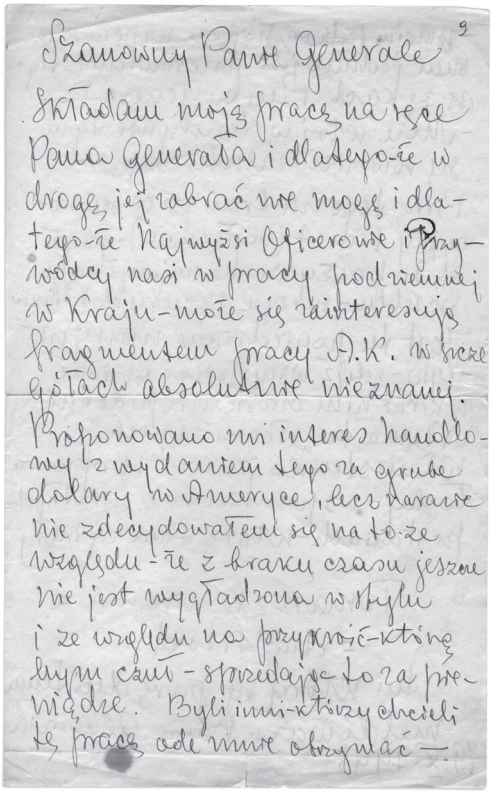
Małgorzata Kupiszewska – the Project Coordinator on behalf of the GDZIE Foundation
Fr. Grzegorz Radzikowski SAC – APOSTOLICUM Publishing and Printing House

* Apart from the printed version, the PDF file and audiobook are available through www.rtmpilecki.eu



Witold Pilecki

13.05.1901 – 25.05.1948



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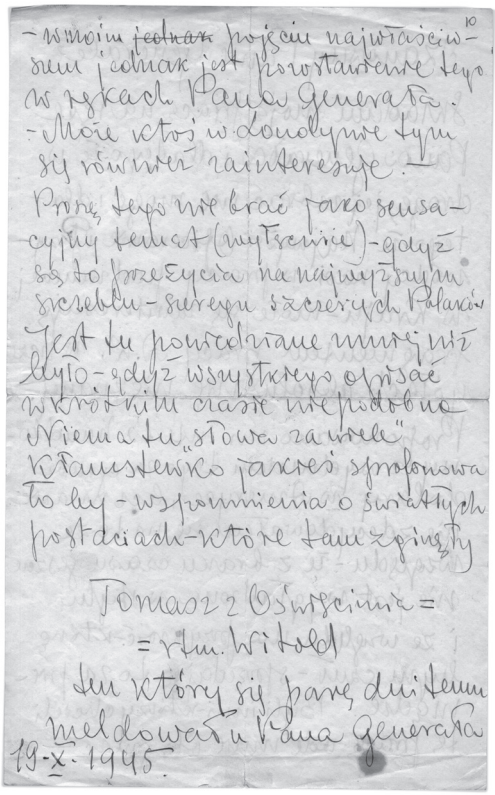
Szanowny Panie Generale

Składam moją pracę na ręce Pana Generała i dlatego-że w drogę jej zabrać nie mogę i dlatego-że Najwyżsi Oficerowie i Przywódcy nasi w pracy podziemnej w Kraju - może się zainteresują fragmentem pracy A.K. w sferach absolutnie nieznanej.

Proponowano mi interes handlowy z wydaniem tego za grube dolary w Ameryce, lecz dotąd nie zdecydowałem się na to-ze względu-że z braku czasu jeszcze nie jest wygładzona w stylu i ze względu na przykrość-którą tym czuł - sprzedając to za pieniądze. Byli inni-którzy chcieli tę pracę ode mnie otrzymać —



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- w moim ~~jednak~~ pojęciu najwłaściwszem jednak jest przetłumaczenie tego w rękach Pana Generała. - Może ktoś w dowolnym tym się również zainteresuje. —

Proszę tego nie brać jako sensacyjny temat (wytrzenie) - gdyż są to przeżycia na najwyższym szczeblu - szeregu szczerych Polaków Jest to powiedziane mniej więcej - gdyż wszystkiego opisać w krótkim czasie niepodobna Niema tu „słowa zawiele" Krańcowo jaskrawo sprofanowano by - wspomnienia o świętych postaciach - które tam zginęły

Tomasz z Oświęcimia =
= płk. Witold

ten który się panu dniem meldował u Pana Generała
19-X-1945.

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* This document can be found in the collections of the PUMST in London. Tadeusz Walenty Pełczyński – born February 14, 1892 in Warsaw, died on January 3, 1985 in London; brigadier general of the Polish Armed Forces, Chief of Staff of the ZWZ-HA High Command and deputy of the HA, Major General Tadeusz Bór-Komorowski – the C-in-C of the HA.

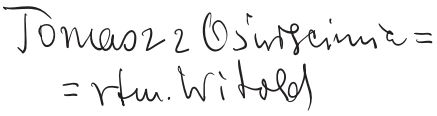
WITOLD PILECKI'S LETTER TO GENERAL TADEUSZ PEŁCZYŃSKI*

Dear General,

I am submitting my work to you, because I cannot take it with me and because our highest-ranking leaders and officers in the underground resistance movement might take an interest in some fragments of the Home Army's work, as its details are completely unknown.

I have had lucrative offers to have it published in America, but I have not made a decision yet; its style is unpolished due to lack of time and, moreover, it would distress me to sell it for money. There were others who wanted to obtain this report from me; however, in my judgment it would be best to leave it in your hands. Maybe someone in London will also find it interesting.

Please do not treat it as pure sensationalism: these are the experiences of honest Poles of the highest order. I have said less than I actually could have, but it is impossible to describe everything in such a short space of time. There are not too many words here. Every little lie would desecrate the memory of the wise people who died there.



Thomas from Auschwitz
= Cpt. Witold,
who reported to you a couple of days ago.
19-X-1945.

STATEMENT AS TO THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE REPORT OF WITOLD PILECKI*

I state that I have in my possession a typescript of 104 foolscap pages closely written, either almost without margins or with the margins cut off and with corrections written by hand.

The contents of this typescript are the author's experiences in the concentration camp at Auschwitz and the setting up of an underground movement there. The typescript ends with the author's escape from the camp with two companions and his arrival later in Warsaw.

The author of this report is Witold Pilecki, who was in the camp under the name of Tomasz Serafiński. I received the report from the hands of Witold Pilecki in San Giorgio in Italy, in the middle of October 1945, before Pilecki's return to Poland.

I have now deposited Witold Pilecki's report in the Polish Underground Movement (1939–45) Study Trust in London.

Tadeusz Pełczyński Maj. Gen.**
(former chief-of-staff and second in command of the Polish Home Army)

London 12th Dec. 1972.

* This document is kept by the Polish Underground Movement Study Trust in London.

** As stated in the English version of the original typescript of this statement; but taking into consideration the military ranks of the Polish Armed Forces from the interwar and WWII period, Pełczyński served as a brigadier general, which was subordinate to a major general.

Captain Witold Pilecki

WITOLD'S REPORT FROM AUSCHWITZ

co było chyba gdzieś poza nią.
Nie jest to silenie się na jakieś dziwne słowa, określenia. Przeciwnie - uważam, że na żadne słówko ładnie brzmiące a nieistotne... się nie potrzebuję.
Tak bu...
Więc mam napisać możliwie suche fakty, jak tego chcą moi koledzy.- Mówiono: "Im więcej pan się będzie trzymał samych faktów, podając je bez komentarzy - tym będzie to wartościowsze."
Spróbuję więc...lecz człowiek przecie nie był z drzewa - już nie mówię z kamienia - /chociaż wydawało się, że i kamień nieraz musiałby się spocić/.
Czasami więc, wśród podawanych faktów będę jednak wstawiał myśl, wyrażającą to co się czuło.
Nie wiem, czy koniecznie ma to obniżać wartość napisanego.
Nie było się z kamienia - często mu zazdrościłem - miało się jeszcze ciągle bijące, czasem w gardle, serce, kołaczącą się gdzieś... chyba w głowie - myśl - czasami łapałem ją z trudem...
O nich - wstawiając od czasu do czasu zdań parę, -sądzę, że dopiero się odda obraz prawdziwy.

Dnia 19 września 1940 roku - II-ga łapanka w Warszawie.
Jeszcze żyje kilku ludzi, którzy widzieli, jak o godzinie 6-ej rano, poszedłem sam i na rogu Al. Wojska i Felińskiego stanąłem w "piątki" ustawiane przez ss-mann'ów z łapanych mężczyzn.
Potym załadowano nas na Pl. Wilsona do aut ciężarowych i zawieziono do koszar Szwoleżerów.
Po spisaniu danych personalnych, w zorganizowanym tam prowizorycznie biurze i odebraniu ostrych przedmiotów, pod groźbą zastrzelenia, jeśli się potym u kogo bodaj żyletka znajdzie, wprowadzono nas na ujeżdżalnie, gdzie pozostawaliśmy przez 19-ty i 20 września.
W ciągu tych paru dni niektórzy już zapoznali się z pałką gumową spadającą na ich głowy. -Mieściło się to jednak w ramach mniejwiecej możliwych do przyjęcia, dla lu[illegible] przyzwyczajonych do tego rodzaju sposobów utrzymywania ładu, przez [illegible]rożów porządku.
W tym czasie niektóre rodziny wykupywały swych najbliższych, płacąc ogromne sumy ss-mannom.
W nocy spaliśmy wszyscy pokotem na ziemi.
Ujeżdżalnię oświetlał ogromny reflektor, stojący przy wejściu.
Po czterech stronach umieszczeni byli ss-manni z bronią maszynową.
Było nas tysiąc osiemset kilkudziesięciu.
Mnie osobiście najwięcej denerwowała bierność masy Polaków. Wszyscy złapani nasiąkli już jakąś psychiką tłumu - która wtedy wyrażała się w tym, że cały tłum nasz upodobnił się do stada biernych baranów.
Nęciła mnie myśl prosta: wzburzyć umysły, zerwać do czynu tą masę.
Wspólnie z towarzyszowi memu - Szpakowskiemu Sławkowi/wiem, że był do czasu Powstania w Warszawie/ proponowałem wspólną akcję w nocy: opanowanie tłumu, napad na posterunki, przy tym miałem przechodząc do ubikacji "zawadzić" o reflektor i zniszczyć.
Lecz ja - w innym celu znalazłem się w tym środowisku.
Było by to pójście na rzecz znacznie mniejszą...
On - wogóle uważał to za pomysł z dziedziny fantazji.-
21-go rano wsadzono nas do aut ciężarowych i w towarzystwie eskortujących motocykli z bronią maszynową, odwieziono na dworzec zachodni i załadowano do wagonów towarowych.
W wagonach tych przedtym widocznie musieli wieźć wapno, gdyż cała podłoga była nim wysypana.
Wagony zamknięto. Wieziono dzień cały. Pić ani jeść nie dali. Zresztą jeść nikt nie chciał. Mieliśmy, wydany dnia poprzedniego, chleb - który regeśmy jeszcze wtedy ani jeść ani cenić nie umieli. Chciało się nam tylko bardzo pić. Wapno, pod wpływem wstrząsów rozdrabniało się w pył. Unosiło się w powietrzu, drażniło nozdrza i gardło. Pić nie dali.-
Przez szczeliny desek, którymi zabite były okna, widzieliśmy, że wiozą za nas gdzieś na Częstochowę.
Około 10-ej wieczór/godzina 22-ga/ pociąg się zatrzymał w jakimś miejscu i dalej już nie ruszył. Słychać było krzyki, wrzask, -otwieranie wagonów, ujadanie psów.
To miejsce we wspomnieniach moich nazwałbym momentem - w którym [illegible] zaczynałem co [illegible] można się do [illegible] sprawy Po-
[illegible] znajdzie.. zwrócił się do mnie:

The original typescript of the *Witold's Report*, stored in the PUMST (London)

So I am to write down, if possible, plain facts, as my colleagues[1] want me to.

I have been told: 'The more you stick to plain facts, with no superfluous commentary, the more valuable they will be.'

And so I shall try... But a man is not made of wood, let alone stone (although at times even a stone might break out in a cold sweat at what I shall relate).

So sometimes, in between facts, I am going to throw in a reflection expressing my feelings.

I am not sure if this will necessarily diminish the value of my writings.

I was not made of stone – although I envied a stone many times. I still had a heart, sometimes rising to beat right up in my throat, a thought, fluttering somewhere in my head, I guess... sometimes I managed to catch it with difficulties...

All that altogether – with some side remarks from time to time – will convey a faithful picture of what this report seeks to describe.[2]

19 September 1940 – the second street roundup of civilians in Warsaw.[3]

There are still some people alive who saw me walk up at 6 a.m. and stand among the 'fives,'[4] assembled from men, detained by the SS[5] at the corner of Wojska Polskiego Avenue and Felińskiego Street.[6]

1 When Pilecki uses the word 'colleague' in the *Witold's Report*, he usually has a person involved in the conspiratorial work or a companion from the army in mind.

2 General note: the original of the report is full of German words. For those readers who are not aware, nouns in German are capitalized, and this translation follows the rule. The plural of German nouns was created artificially by adding the ending 's' to the singular – as if they were English words. The *Index of selected non-English terms* with the indication of the page number, where they are explained, can be found in the *Appendix*. For more information on the rules adopted in this translation – see pp. xxxi–xxxiv.

3 One of the forms of German terror during the Second World War was the street roundup: an area of the city was surrounded by the police, who would then stop all passers-by, sometimes even drag people out of their houses. Some would be released (for example, the employees of German companies). Others were taken to Germany as forced labourers or to concentration and extermination camps.

4 Pilecki describes a slightly different version of his arrest – probably intentionally. It is known that he did not 'go into the fives' (as the arrested were led in rows of five), but rather was taken or allowed himself to be taken from Eleonora Ostrowska's (his sister-in-law) flat in Warsaw's Żoliborz district. Probably he wanted to emphasize that he accepted the 'mission to enter Auschwitz' of his own free will, and he did not want to describe the circumstances of the underground resistance conferences after many of his fellow members of the Underground had been arrested, nor discuss the possibility of soldiers of the Underground infiltrating the newly set up Auschwitz concentration camp in the town of Oświęcim.

5 SS (Ger. Schutzstaffel) – German elite troops subordinate to the Nazi Party – NSDAP. Their members, the SS men, were known for exceptional cruelty, fanaticism, genocidal activities and numerous crimes perpetrated during the Third Reich period on the populations of annexed and subjugated countries. The SS-Totenkopfverbände troops (Skull Troops – after the emblem on their caps and uniforms) constituted the crew of the concentration camps. In 1940 the Waffen-SS (Military SS) was formed.

6 Streets in Warsaw's Żoliborz district. Before 1965 Felińskiego Street was named after Zygmunt Szczęsny Feliński, Archbishop of Warsaw in the nineteenth century; after 1965 it was named after Alojzy Feliński, an eighteenth/nineteenth century poet and playwright.

We were then loaded into trucks at Wilsona Square[7] and driven to the Szwoleżerów[8] barracks.

After registration in a makeshift office and having any sharp objects we happened to have on us confiscated (under the threat of being shot on the spot if even a razor blade was found later on), we were led out into the riding hall, where we remained for September 19 and 20.

During these few days some of us got acquainted with the rubber baton which would come down on our heads. However, this was more or less within the acceptable bounds for those accustomed to guardians of the peace using such methods to keep order.

Meanwhile, some families bought out their relatives with large wads of cash paid to the SS men.

At night we slept side-by-side on the ground.

The riding hall was illuminated by a giant searchlight which stood right next to the entrance.

On all four sides, SS men with machine guns stood watch over us.

There were eighteen hundred of us, or more.

What annoyed me the most was how passive all the Poles were. It was as if all the captured were afflicted by a collective psychosis, which turned them into a herd of sheep.

I was tempted by a simple idea: to stir their minds, to rally this crowd and spur it into action.

I even suggested a joint night action to a comrade of mine – Sławek Szpakowski[9] (I know that he lived in Warsaw until the Uprising[10]): we would take control of the crowd and launch an assault against the sentry posts. On my way to the lavatory I thought I could bump into the searchlight and smash it.

But then again, I joined this group for a different reason.

Settling for this plan would mean settling for a much lesser cause...

Sławek thought this was all pure and complete fantasy.

In the morning of September 21 we were packed tight onto trucks and, escorted by motorcycles with mounted machine guns, delivered to West Station[11] and loaded into goods wagons.

7 A square in the Żoliborz district of Warsaw named after the U.S. President Woodrow Wilson.

8 Grounds by the present Szwoleżerów Street, a former road to the Solec district in the southern part of the centre of Warsaw. Under the Tsarist regime that area was occupied by the barracks of a Russian cavalry regiment (since 1818). In the interwar period these barracks were occupied by the Józef Piłsudski 1st Light Cavalry Regiment. The barracks were demolished in 1944; in the 1970s a housing estate was erected on the site.

9 The biographical notes on the majority of people appearing in this book can be found in the *Appendix*.

10 Witold Pilecki means the Warsaw Uprising, which started on the orders of the HA HQ on August 1, 1944, not the Warsaw Jewish Ghetto Uprising of April 1943, with which it is often confused in Western countries.

11 Warszawa Zachodnia Railway Station (Ger. Warschau-West).

These wagons must have been carrying lime beforehand, for the entire floor was covered in it.

The wagons were slammed shut. We traveled the whole day with nothing to eat or drink. Not that anybody wanted to, anyway. We had some bread from the day before. Bread that we were not able to eat nor appreciate at the time. We were just very thirsty. The wagon was shaking so much that the lime gradually turned into fine dust, became airborne and irritated our nostrils and throats. They gave us nothing to drink.

Through the gaps in the planks, boarding up the windows, we could see that we were going somewhere towards Częstochowa.[12]

Around 10 p.m. the train came to a halt. We heard shouts, screams and dogs howling as the wagons were opened.

In my recollections this was a point which marks the moment when I left behind everything I was familiar with 'on earth'[13] and stepped into somewhere beyond it.

I am not trying to be fancy. Quite the opposite – I see no need to use any sophisticated albeit irrelevant words.

This is exactly how it was.

The blows to our heads were not just the doing of SS men rifle butts – it was something else, something more.

All our notions we were accustomed to 'on earth' (the established order of things – the law) took a brutal kicking, too.

Everything fell apart.

They tried to strike us with all their strength, to break us mentally as fast as possible.

A tumultuous clamor of voices was gradually approaching. Suddenly the door of our wagon flew open. We were blinded by the searchlights.

'Heraus! rrraus! rrraus!...,'[14] they were hollering. Blows by SS men rifle butts rained down on our arms, backs, heads. We had to get out quickly.

12 The concentration camp of Auschwitz, built by the Germans in the Polish town of Oświęcim, was situated about 100 km south of Częstochowa. The most significant railway line at that time led from Warsaw via Częstochowa to the coal-mining and industrial region of Silesia and further south to Oświęcim. In 1940, Oświęcim was in the territory incorporated into the Third Reich by order of Hitler, however the border with the General Government – the conquered Polish territories left to be populated by Poles – ran at a distance of only 25–30 km from the town. It is possible that due to this proximity, as well as the presence of that strategic railway artery, which facilitated the transport of prisoners, it was decided to locate the camp in Oświęcim. The Germans changed the name of the town (and consequently the camp) to Auschwitz. It was a historical name, derived from the medieval German settlement of Oświęcim and the era of the Partitions of Poland, when between 1772 and 1918 the town was under Austrian rule and a Germanized name was used on maps, etc.

13 Here and in several dozen other places of the *Witold's Report*, Pilecki refers to earth (mostly using: 'on earth,' 'earthly') in the sense of 'there in freedom, outside of wires,' as the opposite of the camp reality that seemed to be something 'not of this earth' – seemed to be hell.

14 Out! Get out! Get out! – a typical German command; in the circumstances described by Pilecki, it was usually shouted loudly.

I jumped out and, surprisingly, avoided getting hit while joining the rows of 'fives' somewhere in the middle of the column.

A larger gang of SS men was hitting, kicking and hollering at the top of their lungs: 'Zu fünfen!'[15]

Those on the flanks of the 'fives' were savaged by dogs and taunted by the soldiers.

Blinded by the spotlights, shoved, hit, kicked, savaged by the dogs, we found ourselves under conditions unlike anything any of us had ever experienced. The weaker ones were dazed to such an extent that they literally formed a mindless mass.

We were rushed towards a brightly lit area.

On the way there, one of us was told to run to the side of the road, towards a pole, just to be followed by a swift round of fire from an SMG.[16] Killed. A random ten were pulled out and shot as part of a 'collective punishment' for the 'escape,' which was arranged by the SS men themselves.

All eleven corpses were dragged away, pulled by straps tied to one of their legs. The dogs were set loose on the bloodied corpses.

All of that was accompanied by laughter and mockery.

We were approaching a wire fence with a sign above it that read: 'Arbeit macht frei.'[17]

It was not until later that we learned the meaning of that inscription.

Behind the fence there were rows of brick buildings and a large square.

When walking between the rows of SS men, before the very gate, we found a moment of respite. The dogs were chased off and we were ordered to align our 'fives.' They counted us meticulously, adding the corpses to the total number.

The high (at that time single) barbed wire fence and the gate full of SS men for some reason brought to my mind a Chinese proverb that I had read some time in the past: 'When entering, think of retreat, and you shall leave safe and sound...' I could not help an ironic smirk, which faded away... What good would that do here?...

Inside the wires, in the square, we were struck by a different view. In a somewhat supernatural beam of the searchlights, crawling upon us from everywhere, we saw some beings – seemed to be humans by appearance, but their behaviour was more like that of wild animals (nay, this is offence to animals here – there is no word for creatures like that in our language, at least not yet). In bizarre striped outfits, like the ones in

15 Into fives! (form rows of five people, one after another).

16 A submachine gun.

17 Literally 'Work sets you free,' a paraphrase of John 8:32: 'The truth will set you free.' By order of the SS-Obergruppenführer Theodor Eicke, the co-organizer of the whole concentration camp system, this motto was placed over the camp gates in Germany (Dachau, Flossenbürg, Gross-Rosen, Sachsenhausen), as well as in occupied territories of Poland (Auschwitz) and Bohemia (Theresienstadt; before World War II and now: Terezin) – so that every prisoner leaving for and returning from work could see it at all times.

the movies about Sing-Sing,[18] with medals on colourful ribbons (that is what I thought they were in that sweeping light), with clubs in their hands, they jumped onto some of us, laughing hysterically. Hitting people on their heads, kicking in the kidneys and other vulnerable places those who were already lying on the ground, jumping on people's chests and stomachs – they were inflicting death with most uncanny relish.

'Ah! So they locked us up in a lunatic asylum!...,' a thought raced through my mind. 'Such wickedness!' I was still thinking in 'earthly' human categories. We were people from a street roundup – and so, even in the eyes of the Germans, guilty of no crime against the Third Reich.

The words that Janek W. [Jan Włodarkiewicz][19] spoke to me after the first street roundup (in August) in Warsaw, flashed through my mind: 'So, you see, you failed to make use of such a great opportunity – people caught in a street are not going to face political charges – that is the safest way into the camp.'

How naïve, back then in Warsaw, we were when thinking about those Poles who had already been taken to such camps.

Here, you need no political accusations to lose your life.

Anyone who was at hand could get killed at any time.

For starters, the striped fellow with a club would ask: 'Was bist du von zivil?!'[20]

Answering anything like: 'priest,' 'judge,' 'lawyer' – at that time – got you beaten and killed.

Standing in the 'five' before me was a man who, grabbed by the clothes under his throat, answered: 'Richter.'[21]

A dreadful idea! A moment later, he was on the ground, beaten and kicked.

So they were intentionally eradicating the intelligentsia.

When I realized that, I modified my attitude somewhat.

These were not madmen, they were some monstrous tool for murdering Poles, starting with their intelligentsia.

The thirst was unbearable.

Pots with something to drink were brought. Now these ruffians-murderers distributed among the lines mugs with this drink and asked: 'Was bist du von zivil?'

They would hand us the coveted drink – coveted because it was a wet substance – provided we answered that we were workers or craftsmen.

18 Sing Sing Correctional Facility in Ossining, New York (U.S.) – the famous prison with a maximum security grade.

19 Texts, not written by the author of the *Witold's Report*, are enclosed in square brackets.

20 Who are you as a civilian? – meaning: What do you do for a living?

21 A judge.

Beating and kicking, sometimes these strange 'quasi-people' would shout: '...hier ist KL Auschwitz – mein lieber Mann!'[22]

We were asking each other what that was supposed to mean. Some of us knew that it meant Oświęcim,[23] although all it meant to us was the name of a Polish town – the dreadful notoriety of that camp was yet to reach Warsaw, and the world did not learn that name until later.

It was not until later that this word curdled the blood of freemen and came to haunt the prisoners of Pawiak, Montelupich, Wiśnicz, Lublin.[24]

One of the inmates explained to us that we were in the former barracks of the 5th DAK[25] near the town of Oświęcim.

We learned that we were a 'Zugang'[26] of Polish bandits, who had been harassing the peaceful German population, and that we were waiting for a fitting punishment.

'Zugang' referred to all arrivals to the camp, every new transport.

In the meantime they started a roll-call by shouting out the names that we had given back in Warsaw, and we had to reply quickly and loudly: 'Hier!'[27] There were plenty of opportunities for harassment and persecution on such occasions.

After the roll-call we were sent in 'hundreds' to the euphemistically called 'bath.'

This was how transports of people, captured in the streets of Warsaw and allegedly to be sent to Germany to work were taken in, this was how every transport in the first months of establishing the Auschwitz camp (June 14, 1940) was received.

Out of the darkness, from somewhere above (from above the kitchen), the executioner, Seidler [Fritz Seidler], would speak:

'None of you should hope to get out of this place alive... The rations are calculated for you to survive for six weeks; if you live longer... it means you steal – and if you steal

22 Here's concentration camp Auschwitz, my dear chap!

23 At the beginning of the war, the name of the small town of Oświęcim/Auschwitz did not have any of the gruesome connotations it was to acquire.

24 These are the names of towns or buildings, where the more rigorous German prisons were located and people were transported to Auschwitz from: the Pawiak Prison (the central prison in Warsaw, at 24/26 Dzielna Street, at the corner of Pawia Street – hence the name; it was the largest political prison set up by the German occupants in Poland; according to approximate calculations, by July 1944 around 100,000 Polish citizens had passed through that prison, 37,000 of whom were murdered on site and the remainder were sent to concentration camps and other prisons), Montelupich (named after the street on which is located; the central prison in Cracow), Wiśnicz (the highest security prison in pre-war Poland; during the war in the Cracow District of the General Government), Lublin (prison located in the Castle; after KL Majdanek the biggest centre of terror in the Lublin region).

25 Dywizjon Artylerii Konnej (Horse Artillery Battalion) – a basic unit of cavalry artillery forces, supporting ordinary cavalry troops. There were 11 cavalry battalions and 11 DAKs in interwar Poland. The 5th DAK was part of the Cracow Cavalry Brigade and was garrisoned at first in Zakrzówek (Cracow district), and later (from the spring of 1939 until the outbreak of war) in Oświęcim.

26 Zugang (Ger.) – an entrance, access, entry, arrival. In the *Witold's Report* this word primarily means a fresh transport of prisoners or an individual new prisoner.

27 Here! – meaning: Present!

you will be put in the SK[28] – where you won't stay alive for long!' This was translated into Polish by Baworowski [Władysław Baworowski] – the camp interpreter.

The goal was to break us psychologically as quickly as possible.

We deposited all the bread that we had in our possession onto the wheelbarrows and a Rollwagen,[29] that were brought to the square. No one regretted it back then – no one was thinking about food.

How often, later on, just the very thought of that moment drove us into a rage and made our mouths water! Several wheelbarrows and a Rollwagen, full of bread! – what a pity we could not fill ourselves in advance...

Along with my 'hundred,' I finally found myself in front of the Baderaum[30] (Block[31] 18, according to the old numbering[32]).

We deposited everything into large sacks, to which our respective prisoner numbers were tied.

Here we had our heads and bodies shaved, and merely sprinkled with tepid water.

It was here that I had my first two teeth knocked out, the reason being that I was carrying the registration number in my hand instead of carrying it in my teeth, as the Bademeister[33] happened to wish that day.

I got hit in the jaw with a heavy rod.

I spat out two teeth. There was a little blood... Harassment.

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28 SK, Strafkompanie (Ger.) – the penal company; a special prisoner unit, subject to an especially strict regime typified by the abuse and torture of its victims.

29 Rollwagen (Ger.) – a heavy horse-drawn platform trailer, used for transporting goods. In KL Auschwitz such platform trailers (in normal conditions dragged by horses or lorries) were usually dragged by inmates.

30 Baderaum (Ger.) – a public bathroom or bathhouse. In the so-called camp literature it is very often repeated that newly arrived prisoner transports had been led to bathhouses, that in fact were ingeniously disguised gas chambers. In reality, bathhouses in KL Auschwitz were used in accordance with their primary function. However, in later years, when a new form of mass extermination – gas poisoning – was introduced, the Germans wanted to keep up appearances of normality and avoid panic among inmates, at the same time convincing them to undress and leave all belongings, valuables, food, etc., that they brought with them. Therefore, those ushered into real gas chambers were informed that they were going to the showers. Hence the widespread opinion that the bathhouses were used only as gas chambers.

31 Block (Ger.) – a building or barrack, where the prisoners lived. Colloquially: the prisoners living there. The administrative unit of a camp. In KL Auschwitz I, where the camp's premises were adapted from former military barracks, blocks were initially single- or two-story; later new blocks were built and all older ones enlarged to two-story. A block as a building was divided into two blocks of prisoner groups. Both were numbered: a number with the letter 'a' meant a group living on the upper floor, and without an 'a' – a group living on the ground floor. In KL Auschwitz II-Birkenau there were barracks instead of blocks.

32 The old numbering system was replaced by a new one as a result of the construction of eight new blocks, finally completed in 1942 (e.g. Block 20 became 28).

33 Bademeister (Ger.) – a bath-keeper.

From that moment on we became mere numbers.[34] The official name was: Schutzhäftling[35] number such-and-such...

My number was 4859.

Two 'thirteens' (the sum of the two digits in the middle and the two on the outside) had my comrades convinced of my impending demise; I, however, was glad that I had them.

We were given blue-and-white striped uniforms, made of drill, just like the ones that had us so shocked at night.

It was already morning (September 22, 1940). Many things have now lost their imaginary appearance from the nighttime.

The 'quasi-people' wore yellow armbands[36] with black letters, reading CAPO,[37] on their left arms, and instead of colourful ribbons with medals, as I had thought at night in the sweeping lights, they had a colourful triangle (here known as a Winkel[38]), on the left side of their chests, and below the triangle, as if under a ribbon, a small black number on a white patch.

The Winkels came in five colours.

Political offenders wore red, criminals – green, those who disdained working in the Third Reich – black, the Bible Students[39] – purple, homosexuals – pink.

We, all the Poles caught in the streets of Warsaw, supposedly meant to work in Germany, were assigned red Winkels as political offenders.

I must admit that of all the colours, that one suited me best.

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34 Henceforth the camp authorities no longer referred to the prisoners by their names. It was one of the components of the planned humiliation and dehumanization of inmates. The *Witold's Report* reflects this convention in a few places.

35 Schutzhäftling (Ger.) – someone in preventive detention. Not every concentration camp prisoner was incarcerated there as a consequence of a verdict for any particular crime against the Third Reich. Most of them were victims of street roundups (like Pilecki) and other German terror policies designed to intimidate Polish society. Such arrests were treated as preventive measures against 'Polish anti-German actions.'

36 Armbinde (Ger.) – an identification armband worn by the prisoner functionary (Ger. Funktionshäftling – an SS-appointed inmate with allocated administrative tasks and supervising duties, thus enjoying numerous privileges over regular prisoners). On a yellow, red or black background (depending on the function) there was a description in black or white letters, informing of a prisoner's post and his place in the camp's hierarchy.

37 Capo (from Italian), further Kapo (Ger.) – an SS-appointed prisoner functionary, a supervisor of a work unit (Ger. Kommando; see footnote 52). Nazi authorities usually gave this duty to criminal prisoners, predominantly Germans.

38 Winkel (Ger.; means 'angle') – a piece of fabric in the form of a down-pointing triangle, sewn onto the inmates' uniforms on the breast and also sometimes on the thigh, denoting the types of 'crimes' they were in for. The Jews had an additional yellow triangle under the main one, pointing upwards and thus forming the shape of the Star of David. Prisoners of nationalities other than German and Jewish were labelled with the following letters (derived from German nationality names) on Winkels: P – Poles, B – Belgians, T – Czechs and Slovaks, F – French, S – Spanish, N – Dutch, R – Russians, U – Hungarians, I – Italians, etc.

39 That is how Jehovah's Witnesses were referred to.

Dressed up in striped drill uniforms, with neither caps nor socks (I was given socks on December 8, and a cap – on December 15), in wooden clogs falling off our feet, we were led out into a so-called roll-call square, and divided in two groups.

Some of us went to Block 10, while others (us) – to Block 17, to the upper floor.

The Häftlings[40] were accommodated both on the ground and upper floors of each block. They had separate commercial and administrative staffs, amounting to a separate block. To help distinguish them, all blocks on the upper floors had the letter 'a' added to their numbers.

And so we were taken to Block 17a and handed over to the block elder[41] Alois, who later became known as 'Krwawy Aloiz' ['Bloody Alois'; Alois Staller].

He was a German communist with a red Winkel – a degenerate, who by then had spent about six years[42] in camps; he single-handedly would beat, torment, torture and kill several people a day.

He took delight in imposing order and military discipline, adjusting the rows on the square by swinging his club.

Our block, arranged in ten rows adjusted by Alois, who would run in between the rows with an enormous club, was a paragon of military parade alignment.

Now, in the morning, he was strutting amongst the rows for the first time.

He was forming a new block of Zugangs.

He peered into our strange faces, looking for people fit for maintaining order in the block.

Fate wanted that he chose me, Karol Świętorzecki (a reserve officer of the 13th Uhlan Regiment), Witold Różycki (not the infamous one; this Różycki was a decent man, from Ładysława Street[43] in Warsaw), and a couple of others.

Having quickly led us into the block, to the upper floor, he ordered us to form a row against the wall, turn around and bend over.

He dished each one of us five hefty blows at full strength, in a spot allegedly designed for that purpose.

You had to clench your teeth and suppress any inclination to groan...

The test turned out – I think – rather well.

40 Häftling (Ger.) – a prisoner.

41 Blockältester (Ger.) – an SS-appointed prisoner functionary, a block chief; responsible for all the inmates in a single block, their number, personal hygiene, tidiness of the room and beds, proper bed making, food distribution, and for leaving the building on time and standing appropriately at roll-calls.

42 The first German concentration camp was set up in March 1933 in Dachau.

43 A street named after Ładysław Jan (Władysław) of Gielniów (Gielniowczyk), who lived in 1440–1505; a blessed man of the Roman Catholic Church, a Bernardine monk, a patron of Warsaw and a street in the Warsaw district of Ochota.

'So that you know the taste of it and so that you know how to use it while caring for the block's cleanliness and order.'

This is how I became a Stubendienst,[44] but not for long.

Even though we maintained exemplary order and cleanliness in the block, Alois did not like the methods we employed to achieve them.

Having warned us a couple of times, both personally and through Kazik [identity unknown] (Alois' henchman), to no avail, he flew into rage and threw us out into the camp for three days, saying: 'So you may have a taste of the work at the Lager[45] and appreciate the roof over your heads and the peace you have here, in the block.'

I had noticed that less and less people were coming back from work each day, I knew that they were 'done in' by one or another kind of work, but it was not until now that I had the opportunity to get first-hand experience of a regular Häftling's day of labour at the Lager.

And everyone had to work.

Only the Stubendienst were allowed to stay in the block.

We all slept on the ground strewn with straw-filled mattresses. During the first period we had no beds at all.

The gong marked the start of each day, in the summer at 4:20 a.m., in the winter at 5:20 a.m.

At that sound, which was an irrevocable order, we had to spring to our feet.

We had to fold our blankets quickly, meticulously adjusting the edges. The straw-filled mattresses had to be carried to one end of the room, where the mattress-orderlies collected them in order to stack them into a pile. The blanket had to be returned to the blanket-orderlies upon leaving the room. We finished dressing already in the hallway.

Everything was done hastily, in a rush, as 'Bloody Alois' [Alois Staller] would burst into the room, wielding a rod and shouting: 'Fenster auf!'[46] Also you had to hurry to stand in a long line to use the lavatory.

During the first period there were no lavatories in the blocks. In the morning we had to run to several latrines, where very long queues would form, sometimes a hundred or two-hundred men. There were not enough seats. Inside, a Kapo armed with the usual rod would count to five – whoever failed to finish his business at the count of five received blows to the head. Many Häftlings fell into the hole.

From the latrines we would rush to the few pumps available in the square (there were no Waschraums[47] in the blocks during that first period).

44 Stubendienst (Ger.) – an inmate in charge of the room in a block or barrack; a room supervisor.

45 Lager (Ger.) – a camp. Here and in a few other places of the *Witold's Report* the expression 'at the Lager' means 'outdoors, not under a roof.'

46 Open the windows!

47 Waschraum (Ger.) – a washroom.

Several thousand people were supposed to wash there.

It was impossible, naturally.

You broke through to the pump and drew some water into your billycan.

Your feet had to be clean for the night, though. During the evening inspections, when the Stubendiensts would make their quantity reports on the Häftlings lying on the straw-filled mattresses, the block elders would simultaneously check the cleanliness of our feet. We had to put our feet out from under the blankets to make our soles visible. If the foot was not clean enough, or the block elder deemed it to be insufficiently so, the offender was seated on a stool and administered 10–20 blows with a rod.

This was one more way designed to eliminate inmates under the guise of caring for hygiene.

The same applied to doing unspeakable damage to the bodies of prisoners in latrines by forcing bodily functions on a count of five, as well as the nerve-wracking struggle at the pumps; indeed, the continuous rush and Laufschritt,[48] applied everywhere during the first period of the Lager.

From the pumps everyone rushed to the side for the so-called coffee or tea. The hot liquid, delivered to the rooms in pots, was a rather weak imitation of these beverages.

A regular Häftling never saw sugar.

I noticed that some of the inmates, who had been here for several months, had swollen legs and faces. Physicians, whom I asked about that said the swelling was due to excessive liquid intake. Either the kidneys or the heart were beginning to fail – an enormous effort of the body, coupled with the consumption of almost everything in liquid form: coffee, tea, AVO[49] and soup. I resolved to give up liquids that were not beneficial to me and stick to AVO and soups.

Generally you had to keep your whims and desires firmly in check.

Some of us refused to give up hot liquids due to the cold.

Things were even worse when it came to smoking because, during the first period, Häftlings had no money, as they were not allowed to write home at first. We had to wait a long time for that, and it took about three months for the reply to arrive.

Whoever was unable to control himself and traded bread for cigarettes, was digging his own grave.

48 Laufschritt (Ger.) – a run, at a running pace.

49 AVO (August Vodegel Osnabrück) – the name of a German family company, producing food concentrates. Food distribution for inmates in KL Auschwitz, especially in the camp's first years, was tantamount to starvation rations. Officially, the prisoners received soup with meat three times a week and vegetable soup four times. In reality, the soup was a watery liquid, usually cooked on leftovers or products that had gone off. 'Vegetable soup' consisted of rutabaga with a small addition of barley groats, rye flour and AVO concentrate. Sometimes the soup was barely the AVO concentrate, way more diluted than the recipe said. AVO soup was sometimes available in the camp canteen (of course provided that a prisoner had money to buy it at all).

I knew a good deal of people like that – and they all brought their demise upon themselves.

There were no graves. All the corpses were burnt in the newly built crematorium.

Therefore, I was in no rush for the hot slurry, while others were pushing and shoving and getting themselves beaten up and kicked in the process.

If a Häftling with swollen legs grabbed an opportunity to get better work and better food – he would recover, the swelling would go down, but irritating ulcers would form instead, oozing foul fluid and sometimes phlegmon, which was something I had never seen until then.

By avoiding liquids I fortunately managed to save myself from that.

Even before everyone managed to get the hot slurry, the Stubendienst was already emptying the room with the help of his club, as the room had to be cleaned before the roll-call.

In the meantime, the straw-filled mattresses and blankets were arranged according to the fashion in the block, and the blocks competed against one another in arranging the 'bed linen.'

The floor had to be washed as well.

The gong for the morning roll-call sounded at 5.45 a.m.

At 6.00 a.m. everyone was standing in aligned rows (each block formed ten rows, which made counting easier).

Everyone had to be present at the roll-call.

If someone happened to be missing – not because he escaped, but for example some new arrival naïvely hid away or simply had overslept – and the numbers at the roll-call did not tally with the Lager registers – such a person was found, dragged out into the square and almost always publicly killed.

Sometimes the absentee was a Häftling who had hanged himself somewhere in the attic, or 'went for the wires'[50] precisely at the time of the roll-call – in such cases gunshots were ringing out from a sentinel in a watchtower and the prisoner was falling, riddled with bullets.

Prisoners 'went for the wires' mostly in the morning, before a new day of the ordeal began. It happened less often before night-time, because it was a few-hours respite from the torture.

50 'To go for the wires' – in concentration camp slang: to decide to die. In the beginning, the fence wires of KL Auschwitz were not electrified. However, a 'security zone' started several metres from the fence, and if any inmates entered that zone, guards on the watchtowers were authorized to shoot them. Often those who could no longer stand the harsh camp conditions and torture, deliberately entered the security zone in order to be killed quickly and spared further torment. Later, when the fencing was doubled and the inner fence electrified, inmates died mostly by electrocution rather than by being shot.

There was an official order which prohibited prisoners from preventing their fellow inmates from committing suicide.

Those who were caught trying to prevent their fellow Häftlings from committing suicide were sent to the bunker[51] as punishment.

All authorities inside the Lager consisted exclusively of prisoners. Initially they were Germans, but later on other nationalities started to find their way into it.

The block elder (wearing a red armband with white letters reading Blockältester on his right arm) would finish off prisoners with rigor and rod. He was responsible for the block, but had nothing to do with a Häftling's labour.

A Kapo, on the other hand, would finish off prisoners with labour and rod in a Kommando[52] (a work unit) and would be responsible for a given Kommando's work.

The supreme authority of the Lager was the so-called Lagerältester.[53]

In the beginning there were two of them: Bruno [Bruno Brodniewicz] and Leo [Leo Wieczorek] – both prisoners.

Two scoundrels, who made everyone freeze in fear.

Murdering in full view of the audience, sometimes with just one strike of a club or fist.

The true name of the former was Bronisław Brodniewicz, the latter – Leon [Leo] Wieczorek; ex-Poles in German servitude...

Dressed differently[54] from everybody else, in high boots, navy blue trousers, jackets and berets (with black armbands with white letters on their left arms).

They made a somber pair, often seen together.

But all these auxiliary camp authorities, recruited from 'people from inside the wires,' bowed and scraped before every single SS man, not daring to reply to their questions until they took off their caps and stood to attention.

An ordinary Häftling truly amounted to nothing...

51 In KL Auschwitz, a slang name for Block 11's cellars with prison cells and also solitary confinement facilities. Mainly inmates subject to interrogations and investigations by the camp's Gestapo officers were held there.

52 Kommando (Ger.) – a basic forced labour squad in a camp, supervised by SS men and prisoner functionaries. There were so-called good Kommandos – those under the roof, and bad ones – outside, 'at the Lager.'

53 Lagerältester (Ger.) – an SS-appointed senior concentration camp prisoner functionary; camp elder. This position could be held exclusively by a German prisoner, usually criminal prisoners were appointed. The camp elder supervised all prisoner functionaries. He did not have to work physically, had better clothes, food, his own bed, as well as the possibility of owning his personal belongings.

54 More important KL Auschwitz prisoner functionaries were allowed to wear clothes other than the ordinary prisoners. They usually wore civilian clothing (navy blue or black), on which they put badges denoting their functions and their prisoner numbers.

The official authorities, formed of 'super-humans'[55] in military uniforms, namely the SS members – lived outside the camp's perimeter, in barracks and in the town.

I will now go back to describing the camp's daily schedule.

The roll-call. We were standing in rows as straight as a wall (I had actually missed well-aligned Polish rows since the war of 1939), aligned with the help of a rod. We were mesmerized by the abhorrent scene that unfolded before us.

The rows from Block 13 (according to the old numbering) – the SK (Strafkompanie) were aligned by the block elder Krankenmann [Ernst Krankemann[56]] in a radical manner – with a knife.

At that time all the Jews, priests, and some of the Poles with proven infractions were sent to the SK.

Krankenmann's duty was to finish off the Häftlings, who were sent to him almost on a daily basis, as quickly as it was possible; this duty was well suited to this man's character.

If someone, by any chance, happened to lean forward a couple of centimetres too much, Krankenmann would stab him in the belly with a knife he kept up his right sleeve.

Those, who moved back too much due to excessive caution – were stabbed in the kidneys by the butcher as he ran through the lines.

The view of a collapsing man, kicking out his legs and moaning, was enough to evoke Krankenmann's wrath. He would jump on the man's chest, kick him in the kidneys, genitals, trying to finish him off as soon as possible – and to silence him...

Sights like these were enough to make us tremble as if electrocuted.

Back then, I had one thought as I stood side by side with my fellow Poles: we were all united by the same wrath, with a desire for revenge. I felt that I was in an environment, perfectly suited for getting on with my task, and I discovered a small glimmer of joy inside of me...

A moment later, however, I became frightened of losing my mind – joy, here? – that had to be madness...

I looked closely inward and now I definitely felt joy – mostly because I wanted to start my task, and so I did not break down.

This was a psychological turning point for me. In an illness, one could perhaps say that the crisis has been averted.

For now, however, I had to fight for my life with a great deal of effort.

55 A super-human (Ger., sing. Übermensch, pl. Übermenschen) – a philosophical and literary concept, but also an ideological one, originating from that of a 'higher level' in the human evolution theory, proclaimed by the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, and adapted by the Germans as an official basis of the Third Reich's racial theory. It stated that the Aryans, and especially Germans, are the representatives of the supreme human race (Ger. Herrenvolk – 'the nation of masters') and every other nation and race should be subordinate to them. See also footnote 135.

56 In the *Witold's Report* referred to as Krankenmann.

The gong after the roll-call meant: 'Arbeitskommando[57] formieren!'[58]

Upon that signal, everyone ran to the formed Kommandos – work units whichever they thought were better.

Back then there was still some chaos with the assignments (unlike later on, when everyone calmly approached the Kommando to which he was assigned as a number). The prisoners were running in all directions, crossing each other's paths, while all the Kapos, block elders, and SS men took advantage of that, trying to trip them up, shove them, hit those who were running or falling with their rods, always kicking where it hurt the most.

During those three days which I was to spend in the camp, expelled by Alois [Alois Staller] as punishment, I was working with the wheelbarrows, carrying gravel.

Not having any particular Kommando in mind and simply not knowing which to join, I stood in one of the 'fives' in the 'hundred,' chosen for this work.

It consisted mostly of fellow inmates from Warsaw.

Numbers older than us, which meant people who had been imprisoned before us, those who somehow managed to survive – had already taken some of the more comfortable 'jobs.'

We – inmates from Warsaw – were being decimated with various kinds of labour, sometimes forced to carry gravel from one pit to another and then back again.

I found myself among those carrying gravel for the construction of the crematorium.

We were building the crematorium for ourselves.

The scaffolding around the chimney was rising higher and higher.

With a wheelbarrow filled by Vorarbeiters,[59] toadies with no compassion for us, one had to move quickly, and while moving over wooden boards laid further on – run with the wheelbarrow.

Every 15–20 steps there was a Kapo with a rod, hitting passers-by, shouting: 'Laufschritt!'

You pushed the wheelbarrow up slowly. With an empty wheelbarrow Laufschritt was obligatory for the entire length of the route.

Muscles, eyes and wits competed against one another in this struggle for survival.

You had to have a lot of strength to push the wheelbarrow, to keep it from falling off the plank, you had to spot and use an opportune moment to take a breath and catch a second wind.

This is where I saw how many of us, members of the intelligentsia, failed in those harsh, unforgiving conditions.

57 Arbeitskommando (Ger.) – a forced labour unit.

58 Form a work unit!

59 Vorarbeiter (Ger.) – a foreman.

Yes – it was a tough selection we had been going through back then.

My past interest in sports and gymnastics turned out to be hugely beneficial for me at that point.

An educated middle-class person, looking around helplessly or expecting help for having been a lawyer or an engineer, was always treated with a hard rod.

Here, a pot-bellied lawyer or landowner ineptly trying to push the wheelbarrow would fall off the plank into the sand, unable to get it back on track.

There, a helpless professor in his glasses or an elderly gentleman, would paint an equally pathetic picture.

All those unfit for labour or those exhausted from running with a wheelbarrow were beaten, and if they happened to fall while pushing the wheelbarrow – killed by blows from a rod or a boot.

At moments like these, taking advantage of another prisoner's death, you stood there like an animal, trying to catch some breath, fill your overworked lungs, to calm the rhythm of a fast beating heart...

Luckily, we were not expected to pass by our predecessors under this order of the Third Reich.

The gong for lunch, which, I think, was welcomed with joy by everyone in the camp, would sound at 11.20 a.m.

Between 11.30 a.m. and noon, a roll-call would take place – usually pretty quickly, and from 12.00 p.m. to 1 p.m. it was time for lunch.

After lunch another gong would tell us to return to our Arbeitskommandos and further torture would commence until the gong signaling the evening roll-call.

I was working 'with the wheelbarrows' for three days.

On the third day, after lunch, it seemed to me that I would never make it to the next gong.

I was already exhausted and I understood that once there was no one else weaker than me left for killing, it would be my turn to die.

'Bloody Alois' [Alois Staller], who was fond of supervising our work in the block as far as orderliness and tidiness were concerned, graciously took us back to the block after these three penal days out in the open, saying: 'Now you know what work at the Lager means. Paßt auf![60] with work in the block, lest I throw you outdoors for good.'

As far as I was concerned, he carried out his threat pretty quickly.

I did not apply the methods he required and which Kazik [identity unknown] advised me to use against the inmates and I was thrown out of the block with a bang, which I will describe below.

Now I would like to write something about the beginnings of the work I started there.

60 Here: Take care (of)...

At that time, my main goal was to establish a military organization, in order to:

Build up inmates' spirit by distributing and circulating news from the outside.

Provide – as much as possible – additional food and distribute undergarments among the members.

Pass on information on what was going on in the camp to the outside world, and, most importantly:

Prepare the ZOW's own troops to seize control of the camp at an opportune moment, following an airdrop of weapons or troops landing in the area.

I set out to perform that task just like I had in Warsaw in 1939, even (with small exceptions) with some of the very same people I had once recruited into the TAP[61] in Warsaw.

I organized the first 'five' here and swore in Colonel 1 [Władysław Surmacki], Captain Doctor 2 [Władysław Dering], Captain 3 [Jerzy Virion], Second Lieutenant 4 [Alfred Stössel][62] and fellow inmate 5 [Roman Zagner][63] (I shall provide the code corresponding to their names in a separate document[64]).

Colonel 1 became the commander of the 'five.' Doctor 2 [Władysław Dering] was ordered to take control of the situation in the Krankenbau[65] – where he had already

61 Tajna Armia Polska (Secret Polish Army) – an underground resistance organization, created on November 9, 1939 in Warsaw by merging Jan Dangel's group of students of the SGH Warsaw School of Economics and Major Jan Włodarkiewicz's group of social activists and soldiers, co-led by W. Pilecki. The TAP declared its loyalty to the Polish government-in-exile (headed by General Władysław Sikorski) in France and – later – in Great Britain; appealed to Christian and national ideals. Later on, it joined the structures of the KN, forming a separate military organization out of its military cadres – the KZ. Merged in 1941 with the ZWZ. Many TAP members co-formed a separate sabotage organization of ZWZ – 'Wachlarz' ('Fan'), whose first commander was also a former TAP commander, Major J. Włodarkiewicz.

62 According to the key to the *W Report* of 1943, No. 4 was supposed to be Eugeniusz Obojski. Later events, described in the *Witold's Report* from 1945, nevertheless confirm that No. 4 was A. Stössel.

63 This way in 1940 Witold Pilecki started the process of forming an underground military organization in KL Auschwitz, which while growing adopted the name of the Military Organization Union (Pol. Związek Organizacji Wojskowej, ZOW). The ZOW consisted mainly of the imprisoned in KL Auschwitz (later on in KL Birkenau as well) soldiers and officers of the Polish Army. At its peak the ZOW listed around 800 sworn in members. The actual leader and organizer of the ZOW was, until his escape from the camp in April 1943, Lieutenant Witold Pilecki, and later on Henryk Bartosiewicz took over command. The formal military leader as far as forming combat structures and preparing the ZOW for a military action were concerned, was Lieutenant Colonel Kazimierz Heilmann, and after his transfer to KL Mauthausen – Lieutenant Colonel Juliusz Gilewicz.

64 For security reasons, Pilecki encoded the names and surnames of members of the ZOW unit in KL Auschwitz. In reports, he assigned every co-worker a number in the order in which they appeared in his descriptions of events (or in the order in which they had joined the organization). The key to the *Witold's Report* of 1945, mentioned here by Pilecki, had been lost. Attempts at deciphering Auschwitz resistance movement members' names were made by Dr. Józef Garliński in London and Dr. Adam Cyra in Poland. Thanks to their arduous work and finding the key to Pilecki's *W Report* of 1943 by the latter, the vast majority of names were deciphered. When listing the camp's underground resistance movement's members, we are basing them on the facts that A. Cyra established and published, inter alia, in his book *Rotmistrz Pilecki. Ochotnik do Auschwitz* (Warszawa 2014). Some names still remain undeciphered and furthermore, contradictions between the 1943 and 1945 versions of the reports occur.

65 Krankenbau, Häftlingskrankenbau, HKB, Revier (Ger.) – a sick bay, infirmary; in reality: the camp hospital for prisoners.

been working as a Pfleger.[66] (Poles were officially banned from working as doctors, they could only be nurses.)

In November I sent the first report to the Headquarters[67] in Warsaw via Second Lieutenant 6 [Tadeusz Burski] (he lived in Warsaw, at 58 Raszyńska Street, until the Uprising), one of our intelligence officers who was bailed out of Auschwitz.[68]

Colonel 1 [Władysław Surmacki] was moved to the Baubüro.[69]

In the future I was to organize four other 'fives.' None of them knew about the others and they all thought that they were at the top of the organization, developing as broadly as the sum of abilities and energy of their members would allow.

I did it out of caution, so that any slip-up of one of the 'fives' would not bring others down as well.

Later, more extensive 'fives' began to contact and detect each other.

Sometimes, my fellow inmates would come to me and report: 'You know, there's some other organization hiding around here as well.' I calmed them down by saying that this was none of their concern.

This is the future, though. For now, there was only one 'five.'

In the meantime, one day after the roll-call, I went to report to Alois [Alois Staller] that there were three sick people in the room, unable to work (they were virtually on their last legs).

'Bloody Alois' flew into a rage. 'What, a sick person in my block?!!... No sick ones!... Everyone has to work, including you! Enough is enough!...,' and he burst into the room with me, brandishing his rod. 'Where are they?!!...'

Two of them were lying against the wall, breathing heavily, the third one was kneeling in the corner and praying.

'Was macht er?!' he yelled to me. – 'Er betet.' – 'Betet??!... Who taught him how to pray?!...' – 'Das weiß ich nicht,'[70] I replied.

He jumped at the praying prisoner and started to abuse him, yelling that he was an idiot... that there was no God... that it was him, Alois, who gave us bread, not God... – but he did not hit him.

66 Pfleger (Ger.) – a nurse; in the *Witold's Report* – a male nurse.

67 Here Pilecki probably means the TAP HQ. After TAP's merger with ZWZ in 1941 his reports were delivered to the ZWZ HQ.

68 According to the data in the *W Report* of 1943, this first report was carried by Aleksander Karol Wielopolski (1910–1980) – a member of the deeply clandestine intelligence organization 'Muszkieterzy' ('Musketeers'). Burski, released from KL Auschwitz the following year, passed another Pilecki's report to the underground resistance authorities in Warsaw – see p. 53.

69 Baubüro (Ger.) – a construction office.

70 What's he doing?! – He's praying. – Praying??! – I don't know.

Then he ran at the two lying against the wall and started to kick them in the kidneys and other places, shouting 'auf!!!...auf!!!...'[71] and, confronted with the vision of approaching death, they mustered their last reserves of strength and stood up.

Then he started yelling at me: 'See! I told you they were not sick!... If they can walk, they can work! Weg!!!...[72] Off to work!... And you right with them!...'

And so he kicked me out to work in the camp.

And he escorted the prisoner who was praying to the infirmary.

He was a strange man – that communist.

In the square, I found myself in a rather vague situation.

Everyone was already standing in work Kommandos, waiting for the signal to march out. To run for a place in a row as a belated Häftling meant submitting to being beaten and kicked by Kapos and SS men.

I saw that there was a company of prisoners who were not included in the working Kommandos. At that time, unassigned prisoners (there were not that many Kommandos, the camp was still under construction) were made to exercise in the square.

There were no Kapos or SS men to be seen in their proximity at that moment, as they were busy with forming Arbeitskommandos.

I ran up to them and took my place in a circle 'for gymnastics.'

I used to like gymnastics, but since Auschwitz my liking for it seems to have diminished.

From 6.00 a.m., often for several hours on end, we had to stand in the freezing air.

With no caps or socks, wearing nothing but thin drills, in this hilly climate, in the fall of 1940,[73] on what were almost always foggy mornings, we would stand there, shivering from cold.

Our legs and arms, sticking out from often too short trousers and sleeves would turn blue.

They kept us standing still.

We were supposed to remain there and freeze.

The cold was finishing us off.

The passing Kapos and block elders (often with Alois [Alois Staller] among them) would stop, laughing, and, with suggestive gestures imitating evaporation, saying: '...und das Leben fliiieeegt...[74] Ha! Ha!'

When the mists would finally lift, the sun would shine through and it would get a little warmer and lunch would seem to be getting closer, a horde of Kapos would start the 'gymnastics' with us – which could easily be called harsh punitive exercises.

71 Up! Get up!

72 Out of here!

73 Winters in the 1940s were exceptionally harsh and came early.

74 And life flieees awaaaaay...

For that kind of gymnastics there was far too much time until lunch.

'Hüpfen! Rollen! Tanzen! Kniebeugen!!'[75]

One 'hüpfen' was enough to finish one off!

It was impossible to leap like a frog around the giant square – and not just because of the clogs, as we were holding them in our hands, and not because of tearing off the skin of our soles from jumping on gravel until they started to bleed; but because no muscles were strong enough for a feat such as this.

My sports training from years ago was saving me again.

Here, again, feeble intellectuals out of shape, unable to hop even for a short distance, were meeting their end.

Here, again, the rod was falling upon the heads of those who were stumbling every couple of steps. Again, beating and merciless extermination.

And, yet again, like an animal, a man would exploit a moment of respite and catch his breath whenever a horde with rods started assaulting some new victim.

After lunch – part two.

Collecting the corpses and taking the half-dead to the infirmary, where they were finished off by the evening.

There were two rollers 'working' in the square right next to us. They were, allegedly, levelling out the ground.

Their true purpose, however, was the extermination of the people who were pulling them.

Priests, with some other Polish prisoners, up to 20–25 people, were harnessed into the first, smaller one.

The second, bigger one, had about 50 Jews harnessed to it.

Krankenmann [Ernst Krankemann] and some other Kapo were standing on the shafts, and the combined weight of their bodies made the shafts heavier, pressing them into the necks and arms of the prisoners pulling the rollers.

From time to time a Kapo or Krankenmann, the block elder, would bring down their rods on someone's head with philosophical detachment, hitting this or that draft animal – prisoner with such force that they either killed them on the spot or sent them, stunned, under the roller, hitting the rest of the prisoners to prevent them from stopping.

Every day a great number of corpses was pulled out by their legs from that little carcass factory to be laid in rows and counted during the roll-call.

In the evening Krankenmann, walking about the square with his hands behind his back, would look with a smile of satisfaction at the former prisoners, finally lying in peace.

I had been doing 'gymnastics,' called the 'circle of death,' for two days.

75 Hop! Roll! Dance! Squat! (hop – in a crouching position, making frog-like leaps around the roll-call square).

On the third day, while standing in the circle, I was wondering about the percentage of prisoners physically weaker and less fit than me, trying to calculate how much longer I could count on my own strength, when suddenly my situation changed.

The Kommandos were marching out to work. Some of them were working within the wire fencing, some of them were to work outside the fence.

The Lagerführer[76] was standing at a lectern near the gate with a group of SS men. He was inspecting the Kommandos heading outside and checking their numbers against the ones in the roster.

Right next to him stood the Arbeitsdienst[77] – Otto [Otto Küsel] (a German who never hit any Pole). By virtue of his position, he was the one to assign each prisoner to their respective place of work. He was responsible for appointing people to specific Kommandos.

I was standing at the arc of the circle near the gate when I noticed Otto running straight at us.

Instinctively, I moved a little bit closer still.

The embarrassed Arbeitsdienst ran right into me: 'Vielleicht bist du ein Ofensetzer?!' – 'Jawohl! Ich bin ein Ofensetzer,' I replied without hesitation. – 'Aber ein guter Meister?' – 'Gewiß, ein guter Meister.' – 'Also, schnell!...'[78]

He told me to pick four more people from the circle and rush at full speed, following him to the gate near Block 9 (according to the old numbering); we were given buckets, trowels, a brick hammer, lime, and the five of us stood in line in front of Fritzsch's [Karl Fritzsch] lectern, who was the Lagerführer at the time.

Only then did I look at the faces of my accidental comrades.

I knew none of them.

'Fünf Ofensetzer,'[79] loudly reported Otto, breathing heavily.

We were given two Posts[80] and marched out of the gate, heading towards the town.

76 Lagerführer (Ger.) – the head of the camp; an SS officer. In the concentration camp structure – the leader of the so-called Department III, with the official name Schutzhaftlagerführer. Also, a Lagerkommandant's deputy (in case of the commandant's absence). Responsible for the overall functioning of a camp, appointing and dismissing prisoner functionaries (e.g. Kapos and block elders), giving opinions and suggesting punishments, he took every measure to prevent inmates from running away, controlled the work efficiency, supervised cleaning and order in the camp, was obliged to look after food rationing (so that every prisoner was given a fair food ration) and was supposed to instruct the personnel about the prohibition of inmate abuse. Especially the two last duties were treated as pure formality, or rather a total fiction. During Pilecki's imprisonment in KL Auschwitz, the Lagerführer was SS-Hauptsturmführer Karl Fritzsch and after him – SS-Sturmbannführer Hans Aumeier.

77 Arbeitsdienst (Ger.) – an SS-appointed prisoner functionary, supervising all work units and assigning prisoners to them; also work assignment office.

78 Are you perhaps a stove fitter? – Yes, Sir! I'm a stove fitter! – But a good professional? – Of course, a good professional... – So hurry up!...

79 Five stove fitters.

80 Post (Ger.) – a sentry post, a guard. The SS men on guard, located on watchtowers or by the camp fence were called Posts. Often, the word 'Wachmann' (Ger.) was also used.

It turned out that Otto was supposed to find some tradesmen for moving the stoves in an SS man's home, and had forgotten about it, and at the last moment saved the situation and assembled a makeshift crew from the five of us, while the previous Kommando was being counted at the gate.

The Posts were now taking us to that SS man's home.

In one of the houses in town, the owner of the place, an SS man, spoke to us in German, but in a humane voice, which seemed odd to me.

He asked who the foreman was and explained to me that he was relocating the kitchen. His wife was coming and therefore he wanted to move the cooking stove here, and the other oven there, into the room. He thought there were too many of us, but the main point was to do a good job, so we were all allowed to work, but if any of us had nothing to do, they could clean up his attic. He would come and visit us daily to check up on the work. Having said that, he left.

I checked whether any of my companions knew anything about stoves. When it turned out that no one did, I assigned all four of them to carrying water, digging clay, tempering, etc.

Two SS men kept watch outside the house.

I was left alone. What I was doing with the stove is of no importance.

A man, fighting for his life, is capable of more than he would think possible.

I carefully dismantled the stove, so that no tiles were broken, I studied the layout of the Lufts,[81] where and how they were connected, with undivided attention.

Afterwards, I assembled the stove, and then a smaller one in the places that were pointed out to me.

It took me four days to build them.

However, on the fifth day, when it came to lighting a fire in the stove to test it, I luckily managed to get lost in the camp, even though I heard that they were looking for the Ofensetzer[82] – the foreman, but they did not find me.

Nobody thought to look among the gardeners in the commandant's garden...

And the numbers of our 'five' had not been noted anywhere either. At that time even the Kapos in our Kommandos did not always note down the numbers.

Whether the stoves worked or not – I never found out...

Now I will return to the moment when I found myself in town for the first time, in the SS man's house.

Albeit, I am to describe pure facts only...

I had already seen dire scenes in Auschwitz, up to that point nothing could break me.

81 Luft (Ger.) – air; here: air vents and flues inside a stove, distributing hot air and directing smoke to the chimney.

82 Ofensetzer (Ger.) – a stove fitter.

And here, where no rod, no kick posed a threat, I suddenly felt my heart rising up to my throat and I felt bad, as never before...

I know... somebody might remind me that I was supposed to give dry facts only – what I am stating here is, indisputably, a fact. All this, however, dredges up straight from the depths of my soul, and so perhaps that is why it is not so dry.

I faced the 'stove assignment' alone, but it was not about stoves at all... So, there is still a world out there, and people still live the way they used to? Here: houses, small gardens, flowers and children. Happy voices. Leisure.

And fast beside: hell, murder, eradication of everything that was humane and good...

There – the very same SS man is an executioner, a tormentor; here – he is pretending to be a human.

Where does the truth lie, then? There? Or here?

He is making a nest at home. His wife is coming, so he must feel some emotions sometimes.

The church bells are chiming, people are praying, loving, giving birth; and just right next to that – they are committing murder...

A mutinous groundswell took hold of me at that time.

It was a moment of heavy struggle.

For four days, while working with the stoves, visions of hell and earth took turns appearing before my eyes. I felt as if I was pushed into flames, only to be submerged in cold water moments later.

Yes! I was getting hardened back then!

In the meantime, our first 'five' had already made a few steps forward, and had sworn in a couple of new members.

One of them was Captain 7 [Michał Romanowicz]. Michał was his name.

Captain Michał approached his task in such a way that in the morning he helped in arranging the 'fives' for work. In front of the Kapos he would abuse the inmates and nag, quickly aligining the rows, but he saved more than one prisoner from the Kapo's rod, while making much noise and commotion, at the same time winking meaningfully at the inmates when the Kapo turned his back.

The Kapos had decided that he was fit to be a supervisor of a 'twenty' and delegated four 'fives' to serve under his command, making a Vorarbeiter out of him.

That very same Michał saved me on a critical day when I had to disappear from the Kapos' view. He put me in the 'twenty' of an Unterkapo[83] he knew, in one of the Kommandos working outside the gate.

83 Unterkapo (Ger.) – under-kapo; often a deputy or an assistant of the main Kapo in a given Kommando. There were also over-kapos (Ger. Oberkapos), who supervised some or all the Kapos in larger divisions and particular enterprises of a camp. See also footnote 37.

I ended up in a division working in the field, just by the Lager commandant's villa.

In the meantime, they were looking for the Ofensetzer, until Otto [Otto Küsel] found another prisoner and the entire 'five' set off for the stoves as usual.

It was raining the whole day and a strong wind was blowing.

When working in the field, which we were supposed to turn double quick into a garden for the commandant, we were all getting drenched; we also felt as if the wind was cutting right through us. We were soaked to the bone. The wind was lashing us, it was impossible to expose one side of the body too long. The blood in our veins was turning into ice, and only work – quick work with the shovel – tapped into one's energy reserves to produce some heat. And energy was not something to be spent too freely, as regenerating it was very doubtful...

We were told to throw off our striped clothes. In shirts, barefoot, in clogs sinking into clay, without caps, with water running down our heads, we would be steaming like horses after a run every time the rain stopped.

The year of 1940 and its fall in particular, turned out to be a time of torture for the prisoners of Auschwitz due to the constant downpours, especially during roll-calls. A roll-call with rain became a regular occurrence, even on days that could be considered sunny. At roll-calls everyone was getting soaked – those working the entire day in the field and those who spent the day working indoors.

Indoor work was mostly given to the 'old lags,' that is those who came one, two, or three months before us.

Those three months made a huge difference both in terms of 'jobs' (as all those under the roof had been already taken), and in experiences.

Also, in general terms, a prisoner who came a month later was no different from his companions due to having been imprisoned for a shorter period, but due to not being exposed to the torments that were devised a month before his arrival. The methods kept changing constantly, always in abundant supply with wardens, henchmen, and other shady individuals who tried to win favour with the authorities.

This was also true in the following years. But for now, nobody was thinking in terms of years. Kazik [identity unknown] (Block 17) told us once that the first year was the worst. Some of us laughed heartily upon hearing this. A year? We will be back home for Christmas! The Germans will not last that long! England! etc., etc. (Sławek Szpakowski).[84] The others were struck with horror. A year?! Who could possibly survive a year here, when every day you played blindman's bluff with death... Maybe not today, Grim Reaper ... maybe tomorrow! And a day sometimes seemed like a year.

And it seemed like a never-ending nightmare. Sometimes, when you had no strength left and there was work to be done, an hour seemed like a century, but

84 Pilecki put his name in brackets, probably wishing to point out that this man was the author of all those optimistic suggestions, consoling other inmates.

weeks, on the other hand, were passing relatively quickly. Odd, but this is how it was – sometimes it seemed like there was something wrong with either time itself, or our sanity...

And our sanity was not the same as that of other people, that is for sure... as that of people far, far away, there, 'on earth'...

The men we were back 'on earth' were dying – we were transforming and becoming different.

Not once, not twice, would I hear a fellow prisoner sigh, summing up his life with words: I was so stupid!

...And so – as we grew closer to one another after our challenging ordeals, our experiences tied knots of friendship tighter than there, 'on earth'...

...when you had your team, in which you supported others and risked your own life to save another... and then suddenly... before your very own eyes, brother, they killed your friend, murdering him in the worst way possible... – what then?!...

There seemed just one thing to do: assault the tormentor and die together with him... It happened a couple of times, but the only result was always one more death...

No, this was not the solution! That way we would die far too quickly...

So being a witness to the slow death of a friend, you – so to say – were dying along with him in a way... Watching this, you felt like your life came to an end as well... And yet... you went on living despite this... so you revived, you got reborn... you transformed...

And if one dies this way, let us say, even 90 times only, well, one becomes someone else than he used to be before, on 'earth'...

And we were dying in thousands... tens of thousands... and then hundreds of thousands...

So 'earth' and its people seemed ridiculous, preoccupied with matters that seemed trifling in our eyes.

This is how we were being reforged internally.

Not everyone, though.

The Lager was a gauge that tested characters.

Some fell into swamps of moral depravity.

Others were shaping their character like grinders cutting crystals.

We were cut with sharp instruments. Blows caused burning pain to the flesh, but they were like ploughs for the fields of the soul...

Everyone went through this transformation.

Just like fertile soil, treated with a plough, is cast to the right, the one to the left is to be ploughed with the next slash.

Only from time to time the plough encounters a rock and leaves a bit of soil untreated, barren – which was a dissonance to the whole field...

We shed all the titles we may have ever gloried in...

All the distinctions and diplomas were left far behind, 'on earth'...

Gazing as if from beyond at those figures of ours, dressed in all those mundane layers, you were able to see our entire group the way we used to be back then: one with that title, the other one – with another title, but you could only smile indulgently at that... As if looking at children...

We were all on first-name terms.

The Zugangs were the only ones who were addressed as 'sir,' for they did not understand it yet.

Among the 'old numbers'[85] such a form was usually considered to be offensive.

Colonel R. [Tadeusz Reklewski], whom I addressed as 'Sir' one time when I forgot myself, snorted at me and said: 'Would you quit calling me that...'

How different it was 'on earth.'

Any Tom, Dick, or Harry would have bragged to his friends about having the honour of being on first-name terms with someone superior by two ranks.

Here, everything was gone without a trace.

We became a bare essence.

A man could matter and mattered only as much as he was worth himself...

I had been working in the commandant's garden for two days.

We were levelling the land, marking out the flower beds and paths.

We were removing the dirt from deeply cut paths, filling the cavities with thickly strewn brick. We pulled down a couple of houses in the neighbourhood. All houses in the vicinity of the Lager, especially within the perimeter of the kleine Postenkette and the große Postenkette,[86] i.e. a ring of several kilometres in radius, had to be demolished.

The German wardens set about these buildings, left here by the Polish population, with particular zeal or rage of a kind.

Rich villas and modest yet neat little houses, the construction of which perhaps meant a lifetime of work for some Polish labourer, were disappearing from the face of the earth, taken apart by Polish prisoners, rushed by the blows of rods, beaten, kicked, and insulted with various 'Verfluchts.'[87]

There was always an occasion for such harassment, be it in the garden or in the course of the demolition of the houses.

85 Prisoners bearing the lowest numbers, who arrived at KL Auschwitz in the first transports in 1940. In Auschwitz (as in other camps) people were numbered consecutively, in the order of their arrival.

