

T R A N S P O R T

(The Polish Major's Report).

TRANSPORT.

On March 24, 1942 we were gathered together in special "assembling cell" No. 2 of the Montelupich prison in Cracow. We knew that our group consisting of 60 men was to be sent to the concentration camp of OSWIECIM (AUSCHWITZ). At 8 o'clock the next morning, two SS guards appeared with lists and started counting those present. We had to undress and wait. Finally the doors were opened and we caught sight of two columns of SS guards and policemen with fixed bayonets. In the courtyard two trucks were parked in each of which 30 men had to take their places. These trucks were quite small and the space on the inside was divided in two by a chain running across the middle. The first to enter had to stand with bent heads whereas the others crouched down between the legs of the standing men. In this way it was possible to fill up the very small space with 30 men. We were loaded in with blows from rifle-butts, shouts and kicks. In the second separated section of the truck, two SS men stood guard with machine-guns. We departed. Behind us, at a certain distance, followed motor-cyclists with machine-guns. Our trucks were hermetically closed so that there was no possibility of seeing where we were going. Our journey lasted 1 1/2 hours with several short stops. Our limbs grew stiff as there was no possibility of changing one's position and one of our men who was up against the chain became unconscious. He was brought back to his senses by blows from the guards. At last we arrived, staggered to the ground and found ourselves standing in front of a gate over which we could read: "Work brings freedom". Inside an orchestra was playing. This was AUSCHWITZ and it appeared that we were expected.

We were lined up in columns of five (a system applied on every conceivable occasion in the camp) and the names of the "newcomers" were once more read out. The man called up had to immediately run over to the one reading the roll and place himself in a line with those already summoned after having received his number from the hands of an assistant. From this moment on, names were replaced by numbers. This system of "reception" was maintained until the summer of 1943. Later, all the prisoners (with the exception of Germans) had their number tattooed on their upper forearm, which had been the practice in the case of the Jews from the beginning. This whole numbering system was apparently applied to lessen the possibility of escape and to make it easier to identify the bodies. These numbers were handed to us by the "Block leader" named STUBA, after which we went bare headed and accompanied by the orchestra, into the camp itself. The clock stood at 11 a.m. After a short visit to the "stock" room we were shut up in a barrack until 5 p.m. There we were visited by a number of old inmates who earnestly begged us to give them our watches, rings, lighters, and

cigarettes to avoid their being confiscated. Any food brought with us should be eaten at once as it would be taken away as well. In return, the prisoners promised us bread, soup etc.. once we were officially incorporated into their ranks. At last the CAPO (a sort of camp overseer) arrived and delivered a short talk in which he stressed that a prisoner could not exist in this camp for more than two months without the help of his comrades; and this was to be confirmed later on by numerous examples. Out of the 60 originally in my group I was to be the only survivor. At 5 p.m. we were herded out into the corridor. There we had to undress and pack our clothes into a bundle provided with our respective number. We stood there naked. All we were allowed to keep was a belt and two handkerchiefs. I wanted to keep a small holy picture but one of the prisoners who acted as assistant in these operations dissuaded me, saying: "It isn't worth while you will merely be laughed at and it will finally be taken anyway." First our hair was cut short and then our heads shaved, after which we were given a bath. The water was very warm. All these preparations prior to being admitted as an inmate to the camp took place in "Block 27". Next, although it was snowing we had to run to "Block 26" where the clothing room was located. There we were issued our prisoner's outfit which consisted of a shirt, underpants, shoes, socks, a warm jacket, trousers, vest, cap and blanket. Everything was filthy, patched and practically worn out. My jacket, for instance, could be buttoned up in front but the back and sleeves merely consisted of black strips of cloth patched together. Finally this operation came to an end and we were again lined up in rows of five and taken to one of the "Blocks". There we were awaited by the "Block leader" (most of them were Poles from Upper Silesia) who initiated us into the mysteries of barrack duties. We were instructed in sweeping and cleaning the dormitories, in taking off one's cap when commanded and how to keep in line and step. Orders were given in German and when badly carried out the block leader grew furious and struck people right and left. The evening roll-call finally put an end to these exercises. The block leader then assembled his people in front of their respective block and in turn all the block leaders presented their figures to the chief recorder or clerk. If the number of prisoners tallied with the records, the roll-call was over; actually the whole tiring ceremony was nothing else but one of the numerous ways in which the prisoners were mistreated. During 1940, 1941 and 1942 the roll-call was usually expected to last at least an hour in all weather conditions - frost, rain or snow - the prisoners having to wait patiently with bare heads. If an escape was reported, which resulted in a "manco" at evening roll-call, all those assembled had to wait outside until the result of the search was known. The search parties usually returned 3 or 4 hours later and with disastrous consequences for all the prisoners' health. In 1940, for example, one escape cost the lives of a hundred inmates. It was during severe winter weather and the prisoners were forced to stand out of doors from 3.30 in the afternoon until 11 o'clock the next morning, as a result of which a hundred totally or half-frozen men were counted.

