

Tingsryd, 15 January 1946

Testimony received by Institute Assistant Bożysław Kurowski, LLM

transcribed

Record of Witness Testimony 131

Here stands Mr Henryk Gdeczyk born on 23 January 1921
in Sochaczew, occupation machinist
religion Roman Catholic, parents' forenames Michał and Marianna
last place of residence in Poland Warsaw, ulica Gibalskiego 8 m. 33 [lit. 'Apt. 33, 8 Gibalskiego Street']
current place of residence Tingsryd

who – having been cautioned as to the importance of truthful testimony as well as to the responsibility for, and consequences of, false testimony – hereby declares as follows:

I was interned at the concentration camp in Grini (eight kilometres from Oslo, Norway)
from 22 June 1944 to 12 May 1945 as a political prisoner –
bearing the number 14572 and wearing a yellow -coloured triangle
with the letter 'P'.

~~I was later interned in~~ I was arrested on 27 October 1943 in Warsaw
~~from~~ in a round-up on ~~to~~ the street. I was interned at a transit camp in ulica Skaryszewska.
After five days, 620 of us were transported from Skaryszewska to Tomaszów Mazowiecki. After we had been
interrogated and photographed, 280 of us were transported to a transit camp on the Schlachtensee lakeside in
Berlin.

Asked whether, with regard to my internment and my labour at the concentration camp, I possess any particular knowledge about how the camp was organized, how prisoners were treated, their living and working conditions, medical and pastoral care, the hygienic conditions in the camp, or any particular events concerning any aspect of camp life, I state as follows:

The testimony consists of six handwritten pages and describes the following:

1. The Berlin-Schlachtensee transit camp in autumn 1943:
 - Punitive exercise drills (*żabki* [squat jumps, lit. 'frogs (dim.)', Pol.], squat thrusts in the water)
 - Barracks
 - *Bunkersuppe* [lit. 'bunker soup', Ger.]
2. Poles working for companies belonging to OT [*Organisation Todt*, a German engineering group] in Mo i Rana, Norway; worse kitchen for the Poles; beating at the Gestapo station in Trondheim; penal camp in a place named Hell, hard labour
3. The concentration camp in Grini:
 - Induction
 - Prison attire
 - Prisoner categories and insignia
 - Camp population
 - Callisthenics during first four days
 - Vermin
 - Daily two-hour punitive exercise drills for Poles and Russians (*żabki* and push-ups while being beaten)
 - Working in the camp without kapos
 - Punishments, solitary confinement
 - Smaller food rations for the Poles and Russians
 - Seventeen-day collective starvation punishment

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Record of eyewitness testimony from Henryk Gdeczyk, born on 23 January 1921 in Sochaczew

The Berlin-Schlachtensee camp and Norway

Over a six-month period, I was interned at a transit camp situated on the lakeshore of Schlachtensee. Work was occasional and involved building bunkers. We were in the custody of the SS. At work, we were whipped. We were made to do punitive exercises: *żabki*, squat thrusts in the water, etc. We wore our own civilian clothing. We lived in wooden barracks. The camp diet was very poor. We used to call the soup '*bunkierzupa*' [Pol.]; it was very thin and made from boiled vegetables.

On 18 November 1943, 160 Polish civilians, including myself, were transported to Norway on a merchant ship that had been converted to carry passengers. I was detained in Mo i Rana at the nearest construction facility, where I was given a black uniform with collar buttoned high up the neck. It was the uniform worn by all Poles doing forced labour in Norway. As of that moment, all of us Poles were detailed to OT – *Organisation Todt* [a German engineering group]. In Mo i Rana, I worked for six months outdoors as a locksmith, making locks and keys as well as repairing them. For each of the first two months, I received fifty kroner. The job was with a construction company called Bauwenz within the OT group. For four months, I didn't receive any remuneration whatsoever. I received food from the Polish OT kitchen. We would receive 1.2 kilograms [note written above text] of bread [/note] per day, split between three people, sometimes four. The lunches were the same as in the German OT kitchen. At suppertime, we got twenty grams of margarine; there was no sausage for the Polish men.