86 Kleine Postenkette, große Postenkette (Ger.) – KL Auschwitz was surrounded by a chain of watch towers and posts; this was the so-called small chain of sentry posts. The second one, the outer 'large chain,' ran for quite a distance (sometimes significant) from the camp buildings and also protected KL Auschwitz II-Birkenau and parts of the so-called camp interest zone (Ger. Interessengebiet des KL Auschwitz), i.e. the places and factories where the prisoners worked.

87 Verflucht (Ger.) – 'bloody' or 'damned.'

After having the roofs torn off and the walls taken down, the hardest part was removing the foundations, which had to disappear without a trace. The pits were then filled with soil; should the owners return, it would take them a long time to identify the former location of their family nests.

We were also uprooting trees. There was nothing left of the homesteads.

During the demolition of one such home I spotted a picture of Our Lady hanging on a bush which, as it seemed to me, was there all alone with some kind of calm endurance in the midst of all this chaos and desolation.

Our people refused to take it down.

The Kapos felt that here, when exposed to rain, snow and frost, it was going to be most vulnerable to all adversities.

And so, even much later, we could still see that picture, hanging on the snow-covered bush, all frosted and shimmering with gildings, only revealing her face and eyes from behind that part of the glass not steamed over. Her face and eyes, for prisoners brought there to work in the winter to the accompaniment of savage shouting and kicking, was something pleasant. It diverted their thoughts to their homes, for some – to their wives, for others – to their mothers.

At night, we would put our wet clothes which had been drenched during work and drenched at the roll-calls, under our heads instead of pillows.

In the morning we would put the wet clothes on and go to work, without socks, in clogs falling off our feet, without caps, sometimes in rain or piercing wind.

It was already November.

Sometimes it snowed a little bit...

My colleagues were slowly dying out. They were going to the infirmary, never to come back.

Odd – I was no Hercules, and yet I did not even catch a cold.

After a couple of days of work in the garden, Michał [Romanowicz] put me in his 'twenty' he was free to pick as he pleased.

He formed it from his colleagues, usually those who were sworn in already or those, who could be trusted to join our organization – valuable people, worth saving.

Our 'twenty' belonged to a 'hundred,' which, among over a dozen of other 'hundreds,' went to Industriehof II.[88]

The Kapos, who reigned there, were: 'August Czarny' ['August the Black'; identity unknown], 'Sigrod' [Johann Siegruth], Bonitz [Bernhard Bonitz], 'August Biały' ['August the White'; identity unknown] and others.

88 Industriehof (Ger.) – KL Auschwitz industrial zone. The whole Auschwitz camp structure consisted of 58 camps and subcamps, containing many factories and sites, where the inmates worked.

There was also a handful of teenage cubs – Volksdeutsches,[89] serving the Germans, who took delight in slapping prisoners' faces, smashing them with rods, and so on.

One of them seemed to get carried away a little bit and a couple of days later he was found hanging in one of the barracks: 'he must've hanged himself,' 'nobody stopped him' – the instruction regarding such a cases was clear in the Lager.

Michał [Romanowicz], as a Vorarbeiter, along with his 'twenty,' was assigned to pull down one of the houses in the field.

He took us all there, and we had been 'working hard' there for a couple of weeks.

We were sitting in the corners of the house's foundations and resting after work, only from time to time hitting something with a pickaxe so that the sounds of work could be heard.

Occasionally several inmates removed the rubble from the walls and foundations of the demolished house on a stretcher.

This resource, the rubble, was used to build a road several hundred metres further on.

No guard or warden paid much attention to this house, located far from where the other 'hundreds' were working.

The Kapos had so much work with finishing off over a dozen 'hundreds' of 'damned Polish dogs' that they either forgot about us, or did not want to make the effort of walking up to us through a muddy field.

Michał was on guard and was watching the surroundings carefully. Whenever some SS man or Kapo appeared in the vicinity, two colleagues with stretchers would show up and picks and axes would start hitting the concrete of the foundations and the ceiling of the basement.

89 Volksdeutsche (Ger.) – a person, registered by the Third Reich's authorities on the German ethnicity list (DVL), giving that person citizenship of the Third Reich, regardless of the pre-war nationality. The enlistment was made according to the racial and national criteria, but not consistently. Enrolling onto the DVL was one of the forms of weakening the consistency of Polish society and Germanization of the conquered lands. The pre-war Polish citizens of 'German blood,' able to prove their German origin, or at least carrying a German surname, could apply for allowing them to be counted among German citizens – which would give them material profits and a better status. Citizens, who received the first and second categories of the DVL, were considered Reichsdeutsches, which made them equal with the pre-war citizens of the Third Reich. Enrolling onto the DVL, regardless the category, gave the Germans the possibility to draw all the members of the Volksliste, as well as their children (if they reached the recruiting age), to the army. Registering on the DVL was most often treated by the Poles as an act of high treason of the Polish nation and collaboration with the Germans, especially in the General Government, where most of the interested applied. In areas, incorporated to the Reich, however, the cases were much more complicated. A refusal to sign the list in many cases meant displacement or imprisonment in a concentration camp. Many autochthonous Poles were registered on the list: the Kashubians, Mazurians, Silesians and the inhabitants of Greater Poland (Wielkopolska). They were mostly enlisted into groups III (the majority) and IV. They were given a temporary Third Reich citizenship with the possibility of having it retracted by the Germans. In Pomerania and Greater Poland, more restrictive criteria of accepting new DVL members were applied, but in Silesia, where the Germans did not want to lose qualified workers in the mines and industrial plants, various forms of pressure and incentive were applied.

While working, I was standing next to Sławek Szpakowski. Generally we touched upon culinary matters most of the time. We were both optimists. We came to the conclusion that our preferences as far as dishes were concerned, were almost identical. And so, Sławek was arranging the menu he wanted to treat me to, one day, in Warsaw, after our return from the Lager.

From time to time, when the chill in the air was a nuisance and we were soaked by the rain, we would work for real, chipping off huge chunks of concrete.

In striped clothing, with pickaxes and sledge hammers, we presented an image that could easily be summed up with a verse from the song: 'Hammering down ore in the mines...,'[90] and Sławek promised himself to paint – after getting out of this hell – my portrait in a striped uniform and with a pickaxe.

Only optimism was keeping us alive, for everything else – the entire reality was very bleak indeed.

Hunger was twisting our intestines.

Oh, if only we could have that bread that we threw into the wheelbarrows in the square on the day of our arrival!

Back then we were incapable of appreciating bread.

Right next to our workplace, on the other side of the fence, bordered by a large chain of guards, two goats and a cow were eagerly grazing on cabbage leaves which grew there.

On our side, there were no cabbage leaves left, they had all been eaten. Not by cows, though, but by creatures still akin to humans – by the Häftlings – by us.

We would eat fodder beets raw.

How we envied the cows – beets did not disagree with them. A great part of us was getting sick. More and more Häftlings were getting afflicted by Durchfall,[91] raging in the camp at that time.

In other words: diarrhea and dysentery.

Somehow, my stomach had never been afflicted.

Such a simple thing – a healthy stomach, and yet so important in the camp.

The ones, who fell sick, had to have a very strong will to refrain from eating at all, even for a short time.

Any special diet was out of the question. It was only accessible in the infirmary, but getting there was no small feat, and it was even harder to get out: usually, one got out of there as smoke through the chimney of the crematorium.

90 A verse from a song of Polish katorga prisoners *Nie dbam, jaka spadnie kara* ('I don't care what punishment falls'; 'katorga' was a system of forced labour in Tsarist Russia), sung by those deported to Siberia after the January Uprising of 1863, who were forced to work in great numbers in gold mines in the north-eastern part of the Russian Empire. The song was popular with several generations of Polish deportees and anti-Tsarist conspirators. The lyrics are taken from the 3rd part of *Dziady* ('Forefathers' Eve'), written by the poet Adam Mickiewicz. Various melodies are known.

91 Durchfall (Ger.) – diarrhea.

Willpower, which meant so much, was not enough here.

Even if a prisoner was able to get a hold of himself and give up lunch, dry the bread to eat it the next day, or burn it to cinder to eat it to stop the diarrhea – he was still enfeebled by the constant malfunctioning of his stomach, so at work in a Kommando (carefully guarded by tormentors with rods), due to his lack of strength, he was quickly marked as 'ein fauler Hund'[92] and finished off by beating.

Upon our return to the Lager for the midday and evening roll-calls, twice a day, we had to carry bricks.

For the first two days each of us carried seven bricks, then, for a couple of days – six, and in the end the standard was set at five bricks.

When we arrived at the camp, there were six two-story barracks and fourteen one-story barracks behind the fences. On the roll-call square eight new multi-story blocks were being built, and all the one-story blocks were transformed into multi-story ones by means of a superstructure.

All of the materials (bricks, iron, lime) were being carried into the camp by us over a distance of several kilometres and before the construction was completed, thousands of Häftlings had died.

Working in Michał's 'twenty' saved us a lot of strength.

Good old Michał, who, guarding our safety, standing outside the house, caught a cold, then got pneumonia and ended up in the infirmary. He died in December.

When he left us for the Krankenbau, it was still November – since then they got tough with us as with all the other 'twenties' and 'hundreds.'

And so the ordeal began anew, no holds barred.

We were unloading the freight trains, shunted off onto the sidings.

Iron, glass, bricks, pipes, drains.

All the materials, necessary for developing the camp, were sent to us. The wagons had to be unloaded quickly, and so, under the threat of a rod, we were rushing, carrying, tripping over and falling under the weight of an I-beam or a rail.

Even those who did not fall, were exhausting their reserves of strength, seemingly aggregated at some point back in the past.

Each day they were more and more surprised that they are still alive, walking, when we had been pushed far beyond the threshold of what the strongest human can endure.

Yes, on one hand, a strange kind of contempt was born here, contempt for those who had to be considered human due to their physical form and, simultaneously, for the rest of humanity, but at the same time, recognition for the strange wonder of human nature was forming, which had such a strong spirit, seemingly, something akin to immortality.

Although dozens of corpses, each of which the four of us would drag on our way to the roll-call in the Lager, seemed to deny this.

92 A lazy beast.

Clutching cold legs and hands, that were like bones covered with bluish grey skin.

Eyes, often already indifferent, would look at us from blue-grey-purple faces, which bore the signs of beating.

Some of the bodies, still warm, would swing their heads, smashed open with shovels, to the march of the column, which had to 'keep its pace.'

The food we were given was sufficient maybe for bare existence, but it was nowhere near adequate for sustaining the energy levels we needed for the work our muscles were put to. Moreover, this energy was necessary to warm up the body, chilled during work out in the open.

After the loss of Michał [Romanowicz] we took to scheming with Sławek [Szpakowski] at Industriehof II, maneuvering rather deftly between the blows raining down on us, to always show up in some more acceptable team.

One time we were unloading the carriages, some other – working in the Straßenbaukommando[93] of 'August the White' [identity unknown].

While working in this Kommando, it just so happened that we were working on a road right next to warehouses, a strong smell of cold meats hit our nostrils.

Enhanced by hunger, our sense of smell was particularly acute.

In our minds we saw rows of hams, smoked bacons, sirloin, just hanging there.

Unfortunately, not for us.

The provisions were, obviously, for the 'super-humans.'

Apart from this, we would joke that our sense of smell proved we were no longer human beings. It was about 40 metres to the warehouses. It was more an animal's sense of smell than that of a human being...

One thing was always saving us – a good mood.

Still, all these conditions, combined together, started to take their toll.

When carrying the bricks to the Lager, especially in the evening, I would walk – seemingly – confidently.

In reality, however, sometimes I would lose my sense of awareness and I walked like an automaton... as if in a dream... somewhere far away from my surroundings... seeing green petals... almost stumbling...

I would come to myself as my thoughts started working again and register my internal states with the thought which was running through my head: No! You can't give up!

And I would walk on... Pushed on by sheer willpower...

This state of frenzy would slowly come to an end... and as I would enter the camp through the gate... Yes, now I would understood the sign on the gate which said: 'Arbeit macht frei'!

93 Straßenbaukommando (Ger.) – a roadworks Kommando.

Oh yes, indeed... Work sets you free... It liberates you from the camp... from consciousness... just like I had experienced a while earlier... it liberates the spirit from the body... leading that body to the crematorium.

And yet, we had to think of something... Something had to be done to end this process of fading away.

When I would meet with the two Władeks (Colonel 1 [Władysław Surmacki] and Doctor 2 [Władysław Dering]), Władek 2 would always ask: 'So, Tomasz,[94] how are you?' And I always cheerfully replied that I was feeling great. In the beginning it caused confusion, then they got used to it and actually believed that I was, indeed, feeling well.

I could not answer in a different manner. If I wanted to conduct my task – even though my colleagues followed in my footsteps with zeal and one managed to establish himself in the infirmary, where he started to have some influence, and the other one was developing a 'five' in the Baubüro – I had to keep suggesting that work here was absolutely possible and fight the psychosis that no. 3 [Jerzy Virion] started to succumb to.

What would have happened if I complained, even once, that I was unwell... or that I was feeling weak and actually overburdened with work so much that, in pursuit of saving my own life, I was looking for a way out...

Of course, in such a situation I would have been in no position to suggest anything to anyone nor demand anything from anyone...

And so, I was well – only for the information of others at the moment – and then, as I will describe further on, despite the constant threats and strained nerves, I actually started to feel well, not only in words meant for others.

A kind of a duality started to occur.

When the body was under constant torture, sometimes a man would feel excellent spiritually, and I don't mean in an abstract sort of way.

Contentment started to nestle somewhere in the material brains, both because of the spiritual experiences and that interesting, purely intellectual game that I was playing.

Still, the priority was to save my own body and prevent it from dying in order to organize anything here.

Somehow I had to get under the roof in order to avoid getting finished off by the horrible atmospheric conditions under the open sky.

Sławek's [Szpakowski] dream was to get into the woodworkers' workshop in the carpentry workshop.

Afterwards he was supposed to get me in there as well.

94 Witold Pilecki was registered in the camp under a false name. When he was caught in Warsaw, he presented documents for the name of Tomasz Serafiński, whom he assumed to be dead. But the real Serafiński – Tomasz Antoni Leonard Józef Serafiński – survived the war (died in 1966). Pilecki met him in 1943, after escaping from KL Auschwitz.

There were already two carpentry workshops in the camp at that time. A bigger one, at Industriehof I, and a smaller one in the camp itself, in Block 9 (according to the old numbering).

A colleague of mine, way back from Warsaw, Captain 8, named Fred [Ferdynand Trojnicki], managed to get in there already.

When I asked him, he informed me that maybe I could get in there as well, if I would be able to, somehow, convince the workshop's Vorarbeiter.

Wilhelm Westrych, a Volksdeutsche, from Pyry near Warsaw, was the Vorarbeiter at that time. Imprisoned for trading in foreign currencies, he was expecting imminent release.

Even though Westrych was a Volksdeutsche, he was playing for two teams. He was working for the Germans, but sometimes saved Poles if he felt that he could potentially benefit from it in the future in any way.

He was eager to save former celebrities, so that – if the Germans lost the war – he could rely on them to have his years of collaboration with Germans whitewashed.

I had to become a former celebrity as well.

I decided to play va banque.

My colleague, Captain 8 [Ferdynand Trojnicki] promised to predispose the Vorarbeiter positively to me, and in the evening he called on him outside Block 8 (according to the old numbering), where he lived.

This is where our conversation took place. I said it was no wonder he did not remember me, for who could have possibly heard about a Tomasz... Here I gave him my Lager name [Serafiński].

'So, mister, I'm here under a false name...'

'...and so have the Fates taken the thread of my life into their shears...,' I thought, quoting Sienkiewicz.[95]

I was putting my life at risk.

It was enough for the Vorarbeiter to report to or confide in one of the horde of SS men or Kapos, which he was a part of, saying that someone around here was using a false name, and I would have been done for.

How I managed to charm Westrych – is of no object here...

But – I did it. He started addressing me as 'sir,' which, coming from a Vorarbeiter referring to a regular Häftling, did not sound as an insult, but quite the contrary. He decided that he must have seen my face somewhere... Perhaps in some pictures of the receptions held at Warsaw Castle[96] and – what was more important – he said that he was

95 Henryk Sienkiewicz, a famous Polish writer, used the Fates' and the thread of life metaphor in his works, *Ogniem i mieczem* (*With Fire and Sword*) and *Quo vadis*.

96 Between the wars, the Royal Castle in Warsaw was the official residence of the President of the Republic of Poland. Many formal receptions and ceremonies took place there, attended by numerous representatives of the government, the Diplomatic Corps and various prominent celebrities.

always saving decent Poles, because he actually felt like one himself. He told me to come to the small carpenter's workshop the next day. He was going to arrange everything with the Kapo. I was to be unquestionably admitted to the carpenter's workshop, and he expressed his hope regarding my future gratitude...

This conversation took place on December 7, in the evening.

The next day, on December 8, after the roll-call, I found myself in the carpenter's shop.

Hitherto, while working in the field, I had no cap and no socks. Here, under the roof, where it was warm, quite ironically indeed, on December 8, Westrych gave me socks, and a week after that, on December 15 – a cap.

In the carpentry workshop I was introduced to the carpentry Kapo as a good craftsman (the poor ones were not taken in), though on probation.

The Kapo looked at me and nodded approvingly.

The working day passed in completely different conditions. It was warm, dry, the work was clean.

The punishment here was not a beating, but the very fact of being removed from these conditions: expulsion from the carpentry workshop and being shoved back into the nightmare of the Lager – harassment.

But in order to work in here, you had to have some skill.

I had a fair share of abilities in life – but, tough luck, I knew nothing about carpentry.

I stood next to the workplace of a good carpenter, a future member of our organization, Corporal 9 (Czesiek [Czesław Wąsowski] was his name).

I followed his example and under his supervision I put my hand in the correct positions of a genuine carpenter.

The Kapo was in the workshop and knew the trade. I had to mimic all the movements quite professionally.

In the beginning I did not really do anything too difficult. I was either planing the boards or sawing them with Czesiek, who deemed my work to be actually pretty good for a beginner.

The next day the Kapo gave me an individual assignment. This is where I had to actually make some effort. Luckily, it was not anything difficult, and with Czesiek's assistance I managed to do just fine.

That day we managed to get Sławek [Szpakowski] into the carpentry workshop as well, as the Kapo was just looking for a sculptor, and another inmate and I gave Sławek's number and recommended him as a good candidate.

After a couple of days Czesiek got a new assignment from the Kapo.

As I was assigned to his workplace, I was helping him in this work, following his guidelines. He was quite pleased with my work.

But the Kapo was disgruntled by the way we chose to tackle the carpentry assignment and we were both kicked out of the workshop. Czesiek – the foreman and me – his helper.

'...How could that happen... Such a good carpenter, and failed at the woodworking joints...,' other carpenters were discussing our case.

Czesiek did not fail at the joints, but thought that the Kapo did not want them in the commissioned item at all.

One way or another – our case was really serious.

For this lapse in work we were thrown out into the camp to do punitive labour with the wheelbarrows, at the Lagerältester disposal.

The day at the Lager began with a tough morning at the wheelbarrows.

'Bruno' [Bruno Brodniewicz] and the Lagerkapo (the Kapo responsible for order in the Lager[97]) were ruthless.

The frost was biting, but the Laufschritt did not let us feel the cold.

But our strength was sapped more and more. Czesiek, who had been working in the carpentry shop for a longer time, had more stamina.

I only got a couple of days of rest in the warmth, which allowed me to gain a bit of strength.

But this was not our first day in the Lager.

Czesiek managed to shirk work before noon, me – in the afternoon, and we vanished, each into a different block.

We were beginning to establish a network of protections and favours of our own, something that a Zugang could not possibly think of without exposing himself to the risk of a beating.

The day somehow passed, but what next?

Czesiek did not return to the small carpentry workshop. Later I met him somewhere else.

But Westrych must have taken me quite seriously indeed...

He informed me through Fred [Ferdynand Trojnicki] (Captain 8) that he wanted to see me in the carpentry workshop the next day, after the roll-call.

He explained to the Kapo that I was just following Czesiek's orders and I was a good carpenter, and the Kapo agreed to take me on again.

In order to avoid me falling from the Kapo's grace, Westrych came up with carpentry work outside the workshop. Here, the hands and movements of all the carpenters were closely watched by the Kapo, so Westrych took me to Block 5 (according to the old numbering) and entrusted me to the block elder Baltosiński [Józef Baltaziński], saying that I could make doormats, or crates for coal, or fix a window frame or do other minor jobs like that for the block, which did not require extraordinary skills as a carpenter.

Aside from that, he instructed Baltosiński (I only learned about that later, from Jurek 10 [identity unknown]) to keep a close eye on me and provide me with some extra food, as that could possibly pay off in the future since I was not just a regular anyone

97 Lagerkapo (Ger.) – see also footnotes 37 and 45.

(apparently he still had those images of me at celebrity events at the Castle, ingrained in his mind).

At Block 5 I was working in Room no. 2, the supervisor of which was Stasiek Polkowski from Warsaw (a barber).

I was making the aforementioned items for the block.

I was fixing old lockers for the Stubendiensts, or making new ones from pieces of some old lockers, brought from the carpentry workshop.

They gave me extra food. Baltosiński would send me additional bowls of soup – which helped me slowly regain my strength.

This is how I spent my time working through December and the beginning of January 1941, until the incident with Leo [Leo Wieczorek], which I will describe below.

1940 was coming to an end.

Before I proceed to the year of 1941 in Auschwitz though, I would like to add a couple of 'images' from the Lager that still belong to the year 1940.

The bestiality of the German tormentors, which emphasized the degenerated instincts of the outcasts, criminals, once – prisoners with several years of experience in German concentration camps, today – our figures of authority in Auschwitz, was manifested in a number of ways.

In the SK the tormentors enjoyed themselves by smashing the testicles – usually of Jewish prisoners – with a wooden hammer on a stump.

At Industriehof II, an SS man, nicknamed 'Perełka' ['Pearlie'; identity unknown], trained his dog, a German Shepherd, in mauling people. To that end, he was using the 'human resource,' which was of no importance to anyone around there.

The dog would attack the Häftlings, rushing about their business, and shove the weakened victims onto the ground, biting into their flesh, rending it with its fangs, tearing at the genitals, strangling them.

The first prisoner to ever flee from Auschwitz through a still single barbed wire fence, back then not yet charged with electricity, was named – as if out of spite to the Lager authorities – Wiejowski [Tadeusz Wiejowski].[98]

The authorities went mad.

At the roll-call, after confirming that we were one prisoner short, the entire camp was held in the square for 18 hours at attention.[99]

It goes without saying – no one was able to withstand this.

At the end of this ordeal, people, given neither food nor the opportunity to go to the lavatory throughout all of this time, were in a truly woeful condition.

98 Pilecki makes this remark because Tadeusz's surname 'Wiejowski is a pun on the Polish word 'zwiewać' – a slang term for making oneself scarce; 'fugitive' in loose translation. After Wiejowski's escape, the Germans held a deadly standing roll-call, lasting over 19 hours. In its aftermath, an emaciated Polish Jew racked by illness, Dawid Wongczewski, died, thereby becoming the first victim of KL Auschwitz.

99 In reality this roll-call lasted for over 19 hours.

The SS men and Kapos alike would beat with their rods those unable to stand.

Some of us were literally fainting from exhaustion.

A German physician [Max Popiersch] intervened; the Lager commandant replied: 'Let them die. Once half of them will be dying – then I will dismiss them!'

That doctor started to walk among the rows of people and convince them to lie down on the ground.

When great masses of people were lying on the ground and even the Kapos lost their urge to beat us, the ordeal was finally over.

In the following months we were working on the fence. Another wire fence was built around the first one, a few metres away.

Two high concrete walls were built on either side of the wire fences in order to prevent anyone from looking into the camp from the outside.

It was not until much later that the wires were charged with high-voltage electricity.

All around the camp, between the concrete walls and the wire fences, watchtowers were overshadowing the square and the camp, offering the watchful SS men with machine guns the advantages of birds-eye views.

Therefore people were trying to flee not from the camp, but from work, which required going outside the wires.

Little by little, the repressions for escapes abated – we did stand at the roll-calls, for long periods of time, but afterwards, if it was an evening roll-call we would eat cold supper just before the gong would sound ordering us to go to sleep.

There was no rule in that regard though, and sometimes we missed lunch or supper.

The punishments for attempted escapes, however, did not get any more lenient.

The escapee always paid with his life for it, killed either immediately, on the spot, or after being locked in a bunker, or hanged publicly.

A Häftling caught while trying to escape, was dressed up, for mockery, in a cap with donkey ears and had other fripperies attached to him.

A sign, saying: 'This is a donkey... he tried to escape...,' etc., would be hung around his neck. With a drum tied to his belt, dressed up like a clown, the failed escapee was forced to walk his last stretch on this earth, banging on the drum in front of the other inmates standing in rows at the roll-call, to the delight of the sneering Lager 'hounds.'

The blocks, aligned at the roll-call, watched this gruesome comedy with dead silence.

But before such a person was found, the blocks were made to stand to attention.

Several hundred prisoners, led by a band of Kapos and dogs, would search for the escapee (or escapees), who would usually try to hide somewhere between the small and the great chain of sentry posts, unless he managed to cross the great chain.

The outposts at the towers of the great chain were discharged only when the number of prisoners at the evening roll-call corresponded with the number of prisoners in the camp on that particular day.

Once, during the evening roll-call, on a particularly cold and wet day, when it was both raining and snowing, we heard a shrill siren, a menacing portent of a 'stand-still roll-call.'

Two prisoners were declared missing.

A punitive roll-call was ordered until the two fugitives, who must have hidden somewhere in Industriehof II, were found.

The Kapos, the dogs, and a few hundred prisoners were sent out in search, which lasted for a long time.

Snow, rain, exhaustion, poor clothing, it was all a great bane for us on that day.

Finally a gong declared that the fugitives were found.

Only the inert corpses of those poor souls returned to the camp.

One of the scoundrels, mad at the escapees for prolonging the working day, stabbed one of them from behind with a thin stake, skewering him through the kidneys and the stomach. Four scoundrels brought the prisoner back to the Lager unconscious, with a blue distorted face.

Yes, an attempt at absconding was completely pointless and it was an act of great selfishness as well, because, for thousands of our fellow inmates, it meant suffering the 'stand-still roll-call' out in the biting cold.

Over a hundred of them froze to death, having lost their will to live.

They were taken to the infirmary, where they died overnight.

Sometimes, even when no one had run away, and the weather was nasty, we were kept at the roll-call for a long time, for several hours, under the false pretext that the numbers did not add up right.

The authorities were somewhere indoors, as if to do the regular calculations – and we were being 'weather-conditioned' by cold or rain and snow, with the obligation to keep standing on one and the same spot, motionless.

We had to fight with all our might, flexing and releasing our muscles to produce some warmth and save our lives.

At the roll-calls, the block elder would report to an SS man – a Blockführer.[100] After having received all the reports from several blocks, he would go up to the lectern of the Rapportführer,[101] that is, SS-Obersturmführer[102] Palitzsch [Gerhard Palitzsch].

100 Blockführer (Ger.) – an SS supervisor of inmates living in a block, or of a block (as a group of inmates) standing on a roll-call; the lowest-grade administrative official of Department III (camp administration). Inmates would encounter them most often.

101 Rapportführer (Ger.) – an SS reporting officer, responsible for discipline; the second most important official of Department III following the Lagerführer; immediate superior of the Blockführers. His duties included: controlling inmate numbers at roll-calls; leading prisoners to report on time to the Lagerführer, the camp doctor, the commandant's office or the Political Department (in other words: the in-camp Gestapo); reporting every fault identified to the Lagerführer, executing punishments, ordered by the Lagerkommandant or Lagerführer and reporting their execution.

102 SS-Obersturmführer (Ger.) – an officer's rank in the SS and SA, an equivalent to Oberleutnant in the Wehrmacht. However, Pilecki made a mistake here – Palitzsch was not a commissioned SS officer, but only a non-commissioned one.

Palitzsch, whom I shall describe later, was feared like the plague by the SS men themselves. He punished them by sending them to the bunker for just about anything; his report was enough to send any of them to the front.

He was dreaded by everyone. Whenever Palitzsch appeared – silence would descend instantly.

The positions of the block elders were slowly being claimed by people I once thought to be Poles, but who, in large numbers, denied their Polish identities – the Silesians.

I used to think the best of them – here I could not believe my own eyes. They were executing Poles, considering them to be aliens; they thought themselves to be some kind of Germanic tribe.

One time I pointed out to one Vorarbeiter, who originated from Silesia: 'Why are you beating him? He's a Pole, after all.' He replied: 'But I am no Pole – I'm Silesian. My parents wanted to make me into a Pole, but Silesia is German. A Pole must live in Warsaw, not in Silesia.' And he continued beating the poor fellow.

There were two Silesian block elders: Skrzypek [Alfred Skrzypek] and Bednarek [Emil Bednarek], who were, I think, even worse than the worst German.

They finished off so many prisoners that even 'Bloody Alois' [Alois Staller], who started to moderate his conduct at that time, was unable to keep up with these scoundrels.

Every day, during the evening roll-call, we could see at the left wing of the barracks, by the place of these butchers, wheelbarrows full of corpses.

They bragged about their work to the SS men, whom they reported to.

I will not generalize as, like everywhere, there were exceptions to this rule.

Such an exception was a Silesian, who was a good Pole – you could trust him with your life, he was such a faithful friend.

There was one Silesian like that – a block elder called Alfred Włodarczyk, and there was Smyczek [Wilhelm Smyczek]; there were also Silesians in our 'fives,' but I will write about them a bit later.

'Bloody Alois,' whom I have mentioned before, was no longer the block elder.

Block 17a (according to the old numbering) was turned into a warehouse for sacks, full of prisoners' clothes.

Fresh transports of prisoners were still pouring into the Lager, increasing the current registration numbers – and yet the population of the camp did not increase at all.

There was a constant outflow of prisoners through the chimney of the crematorium.

The Effekten[103] – sacks with our 'earthly' belongings – were scrupulously stored and quickly occupied all of the free space in Block 18.

The warehouse of the Effektenkammer[104] was expanded into the upper floor of Block 17 (Block 17a); all the prisoners were transferred to various blocks.

103 Effekten (Ger.) – the inmates' personal possessions.

104 Effektenkammer (Ger.) – the personal belongings' storage.

Starting from October 26 I lived in Block 3a (on the first floor of Block 3), where Koprowiak [Stanisław Koprowiak] was appointed block elder. Someone had mentioned him to me, and spoke of his past in some prison, in glowing terms.

Here I saw that he was beating people sometimes – maybe he was losing it already.

Usually, though, he only resorted to beating when a German was watching.

Maybe he wanted to save his own skin, maybe secure his position. Still, for the Polish prisoners he was one of the best block elders.

I was living in Room no. 1 in Block 3a, whose Stubendienst was Drozd [Franciszek Drozd]. A good fellow, he was rather hearty in his dealings with his inmates – he did not beat anyone. The block elder left that up to each room supervisor's own judgment.

One time, through the upper floor window, I saw a scene that etched itself in my memory for a long time.

I stayed in the camp on a workday. I went to the infirmary, summoned there by a note.

After I returned, I stayed in the barrack.

It was raining, the day was grim.

The SK was working in the square, transporting the gravel that was dug out of a pit. Apart from that, some Kommando was freezing while 'exercising.'

Next to the pit, three SS men, reluctant to leave the Kommandos in fear of Palitzsch or the commandant, who was roaming the camp, came up with a game. They were making bets with each of them putting a banknote on a brick.

Then they would bury a prisoner alive, upside down, covering his upper body in the pit. They would look at their watches – and measure how long the prisoner kicked his legs up in the air.

Modern sweepstakes – I thought.

The one able to most accurately predict how much time a prisoner buried alive would kick out before he died – was the one who collected the money.

1940 was coming to an end.

Before I managed to get myself into the carpentry workshop and started to enjoy all the benefits that came with it, including additional food at Block 5, the hunger twisting my intestines grew so incredibly, that in the evenings I started to devour with my eyes the bread given to those with good 'jobs,' who were able to save some of it until morning. I was fighting the most challenging fight in my life – the fight with myself.

The problem was: how to eat something now and leave something for the morning...

But there is no point in describing hunger to sated people... Or those who received parcels from home or from the Red Cross, living without the duress of labour, who later on complained how hungry they were.

Oh!... The intensiveness of hunger has a whole scale of its own.

Sometimes it seemed like one would be perfectly capable of cutting out a piece of flesh from a corpse, lying outside the infirmary.

It was at that time, just before Christmas, when, instead of 'tea' every morning they started to serve us barley, which was a great boon indeed. I do not know to whom we owed this (but it stayed that way till spring).

Several beautifully illuminated trees were brought into the camp for Christmas.

In the evening the Kapos put two stools under them, then laid two Häftlings across these stools, and thrashed each of them 25 times in that part of the body which, out there in the free world, was called 'the soft part.'

It was supposed to be a joke in the German manner.

Punishment in Auschwitz had different levels:

The least severe punishment was beating on a stool. It was held publicly, in front of all the blocks present at the roll-call.

A special piece of 'executional furniture' was prepared – a stool with clamps on both sides for legs and arms.

Two SS scoundrels (often it was Seidler [Fritz Seidler] himself, sometimes Bruno [Bruno Brodniewicz] the Lagerältester) would beat a prisoner's bare body part in order not to damage the clothing.

They used cow-hide whips or simply heavy rods.

After several blows the body would give way, the blood would gush, and the following blows would hit the flesh as if it were minced beef.

I witnessed this many times.

Sometimes the punishment counted 50 blows, sometimes – 75.

One time, when the punishment amounted to 100 blows, around the 90th strike a Häftling – some poor fellow – passed away.

If the inmate was alive, he had to stand up, do several squats to regulate the blood flow, and, standing to attention, thank his oppressors for being meted out his just measure of punishment.

The second punishment was the bunker.

The bunker had two sub-types. A regular bunker was formed by cells in the basement of Block 13 (according to the old numbering), where prisoners were usually held before interrogations, at the disposal of the Political Department,[105] but also as a means of punishment for Kapos or SS men.

105 The Political Department (Ger. Politische Abteilung); in the Third Reich police slang also called the Lagergestapo (concentration camp Gestapo) – camp secret police. In the camp structure it was the second most important department after the commandant's office and before the Lagerführer office (Department III). The Political Department officials were Gestapo or Kripo employees, delegated from the main police office in Katowice. The head of the Political Department was subordinate to the Lagerkommandant and RSHA as well, and carried out the orders of both the camp commandant and RSHA. During Pilecki's imprisonment in KL Auschwitz, the head of the Political Department was SS-Untersturmführer Maximilian Grabner, followed from November 1943 by SS-Untersturmführer Hans Schurz. Of all the subdivisions of the Department, the most feared was the interrogation and investigation section (Ger. Vernehmungsabteilung). Its most cruel torturers

The cells of this bunker occupied three quarters of the basement of Block 13, the remaining fourth part held a cell similar to the other three but devoid of light, called 'the dark room.'

At one end of the block, the hallway turned to the right at a right angle and immediately came to a dead end.

There were small bunkers of another kind in this spur of the corridor. These were three so-called Stehbunkers.[106]

A square entrance, only allowing entry if one was leaning forward, led to some kind of a quasi-wardrobe, 80 cm deep, 80 cm wide, two metres high – it was easy to stand straight in there.

This 'wardrobe,' however, was used to house four prisoners sentenced to the punishment of the Stehbunker. Shoved inside with the help of a rod and locked from the outside with heavy bars, they were to remain inside till morning (from 7:00 p.m. until 6:00 a.m.).

It would seem impossible, but there are witnesses still alive today, who were sentenced to the Stehbunker along with seven other companions.

In the morning they would be let out and taken to work as usual, and then shoved back inside, packed like sardines, locked in with iron bars until the next morning.

The usual punishment amounted to 5 nights, but sometimes it was more than that.

Those who had no relations with the 'authorities' at work usually got finished off at work from exhaustion after one or more nights spent like that due to a lack of strength.

Whoever could grab some rest at work in the Kommando during the day with the Kapo's knowledge and consent – usually somehow survived.

The third punishment was an ordinary pole,[107] borrowed from the Austrian penal practices.

There was a change to it, though: those hanged by their arms pulled upwards and tied behind their backs were sometimes rocked back and forth by the supervising SS man, for amusement. Joints would crack, the rope would bite into the flesh.

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were SS-Oberscharführer Wilhelm Boger and SS-Unterscharführer Gerhard Lachmann. The Political Department had the authority to admit and release inmates, hold their personal and identification files, run the crematorium administration, invigilate both ordinary inmates and SS staff members, counteract inmate conspiracies and every single attempt at resistance. It also supervised the mass extermination of the Jews. The Lagerführer and head of the Political Department made decisions about the incarceration of inmates in the camp arrest in Block 11, as well as executions under the Death Wall.

106 Stehbunker (Ger.) – a bunker so narrow that the incarcerated could only stand upright inside.

107 A punishment, executed mostly in the attic of Block 11 or in the yard of that block. The convict had his hands tied behind his back and was hung by them on a hook, so his feet did not touch the ground. The hanging lasted several hours, usually divided into one-hour blocks. Because of the excruciating pain of the twisted joints, the condemned would lose consciousness. As a result, the tendons in arm joints would tear and people subject to this torture would not be able to move their hands, which made them unsuitable to work. That put them at risk of being sent directly to the gas chamber.

It was good when 'Perełka' ['Pearlie'; identity unknown] did not show up with his German Shepherd.

Sometimes it was used as an interrogation technique, when the prisoners were sometimes given juice from a salad – the dressing, that is – vinegar, to keep them from passing out too early.

And, of course, the fourth, most severe punishment, was being shot to death – a quick death, so much more humane and so longed for by those who were tormented for a long time.

'Being shot to death' – that is not the correct term; it would be more appropriate to say: shot down or simply – killed.

It also took place in Block 13 (according to old numbering).

There was a courtyard, surrounded by barracks (between Blocks 12 and 13). From the eastern side it was closed off by the wall connecting the barracks, known as the 'wailing wall.'[108] On the western side there was a wall with a gate, usually closed, restricting the view. It was only opened before a living victim or to throw the bloodied corpses out from the courtyard.

When passing by, one could usually smell the stench of a slaughterhouse.

A red stream would flow down the gutter.

It was whitewashed each day anew, but basically every day the red stream would fill it up brimful again...

Oh! If it was not blood... not human blood... not Polish blood... the best blood of all... then... who knows... maybe we could even take delight in the simple juxtaposition of the colours...

So much for the outside.

Inside, however, in the courtyard, dreadful things were happening.

Inside, executioner Palitzsch – a handsome lad who never hit anyone at the Lager, for it was not his style to do so – was the main stage-set designer of ghastly scenes.

The convicts would be standing one by one, naked, by the 'wailing wall,' and he would put a low-caliber rifle to the back of their heads, and end their lives.

Sometimes he used a simple bolt for slaughtering cattle for that purpose.

The spring bolt would ram through the skull, into the brains, and kill the victim [*saving a bullet* – an annotation at the back of page 21 of the original typescript of the report, not necessarily made by Pilecki].

Sometimes groups of civilians, tortured in the cellars at interrogations were brought in, and handed over to Palitzsch for his fun.

108 The place of executions in KL Auschwitz, also called the 'Death Wall.' Executions by shooting to death were performed under a wall closing the yard between Blocks 12 and 13 (in the old numbering system; subsequently Blocks 10 and 11). The wall was padded with hardboard, which was supposed to catch the bullets that missed their targets and those which found them, as well as protect the wall from bloodstains.

Palitzsch would order girls to strip and run around in circles by the perimeter of the closed courtyard, with himself standing in the middle.

He took his time with making a choice, then aimed, shot, killed – all of them, one by one.

None of them knew whether her time had come already, or maybe she was spared for a while or two longer, or maybe she would be taken back for interrogation...

But this was his way of practicing aiming and precision shooting.

These scenes were seen from Block 12 by several Stubendiensts, standing guard and ensuring that no Häftling would come near the window at that time.

The windows were protected by wooden 'baskets,'[109] but not tightly enough – so things were seen clearly.

Some other time it was seen from Block 12 that a family had been brought in, and made to stand in the courtyard, by the 'wailing wall.'

First, Palitzsch shot the father of the family and killed him right in front of his wife and two children.

Then he killed the small girl who was clutching her pale mother's hand tightly.

Then he snatched the small baby, held firmly by the poor woman, from her motherly embrace. He grabbed it by the legs and smashed the baby's head against the wall.

Finally, he finished off the mother, who, at that point, was half-conscious from grief.

That scene had been reported to me by several colleagues, who bore witness to it, so accurately and so consistently that I cannot possibly have any doubts that this was exactly what happened.

Christmas 1940 was the first time when the prisoners received parcels from their families.

Oh, no! Not food parcels!

Food parcels were not allowed, that would be too good for us.

The first parcel in Auschwitz was a clothes parcel containing pre-specified items: a sweater, a scarf, gloves, earmuffs, socks.

Nothing else was allowed. If there was any underwear in the package – it was taken to the sack in Effektenkammer, labelled with the prisoner's number and there it would remain.

This is how it was back then.

Later on we were able to creep in everywhere with the help of collaborating colleagues.

The Christmas parcel was the only one throughout the whole year, and even though it did not contain any food, it was necessary – because of the warm clothes, and the pleasure it gave in coming from home.

109 Protruding screens made of planks, covering the window openings from the outside.

During the Christmas holidays, Westrych and the carpentry workshop's Kapo procured additional pots of excellent stew straight from the SS kitchen[110] for the carpenters and we held a feast in the shop, treating all the carpenters who showed up.

Pots like these were being delivered there in great secret a couple of times a day by the SS men in exchange for money that Westrych had collected from us.

1941 began with more carpentry work for me at Block 5, where I was constantly coming up with more and more jobs that had to be done.

The block elder did not interfere with my work.

Here, I met a friend of mine, Gierych [Bolesław Gierych], the son of my acquaintances who had had an apartment in Orel,[111] which I used for conspiratorial purposes in 1916/17.

Almost every day Block 5 was visited by the Lagerältester, Leo [Leo Wieczorek] (prisoner no. 30).

His appearance in the room, as well as the appearance of an SS man, was a signal to shout 'Achtung!'[112] and deliver a report.

I would do it flawlessly, adding at the end of the report: '...ein Tischler bei der Arbeit.'[113]

Leo seemed pleased with it, did not question my prolonged presence here, and would leave the room proud as a peacock.

Block 5 was the barrack for juveniles. It was inhabited by boys between 15 and 18 years of age. The Third Reich was still hoping to convert them.

They held courses of a certain kind there.

Leo would visit them daily, he liked teenagers, but boys... He liked them too much... He was a pervert.

This is where he would choose the victims of his depravity. He fed them, nourished them, forced them into submission with either visions of prosperity or threats of work in the SK, and once he was over with a boy, in order to get rid of the witness of his behaviour, forbidden in the camp, he usually hanged him in the latrine at night.

Around January 15, I was standing by the window, when Leo entered the room.

I did not see him, so I did not shout 'Achtung!' as I was distracted by the view of the 'Zugang' through the window pane. At the same time I noticed Colonel 11 [Tadeusz Reklewski] outside the window.

Leo was visibly upset at me. He walked up to me and said: 'You've been sitting in this block for too long. I don't want to see you here tomorrow.'

110 SS kitchen (Ger. SS-Küche) – the kitchen for the German camp crew.

111 Orzeł (Pol.; lit. 'Eagle') – a city in western Russia, on the river Oka (tributary to the Volga). A destination for numerous deportations of Poles in the 19th and early 20th centuries. During the First World War, Pilecki organized a scout troop there which broke into a military warehouse to obtain firearms.

112 Attention!

113 One carpenter at work.

I told Westrych about that, and he told me to go there the next day anyway.

And so the next day I did go, once again, to Block 5.

Not much later after my arrival Leo entered, and flew into rage. 'Deine Nummer?'[114] he yelled, and, strangely enough, he did not hit me. 'Rrrraus mit dem alles!'[115] he pointed at the carpentry tools.

I was leaving rather hastily, and he was writing down my number, calling after me that today I would be thrown out of the carpentry workshop.

In the workshop, I told Westrych about the incident.

Soon after that, Leo burst into the room.

Fortunately, the Kapo was not there and Westrych was substituting. He allowed Leo to yell however long he wanted to, and then Westrych explained that this carpenter had informed him about everything yesterday, but it was he, Westrych himself, who told the prisoner to go back to Block 5 to pick up the tools. And Leo calmed down.

I remained working as a carpenter, but, just in case, I was working in the second room of the carpentry workshop in Block 9.

After a couple of days Westrych told me to get my tools and follow him into the camp.

He led me to Block 15 (according to the old numbering).

It was the infirmary, called the Krankenbau in German.

The block elder of the infirmary, a slightly crazed German, wanted to have order in his block.

Westrych advised him the day before to have the straw-filled mattresses framed with boards.

There were no beds here.

The sick were lying on the ground in terrible conditions.

The mattresses were cast onto the ground (the patients were lying with their heads against the wall), not always aligned, which only added to this picture of woe. And so it had been decided that the mattresses, lined up against the walls in two rows along the room, should have boards added to both ends.

These boards would form an evenly framed passage in the middle of the room.

The block elder looked at me and asked if I was able to do a good job. For a job poorly done, I was to be punished with a beating on a stool, for a job well done – rewarded with extra food every day.

And so I started my work here and I equipped room after room with mattress framings; the boards were moored to the floor by Winkels.[116]

I was given help in the form of some engineer from Warsaw, sent by Westrych.

We were both getting extra rations every day.

114 Your number?

115 Get out!... with all that!

116 Winkel (Ger.) – here: an iron carpentry fitting in the shape of a triangle.

There was plenty of food in the block.

It was being distributed to everyone, and some of the sick were refusing to eat any more.

The engineer from Warsaw caught the flu. He was admitted to the hospital, in the same block, into the conditions of the Krankenbau, with horrible lice; he soon died.

I finished the framing job by myself.

And soon after that it was my turn. I caught the flu or a cold at the roll-call.

Winter was quite harsh. While we had coats that were given to us before Christmas, they were made of 'Ersatz,'[117] without lining and offering almost no protection from the cold.

I fought the illness for a couple of days.

I had a fever – in the evenings it was even 39 degrees Celsius, so even without any connections I would have been admitted to the infirmary. That, however, was not what I wanted.

The reasons were twofold: the first being the horrible lice plaguing the infirmary, the second – that would mean the end of my work as a carpenter.

I tried to defend myself as best I could, but the illness latched onto me and refused to let go.

The worst thing was to stand at the roll-calls with my head as if on fire, exposed to the sweeping winds.

I do not know what the outcome of this struggle would have been.

An unrelated event resolved the situation.

In the block, in Room 1, we still had some relatively good contacts. After the Stubendienst Drozd [Franciszek Drozd], came another one – Antek Potocki.

Some of us performed different cleaning jobs.

I was doing windows, doors and lamps.

Life in the block would not have been so bad if it was not for the fact that we all had 'a bit' of lice at that point.

Each evening we would hunt them down as they lurked in our shirts.

I would kill about a hundred lice every evening, hoping that during the night perhaps no more would manage to crawl in, but the next morning there was another hundred.

It was difficult to kill more of them, as the lights had to go out at a set time. During the day, while working, it was not really possible either.

At night lice would crawl over from the blanket to the shirt. Even if one was to pick them all from the blanket, it would be to no avail either; all the blankets were kept on a pile together – so we were given a different blanket every day. Right next to the warm stove, these creatures were eager to crawl to a clean blanket.

117 Ersatz (Ger.) – a surrogate material.

A delousing was finally announced.

Unfortunately for me, its timing was very poor indeed.

My fever got worse.

In the evening they told us to undress; the clothes, stringed together on a wire, were sent to be fumigated.

After that, we were sent naked to take a shower in Block 18 (old numbering) and then – still naked – we went to Block 17 (old numbering). We spent the whole night there, naked – several hundred people in each room; and it was extremely stuffy.

In the morning, we were given clothes and chased across the square, through wind and cold, to Block 3a.

I gave my coat to Antek Potocki, who was also ill at that time.

That night really exhausted me.

Barely conscious, I went to the infirmary. They once again sprinkled me with water in the Waschraum and put me to bed in Block 15 (old numbering), in Room 7 (where I once fixed boards to the floor), among the most foul lice.

These several nights which I spent combating lice were, I would say, the hardest in the Lager.

I did not want to give up and let the lice eat me.

But how was I supposed to defend myself?

When looking at the blanket against a source of light, one could see that the entire surface was writhing.

The lice were of many kinds – smaller, bigger, rotund, elongated, white and grey, or red from blood, striped and lined... crawling slowly and slipping rapidly over the backs of other lice.

I was repulsed and resolved not to be eaten by this abominable mass.

I tied my long johns tightly at my ankles and in the waist; I buttoned up the shirt near the neck and at the sleeves.

Killing one by one was not an option. I was crushing the insects with my fists, making quick moves, gathering handfuls of them from my neck and feet.

My body, enfeebled by fever and constant movement, urgently called for sleep.

My head kept dropping down, but I kept waking up time and time again.

Under no circumstances I could allow myself to fall asleep.

Falling asleep meant to stop fighting and to get eaten alive.

After an hour, my hands were already stained with the dark blood of this defiled spawn.

Slaying them all was impossible.

We were lying closely, with bodies wrapped in blankets, with backs or sides pressed against each other.

Not everyone was fighting. Some were unconscious, others were wheezing, others could not fight any longer...

An unconscious, elderly prisoner was lying next to me (a highlander). I will never be able to forget his face, it was just right next to my head – covered in an immovable crust of assorted lice, gnawing at his skin.

To the left of me there was a prisoner who had died (Narkun[118]). They pulled a blanket over his head and were waiting for someone with the stretcher.

The lice on his blanket started to move more lively and crawl towards me.

In order to eradicate the lice on one's own blanket, one would probably have to hit the blanket, lying on a level surface, with a stone, again and again.

But to protect yourself was almost as impossible as to halt a running stream – there was neither interrupting nor destroying this flow.

I must admit that was the first time when it seemed to me that my strength was not sufficient to fight or even to want to fight.

My psychological state was in a precarious condition. To doubt in the will to fight was to break down.

When I realized that, I revived.

I kept killing the lice on my neck and legs.

They put a new patient in place of the corpse. It was a lad of perhaps eighteen. His name was Edek Salwa.[119]

As I slept, he would protect me from the stream of wanderers from the right side, sometimes scraping them off with a knife, sometimes with a spoon.

He put up a fight on his own blanket as well – so he was a neighbour safeguarding my left flank and giving me more peace.

Apart from that, he would buy me bread from patients who were unable to eat any more.

I could eat everything.

My nature is peculiar – I have reached this conclusion many times.

When in fever, some people cannot eat at all, while I eat as much as several people would.

Whoever shrugs upon having read this, is cordially requested to come to know me a bit better – they will realize that my whole life was quite contrariwise.

There were some noble people in this room, who did their best to ease the last days of the sick ones.

Janek Hrebenda and Tadeusz Burski, both righteous and good, worked with the patients. There was not much they could do, but they would do what they could.

It was not up to them to change the rules.

In the summer, for example, it was prohibited to open the windows in order to avoid the patients catching a cold – so everyone was suffocating in fever and stench.

118 Details could not be determined; such a person does not exist on the lists of KL Auschwitz prisoners.

119 Pilecki had remembered him as younger than he actually was.

Now, when it was hard frost, all of the windows were opened wide twice a day and stayed opened for long periods of time. The icy air, creeping into the room from the windows down to the floors, would make the silhouettes cowering under the thin, scanty blankets shiver...

I was fighting lice more than I was fighting the sickness, for three days and two nights.

On the third day, with not much strength left in me, I decided to reveal my weakness to Władek.

Through my new friend, Tadek Burski, I sent a note to Doctor 2 [Władysław Dering].

Every note in the Lager was treated as suspicious, as it could be considered a conspiracy of two prisoners aimed against the Third Reich.

I wrote: 'If you don't take me away from here immediately, I'll lose the rest of my strength fighting lice. In my current condition I'm rapidly getting closer and closer to the chimney of the crematorium,' and stated my whereabouts.

A couple of hours later, Doctor 2 [Władysław Dering] arrived, assisted by Doctor 12 [Edward Nowak].

Officially they were only Pflegers (nurses).

A Pole could not officially be a physician in the camp.

Doctor 2 somehow managed to seize control of the situation, so he had some influence on what was going on in the infirmary.

Now, he took to inspecting the room (it was not his ward).

He was pretending he did not know me at all.

He asked Doctor 12: 'And what's wrong with this one? Examine him.'

It turned out that I had pneumonia in the left lung.

Doctor 2 decided I had to be taken for an experiment of a kind and test some new injection.

I marched to Block 20 (according to the old numbering).

I was put into bed in one of the rooms upstairs.

I felt like a newborn. There were no lice here at all. I mean, I found some forty-fifty of them in the new underwear and on the blanket I got, but it did not count. I killed them – and that was it.

After all, new ones would not climb up the bed legs from the neighbours. They have not learnt that art yet.

It did not matter that they put me into a bed next to a constantly opened window. The wind was blowing in and the cold air was coming in, turning the exhaled breaths into haze.

I tried to position my left side, where my inflamed lung was, so that it would have been relatively unexposed to the chill.

The next day I was moved to the middle of the room. I was given four additional blankets and an injection.

Ten days later I was healthy enough to give my bed to those who were sicker than me.

I was moved back again to Block 15, where I had stayed during the first days of my illness, but there were no lice there anymore.

In the meantime, the delousing had already reached Block 15.

What a bizarre story indeed. That ghastly room, swarming with lice – it looked so different after it was fumigated and whitewashed!

This was February 1, 1941.

I rested here for a month after my sickness, helping Tadek [Tadeusz Burski] and Janek Hrebenda.

A good man, Pfleger – Krzysztof Hofman – would visit us now and then, sometimes even slept in our room.

Heniek Florczyk, a mathematician from Warsaw, was a patient here.

Tadek Burski (from 56[120] Raszyńska Street) was released from the camp as a result of his sisters' efforts.

I used him to send news to Warsaw.

Even though the conditions had improved, at least several patients would die each day.

There was nothing to treat them with, and the pills which Krzysio [Krzysztof Hofman] had been procuring, were just pills and nothing more.

Sometimes people simply had no will to live.

They did not want to fight any more, and giving up was equal to dying quickly.

When I was a convalescent here, some of the nurses I knew gave me the option of going out into the camp (I was given clothes by Fredek 4 [Alfred Stössel]).

Sometimes I would leave the room so that the authorities would not spot me.

I had more time to organize a 'five.'

The camp was like an enormous mill, where living people were processed into ashes.

We, the prisoners, were being exterminated in two ways, parallel to each other and independently from each other.

Some were working on exterminating us by labour, others by the terrible conditions of the camp. Hardened criminals and people with no criminal record at all were dying side by side. Besides, no 'earthly' prisoners' cases had any impact on anything. Others, on the other hand, independently from the first ones, were actively going through the cases in the Political Department, and sometimes, even if a prisoner had managed to 'cling on to life' – he surfaced at work, would do fine, and even be able to arrange some food for himself – and then one day, he would be gone.

His number would be read out at the morning roll-call. He had to go to the main Schreibstube,[121] and from there, he was usually dispatched to the Political Department

120 Or 58, as Pilecki gives earlier in this report.

121 Here: Hauptschreibstube (Ger.) – the camp's main office. This is where all the files and records regarding every KL Auschwitz prisoner were kept. There were also smaller offices at the blocks or divisions, called simply 'Schreibstube,' with the addition of the division's name or the block's number.

with an SS man and was very often finished off by Palitzsch in Block 13 with a shot to the head.

This was the result of the paperwork research, done by the second executioner – Grabner [Maximilian Grabner].

Palitzsch was remunerated with a 'per capita' fee for the people he shot.

Often these two 'gentlemen' would come to an agreement: one would pick the cases, the other – shooting in the back of the head. The money was somehow split, the business was running.

The death of one or another of my colleagues sometimes disrupted our organizational network – one that I had been painstakingly constructing after a period of long observation.

The network was sometimes ripped here and there – I had to constantly tie the threads anew.

My colleagues, already tied to each other in some sort of way, felt morally stronger; among kindred spirits, ready to support one another, they started to push themselves into various Kommandos with greater confidence.

Talking about what anyone would normally, in the past – before Auschwitz – call an 'organization,' was altogether prohibited and I did not allow this word to be used.

We gladly took up the new meaning of the word and 'spread' it widely around the Lager, until it became common.

It was a sort of lightning conductor for us.

The word 'organizing,' as in 'procuring something illegally.'

If someone managed to steal a packet of margarine or a loaf of bread from the warehouses at night – we called it 'the organization of margarine or bread.'

Someone else 'organized' a pair of shoes, another – some tobacco.

The word 'organization' was widely accepted and heard everywhere. When it was overheard by someone unwelcome, used incautiously, in our conspiratorial sense, it no longer had any other meaning than stealing, procuring something.

In our work, an average 'link' was not supposed to know too much.

Any given colleague knew the general 'skeleton,' a couple of his own 'contacts,' and knew who was his supervisor.

As an organization, we were slowly starting to take control over particular Kommandos and increasing our potential.

I decided to use some of the German Kapos, those who were quite reluctant to resort to beating (there were a couple of them) – I reached them through some of our members.

In the initial phase of the Auschwitz camp's existence, where systemic killings began with the first transport of Poles, delivered here on June 14, 1940, the personnel

working on exterminating the prisoners consisted of 30 Germans or wannabe Germans, brought here from Oranienburg in May 1940.[122]

Although they themselves were prisoners, they were selected to be our tormentors.

They bore the first registration numbers (from 1 to 30).

The first and the last of them, prisoner no. 1 – 'Bruno' [Bruno Brodniewicz], and prisoner no. 30 – 'Leo' [Leo Wieczorek], were given the Armbindes of Lagerältesters, some others – the Armbindes of the block elders, the rest of them were given the status of Kapos.

Among this pack of bandits, murdering the prisoners with monstrous brutality and treachery, there were several individuals who beat the prisoners reluctantly, rather out of necessity, mainly to avoid the wrath of the other sadists and the SS men.

The prisoners realized that very quickly.

We, as an organization, decided to take advantage of this.

Soon enough, Otto [Otto Küsel] (prisoner no. 2) as the Arbeitsdienst; Balke [Artur Balke] (no. 3) as the Oberkapo of the carpentry shop; 'Mateczka' ['Mommy'; Fritz Biessgen] (no. 4), nicknamed so for his attitude towards us in the kitchen; Bock ['Dad'; Hans Bock] (no. 5) in the Krankenbau; Konrad [Konrad Lang] (no. 18); 'Jonny' [Jonny Lechenich] (no. 19) – they all started to do us all kinds of favours, without any knowledge or inkling of any organization's network.

Our colleagues would visit them supposedly in their own matters or those of their friends, and they – if they only could – helped us out. Otto – by assigning us to work in the chosen Kommando; Balke – by putting as many of our colleagues as he could in the carpentry workshop, under the roof; 'Mateczka' – by giving extra food (soup from the kitchen) to those who were especially enfeebled; Bock – making things easier in the infirmary. 'Jonny,' as the Kapo of the Landwirtschaftskommando,[123] initially did not interrupt, and later on – even helped us to communicate with the outside world, contacting the organization outside, with the help of Miss Zofia S. (13 [Zofia Szczerbowska]; from Stare Stawy). Because of that, he must have guessed a bit more than the others.

He did not betray us, and from the moment he had been beaten on a stool as a punishment for 'not noticing' the civilians throwing bread to the prisoners over the fence – nothing more than that had occurred to the Lager authorities – he became a complete friend and ally of ours.

And so I was arranging and coordinating, having – considering the conditions – an exceptionally great deal of time, as in February '41 I was still a convalescent in the hospital in Block 15 (old numbering).

Things changed on March 7.

122 Witold Pilecki is mistaken. The Oranienburg concentration camp, established in March 1933, was dissolved the following year, and its prisoners (mostly Germans) were transferred to the nearby KL Sachsenhausen.

123 Landwirtschaftskommando (Ger.) – a Kommando working in the fields and farms, producing food for the camp crew.

Suddenly, a couple of incidents occurred at the same time.

On March 6, in the morning, I was summoned to the Erkennungsdienst,[124] Block 18 (old numbering), where all of us had been photographed earlier.

I was shown a photo of myself and asked if I knew the people who had their pictures taken before and after me (the prisoner numbers neighbouring my own). I replied that I did not.

The SS man, with a taunting grimace, said, that it was very suspicious that I did not recognize the people I was brought into the camp with.

After that, he took a closer look at my picture and stated that I did not look like myself – and that was suspicious, too.

It was true, I was trying to have an unnatural look, grimace and my cheeks puffed out when my picture was taken. I replied that I had had a kidney complaint at that time, which must have caused the swelling...

On the same day, Sławek [Sławomir Szpakowski] informed me that he was going to be released from the camp the following day and he was going to Warsaw.

Ever the optimist – he declared that he would wait for me in Warsaw.

He was released without quarantine – that is how things were back then.

He was released due to his wife's efforts at the Swedish consulate. At the same time in the evening I learned from Doctor 2 [Władysław Dering] that I was going to be summoned to the main Schreibstube – and it was widely known how it usually ended.

I did not know the reasons and I was pondering what they could want.

I had no pending cases.

The only thing I was able to come up with was that Westrych might have, intentionally or by indiscretion, revealed the fact of my stay there under a false name.

Westrych had been released from the camp two weeks earlier.

Maybe before his departure he had 'confessed' his secret?

Should that have been the case, my fate would surely have been sealed.

Doctor 2 [Władysław Dering] got really concerned with my case and instructed me how to fake an illness that was relatively common around the Krankenbau: meningitis, which could save me from providing answers.

He tried to find out what was going on through one of the SS men, who used to be a non-commissioned officer in the Polish Army. He asked him not to beat his colleague (i.e. me) especially hard, as I was ill.

Doctor 2 [Władysław Dering] who had already been acquiring considerable esteem in the infirmary, was renowned as a good physician and had some connections among the SS men, who sometimes sought his advice.

124 Erkennungsdienst (Ger.) – an investigation and identification service. One of the sections of the camp's Gestapo, responsible for the identification, record-keeping and documentation of inmates (photos, correspondence and contact control).

In the morning of March 7, at the roll-call, my number was read out loud with the order to go to the main Schreibstube.

There were several of us.

They separated us from the rest.

The entire block was looking at us as if we were dead men walking, who were not going to come back.

They were not so far off the mark.

The moment the gong sounded for Arbeitskommando, everyone ran to their posts, and we marched to Block 9 (according to the old numbering).

In the hallway right before the main Schreibstube everyone, who was summoned, had their numbers checked. There were over 20 of us there, from different blocks.

I was the only one made to stand aside.

'What on earth is going on?' I thought to myself. 'Why not together?'

They pointed a finger at me and said something to an SS man, something that I could not hear.

They must have considered me to be a 'fine specimen.'

But the situation turned out differently from what I might have expected.

All the others were led to the Political Department, and I was taken to the Erkennungsdienst.

'That's better,' I thought.

On my way there I began to understand why I was summoned, and with each step I got less and less anxious.

All Häftlings were obliged to write letters to their families, and only using the address they had provided straight after the arrival.

(Shortly after our arrival to Auschwitz they conducted an interrogation at night.

They woke everyone up, told us to say – Block 17a – and with an odd smirk asked us about the address that was supposed to be used in case any accident occurred – as if it were possible to die here only by accident).

We had to write to the provided addresses fortnightly, so they could have a route to the prisoner's family, just in case.

I gave the address of my sister-in-law [Eleonora Ostrowska] in Warsaw, who was supposed to forward my messages to my family, which had to remain a secret to the Lager authorities.

My sister-in-law was thought to be an acquaintance of mine, as they considered me to be single with no one in the world except for my mother.

I only sent a letter to this address once, in November, reporting of my whereabouts, and refrained from writing anything else in order to keep my 'acquaintance' free from any responsibility for my possible exploits here.

By doing that, I wanted to sever all the links with the people in the outside world that were visible to the German authorities.

Behind the gate, escorted by an SS man, I entered a wooden building which housed Blockführerstube[125] at one end (the one closer to the gate), and at the other – the Postzensurstelle[126] itself.

Over a dozen SS men were sitting behind tables here.

The moment I walked into the room, they all raised their heads and a moment later returned to their job of censoring letters.

The SS man following me reported my arrival.

Some other SS man spoke to me: 'Ah! Mein lieber Mann...[127] Why don't you write letters?!!'

'I do write,' I replied.

'Aaa! And you are lying, on top of everything! What do you mean, you write? All of our mail that is sent out is being registered!'

'I do write, but my letters keep on being returned to me. I can prove that.'

'Returned?! Ha! Ha! He can prove that? Look, he can prove that!'

Several SS men surrounded me and began to mock me.

'What proof do you have?!'

'I have the letters which I had written regularly and which, for reasons unknown, were returned to me,' I spoke as if I was hurt by the unfair return of the letters.

'Where do you have them?!'

'In Block 15.'

'Hans! Take him back to the block, let him take these letters, but if he doesn't find them...,' he turned to me: 'Ich sehe schwarz für dich!'[128]

I did indeed have such letters back in the barrack.

In anticipation of some kind of inspection, I had written fortnightly 'regular' letters, which always began with some stereotypical sentence like: 'Ich bin gesund und es geht mir gut...,'[129] without which – as the block elders told us – the letters would not have passed the censorship (even if a dying prisoner wanted to write to his family one last time, he had to put these words in the letter). The family, however, was able to realize the state of the prisoner and his health from the trembling handwriting.

Generally, everyone valued the possibility of writing to their loved ones, were it for themselves or the money they sent.

125 Blockführerstube (Ger.) – the block supervisors' office; a place for an SS officer on duty and a guardroom at the same time.

126 Postzensurstelle (Ger.) – the mail censoring office.

127 Ah! My good man...

128 I see your future in dark colours.

129 I am well and everything is fine with me...

I noticed, however, that the letters which did not pass camp censorship for some reason, not accepted by the SS men, had been returned to their authors, with a special green check mark, put on them, or sometimes with the word 'zurück.'[130]

I managed to obtain two such envelopes with characteristic markings and with exactly the same pencil, provided by Captain 3 [Jerzy Virion], I would mark my envelopes, never giving them away when letters were collected in the block on 'letter Sundays.'

I kept these letters secret and safe.

On my way to the block to fetch these letters (7.03) I met Sławek [Sławomir Szpakowski] by the gate – he was escorted by an SS man to freedom.

I took the letters from Room no. 7, Block 15 (old numbering). My companions from the room, upon seeing the SS man waiting for me and papers of some sort, were convinced that the matter was of a political nature and they were never going to see me again.

I was received with interest in Postzensurstelle.

The SS man, who was escorting me, handed six or seven of my letters to the office manager, which sparked the interest of some of the other SS men.

'So... Here are the letters.'

The green markings must have been made rather well.

Besides, they did not suspect that a prisoner could be regularly writing letters only not to send them.

They started to inspect their content. There was nothing there – they were rather laconic.

'Aha! So you are not writing to the address you provided!!'

I replied that I thought the letters were being returned to me by some mistake, because I had been writing to the address that I had given.

They checked. That must have been so.

'Aha... but who is this E. O. [Eleonora Ostrowska] lady, that you are writing to?'

'An acquaintance.'

'An acquaintance?...,' a derisive smile accompanied that word. 'Why aren't you writing to your mother? It says right here that you have a mother!'

(This was what I had stated indeed, even though my mother had been dead for two years at that time. I wanted to be as unsuspicious as possible, I did not want to be a bird with no ties to 'earth.' I wanted to suggest that I had someone close to me 'on earth,' but did not want to truly provide the addresses of people who were alive).

'Oh, yes,' I replied, 'I do have a mother, but she lives abroad. Wilno, after all, lies abroad[131], and so I do not know whether I'm allowed to send my letters there.'

The SS men started to disband slowly.

The initial heat of the case was waning little by little.

130 Return to sender.

131 At the time of Pilecki's imprisonment in KL Auschwitz, Wilno was under Soviet occupation.

'Well,' said the office manager as if he were Salomon passing a judgement, 'the letters are being returned to you because you aren't writing to your mother, even though you have one, but some friend. You must write an application to the Lagerkommandant[132] and ask for permission to change the addressee of your letters to Madame E. O. [Eleonora Ostrowska]. The application has to be sent the official way, via the block elder.'

This is how my case in Postzensurstelle came to an end.

The next day I rushed with my application to Block 3a, where the block elder Koprowiak had considerable problems with understanding how exactly it was possible that I had been writing to Madame E. O. until that point, and now I am respectfully asking the commandant to change the correspondence address to the address of the very same Madame E. O.

But before I turned up in Block 3a the next day, I was still up for one surprise in Block 15 on March 7.

Out of the entire group of people whose numbers were read out in the morning, I was the only one who returned to Block 15.

For the rest of my fellow inmates, the paths of their lives led through the Political Department and into the courtyard of Block 13, where they met their end, shot by Palitzsch.

I returned from Postzensurstelle to the infirmary just when a committee was inspecting all the patients. Everyone without fever was thrown out of the infirmary, into the camp, back to the blocks they originally came from – and suddenly a 'patient' appeared, as if returning from a 'walk' around the camp.

I got hit in the stomach and the head a couple of times and immediately expelled from the infirmary...

That is why the next day I was already writing an application in Block 3a.

The application was not the point.

The point was to find a place in some Kommando under a roof.

Westrych was already gone. The small carpentry workshop in Block 9 (according to the old numbering) was closed down. The big carpentry workshop was at Industriehof I; Oberkapo Balke was in charge of supervising and developing it.

It became a priority to get under a roof immediately. My convalescence was over, but jumping straight from the infirmary to hard labour in the fields, out in the cold, would be too much for me.

These were already times when the numbers of prisoners working in each Kommando were scrupulously recorded, and to find oneself in the wrong Kommando meant having problems with leaving it later on, if you were trying to change the Kommando for a better one.

Here is where my colleagues came to the rescue.

132 Lagerkommandant (Ger.) – the camp commandant. During Pilecki's imprisonment in KL Auschwitz the Lagerkommandant was SS-Sturmbannführer Rudolf Höß.

There were already some members of our organization working in the large carpentry shop in Industriehof I and one of them, Antek [Antoni Woźniak] (14) was even a foreman there. Czesiek [Czesław Wąsowski] (9) was also a worker there.

Antek [Antoni Woźniak] (14) took me to Balke's office and presented me as a good carpenter.

Upon being asked about my qualifications, I replied, in accordance with Antek's instructions, that I knew how to work with machinery.

And so it happened that machines were just being delivered to the shop and installed.

Balke agreed.

For the time being, they put me at the stations which were supervised by Władek Kupiec.

The work was not strenuous.

Władek Kupiec was an extraordinarily decent man and a good colleague. He was imprisoned along with five brothers of his.

I also met some friends here, one of them was named Witold [Witold Szymkowiak] (15), another one Pilecki [Jan Pilecki] (16).

After a couple of days of work in the carpentry shop I organized a second 'five' here, consisting of: Władek [Władysław Kupiec] (17), Bolek [Bolesław Kupiec] (18), Witold [Witold Szymkowiak] (15), Tadek [Tadeusz Słowiaczek] (19), Antek [Antoni Woźniak] (14), Janek [Jan Kupiec] (20), Tadek [Tadeusz Pietrzykowski] (21), Antek [Antoni Rosa] (22).

After several weeks of work here I heard a rumour, circulating among my colleagues, according to which Colonel 23 [Aleksander Stawarz] and Second Lieutenant 24 [Karol Kumuniecki] were allegedly planning a camp coup of a kind; Second Lieutenant 24, along with the healthy prisoners, was supposed to go towards Katowice, and Colonel 23 was going to stay put here with those who were ill.

The naïvety of such planning, as well as the failure of other similar projects, made me avoid discussing issues of the organization with those officers in front of the camp's ordinary inmates. Initially, I generally avoided inviting higher-ranking officers registered under their own names into the organization (except for Colonel 1 [Władysław Surmacki], whom I trusted completely) due to the fact that should any suspicions arise, these officers, known to the camp authorities, could be locked up in the bunker, tormented, and put to a challenging test of silence.

This is how things were being done in the initial phase of the organizational work. It changed later on.

In April and May of 1941, large transports of Poles arrived – prisoners of Pawiak.

Many of my colleagues were brought into the camp.

I formed the third 'five,' into which I recruited my former second-in-command from the times of my work in Warsaw 'Czesław III' [Stefan Bielecki] (25), Stasiek [Stanisław Maringe] (26), Jurek [Jerzy Poraziński] (27), Szczepan [Szczepan Rzeczkowski] (28), Włodek [Włodzimierz Makaliński] (29), Genek [Eugeniusz Trebling] (30).

The organization was growing quickly.

But the Lager's extermination machinery was also gaining momentum.

The transports from Warsaw were thrown into the Lager's 'jaws'[133] – people were given horrible treatment as we once had to endure, with masses of them dying out, decimated by the cold and beatings.

From spring 1941, we had something of a novelty in the camp – an orchestra.

The commandant liked music – as a result an orchestra was formed, with good musicians, who, just like other professionals, could easily be found in the camp in no short supply.

A job in the orchestra was a good one, therefore everyone, who had an instrument back home, quickly had that instrument delivered and signed up for the orchestra, which – conducted by 'Franz' [Franciszek Nierychło] (a good 'scoundrel'), a former Kapo of the kitchen – played numerous and various pieces.

The orchestra was actually really good.

The camp commandant took great pride in it.

If they lacked someone proficient in playing a specific instrument, it was easy to find someone among the 'civilians'[134] and bring them into the Lager.

