

Voices from Ravensbrück

Interview no. 420 (English translation)

Polish Documentary Institute, Lund

Lund, 25 July 1946

Helena Miklaszewska, Institute assistant taking the record

Reminiscences from time in concentration camp 420 Protocol of witness questioning

Witness: xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Born: 25 July 1898

In: Tatarynówka

Occupation: - - -

Faith: Roman Catholic

Parents' names: Wincenty, Maria Chojecki

Last place of residence in Poland: Warsaw, Aleje Niepodległości 225

Current place of residence: Karlstad, Rudsvägen 15 C

Having been informed of the importance of truthful testimony, the consequences of false testimony and her responsibility to tell the truth, she has made the following statement:

From 1940 to 28 April 1945, I was in the Ravensbrück concentration camp as a political prisoner, having the number 4580, and wearing a red triangle with the letter "P" on it.

Before that, I was at the prison in Nowy Sącz, then in Tarnów, from 14 May 1940 until September 1940.

Asked whether I have any specific information from my time or work in the concentration camp about how it was organised, the camp regimen, inmates' working conditions, treatment of prisoners, medical and pastoral care, hygienic conditions, and also specific events in all areas of camp life, I can state the following:

[Signed] xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

The testimony is comprised of two parts: the reminiscences themselves, which include 36 typewritten pages, and explanations received in the form of correspondence. The reminiscences include a description of the camp at Ravensbrück and are divided into three basic periods:

1. Period I from 1940 to mid-1941.

The layout and external appearance of the Ravensbrück camp. Arrival and reception at the camp.- Description of working passing bricks.- Injured hands.- Camp discipline.- Checks, searches and punishment for not adhering precisely to regulations.- Harassment.- Cooperation between

the camp authorities and the German women prisoners who held positions.- Punishments disproportionate to the infringements committed.- Death as the result of punishment meted out.- Delousing.- Medical care.- "Heine Medina" [poliomyelitis] epidemic.- Torture through work.- Lynching of Gypsy woman.- Suicides.- Authorities' attitude toward abnormal [prisoners].- Inspections and related harassment.- Characteristics of a camp education.

2. Period II from mid-1941 to mid-1944.

Polish women's position in the camp.- Harsh orders from the central authorities.- Arrival of abnormal German women at the camp.- Worsening of supply conditions.- Economising orders regarding clothes and bedclothes.- The start of the "organisation"..- The creation of blocks segregated according to nationality.- Frequent collective punishments.- Polish women organise themselves.- Development of artistic and educational life.- Transports to the military industry factories.- Treatment of the workers in the camp workshops.- Tricking the German authorities.- The physical size of the camp increases.- Destructive element in Polish life.- Religious life.- Refusal to accept bonus.- Protest when [they were] taken to be shot.- Forcing Polish women to have experimental operations.- Contacts with the civilian population.- The first successful escapes.- Delousing.- Huge influx of transports.- Persecution of Jehovah's witnesses.- Transports of Russian and Ukrainian women.- Appearance of children in the camp.- Influence of different nationalities.- General characteristics of the Frenchwomen.- Organisation of a secret international women's section.- Disorganisation.- Increase in disease and mortality.- New hospital blocks.- Treatment of pregnant women.- General characteristics of this period.

3. Period III from mid-1944 until the camp ceased to exist. Struggle for life.- Mass transports to military industry factories.- Partial evacuation.- Selection for the gas chamber.- Camp appearance during this period.- Frequent moves from block to block.- Clothing.- Long roll calls.- Rations.- Disease and mortality rate increase.- Relations in the hospital blocks.- The *Jugendlager*.- The block for convalescents.- Complete exhaustion of those returning from the transports.- Sterilisation of Gypsy women and their children.- Protection against being sent on transports.- Evacuation from Warsaw.- Transport from Auschwitz.- Roundups.- Selection roll calls.- The issue of guinea pigs.- The last days of the camp's existence.

Polish Documentary Institute, Lund

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

I was arrested under the name

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

No. 4580 Red Triangel

Date of birth: 25 July 1898

Place of birth: Tatarynówka, near Kiew

Profession: Instructor [of women's military preparedness]

Place of residence: Warsaw

I was arrested 15 May 1940 for illegally crossing the border to Hungary. I was in prison for 6 weeks in Nowy Sącz. 2 ½ months in the Tarnów prison. In mid-September, I was taken to the camp at Ravensbrück, where I stayed until 28 April 1945.

[signed, xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx]

Information from the Ravensbrück camp
from 15 September 1940 to 28 April 1945

I am only able to provide information about the Ravensbrück camp, but I will try to describe certain periods during the camp's existence that were to a large extent an accurate reflection of the political and military situation in Germany.

It seems to me that there were three different periods.

Unfortunately, as I do not remember the names of many of those who were in charge, or exact dates, I must limit myself to describing minor camp events that seem to me to be typical both in terms of the psychology of camp authorities and above all of the [women] prisoners themselves.

I will only mention general features of the momentous events for Polish women: such as executions by shooting, experimental surgery, the gas chamber, and mass transports to factories, because they require a thorough statistical treatment.

The first period: from approximately 1940 to mid-1941

When I arrived at Ravensbrück, the camp consisted of 16 wooden blocks, and a building that housed the kitchen, baths, and offices. In addition, there was a brick "bunker" - in other words, the camp prison. Outside the walls of the camp several residential buildings for the women guards and SS men were already finished - the rest were still under construction. One road leading to the station was also completed. The prisoners in the camp worked building the roads and barracks.

There were very carefully tended lawns and flowerbeds around the blocks. The roads were swept (sand was spread in intricate designs). The blocks were very clean, beyond the walls one could see a pine forest, within the walls, each block had one small tree next to it, and some decorative bushes. The terrain was sandy and dry, and as the camp expanded, the additional blocks were built on wet ground.

The first Polish transport arrived in early 1940. Most [of the people] came from Pomerania, and the next came in spring from various parts of Poland, the third in August from Kielce and Piotrków. Ours was the fourth to come. As far as I know, the first transport from Poland was treated relatively benignly, but for those who came later, things got worse.

Our transport had about 60 people, and was met at the station by women guards with revolvers and dogs (no SS men). We were taken by lorries that had benches. The transport was received properly, and it did not take any longer than necessary to deal with formalities. Everything was taken away from us, leaving at most personal toiletries. Crosses and religious medallions were snatched from people's necks and thrown in the rubbish bin. Hair was cut only in cases where lice were actually found. Medical examinations were very superficial. After the baths, we were given a complete set [of clothing] (prisoner

stripes). Brand new eating utensils and dishes were ready in the block: a mess kit, including a dish, knife, fork, spoon, glass, and a dishcloth. Each prisoner got a cupboard, a bed and bedclothes, and two blankets with a cover. There were triple bunk beds.

Of the 16 blocks located within the walls, (with the tailoring shop and laundry located beyond the walls) there were 9 residential blocks (about 250 people to a block). Five other "rewirs" (camp hospitals), 2 warehouses and one seamstress shop for women prisoners and the punishment block. Three blocks were occupied by Polish transports, 1 by German political [women] prisoners, mostly communists or *bibelforszerki* [Jehovah's Witnesses, from German, *Bibelforscherin*, "Bible researcher" = Jehovah's Witness (female)] and the rest by Gypsies and asocial Germans. At that time there was still a small number of Jewish [women]. For a short time, a transport of Dutch [women] were at the camp, which had special privileges. The communists and "Bibelki" [short form of *bibelforszerki*] also still had certain special privileges at that time.

The whole external camp set-up gave the impression of an exemplary institution, which treated the prisoners humanely. The female personnel acting as supervisors, however, were instilled with a profound hatred and contempt for Polish women, and believed wholeheartedly that Poles in Bydgoszcz had gouged out the eyes of German children. Discipline was employed as a tool for harassment, humiliation and breaking people's individuality.

As soon as you passed through the camp gates, you sensed an atmosphere that was more prison-like than that inside an actual prison cell. It was not the limited space that cramped your freedom, but the constant monitoring of the most minor details of each person's daily life, the enormous gap between the authorities and humiliated prisoners. It was interesting to observe these relations during those five years.

After five weeks' quarantine, the *blokowa* [[German, *die Blockälteste*: prisoner who was head of block] and German *sztubowa* [assistant to the *blokowa*, responsible for order in individual room] received our transport, after which we were assigned our work, consisting of earth-moving on the road construction site and helping to build houses for the SS. [xx]

The first day, the entire transport was sent off to work regardless of people's age or health. Since the work that day was handing bricks down the line and the block was attached to a group of asocial German women, the weaker prisoners were not able to keep up with the pace required. Dogs were let loose on those who lagged behind, or they were beaten. If one fainted, the others were not allowed to move her, and the bricks were then supposed to be thrown to the next in line over the woman lying on the ground. The German women who already had experience doing this work would throw the bricks on the other women's legs if not caught in time. After working all day long, our hands looked like one big wound, since no gloves were given to us. After a couple days, a selection was carried out and the weaker women were sent to make stockings.

Life inside the block was regulated by a slew of rules for every little thing, which if broken were punished harshly, and whose enforcement was entirely up to the discretion of those in charge of the block under the lax supervision of the guard assigned to it.

All these rules were raised to the dignity of canons, they tried to inculcate the prisoners with them, [making them understand that] not obeying them attested to the baseness of the individual who does not live up to the German concept of discipline.

According to the German way of doing things, any ordinary thing a person might possess was turned into a source of suffering, as well as colourful flowers, green grass and the short walks that were permitted.

As a result, weaker people lost their sense of personal dignity and tried to "live up" to [the German standard of discipline]. In others, it created apathy and an internal breakdown, which at more difficult and dangerous moments was sometimes stronger.

The main emphasis was on respecting state property. The smallest infractions were elevated to the level of "sabotage", which brought the highest possible sentences: whipping, the bunker, and even execution by shooting.

For making toewarmers with camp wool for her stockings in the winter, a prisoner would get 25 blows and two weeks in the bunker.

Altering dresses that were too big, scratching mess kits, holes in a sweater or sheets were reported to the highest camp authorities and punished in a similar fashion.

In addition, detailed rules governed prisoners' behaviour. They were not allowed to look or talk through the window, keep their hands in their pockets, shake hands as a greeting, read (there were no books, but if prisoners were caught reading German newspapers that were meant for the toilets [as toilet paper], they were punished immediately).