I thought constantly about escaping to Sweden, and after six months had passed I was already on my way there. I was recap-

tured en route and sent to a penal camp (*Straflager* [Ger.]) in Mo i Rana. Two weeks later, I was sent on to Trondheim, where over a four-day period I was interrogated at the Gestapo station, based in a hotel. During this time, I was flogged with a bullwhip and ordered to count out the twenty-five lashes. Once I had counted to twenty-five, I was told there had only been twenty lashes and the flogging resumed. By the time they were done, they had robbed me of half of my health. Finally, I was transported to a penal camp in a place named Hell. From 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. with a half-hour lunchbreak we worked building bunkers together with Norwegian, Dutch, and French men. Out of 130, only six of us were Polish. We were at the disposal of OT the entire time. There weren't any beatings as such, but the work was hard. We had to excavate a fixed amount of earth – eleven cubic metres. That was the amount every SD man ordered us to excavate, but how much we actually excavated – I don't know. In the space of three days, we had to dig out a bunker measuring eight by eight [metres], working in a four-person team.

We lived in barracks.

Finally, after six weeks' internment at that penal camp, we were informed that we were to go free. We were told to pack our things; then, on 22 November 1944, we were loaded aboard trains and transported to a concentration camp in Grini.

Induction to Grini

We were subjected to a thorough search and were made to hand over any valuables for safe-keeping. We were bathed; our hair was cut; and we were issued navy blue prison clothes – old police uniforms and navy blue forage caps with the letter 'P'. The 'P' was on the left side of the forage cap; we also wore a 'P' on our backs and on the left breast above our numbers. Additionally, our number was emblazoned on the left knee and on the right side of the forage cap. Lastly, inside the large 'P' that we wore on our backs was a yellow triangle. The triangles came in white, yellow, and red. I know that red ones were given to Norwegian

partisans, who used to be referred to as bandits. Anyone with a red triangle couldn't even leave the grounds of the camp in order to work. As for yellow, I know that they couldn't use the canteen, nor write or receive letters or parcels – not even at Christmas or Easter. White triangles were worn by terrorists and criminals.

The total inmate population of the camp was 19,872. Most were Norwegians; there were 84 Poles, 152 Russians, 63 Frenchmen, 32 Dutchmen, and 11 Belgians as well as three Yugoslavians and two Czechs. Eight of the Poles, myself among them, wore yellow triangles, whereas the rest of the Poles didn't wear triangles at all. Many men of other nationalities didn't wear triangles either. For the non-Norwegian prisoners, it was the letters that really mattered; it wasn't clear exactly what the criteria were in issuing the triangles. A triangle would be given on the basis of prisoners' statements or the contents of their files. Non-Norwegians weren't permitted to leave the confines of the camp. In the daytime, no one was allowed to remain inside the barracks. Even during the winter, we had to be outside the block working. There were women living in our vicinity – approximately 700, including three Poles.

It was the largest concentration camp in Norway. Poles and Russians were treated worst, and Norwegians best, especially those being held in the camp as quislings who had fallen from favour or committed abuses.

During the first four days of internment, we were put through callisthenic drills with a fifteen-minute break every two hours. We drilled squat thrusts as well as how to report for duty and fall into formation. After these several days, we were taken to cut down trees in the woods around the camp. Only Poles and Russians were used for this work; we did it for seven days. Later we helped lay mines in the same area. One Russian was blown to pieces; a Pole had his leg torn off;

and other men were wounded. The SS men said it didn't matter, because all the Poles and Russians must die like dogs. From then on, we worked only within the confines of the camp, constructing barracks, breaking stones, and building roads. Non-Norwegians had a special barrack block that held approximately 400 people. Later, the Russians were isolated in a separate block. The bunk beds were in stacks of three and four. Incidentally, I must emphasize that we were plagued by all manner of vermin throughout our time at the camp. Once a month, disinfections would be carried out. These involved being sprinkled with powder and doused with a foul-smelling liquid. A disinfection would last us two or three days, as our outer clothing was never changed and our underwear only once a month. A piece of clay soap could be bought from the canteen once a month using the money deposited with the camp authorities at time of internment. I had 700 kroner on deposit. If anyone had no money, a friend would buy him some soap, but no one got any from any official source.