Not only did the commandant take delight in the orchestra, but so did every possible commission which sometimes inspected the camp.[135]

The orchestra would play for us four times a day.

In the morning, when we were leaving for work, when we came back for lunch, when we went back to work after lunch and upon our return for the evening roll-call.

The place for the orchestra's 'performance' was right in front of Block 9 (according to the old numeration), near the gate, just by the route of all the Kommandos.

A sense of the macabre was to be felt especially in its entirety upon the return of all the Kommandos from work.

The shuffling columns of prisoners were dragging along the ground the corpses of their fellow inmates, killed during work.

Some of the corpses were terrifying.

Accompanied by the sounds of lively marches, bearing more resemblance to polkas or oberkas than to marches, the beaten figures of exhausted prisoners would mark their return.

133 Pilecki uses a metaphor to describe the process of dealing with consignments of prisoners. 'The Lager's jaws' – the camp's extermination machinery which was chewing over, consuming and processing consecutive transports.

134 Outside the camp.

135 The camp was often visited by German officials and commissions from the RSHA, as well as from various SS institutions. In the years to come, the Red Cross and other civilian institutions (among them international) also visited the camp. The merrily and energetically playing orchestra was to convince them that everything was in perfect order.

The rows were made to march to the beat, usually dragging the dead bodies of their friends, whose bellies were touching the ground, often half-naked, since the mud and rocks on the ground ripped the clothing off of them.

Columns of boundless physical human misery, surrounded by the oppressors, beating them with rods, had to keep up with the rhythm of the merry melodies.

Those failing to do so were hit with rods on the head, and would soon themselves be dragged by their companions.

All of this would be escorted by two chains of 'heroes,'[136] armed and dressed up in the uniforms of German soldiers.

Before the gate, to ensure security, next to the armed gangs, there was a group of 'super-humans' – all the top-tiers of the Lager – non-commissioned officers (who could be easily blamed in the future – because what could anyone possibly want from simpletons?).

All haughty, with faces gleefully approving what they saw, would proudly look at the dying, hated race of Untermenschen.[137]

That is how the Kommandos which worked in the fields would return.

There were not many 'old numbers' among them anymore.

Those either 'went through the chimney,' or managed to get a job somewhere under a roof.

These Kommandos mostly consisted of Zugangs.

The 'hundreds,' working in the workshops, would come back in a different manner – strong, healthy, with a spring in their step, in well-aligned 'fives.'

Upon that sight, the smirk of satisfaction would fade away from the faces of the horde of oppressors at the gate. They usually turned away, reluctantly. For the time being, though, they needed the 'workshoppers.'

Many SS men commissioned necessary items in this or that workshop, which were to be manufactured illegally, without the knowledge of their superiors.

Even those from the top were ordering unauthorized items, hiding this fact from each other.

In that regard, they were all afraid of being reported to their superiors.

Murdering people was a different thing – the more victims he had – the better his 'trademark' was.

These were the things which I refer to as 'not happening on earth.'

136 Pilecki, of course, is ironic here, pointing out how 'heroic' the Germans were, torturing and abusing helpless camp inmates.

137 Untermensch (Ger., pl. Untermenschen) – an 'underman' or 'subhuman.' The Germans would use this term for Poles and other nations and races, perceived by them as inferior. See also footnote 55.

How is that... How can I possibly put it otherwise? Culture... the twentieth century... whoever heard about killing other men in this way?

Anyway, one cannot really do it with impunity 'on earth.'

Supposedly, although it is the twentieth century and our culture is so well developed, these 'people of great culture' smuggle in the notion of war somehow, even justify it, as a necessity.

Ah!... Even the war, suddenly, in a certain discussion of civilized people, becomes 'indispensable and necessary.'

Agreed! But until now (recognizing the mask that covers the bloodlust of some and the interests of the others) one could only speak out loud about mutual murdering of certain, specific sections of societies – that is, armies.

This is how, unfortunately, it used to be, I think. It is just past – more beautiful than the present.

What can humanity possibly say today, the same humanity which wants to prove the progress of culture and puts itself, as being from the twentieth century, at a much higher level than the humanity of the centuries of yore?

Can we, the people of the twentieth century, even look at the faces of those who lived before us and – a funny thing – argue our superiority?

When, in our time, a 'cover' of the past has already been removed, an armed mass destroys not an enemy army, but entire nations, helpless societies, by means of the latest technologies. The progress of civilization – yes! But the progress of culture??? – ridiculous.

We have gone far too far, my friends, horribly so.

A dreadful thing indeed, there are no words to describe it...

I wanted to say: animal-like cruelty... But no! We are a whole level of hell worse than animals!

I have every right to make such a statement, especially after seeing all these things I had seen and after what started happening in Auschwitz a year later.

The difference between the conditions of those who were working under a roof (in stables, warehouses, or workshops) and those who were expiring under the open sky, was the difference between 'to be' and 'not to be.'

The former ones were considered to be necessary; the latter ones were paying with their lives for that necessity – the order of exterminating as many people as possible.

One had to pay in some way for being considered special, justify it somehow.

That payment was either proficiency in some trade, or smartness, which had to substitute any profession.

The camp was self-sufficient.

They were sowing grain and keeping animals: horses, cows, and pigs.

There was a slaughterhouse processing the animal meat into edible products.

The slaughterhouse was not too far from the crematorium, where copious amounts of human flesh were being turned into ash for fertilizing the fields – the only benefit one could possibly have had from that meat.

The best of all the jobs was under the roof of the pigsty, as the food there was much more substantial and of superior quality in comparison to that given to the Häftlings.

The pigs were fed with the leftovers from the tables of the 'super-humans.'

The prisoners, who were lucky enough to get the job of swineherds, ate some of that excellent food, taking it away from their charges – the pigs.

In the stables, where the horses were kept, the prisoners had other options.

A couple of times I got invited from the carpentry workshop to the neighbouring stable by friend 31 [Karol Świętorzecki]; I would go there with my tools under the pretense that something needed to be fixed – justifying my need for being there in front of the encountered SS men.

My friend was hosting me with real feasts: billycans full of black sugar, which, after being washed in water and separating the salt was turning almost white. We would add wheat bran to that. After mixing it up I would eat this like the most delicious cake.

Back then I could not possibly imagine ever eating anything as tasty as this, either before or in the years to come, provided I could return to life in freedom.

My friend had milk as well, poured away from the portions delivered here for a stallion.

You had to be careful not to 'incur displeasure.'

Just coming here without a specific reason or to repair something ordered by the Kapo, was forbidden.

My friend 31 [Karol Świętorzecki] created a 'bud' of our organization's unit among the stable's personnel.

On May 15, however, as a result of his mother's efforts, he was released from the camp and left for Warsaw, carrying my report regarding the work here.

Much later, a friend of mine, no. 32 [Leszek Cenzartowicz], whom I placed in the stables, was able to sustain his exhausted body by milking pregnant mares and drinking koumiss.

And then there was a tannery here as well, where the colleagues, taking advantage of the circumstances, would cut the pig skins sent here to be tanned – diminishing them, but keeping the general form – and boiling 'excellent' soup from these scraps.

One time I ate dog's meat, provided by my friends from the tannery, without knowing what animal it was (the first time in summer of 1941).

Later I did that knowingly.

Instinct and the necessity of keeping my strength up made everything edible – indeed, tasty.

I put raw bran (so badly purified that my own calves back home might have never wanted to eat it), provided to me in secret by friend 21 [Tadeusz Pietrzykowski], who was attending the calves – into the soup delivered to us to the carpentry shop. My only concern was whether I should put two spoons or just one into the billycan (we were 'kommandiert,'[138] we did not go to lunch or the noon roll-call in the camp – they would count us in the workshop).

Whenever my friend 21 [Tadeusz Pietrzykowski] was able to smuggle in some more bran, I would eat dry handfuls of it, swallowing slowly, in small mouthfuls, having the chunks broken down into small portions that I was able to swallow, with chaffs.

And so it turned out that everything was possible and everything could be tasty.

Nothing made me feel sick; I always had an extremely durable stomach.

I was not a professional carpenter, so I had to make up for it with smartness.

Initially I was covered by my colleagues (but it was impossible to continue like that in the long run), but I had to face real carpentry tasks eventually.

It was only here where I learned how to sharpen tools.

To a carpenter's mind, I should have known that a long time ago.

Aside from Oberkapo Balke, there were a few Kapos and a few masters in front of whom I had to skillfully pretend I was a carpenter.

Under the supervision of Władek [Władysław Kupiec] and some other colleagues I learned to saw, plane, smear board ends with a Raubank[139] to paste and glue boards into tabletops.

The eyes, however, played the most important part.

In Auschwitz, at various positions and in various jobs one's eyes and ears were always working the most.

One had to pay attention so that a moment of respite would always get in sync with the moment when the Kapo – 'beater' was not looking.

But if the warden's gaze, wandering from person to person, from one work station to another, alighted on you, or if you found yourself in his field of vision, even just peripherally – then, brother, you had to work or at least convincingly pretend to be working.

You cannot just stand or rest, even if you have been working hard when the warden was not around.

And if you really did that – you were being imprudent.

Be careful! Arbeit macht frei! – you read that a couple of times a day at the gate.

You may 'fly away through the chimney,' when you run out of strength.

You could get smashed with a rod if you decided to rest while being watched by a guard.

A renowned first-class professional, naturally, had no need to pretend.

138 Kommandiert (Ger.) – delegated officially to work other than usual.

139 Raubank (Ger.) – a jointer plane.

The others, even if they really were carpenters, had to be cautious.

There were several hundred spots in the carpentry workshop – and the camp was burning through thousands of people.

New, real professionals were trying to win their way into the workshop.

Duffers were removed and died in the field.

This way, out of necessity, I was slowly turning into a carpenter. I was already making acceptable joints and I was polishing.

I managed to put my friends, who were brought here from Warsaw (April-May of 1941) and whom I had recruited into the organizational work, under a roof.

Colleagues 25 [Stefan Bielecki] and 26 [Stanisław Maringe] were placed in the Fahrbereitschaft[140] Kommando by a member of our organization, no. 33 [Stanisław Kocjan], who treated this Kommando as if it were his own.

Colleague 27 [Jerzy Poraziński] ended up in the infirmary as a nurse, thanks to Doctor 2 [Władysław Dering].

Colleague 34 [identity unknown] was also assigned to the infirmary, but as a secretary – thanks to Second Lieutenant 4 [Alfred Stössel], etc.

I paid regular visits to Blocks 11 and 12 (spring of 1941, according to the old numbering), where Zugangs were being delivered, to look for familiar faces, pick colleagues to work with, to put them under a roof, to save them.

It was here, where one day I unexpectedly encountered the Czetwertyński family: Ludwik [Ludwik Czetwertyński], the owner of Żołudek estate, his two sons [Jerzy Czetwertyński and Stanisław Czetwertyński], and his brother from Suchowola [Seweryn Czetwertyński]. At the same time I met there a colleague of mine from the partisan campaign in 1939 – Officer Cadet 35 [Remigiusz Niewiarowski].

A couple days later I met two colleagues from Warsaw – 36 [Stanisław Arct] and 37 [identity unknown].

I watched them all carefully, because you could never be certain of anyone who had experienced Szucha Avenue and Pawiak.[141]

Some were exhausted, some others – devastated.

Not all of them were suitable for our organization, a new form of underground work.

Major 38 [Kazimierz Chmielewski], who used to work with us in Warsaw under the nom de guerre 'Sęp II' ['Vulture II'], at the first sight of me in Auschwitz (summer of 1941) jumped right at me, yelling: 'You, here?... And the Warsaw Gestapo smashed

140 Fahrbereitschaft (Ger.) – the transportation department; car pool.

141 Jana Chrystiana Szucha Avenue – a street in the southern part of downtown Warsaw. There, in the former building of the Ministry of Religious Beliefs and Public Enlightenment, the seat of the Warsaw Gestapo was located. It was widely known as a slaughterhouse, where the most sadistic methods of interrogation in extracting information from victims were employed. The Pawiak Prison – see footnote 24.

my butt, asking: where is Witold?... How long have you been here?... You have such an old number!... How did you do it?... I saw you some two months ago in Warsaw, and that is what I told them at Szucha Avenue!' He was shouting loudly in the square, he managed to blow my cover in front of several of my colleagues, who thought me to be Tomasz [Serafiński].

It was fortunate that there were no scoundrels among us.

And as for 'how did you do it, I saw you some two months ago in Warsaw...' – well, I could only justify it with a slight touch of insanity that must have claimed him after all the beatings he took at Szucha Avenue.

As it turned out much later, the explanation was quite different.[142]

Out of several old colleagues who arrived here in those months, 25 [Stefan Bielecki] and 29 [Włodzimierz Makaliński] were of the most use for me; I trusted them almost like I trusted myself.

I felt a bit weird in the Zugang blocks, while standing in the corner and watching all these people, freshly brought here from 'earth' and seemingly still covered with the dust of Warsaw.

It was as if I had several people inside of me.

One of them would like to hold a grudge against fate and yearning for 'earth,' if he was not ashamed of the rest inside of him.

The second, however, was stronger, and that other person felt the joy of having prevailed over trifling whims and petty little things that were completely useless here and which people from 'earth' are so attached to.

The third person looked on condescendingly – not in the worst sense of this word, but with some internal, fraternal prudence – at these visitors, who were still addressing each other by their titles as: counsellor, engineer, colonel, lieutenant, sir.

My God! How quickly you had to lose this attitude... The sooner, the better.

Here they were exterminating the intelligentsia before anyone else, as that was the order that had been given to the Lager authorities, and because an educated man did not fit into the workshop. If he was not spared and thrown into the asylum for the Lager's intelligentsia: the Baubüro, the Schreibstube, the Krankenbau, the Effektenkammer or the Bekleidungskammer[143] – then he would be condemned to die as useless. But sometimes they would also die because, unfortunately, an educated man, possessing scholarly knowledge, was completely deprived of ordinary everyday pragmatism.

Besides, his body was too delicate, unfit for physical labour and bleak food.

I am sorry, but in order to tell the truth about the camp I cannot skip that part.

142 Pilecki does not give any explanation about the causes of Kazimierz Chmielewski's mental breakdown.

143 Bekleidungskammer (Ger.) – a clothing room, storage of inmates' clothing.

And if any reader accused me of trying to 'dish the dirt' on the intelligentsia – he would be very much mistaken.

I think I have some right to claim a place of a kind among the intelligentsia myself, but it does not mean that I am not entitled to report this bitter truth.

A great percentage of those educated people brought into the camp were downright inept as far as everyday skills go. They failed to realize that their scholarly and certified intelligence should be hidden under the intelligence of a flexible mind seeking a way of getting a foothold to survive on this stony, infertile soil of the concentration camp.

One should not claim titles, but tackle the conditions as they were.

One should not demand being put in an office just because one was an engineer, or in a hospital just because one was a physician. One should be happy with even the smallest of 'holes' that would allow one to escape the Zugang block to any job seen as necessary to the camp authorities and that would not violate the honour of a Pole.

Being a lawyer is no reason to get all pompous and proud, this profession did not do anyone any favours here.

What did matter, however, was a friendly attitude towards any Pole, if one was not an immoral scoundrel, and also doing favours for other people and using their favours in return.

The only way to survive in the camp was by forming relationships with the others, bonds of friendship, comradeship at work, mutual support...

How many people did not understand this?!

So many egoists, about whom you could say: 'the waves cleave not to him nor he to the waves.'[144] Those had to die. We had too few free positions and too many people to save.

Besides, they lacked willpower that would allow them to restrain from eating things impossible to digest. Not all scholars had strong stomachs.

'Stupid, shitty intellectual,' that was the insult that carried the most contempt in the camp.

Starting from spring 1941, the Lager population started using a new word: Muselmann.[145] This is how the Germans in power would call a prisoner who was too weak, enfeebled, barely able to walk. This term gained currency.

In a short rhyme of a kind, we would say:

'...the Muselmänner – whiffle sways them in a gentle manner...'

144 Adam Mickiewicz, *Ode to Youth*, transl. by Jarek Zawadzki.

145 Muselmann (Ger., pl. Muselmänner) – in-camp slang, a word describing the 'walking dead' – an extremely emaciated prisoner. In Muselmänner, both the muscles and the layer of fat under the skin atrophied; dry skin would underline protruding bones; faces became mask-like with blurred eyes. Their movements slowed down, they would stoop and prefer to stay in a squatting position. Along with somatic degeneration, mental anomalies would develop. Initially, the Muselmänner became overexcited, easily irritated and focused only on finding food; as time passed, they would become increasingly indifferent to exterior stimuli. They were exempt from work, but were consigned for extermination in the gas chambers at the next opportunity that arose.

It was a creature somewhere in between life and the chimney of the crematorium.

It was very hard for them to recover, they usually ended up in the hospital or at the Schonungsblock[146] (Block 14 – old numbering, Block 19 – new numbering), where several hundred of these human shadows were to experience the mercy of the Lager authorities: they could do nothing but stand the entire day, forming rows in the building's hallways – but this standing was exhausting for them as well.

The mortality rate in this block was enormous.

In July of 1941, when I was passing by a group of several young boys (16–17 years) who had been brought here straight from school in punishment for singing patriotic songs, one of them, 39 [Kazimierz Radwański] ran towards me, shouting: 'Uncle!' My cover was blown yet again.

But I was glad – not because he was brought here, understandably, but because I received some news from my kith and kin.

A couple of weeks later in the carpentry workshop I noticed someone's inquisitive gaze fixed dead on my face without blinking.

I endured this gaze.

The man who was looking at me, not too tall, a Polish prisoner, approached me and asked whether I was XY – he said my real name.

I said that it was a mistake, but he refused to be misled and assured me that there was no need for me to be afraid of him.

A couple of weeks later he was sworn in and worked in our organization as no. 40 [Tadeusz Szydlik].

He got a job at the carpentry workshop, in the machine room.

I expanded our team in the carpentry workshop by taking the oath from three valiant Poles: 41 [Stanisław Stawiszyński], 42 [Tadeusz Lech], 43 [Antoni Koszczyński].

Soon 44 [Wincenty Gawron], 45 [Stanisław Gutkiewicz] and 46 [Wiktor Sniegucki] also joined our work.

At that point, I was already doing just fine with my work in the carpentry workshop.

My work and appearance, by some quirk of fate, did not seem suspicious to the Kapos.

There was only one incident like that. I was alone in the workshop, working on the planks. Oberkapo Balke stood a couple of steps behind me – unbeknown to me – and was watching my work for a while, then he summoned Kapo Walter [identity unknown] and, pointing his finger at me, slowly uttered: 'Wer ist das?'[147] But after that, they left, without disturbing my work.

146 Schonungsblock (Ger.) – the hospital in KL Auschwitz consisted of the following Blocks: 19 – convalescents, 20 – infectious diseases, 21 – surgery, and 28 – internal diseases.

147 Who's that?

My colleagues, next to whose work stations the Kapos had been standing, told me about that.

Apparently Balke realized that I was no carpenter.

Balke was, generally, an interesting person in many ways. Tall, handsome, intelligent-looking, rather rigid and cold.

On Sundays, when we were being tortured till noon with the so-called Blocksperre[148] – that is, being locked in our barracks and enduring various inspections of uniforms, Balke would come over and take all the carpenters out into the square for an assembly gathering: moving them, dividing them into 'twenties,' appointing leaders of these 'twenties' and keeping us in the square, when the sun was shining and with the orchestra playing in the background, until the Blocksperre was over. Then, he would release us with a smile, happily waving goodbye, and send us back to the block.

Our camp was constantly growing.

I do not mean the number of prisoners, though – it was always about 5–6,000 men.

The current prisoner number was over 20,000, but several thousand people had been devoured by the crematorium.

The camp was growing in another way – it was expanded.

Save for the eight blocks, built at the roll-call square (which changed the numbering in the entire Lager) and except for the fact that the camp was expanded further in the direction of Industriehof I, in the main camp itself (i.e. the Stammlager[149]) some sub-branches were quickly constructed. The first one, called Buna,[150] was eight kilometres east of the camp, where a quasi-rubber factory was constructed, the second branch of the Stammlager, a newly-constructed camp 'Birkenau' (Brzezinka), named

148 Blocksperre (Ger.) – a ban for leaving the blocks by the inmates. It was employed as an additional punishment, especially in the inmates' free time. Sometimes it also involved limiting the freedom of movement inside the camp, so an unauthorized person could not witness a certain action conducted by Germans, e.g. transferring the sick from the infirmary to the gas chambers.

149 Stammlager (Ger.) – the main camp. KL Auschwitz, at that moment already coded KL Auschwitz I, was the parent camp for KL Auschwitz II-Birkenau, KL Auschwitz III-Monowitz and several dozen other smaller units and subcamps, located by numerous factories and works in Silesia.

150 Buna – the German brand name of synthetic caoutchouc – rubber, synthesized for the first time in 1936 by IG-Farben. The plant's construction started in 1941 in the fields of the Monowice village (near Oświęcim). The first Kommandos of prisoners were transported to the site from KL Auschwitz in trucks in mid-April 1941, but from May 1941 onwards they had to walk the whole distance (6–7 km). By the end of July, the whole Buna Kommando (about 1000 prisoners) was transported by train to the Dwory station. The inmates' work on site was heavy and physical: they would level the ground, dig ditches, lay cables and build roads. After the winter break the works in Dwory were resumed in the spring of 1942 and continued until July 21, when due to an outbreak of typhus in KL Auschwitz I and KL Auschwitz II-Birkenau all the departures were halted. The IG-Farben administration, being afraid of losing the workforce, agreed to let the SS use one of the barrack camps being built near Monowice, where instead of civilian workers – as it was originally planned – inmates were located. The first prisoners entered the new camp on October 26, 1942 (the opening was postponed several times), and in early November the number of inmates in KL Auschwitz III-Monowitz reached 2,000.

after a birch grove.[151] Also bearing the name 'Rajsko,' which had nothing to do with Rajsko village[152] ('Rajsko' was located several kilometres to the west, the village – to the south), and the name was rather ironic.[153]

Building both sub-branches of the camp was claiming a great number of human lives.

Over a thousand prisoners would march every day to Buna before the morning roll-call (they would get up much earlier than us, coming back a couple of hours after we had already finished our day of labour).

In Birkenau they were only just building barracks: for now, wooden, unspoiled, innocent-looking, new.

Not until later did Birkenau-Rajsko become the site of infernal scenarios.

Carpenters and woodworkers were needed to construct these barracks, and in the absence of woodworkers, they were immediately substituted with carpenters.

They worked in the field, in the rain, later in the snow, under the Kapos' rods, as the order was clear: the hell in Rajsko had to be built as soon as possible.

Our carpenters were supposed to go there to die...

Balke had to supply those carpenters, but was reluctant to do so. He always took his time with it.

It was a tough time for the carpenters, but – it seemed – for him as well.

The carpenters who were sent to build cabins in the open fields (and ultimately about one third of all the carpenters were sent there) usually died there, having caught a cold or just collapsed from exhaustion.

So, it was always the inferior professionals who were chosen by Balke.

He usually looked at me inquisitively, as if pondering: send him there, or not?

And somehow he always marched on further, to the rest of the carpenters awaiting their fate, leaving me in the workshop.

Only a marginal number of people were ever released from Auschwitz.

They were mostly inmates from the street roundups in Warsaw, with no cases on record, who were bought out from the camp by their families through various kinds of middle-men practicing this trade. These middle-men were often blackmailers or charlatans. Some families had the backing of foreign consulates, or even private contacts at Szucha Avenue.

In the fall of 1940, about 70–80 people from the Warsaw consignment were released.

In 1941, however, releases were very few and far between, literally only a few prisoners each time till the fall of '41, altogether several dozens of prisoners. Only in the

151 KL Auschwitz II (KL Birkenau) was built on the site of Brzezinka village, its population evicted, its buildings razed to the ground by Germans. The name 'Brzezinka' means 'small birch grove' in Old Polish.

152 A village south of Oświęcim, towards Brzeszcze. It was located in the so-called Auschwitz zone of interest and due to this its inhabitants were evicted, but the camp itself was built on the site of Brzezinka village.

153 'Rajsko' means 'heavenly' in Polish. It is also a pun on the Polish word 'raj,' which means 'paradise.'

fall of 1941 about 200 prisoners were sent to the 'liberty block' (specially dedicated for that purpose), where they were kept in 'quarantine' prior to their release.

They were provided with better quality food, so that their appearance would improve; they were not abused, and those who bore evident signs of having been beaten were kept in the hospital until they fully recovered, so that they would not bear the evidence of the atrocious ill-treatment of prisoners in Auschwitz.

When one considers, however, that in November 1941 the new prisoners who were brought into the camp were given numbers over 25,000 – well, of what consequence was releasing three hundred individuals?

Each released prisoner was dressed in his civilian clothes (produced from the bags, hanging in the Effektenkammer); they also had to go, in the company of other inmates who were about to be released as well (or alone) through the wooden cabin behind the gate (this is also where the Postzensurstelle was located). There, an SS man would bid them farewell, reminding them that they were not to say a word about the camp in Auschwitz.

If anyone were to ask 'how was Auschwitz,' they were supposed to say: 'Go and see for yourself!' (a naïve suggestion).

Should the German authorities find out about someone's inability to hold his tongue, that man was sure to swiftly turn up in Auschwitz again (this was more convincing and former prisoners of the camp really remained silent as if under a spell).

The game that I had started in Auschwitz was a very dangerous one indeed.

In fact, this sentence does no justice to reality – I have long since crossed the line of what people 'on earth' call 'danger' – merely stepping inside the wires at the entrance was dangerous itself.

My work here had me absorbed unreservedly, and because it started to develop faster and faster still, I started to worry about my family buying me out of the camp as it was the case with other inmates – just like them, I had no case, because I was brought here from a street roundup as well.

And so, not wanting to expose my work, I had been writing letters to my family, telling them that I was treated really well, that they should not do anything about my case, that I wanted to stay there till the end. It was up to fate itself whether I was going to leave or not, etc.

I received an answer: when Janek W. [Jan Włodarkiewicz] found out about my whereabouts, tormented by a bad conscience, he kept asking everyone: 'Why did he go there?' He retained his integrity, however, and when the family asked him to buy me out, he replied that he had no money for that.

I found a way of sending letters to my family, written in Polish.

A young friend of mine, 47 [identity unknown], was working in town and it was there where he had managed to get in touch with some civilians. These civilians forwarded two letters of mine to my family.

The letters were then forwarded to Headquarters.[154]

Out of my first cooperators in Warsaw, here, in Auschwitz, save for those whom I have already mentioned, at the beginning of 1941 I met Stach 48 [Stanisław Ozimek] – who was later moved to the quarries, and, in the summer of 1941 – Janek 49 [Jan Dangel], whom, as allegedly sick, I successfully managed to put in the transport to Dachau.[155] Dachau, in comparison with Auschwitz, was a much better camp.

Because of recurring escape attempts the camp authorities decided to enforce the policy of collective responsibility: since the spring of 1941, for one prisoner's escape, ten prisoners were to be shot dead.

Selecting the ten condemned to death was a tough experience for the camp, especially for the block these victims were to be chosen from.

We, as the organization, positioned ourselves in clear opposition to these escapes. We organized none ourselves, and condemned every inclination to flee as a manifestation of extreme selfishness, until major changes would be introduced in that regard.

Up until that point, all the escapes were wildcat acts unrelated to our organization whatsoever.[156]

The 'death selection' would take place just after the roll-call at which the absence of the fugitive was noticed.

The camp commandant with his entourage would show up in front of the block that the fugitive came from, walking in front of the rows of inmates, making a beckoning gesture with his hand in front of the prisoners he liked, or, rather, did not like.

The already 'inspected' row would take five steps forward, and the entourage continued the march in front of the next one.

Sometimes the commandant picked several inmates from one row, sometimes – not even one.

The best thing to do was to look death daringly in the face – those who did so, were usually spared.

Not everyone could handle the pressure, though – sometimes someone would try to sneak past the commission to one of the rows that had been already inspected. Those inmates were usually spotted and marked down for death.

154 Here Pilecki probably means the KZ HQ, co-formed by Pilecki's TAP in January 1941. Only after September 1941 could Pilecki's reports be delivered straight to the most important address, to the ZWZ HQ. Only then KZ submitted to the merger orders of the Polish political and military authorities and, as most underground organizations, joined the ZWZ.

155 The first concentration camp in the Third Reich, created in March 1933 and liberated by the US Army in late April 1945. At least 31,000 prisoners were murdered there. All the 'old' camps, that is older than KL Auschwitz and usually smaller, were considered far better, giving the inmates a greater chance of survival.

156 Some of the passages are clearly underlined in the original typescript of the Pilecki's report. We follow this notation.

There was an incident one time: when a young inmate [Franciszek Gajowniczek] was chosen to die, an elderly priest [Maximillian Maria Kolbe] took a step forward and asked the camp commandant[157] to choose him instead, and let the young man go unpunished.

The moment was potent – the entire block was petrified from shock.

The commandant agreed.

The heroic priest went to meet his death, and the other prisoner fell back into line.[158]

The Political Department worked efficiently, which resulted in people being killed because of their previous records 'on earth.'

The camp's authorities took particular delight in gathering up larger groups of Poles to be gunned down on Polish national holidays.

We usually had a bigger 'cull' on May 3 and November 11,[159] and, on one occasion, a group of Poles was shot dead on March 19.[160]

Once upon a time, still out in the normal world, I yearned for creative work, for a chisel, for sculpting. Many a time did I think: well, I never have any time for that, someone would have to lock me up in prison...

Fate has always been on my side, and listened to me this time as well.

I was, indeed, locked up – so the only thing left to do was to start sculpting – but I knew nothing about it.

There was a carving shop next to the carpentry workshop.

Except for several fine artists, graduates from the academy, like 44 [Wincenty Gawron] and 45 [Stanisław Gutkiewicz], everyone there was a woodcarver, mostly – highlanders.

Thanks to 45 [Stanisław Gutkiewicz] and 44's [Wincenty Gawron] help, I got into the carving shop as well.

157 Pilecki's memory fails him: in this case it was not the camp commandant Rudolf Höß, but his deputy, Lagerführer Karl Fritzsch.

158 This event took place on July 29, 1941. After one prisoner had escaped, every tenth inmate of the fugitive's block was selected for execution (the so-called decimation) by Lagerführer Karl Fritzsch. When Fritzsch chose Franciszek Gajowniczek (camp no. 5659), who complained loudly that he had a wife and children, Fr. Maximillian Maria Kolbe stepped out of the line and asked to be taken instead of him. To both inmates' and the remaining SS men's amazement, Fritzsch agreed. After two weeks in hunger cell no. 18 in the Death Block, Fr. Kolbe was finished off by a phenol injection, administered by Hans Bock, the block elder in the inmates' hospital. Witold Pilecki was 40 years old at that time, Fr. Kolbe was 47 – so he was not an 'old man,' as Pilecki had described him; but after two months' stay in the camp, racked by the effects of daily drudgery and torture, he might have looked much older than he was.

159 May 3 – adoption of the first Polish constitution (1791); November 11 – Poland's National Independence Day, established to commemorate the restoration of a sovereign Polish state in 1918, after 123 years of partitions of Poland conducted by the Russian Empire, the Kingdom of Prussia and Habsburg Austria.

160 March 19 is the name-day (a Polish tradition of celebrating a person's name on a fixed day, similar to birthdays) of Józef. In pre-war Poland traditionally celebrated as the patron's day of Marshal Józef Piłsudski.

What made it easier was the fact that the carving shop was a subdivision of the carpentry workshop, where I had worked for a few months.

The head of the carving workshop, 52 [Tadeusz Myszkowski], was a good colleague of ours.

I showed up there on November 1, 1941 and made several designs of paperknives.

They told me: 'It looks splendid on paper, but please transpose this to actual woodwork.'

And so I started my work, moving permanently to the carving shop.

In the first week I carved three knives.

The first one was just for practice, to generally familiarize myself with handling the tools; the second one was slightly better, and the third one was shown to the carvers by 52 [Tadeusz Myszkowski]: 'This is how you should carve knives!'

And so, the work went well.

A great fellow, always cheerful – 42 [Tadeusz Lech] sat on one side of me, on the other – a good colleague – 45 [Stanisław Gutkiewicz].

In the morning of November 11, 1941, colleague 42 approached me, and said: 'I had a weird dream, I feel that they will blow me away today. Maybe it is a trifle, and yet, if nothing else, it makes me happy that I'll die on November 11.'

Half an hour later his number was read out among others at the morning roll-call.

He bid me a heartfelt farewell and asked me to tell his mother that he had died in good spirits.

He was dead a couple of hours later.

Our work was divided in a way that the news from the world outside the camp (delivered to us regularly via our well-established routes) was spread all over the camp by a three-member unit of our organization.

One of these members, our unforgettable 'Wernyhora'[161] – 50 [Jan Mielcarek], wherever he went, was surrounded by groups of inmates, as he was constantly uttering optimistic prophecies.

He was liked and sought by everyone.

The organization was expanding.

During my stay in the carving shop, I recruited several friends – 53 [Józef Chramiec-Chramiosek] and 54 [Stefan Gaik], then 55 [Mieczysław Wagner], 56 [Zbigniew Różak], 57 [Edward Ciesielski], 58 [Andrzej Marduła].

It was not just me who was busy recruiting people. Each 'five' expanded on its own – among the mass of inmates, by virtue of their own industriousness, by finding new routes to various Kommandos, starting new branches based on their knowledge of the character of prospective new candidates.

161 The name of a legendary Cossack seer, an important character in Polish literature and painting.

Everything here was based on mutual trust.

Solving the problem of leadership in specific interconnected groups, I took the position of leaning on particular commanders, taking each leader's personal merits as the sole criterion – regardless of his rank.

I could not have solved this in any other way.

All the suggestions from 'earth' had to be rejected completely.

It meant nothing who you used to be. What did matter, however, was to 'be a real man' in each command position, the one who, at the moment of action, would be able to rally the masses, but not with his title, as it would not be known to the people. And therefore, such a commander – having kept silent earlier - must have demonstrated his exceptional courage beforehand to inspire the others once the time was right and to be the one whom his colleagues would gladly follow.

Bravery was not the only necessary quality – inner strength and tact were of vital importance too.

A minor observation here – when one was molding and selecting people, it was often those in positions of power who were recruited.

A sworn in room supervisor was often helpful later on, providing extra food and sustaining the strength of our members, sent to him in need of additional nutrition, even if it meant saving food on some people in his room.

But if someone trying to win over a Stubendienst did not know how to behave, had no tact or willpower to refrain from taking the bowl of extra food for himself – then our efforts were sure to backfire.

Usually, though, it was the Stubendienst himself who would take the initiative after several conversations – provided that the visitor had enough willpower and did not say a word about being hungry, even if his own stomach was crying out for food. Doing things this way ensured that the food received from the room supervisor did not disturb constructing the organizational network.

Regrettably, there were a couple of individuals who, approaching the newly acquainted Stubendiensts, first and foremost asked for food for themselves.

In such cases, there was no chance of solid cooperation.

The Stubendienst would only fill the bowls of those who visited him – and that was it.

The breakout of the German-Bolshevik war,[162] even though the news was long awaited and greeted by us with great joy, brought only minor changes to the camp.

Several SS men were sent to the front. They were replaced with other, older ones.

It was only in August 1941 that this new war resonated within the camp, like everything else, with a gruesome echo.

162 The German-Soviet War started on June 22, 1941 with the German attack on the Soviet Union, which until then was its ally.

The first Bolshevik prisoners of war were brought to Auschwitz, only officers for now, and put into one room of Block 13 (according to the new numbering, Block 11). There were over seven hundred of them, squeezed in that one room so tightly that nobody could even sit. The room was sealed (there were no gas chambers in the camp back then).

In the evening of that day, a group of German military men, including officers, arrived.

The German commission entered the room, put on gas masks, and scattered a few gas canisters in there, while observing the effects.

My fellows, the Pflegers, who were delegated to clear the corpses the next day, said that even to them it was a truly ghastly sight.

People were so crowded that they had no room to keel over upon dying. Leaning one against another, they clutched each other so tightly that separating the bodies was quite a challenge.

Judging by their uniforms, the gassed victims were all high-ranking Bolshevik officers from different regiments.

It was the first test of gas in our camp (prussic acid).[163]

I was informed about this by 19 [Tadeusz Słowiaczek], who, greatly disturbed, was the first to bring me the news.

His intelligence prompted him to foresee the possibility of perhaps other attempts that were yet to come, maybe with the prisoners as their subjects.

Back then, it seemed quite impossible.

In the meantime, we had another delousing at the camp (summer of 1941), after which all of the carpenters were put together in Block 3, on the ground floor.

We were given beds, as almost the entire camp was getting beds, one block after another.

It was yet another opportunity for the beaters[164] and the SS men to shine.

The beds had to be made better than back in the cadet school – and so, more persecutions, more beatings, more violence.

163 Prussic acid – a name for the solution of hydrogen cyanide in water. Hydrogen cyanide is a highly toxic compound in the form of a colourless volatile fluid with the smell of bitter almonds. KL Auschwitz inmates were killed with hydrogen cyanide produced in Germany under the trade name of 'Zyklon B.' The first trials were made shortly after the outbreak of the German-Soviet War. Soviet POWs started arriving in KL Auschwitz from July 1941. Initially, victims were executed in gravel pits near the camp. In early September 1941 a group of ca. 600 Russian POWs was led to the cellars of Block 11 along with about 250 Poles, selected from the hospital. The cellars were shut and Zyklon B was poured in by SS men in gas masks. This caused the demise of all the incarcerated within two days. It was the largest group used in testing the 'efficiency' of Zyklon B, which later on, was employed in the mass extermination of the Jews. The test 'yielded positive results' and led to the construction of the first gas chamber in KL Auschwitz. It was put into operation in the fall of 1941, in a room by the crematorium, hitherto used as a morgue. Mostly Soviet POWs and the first groups of Jews were murdered there. It was used for the last time in December 1942.

164 Pilecki means the Kapos and other prisoner functionaries.

In September, some of the carpenters (including me) were moved to Block 12 (new numbering), and in October, to Block 25 (new numbering, old numbering – 17).

It was here, on one November morning, when, shivering from exposure to chilling winds, slashing me interchangeably with rain and frozen snow, I was struck by a most dreadful sight.

Through the double wire fence, about 200 steps from me, I saw long columns of completely naked people, divided, as it was customary in the camp, into 'hundreds' consisting of twenty 'fives,' who were being chased by German soldiers and beaten with rifle butts.

I counted eight 'hundreds,' but the front of the group was already inside the gate of the building, so perhaps several hundreds more could have entered before I walked outside the block.

The building these prisoners were entering was the crematorium.

They were Bolsheviks, prisoners of war.

Later on, I found out that there was over a thousand of them in total.

One can remain naïve till one's last breath.

Back then, I had presumed that the Germans wanted to give underwear and clothes to these prisoners, but... Why were they using the crematorium to that end, and using up precious time in this 'factory,' where our colleagues worked three shifts, 24 hours a day, still unable to burn all the incoming bodies of our dead companions?

As it turned out, the Bolsheviks were led there precisely for the sake of saving time.

They were locked inside.

A canister (or two) of gas was dropped in from above and then the still twitching corpses were quickly put on the crematorium's burning grates.

Simply because the authorities of Auschwitz failed to prepare enough room in advance for the Bolshevik prisoners of war, they burned them, as there was an order to exterminate the Bolsheviks as quickly as possible anyway.

Everyone was rushed to erect a fence between our camp and the part for Bolshevik prisoners of war. The camp was cramped and packed more tightly, as nine blocks were given to house them.

The administration – an eradication apparatus – was also set up.

It was announced that those of us who spoke Russian could be offered the positions of Stubendiensts, or even Kapos, in the camp for the Bolshevik POWs.

We, as the organization, greeted this project – and those who offered their assistance in murdering POWs – with disdain, understanding that the authorities wanted to do this vile work using Polish hands.

The fence was built quickly, and the camp for the Bolsheviks was ready.

There was a huge sign hanging above the internal gate separating our camps, reading: 'Kriegsgefangenenlager.'[165]

165 Kriegsgefangenenlager (Ger.) – a POW camp.

Later it turned out that the Germans – Kapos and SS men – were murdering the Bolshevik prisoners of war just as quickly and efficiently as they murdered us, as 11,400 prisoners of war who were brought here at the end of 1941 (the number given to me by the main Schreibstube) were killed very quickly during the winter months.

The exception was a couple of dozen prisoners who had agreed to collaborate wickedly and help in exterminating first their colleagues, and later also Poles and prisoners of other nationalities in the Birkenau camp. Another exception was a few hundred people who had accepted the offer to become saboteurs – they were dressed in uniforms, trained, and fed, and were later supposed to be dropped behind the Bolshevik troops.

They were accommodated in the barracks near the town of Oświęcim.

The rest, however, was exterminated by excessive labour, beatings, hunger, and the cold.

Sometimes the prisoners were kept out in the cold in front of the block in nothing but their underwear or even naked, usually in the evening or early in the morning.

The Germans would laugh and joke that people from Siberia should fear no cold.

We heard the howling of people freezing to death.

During this time, our camp relaxed in a sense, since the intensity of murdering us had abated, as all the anger and resources needed for torturing and murdering people were redirected against the Bolshevik part of the camp.

The rail beam, which served as a gong for all the roll-calls and gatherings at the beginning of the camp's existence, was replaced with a bell, hung between two poles near the kitchen.

The bell was brought here from some church.

It was adorned with an inscription: 'Jesus – Mary – Joseph.'

After a short time, though, it broke.

The prisoners said that it just could not bear the scenes that unfolded at the camp.

A second bell was brought to the camp, and this one broke as well.

So yet another bell, a third one, was brought (churches still used to have bells back then), and it was rung with care. This one survived until the end.

Yes, indeed, the church bell brought up a great deal of emotion in us.

Many a time, standing at the evening roll-call, we thought that this evening could have been beautiful, if not for the constant spirit of murder surrounding us.

The setting sun was painting the clouds with the most splendid colours, when suddenly the siren sounded its piercing shriek, informing all the outposts that they were not allowed to leave the watchtowers of the große Postenkette, as one or several prisoners were not accounted for at the roll-call.

To us, it was a menacing augury of ten people about to be selected for death, or, in any case, a 'stand-up,' during which the biting cold would freeze us to the marrow.

Or, another time, when we were standing as the honorary assistance of a victim, who, with his hands tied, was supposed to be hanged at the gallows in a few moments...

All of a sudden, in the silence, the calm, peaceful sound of a bell filled the air. The bell tolled in some remote church far away.

It was so close, both to my heart and in terms of physical distance, and yet so remote... Because out there, 'on earth,' people were tolling bells...

They lived, prayed, sinned – but what meaning did their sins have in comparison with the crimes taking place here!

Starting from summer 1941, a new custom was introduced – allegedly regulating admittance to the Krankenbau – for those inmates who felt so weak that they were not able to go to work when the bell at the morning roll-call tolled the signal: 'Arbeitskommando formieren!' and everyone was running to their work columns. The feeble ones – the ill, the Muselmänner – were to gather in a group at the square in front of the kitchen. Their strength was inspected by the Pflegers and the Lagerkapo, sometimes also by the Lagerältester, by pushing them around.

Some were taken to the infirmary, others – to the Schohnungsblock; others still, despite their exhaustion, were ordered to go to work in the field, and sent to their doom, accompanied by a lively march.

Those in the Schohnungsblock and in the infirmary usually did not live much longer either.

Having moved to Block 25 (November 1941), I was acquainted with and came to know better a colleague, 59 [Henryk Bartosiewicz], who later became a good colleague of mine.

He was a brave and jolly man.

I organized a new, fourth 'five,' which comprised, apart from 59 [Henryk Bartosiewicz], of 60 [Stanisław Kazuba] and 61 [Konstanty Piekarski].

In the meantime, two senior officers, Colonel 62 [Jan Karcz] and certified Lieutenant Colonel 63 [Jerzy Zaleski] were brought into the camp among other colleagues.

I made Colonel 62 [Jan Karcz] an offer to join our ranks, to which he agreed and started to work with us.

By doing so, I made the first exception, since, as I have already mentioned, up to that point I was trying to avoid recruiting senior officers, imprisoned here under their own, real names.

However, since the organization was growing in size, my colleagues let me know that keeping my distance from senior officers could potentially spark accusations of excessive ambition. A good opportunity to resolve this matter presented itself: my friend 59 [Henryk Bartosiewicz] found Colonel 64 [Kazimierz Heilmann], imprisoned under a false name and thought by the Germans to be a perfect civilian. I contacted Colonel 64 [Kazimierz Heilmann], asking him to support our work and became his subordinate.

Colonel 64 had agreed with my work plan up to that point, and since then, we kept working together.

At the same time, I introduced inmates 65 [identity unknown] and 66 [identity unknown] into the organization, and also, with 59's [Henryk Bartosiewicz] assistance,

67 [Czesław Darkowski] and 68 [Mieczysław Januszewski] as well. 68 soon started to be of great benefit to us, having reached the position of Arbeitsdienst.

I have lived to finally see the moment that once seemed to be nothing but an unreachable dream – we organized a political cell of our organization. Colleagues who used to be at each other's throats in the Sejm[166] started working in unison now.

These were: 69 [Roman Rybarski] – right wing, 70 [Stanisław Dubois] – left wing, 71 [Jan Mosdorf] – right wing, 72 [Konstanty Jagiełło] – left wing, 73 [Piotr Kownacki] – right wing, 74 [Stanisław Leśkiewicz[167]] – left wing, 75 [Stefan Niebudek] – right wing, and so on. We had a sizeable group of our former politicians-partisan activists.

Therefore, Poles had to be shown mountains of Polish corpses every day in order to make them bury the hatchet and agree that there is something bigger at stake here – agreement and a unified front against a common enemy (we have always had an abundance of these) were more important than differences and the hostile attitudes they used to harbour towards each other back in the normal world.

And so, agreement and a unified front were in opposition with what these people had always practiced before: ceaseless quarrels and altercations in the Sejm.

From the group of Colonel 64's [Kazimierz Heilmann] acquaintances, I took the oath from 76 [Bernard Świerczyna] and 77 [Zbigniew Ruszczyński], and after that recruited 78 [identity unknown] and 79 [identity unknown] as well.

In November 1941, Oberkapo Balke left the carpentry workshop and Oberkapo Konrad [Konrad Lang] took his place. Konrad had a good attitude towards Polish carpenters and he was polite.

He loved art, sculpture and highlanders – woodcarvers.

He had convinced the authorities to separate all the sculptors, together with eight of the best carpenters, from several hundred people, along with experts in making artistic caskets, incrustations, and other kinds of woodwork masterpieces. He then moved this artistic elite from Industriehof I to the great tannery, with a gigantic factory chimney and a wooden fence with four watchtowers by the town.

The tannery housed many Kommandos of artisans: tailors, shoemakers, locksmiths, painters, blacksmiths, stables with several horses, and the 'aristocracy' of the craftsmen's community – the well-off tanners.

As far as artists go, there was a section in there that should be called a real sculpting workshop, as our Kommando (with a few exceptions) comprised only woodcarvers.

Here, in this small section, Professor Dunikowski [Xawery Dunikowski] was working, along with Janek Machnowski [97] and our colleague Fusek [Aleksander Fusek],

166 The lower chamber of the Polish Parliament.

167 According to the data in the *W Report* of 1943, the deciphering key and the additional information provided by A. Cyra, it can be determined that Pilecki was most probably talking about Stanisław Leśkiewicz.

who were both looking after the professor. For a short time, Wicek Gawron [44] had also been assigned there.

Each Kommando had its own Kapo.

Everything was held together in the iron grip of Oberkapo Erik [Erik Grönke], a cruel scoundrel, and his second-in-command – a hot-headed Kapo, Walter [identity unknown].

Our 'artistic sculpting and woodworking' Kommando, as Konrad [Konrad Lang], our Oberkapo of the carpentry workshop wished us to be perceived, joined this collection of various trades.

But Konrad did not anticipate the darker side of moving into the Lederfabrik.[168]

It was the realm of Oberkapo Erik, who did not recognize any other Kapos' authority at all.

These two types clashed: Konrad – an honest art lover, however naïve and not hiding his rapport with the Poles, and the insidious, deceitful, foul Erik, feared even by the SS men, as he had some shady dealings with the camp commandant. He ruled the tannery shop as if it was his own domain, running his homestead and hosting the commandant from time to time. They made some kind of a deal on the tanned skins.

So it goes without saying, Konrad lost.

Our workshops were located in two rooms of the factory.

Behind a couple of walls, where the proper tannery was housed, there was a reservoir, occasionally filled with warm water.

The reservoir was so big that you could even swim a few metres.

When I swam there once, by courtesy of my friends from the tannery, I had the same feeling that I used to have when I was still free...

It was a long time indeed since my skin had the opportunity to enjoy a warm bath!

All of this was done covertly.

To think that a Häftling in Auschwitz could possibly take hot baths!

To tell someone that you have been swimming – unbelievable!

Konrad once took a swim in the reservoir as well, ignoring the fact that he was taking a bath in the company of Polish Häftlings.

He was not feared, for he never did any wrong to anyone.

But some scoundrel saw this, and the first Meldung[169] was filed against Konrad.

In December (1941) we were 'kommandiert' to work in the evenings and worked till 10 p.m., not attending the evening roll-calls.

We had our hands full with toys, commissioned for our German authorities' children.

168 Lederfabrik (Ger.) – leatherworks and tannery.

169 Meldung (Ger.) – a report.

One evening, a Kapo – one of Erik's henchmen – came to us with some SS man and talked Konrad into going out with them to the town.

Konrad, a prisoner himself, longing for the company of free men, agreed – and the trio (along with an SS man keeping an eye on them) went to the town.

An hour later, just as we were about to leave the tannery and go back to the camp, a drunk Konrad entered the tannery.

He was followed by some Kapo and an SS man, different from those who had accompanied him into town.

These two witnessed Konrad patting his favourite craftsmen on the head, saying to one of them that he should already have been made a Kapo because he was an excellent worker, and 'nominating' several others as Kapos and leaders of twenty-man teams.

That was all that was needed. Konrad was locked in the bunker for a good spell.

This is how Erik got rid of the Oberkapo on his premises.

Because the issue of every prisoner's accommodation was starting to be put in order – the authorities were trying to put the Kommandos together – I got moved from Block 12 to Block 25 (which I have already mentioned), together with a group of other prisoners who had been working in the Lederfabrik, or, as it was still officially called, Bekleidungswerkstätte.[170]

The beds, which were being successively delivered to all the blocks, were wooden, one on top of another, making up triple-decker bunk beds.

But they were yet to reach Block 25.

We were sleeping side by side on a bare floor, about 240 people in the room, horribly squashed, on one side only – as regards the legs it was called 'bookmarking'[171] in the camp jargon.

At night (just like a year earlier), people were walking on others, trampling their heads, stomachs, aching legs, when going to the lavatory and not finding any space to lay down again upon their return.

This is not a particularly pleasant memory, but since I am writing down everything, I will mention this as well.

Due to some inefficiency in the camp's economy, in winter 1941 (starting from December) rutabagas were being brought into the camp in trains and moved to mounds from the sidetracks, located 3 kilometres from the camp.

170 Bekleidungswerkstätte (Ger.) – the clothing factory. In KL Auschwitz this whole complex was located in a former tannery and was the workplace of many different craft Kommandos, not only those involved in sewing or tanning.

171 Prisoners would sleep tightly packed on the floor, row upon row, with the legs of those from one row rested between the legs of those from the other (partially similar to the head-to-toe way of sleeping). Any turning or change of position had to be done upon command by everyone at the same time, so little space was left.

Because from the farm Kommandos and others, constisting of Zugangs, who were being finished off in the field, one provided too few men, while others were not physically fit enough for this work, strong men were taken from the workshops. Sundays were dedicated for this activity.

I usually tried to avoid that, pretending – thanks to Doctor 2 [Władysław Dering] – to be summoned to the infirmary for a simulated radiography or check-up.

One Sunday, however, was rather sunny, a lovely day indeed.

I went with everyone else.

I was carrying baskets of rutabagas along with Zygmunt Kostecki.

The Kapos and SS men were making sure that the baskets were full – and we were keeping them full indeed.

At one point, as we were loading the rest of the rutabagas, we only loaded our baskets half-full, but it was already high time to return to the barracks; the leaders of the 'hundreds' were beginning to form columns, so the Unterkapo who was filling out baskets decided that it was too late to go somewhere else to fill them completely. He told us to go with whatever was in our baskets.

An SS man was standing in the square that we had to cross; he saw from a distance that our baskets were not full enough. He ran at us and smacked my hands with a rod.

We stopped. He pounced on me, for some reason yelling: 'Du polnische Offizier!'[172] smashing my head and face with his rod.

It must be some kind of a nervous reflex, but in such situations (I have experienced several of them), I sport a grimace, a grin of a kind, which fueled the SS man's rage even more. He hit my head again, with even greater strength.

It lasted, I presume, only a short while, but many thoughts race through a man's mind at moments like this.

I recalled a saying: So-and-so... you can't beat him down, even with a rod – a saying that has been around since one or another uprising... And now, I really did smile.

I must have been stunned, as I did not really feel much pain.

The SS man looked at me and growled: 'Du lächelnde Teufel.'[173]

I do not know what would have happened if it was not for the sound of the camp siren which distracted him: someone had escaped.

My colleagues told me later on that I was lucky.

My head and my face were swollen for two weeks after that, though.

The second time I got beaten up was much later, in the tannery.

My colleagues were smoking cigarettes in the lavatory, while smoking during work time was prohibited. Suddenly, Kapo Walter [identity unknown] burst in, like a tiger.

I did not smoke, but I was just leaving.

172 You Polish officer!

173 You laughing devil!

He jumped at me: 'Who's been smoking?!'

I remained silent, but must have smiled unwittingly.

'Was? Gefällt es dir nicht?!'[174]

(I do not know the grounds which led him to the conclusion that I liked something or not.)

Walter was a fiend, able to knock a man down with a single strike.

I got hit many times on the head, and I landed on the ground several times. Every time – according to what 59 [Henryk Bartosiewicz] and 61 [Konstanty Piekarski] told me later – I kept standing up with a grimace akin to a grin.

Walter left me eventually, because the camp commandant arrived, and Erik [Erik Grönke] was nowhere to be found at the time.

In the meantime, beyond this hell – far away, in Warsaw – I was promoted.

For assembling the TAP, for working towards the integration in the KZN,[175] for disregarding my own ambitions, and, with General Sikorski's authorization, for pursuing the aim of submitting all the troops to ZWZ,[176] which was the first bone of contention with 82 [Jan Włodarkiewicz]. Who knows, maybe this was the reason why I had left Warsaw.

And yet, Janek W. [Jan Włodarkiewicz] filed the motion, and, according to 'Bohdan' 85 [Zygmund Bohdanowski], watched over my case, saying that he cared more about my promotion than for his own.

Colonel 'Grot' ['Spearhead'; Stefan Rowecki][177] promoted several of us from the KZN.

82 [Jan Włodarkiewicz] and 85 [Zygmunt Bohdanowski] reached the rank of lieutenant colonel.

This way, finally, under my very own name, I was promoted to lieutenant (so, in fact, I got back to 1935).[178]

If back there, in hell, I would not have considered such matters insignificant, I would rather consider them bitter.

174 What? You don't like it?!

175 Correctly: KZ (Pol. Konfederacja Zbrojna – Armed Confederation), military structures of the KN (Pol. Konfederacja Narodu – Confederation of the Nation) – the organization created in October 1940 after merging the TAP with other smaller organizations.

176 Związek Walki Zbojnej (Union of Armed Struggle) – the main military organization of the Polish Underground State, formed on November 13, 1939 in place of the earlier SZP. With time it incorporated various underground resistance initiatives and supervised nearly the whole of the underground movement. In February 1942 it was transformed into the HA.

177 At the moment of Pilecki's promotion to the rank of lieutenant, 'Grot' had already been a brigadier general.

178 Meaning unclear. Maybe Pilecki assumed that he should have been promoted as a reserve officer in 1935, when he began organizing the voluntary Squadron of Military Horsemen Training 'Krakusi.' The ZWZ-HA had a tradition of not promoting incarcerated officers (even those held in concentration camps). A promotion meant exceptional distinction for merits.

Good positions in Auschwitz included, among others, Pflegers, who treated pigs (so-called Tierpflegers[179]), musicians (who were usually not only members of the orchestra, but Stubendiensts as well), and barbers.

Usually they tried to combine these two functions – being a barber and a Stubendienst, but even if that was not the case, barbers were doing all right anyway.

There were barbers who shaved only the SS men, but also each block had several barbers, whose only duty was to shave the entire block every week.

Hair cutting and shaving was mandatory for Häftlings, but it was done by the barbers.

The block elder and the Stubendienst were held responsible for any prisoner from their block who had not been shaved properly or whose hair was even slightly too long.

A barber received more than enough food from the block elder, the Kapos, and the Stubendiensts.

One December evening (1941) we were standing next to Block 21 (new numbering) with Colonel 1 [Władysław Surmacki] and Doctor 2 [Władysław Dering] and talking, when we were struck with the sight of a group of naked people, steaming heavily, who were leaving Block 26 (new numbering).

They were Poles, a hundred give or take, sent here to be finished off as quickly as possible.

Having put them under hot showers for a longer while, about half an hour (not suspecting anything, they took the showers gladly), whereupon the German authorities later put them out in the open, exposing them to snow and cold.

We had to go back into the block already, and they were still standing there, freezing, emitting muffled groans, or rather animal-like howls.

They kept them like this for several hours.

When a larger group of prisoners was finished off one way or another or gunned down at once, the Krankenbau was given a list with their numbers and had to – reporting the list of those who had died that day to the main Schreibstube – add fifty a day from this list as allegedly deceased due to heart failure, tuberculosis, typhus, or some other 'natural' illness.

1941 was coming to an end.

The second Christmas in Auschwitz came, and with it, the second parcel from home – again containing clothes, as it was still not allowed to send food.

In Block 25, where the block elder 80 [Alfred Włodarczyk] turned out to be supportive of our work, in Room 7, where 59 [Henryk Bartosiewicz] was the supervisor, we had a Christmas tree with the Polish Eagle hidden in its branches.

The room was tastefully decorated by 44 [Wincenty Gawron] and 45 [Stanisław Gutkiewicz], with my modest contribution.

179 Tierpfleger (Ger.) – an animal keeper.

On Christmas Eve the representatives of our political cell made several speeches.

Would it be ever possible 'on earth' to see Dubois [Stanisław Dubois] listening contentedly to Rybarski's [Roman Rybarski] speech and cordially shaking the latter's hand afterwards? Or the other way around?

In the past, in Poland, such a scene of concord would be as tear-jerking, as it would be impossible.

And here, in our room in Auschwitz, they spoke with one voice.

What a metamorphosis!

One Volksdeutsche, a Silesian (who was nevertheless working with us as 81) [Aloizy Pohl], informed me about a new initiative of the camp's Political Department, which posed a serious threat to me personally.

There were not many of us, the old lags, left around at that time.

It was particularly visible on the occasion of payouts.

Money, sent to us by our families, was paid out monthly – 30 marks once, or 15 marks twice a month.

If a larger amount was sent, it remained in the inmate's account.

Later on, the payout limit was raised to 40 marks a month.

We could spend the money in the camp canteen to purchase everything that was detrimental to one's body: cigarettes, saccharine, mustard, sometimes salad in vinegar (pickles).

In order to get paid, we all had to stand sorted according to our camp prisoner numbers.

A couple of times they even forced those who had no money at all to show up, just to sign their accounts.

It was then when it was easiest to count everyone, starting from the first to the last numbers, and realize how many of us out of each 'hundred' was still alive...

The havoc in the 'hundreds' was enormous, especially in the Warsaw transports.

Maybe it was so because the very first transports, which had been already here when we arrived, got jobs under the roof, while we were being finished off out in the open.

Or maybe because people from Warsaw, as the Silesians were saying, had no endurance.

Or maybe because other groups had gained more favour in the eyes of the Lager authorities.

Suffice it to say, some 'hundreds' from the Warsaw transports were now reduced to two people.

There were six people left in our 'hundred.'

There were also relatively large 'hundreds' which counted eight people still alive, but there were also those which were not represented by anyone any more.

The Political Department came up with an idea of checking the metric data[180] of everyone who was still alive at that point, starting from the first numbers, which, considering how few of us were left, was no hardship.

Maybe someone was using a false identity (like me, for example).

In order to hunt down such dodgers, the Political Department would send written requests to parishes, asking for excerpts from their registers regarding each prisoner.

These letters were addressed to the parishes where the prisoners under investigation were born (or at least testified so, when interrogated).

If one wants to imagine my situation, they need to get back to the year 1940, to Warsaw.

Warsaw society was eager to help those committed to underground resistance work, especially in the first period of the movement, when Poles had not yet been intimidated by a gruesome reputation of the concentration camps and Szucha Avenue.

Later on, finding an apartment was more difficult, but at the beginning, kind Polish families gladly lent us their premises to use for underground purposes, along with their own personal support.

In this initial period I had several flats and several personal IDs with various names, registered in different places.

Back then, however, it was still possible to leave one's personal ID in the apartment when going out.

Because of that, I did not carry my ID cards with me; when apprehended on a street, I would give one of my names and the apartment that would be the least incriminating at that given moment and which would have an ID card left in it.

One of the apartments I had been using for the work belonged to Madame 83 [Helena Pawłowska].

She told me one day that she had an ID card made for a real name, belonging to one of our officers 84 [Tomasz Serafiński] who had already been moved to another area before his ID card was ready.

Since the ID card came with a labour card, I accepted 83's proposal to use it as my own after changing the photo on it.

I had this ID card on me when I went to the street roundup, having assumed (and correctly so) that the name had not been 'blown' yet.

And so I had the ID card of a real person (84 [Tomasz Serafiński]), who was living somewhere out there.

But the ID card did not say anything about the mother's given and maiden names.

180 Pilecki means here the 'certificate data,' allowing the precise identification of a person. In other words, first and family name, date of birth and parents' given names, allowing to determine the details of the whole family.

When we were examined at night in Auschwitz soon after our arrival I made one up, as I had to give some name.

Because of that, however, the situation was quite uncertain.

When my turn came, and it was bound to come in a few months, and the Political Department requested the parish in the town Z.[181] to send them an excerpt from my registers (or rather Mr. 84's [Tomasz Serafiński]) vital records – the first and mother's maiden name would not match those I had given.

They would summon me, ask about my identity, and... That would be it.

By happy coincidence, my fellow prisoners captured during the same street round-up, several hundreds of them (as I have already mentioned), were quarantined at that time, scheduled to be released to Warsaw shortly.

Through the released colleague 14 [Antoni Woźniak] I passed on a message to my sister-in-law, Madame E. O. [Eleonora Ostrowska], informing her about the details of my situation and indicating the name and mother's maiden name that I had given to the camp's authorities.

A good number of our colleagues were departing, some of them – members of our organization: besides 14 [Antoni Woźniak], 9 [Czesław Wąsowski] was also going.

Colonel 1 [Władysław Surmacki] went to the 'freedom block,' having been released thanks to the efforts of his old friend from his student days in Berlin, now a senior officer in the German military.

Colonel 1 [Władysław Surmacki] was to pass on my report on the organization's work to Warsaw.[182]

I sent a number of messages through colleague 86 [Aleksander Paliński] as well; he had been imprisoned only because his last name matched that of one of our colonels.

To complete the image of the Lager at that time (I mean, only the things that I had witnessed myself, as I can't describe everything I heard from colleagues working in other Kommandos), I also need to mention the so-called Seidler week.

During one week in December 1941, every evening at the roll-call, we saw a display of cruelty by Seidler [Fritz Seidler], an extraordinary sadist, substituting for the Lagerführer.

It was a week of especially dreadful weather: the cold damp wind and rain mixed with frozen snow was penetrating not only our clothes, but our bodies as well, freezing us to the marrow. In the evening, it was even colder.

Seidler had resolved to use even that as a means of exterminating as many Häftlings as possible.

181 Bochnia – a town east of Cracow, famous for salt mining; hometown of the real Tomasz Serafiński. In addition to the letter 'z' also the number 'IX' stands for Bochnia in the *Witold's Report*.

182 Władysław Surmacki was arrested by the Gestapo almost immediately upon his arrival in Warsaw, so most possibly he did not manage to pass on Pilecki's report to the underground resistance authorities.

Every day, starting from 5:45 p.m., signaled by a gong summoning for the evening roll-call, we stood in wet clothing, fighting the biting cold, till 9:00 p.m., only released from the 'stand-still in the roll-call square' before the very gong urging us to sleep.

We had to quickly swallow cold supper, given to us in the evening, and rush to make it in 15 minutes with everything that had to be done before going to sleep.

These stand-stills lasted a week, because allegedly every day someone was missing from the roll-call, which was, naturally, made up by Seidler.

This ended when his time as a substitute in receiving evening reports from Palitzsch came to an end.

Still, that one week made us pay a hefty price in our strength; many of the weaker inmates paid that price with their lives.

The main Schreibstube never notified the families of the deceased prisoners about their deaths unless explicitly told to do so by the Political Department. Information about a prisoner's death, breaking out into the world outside the camp, was not always convenient for the German authorities, mainly because it interfered with other investigations, where other prisoners, kept in one or another gaol, were being threatened: 'We already hold a prisoner X, and he is telling us "the whole truth."'

1941 was coming to an end.

1942 was about to begin. It was to be the most horrifying year in Auschwitz, but as far as the work of our organization was concerned – it was the most interesting one, as we had our greatest achievements in that year.

...and it just so happens that, because of a lack of time before making a new decision, I must write very laconically.[183]

Out of the blue, a rapid and substantial change of attitude towards the Jews occurred.

Much to everyone's wonder, the remaining Jews were taken from the SK and together with the Jews, who were only just brought to the camp, the Zugangs, were assigned to work indoors, in good conditions: making stockings, or peeling potatoes, or preparing vegetables.

They even assumed a 'haughty' attitude towards us.

However, they did not expect that some monstrous, deceitful intent lay behind all this.

183 At the time of writing the *Witold's Report* by Pilecki when with the Polish 2nd Corps in Italy, the possibility of his return to Poland (with a new secret mission) was being decided upon. Here Pilecki draws the attention of the *Witold's Report's* readers – mostly his political and military superiors, for whom the report was meant – that because that decision was already made, he could not devote too much time to describe the events mentioned in this report in detail.

It was all about the letters, in which for these several months the Jews were writing, that they were made to work in the workshops and they were treated well.

The fact that these workshops were located in Auschwitz, an unknown name of some town, mattered nothing to Jews in France, Czechoslovakia, the Netherlands and Greece, where these letters were being sent.

Even Poles in Poland knew very little about Auschwitz at that time, and their approach to someone's imprisonment there was rather naïve.

Our Polish Jews were usually finished off in Treblinka or Majdanek.[184]

Jews from all over Europe were brought to Auschwitz.

The Jews, after a couple of months of writing letters, praising their conditions, were suddenly taken off various jobs and quickly killed.

In the meantime, transports carrying tens of thousands of Jews from all over Europe were sent to Birkenau, where the construction of the first buildings of the new camp had already come to an end.

The approach to the clergy had long since changed, but for another reason.

Due to some influence that the Vatican must have had on the Reich's government via Germany's ally, Italy, the priests were moved to Dachau: for the first time, at the beginning of 1941, for the second time, in July 1942.

I heard that Dachau, in comparison to Auschwitz, was actually an acceptable environment for priests in terms of survival.[185] In the period between these two transports I met several brave priests in Auschwitz, Father 87 [Zygmunt Ruszczak] among them. He was the chaplain of our organization.

We had religious services and confessions, celebrated in secrecy, shielded from prying eyes. The Hosts were delivered to us by the clergy thanks to our contacts with the civilians outside the camp.[186]

The beginning of 1942 was marked by the swift extermination of the rest of the Bolshevik POWs.

They were murdered quickly and efficiently, as their blocks had to be reassigned.

A new massacre was about to start.

184 Names of German camps. The extermination camp Treblinka was located about 80 km north-east of Warsaw; KL Majdanek – in Lublin. Some Jews from southern Poland were also exterminated in the Bełżec camp (about 110 km south-east of Lublin).

185 The conviction that in some camps life was much more bearable was due to word of mouth rumours, which were usually untrue, passed around by the inmates themselves.

186 All manifestations of religious cult were strictly forbidden in KL Auschwitz. This particularly applied to Catholicism. Imprisoned priests were treated on equal terms with other inmates, initially even worse. Therefore, all forms of religious practices had to be deeply concealed. The Hosts were smuggled into the camp with the help of the local people, working with prisoners outside the camp. Holy Masses for the ZOW members were celebrated by Fr. Zygmunt Kuzak (a Salesian, prisoner no. 39884) and Fr. Zdzisław Piotr Uliasz (a Capuchin, prisoner no. 12988). According to Fr. Kuzak's statement, the German camp authorities never managed to detect their activities.

The corpses of Bolsheviks who were killed at the road construction sites, digging trenches near Birkenau, were brought in wagons – several wagons to each roll-call.

Some POWs simply froze to death, unable to muster even enough strength to start working, which could have warmed them up a little bit.

One day, during work, the Bolsheviks mutinied and attacked the SS men and the Kapos.

The riot was brutally pacified – the entire division was gunned down.

The corpses had to be brought to the roll-call in the Rollwagens in several runs for the camp authorities to count them properly.

Having killed every single one of them (February 1942), excluding the several hundred that I have already mentioned, the camp authorities quickly dismantled the fence erected between our camp and the POWs' camp.

At the same time, another fence was built, in another place, serving another purpose.

Ten blocks were separated from us by a high concrete wall – women were about to be kept there.

That was a novelty in the camp.

In the first stages of its existence, the camp used to work on Sundays as well. Later on, Sundays were allegedly 'free,' except for the first half of the day, till lunch, it was forbidden to leave the blocks (Blocksperre).

Now, in order to minimize our possibilities to communicate with each other and organize ourselves, two more hours on Sundays were taken away.

After lunch, from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m., Häftlings had to undress and go to sleep.

The block elders would check the rooms.

The Lagerältester or the Lagerkapo were in charge of checking the blocks, because a prisoner who was not sleeping was squandering his health (an outrageous irony!), so needed by the Third Reich, so he surely was a saboteur.

On January 18, 1942, due to the lack of space in overcrowded bunkers, 45 prisoners were locked for the night in the 'dark room' bunker.

Moments later, still in the evening, in the underground part of Block 11 (new numbering), someone started to bang on the door and call to the SS man standing guard to open it.

These prisoners were suffocating, fighting with their teeth, fists, and knives[187] for access to the door – some air was getting into the room through a small gap in it.

After that night, out of 45 prisoners initially locked in, 21 were dead by the morning – they either suffocated or died in the fight. Out of the remaining 24, nine inmates, also at death's door, were taken to the infirmary, and 15 were sent to the SK, in punishment for not dying in the darkness.

187 On page 48 of the original typescript of the *Witold's Report*, the Polish word 'nożami' (which means 'with knives' in English) can be clearly seen, but it seems that there should be rather the word 'nogami,' which differs only with one letter and means 'with legs.'

Konrad [Konrad Lang], the former Oberkapo of the carpentry workshop, was among them.

Kapo 'Jonny' [Jonny Lechenich], locked at that time in the Stehbunker as a punishment for 'some machinations with the Poles,' as the authorities called it, bore witness to this horrifying sight.

In February 1942, a letter came to the Political Department from the party authorities in Berlin, banning the policy of joint responsibility and killing ten prisoners for each fugitive.

Apparently this was the result of a similar policy being enforced in some camps for Germans.[188]

Simultaneously, an official order banning beating the prisoners was released as well (I wonder – was this because of our reports?).

Since then there were no major repressions against the prisoners in retaliation for other prisoners absconding.

The option to flee became viable again, and so we, as an organization, started to prepare a report with the intention of sending it to Warsaw by means of an organized escape.

The Bolsheviks had left behind lice and a horrible Siberian type of typhus, which started to infect whole groups of our colleagues.

Typhus gained purchase in the camp, spreading desolation everywhere.[189]

The camp's authorities were very glad, and watched with satisfaction the work of that new ally of theirs in their vile job of murdering Häftlings.

188 Pilecki's description is unclear. The remark 'for Germans' should be understood as 'towards Germans.' The Germans, incarcerated in concentration camps, were usually treated better than the inmates of other nationalities. Most of them were not considered enemies of the state and they did not consider themselves to be such either, even if they were political opponents of Hitler's regime. Furthermore, the constant need for a strong workforce and the possibility to utilize some inmates as backup troops for the Wehrmacht made drastic punishments for Germans unprofitable for the Third Reich's government. It is possible that a German prisoner would be executed by 'decimation' (a selection of every tenth man from a line to be killed – a practice commonly applied in KL Auschwitz) and it drew attention to the problem. In theory, every inmate was to be treated equally. Another reason behind tempering the harsh policy of collective responsibility might have been that prisoners in the camps were still used as slave labourers. Every additional person executed meant a weakening of the workforce, and this was economically unwise. According to the philosophy behind the creation of concentration camps, every inmate was to work efficiently for the Third Reich's benefit.

