

Rudolf Reder **versus** **Kurt Gerstein**

Two False Testimonies
on the Bełżec Camp Analyzed

Carlo Mattogno



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Introduction

The Polish Jew Rudolf Reder is considered the only survivor of the alleged Bełżec Extermination Camp, or, more precisely, the only one who left a long and detailed description of its alleged vicissitudes (Trogenza 2000, Note 5, p. 259). According to Michał Trogenza, there were in fact at least six other survivors in addition to Reder: Sara Bender of Lemberg (Lwów, now L'viv), Hirsz Binder, Mordechai Bracht and Samuel Velczer of Tomaszów Lubelski, Chaim Hirszman of Janów Lubelski, and a Hungarian Jew who was called "Szpilke" (to whom I will return later). On January 7, 1960, the *Gerichtsassessor* (judge in training) Zeug, an official of the German Central Office of the State Justice Administrations for the Investigation of National-Socialist Crimes¹ communicated to Tuwiah Friedmann, director of the Haifa Documentation Center, the names and addresses of Samuel Velczer, Herz Binder and Mordechai Bracht, who had requested reparations from the State Office for Reparations (*Landesamt für Wiedergutmachung*) in Stuttgart, Germany, and Zeug had also sent a questionnaire to the Haifa Center (Friedmann, unpaginated). On January 13, 1960, Zeug wrote to Friedmann that he had learned that Herz Binder had died in February 1959, while Samuel Velczer had moved away. In the meantime, another witness had been identified, Gisela Rosenbaum born Biberstein from Tarnów, who lived in Haifa in 1958 (*ibid.*):

"In her reparations case at the State Office for Reparations in Karlsruhe, Ms. Rosenbaum credibly stated that she was imprisoned in Belzec from 1942 to 1944, where she was employed at sorting clothes inside the extermination camp."

With the exception of Hirszman, none of these people evidently ever made a deposition. Hirszman was questioned on March 19, 1946 by the Jewish His-

¹ The *Zentrale Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltungen zur Aufklärung nationalsozialistischer Verbrechen* at Ludwigsburg, Germany, was created in 1958 for the primary purpose of prosecuting alleged perpetrators of so-called "violent Nazi crimes."

torical Commission of the Lublin District, but his statement is terse and generic in nature (Libionka, pp. 93-95). Reder's testimony is therefore indeed unique and fundamental.

Reder was born in Dębica, Poland, on April 4, 1881; in August 1942, when he was deported to Bełżec at the age of 61, he lived in Lwów, where he had a soap factory. On November 8, 1949, he married Johanna Robak in Krakow. In 1949, he assumed his wife's surname and became Roman Robak. In 1951, he moved from Poland to Israel, and in 1952 he emigrated to Toronto, Canada, where he died in 1968.²

His early statements (1944-1946) were for many years unknown or ignored outside Poland. Even in 1951, Léon Poliakov, one of the first European orthodox Holocaust historians, did not know of him at all; in his exposition of the Bełżec Camp, he relied exclusively on Kurt Gerstein (Poliakov 1979, pp. 218-224).

Gerald Reitlinger, who wrote his treatise two years later, limited himself to a fleeting and confused reference (Reitlinger, p. 140):

"It was only after the war that a real survivor appeared to describe the miserable Diesel engine which had supplied the carbon monoxide. He was Rudolf Reder, [...]. Reder once saw the victims locked in the gas chamber for hours on end while efforts were made to start the Diesel engine."

Reder, however, had only talked about a gasoline engine, as we will see later.

Reitlinger relied on an English book published in 1948 which contained excerpts from Reder's statements (Muszkat, pp. 229-232), but this witness continued to be ignored otherwise.

In early December 1954, Reder/Robak filed a request for reparations to the Federal Republic of (West) Germany, as provided by a West-German law enacted to the benefit of victims of National-Socialist persecution (see Chapter 1.6.). In accordance with statutory practice, the German judiciary sent Reder a questionnaire with twelve questions, which was sent to all claimants who claimed to have escaped the Bełżec Camp (see Chapter 1.7.). Reder replied in late January 1956.

Subsequently, in August 1960, Reder went to Munich and was interrogated twice by the local prosecutor, but was not asked to testify as a witness during the subsequent Bełżec Trial against Josef Oberhauser (January 18-21, 1965), and in the grounds for the judgment dated January 21, 1965, Reder is not even

² See Duffy for the year Reder died. The name of his second wife results from Reder's declaration of Dec. 7, 1956 (see Chapter 1.6.). Wikipedia gives "Joanna Borkowska" as the maiden name of his second wife, but this is not supported by the Majdanek Museum's web page quoted as a reference, which has since been deleted. (web.archive.org/web/20141129063647/http://www.majdanek.eu/articles.php?aid=471&acid=101&lng=1) In addition, Wikipedia states that Reder's actual date of death was Oct. 6, 1977, but no source is given. Reder was allegedly buried at the Mount Pleasant Cemetery in Toronto. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rudolf_Redder, last accessed on Jan. 23, 2021)

mentioned (Sagel-Grande *et al.*, pp. 629-647). Only in 1977 did Adalbert Ruckerl publish a few lines of Reder's interrogation of August 8, 1960.³

At the Eichmann Trial in Jerusalem, Reder's testimony was irrelevant; he was mentioned only in passing during the 67th hearing on June 6, 1961.⁴

In 1977, Michael [Michał] Tregenza, a historian of Polish origin, was the first to make Reder's statements known in more detail, specifically Reder's 1946 booklet *Bełżec* (Tregenza 1977, pp. 19f.), of which he provided an extensive summary. Ten years later, Yitzhak Arad presented many excerpts from this same booklet in his well-known study on the Reinhardt camps.⁵ In 1999, the Jewish Foundation of Krakow in collaboration with the Auschwitz Museum made Reder's booklet available for the first time in English translation.⁶ Franciszek Piper explained in the introduction to that translation that Reder's statements had been "often cited in historical works as one of the basic sources of knowledge about that camp" and that "in view of their historical value," since they had been published previously only in Polish, it was decided to publish them in English translation (Reder 1999, p. 83). An even more-uncritical Italian translation was published in 2004 by Roberto Sforini, but without a map of the camp, which undermines the author's entire argumentative structure.⁷

In 2000, in the only currently existing dedicated orthodox study on the Bełżec Camp, Robert Kuwałek made abundant use of Reder's testimony taken mainly from the booklet mentioned, with some brief and fragmented excerpts from three other statements (Kuwałek 2000).

Only in 2013, almost all of Reder's statements were published in Polish by Dariusz Libionka.⁸

As always when faced with a self-proclaimed eyewitness who more-or-less-miraculously escaped from an extermination camp, orthodox historians lose all semblance of critical sense: any witness who claims these attributes for himself is *a priori* trustworthy and reliable in their eyes, and the mere thought of seeking to verify their reliability is almost a sacrilege to them.

This attitude has ensured that my first critique of Reder's statements dating back to 1985 has remained singular to this day.⁹ Hence, the following state-

³ Ruckerl, p. 69. This book also contains a long excerpt of the reasons for the judgment of the trial against Josef Oberhauser (pp. 132-145).

⁴ State of Israel, Vol. III, p. 123; here, only four lines are dedicated to Reder.

⁵ Arad, pp. 73f., 117f., 126, 187f., 199, 200, 207, 217, 227, 246f., 264f.

⁶ Reder 1999. With incredible chutzpah, the preface was written by Jan Karski, the notorious impostor who had claimed to have visited the Bełżec Camp in October 1942 and to have "seen" an extermination system using "death trains" there. On this see Mattogno 2016, Section I.3., pp. 22-33.

⁷ Sforini, pp. 109-139. This is mainly a regurgitation of articles by Robert O'Neil and Michał Tregenza, which I dealt with in Mattogno 2007.

⁸ Libionka, pp. 26-81. The transcript of the interview with Reder is missing, which I transcribe in Chapter 1.2., although the author reproduces a photocopy of the original text on his p. 257.

⁹ Mattogno 1985, Chapter VIII, "Il testimone Rudolf Reder," pp. 129-137. In it, I took into consideration Reder's *Bełżec* booklet and the declaration quoted here in Chapter 1.3.

ment, which Michał Tregenza wrote in 2000 in a laudable, albeit-belated awakening of critical sense with regard to Chaim Hirszman and Rudolf Reder, is very true:

“According to current knowledge, these two reports are contradictory and contain inaccuracies.”

Also throwing Kurt Gerstein into the same pot, Tregenza continued that “all three eyewitness reports on the Bełżec Camp are to be considered unreliable” (Tregenza 2000, pp. 242f.). Ignoring his own scathing conclusion, however, he dismissed the issue in a few lines and quoted only a few examples of the witnesses’ unreliability.

In a long-unpublished paper of 2006, Tregenza returned to the subject more-thoroughly by documenting some more contradictions and inaccuracies of Reder’s statements (Tregenza 2006, Chapter 10, pp. 22-30). These critiques, as unsystematic as they were, did not in the least affect the unshakable credulity of his Polish colleagues, and not just the Polish ones. In particular Robert Kuwałek, editor of the compilation of Reder’s statements as published in Dariusz Libionka’s anthology, did not dare express even the slightest hint of criticism of “his” witness *par excellence* in his 13 apologetic biographical pages.¹⁰

Therefore, a systematic and comparative critical examination of all of Rudolf Reder’s statements is still lacking, and this study aims to fill this lacuna.

In Part 1, I first present the complete picture of Reder’s statements, while Part 2 contains my detailed critical analysis of them.

There is also another important issue that orthodox Holocaust historians have never dealt with: the enigmatic relationship between Rudolf Reder’s and Kurt Gerstein’s accounts, which is the subject of Part 4 of this study. This obviously first requires an accurate exposition and evaluation of Gerstein’s statements, which I present in Part 3.

¹⁰ R. Kuwałek, “Relacje i zeznania Rudolfa Redera” (Rudolf Reder’s testimonies and statements), in: Libionka, pp. 13-25.

Part 1:
Rudolf Reder's Statements

1.1. The Testimony of September 22, 1944

The documentation relating to Rudolf Reder includes at least nine statements dating from September 1944 to August 1960, which I deal with in chronological order in this part.¹¹ I translate without literary embellishment and as closely as possible to the original texts, adding clarifications only where necessary.

Reder's first statement is contained in an interrogation report by the Soviet prosecutor of the L'viv Oblast (district) of L'viv (Lwów) dated September 22, 1944. It exists in two versions: the original, handwritten text, countersigned by the witness,¹² and the typed transcript.¹³

*"[p. 1] Reder Rubin Hermanowicz
worker, born in Dębica in 1881, district of Krakow
profession - soap maker [soap manufacturer]
education - 7 classes of the gymnasium
address: Lwów, 7 Panieńska Street, Extension 4.*

I was taken to Bełżec in July [в июле] 1942. Bełżec is located at a distance of 60-70 km from Lwów and is a railway junction from which the railway goes to Warsaw, Jarosław, Tomaszów and Zamość. From the main track starts a spur built by the Germans that reaches the special plant built by the Germans [and] designed for the extermination of people. This plant consists of three huts for 250 /two hundred fifty/ people, two huts for 500 Jewish workers, with a strength of 500 /five hundred/ people, the building is called 'Bath house and disinfection'; a vase of flowers hung above the entrance to this building; the next building was the kitchen, the warehouse for the [personal] effects of those killed, and food for the workers and the guards, the sick bay for the guards. The bath house was made of concrete, the other huts were made of wood. When I was taken to Bełżec, one of the SS men asked who had any special training. I stated that I was a mechanic, and since they needed such a worker, they made me operate the gasoline engine [p. 2] of the 'Deič' Company¹⁴ that turned the transporter [транспортер] that lifted the earth from the pits in which the corpses of those exterminated /asphyxiated/ were buried. The steam locomotive carried the convoy of people to the branch leading to Bełżec. In each convoy there were 50 wagons, that is, one convoy carried 5,000 /five thousand/ people. Every day [ежедневно], two to four convoys arrived. They brought people from Poland, France, Belgium, Holland, Denmark, Norway, Czechoslovakia. It must be said that the deported people did not know their fate. After their arrival, they were ordered to strip naked in the courtyard. The women had their hair cut with a machine. Then the deportees were ushered in groups to the 'bath house,' where they were told that after bathing they would

¹¹ Almost all statements are included in Libionka, from which I take only those texts of which I do not have a photocopy of the original document.