The regulation bed-making, folding of napkins into intricate triangles, wiping glasses (this had to be done with a dirty apron, because the dishcloth might leave white fuzz), checking the contents of pockets and cupboards, the way prisoners combed their hair, constituted an unspeakable daily torture. The favourite occupation of those in charge of the block, along with the [female] guard, was checking cleanliness, and the way the prisoners had put their undergarments on. This was done by suddenly locking the prisoners into the dormitory, then forcing them to march by the [female] guard while lifting their skirts up in the back. Shoes were checked every day, especially in the winter. The soles had to be cleaned so well that the blokowa could touch them without getting her finger dirty. As punishment for not having clean enough shoes, people would have to go outside to clean shoes (from 30 to 50 pairs) in winter without a coat, and take them to be checked. People on such occasions were usually hit in the face, and kicked, of course accompanied by a flood of cursing, which was always the case when prisoners were being addressed.

Tempo and the immediate execution of orders were most important in the German "education". If one was called, one had to stand up lightning-quick. When people left their blocks for roll call, for which they usually had to wait an hour, it looked like they were fleeing a burning building.

In an attempt to curry favour with the authorities, the German *blokowe* would apply other means of torture they had thought up on their own.

No one could go to the toilet all night long, there was to be absolute silence all the time, the floor was washed several times every day, and the prisoners were forced to take off their shoes before entering the block, and had to put them on outside, too. Of course this would take place in winter. When we got to the block, we sat in our stockings, with our feet on the wet floor.

Sundays were mostly dedicated to making the beds as punishment, which meant that we would have to stay in the unheated dormitory all day long. If someone put her coat on, she was punished by being forced to carry kettles with food all week, whether it was her turn to do so or not. Every once in a while, the *blokowa* came in to the dormitory upset that the beds were poorly made.

If we did not go to work, we had to sit in the block the whole day, forbidden to move at all, change where we were sitting, etc. The women who would sit by the stove fainted from the heat, and the hands of those near the open window would grow stiff with cold.

Walks were mandatory when the weather was bad and freezing cold, and forbidden when it was nice outside. Our block was surrounded by barbed wire all year long, and walks for the neighbouring blocks took place in such a small area that it was more like people standing next to each other. Nevertheless, speaking with the prisoners from neighbouring blocks was forbidden, and the *blokowe* "chased" the prisoners, trying to catch them red-handed.

The favourite method of punishment was having people stand for several hours, of course during our free time, specially choosing days when it was cold and the weather was bad.

In wintertime, when it was 30 below, the *blokowa* removed the windows in the dormitory. Sometimes we would wake up and our hair would be frozen to the pillow. The walls and ceiling were covered with hoarfrost, which dripped onto our beds as it melted.

Every evening there were checks to see if any of us were sleeping in our clothes, or if there were two people in one bed. (The last year of the camp, the prisoners were forced to sleep three to a bed.) The [female] guard's dog would sniff to see if there was any food hidden in the bed, and the guard would suddenly snatch the blanket away as the person slept. "Clothes cubes" had to be placed exactly in the right place, down to the last centimetre.

The washroom was also fertile ground for harassment. Under the pretext that Polish women were dirty, they were doused with cold water and scrubbed until they bled with a scrub brush [made of rice stalks] used for the floor. This usually happened to older women who were more helpless.

Dousing people with water was also used as a punishment for not leaving the block quickly enough, or for talking during roll call. In wintertime, we went to work in wet clothes, sometimes looking like icicles.

During this period, only women who went to work got shoes, the rest only had [light weight shoes] that didn't provide any protection against the cold. The *blokowa* distributed the shoes at random and at the

last minute, without any chance to find ones that fit, which meant they hurt our feet badly later. Whether or not people were sent to work depended on the *blokowa's* own preferences and whims, since no permanent work columns had been formed yet.

Roll calls took place twice a day, and lasted about two hours each time. If the number of people didn't add up, the entire camp kept standing until the mistake was explained or until the escapee had been caught, if there had been an escape.

The *blokowe* tried to develop a spy network among the prisoners using *folksdeutsche* (German, *Volksdeutsch* - ethnic German living outside of Germany) and "dubious elements" for that purpose in the Polish blocks.

A group of Polish Jewish women brought from Kielce were put in one of the Polish blocks, where the *blokowa* and the *sztubowa* had been professional prostitutes, and the other *sztubowa* had been the owner of a brothel. That group consisted of the owner of a clandestine bordello and her charges. The group came to an understanding with the block's authorities right away, and became the bane of the Polish women. We had to tiptoe past the table where the *blokowa* and her friends were sitting, so as not to disturb them.

Severe beatings, even injurious or life-threatening ones, were part of everyday life at the camp. Often people who were not entirely normal or physically disabled were brutally treated.

A delegation from the block went to the highest [camp] authorities to present a complaint when one of the prisoners whom the *blokowa* didn't like nearly went blind as the result of being hit in the eye, and when the *sztubowa*, furious because a floor had not been washed well, intentionally struck a prisoner in the leg so hard the bone cracked. An investigation was conducted which involved summoning several prisoners living in the block, who were supposed to testify as to whether prisoners were being abused by those in charge of the block. The names of the prisoners to be summoned were prepared ahead of time and chosen from among the *blokowa's* confidantes (Jewish women were also trustworthy witnesses), having come to an agreement first with the block's [female] guard. Two prisoners selected by the block were not questioned because there wasn't enough time. Everything remained just as it had been, but someone heard the [female] guard saying to the *blokowa*, "I always told you to beat people so that there wouldn't be any way to check [afterwards]."

According to the regulations, the prisoners were not supposed to be beaten except with a whip when punished, on which occasion the director and doctor assisted. The doctor would check the prisoner's pulse if she fainted and bring her around, then the beating would continue.

The punishments meted out by those in charge were also out of proportion to the crimes that had been concocted.

The following can be considered a typical example. A seventeen-year-old prisoner, despite the ban on trimming our hair, evened out her fringe. The *blokowa* sent her to the disciplinary board. The girl got 14 days of arrest (dinner twice a week, bread and coffee twice a day, the dark cell was heated feebly by

radiators only an hour or two a day). Because this taking place during a period of severe frost, the girl's legs were so frostbitten they became gangrenous, and were amputated too late, and the girl died.

The hardest aspect of German discipline was not the strict observance of orders that had been given, since to a certain degree they protected against the rage of crowds, but rather the creation of so many regulations that it was difficult to avoid conflicts even if one had the best intentions of obeying them. Moreover, the method of threatening and frightening people until a person became familiar with them led to nervous breakdowns.

During the early period of the camp's existence, camp authorities paid great attention to the matter of delousing, a process which was carried out with great thoroughness. It also gave great possibilities for harassment. In one of the Polish blocks, the *blokowa*, having found one louse on someone, reported the discovery to the directors, which resulted in the prisoners having to hand over all their clothes to be disinfected. It was winter. For three weeks, only summer clothes were distributed, but people were sent to work outside all the same.

Rations during that period were relatively sufficient, provided those in charge of the block didn't steal from the prisoners and divided the rations fairly.

The medical care was not bad in terms of accommodation for the patients who had been admitted to the hospital, but the head doctor was a sadistic type, constantly drunk, often turning away the sick without even having examined them, and refusing to write excuses from work. There were cases of patients being kicked and beaten.

One interesting event was an epidemic that broke out during a heat wave and lasted several days, which was thought to be a form of "*Hajna medina*" [sic][Heine-Medin disease, i.e. poliomyelitis, at that time also called "acute paralysis"] because of the sudden onset of symptoms. Women became paralysed suddenly for no clear reason. A strict quarantine was ordered. After several days of quarantine, or longer, the sick recovered without having had any special treatment. It is worth noting that it was only the German women who succumbed to this illness, or mass hysteria. There were only two cases among the Polish women, and the quarantine period was greeted as a blessed period of rest for our nerves and a haven from harassment. People preferred the illness to the everyday life of the block. The general opinion was that the Polish women were more resistant because their diet before the war had been different.

During that period, the question of work often involved devising activities the aim of which was not always clear, just so that as many prisoners as possible were kept working. In the winter of 1940, many work gangs were sent off to work moving sand from one place to another (jokingly called the *sand bevegung* [sic] *kolonne* [German, "sand movement columns"]). Since the ground was frozen solid, a small square of earth was chopped out with a pickaxe and then taken to another place. (The sand was passed down a line of people.) It took a week to do what could have been done in one day in the summertime. The work only resulted in our hands and legs becoming frostbitten.

Supervision as we worked was extremely strict. Resting for even a moment was out of the question. Usually there was a certain number of bricks that had to be tossed along from person to person, a certain amount of rocks that had to be put on the cart, [and] how much sand was put on a shovel was checked.

These norms were set for the strongest. Theoretically only women up to the age of 45 were to be used for work, but in the Polish blocks, the *blokowe* set the age limit at whim.

Only dangerous accidents during work received attention. Women who had fainted were laid on the ground and left on the snow or wet grass until they came to on their own. People were often bitten by dogs that had been set on them by the [female] guards.

There were also brutal caprices that went beyond the regular program of official punishments, such as locking people in the bunker from 2 to 8 weeks, the whip (25 to 75 blows), being made to stand for many hours, withholding food from an entire group for a day or more, working on Sundays and holidays, assigning people to the punishment block for six months or a year.

A Gypsy woman who escaped from the punishment block and was caught was turned over to her block for them to mete out justice as they saw fit. Because the entire camp was forced to stand for many hours as punishment when one of the prisoners escaped, and that block suffered doubly, the asocial prisoners [handwritten note: the name used by the Germans to describe those who avoided work and were engaged in immoral behaviour/prostitution], who comprised the majority in the punishment block at that time, ripped the escapee to shreds, and then, on authorities' orders, carried the pieces of bloody remains and clothing past the windows of other blocks.

In the camp, people sometimes committed suicide by throwing their bodies onto the high-voltage wires. To scare the others, the body was left on the wires for a couple of days and officially shown to the prisoners. That person's block was punished, and if her attempt was unsuccessful, she was sent to the bunker and beaten after she recovered.

I don't remember any cases of people going insane from being in the camp (interesting phenomenon). People who were not normal when they arrived at the camp, however, were quickly done in. They were treated as if they were normal, or even provoked psychologically, whereupon their behaviour would bring on far-reaching consequences.

The constant inspections by authorities checking the camp plagued the camp, not to mention the inspections inside.

They were only shown selected blocks, but everyone had to clean more than usual, reaching absurd extremes. (In the winter, the outside walls of the block were scrubbed with a hand-held brush, windows were washed during frosts, etc.) This gave the *blokowe* a chance to settle their personal accounts, most often persecuting members of the intelligentsia.

The Polish women prisoners who had arrived earlier tried to help each other to a certain degree already during the first year, but at that time this was still undertaken only on a very small scale. Once a month

we were allowed to get certain things in the camp shop, but these were for the most part worthless. There was no bread, in the beginning there used to be rather good jam, then later there were sour, salty vinegar-based preparations.

Collecting money that had been sent from home took place after an hour-long wait in the freezing cold, right after a long roll call.