189 From 1942–1943 there were several outbreaks of exacerbated epidemics of various diseases in KL Auschwitz. Most of the inmates died of typhus. Cyclical epidemics of typhus, spread by lice, were a regular occurrence in every concentration camp. From 1943 the disease was less dangerous as the anti-typhus vaccine, developed by a Polish biologist Rudolf Weigl in the interwar period, became more accessible. Officially, the camp's inmates were not vaccinated, but significant amounts of the vaccine were smuggled into camps in Poland (especially to KL Auschwitz) by underground organizations. As a result of disastrous living conditions in the camps the number of the sick was growing from the first days after arrival. Chronic hunger, leading to starvation, was widespread – combined with diarrhea (often bloody), the swelling of legs, deteriorating sight and hearing, memory loss, mental breakdown and – in effect – overall extreme emaciation. The hygienic conditions were the cause of skin diseases, predominantly scabies. Many inmates suffered from tuberculosis, malaria, meningitis, pemphigus, dysentery and digestive

In response, we started to breed lice infected with typhus in the Krankenbau's laboratory. We would put them on the coats of SS men every time they demanded a report or inspected our blocks.

A mailbox was hung outside of Block 15 and it was announced in all the blocks that denunciations, signed or not, were expected to be put in there, reporting all overheard conversations in the blocks.

A Häftling who delivered a report that would prove useful for the camp's authorities was to be rewarded.

They wanted to protect themselves against our organization's activity.

A stream of anonymous letters and reports started to flow.

Captain 88 [Tadeusz Dziedzic] opened the box every evening, and we browsed through the letters before Palitzsch could get to them at 10 p.m.

Dangerous messages that threatened our work were destroyed, and in their place, we put reports aimed at harmful individuals.

This is how the 'paper fight' had begun.

Both while in the blocks and while marching to work, they made us sing German songs.

A couple of times the entire camp had to sing during the roll-call.

In Birkenau the gas chambers were being built in great haste – some of them were already standing.

What I was afraid of – inviting officers imprisoned under their own names into the organization – was not without grounds. Should a suspicion arise among the camp's authorities about the possibility of any covert activity taking place among the prisoners, the officers would surely be the first to go to the bunker.

One day, they locked Colonel 62 [Jan Karcz] in the gaol bunker, taking him every day to the Political Department for interrogations. Every time he came back from there, he was pale, barely able to stand straight.

I was afraid of various complications.

After over two weeks, Colonel 62 [Jan Karcz] approached me with colleague 59 [Henryk Bartosiewicz] and said: 'Well, you can congratulate me now – they let me go. They wanted to know if there was any underground movement in the camp.' Saying goodbye, as it was time to go to sleep, he said: 'Worry not, I told them nothing – I'll tell you everything tomorrow.'

But in the morning he was moved to Rajsko, perhaps precisely to prevent him from saying anything.

problems, caused by inappropriate and insufficient nourishment. The effects of physical abuse included many cases of limb fractures and phlegmons (especially on the buttocks as an effect of flagellation). Nearly every inmate had abscesses and ulcers, developing mainly due to vitamin deficiencies and infections. In winter, late fall and early spring head cold, pneumonia and frostbite (leading to necrosis) would be rife. All these diseases developed acutely in the camp conditions, leading to numerous complications and other diseases. Most inmates suffered from several ailments simultaneously.

Colonel 62 [Jan Karcz] was audacious indeed.

Over a hundred Czechs were brought to the camp, all well-educated people – the 'Sokol' ['Falcon'][190] organization.

They located them in our room (Block 25, Room 7), and started to exterminate them in no time.

I made contact with a representative of theirs, 89 [Karel Stransky] – he is alive and lives in Prague.

In agreement with Colonel 64 [Kazimierz Heilmann], I showed my trusted friend, Lieutenant 29 [Włodzimierz Makaliński], around all the units of our organization in the camp.

I did it just in case of some tragedy happening to me.

Lieutenant 29 reported to Colonel 64 that we had visited 42 units.

One day they moved from our Stammlager Auschwitz to Birkenau a group of 70–80 Silesians (rumour had it – to have them killed), including my friend 45 [Stanisław Gutkiewicz].

He had anticipated this the evening before that fateful day; he was anxious and was shivering at night.

He asked me to pass on a message about himself to his wife and little son, Dyzma.

He never returned from Rajsko.

All the Silesians from that group were killed there.

Some of them had been in Auschwitz since the first days of the camp and had hoped for survival.

Since then, all the Silesians remaining in the camp decisively changed their attitude towards working for the Germans, rejecting it as a no-no.

I went to visit my colleagues one morning. Running quickly through the already empty hallway of Block 5 (according to the new numbering) to the roll-call, I bumped into 'Bloody Alois' [Alois Staller]. He recognized me, even though over a year had passed since our last meeting. He stopped and yelled, with some surprise and inconceivable joy in his voice: 'Was? Du lebst noch?'[191], then grabbed my hand and shook it.

What was I supposed to do? I did not struggle. He was a strange man indeed.

There were several men of this bloodthirsty type in the camp's early days, and some of them were already dead.

190 The Czech Sports Society, established in the 19th century, consisting mainly of the intelligentsia and bourgeoisie. Its main goal was the promotion of physical fitness and raising national awareness. 'Sokol' also advocated the ideas of Panslavism (i.e. the common roots and interests of the Slavic nations). The first 'nest' of the organization was set up in Prague in 1862. Following this example, Sokol-like organizations started to appear in Slovenia, Poland (in the Austrian partition; Pol. 'Sokół'), Croatia, Lusatia (a historical territory in today's Polish-German border region), Berlin, Macedonia, Serbia, Ukraine, Russia and Slovakia. In 1865, the Czech immigrants established a 'Sokol' division in the U.S. The original Czech organization was disbanded after the Third Reich's annexation of Czechoslovakia, and its members were persecuted and sent to concentration camps (notably KL Auschwitz).

191 What? You're still alive?

When faced with external inspection commissions (consisting of, among others, some gentlemen in civilian clothing), the camp's authorities were trying to show the camp in the best possible light.

The inspectors were always shown only the newest blocks, and only those with beds.

The kitchen always cooked a good lunch on that day.

The orchestra would play beautifully.

Only the healthy and strong Kommandos, and those working in the camp's workshops, were to enter the camp after the day of labour.

The remaining Kommandos – Zugangs and those looking miserable – had to wait out in the field for the commission to leave the camp; this way, the inspectors were under the impression that the camp was a relatively nice place. The need to show the better side of the camp also forced the authorities to move some of the particularly bloodthirsty torturers from the first months of the camp, especially those who had gained particular infamy, to other camps, among them, Krankenmann [Ernst Krankemann] and 'Sigrod' [Johann Siegruth].

The SS men packed them into train wagons and made it clear to the Häftlings that they had nothing against the prisoners taking their revenge on Krankenmann.

The prisoners needed no further incentive – they invaded the wagons and hanged Krankenmann and 'Sigrod' on their own belts.

The SS men turned around and did not intrude.

This is how the tormentors met their demise. Every witness of so many murders sanctioned by the camp's authorities was a nuisance, even if it were a German Kapo, and so these two, being witnesses themselves, had to be removed.

The organization was constantly growing.

Along with colleague 59 [Henryk Bartosiewicz], we made it so that Colonel 23 [Aleksander Stawarz], Lieutenant Colonel 24 [Karol Kumuniecki], and new men: 90 [identity unknown], 91 [Stanisław Polkowski], 92 [Wacław Weszke], 93 [identity unknown], 94 [identity unknown] and 95 [identity unknown], joined our cause.

44 [Wincenty Gawron], a great man indeed, was taking care of many inmates, sharing his food with them, as he made his living by painting portraits of the camp's authorities and was given food for himself for the services he rendered.

A transport from Warsaw (March 1942) again brought many friends of mine and news about how things were back home.

Major 85 [Zygmunt Bohdanowski] came to the camp, and so did 96 [Tadeusz Stulgiński], the swellest of lads, who held a record[192] for the most severe beatings at Szucha Avenue and in Pawiak.

192 Pilecki probably means the long-lasting nature of T. Stulgiński's investigation and the number of the interrogations he had gone through.

From them I learned that Colonel 1 [Władysław Surmacki] had been arrested again and imprisoned in Pawiak.

It was Colonel 1 [Władysław Surmacki], who had directed 96 [Tadeusz Stulgiński] to me.

I put 96 [Tadeusz Stulgiński] into the Kommando of 97 [Jan Machnowski] (already a member of our organization at that time).

We were expanding our organization in two different directions at the same time, recruiting 98 [identity unknown] and 99 [identity unknown] in the Baubüro and 100 [identity unknown] and 101 [Witold Kosztowny] in the infirmary.

Professor 69 [Roman Rybarski] died at that time.

As if by two great pillars, the organization was supported by two institutions: the Krankenbau and Arbeitsdienst.

When we had to save someone of ours from Zugang transports and keep him inside under roof, or take someone from a Kommando in which he was beginning to fall into disfavour or his silhouette started to attract an eye of some scoundrel, or simply when there was a need to introduce the [next] stage of our [conspiratorial] work into some Kommando, [Here the author's hand note, but without specifying the place of insertion: *to start our work in some Kommando*], we would go to Doctor 2 [Władysław Dering]: 'Dziunek,[193] tomorrow such-and-such a number will pay you a visit, you need to admit him to the infirmary for some time.' (Such things could also be arranged with Doctor 102 [Rudolf Diem].)

Once that had taken place (and, in a Kapo's understanding, the Häftling was lost, since hardly anyone returned from the infirmary), you could go to 68 [Mieczysław Januszewski] and say: 'Give us a referral for such-and-such a number to such-and-such a Kommando' (or sometimes this could also be done by 103 [identity unknown]) – and the case was settled.

This is how we also paved the way for the escape of 25 [Stefan Bielecki] and 44 [Wincenty Gawron].

They were both great men, imprisoned here for possession of firearms; their cases had been already proven, and they would have surely been shot if they stayed in the camp. The only question was how long would it take for Grabner's [Maximilian Grabner] eye in the Political Department to take notice of their cases.

By some miracle, they were still alive.

44 [Wincenty Gawron] was painting portraits of SS men, and his case was postponed presumably exactly for that reason. But this could not go on forever.

In the manner that I have described above, in February 1942, we had 25 [Stefan Bielecki] moved to the Harmense[194] Kommando – to the fish ponds that were several kilometres from the camp, where the prisoners were working with the fish and lived there as well.

193 Dziunek is a diminutive form of the Polish name Władysław.

194 Harmense (Pol. Harmęże) – a village near Oświęcim, on the Vistula river. During the German occupation, after the creation of KL Auschwitz, between April 7 and 12, 1941, the German troops carried out

Much later, in May, 44 [Wincenty Gawron] went there and on the same day he came there with a message from me for 25 [Stefan Bielecki] not to wait, but to flee; I told both of them to 'make for the hills.' They fled from their house through the window, carrying my report to Warsaw.

In the tannery shop, the kingdom of Erik Grönke, after Konrad's [Konrad Lang] imprisonment in the bunker, the Kommando of sculptors and selected carpenters was in a crisis.

Tadek Myszkowski, the Kapo's second-in-command, had found himself in a difficult position.

The spiteful and piercing glare of a wild beast – Erik – replaced Konrad's gentle gaze.

Soon, bent on putting an end to everything that Konrad had created and calling the sculptors' workshop a 'luxury,' he closed it down, forcing us to make spoons.

He gave us a mean idiot for a Kapo, nicknamed 'Hulajnoga' ['Scooter'; identity unknown].

He told the carpenters who used to make artistic caskets to switch to wardrobes and the simplest of things.

We were making five spoons a day, then seven, and eventually – twelve spoons a day.

Meanwhile, 104 [Józef Putek], a former MP, was working there.

At that time I recruited colleagues 105 [Edward Berlin], 106 [identity unknown], 107 [identity unknown], a former soldier of my partisan group (1939) – 108 [Stanisław Dobrowolski], and Second Lieutenants 109 [identity unknown], 110 [Andrzej Gąsienica-Makowski] and 111 [identity unknown].

Out of the colleagues painting the toys that we had been making, where Colonel 62 [Jan Karcz] used to work (shortly before his imprisonment in the bunker), Officer Cadet 112 [Stanisław Jaster] entered our organization, sent to me by Captain 8 [Ferdynand Trojnicki], who had been released from the camp.

At that point, we had seized control of all the Kommandos except for one.

Finally, in February (1942), when I was 'kommandiert' and coming back to the camp rather late, having reached the block, I was told by 61 [Konstanty Piekarski] that 68 [Mieczysław Januszewski] had paid me a visit earlier on. The Funkstelle[195] needed two cartographers – draftsmen of maps, so 61 gave him his number and the number of our former Navy Commander, 113 [Franciszek Sokołowski].

mass clearances of the nearby villages – and Harmęże among them. Most houses were demolished, only a few remained. Fish, poultry and rabbit farms were built on the site, using prisoners' forced labour. The fishponds were used as dumping grounds for the ashes of the cremated Auschwitz prisoners, which were brought over in trucks. On December 8, 1941, one of first subcamps of KL Auschwitz – the Harmense subcamp – was created there and manned permanently by fifty prisoners. On July 17, 1942, the Harmense subcamp was visited by Heinrich Himmler himself.

195 Funkstelle (Ger.) – a military radio station, used for SS and KL Auschwitz garrison purposes.

After a couple of days it turned out that 113's [Franciszek Sokołowski] hand was shaking, so we moved him to the SS-potato peeling Kommando. He had enough food there, and I took his place in the Funkstelle (after having discussed it with 52 [Tadeusz Myszkowski] in the woodcarving shop).

We worked on the maps in the Funkstelle with 61 [Konstanty Piekarski] for a couple of weeks. The radio station was not only a place of work for the SS men – courses were also being run there. During this time (after having assessed the situation thanks to 77 [Zbigniew Ruszczyński]), I managed to procure vacuum tubes and other parts for which we had been hunting for a long time with no result.

From the spare parts that our Häftlings had access to, for seven months we had our own broadcasting station,[196] operated by Second Lieutenant 4 [Alfred Stössel]. We put it in a place which the SS men were very reluctant to enter.

In the fall of 1942, the big mouth of one of our colleagues forced us to dismantle the station.

We had been broadcasting programs repeated by other stations, information regarding the number of Zugangs and deaths in the camp, the conditions and the state of the prisoners.

The camp's authorities were raging, searching, tearing up floors in the workshops at the Industriehof I and in the warehouses.

Since our broadcasts were few and far between, and had no fixed schedule, finding us was no easy task.

After some time, the authorities gave up and moved their search outside the camp, to the town of Oświęcim. They thought that precise information from the camp was the result of our contact with some external organization with civilian workers serving as middle men. They started to look in the Gemeinschaftslager.[197]

196 The issue of owning a radio transmitter by the ZOW members inside KL Auschwitz remains controversial and is questioned by former inmates (often ZOW members themselves) and researchers alike. It is known for sure that the ZOW had receivers: at least one, hidden under Doctor W. Dering's 'office' floor, operated by A. Stössel, and another one, operated by J. Pilecki in the Death Block (11). It is, however, not improbable that the ZOW had used a transmitter of some kind, but for obvious reasons its existence had to be kept even more secret than owning a receiver. For W. Pilecki's account can be considered completely reliable as a source of factual material, there is no reason to question his statements, even though the existence of a prisoners' radio station cannot be verified elsewhere. Due to the close proximity of a German transceiver its signal might have been very difficult to target. Furthermore, Pilecki had minimized every risk of discovery or treason as much as possible and therefore even high-ranking officers, cooperating with him closely, might have not been informed of its existence.

197 Gemeinschaftslager (Ger.) – a camp for civilian workers, employed in the construction sites of KL Auschwitz and Buna-Werke. Several thousand employees from the Oświęcim area lived there. They were allowed to go back home for Saturday afternoons and Sundays. Many of them were active in numerous resistance organizations (HA, NOW, BCh) and, keeping contact with KL Auschwitz inmates on various occasions at work, gave them the possibility to get in touch with the Polish underground outside the camp. Often inmates used this route to pass informal correspondence to their families,

And we did indeed have contact with the civilians.

The route to reach us led through the civilian population (there were members of our organization among them as well) in Brzeszcze.

It also led through the Gemeinschaftslager, through the people who seemed to have been our superiors, but were, in fact, working for us. The route also led through Buna, through the contact with civilian workers.

This way, I also managed to 'release' a whole package of German encrypting abbreviations, known as the Verkehrsabkürzungen,[198] stolen from the Funkstelle.

We were receiving anti-typhus drugs from the outside. From the one side, Doctor 2 [Władysław Dering] was working on it, from the other – my colleague, 59 [Henryk Bartosiewicz].

59 [Henryk Bartosiewicz] was a peculiar fellow.

Everything he did, he did 'in a cheerful manner,' and always succeeded.

He gave sanctuary and food to several colleagues in his room and in the tannery until they could handle themselves again.

He would constantly take people into the tannery.

He was always going the whole hog, with courage, even with some nerve, into places where other people would give up.

Tall, broad shouldered, with a bright face and big heart.

Himmler[199] arrived once, with a commission. 59 was a Stubendienst in Block 6 (old numbering) back then, and he had been instructed how to report to Himmler, who would make anyone and everything tremble before him. When the sublime moment came and Himmler entered the room, 59 stood before him and... said nothing... and then he burst out laughing, and so did Himmler.

Maybe what saved him was the fact that there were two civilians of some kind with Himmler, and such gentle treatment of a Häftling made good publicity.

Yet another time, in the tannery, 59, seeing through a courtyard window a commission, which was visiting the workshops and heading for the door to the great hall, where all the tanners had been working, grabbed a hose and, as if cleaning by spewing water all over the room, he intentionally and completely drenched a group of German officers. Pretending to be in great awe, he instantly dropped the hose and stood to attention. And... he got away with it, again.

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bypassing the KL Auschwitz censorship office. Many civilian workers from the Gemeinschaftslager had provided KL Auschwitz inmates with food and clothes. This was also the main route of providing medicines and vaccines. Similar labour camps existed all over the Third Reich and in most of the German-occupied areas, basically wherever any large scale construction projects were undertaken – highways, roads, industrial plants, etc.

198 Verkehrsabkürzungen (Ger.) – the codes and abbreviations used in communications and telegraphy.

199 Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler visited Auschwitz in the spring of 1941 and in July 1942.

As the serried ranks of prisoners came back to the camp, drowning in the depths of grim thoughts, 59 would give commands in Polish, shouting loud and clear: raz... dwa... trzy...[200]

He certainly had his flaws, but show me a man without them!

In any case, he always had a circle of friends and allies nearby. He impressed them, and could be a leader for many.

The last discharges took place in March of 1942; several colleagues from the orchestra were released, since the commandant, as I have mentioned, liked music, and had earned the favour of the Berlin authorities: he was allowed to release several musicians from the orchestra every year.

The musicians were told: whoever played well, would be released from the camp. And so the musicians played beautifully, and the commandant would get drunk on their music.

Each year, though, those who were the least needed in the orchestra, were released.

After March, throughout the whole of 1942, there were no discharges at all – having any witnesses to the horrors of Auschwitz roaming free outside the camp was extremely undesirable, especially considering what started to take place there that year.

Finally, the first women were brought into Auschwitz, to the part separated from us by a high wall – prostitutes and criminals from German prisons. They were made the 'educational staff' for the women who were soon to be brought here, for decent women – 'political offenders.' Every day in Rajsko-Birkenau, in the gas chambers that had already been finished, the first mass gassings were taking place.

On March 16, 1942 they brought in 120 Polish women.

They were smiling at the prisoners who were entering the camp in columns.

After the interrogation, or maybe some special kind of torment, which was impossible to determine, in the evening of that day, wagons left to the crematorium, full of dismembered corpses, with cut off heads, arms, breasts, mutilated cadavers.

The old crematorium did not have the capacity to keep incinerating the corpses from both the central camp and from Rajsko (the chimney built in 1940 had cracked and collapsed from constant exposure to the fumes from burning corpses and a new one was constructed).

Because of that, the corpses had to be buried in wide trenches, dug by Kommandos of Jews.

Two new electric crematoriums were built post-haste in Rajsko-Birkenau.

The plans were made in the Baubüro.

According to colleagues from that office, each crematorium had eight slots, each of them could take two corpses at the same time.

Electrical incineration – three minutes.

200 One... two... three...

The plans were sent to Berlin.

They came back approved, with an order to have the construction finished by February 1. Later on, the deadline was postponed to March 1 – and in March, the crematoriums were ready.

The factory started to work at full capacity.

An order to destroy all the evidence of all the murders which had taken place up until that moment was received.[201] The corpses which had already been buried, had to be dug up again – and there were tens of thousands of them.

The corpses were already decomposing. The air was very heavy in the proximity of these great mass graves; some of them, the older ones, had to be dug up while wearing a gas mask.

The degree of work in this hell on earth was enormous.

Over a thousand victims from new transports were being gassed every day, and their corpses incinerated in the new crematoriums.

Cranes were employed to remove the corpses from the ditches. Giant iron claws were piercing into the mass of the dead, causing small fountains of rancid pus to shoot skyward here and there.

Chunks of dead flesh, torn by the cranes from the piles of corpses, were then manually transported onto huge pyres, constructed from layers of wood and human remains.

These pyres were set ablaze, sometimes after being liberally sprinkled with gasoline...

They continued to smolder for days and nights at a stretch, for two and a half months, spreading the stench of burnt meat and human bones around Auschwitz.

The Kommandos doing this work consisted solely of Jews and had a lifespan of two weeks. After this time, they were gassed as well, and their bodies were added to the piles of bodies that other Jews, who had just arrived at the camp, had to burn. These new Jews, forming new Kommandos, did not know that they only had two more weeks to live, and clung to some hope of survival.

Chestnut and apple trees were blooming beautifully...

It was in spring when this slavery was particularly painful.

While marching to the tannery, on the grey, dusty road, one could see the brilliant sunrise, fine pink blossoms in the orchards and on trees by the road. On the way back

201 The KL Auschwitz criminal enterprise evolved through the five years of the camp's existence. Despite the drastic regime and the organized system of abuse and murder, the earlier forms of extermination at KL Auschwitz were not as massive as those devised in the years of 1941–42 and later, when the KL Auschwitz complex became a true 'factory of death.' Burial sites of those murdered before the introduction of crematoriums could be utilized for other purposes, and – first and foremost – contained criminal evidence. Therefore, long before the situation on the front became unfavourable for the Third Reich, the German authorities had decided to remove all traces of genocide. In later years it became simply inevitable from the German point of view, because successive discoveries of mass murder sites as German forces retreated alarmed the public in the free world and confirmed the information about the atrocities of the German National Socialist system.

to the camp, one would meet young couples walking, admiring the delightful charm of the spring, or women pushing their babies in prams. These situations were bound to summon a fluttering thought, fading in and out of one's inner world, desperately looking for a way out... Or an answer to the insoluble question:

'Are we all human?'

Both those taking a stroll amidst the flowers – and those going to the gas chambers, too?

Those marching next to us with bayonets – and we, for several years now nothing but lost, forfeited souls?...

The first larger transports of women were brought into the camp and accommodated in separated blocks (numbers 1–10, new numbering).

Soon after that, transport after transport after transport, of German, Jewish and Polish women would roll in.

They were all put under the command of criminals – prostitutes and convicted felons.

Except for the Germans, all the women had their heads and bodies shaved by our male barbers.

Their agitation and desires were soon transformed into frustration, for their lust could not ever be satisfied despite the distasteful abundance of women around.

The women found themselves in the same situation as the male inmates.

They did not, however, experience the same fast methods of killing people as we did in the first year of the camp's existence, since the methods had long changed in the male camp as well. Rain, cold, the type of labour they were not used to, the lack of rest, and standing to attention interminably, were killing them just as they were killing us, though.

We saw the same groups of women every day, passing by them, each group headed in different directions to work.

A man could recognize some silhouettes, heads, little faces.

Initially staying tough, the ladies soon lost the glint in their eyes, the smile on their faces, the spring in their step.

Some of them kept smiling, but those smiles were growing more and more gloomy.

The faces turned grey, an almost bestial hunger reposed in their gaze – they were becoming Muselmänner.

More and more often we would notice that some of the familiar figures were no longer to be seen in their 'fives.'

The columns of women marching to their doom through labour, were escorted by people resembling human beings, dressed in the heroic uniforms of German soldiers, and a whole pack of dogs.

In the field, two 'heroes' – or sometimes just one – with several dogs, kept an eye on each women's 'hundred.'

The women, already feeble, could only dream of escaping.

Starting from the spring of 1942, the Krankenbau started to readily admit all the Muselmänner, who, as before, were still gathering in a group in front of the kitchen to be inspected.

Later on, nobody did that any more, everyone just went to the Krankenbau to Block 28 (new numbering), where, without further fuss, they were admitted.

Things got better in the camp – the prisoners would say to each other – they do not beat us, they admit us to the infirmary, etc.

And indeed, sometimes several people would have to share the same bed in the infirmary – but new patients were still being admitted.

Every day Klehr [Josef Klehr], an SS man, would write down the numbers of the weaker prisoners.

It was said that these patients were going to be given extra rations of food.

These noted numbers were then read out loud and the Häftlings were directed to Block 20 (new numbering).

Soon, one could see the corpses marked with these very same numbers among the corpses piling up in front of the infirmary (upon his admittance to the infirmary, each prisoner had his number written in chemical pencil across his chest, on the skin, in huge digits – this was to make sure that there would be no problem with identifying the dead when making a daily list of those who had died or were murdered).

Phenol – that was the new instrument of murder.[202]

Yes, the image of Auschwitz underwent some radical changes.

Nobody was (at least in the Stammlager) smashing heads open with a shovel, or killing people by impaling them on stakes, or by jumping on the chests of prisoners, who were made to lie down in plain sight. Now, ribs were not broken under the weight of the bodies of the depraved tormentors, who crushed prisoners under their heavy boots.

Now, silent, calm, and naked, the prisoners, having their numbers recorded in the Krankenbau by a German SS doctor, would stand in the hallway of Block 20 (new numbering), and patiently wait their turn.

One by one, they were stepping beyond the curtain, marking the entrance to the Waschraum, and sitting on a chair. Two henchmen would grab their arms from behind, push their chests forward, and an SS man called Klehr would inject the phenol with a long-needled syringe, straight into their hearts.

Intravenous injections were used at the beginning, but since the victim lived for a couple of minutes after that (which was too long), in order to save time, the system was changed – after having been injected in the heart, the prisoner was only alive for a couple of seconds.

202 Phenol – a hydroxybenzene, an antibacterial solution, used in the production of pharmaceuticals, detergents, herbicides, fungicides and pigments. A toxic and corrosive substance. During the Second World War inmates of KL Auschwitz-Birkenau, KL Dachau and KL Buchenwald were killed with phenol injections (the most notable victim being Fr. Maximilian Maria Kolbe).

The twitching half-corpse was then thrown into the toilet in the next room, and another soon-to-be-dead number entered.

Yes, this manner of murdering was much more clever, and yet much more monstrous in its workings.

Everyone standing in the hallway knew their fate very well.

Walking by them, one could see familiar faces in the row, and say: 'Cheers, Jaś,' or 'Hi there, Staś, today – you, tomorrow – maybe me.'

One did not have to be seriously ill or exhausted.

Some were only being sent here because Klehr did not like them, so their numbers were put on the list for the 'needle.' There was no way out.

The torturers were different than those in the camp's early days; but I do not know if one can refrain from calling them 'degenerates.'

Klehr was murdering with great passion using his needle; with madness in his gaze and the smile of a sadist, putting a mark on a wall after each kill.

In my time, he had reached the number of 14,000 people murdered, and every day he kept boasting about it with great satisfaction, like a hunter telling stories about his trophies.

Somewhat fewer prisoners, about 4,000, were killed by inmate Pańszczyk [Mieczysław Pańszczyk], who had volunteered to inject poison into his fellow inmates' hearts and by that he brought great disgrace on himself.

Klehr had an incident.

One time, when he had already killed everyone in the queue, he entered the toilet, as usual, in order to admire his handiwork in the form of piles of corpses and almost-dead Häftlings in agony, one such 'corpse' came to life (apparently there must have been an inaccuracy in the operation and he must have been given not enough phenol), rose, and, stumbling, as if drunk, walked over the corpses of his other inmates, approaching Klehr and saying: 'Du hast mir zu wenig gegeben – gib mir noch etwas!'[203]

Klehr's face turned pale, but he did not lose grip of himself. He charged at the prisoner, and the mask of fake sophistication of the executioner fell – Klehr took out a pistol and without firing once, since he did not want to make a noise, finished off his victim by pistol whipping him.

The Stubendiensts in the Krankenbau had to deliver daily reports on those who had died in their respective rooms.

An accident happened one time (at least I know only of this one, perhaps there were more): the Stubendienst confused the numbers and stated as dead the number which was still alive, failing to report the number who really died.

The report was subsequently sent to the main Schreibstube.

203 You haven't given me enough – give me some more!

Fearing for his position, and just for the sake of his own peace of mind, that wicked man told the patient (a Zugang, therefore not knowing what was in store) to get up and stand in the queue to Klehr.

One dead man more, one dead man less – that mattered nothing to Klehr.

This way, the Stubendienst corrected his mistake, because both – the man who died in his ward and the one who died at the stab of Klehr's needle – were already dead. The report stated the truth, as the number of the patient who had died in the infirmary was added to it.

However, we had many Stubendiensts in the infirmary who were excellent Poles.

Twice we needed to switch the numbers, and both times it was done smoothly and without harming anyone.

In the time of particularly great mortality caused by typhus, when corpses were removed from the blocks in vast numbers, we arranged unofficial admittance to the infirmary for two of our colleagues, who had serious cases in the Political Department. We saved them by writing their own numbers on dead bodies with similar numbers, and, in return, assigning to them numbers belonging to corpses – making sure that these dead men were not charged with serious political issues.

By that means we succeeded in placing them – equipped with changed personal data, surnames, first names (provided by our colleagues in the main Schreibstube), everything changed at the same time – in Birkenau straight from the infirmary.

They were completely unknown there – new numbers, Zugangs – so the camp authorities lost the trace and all things went our way.

The organization was growing larger and larger still.

I proposed to Colonel 64 [Kazimierz Heilmann] to make my colleague, Major 85 [Zygmunt Bohdanowski], the general military commander of the entire operation, just in case of armed action being needed. I had long anticipated this position for Major 85 back in 1940, in our underground work in Warsaw.

Colonel 64 gave his consent readily.

'Bohdan' [Zygmunt Bohdanowski] was familiar with the local area – many years ago he was the commander of the 5th DAK.

I decided, with Colonel 64's approval, to solve the plan of prospective action depending on specific objectives that would have to be met. We counted four of them.

The plan of seizing control of the camp (we wanted to have well-prepared troops in here for that end) had to have two variants – one for a regular day of labour, and one for the night or a day free from work, when we would be cooped up in the blocks. The reason was that back then the Kommandos were not housed together yet. There were different contacts, connections, different commanders at work, different ones in the blocks.

Because of that, we had to base our plan on outlining general objectives, and design a separate action plan for each of them.

The need arose to appoint four commanders.

I had proposed Captain 60 [Stanisław Kazuba] for one of them, for the second one – Captain 114 [Tadeusz Paolone], for the third one – Second Lieutenant 61 [Konstanty Piekarski] had suggested Lieutenant 115 [identity unknown], and for the fourth one – Captain 116 [Zygmunt Pawłowicz].

Colonel 64 [Kazimierz Heilmann] and Major 85 [Zygmunt Bohdanowski] agreed to such proposals.

Finally, thanks to the help of colleague 59 [Henryk Bartosiewicz], and only after longer talks about the urgent need to accentuate the necessity for unanimity and remaining silent even if one of us were to be put in the bunker and cross-examined by the tormentors from the Political Department, Colonel 23 [Aleksander Stawarz] and Lieutenant Colonel 24 [Karol Kumuniecki] join us and accept our authority.

My colleague 76 [Bernard Świerczyna], a first-class Polish-Silesian, was very efficient in his given line of work, providing us with underwear, uniforms, sheets and blankets from his warehouse.

He also gave employment to many of our colleagues, among them one from Warsaw – Lieutenant 117 [Eugeniusz Zaturski] – as well as 39 [Kazimierz Radwański].

Colleague 118 [identity unknown] joined our ranks, and so did Cavalry Sergeant 119 [Józef Miksa].

A colleague from my old work in Warsaw, Doctor 120 [Zygmunt Zakrzewski], came in a transport from Cracow.

A bomb factory was discovered near Cracow at that time.

Its workers were brought here and killed quickly.

Doctor 120 [Zygmunt Zakrzewski] somehow managed to survive; he was taken to another camp.

From time to time, the camp's authorities would send informers to our organization. A Volksdeutsche, pretending to be Polish but working for Grabner [Maximilian Grabner], tried to detect the existence of any covert activity, soon after coming to us (or even before making contact), he was identified by our colleagues who had contacts with SS men.

Such a gentleman had a few drops of croton oil,[204] acquired from the hospital, added to his food, which upset his stomach and soon he had such gastric problems that he would run to the Krankenbau for help.

They were already warned about the scoundrel, and, having recorded his number, they would give him a few more drops of croton oil, concealed in harmless medicine.

A few days would pass – and the delinquent would be so weak that he needed to go to the Krankenbau again, where he would be given an injection, supposedly necessary and generally harmless – if not for the fact that it was always done with a rusty needle.

204 Croton oil – one of the strongest laxatives, extracted from croton (*Croton tiglium*) seeds. Just a few drops, administered orally, may cause death by way of acute enteritis. The oil, added to food or medicine, was nearly imperceptible, but fatal nevertheless.

There were two cases, which were quite thrilling.

In the first case, one such gentleman had been admitted to the Krankenbau already. They X-rayed his lungs; the resulting photograph revealed open tuberculosis (it was, however, not his photo).

Next day, when Klehr was inspecting the rooms, the patient was pointed out to him as the one with TBC.[205]

That was enough: Klehr wrote down his number.

That man knew nothing back then, but on his way to the needle,[206] he was spewing threats and invoking his association with Grabner [Maximilian Grabner].

When Klehr heard that foul name, he turned white, flew into a rage, smashed him in the face and finished him off quickly, so there were no more Grabner-threatening, dissatisfied prisoners.

The other case was almost identical, except the man had just been brought into the camp, knew nothing, and threatened nobody with Grabner. He met his sudden and swift end when confronted with the needle.

Soon enough, however, a great commotion arose in the camp, since Grabner, who had not received a report from his informers for a long time, finally discovered that they had made their way out of the camp through the chimney quite a while earlier. On top of that, it was his own man, Klehr, who had caused their demise.

An investigation was launched in the infirmary in order to establish how it was possible for them to be done with so quickly.

Henceforth, Klehr had to provide Grabner with a list of numbers he had prepared for his needle before getting to work, and Grabner would examine the list carefully, looking for his employees.

Easter came.

I was still living in Block 25, Room 7.

In comparison with Christmas (as usual in Auschwitz), not many colleagues were still alive at that point. Typhus was a great menace to us. Everyone around me was falling ill. Only a handful of us, old colleagues, were still standing our ground.

Contracting typhus was usually tantamount to death.

But our cultivated lice were doing a fine job, too – typhus was rife in the SS men's barracks.

The physicians could barely manage this Siberian typhus – as well as the bodies of the SS men. They suffered many losses; the SS men who had contracted typhus were sent to the hospital in Katowice, but usually they died in the end anyway.

205 TBC – acronym for tuberculosis.

206 'The needle' or 'the pin,' also 'to pin sb.' – camp slang for intracardiac phenol injection, causing death. This method was invented by an SS-physician, Friedrich Karl Herman Entress.

A transport of prisoners was departing from Auschwitz to Mauthausen[207] in June.

This transport carried Colonel 64 [Kazimierz Heilmann] (although he could have weaseled his way out), who, as he said, wanted to attempt to escape on the way to Mauthausen (which did not happen).

The same transport took Officer Cadet 15 [Witold Szymkowiak], Cavalry Sergeant 119 [Józef Miksa], and Second Lieutenant 67 [Czesław Darkowski].

Before his departure, Colonel 64 [Kazimierz Heilmann] advised me to take Colonel 121 [Juliusz Gilewicz] to fill his shoes. I did that, Colonel 121 [Juliusz Gilewicz] agreed, joined us, and we worked in harmony ever since.

Colonel 122 [Teofil Dziama] had also decided to join our ranks.

At that time, Colonel 23 [Aleksander Stawarz] and the former MP 70 [Stanisław Dubois] were shot.

After having the first two electric crematoriums built in Birkenau, the construction of the next two, similar to the first ones, began.

The first ones were working without respite.

And the transports kept coming...

Some Häftlings were brought to us, to the camp, and then registered here by being given their numbers (which were already over 40,000), but the vast majority of transports went straight to Rajsko-Birkenau, where people were being turned into fumes and ash without being registered.

On average, a thousand people were burned every day at that time.[208]

Who were the people heading straight into the jaws of death, and why were they headed there?

They were Jews from France, Czechoslovakia, the Netherlands and other countries of Europe. They were traveling alone, without escort, and it was only several kilometres

207 KL Mauthausen-Gusen – the first German concentration camp founded outside the Third Reich. Set up in 1938 in Austria after its annexation by Germany (Ger. Anschluß); during the first months of the occupation the Germans sent there most of those arrested in the Polish territories, especially people from Southern Poland. After the development of KL Auschwitz, the inmates who were transferred to KL Mauthausen, often stated that conditions in that camp were incomparably worse than in KL Auschwitz. The KL Gusen subcamp of Mauthausen, where the prisoners were forced to work in quarries, had acquired a particularly sinister reputation in wartime labour camp lore.

208 The number of the burned corpses, stated by Pilecki, is an estimate, calculated on the basis of partial data, given by various members of the KL Auschwitz resistance network. Historians still discuss the factual number of people killed in KL Auschwitz, and verification of this data is difficult due to the lack of most German documents. After the war the advocates of punishing Germany for war crimes did not want precise statistics; all they wanted was to reveal the mass scale of the slaughter. Moreover, the Soviet Union wanted to hide in these numbers the victims of its own crimes (among them – the citizens of Poland and other European countries), hence the later problems with determining the number of victims from particular countries. It is likely that Dr. Franciszek Piper from the ABSM is closest to the truth, estimating the total number of the murdered and deceased in the KL Auschwitz complex at slightly over 1 million.

from Auschwitz where they were given guards[209] and shunted off on the spur track to Rajsko-Birkenau.

And why were they heading there?

I had the opportunity to speak to Jews from France a couple of times, and one time with a rarely seen transport of Polish Jews, from Białystok and Grodno.

From what they unanimously said, as far as I could make out, that they were leaving as a result of public notifications being displayed in many cities and states under the German occupation, promising that only the Jews who went to go to the Reich to work could expect to survive, so they were going to the Third Reich. Even more so, because they were being encouraged by letters from the Jews in Auschwitz (and surely from other camps as well), saying that the conditions of work were good and that they were doing well.

They had the right to take some hand luggage – only as much as they were able to carry.

So, they would take one or two suitcases, trying to put all of their wealth in them, selling their immovables and movables, and buying small, but valuable goods, like diamonds, gold, gold dollars, etc.

Trains, carrying about a thousand people every day, had their terminus at the sidetrack in Rajsko.

Ramps were put at their sides, and the wagons – unloaded onto them.

I wonder what the SS men were thinking at such moments.

There were many women and children in these carriages. Sometimes babies in their cradles. Here they were to end their lives, all together.

Like a herd of animals, led for slaughter!

For now, though, not anticipating anything, the passengers were stepping onto the ramps, as ordered.

To avoid problematic scenes, they were treated with relative politeness.

They were told to put all their food onto one pile, all the other goods – onto another one. They were told that these items would be returned to them later on. The passengers had a reason for their first anxieties: will not they lose their belongings? Will they be able to find their luggage? Will their suitcases not be switched?

Then, they were divided into groups: men and boys of over 13 years of age were in one group, and women with children (boys up to 13) were in the other. Under the false impression of having to take a shower, they were told to undress themselves in two separate groups, keeping up appearances of some privacy.

209 Many Jews from European countries, especially France, Belgium and the Netherlands, were brought to KL Auschwitz in passenger trains. The Germans had told them that they were being resettled and would be given new jobs. Such transports did not have any police or military guards. The Jews were often informed by Polish train crews about the real purpose of their journey, but usually they did not believe it, suspecting the Poles of trying to terrorize them in order to steal their belongings or even murder them. Some transports from other countries also lacked armed convoys as the Germans assumed that the Jews would not resist in any way.

The clothes, also put onto two huge piles, were allegedly going to be disinfected. The anxiety would mount: would they swap our clothes and underwear?

Then, hundreds of them – women with children separately from their menfolk – were heading into barracks which they though were the baths, but, in reality, were gas chambers. They had false windows in the façade, there was a wall inside.[210]

After the air-tight door was closed, the mass murder would begin inside.

From a little balcony, an SS man wearing a gas mask would throw gas down onto the crowd gathered below him.

Two types of gas were used: in breakable cylinders, and in discs packed in airtight cans. The discs, upon being taken out of the cans by an SS man wearing rubber gloves, turned to gas that filled the chamber and killed the gathered people rapidly.

It took several minutes. They waited ten minutes. Then the gas chambers were aired, the doors opposite the side of the ramp were opened and Kommandos composed of Jews were transporting still warm bodies on the wheelbarrows and carts to the nearby crematoriums where the corpses were quickly incinerated.

In the meantime, the next people would enter the chambers by the hundreds.

In the future, technical improvements were introduced in this slaughterhouse for humans, making the process even faster and more efficient.

Everything that was left after these people – piles of food, suitcases, clothes, underwear – was in general supposed to be burned as well, but that was true on paper only.

In practice, underwear and clothing, after being disinfected, were sent to Bekleidungskammer, shoes – to the tannery, to be put into matching pairs.

The suitcases were brought into the tannery to have them burned.

But from the piles in Birkenau and along the way and in the tannery, the SS men and Kapos eagerly picked out valuable items for themselves, saying that Auschwitz had become 'Canada.'[211]

210 In 1942, with the commencement of the plan of the mass extermination of the Jews in KL Auschwitz I, the first gas chamber started to operate, and in KL Auschwitz II-Birkenau two buildings were adapted for gas chambers. The first one, called 'the little red house' commenced work in March 1942, to be followed by 'the white house' in mid-1942. Next to them there were two barracks, where the victims would undress before entering the chamber of death. Between 1942–43 the SS men murdered tens of thousands of Jews there: men, women and children from France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Norway, Yugoslavia and Poland. In the 'red house' Gypsies were murdered as well. These gas chambers operated until the spring of 1943, when four bigger gas chambers with separate crematoriums were completed in KL Birkenau. Due to this fact, the SS stopped killing people in the old locations, the building and barracks were demolished, the ground was levelled, and the scene of some of the most abominable crimes imaginable was obliterated without a trace. The remaining buildings were blown up in January 1945, with only ruins left. However, the 'red house,' the first gas chamber in KL Auschwitz I, remained.

211 The first storage for valuables, taken away from victims, especially the Jews arriving at KL Auschwitz with much luggage, had been built in the summer of 1942, next to a factory, located between camps Auschwitz I and Auschwitz II-Birkenau, and was called 'Canada I' in the camp's slang. In December

That term gained popular acceptance and since then everything that was left after the people who had been gassed, was called 'Canada.'

And so you had 'Canada' with food, from which all kinds of delicious titbits, previously unseen, were flowing into the camp: figs, dates, lemons, oranges, chocolate, Dutch cheese, butter, sugar, cookies, etc.

As a general rule, owning anything from 'Canada' was strictly prohibited, let alone bringing this stuff into the camp.

Everyone was forever searched at the gate.

Whoever was found to have taken something from 'Canada,' was sent to the bunker and usually did not come back at all.

But the level of risk to life in Auschwitz was different from the level of risk 'on earth' – it was constantly so high, that risking one's life for whatever trinket that would bring at least some joy did not matter.

This new mentality required having some joy, even if the price for that was a huge amount of risk.

And so, everyone was constantly trying to get hold of whatever food could be sneaked out from the nearby 'Canada.'

Heading back to the Lager after a day of labour, we had to be searched at the gate – it was always a chilling experience.

There was also a 'Canada' with underwear, clothing and shoes.

Both the Kapos and the SS men were soon seen in the best kind of underwear (often brought here from the capital of France), silk shirts and pants and exquisite shoes.

Also: soap, luxurious perfume, razor blades, brushes, and cosmetics for women.

It is difficult to list in this place everything that a well-situated woman or man would want to take with them.

'To organize' something from 'Canada' became almost a universal drive, and for some of us – the main goal of the day.

The SS men would rifle through suitcases and wallets, looking for gold, money and diamonds.

Auschwitz soon became a source from which little brooks of diamonds and gold would flow.

After some time, you could see the military police setting up roadblocks, searching everyone, stopping military vehicles as well.

Neither the SS men nor the Kapos had as much cunning in searching for confiscated items as did the Häftlings, who could find, from time to time, a diamond hidden in

1943, close to one of the KL Birkenau gas chambers, a complex of thirty warehouse barracks, called 'Canada II' was erected. It served mostly as a place for storing the luggage brought by the Hungarian Jews, who had been arriving at the camp from the spring of 1944. In both 'Canadas,' about 2,000 inmates of both sexes were employed. It was considered the best job in the whole camp.

a shoe's heel, in an indentation of a suitcase or a handbag, in toothpaste, a tube of cream or shoe shine – everywhere where it was least expected.

They were only doing it covertly, when the circumstances were favourable, when it was possible to snatch some item left behind by people who had been gassed.

The SS man would also try to keep it a secret from each other, but since the Lager commandant himself would visit Erik's [Erik Grönke] tannery workshop, where a great abundance of already assorted valuables was brought in suitcases by trucks – watches, perfume, money, etc. – so he had to connive at his subordinates' misconduct, himself being afraid of an unpleasant report.[212]

Part of the Häftlings, who had access to any sort of 'Canada,' quickly attained a privileged status in the camp.

They traded in everything, but to think that there was chaos in the camp, and that gold brought any respite – that would be wrong.

Death, despite having become quite familiar to us, was still regarded as punishment, so all of this trading had to be done in secrecy and undisclosed to anyone from outside.

Jasmine was in full bloom and smelled beautifully, when a great companion, Senior Uhlan 123 [Stefan Stępień], was murdered with a shot to the back of his head.

I well remember his bravery and cheerful face.

Soon after that, one of my dearest colleagues, a courageous officer of the 13th Uhlan Regiment, Lieutenant 29 [Włodzimierz Makaliński], was killed in the same way.

He had passed on to me the location of two standards of the uhlan regiments (4. and 13.) which had been hidden in 1939.[213]

I sent yet another report to Warsaw by Officer Cadet 112 [Stanisław Jaster], who, along with three other colleagues, escaped from the camp in spectacular fashion.[214]

212 Under German law, all property of the murdered prisoners became the property of the Third Reich. Theft of such property was considered a crime against the state and severely punished. Neither a military rank nor an administrative post could protect the offender. There were even cases of camp commandants being executed.

213 These standards have not been found yet. Every trace of them disappeared on the Polish-Ukrainian border near Medyka.

214 In reality, S. Jaster's (prisoner no. 6438) participation in the escape was a matter of last minute improvisation. The true designer of the plan was Eugeniusz Bendera (prisoner no. 8502), a driver from Czortków, sentenced to death and awaiting execution at any moment. He contacted his inmate friend, Kazimierz Piechowski (no. 918), a scout from Rajkowy in the Pomerania region, who had been working with him in the garage of the SS commandant's office as a welder. Later on, Bendera enlisted one more man into the escape plan – Józef Lempart (no. 3419) from Zawadka near Wadowice, a Salesian seminarian, and when their fourth colleague refused to escape, they offered Jaster his place. They did not know that he was working for the ZOW and by escaping he was carrying out a mission of passing information gathered by Pilecki to the Polish underground authorities. On June 20, 1942 they broke into the SS warehouses, stealing uniforms and firearms, and dressed as SS men they drove out of KL Auschwitz in a car, stolen from the SS garage. Despite the general alarm that was raised, the chase

A long time ago I saw the movie *10 from Pawiak*.[215]

I dare say that the escape of four prisoners from Auschwitz, disguised as SS officers, in the best car in the camp belonging to the Lager commandant, when juxtaposed with what this hell truly was, could surely be material for some great movie.

The Hauptwache[216] presented arms.

Lagerführer Aumeier [Hans Aumeier] was riding horse-back in a hurry from Buna to the evening roll-call, when on the road he encountered a car with several officers. He saluted them politely, but was a bit surprised that the driver tried to go across the old, now defunct, level crossing.

The car turned around quickly and crossed the railway in a different spot.

He blamed vodka and the driver's weak head for drink.

Their heads were not weak – the escape was a success.

The Lagerführer only came back to Auschwitz for the roll-call itself, when everyone was already standing in well-adjusted blocks.

It was then that all hell broke loose! – they told him that four prisoners were missing from the roll-call, and what was worse – that they had escaped in the commandant's car.

This took place in the building of Blockführerstube.

Aumeier flew into a rage; he was pulling his hair out, yelling that he had bumped into them. Then, he threw his cap on the ground, and... suddenly burst out with laughter.

We had no repressions, executions, standing to attention at that time.

This is how things were since February 1942.

In 1941, football matches were played on the roll-call square; now (in 1942), since it was completely filled with buildings, that was not possible any more.

The only sport in which the representatives of the German Kapos could compete with the Polish prisoners were boxing matches.

Both in football, as well as boxing, despite severe differences in nutrition and labour, the German Kapos were always getting beaten by the Poles.

Boxing was the only occasion to punch a Kapo's face, and every Polish Häftling was very eager to do so with the utmost satisfaction, which was always met with great cheering of the audience.

We did have quite a few good boxers. From the work in the organization, I had only known 21 [Tadeusz Pietrzykowski] closer, who never lost a match and gave many scoundrels a pummeling.

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and police roadblocks, they reached the Maków Podhalański area, where they crossed the border with the General Government. Everyone except Jaster survived the war.

215 *10 from Pawiak* – a 1931 Polish movie, directed by Ryszard Ordyński, based on the reminiscences of a PPS's Combat Organization fighter about liberating ten political prisoners from the then-Tsarist prison of Pawiak on Dzielna street in Warsaw on April 24, 1906.

216 Hauptwache (Ger.) – guards at the main gate.

Prisoners who were caught trying to escape, were publicly hanged in front of all prisoners.

It was also a change for the better: no smashing to death with a rod, no impaling on a stake.

After having the prisoner spend some time in the bunker, he would be hanged on wheeled, mobile gallows near the kitchen during the evening roll-call, with all the other prisoners present in the square.

Those hanging the prisoner were to be hanged themselves in the next turn by their successors.

This was done to torture them even more.

During one such hanging, an order was read aloud: the camp commandant made a solemn promise that a Häftling who worked efficiently and behaved well, could be even released from the camp. It was, therefore, ill-advised to undertake unwise escape attempts, as that would lead, as demonstrated at that very moment, to shameful death by hanging.

The order did not really have much impact on us. Nobody believed the promise of being released. Our eyes had seen far too many murders for their owners to be set free.

Besides, an order such as this, read at a moment such as that, could only have resonated with someone with a German mentality.

With a whole panoply of humane ways of killing, which were supposed to testify to our executioners' culture, also came the blatant and open transportation of prisoners straight from the infirmary to the gas chambers.

When the infirmary accepted more prisoners than it could fit, even with three prisoners sharing one bed, and when Klehr sated his lust for killing, and yet the hospital was still overcrowded – patients would be taken by trucks to the gas chambers in Birkenau.

Initially it was done as if with 'shame,' under the cover of darkness, in the late evening, or early in the morning, so that nobody could see.

Then, once the entire camp found out about this tactic with the 'sick tourists,' the shame was gone and the 'sick tourists' were often transported during the day.

It was sometimes done during roll-calls, with reinforced guards and rifle barrels looking down at us chillingly from the watchtowers.

More than one inmate, on his way to the gas chambers, would call out to his friends, still standing in the square: 'See ya, Jasiu, take care!' waving his cap, bidding them a cheerful farewell.

Everyone in the camp was aware of their destination. Why was he so happy, then? (one would ask).

It should be assumed that some had had enough of all the horrors they had been through in the camp, so they must have thought that nothing worse could possibly await them after death.

One day colleague 41 [Stanisław Stawiszyński] approached me and said that among those who had been delivered here from Birkenau to be gunned down was Colonel 62 [Jan Karcz] (41 saw him very clearly).

The information was confirmed. Colonel 62, a brave officer, had died.

I had given these several dozen pages containing descriptions of Auschwitz to some friends of mine.

They declared that I had been repeating myself in places. That is possible – partially because of the lack of time to review everything once again, but also because this giant 'mill,' processing people into dust, or, if you will, this giant 'roller,' crushing transports of people into a bloody pulp, revolved constantly and always around the same axis, called: annihilation.

Fragments of individual scenes from the Lager, every day anew, over three hundred times a year, every day in a slightly different, but generally similar way, were showing the same side of the roller, with all its details... If you looked at it for almost a thousand days, well... If people who live their comfortable lives 'on earth' make an effort, however small it might be, while reading these pages, they will occupy their minds with one vista of Auschwitz, but from a slightly different angle.

Maybe it is for the better, that the minds of these people can in some microscopic way unite with our minds, even though our mentalities are as different as two is different from a thousand. We were forced to look a thousand times, and nobody could ever get bored.

There was no time for any English 'spleen'!

And I want to repeat myself again.

It was very difficult to look at the rows of women, exhausted by labour, shuffling in the mud.

Grey faces, muddy clothes... They walked, holding the weaker Muselmänner.

There were still some among them whose strong spirit helped to support their muscles and, by that, able to help others.

Some eyes still retained their glow, looking bravely, while marching, trying to adjust their rows.

I do not know what is more difficult to look at: the exhausted shadows coming back in the evening after each day of labour, or those women who, having an entire day of labour ahead, were venturing out into the fields still supporting their weaker friends.

Unfit for hard labour in the field faces and hands were seen. Women from the countryside, used to demanding physical work, were seen dying here alongside the 'ladies' as well.

They were all rushed to work for many kilometres every day, under the blazing sun and under torrential rain alike.

When the women's feet would sink deep into the mud, the 'heroes' would ride horses right next to them, in the company of dogs – shouting and smoking cigarettes, as cowboys would do with their herds.

We had a real Tower of Babel in the camp: the fellow inmates spoke various languages. It is because that along with the Poles, Germans, Bolsheviks, Czechs, a couple of Belgians, Yugoslavians and Bulgarians, also some Frenchmen, Dutchmen, a few Norwegians and finally Greeks, were brought here.

I remember the Frenchmen being given numbers of over 45,000.

They died very quickly – like no one else in the camp – they were not fit for work or for friendship. In poor physical shape, stupidly stubborn.

The SS men would pick out some of the young Jewish girls brought into the camp in transports and already awaiting their 'baths' in the gas chambers, saving them from death.

Being attracted by the naked body's beauty, they would pick several girls a day, the more curvaceous ones.

If the girl was still able to save herself after a few days, paying for her right to live with her beauty or some kind of clever stratagem, she could be put in the Schreibstube, the Revier, or the commandant's office.

There were not many job openings, though, and a lot of belles.

In a similar manner, the SS men also pulled out some of the young Jews, standing in line to the gas chambers.

These Jews were normally registered and put in our blocks, in various Kommandos.

This was, again, a way of handling the rest of the world's Jews.

I have already mentioned that for some time the Jews were being assigned to various indoor jobs. They would write letters to their families, saying that they were being treated well. But the frequency of their letters was equal to ours, that is, twice a month, on Sundays.

Now from time to time the SS men would visit the blocks where the Jews were living, usually on working days (we were still writing our letters on Sundays). The SS men would come in the evening, gather all the Jews, living in this block, and tell them to sit at one table.

They were giving them standardized letter templates, ordering them to write to their families, cousins, or, should a Jew have none, even friends or acquaintances.

They patiently waited until everyone was done, after that they collected the letters to have them sent to various European countries.

If a Jew happened to write that he was not doing so great, then, well... So everyone would write that they were doing great...

Once they completed their objective of writing a satisfying amount of reassuring letters to Jews in other countries, our Jews would become redundant and useless, so they were quickly disposed of by being moved to Birkenau, to the most exhausting kinds of labour, or even directly to the Strafkompanie.

In the SK, as always, people were being finished off.

There was a Jew there, commonly known as 'Dusiciel' ['the Strangler'].[217] His duty was to kill a varying number of Jews a day, ranging from a few to several. It depended on the general population of the Strafkompanie on any given day.

Jews, designated for death that day, had to face the grim fate of being killed by their co-religionist – a muscular Jew, 'the Strangler.'

Every half hour or so, more or less frequently, depending on how long the line was, 'the Strangler' would order his chosen victim to lie down on the ground, face up (should someone resist, 'the Strangler' would lie him down). He would position the shaft of a shovel on the victim's throat, and then jump onto it, pressing the entire mass of his body on the shovel's shaft. The shaft would throttle the victim's throat. 'The Strangler' would then swing from one side of the shaft to the other, while the Jew under the shovel grunted, kicked, only to die in the end.

Sometimes 'the Strangler' would tell his victim that there was nothing to fear, for 'death comes quickly enough.'

In the SK 'the Strangler' and the Jews sent to him to be killed were treated as an autonomous death sub-Kommando.[218]

The proper part of the SK, where Poles made up the majority of the personnel, lived, worked, and died separately, accepting the same death in other ways.

In the summer, rather unexpectedly, many inmates were moved to the SK.

This was the Political Department's directive as a result of their inquiry of the cases from 'earth' – that those cases had been proven.

As for my colleagues and members of the organization in the camp, Master Corporal Officer Cadet 26 [Stanisław Maringe], Lieutenant 27 [Jerzy Poraziński], Captain 124 (father) [Tadeusz Chrościcki], and 125 (son) [Tadeusz Lucjan Chrościcki] were moved to the Strafkompanie in Rajsko.

After some time I received a note (which was sent rather carelessly, although, fortunately, it was not intercepted) from Lieutenant 27 [Jerzy Poraziński], which read: 'I would like to inform you that we are bound to become nothing but puffs of smoke soon enough, so we'll try our luck tomorrow, during work... Our chances are slim. Bid farewell to my family, should you live and find yourself back "on earth" one day, and tell them that, if I am dead by then, I died fighting...'

The following day, before nightfall, I received news: upon hearing the sound signaling the end of the workday in Rajsko-Birkenau all the prisoners from the SK started running, trying to escape.

217 Some authors claim that his name was Moszko Israel (Izak) Gąska, but such a prisoner – a Jew with the camp number 22107 – according to the *Death Books* (*Sterbebücher*) lost his life in Auschwitz on February 11, 1942, whereas Pilecki mentions 'the Strangler' a few months later – in the summer.

218 Ger. Unterkommando.

Perhaps the escape was poorly prepared, or perhaps someone had betrayed them (since everyone had to be informed ahead of time), or maybe the conditions were too difficult... Whatever the reason, the SS men killed all the prisoners, about 70 of them. The German Kapos had been of great assistance in catching and killing the prisoners.[219]

Reportedly they had spared some of them.

It was said that several of them successfully escaped. Some of the prisoners apparently made it across the Vistula. The incoming news was self-contradictory, though. Three years later, however, I found out from Romek G. [identity unknown] that 125 [Tadeusz Lucjan Chrościcki] (the son of one of my colleagues in Warsaw), who was in the fleeing group, that he had somehow escaped death.

We knew that just as once in our blocks inmates were suffering of lice, in the female camp, in the blocks, separated from us there was a plague of fleas.

What was the source of this differentiation, with different types of insects having penchants for different genders – we did not understand at that time. It was not until later when it turned out that some of the Kommandos from the female Lager were working in buildings which had fleas, and they brought these fleas into the blocks.

The fleas, having found themselves in excellent conditions, soon took control of their blocks, having driven the then-incumbent white tenants[220] away.

Soon the women had been moved from our main camp to Birkenau, where they were dying in horrible conditions in wooden blocks.

There was no water and no toilets in the blocks, as well.

219 On May 27, 1942 the Germans put about 400 Polish political prisoners in the KL Birkenau penal company, most of them from the Cracow and Warsaw transports of 1941 and 1942. Every couple of days they killed several people, so the remaining ones decided not to wait passively for death and planned a group escape. It was supposed to take place on June 10, 1942, after the end-of-work signal on the construction site of a drainage ditch in KL Birkenau and before coming back to the Auschwitz I camp. However, because of heavy rain, the penal company chief, SS-Hauptscharführer Otto Moll, ordered them to finish work much earlier than usual and some of the inmates were not ready to act. About fifty people began to disperse. Several were caught and turned back by Kapos, two were stopped during their attempted escape. Those captured and those who failed to flee were turned back to KL Auschwitz, carrying 13 bodies of their shot companions. Out of 50 escapees, only nine broke free: August Kowalczyk (no. 6804), Jerzy Łachecki vel Lachecki (no. 12541), Zenon Piernikowski (no. 12544), Aleksander Buczyński (no.12754, died on July 13, 1942 in KL Auschwitz), Jan Laskowski (no. 12543), Józef Traczyk (no. 13323; died on June 10 during an escape attempt, according to the *Death Books* [*Sterbebücher*]), Lucjan Chrościcki vel Chróścicki (no. 16655), Józef Pamrow (no. 22868, probably captured later – according to the ABSM files, he died on February 23, 1943 in KL Auschwitz) and Eugeniusz Stoczewski (no. 22883; according to the ABSM files – not shot, but hanged on July 14, 1942). On June 14 the Germans also managed to capture Aleksander Buczyński and Eugeniusz Stoczewski. Both of them were taken back to camp, where they were shot a month later. The next day, 20 inmates were shot in retaliation and about 320 Poles from the penal company were exterminated in the gas chambers. This was the first group escape attempt from KL Auschwitz.

220 'White tenants' and 'black tenants' are the terms for lice and fleas. Lice are creamy white and fleas are black. Hence Pilecki names them 'blondes' and 'brunettes.'

Some of them had to sleep on the bare ground, for the wooden blocks had no floors. They were knee-deep in mud, as there was no drainage nor paving.

In the morning hundreds of them remained in the square, not having enough strength to work. Gloomy, indifferent sufferers, no longer really resembling women.

Soon they came to know the Lager authorities' 'mercy' by being sent to the gas chambers by the hundred.

Over two thousand of these beings, who used to be women once, were gassed on that occasion.

The women had left behind them an enormous legion of fleas in the now derelict blocks.

The carpenters, who had to go there and fix some damaged windows or doors before male Kommandos could be accommodated in these blocks again, were talking about their truly grisly work in this kingdom of the swarming 'brunettes.'

They were eager to jump at intruders, biting the flesh in great masses.

There was no protection against them, gathering up trousers at one's ankles or sleeves at one's wrist was no use. The carpenters just took their clothes off and put them in some safe place, and protected their naked bodies by waving their hands constantly, like an animal being put out to pasture in the field.

The fleas were jumping all over the floor, and when you looked at them against the sun, you had the impression of seeing a great number of fountains.

At that time, our camp already had lavatories and nice bathrooms in all the blocks. Sewage systems were installed everywhere. Motor pumps had been installed in the basements of three blocks, providing water to the entire camp.

Many prisoners lost their lives to have all these facilities constructed.

A Zugang, coming into the camp, was now being put in a situation very different from the one that we had once encountered, and which was finishing us off also by the lack of the option to wash ourselves or have a quiet moment in a lavatory.

Now there was a warden here, and many people envied him this position. He just sat in the lavatory, eating his soup; he was always given extra food, and even though the place was not exactly suitable for eating, he was not bothered at all. Consuming his soup in peace, he would shout at the Häftlings using the beautiful lavatory, urging them to hurry.

The women, moved from the acceptable conditions such as those in our blocks in 1942 straight into these primitive conditions of Rajsko, felt the difference profoundly.

The women were moved, but the high fence which was once built in the spring to separate the prisoners of different genders, had remained until the entire camp was deloused.

The fleas, however, managed to overcome the obstacle. Not all of them, but some, the more enterprising ones, managed to get over the fence somehow and launch an assault on our camp, finding plenty of food there.

In the meantime, in the spoon-carving workshop, the situation was such that many thousands of spoons had been produced up to that point and one could reasonably suspect that our Kommando was to be disbanded soon.

Thanks to the influence of my friends, 111 [identity unknown], 19 [Tadeusz Słowiaczek], and 52 [Tadeusz Myszkowski], a place was prepared for me in the carpentry workshop among the carpenters who had once been chosen by Konrad [Konrad Lang].

For the time being I was working with master carpenter 111 [identity unknown] in one workshop, but when 111 [identity unknown] and 127 [identity unknown] caught typhus, I was the only one left in the workshop. I had to pretend to be an able carpenter, responsible for the workshop.

The Kapo was new, having taken his position as the person responsible for the carpenters in the tannery after the death from typhus of the madman 'Hulajnoga' ['Scooter'; identity unknown].

My position was difficult. I was given designs for ordered pieces of furniture, which I had to make myself from wood.

I had only been working alone for 12 days, but I must confess it was extremely nerve-wracking.

I was no professional, and I did not want to get into the Kapo's bad books.

Anyway, I was making a wardrobe, and even though when it came to finishing it, I had the help of 92 [Wacław Weszke], an excellent master craftsman, still – for these twelve long days I managed to pretend to be a master carpenter in front of the capricious, but foolish Kapo.

I was no novice in carpentry, after all (guile had to make up for my lack in advanced skills), I greeted the arrival of 92 [Wacław Weszke] into my workshop (which he had chosen on purpose) with genuine happiness.

Since then I had more time to set up our 'network' there, and make plans for the organization's next moves, meeting my colleagues in the tannery shop or under the pretenses of having to choose the correct resource from the shed where the planks were stored, conferring with 50 [Jan Mielcarek] and 106 [identity unknown] on the tall pile of new straw-filled mattresses. Through the gaps in the roof we could see the movements of Erik [Erik Grönke] or the commandant, as if from an excellent vantage point.

Typhus was still bothering us greatly, and the SS men's barracks had been deloused.

In our part of the camp every block had sick people.

In our room (no. 7, Block 25), every day someone new went to the infirmary, having caught typhus.

We already had half as many beds as we needed.

Officer Cadet 94 [identity unknown] was the first one from our group to catch the disease, followed by Corporal 91 [Stanisław Polkowski], then 71 [Jan Mosdorf], then 73 [Piotr Kownacki], 95 [identity unknown], 111 [identity unknown] (who shared a bed

with me), 93 [identity unknown], then – almost everyone else (it is difficult to remember the order, in which people went to the hospital).

Not many of them returned; instead, they were heaped onto the wagonloads of corpses heading for the crematorium.

Every day one could see several familiar faces among the corpses of Häftlings being cast onto the wagon like wooden logs.

I was somehow resisting the disease at that time.

Doctor 2 [Władysław Dering] showed up and offered to give me an anti-typhus shot; he got the vaccine secretly from 'outside' the camp.[221] I had to think what to do, because had I already been bitten by a typhus 'blonde' (I presumed so, as I had been sleeping with 111 [identity unknown], who was already sick, and it usually took over a dozen days for the first symptoms of fever to manifest themselves), taking the vaccine could mean death.

As I suspected, I was not infected. I decided in favour of taking the shot.

Out of our team, standing at the front of the block at the roll-calls, out of 30 lads, only seven remained, maybe eight. The rest died of typhus.

From our colleagues, the following passed away: the brave 'Wernyhora' – 50 [Jan Mielcarek], and also 53 [Józef Chramiec-Chramiosek], 54 [Stefan Gaik], 58 [Andrzej Marduła], 71 [Jan Mosdorf], 73 [Piotr Kownacki], 91 [Stanisław Polkowski], 94 [identity unknown], 126 [Tadeusz Czechowski], and my late lamented friend 30 [Eugeniusz Trebling].

How can I say about one person, that he is my 'late lamented' colleague, if I grieved over all of them?

I went to great lengths to try to save Captain 30 [Eugeniusz Trebling]. He was always cheerful, supporting others with his humour and a bowl of extra food; many people had been surviving by his side.

Just before he contracted typhus, his blood got infected, but Doctor 2 [Władysław Dering] performed surgery on Captain 30's hand, removing the threat.

A week later, however, Captain 30 caught typhus. Having gone to Block 28, he spent several days there, asking colleagues, as a good host, to eat all the treats that he was given from 'Canada.' He would say in a loud voice: 'God has given it, good people have brought it, so eat it!'

He had a high fever, and yet kept talking with humour, saying that he had to live, that he was going to leave Auschwitz even if he had to carry his own head under his arm, and that since he had already been through the horror of Hamburg, he was going to see his Jasia no matter what. He kept talking like this. In the end he got meningitis.

They moved him to Block 20. He was given (medical) punctures. He was well-cared for, but to no avail.

221 The secret supply of anti-typhus vaccines was one of the greatest achievements of the Polish underground which helped many KL Auschwitz prisoners survive.

He left Auschwitz in the form of smoke coming out of the chimney.

I have an instruction: 'Isjago' from him. If anyone understands it – please, contact me.

We had our losses (summer of 1942), true, but there were new incoming recruits as well.

Several new colleagues joined our organization, even though some of them had been in the camp for a long time at that point: 128 [identity unknown], 129 [Leon Kukiełka], 130 [identity unknown], 131 [identity unknown], 132 [identity unknown], 133 [identity unknown], 134 [identity unknown], 135 [identity unknown], 136 [identity unknown], 137 [identity unknown], 138 [Bronisław Motyka], 139 [identity unknown], 140 [identity unknown], 141 [identity unknown], 142 [identity unknown], 143 [identity unknown] and 144 [identity unknown].

I had been working for a couple of weeks in the block, not going to the carpentry workshop at all, reaping the benefits of block elder 80's [Alfred Włodarczyk] friendly attitude towards me. He had rescued me in difficult moments several times before already.

He gave me some 'artistic' work to do in the block, explaining to the authorities that he needed proper inscriptions on the covers of the block's books.

I was painting typical camp scenes: 'giving out extra soup to the entitled ones,' 'evening feet inspection, combined with beating on the stool.'

From pieces of coloured paper I managed to make some kind of a paper mosaic.

The result was quite nice. Even when Palitzsch came to the block a month later, when I was not there any longer, he instructed all the other pictures to be destroyed, shattering the glass and breaking the frames, but he requested my mosaic to be given to him.

A new round of delousing at the camp had started.

One day, somewhere between August 20 and 25, 1942, just like every other day at this time, I did not go to work and stayed in the camp, painting in the block. Suddenly I spotted several trucks with SS-troops of considerable strength approaching the typhus block (Block 20, according to the new numbering).

The SS men quickly surrounded the block.

I must confess that observing this scene made my heart first turn ice cold, then burning hot. I thought that the reason for this invasion was different, but what I actually witnessed a minute later was equally dreadful.

The patients were dragged out and quickly loaded into the trucks.

It did not matter whether they were sick and unconscious, or sick a month ago, but now almost healthy convalescents in quarantine. All of them were packed into the trucks and taken in several rounds into the gas chambers.

Then everyone from Block 20 was taken away, even those who were healthy and only prolonged their stay here to have some more rest. Apart of the Pflegers who were recognized by their uniforms, as for many months the infirmary staff have been wearing uniforms quite different from ours. These uniforms were made out of white canvas with a vertical red stripe painted on the back and the same stripes painted on their trousers.

Doctor 2 [Władysław Dering] saved many Poles then by ordering them to change, a few at the time, into the white uniforms of the Pflegers, introducing them to the commission of SS doctors as those working with patients.

Finally it was pointed out to him that there were slightly too many of these alleged nurses. But then, since the real ones, whom the SS men already knew, came out at the end of the group, somehow they got away with it.

I saw a scene when an SS man threw two little prisoners into a truck. One eight-year-old boy kneeled before him on the ground and begged to be left alone. The SS man kicked him in the stomach and threw him into the truck like a puppy.

They were all finished off that day in the gas chambers at Rajsko.

After that they have been burning for two days in the crematorium and more bodies of the prisoners have been added continuously.

For Block 20 was by no means the last one. After 20, Block 28 had to give up its prisoners, then – the wooden barrack, which had been built between Blocks 27 and 28 for the time of the typhus epidemic. And then they set about choosing people from the Kommandos.

The SS commission was walking from block to block, where the Kommandos lived, taking to the gas chambers everyone, who had swollen legs, any bodily injuries or seemed like a poor worker.

Then they dealt with the Schonungsblock and all the Muselmänner in the camp, whose number was not as great at that time because of the supplies from 'Canada.'

Those, however, who were Muselmänner at that time, were swiftly taken to the gas chamber, to be 'deloused.' From the gas chamber to the crematorium, from the crematorium – they were leaving via the chimney in the form of smoke.

This new expression – 'delousing of life' – had gained popularity in the camp as well.

The piles of clothing and underwear that had been left by those, who were brought to the camp from the free world only to lose their lives in the gas chambers, were also packed and hung in the separate gas chambers to be disinfected, for proper delousing. Because of that, the term 'delousing' took the meaning of exposing an item to the effects of the gas, even if the said 'item' was a Häftling.

A couple of days later, on August 30, I fell ill with fever and joint pain; my calves also hurt upon being pressed. These were almost all symptoms of typhus, the only thing missing was the headache – but I never had a headache in my entire life, so I did not know this feeling at all. I assume I inherited it from my father, who used to say many a time with genuine surprise: 'It must be a stupid head indeed to hurt!'

But because both the physicians and my colleagues insisted that a headache is a must with typhus, I waited a couple of days.

Fortunately enough, thanks to the block elder 80's [Alfred Włodarczyk] permission to stay at the block, I did not go to work.

But my fever shot up to over 39 degrees Celsius at this point and it was pretty difficult for me to stand straight at the roll-calls.

However, I did not want to go to the Krankenbau, because there was no certainty that the trucks would not come again to take everyone to the gas chambers. The sickness, in the best case scenario, with quarantine included, would take no less than two months.