¹² GARF, 7021-67-75, pp. 164-166. See Document 1.

¹³ GARF, 7021-149-99, pp. 16-19. See Document 2.

¹⁴ This company is unknown to Holocaust historiography.

all go to work. The 'bath house' itself was a concrete building divided by a corridor into two parts; in each part of the building there were three rooms, in which there were no windows, and the doors closed hermetically. On one side of the 'bath house,' the part opposite the railway line, there was an annex in which the compressor [компрессор] powered by a gasoline engine was located. Gas cylinders [баллоны с газом] were leading [were connected] to this machine. From the compressor the tubes went to each room. In each room on one wall there was a small grillwork to which the gas pipe led. The undressed people were made to enter the rooms; since the people were afraid of entering the dark rooms, the SS guards pushed those who resisted into the room with the bayonet. From 750 to 770 people entered each room. At full capacity, the entire 'bath house' killed up to 4,500 people /four thousand five hundred/. After twenty minutes, the doors of the rooms were opened, and the workers – Jews – among whom I was as well, fastened the loop of a belt to the hand of a dead man [and] two of us dragged the corpses [to the place] where the dentists were [p. 3] and [who] extracted gold teeth from their mouths. I must explain that the rooms had two doors: one through which people were made to enter and the other, large one, in all three rooms, from which the bodies were dragged out. Those condemned to death who were waiting for their fate in the courtyard did not see how the corpses were removed. The corpses were dragged into [already] dug pits measuring 100 x 25 x 15 meters. After a pit was full, which contained more than 100,000 /one hundred thousand/ corpses, the pits were sprinkled with slaked lime and filled with sand. All day, while this work was being carried out, an orchestra played near the pits. The orchestra played only cheerful melodies in order to drown out the cries of the unfortunates who had been pushed into the rooms. In this way, those who waited for their turn in the 'bath house' did not know the fate of those who had entered the 'bath house.'

Every day a whole basket full of gold, money and diamonds was brought to the Belżec commandant's office, stolen from the people condemned to death. The camp commandant was Stabscharführer Irman, of Czech-German nationality from the Sudeten region. Deputy commandant was Hauptscharführer Schwarz – a German. Also at the camp was Oberscharführer Feiks – German. The chief of the guards was Zugwachmann Schmidt. Schmidt was distinguished by his extraordinary brutality: if he noticed that any of the Jewish workers of the group of 500 was working poorly, he hung him by the feet from a gallows; after 3 hours, he detached the victim, still alive, from the gallows, then beat him vigorously, threw him on his back, poured water into his mouth, then began to fill his mouth with sand until the man choked. During the time I stayed in Belżec, 30 graves were filled, which corresponds to the killing of 3,000,000 people.

I managed to escape from Belżec in the following manner: the camp headquarters needed iron for the kitchen chimneys. I [p. 4] joined the unit to bring back the iron from Lwów. Four SS men and an officer, Scharführer Schatkow-

sky,^[15] came with me to Lwów in a car. The officer stopped the car on Legionów Street and went to lunch with 3 SS men, leaving one SS man in the back of the car. When I realized that the SS man had fallen asleep, I fled, and in this way I remained alive. Of the 500 workers in Bełżec, only I survived. I can't say more. My words were reported exactly and read back to me. Reder."

1.2. The Interview of November 1, 1944

On November 1, 1944, an article by Włodzimierz Bielajew appeared in the Polish newspaper *Czerwony Sztandar* (*Red Banner*) titled "The Eternal Fire of Bełżec," which contains an interview with Rubin [sic] Reder conducted in the area of the former Bełżec Camp, with a brief introduction and a final comment.¹⁶

"The Story of a Former Detainee"

The next week, when I went to the soft sandy ground of the Bełżec Camp, I heard terrible words again. In front of me sits a rather old man, white-haired, of small build and soberly dressed. His name is Rubin Reder. He was born in Dębica in 1881. He is now 63 years old. Rubin Reder can be considered without exaggeration a man who has returned from beyond. He has returned from a place from which no one else has returned. He went to Bełżec, one of the most-terrible death camps, but managed to escape from it. Here is the literal story [do słownie: sic] of a man who saw Bełżec from the inside:

* * *

On July 15 [15 lipca] 1942, when the first big 'action' in Lwów began, I was captured along with others passing through Zamarstynowska Street and loaded onto a covered truck. They took us to a barracks in Podzamcze. In the evening I was ordered to join the other detainees. We were all taken to the Janowska Street Camp. We spent the night outdoors, and in the morning, they took us to the railway cars. At the entrance of each car there were 4 Gestapo officials. When we got into the cars, we were beaten with sticks on the head and in the face. The train consisted of 50 cars – 100 people were crammed into each car. The cars were sealed. On the roof of the cars were turrets. The guards guarded the transport not only from the sentry boxes, but also from above.

At noon we arrived in Bełżec. The train was still at full speed when an intense cadaverous stench reached us through the grates of the cars. It was clear to each of us what lay ahead. The name of the station whizzed past us across the

¹⁵ This person is also unknown to Holocaust historiography.

¹⁶ Bielajew 1944, p. 2. The article is divided into two parts: "Zadakowe 'Uzdrowisko'" ("Enigmatic 'Health Station'"), which outlines the camp's history based on statements by Ignacy Mazur, and "Opowieść byłego więźnia" ("The Story of a Former Detainee"), which contains Reder's account. See Document 3.

grate. It shattered our last hopes. Each of us was condemned to end his life at Belżec – the death camp. The train pulled into the camp. The doors were opened. The guards began to kick us out of the cars. Everyone was ordered to undress completely. Women, children, old people, everyone, without exception, began to undress.

A Sudeten German, *Stabsscharführer* Franz Irmann, announced that we should first take a bath and undergo disinfection [dezynfekcję]. ‘Only after that,’ said Irmann, ‘can I assign you to work.’

In fact, in front of us on a platform was a low building, very long and wide, about 100 x 100 meters, with the sign on the front attic wall saying ‘Bade und Inhalationsräume’ [bath- and inhalation rooms]. A vase of flowers hung under the sign. While we undressed, Irmann ordered all skilled workers – carpenters, shoemakers, tailors and the like – to leave the ranks. As a soap manufacturer, I also have various skills; therefore, after having introduced myself as a machinist [maszynist], I stepped forward among the 8 specialists as well.

Here in the open [pod gołym niebem] the barbers began to cut women’s hair. When the whole procedure was finished, the guards began to push all the new arrivals, except us 8 specialists, into the bath house. Inside it looked very strange, and did not correspond at all to its name. This low and wide building was divided into two parts by a large corridor, in which three doors opened to the right, three to the left. They were the access doors to six rooms with false windows [z pozornymi oknami]. Each room could accommodate 750 people. As soon as the first of my unfortunate traveling companions crossed the threshold of the corridor, they had a bad feeling and wanted to go back. Then the guards began to push them with bayonets. Those who resisted were bayoneted. Eventually, some 4,500 people were crowded in the chambers. The doors were closed tightly. From the gassing device [z urządzenia gazowego] located behind the building, gas was conducted through special pipes. After 20 minutes, all the people locked up had taken their last breath.

A team of 500 people who had been left alive for auxiliary work began pulling the dead bodies out onto the street. The group of dentists, equipped with pincers, examined the mouths of the dead. When they found gold teeth, they pulled them out. Then there, at the camp, the gold teeth were melted into small ingots that were delivered to particularly reliable high-ranking Gestapo officials. Ten inmates left alive dealt exclusively with the thorough search of the clothes of those killed. They searched for jewels by unstitching the seams of clothes, carefully crushing the largest buttons in search for diamonds.

I stayed in the camp for four full months. In this period, 30 huge and deep pits were dug, filled with corpses and covered up around me. Thanks to simple mathematics, I estimate that the Germans killed and buried about 3 million people during this period. When the Red Army then went on the offensive and began to approach Belżec, the Germans, wanting to erase the traces, began to burn the corpses of the people they had murdered. Here in Belżec, they killed not only the population of Poland and western Ukraine. They also brought in

people condemned to death from Belgium, Holland, Czechoslovakia, France and Vienna. Only of the Germans, there was not a single one. They killed them in their own country, in Dachau and in other camps.

In general, the rate of killings I witnessed allows me to estimate that around 5 million people have been killed in Bełżec from the time of the creation of this camp to the time of its liquidation.

In October 1942 [w październiku 1942], they began to build a new kitchen in the camp. I took charge of this work. For the final commissioning of the kitchen, sheet-metal pipes were required for the chimney. There were none at the camp. I said cautiously to Irmann: 'In Lwów I could get some sheet metal – I have acquaintances there, but I don't know anyone here.' Contrary to my expectation, Irmann sent me to Lwów in search of sheet metal. But he ordered four Gestapo officials and a young officer to guard me. I got the sheet metal in Lwów and might actually then have returned, but as it was lunch time, the officer and the three guards went to eat and left me in the truck under the supervision of a 'volksdeutsch' [ethnic German] official of the Gestapo named Trotwein. The truck was parked next to the sidewalk in Legionów Street. It was a hot October day [dzień październikowy]. Trotwein was probably overwhelmed by the brandy he had drunk, by exhaustion and by sleepiness. He fell asleep while sitting next to me. I cautiously slipped out of the truck and left it as if nothing had happened, mingling with passers-by. A good woman, to whom I had once rendered many services, welcomed me into her home. She hid me in her house for twenty months. When people came, she hid me with blankets under two beds. In this way I saved myself, and if my salvation were only to tell the world of another unparalleled crime by the Hitlerites, for that alone it would be worth for me to live the rest of my life.

* * *

What can be added to this tale? The 'eternal flames' of Bełżec must not be extinguished in the memory of humanity, which has the sacred historical duty not only to completely destroy the brown plague of fascism, but also to do everything possible to ensure that the crimes committed in our splendid world by criminals with the mark of the swastika can never again be repeated in their full extent."

1.3. The Testimony of 1945

In 1945, Reder made an otherwise-undated statement to the Krakow section of the *Centralna Żydowska Komisja Historyczna* (Central Jewish Historical Commission), of which two versions exist. One was published with the title "Bełżec Rudolf Reder Komory gazowe" ("Bełżec Rudolf Reder Gas Chambers"; Borwicz *et al.*, pp. 56-59), the other simply untitled as Declaration No. 93 (Blumental, pp. 221-224). The contents are very similar, but there are dif-

ferences in structure and partly also in content. The archiving number of the aforementioned Commission – 162 for the first, 594 for the second – suggests two distinct statements, but the second version is undoubtedly a reworking of the first made by some diligent official of the aforementioned Commission. In addition to the almost-identical general structure of the writing, certain “corrections” were introduced in the second version. First of all, “gas chambers” (“*komory gazowe*”) are mentioned explicitly only in the second version, which makes little sense, because Reder declares that he did not know whether the famous “gasoline engine” produced gas or “condensed air”! However, this clarification does nothing but highlight a fundamental inconsistency which is found in all the witness statements.

