

A YEAR IN TREBLINKA

By Yankel Wiernik

An Inmate Who Escaped Tells the
Day-To-Day Facts of One Year of His
Torturous Experiences

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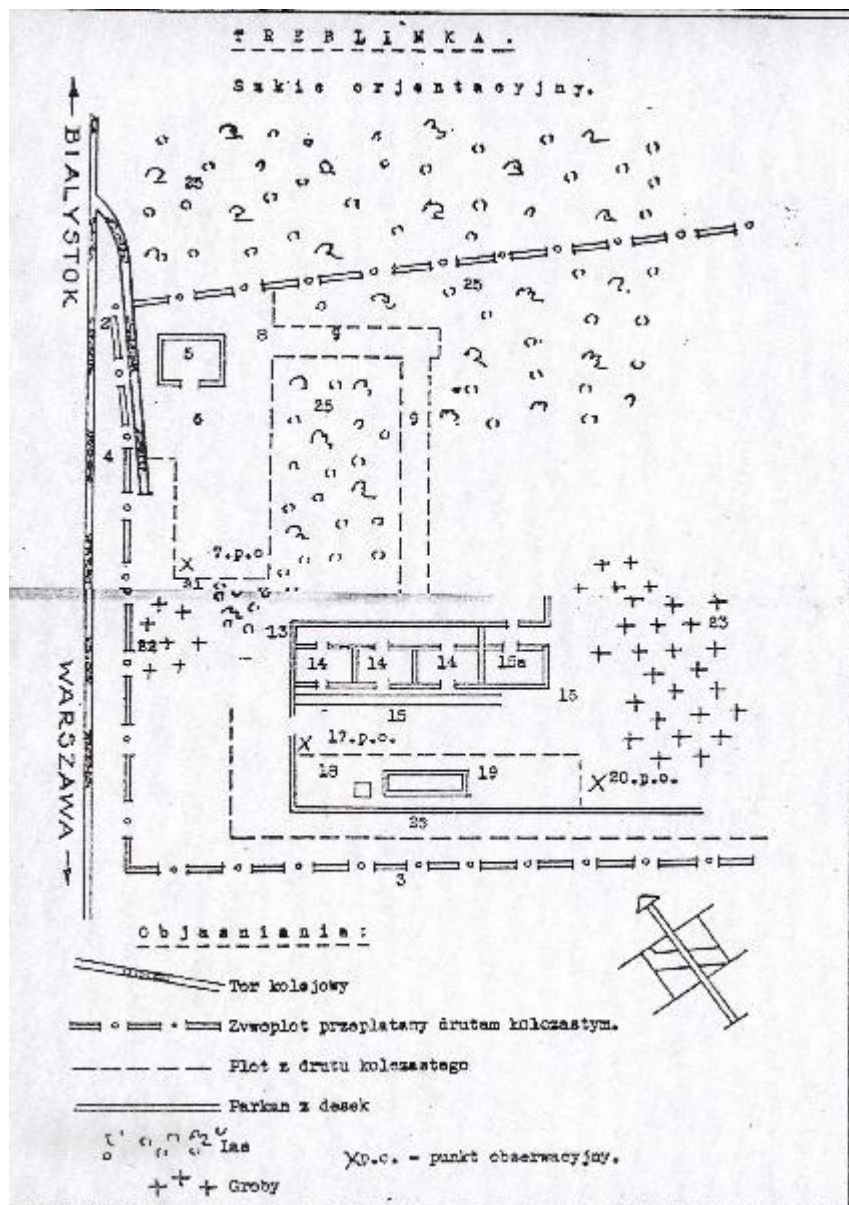
of the

General Jewish Workers' Union of Poland

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1945



The original Map of Treblinka, drawn from memory by Yankel Wiernik in his testimony. Years later, Yankel Wiernik built the model of the death camp Treblinka is exhibited in [the Ghetto Fighters' House Holocaust and Jewish Resistance Heritage Museum, Israel](#).

This amazing manuscript is THE FIRST EYE-WITNESS REPORT on Treblinka, a German death camp in Poland. It was written by an escaped prisoner of the camp, Yankel Wiernik, a Jewish worker from Warsaw, who spent a year there.

ONE YEAR IN TREBLINKA was recently published in Poland, in the form of a CLANDESTINE BOOKLET, by the Coordinating Committee, an underground body of the remnants of the Jewish population of Poland, which comprises the Jewish Labor Movement and the Jewish National Committee.

Wiernik escaped from Treblinka during the uprising there.

The Nazi murderers slaughtered millions of Jewish men, women, children and oldsters in cold blood.

Every man and woman who wishes to acquaint himself with the criminal aspect of Nazism and Fascism

should read Wiernik's book.

The following is a VERBATIM TRANSLATION (from Yiddish) of this document.

Chapter 3-14 was sent to me by Mr. Peter Laponder, builder of the Treblinka's Model (following Wiernik's model, at the new [Cape Town Holocaust Center](#).

I extend my sincere gratitude to Mr. Laponder!

Those chapters were taken from the version published in the book: Alexander Donat , " The Death Camp Treblinka", Holocaust Library, style="font-size:13.5pt"New York, 1979. The photographs in this web page were taken from the book : "Treblinka - Hell and Revolt", Yitzhak Arad, Tel Aviv, 1983.



The Gas Chambers, Model made by Peter Laponder at the [Cape town Holocaust Center](#) copied with minor changes from Wiernik's original model

[Ada Holtzman & Yael Levy: "When Evil Will be Defeated" Yom H'Shoah, April 16th 2007 \(Hebrew\) - the Complete Introduction to "A Year in Treblinka"](#)

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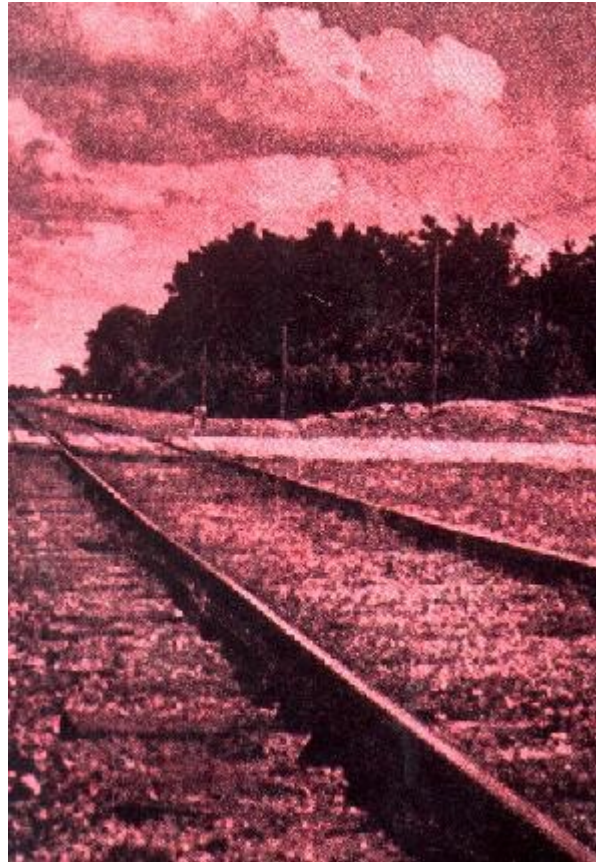
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Yankel Wiernik while building the model at [the Ghetto Fighters' House Holocaust and Jewish Resistance Heritage Museum, Israel.](#)

The Lochemei Hagetaot photograph archive number 25321.

CHAPTER 1



The Railway to Treblinka

Dear Reader:

For your sake alone I continue to hang on to my miserable life, though it has lost all attraction for me. How can I breathe freely and enjoy all that which nature has created?

Time and again I wake up in the middle of the night moaning pitifully. Ghastly nightmares break up the sleep I so badly need. I see thousands of skeletons extending their bony arms towards me, as if begging for mercy and life, but I, drenched with sweat, feel incapable of giving any help. And then I jump up, rub my eyes and actually rejoice over it all being but a dream. My life is embittered, Phantoms of death haunt me, specters of children, little children, nothing but children.

I sacrificed all those nearest and dearest to me. I myself took them to the place of execution. I built their death-chambers for them.

Today I am a homeless old man without a roof over my head, without a family, without any next of kin. I talk to myself. I answer my own questions. I am a nomad. It is with a sense of fear that I pass through human settlements. I have a feeling that all my experiences have become imprinted on my face. Whenever I look at my reflection in a stream or pool of water; awe and surprise twist my face into an ugly grimace. Do I look like a human being? No, decidedly not. Disheveled, untidy; run-down. It seems as if I was carrying a load of several centuries on my shoulders. The

load is wearisome, very wearisome, but I must carry it for the time being. I want to and must carry it. I, who saw the doom of three generations, must keep on living for the sake of the future. The world must be told of the infamy of those barbarians, so that centuries and generations to come can execrate them. And, it is I who shall cause it to happen. No imagination, no matter how daring, could possibly conceive of anything like that which I have seen and lived through. Nor could any pen, no matter how facile, describe it properly. I intend to present everything accurately so that the entire world may know what "western culture" was like. I suffered while leading millions of human beings to their doom, so that many millions of human beings might know all about it. That is what I am living for. That is my one aim in life. In peace and solitude, I am constructing my story and am presenting it with faithful accuracy. Peace and solitude are my trusted friends and nothing but the chirping of birds furnishes accompaniment to my meditations and labors. The dear birds. They still love me otherwise they would not chirp away so cheerfully and would not become used to me so easily. I love them as I do all of God's creatures. Maybe the birds will restore my peace of mind. Perhaps I shall some day know how to laugh again.

Perhaps that will come to pass once I have accomplished my work and after the fetters now binding us have fallen away.

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CHAPTER 2



[Inside the Freight Wagon to Treblinka](#)

It happened in Warsaw on August 23, 1942, at the time of the blockade. I had been visiting my neighbors and never returned to my own home again. We heard the noise of rifle fire from every direction, but had no inkling of the bitter reality. Our terror was intensified by the entry of German "squad leaders" (Schaar-fuehrer) and of Ukrainian "militiaman" (Wachmaenner) who yelled loudly and threateningly: "All outside".

In the street a "squad leader" arranged the people in ranks, without any distinction as to age or sex, performing his task with glee, a satisfied smile on his face. Agile and quick of movement, he was here, there and everywhere. He looked us over appraisingly, his eyes glancing up and down the ranks. With a sadistic smile he contemplated the great accomplishment of his mighty country which, at one stroke, could chop off the head of the loathsome hydra.

He was the vilest of them all. Human life meant nothing to him, and to inflict death and untold torture was a supreme delight. Because of his "heroic deeds," he subsequently became "deputy squad commander" (Unterschaarfeuhrer). His name was Franz. He had a dog named Barry, about which I shall speak later.

I was standing on line directly opposite my house on style="font-size:13.5pt"Wolynska Street. From there we were taken to style="font-size:13.5pt"Zamenhof Street. The Ukrainians divided our possessions among themselves under our very eyes. They quarreled, opened up all bundles and assorted their contents.

Despite the large number of people, a deep quiet hung, like a pall over the crowd, which was seized with mute despair. Or, was it resignation? And still we were ignorant of the truth. They photographed us as if we were animals. Part of the crowd seemed pleased and I myself hoped to be able to return home, thinking that we were being put through some identification procedure.

At a word of command we got under way. And then, to our dismay, we came face to face with stark reality. There were railroad cars, empty railroad cars, waiting to receive us. It was a typical bright and hot summer day. What wrongs had our wives, children and mothers committed? Why all this? The beautiful, bright and radiant sun disappeared behind clouds as if loath to look down upon our suffering and humiliation.