That was my second severe sickness in Auschwitz.

Apart from that, I had a slightly raised temperature a couple of times due to a cold; had I been free, it would perhaps have evolved into a flu or something like that. Here, I was fighting off the sickness with my willpower – or, perhaps, nervous tension, while at work.

Now, however, I knew that day by day, especially in the evening, I would not be able to get over the sickness, for I had barely any strength left to walk.

I do not know what would happen if it was not for the delousing of the camp – just like the first time, but in a different manner.

I was already exhausted with the fever, which had lasted for days.

All the other blocks had been deloused already, and it was our block's turn now.

Even though my fever had almost reached 40 degrees Celsius in the evening, I prepared myself for the delousing, helping the Stubendienst, my colleague 111 [identity unknown], who had fortunately recovered from typhus. When the whole block went to be deloused, the only people left in the building were those responsible for moving the block's inventory. In half an hour everyone had to leave to be deloused anyway, then because of my great enfeeblement, I did not feel like doing that (remembering how difficult it was for me to survive the delousing when I had fever that other time).

There was one way to avoid that – I had to go to the infirmary, but then again, they could snatch me and send into the gas chambers from there.

I hesitated, but Doctor 2 [Władysław Dering] arrived and seeing that my temperature was high, he had all the paperwork filled out for me outside official hours, and put me in Block 28 (in the infirmary), pulling me out of Block 25 just at the very last minute before the roll-call.

My fever had reached 41 degrees Celsius at this point, and I was incredibly weak – that was, indeed, typhus.

The lack of headache had the advantage of allowing me to stay conscious and alert all the time.

Perhaps the course of my illness was less severe due to having been vaccinated.

During my first night in Block 28, the first air raid took place – several airplanes cast light onto the camp and dropped two bombs onto Rajsko.[222]

222 There is no information about air raids in the Auschwitz area at that time. It must have been an isolated incident and not aimed specifically at the camp. Only from spring 1944 did the Allied Air Forces, using

It is possible that they were trying to hit the crematorium, but the raid was not really serious.

It had a wonderful effect on us. We saw the chaos among the SS men. The two Posts, perched on the nearest watchtowers, abandoned their positions. They were running along the wires like they had lost their heads.

The SS men ran from the barracks to our camp in a chaotic horde, looking one for another.

Unfortunately, it was a very weak raid, and the only one that aimed at Auschwitz, at least during my time there.

My stay at Block 28 lasted two days and was called 'observation time.'

My dear colleague 100 [identity unknown] cared for me with a lot of kindness, always staying at my side, eager to bring me lemon or sugar.

Thanks to him, I still had contact with my colleagues and could influence the further activity of our organization.

My rash must have been visible, though, because they had to move me to Block 20, where grim events had taken place weeks earlier.

While I was still in Block 28, Doctor 2 [Władysław Dering] gave me an injection of some kind, which lowered my fever from 40 degrees Celsius to just a tiny bit over 37.

When he appeared the next day, I jokingly said that if this next injection was going to bring my temperature down from 37 to 34, I would surely die, so I cannot agree to take it.

My body was always very responsive to all treatments and medicines.

Block 20, after the recent removal and gassing of all its ill inhabitants, was already full again.

Every day the bodies of those who had died of typhus were thrown onto the trucks like logs and taken away.

I do not know if I have mentioned that already, but all the bodies that were taken to the crematorium were naked, regardless of how they died, be it typhus, some other disease, Klehr's needle, or Palitzsch's gunshot.

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the bases in southern Italy, regularly raid industrial sites and installations in Silesia, e.g. the Trzebinia refinery, and – as time went on – targeted petrochemical installations of the IG-Farben Buna-Werke synthetic rubber factory, built in Dwory-Monowice, ca. 7 km from KL Auschwitz. The factory was bombed for the first time in May 1943, so it was after Pilecki's escape. The first major air raid took place in August 1944, when 127 American B-17 bombers dropped 1336 bombs on the IG-Farben site. The successive attacks damaged the factory and prevented the Germans from going into wide-scale production. Some bombs missed their target and exploded in the camp areas, causing fatalities among the prisoners and SS men alike. Information about the mass extermination in KL Auschwitz, passed on to the West, was followed by pleas for bombing the gas chambers, crematoriums and the railroads leading to the camp. These pleas were made by various individuals and organizations, mostly Jewish, and addressed mainly to the US government – but to no avail. The US Department of War believed that military force and money should not be used for non-military purposes. Such an action would have required the commitment of considerable air force resources, indispensable on the front. It was considered that only a quick Allied victory, accomplished by all means available would help the camp prisoners. The British Air Ministry shared this opinion.

Here, in the typhus block, corpses were removed in the morning, but just before noon, and especially in the evening, new dead bodies were piling up in the hallways, blue-hued, naked, lying on top of each other, resembling meat stalls at the market.

My first encounter with a quite quarrelsome colleague, the local physician, was not exactly cordial, but just a few hours later I felt a surge of friendliness towards him. He was selfless and cared only about his patients, looking after everyone, running around, washing them, feeding them, giving them the necessary shots of medicine; to me, he was Doctor 145 [identity unknown].

The second courageous doctor here was Captain Doctor 146 [Henryk Suchnicki], a kind man full of energy.

Next to that, I was still under 100's [identity unknown] care through his colleague 101 [Witold Kosztowny], who had access to this place as a nurse, with a syringe or taking blood samples for analyses.

Amongst the staff of this block was a member of our organization, my young friend, Edek 57 [Edward Ciesielski], who worked as the warehouseman. Thanks to him, once I felt better, I had access to additional rations of food, lard, and sugar.

A pillow and a blanket from 'Canada' were sent to me by Kazio 39 [Kazimierz Radwański], with the consent of 76 [Bernard Świerczyna].

Before the crisis passed in this great semi-mortuary people were constantly grunting and groaning in agony, dying, getting out of bed and falling on the floor, throwing blankets, someone was talking to his dearest mother in a fevered delusion, yelling at somebody, refusing to eat or requesting water, in high fever one was trying to jump out of the window, one was arguing with the doctor or asking him for something.

I was lying, pondering the fact of still having the fortitude to understand it all and accepting it calmly, and that from all those experiences one could fall ill, and at the same time thinking that just witnessing these sensations one could develop a distaste for the journey of a human being, and, in a way, pity the imperfection of the human body, detest the very condition of being ill.

Because of all that, an immense desire to leave this place and regain my strength started to grow in me.

Once the crisis had ended, and I had the impression of being strong enough to go down the stairs to the lavatory (before that, one had to use a rather primitive one, for the patients in the room), it turned out that I was still so weak that I had to cling to the wall.

It seemed weird that I lacked enough strength not only to ascend, but also to descend the stairs.

My vitality was coming back to me, seemingly, very slowly.

During my time of weakness, in case of plans to take people to the gas chambers, my colleagues were ready to carry and hide me somewhere in the attic.

A couple of times Klehr with the gaze of a basilisk had traversed the rooms, picking candidates 'for the needle.'

Here I meet and recruit to our work: 118 [identity unknown], 146 [Henryk Suchnicki], 147 [identity unknown], 148 [identity unknown] and 149 [identity unknown].

'Doctor' 145 [identity unknown] was doing his best, the position was perfect for him, there was absolutely no need to set up or change anything here. I knew he was worthy of my trust.

Doctor 2 [Władysław Dering] would come here from time to time, bringing me lemons and tomatoes, always procured in some illegal manner.

My recovery was actually relatively quick. During my quarantine I spent time in the courtyard, talking to my colleagues through the bars, which separated the 'pestilent' block.

My colleague 76 [Bernard Świerczyna] would bring me news about a new 'branch' of the organization which he had just created, 61 [Konstanty Piekarski] – about the project of fleeing the camp through the tunnel under Block 28, which 4 [Alfred Stössel] had initiated and started with the help of 129 [Leon Kukiełka] and 130 [identity unknown]; colleague 59 [Henryk Bartosiewicz] came to me with a proposition to merge and divide anew all of our forces, and also to appoint a permanent commander for each individual group, which was also Colonel 121's [Juliusz Gilewicz] wish (as there had been some changes after the last delousing).

I devised a plan of merging and dividing the organization in the following way:

As the base of the plan, I chose the blocks. Because after the general delousing the camp authorities sorted the Häftlings in the blocks by Kommandos, there was no longer any need to duplicate the work by preparing separate plans of seizing control of the camp for two situations: during work, and while staying at the blocks.

Each block was a platoon, which meant that the members of the organization, living in a building, regardless of the original structure, formed the skeleton of that block's platoon. Each platoon could potentially greatly increase in size, depending on how many other inmates the colleagues would be able to inspire at the moment of the 'explosion,' while at the same time neutralizing the pro-German faction.

Block 'X' – the inmates from the lower floor, and Block 'Xa' – the inmates from the upper floor, put together, would form a two-platoon company housed in one building, with the company's commander on the spot.

Several blocks-buildings would form a battalion.

I divided the whole into four battalions, and proposed to make Major 85 [Zygmunt Bohdanowski] – as it was till that point anyway – the commander of the entire military action.

To command the 1st Battalion: Major 150 [Edward Gött-Getyński] (Blocks 15, 17, 18).

To command the 2nd Battalion: Captain 60 [Stanisław Kazuba] (Blocks 16, 22, 23, 24).

To command the 3rd Battalion: Captain 114 [Tadeusz Paolone] (Blocks 19, 25, the kitchen, and the infirmary personnel from Blocks 20, 21, 28).

To command the 4th Battalion: Captain 116 [Zygmunt Pawłowicz] (Blocks 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10).

I refrained from organizing the rest of the blocks due to technical reasons, as the remaining ones were only being freshly put to use, like Blocks 1 and 2, or used as warehouses, like 3, 26, and 27, or undergoing the final phases of construction, like 12, 13, 14, or the special block: 11.

Colonel 121 [Juliusz Gilewicz] had no objections to this plan and approved it in this shape.

A couple of days later I left the infirmary and returned to the camp. My quarantine was shortened thanks to friendly physicians, who forged the paperwork by stating an earlier date of my admittance than in reality.

It was the beginning of October 1942.

I went to work among five 'hundreds,' as always – to the tannery, but this time I did not join the Kommando of carpenters, as I used to before my illness, but the Kommando of tanners (the real ones), thanks to my colleague 59 [Henryk Bartosiewicz], who introduced me to the new Kapo of the tannery, 'Mateczka' ['Mommy'; Fritz Biessgen], as a tanner who had been sick but now returned to work.

During the first period of my stay in the tannery, I worked with Colonel 121 [Juliusz Gilewicz], taking care of wet white tanning, then, thanks to the friendly attitude of 59 [Henryk Bartosiewicz] and 61 [Konstanty Piekarski], I was moved to the drying chamber, which was warm (thanks to a giant iron furnace), and stayed there for four months, pretending to be a tanner, learning the tricks of this new trade.

The appearance of the giant courtyard of the tannery did not change too much.

Every day, several trucks would bring items left behind by the people who had been gassed, in order to have them burned in the tannery's great hearth. Shoes were not burned.

A huge number of shoes of all kinds, tan and black, for men and women, for children, of various sizes, was dumped from the trucks every day, forming great pyramids.

A separate Kommando was formed, tasked with pairing these shoes. Someone else was responsible for burning suitcases, wallets, women's handbags, prams, and various toys.

Woollen yarn in all colours that many women brought with them was not burned, but tucked away.[223] It was used for knitting sweaters.

The tannery's giant furnace, equipped with an industrial chimney, absorbed it all – the fuel was for free, always being brought almost to the very fireplace itself.

Those, who were doing the burning, had a chance to rummage through the suitcases.

From time to time, someone from the tannery could get to the pile of suitcases before their delivery to the furnace. Snatching anything from the courtyard was difficult, it was easy to get spotted by Erik [Grönke] or Walter [identity unknown].

223 Here: hidden.

Again, I saw, pushed by the urge of owning gold or precious stones, suitcases, handbags and briefcases that were ripped apart, and shoes, cream and soap that were checked.

Dollars were the only paper money which were taken.

The whole courtyard was full of banknotes, whirling in the wind like fallen autumn leaves – usually French francs. Nobody wanted to hold on to them, especially bearing in mind the prospect of being searched at the gate. We thought them to be completely useless. They were only good to be used in the lavatory.

The tanners – fellow inmates, 'the camp aristocracy' – out of all the Kommandos for some time used to take fifty thousand franks whenever one wanted to go to the lavatory.

It was a running joke at that time, saying that if one were to take less, others would think him to be a miser.

Writing about myself is most difficult.

To an unexpected extent, even for me, I walked indifferently past gold and gems.

Now, as I write these words, safely back 'on earth,' I am trying to figure out: why?

They were nobody's property at that time, the Häftlings were saying to themselves. Perhaps I almost agreed with this explanation at that time.

But first and foremost, I could not get rid of my aversion to things that I had seen as stained with blood, besides, even if I forced myself, there was really no point in doing that. In some bizarre way, those things had long lost their value for me.

Even more! At that time, I was going through a period, maybe due to having experienced so much, or maybe due to my faith's demands (for I have always been a man of faith) of valuing my own contentment much higher than some stone...

If I would force myself to take gold or diamonds, it would have felt as if I plunged from those heights I climbed with so much effort.

The first and a major obstacle to looking for gold was the tangible conviction, that by doing so I would hurt myself in some way.

This is what I was feeling then, and who knows – maybe if I were to face a similar situation now, I would do the same thing again?

My fellow inmates had various attitudes towards that.

To me, money was of no use at that time, but when much later I wanted to leave the camp and it would have been handy to have some, I asked one prisoner (his name was Romek [identity unknown]) to escape with me and asked, if he had any money, just in case. He said that he would tell me the next day, for he had to count it. The next day he told me that he had over a kilogram of gold.

However, it just so happened that I did not leave the camp with him, but with colleagues who did not have a single penny on them. But that is a thing of the future – for

the time being, I had no intention of leaving the camp, still waiting for the most interesting moment in the camp at which all work was aimed.

For a couple of months now we could have taken over the camp almost every day.

We were waiting for the order, though, understanding that even though it would surely be a spectacular and unexpected 'firework' for Poland and the rest of the world, we could not let ourselves be guided by nothing but our own ambition, just because Mr. X or Mr. Y had accomplished something like that before. Such risk must not be taken without orders from the High Command itself.[224]

But every day we were itching to do something.

However, we understood very well that to act without orders would simply confirm our centuries-old national flaws. An explosion of ambition, private desires that could potentially lead to a tragic aftermath in the whole of Silesia.

Especially since it was still difficult at that time to foresee how things would go.

As the organization, we were still hoping strongly to be able to play the role in the action, coordinated with the rest of the operation.

This was the concept behind all of our reports, addressed directly to the Commander-in-Chief himself.[225]

Out of caution, fearing that someone out there might make a false move, we wanted to avoid any middle-men when delivering our reports.

We were not sure how deeply the German intelligence had infiltrated our networks; perhaps they had even reached those at the higher levels of the entire Polish Underground Movement.

There was always a possibility, had they realized what was afoot, that they would surely have had all the most resourceful individuals here blown to pieces.

It was then when we heard about the pacification of the Lublin region.[226]

First, among the things to be burned, among the poorest and somewhat ruined shoes, one day peasants' shoes, large and small, and later on – Polish peasants' clothing, prayer books in Polish, and simple, rustic rosaries were found.[227]

224 Pilecki meant orders of the HA HQ, as the supreme command and coordinators of all military operations in occupied Poland. The HA High Command represented the Polish government in the country and for loyal soldiers it would have been unacceptable to start military action – especially such a serious one – without specific orders.

225 To the HA's Commander-in-Chief. The report was addressed directly to the C-in-C due to its importance and the deep conviction that only a direct account of what was happening in KL Auschwitz would force the underground to act. Members of the KL Auschwitz resistance organization had reasons to suspect that reports passed by traditional channels get lost at the lower levels of official HA hierarchy.

226 The pacification of the Lublin region (here rather: the forcible depopulation of the Zamojszczyzna region of the Lublin province – Ger. Aktion Zamość) resulted in numerous transports of its inhabitants to KL Auschwitz-Birkenau. Many of them were murdered straight away, with those spared being left to replenish the workforce.

227 Within the frames of the 'General Plan for the East' (Ger. Generalplan-Ost) the Germans planned to accommodate German colonists and colonists of German origin in the areas east of the Reich's

A murmur was heard among our 'fives.' People began to form groups. One could see cold determination in their eyes. Fists clenched impatiently...

Those were the belongings of our Polish families, exterminated in the gas chambers of Birkenau.

Following the pacification of the Lublin region (as we were told by our colleagues from Rajsko), the populations of several Polish villages were brought here to be gassed.

This is how things are in this world, and there is not much we can do about it: whenever items belonging to people brought here from abroad were burned – although dealing with that was always a monstrous experience for us, as well as in the tannery, where shoes and suitcases for several months have constituted a sinister echo of the committed crimes – still, now, when we were seeing tiny shoes or a ladies' blouse, and among all that, a rosary, our hearts were beating faster with the desire for revenge.

Young boys, aged 10 to 14 or 15, were picked from these transports from Lublin. They were separated from the rest and released into the camp.

We thought that they were going to survive somehow. One day, when news about some incoming inspection had reached the camp, in order to avoid explaining the presence of prisoners so young (and maybe for some other reasons as well), the camp authorities had them all murdered with phenol injections in Block 20.

We saw a great number of corpse heaps in the camp, but this particular pile of young bodies, about two hundred of them, affected everyone, even long-serving prisoners like us, making our hearts race...

Several new members joined our organization in the tannery: 151 [identity unknown], 152 [identity unknown], 153 [identity unknown], 154 [identity unknown] and 155 [identity unknown].

At the same time we created in our organization a new planning and advisory unit, joined by Colonels 24 [Karol Kumuniecki], 122 [Teofil Dziama] and 156 [Stanisław Wierzbicki].

Being in Auschwitz, I often witnessed one or another colleague receiving letters from home in which his mother, father, or wife would beg him to sign the Volksliste.[228] It was usually the case with prisoners with German-sounding surnames, or who had a mother whose maiden name had been German, or who had some German relatives, and so on.

eastern borders of September 1939. The plan was aimed at resettling and 'Germanizing' the Eastern European territories, inhabited by several millions of people. One of the plan's elements was the mass displacement and extermination of the inhabitants of the Zamość region in order to prepare it for the settlement of the 'Volga Germans' from Russia. Because of the German military failures on both fronts, the plan was not executed – and the Zamość region exterminations only served as a test of the envisaged general assumptions and methods of implementation.

228 Deutsche Volksliste, DVL (Ger.) – the German People's List (see footnotes 88 and 240).

Later on, the authorities made the whole process easier: they did not require any German – sounding surnames anymore, nothing but a will to erase the Polish conscience – unless there were higher reasons.

How often hearty lads, who were seen in this hell were not bothered by their foreign-sounding names and did not see it as an obstacle of being worthy of calling themselves Poles.

They would say, with fondness: 'Yes, I love my mother, wife or father, but sign the list, I will not! I will perish here, that much I know... The wife is writing: my beloved Jaś, sign it... No! Hell no! Nobody will ever spit on my Polish identity. I might be young – but unbreakable!'

Oh, how many such men died in Auschwitz...

... and had a most fine death, having stood their ground on the redoubt of the Polish conscience, to the end...

Would all countrymen, who bear a Polish name in freedom, fight for their Polishness?

An apparatus of a sort, capable of inspecting one's Polish conscience, would be of great help. From the beginning of the war, through that time the conscience of different people took different directions.

In the second half of October, my colleague (it was 41 [Stanisław Stawiszyński] who had informed me about it) noticed that two of the most infamous Kapos (not only infamous for killing inmates, but also for being informants of the Political Department and its chief, Grabner [Maximilian Grabner]) were wandering around the camp as if looking for someone, writing down the numbers of some Häftlings.

One day in the afternoon, when I was rushing down the main road, on my way from Block 22 to see my colleagues in the vicinity of the infirmary, I encountered these two Kapos in front of Block 16.

One of them was holding a notepad, the second one approached me with a fake smile and asked: 'Wo läufst du?'[229] just to say anything, very clearly pointing out my number to the other one, and then walked away immediately. The other man looked at me, as if in hesitation. Since they both left, I continued on my way, thinking the whole situation to be a mistake of some kind.

During the morning roll-call on October 28, 1942, the Schreibers[230] in various blocks started to call out the numbers of prisoners, saying that these inmates had to go to the Erkennungsdienst to have their photos checked.

Two hundred and forty-something Häftlings were called out altogether – only Poles (as we later determined), mostly from Lublin; about a quarter of them had nothing to do with the Lublin transports. They were led for the time being to Block 3. It seemed

229 Where are you running?

230 Schreiber (Ger.) – a writer.

suspicious to us: why not straight to Block 26 which housed the Erkennungsdienst, the stated reason of this call?

The bell for Arbeitskommando tolled for us, and we then left the camp as usual, each Kommando to its designated destination to work.

While working, the tension in all the Kommandos was great indeed – we did not know whether those called out were in danger or not.

Later on a rumour came from somewhere that they were going to be gunned down. Two hundred and forty boys – mainly from Lublin, later joined by men, picked rather at random by Grabner's [Maximilian Grabner] lapdogs, who were on the lookout for the numbers of those, whose vitality and energy were visible.

What was steering them? We never found out. Perhaps it was only 'the whim' of these two scoundrels.

However, it was called the 'pacification of the Lublin region,'[231] which resonated in the camp with such enormous strength.

Brave 41 [Stanisław Stawiszyński] (from Warsaw), the first one to have reported certain numbers being recorded, was to be found among them.

For the time being we did not know whether they were really going to be shot – we thought it was maybe only a rumour.

So many inmates had never been shot at the same time until then. The mask of apparent passivity was wearing us out, as we wanted to act. We, at the top of the organization, had been almost biting our nails (getting ready for the showdown – just in case).

If among them riot and resistance burst out, all of us would have joined the action.

A rebellion would have ignited the spirit among our people – that would have been vis maior[232] that would have allowed us to act.

On the way to the camp our five 'hundreds' of healthy indoor workers were passing the Baubüro under which there was a spare armory.

Then this was not difficult – the boys were afire. Everyone was always ready for death, but before that we would pay back our torturers bloodily.

There were just nine measly watchtowers and the Hauptwache. Only 12 Gemeines[233] were escorting us. They were wearing their rifles slung over their shoulders and taking them in their hands just before the camp out of fear of their superiors, because they had become accustomed to our calmness.

If only, by some miracle, one word arrived from Warsaw: 'Proceed!' – today... to rescue them...

231 This action coincided with the German extermination of the Zamość region, hence the KL Auschwitz prisoners named it – by analogy – the 'pacification of the Lublin region.' This was the biggest mass execution in KL Auschwitz. It took place on October 28, 1942. In total, over 280 prisoners were murdered, mostly from transports from the Lublin and Radom areas.

232 Vis maior (Lat.) – a higher force, act of God.

233 Gemeine (Ger.) – low-rank soldier, private.

Yes... This was a daydream...

Did anyone know? Was anyone thinking about that? From a distance, one could perhaps say that it was just a fragment of Poland's martyrdom.

But how hard it was, having received the message in the afternoon that all of them... calmly... without problems... were shot.

We spoke to each other many times that evening, thinking, how did each of them die – were they afraid of death? Or did they face it fearlessly?

The inmates, who were murdered on October 28, 1942, knew what was in store for them. In Block 3 they had been told that they were going to be shot. They were throwing scribbled notes to the inmates, who were still spared, containing their last words that were meant to be passed on to their families...

They wanted to die 'the cheerful way,' so that they would be well spoken of that evening.

Let no one tell me that we, the Poles, do not know how to do it!

Those who had seen this picture said they were never going to forget it.

From Block 3, between Blocks 14 and 15, between the kitchen and Blocks 16, 17, and 18, and then straight between the blocks of the infirmary, they were marching on, grouped in a column of 'fives,' with their calm heads held high, some of them – smiling.

They were walking without an escort. Behind them Palitzsch with a rifle on his shoulder and Bruno [Bruno Brodniewicz], both smoking cigarettes and chatting.

It was enough that the last 'five' would do about-face and turn against them that those two executioners would cease to exist.

Why did they go, then? Were they afraid for themselves? What could they possibly have feared, already on their path to death?...

It seemed like a psychosis of some sort... But they were walking, because they had their point...

They knew as the authorities had announced it long ago and it was confirmed by colleagues who were brought to the camp from the outside world, that for every escapade of the prisoner the whole family would be accountable. It was known that the Germans were ruthless when it came to reprisals and that they exterminated families showing such brutality which only they were capable of. And how brutality looks, who knows better than us?

To see (or just to know) that someone's mother, wife, or children would find themselves in such circumstances as those which the women in Rajsko had to endure – that was enough to paralyze all will of revenge on the executioners.

The entire camp, however... A different story.

To take control, to destroy the documents... Who would be held responsible? It would be difficult to try to capture tens of thousands of families at once.

But even that, after long deliberation, we made dependent on explicit orders because of the possibility of reprisals, that could follow and a desire to coordinate the action.

Being used to death, which we had to face several times a day, it was easier to think of our own death than thinking of hurting our loved ones.

Not only their death, but all these awful experiences, connected with taking our loved ones from this world by a ruthless iron fist, breaking their spirit and casting them into a different world, a world of hell, which not everyone enters easily...

Thinking that an old mother or father are walking in knee-deep mud with the last of their strength... being poked and beaten with a rifle's butt... as a result of their son's behaviour... or children going to the gas chamber because of their father... it was much harder than thinking of one's own death.

And even if there was someone for whom the standards were too high, he walked on, led by another's example.

He was 'ashamed' – this word is too weak. He did not dare to break out of the column of inmates of such an impressive attitude, who were heading bravely towards death.

So they walked...

Near the canteen (a wooden building next to Block 21), going down the road between Blocks 21 and 27, the column seemed to stop... hesitated for a while..., almost went straight on – but it was just a short moment. They turned left, at ninety degrees, towards the gate of Block 11, and marched straight into the jaws of death.

Only after the gate was shut tight behind them and they were left in the block for several hours – they were to be shot in the afternoon – while awating death various doubts started to emerge and five colleagues encouraged others to take over the camp and start the action there.

They barricaded the gate, and this might have even had evolved into something more serious, as the Germans did not reinforce the guards at all and all our Kommandos were eagerly awaiting the sign to start the action, if it were not for the fact that this protest against death did not spread beyond Block 11.

Apart from these five colleagues the rest did not let themselves to be entailed and the Silesian, who was a functionary on that block, informed the SS men of this firebrand. Palitzsch appeared on the block, assisted by several SS men. They dealt with those few inmates, shoting them first and leaving the rest until after dinner.

They were deemed to have fallen in battle (Captain Doctor 146 [Henryk Suchnicki], colleague 129 [Leon Kukiełka], and three other colleagues).[234]

They were all dead in the afternoon...

From our organization, except for those whom I had mentioned before, the following colleagues had fallen on that day: 41 [Stanisław Stawiszyński], 88 [Tadeusz Dziedzic], 105 [Edward Berlin], 108 [Stanisław Dobrowolski] and 146 [Henryk Suchnicki].

234 Henryk Suchnicki, Leon Kukiełka and three other inmates (all members of the ZOW) unsuccessfully tried to incite a mutiny among the men condemned to death under the so-called pacification of Lubelszczyzna. The mutineers were shot first by the SS.

These are only the ones whom I had personally known, but it was impossible to know everyone in an underground organization such as ours.

Upon returning to the camp, we could smell our colleagues' blood in the air.

They managed to have their bodies removed to the crematorium before our arrival.

The entire road was bloodstained; blood must have been dripping from the wagons carrying their bodies...

That day in the evening the entire camp was grimly coming to terms with these deaths.

Only now have I realized that I had almost been put on the list of numbers which were called out that day. Recalling these two Kapos scribbling down the numbers, I did not know whether the Kapo with the notepad did not write my number down because I did not look dangerous enough, or maybe among the excess of numbers on the list Grabner [Maximilian Grabner] later removed those without any cases against them.

A new transport of prisoners was brought in from Warsaw, from Pawiak, and once my former co-workers and colleagues from TAP in Warsaw arrived with it: Second Lieutenant 156 [Stanisław Wierzbicki], 157 [Czesław Sikora] and 158 [Zygmunt Ważyński].

They brought me some interesting news.

156 [Stanisław Wierzbicki] told me about how 25 [Stefan Bielecki] reached Warsaw from Auschwitz, and how he, 156 personally drove him to his post in Mińsk Litewski.[235]

158 [Zygmunt Ważyński] told me in great detail how the message that I had sent through Sergeant 14 [Antoni Woźniak], regarding the potentially dangerous excerpts from the parish registers in town Z. [Bochnia], made my sister-in-law, Madame E. O. [Eleonora Ostrowska] to rush to him. My good colleague, 158, got on a train that very same day and made his way to Z. [Bochnia], where he explained the whole thing to 160 [Władysław Kuc], the parish priest. The priest 160 wrote down in pencil in the book next to the entry of the owner of my assumed name, and promised to take care of everything. This must have been checked out, because the camp's Political Department never mentioned my case again.

Colleague 156 [Stanisław Wierzbicki] pointed out to me that captain 159 [Stanisław Machowski] from the High Command in Warsaw was among the new arrivals. He was the second-in-command of 'Iwo 11.'[236]

One of our members, 138 [Bronisław Motyka], had known Captain 159 [Stanisław Machowski] personally, having been under his command once, and now, being a block elder, had easily taken the captain under his protection (colleague 156 [Stanisław Wierzbicki], along with 117 [Eugeniusz Zaturski] who was already working there, 76 [Bernard Świerczyna] took to work).

From then on, the two TAP-men lived and worked together.

235 Mińsk Litewski – now Minsk, the capital of Belarus.

236 Perhaps Pilecki is referring to Major Jerzy Cezary Antoszewicz.

From the TAP members, whom I knew once in Warsaw, the following numbers went through Auschwitz: 1 [Władysław Surmacki], 2 [Władysław Dering], 3 [Jerzy Virion], 25 [Stefan Bielecki], 26 [Stanisław Maringe], 29 [Włodzimierz Makaliński], 34 [identity unknown], 35 [Remigiusz Niewiarowski], 36 [Stanisław Arct], 37 [identity unknown], 38 [Kazimierz Chmielewski], 41 [Stanisław Stawiszyński], 48 [Stanisław Ozimek], 49 [Jan Dangel], 85 [Zygmunt Bohdanowski], 108 [Stanisław Dobrowolski], 117 [Eugeniusz Zaturski], 120 [Zygmunt Zakrzewski], 124 [Tadeusz Chrościcki], 125 [Tadeusz Lucjan Chrościcki], 131 [identity unknown], 156 [Stanisław Wierzbicki], 157 [Czesław Sikora] and 158 [Zygmunt Ważyński].

Because 129 [Leon Kukiełka] got shot and 130 [identity unknown] died of typhus, it was impossible to continue digging the tunnel from under Block 28. The tunnel was never discovered, and 5 [Roman Zagner] got arrested during the course of another investigation.

In the late fall of 1942, when the block elders were sent to work in the fields, clamping potatoes, 4 [Alfred Stössel] also started working on them quite far away from the camp. A disoriented SS man from the Political Department, unfamiliar with the case, Lachmann [Gerhard Lachmann], came to see 4 on some matter, but found that he was absent. Lachmann turned around and left.

His colleagues quickly realized what was going on, rushed into 4's room (as the block elder of Block 28, he had a separate room), and cleared it of many items that could potentially complicate things.

Someone must have spilled the beans...

Lachmann had only reached the gate, and, as if struck by something, turned back and searched 4's room very thoroughly, but he did not find anything.

He was waiting for 4 when he was coming back from work in the evening and had him 'arrested' and took him to the bunker. 4 never came back to Block 28.

He was interrogated at Block 11, in the bunkers and in the Political Department.

Even though 4 used to have a rather nasty mania those last days,[237] I must admit that he took the torture-investigation with courage and said nothing, even though he knew a great deal.

The case was not carried on.

Fortunately for him, he caught typhus and was moved to the typhus block.

One needs to go through a certain gradation to understand that just like the world outside the wires, represented freedom for the prisoners in the camp, for those who had been locked in the bunker – the camp itself was freedom.

237 Pilecki points out the problem of A. Stössel's participation (as an SS medical orderlies' helper) in murdering inmates with phenol injections. One hypothesis states that someone might have reported him to the camp's Gestapo. Other inmates had no idea of Stössel's role in the underground resistance activities, for obvious reasons.

Getting out of the bunker – even if one was ill – to the typhus block was a substitute of freedom for him.

But even here he had been under the constant watch of an SS man.

Lachmann was not about to concede defeat!

4 [Alfred Stössel] had a strong character and strong will, though. One night, he just stopped living.

The colleagues, who had been brought here from Warsaw and whom I have already mentioned (156 [Stanisław Wierzbicki], 157 [Czesław Sikora] and 158 [Zygmunt Ważyński]), said that they did not expect to see such strong spirits and relatively good physical condition among the prisoners in Auschwitz.

They said that they knew nothing about the torture methods here, about the 'wailing wall,' about the phenol, about the gas chambers.

They themselves did not think – nor anyone in Warsaw did – about Auschwitz seriously as an outpost of any considerable strength. The word about town in Warsaw was that there was not much worth saving there – mostly skeletons hardly worth liberating.

It was a bitter thing to hear people saying that while looking at the brave silhouettes of my colleagues.

So... People of great worth were dying here just to keep someone out there safe, and they, people much weaker, were speaking about us with disregard and calling us 'skeletons.'

It took a great deal of self-sacrifice to keep dying for our brothers, merrily 'enjoying' themselves, while free!

Yes, all the methods of destruction used in the camp had a devastating effect upon us, and on top of that, to add such insult to injury, such assessment from the freedom, and this continuous indifference, this indifferent silence...

The four battalions had their service roster divided so that each battalion was on duty for one week. This meant that it was this battalion's job to act in the case of some airstrike or a weapons drop.

All the goods procured by 76 [Bernard Świerczyna], 77 [Zbigniew Ruszczyński], 90 [identity unknown], 94 [identity unknown], and 117 [Eugeniusz Zaturski] were sent to the battalion on duty as well; it was also this battalion's duty to distribute food and underwear among the core platoons that week.

Despite a ban being imposed – after all, of what importance was a ban for a Häftling then? – and even despite the capital punishment, trade in gold and diamonds flourished in the camp immensely.

An entire quasi-organization was founded, because each pair of prisoners who ever had any dealings with each other – food barter, e.g. sausages from the butchery

for gold – could very well lead to mutually assured destruction. Those caught with gold and beaten in the bunker could expose one another.

We were seeing more and more people getting arrested for possessing gold.

The SS men were hunting down this new organization with zeal, because it was providing them with income.

For us, the 'gold organization' had become an excellent lightning conductor, protecting us from detection.

Any investigation initially on track leading to us was, sooner or later, bound to lead to the 'gold organization' anyway, and then get convoluted and confusing; the SS men, content with the new source of income, were very reluctant to put any effort into other chores.

I have already mentioned that we kept a close eye on Zugangs, because it was impossible to know how a colleague coming from freedom would behave in the camp – but even the 'old' prisoners could sometimes act in a surprising manner.

Because of one of our colleague's recklessness, 161 [Bolesław Kuczbara], a typical schizophrenic, who had been told too much, painted two honorary 'order of the garter' diplomas for the underground work for Colonel 121 [Juliusz Gilewicz] and colleague 59 [Henryk Bartosiewicz].

He only spared me due to that colleague's intervention.

With these 'diplomas' tucked under his arm, he marched right across the camp's main square at lunch time to display his handiwork in the infirmary.

He could have easily been stopped by an SS man or a Kapo and asked about them, and that would have put those colleagues – and maybe even more people – at great risk.

He showed them to Doctor 2 [Władysław Dering], telling him that only I was smart, etc., and that is why he did not prepare a 'diploma' for me.

Doctor 2, assisted by Doctor 102 [Rudolf Diem], managed to take those 'diplomas' away and destroy them.

161 [Bolesław Kuczbara], however, was clever. One evening I got called out by my colleague 61 [Konstanty Piekarski] from Block 22, who led me to an SS man. It turned out that this SS man was none other than 161, disguised in a uniform and a coat of an SS man. He put them to good use in an escape that occurred shortly after that.

The third Christmas in Auschwitz was upon us.

I was living in Block 22a at that time, together with the entire Bekleidungswerkstätte Kommando.

This Christmas was very different from the previous ones!

The prisoners received, as always, their Christmas parcels from home, with jumpers, but apart from clothes, this time the authorities finally allowed food to be sent as well.

Because of 'Canada,' hunger was no longer an issue in the camp.

The food parcels improved the situation even more.

The news about the German troops suffering major defeats improved the morale and the mood of the prisoners considerably.

In these improved spirits, the news about the escape (December 30, 1942) of Mietek [Mieczysław Januszewski] – Arbeitsdienst, Otto [Otto Küsel] – Arbeitsdienst, 161 [Bolesław Kuczbara], and their fourth companion,[238] was received with joy.

An audaciously prepared escape, made easier by the fact that the Arbeitsdiensts could move freely between the small and the great chain of guards, with 161 disguising himself as an SS man, with the insolent act of driving out of the camp in a horse-drawn carriage in broad daylight, with a fake pass that the fake SS man flashed at the Post from a distance... It had an added bonus for all the prisoners: thanks to a letter that Otto [Otto Küsel] left in the camp, Bruno [Bruno Brodniewicz], the Lagerältester, Bruno, prisoner no. 1, the infamous torturer, was locked up by the authorities in the bunker on New Year's Eve.

Otto, Bruno's enemy, wrote a letter which he had left on purpose in his coat in the carriage that they abandoned over a dozen kilometres from the camp. In that letter Otto said how sorry he was for not having enough time to take Bruno with them despite their previous agreement, and this gold that Bruno still had, well... He could actually keep it!

The authorities, hardly known for their quick-wittedness, locked Bruno, our torturer, in the bunker for three months. He had it better than any of the camp's inmates in the bunker, but the camp was freed from that scoundrel forever – upon release, he was not reinstated to his previous position, but sent to Birkenau on a similar assignment.

In the meantime, the whole camp was drunk with joy during Christmas, feasting on food that had been sent by our families and telling the latest jokes about Bruno...

Boxing matches and artistic evenings were held in the blocks. Improvised bands and orchestras were walking from one block to another.

The general mood was so upbeat in the camp that the old prisoners would nod their heads saying: 'Well, well... there was the Lager of "Auszwic" (Auschwitz), but it's gone now... the very last syllable remains... "wic."'[239]

Yes, indeed, the hardship in the camp was weaker from month to month.

However, at that time very often we could witness very disturbing scenes.

On our way from the tannery, in five 'hundreds,' right after New Year's Day, I witnessed a group of several women and men standing in front of the crematorium (the old crematorium fueled by coal, built right next to the camp). There were several of them, altogether, young and old, both sexes.

238 The fourth one was Jan Baraś-Komski (no. 564). The correct date of the escape: December 29, 1942.

239 A wordplay; 'wic' (pronounced in Polish similarly like 'witz' in the ending of the word 'Auschwitz') meant a 'joke' in Polish (the word is obsolete now). Hence, 'Ausch-wic' can be translated as 'Ausch-joke.'

They were standing there like cattle in front of the slaughterhouse.

They knew what they had come there for...

Among them, there was a boy, maybe ten years old, watching our 'hundreds' passing by – he was looking for someone amidst them: maybe his father... maybe brother...

Approaching this group, a man would fear seeing contempt in the eyes of the women and children.

Here we are – robust and healthy men and there are five 'hundreds' of us, and those few – when they are being led to die...

Inside you were shrinking and twisting, but no! When walking by, with relief we would notice in their eyes contempt – but only for death!

When entering the gate, we saw another group, standing against the wall with their hands raised and their backs turned to the passing rows of returning prisoners.

These ones were going to be interrogated before death, they were going to be sent to their ordeals at Block 11 before Palitzsch the executioner would mercifully end their torment by shooting them in the back of the head. After that, their bloodied corpses would be loaded onto wagons and carried to the crematorium...

Just as we were at the gates, this first group had already been rushed into the crematorium.

Sometimes the oppressors did not want to waste a gas container for just a bunch of individuals; they were stunned by blows with rifle butts, and, half-conscious, pushed onto the blazing ovens.

From our Block 22, the one standing in the closest proximity to the crematorium, we heard horrifying screams and groans, somewhat muffled, of tortured victims being murdered on numerous occasions.

Not everyone took the same road back from work to the camp as we did.

Those who did not see the faces of the victims, those who took another road, were never free from the thoughts: maybe my mother... maybe my wife... my daughter...

But a Lager inmate's heart is like a stone. Half an hour later, some of them were buying margarine or tobacco, not even noticing the giant mound of naked corpses right next to them, 'done' with the phenol injections.

Sometimes someone would step on a stiff leg of a dead man, on occasion, and look down: 'Oh dear! – it's Stasio... Well... It was his turn today, maybe it will be mine next week...'

And yet... that little boy's eyes, looking at us, clearly looking for someone, kept me awake for many nights...

Unfortunately, the 'festive mood' in the camp and the relaxation it brought upon the inmates had another darker scenario in store for us.

Block 27, a warehouse for uniforms and underwear, was where the Bekleidungskammer Kommando, comprised almost exclusively of Poles, was working.

'It was a good Kommando' – working under a roof, giving its workers opportunity to selflessly provide underwear, uniforms, blankets and shoes for their colleagues. They also had the possibility of receiving food from the well-positioned inmates, working as block elders, in the slaughterhouse or in the food warehouse, for making their existence easier.

The place was good, and with 76's [Bernard Świerczyna] help, we managed to provide many of our colleagues with jobs there.

A general mood of certain easiness in the camp at that time, coupled with the absence of Bruno [Bruno Brodniewicz] at the Lager, imprisoned in the bunker, made some of them disregard a bit the necessary means of precaution.

The colleagues from Block 27 organized a joint celebration of sharing the Christmas wafer. 76 [Bernard Świerczyna] recited a patriotic poem of his own authorship (a Silesian woman had two sons, one in the German army, the other one – an inmate in Auschwitz; during the prisoner's escape, the other son, standing guard at the outpost, not knowing that this was his brother, shot him).

The poem was beautifully written, the mood was pleasant.

The result: the authorities decided that the Poles in Block 27 were doing too well, and the Political Department resolved that the Poles from Block 27 had 'organized' themselves.

On January 6, 1943, the SS men from the Political Department came to Block 27 during regular working time. They rounded up the entire Kommando and asked about the identity of the colonel.

Colonel 24 [Karol Kumuniecki] did not say anything, but Lachmann approached him and pulled him out to the front (the whole case was already being worked out by the Political Department).

Then, they started to segregate people into three groups. The Reichsdeutsches and Volksdeutsches[240] were the only groups left to continue their labour in the block. All the remaining Poles were further divided into two groups, over a dozen intellectuals being put aside to the right (including Colonel 24 [Karol Kumuniecki], Major 150 [Edward Gött-Getyński], Captain 162 [Włodzimierz Koliński], Second Lieutenant 163 [Mieczysław Koliński], lawyer 142 [Stefan Niebudek]) and those seen as non-intellectuals by the SS men (including Major 85 [Zygmunt Bohdanowski], pretending to be a gamekeeper, Second Lieutenant 156 [Stanisław Wierzbicki], and my nephew, a student, 39 [Kazimierz Radwański]) – to the left.

240 Reichsdeutsche (Ger.) – a citizen of the Third Reich from before 1939 and an individual with documented German origin, supported by activity in German organizations, who had been living outside the Reich before the war, awarded the first two categories of the DVL. In turn, a Volksdeutsche (Ger.) was someone claiming German origin with Aryan blood or being considered as such by other Germans but not being a Reichsdeutsche (III and IV groups of the DVL). See also footnotes 88 and 228.

They were kept outside, in the biting cold, for several hours.

The intellectuals were then imprisoned in the bunker, the non-intellectuals sent to the so-called Kiesgrube of Palitzsch.[241]

The first group was interrogated and tortured in the bunker; the interrogators wanted to obtain confessions that they were organized by asking what organization they represented.

The fate of the second group, left to die of hard labour in the biting cold, also seemed to have been sealed. Some of the condemned men, however, were able to wangle themselves out from the Kommando after several months of hard labour.

A couple of colleagues, 117 [Eugeniusz Zaturski] and 156 [Stanisław Wierzbicki], did that too quickly.

They worked together in the Bekleidungskammer, they lived together in Block 3, in a separate storage room. On January 6, 1943 they both successfully managed to avoid being counted among the intellectuals, and by dodging the menace of the bunker, they found themselves in Palitzsch's Kiesgrube – for now.

My colleague, 156 [Stanisław Wierzbicki], when asked by me a couple of months earlier, right after his arrival from Warsaw, about the reactions of people in Warsaw to escaping from Auschwitz, replied that the reaction would be twofold. The Headquarters give the Virtuti Militari award[242]* [Here a reference to a bottom footnote, added by the author: **Maybe he thought that by saying so he would encourage me to run*.], and the society, ignorant of the fact that collective responsibility is no longer the practice, sees it as an act of egoism...

Now, having found himself in a difficult situation, he started to persuade me to escape with him.

At that moment, I had no such intention. He, a poor soul, did not live long enough to make it...

Both of them wanted to ease their camp life too quickly. They fell ill, and upon recovering, they found themselves new, lighter work.

They were not experienced Lager inmates yet.

One time, when I thought that they were still in the infirmary, I found out that they both got shot (February 16,1943).

Lachmann caught them in some other Kommando and asked them where they came from; they were dead that very day.

Soon after, in March, a whole group of intellectuals, previously tortured and interrogated in the bunker about the existence of an organization (which was suspected

241 Kiesgrube (Ger.) – a gravel pit. SS-Hauptscharführer Gerhard Palitzsch often executed inmates working in gravel pits near KL Auschwitz.

242 The War Order of Virtuti Militari is Poland's highest military decoration for valour in the face of the enemy.

by one of the Kapos, who had witnessed the unfortunate sharing of the Christmas wafer), was shot.

They did not say anything. PRAISE BE THEIR MEMORY! – those colleagues of mine.

After throwing the Poles out of the Bekleidungskammer, the vacated positions were cast by the Ukrainians; however, the SS man – the Kommando's chief – and the Kapo, did not like them as employees, so slowly some of the Poles started to find their way back there.

The supplies from this Kommando were unavailable for a while.

Other deliveries were working flawlessly. According to Officer Cadet 90's [identity unknown] calculations, despite relentless personal searches, during the Christmas period alone (1942), 700 kg of meat products had been smuggled out of the slaughterhouse through the gate.

In the late fall of 1942 some extraordinary preparations began in Block 10.

All the prisoners and some beds were removed, and basket-like wooden screens were installed on the windows outside, preventing anyone from looking inside.

Various instruments and implements were delivered.

After that, German professors and students started to come in the evenings. They would deliver some people and work nights on something, leaving in the morning or staying for a couple of days.

In the morning, I met a professor that left a horrible impression on me. He had a detestable gaze.

For quite some time we did not know anything about the block, all we could do was speculate.

But they could not manage without the help of the Pflegers from the camp's infirmary.

In the beginning it was just about cleaning, later on – various other kinds of assistance. They picked two Pflegers, and it just so happened that they were both members of our organization.

Our colleagues finally gained access to the permanently locked Block 10.

This was of no use to us for some time because they were locked inside. One day, however, one of them, 101 [Witold Kosztowny], came to me, terribly upset, saying that he could not take it anymore, that what was going on in Block 10 was beyond the limits of his endurance.

They did experiments there.

Physicians and medical students were conducting experiments, having an abundance of human material at their disposal, not having to answer for it to anyone.[243]

243 Medical, or rather pseudo medical experiments were among the worst crimes committed on a massive scale in KL Auschwitz and other concentration camps. They were performed by SS physicians

The lives of those guinea pigs were forfeit anyway, belonging to the deviants in the camp – one way or another, they were going to to be murdered. No matter how – they were destined to become ashes.

Thus, various sexual experiments were being conducted.

Surgical sterilizations of women and men. Radiating the genitals of both genders with rays of some kind, apparently meant to kill reproductive functions. The tests, following, would show, whether the results were positive or negative.

No sexual intercourse was practiced. A Kommando of men had to provide semen, which the women were later inseminated with.

The tests showed that women who had their reproductive organs exposed to radiation could become pregnant again after several months. Much stronger radiation was applied then, burning their organs, and several dozen women died in horrifying agony.

Women of all races were used in those experiments. Polish, German, Jewish, and, recently, Gypsy women were brought in from Birkenau. Several dozen young girls were brought from Greece – they all died during these experiments. They all – even if the experiments were successful – were eliminated. Not a single woman, not a single man, ever left Block 10 alive.

Attempts were made to create artificial semen, but all the tests failed.

The artificially created substitute of semen caused some kind of infections when injected into women.

Women subjected to this test were ultimately killed with phenol.

Colleague 101 [Witold Kosztowny], who witnessed all this ordeal, experienced anger that was unusual for the long-time inmates.

Colleague 57 [Edward Ciesielski] was also a witness to everything that took place in Block 10 (they are both currently alive and free).

During our time in Auschwitz, sometimes in the evenings we would say among ourselves in that little group of ours that if anyone left that place alive, it would surely be a miracle, and it would be difficult for him to communicate with people who were leading a normal life 'on earth' during this time.

and outside specialists, and initiated and organized by Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler, Head Physician of the SS and Police, Ernst Grawitz, and Wolfram Sievers, Head Secretary of the Ahnenerbe (Ancestors' Inheritance) Institute and Director of the Institute for Military Scientific Research. Financing was provided by the SS Head Economy Office, to which every concentration camp had been subordinated since 1942, and specialist examinations were carried out with the great help of the Waffen-SS Institute of Hygiene, led by Joachim Mrugowsky, Professor of Bacteriology at the University of Berlin, Faculty of Medicine. Experiments were supposed to serve the army (some of them were aimed at improving the soldiers' health), execute post-war plans (e.g. in demographic policy; by researching mass sterilization methods that were to be applied to 'lower-grade' nations) and to corroborate racist theories. Apart from some centrally planned research, many German physicians conducted experiments financed by pharmaceutical companies, medical institutes or even pursued their own career or interests.

Ordinary human matters would seem too small, too trivial to him.

He would not be understood by them either...

But if someone really gets out of here, his duty will be to tell the world how real Poles were dying here.

He should also tell how people were dying here in general... murdered by people...

It sounds strange in the language of a Christian: ...murdered by their brethren, just like centuries ago!...

This is why I wrote that... we have gone too far... But where, exactly?... Where are we trudging in our 'progress of culture'?...

Word came via our unofficial channels from the Political Department that all Poles (inmates) were to be deported somewhere out of fear of any incidents in the camp.

The authorities decided that such a concentration of Poles, whose experiences made them more and more determined and ready for everything, kept on Polish ground, with local support – was nothing short of dangerous.

A landing of troops, or a supply of weapons.

This was not in the plans of the Allies, or perhaps they did not see it. The enemy, however, spotted this.

So, out of the crafting Kommandos they started taking out some Poles for now and accustom the Kommandos to working without them.

A Pole was, always, in any Kommando, the best worker.

The Germans were saying that the Poles were as good as the Germans, but that was not true.

They were ashamed to admit that a Polish worker was better than a German one.

For now, only those Poles were removed from the crafting Kommandos whose behaviour showed that they became artisans only in the camp.

Out of five 'hundreds' of workers in the Bekleidungswerkstätte, about 150 were discharged from work.

I, because of my intellectual look, was among them as well. All of this happened on February 2 ('43).

This did not worry me at all. I believed that being released on that day[244] would bring me no ill fortune.

The very next day I was working in the basket-making Kommando, admitted there by my friends.

It was the general custom in the camp that an 'old number' could be admitted to any Kommando. He was a senior in the world of the prisoners.

244 February 2 in the Roman Catholic Church marks the Feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary or Feast of the Presentation of Jesus at the Temple, commonly known as Candlemas.

I only worked in that Kommando for one day, and not for the benefit of the camp – I learnt to make shoes out of straw.

The day after that I already had a great job in a newly-formed 'parcel Kommando.'[245]

As a result of the permission for sending food parcels to the inmates, more and more parcels were being delivered everyday to the camp by trucks. This posed a problem for the authorities. It was only allowed to send one parcel a week, not larger than 5 kg. Convinced that the amount of parcels would not decline, it was banned to send large packages, but allowed small parcels, up to 250 g, to be sent without limitations.

This is where the authorities were mistaken. An enormous amount of tiny parcels arrived every day.

The families, glad that they could help their imprisoned relatives, were eager to send small parcels every day instead of one big package a week.

The result of the camp authorities' decision was exactly the opposite. The immense amount of work with registering huge numbers of parcels and then giving them out to the prisoners required a whole separate organization, a new Kommando, which I joined.

Three small rooms in Block 3 were assigned to our Kommando. One room here was completely flooded with parcels.

The efficacy of all the other Kommandos in the camp required us to make an effort to get rid of the backlog, and it would be better for the prisoners, too, if they got their packages quickly enough.

The Kommando worked two shifts, 20 prisoners in each of them. The parcel unit was working 24 hours a day.

I intentionally signed up for the night shift.

Because parcels were being sorted around the clock, the main Schreibstube had to work simultaneously with us. A document had to be prepared for every parcel. Hundreds of such notes were sent every half hour to the Schreibstube. There it was marked which block 'a given number' (the prisoner) currently lived in, or a cross was put on it, signifying the addressee's death. When the notes returned, the parcels were sorted by putting them on individual shelves for each block. Parcels marked with the cross were discarded onto a gigantic pyramid, piling up in another corner of the room. There were many parcels for our deceased colleagues.

Besides parcels sent to prisoners from the Jewish, French, or Czech transports, which were usually completely exterminated at that time, many Polish families would also send parcels, not being aware that their addressees were already dead. This was because, as I have already mentioned, a notification about the death was not always sent, or the Political Department would procrastinate for several months before sending one.

245 A forced labour squad organized to deal with the deluge of parcels for prisoners; Ger. Packetstelle – the camp's post office unit and the place where this Kommando worked.

The better quality parcels belonging to already deceased prisoners, mostly from France and the Czech territory, containing wine and fruit, would be taken by the SS men to their canteen in baskets.

The parcels which were not so appealing, were usually sent to our Häftlingsküche,[246] which was also receiving food from 'Canada,' already snooped through by the SS men. Everything was then put into the dinner pots.

We were eating sweet soups at that time, with pieces of cake and cookies in them, as if smelling with perfume. Once in our room we found a not completely dissolved piece of soap in our soup.

Sometimes the cooks would come across a golden trinket or simply coins at the bottom of the pot, carefully hidden by the previous, now deceased, owner, in a loaf of bread, in a roll, or cookie.

The workers of the parcel unit with clear conscience would eat food from parcels addressed to their deceased colleagues, usually giving away their bread and soup in the blocks to those who were more hungry than they were.

However, one had to be very careful with eating food from the parcels belonging to the dead. Only the Übermenschen could do that, the prisoners were not allowed to do so under the penalty of death.

One time a search was made of those who were leaving work and revealed that seven Häftlings had white bread, butter and sugar, taken from the parcels of dead men, in their pockets. All seven were shot dead that very day.

An Austrian SS man was the chief of the parcel unit. He was pretty reasonable for an SS man.

After the original norm of one parcel of 5 kg a week had been reinstated, different sort of parcels were coming in, sometimes entire suitcases. The chief of the parcel unit did not question them at all, giving them all to their rightful owners, not searching them in detail, only sometimes cutting the ropes due to the lack of time. But when the block elder, a German scoundrel, took a handful of sweets from a parcel sent to a prisoner who was still alive, while distributing the parcels in the block, the chief of the parcel unit reported him to his superiors, and the block elder, a German, was shot the same day.

As far as these things went, there was justice...

I found another way to provide food to my hungry colleagues.

I was working night shifts in the parcel unit. The SS guard, sitting in front of me next to a warm stove, had a habit of always falling asleep around 2 a.m.

There was a huge pile of parcels belonging to dead prisoners behind me, and a separate smaller pile of better quality parcels on the side, prepared potentially for the SS men's canteen.

246 Häftlingsküche (Ger.) – the prisoners' kitchen.

While carrying around, registering and moving the parcels, I would unnoticeably pick the packages from this other pile with the SS man snoring to his heart's content. I would unwrap the parcel, tear the address off, turn the paper over, wrap the parcel again, tie it with a string and write the address of some of my colleagues within the camp. I had official authority to repack badly packed bundles. Some parcels had their wrapping completely torn, which was even better. I did not repack the parcels bearing seals, but just simply wrote a new address on a different piece of paper and paste it onto the parcel. A package prepared in such a way then landed on its correct shelf.

The SS man's job was comfortable, because he slept at night, and since he had no duties during the day, he would ride the bike to his wife, who lived some 20 kilometres away. Everyone was happy with this arrangement. I tried to send at least eight parcels a night, two parcels for each battalion; sometimes more, sometimes less.

In the morning I would visit the friends to whom the 'dead' parcels were readdressed, warning them not to be surprised when they got an unknown parcel.

As I had changed Kommando, I was moved to Block 6.

In the block and at work I met several colleagues whom I had recruited into our organization: Second Lieutenant 164 [Edmund Zabawski], Second Lieutenant 165 [Henryk Szklarz], and Master Corporal 166 [identity unknown].

At the end of 1942, Olek – Second Lieutenant 167 [Aleksander Bugajski]) – was brought into the camp with a whole transport from Cracow. I was informed then that he was a hero from the Montelupich Prison, that he had slipped death's grip by breaking out of gaol, and he had two death sentences hanging over him, but thanks to his smart dealings with the SS men (he pretended to be a doctor, and even treated the SS men), he somehow survived. But he was in Auschwitz now; surely he was to meet his end here.

I came to know him: I liked his sense of humour.

I made him an offer to use the way of getting out of the camp that I was preparing for myself.

The sewers.

The maps of the sewers, provided to me by colleagues from the Baubüro, had exactly shown the best point of entering the sewers.

Usually the German authorities only got smart after some prisoner had already used a way of breaking out, then, using the same escape route was almost impossible.

The proverb: 'A Pole is wise after the harm has been done'[247] can be perhaps extended to other nationalities as well.

By giving my escape route to Olek 167 [Aleksander Bugajski] I forfeited it for myself, but I was not going to flee just yet, and he was in a big danger.

I could use him to send a report, and I hoped that some fortunate coincidence would provide me with a way out as well.

247 Equivalent of: 'It is easy to be wise after the event.'

At that time, Lieutenant 168 [Witold Wierusz] had reported to me with a plan of escaping from the Kommando where he was working. He was second- in-command to the Kapo there, and when the Kapo fell ill, he had more freedom to act. He would take the Kommando to take some measurements several kilometres from the camp.

I introduced Second Lieutenant 167 [Aleksander Bugajski] to him; he preferred 168's [Witold Wierusz] plan more, so 167 commenced preparations to leave the camp in this way.

He moved too quickly from the 'parcel Kommando,' where he used to work, to the Kommando of measurers,[248] where 168 was working.

One night in January ('43) seven colleagues left the camp via the SS-Küche.

Seeing that hanging escapees who had been caught was not an effective countermeasure, the authorities came up with a new idea. It was announced in all the blocks that if a prisoner decided to escape from the camp, his family would be brought to Auschwitz in his place.

That hit us right where it hurt.

Nobody wanted to put his family at risk.

After having returned to the camp one day, we saw two women – a kindly-looking elderly lady and a likeable young one – standing under a pole with a sign, reading 'Your fellow inmate's imprudent act has put these two women in jeopardy by sentencing them to a life in camp.'

This was supposed to be the repression for one of our inmate's escape.

We were sensitive towards women.

Initially, we condemned the scoundrel who jeopardized his own mother and fiancée by saving his own life, but soon it turned out that the women had numbers around the 30,000 mark, while the current numbers in the women's camp were about 50,000.

We came to the conclusion that these women were brought here from the camp in Rajsko and made to stand by the pole for several hours. An SS man stood guard near them, preventing us from talking to them.

In any case, there was no certainty that one's family would not be brought into the camp, and so, other inmates could not decide to flee the camp.

248 The surveying Kommando was involved in planning the camp's infrastructure, industrial plants and economic zones. Its members worked outside KL Auschwitz, so were able to contact Polish civilians around Oświęcim – and thanks to that fact they organized a system of undercover communications with the outside world. With the help of several liaisons, they smuggled food and medicines into the camp. They remained undercover for a long time, but finally the work assignment officers noticed that some inmates were changing Kommandos too often and without permission. The fact of maintaining contact with people outside the camp by the inmates had been fully revealed in 1943. As a result of a spy's report, on May 19, the camp's Gestapo arrested one of the liaisons, Helena Płotnicka of the Brzeszcze village. Fearing their names would be revealed by her upon being tortured, three members of the surveying Kommando escaped while working outside the camp. The Germans retaliated by incarcerating the remaining Kommando members in the bunker cells. The first group of 13 prisoners was shot after a lengthy investigation in June 1943, the following 12 were hanged on July 19, 1943, in the biggest public execution in KL Auschwitz's history.

Colleagues 167 [Aleksander Bugajski] and 168 [Witold Wierusz] were preparing an escape plan. Contact with Cracow had been established via the civilian population.

Clothes and liaisons were to be prepared in several places.

167 suggested that I could leave the camp with them.

While discussing their plan in more detail with 168, I realized that it was not exactly perfect.

The two SS men who guarded the surveyors Kommando, and who (against the explicit ban) sometimes accompanied them to the local tavern to drink vodka as well, were to be made drunk and bound, and should that not work, the escapees wanted to resort to a 'wet work.'[249]

Then, on behalf of the organization, I categorically protested.

Such an escape could have caused potentially disastrous repressions for the prisoners staying in the camp, and I could not agree to that on behalf of the organization.

Escaping was not the difficult part – the difficult part was to flee and not cause excessively grievous harm to the camp.

They started to prepare luminal[250] to put the SS men to sleep.

Acquired from the infirmary, powdered, served in vodka, tested on the Kapos, was not effective as it did not dissolve in vodka and left a residue on the bottom of the glass.

They were to serve luminal in candies.

In the meantime, several thousand Gypsies were brought to Birkenau, and put in a separate, walled off camp – whole families for now.

Later on, the men were separated from the rest, and then finished off in 'the Auschwitz style.'[251]

One day, colleagues from Rajsko pulled off a humorous escape, dubbed by us the 'barrel of Diogenes.'[252]

One dark, windy, rainy night, over a dozen prisoners left the camp by using poles to separate the wires – single there – in the camp's fence and putting between the wires a simple barrel, with its bottom removed, once used for transporting food, into the gap, thereby providing good insulation against the current in the electrified fence. They left the camp through the barrel, like cats through a muff.

The authorities flew into a rage – again.

So many inconvenient witnesses of what has been going on in Rajsko-Birkenau – on the loose!

They resolved to do everything they could to catch the fugitives. An entire army was deployed in the search, which lasted three days.

249 Murder; in this case a plan of eliminating both Germans.

250 A sedative and a tranquillizer, produced by the German company Bayer since 1912.

251 In the gas chamber.

252 An ancient symbol of renouncing the comforts of life and reducing needs to a minimum.

The camp was closed for that time, because there were no Posts available to keep watch over the prisoners going to work.

The authorities used this time to delouse the camp, which they managed to do in those three days.

By pure coincidence, 167 [Aleksander Bugajski] and 168 [Witold Wierusz] had their escape scheduled with the organization outside the camp just one day after the 'barrel of Diogenes.' The lack of possibility to leave the camp invalidated the plan, but that was not all.

The chiefs of the Kommandos and the Kapos alike, afraid of their angry superiors, started to search the prisoners. They were checking their workplaces and their numbers, generally looking for just about anything the others could make an issue of.

In the parcel unit the chief of the Kommando and the Kapo asked about Olek 167 [Aleksander Bugajski], who used to work here, but was nowhere to be seen right now! Was he sick?

They ran to the Schreibstube and found out that Olek had already moved to another block and to another Kommando, and because he switched jobs (moving to the field, on top of that) without notifying anyone and without the Arbeitsdienst's permission, while having a pretty serious case in the Political Department, they chose to see it as preparation for an escape. And so, as a punishment, Olek was moved to SK.

I had been preparing the way out via the sewers for a long time now, just in case.

It was not an easy route, though. The sewage system network, as shown in the plans from the Baubüro, ran in different directions, but mostly comprised of 40–60 cm pipes.

From the manhole which was the most convenient for my plans, next to Block 12, the pipes branched out and split into three directions only, next to Block 12, with 60 cm pipes going up vertically and 90 cm ones going horizontally.

Once I even tried to enter and open the grate next to the manhole, closing the entrance to the sewers, but I was not the only one interested in them.

Other colleagues of ours also knew this route.

I struck an agreement with them (they were 110 [Andrzej Gąsienica-Makowski] and 118 [identity unknown]). There were also others who kept their eye on the sewers.

The only question was: who would actually decide to use them?

When before the previous Christmas a group of Arbeitsdiensts wanted to break out from the camp, but 61 [Konstanty Piekarski] was also very eager to do so, I showed this way to him, and maybe several prisoners could have actually made it that Christmas night as well, since, as usual, the guards were less alert.

But that very evening, on Christmas Eve, a second Christmas tree was put right next to the spot where they would be getting out, flooding the area in light.

Later on, when I was already working the night shift in the 'parcel Kommando' the sewer entrance was very close to me. Then, at night, I entered the foul-smelling sewers twice, after having changed into a worker's outfit at Block 3.

The drainage grates, with hinges, used to be locked from below by two padlocks; now, broken, submerged in mud, from above they seemed shut.

From this point, the route went on in three different directions by those broader pipes. One was laid between Blocks 12 and 13, 22 and 23, then it turned left and went next to the kitchen and on, and just behind the last watchtower, next to Block 28, it turned slightly to the right. The exit was far behind the railway tracks.

It was a very long pipe, about 800 metres. It had one great advantage – a safe exit; and one disadvantage – it was extremely sludgy. I crawled for only 60 metres in this pipe to test the possibility of moving inside it. I got out of it, completely exhausted.

The night was pitch black.

I was all dirty. I washed myself and changed my underwear in Block 3. I must admit, I got discouraged for some time.

The second direction of the sewers offered a much drier option, in which it was easier to maneuver as well; it was also much shorter.

The route was laid between Blocks 4 and 15, 5 and 16, etc., and then it went straight on, to 10 and 21, still going forward after that.

It went uphill, there was less filth and water flowing down in it from the blocks, but the exit was not further than two metres from the watchtower.

The slab covering the exit beyond the fence, next to a gravel pit, even when prepared beforehand by colleagues during the day, was next to impossible to be raised at night without any noise alerting the guard just above it.

The third option remained – the shortest route, only about 40 metres – which was an extension of the previous one.

It contained the most water. Its course ran between Blocks 1 and 12, and past the fence, between the commandant's office and a newly constructed building. The exit was right by the road, pretty well visible, especially from the Hauptwache against the light.

That is where they put a Christmas tree one time; but now, they would not do it.

There was also the so-called submarine[253] underground with permanent staff, but I could not have included it in my plans.

Eventually, I could already theoretically take the risk of leaving the camp, but I still believed that it would have been premature in my case.

One evening, we reached the conclusion that there was a regular war being waged against us.

Usually we would get news from the Political Department, from the commandant's office, from the Revier, brought by the SS men, sitting on two stools and passing on news through the Volksdeutches or Reichsdeutsches, working for us.

253 None of the researchers were able to determine what Pilecki meant by that.

Some of the SS men, formerly non-commissioned officers of the Polish Army,[254] let us know clearly enough that they were ready to follow us into any action, and even give us the keys to the armories.

We did not need their keys, for we already had our own duplicates made by our colleagues in the locksmith's shop. But people of this kind, although two-faced and nasty, were of use to us on many an occasion, often letting us know about what the authorities wanted to do. Their information was always correct.

Apparently Grabner [Maximilian Grabner] did not trust his closest accomplices anymore, and trying to achieve perfect discretion, he kept the decision and the list of candidates for departure undisclosed until the very end. He shared his decisions with Palitzsch only.

On March 7 [1943], a Blocksperre was held.

Lists were sent to the blocks and the blocks were suddenly locked. They started to call out people whose numbers were to be found on these lists, exclusively Poles, ordering them to get ready for transportation.

Only those whose cases had already been closed, with whom the Political Department had no grudge, were called out.

The transports were supposed to take them to other camps, allegedly much better than Auschwitz.

We found out in confidence that the first transports did indeed go to better camps, but after that – they went to progressively worse ones.

The mood in the rooms was mixed. Some colleagues were glad to be going to better camps and that they were not going to be shot here, others were worried that they were not going, which meant that their cases were not closed yet and therefore they could still be shot. Others were very displeased by their departure, because they had reached a respectable, good position after years of hard work, and they were facing the prospect of being Zugangs again, having to go through a challenging selection process again, not knowing the odds of success.

The general opinion, however, was that it was worth going, because there could not be a second hell like this one anywhere anyway.

Besides – nobody asked for anybody's opinion.

If it was during the day, if the blocks were open, perhaps something could have been done.

Whoever wanted to stay, could 'fall ill' – but at night nothing could be done.

I was called out the very first night [March] 7 to 8.

254 Among the SS crew there were Germans who, in the inter-war period, were Polish citizens, as well as numerous Volksdeutsches. Due to the general national defense training obligation in Poland, many of them had completed their service in the Polish Army. Because of the fact that at the turn of 1942/43 the fortunes of war started to turn against the Third Reich, some of them tried to secure immunity for themselves after the war.

We were told to collect our belongings and move to Block 12a, which had been vacated beforehand for that particular reason – and so we did exactly that.

Block 19 was also reserved for that reason, because the numbers were called out over the course of three evenings (March 7, 8, 9), and our number amounted to about six thousand.

We were also locked in Blocks 12a and 19, and only able to communicate through the windows.

Doctor 2 [Władysław Dering] came to the staircase and by gestures through the pane in the door he let me know that if I wanted to stay, the only way to do that was to fall ill.

Considering all the underground work and my position among the inmates in our world of labour – this was some food for thought.

On March 10 ('43), they dragged us all out in 'fives,' grouped in columns, to the 'red alley,' already at 6 a.m.

This is where the health of the prisoners, selected by the Political Department for transportation was inspected by the committee comprised of German military physicians.

I was standing near Colonel 11 [Tadeusz Reklewski] and Kazio 39 [Kazimierz Radwański].

My brain was working intensely, making a list: who is going and who is staying?

A coherent group of reliable colleagues was going, and so I opted for leaving the camp as well...

The physicians were genuinely impressed by how healthy, well-fed, and fit the prisoners – mostly Poles – were (save for some Zugangs, freshly brought into the camp), nodding their heads and saying: 'How did they survive here...'

Apart from the parcels and the 'Canada,' it was also partially owing to the work of our organization, the results of which were clearly visible here...

...But my job was to secure the continuity of the work here... If I were to stay, with whom would it be?... I started to discuss this matter with some colleagues...

Colonel 11 [Tadeusz Reklewski] and Kazio 39 [Kazimierz Radwański] were happy to leave the camp. They were scheduled to go to Buchenwald,[255] allegedly one of the better camps.

My colleague, Colonel 11, thought it was my duty, all things considered, to stay in this hell.

255 KL Buchenwald was set up in Ettersberg near Weimar in July 1937. A place of transfer for some prisoners of KL Sachsenhausen, later on – the inmates of the closed-down camps KL Sachsenburg and KL Lichtenburg, opponents of the Hitler regime, criminals, Jehovah's Witnesses and homosexuals, and finally – Jews and Gypsies. Towards the end of the war, many inmates from camps, closed down due to the fact that the front line was moving inland Germany, were brought here by trains and 'death marches.' In total, by April 1945, when the camp was liberated by the US Army, over 250,000 inmates were imprisoned here, out of which ca. 56,000 were tormented to death. At present, the former camp houses a museum and the Centre for the Studies on Nazism.

I had a lot of time to think about it – the inspection progressed very slowly indeed.

We were standing there for the entire day and part of the night.

The committee had only reached us (Colonel 11 and Second Lieutenant 61 [Konstanty Piekarski]) around 2 a.m.

Already much earlier I had decided to try to stay behind in Auschwitz.

Thanks to colleague 169 [Stanisław Barański], who was able to move around freely, I obtained a hernia belt from the Krankenbau (naturally, I did not really have a hernia at all).

At 2 a.m. the committee was already tired.

Colonel 11 [Tadeusz Reklewski], who was several years older than me and very thin in comparison to me, was counted among those able to work and admitted to the transport.

But when I stood naked in the front of the committee with the hernia belt on, the physicians waved their hands and said: 'Weg![256] We don't need people like this one!' and I was not admitted to the transport.

I marched back to Block 12a and right after reporting there with the paper confirming that I had not been admitted to the transport, I immediately returned to Block 6, to my own bed, and the next day – to the regular work in the parcel unit.

On March 11, after rejecting those unfit for labour or those, who pretended to be so, they transferred slightly over 5,000 healthy Poles from the camp.

Because we, as the 'parcel Kommando,' were given an exact list from the main Schreibstube with the numbers of the transferred prisoners with the purpose of forwarding the incoming food packages addressed to them, we precisely determined that 5,000 Polish colleagues were sent to the following camps, more or less a thousand to each: Buchenwald, Neuengamme, Flossenbürg, Gross-Rosen and Sachsenhausen.[257]

The main skeleton of the organization had managed to wriggle out of this transport, so we kept working.

A week later, on the first Sunday, we were surprised again.