After the roll-call we returned to our block where we were allotted a "room;" we slept three to a bed. Old-timers told us that the best thing to do was to use our clothing as a pillow otherwise something was bound to be stolen. So we lay down without having had the slightest bit of food the whole day. The "reception" had been so strenuous and exhausting that all of us immediately fell asleep.

At 4 a.m. we were awakened by a gong and frightful confusion ensued. About 100 people were compressed into the small hall space and in a wild stampede each one first tried to tidy up his bed (the block leader would not tolerate the smallest wrinkle in the bedding) and dress himself. There was no question of washing. Ten minutes after the gong had sounded the "room eldest" arrived and kicked everyone out into the corridor as the "rooms" had to be cleaned. The corridor was thronged with people who flocked together from all over the block. Most of them had managed to get dressed. There was really scarcely room to move in this crowd and one was pushed against walls and squashed into corners and often kicked or hit for no apparent reason. After having been in the camp for over 24 hours we finally received some cold, unsweetened coffee, after which there was a further wait of one and a half hours until roll-call; then all the prisoners were taken to work. The newcomers were at first told to fill in questionnaires in which they had to indicate an address where they desired their letters to be sent. It was strictly forbidden not to give an address or not to write as "they" obviously needed an address to which the death of a prisoners could be reported when the need arose.

We were issued a piece of cloth with a triangle and our number painted on it, which we were instructed to sew on our tunics. Prisoners were numbered from No. 1 onwards, and in November 1943 the last consecutive serial number had reached 170,000. The triangles in question were of different colors, each representing a category of criminal or prisoner. The "Aryan" triangle was red, the red corresponding to a political prisoner, green to professional criminals, black to "work-shirkers," pink to homosexuals (according to paragraph 175) and violet to members of the "Bibelforscher" religious sect. In addition, a large letter indicated the nationality of the prisoner, such as "P" for the Poles, etc. For Jews the insignia was composed of a yellow triangle on which was sewn a second triangle whose color corresponded to the "crime," the whole forming a Jewish star. From this marking system one could therefore rapidly pick out, for instance, a Polish Jewish political prisoner or a Jewish "work-slacker," etc.

When we had finished sewing on our triangles and numbers, we were herded over to the "Infirmary" where we were to be "examined" by a German doctor regarding our physical aptness for work. Again we had to undress and stand in a chilly corridor for almost three hours, shivering, as the weather was still very cold even at the end of March. We met old acquaintances who were working in the infirmary and their first concern was to have news of their relatives. Upon the doctor's arrival we had to present ourselves in groups standing stiffly at attention.

All that was required of us was to stretch out an arm, move the fingers, turn around and march off. The examination consisted of nothing more and all of us were of course considered fit for work. Hadn't we come here for this very purpose and besides, didn't "Work bring freedom" ? We knew only too well what it meant to be considered unfit for work : being taken away and condemned to "liquidation" by gas. At last we received our first warm nourishment in 36 hours. The camp food consisted of coffee or cold tea (made from acorn leaves etc.) in the morning and soup thick or thin, as the case might be, at midday. From the time of our arrival at the camp we had soup made from water and turnips during fully 5 months. After evening roll-call we received 300 grams of bread, although its weight was usually considerably diminished by the time it reached the prisoner. On Mondays and Saturdays, 300 to 400 grams of cheese were distributed. It was some sort of a crude home-made, peasant cheese which often contained more worms than cheese. Rations further included 1/2 kilo of margarine for twelve persons distributed every Tuesday, Thursday or Friday and blood sausage or red sausage on Wednesdays and Mondays. These rations represented approximately 300 to 400 grams. In addition to margarine on Tuesdays and Fridays we also received a spoonful of marmelade per person. Since the barrel however, bore a label stating that the marmelade was destined for the camp its quality was correspondingly bad. Theoretically the above are the rations each inmate received but practically a good part of them were stolen before they were actually distributed. In the evening, tea or coffee were distributed with the bread. The soup had to be licked up as most of the prisoners did not possess spoons. I forgot to mention that we had to eat our food squatting on our haunches as a punishment by the room eldest to us newcomers for having crowded around the soup kettle during distribution.

After our meal we were sent to the identification service where photographs from three different angles were taken. So on that day the camp picture gallery was increased by 60 more criminals ! One by one we were called up and I noticed that my comrades came out of the photographer's room looking frightened. Beware ! It was my turn. I was seated on a chair and photographed. When I tried to get up the floor started moving and, losing my balance I was thrown against the wall. It was a practical joke played by the photographers. (all of whom are Poles) in setting the revolving platform in motion when one got up. It was not surprising that one sometimes had to have some kind of amusement even at the expense of one's camp comrades. We then returned to our quarters and by that time the roll-call was again due. So ended our second day in camp; and the next morning we were to be marched off to work with all the other inmates.

All the prisoners had to work except the sick, those in "quarantine" and those confined to their cells. The total camp strength was divided into camp commandos or squads which were each headed by a "Capo" or leader and several foremen.