Typical of that first period was the thoroughgoing application of German "educational methods" with respect to the conquered nation. Above all, these consisted of killing a person's individuality and her belief in her own strength, loss of ambition, and loss of her desire to respond to being offended. The program also involved the fomenting of hatred between classes and ethnic groups, and the encouragement of suspicion and informing.

Informing was so well developed among the German women that it gave the impression of being an integral part of their character.

All the shortages and conditions that were difficult to bear worsened along with Germany's own situation, and were intentionally used as a way to torment people. That was all the more difficult to bear.

The authorities' disdain for the prisoners was a slow poison for those with weaker characters, though Polish women came out for the most part victorious, cultivating an ever-greater resistance within themselves.

At the end of that period, the official number reached six thousand, while the actual number of people in the camp was actually approximately five thousand.

The second period: from mid-1941 to mid-1944

A Polish "community" began to form gradually beginning in mid-1941, and in 1942 and 1943. Compared to the asocial German women, who were depraved types, the Polish women, as workers, inspired trust in the camp authorities. Because most of the internal work in the camp was done for the prisoners themselves (in the kitchen, hospital, laundry, and mending clothes), this provided the moral basis for solid work in those areas.

Thanks to the fact that Poles got such positions, they began to help each other, which played an enormous role in camp life.

In the early part of this period, the original discipline was still in force, but the harassment gradually diminished.

The assistance of many Polish *blokowe*, who treated their jobs as a kind of community service and the loss of the initial impetus to interfere on the part of the [female] guards, eased the situation to a certain extent.

At this time, however, we got the clear impression that harsh directives coming from the central authorities, which had tragic consequences, were exerting an ever-greater influence on the way the camp was being run. The camp authorities carried out these orders ruthlessly, in contrast to the "homegrown" torment that we had known up to then.

Those were: the shooting of Polish women brought from prisons, the beginning of the experimental operations, persecution of the *Bibelforszerki* and communists, block searches to uncover political conspiracies, sending transports to ammunition factories, death transports of sick and abnormal people, recruiting women for brothels for German soldiers, etc.

Retarded, often half-crazy, German women who had been gathered at random from all over the country, begin to be brought to the camp. They were slated for execution from the start, and are held like animals in terrible conditions, and punished as normal people were for the most minor offences.

The problem of supplies worsens dramatically. Food rations are reduced, and the items are often rotten and inedible [handwritten note: after surviving the period of scarcity before the harvest, for a short time, rations improved a lot again.].

The directives regarding economising measures also included the prisoners' clothing. Winter coats are taken away at the beginning of April, stockings and shoes in May. We were terribly cold during the long roll calls. They also took our kerchiefs, sheets, and double blankets.

Despite the harsh punishments for breaking those rules, what was called under-the-table "organisation" is initiated, something which later reached such great dimensions.

It was especially the Polish women who worked in the kitchen, and work gangs that would leave the camp, who developed the far-reaching assistance with supplies, some by providing bread and any other foodstuffs they could obtain, others by providing raw vegetables.

One can state with confidence that half of them are sent to the punishment block, [and] are beaten, but their operation does not stop.

Just as in every other area, here, too, there were those who would take foodstuffs meant for general consumption from the kitchen for themselves and their friends, which to a certain extent could have had a negative effect on the quality of the food. The noble principle of "organising" in the kitchen involved getting foodstuffs straight from the warehouse before they reached the kettles, or from the warehouse for SS men, but that method was very risky.

This operation resulted in constant searches of our personal belongings, but nevertheless people still keep taking everything they could get their hands on. Since we were allowed to receive packages, they were no longer really able to check: we always say that the food in the blocks, and smuggled from the kitchen, came from our packages (they didn't always want to believe us, however).

During this period internal discipline depends during this period above all on what kind of "Oberaufseherka" [German, *Oberaufseherin*: female SS head of the camp] there is. They are changed often, and each makes that even if they aren't intended to torment us were never easy to withstand.

During one period of "organisational reforms", certain ethnic groups were put in separate blocks. (At first, the Polish women lived together, but that did not last for long.) It goes without saying that terrible chaos accompanied the moves, but the ethnic blocks, relieving the tension of our personal lives somewhat, were more likely to be burdened with group guilt [for offences]. In addition, the fact that some of the Polish transports were left in the old part of the camp and others were put in the new part, with a very strict ban on communications between the two, created one more opportunity for round-ups, punishments, searches, etc.

The German directives were dominated by the principle that any kind of coherent group had to be broken up, and the creation of permanent temporariness. This was one of the most exhausting things for people who were in the camp for longer periods.

The individual stops being so closely supervised and slips out of the control of the authorities, whereas cases of collective guilt, applied from the beginning, are now repeated ever more frequently. Individual punishments as the result of the laxer discipline are treated as examples [for the rest of the prisoners] and are very severe.

One of the *oberaufseherki* [from German, *Oberaufseherin*] wanted to give the camp a more military character. The roll calls were [her uninterrupted hunting ground] for: non-regulation dress, hairstyle, or behaviour. When she noticed some of the prisoners had curls, their hair was cut immediately and they were led through the ranks [during roll call] with a board on their backs.

During this period the prisoners' ingenuity is in competition with the terror used by the authorities. Tighter-knit groups begin to form among the Polish women, more conscious and accomplished prisoners, whose aim is to keep their fellow prisoners' spirits up, send news to the outside, help those who had undergone operations (called "guinea pigs"), teaching the young people, etc.

Newspapers were allowed at that time, as was the radio, which mean that at least we could follow political events to a certain extent. Each new transport introduces a breath of fresh air from the outside world, and breaks the prison automatism that had developed during the first few months in prison.

Artistic creativity began to develop on a large scale, in which Polish women excelled until the very end, even after many prisoners of different nationalities had arrived. Poetry, drawings, artistic creations made out of buttons and toothbrush handles are on a high level.

There are many lectures and discussions on literary subjects, camp [Christmas] pageants allow us to relax a bit and rest. These are not only ad hoc meetings, as for example, later in the French or Russian groups, but are carefully prepared as much as possible, and have a goal. The types of work to be done as set by the authorities expand enormously. The need for female farm workers declared by the farmers

provides the camp with a source of income and the prisoners begin to be truly needed, as well as in the aeroplane and munitions plants.

Larger transports are sent, at first they are examined thoroughly by a doctor and only the healthy ones are accepted.

They started checking very carefully to see whether there were people in the camp who were avoiding work. (Knitting was also forbidden for people who had not been granted permission to do so.)

The famous "work fairs", i.e. work roll calls during which prisoners who did not yet have permanent jobs were given their work assignments, were a scare tactic for the prisoners, and yet for those who knew how to cope, they became a prime place to dupe the authorities.

The military uniform workshops in the camp introduce stricter and stricter requirements in terms of quality and quantity of work. The prisoners are treated increasingly harshly in this area and the SS men who are in charge of the factories allow increasingly cruel excesses.

Beatings until prisoners would lose consciousness, throwing stools at prisoners, stepping on women who were lying on the ground and knocking out teeth were all daily occurrences. One of the most dangerous SS men, who was nevertheless known for his circumspection, would call a prisoner into his office, tell her to take off her glasses, if she had any, and would hit her with his fist between the eyes. The director's fury was usually provoked by minor shortcomings or by someone's failure to fulfil the regulation number of hours to be worked.

The number of work hours in all areas increases continuously. Holidays and Sundays are often taken up with work. Toward the end of this period the workday reaches as much as 12 hours a day and work at night is introduced right at the beginning. One can tell that the prisoners are becoming seriously exhausted [handwritten note: physically], the result of hunger and work. The very uncomfortable living conditions by that time (sleeping two to a bed) prevent us from getting proper rest.

Fooling the German authorities, which was very noticeable right from the start, gradually becomes more frequent as they lose ground. They try to keep up appearances in each of their most ruthless orders. A typical example is the spreading of a rumour that the sick transports are being sent to comfortable sanatoria for treatment. Wild stories circulate about Polish women that had been shot, suggesting that they had only been taken away by transport; such rumours were not only spread by prisoners who were trying to delude themselves. The prisoners with death sentences who are selected for experimental operations are promised that their sentences would be commuted. (As a result, several of them went to their executions on crutches after this kind of quasi-treatment.)

To pull the wool over people's eyes, the kitchen received orders to prepare food packages for the journey for the condemned women. The packages were distributed half an hour before the sentence was to be carried out. In order to divert people's attention, those prisoners were taken to the bunker several days earlier, where they were kept in suspense as to their fates.

The German principle was never to inform anyone of anything ahead of time, and to announce everything at the last minute.

As far as space is concerned, the camp's size increased threefold. Movement about the camp was relatively free after the walls between individual sections were demolished, and communication between prisoners was possible.

The mindless automatism slowly disappears from the prisoners' lives, and virtually every prisoner has many different things to keep her busy, whether it be getting extra food or clothes, or studying, getting books, etc.

One can see a greater differentiation among the Polish prisoners begin to take shape. Entire transports of girls who had been working on farms began to be brought [to the camp]. Those were in part prisoners who had been taken [from Poland] for forced labour, but among them were also many volunteers whose moral level and national consciousness left much to be desired.

Inside the camp, the craftier ones easily made a "career" for themselves by getting the position of *blokowe* or *sztubowe*, or as the work gang leader. Their attitudes toward rest of the Poles were sometimes terrible.

During this period, the supply of camp uniforms had almost run out. [The camp authorities] began to dress the prisoners in stolen civilian dresses, employing stranger and stranger ideas in order to make escape impossible. (Painting, and then cutting out crosses on our backs, sewing on coloured patches, etc.)

The more relaxed conditions in the camp not only attracted the less-enlightened semi-intellectual elements. Ever-broader segments [of camp society] became wrapped up in the mania for getting pretty dresses and underclothes and comfortable positions, trading in whatever we could, and [taking for oneself] things that the Germans had confiscated from the newly-arrived transports.

People who tried to be appointed *blokowa* just for their own benefit, fearing conflicts with the authorities, were often unbearable for their subordinates.

The possibility of meeting men from the neighbouring camp, though very limited (men were sent to do certain heavy jobs in the camp) also resulted in a couple of unfortunate incidents.

The lesbianism that was growing at such an incredible rate among the German women also seeped through to Polish groups. In many cases it was the result of loneliness and hysteria, but it made a repulsive impression from the outside.

In this general context, the dedication of many individuals becomes all the more clear - whether in the position of block authorities or as work gang leaders, these women help their fellow prisoners enormously, sometimes risking severe punishment.

Already during this period, religious life was organised quite freely, after the previous persecutions, and mostly consisted of praying together and singing [hymns], which helped maintain some coherence among the various social strata. We prayed to ourselves during the long rolls calls.