256 Out of here!

257 The German concentration camp of Neuengamme was formed in December 1938, in the Neuengamme district of Hamburg. It developed from the expansion of a KL Sachsenhausen Kommando. This was the place where the first experiments in murdering people with Zyklon B were conducted. Over 106,000 people, 17,000 of whom were Poles, passed through the camp. 55,000 of them died. KL Flossenbürg was set up in May 1938. With time the vast majority of its inmates comprised Poles and Soviet POWs. 96,000 people passed through that camp, 30,000 of them died. KL Gross-Rosen in Lower Silesia (now Rogoźnica in Poland) was set up in 1940 as a German labour camp for political prisoners, and in May 1941 it gained the status of an independent concentration camp. At least 125,000 people passed through that camp, of whom an estimated 40,000 died. KL Sachsenhausen was set up in July 1936, originally for criminal prisoners, but it became a place of incarceration for particularly important political prisoners, e.g. 180 professors from the Jagiellonian University and other universities of Cracow were sent there in November 1939. Also here, in the summer of 1943, the C-in-C of the HA, Stefan Rowecki (pseudonym 'Grot' ['Spearhead']) was imprisoned and subsequently murdered. Over 200,000 prisoners passed through this camp, of whom tens of thousands died.

In order to avoid a load of work in a hurry just before sending out the transport, they decided to do everything calmly beforehand.

All the Poles, remaining in all the blocks in the entire camp had to face on that day the medical committee which was marking people with either 'A' – meaning: able to work – or 'U' – unable to work. These categories were to be permanent. It was a surprise because it would potentially render all the tricks that we had played up to that point useless.

I was thinking what to do with myself. To get an 'A' would mean having to go to another camp in the next transport, and to a worse camp at that, as I did not go to the better ones.

To get a 'U' – well, at least they said that they would send the unable ones to Dachau, where the conditions in the infirmary, etc., were better. But knowing our current camp authorities, I would have rather expected the gas and chimney treatment being prepared for those with a 'U.'

I had to find a solution.

Anyway, I decided not to put the belt on. The committee did not examine me too close and released me, putting a letter 'A' next to my number in the register.

I looked good.

The German military physicians, looking at the fit bodies of the Polish prisoners, also this time could not resist expressing their bewilderment: 'What a regiment they could form!'

Now, being scheduled for departure from the camp, I had to do something, for I did not want to be sent to one of the 'worse' camps, as I did not go to the 'better' ones.

The SS men, chiefs of the Kommandos, responsible for some aspect of the labour system, were very eager to demand the Polish master workers to stay. They always preferred to work with Poles, who were the best workers. It was, however, not easy at that time, because of the camp authorities' orders.

Being an expert in sorting parcels was really a tough task, too. But somehow, I managed to pass as just that – thanks to Doctor 2 [Władysław Dering] and colleague 149 [identity unknown] I was proclaimed, along with four other people, by the chief of the parcel unit as an absolutely necessary worker.

Thus I was not made to join the new transport to Mauthausen which left over the course of two days (April 11 and 12, 1943).

They shipped out 2,500 Poles.

All in all, they transferred 7,500 healthy Poles in March and April of that year.

It was then when I decided my further stay here was getting too hard for me.

After more than two and half years of work I would have to start the work from scratch, building a network all over again, with new people.

On April 13, before noon, I went to the basement of Block 17, where, in a small separate room, Captain 159 [Stanisław Machowski] from the Warsaw HQ was working.

I knew his posture, because Second Lieutenant Stasiek 156 [Stanisław Wierzbicki] (already dead at that time) and Major 85 [Zygmunt Bohdanowski] had shown him to me a couple of times, but I did not have the opportunity to talk to him personally as I entrusted him to one member of our organization, 138 [Bronisław Motyka]. I talked to him for the first time.

I said: 'I've been here for two years and seven months. I have supervised the work here. I have not been given any new orders as of late. The Germans have already transferred the best people I worked with. I would have to start all over again. I think that prolonging my stay here is pointless. And therefore, I'm leaving.'

Captain 159 [Stanisław Machowski] looked at me, perplexed, and said: 'Well, yes, I understand, but can one come to Auschwitz and leave it just like that, whenever one wants?' – 'One can,' I replied.

From that point onwards all my effort was focused on finding the most suitable way out of the camp.

Afterwards I talked to Major 85 [Zygmunt Bohdanowski], who was pretending to be ill and in the infirmary, resting under Doctor 2's [Władysław Dering] care, and this way he managed to avoid being transported someplace else; they were not moving the ill ones just yet. However, he was given the 'A' category. Before I left, I managed to secure him a position in the parcel unit.

I came to him, as he knew the local areas around Auschwitz really well, and asked where would he go and which direction did he advise me to take. Zygmunt looked at me in disbelief and said: 'If someone else came to me with these questions, I'd think they're surely mocking me; but since it's you, I believe you. I'd head to Trzebinia, Chrzanów.'

I showed him a map of the areas surrounding Auschwitz (scale 1:100000), acquired by 76 [Bernard Świerczyna].

I intended to head towards Kęty.

We bid each other farewell. I entrusted him, 'Bohdan,' with the command in case of some action erupting.

I went to my colleague, 59 [Henryk Bartosiewicz], and transferred the command of the organizational side of the entire operation over to him, with the support and succor of the brave, approachable Colonel 121 [Juliusz Gilewicz], who was the official head of the entire operation, and a colleague of 59.

Now, I simply had to get out... And for real...

There is always a difference between saying that one is doing something, and actually doing it. For years now I had been working on merging these two things together.

But above all, I was a believer, and I had faith that I would leave the camp for sure if only God helped me to do so...

There was also another reason to speed up my decision. Doctor 2 [Władysław Dering] told me, he himself having found out about it from the Zugangs who came from

Pawiak, that 161 [Bolesław Kuczbara] (who had escaped from Auschwitz with the Arbeitsdiensts) got caught in Warsaw and was currently being imprisoned in Pawiak.

I distrusted this man deeply because of the rumours about his past, and because of his unscrupulous collecting gold crowns from dead people, and also because of the story with the 'diplomas,' which he had painted for the underground work for Colonel 121 [Juliusz Gilewicz], and 59 [Henryk Bartosiewicz]. I understood it would not be out of character for him to save his own skin by collaborating with the Germans and telling them about what he had seen in the camp.

I discussed this topic with Doctor 2 [Władysław Dering], colleague 59 [Henryk Bartosiewicz] and colleague 106 [identity unknown], and I was convinced that those known to 161 as members of the organization (all high-ranking members) needed to leave.

In mid-March, my colleague and friend, 164 [Edmund Zabawski], informed me that one of our colleagues (I only knew him from seeing him occasionally here and there), Jasiek 170 [Jan Redzej], wanted to leave the camp, so if I had any reports I would like to send, I could use him.

I had met Jasiek and immediately came to like him.

I liked his constantly grinning face, broad shoulders and straightforward honesty. In other words – a first rate companion.

I told him about the possibilities of using the sewers as a last resort, and asked him about his approach.

He answered that as he had been going with the Rollwagen to the town for bread from the bakery he had seen the civilian bakers' bikes parked by the bakery many times. If it cannot be done any other way, he would just take a bike and ride on, hoping for the best.

I advised him against it. After some time, he came back to me with news: there was a huge, heavy, and reinforced door in the bakery, and if one could get to the bakery, one could also perhaps open that door, for it had two wings.

In order to take a closer look at this door, Jasiek moved to the bakery for a couple of days with the permission of the Kapo of his own Kommando (Brotabladungskommando[258]), under the pretense of wanting to stuff himself with bread.

Jasiek weighed 96 kg at that time. The Kapo liked him as an old and cheerful worker.

It was the end of March.

After five days in the bakery Jasiek returned, rather crestfallen. The work in the bakery was very hard.

After five days of work, he lost 6 kg due to the profuse sweating and weighed only 90 kg. But what was even worse, he determined that the door could not be opened.

258 Brotabladungskommando (Ger.) – the work group responsible for transporting bread from the bakery to the camp.

A powerful lock, attached to one wing and a slab in the other when locked with a key, perhaps would not be an insurmountable obstacle if we could remove the four bolts in both doors. But there was also a hook on the outside, which, upon closing the door, held both wings together.

Hard work and this hook discouraged Jasio.

Therefore, for some time, we did not talk about the bakery at all, shifting our focus of interest back to the sewers.

Two innovations were introduced at the camp at that time.

In the first years, we used to have three roll-calls a day. Prolonged roll-calls with 'stand-ups' were a common quiet way of finishing people off, along with some other brutal and primitive methods.

A change occurred since then, a change to more 'cultural' ways of murdering people... Thousands were killed every day with gas and injections of phenol, and about 8,000 people were brought daily into the camp.

In this progress of 'culture,' having rejected beating people with a rod, they decided that it was nothing short of ridiculous to keep killing people silently with 'stand-ups,' as the results were pitiful in comparison with the gas chambers (which were also just as silent), and in 1942, the midday roll-calls were thus cancelled.

The camp only had two roll-calls from this time. On Sundays – as usual – there was only one roll-call, at 10:30 a.m.

Now (in the spring of '43) the next innovation was the cancellation of yet another roll-call – the morning one, and introducing civilian clothing for Häftlings. There were hundreds of thousands of sets of civilian clothes available, left behind by those who had been gassed.

A prisoner working in the camp within the wires was entitled to wear civilian apparel with stripes, painted along his back and at he waist of his jacket with red oil paint.

Nobody working outside the camp and who was leaving the area of the camp – except for the Kapos and Unterkapos – had the right to wear these civilian clothes.

Anyway, the difference between 'then' and 'now' was huge.

Now, we were sleeping on bunk beds, covered with fluffy blankets from 'Canada,' left behind by the people who had been brought here from Holland to be gassed. Those, staying in the camp, every morning would put on civilian clothes, made of excellent quality wool, marred by these bright stripes, and would go to work like office clerks, without any roll-calls.

The lunch break was not disturbed by any roll-call or a stand-up either.

Only the evening roll-calls remained, and these were not too annoying by then either. We did not stand there for too long. Even on the day when three colleagues were declared missing from the Revier – there was no 'stand-up' as a repercussion. The fugitives were looked for scrupulously, because the authorities did not want to have any witnesses at large.

They put a lot of effort into drastically altering the horrifying opinion about Auschwitz, which had already gained currency outside.

They announced that the camp was to be renamed from a concentration camp to an Arbeitslager[259]; no physical violence was to be seen at this point.

At least in the Stammlager.[260]

I was comparing the pictures I remembered from 1940 and 1941, and I just could not believe that these were the same walls and the same people, that were surrounding me.

I remember the winter of 1940/41, when an SS man, in the presence of several of us, suddenly flew into a rage and murdered two prisoners, and then turned to us, upon seeing our stare fixed at him, as if in a need to justify himself, he blurted out: 'Das ist ein Vernichtungslager!'[261]

Now, they were trying to erase these horrible memories from our minds in every possible way...

How are they going to erase the memories of the gas chambers and six crematoria, I wonder?...

The attitude towards those caught while trying to flee did not change, though...

Two more people were hanged in the square again, serving as a grim warning to any potential imitators.

We looked at each other with Jasio [Jan Redzej], our eyes saying: 'Oh, well, so what? Both sides will be trying their best. We will be trying to leave; let them try catching us!'

Once Jasiek had rested a bit after his several days of trial work in the bakery, I asked him if it would be possible to remove this damned hook from the door. Jasiek explained that it would be possible indeed, as the hook was attached to the wall by a big bolt from the inside.

On the following days, Jasiek who was transporting bread from the bakery on a Rollwagen then, made an imprint of the screw's head in a piece of fresh bread and of the key to the padlock on the window to the bakery's warehouse, used for storing the freshly baked loaves.

On the basis of this imprint, a spanner was made by an acquaintance of Jasiek, a locksmith at Industriehof I.[262] The key to that padlock was made by a former colleague of mine from the TAP in Warsaw, Warrant Officer 28 [Szczepan Rzeczkowski]. Both keys were ready within 24 hours.

259 Arbeitslager (Ger.) – a work camp for forced labourers. In contrast to KL, its purpose was not to exterminate, but to provide a permanent workforce, e.g. for industry or construction.

260 Only the main camp (KL Auschwitz I) was to be renamed. KL Auschwitz II-Birkenau was still working flat out, exterminating masses of prisoners – mostly European Jews, but also Gypsies (Roma and Sinti) and members of all nations that were fighting the Third Reich. On the other hand, KL Auschwitz III-Monowitz was considered, at all times, a work camp of the IG Farben factory.

261 This is an extermination camp!

262 The spanner for undoing screws in the bakery doors was made by Franciszek Sobczyński.

Jasiek was able to carefully check whether they worked.

The key to the padlock was made just in case, because, according to Jasiek, it was almost impossible to open the window even slightly.

But from having the tools prepared to actually leaving the camp there was a long way.

It was but a small step on a long road.

Firstly, we would both have to have a job in the bakery, and for me it would have to be only for a short time, as they were sure to notice I am no baker, and this because all the jobs for the 'beasts of burden' (carrying sacks of flour) were already taken, and guarded jealously, by those who pretended to be bakers.

Besides, my stay at the bakery would have to be really short indeed and remain undiscovered by the authorities of the parcel unit, because it was not that long ago since they declared me to be a crucial member of their team and therefore wanted me as such.

An arbitrary change of a Kommando was always seen by the camp's authorities as preparation for escape, especially when it involved abandoning a good Kommando such as the parcel unit. It was a good way of securing one's detention in the SK, as was the case with Olek 167 [Aleksander Bugajski].

After spending some time on pondering the ways to defeat the obstacles on my way to the bakery, I shifted my thoughts to the sewers, but they also presented a bundle of similar difficulties... And so, I was always coming back to the bakery.

Eventually, we (Jasiek [Jan Redzej] and I) decided that we would take the way through the bakery. To conquer all the remaining barriers, to get there for the night shift, and – at least for me – only for one night, and no longer.

This was the plan that had to be... executed.

Without saying a word to anyone (for now, not even to Jasiek), I approached 92 [Wacław Weszke], whose colleague was an Arbeitsdienst now, having replaced Mietek [Mieczysław Januszewski]. Thanks to him, without disclosing the actual purpose of this move, I solved the matter of moving Jasio to the bakery, by saying that he is actually a baker by trade and he had been wandering around different Kommandos without end, without really knowing why, which is even inappropriate because he is such an 'old number.'

Jasiek came to me the following day, saying that he did not know how it happened, but he was summoned to work in the bakery, that his Kapo was worried because of his departure and was really upset, but has somehow accepted the fact. I told him where the note summoning him to the bakery came from, and Jasiek went to the bakery to work there on a permanent basis. After a few days, he was already an 'old' baker.

The bakery's Kapo, a Czech, was impressed by Jasiek's humour and strength, and made him his second-in-command, the Unterkapo, and gladly agreed to take the day shifts, leaving the night shifts to Jasiek.

We had only several days until Easter left...

We decided to use the holidays as a period during which the SS men, Kapos, and all

other kinds of camp authorities were somewhat more at ease and less alert because of the influence of vodka.

In the old days, a Kapo who had been caught smelling of vodka would have been imprisoned in the bunker by Fritzsch or Aumeier, but times had changed.

And just like it was now officially prohibited to drink vodka under the threat of the bunker, it was prohibited (and the punishment was not just the bunker, but SK) to have any dealings with women – and yet, even that ban was loosened a little bit.

Not only the SS men, but also the Häftlings had contacts with German women in SS uniforms, who formed the authorities of the female part of the camp and who had been recruited usually from the ranks of streetwalkers. Sometimes one could see the prisoners on their way back to the camp communicating in a 'meaningful' way with some SS-women.

Some percentage of those using this opportunity was sometimes caught, and many prisoners, usually Kapos or block elders, were then put in the bunker, only avoiding the SK thanks to their reputation with the authorities.

For example, block elder 171 [identity unknown] was imprisoned in the bunker for such an offense.

Now, due to less discipline in the camp, some prisoners started regular relationships with women.

Couples were formed, along with entire romantic backgrounds.

The SS men were not free from such offences. For several months now one could see a picture that would have been unthinkable earlier: SS men walking out of our bunker in Block 11, twice a day, without belts, for a half-an-hour's walk; they have been locked up there for having intercourses with women.

As a general rule, the punishment for consorting with women of the Untermensch race was much greater for the SS men – a penal colony dedicated for SS men. Palitzsch himself was sent there for many years for his contacts with a Jewish girl, Katti [identity unknown].

But that did not happen until much later. For now, less severe punishments were meted out (like the bunker) or sometimes they could even go unpunished. Still, it required secrecy, and the careful selection of women in Rajsko by the SS men was a secret guarded closely even by the SS men themselves. Even the camp commandant's conscience was not completely clean: he had been afflicted by the 'gold rush,' he would very carefully collect gold, precious gems, and other valuable items in cahoots with Erik [Erik Grönke] from the tannery shop. Should he dare to dish out any more severe punishment to one of his subordinates, a vengeful SS man could retaliate by reporting the commandant's misconducts. For that reason, he tried to remain almost blind and deaf to his subordinates' offences.

A Häftling's 'gold rush,' however, was always a guarantee of his death, because after his interrogation in the bunker and searches in the places he indicated, the

ss men usually finished him off to get rid of the witness to the amounts of gold they took from him.

Here everyone died, regardless of their nationality.

This is where two German scoundrels: the block elder of Block 22a [Reinhold Wienhold] and Kapo Walter [Walter Walterscheid], died as well.

Second Lieutenant 164 [Edmund Zabawski] initially wanted to go 'home' with us, but changed his mind, fearing for his family's safety. He gave us the address of his family in town Z. [Bochnia]. He wrote them a letter, discreetly informing about the expected arrival of his acquaintances, he also gave us the password and contact information to the underground organization in Z. [Bochnia].

I moved to the day shift in the parcel unit.

Easter came on April 25 that year ('43).

The weather was beautiful and sunny. Just like every spring, seeing the grass grow rapidly and blossoms appearing on the trees strengthened the desire to finally break free.

On Easter Saturday, April 24, in the parcel unit, I kept complaining about a headache since morning. Nobody knew that my head did not know how to hurt.

I did not go back to work in the afternoon, and while staying in the block, I complained about my joints and calves hurting as well.

When the block elder (a pretty calm German, always polite towards the workers of the parcel unit) heard me talking tendentially loudly to the Stubendienst about my characteristic symptoms, he said with concern: 'Du hast Fleckfieber. Gehe schnell zum Krankenbau!'[263] I pretended to be very reluctant to do so, and in the end got myself to the infirmary, making a fuss about it.

In the infirmary I encountered Edek 57 [Edward Ciesielski]. I told him that I needed to get into the infirmary exactly that day, preferably into the typhus block (he was a warehouse worker there), provided that he would be able to secure my unofficial admittance and release a couple of days later.

Edek did not ponder the matter too deeply. He always picked up a task wholeheartedly.

The Ambulanz[264] was closed on Holy Saturday afternoon. Edek using methods known only to himself, attended to all the paperwork necessary for my admittance to the typhus block through the Ambulanz (in Block 28) and, benefiting from the lack of personnel on Holy Saturday, ushered me in as a patient himself.

Here, bypassing the regular procedure of bathing the patient and taking his belongings away, he put me in a separate room on the ground floor; I undressed, leaving my things under his colleague's watchful eye. Then, Edek led me to the ground floor ward, supervised by 172 [Janusz Młynarski].

263 You have typhus. Go quickly to the hospital!

264 Ambulanz (Ger.) – dispensary.

A spare bed was found, and Edek passed me on to 172's [Janusz Młynarski] care, who remembered me from my struggles with typhus.

He thought that my typhus returned, but since I did not look sick at all, he nodded his head and asked no questions.

I told Edek goodbye and shook his hand with gratitude, and told him that I needed to leave in the morning in two days.

On Sunday, the first day of Easter, the bakery was closed, but it was going to work on Monday.

I knew I needed to leave the infirmary and try to rejoin work on Monday, because my appearance would not be as obvious at that time (a psychological moment), and it would raise no suspicions that some change in personnel might have taken place over the holidays.

I spent the Saturday night in Block 20 and had a beautiful dream: I entered a shed of some kind, where a magnificent horse stood. If I were not a cavalry man and did not know the coat colours of horses, I would have said it was white as milk. I quickly saddled the horse, which was 'dancing' on a tether, someone gave me a saddlecloth, and I said: 'don't disturb me, I'm busy.' I adjusted the girth with my teeth (a habit of mine from 1919/20[265]), I mounted the magnificent horse, and left the shed. And oh, how much I had yearned for a horse already...

Easter Sunday. I was still lying in bed in Block 20.

Edek dropped in from time to time, to ask if I needed anything.

In the afternoon, I decided to have a certain conversation with Edek.

He was brought here as a young lad, and after two years in Auschwitz, was almost twenty years old.

They caught him with a pistol in his pocket. He thought that he was not going to make it. He kept telling me: 'Mr. Tomek [Tomasz Serafiński], I can only count on you, Sir...'

So, on Sunday afternoon I told him: 'Edek, it's simple as that: I'm leaving the camp. Because you have admitted me to Krankenbau unofficially, without all the formalities, and you are going to let me out tomorrow – disregarding the procedures yet again: without the quarantine, and not to my "home" Block 6 where I came from, but to Block 15... Who's going to be held responsible once I'm gone? You are. And so, how about you coming with me?'

Edek only needed a couple of minutes to think. He did not even ask about the route. He decided to go with me.

Soon afterwards Jasiek [Jan Redzej] came up to the window and told me that I had to be out the next morning and back in Block 15; I told him that all was good, but I was not leaving alone, but with Edek.

265 The Polish-Bolshevik War.

Initially, Jasiek was shocked, but when I told him that Edek was a fine lad, it only took him a moment to regain his composure and his always cheerful expression: 'Well, what to do?'

In the evening of that day, Edek started a scene, throwing a tantrum and complaining to the block elder, saying that there was no place here for Poles, he did not want to be there anymore, and that he was going to leave 'to go to the Lager' the next day. The block elder, a German, liked Edek, and started to calm him down, saying that there was no need for him to abandon such a good job as a warehouseman, that he was not going to let him go in the first place, because here, in the warehouse, there was little to do and plenty of food. Edek refused to listen, claiming that he was persecuted for being a Pole, etc.

Finally, the block elder lost his patience: 'Fine! Go wherever you want, you hothead!'

I could hear the echo of this row all the way to the room where I was resting. For many hours, the Stubendiensts and Pflegers from the entire block were coming to 172 [Janusz Młynarski], asking one another what might have made Edek abandon such a good job. Since they had seen Edek coming to me, they were asking me as well about the possible causes of his departure. I said: 'Oh, you know, he's young, still reckless...'

I spent the next night in the same bed, and dreamt about horses again.

I dreamt that the wagon carrying me and some other colleagues had two horses in the front, but also three more horses harnessed abreast in front of them. The horses cantered with ease, but all of a sudden, the wagon went straight into a patch of dense mud. The horses struggled to keep moving forward, but eventually managed to get the wagon out of the mud onto solid road and back on track.

Monday morning, the second day of the Easter holidays, Edek brought me a note, a Zettel,[266] moving me to Block 15. He had a similar paper as well. They both were obtained with the help of colleague 173 [Władysław Fejkiel].

I got out of bed, put on my clothes, which were stored in a small chamber adjacent to the patients' room, and, accompanied by Edek, went to Block 15.

We entered the block's Schreibstube to report to the block elder, a German. The mood was clearly festive. The block elder, already tipsy, was avidly playing cards with the Kapos.

We stood to attention and reported efficiently and by the book our assignment to this block. The block elder said in German: 'You can clearly see that they're "old numbers." It's a pleasure to hear them report,' he brightened up. But then, he suddenly frowned: 'Why are you coming to my block?' – 'We're bakers.' – 'Ah, okay, bakers. Well, so be it,' the block elder said, coming back to his cards. 'Does the Kapo of the bakery know about this?' – 'Jawohl![267] We have talked to him already. He will accept us.'

266 Zettel (Ger.) – a referral (in the medical sense of the word).

267 Yes, Sir!

We had not even seen the Kapo of the bakery yet, but we decided to deceive all the camp's authorities anyway, and go all the way.

'Okay, give me your Zettels and go to the room.' We gave him the transfer cards from Block 20 to Block 15, and went to mingle with the bakers.

Jasiek [Jan Redzej] was already waiting for us, but prudently he did not approach us immediately.

We stood in front of the Kapo and told him that we were bakers, that we knew how to work in a mechanical bakery (one was just about to be launched), that we were moved to Block 15, and that the block elder knew us (even though he had just met us a second ago), that we were 'old numbers,' and we were not going to embarrass him at all.

The Kapo, who was sitting behind the table, was clearly surprised and confused, but before he could decide on anything, Jasiek was already by his side, whispering into his ear and smiling. The Kapo smiled as well, but did not say anything yet. Later on, Jasiek told us what he had said to the Kapo at that moment: 'Kapo, these two are just losers, about to regret it. They think that the bakery is some light stuff, that they're going to just eat bread and do nothing. Kapo, put them on night shift, and I'll teach them a lesson – he pointed at his huge fist – that after the first night they'll have had more than enough of the bakery.'

In the meantime, we gave an apple, some sugar and some preserves to the Kapo, all taken from a package that had been sent to me from home.

The Kapo looked at Jasiek with a smile, then at the apple and sugar. Maybe he was trying to silently assess us, hoping for the prospect of getting more packages in the future. Then he just looked at us and said: 'Sure, let's see what sort of bakers you are.'

The bell, calling for the roll-call, scheduled to toll a couple of minutes before 11 a.m. because of the holiday, interrupted the conversation with the Kapo and prevented us from talking to Janek.

The roll-call went smoothly and without any incidents. No prisoners were missing. For now.

Standing in the row, I was only thinking about the fact that if everything went right according to plan, this would be my last roll-call in Auschwitz. I calculated that I must have seen about 2,500 of them.

Such a great scale for comparison – over the course of all these years, in all the different blocks.

Yes, things in the camp were consistently getting more and more lenient...

After the roll-call, the three of us gathered on the top of the bunk beds in the bakers' room, and talked loudly about completely neutral things or food parcels, as there were strangers all around us. From time to time, however, we exchanged more meaningful messages.

Jasiek, who became friends with Edek pretty much immediately, pretended to only be interested in us because of our Christmas food parcels.

We had to go to the bakery that very night, because the state of general confusion among the camp's authorities that we created could not be maintained for too long. Besides, I had to be invisible to the fellow inmates of Block 6 and for the employees of the parcel unit as well, because they had already seen me back at the Lager, healthy, and such news could interest the Kapo and the chief of the parcel unit. I could share Olek's [Aleksander Bugajski] fate.

We could also expect a conversation about us between the Kapo of the bakery and the block elder; it would become very clear that neither of them knew us, and so, we had to act quickly and overcome all the obstacles.

The night shift was comprised of eight bakers.

More of them were not necessary, this was reported on the gate in the Blockführerstube, and could not be changed. Or, at least, it was beyond our power to change it.

The night shift was manned by the prisoners who would not trade places with anyone.

The good news was – Jasiek was already working there. The bad news – we needed two more places. How could we convince the bakers, without raising their suspicions, to skip their work that night, and let us take their places instead?

They were suspicious and they feared we wanted to take away their positions. Who knows, maybe we were good bakers (we never said we were not) and the Kapo would kick them out of the bakery, taking us instead. We explained that a mechanical bakery was soon going to open, and that we were all going to be needed anyway.

We said that we were 'old numbers' and we had no problems with finding pretty much any job, especially since apparently the job in the bakery was not all that great and easy. We were going to go there just once, see what kind of work it was, and not ask for more – we would find another job instead.

It is difficult to list all the arguments, all the methods we tried, while having to pretend, at the same time, that we were not really too hell-bent on that, and producing gifts like sugar, gingerbreads, apples. We had given away all the parcels we had, except for a small box of honey that I received from home.

It was difficult to make progress.

We decided a long time ago that once we had set foot in the bakery, there was no turning back because, for changing the Kommando arbitrarily, I would surely be sent to the SK, and besides that, our lack of professionalism as bakers would be discovered pretty quickly. We would be kicked out of the bakery and never taken for a job like that again.

But in order not to come back, we had to leave first.

And we still had no place in the night shift.

Around 3 p.m. one of the bakers finally agreed to give his place to us for that night – now we just needed another one.

In the meantime, I was collecting some things from my friends. To Block 6, very carefully for the things I needed, allegedly for a sick colleague, went Master Corporal 40

[Tadeusz Szydlik] (Block 18a), who had known about my plan. I changed my shoes twice in his presence.

I visited Lieutenant 76 [Bernard Świerczyna] (Block 27), who gave us (Edek [Edward Ciesielski] and me) warm underwear – navy blue skiing trousers, which we put on underneath our regular trousers.

Colleague 101 [Witold Kosztowny] (Block 28) gave me a navy blue wind-proof jacket.

We were running out of time, and we still needed the second spot in the bakery.

When I came running with a pair of high boots, which turned out quite uncomfortable after trying them on, I almost bumped into the Lagerältester. I left the boots in the hallway of Block 25, by the door of the block elder, 80 [Alfred Włodarczyk], and due to the lack of time I did not try to explain anything. When leaving the building, I ran into Captain 11,[268] to whom I cordially bid farewell, again, without explaining anything.

I changed (partially) in Block 22a, in the presence of Colonel 122 [Teofil Dziama], Captain 60 [Stanisław Kazuba], and colleague 92 [Wacław Weszke]. Those lying on the top of bunk beds, upon seeing my quick movements when putting a wind-proof jacket and skiing trousers under my regular striped outfit, nodded with understanding. Captain 60 [Stanisław Kazuba] uttered his favourite saying with humour: 'Uh-oh, nooooot goooood...'

After that, I bid farewell to my colleague 59 [Henryk Bartosiewicz], who gave me some dollars and marks.

The rest of the preparations were made on the top bunk bed of my colleague, Lieutenant 98 [identity unknown]; Officer Cadet 99 [identity unknown] slept like a baby at that time, and so I refrained from waking him up.

We waited in Block 15 till it was several minutes past 5 p.m., until we finally found a baker, who either wanted to make friends among the 'old numbers,' rich inmates, or maybe wanted to grab some rest at night – whatever. Be that as it may, we won his trust: he believed us when we said we would not double-cross him and that we were not going to take away his job, and agreed to help us.

We were ready at 6:00 p.m.

268 On page 91 of the typescript's Xerox copy of the *Witold's Report*, kept in the ABSM, only the digit '1' is visible. Dr. Adam Cyra, when interpreting the document, probably basing on Dr. Józef Garliński's earlier suggestions, presupposed that this is the beginning of number '159,' which stood for Captain Stanisław Machowski. On the other hand, in the original document, kept in the PUMST in London, number '11' is visible there. In the *Witold's Report* it denotes Lieutenant Colonel Tadeusz Reklewski and here the author clearly mentions a captain. On the typescript page, stored in London, number '11' is located at the end of the verse and is most probably a part of a three-digit number. An analysis has shown that Pilecki was coding his associates in the order of mentioning them. In the interval of 110–119 only two individuals were identified as captains: no. 114 (Tadeusz Paolone, in camp: Lisowski) and no. 116 (Zygmunt Pawłowicz vel Pawłowski, registered in camp as Julian vel Franciszek Trzęsimiech). The only unidentified person is the one with the number '111.' The remaining people were either not military men or had different ranks. Therefore, most probably Pilecki means one of the two above mentioned captains.

Jasiek [Jan Redzej] changed into his civilian clothing, acquired some time ago from Lieutenant 76 [Bernard Świerczyna], since he, as an Unterkapo, was allowed to go out to work outside the camp in civilian clothing.

He had bright wide red stripes painted along his back, at the waist, and on his pants (so the Häftling could not escape – as he would be visible from afar).

Nobody knew, of course, that these stripes were painted by colleague 118 [identity unknown], by dissolving the paint in water, and not in varnish.

At 6:20 p.m. the SS man shouted loud from the gate: 'Bäckerei!!!'[269]

This was the signal for all of us who belonged to the night shift in the bakery to run out of Block 15 and sprint towards the gate.

It was a sunny day. The camp was in a cheerful and festive mood. The prisoners were strolling about. On my run to the gate I encountered several colleagues, who looked at me with a gaze of the greatest bewilderment, pondering where I could possibly be going with the bakers while having such a good job in the parcel unit.

I recognized the faces of Lieutenant 20 [Jan Kupiec] and Second Lieutenant 174 [Jan Olszowski], but I was not afraid of them. I smiled at them: they were my friends.

At the gate we formed two rows ready to march out. To the very end we were afraid that one of the bakers who traded their places with us might change his mind and show up.

Then one of us, one of the new ones, would have to stay.

We would both have to go alone, because even if we had wanted to back out, it was not doable any more, not at the gate.

But there were eight of us, the exact number.

We were surrounded by five SS men.

The Scharführer[270] counted us through a small window of the Blockführerstube, he uttered towards our guards: 'Paßt auf!'[271] Did they figure something out? No, there was another reason: it was Monday, the day of changing the composition of the bakers' guard squad for the entire upcoming week.

We moved on.

At that moment I thought that I had passed through this gate so many times, but never like this. Now I knew I could not return. This very reason was enough for me to feel joy and wings of a sort. But taking off was still pretty far off...

We marched by the tannery. It was a long time since I had been there. While passing by, I looked at the buildings and the courtyard, recalling all my works here and colleagues, some of whom were already dead...

269 'Bakery!' – call for the bakers to depart.

270 SS- Scharführer (Ger.) – the equivalent of staff sergeant.

271 Here: Pay attention!

We split at the junction of our road from the camp and another road, leading to the town. Two bakers and six SS men took the road to the right, towards the bridge, to the 'smaller bakery.'

The reason for such a disproportionate escort for these two bakers and our oddly small escort (the six of us – and only two SS men) was that those three SS men intended to indulge in some holiday drinking.

We marched to the left. Finally I saw the larger of the two bakeries, the day shift of the bakers going out to meet us mid-way, the door – menacing, reinforced, towering – and the battlefield for our lives that night.

To the left of the bakery's entrance, in a separate room, coal was stored. We put our belongings there, stripping naked because of the high temperature.

The place was pretty dark.

We put our things separately, dividing them into stuff that we had to take and stuff that was to be left – striped clothing.

The smaller of the two SS guards, as if smelling a rat, started to examine the door immediately, shook his head, and said that it was not sturdy enough.

Silver-tongued Jasio [Jan Redzej] started to persuade him with a smile, convincingly arguing that it was quite the opposite.

The door was heavy, reinforced with metal, with a gigantic lock opened only by a key attached to the SS man's belt, and the spare key hanging in a cavity in the wall behind glass that would have to be broken to get it.

The SS man's suspicions were maybe caused by an inkling of some sort, but they might equally have been caused by the new guards' eagerness to demonstrate their commitment to duty.

From that point of view, Monday was not the luckiest of days.

At the end of the week the SS men were somewhat used to the workers and were more comatose, not so alert.

The new set of guards was advantageous due to having arrived here along with me and Edek [Edward Ciesielski] for the first time, so they did not know that we were here for the first time as well. They made no distinction between watching us and the old bakers.

What did we do in the bakery?

Civilian bakers, also working two shifts and coming here from the town, were supervising the baking of the bread.

We had quotas of bread loaves that we had to bake during the night. Should a team of bakers fail to achieve their quotas, they would go straight to the bunker, civilian bakers and inmates alike.

Because of that, there was a great rush in the bakery.

At night we had to make five batches. We had to fill all the ovens five times and empty them five times.

We were supposed to try leaving the bakery after the second batch of bread, because it would have been too early after the first one.

In reality, the first, the second, the third, and the fourth batches were already done, and we still could not leave.

Just like when one plays the game of solitaire and needs to keep shuffling the cards to succeed, also here, crossing the paths of the bakers going for flour, sawdust, coal, water, transporting ready loaves, further complicated by the paths of the SS men standing guard – all these things had to click and fall into place, aligning themselves in a way that gave us access to the door without being seen by either the SS men or the bakers.

And the stake of this 'solitaire' was... our life.

We were locked in the bakery because we had to do a job that had to be performed quickly and without hampering the other bakers. We were dripping with sweat from the stifling heat. We were drinking water almost by the bucket-full.

We were trying to fool our SS men and other bakers by pretending to be absorbed only in work.

In our own eyes, we were more like animals locked in a cage, thrashing around, trying to the full extent of our wits to align all the conditions necessary to leave that very night...

The hours were passing... The 'solitaire' was getting complicated... not going well... leaving was not an option just yet...

The situation looked good one moment only to go awry the next.

Our nervous tension would ebb and flow.

We could see the door. The SS men were going back and forth, approaching the very door itself.

Opening the window, secured with a lock, was not an option either – there was always someone right by it.

Midnight, Monday had passed and Tuesday began. This led to some improvement in the circumstances.

One of the SS men laid down and fell asleep, or at least pretended to be asleep. In any case, he remained stationary.

All the bakers were exhausted as well.

When the fourth batch of bread loaves was ready around 2 a.m., the bakers took a longer break and started to eat.

The three of us had no rest.

Janek [Jan Redzej] was already changing his clothes in secrecy; Edek [Edward Ciesielski] and I were trying to mask his movements by carrying around, with fake eagerness, coal and water, preparing them for making the final batch of bread.

In reality, we were preparing ourselves for the ultimate effort – leaving the camp.

At one moment, when the SS man was going from the door towards the baking hall, Janek, hoping the SS man will only turn around in two or three minutes, he moved

towards the door, fully dressed, quickly twisted the screw's nut: it was no match for Jasio's iron hands. The screw with the hook fell out behind the door.

When the SS man came back, Jasio disappeared in the cell for coal for a while.

We were walking here and there with the wheelbarrow, full of coal.

During the next round of the SS man's trip away from the door, when he had his back turned, Jasiek quickly and silently opened the two upper and two lower bolts. We, going back and forth with our wheelbarrows, took turns in covering him.

All the bakers were exhausted and either sat or lay down in the great hall.

The bolts took more time than the nuts.

Jasiek, in front of the SS man, fully clothed, entered the lavatory right by the door. The SS man did not notice he was dressed – perhaps he, being a 'newbie' himself, thought it was a regular thing at the crack of dawn.

Until this point, things were going well.

Suddenly, an unexpected thing happened. Either prompted by an inkling or maybe without giving it a single thought, the SS man approached the door, stood right by it, with his face maybe some half a metre from it, and started to examine it.

I put down my wheelbarrow, even though I was some four metres away from him. Edek also froze in fear, rooted to the spot, by a pile of coal.

We were both just waiting for the SS man's loud scream as a signal to jump at him, incapacitate, and tie him up.

Why did he not notice anything? Did he even have his eyes open? Maybe he was dreaming about something? I could never understand it.

I assume that he must have given it a lot of thought as well the next day, in the bunker.

In any case, he just turned around and walked towards the ovens. When he was some six metres away from the door, Jasiek sneaked out from lavatory, I jumped silently to fetch our stuff and a second later both of us were pushing the door.

At that moment Edek sneaked past behind one SS man, approached the bed where the other SS man was sleeping, and slashed the cables in two places with a knife, taking a piece as a souvenir!

The door was bending under our pressure, but refused to give way.

The SS man was going away from us: eight metres, nine metres...

We pressed the door even more, and it bent even more as well, but still refused to yield, as we had never opened them before and therefore had no guarantee that they would finally do so. If we had been able to feel fear at that moment – we should have been covered in a cold sweat – but we did not have time for that.

In the meantime, Edek jumped from the SS man's bed to the coal storage for his stuff.

Jasiek had lots of strength, mine was doubled due to having all my nerves strained – but the door still prevented passage...

We pushed with all our might, and... Suddenly and without any sound, the door gave way...

A chilly gust of air hit our overheated heads, the stars blinked to each other in the sky, as if trying to say something...

All this somehow fitted into the blink of an eye...

A jump into the darkness, and a run: Jasiek, then me, then Edek.

At the same time, a hail of bullets followed us.

It is hard to describe how fast we were running. The bullets did not hit any of us. We were shredding the night air to pieces with quick movements of arms and legs.

When we were about 100 metres away from the bakery, I started to yell 'Jasiek!... Jasiek!...,' but Jasiek was running straight ahead like a racing horse. If I could catch up with him... grab his arm and stop... But the distances between the three of us were identical, we were all running at the same speed.

Nine shots had been fired behind us, and then – silence. I assume the SS man must have grabbed the phone. The one who was asleep surely must have been completely disoriented for the first minute.

I wanted to stop Jasiek, for according to my plan of the route we were supposed to take ran at an acute angle to the direction we had actually taken. It was possible to achieve that after some 200–300 metres. Jasiek slowed down, I caught up with him, and so did Edek.

'Well? What is it?' asked Jasiek, panting heavily. – 'Now? Nothing, I guess,' I replied.

'You said that you had a plan where to go next?'

That was right, indeed I had a plan. I wanted to get across the Soła River and walk on its other side, into the opposite direction, towards the camp and then further south, towards Kęty. But Jasiek's run north changed everything. It was too late to turn back now. It was past 2 a.m. We had to hurry.

'So what now?' asked my colleagues.

'Nothing. Let's get dressed,' I told Edek. 'I'll lead the way differently.' The two of us were almost naked, in swimming trunks, with bundles of clothes under our arms.

Up to that point, we had been running at some distance from the river, but along the Soła, towards north.

Now, after getting dressed and hiding our striped trousers carefully in the bushes (we took these with us by mistake), I led us to the river bank (the left one), and then along the bushes, further towards the north.

Edek, upon being asked if he had the package of powdered tobacco said that he did, but lost everything when we were running. Should the dogs be released after us, they would surely lose our scent, smelling only tobacco instead.

I dried and powdered this tobacco a long time ago, back in the days of carving spoons (tannery), from where we planned to prepare an escape route for some colleagues one day.

While it got spilled a bit too quickly now, it would cover a bit our footsteps.

Not changing the once assumed north direction, we encountered a fork in the river. The Soła river flows into the Vistula at this point, but just before that there was a railway bridge over the Soła, on the right, and according to our information, always guarded.

'Tomek [Serafiński], where are you going?' asked Jasio.

'Don't say a word. There's no other way and we have very little time. We're taking the shortest possible route.'

We were approaching the bridge. I was leading. The soles of my shoes were made of rubber. Jasiek followed about 10–15 steps behind me, Edek at the end.

Very carefully, observing the sentry post in front of the bridge from the left side, I climbed the railway embankment and the bridge.

My colleagues followed.

Walking silently, we started to move rather quickly on the bridge. We covered a third... then a half... we were approaching the other side... up to the end of the bridge... till now we did not encounter any obstacles...

Finally, at the end of the bridge, we quickly jumped to the left from the embankment, into a meadow or field of some kind.

Surprisingly for us, we managed to cross the bridge without any obstacles.

The guards must have been having a good time in good company at Easter.

Further on, on the left side of the rails, I turned to the east, along the Vistula.

Finding our way was easy – the sky was full of shimmering stars.

We already felt free to some extent, but there was still some danger between us and the feeling of complete freedom.

We started to run cross-country.

We left the town of Oświęcim on our right.

We jumped over trenches, ran across roads and ploughed fields and meadows, we were getting closer to the Vistula and then further from it again, depending on how it twisted and turned.

It was not until later that we could truly appreciate how much a man can endure when all of his nerves are put to work.

We crossed ploughed fields going uphill, slid down the concrete-reinforced slopes, climbing the edges of some canals like cats. A train caught up with us when we were going along its tracks.

Finally, after several kilometres, we thought it was ten (but in reality it was slightly less), we spotted fences, blocks, watch-towers, and wires... ahead, rising from beyond the hill. There was a camp before us, and the crawling light of spotlights that we knew so well.

Initially, we were simply frozen by this sight, but soon enough we realized that it had to be a sub-branch of our camp, the so-called Buna.

There was no time for changing the direction of our march.

Dawn was colouring the sky...

Having hastened our steps, we started to flank the camp from the left. We hit the wires. again, we were sliding down and climbing back up the slopes... We crossed the canals by a footbridge. In one place very carefully we moved on a footbridge over which the foamy water was overflowing... We bypassed the wires in the water. Ultimately we left this camp behind us as well.

We reached (still capable of running) the bank of the Vistula river, and started moving forward along its bank, at the same time looking for prospective places to hide during the day, just in case.

It was almost daylight. We had no real cover. The dark line of the forest blackened on the horizon far away. It was already very bright.

There was a village right by the river bank; we saw some boats, the property of the villagers, floating on the water.

I decided to take a boat over the Vistula. They were docked at poles with chains. The chains had padlocks on them. We inspected the chains. One of them was made of two pieces joined by a bolt.

Jasiek produced a spanner (a piece of an iron bar with a hole for the screw's nut) which he had used to unscrew the bolts in the bakery.

A coincidence surprised us again. The spanner fitted. We unscrewed the nut, and the two parts of the chain fell apart...

The sun was just rising.

We got on the boat and took off.

Someone could have come out from one of the houses, only several dozen steps away, at any moment.

Over a dozen metres from the other shore, the boat hit the sandbank. We did not have the time to push it – we jumped into the water and went further on foot, waist-deep in the water.

The body and the joints, hot from running the entire night, reacted. We did not feel anything just yet, quickly jumping onto the other riverbank of the Vistula.

More or less two kilometres from us there was the black tract of forest.

The forest – my beloved forest; I missed it terribly for several years – was our salvation here, the first true cover that could reliably hide us.

I cannot say that we ran towards that salvation. We did not have the strength to run. We walked at a quick pace, but had to slow down from time to time due to the lack of strength.

The sun was shining brightly.

We could hear the whirr of the motorcycles in the distance, maybe even in pursuit of us...

And we walked slowly...

Edek and I were wearing clothes that, while somewhat suspicious from close up, from a distance could easily pass for dark silhouettes not out of context to their

surroundings. However, the flashy red stripes on Jasio's beautiful suit made him very noticeable from a distance.

Some people working in the field were to be seen out in the distance. They must have spotted us.

The forest was slowly getting closer.

A weird thing: for the first time in my life, I caught the scent of the forest from the distance of a hundred metres.

All our senses caught this powerful aroma, the most beautiful twitter of the birds, a humid whiff, the smell of resin... The gaze wanted to wander inside this close-by mystery of the woods.

We crossed the threshold of the first trees and dropped ourselves down on the soft moss.

Lying on my back, I was sending a thought far above the tree tops, into the sky, a thought that transformed happily into a huge question mark. A metamorphosis. What a contrast with the camp in which I felt like having spent a thousand years...

The pines were rustling, their giant tops swaying gently.

We could see the azure scraps of sky between the branches. Diamonds of dew shone on the blades of grass and on the leaves of bushes... The sun penetrated the canopy here and there with its golden rays, brightening up thousands of tiny beings... The world of beetles, flies, butterflies... The world of birds, which, just like thousands of years ago, still had its own rhythm...

And yet, despite so many sounds, there was a silence... a great silence... Silence, isolated from the human hustle and bustle... From all the villainy of men... Silence – not a living soul there...

We did not matter.

We were merely on our way back to 'earth,' only to be counted among the multitude of humans.

Oh, how glad we were not to see people yet.

We decided to stay away from them for as long as possible.

However, it would be a difficult task to keep away from them for too long. We had nothing to eat. For the moment we were not very hungry. We ate wood sorrel,[272] we drank water from a stream...

We were delighted with everything.

The whole world was beloved by us... Only not the people... I had a small box of honey that had been sent to me from home, and a teaspoon... In turns I was giving a spoonful of honey to Jasio and Edek.

While lying down, we discussed the events of that night. Jasiek was bald, so he did not need any headgear. Edek and I had shaved heads. In order to hide the lack of hair

272 An edible plant common all over Poland (Lat. Oxalis acetosella).

from people, we took two civilian caps from the bakers' staff, back in the bakery, but Edek lost his cap during our run through the bushes. Now, he had to put a scarf on his head, and for that reason, we dubbed him: Ewunia.[273]

Jasio, in turn, called himself Adam, and seeing some green branch, picked a surname: Gałązka ['Twig']. It was perfectly fitting, considering he weighed about 90 kilograms.

After Jasio's suit was washed in the stream in order to get rid of the red stripes, and after the four banknotes found in my shoes were dried, we marched again heading east, going through the woods, jumping through small patches of open fields or avoiding some larger ones by skirting the forest's perimeter.

The rule was – as far from people as possible!...

Just before the very evening we had a little altercation with a gamekeeper, who spotted us from some distance when we were eating the rest of the honey... and tried to stop us by crossing our path. I entered a small patch of young trees, which happened to be there rather fortunately... and which was thick enough to restrict all movement to crawling. In there, I ordered that we change direction, and we left the young woods right by the road.

We crossed the road and disappeared into the young woods again.

The gamekeeper lost our trail; we stayed on the road, because, according to the signposts, it led to Z.,[274] which happened to be on our route.

We approached it when the sun had already set.

There were ruins of a castle on top of the hill just before the town.

We went around the whole open field before the town from the left side, went across the road between the houses, and headed to the woody hill, straight to the ruins of the castle.

Here, near the ruins, on the slope of the hill, we lied down, covered in the previous year's leaves, terribly tired, and fell asleep...

This was Tuesday, April 27.

Edek fell asleep immediately.

Jasiek and I still had arthritis, as a result of the cold bath. On top of that, I suffered from sciatica.[275]

I endured the last hour of our march by sheer willpower alone. Apart from the pain in my right hip, I also had a nasty pain in my knees, particularly severe when I was going down a slope, I had to grit my teeth when taking steps.

273 Ewunia (Evie) is a diminutive form of the Polish name Ewa (Eve).

274 Unlike some other places in the *Witold's Report*, where the letter 'Z' stands for Bochnia, here it refers to the village of Babice in the Chrzanów district, still at a distance from the escapees' final destination.

275 Inflammation of the sciatic nerve, running down the leg from the lower part of the back.

Now, when I was lying down, the pain was not so great, but definitely still bothering me.

Jasiek did not feel any pain, lying, and he fell asleep, too.

I could not fall asleep, taking advantage of sleepless hours, I started to think about what to do next.

The border between Silesia, which had been incorporated into the Third Reich[276], and the General Government,[277] was eight kilometres away – and we had to cross it.

I spent long hours making plans, half-asleep, thinking how to get to the border and where to head next. Suddenly, a revelation – I sat up on the leaves so quickly... that I hissed from a sudden surge of pain...

I recalled the year 1942. I worked in the spoonery (tannery), where my colleague 19 [Tadeusz Słowiaczek], with whom we often talked very openly, worked as a Schreiber.

He told me that he was writing letters to his uncle, who was a parish priest in a town lying astride the border, and that parish priest was allowed to cross the border with a wagon driver. He was also allowed to leave that wagon driver on the other side...

We were only seven or eight kilometres away from the parish of my colleague's uncle.

Edek started to talk in his sleep, initially – incoherently, but then he asked some Bronek [identity unknown] if he had brought bread for him (he was hungry, so he dreamed about eating at night). Suddenly, he jumped up from the ground and asked very loudly, waking up Jasiek: 'Well? Did he bring bread?' – 'Who was supposed to bring bread?' – 'Uh, Bronek...' – 'Calm down, my dear. You see, here's the forest, the castle, and us, sleeping in the leaves. You were dreaming...'

Edek lied down.

Now I got up in turn. It was 4 a.m. I decided to reach the parish priest in the morning. We did not have a long way to go, but our joints hurt. I was barely able to move my legs with my knees hurting badly. Jasiek stood up reluctantly, almost fell down again, and started to slide down the slope. The pain in his knee joints almost caused him to faint. But we got a grip on ourselves.

276 By Hitler's decrees of October 8 and 12, 1939, the following territories of the Second Polish Republic were incorporated into the Third Reich: the Pomeranian, Poznań, Łódź and Silesian Voivodeships, as well as the Suwałki region and parts of Mazovia, Małopolska (Lesser Poland) and the Kielce region. They were claimed to be 'indigenously German' and their populations were to be evicted. The specific course of the evictions and Germanization policy depended on local needs; the most brutal forms were experienced in Pomerania and Greater Poland, but most Poles were left in Silesia (due to the high demand for industrial workers there).

277 Generalgouvernement (Ger.) – an administrative unit in the German-occupied Polish territories, established by a decree of October 12, 1939 (enforced as from October 26). It included the eastern part of pre-war Poland occupied by the Third Reich: the former Lublin Voivodeship, part of the Warsaw Voivodeship, most of the Cracow and Kielce Voivodeships and part of the Lwów Voivodeship. It was divided into Cracow, Warsaw, Lublin and Radom districts. These areas were not directly incorporated into the Third Reich and were meant to be inhabited by Poles. After the outbreak of the Soviet-German war in 1941, most of the former Lwów Voivodeship was incorporated into the General Government, forming the Galicia District. Cracow was the capital city of this administrative area, ruled by its Governor General Hans Frank.

The first steps were hard and painful, especially walking down the slope.

These seven or eight kilometres took a bit longer, as we could not go in a straight line. Initially we were moving very slowly, then – slightly quicker.

Jasiek, in order to get some information as the best dressed man amongst us not needing to hide the lack of hair on his already bald head, approached a villager going to work and walked with him, chatting.

We were approaching town II.[278]

A small church was visible on the wooded hill.

Jasiek left the villager, joined us again and told us that the town we wanted to get to was matching the area around the hill with the church.

Meandering between the fields, we finally reached the road, where the customs office was. The border itself was further on, on the hill.

It was 7 a.m. Several people were already in the office, and they were watching us inquisitively from a distance.

However, we crossed the road first, then a small bridge over some brook, overseen by people, trying to walk as energetically and merrily as possible.

Finally, we reached a forested hill and after climbing several metres of its slope, we collapsed on the ground, exhausted...

At that moment, as if having waited for us, a bell tolled from the belfry of the church on the hill...

'Jasio, my dear brother, I'm sorry, but it is you who needs to go to the church, as out of the three of us, you look the most respectable and you can go there without a cap.'

I sent Jasio to the parish priest, whom he was supposed to tell that we were in hell together with the priest's brother, Franciszek [Franciszek Słowiaczek], and his two sons: Tadek [Tadeusz Słowiaczek] and Lolek [Karol Słowiaczek].

Jasio went and was gone for a long time.

When he finally returned, he was not very happy. He told us that he had to wait for the priest who was about to celebrate Mass, and that he talked to him, but the priest did not believe him that we were able to escape from Auschwitz and explicitly said that he was afraid it was some kind of a trap.

I bet! When he saw Jasio's face, smiling from ear to ear, he found it difficult to believe at once, hearing about Auschwitz, that Jasiek spent two and a half years there and managed to escape...

I sent Jasio back again, for the Mass might have already ended, and gave him proper and detailed instructions: I told him which relative of the priest lived in which block, where the nephews went, in which block they were to be found, and even the content of their letters written last Christmas...

278 Alwernia – a small town in the Chrzanów district.

Jasio went out again. The Mass had already finished. Then Jasio approached the priest and told him everything, adding that he was with two colleagues, who had to remain hidden in the bushes because of their shaved heads and strange clothing.

The priest believed him and came with Jasio to us.

Here, he threw up his hands and finally believed everything. He returned to us every half an hour, bringing milk, coffee, rolls, bread, sugar, butter, and other delicacies.

As it turned out, this was not the right priest – the one we wanted to get to was two kilometres further away.[279]

This parish priest was no stranger to the other one, and also knew the history of his entire family imprisoned in Auschwitz.

He could not take us into his home, because too many people were constantly wandering around his courtyard.

We enjoyed staying in our spot amidst young spruces and bushes.

The priest gave us some medicinal ointment for our hurting joints. Here we wrote the first letters to our families, which the priest then posted.

In the evening, when it got dark, the priest sent a good guide to us.

'So there are still good people in this world,' we said to ourselves.

This is how Wednesday, April 28, drew to a close.

We bid the priest farewell. Our knees did not hurt so much anymore. At 10 p.m. we followed the guide with the intention of crossing the border.

The guide took a long, complicated route, doubling back a lot, to finally reach a place where he said: 'It's best to do it here!' He himself went back.

It was possible that it was the best place to cross the border because the area was full of cut trees, wires, and trenches. The Border Guards must have assumed that nobody would try to cross the border here, and so they guarded other places.

It took us about an hour to cross this 150 metre wide belt.

It went much quicker after that, the terrain varied, but we mostly stayed on the road.

The night was pitch black, we did not have to fear being identified from a distance. There was a risk of encountering a patrol, but alertness and some animal-like instinct led us safely onwards.

Sometimes, when we felt that the road was no longer leading to where we wanted it to go, we would take turns at cutting across fields, following the stars as our points of reference, going through woods, falling into gulches and climbing their slopes.

We walked through the night and we left behind a vast area – or at least we thought so.

279 The fugitives wanted to get in touch with Fr. Karol Słowiaczek, a parish priest in Poręba-Żegoty, brother of a prisoner of KL Auschwitz Franciszek and uncle of Karol and Tadeusz. However, instead of Poręba-Żegoty they arrived in Alwernia and maintained contact with Fr. Jan Legowicz, the guardian of the Bernardine cloister in that town.

The first light of the new day found us in some village, which was several kilometres long. The road in the village turned left, while we had to go right, diagonally. Because we spotted our first group of people that day, far away to our left, we turned right and went straight ahead, through the fields, then through a meadow.

The sun had risen (it was Thursday).

The area ahead of us was completely open. Crossing it would mean exposing ourselves to risk. We found a huge bush and spent the entire day inside of it, not being able to fall asleep – it was not easy to fall asleep in a marsh, sitting on a stone or on the branches of a bush.

In the evening, when the sun had set but one could still see relatively well, Jasiek went out to scout ahead. He came back quickly enough, bringing the news that we had the Vistula close to our right, and that in order to maintain our current direction, we would have to get across it here. There were boats available and a ferryman who could get us over to the other side.

We decided to use the ferryman's boat. We left the bushes. We approached the river. The ferryman sized us up with his gaze. We got into the boat. The boat left the bank. We safely reached the other side. Once the ferryman received payment in marks, he looked at us again in a strange way.

III[280] and the town of IV[281] itself were right in front of us.

We took the main road through the little town. People were returning home after their day's work. Cows, being late, were hurrying back to their pens. Householders, standing by their homes, were looking at us, intrigued.

We really wanted to eat something and have a hot drink. The nights were cold. The last time I slept was Sunday night, in the infirmary in Auschwitz, but we had not decided to enter someone's house just yet.

At the end of the little town, an elderly man stood by the gate of his house, looking at us. He seemed so approachable that I told Edek to ask this man for milk.

Edek approached the man and asked, if he could sell us some milk. The man waved to us and invited us in, saying: 'Come, come, I'll give you milk.' In his words there was something not connected with the subject of milk, but he looked so honest that we decided to enter his home.

After we came to his house, he introduced us to his family: wife and children, and said: 'I'm not going to ask you any questions... but you should not be walking around like that...' After that he explained that he himself had been through a lot in the previous war, and did not want to know anything. He fed us with hot milk, noodles, eggs, bread, and then offered us his barn as a place to sleep, where he would lock us inside.

280 The towers of the Benedictine Abbey in Tyniec.

281 Tyniec – an old town near Cracow, today within Cracow's administrative borders, at the foot of the abbey.

'I know,' he said, 'that you don't know me and might be afraid, so I won't insist, but if you trust me, then stay and don't worry!'

His face, eyes, and general appearance were so transparently honest, that I decided to stay.

We spent the night in the barn, locked again, yet we slept peacefully, on real pillows, like we had not seen for years.

This is how Thursday, April 29 ended.

The host himself opened the door in the morning, without the assistance of the gendarmes. He gave us food, he gave us drink. We talked to our hearts' content. We changed the currency. He was an honest, sincere Pole, a patriot.

So there are still humans in this world... His name was 175 [Piotr Mazurkiewicz[282]]. His whole family was very kind to us. We told them where we were heading from. Again we wrote letters to our families – it stands to reason that, we did not use the addresses known to the camp authorities in Auschwitz.

After breakfast we went on, through the fields and woods, leaving V and VI[283] to our left. We headed towards VII.[284]

We spent Friday night in some lone hut in a field, where a young married couple lived with their children. We arrived late, and left before they woke up. We paid and went on our way.

We omitted VII [Wieliczka], heading for the forests of VIII [Puszcza Niepołomicka].[285]

It was Saturday, May 1, when we entered the resin-scented woods. The weather was beautiful, with the sun casting golden spots on the ground covered with needles from the surrounding conifers. Squirrels were climbing, does were prancing around.

Jasio and I took turns in leading the way, Edek acted as the rearguard.

Up to now the day passed without any incidents. We were hungry. Starting from 2 p.m., Jasio was leading the way. We took a broad road, leading us exactly in the direction we wanted to go. Jasio was still leading the way. Around 4 p.m. we approached a wider brook with a bridge over it. Behind the bridge there were some buildings on the left side of the road: a forester's house and some sheds. To the right – some other buildings.

Jasio bravely marched right towards the bridge and the forester's house. We had been successful for too long, so we stopped being cautious. The lack of any movement and lack of people misled us, and all the shutters of the house, painted green, were closed.

282 According to Edward Ciesielski it was supposed to be a Tyniec inhabitant called Piotrowski.

283 The towns numbered V and VI have not been unambiguously identified.

284 Wieliczka – a town south-east of Cracow, famous for its salt mine.

285 The Niepołomice Forest – a huge forest complex in the western part of Sandomierz Basin, east of Cracow.

Passing by the house, we took a look at the courtyard behind it, going all the way to the sheds. A German soldier (possibly a gendarme) was marching on the courtyard towards us holding a rifle in his hand. Outwardly, we did not react at all in order to keep marching as long as possible – we were already about ten steps from the building. Our reaction was purely instinctive. But the gendarme reacted outwardly: 'Halt!'[286], and we were still marching on forward, as if we did not hear him. 'Halt!' he yelled again, and now we heard the sound of him reloading his rifle. We stopped, with smiles on our faces. The soldier was behind the courtyard's fence, some 30–35 metres from us. A second soldier quickly emerged from a shed about 50 metres away from us. We said: 'Ja, ja... alles gut...,'[287] and we calmly turned around to face them.

Seeing our calmness, the first soldier, who already had his weapon ready to fire, lowered the rifle. Upon seeing this, I said calmly: 'Boys, run!' And we all ran off in different directions. Jasiek fled to the right at the angle of ninety degrees of the direction of our march, Edek was running in a ditch along the road with the direction of our march, and I jumped right between them, diagonally.

It is difficult to describe the way we ran. We all ran the way we could. I jumped over fallen tree trunks, the fence of a plant nursery and bushes.

They were shooting at us many times. I could hear the bullets whizzing right by my head not once, not twice.

At a certain moment I felt, shivers in my spine, that someone was aiming at me.

Something hit my right arm. I thought: 'Scoundrel! He hit me!' But I felt no pain. I kept running quickly, leaving that place behind.

Far away to my left, I saw Edek. I called out to him. He saw me and we started getting closer, running in the same direction. We must have been some 400 metres from the forester's house, and the soldiers just kept on shooting. Because they could not see us anymore, I thought they were shooting at Jasiek – maybe they had killed him already...

In the meantime, Edek and I were sitting on a fallen tree.

I had to dress the bleeding wound. My right arm was shot right through, but the bone was not damaged. Besides, of course, my clothes were torn – the trousers and wind-proof jacket were pierced in four places in total. After bandaging my wound with a handkerchief we started heading east.

Edek wanted us to stay in the hollow by the tree, but I thought that it would be better to leave this place quickly, as the Germans might use the telephone to organize a bigger pursuit.

I thought that Jasiek might be in trouble, as they had been shooting for a long time but not in our direction.

286 'Stop!' or 'Freeze!'

287 Yes, yes, everything's all right.

An hour later we reached some village, we said outright that we were 'boys from the forest,' that there were three of us, but only two remained. They heard the gunshots, maybe our friend was killed...

These kind people gave us milk and bread, and a guide to lead us to the ferry. We took the ferry to the other side of the river, and found ourselves in some larger village with a church. Again, we met German soldiers there, but they paid no attention to us whatsoever, looking for food and probably thinking we were locals.

Finally, having left the village, we spotted the town of IX [Bochnia] in the distance, the closest destination of our march. Because the home of 164's [Edmund Zabawski] family was on the other side of the town, and it was already half past seven (the curfew was from 8 p.m. here), I did not want us to walk through the town because of the way we looked. Edek and I spent the night in the attic of a local's house, which we reached by going around the town's perimeter from the north and east.

In the morning of May 2 we started our journey (we were very close now) to see Mr. and Mrs. 176 [Józef and Teofila Obora].

We approached their house and saw an elderly couple on the porch, the in-laws of 164 [Edmund Zabawski], a young lady – his wife, and their daughter Marysia.

The smiling hosts greeted us cordially and, no questions asked, invited us inside. We introduced ourselves as 164's colleagues. The hosts invited us further into the rooms, where upon opening the last door we saw a bed, and... Jasio, sleeping soundly.

We woke him up and hugged him heartily.

Jasio, dressed properly, had arrived in town already the previous evening. This explained the hosts' behaviour, who did not ask any questions and invited us in with a smile – Jasio had already told them everything.

Jasio's clothes and his bundle were pierced by bullets in several places, but he himself was not hurt.

My wound was not serious. All is well that ends well – we all made it.

Mr. and Mrs. 176 [Józef and Teofila Obora] and Madame 177 [Helena Zabawska] gave us an exceptionally warm and hospitable reception, in fact such as one can only hope for from one's own family, and that, after a long period of separation.

Here, at their home, we should repeat several times a day, that... there are still good people in this world...

The tales of our experiences in Auschwitz with our dear colleague and their beloved relative, 164 [Edmund Zabawski] were met with great interest, cordiality and kindness.

After the first meeting and winning each other's trust by exchanging the agreed passwords, I asked to be contacted with someone from the military underground. A few hours later I was already talking to Leon 178 [Leon Wandasiewicz],[288] with whom

288 Leon Wandasiewicz had no connections with the conspirators in Bochnia, but probably with the outpost in Nowy Wiśnicz, because he was a friend of its commander, Lieutenant Tomasz Serafiński.

I yet again exchanged passwords and asked to be contacted with the commander of the local outpost.

Leon presented me with two options of speaking with two gentlemen – one of them was from the northern area IX [Bochnia], and the second one, living in the town X[289], 7 kilometres away from here, was the leader of the southern area. I said that it did not matter to me. Leon proposed visiting the commander from X [Nowy Wiśnicz], as he was a colleague of his.

I was the guest of Mr. and Mrs. 176 [Józef and Teofila Obora] on Sunday and Monday (May 2 and 3). On Tuesday (May 4), in the morning, dressed in the proper clothing of one of Leon's colleagues, I went with him to X [Nowy Wiśnicz]. Jasio and Edek remained as guests at 176's [Józef and Teofila Obora] place.

It was a beautiful, sunny day. We walked and talked cheerfully. Leon had a bike with him, which he intended to use to get back home, as he suspected that I would stay as a guest at the commander's home.

Whilst walking, I was thinking about all the unexpected situations that I had been through over these past years. And now they all came to an end. And yet, fate still had one great surprise in store for me...

When we were more or less halfway there, we sat down in some copse to rest.

Out of curiosity I asked Leon about the name of the commander of the outpost to whose house we were headed, as I was to meet him soon anyhow.

Leon uttered two words, saying the name and the surname... Those two words for others would be perfectly normal... for me they were a shocking discovery. It was rather a weird and uncanny occurrence, a strange coincidence...

The commander's name was exactly the same as the one... I had been using all those years in Auschwitz...

So it was his identity that I was using every day of my stay in that hell... and he knew nothing about it...

And now, my road was leading me to him, to the owner of that name.

Was it fate? Blind fate? If it was really only fate, then it surely was not blind!...

I was speechless, I went quiet. Leon asked: 'Why aren't you saying anything?' – 'Oh, it's nothing, I'm just a bit tired...'

I was just counting the days that I had spent in Auschwitz.

The number of my days in that hell behind wire was 947. Almost a thousand... 'Let's hurry,' I said. 'You and the commander of the outpost are in for an unusual surprise.' – 'If so, than let us go.'

We were approaching the beautiful town of X [Nowy Wiśnicz], located among valleys and hills, with a picturesque castle on the hill.

289 Nowy Wiśnicz – a town in the Bochnia area. Its former Carmelite abbey housed the most rigorous prison in Poland, also used by the Germans during the occupation.

Whilst walking, I was thinking: 'Well, yes, I was fictitiously born here, in IX [Bochnia]. 158 [Zygmunt Ważyński] came here one time to settle a matter regarding me with Reverend 160 [Władysław Kuc].'

A gentleman, along with his wife and daughters, was sitting on a veranda of a house surrounded by a garden. We approached them. Leon whispered to him that he could speak freely.

I introduced myself, using the name that I had been using in Auschwitz. He replied: 'So am I...' – 'But I am Tomasz [Serafiński],' I said. – 'I'm Tomasz [Tomasz Serafiński] as well,' he replied, surprised. Leon was listening to this conversation in bewilderment. His wife was watching me as well.

'But I was born on...,' and here I said the day, the month, and the year, which I had to repeat in Auschwitz so many times over the course of those years at every change of the block or the Kommando, whilst the Kapos were making their lists.

The man almost jumped: 'Sir, what is going on?! These are my personal details!' – 'Yes, sir, these are your personal details, but I have lived through so much more than you while using them,' and I told him about my stay in Auschwitz that lasted for two years and seven months, and now I escaped from there.

[At the back of page 101 of the original typescript of the report there are some hand-written notes, added by the author, which are hard to decipher].

Different people could perhaps react differently. My namesake and the owner of the surname which I had been using seemingly for ages, opened his arms. We hugged each other cordially and immediately became friends.

'But how did it happen?' asked my namesake.

I asked him if he knew Madame Doctor 83 [Helena Pawłowska] from Warsaw. Yes, he lived there and his ID was prepared for him at that place, but he had left before the card was ready. Later on, I put this card to use as one of my many fake IDs that I used to have at that time.

I spent three and a half months staying with Mr. and Mrs. 179 [Tomasz i Ludmiła Serafiński].[290]

Through some colleagues we sent a message to Reverend 160 [Władysław Kuc], asking him to erase the once such necessary information written in pencil in the parish register next to my namesake's name.

Here I was organizing a troop with the help of 84 [Tomasz Serafiński] and 180 [Andrzej Możdżeń], wanting eventually, should Warsaw accept my plan, to launch an assault on Auschwitz, after consulting it with my colleagues in the camp.

290 Pilecki was hiding in the Serafińskis' estate Koryznówka near Nowy Wiśnicz.

My colleague 180 [Andrzej Możdżeń] and I had some weapons and German uniforms. I wrote a letter to the family, to my colleague 25 [Stefan Bielecki], who was once dispatched with a report when fleeing from Auschwitz, and was now working in one of the departments of the High Command.

I wrote a letter to XI [Warsaw], to 44 [Wincenty Gawron], who was also dispatched with a report during his escape from Auschwitz, intending to get in touch for the benefit of our further work.

My colleague 25 [Stefan Bielecki] came from Warsaw on June 1, bringing me valuable news – Madame E. O. [Eleonora Ostrowska], the addressee of my letters from Auschwitz, fortunately still lived in the same apartment. The Gestapo only threatened the family of the escapees. They had no reason to persecute someone they thought to be a mere acquaintance.

They had no way of finding my family, nor did they know the name.

25 [Stefan Bielecki] also brought me an ID card and some money.

I discussed the matter with him, explaining that I was not going to leave for Warsaw just yet, hoping that they would allow me to attack Auschwitz from the outside now. However, if there would be a direct ban for attacking Auschwitz, then I would go to Warsaw.

The colleague, a bit sad that he was going back alone despite having promised the family to bring me with him, left for Warsaw.

On June 5, a local Gestapo officer and an SS man from Auschwitz came to Tomek's [Tomasz Serafiński] (my namesake) mother, asking about her son's whereabouts. She told them that he had been living in the vicinity for many years.

They came to Tomek.

I was very close by then.

The SS man must have been informed by the local Gestapo officer that 84 [Tomasz Serafiński] had been living there for a long time. He just looked at his face and at the paper held in his hand (probably comparing it with my photograph with puffed out cheeks).

He asked if there was a chance of any fruit in the fall, and left.

During my work in X [Nowy Wiśnicz], I met really first-class and worthy Poles: not only Mr. and Mrs. 179 [The Serafiński], but also Mr. 181 [Józef Roman].

Later on, colleague 25 [Stefan Bielecki] sent me a parcel from Warsaw with the latest means on fighting the invaders and a letter, in which he said that the underground authorities looked very favourably... (reading this, I shook with satisfaction, presuming that he meant the Auschwitz action; but further were the following words: 'on the prospect of decorating you for your work in Auschwitz...'). However, my colleague still hoped that they would give their permission to attack Auschwitz, though.

In July, I received a letter with truly tragic news – General 'Grot' ['Spearhead'; Stefan Rowecki] had been arrested.[291]

Seeing how tense the situation in Warsaw was, I came to understand that I could not possibly wait for the answer regarding Auschwitz any longer, and decided to go to Warsaw.

I arrived in Warsaw on August 23. Jasio [Jan Redzej] came in September, Edek [Edward Ciesielski] – in December.

In Warsaw, I worked in one of the units at the HQ.[292]

I kept presenting the situation of our colleagues remaining in Auschwitz and the necessity of conducting an operation there to the appropriate authorities.

I found out that 161 [Bolesław Kuczbara] during his imprisonment in Pawiak revealed the identity of the leaders of the organization in Auschwitz. Since then he worked for the Germans.