Next came the command to entrain. As many as 80 personas were crowded into each car with no way to escape. I was dressed in my only pair of trousers, a shirt and a pair of low shoes. I had left a packed knapsack and a pair of high boots at home, which I had prepared because of rumors that we were to be taken to the style="font-size:13.5pt"Ukraine and put to work there. Our train was shunted from one track of the yard to another. In the meantime our Ukrainian guards were having a good time. Their shouts and merry laughter were clearly audible.

The air in the cars was becoming stifflingly hot and oppressive, and stark and hopeless despair descended on us like a pall. I saw all of my companions in misery, but my mind was still unable to grasp the immensity of our misfortune. I knew suffering, brutal treatment and hunger, but I still did not realize that the hangman's merciless arm was threatening all of us, our children, our very existence.

Amidst untold torture, we finally reached Malkinia, where our train remained for the night. The Ukrainian guards came into our car and demanded our valuables. Everyone who had any surrendered them just to gain a little longer lease on life. Unfortunately, I had nothing of value because I had left my home unexpectedly and because I had been unemployed, gradually selling all the valuables I possessed to keep going.

In the morning our train got under way again. We saw a train passing by filled with disheveled, half-naked, starved people. They spoke to us, but we couldn't understand what they were saying.

As the day was hot and sultry, we suffered greatly from thirst. Looking out of the window, I saw peasants peddling bottles of water at 100 zlotys a piece. I had but 10 zlotys on me in silver, with Marshal Pilsudski's effigy on them, which I treasured as souvenirs. And so, I had to forego the water. Others, however, bought it and bread

too, at the price of 500 zlotys for one kilogram of rye bread.

Until noon I suffered greatly from thirst. Then a German, who subsequently became the "Hauptsturmfuehrer," entered our car and picked out ten men to bring water for us all. At last I was able to quench my thirst to some extent. An order came to remove the dead bodies. If there were any, but there were none.

At 4 P.M. the train got under way again and, within a few minutes, we came into the Treblinka Camp. Only on arriving there did the horrible truth dawn on us. The camp yard was littered with corpses, some still in their clothes and some naked. Their faces distorted with fright and awe, black and swollen, the eyes wide open, with protruding tongues, skulls crushed, bodies mangled. And, blood everywhere, the blood of our children, of our brothers and sisters, our fathers and mothers.

Helpless, we felt intuitively that we would not escape our destiny and would also fall victims to our executioners. But, what could be done about it? If it were only a nightmare! But no, it was stark reality. We were faced with what was termed "eviction," meaning eviction into the great beyond under untold tortures. We were ordered to detrain and leave whatever packages we had in the cars.

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CHAPTER 3

They took us into the camp yard, which was flanked by barracks on either side. There were two large posters with big signs bearing instructions to surrender all gold, silver, diamonds, cash and other valuables under penalty of death. All the while Ukrainian guards stood on the roofs of the barracks, their machine guns at the ready.

The women and children were ordered to move to the left, and the men were told to line up at the right and squat on the ground. Some distance away from us a group of men was busy piling up our bundles, which they had taken from the trains. I managed to mingle with this group and began to work along with them. It was then that I received the first blow with a whip from a German whom we called Frankenstein. The women and children were ordered to undress, but I never found out what had become of the men. I never saw them again.

Late in the afternoon another train arrived from Miedzyrzec (Mezrich), but 80 per cent of its human cargo consisted of corpses. We had to carry them out of the train, under the whiplashes of the guards. At last we completed our gruesome chore. I asked one of my fellow workers what it meant. He merely replied that whoever you talk to today will not live to see tomorrow.

We waited in fear and suspense. After a while we were ordered to form a semi-circle. The Scharfuhrer ("squad leader") Franz walked up to us, accompanied by his dog and a Ukrainian guard armed with a machine gun. We were about 500 persons. We stood

in mute suspense. About 100 of us were picked from the group, lined up five abreast, marched away some distance and ordered to kneel. I was one of those picked out. All of a sudden there was a roar of machine guns and the air was rent with the moans and screams of the victims. I never saw any of these people again. Under a rain of blows from whips and rifle butts the rest of us were driven into the barracks, which were dark and had no floors. I sat down on the sandy ground and dropped off to sleep.

The next morning we were awakened by loud shouts to get up. We jumped up at once and went out into the yard amid the yells of our Ukrainian guards. The Scharfuhrer continued to beat us with whips and rifle butts at every step as we were being lined up. We stood for quite some time without receiving any orders, but the beatings continued. Day was just breaking and I thought that nature itself would come to our aid and send down streaks of lightning to strike our tormentors. But the sun merely obeyed the law of nature; it rose in shining splendor and its rays fell on our tortured bodies and aching hearts.

I was jolted from my thoughts by the command: "Attention!" A group of Scharfuhrer and Ukrainian guards, headed by Untersturmfuhrer Franz with his dog Barry stood before us. Franz announced that he was about to give a command. At a signal from him, they began to torture us anew, blows falling thick and fast. Our faces and bodies were cruelly torn, but we all had to keep standing erect, because if one so much as stooped over but a little, he would be shot because he would be considered unfit for work.

When our tormentors had satisfied their thirst for blood, we were divided into groups. I was put with a group that was assigned to handle the corpses. The work was very hard, because we had to drag each corpse, in teams of two, for a distance of approximately 300 meters. Sometimes we tied ropes around the dead bodies to pull them to their graves.

Suddenly, I saw a live, nude woman in the distance. She was entirely nude; she was young and beautiful, but there was a demented look in her eyes. She was saying something to us, but we could not understand what she was saying and could not help her. She had wrapped herself in a bed sheet under which she was hiding a little child, and she was frantically looking for shelter. Just then one of the Germans saw her, ordered her to get into a ditch and shot her and the child. It was the first shooting I had ever seen.

I looked at the ditches around me. The dimensions of each ditch were 50 by 25 by 10 meters. I stood over one of them, intending to throw in one of the corpses, when suddenly a German came up from behind and wanted to shoot me. I turned around and asked him what I had done, whereupon he told me that I had attempted to climb into the ditch without having been told to do so. I explained that I had only wanted to throw the corpse in.

Next to nearly every one of us there was either a German with a whip or a Ukrainian armed with a gun. As we worked, we would be hit over the head. Some distance

away there was an excavator, which dug out the ditches.

We had to carry or drag the corpses on the run, since the slightest infraction of the rules meant a severe beating. The corpses had been lying around for quite some time and decomposition had already set in, making the air foul with the stench of decay. Already worms were crawling all over the bodies. It often happened that an arm or a leg fell off when we tied straps around them in order to drag the bodies away. Thus we worked from dawn to sunset, without food or water, on what some day would be our own graves. During the day it was very hot and we were tortured by thirst.

When we returned to our barracks at night, each of us looked for the men we had met the day before but, alas, we could not find them because they were no longer among the living. Those who worked at assorting the bundles fell victim far more frequently than the others. Because they were starved, they pilfered food from the packages taken from the trains, and when they were caught, they were marched to the nearest open ditch and their miserable existence was cut short by a quick bullet. The entire yard was littered with parcels, valises, clothing and knapsacks that had been discarded by the victims before they met their doom. As I worked, I noticed that some of the workers had red or yellow patches on their pants. I had no idea what this meant. They occupied a part of our barrack marked off by a partition. They were 50 men and one woman. I spent four days working with the corpses and living under these appalling conditions.

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CHAPTER 4



Siedlce: Deportation!

One Friday, I believe it was August 28, 1942, we returned from work. Everything went off in accordance with routine, "Attention! Headgear off! Headgear on!" and a speech by Franz. He appointed a headman from among us and several bosses (kapos), who were to drive us to work. In his talk, Franz told us that if we worked hard, we would get everything we needed. If not, he would find ways and means of dealing with us. A German proved his skill, Franz said, by his ability to master any situation. Thus, the Germans carried out the deportations in such a way that the Jews pushed into the trains of their own free will, without thinking of what might be in store for them. All of Franz's talk was spiced profusely with his usual invective.

On August 29 there was the usual reveille, but this time it was in Polish. We got up quickly and went out into the yard. Since we slept in our clothes, we did not have to

get dressed; accordingly, we were able to obey the order quickly and to form ranks. The commands were given in the Polish language, and by and large we were treated politely. Once again, Franz delivered a speech in which he said that from now on everybody was going to be put to work at his own occupation.

The first to be called were specialists in the building trades; I reported as a master construction worker. All those in this group were separated from the others. There were fifteen of us in our construction group, to which three Ukrainians were assigned as guards. One of them, an older soldier by the name of Kostenko, did not look too menacing. The second, Andreyev, a typical "guard," was of medium size, stout, with a round red face, a kind, quiet individual. The third one, Nikolay, was short, skinny, mean, with evil eyes, a sadistic type. There were also two other Ukrainians, armed with rifles, which were to stand guard over us.

We were marched to the woods and were ordered to dismantle the barbed wire fences and cut timber. Kostenko and Andreyev were very gentle. Nikolay, however, used the whip freely. Truth to tell, there were no real specialists among those who had been picked for the construction gang. They had simply reported as "carpenters" because they did not want to be put to work handling corpses. They were continuously whipped and humiliated

At noon we stopped working and returned to the barracks for our meal, which consisted of soup, groats and some moldy bread. Under normal conditions, a meal like ours would have been considered unfit for human consumption, but, starved and tired as we were, we ate it all. At 1 p.m. our guards came with the Ukrainians to take us back to work, at which we remained until evening, when we returned to the barracks. Then came the usual routine, commands, and so forth.

On that particular day there were many Germans around, and we were about 700. Franz was there, too, with his dog. All of a sudden he asked, with a smile on his face, whether any of us knew German. Approximately 50 men stepped forward. He ordered them all out and form a separate group, smiling all the while to allay our suspicions. The men who admitted knowing German were taken away and never came back. Their names did not appear on the list of survivors and no pen will ever be able to describe the tortures under which they died. Again, a few days went by. We worked at the same assignment and lived under the same conditions. All this time I was working with one of my colleagues and fate was strangely kind to us. Perhaps it was because we were both specialists in our trade, or because we had been destined to witness the sufferings of our brethren, to look at their tortured corpses, and to live to tell the tale. Our bosses gave me and my colleague boxes for lime. Andreyev supervised us. Our guard considered our work satisfactory. He showed us considerable kindness and even gave each one of us a piece of bread, which was quite a treat since we were practically starving to death. Some people who had been spared from another form of death, which I shall discuss later on, would become yellow and swollen from hunger and finally drop dead. Our group of workers grew;

additional workers arrived. The foundations were dug for some sort of building. No one knew what kind of a building this would be. There was in the courtyard one wooden building surrounded by a tall fence. The function of this building was a secret.

A few days later a German architect arrived with an assistant and the construction work got under way. There was a shortage of bricklayers, although many pretended to be skilled laborers in order to avoid being ordered to handle corpses. Most of these men, however, had been killed off. Once, while doing some bricklaying, I noticed a man I had known in [Warsaw](#). His name was **Razanowicz**. He had a black eye from which I inferred that he would be shot by evening. An engineer from [Warsaw](#) by the name of **Ebert** and **his son** were also working with us, but within a short time they, too, were put to death. Fate spared me nothing.

A few days later I learned the purpose of the building behind the fence, and the discovery left me shuddering with terror.

The next job for my colleague and myself was to cut and process lumber. It was hard for the two of us. I had not done such work in 25 years, and my colleague was a cabinetmaker by trade and not very adept with an axe, but, with my help, he managed to hold on to the job. I am a carpenter by trade, but for many years I had functioned only as a member of the examining board of the Warsaw Chamber of Artisans. Meanwhile, eight more indescribable days of hard existence went by. No new transports were arriving. Finally, on the eighth day, a new transport arrived from [Warsaw](#).