For the most part, Poles were organised to the extent that most refused to accept the bonuses that were introduced for productivity. Despite the serious threats the Germans made in the beginning, they managed to defend their position.

The spontaneous demonstration in response to the taking of more than a dozen Polish women to be shot and the beating of the *oberaufseherki* in a crowd did not bring on very serious repercussions. The whole camp had to stand [for a long time as punishment] on Sunday and a warning for the block from which the women had been taken to be shot.

Another time, a group of girls that had been summoned for experimental operations did not go to the *rewir* on their own. They were taken by force to the bunker, where, in the most unhygienic of conditions, the operations were carried out. Since the entire block protested and tried to prevent their fellow prisoners from being taken, they were punished by having their food withheld and by having their windows tightly closed for three days during a spell of very hot weather, and were banned from leaving the block. The result, however, was that no more operations were carried out.

By that time, we had the chance to come into contact with German workers we met when we were at work. Some of the women working in the offices turned a blind eye to this. We could send letters without censorship, and a list of guinea pigs - who had been operated on - made it out that way. Of course this was always very dangerous. After a while, the guinea pigs got packages addressed to them personally from Akcja Katolicka [Catholic Action] with a papal blessing attached. The packages were not given to their recipients, but it was proof that the list had made it out.

Earlier, the [women] guards who had been recruited at first from the "trained cadre" were now being taken from a broader range of people, and they did not take the job because they believed in what they were doing, but because they were afraid that if they refused they'd have to face consequences.

An important event was the first successful escape. Up to this time, many prisoners had tried to escape just by making a dash for it, without any plan. They were always caught and then tortured in a terrible way.

This time, two Polish women prisoners (unfortunately not very worthy individuals) planned their escape in detail, carried it out successfully, and despite the director's promises to get them back dead or alive, he failed to do so; he did get a card from one of the escapees after a while wishing him further success in his work. (The news got out via one of the prisoners working in the office.)

To everyone's surprise, the entire camp was not forced to stand [as punishment], and because it was summer, and the escapees had been from the kitchen block, better fed than the others, they made it through 10 hours of standing after 8 hours of work quite easily.

Some time later, there was a second successful escape, carried out according to a masterfully designed plan, without the participation of SS men as had been the case in the first escape. Unfortunately, this prisoner's work gang had to face harsh consequences.

Every once in a while, the leadership would think up some special orders to counteract the rapidly spreading shortages. At that time, lice posed a very great danger.

In winter, the blocks were deloused. This was carried out in the following way. The prisoners were bathed, and then their clothes were taken away, and they were dressed in light-weight dresses, then sent to an unheated block, where they were forced to wait for 24 hours while their block and clothes were being disinfected. Because there were such shortages, neither their straw mattresses, nor the hay were changed, and the packages with clothes came all mixed together, so the result after a terribly exhausting day was that the lice had only been suppressed for a couple of days, and the prisoners who hadn't caught them previously now caught them from the clothing of very lice-infested prisoners that had not been adequately disinfected.

In order to prevent puddles from forming, the streets were covered with slag and coal-dust. At that time, soap was hard to come by and many people had to go barefoot, which meant the condition of people's feet often put them at risk for infection.

The new and increasingly large transports were received in a terrible fashion. They were kept for hours outside in winter. They were often half-naked beings, brought from various prisons. The hair of some transports was cut en masse. Despite the fact that sets of camp clothes were no longer given out, their clothes were taken away (though some transports were well-dressed) and they were randomly given articles of clothing that didn't match.

Persecution of the *bibelforszerki* reached its height. In addition to being forced to carry out [the prisoners] who did not want to leave the block for roll call, and being beaten and kicked, a group of *bibelforszerki* that had refused to work for the army was locked up in winter in an unheated block, without any beds or straw mattresses. They stayed there an entire month, and got bread once a day, without any hot coffee, and dinner twice a week. Another group stood naked out in the freezing cold for a couple hours.

A month later, the starved "*bibelki*" were assigned to do hard physical labour, during which 90% of them died from dysentery and exhaustion.

Even though the "*bibelki*'s" behaviour seemed rather unwise, their deep religious fanaticism which allowed them to go to their torture with a smile, was admirable. All a *bibelka* had to do to be released from the camp was to sign a document saying she was renouncing her religion.

The number of people in the camp increased enormously as transports of Russian and Ukrainian women began arriving. At first they were civilians, then female Red Army detachments.

The Russian women make the camp even more disorganised. There are not only thefts, but also burglaries of the food warehouses. Severe measures are taken. The Russians are held behind barbed wire fences, banned from communicating with the rest of the camp.

Along with these women appeared the first children in the camp. These were 10 and 12 year old girls who elicited pity from the rest of us. An understandable phenomenon among the prisoners, but it was rather strange to see ruthless [female] guards showing such great concern.

They were dressed like dolls and were given presents. One of the girls was given a pendant to wear around her neck. She apparently came from a family that still maintained its religious customs, because she would kiss it piously as something "holy". It turned out that it was a miniature ballerina. From the first moment, attempts were made to convert the children to Nazism.

In late 1943, the children are a common sight at Ravensbrück. There are very many of them, of different ages. They live in the blocks together with their mothers, get their own numbers and are required to stand at the long roll calls year-around. When a larger group of children arrived, at first they got extra soup and milk, but still the amounts were not sufficient.

Larger groups of Czech women also appear at this time. In addition to political prisoners, an entire village where unrest had broken out was also brought [to the camp]. The Czech women organised themselves quickly and showed a great deal of solidarity.

The camp becomes more international. Norwegian and Dutch women arrive, and so does a larger group of Frenchwomen. The arrival of the latter changes the atmosphere of camp life to a certain degree.

The group of Frenchwomen was very mixed. They were recruited either among the worst street types, who had with their audacity even managed to stand up to the equally brazen [female] guards, or from the politically aware and organised members of the *Resistance* [sic] (among whom there were many communists) who, coming from a nation that had not known captivity, often, very audaciously and unwisely, opposed the authorities' orders, and with a great deal of bravura.

Compared to the Polish women, they had less physical stamina, were much less obedient with respect to the decisions of their own group and less able to cope with practical matters, but they brought a certain amount of humour and a carefree attitude, manifested in a number of performances: songs, dances and plays. Striking was that although they took great care about their looks, their clothes were dirty and in disarray, even though prisoners who wanted to could manage to keep them tidy.

At this point I would like to mention one Frenchwoman, Anais de Montfort, who deserves to be remembered by us because of her exceptional interest in Poland (she had spent a number of years in Poland and knew Polish fluently). She was the soul of the French transports, and her sudden death made a strong impression, even among people so accustomed to death.

Mrs. de Montfort and I organised an international women's section while in the camp, which was supposed to link up with similar institutions [after leaving the camp], or, if there was no such organisation in our own countries, organise one.

The goal was to establish close ties between women of all the different countries (up to now there were special institutions, women with a university education or scouting, but there was none with a broader scope), publishing periodicals in which camp experiences, information about missing persons, etc., were included in the first phase, and then would acquaint [readers from those countries] with the life, culture and work of the various nationalities.

Two or three delegates were selected from each nationality for this purpose, who over the course of about two years kept in close contact, trying to get to know each other and discussing plans for future work. Because of safety considerations, the number of delegates could not be increased, but delegates informed their own groups about the plans for future work.

After leaving the camp, these plans could not be carried out for various reasons. The deaths of some of the most outstanding individuals in the organisation were one of the reasons.

In the camp, or shortly after leaving it, the following women died: 2 French delegates, 1 American, 1 Englishwoman (the leader of [the English women's intelligence] in Southern France), 2 Belgians, and America and England only had one delegate each because there were few prisoners from those countries.

This project was, however, not abandoned and we stay in touch.

The fact that there were very few German political prisoners in the camp was striking, and even the few that there were, with the exception of two or three, were subservient to the authorities and other prisoners [could not count on them.] The communists had a very tight internal organisation and chances to make contact with the "outside".

The camp's general disorganisation helped encourage a sense of community among the prisoners. The completely changed living conditions inside the blocks made people completely exhausted on the one hand, while at the same time allowing them to organise themselves.

The prisoners could spend their free time either on the "*lagierstrasse*" [German, *Lagerstrasse*] or on their beds. The bed becomes a focus for social life. The overcrowding and disarray in the blocks is terrible, but it [also means that it] is difficult to introduce any kind of checks. [As a result,] we are able to keep our "supplies" in our beds, illegal books, clothing and even military maps. Thefts become increasingly frequent, but the authorities turn a blind eye to this, allowing us instead to settle our accounts amongst ourselves.

There are now sometimes murders among the asocial German women, and also among the Russians. More than a dozen Germans were hanged for having stolen military materials. They would take care of personal disputes among themselves on the spot. During work, they drowned a Gypsy woman they did not like in the canal. Women were chosen from this group to mete out the punishments by whipping, then later to work at the gas chamber. Sooner or later they, too, were liquidated.

In order to bolster the authority of [female] guards during this period, pro-German detachments of Ukrainians were sent to the camp, and *folksdeutsche* [sic] SS men of various nationalities, although this did not result in anything particularly unpleasant for the prisoners.

The mortality rate in the camp grew dramatically as the result of disease, but most importantly because of general exhaustion.

Toward the end of this period, the official number reaches more than 30,000 (there were about 25,000 actually in the camp). Bodies are burnt in the camp crematorium, earlier they had been sent to other locations.

The hospital is expanded significantly. Normal blocks are used for that purpose, and ill prisoners are kept in very unsuitable conditions. The nurses are chosen from among an unsuitable group [of prisoners], and do not bother to find out what the patients' needs are.

The hygienic conditions are already a preparation for the horrors of the third period [in the camp].

Pregnant women are excused from work, but they did not receive any special rations. Infants are taken away from their mothers as soon as they are born, and are given back only for feedings. The children would lie in a separate room without proper supervision, which was badly heated in wintertime. The average mortality rate for infants was approximately 90%. Later, mothers with children who survived were moved to a separate block.

Characteristic for this period were the tragic events that affected the larger Polish groups, brought by ever larger transports from various countries, and the partial evacuation of prisons. The loosening of discipline and, at the same time, very severe punishments, both individual and collective, the prisoners' liberation from the regimen and stagnation of camp life, examples of far-reaching heroism and dedication in the case of some, and, in others, the loss of all moral principles. Worsening of rations and living conditions, while at the same time the possibility for intellectual life and development in many fields, the establishment of international contacts. Worsening of work conditions, mass employment in military plants, and the very noticeable extreme physical exhaustion as the result of hunger and having spent too much time in captivity.