He was released from Pawiak and walked around with a gun, but was soon eliminated in Napoleona Square.[293]

I stayed in touch by exchanging letters with my Auschwitz colleagues via their families outside the camp. I tried to offer them moral support, but did not think it was enough.

Not long after that, I received the news that (maybe because of 161's [Bolesław Kuczbara] testimony), a whole group of colleagues from Auschwitz, all high-ranking in our organization, were shot dead.

I saw the name of Westrych Wilhelm on the list of those who were to be executed by Kedyw.[294] He saved me once in Auschwitz. I knew him to be a scoundrel, but even if I wanted to change something in his case, it was already too late, as there was a note next to his name: executed on...

I met Sławek [Sławomir Szpakowski] in the street one day. Back in Auschwitz, we used to quarry rocks with pickaxes together, dreaming about being invited over by him for dinner in Warsaw. We were both optimists and, as people used to say it back then, we were thinking unrealistically. And yet, we did meet again: both in Warsaw, both alive.

He was carrying a package of some kind and almost dropped it when he saw me.

291 The C-in-C of the HA was arrested by the Gestapo in Warsaw on June 30, 1943, possibly after being denounced by Soviet agents, and imprisoned in KL Sachsenhausen. There he was killed after the outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising in August 1944.

292 Pilecki served in the 3rd Department (Operative) of the HA High Command. He also held the post of a deputy chief in the Information and Intelligence Brigade.

293 A square in the centre of Warsaw; since 1957 – Powstańców Warszawy Square (Warsaw Insurgents' Square).

294 Kedyw (abbreviation from Polish: KiErownictwo DYWersji) – Directorate of Diversion; a separate structure within the HA, supervising and coordinating all diversion units at all levels of the underground resistance movement; from the HQ to outposts and partisan units. Kedyw's task was to take active initiative – mainly in the form of sabotage and diversion, and also retaliatory and elimination actions.

I have had many dinners with him since, and according to the menu that we thought up back there, in hell.

I lived in the same house from which I was taken to Auschwitz in 1940 and to the address of which I was writing the letters to Madame E. O. [Eleonora Ostrowska], only one floor above.

It was the source of a certain sense of achievement, challenging the authorities like that.

Nobody even visited Madame E. O., nobody ever asked any questions about my disappearance from Auschwitz. Jasio's [Jan Redzej] sister and Edek's [Edward Ciesielski] family were also left undisturbed.

I presented the plan of action in Auschwitz to the chief of planning Kedyw's actions ('Wilk' ['Wolf'] – 'Zygmunt' [Major Karol Jabłoński]) in the fall of 1943. He told me: 'When the war is over, I'll show you a file full of documents regarding Auschwitz, where we have all the reports that have ever been written, including yours...'[295]

I wrote the last report on Auschwitz, twenty pages long, on a type-writer. The last page contained the statements of all the colleagues who carried my reports, wrote for me by hand what, to whom, and when they reported it.

I collected eight of these statements, for the rest of the colleagues were either dead or away from Warsaw.

Apart of being busy in one of the departments of the HQ – I was also taking care of the families of those prisoners of Auschwitz who were either still alive and imprisoned, or dead.

Colleague 86 [Aleksander Paliński] was helping me with that. Money for the benefits of the prisoners and their families was coming through a well-organized unit, formed of three ladies 182 [identity unknown] who dedicated a lot of time to help the prisoners and their families.

One day I was informed by these ladies that there was a man, whose operation area included Auschwitz. The man was a 'pistol' and organized his work in an excellent manner, and through him we might be able to reach the prisoners in Auschwitz, as recently the contact with them was lost.

This gentleman was about to leave and I could not meet him, however as he was known to be effective and claimed that he could get in touch with the inmates... I wanted to make it easier for him and gave him the name of a colleague of mine – Murzyn [Leon Murzyn],[296] a prisoner of Auschwitz. I told him to mention the name of Tomasz [Serafiński], who had left the camp at Easter.

295 The 3rd Department of Kedyw was codenamed 'Cyrkiel'-'Wilk' ('Compass' [the mathematical instrument] – 'Wolf') and was led by Major Karol Jabłoński (pseudonym 'Zygmunt').

296 Leon Murzyn (the English meaning of his surname is 'black man,' 'Negro' – this detail is crucial for understanding one of the odd ideas of the man the meeting with whom Pilecki describes in the next paragraphs).

Among the trusted colleagues I met a few times several inmates from Auschwitz, who to me were not trustworthy (they had been released earlier) and those thought that I had been released as well.

On June 10, 1944, on Marszałkowska Street, someone suddenly opened his arms and said: 'I don't believe that they let you out from Auschwitz.' I replied that I could not believe he had been released either. It was Olek 167 [Aleksander Bugajski]. That lucky beggar always landed on his feet, like a cat. He had managed to get himself into the transport to Ravensbrück[297] as a doctor in the SK and escape from the camp.

The ladies 182 [identity unknown] informed me that the gentleman, working near Auschwitz, was going there again and asked to see me.

I rushed to the meeting. I came a couple of minutes earlier, before the man's arrival. The ladies discreetly stayed in another room, waiting for the outcome of the meeting of two aces.

I waited for a while, waiting for some genius to arrive. The door opened, and... A tiny ball rolled in – small, bald, with a pug nose. Well, one's appearance gives no grounds for judging a man, does it...? We sat down, and that gentleman began the conversation like this: 'And what if I took a wooden plank and painted a black man on it? And walk up to the fence of Auschwitz with that plank with a black man drawn on it?' I stood up, apologized, and approached the ladies: 'Who did you put me in contact with? Can he be taken seriously?' – 'Oh yes, he can. He's a great organizer and...,' here they gave his military rank.

I came back, thinking that this was perhaps his way of starting conversations, and promised myself to be patient.

When I took my place at the table, the gentleman, seeing that I was not particularly fond of the idea of a black man on a plank: 'Or maybe not a black man. Maybe a St. Thomas or an Easter Bundt cake?'

I must admit I was choking on my internal laughter and I thought I was going to break the chair squeezing it so hard with both hands till I felt the pain, just to avoid bursting out laughing.

Finally, I stood up and said that, much to my regret, this conversation was not going to reach its conclusion, for I was already late someplace else.

I am not making this up, this is precisely what happened.

At the end of July 1944, a week before the Uprising, somebody stopped me when I was riding a bike down Filtrowa Street, shouting: 'Hello!' I stopped reluctantly, as was always the case during underground work. A gentleman approached me, and

297 KL Ravensbrück – a German concentration camp for women and children, set up in November 1938 near Fürstenberg in Brandenburg. Over 132,000 people passed through it (among them ca. 40,000 Polish women i.e. from the HA). 92,000 people died there (32,000 Poles in that number). Later on, male subcamps were also set up in KL Ravensbrück. Pseudo medical experiments were conducted at the camp.

I failed to recognize him, but only for a second: it was my colleague from Auschwitz, Captain 116 [Zygmunt Pawłowicz].

Jasiek [Jan Redzej] and I took part in the Uprising in the same sector. The description of our actions and my colleague's death is described in the history of the I Battalion of the 'Chrobry II'[298] unit.

Edek [Edward Ciesielski] got shot five times, but fortunately made it without any severe consequences.

During the Uprising my colleague 25 [Stefan Bielecki] was heavily wounded.

During the course of the Uprising I also met a colleague of mine, 44 [Wincenty Gawron].

Later on, somewhere else, I had met colleagues who were in Auschwitz almost till the very end (January 1945): 183 [identity unknown] and 184 [identity unknown]. I was very pleased to hear about the aftermath of our escape via the bakery. The entire camp laughed at the camp's authorities, for we fooled them well and there were no repercussions against the colleagues who remained, except for the SS men who guarded us, who had to spend some time in the bunker.

Here I shall provide the number of people who had died in Auschwitz.

When I was leaving Auschwitz, the latest registration number was slightly over 121,000. The living ones, those, who had left the camp in a transport or were released, counted about 23,000. About 97,000 prisoners that had been recorded and numbered, died[299].

This has nothing to do with the people who were gassed and burned in great masses without ever being registered.

According to the daily calculations of the inmates who had worked near the Kommando, over two million of those people had died by the time of my escape from Auschwitz.

I was giving these numbers cautiously, not to overstate the figures; exact numbers, given on a daily basis, should be properly discussed.

My colleagues who spent more time there and witnessed about 8,000 people being gassed every day quote the figure of, give or take, five million people[300].

298 'Chrobry II' unit – the biggest unit of the NSZ; aided by the HA and other factions of the Polish Underground. About 3,000 soldiers of this unit fought in downtown Warsaw. Pilecki commanded one of its units, defending what was called the 'Witold's Redoubt.' The unit became famous for not surrendering to the enemy any part of the area it defended.

299 The number of people murdered in KL Auschwitz is difficult to estimate because of the large amount of German documents that were destroyed.

300 A rough estimate, but not questioned for a long time. Only after many years after the war the losses were analyzed and research based on archival sources, suggesting the need to verify the figures, was conducted. Pilecki based his figures on information gained by underground structures which were only estimated calculations.

Now I wanted to say something in general about what I felt when I was back among the living, back from a place about which one could say: 'Who entered, had died. Who left, had been born again.' What impression did I have, not of the best ones or the most wicked ones, but in general, of the entire mass of people I encountered upon having returned to life 'on earth.'

Sometimes I had the impression that I was walking around a big house, and I accidentally opened the door to a room full of children... 'Oh, the children are playing...'

Yes, the leap was too great between what we thought to be important, and what other people think is important, what was their worries, what was their joy.

But this is not all... All too visible for me these days was some kind of common deceit. Some kind of destructive work was so visible to me, aiming at blurring the boundary between truth and falsehood.

The truth became so flexible, that it was stretched to cover many inconvenient things.

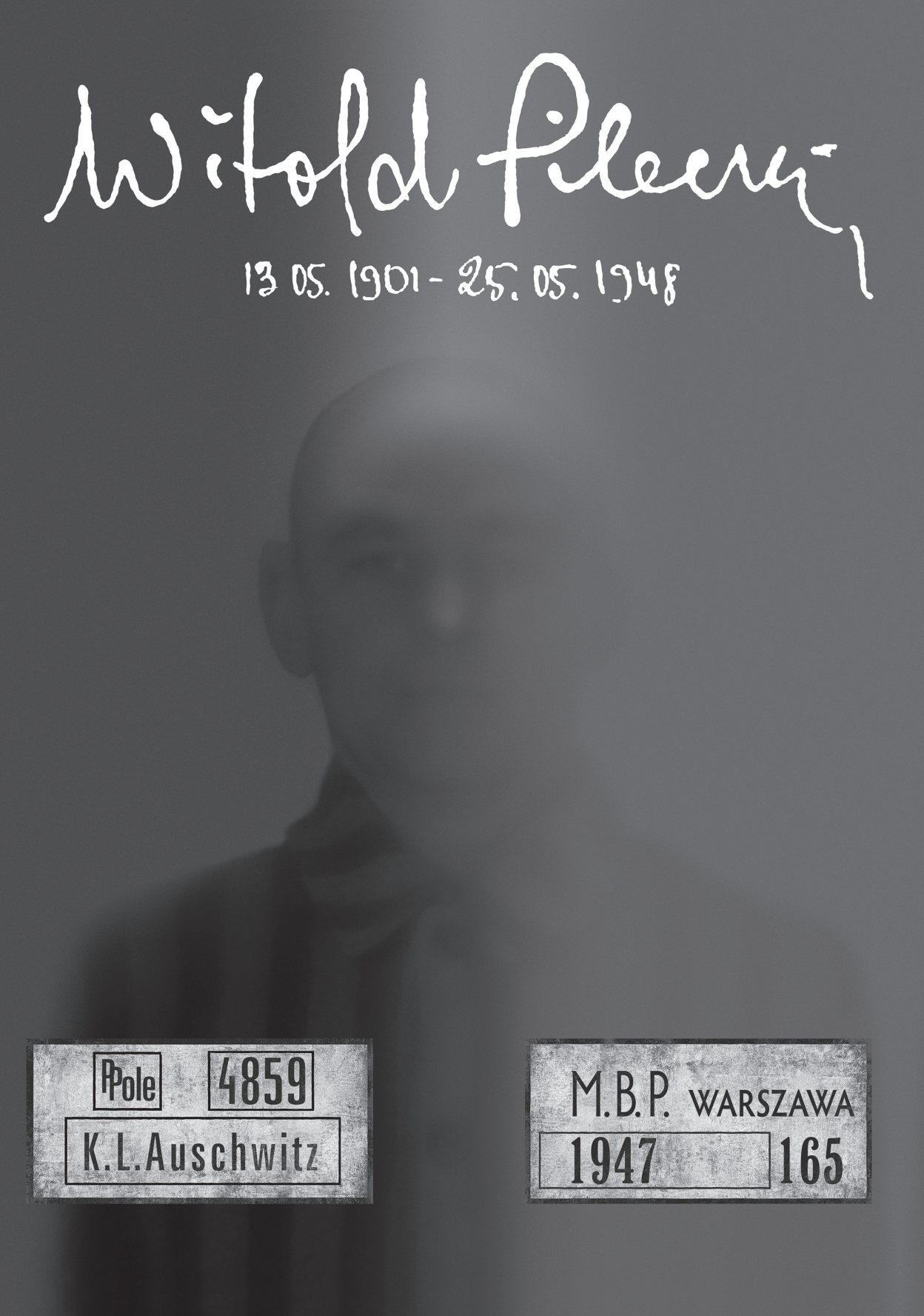
The line between honesty and falsehood was carefully blurred.

It is not important what I have written so far on these several dozen pages, especially for those who will be reading them only as a sensation, but here I would like to write in such capital letters, which are unfortunately not available on a typewriter, for all those heads which have just water under their beautiful parting and they can perhaps be thankful to their mothers for well-formed skulls, so that water is not running out of their heads – let them think deeper about their own lives, let them look around at people and start the battle against falsity, hypocrisy, against interest cleverly and conveniently adjusted for the idea, the truth and even the huge issue, from themselves.

[In the PUMST archives in London there is a sheet of paper with an undated note, written by Witold Pilecki: *There is not enough time for me to finish this work now. Anyway, three Auschwitz inmates managed to flee safely and join the 'Chrobry II' unit in the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 (the records of the I Battalion of the 'Chrobry II' unit are kept in the Historical Office of Saint Giorgio).*]

Witold Pilecki

13 05. 1901 - 25. 05. 1948



Appendix

The Lager was a gauge that tested characters.
Some fell into swamps of moral depravity.
Others were shaping their character
like grinders cutting crystals.
We were cut with sharp instruments.
Blows caused burning pain to the flesh,
but they were like ploughs for the fields of the soul...

(from the 'Witold's Report from Auschwitz')

AFTER AUSCHWITZ: THE UNDERGROUND ACTIVITY OF CAPTAIN WITOLD PILECKI AND THE FIGHT FOR THE NATION'S SURVIVAL

...from this camp, from this time of imposture,
we will have to make a report to the living
and protect the dead...
J. N. Siedlecki, K. Olszewski, T. Borowski,
Byliśmy w Oświęcimiu, Monachium 1946

The escape from KL Auschwitz did not put an end to Pilecki's underground and military activity – quite the contrary, it was given a significant boost. On August 22, 1943 Pilecki returned to Warsaw. In the capital he lived under the name of Roman Jezierski. On August 25, 1943 Pilecki reported to the HA HQ. He hoped there he would find some understanding for his plans of conducting a military action by the HA in order to take the camp and free the prisoners. Unfortunately earlier, on June 30, General Stefan Rowecki (pseudonym 'Grot' ['Spearhead']), who had been aware of Pilecki's Auschwitz mission, was arrested. Therefore, he met with the High Command's representative, Major Karol Jabłoński (pseudonym 'Zygmunt'), who had a watching brief on the Auschwitz matters. Pilecki recalled this meeting in the following way: 'In the fall of 1943 I presented the KL Auschwitz operation plan to the Kedyw planning chief ('Wilk' ['Wolf']-'Zygmunt'), who told me: 'When the war is over, I'll show you a file full of documents regarding Auschwitz, where we have all the reports that have ever been written, including yours...'

On July 21, 1944 he again spoke with an HA High Command representative in order to hand him a report on the camp to be passed on to the HA C-in-C. His interlocutor – probably Colonel Kazimierz Pluta-Czachowski, the chief of the 5th Department of HA HQ – assured Lieutenant Pilecki that General Tadeusz Komorowski (pseudonym 'Bór' ['Forest']) the HA C-in-C, knew about KL Auschwitz issues, but at the moment an operation in the camp was simply out of the question. Pilecki's accounts about the situation in KL Auschwitz, sent to the Polish government-in-exile and the Allied army in London, were taken very seriously. However, the Allies had not considered bombing the camp, as apart from the limited reach of their bombers and the technical difficulties, obstacles of a political nature stood in the way. Also, the plan of an uprising in the camp had no chance of execution.

An armed struggle was only considered in case the Germans would decide to liquidate all of their prisoners. The case was entrusted to the Silesia District Commander, Major Zygmunt Janke (pseudonym 'Walter'). It was presumed that it would be possible

to open the camp for not more than half an hour and hold back the SS forces for that time, but according to the HA High Command the human cost of such an operation would have been too high, as probably only 200–300 prisoners would have been able to flee the camp with the partisans. The rest of them would have had to have been left to their own devices, so they would not have stood much of a chance and the end result would have been a massacre. The plans were made in the spring of 1944, when the camp complex held around 100,000 inmates. The District commander confirmed the previously formulated conclusion that the plan could only be put into action if the Germans started to mass murder their prisoners summarily.

No fighting to liberate the camp took place, but due to the fact that the Germans knew about the activity of the KL Auschwitz underground, they did not carry out the mass liquidation of their prisoners in the final period of the camp's existence, and the in-camp underground movement gave physical and moral support to many prisoners.

Pilecki, after having learnt the various aspects of the situation, came to understand the apparent reluctance of the HA High Command to take action in liberating the concentration camp prisoners. Via a clandestine channel, he dutifully informed Captain Stanisław Kazuba, who was designated a commander of one of the inmates' battalions, of the situation. He still lived the lives of the KL Auschwitz prisoners, caring for the families of his erstwhile fellow-inmates from behind the wires. The fact that the issue of liberating the KL Auschwitz prisoners was under constant consideration can be evidenced by the dispatch of Lieutenant Stefan Jasieński (pseudonym 'Urban,' 'Alfa' ['Alpha']), a cichociemny,[1] by the HA High Command, on a special mission. Unfortunately, Jasieński was captured by the Germans in the late fall of 1944, and imprisoned in KL Auschwitz.

Until the outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising Pilecki remained in contact with the camp's underground. It was even easier due to the fact that since January 1944, the HQ's prison section of the 2nd Department, code-named 'Kratka' ('Grate'), was headed by Pilecki's escape companion from KL Auschwitz, Jan Redzej (pseudonym 'Klemens').

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After coming to Warsaw at his own request, Pilecki was assigned to the Kedyw's 3rd Department of the HA High Command, code-named 'Kameleon' ('Chameleon'). The 'Kameleon' was headed by Lieutenant Stefan Wysocki (pseudonym 'Jeż' ['Hedgehog']); Pilecki was his deputy as from August 24, 1943. He also returned to using the pseudonym 'Witold.' At that time he was promoted to the rank of Captain with seniority from November 11, 1943.

The course of the war also produced changes in the political and military goals of the Polish Underground State. Due to the visible submissiveness of the Allies to

1 A World War II special operations agent. 'Cichociemny' literally means 'silent and dark.'

the Soviets and the possibility of the latter seizing the whole of Poland, the Polish Underground State authorities came up with an idea of forming a completely new underground state organization of a political and military character. Its goal was to immunize the Polish society, which was still under the German occupation, but already being 'liberated' by the Soviets, from the barrage of Communist propaganda, to mobilize the spiritual strengths of the nation and to protect pro-independence individuals and underground institutions alike from the surveillance of the Communist security services.

In April 1944 General Tadeusz Komorowski ordered Colonel August Emil Fieldorf (pseudonym 'Nil'['Nile']) to develop the structure of an underground organization, called NIE. 'Nil' also took charge of the military aspects of the organization. It was supposed to be a clandestine initiative within a broader underground movement, and its super undercover structure was based on a system of three-man teams. NIE's statute underlined that 'the organization was to sustain, with all available means and methods, the Spirit of the Nation and secure an Independent Free Poland.' Pilecki was also involved in the works of this organization. 'Witold,' this time under the code name 'T-IV,' was to organize the planning structure and military operations.

Due to his obligations to NIE, Pilecki was not allowed to actively participate in the Warsaw Uprising, but he just could not stand by and watch when the Uprising broke out. Initially he fought as a rank-and-file HA soldier, later on he took command of the 2nd company of the I Battalion in the 'Chrobry II' Group. During the fighting he met his Auschwitz co-escapee, Edward Ciesielski.

After the capitulation of the Warsaw Uprising, Pilecki was first imprisoned in the German POW camp of Lamsdorf (Łambinowice), and later in Murnau. When the latter was liberated by the Americans, Captain Pilecki, as a man with a sense of duty and of a deeply-ingrained conscientiousness, decided to report and answer for his insubordination in that he disobeyed his orders not to participate in the fighting. When on May 8, 1945, General Tadeusz Komorowski, the acting C-in-C of the Polish Armed Forces, General Antoni Chruściel and General Tadeusz Pełczyński arrived in Murnau, Pilecki reported to Pełczyński. According to the rules adopted by NIE and confirmed by oath, he should have remained in the Soviet-occupied part of Poland to conduct underground resistance operations there. According to him, no circumstances could justify his deed.

However, the military authorities treated his action as driven by necessity and soon Pilecki was assigned to the Polish 2nd Corps, stationed in Italy. On July 11, 1945 he arrived in Rome and reported for duty, although for some time he did not have a direct assignment, as his return to the country, dominated by the Communists and Soviets, was already decided.

Meanwhile Witold Pilecki set about writing his Auschwitz recollections. In Porto San Giorgio on the Adriatic Sea, in the summer of 1945, he wrote his next report,

which ran to 104 pages, the most important document on the underground activity in KL Auschwitz-Birkenau. It is kept in the archives of the PUMST in London.

The first report had been written straight after his escape from the camp, in Nowy Wiśnicz in June 1943. An 11-page long document was buried in the garden of Lieutenant Tomasz Serafiński's etsate, commonly called Koryznówka; they would not destroy it even after Pilecki's request to do so after compiling the 'Italian' report. It remains to this day in the collection of the archives of the ABSM. In 1943 the three accounts – of Pilecki, Redzej and Ciesielski – were translated by the HA High Command into English, French and German in order to inform the public opinion about the criminal character of KL Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Pilecki elaborated the details of the second report, called the *W Report*, in Warsaw in the fall of 1943. After the war he commented: 'I wrote the last report on Auschwitz, twenty pages long, on a type-writer, and on the last page my colleagues, who carried my reports, wrote for me by hand what, to whom, and when they reported it. I collected eight of these statements, for the rest of the colleagues were either dead or away from Warsaw.'

Apart from the three mentioned ones, Pilecki also left the *Teren S* ('S Area') report which described the underground movement in the camp hospital.

After Pilecki's talks with General Władysław Anders, the C-in-C of the Polish 2nd Corps in Italy, during which the Captain told the General about the Auschwitz camp and his subsequent underground work, it was decided that Pilecki must return to Poland. His tasks were set out vaguely, and the range of his activities was left to his own initiative, based on the possibilities open to him. It meant that he was given vast powers with a high position in the structure of NIE. As one of the creators of this structure, he was familiar with the tasks and aims of the organization: he was returning to the country to fulfil them. He was planning to base his activities on NIE's underground network. On December 8, 1945 he arrived in the Soviet-occupied Poland under the false name of Roman Jezierski.

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Staying true to his oath and the values he followed gave Pilecki moral support, who, when coming to Poland, already had an idea about the course of his further underground work. It quickly transpired that the new conditions required many changes, and old contacts had to be replaced by new ones. First of all, the Captain tried to recreate his own contacts in the NIE structure. Because the plan of basing the movement on NIE's existing organizational network proved unworkable. Pilecki had to start from scratch. Generally, it meant verification of the new conditions and restructuring the network slowly and systematically.

Upon his return to the country, Witold devoted much time to collecting documents and elaborating his recollections, the most important part of which was the account of

the underground movement in KL Auschwitz. He was very responsive to all messages about the camp. An additional reason for writing down his recollections was the false presentation of the camp's reality, which he had often encountered. In May 1946, Witold Pilecki and Witold Różycki even went to Auschwitz to see the camp.

While collecting materials for his planned book, the Captain met many people. These meetings were often an opportunity for assessing the usefulness of the people with whom he had worked before, for further cooperation. In order to clarify some of the facts from the camp's reality, he would visit his old companions, including Tadeusz Pietrzykowski ('Teddy'). He talked to Tadeusz Baird, a former employee of the Government Delegation for Poland (an agency of the Polish government-in-exile), who was passing on the camp's ZOW reports to the HA High Command, and received the copies of his reports from him.

He asked his friends to acquire from the Cracow branch of the Polish Red Cross the pictures of Stefan Bielecki, Edward Ciesielski, Jan Redzej and Kazimierz Radwański, his nephew, who was also imprisoned by the Germans in KL Auschwitz. He wanted to include them in his documentary memoir book, which he was just beginning to write. Many materials had gotten lost, like the ones, kept by Aleksandrowa Jalińska, whose husband, a KL Auschwitz prisoner and Pilecki's friend, died in the Warsaw Uprising. After Pilecki's escape from KL Auschwitz, Jalińska transcribed the ZOW reports and hid the copies in her flat on 16 Krasińskiego Street in Warsaw, but when the Captain visited her once the German occupation was over, it turned out that somebody had already picked them up from her.

Pilecki had deposited one of the copies of the report at his sister-in-law's, Eleonora Ostrowska. It was probably an outline of his planned text. Witold was also going to write about the Warsaw Uprising. However those recollections could only constitute a momentary retrospective reverie over the path of life he passed along till now. It was perhaps a kind of an escape from the surrounding reality which was no less dangerous than the past of the war, occupation and Auschwitz imprisonment. It was this reality, and strictly speaking the fight with it, that fully absorbed the Captain's attention.

Witold could have doubted the point of his mission, but even if such a thought could have been supported by intellectual, moral or other reasons, he was not able to back out of it. Janina Pieńkowska recalls: 'My cousin, who was also in a very precarious situation, wanted to flee abroad. They met at my place. I asked at one point: "What about you, Witold?" And he answered slowly, with his characteristic Kresovian[2] accent: "I'm staying. Everyone can't leave, someone has to stay regardless of the consequences."'

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2 Adj. of Kresy (lit. Borderlands) – in general: the name, referring to the eastern territories of Poland, lost after the WWII. They constituted nearly half of the area of the state.

The Communist apparatus of repression caught up with Pilecki on May 8, 1947. He was imprisoned in the Ministry of Public Security building on Koszykowa Street in Warsaw, subjected to an all-night interrogation, handed over to the Investigation Department of the Ministry of Public Security and put in the Mokotów prison on Rakowiecka Street, in the infamous X Pavilion. He was confined in complete isolation. He was arrested and accused of an alleged assassination of the Ministry of Public Security senior officers. The investigation, conducted by the officers of this institution in line with the methods exercised by the Soviets, was physically and emotionally drastic.[3]

On January 23, 1948 the indictment, containing numerous charges against the Captain, compiled by the investigation officers, was accepted by Major Adam Humer and forwarded to the Chief Military Prosecutor's Office, and hence to the Military District Court in Warsaw on February 7, 1948.

The trial of Pilecki's group – as the investigation also included his associates – took place in the Warsaw Military District Court on Nowowiejska Street. The judicial panel was presided by Lieutenant Colonel Jan Hryckowian. The trial of 'Witold' and his companions began on March 3. The prosecutor demanded the death penalty for Witold Pilecki, Maria Szelągowska, Tadeusz Płużański and Makary Sieradzki, and life sentences for Witold Różycki and Maksymilian Kaucki. He also demanded harsh prison terms for Ryszard Jamontt-Krzywicki and Jerzy Nowakowski.

In their final words the defendants denied the allegations of espionage and any conscious participation in such activities, but they underlined their military dedication to what they regarded as a good cause. Captain Pilecki stated tersely: 'I wasn't a resident [spy], but a Polish officer. Until the arrest I was obeying my orders. I didn't treat my actions as espionage and please take this into consideration when passing sentence.'

During the trial, according to his relatives, Pilecki looked exhausted but resolute. After hearing the sentence he was heard to have said to Eleonora Ostrowska: 'I cannot live, they finished me off. Auschwitz compared with them was a mere trifle.'

On March 15 the Military District Court delivered its verdict. Pilecki was convicted to a triple death sentence, stripped of all public and citizen rights, with all his assets confiscated. Szelągowska and Płużański were sentenced to death together with him.

Legally, from the judicial point of view, the sentence was an evident act of a court-sanctioned murder. As it was supported by the regime's agencies, it was a crime of the apparatus of repression. When it was sanctioned by the residing president of the Polish People's Republic, Bolesław Bierut, it turned into a murder carried out by the state – one of many at that time.

3 The interrogation sessions of Witold Pilecki were personally overseen by a UB Colonel Józef Różański (1907–1981; born into a Jewish family as Goldberg), a communist, a member of the Soviet NKVD and an exceptionally brutal interrogator in the MBP.

Upon hearing his sentence, the Captain turned to President Bierut, in a dignified letter setting out the course of his private and professional life. The letter, addressed to Bierut on May 7, was a military report of the duties he carried out in the service of his homeland. At the same time his text revealed a detail which suggests that Witold did not have to be sentenced to a capital punishment, for Pilecki wrote: 'I couldn't have decided to make public accusations in the courtroom or anywhere else, as I understood that an officer, who besmirches his own superiors, will deserve everyone's contempt, even of the investigation officers themselves.' Thus, by making a public accusation of the émigré decision-making centres, not only could Pilecki have avoided the death penalty, but also he could have started a career of an informer of the imposed from outside authorities and system he did not accept.

He did not want to follow the path of Józef Cyrankiewicz, a long-term Prime Minister of the Polish People's Republic. The Captain had his own way – an honourable one. Cyrankiewicz, also a KL Auschwitz prisoner, had played a significant role in Captain Pilecki's life and, undoubtedly, a shameful one. Many former KL Auschwitz prisoners were convinced that Cyrankiewicz was a German informer at the camp, and after the war he falsified his camp past. He knew about Pilecki's underground activity and was aware that he was hiding in the camp under the name of Tomasz Serafiński. He knew all this due to the fact that the real Serafiński family lived right next to Cyrankiewicz's mother.

When the sentence on Pilecki was delivered, some people tried to convince Cyrankiewicz to sign, just like many other KL Auschwitz inmates, a petition to pardon 'Witold.' However, Cyrankiewicz ostentatiously refused to help in the attempts to free Pilecki. For many years, the Communist propaganda would present Cyrankiewicz as a heroic camp conspirator while robbing the Captain of the recognition that was his due.

Witold Pilecki was executed in the Mokotów prison on May 25, 1948 at 9:30 p.m. The list of his executioners is long – from Bierut through Cyrankiewicz and Józef Różański, down to the commander of the execution squad and 'the trace removers.' The degree of culpability and responsibility for this most shameful of crimes is shared between them, albeit in different proportions.

Today there is still no certainty as to where Pilecki's ashes lie. Murdered prisoners were buried in secrecy, furtively, and potential witnesses 'would lose their memory' regarding such places of burial. According to some, it could have been a meadow, neighbouring the Służew cemetery, or a similar spot under the inner wall of the Powązki military cemetery, today incorporated within that cemetery's perimeter, constituting the 'Ł' quarter, the so-called Łączka (Little Meadow). The grave is still being looked for...

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Witold Pilecki belongs to a group of exceptional historical individuals. Many people remain under the spell of his inner beauty and are fascinated by his spiritual wealth. His character was popularized in the world, among others, by an Italian researcher and journalist, Prof. Marco Patricelli, in his book *The Volunteer*. In 2012 an English translation of the 1945 report was published in the book *The Auschwitz Volunteer: Beyond Bravery. Captain Witold Pilecki (Auschwitz Prisoner No. 4859)*, with introductions by Norman Davies (FBA, FRHists) and Michael Schudrich (the Chief Rabbi of Poland). The book was translated into German, Italian, Portuguese, Finnish and Chinese. In turn, Dr. Adam J. Koch translated the *W Report* into English (*Report W. KL Auschwitz 1940–1943*).

In Poland already more than 40 schools now bear Captain Witold Pilecki's name. The Captain patronizes many streets, residential districts, roundabouts, squares and parks – in 2015 his name was commemorated in the town of Vicoli in the region of Abruzzo in central Italy. There are marathons, bicycle, pedestrian and horse rallies, tournaments and marches organized under his name. Monuments and commemorative plaques, bearing his name, are put up. Many films and theatrical plays have been produced to give us honest and vivid glimpses into his character. His immortal services were recognized when he was posthumously awarded the Commander's Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta and Poland's highest order, the Order of the White Eagle, for his civil and military merits.

For his activity in KL Auschwitz, for the heroic sacrifice, which brought news of the Holocaust to the world, and for his help, given to the Jews in occupied Warsaw, he should be awarded the title of the Righteous Among the Nations. He had always cared – especially in KL Auschwitz – for the man, Job dying in the Shoah, a man in an extreme situation. Therefore, let Witold Pilecki's life be the best commentary to his report.

Wiesław Jan Wysocki

WITOLD PILECKI
13.05.1901-25.05.1948

Stanisław Arct • born on October 20, 1919 in Warsaw; a bookseller. A TAP member. Brought to KL Auschwitz from Warsaw on April 6, 1941; prisoner no. 12654; a ZOW member. Executed on July 23, 1942.

Hans Aumeier • born on August 20, 1906 in Amberg (Bavaria); an SS-Sturmbannführer. Worked in arms factories in Amberg, Munich, Berlin, Bremen and Cologne as an assembler and turner. An NSDAP member since 1929, an SA and SS member since 1931. On January 15, 1934 he became a recruit instructor in KL Dachau, in April 1936 – a guard in KL Esterwegen, in December the same year – the commander of the guard troops in KL Lichtenburg. Between 1937–38 he served at the same post in KL Buchenwald; from August 1, 1938 until January 1942 he was the Lagerführer and deputy commandant of KL Flossenbürg, where he made himself famous for being a follower of extreme methods of punishment and created an atmosphere that brought numerous inmates to suicide. He personally executed prisoners. In January 1942, he took over the same post in KL Auschwitz, becoming an infamous sadist. His motto was: 'Only a dead prisoner is a decent one.' He was responsible for exterminating Jews, executions at the 'wailing wall' and many more. He was guilty of so many abuses of power for personal profit that on August 18, 1943 he was dismissed at KL Auschwitz's commandant Rudolf Höß' request. Transferred to the Reich-occupied Russian territories and Baltic countries, he organized the KL Vaivara concentration camp in Estonia, and after its evacuation commanded a battalion in the Jeckeln army group on the Eastern Front. From October 1944 he commanded the KL Kaufering subcamp in the KL Dachau complex. In January 1945 he created the KL Grini camp in Norway, where he treated prisoners exceptionally well and liberated them on May 7, 1945. Arrested by the US troops on June 11, 1945, he was imprisoned in a POW camp in Great Britain. On May 4, 1947 he was handed over to the Polish authorities to be tried for his crimes in KL Auschwitz and KL Flossenbürg. He was one of the accused in the first Auschwitz trial in the Supreme National

Tribunal in Cracow. On December 22, 1947 he was sentenced to death. Executed in the Montelupich Prison in Cracow on January 24, 1948.

Artur Balke • a joiner and a carpenter. Arrived in KL Auschwitz with the first group of 'prisoner functionaries' from KL Sachsenhausen; camp prisoner no. 3. Until November 1941 he was an Oberkapo of the carpentry shop, as well as the sculptors' workshop, incorporated by the former. After his release in 1943 he worked in the Bata shoe works in Chełmek.

Józef Baltaziński • born on November (or October) 2 (or 20), 1896 in Jasień near Brzesko; a landowner; a Polish Army reserve officer, a lieutenant of the artillery in the mass levy with seniority from June 1, 1919. Brought to KL Auschwitz on June 14, 1940 (first transport); prisoner no. 749. Later released from the camp.

Stanisław Barański • born on May 4, 1921 in Dynów; a student. Brought to KL Auschwitz with the first Cracow transport (June 14, 1940); prisoner no. 132; a ZOW member. Later on transferred to KL Neuengamme; died on May 3, 1945 in Lubeck Bay onboard a prisoners' ship, mistakenly bombed by the Allies.

Henryk (in the ABSM files: Heinrich) **Bartosiewicz** (in the ABSM files: Bartoszewicz, Bautniewicz) • born on January 2, 1908 in Łódź; a technician. A KL Auschwitz prisoner no. 9406; a ZOW member and W. Pilecki's successor as the commander of the organization.

Władysław Baworowski • born on August 10, 1910 in Germakówka (now in Ukraine); a landowner. Brought to KL Auschwitz with the second transport from Cracow on June 20, 1940; camp prisoner no. 863. Died in KL Auschwitz on June 1, 1942.

Emil Bednarek • born on July 20, 1907 in Królewska Huta (Ger. Königshütte; today Chorzów). At the outbreak of the WWII he was called up for service in the Polish Army, but defected and went over to the Germans. Imprisoned in KL Auschwitz on July 6, 1940 as prisoner no. 1325, he was appointed block elder. During the evacuation of KL Auschwitz in 1945, he was moved to KL Mauthausen-Gusen with a group of Poles, where he was liberated by the US Army. After the war he returned to Chorzów and started working in a railway station restaurant. Arrested and tried during the second Auschwitz trial in Frankfurt am Main (1963–65), he was sentenced to life imprisonment; released upon applying for clemency in 1975. He died on February 27, 2001.

Edward Berlin • born on January 28, 1908 in Brody (Białe Brody) • as stated in the ABSM files; a joiner; a Polish Army master corporal. Brought to KL Auschwitz in a transport

from Lublin on July 30, 1941; prisoner no. 19490; a ZOW member. He died on October 28 or 29, 1942 in KL Auschwitz.

Stefan Bartłomiej **Bielecki** • born on February 20, 1908 in Częstochowa; graduated from the Warsaw University of Technology, Department of Hydraulic Engineering. A voluntary participant in the defense of Warsaw in 1939, after which he joined the TAP. Arrested by the Germans in September 1940 and incarcerated in the Pawiak Prison. Brought to KL Auschwitz on April 6, 1942; prisoner no. 12692; a ZOW member. Escaped from KL Auschwitz on May 16, 1942 and rejoined the underground resistance movement. Worked in the HQ of the sabotage organization 'Wachlarz' ('Fan'), and later in the counter-intelligence section of the Second Bureau of the HA HQ. Heavily wounded in the Warsaw Uprising on August 2, he died on September 5, 1944.

Fritz Biessgen ('Mateczka' ['Mommy']) • born on September 15, 1900 in Mülheim (Germany); a butcher by profession. He arrived in KL Auschwitz with the first group of 'prisoner functionaries' from KL Sachsenhausen; prisoner no. 4. He was an Oberkapo of the prisoners' kitchen. Released from KL Auschwitz in 1941. Died on April 14, 1964.

Hans Bock ('Tata' ['Dad']) • born in 1900. Came to KL Auschwitz from KL Sachsenhausen; prisoner no. 5. A criminal, homosexual and morphine addict, he held the post of the prisoners' hospital supervisor. Even though he often helped sick Poles and other inmates, at the same time he ruthlessly obeyed numerous SS orders, e.g. executing people, sentenced by the Political Department in Block 11, by phenol injections. It was him who killed Fr. Maximilian Maria Kolbe in the starvation bunker of Block 11. For drug addiction he was disciplinarily transferred to the Łagisza subcamp (a KL Auschwitz III subcamp at the 'Walter' power plant – presently the Łagisza power plant in Będzin), where he died in 1944.

Zygmunt Bohdanowski (in camp: Zygmunt Bończa; pseudonym 'Bohdan') • born on October 30, 1893 in Dźwińsk (Dyneburg, now in Latvia); a professional Polish Army officer, a lieutenant colonel of the artillery with seniority from November 11, 1941. He graduated from the Russian Cadet Corps, later he studied at Riga Polytechnic Institute, Faculty of Machine Construction. During the First World War – a Russian Army officer, later in General Józef Dowbor-Muśnicki's 1st Polish Corps. From November 1918 in the Polish Army – served consecutively in: the 8th Field Artillery Regiment, the 5th and 12th DAK and the 9th and 21st Field Artillery Regiments. From 1936 until the outbreak of World War II he was a regional horse inspector in Wołkowysk (now in Belarus). During the September Campaign – a Chief of Staff in General Wacław Przeździecki's group; from 1939 in the underground resistance, the co-founder of the TAP. Brought to KL Auschwitz on April 18, 1942 in a transport from Warsaw; prisoner no. 30959, registered as

a forester. Witold Pilecki's active associate in the ZOW, a prospective commander of a military action in case of an uprising and fighting in KL Auschwitz. Executed on October 11 (according to the *Death Books* [*Sterbebücher*] – on October 13), 1943 in KL Auschwitz.

Bernhard Heinrich **Bonitz** • born on June 11, 1907 in Chemnitz (Saxony); a baker. Brought to KL Auschwitz from KL Sachsenhausen; prisoner no. 6. Among other posts: block elder at Block 2, Kapo of the clothing Kommando and Oberkapo of the Buna-Werke Kommando, the Lagerältester in KL Günthergrube subcamp (Günther Mine) and the Oberkapo in the Lederfabrik (tannery) Kommando. He murdered many inmates by beating them to death, drowning them in cesspits or vats with tanning chemicals. Arrested in 1966, he was tried in Frankfurt am Main (the third Auschwitz trial), and sentenced to life imprisonment on June 14, 1968.

Bruno (in some sources: Bronisław) **Brodniewicz** (Brodniewitsch) • born on July 22, 1893 (or 1895) in Poznań, raised in Westphalia in Germany. Brought to KL Auschwitz before the camp's official opening from KL Sachsenhausen, in a group of thirty prisoner functionaries (all of whom were German criminals). Registered as prisoner no. 1 and a worker. First Lagerältester of KL Auschwitz. Nicknamed 'Schwarzer Teufel' ('Black Devil') or 'Schwarzer Tod' ('Black Death') by the inmates and widely remembered as a sadist. Later imprisoned in KL Auschwitz II-Birkenau, in 1943 in KL Neu Dachs (Jaworzno), KL Eintrachtshütte (Zgoda in Świętochłowice), KL Bismarckshütte (Hajduki Wielkie, a district of Chorzów), and in 1945 – KL Mittelbau-Dora. Allegedly lynched in KL Bergen-Belsen in April 1945 by his inmates (information not verified).

Aleksander Bugajski • born on December 29, 1912 in Cracow. After the September Campaign he joined the underground resistance, the ZWZ and the HA. Arrested for the first time on July 2, 1940 in Cracow, he escaped and went into hiding in Zakliczyn nad Dunajcem. After returning to Cracow he took command of one of the ZWZ diversion units, and in December 1940 he supervised the execution of a German informer. Later on, he acted as the head of the Retaliation Union in the Cracow area of ZWZ. Arrested again and shot during an escape attempt, incarcerated in the Montelupich Prison, where he worked as a male nurse, assisting Doctor Kazimierz Garbień. Brought to KL Auschwitz in a transport from Cracow on November 12, 1942; prisoner no. 74503; a ZOW member. In 1943 he was moved to KL Ravensbrück and then to KL Klützow, from which he escaped. After returning to Cracow he was transferred to Warsaw. He fought in the Warsaw Uprising and probably fell in the fighting in Mokotów.

Tadeusz Burski • born on February 5, 1907 in Mohylów Podolski (now in Ukraine). Brought to KL Auschwitz on September 22, 1940 in the same second Warsaw transport as W. Pilecki; prisoner no. 4644, registered as a carter and locksmith; a ZOW member.

Worked as a male nurse in the camp hospital. Released from KL Auschwitz on February 11, 1941, passed one of W. Pilecki's reports to the underground resistance authorities in Warsaw.

Leszek Cenzartowicz • born on February 6, 1922. Brought to KL Auschwitz in the transport from Cracow of June 20, 1940; prisoner no. 870, registered as a junior high school pupil; a ZOW member. In 1943 he was moved to KL Neuengamme. He died on May 3, 1945 in Lubeck Bay, when German ships packed with concentration camp inmates were mistakenly bombed by an Allied aircraft.

Kazimierz Chmielewski • born on August 20, 1891 in Wola Kamieńska or Kamionkowska; a retired professional Polish Army officer, a major of the infantry with seniority from August 15, 1924. In the interwar period he had served in the 32nd Infantry Regiment in Modlin and Działdowo, the 21st Warsaw Infantry Regiment, the 7th Battalion of the Border Protection Corps in Hołubicze and the 71st Infantry Regiment in Zambrów. A TAP member. Brought to KL Auschwitz on April 6, 1941; prisoner no. 12609, registered as a pensioner; a ZOW member. Died on October 8, 1941.

Józef Chramiec-Chramiosek • born on October 20, 1910 in Zakopane; a skier; a Polish Army reserve non-commissioned officer. In KL Auschwitz – a master joiner. Brought to the camp on June 14, 1940 in a transport from Cracow; prisoner no. 101; a ZOW member. Executed on August 24, 1942.

Tadeusz Chrościcki (in some sources: Chróścicki) • born on May 22, 1888 in Przytyk, father of Tadeusz Lucjan (prisoner no. 16655). A TAP member. Brought to KL Auschwitz in a transport from Warsaw on April 6, 1941; prisoner no. 13484, registered as a Polish Army captain; a ZOW member. He died in a gas chamber on June 11 (other sources state 15), 1942 as a victim of a German retaliatory action for the SK mutiny in KL Auschwitz II-Birkenau that broke out on June 10, 1942.

Tadeusz Lucjan Chrościcki (in some sources: Chróścicki) • born on March 27, 1919 in Makarowce (now in Belarus), son of Tadeusz (prisoner no. 13484). A TAP member. Brought to KL Auschwitz in a transport from Warsaw on May 29, 1941; prisoner no. 16655, registered as an engineer; a ZOW member. He escaped from the camp during the SK mutiny in KL Auschwitz II-Birkenau that broke out on June 10, 1942. He survived the war.

Edward Ciesielski • born on November 16, 1922 in Wola Korzeniowska (presently Wola Korzeniowa). Arrested by the Gestapo for the possession of firearms. Brought to KL Auschwitz in a transport from Radom on April 5, 1941; prisoner no. 12969, registered as a stenotypist by profession; a ZOW member. Escaped from the camp with W. Pilecki

and J. Redzej on the night of April 26–27, 1943. An HA soldier, fought in the Warsaw Uprising in the North Centre district (IV Group 'Gurt'); heavily wounded. Survived the war. Died on October 23, 1962.

Tadeusz Czechowski • born on November 13, 1898 in Borucinek; a tradesman. Brought to KL Auschwitz on July 24, 1941; prisoner no. 18369; a ZOW member. He died in KL Auschwitz on September 25, 1942.

Jerzy Konrad Wincenty (Światopełk-)**Czetwertyński** • born on February 19, 1907 in Warsaw, son of Ludwik; a Polish Army reserve officer, a lieutenant of the cavalry with seniority from January 1, 1937, fought in the September Campaign. Brought to KL Auschwitz from Warsaw on April 6, 1941; prisoner no. 12657, registered as a farmer. Transferred to KL Buchenwald, which he escaped from in 1944.

Ludwik (Światopełk-)**Czetwertyński** • born on November 12, 1877 in Milanów; an agricultural engineer, a landowner. Brought to KL Auschwitz in a transport from Lublin on April 6, 1941; prisoner no. 14081. Died in KL Auschwitz on May 3, 1941.

Seweryn (Światopełk-)**Czetwertyński** • born on April 18, 1873 in Warsaw; an agricultural engineer, a landowner. Brought to KL Auschwitz in a transport from Lublin on April 6, 1941; prisoner no. 14080. In 1942 re-transferred from KL Auschwitz to the Lublin prison to be re-interrogated, and sent to KL Buchenwald from there. Survived the war.

Stanisław Tomasz (Światopełk-)**Czetwertyński** • born on March 7, 1910 in Warsaw, son of Ludwik; an agricultural engineer, a landowner; a Polish Army reserve officer, a second lieutenant of the cavalry with seniority from January 1, 1934. Fought in the September Campaign. Brought to KL Auschwitz in a transport from Lublin on April 6, 1941; prisoner no. 14863. Re-transferred from KL Auschwitz to the Lublin prison and sent to KL Buchenwald. Survived the war.

Jan Dangel (pseudonym 'Smoleński') • born on September 1 (according to some sources – August 19), 1916 in Brześć Litewski (now in Belarus), grew up in Mińsk Litewski (now in Belarus); an economist and an academic. As a student of the SGH Warsaw School of Economics he participated as a volunteer in the defense of Warsaw, and after the September Campaign he had co-founded an underground resistance group, with which he joined the TAP in November 1939. Arrested by the Gestapo, he was brought to KL Auschwitz in a transport from Warsaw on April 6, 1941; prisoner no. 13486, registered as a tradesman; a ZOW member. Transferred to KL Dachau in 1941. He graduated from the Warsaw School of Economics in 1948 and worked as the manager of the Department of Residential Statistics in the Institute of Residential Architecture. As from 1973 he was

a supervisor of the Housing Cooperative Department in the Cooperative Institute of Architecture. He died in Warsaw on December 30, 1974.

Czesław Darkowski • born on May 8, 1901 in Mieszki; a forester. A prisoner of Pawiak. Brought to KL Auschwitz in a transport from Warsaw on January 7, 1941; prisoner no. 8121; a ZOW member. Transferred to KL Mauthausen in July 1942.

Władysław Aleksander **Dering** • born on March 6, 1903 in Iwankowce near Berdyczów (now in Ukraine); a gynecologist and an obstetrician; a Polish Army reserve officer – a lieutenant in the Health Corps, with seniority from January 1, 1935 (the rank of captain attributed to him by Pilecki is not confirmed in any military files). A TAP member. Brought to KL Auschwitz on August 15, 1940 in the first transport from Warsaw; prisoner no. 1723; a ZOW member. As a male nurse and the organizer of an in-camp hospital (with German approval), the so-called Revier, he provided all kinds of medical help to hundreds of inmates, saving many lives. Released from the camp in 1944, after having signed the DVL, which was accepted by the Polish Underground authorities (the underground authorities wanted to save him as an important witness to the German atrocities in KL Auschwitz and pseudo-medical experiments). In 1945, prosecuted by the Communist authorities in Poland, he fled to the 2nd Polish Corps in Italy and afterwards settled in Great Britain. There he was arrested and gaoled under the suspicion of collaboration with the Germans and war crimes. Due to the lack of evidence and mostly positive testimonies from the former KL Auschwitz prisoners he was pardoned and released. For his activity he was decorated with numerous British distinctions. He worked as a doctor on missions in Africa. Died in Great Britain in July 1965.

Rudolf Diem • born on August 23, 1896 (according to A. Cyra – in 1898) in Szymanów near Sochaczew (according to the ABSM files – in Hermanów). He studied at the University of Warsaw, Faculty of Medicine, gaining a diploma in 'all-medical sciences.' A professional Polish Army officer, a major in the Health Corps' with seniority from March 19, 1939. Before the war he lived in the Warsaw Citadel and worked in the 1st Regional Hospital. In 1935 at the latest, he became the head physician of Subregion no. 4 of the Warsaw Social Security Service in Otwock and a general practitioner. Brought to KL Auschwitz in a transport from Warsaw on February 1, 1941; prisoner no. 10022. A ZOW member and the head of the organization's health service, meant to be the chief of sanitary services in case of an uprising in the camp; the closest associate of Doctor W. Dering in the HKB. Liberated in KL Auschwitz. After the war he worked in Warsaw as a general practitioner. He died in Warsaw on November 12, 1986.

Stanisław Dobrowolski • born on March 16, 1919 in Lublin. A TAP member. Brought to KL Auschwitz in a transport from Lublin on May 24, 1941; prisoner no. 16061, registered

as a farmer; a ZOW member. Executed at the 'wailing wall' on October 28, 1942; the camp's authorities issued a false death certificate, stating heart failure as the reason of his death on October 29, 1942.

Franciszek Drozd • born on October 6, 1902 in Lutynia Polska (now in the Czech Republic). Brought to KL Auschwitz on June 26, 1940; prisoner no. 1234, released on March 19, 1942.

Stanisław Dubois (in camp: Stanisław Dębski) • born on January 9, 1901 in Warsaw. Fought in the 1st (1919) and 3rd (1921) Silesian Uprisings, as well as the Polish-Bolshevik war. Member of the PPS, Member of Parliament in years 1928–33, sentenced in the Brest trial (proceedings against political opponents of the Sanation movement [Pol. Sanacja] and Józef Piłsudski's dictatorship). When the war broke out, he was in Eastern Poland (which fell under the Soviet occupation), but he managed to break through to Warsaw. Involved in the creation of the Polish Socialist underground resistance movement, remaining in contact with the Polish Socialist authorities in exile. Arrested in Warsaw on August 21, 1940 as Stanisław Dębski and incarcerated in the Pawiak Prison. Brought to KL Auschwitz on September 22, 1940 in the same second Warsaw transport as W. Pilecki; prisoner no. 3904, registered as a clerk. A leader of the Socialist activists in KL Auschwitz, a member of the ZOW. Taken to Warsaw in November 1940 for re-interrogation, recognized by a Gestapo agent as Stanisław Dubois, he was sent back to KL Auschwitz on May 29, 1941. He contributed to the unification of the Polish underground movement in KL Auschwitz. Executed there on August 21 (some sources state 20), 1942.

Xawery Dunikowski • born on November 29, 1875 in Cracow; a painter and a sculptor, graduated from the School of Fine Arts in Cracow. Before the war he was a professor at the Warsaw School of Fine Arts, and then – the Academy of Fine Arts in Cracow. Arrested by the Germans in 1940 and brought to KL Auschwitz on June 20, 1940 in a transport from Cracow; prisoner no. 774. He survived the camp with the help of W. Pilecki's ZOW. Liberated from KL Auschwitz in 1945. After the war he was a professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Cracow and the State High School of Fine Arts in Wrocław. He died in Warsaw on January 26, 1964 and was buried in the 'Avenue of the Distinguished' in Powązki Military Cemetery in Warsaw.

Teofil Bogumił **Dziama** • born on January 5, 1895 in Zalesie (other sources state Biała Rzeszowska); a soldier of the Legions, a retired Polish Army officer, an Air Force lieutenant colonel with seniority from January 1, 1934. In the interwar period he served in the 1st Air Force Regiment in Warsaw, at the High School of Piloting and Department of Air Navigation in the MSWojsk. Retired in 1935, but called up for active service in 1939 (at the MSWojsk Air Force commander's disposal). After the September Campaign he was involved in the resistance activities along with his wife, daughter

and son. Arrested by the Gestapo on October 24, 1940 and incarcerated in the Pawiak Prison. Brought to KL Auschwitz in a transport from Warsaw on April 6, 1941; prisoner no. 13578. A member of the ZOW. Executed on October 11, 1943 at the 'wailing wall' along with 28 other members of the camp underground. Along with Captain Tadeusz Paolone (Lisowski) they demanded to be shot as soldiers, facing the enemy, and not in the back of the head. SS-Oberscharführer Wilhelm Clausen and SS-Unterscharführer Friedrich Stiewitz, who led the execution, accepted their demand.

Tadeusz Dziedzic • born on September 7, 1906 in Bukowno; a teacher; a professional Polish Army officer, a lieutenant of the infantry with seniority from January 1, 1934. Graduated from Male Teachers' Training College in Turkowice and Infantry Officers School in Ostrów Mazowiecka-Komorowo. Served in the 53rd Kresy Riflemen Regiment in Stryj (now in Ukraine), later commanded the 3rd Company in the 7th 'Legions' Infantry Regiment in Chełm. Member of the underground resistance since the September Campaign. Arrested by the Gestapo, brought to KL Auschwitz in a transport from Lublin on May 24, 1941; prisoner no. 16246; a ZOW member. Worked in the construction office. Executed at the 'wailing wall' in KL Auschwitz on October 29, 1942.

Władysław Fejkiel • born on January 1, 1911 in Krościenko. He studied medicine at Jan Kazimierz University in Lwów (now in Ukraine), but received his diploma only after the war, in 1945, from the University of Warsaw. He arrived at KL Auschwitz in a transport from Cracow on August 8, 1940; prisoner no. 5647; a ZOW member. In 1945 he was transferred to KL Mauthausen where he was liberated by the Allied troops (according to other sources, he was transferred to KL Neuengamme in 1944). Between 1953–54 he was the director of the Polish Red Cross hospital in North Korea. From 1960 to 1981 he was the head of Infectious Diseases Clinic at the Medical University in Cracow, from 1963 to 1965 – its vice-rector; a professor of Medical Sciences. A member of the Polish United Workers' Party. He died on June 12, 1995 in Cracow.

Henryk Florczyk • born on April 30, 1904; a mathematician, the author of, inter alia, a pre-war trigonometry textbook for junior high and high schools. Brought to KL Auschwitz from Warsaw on August 15, 1940; prisoner no. 3029. Transferred to KL Buchenwald in 1943.

Karl Fritzsch • born on July 10, 1903 in Nassengrub in Sudetenland (now Mokřiny in the Czech Republic); a member of the NSDAP and SS from 1930, an SS-Hauptsturmführer. From 1933 he commanded a platoon of guards in KL Dachau, from 1939 was the head of the camp censorship department. From June 14, 1940 to February 1, 1942 he was the Lagerführer and deputy commandant of KL Auschwitz. He was the one who greeted the first transport of prisoners, telling them they did not come to a sanatorium; he was

the one who had first used in August 1941 Zyklon-B for the mass extermination of inmates in a gas chamber; he condemned the Roman Catholic priest Fr. Maximilian Maria Kolbe to death from starvation in Block 11's penal bunker. In July 1942 he was moved to a similar post in KL Flossenbürg, where he served as the camp commandant until September; in 1943 he was moved again to one of the subcamps of KL Mittelbau. At the end of the war he was moved to Waffen-SS and incorporated into a front-line unit; he died in the fighting for Berlin on May 2, 1945.

Aleksander Fusek • born on January 20, 1906 in Kańczuga; a court bailiff and a sculptor. Brought to KL Auschwitz on June 20, 1940 in a transport from Cracow; prisoner no. 775. Died in KL Auschwitz on December 3, 1942.

Stefan Gaik • born on January 21, 1912 in Bochnia; a joiner. Brought to the camp from Cracow. Date of arrival and camp number could not be determined; a ZOW member. Died in KL Auschwitz on August 20, 1942.

Franciszek Gajowniczek • born on November 15, 1901 in Strachomin; a professional Polish Army non-commissioned officer, a sergeant in the 36th Infantry Regiment of the Academic Legion in Warsaw, a participant of the September Campaign. After the capitulation of the Modlin Fortress he was taken prisoner by the Germans, but escaped and attempted to get to the Polish Army in France. In January 1940 he was captured by the Gestapo in Poronin. Brought to KL Auschwitz on October 8, 1940 in a transport from Cracow; prisoner no. 5659. Moved to KL Sachsenhausen in 1944. In 1982 he participated in Fr. Maximillian Maria Kolbe's canonization. Died on March 13, 1995 in Brzeg.

Wincenty Gawron • born on January 28, 1908 in Stara Wieś near Limanowa; a painter, studied in the State School of Decorative Arts in Lwów (now in Ukraine), and later in Cracow. From 1935, a student of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw. A member of the ZCZ – one of the first underground organizations in southern Poland. Arrested on January 19, 1941 in Mordarka. Brought to KL Auschwitz on April 5, 1941 in a transport from Cracow; prisoner no. 11237; a ZOW member. Escaped from the camp on May 16, 1942, with Stefan Bielecki (no. 12692). Returned to his hometown, but under a threat of another arrest he decided to move to Warsaw. An HA soldier, participated in the Warsaw Uprising in the ranks of NSZ 'Koło' ('Circle') Disposition-Motorized Brigade in 'Północ' ('North') group, sub-group 'Róg' ('Horn'). He left Warsaw through the Pruszków camp along with the civilians. In April 1945 he was arrested by the NKVD, but escaped and made his way through Czechoslovakia and Germany to the Polish 2nd Corps in Italy, where he met W. Pilecki again. He left for Great Britain with the Corps; after the demobilization he emigrated to Canada and the United States. He died during his visit to Poland, on August 25, 1991, and was buried in Limanowa.

Andrzej Gąsienica-Makowski • born on November 19, 1906 in Poronin; a forester. Brought to KL Auschwitz on October 8, 1940 in a transport from Cracow; prisoner no. 5654; a ZOW member. He escaped from the camp on June 14, 1944 and survived the war.

Bolesław Gierych • born 1910; B. Sc. in architecture. From 1930 he studied at the Warsaw University of Life Sciences and the Warsaw University of Technology, Faculty of Architecture. During the German occupation he was imprisoned in Pawiak and in KL Auschwitz; prisoner no. 6555. From 1945 he had been employed at the Warsaw University of Technology, where he planned the reconstruction of many buildings destroyed during the Second World War. He died on February 6, 1982 in Warsaw.

Juliusz Gilewicz • born on November 1, 1890 in Białopole (now in Ukraine); a professional Polish Army officer, an Air Force retired lieutenant colonel. He graduated from a junior high school in Żytomierz (now in Ukraine), passed his matriculation exams in Wiaźma (now in Russia) and studied medicine and law at the St. Vladimir Royal University of Kijów (now in Ukraine). During the First World War he served in the Russian cavalry and air forces, as well as in General J. Dowbor-Muśnicki's 1st Polish Corps. In the Polish Army as from July 1919; he fought in the Polish-Bolshevik War of 1920. In the interwar period he was an officer of the 3rd Air Force Regiment in Poznań, the commander of the Training Squadron in the 2nd Air Force Regiment in Cracow and the commander of the 3rd Squadron, a quartermaster, the Deputy Commander and the Base Commandant of the 4th Air Force Regiment in Toruń. Retired in 1937, he began a career in civil aviation and became the traffic director of the Polish Airlines 'Lot' in Warsaw and the head of the flying personnel and equipment department. In 1939 he supervised the evacuation of the Polish civil airplanes. After returning to Warsaw, he created a resistance organization among the former 'Lot' employees, members of the Polish Aeroclub and the personnel of the State Aviation Works in Okęcie, all of whom then joined the ZWZ. Arrested by the Gestapo in January 1942 and incarcerated in the Pawiak Prison, he was sent to KL Auschwitz in a transport from Warsaw on April 18, 1942; prisoner no. 31033. As a ZOW member, he succeeded Lieutenant Colonel Kazimierz Heilmann as the commander of the military structures in the camp's underground resistance organization. Arrested and incarcerated in the 'bunker' along with a group of 74 inmates, accused of conspiracy by the Germans. Killed in KL Auschwitz on October 11, 1943 with 54 other prisoners (28 ZOW members among them).

Edward Karol **Gött-Getyński** • born on January 4, 1898 in Brody (now in Ukraine), a professional Polish Army officer, a major of the artillery with seniority from January 1, 1936. Before the war – the commander of the 3rd Battalion in Marcin Kątski Wołyń Cadet School for Artillery Reserve Officers in Włodzimierz Wołyński (now in

Ukraine); in the September Campaign – an officer in the Artillery Command Staff of the Pomorze Army (Pomeranian Army). When the fighting ended, he moved into the underground resistance and co-organized the Conspiracy Mountain Division with Colonel A. Stawarz. After A. Stawarz was arrested, he organized and commanded the Podhale Division in Conspiracy. After a series of talks, they merged with KT, another conspiracy organization in the Podhale region, and E. Getyński became a military department manager in the KT's Head Office. Arrested by the Gestapo in Chrobacze on February 2, 1942, he was transported to the 'Palace' interrogation rooms in Zakopane and to the Tarnów prison. Brought to KL Auschwitz on April 16, 1942 in a transport from Cracow; prisoner no. 29693. A ZOW member, appointed by W. Pilecki in agreement with Lieutenant Colonel J. Gilewicz, to command the 1st battalion in case of an uprising in KL Auschwitz. Arrested by the camp's Gestapo and interrogated in Block 11, he was killed there on January 25, 1943.

Max(imilian) Grabner • an Austrian, born on October 2, 1905 in Vienna; a policeman by profession. Member of the NSDAP from 1932 and the SS from 1938. Initially he was a criminal police officer, later on a Gestapo officer. After the annexation of Poland by the Germans he was assigned to the Gestapo in Katowice and nominated in June 1940 as the head of the Political Department in KL Auschwitz. Due to the nature of the post, his power over the Auschwitz inmates was almost absolute. He also had significant powers over the SS staff and was feared even by the camp commandant, SS-Sturmbannführer Rudolf Höß. Grabner supervised the executions at the Death Wall; he was the main figure behind the extermination of the Jews; he conducted brutal interrogations using exceptionally sadistic methods. He was also the chairman of the police drumhead court-martial (Ger. Standgericht), where both KL Auschwitz inmates and civilians brought from the Katowice Gestapo office and the Mysłowice prison were sentenced to death. He was dismissed from his post in 1943 due to multiple acts of enormous corruption and abuse of power. Arrested by the Germans and incarcerated in Weimar, in 1945 he was captured by the Allied forces and transferred to Poland in 1947. Accused in the first Auschwitz trial, conducted by the Supreme National Tribunal in Cracow. Sentenced to death, he was hanged in the Montelupich Prison in Cracow on January 24, 1948.

Erik (Erich) **Grönke** • born on September 15, 1902 in Berlin; a shoemaker. Brought to KL Auschwitz in the first group of thirty prisoner functionaries, German criminals; prisoner no. 11. An Oberkapo in the clothing and tanning workshops. He supplied the camp commandant with leather goods, made out of tattooed human skin. After the war he lived in Germany. Arrested in 1966 and sentenced in the Frankfurt am Main trial (the third Auschwitz trial) to three years and four months imprisonment, later reduced to three years.

Stanisław Gutkiewicz • born on July 23, 1910 in Janowiec; a painter. He was studying in the City School of Applied Arts and Painting in Warsaw, and between 1934–38 in the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw. Brought to KL Auschwitz on March 18, 1941, in a transport of prisoners from Silesia; prisoner no. 11003; a ZOW member. Executed in KL Auschwitz on June 12 or 14, 1942.

Kazimierz Roman **Heilmann** (in camp: Jan Hilkner, after the war also used the names: Heilmann-Rawicz and Rawicz) • born on February 27, 1896 in Błażowa; a soldier of the Polish Legions and General Haller's Army, a professional Polish Army officer, a lieutenant colonel of the infantry with seniority from January 1, 1931. An officer of the 2nd Legions Regiment in Sandomierz and Staszów, the battalion commander in the 59th Infantry Regiment in Inowrocław and for five years – the commander of the 5th Border Guard Battalion in Łużki (now in Belarus). In 1931 he became the deputy commander of the 62nd Infantry Regiment in Bydgoszcz; in 1936 he took command of that regiment, leading it in the fighting during the September Campaign. After the surrender of Warsaw he escaped German imprisonment and tried to get to the Polish Army in France, but resigned and joined the ZWZ. Arrested by the Ukrainian police in Baligród, imprisoned in Sanok and Tarnów, transferred to KL Auschwitz on January 10, 1941; prisoner no. 9319. A ZOW member, took over the military command of the organization at W. Pilecki's request. On July 7, 1942 he was transferred to KL Mauthausen, where he managed to survive until the liberation. He settled down in Gliwice, where he died on December 12, 1969.

Heinrich Himmler • born on October 7, 1900; the Reichsführer SS, the Reich Commissioner for the Strengthening of Germandom (Ger. Reichskommissar für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums); one of the closest associates of Adolf Hitler and the highest officials of the Third Reich, the second most important person in the state; the chief of the SS, the Gestapo and the German police; the Reich Minister of the Interior. One of the worst war criminals, directly responsible for the extermination of the Jews in Europe. All concentration camps were subordinate to him. He visited KL Auschwitz in the spring of 1941 and in July 1942. He died on May 23, 1945.

Krzysztof Hofman (in some sources: Hofmann) • born on April 30, 1915 in Łódź; a professional Polish Army officer; after the Second World War – a physician, one of the first acupuncture practitioners in Poland. Graduated from Infantry Officers School in Ostrów Mazowiecka-Komorowo and nominated to second lieutenant of the infantry with seniority from October 1, 1938. Assigned to the 55th Infantry Regiment, garrisoned in Leszno and Rawicz, he took part in the September Campaign as a platoon commander. Heavily wounded in the Battle of Bzura, he was taken prisoner but escaped after convalescence. After the September Campaign had ended, he went underground and

became a soldier of the SZP. Arrested by the Germans and brought to KL Auschwitz in the first transport from Warsaw on August 15, 1940; prisoner no. 2738, registered as a male nurse; a ZOW member. In 1942 transferred to Warsaw for a Gestapo interrogation, but managed to escape in transit, at the Main Railway Station. Dispatched to the HA's Świętokrzyskie District, he took command of the HA's 'Dionizy Czachowski' 72nd Infantry Battalion in the Kielce-Radom HA Corps. He was imprisoned by the Soviets, victimized for his activity in the Polish underground movement, and sent into exile for five years deep inside the Soviet Union, where he worked as a miner. After returning to Poland he completed his medical studies and worked as the health centre manager in Dołhobyczów near Hrubieszów, and then in Chochołów near Zakopane. He was also a social and patriotic activist. He died in Cracow on October 30, 1996.

Rudolf Franz Ferdinand **Höß** (Höss, Hoess) • born on November 25, 1900 in Baden-Baden; an SS-Sturmbannführer, the Lagerkommandant during W. Pilecki's imprisonment in KL Auschwitz. Fought in the First World War and was a member of the Freikorps in Upper Silesia and in the Ruhr region; a member of the SS from 1934, served as a guard and an administration staff member at KL Dachau; in 1938 he was appointed the Lagerführer of KL Sachsenhausen; in 1940 he joined the Waffen-SS. On May 1, 1940 appointed the commandant of KL Auschwitz, at that time still under construction, he held this post until December 1, 1943, when he was promoted to chairman of Concentration Camps Inspectorate at the SS Main Economic and Administrative Office. After that he visited KL Auschwitz one more time in May 1944, to supervise the extermination of the Hungarian Jews on the order of Heinrich Himmler within the 'Höß Action.' After the war he went into hiding under the name of Franz Lang or Langer, but was captured by the British on March 11, 1946 near Flensburg and on May 25 handed over to the Polish government. After standing trial before the Supreme National Tribunal in Warsaw, on April 2, 1947 he was sentenced to death. During his imprisonment in Poland he wrote an autobiography. Awaiting punishment in the Wadowice prison, he returned to the Catholic Church, confessed his sins to a Jesuit, Fr. Władysław Lohn, and received Holy Communion. He was hanged on April 16, 1947 in the grounds of the former KL Auschwitz.

Jan Antoni Władysław **Hrebenda** • born on June 10, 1896 in Cracow; a graduate of the Jagiellonian University's Faculty of Law, a Doctor of Laws, a magistrate in the Cracow Appeal Court and a Polish Army reserve officer with seniority from June 1, 1919. Brought to KL Auschwitz on August 30, 1940 in a transport from Cracow; prisoner no. 3665; a ZOW member. Died in KL Auschwitz on August 7, 1941.

Konstanty Jagiełło • born on July 12, 1916 in Żelechów (Huta Żelechowska); a roofer by profession; a PPS activist, as from October 1939 involved in the Socialist resistance movement. Arrested on August 1, 1940 and incarcerated in the Pawiak Prison. Brought

to KL Auschwitz on September 22, 1940 in the same second Warsaw transport as W. Pilecki; prisoner no. 4507. A member of the ZOW and an in-camp PPS group. Escaped from KL Auschwitz on June 27, 1944 with Tomasz Sobański (prisoner no. 13609); later active in the by-camp resistance structures of PPS-WRN. Shot dead by the Germans on October 27, 1944 in Łęki-Zasole while helping another group of KL Auschwitz escapees.

Mieczysław Januszewski • born on July 1, 1918 in Łódź; since July 1937, a cadet at the Technical Department of the Naval Forces Academy in Bydgoszcz. In the first days of the war he was evacuated with all the students of the Academy to Horodyszcze. A professional Polish Navy officer, an ensign promoted on September 15, 1939. Fought against the Soviets and Germans in General Franciszek Kleeberg's Independent Operational Group 'Polesie.' In October 1939 he was taken prisoner by the Germans, wounded and sent to a POW hospital in Radom, from where he escaped to Warsaw. Brought to KL Auschwitz with the first transport from Cracow on June 14, 1940; prisoner no. 711; a ZOW member. He escaped from the camp on December 29, 1942 with Kapo O. Küsel (prisoner no. 2), Jan Baraś-Komski (no. 564) and B. Kuczbara (no. 4308). Arrested again by the Germans, he died in transit to KL Auschwitz (probably committed suicide on the train).