At the head of large working units was a "Chief Capo" who was assisted by several "Capos" and foremen. The size of one of these squads varied from one to several hundred men. Although the Capo was really in charge, a foreman often took over a group of ten, twenty or thirty workmen. The head of the labor administration chose the "Capos," with the consent of the "Chief Capo," the prisoners being assigned to squads by the central administration. Work started after the morning roll-call, i.e. in summer from 5 a.m. to 12 a.m. and 1 p.m. to 6 p.m., in winter from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. without interruption. There were workshops for craftsmen, farmers, industrial workers and various technical trades. Many, particularly those in favor, worked in the camp administration. The camp was provided with an "infirmary," a "canteen," a laundry, a bakery and a slaughter house. Thus prisoners with certain technical training could, in principle, work in their own trade. Intellectuals, liberal professional men, shop keepers or office workers were the worst off and they represented fully 70% of the total number of prisoners. The latter were all employed as unskilled labor in the worst and hardest jobs, such as the coal and gravel pits. The mortality among them was frightfully high. But it seemed to be the aim of the camp administration to kill them off as rapidly as possible.

II. MY FIRST DAYS IN CAMP - THE "INFIRMARY."

My first job was with a demolition squad. Since the area surrounding the camp of AUSCHWITZ had been evacuated for a radius of almost a 100 kilometers, all buildings, unless taken over by the camp, had to be torn down. Even new buildings were demolished. Our work consisted in tearing down such houses and was exceedingly strenuous, particularly since we were expected to work at top speed. A squad consisting of 50 men was supposed to demolish a large building within three to four days; and we were instructed to salvage all building material. The roof of a house, for instance, had to be carefully taken down and all planks, beams, tiles, etc. stacked away. Nothing was to be broken; in fact the slightest damage to anything resulted in an immediate and severe beating with a shovel or pick handle. The walls had to be broken down literally by hand, brick by brick, the cement sticking to each brick being afterwards removed and the bricks piled neatly up. Even the foundations had to be torn out and the ground afterwards levelled to that no trace of the house remained. Many men died at this work; not only from exposure and the strain, but from falling walls and beams - especially those who were elderly or slow. From the 50 who set out in the morning seldom more than 40 returned on their own legs. The remainder was either brought as corpses or in a state of complete collapse in wheel-barrow or on boards. These poor souls still were expected to appear at evening roll-call, after which they were taken to the infirmary. From my working comrades who went there I never saw one alive again.

My work with this squad lasted over a month. I was then transferred to the ditch digging squad. Trenches of from

2 1/2 to 3 meters deep had to be dug, and for the last 50 centimeters we worked standing in water. We were, of course, not allowed to leave the trench during work and this job was considered as one of the hardest in the camp. Many died at it daily. Some time later I was shifted to the "concrete squad" where I had to heave heavy posts and sacks of cement; but after the arrival of new prisoners I was detailed to the making of concrete bricks. This had the advantage of at least being work under a roof, which was very important inasmuch as work went on regardless of the weather. In addition the prisoners were continually mistreated and struck by commando leaders, "capos," and foremen. In general, anyone holding a commanding position in the camp liked to give special emphasis to his position of superiority. Naturally the character of the person concerned played a considerable role; but the fundamental rule was the direct responsibility of the superior for his inferiors, each individual being in turn responsible to the collectivity. These circumstances fostered the "stool pigeon" system. For example, one day a working comrade discovered a few pieces of turnip which he carefully hid. He continued his work, but from time to time, took surreptitious bites off his treasure. Another prisoner having "squeeled" on him, the "capo" arrived a few minutes later. It must be remembered that the capo is absolute master of his commando and that everybody tries to get into his good graces. Unfortunately this favor often had to be attained to the detriment of the well-being or sometimes even of the lives of other prisoners. The capo proceeded to search our comrade and finding the pieces of turnip knocked the weakened man to the ground, hitting him brutally about the head and face and in the stomach. He then ordered him to sit up, hands out-stretched in front of him on the ground with a weight of bricks on each hand; the pieces of turnip were stuck in his mouth. All the men were then assembled and informed that the unfortunate man was to stay in this position for a whole hour. We were warned that this punishment would befall any member of the commando who committed a similar "offence." The condemned man underwent this ordeal guarded by one of the foremen, very eager to fulfill his task to the satisfaction of the capo, so that he hit our friend every time he tried to shift his position slightly. After 15 to 20 minutes the man became unconscious, but a bucket of water was poured over him and he was again forced into his original position. After he had slumped over senseless for a second time his body was thrown aside and nobody was allowed to pay further attention to him. After roll-call that evening he was taken to the "infirmary" where he died two days later. Or another example: on Easter Monday 1942 the weather was extremely bad with a heavy snowfall. We were sitting in the mud scraping cement off bricks, frozen half stiff. Suddenly the commando chief appeared and barked the following orders: "Discard caps, coats and jackets! Sick with fear for what might follow, we obeyed and continued working in our shirt-sleeves. The capo sneered at us: "You dirty Poles, now you can celebrate!" A young prisoner, not more than 16 years old, had hidden in a trench. He was terribly thin and so trembling with the cold that he evidently did not hear the order. Or perhaps he didn't care whether he heard it or not. The capo, however, had meanwhile staggered off (he was half drunk) since he didn't intend to remain out-of-doors in this wretched weather. As a matter of fact, he cared very little about