Then there is a passage that evidently offended the sensitivities of the Jewish Commission – “*Zugführerzy-Żydzi, element bandycki – zapisywali, jak kto pracuje,*” “The squad-leader Jews, the criminal element, wrote down how everyone worked” – which was consequently changed to: “*Pracowników słabych ograbiali niemcy,*” “The Germans robbed weak workers...”

I translate both versions.

a) First version:

“On August 16, 1942, during the Lwów action, I was taken to the Janowska [street] camp. The next day I was loaded onto a railway car at the Kleparów Station. The transport had 50 cars of 100 people each, about 5,000 men, women and children. Escort: Gestapo; freight cars, covered and sealed. It was known that they would go to Bełżec. A 7-hour trip. The train arrived at Bełżec station and then, on a siding, to the camp. The camp [was] in a young forest, cut down to a radius of 3 kilometers in all directions, the ground sandy. From a distance the camp was invisible, cut trees were tied to those that grew so that they formed a hedge. Other cut trees were tied to the top of small trees in order to achieve invisibility. The cars entered the camp’s courtyard; the spur was 200-300 meters long. The camp was surrounded by barbed wire, and on the inside [od strony wewnętrznej] of the fence were stacked iron-wire nets. One couldn’t escape, because one would get caught in the nets. In the middle of the courtyard there was a high tower with a sentry with a submachine gun, a carbine and search lights. There were no towers on the perimeter – the ‘askari’ patrolled there.

There were two large wooden huts for 250 people, on ground level, with small windows, two-story bunk beds, a bare board.

After they were unloaded, everyone, men and women, was ordered to strip completely naked in the courtyard. They were told that they would take a bath and then go to work. The people rejoiced, as they believed it was just going to be work. Ten Jews of the ‘service personnel’ took the clothes, searched them, put aside any gold and money; the clothes ended up in a warehouse, while the precious objects were brought every evening in a suitcase to an office where

they were inventoried and sent to the camp's headquarters, which was located at the railway station. A Jew and an SS man brought them there.

There were 6 rooms in a ground-level building, in the center a corridor, 3 rooms on the left and 3 rooms on the right. The building was made of concrete, without windows, the roof was covered with roofing felt, the building was 3 to 3-and-a-half meters high.

The women's hair was cut in the courtyard [na dziedzińcu] – Jewish barbers did that. The women sat already naked on stools and were shaved one after the other. Uninterrupted blows to their faces and heads. The people were pushed en masse 'into the bath house,' disorderly, without counting them, 'like cattle to the slaughter.' In the corridor of the 'bath house', the people realized what was happening – the rooms were open, the doors had been opened by them [the Germans], darkness, screams. With the bayonet, with the rifle, the askari pushed in those who did not want to enter. The people were pushed into the chambers standing so tightly that the doors could hardly be closed. There were about 750 people in there; 6 times 750 people yields 4,500. The gassing lasted 20 minutes. The gas was produced by a gasoline-powered machine, operated by two askari machinists, [which was] located in a room at the end of the corridor. From this small room, the gas arrived in the chambers through tubes of small diameter. I cannot tell whether the machine produced gas (or condensed air [zgęszczone powietrze]). The poisoning lasted 20 minutes. The corpses were thrown out after the external doors were opened, leather straps were put around their hands, and they were dragged out. Behind the building, a pile of corpses 2 meters high was formed; from this pile, they were dragged 200-300 steps through the sand to the pits. On the way from the building to the pit, the 'dentists,' chosen from among the inmates and 10 in number, opened the mouths of the corpses, tore out the gold teeth, then melted the gold into ingots, which ended up at the headquarters. People from outside who were entering the building by the steps did not see what was happening on the sides of the building, that is, with the corpses and the graves, because dense vegetation covered them.

The transports had 50 cars, 3-4 times a day, hence 15,000-20,000 people a day. From each transport, skilled workers, such as mechanics, carpenters, shoemakers, tailors, were chosen immediately after arrival. The witness presented himself as a mechanic [maszynista monter]. He was assigned to the machine that extracted sand from pits destined to [become] graves. Two persons operated it. The work lasted from 6 to dusk. One pit was 100 meters long and 25 meters wide. One pit held about 100,000 people. In November 1942 there were 30 pits, hence 3 million corpses. The corpses were thrown into it without any order [bez porządku]; the next day a sinister sea of blood flowed to the edge of the pit. The ground [was] sandy. The corpses lay up to a meter above ground level. The pits were sprinkled with slaked lime, then filled with sand. The camp's service personnel consisted of 500 men. Each day they decreased by 30-40. The squad-leader Jews, the criminal element, wrote down how eve-

ryone worked. The worst workers, the weakest, were selected, at noon they were called, taken to a pit and shot. From new transports, they brought the number back up to 500.

At the top of the camp were *Stabsscharführer* Fritz Irrmann of the *Sudetenland*, *Hauptscharführer* Schwarz of the *Reich*, *Oberscharführer* Feix of the *Reich*, the *volksdeutsch* Russian *Zugwachmann* Hans Schmidt, a lank, small thug, and the *volksdeutsch* Russian *Schneider*, in total 5 SS men.

At one point in November, there were many transports, and the 500 men of the service personnel could not cope with the work. So, Schmidt chose 100 men already completely stripped naked and destined for the gas. They worked all day, in the cold, naked and without food; in the evening, he [Schmidt] took them to a pit and shot them. He lacked bullets for 20 people, so he took the handle of a pickaxe and killed them with a blow to the head. When a single blow was not enough, he hit them again.

At 4 in the morning, the workers left the hut, received tea and 200 grams of bread at the kitchen window. The men lined up in the courtyard, [where] they taught [them] German songs. *Oberscharführer* Feix made sure everyone sang, he particularly loved ‘*Montanaro, don’t you mind?*’ An orchestra was playing; the conductor was Wassermann from Krakow. The composition of the orchestra generally did not change; it was completed with people from new transports. The work took place to the sound of music. Work [lasted] until 12, then lunch: barley broth, in the evening coffee or tea without bread.

There was no contact with the [outside] world. Peasants brought potatoes, left them in front of the camp gate. Nobody entered the camp.

Among these 500 that the witness met at the camp were Polish and Czechoslovakian Jews. They began building the camp and the chamber in early 1942; it began operating in April-May 1942.

The witness was at the camp from August 17, 1942 to the end of November 1942.

In 1944, according to statements by a mechanic who reported it to the witness, the pits were reopened, doused with gasoline, burned, the bones ground to [make] fertilizer.”

b) Second version:

“On August 16, 1942, I was taken to the Janowska [Street] Camp in Lwów, and the next day I was loaded onto a railway car at the Kleparów Station. I knew that was the transport of death. The transport had 50 cars, in each car there were 100 people. The train carried around 5,000 people, men, women and children. It was under the escort of the Gestapo. [They were] covered freight cars, sealed, the windows closed with grates. Everyone in the cars knew that they were going to Belżec to their death in the gas chamber [w komorze gazowej]. The journey lasted 7 hours, [it was] terrible, frightening and hopeless. The train arrived at Belżec Station, entered the camp on a narrow-gauge track. The camp was located in a young coniferous forest, cut down to a radius of 3 kilometers in all directions in a sandy soil. From a distance, the

camp was invisible, because cut trees attached to the growing trees formed a light-proof hedge hiding the barracks and gas chamber that were there. Cut trees were fastened to small trees for even greater invisibility. The cars entered the camp yard, the siding was 200-300 meters long. The camp was surrounded by barbed wire, and iron-wire nets were piled up on the inside of the fence, so one could not cross them, lest you get caught in the nets. In the middle of the courtyard there was a high tower with a sentry with a submachine gun, carbine and search lights. There were no towers on the perimeter. The askaris stood guard. Nearby there were two large wooden huts, on ground level, which had small windows. Each hut housed 250 people designated as personnel who slept on bunk beds, on bare boards.

After they were unloaded, everyone, men and women together, was ordered to strip completely naked. In the courtyard they told us that we would go to the bath house and then to work. People rejoiced for a moment because they were going to work there. Ten Jews from the service personnel rummaged through the clothes, putting aside any gold and money; the clothes ended up in a warehouse; precious objects were brought to the camp office.

The building in which the gas chambers were located [komory gazowe] was a small white house on ground level. In the middle there was a corridor, to the left of which there were three rooms, and also three rooms to the right. The building was made of concrete, without windows; the roof was covered with roofing felt; the height of three and a half meters.

The women's hair was cut in the courtyard. Jews and Jewish barbers [sic] did that. The women sat already naked on stools and were shaved one after the other. In the meantime, they were hit with whips in the face and on the head. The people were pushed en masse 'into the bath house,' willy-nilly, without counting them, like cattle to the slaughter. In the corridor, the people realized that they were going to their deaths, the rooms were open, the doors were ajar, [it was] dark. The askari pushed those who did not want to enter with the bayonet. The people were pushed into the chambers standing so tightly that the doors could hardly be closed. There were about 750 people in each room. Now only the shouts, screams and desperate cries of the people could be heard.

The gassing lasted 20 minutes. The gas was produced by a gasoline-powered machine, operated by two askari machinists and placed in a room at the end of the corridor. From this small room, the gas went to the chambers by means of pipes. I don't know whether the machine produced the gas or condensed air. The poisoning lasted 20 minutes. The corpses were thrown out after the external doors were opened, leather straps were put around their hands, and they were dragged out. Behind the building, a pile of corpses 2 meters high was formed; from this pile, the corpses were dragged on the sand to pits 200-300 steps away. On the way from the building to the pit, the dentists, chosen from among the inmates and 10 in number, opened the mouths of the corpses, tore out their teeth, then melted the gold into ingots which ended up in the camp's headquarters. From the outside, people entering the building by the steps did

not see what was happening on the sides of the building, that is, with the corpses and the graves, because dense vegetation covered it all.

The transports counted 50 cars; there were three or four per day, hence 15,000-20,000 people. Specialists were chosen from each transport immediately after arrival: carpenters, mechanics, shoemakers, tailors. I introduced myself as a mechanic. I was assigned to the machine that extracted the sand from the pits destined to [become] graves.

Two persons operated it. The work lasted from 6 AM to dusk. Each pit was 100 meters long, 25 meters wide and 15 meters deep. Each pit contained approximately 100,000 corpses. In November 1942 there were 30 pits, hence 3,000,000 corpses. The corpses were thrown into it without any order. The next day, sinister blood flowed to the edge of the pit. The corpses lay one meter above ground level. The pits were sprinkled with slaked lime, then filled with sand.

The camp's service personnel consisted of 500 men. Each day they decreased by 30-40. The Germans robbed [sic] weak workers, called them at noon, took them to the pits and shot them. From new transports, they brought the number back up to 500.

At the top of the camp were Stabsscharführer Fritz Irrmann of the Sudetenland, Hauptscharführer Schwarz of the Reich, Oberscharführer Feix of the Reich, the volksdeutsch Hans Schmidt and the volksdeutsch Schneider, both of Russia, altogether five SS bandits. At one point in November, there were many transports, and the 500 men of the service personnel could not cope with the work. The SS chose 100 people already stripped naked and destined for the gas. They worked all day, in the cold, naked and without food. In the evening he shoved them to a pit and shot them. He lacked bullets for 20 people, so he took the handle of a pickaxe and killed them with a blow to the head.