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CHAPTER 5

Camp [Treblinka](#) was divided into two sections. In Camp No. 1 there was a railroad siding and a platform for unloading the human cargo, and also a wide open space, where the baggage of the new arrivals was piled up. Jews from foreign countries brought considerable luggage with them. Camp No. 1 also contained what was called the lazaret (infirmary), a long building measuring 30 x 2 meters. Two men were working there. They wore white aprons and had red crosses on their sleeves; they posed as doctors. They selected from the transports the elderly and the ill, and made them sit on a long bench facing an open ditch. Behind the bench, Germans and Ukrainians were lined up and they shot the victims in the neck. The corpses toppled right into the ditch. After a number of corpses had accumulated, they were piled up and set on fire.

The barracks housing the Germans and Ukrainians were located some distance away, and so were the camp offices, the barracks of the Jewish workers, workshops, stables, pigsties, a food storage house and an arsenal. The camp cars were parked in

the yard. To the casual observer the camp presented a rather innocuous appearance and made the impression of a genuine labor camp.

Camp No. 2 was entirely different. It contained a barrack for the workers, 30 x 10 meters, a laundry, a small laboratory, quarters for 17 women, a guard station and a well. In addition there were 13 chambers in which inmates were gassed. All of these buildings were surrounded by a barbed wire fence. Beyond this enclosure, there was a ditch of 3 x 3 meters and, along the outer rim of the ditch, another barbed wire fence. Both of these enclosures were about 3 meters high, and there were steel wire entanglements between them. Ukrainians stood on guard along the wire enclosure. The entire camp (Camps 1 and 2) was surrounded by a barbed wire fence 4 meters high, camouflaged by saplings. Four watchtowers stood in the camp yard, each of them four stories high; there were also six one-storied observation towers.

Fifty meters beyond the last outer enclosure there were tank traps.

When I arrived at the camp, three gas chambers were already in operation; another ten were added while I was there. A gas chamber measured 5 x 5 meters and was about 1.90 meters high. The outlet on the roof had a hermetic cap. The chamber was equipped with a gas pipe inlet and a baked tile floor slanting towards the platform. The brick building which housed the gas chambers was separated from Camp No. 1 by a wooden wall. This wooden wall and the brick wall of the building together formed a corridor which was 80 centimeters taller than the building. The chambers were connected with the corridor by a hermetically fitted iron door leading into each of the chambers. On the side of Camp No. 2 the chambers were connected by a platform four meters wide, which ran alongside all three chambers. The platform was about 80 centimeters above ground level. There was also a hermetically fitted wooden door on this side.

Each chamber had a door facing Camp No. 2 (1.80 by 2.50 meters), which could be opened only from the outside by lifting it with iron supports and was closed by iron hooks set into the sash frames, and by wooden bolts. The victims were led into the chambers through the doors leading from the corridor, while the remains of the gassed victims were dragged out through the doors facing Camp No. 2. The power plant operated alongside these chambers, supplying Camps 1 and 2 with electric current. A motor taken from a dismantled Soviet tank stood in the power plant. This motor was used to pump the gas, which was let into the chambers by connecting the motor with the inflow pipes. The speed with which death overcame the helpless victims depended on the quantity of combustion gas admitted into the chamber at one time.

The machinery of the gas chambers was operated by two Ukrainians. One of them, Ivan, was tall, and though his eyes seemed kind and gentle, he was a sadist. He enjoyed torturing his victims. He would often pounce upon us while we were working; he would nail our ears to the walls or make us lie down on the floor and whip us brutally. While he did this, his face showed sadistic satisfaction and he

laughed and joked. He finished off the victims according to his mood at the moment. The other Ukrainian was called Nicholas. He had a pale face and the same mentality as Ivan.

The day I first saw men, women and children being led into the house of death I almost went insane. I tore at my hair and shed bitter tears of despair. I suffered most when I looked at the children, accompanied by their mothers or walking alone, entirely ignorant of the fact that within a few minutes their lives would be snuffed out amidst horrible tortures. Their eyes glittered with fear and still more, perhaps, with amazement. It seemed as if the question, "What is this? What's it all about?" was frozen on their lips. But seeing the stony expressions on the faces of their elders, they matched their behavior to the occasion. They either stood motionless or pressed tightly against each other or against their parents, and tensely awaited their horrible end.

Suddenly, the entrance door flew open and out came Ivan, holding a heavy gas pipe, and Nicholas, brandishing a saber. At a given signal, they would begin admitting the victims, beating them savagely as they moved into the chamber. The screams of the women, the weeping of the children, cries of despair and misery, the pleas for mercy, for God's vengeance ring in my ears to this day, making it impossible for me to forget the misery I saw.

Between 450 and 500 persons were crowded into a chamber measuring 25 square meters. Parents carried their children in their arms in the vain hope that this would save their children from death. On the way to their doom, they were pushed and beaten with rifle butts and with Ivan's gas pipe. Dogs were set upon them, barking, biting and tearing at them. To escape the blows and the dogs, the crowd rushed to its death, pushing into the chamber, the stronger ones shoving the weaker ones ahead of them. The bedlam lasted only a short while, for soon the doors were slammed shut. The chamber was filled, the motor turned on and connected with the inflow pipes and, within 25 minutes at the most, all lay stretched out dead or, to be more accurate, were standing up dead. Since there was not an inch of free space, they just leaned against each other.

They no longer shouted, because the thread of their lives had been cut off. They had no more needs or desires. Even in death, mothers held their children tightly in their arms. There were no more friends or foes. There was no more jealousy. All were equal. There was no longer any beauty or ugliness, for they all were yellow from the gas. There were no longer any rich or poor, for they all were equal before God's throne. And why all this? I keep asking myself that question. My life is hard, very hard. But I must live on to tell the world about all this barbarism.

As soon as the gassing was over, Ivan and Nicholas inspected the results, moved over to the other side, opened the door leading to the platform, and proceeded to heave out the corpses. It was our task to carry the corpses to the ditches. We were dead tired from working all day at the construction site, but we had no recourse and had no

choice but to obey. We could have refused, but that would have meant a whipping or death in the same manner or even worse; so we obeyed without grumbling.

We worked under the supervision of a Hauptmann [captain], a medium-sized, bespectacled man whose name I do not know. He whipped us and shouted at us. He beat me, too, without a stop. When I gave him a questioning look, he stopped beating me for a moment and said, "If you weren't the carpenter around here, you would be killed." I looked around and saw that almost all the other workers were sharing my fate. A pack of dogs, along with Germans and Ukrainians, had been let loose on us. Almost one-fourth of the workers was killed. The rest of us tossed their bodies into the ditches without further ado. Fortunately for me, when the Hauptmann left, the Unterscharfuhrer relieved me from this work.

Between ten and twelve thousand people were gassed each day. We built a narrow-gauge track and drove the corpses to the ditches on the rolling platform.

One evening, after a hard day's work, we were marched to Camp No. 2 instead of Camp No. 1. The picture here was entirely different; I shall never forget it. My blood froze in my veins. The yard was littered with thousands of corpses, the bodies of the most recent victims. Germans and Ukrainians were barking orders and brutally beating the workers with rifle butts and canes. The faces of the workers were bloody, their eyes blackened and their clothes had been shredded by dogs. Their overseers stood near them.

A one-storied watchtower stood at the entrance of Camp No. 2. It was ascended by means of ladders, and these ladders were used to torture some of the victims. Legs were placed between the rungs and the overseer held the victim's head down in such a way that the poor devil couldn't move while he was beaten savagely, the minimum punishment being 25 lashes. I saw that scene for the first time in the evening. The moon and the reflector lights shed an eerie light upon that appalling massacre of the living, as well as upon the corpses that were strewn all over the place. The moans of the tortured mingling with the swishing of the whips made an infernal noise.

When I arrived at Camp No. 2 there was only one barrack there. The bunks had not yet been finished, and there was a canteen in the yard. I saw there a number of people I had known in Warsaw, but they had changed so much that it was difficult to recognize them. They had been beaten, starved and mistreated. I did not see them for very long, because new faces and new friends kept arriving on the scene. It was a continuous coming and going, and death without end. I learned to look at every living person as a prospective corpse. I appraised him with my eyes and figured out his weight, who was going to carry him to his grave and how badly his bearer would be beaten while dragging his body to the ditch. It was terrible, but true nonetheless. Would you believe that a human being, living under such conditions, could actually smile and make jokes at times? One can get used to anything.



CHAPTER 6



Jews murdered in the railway station of Siedlce, August 1942

The German system is one of the most efficient in the world. It has authorities upon authorities. Departments and sub-departments. And, most important, there is always the right man in the right place. Whenever ruthless determination and a complete destruction of "vicious and subversive elements" are needed, good patriots can always be found who will carry out any command. Men can always be found who are ready to destroy and kill their fellow men. I never saw them show any compassion or regret. They never showed any pity for the innocent victims. They were robots who performed their tasks as soon as some higher-up pressed a button.

Such human hyenas always find a wide field for activity in times of war and revolution. To them the road of evil is easy and more pleasant than any other. But a firm and just order, aided by education, good examples and wise discipline could check these evil tendencies.

Vicious types lurk in disreputable places where they carry on their subversive activities. Today, all ethics have become superfluous. The more vicious and depraved one is, the higher the position he will occupy. Advancement depends on how much one has destroyed, or how many one has killed. People whose hands drip with the blood of innocent victims receive adulation and there is no need for them to wash

their hands. On the contrary, these are held aloft so that the world may pay them honor. The dirtier one's conscience and hands, the higher the glory their owner will achieve.

Another amazing character trait of the Germans is their ability to discover, among the populace of other nations, hundreds of depraved types like themselves, and to use them for their own ends. In camps for Jews, there is a need for Jewish executioners, spies and stool pigeons. The Germans managed to find them, to find such gangrenous creatures as Moyshke from near Sochaczew, Itzik Kobyla from style="font-size:13.5pt"Warsaw, Chaskel the thief, and Kuba, a thief and a pimp, both of them born and bred in style="font-size:13.5pt"Warsaw.

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CHAPTER 7

The new construction job between Camp No. 1 and Camp No. 2, on which I had been working, was completed in a very short time. It turned out that we were building ten additional gas chambers, more spacious than the old ones, 7 by 7 meters or about 50 square meters. As many as 1,000 to 1,200 persons could be crowded into one gas chamber. The building was laid out according to the corridor system, with five chambers on each side of the corridor. Each chamber had two doors, one door leading into the corridor through which the victims were admitted; the other door, facing the camp, was used for the removal of the corpses. The construction of both doors was the same as that of the doors in the old chambers. The building, when viewed from Camp No. 1, showed five wide concrete steps with bowls of flowers on either side. Next came a long corridor. There was a Star of David on top of the roof facing the camp, so that the building looked like an old-fashioned synagogue. When the construction was finished, the Hauptsturmfuhrer said to his subordinates, "The Jew-town has been completed at last."

The work on these gas chambers lasted five weeks, which to us seemed like centuries. We had to work from dawn to dusk under the ceaseless threat of beatings from whips and rifle butts. One of the guards, Woronkov, tortured us savagely, killing some of the workers each day. Although our physical suffering surpassed the imagination of normal human beings, our spiritual agonies were far worse. New transports of victims arrived each day. They were immediately ordered to disrobe and were led to the three old gas chambers, passing us on the way. Many of us saw our children, wives and other loved ones among the victims. And when, on the impulse of grief, someone rushed to his loved ones, he would be killed on the spot. It was under these conditions that we constructed death chambers for our brethren and ourselves.

This went on for five weeks. After the work on the gas chambers had been completed, I was transferred back to Camp No. 1, where I had to set up a barbershop. Before killing the women, the Germans cut off their hair and gathered it all up

carefully. I never learned for what purpose the hair was used.