The third period: from mid-1944 until the end of the camp

One can say that this was a time of unprecedented suffering in our history, when a rotting regime became animal-like in its behaviour, and prisoners struggled pathetically to keep their heads above water, despite everything.

Whereas during the first period one could relatively safely survive the camp by adhering to detailed regulations, in the second, wits and initiatives were what could save someone in dangerous situations. Physical stamina also was of fundamental importance.

Prisoners are divided into two worlds. The first is comprised of prisoners who have spent a long time in the camp, and who already have their possibilities [worked out for accomplishing things] and permanent

jobs. The second is made up of the new prisoners who did not manage to get settled in camp life, either on their own or with the help of the long-time prisoners, and who were slated for extermination.

This period began with the arrival of mass transports of Polish women who had been evacuated from Warsaw, then Hungarian Jewish women and others were brought, and transports from evacuated camps and prisons on the front.

The transports were received in a way that is difficult to believe. The "ritual" bath is kept up until the end despite the fact that immediately afterwards the prisoners are sent to dirty, lice-infested blocks or makeshift tents.

The transports arriving are so large that receiving them takes a couple of days. Summer or winter, they stay outside. The lawns that used to be so nicely kept are now used as miserable beds by all the people who are waiting. Seriously ill or dying people are usually among them.

During the first half of this period there are mass transports to Ravensbrück, which are sorted and then sent to factories, the second part is a gradual evacuation which began with large groups being moved to camps that were farther from the front, and old and ill people being liquidated in the gas chamber, and which ended with marching out of the camp on foot and being transported by Swedish Red Cross vehicles [handwritten note: Although the evacuation had begun, the transports kept coming to the camp, and in large numbers.].

The appearance of the camp changes beyond recognition. The transports that are waiting outside destroy the camp unbelievably. The lawns cease to exist. The blocks are not painted, most of the windows have been broken, and the windows are covered with paper or coloured rags. Prisoners wander the streets of the camp at all hours of the day. Before, no one was allowed to walk around the camp during work time. Bands of wild Gypsy children play raucous games. They are so hungry and bold that they attack passers-by to take away their bowls of food.

Even the prisoners officially bringing food to the blocks in kettles are subject to attacks by Ukrainian and asocial [German] women roaming the camp.

Inside, the blocks begin to look like shelters for the homeless. Order is maintained in only a very few blocks. Dining halls have been turned into dormitories everywhere, and beds are placed so close together that one can get by them only with great effort. The cupboards had been taken away of long ago, and now stand in disarray outside. Because there are no more benches or stools (most were burned by the prisoners in the iron stove in the dining hall in order to be able to cook things), people can only sit on the beds. The sewer lines, which had always been conscientiously maintained, now constantly break down and remain so for long periods of time.

The beds are covered with one blanket, at best, and in some blocks there are no blankets at all. Stolen multi-coloured quilts were distributed, and the rest of the beds, with unravelled straw mattresses and powdered hay, look like a sty. Without even putting up a fight, people are eaten alive by lice.

The authorities keeps moving prisoners from one block to another as transports come in, since the residents of other blocks are squeezed into blocks that are full anyway. The old blocks built for about 250 people during this period have about 700 or more, the newer blocks meant for 500 have over 1500.

The moves are always announced at the last minute, and despite the fact that the prisoners then have to stand in ranks outside for hours, they have to leave their blocks so quickly that it is difficult to collect one's belongings in time.

Considering how miserable the blocks look, the utility rooms in the blocks that were given to the *blokowe* to use are fixed up like comfortable offices by some of them.

When the Warsaw evacuation transports were expected, an aeroplane hangar was put out on the square as temporary housing for the prisoners. The hangar was meant for stays of just a few days, with no floor, and a thin layer of straw spread on the ground, but it remained through the winter, too. After Polish women were put in blocks, or sent on transports, Jewish women from Hungary, who had been slated for the gas chamber from the start, were put there. The poverty and suffering of those beings, clothed in rags, blue from the cold, dying from hunger and disease, were indescribable. They were held there for a couple of weeks.

The prisoners' clothing and external appearance matched the camp's general appearance. We could wear everything we could get. Among elegantly dressed women, one can see rags dangling. Dishes are also obtained on one's own. Searches and checks in the blocks are now almost impossible to carry out, and in addition, one can sense that the [female] guards are to a certain extent afraid to go into a hostile crowd.

The [main] daily roll calls are grotesque. First, conversations that are so strictly forbidden take place out loud. In some blocks, small groups of prisoners usually read newspapers aloud. If it rains, prisoners stand covered with blankets and papers. Children's crying and the *blokowe* shouting for people to be calm increase the chaos.

Every once in a while the authorities try to bring the camp back to order and then for a couple of days repressive measures are used. There are now roll calls only once a day, but they are very long, since the number of people almost always does not tally up. The authorities, however, ignore this and go on to the day's agenda. Besides the normal roll calls, selection roll calls become the bane of our existence, and are very rigorous, during which prisoners are selected for transports of all kinds, including to the gas chamber.

Food rations are completely inadequate for normal life. There is only swede soup now, with no fat, and in small quantities. Towards the end potatoes are eliminated, and the bread rations are reduced. The kitchen cannot keep up with cooking and distributing the meals. They are brought too late, or there are not enough to go around. Prisoners leave for work hungry, and when they return, they get cold leftovers.

Prisoners now often get food on their own. Packages still arrive, and many people receive Red Cross packages. Bartering takes place on a large scale. Clothes [handwritten note: and camp articles like blankets, sheets and utensils] are stolen and exchanged for food. People increasingly help each other. People who are left without any help or who cannot manage on their own are practically starving to death.

The mortality rate in the camp is extremely high, regardless of whether the gas chamber is running. Compared to other camps, typhus is not as widespread, but dysentery and typhoid have devastating effects. Exhaustion brought on by hunger and the cold contributed to lowered resistance [handwritten note: scabies, ulcers and scurvy are common].

The crematorium is expanded and operates day and night. We constantly see a thick, yellowish smoke spreading over the camp.

Since the hospital has not had enough room for some time now already, normal blocks are turned into blocks for the sick. The hygienic conditions are very bad. The sick lie two to a bed. Less serious contagious illnesses such as erysipelas, sore throat and others were disregarded and the sick and healthy lay together.

Other than a few dedicated individuals, the group of nurses was on a very low level. The Germans chose special types, and the volunteers who came forward were sent on transports as unemployed. There were too few nurses and no night shifts. The dying were left without any care whatsoever. Very often, there was not even anyone to give them a glass of water. Their clothes were stolen before they died. The wards for those suffering from communicable diseases were shut for the whole night without any light, and no one at all could be called for help. The fellow prisoners of the very sick could not help them.

One time a dying woman grabbed the woman next to her by the throat so hard that she nearly strangled her, because her bony fingers could not be wrenched away. The sick would fall out of their beds and lay there like that until morning.

The gas chamber began to function in the summer of 1944. At first, groups of mentally ill women were taken from various blocks and sent there, then the ward of people seriously ill with tuberculosis. Selections began in the blocks of sick people, and the seriously ill were added to the transports mentioned above. People were not sent to the gas chamber from the typhus wards because they were apparently afraid that the disease would spread.

During the first phase, much was said about fatal injections being given to the seriously ill, but I don't know whether these things have been verified.

Since admitting oneself to the hospital meant putting oneself in danger of being sent away, many prisoners hid in the blocks.

People rescued and warned the sick energetically and selflessly, and later protected them on a large scale in the face of being sent to the gas chamber en masse and on transports. Very many Polish and Czech nurses, women doctors and *blokowe* deserve much credit.

In addition to selections in the blocks of sick people, the *blokowe* were ordered to write a list of all those in their blocks who in their opinion were not fit to work. This was also done in a very underhand way. It was announced that they would be sent to a "rest camp", where they would have better conditions and would not have to work.

Before, there used to be a children's camp near the camp for female juvenile delinquents. Afterwards, it turned out that this camp was turned into a collection point for the gas chamber that was built nearby.

Hence the name "*Jugendlager*" that was commonly used in Ravensbrück. The first transport of [healthy - handwritten] women was not liquidated immediately. They were kept there through the late autumn and winter, for a couple of weeks, in conditions that decimated that group. They were not sick women, just weaker, unable to do hard physical labour. Their coats and blankets were taken away from them, while they continued to require six-hour-long roll calls, and gave only half the [usual] food rations. There was a selection there again, and they were sent one after another to the gas chamber. The women who survived the hunger and cold managed to return [to their blocks] afterwards.

Since there wasn't enough room in the *Jugendlager*, the authorities organised something that was called the "convalescent block" inside the camp itself, where the sick and those unable to work were sent from various blocks. They were talked into volunteering by being told that they'd be excused from roll calls. Before they were taken to the gas chambers, as they were slated to be from the start, half of them died with no medical care. Every morning the porch of the block would be so littered with corpses that we would have to step on them to get by.

When people began to be taken to the *Jugendlager*, those who could not or did not want to get into the vehicles themselves were thrown in like objects, held by their arms and legs, and swung through the air. As they were being taken away (this was done in groups), sometimes there would be a macabre scene when some managed to escape through a window and, not being able to walk on their own, would drag themselves to reach another block. Of course this was not successful very often, because the block was well guarded.

Some people in the transports sent to work in the munitions plants or at other exhausting jobs would come back half-dead and would be sent to the gas chamber or lie dying in the blocks.

Toward the end, a transport of French-women who levelled and drained some wet terrain where there was to be an airport, returned in such bad condition that not even a single one of them could walk. They were laid down in a row in the block and left to die. This took about two weeks. They were no longer able to eat the soup that was brought to them once a day. Some of them died from dysentery and exhaustion.

The groups sent to dig trenches or move rubble returned in similar condition.

The camp authorities received orders to sterilise Gypsy women and their children. This was to be done in exchange for their freedom.

This was done in a barbaric fashion. Once they volunteered, they could not change their minds. The operations were done without any anaesthetic, and because the women put up a struggle and tried to run away, they were beaten and kicked. As a result, they were taken to another camp.

In the context of the general disorganisation, as in the earlier period, the authorities were above all interested in using as much manpower as possible in the military plants.

Toward the end of the previous period, there was much emphasis on working in the significantly expanded workshops where military uniforms were sewn in the camp itself. The prisoners, who worked there even had better living conditions and, if needed, were protected from transports and selections.

The earthworks near the camp were still carried out on a large scale, it looked as if they existed mostly to employ prisoners and in this way control the increasing disorder in the camp.

The most important aspect of the day, for all involved, was the catching of women for work or transports by special inspectors, and their use of all means possible to avoid being caught.

The selection roll calls occur with increasing frequency. Moreover, the medical examinations of those who are leaving to work in factories take a very long time. The examination itself mostly consists of parading nude in front of the doctor, but the waiting for hours in front of the *rewir* is very tiring.