At 4 in the morning, the workers left the hut. They received tea and 200 grams of bread at the kitchen window. The men lined up in the courtyard. They were taught to sing German songs, without choosing the content. SS man Feix made sure everyone sang. He particularly loved the melody of 'Montanaro, don't you mind?'

An orchestra stayed in the courtyard all day and played. There was no contact with the [outside] world. The farmers who brought potatoes to the camp left them in front of the gate; no one entered the camp.

They began building the camp and chambers in early 1942, and their activities began in April and May 1942. In 1944 the Germans reopened the pits, doused them with gasoline and burned the bones. The unburned remains were ground to [make] fertilizer."

1.4. The Interrogation of December 29, 1945

This interrogation was preceded three days earlier by a statement in which Reder only recounted the details of his deportation to Belżec (Libionka, pp. 30-32), which it is not worth reproducing here.

Reder was interrogated by Investigating Judge Jan Sehn in the framework of investigations by the Central Commission of Inquiry into German Crimes in Poland:¹⁷

“[p. 1] Krakow, December 29, 1945. District Investigating Judge Jan Sehn, acting under the decree of Nov. 10, 1945 of the Central Commission and the District Commission of Inquiry into German Crimes in Poland /Dz. U.R. P. n. 51, item 293/ as a member of the Central Commission, questioned in accordance with Article 107, 115 of the Code of Criminal Procedure the inmate of the Belżec Camp mentioned below who stated the following:

My name is Rudolf Reder, son of Herman and Fryderyka Jortner, born on April 4, 1881 in Dębica, of Jewish religion, of Polish nationality and citizenship, of industrial profession, living in Krakow, 38 Długa Street.

When the German-Russian war broke out, I lived in Lwów, where I had been manufacturing soap at 7 Panińska Street since 1910. On August 16, 1942, I learned that the German police would carry out an action against the Jews, so I hid in a room of my Ukrainian acquaintances Kobzdej, in their building at 31 Zamarstynowska Street. In this room, however, the police found me – I believe this happened as a result of a denunciation by Kobzdej and his family – I was beaten, loaded with others on a freight truck and taken to a barracks in Podzamcze. Here, an SS soldier who was escorting me took me to a side room, thoroughly searched me and stole 18,040 zloty from me. Apart from this cash, I still had 3 zlotys. The SS soldier left me this rest, mockingly saying that he left it for the trip. A short time later this same soldier offered to release me if I gave him a watch and 3,000 zlotys. To this I replied that I could borrow this from acquaintances, and I begged this SS soldier to take me to these acquaintances. He agreed to this, and we drove by truck to the Jewish hospital, where my daughter, a physician, and her husband worked. I got a watch from the boys [p. 1a] and 3,000 zloty and handed them over to the SS soldier who was escorting me, who pocketed them, pulled out his gun, made us all raise our hands, and threatened to teach and convince me that a German soldier cannot be bribed.

Seeing that I was trapped, I took advantage of the confusion and began to flee. The SS soldier, however, grabbed me during the escape, beat me very violently and took me back to the Podzamcze barracks. On the evening of the same day, we were transported from this barracks to the collection camp on Janowska Street, where we spent the whole night outdoors and the next day, that is, on August 17, 1942, at 6 am, we were loaded onto a freight train. 100 people

¹⁷ AGK, OKBZN Kraków, NTN, 111, pp. 1-5.

were loaded into a cattle car. The train had 50 similar cars; the entire transport therefore counted about 5,000 people. They were just Jews of various ages and sexes. We assumed that we would go to Bełżec, because in the last period before the arrest in Lwów it was said that the Gestapo took Jews to Bełżec. However, we did not know what Bełżec was, as the Gestapo were said to bring Jews there for labor. But it was rumored that Bełżec was a camp without people. Our conjectures turned out to be correct, because in fact around noon on August 17, 1942, our train stopped at Bełżec Station. From the station, the train slowly entered the camp, which was a few hundred meters away from it. The entire train entered the fenced-in camp area. The camp was surrounded by a high barbed-wire fence, and on the outside [po zewnętrznej stronie] of this fence it also had a barrier of nets. It was a metal mesh several meters wide stretched horizontally on wooden supports. Right in the center of the camp there was a high watchtower in which SS soldiers stood guard in all directions. On this tower there were also spotlights that illuminated the whole camp and its closest surroundings. [p. 2] Armed guards patrolled on both sides of the fence. On the left, behind the entrance gate, there was the guard post, in which SS soldiers stood guard with police dogs. Still to the left, behind the guard house, there were 3 barracks for the camp's armed service, Germans and recruits from among Ukrainians or Russian prisoners. Behind a large courtyard, which extended from the entrance gate on both sides of the railway track [po obu stronach toru kolejowego] inside the camp, there was a large hut, in which they cut the women's hair, as I convinced myself later [sic]. Behind this hut, on the other side of the camp, there were two huts where the inmates employed in the gas-chamber service [komór gazowych] were housed. Each of these barracks housed 250 inmates. To the left of the hut for cutting the women's hair – proceeding from the entrance gate – was the building of the [gas] chambers. Between the hut for cutting the women's hair and the building with the chambers, there was a small courtyard [małe podwórko] separated from the front courtyard and the back of the camp by a wooden palisade. In the palisade, at the rear of the camp, there were doors through which one could enter this courtyard. The building of the chambers was made of concrete [z betonu] and covered with a flat roof with roofing felt. It was built on a platform [na podwyższeniu], so that it was accessed via steps from the side of the small courtyard, and along the two longer walls there was a kind of raised unloading ramp. Through the steps, on the side of the small courtyard, one entered the door, above which hung a sign with the words 'Bade und Inhalationsräume,' and a large vase of flowers, so that the decoration of the entrance imitated the entrance to a bathhouse. From the entrance door, along the entire length of the building, there was a corridor that had on each side three single-leaf doors, massive and hermetic, which closed on hinges. These doors led to rooms without windows that had on the other side, that is, on the side of the raised unloading ramps that I described earlier, a door sliding sideways on rails consisting of 2 leaves. On the opposite side of the building,

that is, behind the wall in front of which the corridor ended, there was a small room in which the machines [maszyny] were located. I personally saw that in this small room there was a gasoline-powered engine [p. 3a] which seemed very complicated. I remember it had a drive wheel [koło napędowe], but I didn't observe any other constructional or technical details. This engine was permanently served by 2 Russian machinists from the camp's armed service personnel; I only know that it consumed 4 cans of gasoline a day, because that was the amount of gasoline brought into the camp every day. It was during the delivery of gasoline to the engine room that I had the opportunity to look inside. The [gas-]chamber building and the area closest to it were camouflaged. On high poles at a rather considerable height on the roof of the chambers there was a net on which leaves and branches had been thrown.

After the arrival of the train in the courtyard of the camp, we were all thrown out of the cars and ordered to undress completely. This was attended by the camp commandant, SS-Stabsscharführer Fritz Irrmann /originally from the Sudetenland/, who told us that we would all go to the bathroom to wash, and after the bath we would be sent to work, so he asked for skilled workers to come forward. I introduced myself along with 7 other men and declared myself a mechanic [maszynista-monter]. Irrmann ordered us skilled workers to put our clothes back on, and he took us to the workplace immediately. He ordered me, as a mechanic, to operate the gasoline machine with which huge pits were dug in the immediate vicinity of the camp [w bezpośrednim pobliżu obozu]. I worked in this capacity for 2 months. The following month, that is, at the end of November, I worked as a bricklayer at the extension of the camp kitchen. Thanks to these assignments, I had the opportunity to move around the camp area, and to ascertain on the basis of my own direct observation the treatment of detainees brought to Bełżec. Everyone was unloaded from the train; the women were pushed into the hair-cutting hut. There, their heads were shaved with machines, and then, they were shoved through the small courtyard [which was located] between this hut and the entrance to the gas chambers, into the gas chambers. All the men, except for this small percentage who were selected for work in the camp area, were shoved onto the road around the hut used to cut women's hair and, through the door that led to the small courtyard at the rear of the camp and then through [p. 4] the small courtyard, [were also shoved] into the gas chambers. In these chambers, people were crammed to such an extent that even after death they stood upright in the chambers. After all the chambers were filled, all the doors were hermetically sealed, the outer doors were slid shut and locked on both sides [of the two door leaves] for airtight closure, and then the engine was started. The work was directed by the inmate Moniek, a coachman from Krakow. The engine was running without interruption for exactly 20 minutes, after which Moniek gave the signal to one of the operators, and this engine was turned off. After the engine was turned off, inmates of the service staff, under Moniek's command, opened all the doors and, with the help of straps that were tightened around the hands of the corps-

es, the corpses were pulled by two [workers] out of the rooms and then dragged to the mass graves, previously dug with the use of machines. On the road, between the chamber ramp and the pit, dentists extracted gold teeth from corpses. The pits were all dug to a [identical] size and measured 100 meters long, 25 meters wide and 15 meters deep. The corpses were thrown into the pits haphazardly [w nieładzie], and only the upper layers that protruded one meter above the level of the ground surrounding the pits were systematically arranged, one corpse next to another. The prisoners covered the pile of corpses thusly arranged with sand. Before covering them, the corpses were sprinkled with lime. During the first days, a high mound of soil towered over such a pit. As time went by, this soil subsided, and the ground slowly leveled off.

I am unable to say what the chemical aspect [chemizm] of the mechanism of killing people in the Bełżec chambers consisted of. I only know one thing, that from the engine room a pipe of one inch¹⁸ in diameter went into each of the gas chambers [z komór gazowych]. The outlets of these pipes ended in the individual chambers. I don't know whether any gas was released through these pipes into the chambers, whether the air in the chambers was compressed [zgęszczano] or whether the air was pumped out of the chambers. I was often on the ramp when the doors were opened. However, I never smelled any odors, and entering the rooms immediately after opening the door never had any harmful effects on my health. The corpses found in the chamber did not show [p. 4a] an unnatural color at all [żadnego nienaturalnego zabarwienia]. They all looked like living people, mostly their eyes were open. Only in a few cases did it happen that the corpses were stained with blood. The air in the rooms, after their opening, was clean, transparent and odorless [szyste, przezroczyste i bezwonne]. In particular, no smoke or combustion gases from the engine could be perceived. These gases were discharged by the engine directly to the outside and not into the chambers [Gazy te były odprowadzane z motoru wprost na dwór a nie do komór].

During my stay in the camp, i.e. over a period of 4 months, 3-4 trains arrived at the camp per day, consisting of 50 cars each. With these transports, Jews were brought from Poland, Czechoslovakia, Holland, Hungary, France, Denmark, Italy and Romania. All these unfortunates were told that they would go to Poland as settlers, and that is why the Jews took all their possessions with them. These possessions were taken from them immediately after unloading the cars, and were sent to the Reich. The same thing also applies to the gold in their teeth, which was melted into ingots right there, and together with other valuables, was delivered to the camp headquarters, which were located beyond its fence, in a building located near the railway station. The women's hair was sent in railway cars to Budapest. At the end of November, there were around [wokół] the camp already 30 filled pits of the dimensions I have al-

¹⁸ Cal, Polish inch, some 2.4 cm.

ready indicated. I note that the Belżec Camp was still operating throughout 1943 and a part of 1944.