My quarters were still in Camp No. 2 but, because of a shortage of craftsmen, I was taken each day to Camp No. 1, with Unterscharfuhrer Hermann as my escort. He was about 50 years old, tall and kind. He understood us and was sorry for us. The first time he came to Camp No. 2 and saw the piles of gassed corpses, he turned pale and looked at them with horror and pity. He left with me at once in order to get away from the gruesome scene. He treated us workers very well. Often, he surreptitiously brought us some food from the German kitchen. There was so much kindness in his eyes that one might have been tempted to pour one's heart out to him, but he never talked to the inmates. He was afraid of his colleagues. But his every move and action showed his forthright character.

While I was working in Camp No. 1 many transports arrived. Each time a new transport came, the women and children were herded into the barracks at once, while the men were kept in the yard. The men were ordered to undress, while the women, naively anticipating a chance to take a shower, unpacked towels and soap. The brutal guards, however, shouted orders for quiet, and kicked and dealt out blows. The children cried, while the grownups moaned and screamed. This made things even worse; the whipping only became crueler.

The women and girls were then taken to the "barber shop" to have their hair clipped. By now they felt sure that they would be taken to have a shower. Then they were escorted, through another exit, to Camp No. 2 where, in freezing weather, they had to stand in the nude, waiting their turn to enter the gas chamber, which had not yet been cleared of the last batch of victims.

All through that winter, small children, stark naked and barefooted, had to stand out in the open for hours on end, awaiting their turn in the increasingly busy gas chambers. The soles of their feet froze and stuck to the icy ground. They stood and cried; some of them froze to death. In the meantime, Germans and Ukrainians walked up and down the ranks, beating and kicking the victims.

One of the Germans, a man named Sepp, was a vile and savage beast, who took special delight in torturing children. When he pushed women around and they begged him to stop because they had children with them, he would frequently snatch a child from the woman's arms and either tear the child in half or grab it by the legs, smash its head against a wall and throw the body away. Such incidents were by no means isolated. Tragic scenes of this kind occurred all the time.

The men endured tortures far worse than the women. They had to undress in the yard, make a neat bundle of their clothing, carry the bundle to a designated spot and deposit it on the pile. They then had to go into the barrack where the women had undressed, and carry the latter's clothes out and arrange them properly. Afterwards, they were lined up and the healthiest, strongest and best-built among them were beaten until their blood flowed freely.

Next, all the men, and women, old people and children had to fall into line and proceed from Camp No. 1 to the gas chambers in Camp No. 2. Along the path leading to the chambers there stood a shack in which some official sat and ordered the people to turn in all their valuables. The unfortunate victims, in the delusion that they would remain alive, tried to hide whatever they could. But the German fiends managed to find everything, if not on the living, then later on the dead. Everyone approaching the shack had to lift his arms high and so the entire macabre procession passed in silence, with arms raised high, into the gas chambers.

A Jew had been selected by the Germans to function as a supposed "bath attendant." He stood at the entrance of the building housing the chambers and urged everyone to hurry inside before the water got cold. What irony! Amidst shouts and blows, the people were chased into the chambers.

As I have already indicated, there was not much space in the gas chambers. People were smothered simply by overcrowding. The motor which generated the gas in the new chambers was defective, and so the helpless victims had to suffer for hours on end before they died. Satan himself could not have devised a more fiendish torture. When the chambers were opened again, many of the victims were only half dead and had to be finished off with rifle butts, bullets or powerful kicks.

Often people were kept in the gas chambers overnight with the motor not turned on at all. Overcrowding and lack of air killed many of them in a very painful way. However, many survived the ordeal of such nights; particularly the children showed a remarkable degree of resistance. They were still alive when they were dragged out of the chambers in the morning, but revolvers used by the Germans made short work of them....

The German fiends were particularly pleased when transports of victims from foreign countries arrived. Such deportations probably caused great indignation abroad. Lest suspicion arise about what was in store for the deportees, these victims from abroad were transported in passenger trains and permitted to take along whatever they needed. These people were well dressed and brought considerable amounts of food and wearing apparel with them. During the journey they had service and even a dining car in the trains. But on their arrival in Treblinka they were faced with stark reality. They were dragged from the trains and subjected to the same procedure as that described above. The next day they had vanished from the scene; all that remained of them was their clothing, their food supplies, and the macabre task of burying them.

The number of transports grew daily, and there were periods when as many as 30,000 people were gassed in one day, with all 13 gas chambers in operation. All we heard was shouts, cries and moans. Those who were left alive to do the work around the camps could neither eat nor control their tears on days when these transports arrived. The less resistant among us, especially the more intelligent, suffered nervous breakdowns and hanged themselves when they returned to the barracks at night after

having handled the corpses all day, their ears still ringing with the cries and moans of the victims. Such suicides occurred at the rate of 15 to 20 a day.

These people were unable to endure the abuse and tortures inflicted upon them by the overseers and the Germans.

One day a transport arrived from Warsaw, from which some men were selected as workers for Camp No. 2. Among them I saw a few people whom I had known from before the war. They were not fit for this kind of work.

That same day one of our own man by the name of **Kuszer** could not stand the torture and attacked his tormentor, a German Oberscharfuhrer named Matthes from Camp No. 2, who was a fiend and a killer, and wounded him. The Hauptsturmfuhrer, on arriving at the scene, dismissed all the craftsmen, and other inmates of the camp were massacred on the spot with blunt tools.

I happened to be working in the woods in between the two camps, dressing lumber. The processions of nude children, men and old people passed that spot in a silent caravan of death. The only sounds we could hear were the shouts of the killers; the victims walked in silence. Now and then, a child would whimper but then some killer's fingers would grasp its thin neck in a vise-like grip, cutting off the last plaintive sobs. The victims walked to their doom with raised arms, stark naked and helpless.

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CHAPTER 8



Between the two camps there were buildings in which the Ukrainian guards had their quarters. The Ukrainians were constantly drunk, and sold whatever they managed to steal in the camps in order to get more money for brandy. The Germans watched them and frequently took the loot away from them.

When they had eaten and drunk their fill, the Ukrainians looked around for other amusements. They frequently selected the best looking Jewish girls from the transports of nude women passing their quarters, dragged them into their barracks,

raped them and then delivered them to the gas chambers. After being outraged by their executioners, the girls died in the gas chambers with all the rest. It was a martyr's death.

On one occasion a girl fell out of line. Nude as she was, she leaped over a barbed wire fence three meters high, and tried to escape in our direction. The Ukrainians noticed this and started to pursue her. One of them almost reached her but he was too close to her to shoot, and she wrenched the rifle from his hands. It wasn't easy to open fire since there were guards all around and there was the danger that one of the guards might be hit. But as the girl held the gun, it went off and killed one of the Ukrainians. The Ukrainians were furious. In her fury, the girl struggled with his comrades. She managed to fire another shot, which hit another Ukrainian, whose arm subsequently had to be amputated. At last they seized her. She paid dearly for her courage. She was beaten, bruised, spat upon, kicked and finally killed. She was our nameless heroine.

On another occasion a transport arrived from style="font-size:13.5pt"Germany. The new arrivals were put through the usual routine. When the people were ordered to undress, one of the women stepped forward with her two children, both of them boys. She presented identity papers showing that she was of pure German stock and had boarded this train by mistake. All her documents were found to be in order and her two sons had not been circumcised. She was a good-looking woman, but there was terror in her eyes. She clung to her children and tried to soothe them, saying that their troubles would soon be cleared up and they would return home to their father. She petted and kissed them, but she was crying because she was haunted by a dreadful foreboding.

The Germans ordered her to step forward. Thinking that this meant freedom for herself and her children, she relaxed. But alas, it had been decided that she was to perish together with the Jews, because she had seen too much and would be liable to tell all about what she had seen, which was supposed to be shrouded in secrecy. Whoever crossed the threshold of Treblinka was doomed to die. Therefore this German woman, together with her children, went to her death along with all the others. Her children cried just as the Jewish children did, and their eyes mirrored the same despair, for in death there is no racial distinction; all are equal. Her husband probably will be killed at the front, and she was killed in the camp.

While I was in Camp No. 1, I managed to find out the identity of certain Jews I had seen wearing yellow patches. They turned out to be professional people and craftsmen who had been left over from earlier transports. They were the ones who had built Treblinka. They had hoped to be liberated after the war, but fate decreed otherwise. It had been decided that whoever had crossed the threshold of this inferno had to die. It would not do to leave witnesses who would be able to identify the spot where these fiendish tortures had been perpetrated.

Among these men there were jewelers who appraised the articles of precious metal

which the deportees had brought with them. There was quite a lot of this. The sorting and classifying was done in a separate barrack to which no special guard had been assigned, for there was no reason to expect that these men would be able to steal any of the loot. Where would they dispose of their pilfering? Eventually, whatever they might manage to steal would only get back to the Germans again.

The Ukrainians, by contrast, went wild at the sight of gold. They had no idea of its value, but it was enough to give them something that glittered and to tell them that it was gold. When deportations took place, the Ukrainians broke into the homes of the Jews and demanded gold. They did this without the knowledge of the Germans and, of course, they applied methods of terror. They took whatever was given them. Their faces were greedy and savage and inspired fear and loathing in those who had to deal with them. They hid the loot most carefully in order to have something to show their families as spoils of war. Some of the Ukrainians hailed from nearby villages; others had girl friends in the vicinity to whom they wanted to give gifts. A part of their plunder was always traded in for liquor. They were terrible drunkards.

When the Ukrainians noticed that the Jews were handling the gold under practically no control, they began coercing them to steal. The Jews were compelled to deliver diamonds and gold to the Ukrainian guards or else be killed. Day after day, a gang of Ukrainians took valuables from the room where the valuables of the deportees were kept. One of the Germans noticed this and of course it was the Jews who had to pay the penalty. They were searched, and the search disclosed gold and precious stones on their persons. They could not claim that they had stolen these articles under duress; the Germans would not have believed their story. They were tortured and now they were worse off than the camp laborers. Only half of them- there had been 150 of them were left alive. Those who survived suffered starvation, misery and incredible tortures.

The entire yard was littered with a variety of articles, for all these people left behind millions of items of wearing apparel and so forth. Since they had all assumed that they were merely going to be resettled at an unknown place and not sent to their death, they had taken their best and most essential possessions with them. The camp yard in Treblinka was filled with everything one's heart might desire. There was everything in plenty. As I passed, I saw a profusion of fountain pens and real tea and coffee. The ground was literally strewn with candy. Transports of people from abroad had come well supplied with fats. All the deportees had been fully confident that they were going to survive.

Jews were put to work at sorting out the plunder, arranging things systematically because every item had to serve a definite purpose. Everything the Jews left behind had its value and its place. Only the Jews themselves were regarded as worthless. Jews had to steal what they could and turn the stolen articles over to the Ukrainians. If they failed to do so, the Ukrainians killed them. On the other hand, if the Jews were caught red-handed, they were killed on the spot. Despite the danger, the traffic continued, a new accomplice taking over where the previous one had left off. In that

way a chosen few from among millions survived-between the devil and the deep blue sea.

One day a transport of 80 Gypsies from near Warsaw arrived at the camp. These men, women and children were destitute. All they owned was some soiled underwear and tattered clothes. When they came into the yard, they were very happy. They thought they had entered an enchanted castle. But the hangmen were just as happy, because they wiped out all the Gypsies just as they did the Jews. Within a few hours all was quiet and nothing was left but corpses.

I was still working at Camp No. 1 and was free to move about as I pleased. Though I saw many terrible things there, the sight of those gassed at Camp No. 2 was far more horrible.

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CHAPTER 9

It was practically decided that I should remain permanently in Camp No. 1. Hermann, the architect, and a master cabinetmaker from Bohemia, did what they could to this end, because they had no other craftsmen like myself and they therefore needed me. However, in mid-December, 1942 an order came for all inmates of Camp No. 2 to be returned. Since this order could not be appealed, we proceeded to Camp No. 2 without even waiting long enough to eat our noontime meal.