the prisoners, the sooner they died, the better. The snow had stopped falling, but in the cold wind we froze in our shirt sleeves; certain death awaited us. Nobody knew when the Capo might come back, perhaps in a moment, perhaps in a week, or in a month. While we waited the snow started to fall again. A few foremen came running in our direction from a stove around which they had been sitting, to see how we are getting on with our work. One of them discovered the hidden youngster and shouted: "All your clothes off, at once, you swine". As the kid did not react, the foreman pounced on him and started beating him: "Undress or I will beat the life out of you, or better still I will report you to the chief". At that moment the Capo arrived. A sharp blow of a whistle: "Fall in!" We formed our columns and knew that it meant "sticking together". We were led into an open space where we sank ankle-deep in mud. Now the "sport" started. "Down! up! quick march! etc." We literally rolled in the mud. Flatten out! Jump! Run! Hands out front!" We were covered with mud from head to foot and scarcely able to stand. The "exercise" had now been going on for about half an hour. To finish we had to do "push up" exercises, alternately laying down flat and supporting our body on our hands. "Up, down, up, down". The chief of the commando inspected the rows and saw an old man who was unable to continue. Immediately an SS guard threw himself upon him and kicked him in the head and face with heavy hob nailed boots. When at last the poor old man gave no further sign of life he was left alone. We were then allowed to stand up and continue with our work. The badly injured man was carried over to a dry spot among piles of bricks. He opened his eyes, tried to say something but couldn't utter a word; and we had to leave him as in the meantime the order was given to resume work. The result was that at the end of the day we carried home another corpse. But we had grown used to it. We marched and sang jolly German songs, as the Capo wanted it to be so. The commando chief walked alongside the group; he grinned: "You do sing well!"

During my work in the "concrete squad" I caught pneumonia (as was found out later). At the beginning I avoided the "infirmary" and hoped I would get over it. I knew too well what happened there and that seldom one left the place alive. But I became so weak that I could hardly move and finally had to give in. I became completely indifferent. In one way I was lucky that my friends in the "Infirmary" took care of me so that I was then able to enjoy "privileged" conditions. When I entered the "Krankenbau" it was composed of three different buildings: Block 28 - internal illnesses -, Block 20 - infectious illnesses-, Block 21 - surgery -. Later on three new "Blocks" (Blocks 19, 9 and 10) were attached to the "infirmary". They composed the so-called "Hygiene Institute". Here, sterilizing by X-ray treatment, artificial insemination of women as well as experiments on blood transfusions were carried on. Male and female prisoners especially Jews served as "guinea pigs" for these experiments. This "Block" was completely

isolated from the rest of the camp so that news from it reached us only very seldom.

It was not easy to be admitted to the "infirmary" as the "minimum" symptom was a fever of from 38,6 to 39 degrees (C). Light cases of fever were not admitted. All applications for transfer to the "Infirmary" had to be submitted to the chief of one's own Block, who had the right to reject any such request. Then the sick person had to wait for hours in the courtyard of the "infirmary" before being called in for preliminary examination. If the doctor (a prisoner) considered him worth treating, he had to undress and usually take a cold bath before being presented to the German doctor, after further long hours of waiting. The sick were classified into two groups, "Aryans" and Jews. These groups were again subdivided into further groups, of which the first included the sick who were to remain in hospital being considered "curable". The second consisted of extremely run down patients, chronic cases, and the half-starving or mutilated whose recovery could only be effected by a long stay in the hospital. This group was practically condemned to death by Phenol injections in the heart region. Racial considerations played an important role. An "Aryan" really had to be seriously ill to be condemned to death by injection, whereas 80 to 90 % of the Jews "hospitalized" there were "eliminated" in this manner. Many of them knew about this method and applied for admission as so-called "suicide candidates", not having the courage to throw themselves on to the high tension wires. This situation lasted during the whole of 1942 until the time the mass extermination of interned Jews at AUSCHWITZ began. Danger of death by injection did not only threaten the newly arrived hospital cases or casualties. From time to time (usually once a month) the German doctor used to effect a minute control of all the sick. In each ward an attendant (usually a doctor) had to "present" each patient and give full account of his illness. If the patient's stay happened to have exceeded a month or if he was very weak, he was listed. The German doctor always kept the sick records of the condemned so as to avoid any attempt at interference on the part of the prisoners themselves. Each such special check-up by the German doctor usually resulted in a list of 200 to 400 men condemned to death, while the "normal" death list of the daily routine inspection varied from 20 to 80. The injections were given on the same day. The new patients who were booked for the "syringe" (as it was called in the camp jargon) received no clothes and had to remain waiting in the corridor - naked -. They were then led from Block 28 to Block 20 where the "operation" took place in a special room. An SS man by the name of KLER, a shoemaker by profession, gave the injections. He had taken up this post in the hospital as a simple SS private but was later promoted to SS "group leader", although practically a moron. He also received supplementary food rations and was awarded the Iron Cross. There were days when this psychopath picked out victims from the wards on his own initiative, without instructions from the German doctor, on whom to practice his "technique". He was a complete sadist, torturing his victims with animal-like brutality before putting them to death. Later it was decided that his nerves had been strained