Stanisław Gustaw **Jaster** • born on January 1, 1921 in Lwów (now in Ukraine); a scout, a yachting instructor and an HA soldier. Passed his baccalaureate exams in 1939 in Warsaw. He participated as a volunteer in the defense of the capital after which he joined the underground resistance movement. Captured accidentally, during a street roundup in Warsaw's Żoliborz district (September 19, 1940 – the same day as W. Pilecki), accused of an attempted attack on a German officer and incarcerated in the Pawiak Prison. Brought to KL Auschwitz on November 23, 1940; prisoner no. 6438, registered as a junior high school pupil. As a ZOW member, he forwarded one of W. Pilecki's reports to the HA HQ. He fled the camp in the most famous getaway in its history, in the commandant's car, along with three other inmates: Eugeniusz Bendera (prisoner no. 8502), Kazimierz Piechowski (no. 918) and Józef Lempart (no. 3419; a Roman Catholic priest from Wadowice). In Warsaw Jaster joined the HA HQ's 'Osa-Kosa' ('Wasp-Scythe'), the elite diversion unit. However, after many arrests among the unit's members on June 5, 1943, followed by the arrest of its Chief of Staff, Wiktor Kudelski, on July 12, Jaster was accused of treason and collaboration with the Germans. In July 1943 he was captured and eliminated by the HA HQ's security team. The circumstances of his death are still controversial among combatants and researchers.

Jan Karcz • born on October 16, 1892 in Modlnica; studied civil engineering at the Lwów University of Technology (now in Ukraine). During the First World War he served in the Austro-Hungarian Army. From November 1918, a professional Polish Army officer, a certified colonel of the cavalry with seniority from January 1, 1931. An officer of

the 7th Uhlan Regiment, the Józef Piłsudski 1st Light Cavalry Regiment and a clerk in the MSWojsk. He completed the courses at War College. From October 31, 1928 he commanded the 1st Light Cavalry Regiment. In October 1931 he was nominated the head of the Cavalry Department in the MSWojsk and in April 1937 – the commander of the Mazovia Cavalry Brigade, which he also commanded during the September Campaign. He joined the underground resistance movement – initially the OOB, then the ZWZ. In early 1941 he was arrested in Tarnów and incarcerated in the Lublin Castle Prison. Brought to KL Auschwitz on November 27, 1941 with a transport from Lublin; prisoner no. 23569. The highest ranking and the most senior Polish Army officer in KL Auschwitz. Shortly after his arrival in KL Auschwitz he was introduced to the ZOW structures by W. Pilecki. On April 2, 1942 incarcerated in the internal Gestapo camp prison (cellars of Block 11) under the suspicion of resistance activities, later sentenced to six months in the SK in KL Auschwitz II-Birkenau. At that time he accepted W. Pilecki's proposal of coordinating the resistance movement in KL Birkenau. Thanks to other conspirators' efforts, he was moved to Block 7 (typhus), despite still formally belonging to the SK. On January 23, 1943 he reported to Lagerführer Hans Aumeier that his six month sentence in the SK was served and he requested to be transferred to an ordinary barrack. Arrested and incarcerated in the camp prison once again, he was executed on January 25, 1943 in KL Auschwitz. Posthumously promoted by the Polish government-in-exile in London to brigadier general with seniority from November 11, 1969.

Stanisław Kazuba (Kaszuba) • born on July 22, 1900 in Warsaw; a professional Polish Army officer, a captain of the infantry with seniority from January 1, 1935, assigned to the 5th Legions Infantry Regiment in Wilno (now in Lithuania), the commander of the 5th Military Training Circuit of the 5th Legions Infantry Regiment. Participant of the September Campaign. Brought to KL Auschwitz in a transport from Warsaw on August 15, 1940; prisoner no. 1630; a ZOW member. Transferred to KL Buchenwald in 1944. He died in Łódź in the late 1970s.

Josef Klehr • born on October 17, 1904 in Langenau; an SS orderly in KL Auschwitz prisoners' hospital, an SS-Oberscharführer. Son of a teacher from Upper Silesia, worked as a joiner, later on as an orderly in a sanatorium. He joined the SS in 1932 and became a prison guard in Wohlau (now Wołów in Poland). From 1939 he served in KL Buchenwald, moving to KL Dachau in 1940, in 1941 he was assigned to the KL Auschwitz crew as an orderly. His main task was killing inmates and the Soviet POWs with phenol injections. From 1943, as the head of the Disinfection Department in KL Auschwitz-Birkenau, he took part in the mass extermination of the Jews. He controlled the Zyklon-B supplies and often applied the poisonous gas personally. As from 1944 he managed the hospital in the KL Gleiwitz I subcamp (in today's Gliwice in Poland), where he supervised the selection of prisoners unable to work for extermination. Captured in 1945 by

the US troops, released after three years in a work camp, he worked as a cabinet maker in Braunschweig. Arrested again in 1960 and sentenced to life imprisonment with an additional 15 years in the second Auschwitz trial for murdering at least 475 people and assisting in the killing of several thousand more. Died on August 23, 1988 in Leiferde (West Germany).

Stanisław Kocjan • born on November 15, 1916 in Cracow; a clerk. Brought to KL Auschwitz in the first transport from Cracow of June 14, 1940; prisoner no. 65; a ZOW member. Died on February 2, 1943.

Maximillian Maria (Rajmund) **Kolbe** OFM Conv. • born on January 8, 1894 in Zduńska Wola; a Conventual Franciscan priest. Brought to KL Auschwitz in a transport from Warsaw on May 29, 1941; prisoner no. 16670. On July 29, 1941 he offered his life for an inmate, Franciszek Gajowniczek. Finished off by a phenol injection on August 14, after two weeks in the starvation cell no. 18 of the Death Block. A saint of the Catholic Church, in 1982 canonized as a martyr of charity.

Mieczysław Koliński • born on November 28, 1895 in Wypalenisko, the younger brother of Włodzimierz Kazimierz; a farmer. Brought to KL Auschwitz in a transport from Warsaw on October 20, 1942; prisoner no. 68884; a ZOW member. Executed on January 25, 1943 in KL Auschwitz.

Włodzimierz Kazimierz **Koliński** • born on March 13, 1894 in Wypalenisko, the older brother of Mieczysław; a retired Polish Army officer, a captain of the cavalry with seniority from July 1, 1923. Brought to KL Auschwitz in the first transport from Warsaw on August 15, 1940; prisoner no. 3135; a ZOW member. Killed on January 25, 1943 in KL Auschwitz.

Stanisław Koprowiak • born on January 16, 1900 in Gostynin. Brought to KL Auschwitz in the first Cracow transport (June 14, 1940); prisoner no. 714, registered as a toolmaker and a train driver. As the block elder he tried to do no harm to inmates. In 1944 he was transferred to KL Mauthausen.

Zygmunt Kostecki • born on July 20, 1901 in Pomorzanki; an architect. Brought to KL Auschwitz on February 1, 1941 from Warsaw; prisoner no. 9750, registered as a farmer; a ZOW member. Transferred to KL Neuengamme, died on May 3, 1945 onboard the ship 'Cap Arcona,' mistakenly bombed by the Allies in Lubeck Bay.

Antoni Koszczyński • born on January 17, 1915 in Boruszyń; a Polish Army reserve non-commissioned officer. Brought to KL Auschwitz on September 22, 1940 in the same

second Warsaw transport as W. Pilecki; prisoner no. 4075; a ZOW member. Transferred in 1944 to KL Buchenwald. He survived the war.

Witold Kosztowny • born on October 7, 1913 in Grodziec; a laboratory technician. Brought to KL Auschwitz in the first Cracow transport on June 14, 1940; prisoner no. 672. A male nurse in the camp hospital, a ZOW member. He bred typhus lice that were then planted on SS men's uniforms. In 1944 he was moved to KL Sachsenhausen. He survived the war.

Piotr Kownacki • born on April 6, 1888 (or 1889) in Tomsk (Siberia); an attorney at law, the SN leader in the Wilno Voivodeship in the Second Polish Republic. Brought to KL Auschwitz in a transport from Warsaw on July 24, 1941; prisoner no. 18469. A member of the ZOW. Died of typhus in KL Auschwitz on August 17, 1942.

Ernst Krankemann • born December 19, 1895; a German criminal brought to KL Auschwitz from KL Sachsenhausen on August 29, 1940; prisoner no. 3210, an exceptional sadist. He exploited his position of Kapo for committing various abuses. In consequence, on July 28, 1941, he was earmarked by the German authorities for transport to the Sonnenstein extermination centre for annihilation by gas poisoning. The SS men, guarding the transport, suggested to the inmates to lynch Krankemann, and for some time after loading the train they pretended not to see anything. Krankemann was hanged by his fellow prisoners inside a railway car.

Władysław Szymon **Kuc** • born in 1885 in Lipnica Murowana; at that time a parish priest at St. Nicholas' in Bochnia. Ordained in 1909, after completing his studies in Rome in 1912 he acquired the academic degree of a Doctor of Philosophy. From 1912, a vicar in Szczawnica; an administrator there from 1913, a catechist from 1914. In 1916 he became the prefect of the Tarnów Seminary and a catechist in the junior high school there. From 1923, a parish priest in Ropczyce, and from 1928 – in Bochnia. In 1930 he was granted the title of the Chamberlain of the Pope. He led to the coronation of the image of Our Lady of Bochnia in 1934. Died in 1953 and was buried in Bochnia.

Bolesław Janusz **Kuczbara** • born on October 26, 1911 in Kowel (now in Ukraine); a dentist. Brought to KL Auschwitz on September 22, 1940 in the same second Warsaw transport as W. Pilecki; prisoner no. 4308. He knew many ZOW members, but was not a member himself as he was suspected of a mental disorder. On December 29, 1942 he attempted an escape with Jan Baraś-Komski (prisoner no. 564) and two Arbeitsdiensts – O. Küsel (no. 2) and M. Januszewski (no. 711). Caught by the Gestapo in Warsaw on March 20, 1943, he got engaged in a gunfight in which he was badly wounded in the stomach. While in the prison hospital, he requested to have poison delivered,

however it is unknown whether he received it. One hypothesis holds that he revealed all his knowledge about the ZOW in KL Auschwitz to the Gestapo, but there is no proof that anyone was actually arrested on the basis of his disclosures. There are also two versions of his death – he either died in prison hospital after poisoning himself or was killed in the ruins of the Warsaw Ghetto.

Leon Kukiełka • born on April 5, 1922 in Gródek Jagielloński (now in Ukraine); a junior high school pupil. Brought to KL Auschwitz in a Lublin transport on May 24, 1941; prisoner no. 16465; a ZOW member. He was executed on October 28, 1942 in KL Auschwitz.

Karol Wojciech (Adalbert) **Kumuniecki** • born on October 23 (some sources state 28), 1893 (or 1894) in Żywiec; a member of the Legions, a professional Polish Army officer, a lieutenant colonel of the infantry with seniority from January 1, 1930, in the interwar period he served in the 21st Warsaw Infantry Regiment, from 1935 he was the deputy commander of the 11th Infantry Regiment in Tarnowskie Góry, in the same year he took command of the 67th Infantry Regiment in Brodnica, which he also commanded during the September Campaign. Badly wounded in the Battle of Bzura, treated in the Ujazdowski Hospital in Warsaw and released at Easter 1940 as a war invalid, only to be arrested on July 16 the same year and incarcerated in the Pawiak Prison. Brought to KL Auschwitz on January 7, 1942; prisoner no. 8361. He actively joined Colonel A. Stawarz's resistance unit, and subsequently joined W. Pilecki's ZOW with all his group. Executed in KL Auschwitz on January 25, 1943.

Bolesław Kupiec • born on July 12, 1913 in Poronin; a sculptor, a Polish Army reserve non-commissioned officer. Graduated from the State School of Wood Industry (now known as Kenar School) in Zakopane. Brought to KL Auschwitz on June 20, 1940; prisoner no. 792; a ZOW member. In 1942 he was transferred to the Gestapo post in Zakopane – 'the Palace' – for an additional interrogation, where he was murdered on March 4, 1942.

Jan Kupiec • born on February 17, 1904 in Zakopane; a construction technician. Brought to KL Auschwitz on June 20, 1940 in the second Cracow transport; prisoner no. 790; a ZOW member. Still in 1940 he was transferred to another camp; liberated by the Allies on May 6 in KL Ebensee.

Władysław Kupiec • born on August 13, 1907 in Zakopane; a Polish Army reserve non-commissioned officer. Arrested on January 17, 1940 along with his five brothers (Antoni, Bolesław, Jan, Józef and Karol) for resistance activities and smuggling across the border Poles, who were trying to join the Polish Army, formed in France. Brought to KL Auschwitz with four of five brothers in a transport from Cracow on June 20, 1940 (the remaining one, Antoni, joined them later, on August 30); prisoner no. 793,

registered as a joiner; a ZOW member. Along with his brother Bolesław he sculpted hollowed-out figures in the camp joinery workshops, in which secret reports and private letters were smuggled out. In 1942 he was transferred to KL Mauthausen. He was liberated on May 3, 1945 by the Allies in KL Mauthausen-Gusen.

Otto Küsel • born on May 16, 1909 in Berlin. Sentenced for stealing cars. Brought to KL Auschwitz on May 30, 1940 in a group of 30 German criminals, meant to take up functionary posts in the developing camp; prisoner no. 2. Until December 1942, Kapo-Arbeitsdienst no. 1 in KL Auschwitz, known for his friendly attitude towards the inmates. On December 29, 1942 he escaped with three Poles: Jan Baraś-Komski (prisoner no. 564), M. Januszewski (no. 711) and B. Kuczbara (no. 4308). He was hiding in Warsaw, but in September 1943 was caught and imprisoned in KL Auschwitz again, this time as an ordinary inmate, incarcerated in the penal bunker, but despite being tortured he did not betray his companions. On February 8, 1944 he was punitively transferred to KL Flossenbürg, where he remained until the end of the war. After the evacuation of the camp, during the 'hunger march' he was helping the Poles. After the war he testified as a witness in the second Auschwitz trial of the KL Auschwitz SS staff in Frankfurt am Main. He lived in Oberpfalz in Bayern. On the initiative of former KL Auschwitz prisoners he was offered honorary Polish citizenship. He died on November 17, 1984 in Oberviechtach (Bayern).

Gerhard Lachmann • born on February 8, 1920 in Strzelce Dolne; an SS-Unterscharführer. From 1940 until January 1945 he was an officer in the interrogation and investigation section of the KL Auschwitz Political Department, led by SS-Oberscharführer Wilhelm Boger. He was one of the cruelest employees of this department, employing sadistic methods of interrogation and specializing in sophisticated tortures. During the liquidation of KL Auschwitz he was moved to KL Flossenbürg. His fate remains unknown.

Konrad Lang • born on June 29, 1903 in Esslingen; a joiner. A KL Auschwitz prisoner no. 18. A block elder, later the Oberkapo in the Abbruch (demolition) and Buna-Werke Kommandos. Incarcerated in the bunker for excessive drinking, later incorporated into Oskar Dirlewanger's troops (the infamous SS penal unit which was used in the suppression of the Warsaw Uprising and committed unspeakable crimes against the inhabitants of the city).

Tadeusz Jan Kazimierz **Lech** • born on March 4, 1913 in Brzeźnica near Bochnia (according to the ABSM files – in Szarów); a philosophy of history student at the Jagiellonian University, a Polish Army reserve officer, a second lieutenant of the infantry with seniority from January 1, 1938. One of the founders, later on – the supervisor of the

first underground resistance organization in Bochnia – the Union of Struggle for the Freedom of Poland. Having been warned about the risk of arrest, he did not want to flee, being afraid for his family. Arrested on September 11, 1940, he was imprisoned in the Montelupich Prison in Cracow. Brought to KL Auschwitz on January 10, 1941 in the Cracow transport; prisoner no. 9235, registered as a woodcarver; a ZOW member. Executed on November 11 (according to the SS files – November 10), 1941 in KL Auschwitz with a group of 150 other prisoners. It was one of the first mass executions of the inmates, held on the Polish Independence Day on November 11.

Jonny vel Johann **Lechenich** ('Jonny,' 'Johny,' 'Dżoni') • born on September 10, 1910 in Büsum (Busum, Biesam); a physical worker and a sailor. A criminal prisoner of KL Sachsenhausen, transferred to KL Auschwitz on May 20, 1940; prisoner no. 19. Nominated a Kapo of the Landwirtschaftskommando. On October 10, 1942, he escaped from KL Birkenau along with Kazimierz Nowakowski (prisoner no. 23048) and Fryderyk Klytta (prisoner no. 637). Between 1943–44 he was a member of a Polish partisan grouping – the 'Las' ('Forest') Battalion of the 74th HA Infantry Regiment, operating near Radomsko (in the platoon commanded by Second Lieutenant Józef Kasza-Kowalski, pseudonym 'Alma'; the battalion was commanded by Major Mieczysław Tarchalski, pseudonym 'Marcin'). One of ex-KL Auschwitz inmates, Władysław Jabłecki (prisoner no. 7765) stated that when the war ended, he recognized Lechenich serving as a soldier of General Władysław Anders' Polish 2nd Corps in Italy. After the war Lechenich moved to Great Britain, later – to Hamburg, where he died on June 17, 1972, and was buried in Munich.

Stanisław Leśkiewicz • born on October 17, 1898 in Żelechów; a clerk and a railway man. Brought to KL Auschwitz in a transport from Lublin on April 6, 1941; prisoner no. 14449; a ZOW member. Died there on August 11, 1942.

Jan vel Janusz **Machnowski** • born on November 8, 1913; a painter and an architect. Brought to KL Auschwitz on June 14, 1940 in the first Cracow transport; prisoner no. 724; a ZOW member. In 1944 he was transferred to KL Sachsenhausen, from which he escaped. He survived the war and emigrated to Venezuela.

Stanisław Ferdynand **Machowski** • born on August 16, 1899 in Przemyśl; a retired Polish Army officer, a captain of the artillery with seniority from January 1, 1927. A TAP member. Brought to KL Auschwitz on November 27, 1942 in a transport from Warsaw; prisoner no. 78056; a ZOW member. Transferred to KL Gross-Rosen in 1944, and then to KL Buchenwald, where he died.

Włodzimierz Makaliński • born on March 23 (some sources state 20), 1912 in Grodno (now in Belarus); a graduate of the 2nd Cadet Corps in Chełmno (1932) and the Cavalry

Military Academy in Grudziądz (1935), a professional Polish Army officer, a lieutenant of the cavalry with seniority from March 19, 1939, a platoon commander in the 13th Regiment in Nowa Wilejka (now in Lithuania) and Wołkowysk (now in Belarus). After the September Campaign he joined the resistance activities; a TAP member. Arrested by the Gestapo on September 21, 1940 and incarcerated in the Pawiak Prison. On April 6, 1941 brought to KL Auschwitz; prisoner no. 12710; a ZOW member. On May 27, 1942 with a group of Poles he was moved to the SK in KL Auschwitz II-Birkenau and executed on June 4, 1942.

Andrzej Marduła • born on February 25, 1899 in Poronin; a sculptor. Brought to KL Auschwitz in a transport from Cracow on July 29, 1941; prisoner no. 18855; a ZOW member. Died in KL Auschwitz on August 18, 1942.

Stanisław Maringe • born on September 6, 1918 in Smolina; a technologist, a graduate of the Wawelberg and Rotwand State Academy of Machine Construction and Electrotechnics. From November 1, 1939 a member of the TAP, subsequently ZWZ, arrested by the Gestapo in the spring of 1941. Brought to KL Auschwitz on April 6, 1941; prisoner no. 12691, registered as a technician; a ZOW member. Died on June 12, 1942 as a victim of a German retaliatory action for the SK mutiny in KL Auschwitz II-Birkenau that broke out on June 10, 1942.

Piotr Mazurkiewicz • a Tyniec inhabitant, who gave shelter to W. Pilecki, J. Redzej and E. Ciesielski during their escape from KL Auschwitz.

Jan Mielcarek vel Mielczarek (Milczarek) ('Wernyhora') • born June 22, 1898 in Gdynia; a retired Polish Army warrant officer. Brought to KL Auschwitz on August 30, 1940 in a transport from Cracow; prisoner no. 3569; a ZOW member. Died in the camp on October 8, 1942.

Józef Miksa • born on March 12, 1916 in Stolniki; a farmer; a Polish Army non-commissioned officer. Brought to KL Auschwitz on April 5, 1941; prisoner no. 12164; a ZOW member. In the summer of 1942 he was transferred to KL Mauthausen.

Janusz (vel Jan) **Młynarski** (family name: Müller) • born on May 21, 1922 in Poznań; a junior high school pupil. Brought to KL Auschwitz in the first Cracow transport on June 14, 1940; prisoner no. 355; a ZOW member. He was evacuated from KL Auschwitz to KL Mauthausen where he survived the war. Died on May 6, 2015 in Germany.

Jan Mosdorf • born on May 30, 1904 in Warsaw; a Doctor of Philosophy, a journalist and an activist of the OWP and the Academic Union 'The All-Polish Youth'; the leader

of the Youth Movement of OWP and Youth Section of the SN, later – the leader of the ONR. From the beginning of the German occupation he was active in the SN's resistance movement, working in propaganda and in the creation of the SN's military wing – later the NOW. Arrested by the Gestapo in July 1940 and incarcerated in the Pawiak Prison. Brought to KL Auschwitz in a Warsaw transport on January 7, 1941; prisoner no. 8230, registered as a teacher. Leader of the radical national activists in the camp, a member of the ZOW, involved in the unification of the Polish political and military underground movements in KL Auschwitz, initiated by W. Pilecki, and involved in organizing help for other inmates. Executed in the camp on October 11, 1943.

Bronisław Motyka • born on December 10, 1891 in Lwów (now in Ukraine); a baker. A TAP member. Brought to KL Auschwitz in a transport from Cracow on August 30, 1940; prisoner no. 3546; a ZOW member. In 1944 he was transferred to KL Mauthausen; there liberated by the Allies.

Andrzej Możdżeń • an HA soldier, the chief of diversion in the Bochnia HA area.

Leon Murzyn • born on October 7, 1914 in Krzesławice; a teacher and a Polish Army reserve officer, a second lieutenant of the infantry with seniority from January 1, 1938. Brought to KL Auschwitz in the second Cracow transport on June 20, 1940; prisoner no. 820; a ZOW member. In 1944 he was transferred from KL Auschwitz to KL Sachsenhausen; he survived the war.

Tadeusz Franciszek **Myszkowski** ('Myszka' ['Mousie']) • born on September 25, 1912 in Zakopane; a painter and a sculptor, a graduate of the School of Decorative Art and Creative Industry in Cracow. Brought to KL Auschwitz in the first Cracow transport on June 14, 1940; prisoner no. 593; a ZOW member. In 1944 transferred to KL Sachsenhausen and KL Ravensbrück (the Barth subcamp). Escaped the evacuation transport. After the war he was one of the co-organizers of the museum in the former KL Auschwitz. Died in Israel on June 21, 1980.

Stefan Niebudek • born on March 13 (in the ABSM files: October), 1910 in Częstochowa; an attorney at law, a journalist, an activist of the Academic Union 'The All-Polish Youth,' the OWP and the SN in Częstochowa and Warsaw. Brought to KL Auschwitz on July 24, 1941 in a transport from Warsaw; prisoner no. 18531; a ZOW member. Executed in KL Auschwitz on January 14, 1943.

Franciszek Nierychło • born on November 17, 1905 in Łagiewniki. Before the war, a musician in military bands in Cracow, the operetta and the Cracow branch of the Polish Radio broadcasting station. Brought to KL Auschwitz on June 20, 1940 in the 2nd Cracow

transport; prisoner no. 994. A Kapo in the kitchen and the bandmaster of the camp orchestra. As a Kapo he was not considered particularly dangerous, and he helped many Poles. Released from the camp on May 29, 1944 after signing the DVL and enrolling in the Wehrmacht. He survived the war and died in Łódź on November 29, 1977.

Remigiusz Niewiarowski • born on July 6, 1914 in St. Petersburg (Russia); an agronomist; a Polish Army reserve officer cadet in the Polish cavalry. Fought in the September Campaign, among others, in Second Lieutenant W. Pilecki's cavalry troop, which he joined in Perespa on September 21. A TAP member. Brought to KL Auschwitz in a transport from Lublin on April 6, 1941; prisoner no. 13957; a ZOW member. Died of emaciation on August 15, 1941 in KL Auschwitz.

Edward Michał **Nowak** • born on September 25, 1909 in Rytro; a doctor, a professional Polish Army officer, a second lieutenant in the Health Corps, with seniority from October 1, 1937, a junior medical officer in the 1st Infantry Regiment in Wilno (now in Lithuania). Brought to KL Auschwitz on August 14, 1940 by the first transport from Cracow; prisoner no. 447; a ZOW member. In 1942 he was transferred to KL Majdanek, where he died on December 24, 1943.

Eugeniusz Obojski • born on September 13, 1920 in Warsaw. Brought to KL Auschwitz on June 14, 1940 in the first transport from Cracow; prisoner no. 194, registered as a trainee cook; a ZOW member. Worked as a male nurse in the hospital and as a corpse carrier. Executed in KL Auschwitz on January 25, 1943.

Józef and **Teofila Obora** • Edmund Zabawski's parents-in-law.

Jan Olszowski • born on February 13, 1907; a Polish Army reserve officer, a second lieutenant of the infantry with seniority from January 1, 1936. Brought to KL Auschwitz from Cracow on November 9, 1940; prisoner no. 6157, registered as a worker; a ZOW member. In 1945 he was evacuated to KL Mauthausen, he survived the war.

Eleonora Ostrowska (pseudonym 'Ryta,' 'Nora') • born in 1909. Living in Warsaw at flat 7, 40 Wojska Polskiego Avenue, W. Pilecki's sister-in-law, from whose flat he was taken by the Germans at the time of a street roundup on September 19, 1940. A member of the TAP-ZWZ-HA underground resistance movement. Her husband was Edward Ostrowski, a reserve lieutenant of the 5th Zasław Uhlan Regiment, who after the 1939 Campaign was taken prisoner and remained in an oflag for the rest of the war. Died on May 6, 2008.

Stanisław (in the ABSM files: Władysław) **Ozimek** • born on July 1, 1901; a Polish Army non-commissioned officer clerk in the Area Management Office of Polish Army Commissariat

in Warsaw. A TAP member. Brought to KL Auschwitz in a Warsaw transport on September 22, 1940 (same as W. Pilecki); prisoner no. 4933; a ZOW member. Transferred to KL Flossenbürg, where he died on August 8, 1941.

Aleksander Paliński • born on April 14, 1894 in Warsaw; a clerk and a glassworker. Brought to KL Auschwitz in a Warsaw transport on January 7, 1941; prisoner no. 8253; a ZOW member. Released from KL Auschwitz on January 10, 1942; lived at 16 Krasińskiego Street. Died during the Warsaw Uprising on September 28, 1944.

Gerhard Palitzsch • born on June 17, 1913 in Dresden (Saxony); a farmer; an SS-Hauptscharführer; an NSDAP and SS member from 1933. He served consecutively in KL Oranienburg, KL Lichtenburg and KL Buchenwald. From 1936, a Blockführer in KL Sachsenhausen, promoted to Rapportführer. In May 1940 he arrived in KL Auschwitz, leading a group of 30 German criminal prisoners sent to take over administrative posts in KL Auschwitz. One of the worst KL Auschwitz torturers, he participated in the first mass murders by gas poisoning and personally executed inmates at the Death Wall. His victims were to be counted in their thousands. From 1942, a Rapportführer in KL Auschwitz II-Birkenau camp; later on – a Schutzhaftlagerführer of a Gypsy camp therein. Committed numerous rapes of female inmates. For having sexual intercourses with a Slovak Jewess he was arrested by the SS in 1943 and transferred to the Brünn subcamp, where again he was appointed Lagerführer. Arrested again and degraded to the rank of a private, he was later assigned to the 4th SS Police Panzer Grenadier Division. He died on December 7, 1944 in Hungary, fighting the Soviets as a front-line soldier.

Mieczysław Pańszczyk • a student of the Academy of Fine Arts in Cracow. Brought to KL Auschwitz in the first transport on June 14, 1940; prisoner no. 607. An orderly in the prisoners' hospital, trained by J. Klehr in administering phenol injections; he performed the injections himself, killing ca. 4000 fellow inmates. According to non-verified information, he was possibly murdered near the end of the war in one of the camps deep in Germany for his participation in the 'needling.'

Tadeusz Paolone (in camp: Tadeusz Lisowski) • born on July 23, 1909 in Piekiełko near Limanowa (in the false documents, issued for the family name of Lisowski, the village of Krzywczyce is stated as the place of birth); graduated from King Bolesław Chrobry Junior High School in Nowy Sącz and Infantry Officers School in Ostrów Mazowiecka-Komorowo, a professional Polish Army officer, a lieutenant of the infantry with seniority from March 19, 1938. Served in the 4th Podhale Riflemen Regiment in Cieszyn. After the September Campaign he managed to reach his hometown and commenced work as a forest fruit picker in the Podhale Fruit Cooperative in Tymbark, setting up an underground resistance unit there. He decided to reach the Polish Army, set up in

France, but was arrested in Slovakia and handed over to the Gestapo in Nowy Sącz. Brought to KL Auschwitz in the first Cracow transport on June 14, 1940; prisoner no. 329. A ZOW member, chosen by W. Pilecki to command one of four prisoners' battalions in case of an uprising in the camp. Executed on October 11 (according to the *Death Books* [*Sterbebücher*] – 12), 1943 in KL Auschwitz, in a group of 54 inmates, 28 among which were ZOW members. Paolone and Lieutenant Colonel T. Dziama demanded to be shot as soldiers, facing the enemy, and not in the back of the head. SS-Oberscharführer Wilhelm Clausen and SS-Unterscharführer Friedrich Stiewitz, who led the execution, accepted their demand.

Zygmunt Pawłowicz vel Pawłowski (in camp: Julian vel Franciszek Trzęsimiech) • born on April 24, 1904 in Brody (now in Ukraine); a bank director. Brought to KL Auschwitz on January 10, 1941 in a transport from Cracow; prisoner no. 9321; a ZOW member. In 1943 he was transferred to KL Mauthausen, survived the war.

Helena Pawłowska • a Warsaw physician, in whose flat Lieutenant Tomasz Serafiński and later Second Lieutenant W. Pilecki were hiding during the German occupation of Warsaw.

Konstanty Piekarski • born on May 3, 1913 in Vienna. Brought to KL Auschwitz on September 22, 1940 in the same second Warsaw transport as W. Pilecki; prisoner no. 4618; a ZOW member. Transferred to KL Buchenwald in 1943. Survived the war and emigrated to Canada where he died in 1991.

Tadeusz Pietrzykowski (pseudonym 'Teddy') • born on April 8, 1917 in Warsaw; a talented boxer, before the war the bantamweight vice-champion of Poland. As an officer cadet at the Cavalry Training Centre in Grudziądz, he participated in the September Campaign. In the winter of 1939/40 he tried to get through to France to join the Polish Army. Captured by the Germans on the Hungarian-Yugoslavian border, he was transferred to Muszyna, and later on to Nowy Sącz and Tarnów. Brought to KL Auschwitz in the first transport on June 14, 1940; prisoner no. 77, registered as a high school graduate; a ZOW member. Famous in KL Auschwitz mainly for his 40 to 60 fights with Germans – inmates as well as the crew members – and prisoners of other nationalities. In 1943 he was transferred to KL Neuengamme, where he fought some 20 bouts. Liberated on April 15, 1945 by the British troops in KL Bergen-Belsen, he joined General Stanisław Maczek's 1st Polish Armored Division, where he worked as a sports instructor and a boxing champion. He returned to Poland, in 1950 he graduated from the University of Physical Education in Warsaw and became a coach and a physical education teacher. He lived in Nowy Targ and Bielsko-Biała, where he died on April 17, 1991. In the popular opinion of inmates, 'the one and only champion of all weights in KL Auschwitz.'

Jan (Isai vel Issaił) **Pilecki** • born on January 21, 1913 (the ABSM files state mistakenly April 1913), of Crimean Karaite origin; a broadcasting engineer; a Polish Army reserve officer cadet. In 1934 he graduated from the Faculty of Mechanics at the Wawelberg and Rotwand State Academy of Machine Construction and Electrotechnics. From 1937, an employee of the Polish Radio broadcasting station in Warsaw. When the fighting for Warsaw in 1939 was over, he became one of the first members of the SZP. After the first underground resistance broadcast he was directed to the Polish Army, formed in France, as he was pursued by the Gestapo. Captured by the Ukrainians in the village of Rzepedź upon trying to cross the border in the Bieszczady mountains and arrested by the Germans. Brought to KL Auschwitz from Cracow; prisoner no. 808; a ZOW member. In the camp's underground resistance structures after assembling the radio he was regularly listening to the news. For spreading the news he was sentenced to 15 months in the SK. Later, he was made a writer in Block 11, called 'the Death Block.' As a witness to the atrocities committed there he was earmarked for elimination by the Germans, but his colleagues from the organization managed to smuggle him into a transport departing to KL Sachsenhausen on October 29, 1944; there he was registered as prisoner no. 1130280, and on November 13, 1944 transferred to the Wansleben am See division of KL Buchenwald, where he was registered as prisoner no. 96399. He returned to Poland in November 1946, and worked at the Polish Radio Katowice broadcasting station, then in the 'Film Polski' movie company and in the Planning Committee of the People's Republic of Poland Council of Ministers. He died in Warsaw in 1992.

Aloizy Pohl • born on January 7, 1913 in Chorzów. Brought to KL Auschwitz on June 25, 1940 in a transport from Silesia; prisoner no. 1214; a ZOW member. As a Volksdeutsche, he was released from the camp on May 12, 1942.

Stanisław Polkowski • born on April 3, 1911 in Warsaw; a barber by profession; a Polish Army reserve corporal. Brought into KL Auschwitz on November 23, 1940; prisoner no. 6398; a ZOW member. Died of typhus in KL Auschwitz on September 6, 1942.

Max Popiersch • born in 1893 in Pszczyna (Ger. Pleß); a Doctor of Medicine; an SS-Sturmbannführer. In 1940 he commenced service in KL Buchenwald and in June he was transferred to KL Auschwitz, which was established at the time, where he served as the chief camp physician (Ger. SS-Standortarzt) until the end of September 1941. On October 1, 1941 he was transferred to KL Majdanek, where in the beginning of 1942 he caught typhus and died on April 21, 1942 in a Lublin hospital.

Jerzy Poraziński • born on November 14, 1916; a doctor. A TAP member. Brought to KL Auschwitz on February 3, 1942; prisoner no. 19902; a ZOW member. Transferred to the SK in KL Auschwitz II-Birkenau. He died in the gas chamber on June 11 or 16, 1942.

He was one of the 300 inmates murdered during the German repressions after the SK mutiny in KL Auschwitz II-Birkenau that broke out on June 10, 1942.

Antoni Potocki • born on June 1, 1906 in Iwaniska. Brought to KL Auschwitz on September 22, 1940 in the same second Warsaw transport as W. Pilecki; prisoner no. 5238. He survived the war.

Józef Aleksy **Putek** • born on July 4, 1892 in Wadowice; graduated from the Jagiellonian University's Faculty of Law, a Doctor of Laws and an attorney at law; a radical political activist of the Polish People's Party and the People's Party, elected an MP several times; sentenced in the Brest trial (proceedings against political opponents of the Sanation movement [Pol. Sanacja] and Józef Piłsudski's dictatorship); a writer, a journalist and the village mayor of Chocznia. Brought to KL Auschwitz in the second Cracow transport on June 20, 1940; prisoner no. 829; a ZOW member, for some time shared Block no. 25 with W. Pilecki. Worked, inter alia, in the camp records office and the spoon-carving workshop. In 1942 he was transferred to KL Mauthausen. After the war he returned to politics as an MP in the State National Council and the Legislative Sejm, as well as the Minister of Posts and Telegraphs. Deprived of an MP's immunity and arrested in 1950, he was kept under arrest without sentence for over two years in the Cracow Montelupich Prison and the Warsaw Mokotów prison. Attempts were made to accuse him of collaboration with the Germans in KL Auschwitz. After 1956 he resumed his career as a lawyer. In the 1957 parliamentary elections he tried to promote independent candidates, but these attempts were blocked by the communists. He died in Chocznia on May 10, 1974.

Kazimierz Radwański • born on October 16, 1924 in Ostrów Mazowiecka, W. Pilecki's nephew; a junior high school student, a scout. Arrested with his friends for singing patriotic songs, brought to KL Auschwitz in a transport from Warsaw on May 29, 1941; prisoner no. 16788; a ZOW member. In 1943 transferred to KL Buchenwald and then to KL Bergen-Belsen. He died on October 16, 1960 and was buried in Ostrów Mazowiecka.

Jan Redzej (in camp: Jan Retko) • born on May 1, 1904 in Mińsk Litewski (now in Belarus). Brought to KL Auschwitz on September 22, 1940 in the same second Warsaw transport as W. Pilecki; prisoner no. 5430, registered as a tradesman; a ZOW member. He escaped from the camp with W. Pilecki and E. Ciesielski on the night of April 26–27, 1943. He was killed in the Warsaw Uprising.

Tadeusz Reklewski (until 1932: Seeliger and Seeliger-Reklewski; in some ABSM files also Rechlewski) • born on February 8, 1890. During the First World War he served in the Polish Legions' 2nd Uhlan Regiment, then became a professional Polish Army

officer – a lieutenant colonel of the cavalry with seniority from January 1, 1928, retired in 1934. Brought to KL Auschwitz on November 23, 1940 from Warsaw; prisoner no. 6471; a ZOW member. On March 11, 1943 he was transferred to KL Buchenwald. Survived the war.

Józef Roman • probably Adolf Roman, Lieutenant Tomasz Serafiński's co-worker in the HA's Nowy Wiśnicz outpost.

Michał Romanowicz • no detailed data. A KL Auschwitz prisoner; a member of the ZOW. Died of pneumonia in December 1940 in the camp. Possibly M. Romanowicz, born on June 11, 1902, a Polish Army reserve sapper lieutenant with seniority from March 19, 1939, assigned to the 3rd Sapper Battalion in Grodno.

Antoni Rosa • born on November 2, 1913; a teacher. Brought to KL Auschwitz on June 20, 1940; prisoner no. 923; a ZOW member.

Stefan Paweł **Rowecki** (pseudonym 'Grot' ['Spearhead']) • born on December 25, 1895 in Piotrków Trybunalski; a Polish Army major general; as from June 1940 – the C-in-C of the ZWZ and later of the HA. Considered the Third Reich's 'number one enemy' in occupied Poland and put on the top of the list of the wanted Poles, which contained 160 names of the most active leaders of the Polish underground. Arrested by the Germans in Warsaw on June 30, 1943. In an act of revenge for the outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising, he was murdered in KL Sachsenhausen between August 2 and 7, 1944, by the order of Heinrich Himmler.

Zbigniew (vel Adam) **Różak** (Rożak) • born on May 24, 1916; a Polish Army reserve officer cadet. Brought to KL Auschwitz on November 28, 1940 in a Cracow transport; prisoner no. 6609; a ZOW member. In 1943 transferred to KL Neuengamme.

Witold Różycki • born on January 5, 1906 in Warsaw. Brought to KL Auschwitz on September 22, 1940 in the same second Warsaw transport as W. Pilecki; prisoner no. 5034. In 1946 he worked as the head of the Department of Press and Information in the Ministry of Merchant Marine and Foreign Trade in Warsaw. Arrested by officers of the Ministry of Public Security on May 13, 1947, he was sentenced in W. Pilecki's trial to 15 years of imprisonment.

Zygmunt Ruszczak • born on August 19, 1909 in Warsaw; a Doctor of Theology, a Roman Catholic priest, a catechist, a teacher. He was ordained on August 27, 1939 and became a curate in the parish of Tarchomin. Arrested by the Germans on September 14, 1939 and imprisoned in Pawiak after the end of the fighting, from where he was released; arrested and imprisoned again on December 9, 1940. Arrived in KL Auschwitz on

February 1, 1941 in a Warsaw transport; prisoner no. 9842. He was the chaplain of the ZOW in KL Auschwitz and celebrated secret religious services and rendered spiritual service to the inmates. On June 5, 1942 in an action of consolidating all clergymen in one camp, he was transferred to KL Dachau in the third transport of the priests, where he received no. 30306. Liberated by the Allies on April 29, 1945.

Zbigniew Ruszczyński • born on December 27, 1914 in Głuchów; a construction technician and an architect; a Polish Army reserve officer cadet. Brought to KL Auschwitz on July 18, 1940 in a Cracow transport; prisoner no. 1360; a ZOW member. Executed in KL Auschwitz on January 25, 1943.

Roman Rybarski • born on August 3 (in the ABSM files: July), 1887 in Zator; a lawyer and an economist, a professor at the Jagiellonian University and the Warsaw University of Technology, as well as head of the Faculty of Fiscal Studies at the University of Warsaw. An activist of the National League, later the OWP and the SN; Member of Parliament from 1928–35. After the German annexation of Poland he was involved in creating the executive of the Polish Underground State and became the Director of Fiscal Department of the Government Delegation for Poland (an agency of the Polish government-in-exile). Brought to KL Auschwitz in a transport from Warsaw on July 24, 1941; prisoner no. 18599. The most important representative of the national activists, imprisoned in KL Auschwitz, a member of the ZOW, involved in the process of the unification of the Polish political and military underground resistance, initiated by W. Pilecki. Died in KL Auschwitz on March 6, 1942.

Szczepan (Stefan) **Rzeczkowski** • born on November 24, 1898 in Suwałki; a sheet metal worker; a Polish Army warrant officer. A TAP member. Brought to KL Auschwitz on April 6, 1941; prisoner no. 13600.

Edward Salwa • born on September 15, 1920 in Warsaw. Brought to KL Auschwitz on September 22, 1940 in the same second Warsaw transport as W. Pilecki; prisoner no. 5256, registered as a student. On January 20, 1944 he was transferred to KL Buchenwald.

Fritz Seidler • born July 18, 1907; a member of the NSDAP and the SS, a war criminal; an SS-Hauptsturmführer. In 1940–42 – the deputy Lagerführer of KL Auschwitz; from October 1942 until early May 1945 – the commandant of KL Gusen I, a subcamp of KL Mauthausen. One of the worst torturers of KL Auschwitz and of equally notorious fame in KL Gusen. Trying to escape responsibility for his crimes, he committed suicide on May 3, 1945, killing his whole family beforehand.

Ludmiła Serafińska • Tomasz Serafiński's wife.

Tomasz Antoni Leonard Józef **Serafiński** (pseudonym 'Lisola') • born on March 18, 1902 in Bochnia; fought in the 3rd Silesian Uprising; an engineer; a Polish Army reserve officer, a lieutenant of the artillery with seniority from March 19, 1939 and an assignment to the 5th Cracow Heavy Artillery Regiment, participant of the September Campaign; after the fighting ended, he joined the underground resistance movement. He was a ZWZ and an HA officer in Bochnia. The owner, together with his wife Ludmiła, of the Koryznówka estate near Nowy Wiśnicz, where W. Pilecki was hiding for 3,5 months after escaping from KL Auschwitz in 1943. He died in 1966.

Johann Siegruth • born on March 24 (or 29), 1903 in Kattowitz (Katowice). A KL Auschwitz prisoner no. 26; in 1940–41 he was a Kapo of Bauhof (the construction warehouses) Kommando. A sadist and a murderer who despised Poles. On July 28, 1941 – with a group of 575 prisoners – he was earmarked for annihilation by gas poisoning in the Sonnenstein extermination centre. He hanged himself in a railway car while in transit. According to another version he was hanged by his fellow inmates.

Czesław Sikora • born on November 22, 1905 in Izabella; M.A. in Law; a Polish Army reserve officer, a lieutenant colonel of the infantry with seniority of January 1, 1934. A TAP soldier, later in the 1st Department of the 'Wachlarz' ('Fan') Commander's Bureau, employed as a verification officer. Arrested by the Gestapo on September 18, 1942, imprisoned in Pawiak. Brought to Auschwitz on November 19, 1942; prisoner no. 76159; a ZOW member. He died in KL Auschwitz on December 7, 1942.

Alfred Skrzypek • born on October 3, 1910 in Silesia. Brought to KL Auschwitz on June 25, 1940; prisoner no. 1122. Released from the camp on March 19, 1942.

Franciszek Słowiaczek • born on May 12, 1888; a clerk. Brought to KL Auschwitz in the second Cracow transport on June 20, 1940 with his sons, Karol and Tadeusz; prisoner no. 1070. He did not survive KL Auschwitz, but nothing is known about the date and circumstances of his death.

Karol Słowiaczek • born on January 7, 1915; a student of the Jagiellonian University's Faculty of Law. Brought to KL Auschwitz with his brother Tadeusz and father Franciszek in the second transport from Cracow on June 20, 1940; prisoner no. 1054. He was transferred from KL Auschwitz to the Neuengamme concentration camp in Germany in 1943; he died with his brother on May 3, 1945 in Lubeck Bay, onboard the refugee ship 'Cap Arcona,' mistakenly bombed by the Allied Air Forces.

Tadeusz Słowiaczek • brought to KL Auschwitz on June 20, 1940 with his brother Karol; prisoner no. 1069; a ZOW member. In 1943 he was transferred from KL Auschwitz to

KL Neuengamme. He died on May 3, 1945 in Lubeck Bay, on the ship 'Cap Arcona,' mistakenly bombed by the Allied Air Forces.

Wilhelm Smyczek • brought to KL Auschwitz on December 13, 1940 from KL Dachau as a Reichsdeutsche, imprisoned in the camp for patriotic activity in Upper Silesia.

Wiktor Józef **Sniegucki** (Śniegucki, Śniegocki) • born on May 11, 1912; a scoutmaster; a Polish Army reserve officer, a second lieutenant of the artillery with seniority from January 1, 1938. Brought to KL Auschwitz on November 23, 1940 in a transport from Warsaw; prisoner no. 6274; a ZOW member. In 1943 transferred to KL Buchenwald.

Franciszek Sobczyński • born on January 22, 1913 in Kolbuszowa. Before the war he served in the Polish Army as a corporal (on a long-term contract after compulsory service) in the 12th Infantry Regiment of Wadowice. He fought in the September Campaign, and then joined the ZWZ (later the HA). Arrested by the Gestapo in Bielsko-Biała and sent to KL Auschwitz with 28 other prisoners by the Katowice Gestapo on March 9, 1942; prisoner no. 26635. He worked as a toolmaker. On August 24, 1944 he was transferred to KL Ravensbrück, where he survived until liberation. After the war he was testifying in several trials against the KL Auschwitz staff criminals. He died in Wadowice in 1969.

Franciszek Teofil **Sokołowski** • born on May 12 (in the ABSM files: April 24), 1875 in Warsaw; a technology engineer; a retired officer of the Polish Navy, an honorary commander of the Marine Technical Officer Corps with seniority from August 31, 1926. Graduated from St. Petersburg Technological Institute. Served in the Russian Navy, inter alia in Kronstadt and Murmansk. From 1922 he served in the Polish Navy and worked in the War Industry Department of the MSWojsk. Retired in the late 1920s. Arrested in Warsaw, brought to KL Auschwitz on a Warsaw transport on February 3, 1942; prisoner no. 20067. Involved in the ZOW, which ordered him to work as a draftsman in the camp's SS communication facility, but he had to resign due to health problems. He died on August 22, 1942 in KL Auschwitz (the description 'honorary' next to his title meant he was entitled to use a one rank higher title from the rank he retired with [that is, a commander], but having his pension calculated according to his true rank, not his honorary rank).

Alois (Aloisy) **Staller** (Stahler) • born June 10, 1905 in Wopotal (as stated in the ABSM files). A KL Auschwitz prisoner no. 3277, the block elder of Block 17a. Survived the war, arrested in the early 1960s by the Prosecutor's Office in Frankfurt am Main, in an investigation against KL Auschwitz criminals.

Aleksander Józef **Stawarz** • born on July 7, 1896 in Cracow; member of the Legions, a professional Polish Army officer, a colonel of the infantry with seniority from March 19, 1938.

In the interwar period he served, among others, in the 2nd Infantry Regiment in Sandomierz, the 78th Infantry Regiment in Baranowicze, the 50th Kresy Riflemen Regiment in Kowel (now in Ukraine), the 3rd Podhale Riflemen Regiment in Bielsko (deputy commander), the 1st Legions' Infantry Regiment in Wilno (now in Lithuania; commander) and from November 1935 he commanded the 12th Infantry Regiment in Wadowice. In July 1939 he was appointed commander of the 2nd Mountain Brigade in Nowy Sącz; after skirmishes with the Germans and the Soviets he evaded Soviet imprisonment and broke through to Cracow. He organized the ZCZ and one of the very first underground military formations, the 'Podhale Division in Conspiracy,' which he incorporated into the ZWZ. Arrested in Rabka with his wife Maria (also involved in the underground resistance movement), in spring 1941 he was transferred to Cracow and subsequently imprisoned in Tarnów. Brought from Cracow to KL Auschwitz on April 5, 1941; prisoner no. 11513. Together with Lieutenant Colonel K. Kumuniecki, he successfully set up an underground resistance unit in the camp. After establishing contact and determining W. Pilecki's commissions in resistance work in the camp, he subordinated himself and his group to the ZOW. After a while he entered the 'planning unit,' which advised W. Pilecki. He was executed in KL Auschwitz on June 14, 1942. His wife was transferred to KL Auschwitz on April 27, 1942, where she died on October 19, 1942.

Stanisław Stawiszyński • born on September 21, 1919 in Pruszków; a blacksmith. A TAP member. Brought to KL Auschwitz in a Warsaw transport on April 6, 1941; prisoner no. 13689; a ZOW member. According to the prisoner's files, he died in KL Auschwitz on January 14, 1943, but according to A. Cyra, he was executed on October 11, 1943.

Stefan Stępień • born on May 16, 1909 in Radom; a physical worker and tanner, a Polish Army reserve senior uhlan. Brought to KL Auschwitz with a Radom transport on April 5, 1941; prisoner no. 12970. Executed on March 13, 1942.

Alfred Wojciech Walenty **Stössel** • born on April 25 (or June), 1915 in Poznań; a professional Polish Army officer, a second lieutenant of the artillery with seniority from October 1, 1937, assigned to the 9th Heavy Artillery Regiment in Włodawa. Fought in the September Campaign. Brought to KL Auschwitz on June 14, 1940 (first Polish transport, from Cracow); prisoner no. 435, mistakenly registered by the Germans as cavalry captain. Worked in the ZOW, operating a radio transmitter, assembled secretly in 1942 by the conspirators. Arrested in the fall of 1942 by SS-Unterscharführer Gerhard Lachmann of the Political Department, incarcerated in a penal bunker, executed in KL Auschwitz on March 3, 1943. In 1942 he was trained by the German orderlies to help, and later on, single-handedly inject phenol, and he participated in the extermination of his fellow inmates. He was denounced to the camp's Gestapo by his fellow inmates, probably in revenge for taking part in these proceedings. The denouncement had

almost resulted in revealing the underground organization, but Stössel did not break and he revealed nothing.

Karel Stransky • born on October 5, 1898; a Czech attorney at law. Brought to KL Auschwitz from Prague in mid-January 1942 by the order of the Gestapo in a group of over 100 Czech 'Sokol' ['Falcon'] Sports Society members; prisoner no. 25625. In the camp he lived in Block 25, where he met W. Pilecki and J. Putek, whom he befriended. Released from the camp with a group of 33 Czechs on June 2, 1942, he returned to Prague. He survived the war.

Tadeusz Stulgiński • born on April 25, 1911 (some sources state 1910) in Gaspal (as stated in the ABSM files); a sculptor. Brought to KL Auschwitz from Warsaw on April 18, 1942; prisoner no. 31315; a ZOW member. In 1944 he was transferred to KL Sachsenhausen. He died in Cracow on August 1, 1994.

Henryk Suchnicki • born on February 8, 1903 in Podbrzozówka; a physician; a professional Polish Army officer, a lieutenant in the Health Corps with seniority from March 19, 1937, a doctor in the 22nd Uhlan Regiment in Równe and Łuck (now in Ukraine). In 1935 he was nominated a reserve second lieutenant in the Sanitary Corps and conscripted into military service as a doctor – later moving into professional service. He fought in the September Campaign. He arrived in KL Auschwitz on July 30, 1941 in a transport from Lublin; prisoner no. 19546; a ZOW member. Executed on October 28, 1942 in the biggest execution under the 'wailing wall' in KL Auschwitz, along with 280 other inmates. Upon being led to Block 11, H. Suchnicki with L. Kukiełka and three other inmates tried to incite a mutiny among those condemned to death, but to no avail.

Władysław Tadeusz **Surmacki** (pseudonym 'Sławek,' 'Stefan') • born on October 20, 1888, in Proszowice; a land surveyor; a retired Polish Army officer, a lieutenant colonel of the artillery with seniority from June 1, 1919 (the rank of colonel attributed to him by Pilecki is not confirmed in any military files), a professor at the Warsaw University of Technology and Officers' Topography School. A TAP member. Brought to KL Auschwitz on August 15, 1940 in the first transport from Warsaw; prisoner no. 2795; a ZOW member. Released from the camp in March 1942, but re-arrested immediately upon arrival in Warsaw, incarcerated in the Pawiak Prison, executed in Magdalenka near Warsaw on May 28, 1942. Took one of W. Pilecki's first reports with him, but most probably, due to his arrest, he could not deliver it to the Polish Underground authorities.

Zofia Szczerbowska (married name: Grohs de Rosenburg) • born on October 30, 1919 in Bronghton (USA). A teacher, living in Stare Stawy near Oświęcim, cooperated with

the by-camp BCh unit, was organizing aid for the inmates, who were employed in the Oświęcim railway station and in the buildings of the pre-war 'Oświęcim-Praga' car plant; she coordinated an initiative to feed the inmates, facilitated contacts as a go-between for the inmates and camp resistance leaders with their families and resistance authorities outside the camp. Died on July 5, 1999.

Henryk Szklarz • born on January 19, 1919 in Bottrop. Brought to KL Auschwitz in a transport from Silesia on June 25, 1940; prisoner no. 1132; a ZOW member. On August 29, 1944 he was transferred to KL Sachsenhausen (as prisoner no. 94211) and liberated there in 1945. After the war he lived in Bochnia and died there in 1997.

Sławomir Szpakowski • born November 19, 1908, in Kielce. Brought to KL Auschwitz on September 22, 1940 in the same second Warsaw transport as W. Pilecki; prisoner no. 5638, registered as a painter. Released from the camp in 1941; survived the war.

Tadeusz Szydlik • born on September 15, 1916 in Danków; a joiner; a Polish Army reserve non-commissioned officer. Brought to KL Auschwitz on August 15, 1940 in a Warsaw transport; prisoner no. 2198; a ZOW member. In 1944 he was transferred to KL Sachsenhausen, and then to KL Ravensbrück. Survived the war.

Witold Szymkowiak • born on December 18, 1918. Brought to KL Auschwitz in a Cracow transport on June 20, 1940; prisoner no. 938; a ZOW member. In 1942 he was transferred to KL Mauthausen.

Bernard Piotr **Świerczyna** • born on February 23 (A. Cyra states December), 1914 in Chropaczów; a clerk; a Polish Army reserve officer, a second lieutenant of the infantry with seniority from January 1, 1938. Brought to KL Auschwitz on July 18, 1940 in a transport from Cracow; prisoner no. 1393; a ZOW member. Hanged in KL Auschwitz on December 30, 1944 after an unsuccessful escape attempt.

Karol Świętorzecki • born on September 2, 1908 in Wysokowszczyzna (now in Belarus); an agricultural engineer; a Polish Army reserve officer, a second lieutenant of the cavalry with seniority from January 1, 1935. Brought to KL Auschwitz on September 22, 1940 in the same second Warsaw transport as W. Pilecki; prisoner no. 5360, released from the camp on May 15, 1941. Świętorzecki created a core ZOW unit among the camp stables workers. He passed on one of W. Pilecki's reports to the HQ of ZWZ in Warsaw.

Eugeniusz Zygmunt **Trebling** (in some files: Triebling) • born on September 16, 1899 in Nowy Sącz; a professional Polish Army officer, a captain of the infantry with seniority from March 19, 1939, served in the 63rd Infantry Regiment in Toruń. Initially

imprisoned in KL Dachau, transferred to KL Auschwitz on December 15, 1940; a ZOW member. Died in the camp on August 22, 1942.

Ferdynand 'Fred' **Trojnicki** • born on January 18, 1897 in Tarnów; a professional Polish Army officer, retired as lieutenant of the infantry with seniority from June 1, 1919; later employed as a contract officer, assigned to the 82nd Infantry Regiment's, where he was in charge of the Military Training and Physical Education in Brześć nad Bugiem (now in Belarus); the city commander of Military Training. Under the German occupation he became a member of the TAP in Warsaw. Brought to KL Auschwitz on September 22, 1940 in the same second Warsaw transport as W. Pilecki; prisoner no. 5145; a ZOW member. Released from the camp in December 1941, he passed on W. Pilecki's report to a representative of the ZWZ HQ. Under the pseudonyms 'Stefan' and 'Kotulski' he was active in the Military Organization, the Armed Rescue of the Nation and the United Organizations of the 'Miecz i Pług' ('Sword and Plough') Movement and took part in the Warsaw Uprising, in the 'Topór' ('Axe') group of the NSZ.

Jerzy Virion (de Virion), nicknamed 'Orcio' (in camp: Jerzy Hlebowicz) • born on September 23, 1901 in Pogryżów (now in Lithuania); an attorney in law; a Polish Army reserve officer, a lieutenant of the cavalry with seniority from January 1, 1936, assigned to the 3rd Light Cavalry Regiment in Suwałki (the rank of cavalry captain attributed to him by Pilecki is not confirmed in military files). Called up for active service in 1939 at 1st Krechowce Uhlan Regiment. A TAP member. Brought to KL Auschwitz in a Cracow transport on August 30, 1940; prisoner no. 3507; a ZOW member. Died in KL Auschwitz on November 3, 1941.

Mieczysław Wagner • born on September 23, 1915 in Gardner (Massachusetts, USA); a professional Polish Air Force corporal. Graduated from the Air Force Non-Commissioned Officer School for Minors in Bydgoszcz. He served in the 5th Air Force Regiment in Lida. Brought to KL Auschwitz on October 8, 1940 in a Cracow transport; prisoner no. 5831; a ZOW member. Transferred from KL Auschwitz to a different camp, probably died there.

Walter Walterscheid • born on April 25, 1908 in Wittenberge; a car mechanic. Brought to KL Auschwitz in May 1941; prisoner no. 15476, Kapo in the slaughterhouse. Accused of gold smuggling and imprisoned in the bunker of Block 11, he committed suicide on March 23, 1943.

Leon Wandasiewicz • a friend of Lieutenant Tomasz Serafiński.

Zygmunt Ważyński • born on March 28, 1898 in Warsaw; an economist; a TAP member, responsible for finances. Brought to KL Auschwitz on November 21, 1942 in a transport

from Warsaw; prisoner no. 77168; a ZOW member. Transferred to KL Gross-Rosen, he survived the war.

Czesław Wąsowski • born on May 18, 1912 in Czerwonka; a joiner; a Polish Army reserve corporal. Brought to KL Auschwitz on September 22, 1940 in the same second Warsaw transport as W. Pilecki; prisoner no. 5298; a ZOW member. Released in the fall of 1941.

Wilhelm Westrych (Westrich) • born on April 9, 1894. A Polish Army reserve non-commissioned officer, a building contractor from Pyry near Warsaw, a currency trafficker and a Volksdeutsche. Brought to KL Auschwitz in the first transport from Warsaw on August 15, 1940; released from the camp in 1942. As a German collaborator and a Gestapo resident in Pyry, he was responsible for sending many of his fellow citizens to forced labour camps in Germany, as well as catching several HA partisans who were executed by him and his co-workers in the nearby forests. Executed by an HA troop under the command of Second Lieutenant Stanisław Milczyński (pseudonym 'Gryf' ['Griffin']) near Iwiczna (Warsaw area) on October 3, 1943, when coming home from an NSDAP meeting.

Wacław Weszke • born on September 5, 1904 in Berlin. Brought to KL Auschwitz in a transport from Silesia on January 25, 1941; prisoner no. 9530; a ZOW member. On November 28, 1944 he was transferred to another camp. He survived the war.

Leo (Leon) **Wieczorek** (Wietschorek) • born on August 4, 1899; a German criminal. Brought to KL Auschwitz in the first group of prisoner functionaries; camp prisoner no. 30, appointed the deputy of Lagerältester B. Brodniewicz. A homosexual, prone to abusing young boys. Later on – the Lagerältester in KL Auschwitz II-Birkenau. In an act of revenge, other inmates hid typhus lice in his sweater. As a privileged prisoner functionary he was treated for typhus in Block's 28 isolation ward in KL Auschwitz, but died of a complication that developed due to typhus fever on July 3, 1942.

Tadeusz Wiejowski • born on May 4, 1914 in Kołaczyce near Jasło; a shoemaker; a Polish Army reserve non-commissioned officer. Brought to KL Auschwitz in the first transport from the Tarnów prison on June 14, 1940; prisoner no. 220. On July 6, 1940 he escaped, joining a five-person electricians' workgroup that was leaving for work outside the camp – it was the first escape from the camp. Wiejowski had been hiding in his hometown Kołaczyce for over a year. Caught by the Germans in autumn 1941 and incarcerated in the Jasło prison, he was executed in one of the defunct oil wells near the town.

Reinhard Georg **Wienhold** • born on February 25, 1916 in Gdańsk (Danzig); a baker. Brought to KL Auschwitz in April 1941; prisoner no. 15174. Accused of gold smuggling and imprisoned in the bunker of Block 11, he committed suicide on March 29, 1943.

Witold Zbigniew Marian **Wierusz** • born on December 8, 1913 in Dolsk; a professional Polish Army officer, a lieutenant of the infantry with seniority from March 19, 1939. He graduated from Infantry Officers School in Ostrów Mazowiecka-Komorowo and was promoted to the rank of a commissioned officer. He served in the 57th Infantry Regiment in Poznań, commanding a platoon in the September Campaign. He arrived in Auschwitz in a transport from Cracow on January 16, 1941; prisoner no. 9479; a ZOW member. He was moved to KL Flossenbürg in 1944, where he survived the war.

Stanisław Wierzbicki • born on April 12, 1907 in Radom.[1] A TAP member. A KL Auschwitz prisoner (no information about his camp number or date of arrival is available), registered as a butcher; a ZOW member. According to the camp's *Death Books* (*Sterbebücher*), he died on February 25, 1943; W. Pilecki states February 16.[2]

Alfred Włodarczyk • born on April 12, 1920 (according to different data: 1912) in Chorzów. Brought to KL Auschwitz on July 18, 1940; prisoner no. 1349, the block elder of Block 25; a member of the ZOW. In 1944 transferred to KL Buchenwald, where he was registered as prisoner no. 30419 – and probably died there.

Jan Henryk **Włodarkiewicz** (pseudonym 'Darwicz') • born on May 28, 1900 in Warsaw; a professional Polish Army officer, a major of the cavalry with seniority from March 19, 1939. In the September Campaign he commanded an improvised uhlan formation and after that – a divisional cavalry regiment of the 41st Reserve Infantry Division, where W. Pilecki (at that time a second lieutenant) was his deputy; later Włodarkiewicz and W. Pilecki created an underground resistance organization TAP, which in 1940 merged with other organizations into the KN and its armed division – the KZ. Włodarkiewicz was the co-creator of the idea of a separate sabotage organization 'Wachlarz' ('Fan') and its first commander. Promoted to lieutenant colonel with seniority from November 11, 1941. Died in Lwów (now in Ukraine) while inspecting the 1st sector of the 'Wachlarz,' on 18 or 19 September, 1942.

Antoni Woźniak • born on May 5, 1896. Brought to KL Auschwitz on September 22, 1940 in the same second Warsaw transport as W. Pilecki; prisoner no. 5512; a ZOW member. Released in 1942.

1 Three individuals named Stanisław Wierzbicki can be found in the records of KL Auschwitz-Birkenau prisoners. None of them fully corresponds to the descriptions given in Pilecki's reports, in particular they are not registered in military files as Polish Army officers. In such circumstance the date of death was adopted as the decisive criterion, and only Stanisław Wierzbicki born on April 12, 1907 died in February 1943.

2 Such differences in dates are not uncommon, as the Germans would often divide large groups of deceased into several days, giving 'natural reasons' as the cause of death.

Helena Zabawska • Edmund Zabawski's wife.

Edmund Zabawski • born on September 14, 1910 in Horyszów Ruski; a teacher; a Polish Army reserve officer, a second lieutenant of the infantry with seniority from January 1, 1935. In 1939 he fought in Pomerania, near Świecie and Chełmno. After returning to his hometown of Tomaszów Lubelski, he got involved in underground resistance work and a collection of firearms. Denounced and arrested on April 21, 1941 in Tomaszów Lubelski, incarcerated in Zamość, then transported to the Lublin Castle Prison. Brought to KL Auschwitz on July 30, 1941, in a Lublin transport; prisoner no. 19547; a ZOW member. On October 25, 1944 he was transferred from KL Auschwitz to KL Sachsenhausen-Oranienburg. On May 3, 1945 he was liberated by the Russians near Rostock, and returned to Bochnia on May 17. He worked as a primary school headmaster in Mikluszowice and Bochnia. He died in 1999.

Roman Zagner • no detailed information. A KL Auschwitz prisoner; a member of the ZOW. Worked in the camp garages, probably did not survive the war.

Zygmunt Zakrzewski • born on October 7, 1904; a biologist, a professor; the founder and head of the biological laboratory in the Maria Skłodowska-Curie Radium Institute in Warsaw. Involved in the conspiratorial work (inter alia, he took part in delivering the anti-typhus vaccine to the Warsaw Ghetto); a TAP member. Arrested in Cracow with his wife Maria on December 16, 1941 and incarcerated in the Montelupich Prison. Brought to KL Auschwitz on June 11, 1942; prisoner no. 39249; a member of the ZOW. Still in 1942 he was transferred to another camp. After the war he returned to Warsaw. Despite contracting tuberculosis in the camps, he still worked in the Maria Skłodowska-Curie Institute of Oncology. He died in 1955 in Warsaw. His wife did not survive KL Auschwitz.

Jerzy Zaleski (in camp: Zalewski) • born on May 5, 1897 in Częstochowa; a professional Polish Army officer, a certified lieutenant colonel of the cavalry with seniority from March 19, 1937; before the war – chief of an Experimental Commission at the Cavalry Training Centre in Grudziądz. Fought in the September Campaign, after which he joined the underground resistance movement. Brought to KL Auschwitz on October 14, 1941 from Lublin; prisoner no. 21514; a ZOW member. In June 1942 he was transferred to KL Mauthausen, where he died on August 15, 1942.

Eugeniusz Zaturski (pseudonym 'Lux') • born on July 9, 1896 in Chord (as stated in the ABSM files; in the *Death Books* [*Sterbebücher*]: Chorol; in other sources: Horod; now in Ukraine); an engineer and a building contractor. A TAP member. Brought to KL Auschwitz from Warsaw on April 18, 1942; prisoner no. 31387; a ZOW member. He died on January 14, 1943 in KL Auschwitz.

DIMINUTIVES OF POLISH FIRST NAMES AND THEIR BASIC FORMS

All names listed below, used in Pilecki's report, are male except *Janina*, *Ewa* and *Maria*. Common English equivalents are given in parentheses.

Antek • Antoni (Anthony)
Bolek • Bolesław
Bronek • Bronisław
Czesiek • Czesław
Dziunek • Władysław
Edek • Edward
Ewunia • Ewa (Eve)
Fred • Ferdynand (Ferdinand)
Fredek • Alfred
Genek • Eugeniusz (Eugene)
Heniek • Henryk (Henry)
Janek • Jan (John)
Jasia • Janina (Jane)
Jasiek • Jan (John)
Jasiu (vocative) • Jan (John)
Jaś • Jan (John)
Jurek • Jerzy (George)
Kazik • Kazimierz (Casimir)
Kazio • Kazimierz (Casimir)
Krzysio • Krzysztof (Christopher)
Lolek • Karol (Charles)
Marysia • Maria (Mary)
Mietek • Mieczysław
Olek • Aleksander (Alexander)
Romek • Roman
Sławek • Sławomir
Stach • Stanisław
Stasiek • Stanisław
Stasio • Stanisław
Staś • Stanisław
Tadek • Tadeusz
Tomek • Tomasz (Thomas)
Wicek • Wincenty (Vincent)
Władek • Władysław
Włodek • Włodzimierz

INDEX OF SELECTED NON-ENGLISH TERMS

For an explanation of each term, see the relative page.
Abbreviations are explained separately: see pp. xxv–xxvi.

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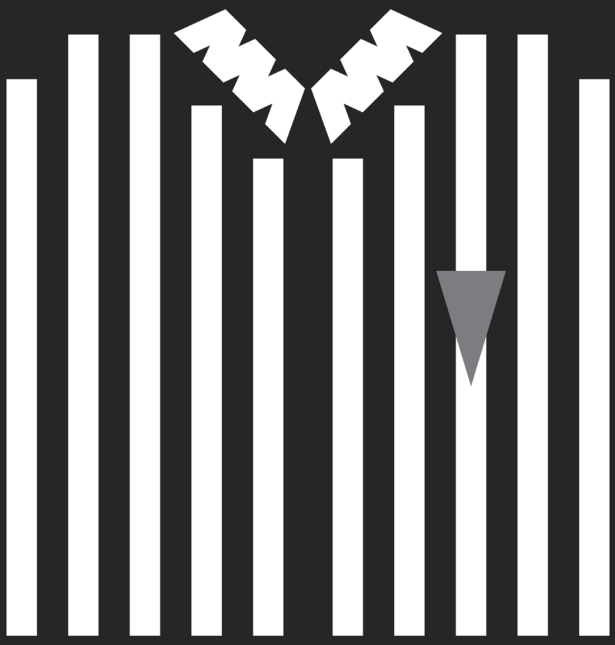

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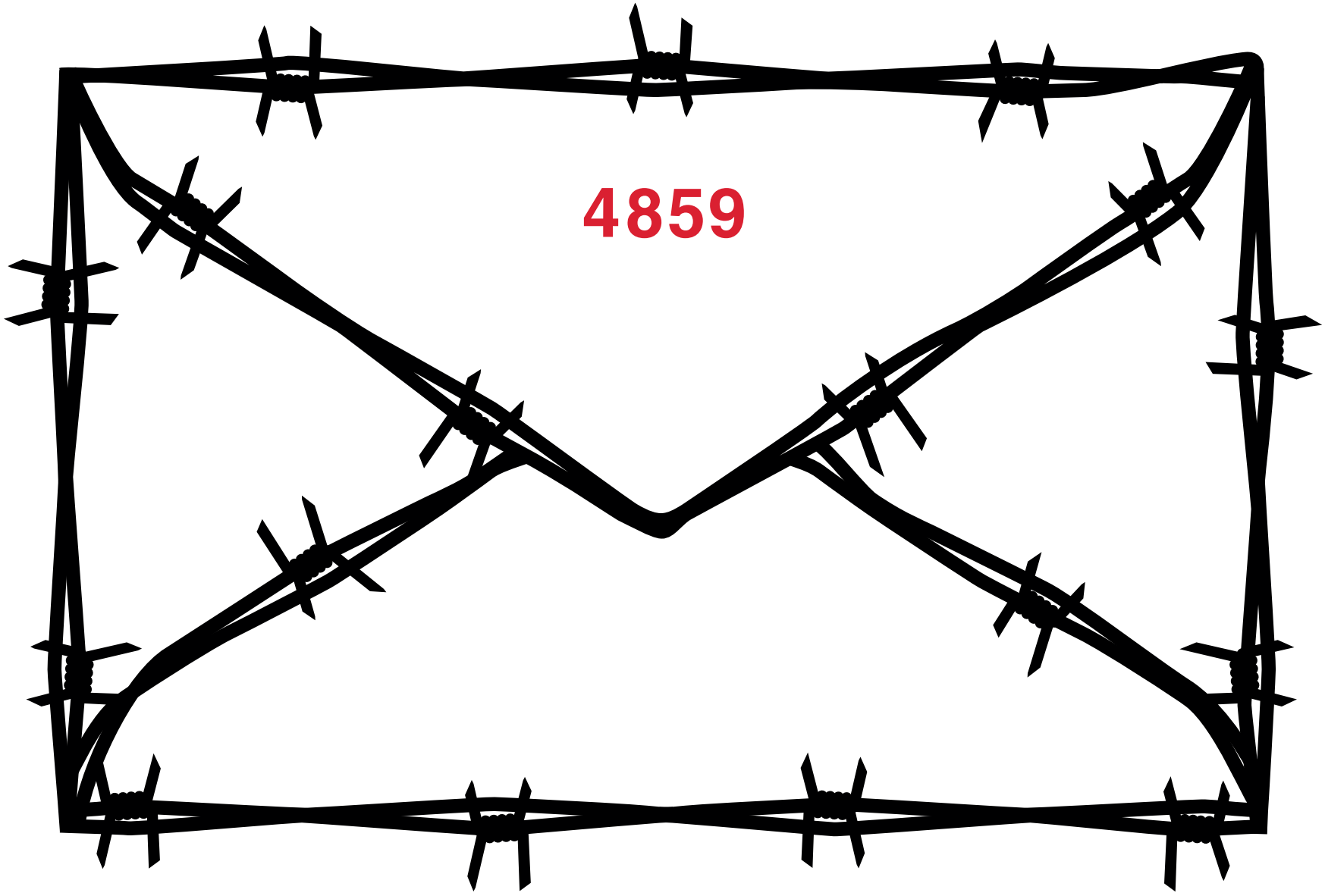
The Lager was a gauge that tested characters.
Some fell into swamps of moral depravity.
Others were shaping their character like grinders cutting crystals.
We were cut with sharp instruments.

(from the 'Witold's Report from Auschwitz')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