The first sight that met my eyes upon my return was that of the corpses of newly gassed victims on whom "dentists" had worked, extracting their false teeth with pliers. Just one look at this ghastly procedure was enough to make me even more disgusted with life than I had been before. The "dentists" sorted the teeth they extracted according to their value. Of course, whatever teeth the Ukrainians managed to lay their hands on remained in their possession.

I worked for a while in Camp No. 2, doing repair work in the kitchen. The commandant of the kitchen had introduced a' new system. During that period fewer transports arrived and no new workers became available. At that time, workers in Camp No. 1 were given numbers and triangular leather identification badges. There was a different color patch for each group. The badges were worn on the left side of the chest. Rumors circulated that we workers in Camp No. 2 would also receive numbers but at the time nothing came of it. At any rate, some system had been introduced so that no stranger from an incoming transport could smuggle himself in, as I had done, to prolong his life.

We began to suffer greatly from the cold and they started issuing blankets to us. While I had been away from Camp No. 2, a carpentry shop had been installed there. A baker from Warsaw served as its foreman. His job was to make up stretchers for carrying the corpses from the gas chambers to the mass

graves. The stretchers were constructed very primitively; just two poles with pieces of board nailed at intervals.

The Hauptsturmführer and the two commandants ordered me to build a laundry, a laboratory and accommodations for 15 women. All of these structures were to be built from old materials. Jewish-owned buildings in the vicinity were being dismantled at the time. I could tell them by their house numbers. I selected my crew and began to work. I brought in some of the new lumber from the woods myself. Time flew fast on the job.

But there were new events to upset our emotional balance. This was the period when the Germans talked a lot about Katyn¹⁾, which they used for anti-Soviet propaganda purposes. One day, by accident, we got hold of a newspaper from which we learned about that mass killing. It was probably these reports that made Himmler decide to visit Treblinka personally and to give orders that henceforth all the corpses of inmates should be cremated. There were plenty of corpses to cremate—there was no one who could have been blamed for the Treblinka killings except the Germans who, for the time being, were the masters of the land which they had wrested from us [Poles] by brute force. They did not want any evidence of the mass murders left.

At any rate, the cremations were promptly begun. The corpses of men, women, children and old people were exhumed from the mass graves. Whenever such a grave was opened, a terrible stench rose from them, because the bodies were already in an advanced stage of decomposition. This work brought continued physical and moral suffering to those who were forced to do it. We, the living, felt renewed grief, even more intensively than before. We were ill fed, because transports had ceased to arrive, so that the hapless purveyors of food had become a thing of the past. We did not like to draw on our reserves. All we ate was moldy bread, which we washed down with water. The malnutrition caused an epidemic of typhus. Those who became ill needed neither medication nor a bed. A bullet in the neck and all was over.

Work was begun to cremate the dead. It turned out that bodies of women burned more easily than those of men. Accordingly, the bodies of women were used for kindling the fires. Since cremation was hard work, rivalry set in between the labor details as to which of them would be able to cremate the largest number of bodies. Bulletin boards were rigged up and daily scores were recorded. Nevertheless, the results were very poor. The corpses were soaked in gasoline. This entailed considerable expense and the results were inadequate; the male corpses simply would not burn. Whenever an airplane was sighted overhead, all work was stopped, the corpses were covered with foliage as camouflage against aerial observation.

It was a terrifying sight, the most gruesome ever beheld by human eyes. When corpses of pregnant women were cremated, their bellies would burst open. The fetus would be exposed and could be seen burning inside the mother's womb.

All this made no impression whatsoever on the German murderers, who stood around watching as if they were checking a machine which was not working properly and

whose production was inadequate.

Then, one day, an Oberscharfuhrer wearing an SS badge arrived at the camp and introduced a veritable inferno. He was about 45 years old, of medium height, with a perpetual smile on his face. His favorite word was "tadellos [perfect]" and that is how he got the by-name Tadellos. His face looked kind and did not show the depraved soul behind it. He got pure pleasure watching the corpses burn; the sight of the flames licking at the bodies was precious to him, and he would literally caress the scene with his eyes.

This is the way in which he got the inferno started. He put a machine for exhuming the corpses into operation, an excavator which could dig up 3,000 corpses at one time. A fire grate made of railroad tracks was placed on concrete foundations 100 to 150 meters in length. The workers piled the corpses on the grate and set them on fire.

I am no longer a young man and have seen a great deal in my lifetime, but not even Lucifer could possibly have created a hell worse than this. Can you picture a grate of this length piled high with 3,000 corpses of people who had been alive only a short time before? As you look at their faces it seems as if at any moment these bodies might awaken from their deep sleep. But at a given signal a giant torch is lit and it burns with a huge flame. If you stood close enough, you could well imagine hearing moans from the lips of the sleeping bodies, children sitting up and crying for their mothers. You are overwhelmed by horror and pain, but you stand there just the same without saying anything. The gangsters are standing near the ashes, shaking with satanic laughter. Their faces radiate a truly satanic satisfaction. They toasted the scene with brandy and with the choicest liqueurs, ate, caroused and had a great time warming themselves by the fire.

Thus the Jews were of some use to them even after they had died. Though the winter weather was bitter cold, the pyres gave off heat like an oven. This heat came from the burning bodies of Jews. The hangmen stood warming themselves by the fire, drinking, eating and singing. Gradually, the fire began to die down, leaving only ashes which went to fertilize the silent soil. Human blood and human ashes - what food for the soil! There will be a rich harvest. If only the soil could talk! It knows a lot but it keeps quiet.

Day in and day out the workers handled the corpses and collapsed from physical exhaustion and mental anguish. And while they suffered, the hearts of the fiends were filled with pride and pleasure in the hell they had created. It gave light and warmth, and at the same time it obliterated every trace of the victims, while our own hearts bled. The Oberscharfuhrer who had created this inferno sat by the fire, laughing, caressing it with his eyes and saying, "tadellos [perfect]!" To him, these flames represented the fulfillment of his perverted dreams and wishes.

The cremation of the corpses proved an unqualified success. Because they were in a hurry, the Germans built additional fire grates and augmented the crews serving them, so that from 10,000 to 12,000 corpses were cremated at one time. The result

was one huge inferno, which from the distance looked like a volcano breaking through the earth's crust to belch forth fire and lava. The pyres sizzled and crackled. The smoke and heat made it impossible to remain close by. It lasted a long time because there were more than half a million dead to dispose of.

The new transports were handled in a simplified manner; the cremation followed directly after the gassing. Transports were now arriving from [Bulgaria](#), comprising well-to-do people who brought with them large supplies of food: white bread, smoked mutton, cheese, etc. They were killed off just like all the others, but we benefited from the supplies they had brought. As a result, our diet improved considerably. The Bulgarian Jews were strong and husky specimens. Looking at them, it was hard to believe that in 20 minutes they would all be dead in the gas chambers.

These handsome Jews were not permitted an easy death. Only small quantities of gas were let into the chambers, so that their agony lasted through the night. They also had to endure severe tortures before entering the gas chambers. Envy of their well-fed appearance prompted the hangmen to torment them all the more.

After the Bulgarian transports, more transports began to come from [Bialystok](#) and [Grodno](#). In the meantime I had finished the construction of the laboratory, the laundry and the rooms for the women.

One day a transport arrived in Treblinka when we were already locked in our barracks for the night. Accordingly, the Germans and the Ukrainians processed the victims without help. Suddenly we heard yells and heavy rifle fire. We stayed put and waited impatiently for morning to come so that we could learn what had happened. The next morning we saw that the yard was littered with corpses. While we were working, the Ukrainian guards told us that the people who had come on that transport had refused to be led into the gas chambers and had put up a fierce fight. They smashed ever thing they could lay their hands on and broke open the chests with gold that stood in the corridor leading to the chambers. They grabbed sticks and every weapon they could get hold of to defend themselves. The bullets fell thick and fast, and by morning the yard was strewn with dead bodies and with the improvised weapons the Jews had used in their last fight for life. Those killed while fighting, as well as those who died from gas, were all horribly mutilated. Some of them had had limbs torn from their bodies. By dawn it was all over. The rebels were cremated. To us it was just one more warning that we could not hope to escape our fate.

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CHAPTER 10

About that time, the camp discipline became stricter. A guard station was built, the number of guards increased and a telephone was installed in Camp No. 2. We were short of hands for work, and so men were sent from Camp No. 1. But their work was

not considered satisfactory, and so they were finished off a few days later. Since they were such poor labor material, they were not worth the food required to keep them alive.

The Scharfuhrer, a German master carpenter from Bohemia, whom I have already mentioned, came to me for advice about the construction of a four-story observation tower of the type he had seen in Maidanek. He was very happy when I gave him all the required information and he rewarded me with some bread and sausage. I figured out the specifications for the lumber and screws and proceeded with the construction work. Whenever I started on a new job, I knew that my life would be spared for a few weeks longer because as long as they needed me, they would not kill me.

When I had completed the first tower, the Hauptsturmfuhrer came, praised me extravagantly and ordered me to build three additional towers of the same type around Camp No. 2.

The guard at the camp was increased and it became impossible to get from one camp to the other. Seven men joined in a plot to dig a tunnel through which to escape. Four of them were caught and were tortured for an entire day, which in itself was worse than death. In the evening, when all hands had returned from work, all the inmates were ordered to assemble and witness the hanging of the four men. One of them, **Mechel**, a Jew from Warsaw, shouted before the noose was tightened around his neck: "*Down with Hitler! Long live the Jews!*"

Among us workers there were some who were very religious, who recited the daily prayers each day. A German by the name of Karol, who was deputy commandant and a cynic, observed the habit of this little group and made jokes about it. He even gave them a prayer shawl and phylacteries for their devotions, and when one of the men died, he gave permission to give him a traditional Jewish funeral, complete with a tombstone. I advised the men not to do this, because our tormentors would exhume the body and cremate it after they had had their fun watching the ceremony. They refused to heed my advice but they soon found out that I had been right.

In April, 1943, transports began to come in from Warsaw. We were told that 600 men in Warsaw were working in Camp No. 1; this report turned out to be based on fact. At the time a typhus epidemic was raging in Camp No. 1. Those who got sick were killed. Three women and one man from the Warsaw transport came to us. The man was the husband of one of the three women. The Warsaw people were treated with exceptional brutality, the women even more harshly than the men. Women with children were separated from the others, led up to the fires and, after the murderers had had their fill of watching the terror-stricken women and children, they killed them right by the pyre and threw them into the flames. This happened quite frequently. The women fainted from fear and the brutes dragged them to the fire half dead. Panic-stricken, the children clung to their

mothers. The women begged for mercy, with eyes closed so as to shut out the grisly scene, but their tormentors only leered at them and kept their victims in agonizing suspense for minutes on end. While one batch of women and children were being killed, others were left standing around, waiting their turn. Time and time again children were snatched from their mothers' arms and tossed into the flames alive, while their tormentors laughed, urging the mothers to be brave and jump into the fire after their children and mocking the women for being cowards.

A number of men from Camp No. 1 were sent into our camp as workers. They were terrified and afraid to talk to us, for Camp No. 1 was known to have a very stern discipline. After a while, however, these men calmed down and gave us to understand that a revolt was being planned in Camp No. 1. We wanted to establish contact with the inmates of Camp No. 1, but no opportunity presented itself, for there were watchtowers and guards all around. The food in our camp had improved. We got a shower and even clean linens once a week, and a laundry had been set up in which female inmates were working. We decided that by spring we would either make a try for freedom or perish.