by "overwork" so an "assistant" was recruited, a Polish volunteer, by the name of PANSZCZYK, No. 607 from Cracow, who was transferred to Germany during the winter of 1943 where he presumably died. The injections were then sporadically administered by "Sanitätsdienstgehilfen" - or given by the chief of the "infirmary". For a certain time, another Pole named JERZY SZYMKOWIAK, No. 15490, "functioned" voluntarily; he died in the summer of 1943.

The injections were not only administered to the weak and ill, but also to prisoners in the political section who were condemned to death. Apart from this, on one occasion, two groups (the first composed of 40, the second of 80 prisoners) of young and strong youths between the ages of 13 and 16 years were put to death, on the grounds that they were "orphans" and could not be considered in the camp as full-fledged workers.

In the autumn of 1942 came the massacre of the LUBLIN transports which caused great unrest in the camp. One of the sanitary service attendants refused to administer injections, stating that he was an SS man and not a murderer of children. Another attendant had to be summoned to carry out the job. This affair caused a lot of talk and stir as at least 15 to 20,000 people lost their lives and even BERLIN asked for an explanation of the high mortality rate in the hospital. The head-doctor, WIRTZ, disclaimed all knowledge of such events and laid the blame on the camp doctor whose name was ENTREST, a German from the POSEN district. A mock inquiry was held at which witnesses from the hospital administration had to testify and the lists of the "deceased" were checked. As "punishment" the camp doctor was simply transferred in the same capacity to the "BUNA". As a result of all this, murdering by means of injections stopped for a while although it was resumed on a smaller scale soon afterwards for hopelessly sick cases. Many of those condemned to the "syringe" were used as experimental material in the "Hygiene Institute" (Block 10). The injections doubtlessly frightened the prisoners from asking to be admitted to the hospital. Another major danger in the camp was "delousing", as it was euphemistically called.

The whole camp obviously was covered with lice and fleas and large disinfection programs were carried out. However, the results were never apparent and our "washing" always came back almost as full of lice. Actually the "delousing" was designed to combat typhus epidemics which had become a real plague at the camp. During these actions everybody was examined and those with bad complexions or in weakened bodily condition were, according to the camp doctor's mood, destined to be gassed. They were simply led to the "infirmary" from where 40 to 50 % were "evacuated". A "delousing" action which took a particularly large toll in victims was conducted in July 1943. During the course of this "purge" the weak, those ill with typhus or in post-typhus quarantine were all sent to BRZINZKI without exception. This method was considered the most radical for eliminating

typhus. The way in which those condemned to the gas chambers were transferred to their doom was exceptionally brutal and inhuman. Serious cases from the surgical ward who still had their bandages on and a procession of exhausted and horribly emaciated patients, even convalescents on the road to recovery were loaded on to trucks. They were all naked and the spectacle was dreadful in the extreme. The trucks pulled up at the entrance of the block and the unfortunate victims were simply thrown or piled on by the attendants (I frequently witnessed such tragic transports). A hundred people were often jammed into a small truck. They all knew exactly what their fate was to be. The large majority remained completely apathetic while others, mostly patients from the surgery with bloody and gaping wounds or frightful sores, struggled frantically. All around the trucks, SS men milled about like madmen, beating back the howling crowd trying to lean out. Every time it was a terrible experience to have to drag our friends to the truck. Most of them were quiet, and bid us farewell, but never forgot to remind us : "Do not forget revenge." Under such conditions men's hearts turn to stone. Imagine a prisoner killing his brother in one of the wards so as to avoid his having to undergo the dreadful trip by truck. (I happen to know the names and immatriculation numbers of these two particular prisoners). It can well be imagined that we just shrugged our shoulders when told the German fairy-tales regarding the KATYN incident.

III. THE JEWS.

Originally, the camp of AUSCHWITZ was intended only for Poles. It was guarded by a group of Germans (no more than thirty at the beginning) who had been transferred from a German concentration camp. They were prisoners as well but "camp veterans", if such an expression may be used. Most of them had been imprisoned as far back as 1934 and were all more or less professional criminals. But as time went on AUSCHWITZ became more and more of an international camp and the first Jews started to arrive in 1941. They were immediately separated from the "Aryans" and quartered in special "Blocks". Although, at the time, systematic executions were not an established rule it can be stated that as a result of bad treatment by SS men, Capos and foremen (the majority of German origin but often Poles who were enlisted by force), a Jew - irrespective of his physical condition - could not last more than 2 weeks. A young Jew, for instance, who was robust enough to be able to do his work "on the double" (for example, pushing a heavily laden wheel barrow) will most probably be unable to keep it up in the long run. If he should show signs of holding out, he would inevitably be killed sooner or later by such mistreatment, as being beaten with a shovel or pick handle.