As long as there was still some kind of order still, the lists of those who were chosen for transports were drawn up very carefully, and getting off of such a list was terribly difficult. Thanks to the Polish women working in the doctor's office (called the *rewir*), sometimes it was possible to get illegal doctor's statements. Signing up for some of the work gangs needed in the camp itself also made it possible to stay, but this had to be done before one was put on a transport list.

Toward the end of the end, during the evacuation phase, no one could be sure she would not be "caught", either while she was working with her whole work gang, or when the block was being inspected, or on the street.

Moving to another block, despite the difficult conditions in Ravensbrück, always meant the situation would worsen.

The last director, who was there until the end of the camp would carry out all the cruellest orders of his superiors, but he personally did not torment the prisoners. There were even times when he would talk with some of them in a friendly way. People used to say that he was active in the English intelligence, but this was never verified.

The arrival of the transport of people evacuated from Warsaw was one of the biggest events for Polish women during their time in the camp.

The news arriving about the uprising in general made people very excited and optimistic, or depressed and pessimistic. The Polish women who were evacuated were the largest transport that had arrived at Ravensbrück up to that time.

It was made up of very different kinds of people. [There were] women who actively took part in the uprising, those who were evacuated by chance and those who decided of their own will to leave with the Germans. The news told to the prisoners already in the camp varied so much that they just contributed to the confusion.

Some of the women arriving believed the Germans' assurances that they were not prisoners per se, but rather evacuees, and as such had special privileges.

The phrase "I am innocent", which those who had been arrested at random used to say earlier as well, also to describe political prisoners, [now] created a gap between the prisoners and some of the new arrivals.

To their great disappointment, not only were they not treated better than the others, some of them were even sent to the *Jugendlager*, and later on the work done in "freedolm" [i.e., outside the camp], which turned out to be even harder than the camp itself.

Both at that time as well as earlier, air raids were a big attraction for the prisoners, because they meant that there was a pause in the work, especially if it meant a break in the work being done at night. In general, the air raids did not upset the prisoners, because it was generally believed that the camp itself would not be bombed, something which turned out in practice to be true.

Unfortunately, the dark side was that wounded prisoners were brought to the camp from other work sites.

The evacuation period began with a transport that came from Auschwitz. That transport marched on foot in terrible conditions. The women who could no longer walk were killed along the way. After they arrived at Ravensbrück, they were kept outside for three days in the late autumn, since there was no more room, and as a result of this a great many of the women died. After a short time at Ravensbrück, they were sent to other camps.

After they had left, other groups were sent one by one to camps that were situated farther from the Russian front.

Part of the camp was partitioned off with barbed wire and there, in terrible conditions, were kept women slated for the next transport. The trains did not go regularly, so sometimes the waiting went on for quite a while.

For the more enterprising, this provided a chance to get out of the transport block.

At this time "roundups" for the transports assumed a tragicomic form, if one can use that expression. Special committees made up of SS men with revolvers and riding crops would surround the blocks, take away entire columns as they were going off to work, catch passers-by, etc.

Special roll calls were held at which selections for transports were carried out. The blocks were emptied at that time and no one was allowed to stay inside. Of course the prisoners mustered all their wits to hide successfully before these roll calls. The work inspector, the infamous Pflaum, would personally look under beds, or on the highest bunks. For some time it was possible to hide in the attics of blocks that had ceilings, but that, too, was discovered. If one managed to jump out of a window during the roundup (of course at the risk of being shot), and run fast enough, one could hide in a different block, if they were not all inspected at the same time. The usual way was also to hide in the epidemic block (at that time, there was dysentery and typhoid), and get into bed with a sick person. Sometimes, however, this method also failed.

In the general chaos, it was sometimes possible to escape from the transport itself. There were even cases of brave and determined *blokowe* or policewomen who led an entire column out of the ranks under the pretext that it was a unit returning from work.

There were fewer and fewer work gangs assigned to the camp itself, which meant that hiding became increasingly difficult. One tragic moment was when the order came that the sock brigades to which the older and weaker women had been assigned ever since the camp started, would be taken away. In addition to the transport, they were in danger of being taken to the gas chamber. Frightened that they would be taken away, very many of those women volunteered for hard physical labour, which they also paid for with disease or death. Those transports were sent to the gas chamber this way.

The selected prisoners filed past the doctor and work inspector. The main emphasis was on external appearance and the condition of one's legs. This was during the period when we were expecting the camp as a whole to be evacuated on foot. Just having swollen legs was enough to qualify you for the *Jugendlager*.

At that time, an order was issued that individuals who had the title of princess or duchess should be put on separate lists. Then people with academic titles were included as well. It was expected that perhaps there might be an exchange for some more prominent Nazi personalities. This had a good effect, since it meant it was possible to get several people out of the *Jugendlager*.

The gas chamber stopped functioning in early April, thanks to the intervention of Baron Folke Bernadotte, after which the survivors from *Jugendlager* returned to the camp.

Before the mass evacuation was begun, it was announced that the "guinea pigs" were to be evacuated by a separate transport. Because we knew this was how they were going to be exterminated so that there would be no live evidence of their crimes, the Poles in the camp decided not to let this happen.

When the guinea pig block had its roll call (after they had refused to report for the transport) (fearing that they might be surrounded and taken by force by some trick), the same number of Polish women

from other blocks went instead, and the guinea pigs were divided up between the other blocks. This was an experiment which would have been unthinkable earlier.

This action, done with a great deal of courage and dedication, had prospects of success because of the general disorganisation in the camp, and also because of the *oberaufseherka's* help. In general, she was a terrible type, who tormented the prisoners, but for unknown reasons she was favourably inclined toward the guinea pigs. A delegation of guinea pigs went to see her and had the following conversation: one of the women who had been operated on, having thanked her for her care up to that time, and recalling her promise that nothing bad would happen to the guinea pigs, said that "if you save us in the near future, this could be useful to you in the future" (verbatim). For this or other reasons, the guinea pig issue dragged on until the last minute, and I do not know what happened after that.

The second phase of the evacuation took place as the result of intervention by the Swedish Red Cross, which sent busses to the camp. First, the Norwegian and Dutch women were evacuated, then the Frenchwomen and those of other Western Europeans. One Polish transport was also taken by a R.C. [Red Cross] train, but the rest were evacuated on foot a short time later.

The first evacuation was another difficult ordeal, which many people paid for with their lives.

There was no set route or area through which they were supposed to be evacuated. They were driven toward the west, between the retreating armies, under fire, with shells exploding. Those who could not walk were liquidated on the way.

Afraid of those conditions, despite very strict orders, large groups of prisoners hid in the camp, waiting until the last minute. On the evening of 27 April, there was a roll call held for the entire camp's final march out. That night, several thousand women left, and in the morning it turned out that almost the same number had stayed.

During the inspection which was carried out before the final march, some blocks closed their windows, and more than several hundred women lay motionless, holding their breaths, not making even the smallest noise so as not to give themselves away. Because of the air raid regulations, the lights were not turned on, and the [female] guards did not risk going inside, which they did not really care about by that time anyway, so the scheme worked. A few hours later, that group also marched out, but under better conditions than the previous group. Each prisoner got a package from the Red Cross for the journey, but because they were tired, most of them left theirs in the forest.

The Czech and German women were also evacuated on foot. [Handwritten: The Russians were sent with general transports, mothers with children were evacuated earlier with a separate transport.]

After virtually the entire camp had left, when gunfire began to be exchanged over the camp itself, only some of the sick from the epidemic wards were left, and some of the nursing staff, i.e. actually those who stayed on as volunteers and hid when the nurses left the camp. In addition, there were still many women who had stayed behind and came out of their hiding places after the transport had left.

With the remaining SS men [joining in], the looting of the warehouses [whose contents] had not yet been taken away. In part, these were Red Cross packages, and the storage room for private clothes. Prisoners who were less ill also enthusiastically participated in this.

The Russian armies were expected to arrive at any moment. The director of the camp was still present, and warned the sick that before evening the headquarters and some of the blocks would be blown up. The hospitals would supposedly remain.

At about seven in the evening, completely unexpectedly several Swedish R. C. [Red Cross] vehicles arrived. Only one was for our use, the rest stayed outside the camp. They contained prisoners who had been picked up along the way or (this information has not been checked) requisitioned by force by SS men who wanted to reach their divisions. Only a small group of sick women (convalescents) were taken, the rest remained in the camp.

The R.C. vehicles (this time not busses, but covered platforms lorries) came at the last moment, just before the battle and artillery barrage began.

In the forest, those vehicles picked up some of the prisoners who were marching on foot. Because only a few could fit, there were formal battles over places [in the vehicles]. After they arrived at Lübeck, another convoy of vehicles was sent for those who still remained in the forest. Some of them got to the English, the rest left by boat from Lübeck to Sweden.

What stands out most in my mind about those last months in the camp is the extent of human stamina, both physical and moral. The transport of Jewish women that I mentioned earlier was reflected in the general situation, precisely because those were beings who, even when they were still living, gave up life and died without putting up a fight.

Certain groups of Polish women who were relatively well organised did much for their compatriots thanks to their good will and dedication.

Surrounded by the misery of corpses and tragedy, unfortunately many people busied themselves with getting as many things as they could. There were prisoners who left with large quantities of gold and diamonds.

This kind of behaviour cannot be condemned out of hand unconditionally, since their future was uncertain, and taking things that would fall into German hands was not a crime. On the other hand, an thoroughly disgusting phenomenon was the intentional securing for oneself as many things as possible by taking advantage of other people's hunger for personal gain.

The German authorities' attitude during the last period was rather indifferent, except for especially ardent individuals, who sought revenge for being on the losing side. No one seemed particularly attached to their fatherland, everyone tried to secure him or herself a way back. [Illegible handwritten note here.]

The director was there until the very last vehicle left, and bowed with a nice smile to the people as they left.

[Handwritten note: The "order numbers" reached 150,000 at that time.]

[Signed xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx]

Stamp: Polski Documentary Institute, Lund

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Dear Marysia! Thank you very much for your reminiscences. They are a very valuable acquisition for us, their form is unusual and differs from those we have received to date.