About that time I caught a cold, which developed into pneumonia. All the sick were being killed either by shooting or by injections, but it seems that they needed me. Accordingly, they gave me whatever medical attention was available. A Jewish physician attended me, examined me every day, and gave me medicine and comfort. My German superior, Loeffler, brought me food: white bread, butter and cream. Whenever he confiscated any food from smugglers, he shared it with me. The warm spring weather, the urge to live and the medical help I was getting did their bit and despite the incredible hardships under which I lived, I recovered. I went back to work to finish the construction of the observation towers.

One day the Hauptsturmfuhrer, accompanied by the camp commandant and my superior, Loeffler, came to see me. They asked me whether I would undertake to build a blockhouse. It was, to be constructed of logs and serve as a guard station in Camp No. 1. When I began to explain to him how the job should be done, he turned to his companions and remarked that I had understood him in a flash.

There was no lumber or building material on hand. We had to cut the wood with saws. I suggested making a shingle roof, and we had to prepare the shingles ourselves. As a result, I was able to make things easier for good many camp inmates, who were relieved from the work with the corpses in order to assist me. I built the blockhouse in Camp No. 2 in such a way that it could be taken apart and moved to Camp No. 1. Everybody liked it so much that the Hauptsturmfuhrer and Loeffler bragged to their colleagues that they had done the work themselves.

After a while, the time had come to take the structure apart and move it to Camp No. 1, but the architect Hermann and the master carpenter were unable to reassemble the structure themselves. It was evidently easier for them to kill innocent people than to do this kind of work. Once again, they turned to me for assistance.

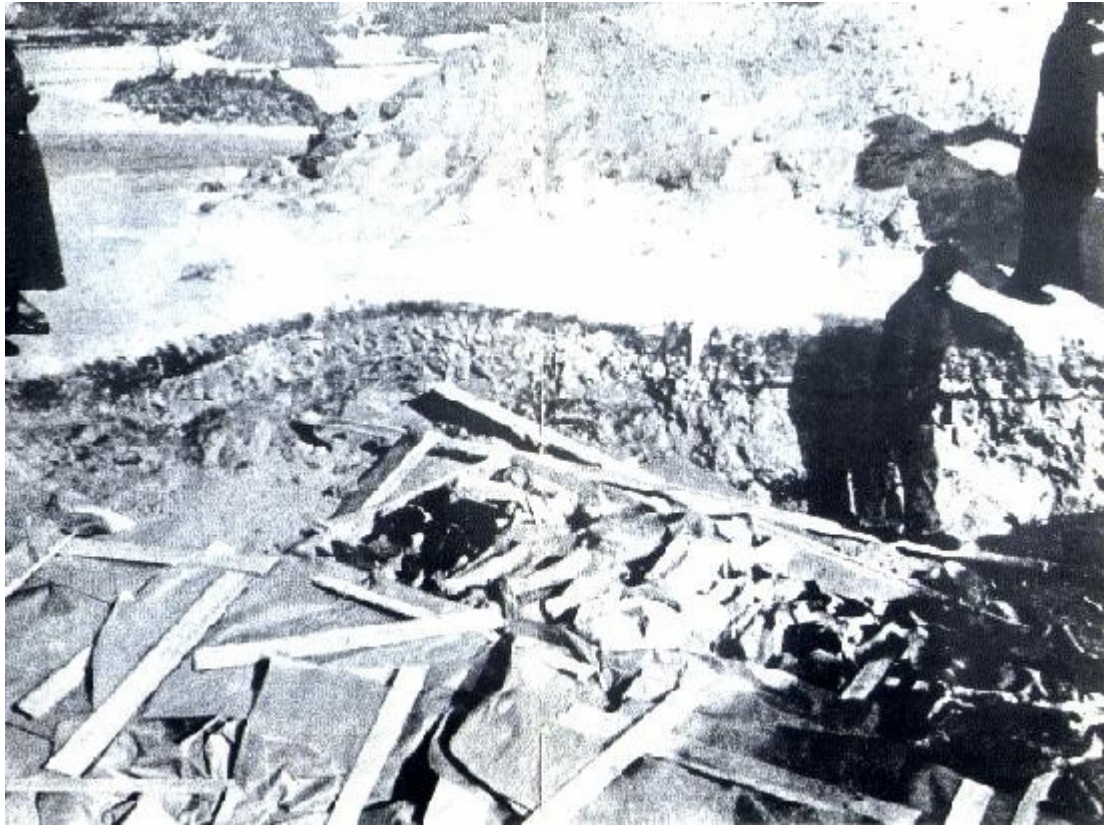
This suited me to perfection because in that way I was able to gain access to Camp No. 1 and to make contact with our companions in adversity there. I needed assistance in my work and, although four men would have been enough, I asked for eight.

When I entered Camp No. 1, I did not recognize it at all. It was spotlessly clean and the discipline was extremely strict. Everyone was terror-stricken at the mere sight of a German or a Ukrainian. Not only did the inmates of Camp 1 refuse to speak to us, they were even afraid to look at us.

Starved and ill treated though they were, they had a secret organization, which was functioning efficiently. Everything was carefully planned. A Warsaw baker by the name of **Lejlezen**, who acted as liaison man between the conspirators, was working near the fence in Camp No. 1. It was difficult to make contact with him because there were German and Ukrainian guards all around and the fence was screened by saplings and you never knew who might be lurking behind them.

The workers in Camp No. 1 were continually under the threat of the whip. Compared with them, we enjoyed complete freedom. For instance, we were permitted to smoke while we worked and even received cigarette rations. We took advantage of our relative freedom for our own purposes. Some of us drew our guard into conversation to divert his attention, while others used that opportunity to make contact with inmates of Camp No. 1.

In due time, we became members of a committee of the secret organization, a circumstance which gave some prospects of deliverance or at least of a heroic death. All this involved considerable risk because of the watchfulness of the guards and the strong fortifications at the camp. However, our motto was "freedom or death." In the meantime, I completed the blockhouse. To celebrate the occasion, the Hauptsturmfuhrer treated us to liquor and sausages. While we worked on the blockhouse, we received additional daily rations of 1/2 kilogram of bread apiece.



Treblinka: Exhumation, beginning of 1943

CHAPTER 11

In contrast to our camp, the reign of terror in Camp No. 1 was getting worse, with Franz and his man-eating hound lording it over the workers. During my first stay in Camp No. 1 I had noticed a few boys, aged 13 and 14, who had been tending a flock of geese and had been doing odd chores. They were the favorites of the camp. The Hauptsturmführer cared for them almost as a father would for his own children, looking after their needs and often spending hours on end with them. He gave them the best food and the best clothes. Because of the good care, the food and the fresh air they were getting, these boys looked the picture of health and I thought that no harm would come to them, but now, when I returned to Camp No. 1., I immediately noticed that they were no longer around. I was told that after the chief had tired of them, he had had them killed.

Having completed our assignment, we returned to Camp No. 2 in high hopes of being free soon. However, we had nothing definite to go on and the contact was broken off again.

The cremation of corpses had been going on in Camp No. 2 while we had been away, but as there were so many of them, the end was not yet in sight. Two more machines for exhuming corpses were brought in, additional fire grates were constructed and the work was speeded up. The fire grates took up almost the entire yard. It was midsummer by then, and the fire grates gave off a terrific heat, turning the place into

an inferno. We felt as if we ourselves were on fire. We anxiously waited for the moment when we would be able to force open the gates of the camp.

Several new transports arrived, I did not know from where. Two transports of Poles arrived also, but since I never saw them alive I do not know how they were treated when they had to disrobe and enter the death chambers. They were gassed just as the others had been. When we handled these corpses, we noticed that the men had not been circumcised. Also, we heard the Germans remarking that those "damned Poles" would not rebel again.

The younger inmates of our camp were growing impatient and were anxious to start the revolt, but the time was not ripe. We had not yet completed the plans for the attack, and escape. Contact with Camp No. 1 was difficult, but soon we were able to communicate with them again.

One Sunday afternoon Loeffler, my superior, told me that the Hauptsturmfuhrer wanted to build an additional gate for the blockhouse and that the job would be given to me. He told me to draw up a plan, and I added the necessary information for the Hauptsturmfuhrer, who accepted my suggestions. I submitted my specifications for the materials I would need and I started the job. I eagerly seized this opportunity, for I realized that this was the last chance of establishing contact with the conspirators. I visited Camp No. 1 under all sorts of pretexts and discussed our plans with my fellow conspirators, who, however, did not give any definite information. All they told us was not to give up but to wait. Meanwhile, bigger and better fire grates were set up at the camp, as if they would be needed for centuries to come. Seeing this, the young inmates were eager to take action. Our patience was wearing thin.

In Camp No. 2 we began to organize into groups of five, each group being assigned a specific task such as wiping out the German and Ukrainian garrison, setting the buildings on fire, covering the escape of the inmates, etc. All the necessary paraphernalia was being prepared: blunt tools to kill our keepers, lumber for the construction of bridges, gasoline for setting fires, etc.

The date for starting the revolt was set for June 15, but the zero hour was postponed several times and new dates were set, because the time was not yet ripe. The committee on organization used to meet after we had been locked in the barrack for the night. After the rest of our fellow inmates, worn out by the day's toil and abuse, had fallen asleep, we gathered in a corner of our barrack, in one of the upper bunks, and proceeded to make our plans. We had to keep the younger men in check, because they were eager for action and wanted to get things going even though we were not yet properly prepared.

We decided not to do anything without the inmates of Camp No. 1, since to do so would have been tantamount to suicide. We in Camp No. 2 were only a handful, because not all of us were physically fit for combat. As I have mentioned before, we had better food and treatment than the inmates in Camp No. 1, but we were only about 300 as against their 700.

The inmates of Camp No. 1 were practically starved and had to endure beatings and brutal punishment, which assumed fiendish forms if they were caught doing business with the Ukrainians. I saw with my own eyes how one of them on whom a piece of sausage had been found was tied to a post and forced to stand motionless through a blisteringly hot day. As he was physically quite strong, he survived the ordeal and did not betray the Ukrainian with whom he had done business. In this connection I must add that whenever the Germans found out about a Ukrainian dealing with the inmates and smuggling food to them, they would beat up the Ukrainian, too. The Ukrainians, in turn, took it out on the Jews. Living under such conditions, the inmates did not last long. It was then Franz's chance to drag those poor devils to the fire grates, torture them brutally and, after beating them to a pulp, kill them and throw their corpses into the fire. In view of these conditions, we knew that the inmates of Camp No. 1 would revolt but, since we were unable to accomplish anything without them, we completed our own preparations, and waited for a signal from them.

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CHAPTER 12

In the meantime, "life" ran its "normal" course. There was no end to macabre ideas. The German staff suddenly felt the need for diversion and amusement, since they had no other worries. Accordingly, they organized compulsory theatrical performances, concerts, dance recitals, etc. The "performers" were recruited from among the inmates, who were excused from work for several hours to participate in rehearsals. The "performances" took place on Sundays. They were compulsory, with the audiences consisting of Germans and Ukrainians. Women were forced to sing in choirs, while the orchestra consisted of three musicians who were compelled to play each day at roll call after the whippings. The inmates were forced to sing Jewish songs as they marched off to work. Plans had been made for a new performance and new costumes obtained for it, but the show never took place because of our successful revolt and escape.

While the Germans ate their midday meal, between

noon and 1 p.m., the Jews had to stand in the yard, in front of the mess hall, and provide music and song. The members of the choir had to work just as hard as the rest of the inmates, but had special hours for singing and performing their music. By and large, our tormentors had quite a bit of fun with the rest of us, dressing up as clowns and assigning functions which, heart-sore though we were, actually made us laugh.