During the first moments after closing the chambers filled with people, frightening screams and moans could be heard, but after a few minutes, there was a dead silence. It never happened that anyone was alive after the chambers were opened. The corpses of the slain were still warm. To cover the moans, an orchestra made up of inmates played from morning to night. SS men supervised the working inmates, beat them and goaded them on to work. Those who hesitated were mercilessly beaten. Of particular sadism was the volksdeutsch Schmidt, Zugwachmann, of Latvian origin. Every day he killed [p. 5] 30-40 [men] from the group of inmates spared for work. He compensated for the decrease [in manpower] by [taking inmates from] subsequent transport. He put people at the [edge of a] pit, then hit them with all his force on the head with the wooden handle of a pickaxe, and then threw them into the pit. In addition to the aforementioned Irrmann and Schmidt, Hauptscharführer Heinz Schwarz, Oberscharführer Faix, Zugwachmann Schneider, Oberwachmann Kunz and Oberwachmann Trottwein served in the camp.

In October [w październiku] of 1942, Himmler carried out an inspection of the camp in the company of SS Major General Katzmann, head of the Gestapo of the Lwów District. During this inspection, a gassing [gazowanie] of people and the burial of their corpses took place. After this inspection, the camp's armed service personnel received praise. From the happy faces of the inspectors and service staff it could be seen that the inspection had had a positive outcome.

At the end of November [z końcem listopada] of 1942, I went with a car under the escort of the SS to Lwów to buy sheet metal. We arrived in Lwów in the evening, spent the night in the Gestapo jail; the next day, still escorted by SS men, I completed the business of buying the sheet metal, and around noon I was put on the truck under the supervision of an SS man, who was Trottwein. After a while, I noticed that Trottwein had put his rifle aside and had fallen asleep. I took advantage of it, opened the door, and ran away. Since then, I had been hiding for 20 months in my factory [w mojej fabryce]. Anastazja Hawryluk, who had been my maid for many years, helped me in this. With her help, I survived the entire German occupation and waited for the Germans to retreat from Lwów. From the stories of the surrounding population, I know that in 1944, as the Russian front approached, the Germans reopened the pits in Belżec, sprinkled them with gasoline, and burned [them], extracted the unburned remains from the pits with machines, ground the bones [to make] artificial fertilizer, and covered the pits, thus erasing the traces of the crimes. An acquaintance of mine, the fitter Scharf-Szpilka, who had assembled the bone-grinding machine, told me about the bone grinding.

Read [out]. With this ends the interrogation of the witness and the report. Witness: Rudolf Reder. Recorded by: Krystyna Szymańska. District Investigating Judge Jan Sehn."

1.5. The Booklet “Bełżec” (1946)

In 1946 the Jewish Historical Commission of the Krakow District published a memorial by Reder titled *Bełżec*, with an introduction by Nella Rost (Reder 1946). The witness’s account covers pages 35-65. I translate it completely.

“[p. 35] As of August 1942, we still did not have a separate ghetto in Lwów. Some streets had been reserved exclusively for Jews. These, therefore, formed the Jewish quarter, which consisted of some isolated streets from the third quarter of Lwów, such as: Panieńska, Wąska, Ogrodnicka, Słeczna and others. We lived there anxiously and in constant anguish. Two weeks before the resettlement, there was generic talk of the impending doom. We were desperate. We already knew then what the word ‘resettlement’ [wysiedlenie] meant. In fact, it was said that a worker who had built the chambers during the first days of the installation of the death factory had managed to escape from the Bełżec death garrison, and that he had spoken of the ‘bath house,’ which was in reality the building intended for the gas chambers. He had predicted that none of the people who would be shoved into it would return.

It was also said that one of the Ukrainians employed in the killing of the Jews had told what was happening at Bełżec to one of his friends who, terrified as she was, felt it was her duty to disclose this and warn the doomed. The news about Bełżec reached us in these ways.

The legend of Bełżec, which we knew about and which made us shiver, thus became truth. Therefore, in the streets of the Jewish quarter, frightened people wandered about [p. 36] with a sense of helplessness already several days before August 10, and asked one other: ‘What should we do? What should we do?’

Only on 10 August, early in the morning, did the guards completely surround all the ends of the neighborhood’s streets. Gestapo, SS, Sonderdienst walked the streets in sets of five or six a few steps apart.¹⁹ The Ukrainian militiamen helped them a lot. Two weeks earlier, Major General [sic] Katzmann, the main cop of Lwów and Eastern Little Poland,²⁰ had delivered the stamps [work permits] for some labor centers. Some centers also received stamps at the police station at the Smolka Post. There were not many of these ‘lucky ones.’ In mortal anguish, most were looking for some way out, a hiding place, an escape, but practically no one knew what to do or how to escape.

Meanwhile, for several days, the patrols searched house by house, hideout by hideout; the Gestapo men had granted stamps to some, yet not to others; those who did not have a stamp and those whose stamps were not accepted were forced out of the houses; they were not allowed to take along even a rag of clothing, or even a piece of bread. Then they gathered the mass of people, and those who resisted received a bullet in the head; I was in my workshop work-

¹⁹ Meaning that each small group proceeded a few steps from the other.

²⁰ The remainder of Poland not annexed by the USSR and Germany during the war.

ing, but I didn't have a stamp, so I locked myself up and remained silent, although I heard them coming. The Gestapo men broke down the door, found me in a hiding place, beat me on the head with their whips, and took me away. They crammed us all into streetcars, loaded us in so tightly that we could not move or even breathe, and took us to the Janowska [Street] Camp.

It was already evening. We were crammed together on a large meadow in a closed circle. We were 6,000. We were ordered to sit down, and we could not stand up, we could not move, not even extend our arms or legs. From a tower, a spotlight was turned on us; it was as bright as day, and we were surrounded by armed cops; we sat incredibly tight, all together, young and old, women and children of all ages. Some precise shots were fired; someone had gotten up; perhaps he wanted to be shot.

[p. 37] We sat like that all night. There was dead silence. Neither the women nor the children wept. At 6 in the morning we were ordered to get up from the damp grass, to line up in rows of four, and a long line of doomed people marched towards Kleparów Station. Gestapo men and Ukrainians surrounded us with a tight cordon. Not even a single man managed to escape. At the station, we were pushed onto the ramp [platform]. A long freight train was already waiting right behind the ramp. It had 50 cars. The loading of the train began. The doors of the cars were opened; on both sides there were Gestapo men, two on each side, with whips in their hands, and they beat everyone who entered in the face and on the head. The Gestapo men beat everyone. Each of us had [whip] marks on our faces, bumps on our heads. The women were sobbing, the children, close to their mothers, were crying. Goaded on by the Gestapo men, who were without compassion, they pushed one other. The entrance was high up; one had to climb up, [yet] they pushed one another down – after all, we rushed there all alone, as we wanted to get it already over with. On the roof of each car sat a Gestapo man with a submachine gun. Gestapo men beat and counted 100 [people] for each car. All this happened so quickly that the loading of a few thousand people did not last more than an hour.

In our transport, there were many men, even workers with various kinds of work certificates [who were] supposedly 'safe,' young and older children, young girls and old women.

They sealed all the cars. Crammed together into a crowd of huddled people, we stood close together, almost on top of each other. Sweltering, suffocating, we were close to madness. Without a drop of water, without a crumb of bread. The train moved at 8 am. I knew that the stoker and driver in the locomotive were Germans. The train went fast, but it seemed to us that it was moving very slowly. The train stopped three times: in Kulików, Żółkiew and Rawa Ruska. The stops were probably necessary for the regulation of railway traffic. During the stops, the Gestapo men [p. 38] descended from the roofs of the cars and did not let anyone approach the train. They did not allow [anyone] to bring any water, which the people, out of compassion, wanted to hand over through the barred window to those who were dying of thirst.

We went on, no one said a word. We were aware of going to death, of having no escape; apathetic, without complaint. We were all thinking about one thing: how to escape; but there was no possibility. The railway car in which we were traveling was completely new, the window so narrow that I could not stick my head out. In other cars it was certainly possible to break down the doors, because for a few minutes we heard them shooting at the fugitives. Nobody said anything and nobody comforted the women who complained, nobody stopped the babies from crying. We all knew it: we were going to a certain and terrible death. We wanted this to be over already. Maybe someone was saved, I don't know ... You could only try to escape from the train.

Around noon the train arrived at Bełżec Station. It was a little station. There were small houses around it. In these houses lived the men of the Gestapo. Bełżec is located on the Lublin-Tomaszów line. It is 15 kilometers away from Rawa Ruska. At Bełżec Station, the train was diverted from the main track and was taken to a siding that ran for a stretch of another kilometer directly to the gate of the death camp. Ukrainian railway workers also lived near the station, and there was a small post office. An old German with a thick black beard – I don't know his name, but I would recognize him immediately – arrived at Bełżec by car; he looked like an executioner; he took command of the train and made it enter the camp. The ride to the camp took two minutes. For four whole months I always saw this same scoundrel. The siding ran across the camps. On both sides there was a completely free space, without any buildings. The German who had brought the train to the camp got out of the car. He 'helped.' Hitting and screaming, he chased people off the train. He personally entered each car and checked if there was still anyone. [p. 39] He was informed of everything. When the train was empty and checked, he gave the signal with the flag and made it leave the camp.

This whole area of Bełżec was occupied by the Germans. Nobody could be seen [inside]. Civilians who had gotten lost [and were trespassing] were shot. The train arrived in the courtyard, which was about a kilometer long and wide [który miał około jeden kilometr wzdłuż i wszerz] and was surrounded by barbed wire and iron nets, placed on top of each other, of two meters in height. The fences were not electrified. One entered into the courtyard through a large wooden gate covered with barbed wire. Next to the gate was a small house in which the telephone station was located. In front of this house there were some SS men with dogs. When the train arrived at the gate, the sentry opened it and went into the house. At that moment the 'reception of the train' took place. A few dozen SS men opened the railway cars shouting 'los' [Let's go!]. They routed the people out of the cars with whips and [rifle] butts. The cars' doors were located more than a meter above ground. Those who were driven out with whips had to jump, everyone, old and young. Having to jump on the ground, they would break their hands and legs. Children got hurt, everyone fell; dirty, exhausted, terrified. In addition to the SS men, the so-called 'Zugführer' were on duty. They were overseers of the permanent death-service

personnel at the camp, dressed in the usual way, without camp badges. The sick, the elderly and the young children, that is, those who could not walk on their own, were carried on stretchers, and unloaded at the edges of huge pits that had been excavated. There the Gestapo man Irrmann shot them, after which he threw them into the pit with the butt of his rifle. This same Irrmann, a specialist in killing old people and small children, was a tall, dark, good-looking Gestapo man with a normal facial expression, like the others who lived in a house in Belzec, near the station, and – like the others – [they were] without a family and without women.

He came to the camp early in the morning, stayed there all day, and received the transports of death. Immediately after the unloading of the victims from the train, they were gathered in the courtyard surrounded by armed askari, and there Irrmann gave a speech. There was a dead silence. He stood close to the crowd. Everyone was eager to listen, [p. 40] suddenly hope arose in us. 'If they give us a speech, maybe we will live, maybe there will be some work, maybe, but...' Irrmann said very loudly and clearly: 'Ihr gehts jetzt baden, nachher werdet ihr zur Arbeit geschickt' ['Now you go bathing, afterwards you will be sent to work']. That's all. Everyone rejoiced; after all, they were glad to go to work. They applauded. I remember these his words having been repeated day after day, mostly three times a day, repeated for the four months of my stay there. This was the moment of hope and illusion. For a moment, the people breathed in relief. There was complete calmness. The crowd proceeded in absolute silence, the men across the courtyard directly to the building on which was written in large letters: 'Bade und Inhalationsräume' [bathing and inhalation rooms]. The women went about 20 meters [further on] to a large hut measuring 30 by 15 meters. In this hut, the women's and girls' hair was cut. They entered without knowing why they were being led there. Now was the time for calmness and silence. Then I learned that only a few minutes later, when they were given wooden stools and arranged themselves crosswise in the hut, when they were ordered to sit down, and 8 Jewish barbers, silent like a set of robots, approached them in order to shave their hair with a machine [down to] the skin, at this moment the whole truth was revealed to their minds, and none of them, and none of the men, could have had any more doubts on the way to the gas chambers.