As far as the content is concerned, we would like to provide the following additional information and corrections:

1. On page 12, where you write about the events and artistic creations, it should be added that these things were done in secret.
2. On page 7, in talking about the conditions prevailing in the rewir would you not like to mention the matter of the "*betkart*" [German, "bed card"] in the blocks, in what instances it was granted, with what kind of fever, whether the recipient of a "*betkart*" had to stand for the roll calls, etc.
3. On page 8 and 15, in dealing with the question of punishment for escapes, would you describe precisely when the entire block was punished by having to stand, from which block the prisoner escaped, and in which block the prisoner worked; it would be important to support these things with names, if you remember them.
4. On page 9, we would like to ask you to detail the kinds of shortages and conditions that were used intentionally as methods of exhausting [the prisoners].
5. On page 12, would it be possible for you to tell us exactly by what means information could make it outside the camp and how the young people's education was organised.
6. On page 12, when did the first transports to military plants (Karlsbad) take place, [here several lines crossed out].
7. On page 13, it seems that work at night in the camp workshops was introduced in mid-1941, and not at the end of the second period, which would make it 1943, as you say. If you in fact mean the 12-hour workday, it was introduced in 1942, in January or February.
8. On page 12, we would ask that you tell us as specifically as possible when the famine began in the camp, what the rations were like in the first period, and how that was later subject to change.

9. On page 14, two events are confused, the beating occurred as Polish women were being taken to be shot on 8 March 1943, and the protest against the "guinea pig" matter took place on 15 August 1943. The punishment for beating the [female] guard was standing at roll call on Sunday and block 15, where the prisoners who were taken to be shot had lived, received a warning from the [female] guard Langefeld.
10. On page 15, regarding packages from the Pope, they were never given to the "guinea pigs", and they were not even shown their contents; the packages came from Catholic Action [*Akcja Katolicka*], and there were blessings from the Pope attached to them; on that same page, you say that the "guinea pigs" had special privileges, could you describe these more carefully for us; we would also ask you to tell us when the first successful escape from Ravensbrück took place and what you meant by the "interesting" way in which it was carried out, and what the "difficult" consequences were for the work gang in which the prisoner who was the second escapee worked.
11. On page 19, please tell us how you know that the gas chambers were operated by women.
12. We would also like to ask that you tell us what the hospital conditions were in the camp during the second period, what the doctors were like, the assisting personnel, Polish women's participation there, etc.
13. On page 28, do you know for certain that the gas chamber at Ravensbrück began to function already in the summer of 1944, because according to the information we have collected, we have established that the gas chamber existed from early 1945; we ask that you provide any details you might have about this matter.
14. On page 29, could you indicate the names (and addresses) of individuals who could tell us more details about the sterilisation and taking of Gypsy women to another camp.
15. Polish women were evacuated to Sweden in two transports by bus, and one transport by cargo train.
16. On page 36, the highest official number of prisoners at Ravensbrück reached 10,000.

In order not to trouble you with rewriting your reminiscences, please just answer the questions and provide explanations for the issues outlined above and include them as an attachment to the main text.

[Signed, Helena Miklaszewska]

Supplementary notes on Ravensbrück

I. Page 12 - cultural events and crafts

Events organised in the camp were of course prepared very carefully and most often in secret.

There was a large event for New Year's 1942, in the kitchen block, which thanks to the Polish *blokowa* (Mrs. Korewina) and less rigorous treatment by the authorities could show more initiative.

The next year, an artistic nativity scene was organised in another block for Christmas. It was done quasi-officially, and the nativity scene was also displayed in other blocks. There were also meetings for discussions, lectures and services without taking special precautions. (The less strict course taken by Langefeld [handwritten note:] made the above events possible.)

When *oberauf*. Mandel was in charge, we had to hide carefully again, whereas the events organised later by the Russian and French women (end of '43 and '44) were rather official ones, often held outside. They were only forbidden if they were too raucous or if a particularly rigorous [female] guard was on inspection duty.

Of course there was never any permission granted for events, but the authorities did not pay attention to information received regarding such matters.

Several women from the September Warsaw transport in 1941 started the artistic work while they were in quarantine. Because the authorities became interested in them (carved figures, slippers made of hay, children's toys, flowers, etc.), a special workshop was set up for the production of such items.

Of course it was forbidden to make these things for one's own use. In particular camp rings with the prisoner's number were condemned.

II. Page 7 - "*Betkarts*."

The rules regarding "*betkarts*" varied a great deal, depending on the period and who was in charge of the blocks. In the first period, which was hardest in terms of discipline, the "*betkarts*" were given out less often (the sick were for the most part taken to the *rewir*).

If someone got a "*betkart*", it meant that the sick woman was allowed to stay in the block during roll calls, but they had to get dressed and sit in the dining hall during the roll call. Because the *blokowe* in some of the blocks opened the windows and doors during that time, the conditions were much worse than those outside.

When *oberauf*. Langefeld was in charge, [sic] [the sick] could remain lying down during the roll call and an official checked the sick in their beds.

When abuse of the "*betkarts*" began (already to some extent in 1942), issuing them illegally, counterfeiting them, not registering for work the day the card expired, rubbing the thermometer when one's temperature was being taken, the rules were tightened and staying in bed during roll call is once again banned, though the sick were not forced to go outside for roll call.

Theoretically, the temperature one needed to have in order to be given a "*betkart*" was 39°C, but this depended to a very great extent on the doctor's own whims and on the assisting nurse's talent for

presenting [the case]. This had special importance in terms of getting assigned "*inendienst*" [German, *Innendienst*, work inside the camp], which required a temperature of 38°C. *Inendienst* meant one had to take part in the roll call and that the *blokowa* had the right to use these prisoners for internal work assignments. If there was ill-will, they were forced to carry the kettles with food every day, to wash the floors, windows, etc.

[Medical] examinations in the *rewir* were very superficial, it was mostly external symptoms that were taken into account, and those that caused fevers, ulcers, rashes and sore throat.

At the end of 1943, more attention was paid to laboratory tests, blood pressure, white blood cell count, etc. X-rays and quartz lamps were introduced.

During the first period, only blood tests were done very carefully using the Wasserman test (the original (1906) non-treponemal antigen serologic test for syphilis, i.e. the laboratory test for determining syphilis).

3. Page 8 and 18 - punishments for escapes

During the time of director Koegel, and I think all the way until 1943, standing [as punishment for] an escape was meted out to the entire camp. (The escapees were always caught, so it was possible.) After I. Kuzoń and her fellow prisoners escaped, in May or June of '43, during Suryn's directorship, the entire camp was summoned to stand for several hours; the kitchen block, on the other hand, [here inserted handwritten note: where only cooks lived, with a few exceptions], where the escapees had lived, stayed longer and had to stand every day after work for a whole week as punishment.

I have the impression (I am not sure) that this was actually the beginning of the change in the punishment system (i.e. *betrib* [German *Betrieb*, enterprise] or the work gang, not the block). I remember very well how after the second successful escape by Eugenia Kocwa (in the summer of 1944[]) her work gang was assigned to the punishment block for a couple of weeks, and the *kolonka* [German, *Kolonnführerin*: female prisoner responsible for the work gang] was locked in the bunker, beaten and interrogated a few times. Only thanks to the "measures" taken by the Polish women working in the *rewir* did it prove possible to protect the work gang from being sent on a transport.

The escape of I. Kuzoń and her fellow prisoners (p. 18) was interesting because they managed to dress in civilian clothes (civilian clothes were not yet given out at that time yet). Over the top of their clothes, they put on camp clothes and worked in the kitchen from the morning, as usual. At about eight in the morning, they disappeared. It was the time of day when the trucks would take the kettles to the work gangs working outside the camp. In all probability, they left [hidden] among the kettles. The lorry had a tarp over it, and the prisoners went inside with the kettles. The driver was on friendly terms with the cooks. After the escape, he was summoned for interrogation, but either there was no evidence against him, or the matter was covered up, because he stayed on. It is not known whether he knew of their escape, or managed to do it on their own.

Several cooks who had been closer to the escapees were called in for questioning, one was taken for a couple of weeks to the bunker. The director made a speech to the kitchen block, announcing that the [daily] standing [after work] would go on until someone came out with the details of the escape. Nothing like that happened, and after a week, the punishment ceased.

4. P. 9 - shortages used to exhaust prisoners

This relates most of all to block 16 in 1940 and was used by those in charge of the block, but with the permission of a [female] official.

During the first period, all the blocks had windows that were untact, while during the coldest weather in winter, they were removed completely, making it impossible to close them at night.

The food brought from the kitchen was hot and carefully prepared, but at least a couple of times a week supper was poured into our mess kits and given to us cold under the pretext that it was punishment for some kind of imaginary crimes (leaving for roll call too quickly, talking, dirty cupboards).

Although no one slept in the dining hall, normally we were not allowed to dry our clothes at night [there] if they got wet. That was only permitted a couple of times after real downpours. [Handwritten note: In winter, jackets were usually damp]

Very exhausting was what we used to call the "fake crowd". In 1940, the blocks were not overcrowded, but because we were not allowed to go into the dormitory during free time, we had to sit in the dining room. There were too few stools, and we had to sit for hours in very uncomfortable positions, forbidden to move.

Going out for roll call always took place too early, despite some very disciplined women among us, and waiting, stock-still, in winter was especially hard.

Because supper would be distributed afterwards, there was too little time until the siren, the *blokowa* would not allow us to wash, even those who had come back from earth moving projects.

The way we dressed was very strictly monitored. Underpants that were too large and did not fit protected us against the cold only insofar as they could be tucked into our stockings and tied with garters. This was forbidden, and every couple of days, checks were made. (At this time, there were not yet checks to see if prohibited items were being taken from one place to another.)

Despite repeated requests to be given rags or paper to wrap our feet in when our shoes were too large and caused our feet to have sores, this request was never granted. Using straw from the mattresses was a punishable offence.

The thin kerchiefs that were given to the women who did not go out to work did not protect them from the cold during the long roll calls. Putting one's own handkerchief or a piece of paper under it, if noticed, meant getting hit in the face at the very least.

If we were not able to eat our entire portion of food (this often happened during the day because we were too tired from working), we were not allowed to put it in the cupboard to eat in the evening.

Bringing underclothes to the block or taking out dirty ones took place in the following way: regardless of how many people there were, the *blokowa* would mobilise all or most of those who were staying inside the block a given day. This column was too big for the number of things that had to be taken, not to mention the long wait in front of the warehouse in the cold (the *blokowa* would go inside). The *blokowa* distributed underclothes in such a way that the first were repacked, the rest returned loose. Helping was not allowed. One of the prisoners who was not very strong fell down, which was described as hysteria, and the entire column had to wait until the said prisoner dragged herself back to the block. There were often similar cases.

A prisoner whom the *blokowa* did not like was punished for snoring by being moved at night to a bathroom with a stone floor for a couple of weeks, where she slept only on a straw mattress. This caused her kidneys to catch a chill.

The ban on going to the toilet at night, because order was not maintained there, caused frequent bladder infections. One of the women who soiled her bed because she was not allowed to go out, had to stand outside with the dirty sheet on her head in winter as punishment.

The *blokowa* and German *sztubowa* are not alive, the second *sztubowa* Greta Muskular, after time in Auschwitz, returned to Ravensbrück before the end of the camp.