One Jewish watchman, especially selected by the Germans, was stationed in front of the door of our barrack. He wore red pants like those of a Circassian, a tight-fitting jacket and wooden cartridges on both sides of his chest. He wore a tall fur calpac on his head and carried a wooden rifle. He was forced to clown and dance to the point of

exhaustion. On Sundays he wore a suit of white linen with red stripes on the pants, red facings and a red sash. The Germans often got him drunk and used him for horseplay. No one was permitted to enter the barrack during working hours, and so he stood on guard at the door. His name was **Moritz** and he came from style="font-size:13.5pt"Czestochowa.

Another such poor wretch was the so-called "Scheissmeister" [shitmaster]. He was dressed like a cantor and even had to grow a goatee. He wore a large alarm clock on a string around his neck. No one was permitted to remain in the latrine longer than three minutes, and it was his duty to time everyone who used it. The name of this poor wretch was **Julian**. He also came from style="font-size:13.5pt"Czestochowa, where he had been the owner of a metal products factory. Just to look at him was enough to make one burst out laughing.

Moritz meekly accepted whatever the Germans did with him; he did not even realize what a pitiful figure he cut. Julian was a poised and quiet man, but when they began their horseplay with him, he wept bitterly. He wept also while he worked on the fire grates. His garb, his appearance and the task he had to perform provoked the German fiends to abuse him all the more and to amuse themselves at his expense.

For quite some time I had been working in Camp No. 1, returning every evening to Camp No. 2. This gave me a chance to make contact with the insurgents in Camp No. 1. I was watched less than the others and also treated better. Time and again, the Ukrainian guards entrusted some of their possessions to me for safekeeping because they knew I would not be searched. My superior bought me food himself and saw to it that I did not share it with anyone else. I never acted obsequious toward the Germans. I never took off my cap when I talked to Franz. Had it been another inmate, he would have killed him on the spot. But all he did was whisper to me in German, "*When you talk to me, remember to take off your cap.*" Under these circumstances, I had almost complete freedom of movement and an opportunity to make all the necessary arrangements.

No transports had been coming to Treblinka for quite some time. Then, one day, as I was busy working near the gate, I noticed quite a different spirit among the German garrison and the Ukrainian guards. The Stabscharfuhrer, a man of about 50, short, stocky and with a vicious face, left the camp several times by car. Then the gate flew open and about 1,000 Gypsies were marched in. This was the third transport of Gypsies to arrive at Treblinka. They were followed by several wagons carrying all their possessions: filthy tatters, torn bedclothes and other junk. They arrived almost unescorted except for two Ukrainians wearing German uniforms, who were not fully aware of what it all meant. They were sticklers for formality and even demanded a receipt, but they were not even admitted into the camp and their insistence on a receipt was met with sarcastic smiles. They learned on the sly from our Ukrainians that they had just delivered a batch of new victims to a death camp. They paled visibly and again knocked on the gate demanding admittance, whereupon the Stabscharfuhrer came out and handed them a sealed envelope which they took and

departed. The Gypsies, who had come from style="font-size:13.5pt"Bessarabia, were gassed just like all the others and then cremated.

July was drawing to a close and the weather was blistering hot. The hardest work was at the mass graves, and the men who exhumed the corpses for cremation were barely able to stand on their feet because of the sickening odors. By now about 75 per cent of the corpses had been cremated; all that remained to be done was to grade down the soil so that not a trace would be found of the crimes, which had been committed on that spot. Ashes don't talk.

It was our job to fill in the empty ditches with the ashes of the cremated victims, mixed with soil in order to obliterate all traces of the mass graves. The parcel of ground thus gained had to be utilized one way or another. It was fenced in with barbed wire, taking in an additional plot from the other camp to form an area for planting. An experiment was conducted with planting some vegetation in this area; the soil proved to be fertile. The gardeners among us planted lupine, which grew very well. And so the area of the mass graves, after 75 per cent of the corpses buried there had been exhumed and cremated, was leveled, seeded and fenced in with barbed wire. Pine trees were also planted there.

The Germans were full of pride over what they had accomplished and thought that they deserved some modest entertainment as a reward for their troubles. They began by celebrating the "retirement" of the excavator which had been exhuming our dead brethren. It was pointed skyward, its shovel high in the air. The Germans fired salvos: then came a regular banquet with much drinking and merrymaking.

We, too, benefited from this celebration: we gained a few days' respite from work, but we realized only too well that these would be our last days on earth, since only 25 per cent of the graves still remained to be emptied. Once this would be finished, the few of us who were the sole witnesses to the appalling crimes which had been committed would also be killed. However, we controlled ourselves and waited patiently for deliverance.

At that time I was working steadily at Camp No. 1. A portion of the area of Camp No. 2 had been joined with Camp No. 1 and one of the towers had to be moved to Camp No. 2. I worked on this job with my men. I was, therefore, able to remain in contact with our comrades in Camp No. 1.

Within a few days work was begun to empty the remaining 25 per cent of the graves and the bodies were cremated. As I pointed out before, the weather was extremely hot, and as each grave was opened, it gave off a nauseating stench. Once the Germans threw some burning object into one of the opened graves just to see what would happen. Clouds of black smoke began to pour out at once and the fire thus started glimmered all day long. Some of the graves contained corpses which had been thrown into them directly after being gassed. The bodies had had no chance to cool off. They were so tightly packed that, when the graves were opened on a scorching hot day, steam belched forth from them as if from a boiler.

In one instance, when a batch of corpses was placed on the fire grate, an uplifted arm stuck out. Four fingers were clenched into a tight fist, except for the index finger, which had stiffened and pointed rigidly skyward as if calling God's judgment down upon the hangmen. It was only coincidence, but it was enough to unnerve all those who saw it. Even our tormentors paled and could not turn their eyes from that ghastly sight. It was as if some higher power had been at work. That arm remained pointed upward for a long, long time. Long after part of the pyre had turned to ashes, the uplifted arm was still there, calling to the heavens above for retributive justice. This small incident, seemingly meaningless, spoiled the high good humor of the hangmen, at least for a while.

I continued working at Camp No. 1, returning to Camp No. 2 each night. I was constructing a birchwood enclosure, a low fence around the flower garden where domesticated animals and birds were also kept. It was a quiet, pretty spot. Wooden benches had been placed there for the convenience of the Germans and Ukrainians. But alas, that serene spot was the seat of infamous plotting, the only theme of which undoubtedly was how to torture us, the hopeless wretches.

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CHAPTER 13

The Lagertilteste [spokesman] of Camp No. 1 frequently watched me at work from a distance. It was forbidden to talk to any of us, but he frequently spoke a few words to me on the sly. He was a Jew of about 45, tall and pleasant, by the name of **Galewski**. An engineer by profession, he hailed from Lodz. He had been appointed to his office in August, 1942, when Jewish camp "authorities" had first been set up. He was the mainstay of the organization work. Because he did not prostitute himself as some of the others had done, but always considered himself one of us unfortunates, he was frequently beaten and hounded like the rest of us.

When he came to me for a brief exchange of words, he had just been set free from a three-day confinement in a prison cell. While there, he had been let out only once each day - in the morning - to empty the ordure bucket. Now, when no one was near me, he took the opportunity and categorically stated that the younger element should be patient because the hour of deliverance was approaching. He repeated this several times. I had the feeling that zero hour was approaching and that the end was really in sight.

On my return home from work that evening, I called a meeting to check the state of our preparedness. Everybody was excited and we did not sleep at all that night, seeing ourselves already outside the gates of the inferno.

The heat was becoming increasingly unbearable. It was almost impossible to keep standing on our feet. The terrible stench and the heat radiating from the furnaces were maddening. The Germans therefore decided that we were to work from

4 a.m. till noon, at which time they herded us into the barracks area. Once again, we came close to despair. We were afraid that now we would never be able to get out. However, we managed to find a way. We convinced the Germans that it would be better if the corpses would be cremated as soon as possible and said that there were volunteers among us who, for extra bread rations, would gladly work overtime. The Germans agreed.

We arranged two shifts, from noon till 3 p.m. and from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. We selected the right men and waited from day to day for the signal. Beyond the area of our barrack there was a well that supplied the kitchen and laundry with water. We made use also of this "gateway," although it was guarded all the time. We made frequent trips to that well, even when we did not need water, in order to get the guards used to seeing us come and go.

At that time no transports at all came in, and so the only executions performed were those of individual Jews. After all, our executioners simply could not remain idle. But in due time the Germans were all in a good mood once more because new victims had arrived: a transport from Warsaw which was supposed to have been sent abroad. All the people in that transport were well-to-do and looked prosperous. They numbered about 1,000 men, women and children. We understood that it was a transport of people who had paid plenty of money to be taken to a place of safety. As I subsequently learned, they had been housed in the Hotel Polski, a first-class establishment on Długa Street in Warsaw, but then they were taken to Treblinka. We learned who they were when we sorted out their possessions and found their personal papers. These people were killed like all the others.

The same fate befell transports coming in from other countries. These people had been told that they were going to be "resettled" in a place called Treblinka. Whenever they passed a station, the poor wretches would poke their heads out of the train windows and casually ask how much longer it was to Treblinka. Spent as they were, they looked forward to reaching a haven where they would be able to rest from their arduous journey. When they finally got to Treblinka, they were put to rest - forever - before they even had time to feel surprise or terror. At this writing, lupine grows over the spot where their ashes were buried.

Next came a transport from the Treblinka Penal Camp. It consisted of about 500 Jews, all barely alive, worked to the bone and brutally tortured. They looked as if they were begging to die and they were killed like all the others.

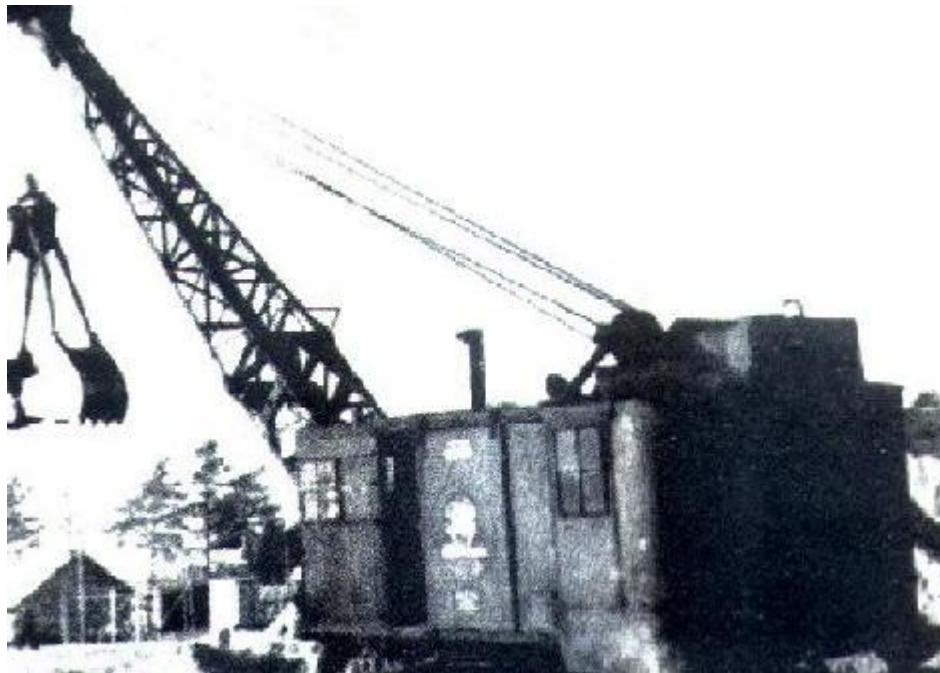
However, we were drawing closer to the end of our suffering. The day of our deliverance was approaching. Just then, my superior, Loeffler, who had been treating me so well, was transferred to Maidanek. He was bent on taking me with him to work there, and I was in a terrible predicament. I knew that a cruel death awaited each one of us. In Maidanek, I would be unable to find a quick way to freedom in the

new surroundings and it would take me a long time to become acquainted with new people and new conditions. However, the decision did not rest with me: what was more, I had to pretend that I was elated over Loeffler's honoring me with such an offer. Luckily for me, the Hauptsturmfuhrer refused to let me go. He still needed me. I, for my part, was very happy about that.