All but a few men who had been selected as skilled workers needed there – everyone – young and old, children and women – all went to a certain death. Girls with long hair were sent to the haircut, while girls with short hair went directly to the chambers with the men.

Suddenly – without passing from hope to final despair – moans, screams arose – many women had hysterical attacks. But many women died calmly, especially young girls. In our transport there were 1,000 intellectuals, very young men and – as in all subsequent transports – a majority of women.

[p. 41] I stood on one side, in the courtyard, with the group [of men] left behind to dig the pits, and I watched my brothers, sisters, acquaintances and

friends pushed to their deaths. By the time the women, completely naked, were driven with whips like cattle to the slaughter, without being counted, all in a hurry – the men were already dying in the chambers. The shearing of the women lasted no more than 2 hours, and so did the preparation for the killing and the killing itself.

A dozen SS men urged the women with whips and pointed bayonets to the chamber building up three steps into the vestibule, and the askaris counted [odliczali] 750 people for each room. Women who refused to enter got stabbed in their body with bayonets by the askaris; blood flowed, and in this manner, they pushed them to the execution. One could hear doors open, moans and screams, desperate pleadings in Polish, Hebrew; the wailing of children and women that made one's blood freeze, and then a terrible common scream... This lasted 15 minutes – the machine ran for 20 minutes, and after 20 minutes of silence, the askari opened the exterior doors, and I began to work together with other workers without marks and without tattoos, spared from previous transports as I had been.

We dragged the corpses of people who had still been alive a little while earlier, we dragged them with the help of leather belts [za pomocą pasków skórzanych] to the huge [already-]prepared mass graves, and an orchestra played near them; it played from morning to evening.

[p. 42] A short time later, I was already familiar with all the [camp's] terrain. It was located in the middle of a young pine forest. The afforestation was dense, and to further reduce the penetration of light, other trees had been tied to the trees; the thickness of afforestation along the place where the chambers were located had been doubled. Behind them [was] a sandy road along which the corpses were dragged. Over it, the Germans had built a roof made of taut iron wires, on which they had scattered green foliage. It was meant to protect the ground from aerial observation. This part of the camp was obscured under the leaf roof. From the gate, one entered a huge courtyard. In the courtyard, there was a large hut in which the women's hair was shorn off. Next to this hut there was a small courtyard [małe podwórko], enclosed by a board fence of tightly nailed boards, without the slightest gap, 3 meters high. This fence, made of gray boards, led up to the actual chambers. In this way, no one could see what was happening behind the fence. The building in which the chambers were located was not high; it was long and wide, of gray concrete [z szarego betonu], had a flat roof covered with roofing felt, and above it again a wire-mesh roof covered with green foliage. From the courtyard, 3 steps, one meter wide, without railings, led up to it. A large vase of colorful flowers was placed on the building's facade. On the wall [na ścianie] was written legibly and clearly: 'Bade und Inhalationsräume.' Through the steps, one entered a dark corridor [p. 44²¹] one-and-a-half meters wide, but very long. It was completely empty, four concrete walls. From the corridor, to the right and left, doors led

²¹ Page 43 contains a drawn camp map.

to the chambers. The doors, made of wood, one meter wide, opened using a wooden handle. The chambers were completely dark, windowless and absolutely bare. In each chamber, a round opening the size of an electrical switch was visible [widoczny był]. The walls and floor of the chambers were made of concrete. The corridor and the chambers were lower than normal rooms; they were no more than 2 meters high [nie więcej niż dwa metry]. Furthermore, in the front wall of each chamber, there was a moving [sliding] door, 2 meters wide, through which the people's corpses were carried away after [their] suffocation [uduszenie]. Outside the building, there was a rather small annex, measuring perhaps 2 by 2 meters, in which the 'machine' was located, a gasoline-powered engine ['maszyna', motor pędzony benzyną]. The chambers were one-and-a-half meters above ground; [there was] a ramp next to the doors, at the same level as the chamber, from which the corpses were thrown onto the ground.

Inside the camp, there were two huts for the death personnel, one for general workers, the other for so-called skilled workers. Each hut contained 250 workers. The bunks were on two levels. The two huts were identical. The bunks consisted of simple boards, and a small board [ran] underneath the head [as a pillow]. Near the huts were the kitchen, then the warehouse, the administration, laundry, tailor shop, and finally elegant huts for the askari.

On both sides of the building[s] were filled or empty pits. I saw a whole row of pits already full and filled to the top [wysoko] with sand. After a while, the ground subsided. There had always to be an empty reserve pit.

[p. 45] I stayed at the death camp from August to the end of November – this was the period of mass asphyxiation [duszenia] of the Jews. A few companions in misfortune, those few who had managed to stay there longer, told me that in this period the death transports reached their peak. They arrived every day, without a day off, mostly 3 times a day, and each train had 50 cars, and each car held 100 people. When the transports arrived at night, the victims of Bełżec waited in the closed cars until 6 am. On average, 10,000 people were killed per day.

It happened [on occasion] that the transports were even larger and more frequent. Jews came from everywhere, and only Jews. There were never any other transports. Bełżec was used exclusively for the killing of Jews. At the railway cars, the Jews were unloaded by Gestapo men, the askaris and the 'Zugführer'; a few steps further on, in the courtyard during the undressing, there were already Jewish workers – they asked in a low voice: 'Where are you from?' They answered in a whisper: 'From Lwów, from Krakow, from Zamość, from Wielicz, from Jasto, from Tarnów, etc.' I saw this every day, two, three times a day.

With each transport, the same thing happened as with mine. They were ordered to undress, things remained in the courtyard, Irrmann always spoke hypocritically and [said] always the same thing. At that moment, the people always rejoiced; I saw this same glimmer of hope [p. 46] in the people's eyes.

The hope to go to work. But a moment later, toddlers were separated from their mothers, the old and the sick were carried on stretchers, the men and girls were urged forward with [rifle] butts further and further up the fenced-in alley directly to the chambers, and the naked women were directed just as brutally into the other hut, where their hair was shorn off. I knew exactly the moment when everyone understood what awaited them, and the fear, desperation, screams and terrible moans mixed in with the tune of the orchestra. The first men were goaded with bayonets, running wounded into the gas chambers. The askaris counted [odliczali] 750 people for each chamber. Even before all six chambers were completely filled, the people in the first chamber had already been suffering for two hours. Only when all six [chambers] were crammed with people so tightly that the doors could be closed only with difficulty, was the machine started.

The machine was one-and-a-half by one meter in size; there was an engine and wheels [motor i koła]. The engine roared for quite long time intervals; it went pretty fast, so fast that the spokes of the wheels could not be distinguished [szprych w kołch]. The machine ran for 20 minutes by the clock. It was turned off after 20 minutes. The external doors of the chambers that opened onto the ramp were opened immediately, and the corpses were thrown onto the ground, rising up to an enormous pile of a few meters high. When opening the doors, the askari did not take any precautions, nor did we notice any smell; I never saw gas cylinders,^[22] nor any other admixtures [domieszek] that were poured out – I only saw petrol canisters. About 80-100 liters of gasoline were consumed every day. Two askari were in charge of the machine. But when the machine broke down once, I was called too, because I was called ‘der Ofenkünstler’ [the furnace artificer]; I looked at it and saw glass tubes [rurki szklane] that were connected to the tubes that went into each chamber. We were of the opinion that the machine either produced high pressure [wysokie ciśnienie], or caused a vacuum [próżnię], or the gasoline produced carbon monoxide which killed the people. The begging for help, the screams, the desperate cries of those who were locked up and asphyxiated in the chambers lasted 10 or 15 minutes; terribly loud; then [p. 47] the screams stopped; in the end, everything was quiet. I listened to desperate screams and pleadings in various languages, because there were not only Polish Jews, there were also transports of foreign Jews. Among the transports of foreign Jews there were mostly French, Dutch, Greek, even Norwegian Jews. I don’t remember any transports of German Jews. Instead, there were Czech Jews. They arrived in cars identical to those of the Polish Jews, but with luggage, with normal outfits and with provisions. Our transports were full of women and children. The transports of foreign Jews mostly contained men, and there were few children. Evidently the parents had been able to leave them under the custody of their

²² “nie widziałem nigdy żadnych balonów z gazem”: the term “balon” means balloon, but here this probably has the meaning of the Russian term “ballon”, cylinder, as in the interrogation of September 22, 1944.

fellow citizens, and to save them from a terrible fate. Jews from foreign countries arrived in Belżec completely ignorant, certain that work would await them. They were well dressed, carefully prepared for the journey. The treatment of these people by the German cops was exactly the same as that of the Jews in the other transports, and the killing system was also exactly the same. They also perished in a terrible and desperate manner.

During my stay in the camp there may have been 100,000 foreign Jews; they were all gassed [zagazowani].

When the askaris opened the hermetically closed doors after 20 minutes of asphyxiation, the corpses were standing upright [trupy były w pozycji stojącej], the faces as if dreaming, unaltered, not blue; blood [shed] here and there by the wounds inflicted by the bayonets of the askari; their mouth a little open, the hands contracted, often wrapped around the lungs [chest]. Those who stood closest fell like mannequins through the wide-open doors.

[p. 48] *All women were shorn before being killed. They were driven into the hut; the remaining women waited their turn near the hut, naked, barefoot, even in winter and in the snow [nawet w zimie i na śniegu]. Among the women, weeping and despair dominated. At this moment, the screaming and moaning began; mothers hugged their children; they lost their mind. It broke my heart every time; I couldn't stand this sight. The group of shorn women was goaded on, and the others walked on hair of various colors, with which the whole floor of the hut was covered like a high, soft carpet. After all the women of the transport had been shorn, four workers with brooms made of limewood swept all their hair together into a large pile of hair of various colors, half the height of the room, put it with their hands into burlap bags, and took them to the warehouse.*

The warehouse for the hair, linen, clothing of the gas-chamber victims [korymory gazowej] was located in a small separate hut, perhaps 6 by 8 meters. The goods and hair were stored there for 10 days, and after 10 days, the hair and the clothes were separately put into bags, after which a freight train arrived and took away this loot. Men working in the office told me that the hair was sent to Budapest. In particular, a Sudeten Jew employed in the office, the lawyer Schreiber, gave me this information. He was a decent man. [p. 49] Irrmann had told him he would take him away when he went on leave. Once Irrmann went on a short leave. I heard Schreiber say to him: 'Nehmen Sie mich mit?' ['Are you taking me along?']. And Irrmann replied: 'Noch nicht' ['Not yet']. In this way, he deceived him, and Schreiber certainly perished like everyone else. He himself told me that every few days an entire railway car of hair bags was sent to Budapest. Except for the hair, the Germans escorted all the baskets of gold teeth.^[23]

Along the path that led from the gas chamber to the pits and therefore in the space of a few hundred meters, there were some dentists with pincers, and

²³ Meaning that only the gold was escorted, not the other loot.