In those days all the Jews had to work in the "quarry squad". At a trot they had to bring gravel on wheel barrows

from a pit about 15 to 20 meters deep up a steep slope. At the top, SS men and Capos checked their work and the speed at which it was carried out and anyone considered as "loafing" was simply pushed over, backwards when he arrived at the top so that he crashed back down the incline with his fully laden barrow. This was one of the guards' favourite pastimes. Such treatment of Jewish prisoners prevailed from the time the first Jews arrived at the camp until Spring of 1942, when the first large transports of Jews (tens of thousands) began to arrive and the extermination campaign was getting underway. At first there were few Jews at the camp, most of them of Polish origin, who had been sent there along with other Poles. They were immediately separated from the latter. They had been arrested not as a consequence of their being Jewish but for offences directed against "the security of the German State". Only from Spring 1942 on were they rounded up and exterminated "en masse" on racial grounds. Certain large scale preparations had to be made to receive these mass transports and a special concentration camp was opened at BIRKENAU (the Polish name of the village is RAJSKO). Administered by Germans and Poles, the camp was guarded by SS detachments. Conditions were appalling. The camp had no water, no drainage system and not even the most elementary hygienic installations. The Jews remained in civilian clothes which were marked with red paint. Food was supposed to be distributed to them on a basis similar to that prevailing in AUSCHWITZ but abuse was flagrant. It often happened that the inmates received nothing to eat for days and then only a small part of the rations they should have had. Altogether they were inhumanly treated. The slightest complaint was punishable by death.

The first large convoys arrived from France and Slovakia. Physically able men and women - those without children or the mothers of grown-up children - were sent to the camp of BIRKENAU. The remainder, i.e. old or weak men, women with small children and all those unfit for labour were taken to the Birch wood (BRZEZINKI) and killed by means of hydrocyanic gas. For this purpose special gassing barracks had been built there. These consisted of large halls, airtight, and provided with ventilators which could be opened or closed according to the need. Inside they were equipped so as to create the impression of bathing establishments. This was done to deceive the victims and make them more manageable. The executions took place as follows: each death convoy consisted of some 8 to 10 trucks packed with the "selectees"; the convoy was unguarded as the whole frightful drama took place on camp territory. A private car containing the camp doctor followed each truck convoy since it was compulsory for him to be present at these mass executions. On their arrival at the gassing establishment, which was surrounded by a double barbed wire fence, men, women and children had to completely undress. Each of them was given a towel and a piece of soap. Then they were driven into the barrack until it was completely filled up. Everything was hermetically closed and specially trained SS units threw hydrocyanic

bombs through the ventilation openings. After about 10 minutes the doors were opened and a special squad composed exclusively of Jews, had to clear away the bodies and prepare for a new group of "selectees". The crematoria had not yet been constructed, although there was a small one at AUSCHWITZ which however was not employed for burning these bodies. Mass graves were dug at that time into which the corpses were simply thrown. This continued into the autumn of 1942. By this time extermination by gas was being intensified and there was no more time even for such summary burial. Row upon row of bodies of murdered Jews, covered only by a thin layer of earth were widely dispersed in the surrounding fields, causing the soil to become almost marshy through the putrefaction of the bodies. The smell emanating from these fields became intolerable. In the autumn of 1942 all that remained of the bodies had to be exhumed, the bones collected and burnt in the crematoria (by that time four had been completed). An alternative was to gather the remains of the unfortunate victims into heaps, pour gasoline over them and leave it to the flames to finish the tragedy. The immense quantity of human ashes thus collected was carted away in every direction to be scattered over the fields where these martyrs had found their last rest.