5. P. 17 - Information made it out of the camp mostly by means of uncensored letters, through specific work gangs. This changed depending on the kind of work being done. Permanent work gangs like Sas, Upenthal, and the seamstress workshop in Furstenberg [sic] had their established routes. For a while, one of the *ausen* work gangs worked near a work gang of French prisoners of war, with whom it was relatively easy to communicate. One of the [female] guards, an Austrian named Erika whose last name I do not remember, helped send letters a couple of times. The aforementioned driver from the kitchen also sometimes took letters.

As far as educating young people is concerned (p. 13), there was a whole group of teachers who did this systematically. I have the impression that the main organiser was Mrs. Madler, and that she would be able to provide more specific details.

6. - First transport to Karlsbad, to the best of my recollection, was in the spring of 1943. It was during a great scandal which resulted in Poles being expelled for taking out things, and the *bibelforszerki* were assigned instead. Most of the Polish women from the "effects" work gang were sent away by the transport as punishment. Maybe this detail will help give you a better idea.

7. p. 14 - As far as working at night is concerned, I made a mistake, because I worked in the *betryb* [German, *Betrieb*, enterprise, workshop] where night shifts were introduced later.

8. p. 11 - During the first period, the rations were as follows: two times a week each of us was given a spoonful of jam or lard. The bread was divided into four parts (250 g). Once or sometimes twice a week there was sweet soup (oatmeal or noodles cooked in milk). Every day for supper we had ¾ litres of thick *knorr* soup. For lunch, an *eintopf* [German, thick soup, stew] made of fresh cabbage, beets, carrots or swedes with a large quantity of potatoes. 1 litre. Two times a week, ½ litre of vegetable soup and 5 or 6 large potatoes in their skins. Every day, one table would have second helpings. The soups had enough fat in them, and contained pieces of meat. The *blokowe* took advantage of the meat, jam, and fat floating on top of the soup. On Saturday and Sunday there was a cold supper as later, but with a much bigger piece of margarine and sausage. The coffee we had with our cold suppers had sugar and milk.

The quantity and quality of the food declined dramatically during the period before the first harvest in 1942, and this situation continued all the way until autumn. Later, the portions were increased, but did not reach one litre again. [Handwritten note: At the same time, packages were allowed, so the situation became normalised.] The basic rations during that time remained the same, but the quantity and quality was worse (mainly because the camp received a large shipment of rotten potatoes). The portions of soup were reduced to ½ litre. [handwritten note: XX *Eintopfs* were not given - the potatoes in the soup were mostly rotten.] We did not get lard anymore, and got jam once a week. Kale soup was introduced (in the first period, it was rare) and soup made of dried vegetables (swedes, cabbage, etc.). The amount of bread that was distributed in the second period, approximately from '42, was constantly changing. It depends on the kind of work being done [handwritten note: and on the day of the week], but I cannot remember what the exact norms were. In '42, there were many work gangs working *na ausen*. After the first shock of prison and the camp, our bodies grew accustomed [to the conditions], which meant that hunger became even more of a problem.

Rations gradually worsened, and the fundamental crisis came in the last period - bread always in five parts, 200 g, then in 6-7 pieces, and then finally there was none at all. The soups had practically no fat in them. To economise, *eintopfs* were reintroduced, but made from boiled, unpeeled potatoes, given to us in very small amounts. Jam was eliminated, margarine and sausage were reduced to a bare minimum. We were not given sweet soups or coffee with sugar. Supper consisted of unsweetened coffee.

9/10. P. 17 - I am attaching a corrected page, as there were two events that had been conflated there.

As far as special privileges for guinea pigs are concerned, they were not required, even after they recovered, to go to work. They could be signed up for work at their own request.

When the whole camp was no longer allowed to have linens [sheets and duvet covers and pillow cases], the guinea pigs could still keep theirs. They were allowed to lie on their beds during the day and leave

[the block] during work hours. These were never special lenient orders, they were able to do so if they were lucky with the *blokowa* assigned to them, and they were also allowed to have more books, textbooks, etc., in the block.

A watershed moment was when a German *blokowa* was assigned as punishment for the block after protest demonstrations. She tried to introduce a strict regime, and, more importantly, spied and informed on the prisoners.

11. P. 22 - As far as using women for the servicing of the gas chambers at Ravensbrück, I heard that they used to load those who had been gassed onto trucks to be taken to the crematorium. Of course these are only things I have heard. On the other hand, I did hear that it was Greta Muskular, the *blokowa* from 16, who was assigned to leading the Jewish women to the gas chamber at Auschwitz, and that she was famous for kicking and beating those who resisted. She was clearly fit for the role.

12. - As far as specific data about the hospital, I think that you should ask Dr. Zofia Mączka. She did not actually work in the *rewir* until the end, since she was locked up in the bunker for almost two months in the summer of '43 and did not return to that job afterwards, but I know that she was always in contact with the *rewir*. Mrs. Mączka was in Sweden, and I have not heard that she returned to Poland.

Ms. Sylvia Salverson, a Norwegian, was in the *rewir* until the end, her address is Parkvagen 47 b., Oslo.

Perhaps she could also give you information about Gypsy women, though as far as I know, she was not involved with that section.

13. p. 28 - I cannot give you any proof that the gas chamber existed at Ravensbrück in the summer of 1944, except that I heard that terminally ill patients were taken there during that period from the blocks where the sick lived, and were gassed there, except for one transport that was sent to Auschwitz. (The first transport of those sick with tuberculosis. There were letters from them from Auschwitz. [Handwritten correction.]) I also heard that during that time a new building was built near the *Jugendlager* that was specially guarded. I did not see that myself. (That was learned from a column working in the area.) [Handwritten note.]

14. p. 29 - About the matter of the Gypsy women, I do not have the address of anyone who would have been in the *rewir* at that time, I only heard that those Gypsy women were taken to a special work camp.

Before that, in 1943, a group of Gypsy women was summoned to be examined, and then sent to the Gypsy camp. One of them told me that at roll call they were officially informed that they were going to

an exclusively Gypsy work camp. The Gypsy women generally believed that it would be a mixed camp and that they would be there with their husbands. It was said they had got some news to that effect.

I do not know if all these things I am writing are of any use, since of course you cannot rely on them, but perhaps in conjunction with other information they will help explain some things.

15. - During the evacuation I was sick with typhus and I did not hear about the Polish transport that went by bus.

16. - As far as the official numbers during the last period are concerned, it seemed to me that they were higher, but I do not have any exact figures.

xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx [signature]

[Stamp:] Polish Documentary Institute, Lund

At the Ravensbrück concentration camp, the witness was in close contact with representatives of almost all the nationalities [represented there]. She was one of the founders of an international women's [group], which she mentions in her testimony.

Her reminiscences are an attempt to make a synthesis of life in the camp on the basis of her own experiences and observations. Life at the Ravensbrück camp is depicted objectively. Many of her judgments are very sound. The document as a whole is very valuable and makes a very positive impression.

Helen Miklaszewska

Addenda by Institute assistant, Helena Dziejicka, to the record of xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx's testimony, No. 420.

To the protocol of xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx's testimony, I am attaching the following supplementary information: I was in the Ravensbrück camp from 23 September 1941 until its end, i.e. until 23 April 1945.

p. 13 /of the record/ - The *oberaufsejerka* mentioned by the witness was Mandel. She was known for her cruelty toward the prisoners. During the roll call, she walked between the prisoners who were standing in rows and checked their pockets, the way their hair was combed, and if the prisoners had put any cardboard under the bare feet. Our shoes were taken away in spring (1 June 1942) and were given back in mid-September '42.

For the slightest deviation from the regulations, she would beat and kick us, and punished people by sending them to the bunker and having them whipped. Once, she ordered several prisoners to shave

their heads because their hair hadn't been combed properly and ordered them to parade in front of all the prisoners who were standing at roll call with boards that read: "this is what will happen to anyone who is not obedient" (I do not remember the exact text). At that time, the roll call would last a very long time. She circulated a memorandum in which she announced that there would be harsh punishments for the smallest infractions of camp regulations. Among other things, the announcement said that there are specially trained dogs to guard the prisoners that if necessary will be set on the prisoners.

p. 13 - They were allowed to subscribe to newspapers only in 1943, and then only to the special *Foelkisher Beobachter* [sic] camp edition. We found out it was a special camp edition because the work columns that left to work outside the camp by train sometimes succeeded in bringing back copies of *Beobachter* that they found in the train or got from civilians; there were always differences in the text, especially in the news from the front

Access to radio was forbidden for prisoners individually during the whole existence of the camp. In the camp there were radio speakers, and music and announcements were broadcast in versions that the authorities deemed appropriate. Hitler's speeches were also broadcast. The radio only played when we did not have to work (*frei stunde*) [German, *Freistunde*, free hour], most often on Sunday. In 1941 and 1942 they played the radio more, as time went on, radio broadcasts were abandoned. News from the radio (even in English) made it to the camp by secret means.

p. 15 - Circulation within the camp was allowed only at the end of 1942. Until this time, it had been strictly forbidden.

p. 20 - In general, the Frenchwomen showed themselves to be rather submissive to the German authorities, and it was often even possible to observe them grovelling in fear before the *aufseherki*. There were cases when they resisted the German authorities, but these were rare and sporadic.

The humour typical of that nation [the French] manifested itself on certain occasions. In general, they had little stamina, whether physical or moral. They broke down psychologically and as a result there was a decline in their physical strength - and death. They dropped like flies.

p. 22 - I do not remember the hanging of German women for sabotage. There were cases of the death penalty for sabotage, but those occurred in factories. The condemned were brought from the factories to Ravensbrück, and the execution took place there, outside the camp. Those were primarily Ukrainian and Russian women. - The one who was drowned in the canal was a spy for the German authorities, a German woman whose last name was Zipzer.

pp. 27-28 - The gas chamber at Ravensbrück began operating in early 1945.

p. 29 - I do not know of the case of the Frenchwomen who came by transport and were sent to dig trenches, and whose state was such that they were lying side by side in the block and not even one of them was able to walk. This probably refers to the transport of Frenchwomen that arrived from Rychlin in March 1945 in very bad condition, but not to the extent that the witness describes it. They were emaciated and very weak, many of them died, but some returned to France.

p. 33 - The conversation between the delegation of "guinea pigs" and *oberaufseherka* Binz included here is not known to us. They had various conversations, but not one with that content. This conversation is known neither to me, nor to Zofia Zokulska, one of the "guinea pigs" who played an active role in the life of the guinea pig group and who knows it from the inside.

p. 34 - Most of the "guinea pigs" went to Poland after the evacuation. Only a few of them went to other countries.