[they] stopped everyone who dragged the corpses; they opened the mouths of the dead, looked inside them and extracted the gold, after which they threw it into the basket. There were 8 dentists. They were mainly young people, spared from a transport in order to do this job. I knew one of them well; his name was Zucker, a native of Rzeszów. The dentists lived separately in a small hut together with the doctor and the pharmacist. At sunset, they brought baskets full of gold teeth to the hut, and there they picked out the gold and melted it into small ingots. The Gestapo man Schmidt guarded them, and when the work proceeded too slowly, he beat them. A transport had to be processed within two hours. The teeth were cast into ingots one centimeter thick, half a centimeter wide and twenty centimeters long.

Every day, jewels, money, dollars were taken from the warehouse; the SS men themselves took them and put them in suitcases that a worker took to Belżec, to the headquarters. A Gestapo man walked in front of them, but Jewish workers carried the suitcases. It was close to the Belżec railway station, 20 minutes by road. The Belżec Camp, i.e. the executions at Belżec, was subject to these headquarters. Jews who worked in the administration told me that an entire transport of gold, jewels and money was sent to Lublin, where the main headquarters were located, to which the Belżec headquarters were subordinated. The worn-out clothes of the hapless Jewish victims were taken by the workers and carried to the warehouse. 10 workers were there who had to carefully unstitch every piece of clothing under the surveillance and the whip of the SS men [p. 50], who shared the money found among themselves. Special SS men were assigned to this surveillance, and always the same ones. The Jewish workers who were in charge of selecting and unstitching the clothes could not get hold of anything, and did not even want to. What could we care about the money and the jewels? We couldn't buy anything, nor did we have any hope of staying alive. None of us believed in a miracle. Each worker was searched very carefully, but we often walked on abandoned dollars that had gone unnoticed; we didn't even take these. They were useless, and so we had nothing to do with them. A shoemaker once intentionally and openly took five dollars. He and his son were shot; he went to death happily, he wanted to end it. Death was certain, so why torture yourself any further... Dollars in Belżec served us to die more easily...

[p. 51] I was part of the permanent death personnel; all in all, we were 500 in total. There were only 250 'specialists,' and 200 of them worked at a task that did not require special skills: the excavation of graves and the dragging of corpses. We dug pits [doły] and huge mass graves [groby masowe], and dragged the corpses there. The specialists also had to participate, in addition to carrying out their work. We dug with shovels; there was also a machine that loaded and spread the sand on the ground. The machine unloaded sand near the pit. A mountain of sand formed with which the pit was covered that was overflowing with corpses. About 450 men were permanently employed at the pits. Digging a pit took a week. To me it was very terrible that we were or-

dered to pile the corpses [up to] a meter on top of an already full pit, and to cover them with sand, and ominous, thick blood burst out of the pits and flooded the whole surface. We had to go from one edge of a pit to the other [edge] in order to go to another pit. We immersed our legs in the blood of our brothers; we walked on heaps of corpses, and that was very nasty, very atrocious... While we were working, the cop Schmidt watched us, pummeled us, beat us. If someone – in his opinion – did not work fast enough, he ordered him to stop, gave him 25 lashes with the whip, ordered him to count them, and if he miscounted, gave him 50 instead of 25. [p. 52] A severely beaten man could not take 50 lashes; usually the victim was dragged to the hut and died the next day. This was repeated a couple of times a day.

Furthermore, 30-40 workers were shot every day. Usually the doctor handed over the list of exhausted men – or the list of ‘criminals’ – to the so-called ‘Oberzugführer,’ the head guard of the inmates, so that every day 30-40 inmates died. At lunchtime they were taken to a pit and shot. This list was also completed each day, with the same number of people spared from some transport every day. Only the registration – of old and new inmates – was brought to the administration office, and it was calculated that the number of inmates always amounted to 500. There was no numerical registration of the victim transports.

For example, we knew that Jews had built this camp and had installed the death machine. No one from this group was there anymore. It was a miracle if any of the Belżec service personnel survived for 5 or 6 months.

The actual machine was operated by two askari fiends, always the same. I found them [employed] at this work and left them there [still doing it]. The Jewish workers had no contact with them, as with any other askari. When people of a transport asked for a little water, the askari shot the Jewish workers who gave it to them.

In addition to digging the pits, it was the death personnel’s job to get the corpses out of the chambers, throw them onto a large pile, and then drag them to the pits. The ground was sandy. Two workers had to drag one corpse. We had leather straps with a buckle that we placed on the hand [wrist] of a corpse, often the head sank into the sand, and we dragged it... They ordered us to load onto our backs the corpses of small children two at a time, and to carry them like that. When we dragged the corpses, we suspended digging the pits. When we dug pits, we knew that thousands of our brothers were being asphyxiated in the chambers. We had to work this way from early morning to dusk. [p. 53] Twilight ended the working day, because this ‘work’ was carried out only during daylight.

Already at half past four in the morning, the askari on guard who went around the hut at night knocked on the door and shouted: ‘Auf! Heraus!’ [‘Get up! Get out!’]. Before we could even get up, Cop Schmidt would arrive and chase us out of the hut with his whip. We ran outside carrying one boot or barefoot.

Generally, we did not undress; we even wore boots [overnight], because in the morning we could not get dressed in time.

It was still dark in the morning when we got woken up; there was no light. Schmidt ran to the hut hitting left and right. We got up sad, exhausted to the extreme, just as when we went to sleep. We had received only one thin blanket; we could cover ourselves with it or put it on the bunk. Old, worn-out rags had been chosen for us in the warehouse; – when someone only sighed, he got it in his face.

In the evening, the light remained on for half an hour; then it was turned off. The ‘Oberzugführer’ went around the hut with the whip, and we could not talk. We talked with our [bed] neighbors very quietly.

The service personnel consisted mainly of people whose wives, children and parents had been gassed. Many had taken from the warehouse ‘tales’ [talleth: prayer shawls] and ‘tfilim’ [tefillin: phylacteries, prayer belts], and when the hut was locked at night, we heard the ‘kadsiz’ prayer [kaddish: memorial prayer] in the bunks. We recited the prayer for the dead. Then there was silence. We did not complain; we had given up completely. Perhaps these 15 ‘Zugführer’ still deluded themselves; we did not.

We all vacillated like people who had no will. We were a crowd. I know several names, but only a few. It was also irrelevant who one was and what one’s name was. I know that the physician was a young doctor from Przemyśl; his name was Jakubowicz. I also knew a merchant from Krakow, Schlüss, and his son; the Czech Jew Ellbogen, who apparently had had a bicycle store; the cook Goldschmidt, from the well-known Karlsbad restaurant ‘Brüder [Brothers] Hanicka.’ Nobody was interested in the others; we mechanically lived this terrible life.

[p. 54] At 12 we received lunch – we passed in front of two windows, in one we received a mess tin, in the other half a liter of pearl-barley soup, that is with water, sometimes with a potato. Before lunch we had to sing a song – we had to sing also before the evening coffee. – While the cries of those asphyxiated were heard from the chambers, the orchestra played; in front of the kitchen there was a high gallows...

[p. 55] The life of the SS at Belżec and at the execution capital itself [i.e. in the camp] took place without the presence of women. Even the orgies were exclusively male. The men did all the work. It was like this until October. In October, a transport of Czech Jews arrived from Zamość. These were a few dozen women whose husbands worked in the death staff. It was decided to spare the [these] few dozens of women from this last transport. Forty were assigned to work in the kitchen, laundry and tailoring. They were not allowed to meet their husbands. In the kitchen they peeled potatoes, washed the pots and brought water. I don’t know what became of them. They certainly shared everyone’s fate. They were just refined women. They arrived with luggage. Some had pieces of butter with them. They gave away what they had. And they helped, if anyone was working in the kitchen or near the kitchen. They were staying in a

small separate hut: they had a 'Zugführerin' over them. During the work (I repaired the stoves everywhere and went around the whole camp), I saw that these women were talking to each other. They weren't mistreated as we were. The work for them ended at dusk; they sat down in twos to [receive] soup and coffee. Like us, they had not been deprived of their clothes; they were not given a prison uniform. It wasn't worth putting on this uniform for such a short time. Straight from the railway cars, with their heads shaved, they were assigned to the workshops and the kitchen. From the kitchen window and the tailor's shop, they could see the death transports arriving every day...

[p. 56] *The death camp was steeped in mass murder day after day. There was a day of deadly mass terror and mass murder. But there were also individual cases of personal mistreatment. I experienced and saw that too. There was never a roll call in Belżec. There was no need for it. The display of horror took place without public announcement. I have to report about a transport from Zamość. It was around November 15th. It was already cold; snow and mud were on the ground. In such a storm, a large transport arrived from Zamość, one of many. The entire Judenrat [Jewish council] was on the transport. When they were all already naked, the men were forced into the chambers, the women into the haircutting hut, as usual. The president of the Judenrat was ordered to remain in the courtyard. The askaris urged the transport to the execution, and an entire group of SS men stood around the president of the Judenrat. I don't know what his name was; I saw a middle-aged man, pale as a corpse and quite calm.*

*The SS ordered the orchestra to move into the courtyard and wait for instructions. – The orchestra, made up of 6 musicians, usually played in the area between the gas chamber and the pits. It played incessantly with instruments stolen from those murdered. At that time, I was doing some brickwork nearby, and I saw them all. The SS ordered the orchestra to play the melody 'es geht alles vorüber' [p. 57], *es geht alles vorbei* ['Everything will pass, everything will be over'], – *Drei Lilien, kommt ein Reiter gefahren, bricht die Lilien* ['Three lilies, a horseman arrives, picks the lilies'] - violins, flutes and accordions played. This lasted for some time. Then they put the president of the Zamość Judenrat on the wall and beat him with whips [with strips] ending in lead balls, especially on the head and in the face. Irrmann, the big Gestapo man Schwarz, Schmidt and some askari tortured him. This victim was ordered to dance and jump to the beats and [to the sound of] the music. After a few hours, a quarter of a loaf was brought to him, and he was forced to eat it while being beaten. He was standing, covered in blood, indifferent, serious; I didn't hear a moan. The tormenting of this man lasted six hours. The SS stood there and laughed at him: *'das ist eine höhere Person, Präsident des Judenrates'* ['This is a higher (important) person, the president of the Jewish council'] – they shouted loudly in a rogue way. It was only at six in the evening that the Gestapo man Schmidt shoved him to the pit, shot him in the head, and kicked him [causing him to fall] onto the heap of gassed corpses.*

There were also other notable events. Shortly after my arrival in Belžec, a very young guy was chosen from among the others of a transport, I don't know from which city (I didn't always know where a transport came from). He was the embodiment of health, strength and youth. He astounded us with his serenity. He looked around and asked almost happily: – 'Has anyone already escaped from here?' That was enough. – Some of the Germans overheard him, and he, still almost a boy, was tortured to death. They undressed him, hung him upside down on the gallows; he hung there for three hours. He was tough and was still alive. They pulled him down, laid him down on the sand, and with sticks [sic] shoved sand down his throat. He died.

On occasion, more transports arrived than usual. It happened that, instead of 50 cars, 60 and more arrived. Shortly before my escape in November, 100 people from such an overcrowded transport, who were already naked, had to be left [alive] for the work of burying corpses, because the Gestapo men had calculated that the permanent service personnel would not have managed to put so many gassing victims into the grave in such a short time. They spared only young men. All day they dragged corpses to the pits under the whips; they were not given a drop of water, [p. 58] naked in the snow and in the cold – in the evening, the cop Schmidt took them to the pit and shot them with a Browning. For about ten, there were not enough bullets, so he killed them one after the other, up to the last, with the handle of a pickaxe. I did not hear complaints; I only saw that in the death queue they were trying to overtake each other, these abandoned relics of life and youth.