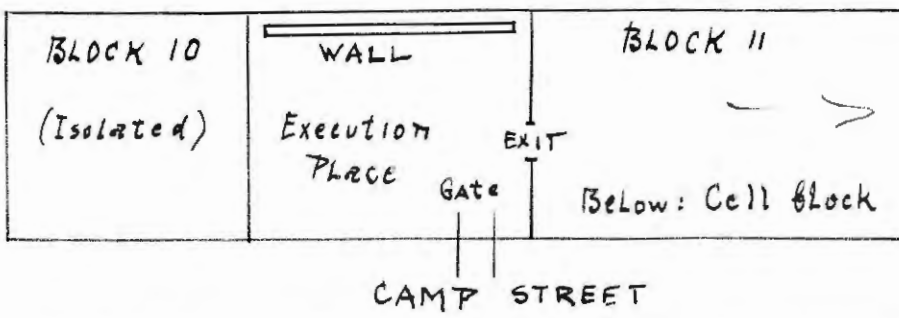
In the meantime the crematoria had been finished and the number of arrivals was steadily increasing. Gassing and burning were carried out at record speed but the supply of corpses became so large that occasionally they had to resort to the old method of open air cremation. It is estimated that approximately 1 1/2 million Jews were exterminated in this manner. With the exception of the Polish Jews, the other Jews had no idea what was in store for them at AUSCHWITZ. We were told by Dutch and French Jews that the Germans had informed them that they were leaving their country to be transferred to Poland where everyone would be able to continue work in his own profession or still better, where for each shop, concern or factory seized by the Germans an equivalent source of livelihood would be put at their disposal. They were to take their whole fortune with them and liquid cash for at least 6 weeks. This resulted in considerable amounts of money and valuables being brought to AUSCHWITZ (most of them by Dutch bankers and diamond merchants) most of which was stolen by the camp staff, SS men and prisoners. The condemned Jews generally faced their fate calmly, although those arriving in 1943 had a clearer idea of what awaited them. The sporadic attempts at rebellion and mass escape when the freight cars were unloaded upon arrival were bloodily repelled. The special railway siding reserved for the convoys was surrounded by searchlight and machine-gun posts. On one occasion these unfortunate people scored a small success. It must have been during September or October 1943, after a transport of women had arrived. The accompanying SS men had ordered them to undress and were about to drive them into the gas chamber. This moment was always used by the guards as a good opportunity for looting; and rings and wrist watches were torn off women's fingers and arms. In the confusion resulting from one such attack,

one woman managed to snatch the pistol of SS Group leader SCHILLINGER and fire three shots at him. He was seriously wounded and died the next day. This gave the signal for the others to attack the executioners and their henchmen. One SS man had his nose torn off, another was scalped, but unfortunately none of the women were able to escape. Although an attempt was made to keep this incident secret, it resulted in an order being issued whereby SS men were not allowed to remain in camp after 8 p.m.

The extermination of Jews continued relentlessly although in the camp, tension relaxed to a certain extent. The fate of those Jews admitted to the camp has been described in the sections of my report dealing with the gassing and killing of the ill by means of injections.

IV. EXECUTIONS.

Until the Summer of 1941 AUSCHWITZ was mainly a concentration camp in which no executions had taken place so far. The first executions came as a surprise for the majority of the camps inmates. They began in the Summer of 1941 when one evening after roll-call, various numbers were called up (I well remember, there were 18 men from Cracow alone). The men whose numbers had been called were ordered to the stock room, where they had to give up their clothes and were given old rags (a shirt and pants) in exchange. Then they were taken to the gravel pit and shot with pistols at point blank range. The other prisoners were not allowed to be present at the shooting but the execution was so arranged that practically the whole camp could witness the proceedings. After the execution a special commando was designated to bury the bodies. This incident caused a great deal of unrest within the camp as we had assumed until then that deportation to a concentration camp excluded the death penalty for offences against the security of the German State. From this day on executions were carried out at more or less regular intervals, the victims being called up on Tuesdays and Fridays. Later a special place of execution was set up within the camp's boundary, an open space between "Blocks" 10 and 11 where executions took place generally in the morning.



The index cards of the condemned men were sent from the chief clerk's office to the respective "Blocks" and in the morning, immediately after roll-call the numbers of the

prisoners were called up by "the Block recorder". If the index card bore the inscription "to report immediately after roll-call" and the signature of the "recording clerk" it meant that the prisoner called up was to be shot. The "block recorder" assembled the victims and brought them over to the chief clerk's office. There the numbers, names and dates of birth were checked again. Ordered into rows of five by the camp eldest and the block eldest (also prisoners) they were then marched to the place of execution. If the shooting was only to take place a few hours later, the men were locked up in cells. If the execution, however, was to be carried out at once they were taken first to the washhouse. They undressed and their number was marked on their thigh with indelible pencil. After these preparations, they were again lined up in fives and then sent out to the execution wall (first four men and then two at a time). The men were led out by the Block eldest of "Block 11" or then by the Capo of the cell-block (a Jew), who took hold of the hands of the condemned and dragged them out to the wall where he stood between the two. In the beginning the condemned were forced to kneel and bend their heads forward, but later they were usually shot standing. The executioners shot their victims in the back of the head with a short barrelled rifle which made a muffled report. After the execution, the "body-bearers" went into action and removed the corpses to a nearby stable where they were thrown on a heap of straw. The blood stains were removed and the emplacement prepared for the execution of two further victims. After the whole group had been liquidated, the bodies were kept in "Block 28" until the evening. At dusk all the bodies, including those of other prisoners deceased during the same day were piled on to a big cart and pulled to the crematoria. Later, the corpses were also removed from the place of execution in coffins and if a considerable number was involved a truck was used for this purpose. These "death transports" always took place during hours of curfew as the camp authorities wished to keep the executions as secret as possible, in which they were, however, not particularly successful. As mentioned before, such executions started during the Summer of 1941 and reached a peak in 1942 with the transfer of "disciplinary companies" from AUSCHWITZ to RAJSKO (BIRKENAU) towards the end of May 1942. Together with a large group of "Muselmänner" ("Muselmann" was a term applied in camp jargon to convicts utterly exhausted by starvation or over work) many young and sturdy men were selected and drafted into these "disciplinary companies". They were all marked with a large red dot as in these special groups the inmates were differentiated by red dots on their chests and backs for offences committed in civil life and by black circles for "crimes" committed in the camp itself. Such "companies" were made up of about 500 men of whom, every second day, 10 to 15 were shot. The rest of them had to work extremely hard and await their turn. At the same time, mass executions started in AUSCHWITZ (middle of May 1942). Once, twice or three times a week, 40 to 60 men were simply picked out and shot. Restlessness increased in the camp when, by middle of June the situation had not changed, to a point approaching open rebellion, especially after one mass executions which cost the