Throughout my internment, there were punitive exercises which had to be done solely by the Russians and Poles for two hours after lunch. We would usually assemble into two ranks and had to perform 200–300 so-called *żabki* (i.e. squat jumps), 200 push-ups (lifting our bodies with our arms and legs against the ground), squat thrusts, running, counting out loud, etc. Not everyone was able to do this, and SS soldiers would lash such men with bullwhips and riding crops and even kick them in the face and stomach. They rode bicycles over people lying on the ground. The drills were followed by a cold shower lasting half an hour, after which we went to work for the afternoon. Work was from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. The morning *Appell* [roll call assembly, Ger.] was from 5 to 6 a.m. The evening one ran from 7 to 8 p.m. The Poles were up to 30 years old. Read, signed, and accepted by

B. Kurowski

Henryk Gdeczyk

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Record of eyewitness testimony from Henryk Gdeczyk, born on 23 January 1921 in Sochaczew, cont'd

Internal organization

The camp commandant was *Sturmführer* [a Nazi commissioned officer rank] Herman Seidler from Gdańsk, who also spoke Polish. Every block was headed by a *barakowy* [Pol.]; as a rule, this post was held by a Norwegian, one of the older prisoners. Apart from the ones who were quislings, the *barakowys* maintained solidarity with the rest of the prisoners. There weren't any *Vorarbeiter*s [foremen, Ger.] or kapos. An SS man allocated the work, and SS men observed our progress from the watchtowers; if need be, with binoculars they could always discern the large number each man wore on his front. For any carelessness in performing our allotted work, we would receive 25–50 lashes with a stick. After three warnings, a fourth violation led to fifteen days of solitary confinement, which meant being held in a basement with a bare concrete floor, sometimes flooded with water, and receiving only 250 grams of bread to eat and half a litre of water every other day. For continuing to dawdle at work or for further violations, prisoners would go to a so-called cell where they would be held until the end of the war, without ever going outside. There, they would receive 250 grams of bread, 20 grams of margarine, and half a litre of coffee per day, as well as half a litre of very thin *bunkerzupa* (soup made from flowers) for lunch. Most of the men held there were Norwegians, of whom there were 920 in that prison. And not all were there because of work – there were also some who had come from penal camps. I remember that number from population figures posted daily on a noticeboard.

Apart from the beatings, we were given nothing in return for our work at the camp, neither in the form of money nor bonuses. The daily food rations in the camp were as follows: 150 grams of bread, 20 grams of margarine, and half

a litre of soup (every third day, instead of soup we would each receive one and a half pickled herrings, three unpeeled potatoes, and half a litre of coffee). That was the diet received by Poles and Russians. However, all the other nationalities – despite being in the same barrack block as us – would receive better food, particularly in terms of quantity. More specifically, they got the same as the Norwegians; namely, 250 grams of bread, 25 grams of margarine, and three-quarters of a litre of soup per day, and every third day two and a half unsalted herrings, which could be baked.

Once, eighteen tins of food disappeared on its way from the town to the camp. The only people accompanying the cart at the time were a Gestapo man and three Norwegian quislings, but neither the culprits nor the circumstances in which the tins vanished ever came to light. Punishment for this was imposed on the Russians and Poles, who were deprived of food for seventeen days. During this time, we received no allotment of food from official sources, with the exception of water from the tap. Eighteen people fell ill with diarrhoea and one of them died. The illness stemmed from the fact that we were eating potato scraps from the kitchen, and fish bones from the rubbish. Norwegians also helped out with food on the sly [illegible crossing-out], or rather supplied their friends with food.

There were no German prisoners in the camp.

I provide this testimony to the best of my knowledge, in accordance with my conscience, and on the basis of what I experienced and witnessed first-hand.

I should like to mention that what caused us the greatest distress were the daily exercise drills, as we didn't especially suffer from hunger. There

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were no cases of Poles swelling up due to disease or starvation.

Read, signed, and accepted by

B. Kurowski
Institute Assistant

Henryk Gdeczyk
Witness

The witness gives his testimony in a credible manner, although he is a person of limited intelligence.

B. Kurowski
Institute Assistant

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