At about that time, for some reason unknown to us, we were ordered to write letters. Some among us were naive enough to do it. Later on I saw with my own eyes how the letters were burned. I do not know whether it had just been a game, a practical joke, or whatever.

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CHAPTER 14



The excavator used to remove the corpses before cremation

The final, irrevocable date for the outbreak of the revolt was set for August 2, and we instinctively felt that this would really be the day. We got busy with our preparations, checking whether everything was in readiness and whether each of our men knew the part he had to play.

It so happened that I did not go to Camp No. 1 for several days because I was busy constructing an octagonal building with a suspended roof, resembling a guard station, that was to house a well. I was also constructing a portable building in Camp No. 2 which could be taken apart and which I subsequently had to move to Camp No. 1, where it was supposed to remain permanently. I was becoming impatient because I was unable to get in touch with Camp No. 1 and zero hour was approaching.

August 2, 1943 was a sizzling hot day. The sun shone brightly

through the small, grated windows of our barrack. We had practically no sleep that night; dawn found us wide awake and tense. Each of us realized the importance of the moment and thought only of gaining freedom. We were sick of our miserable existence, and all that mattered was to take revenge on our tormentors and to escape. As for myself, all I hoped for was to be able to crawl into some quiet patch of woodland and get some quiet, restful sleep.

At the same time, we were fully aware of the difficulties we would have to overcome. Observation towers, manned by armed guards, stood all around the camp, and the camp itself was teeming with Germans and Ukrainians armed with rifles, machine guns and revolvers. They would lock us up in our barracks as early as 12 noon. The camp was surrounded by several rows of fences and trenches.

However, we decided to risk it, come what may. We had had enough of the tortures, of the horrible sights. I, for one, was determined to live to present to the world a description of the inferno and a sketch of the layout of that accursed hellhole. This resolve had given me the strength to struggle against the hangmen and the endurance to bear the misery. Somehow I felt that I would survive our break for freedom.

A presentiment of the coming storm was in the air and our nerves were at high tension. The Germans and the Ukrainians noticed nothing unusual. Having wiped out millions of people, they did not feel they had to fear a paltry handful of men such as we. They barked orders which were obeyed as usual. But those of us who belonged to the committee were worried because we had no instructions about the timing of the outbreak. I was fidgety. I kept on working but all the time I worried that we might fail to establish contact which, in turn, would mean that we would perish miserably and in vain.

However, I found a way of communicating with Camp No. 1. My superior, Loeffler, was no longer there; he had been replaced by a new man whose name I did not know. We nicknamed him "Brown Shirt." He was very kind to me. I walked up to him and asked him for some boards. Boards were stored in Camp No. 1 and he, not wanting to interrupt our work, went off with some workers to get them. The boards were brought. I inspected and measured them, and then said they weren't right for the job. I volunteered to go over myself to select the material I needed, but I made a wry face as if I did not like the idea. And so I went to the storage shed with my superior, all the while shaking with excitement. I felt that unless I made the most of this opportunity, all would be lost.

Presently I found myself in Camp No. 1 and nervously looked around, appraising our chances. Three other men were with me. The storage shed was guarded by a Jew about 50 years of age, wearing spectacles. Because he was an inmate of Camp No. 1, I knew nothing about him, but he was a participant in the conspiracy. My three helpers engaged the German superior in a conversation to divert his attention, while I pretended to be selecting boards. I deliberately went away from the others,

continuing to select boards. Suddenly, someone whispered in my ear: "*Today, at 5:30 p.m.*" I turned around casually and saw the Jewish guard of the storage shed before me. He repeated these words and added: "*There will be a signal.*"

In feverish haste I collected whatever boards were nearest to me, told my comrades to pick them up and started to work, trembling with fear lest I betray my emotions. Thus time went by until noon, when all hands returned from work. Again our committee met furtively and the word was passed around. I asked everyone to keep cool and remember their individual assignments. The younger ones among us were greatly agitated. As I looked at our group, I began to believe that we would really win.

Volunteers for the afternoon work shift were then selected. We assigned the weaker and less capable men to the first shift because it had no task to perform. The first afternoon shift returned from work at 3 p.m. The men we had picked then went to work, thirty in number. They were the bravest, the pluckiest and the strongest in the lot. Their task was to pave the way for the others to escape. A crew was also picked for fetching water from the well. At around 5 p.m. there suddenly was a great need for water. The gate leading to the well was opened wide and the number of water carriers was considerably augmented.

All those assigned to work with the corpses wore only striped overalls. A penalty of 25 lashes was meted out for wearing any other clothing while doing this particular job. On that day, however, the men wore their clothes under their overalls. Before escaping, they would have to get rid of the overalls, which would have given them away at once.

We remained in our barracks, sitting close together and exchanging glances; every few minutes someone would remark that the time was drawing near. Our emotions at that point defied description. We silently bade farewell to the spot where the ashes of our brethren were buried. Sorrow and suffering had bound us to Treblinka, but we were still alive and wanted to escape from this place where so many innocent victims had perished. The long processions, those ghastly caravans of death, were still before our eyes, crying out for vengeance. We knew what lay hidden beneath the surface of this soil. We were the only ones left alive to tell the story. Silently, we took our leave of the ashes of our fellow Jews and vowed that, out of their blood, an avenger would arise.

Suddenly we heard the signal - a shot fired into the air.

We leaped to our feet. Everyone fell to his prearranged task and performed it with meticulous care. Among the most difficult tasks was to lure the Ukrainians from the watchtowers. Once they began shooting at us from above, we would have no chance of escaping alive. We knew that gold held an immense attraction for them, and they had been doing business with the Jews all the time. So, when the shot rang out, one of the Jews sneaked up to the tower and showed the Ukrainian guard a gold coin. The Ukrainian completely forgot that he was on guard duty. He dropped his machine gun

and hastily clambered down to pry the piece of gold from the Jew. They grabbed him, finished him off and took his revolver. The guards in the other towers were also dispatched quickly.

Every German and Ukrainian whom we met on our way out was killed. The attack was so sudden that before the Germans were able to gather their wits, the road to freedom lay wide open before us. Weapons were snatched from the guard station and each one of us grabbed all the arms he could. As soon as the signal shot rang out, the guard at the well had been killed and his weapons taken from him. We all ran out of our barracks and took the stations that had been assigned to us. Within a matter of minutes, fires were raging all around. We had done our duty well.

I grabbed some guns and let fly right and left, but when I saw that the road to escape stood open, I picked up an ax and a saw, and ran. At first we were in control of the situation. However, within a short time pursuit got under way from every direction, from Malkinia, Kosow and from the Treblinka Penal Camp. It seemed that when they saw the fires and heard the shooting, they sent help at once.

Our objective was to reach the woods, but the closest patch was five miles away. We ran across swamps, meadows and ditches, with bullets pursuing us fast and furious. Every second counted. All that mattered was to reach the woods because the Germans would not want to follow us there.

Just as I thought I was safe, running straight ahead as fast as I could, I suddenly heard the command "*Halt!*" right behind me. By then I was exhausted but I ran faster just the same. The woods were just ahead of me, only a few leaps away. I strained all my will power to keep going. The pursuer was gaining and I could hear him running close behind me.

Then I heard a shot; in the same instant I felt a sharp pain in my left shoulder. I turned around and saw a guard from the Treblinka Penal Camp. He again aimed his pistol at me. I knew something about firearms and I noticed that the weapon had jammed. I took advantage of this and deliberately slowed down. I pulled the ax from my belt. My pursuer - a Ukrainian guard - ran up to me yelling in Ukrainian: "*Stop or I'll shoot!*" I came up close to him and struck him with my axe across the left side of his chest. He collapsed at my feet with a vile path.

I was free and ran into the woods. After penetrating a little deeper into the thicket, I sat down among the bushes. From the distance I heard a lot of shooting. Believe it or not, the bullet had not really hurt me. It had gone through all of my clothing and stopped at my shoulder, leaving a mark. I was alone. At last, I was able to rest.

[Chapter 1](#), [Chapter 2](#), [Chapter 3](#), [Chapter 4](#), [Chapter 5](#), [Chapter 6](#), [Chapter 7](#), [Chapter 8](#), [Chapter 9](#), [Chapter 10](#), [Chapter 11](#), [Chapter 12](#), [Chapter 13](#), [Chapter](#)

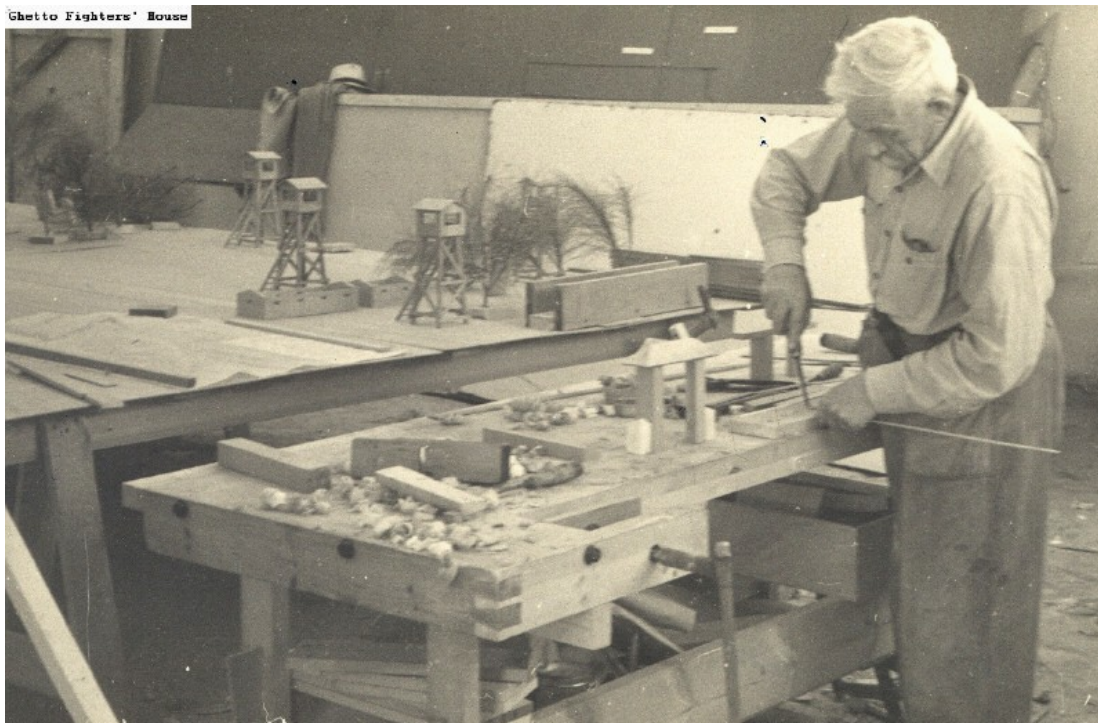
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1. *In 1943 German forces occupying the village of Katyn announced that they had found in the woods nearby a mass grave of some 10,000 Polish officers. They claimed that these Poles had been captured and murdered by Russians. The Russians later accused the Germans of this*

wholesale murder.



The farm which was built in Treblinka after the liquidation of the death camp, in order to leave no traces of the crime.

It was burnt down by the Ukrainian owner on June 1944.



Yankel Wiernik while building the model at [the Ghetto Fighters' House Holocaust and Jewish Resistance Heritage Museum, Israel.](#)

The Lochamei Hagetaot photograph archive number 25322.