lives of 120 prisoners. The camp administration apparently got wind of this and during a roll-call sometime in June it was announced that executions would cease and the death penalty would be abolished. It was true that the prisoners reacted with deep distrust but on the whole the news had a quieting effect on everybody. And in fact there was a pause of 1 to 1 1/2 months after which executions began again although less often and only in small groups. This state of affairs continued until October 1942 when one of the largest mass executions ever held took 247 victims, all Poles from the LUBLIN and PODHALA districts. Terror broke out in the camp as a result although again many reacted with complete apathy. This ended a ghastly series of executions of prisoners who, upon arrival in the camp, were already condemned to death. But some of them had been in camp over a year without knowing that their fate was already sealed. It often happened for instance that a prisoner selected for execution would be lying ill in the hospital, but as the sentence had to be carried out he received a deadly injection in his bed. The famous Polish actor Witold ZACHAREWICZ was murdered in this way. All this of course did not mean that October 1942 saw the end of the execution of prisoners brought to AUSCHWITZ with death warrants already signed.

Only the method underwent certain changes. In the early days for instance, the Aryan prisoners had always been given numbers and then incorporated into the camp. Later a new method was evolved consisting in immediately dividing the newcomers into two groups: those condemned to death and those who were to remain as regular inmates. The first group was not allotted serial numbers but directly transferred from the "Block leader's" central office to the cells in "Block 11". The executions took place there and the arrivals were either shot at once or a few days later. This procedure was adopted in an attempt to keep the whole matter secret and executions were only carried out late at night. In addition the camp inmates were led to believe that only "civilians" were submitted to this radical treatment (it must be stated that only a permanent camp inmate was considered a "prisoner", whereas newcomers, without numbers and who had not yet joined the ranks were still designated as "civilians"). So as long as only "civilians" were executed the regular inmates were not particularly upset. Executions of "prisoners", however, did not cease altogether. The camp administration was extremely severe regarding discipline and respect of camp rules. For the slightest omission one was marched off to the execution cells and of course never returned. Things became even worse when the political section (meaning the camp Gestapo) decided to take charge of the punishment of petty internal offences. The frequent result was that they decided questions of life and death according to their own judgment. Bribery became the order of the day. Among the "offences" for being locked up in the execution cells were: being "politically suspect" on the grounds of having contacted "civilians" in the camp, spreading political news or commenting on the German High Command's communiqués, drunkenness, theft (foodstuffs, gold, precious stones), premeditated escape, etc.. The death cells

were always overcrowded and every now and then they had to be "evacuated". This took place as follows: the camp leader, chief of the political section, GRABNER by name dashed in, accompanied by a number of SS men as drunk as himself. They went from cell to cell, taking down the particulars of each occupant's case, the reason for his punishment etc.. If the camp leader had a list of those condemned to death in hand, the prisoners could consider themselves lucky inasmuch as it might not yet be their turn. But usually no notice was taken of such a list. What decided the individual prisoner's fate was mainly the impression he made on this gang of drunkards and the mood in which the camp leader happened to be. There was no question of considering the actual penalty. If the impression he made was not too unfavourable the prisoner remained in his cell to await his execution at a later date unless he went to his death voluntarily. The whole inspection was accompanied by a great deal of vile language and brutal treatment. Usually 85 to 90 % of the death cell occupants were "evacuated" and shot in front of the wall so that space was again available for new arrivals. The camp in general was of course never informed of this secret justice nor who were its victims. It is true that the relatives of the victims were duly informed but the cause of death was always given as being "natural". An incredible amount of paper was wasted compiling fake records of illnesses, fever charts etc.. destined to justify each single death. Death announcements were telegraphed never more than at the rate of two a day so as not to arouse suspicion on the "outside". From the beginning, the executions were carried out by a single man. First by "Oberscharführer" PALITSCH who was later sent to an officers' training center and then by "Scharführer" STIWETZ who still performs these duties. Executions of women were reported from AUSCHWITZ, but in small numbers. On the other hand great numbers of people were shot after having been brought in by truck straight from freedom or from prisons. In two instances whole families were executed, parents together with their children. In one case, an infant a few months old ended his short life in the arms of his mother before the execution wall.