The whole camp was placed under the surveillance of askari guard chains and a few dozen SS men. Some were distinguished at every step by their particular atrocity. [They were] just beasts. While some killed and beat 'coolly,' others enjoyed killing; they laughed; I could see that they were happy when they looked at the naked people stabbed with bayonets who were being goaded toward the chambers.

With joy they watched the people, particularly the young, desperate and discouraged. We knew that the camp commandant lived in a beautiful little house at the Belžec Station. He was an Obersturmführer, whose name I don't succeed to remember, although I continually strive to recall this name; it had a short sound. He came to the camp rather infrequently; he showed up on the occasion of some event. He was a tall, broad-shouldered cop, over 40 years of age, with a normal facial expression – so perhaps apparently a born thug. He was a perfect beast.

Once the killing machine broke down. Informed of this, he arrived on horseback, ordered the machine to be repaired, and did not let people out of the asphyxiation chambers; – they had to [wait to] die of asphyxiation for another couple of hours. He leaned down in anger, screamed and was all excited. Although he rarely showed up, it was the terror of the SS. He lived alone, [p. 60] with an askari orderly at his service. Every day the askari reported to him. The commandant and many of the Gestapo men had no permanent contact with the

camp. They had their own canteen, and a cook was brought in by the Germans who cooked for all the Germans. No one ever came with their family, no one lived with a woman. They raised whole flocks of geese and ducks. People said that a whole basket of cherries had been sent to him in the spring. Crates of vodka and wine were brought [to him] every day.

I fixed a stove there [at the commandant's house]. There were two young Jewish girls to pluck the ducks; they threw an onion and a turnip to me. I also saw a local girl who worked there as well as the attendants themselves.

Every Sunday evening, they brought the orchestra, and organized a party with drinks. There, only the Gestapo men met, eating and drinking. They threw the remains of food to the musicians. When the commandant appeared at the camp for a few minutes, I saw the Gestapo men and the askari trembling with fear.

In addition to him, four other brigands managed [the camp] by way of Gestapo men, supervising and directing the entire slaughterhouse. Hardly ever did all the cops show up. One of them, Fritz Irrmann, a man of about 30 years, Stabsführer, in charge of supplies at the camp, was a specialist in shooting children and old people. He carried out every atrocity with absolute calm, acted in a mysterious and silent way; every day he spoke to the desperate people who went to the bath house and to work. [He was] a meticulous criminal.

Oberscharführer Faix Reinhold carried out his atrocities differently. He was originally from Gablonz upon Neisse [today's Jablonec nad Nisou], apparently married, father of two. He had a cultured man's way of speaking. He spoke quickly. When someone did not understand him immediately, he beat him, screamed at the top of his lungs like a madman. When he once ordered the kitchen to be repainted, and a Jewish doctor of chemistry did it, who was standing right in the corner under the ceiling on a ladder, he ordered him to descend from the ladder repeatedly, then beat him in the face with the whip so that it was swollen and covered in blood. He did his job like that. Faix gave the impression of being abnormal.

[p. 61] He played the violin. He ordered the orchestra to play continuously the melody 'Montanaro, Don't You Mind?' until exhaustion. He ordered people to sing, dance, and he mocked and mistreated them. [He was] a mad beast.

I don't know which of them was more infernal and more terrible, whether it was Faix or the big, stocky, dark assassin Schwarz (originally from the center of the Reich). He checked that the askaris were beastly enough to us and that they mistreated us severely enough. He watched us during the excavation of the pits, that is, he didn't give us a moment of respite. With the screams, with the whip, with ruthless blows he chased us from the pits to the chambers, where piles of corpses awaited the ultimate road toward the deep pits. He pushed us there and again ran to the pits. On the very edge of the graves, children, old people, sick people waited and gloomily looked down with dazed eyes. They were waiting for death. They had been allowed to look at the corpses and the blood at length, and to inhale into themselves the fumes of putrefaction, only to be liquidated a moment later by the blows of the bloodthirsty Ir-

rman. Schwarz continually beat everyone. You couldn't protect your face from the blows. — 'Hände ab!' ['Hands down!'] — he yelled, and mistreated us with pleasure. The young volksdeutsch Heni Schmidt, probably Latvian, enjoyed his bestial mission even more. He rarely spoke German, instead of 's' he said 't' (not 'was' [what], but 'wat'). He spoke Russian with the askari. He never wished to leave the camp even for a day. Light-footed, quick, slender, with the mouth of a gangster, constantly drunk, he ran all over the camp from 4 in the morning to the evening, mistreating, gladly watching the tormenting of the victims and rejoicing at this sight. — 'He is the worst cop' — murmured the inmates and immediately they said to themselves, 'They are all the worst.' He was the first to appear where people were harassed the most. He was always [present] when the hapless victims were pushed into the chambers, listening to the shrill screams of the women that came out of the terrible chambers and split the air. He was the 'soul' of the camp, the vilest, the most terrible, the most bloodthirsty. With joy he stared at the gloomy faces, exhausted to the extreme, of those who returned to the hut in the evening. He had to hit [p. 62] everyone with the whip on the head with all his strength. When any of us managed to escape from him, he would chase him and torture him. These Gestapo men and others who beat less — they were monsters. None of them was human for even a moment.

From 7 am to dusk they tormented thousands of people in various ways. At dusk they returned to their quarters near the station. The askaris served at night with submachine guns. During the day, the Gestapo men received the death transports with a parade.

The cops' biggest party was Himmler's visit. It was in mid-October [w połowie października]. Since the morning we saw that the Gestapo criminals were behaving in a mysterious way. That day the entire killing of 1,000 people took less time. Everything happened very quickly. Irrman announced: 'Es kommt eine höhere Person, muss Ordnung sein' ['A higher (important) person is coming, there must be order']. They didn't say who, but we all knew it, because the askari muttered it among themselves.

At about 3 pm, Himmler arrived with Major General Katzman [sic], the main murderer of Lwów and the district, along with an adjutant and 10 Gestapo men. Irrman and the others led the guests to the chambers, from where the corpses fell [sic] and from where they were thrown into the place where a horrible pile of young and very-young children's bodies grew. The inmates dragged the corpses. Himmler watched, watched for half an hour, and left. I saw the joy and the great cheerfulness of the Gestapo men; I saw that they were very happy, that they laughed. I heard they were talking about promotions.

[p. 63] I cannot define in what state of mind we, the doomed prisoners, lived and what we felt in hearing these terrible cries of people who were asphyxiated every day, and the begging of the children. Three times a day we saw thousands of people close to losing their minds. And we were very close to mad-

ness. We carried on day after day, not knowing how. We had no illusions, not even for a moment. We were dying little by little every day, along with all the transports of people who for a brief moment had still experienced the torture of illusion. Apathetic and discouraged, we did not even feel hunger and cold. Everyone was waiting for their turn, knowing they had to die and that they had to suffer in an inhuman way. Only when I heard the children cry out – ‘Mom! But I have been good! [It’s] dark! Dark!’ – our hearts ripped to pieces. But then we stopped having feelings.

By the end of November, 4 months had already passed of my incredible stay at the Bełżec execution [camp]. One morning, Cop Irrman told me that the camp needed sheet metal, a lot of sheet metal. At that point, I was swollen and bruised, pus came out of the sores. Gestapo man Schmidt tormented me with a stick on both sides of the face. With malicious laughter, Irrman told me to go under guard to Lwów to [look for] sheet metal – ‘Sollst nicht durchgehen’ [‘You must not escape’]. After getting into the car, I left with four Gestapo men and a guard. In Lwów, after a full day of loading up [p. 64] sheet metal, I stayed in the car under the surveillance of a cop; the others went to have fun [zabawić]. I sat for a couple of hours without thoughts and without moving. I happened to observe that my guard had fallen asleep and was snoring. Instinctively, without thinking for a moment, I slipped out of the car; the cop was asleep. I stopped on the sidewalk, pretended for a moment more to rummage around the sheet metal; I walked away slowly; there was a great deal of movement in Legionów Street. I pulled down my cap; there was blackout in the streets; no one saw me. I remembered where a Polish woman lived, my housekeeper; I went to her. She hid me. Over twenty months the sores all over my body healed. Not just the sores. The images of the atrocities experienced haunted me. While awake and when dreaming, I heard the cries of the tortured victims. And the begging of the children. And the roar of the engine. I couldn’t get the criminal face of every Gestapo man out of my mind. I stayed [there] until the moment of liberation.

When the Red Army drove the German cops out of Lwów, I was able to step out into God’s world, look around without fear, breathe fresh air and, for the first time since the time of German captivity, think of something and feel – I longed to see the place where two and a half million [dwa i pół miliona] had been asphyxiated, who wanted to live, to live.

I went there early. I talked to the inhabitants in the vicinity. They told me that in 1943 there had been less and less transports, that the Jewish killing center had moved to the Oświęcim [Auschwitz] gas chamber. In 1944, the pits were reopened, the corpses were doused with petrol, and burned. A thick black smoke hovered for tens of kilometers around the gigantic furnaces [palenisk]. The stench and bad air spread widely with the wind over a large area. For long days and nights, for long weeks.

And then – said the inhabitants of the vicinity – the bones were ground up and the wind dispersed the dust over the fields and into the woods.

The bone-grinding machine was installed by an inmate from the Janowska Camp, Szpilke, who was brought to Belżec for this purpose. He told me that he found only piles of bones, all [p. 65] the buildings were gone. Then he managed to escape and save himself. He currently resides in Hungary. He reported this to me already after the liberation of Lwów by the Red Army.

When the production of ‘artificial fertilizer’ with millions of human bones ended and the torn pits [sic] were filled, the surface of the blood-soaked soil was leveled in an orderly and accurate way. The German criminal monsters covered the graves of millions of Jews at the Belżec execution [camp] with dense vegetation.

I took my leave from my informants and went along the street known to me as the ‘siding.’ It was gone. A field led me to a pine forest, alive, fragrant. There was a lot of tranquility there then. In the middle of the woods was a large bright meadow.”

1.6. The Affidavit of December 7, 1954

This statement was made in Toronto by Reder, who at the time called himself Roman Robak, in order to obtain reparations from the Federal Republic of [West] Germany for the victims of National Socialism. The Polish text published by Libionka (Libionka, pp. 62-66) is a simple translation of the German text found in the files of the Belżec Trial against Josef Oberhauser, where it is registered as a “transcript of a photocopy” (“*Abschrift von Fotokopie*”), but the original was undoubtedly in English, as evidenced by the final certificate in this language. Since I was unable to locate the English original, I consequently retranslate the German translation from the files of the Oberhauser trial.

The first page contains personal information, which I have already mentioned earlier when introducing this person. Only at the bottom of the first page does the witness mention Belżec, and then in detail on the subsequent two pages:²⁴

“[p. 226...] I was deprived of my freedom when I was sent to the Lemberg [Lwow] Ghetto. In November 1942, I fled from the Belzec Concentration Camp and remained in hiding in Lemberg until July 1944.

I have been at the following places and detention centers:

- 1) Lemberg Ghetto (Poland): Dec. 1941 – Aug. 16, 1942*
- 2) Belzec Extermination Camp: Aug. 16, 1942 – Nov. 1942.*

*signed Rudolf Reder
Roman Robak.*

²⁴ ZStL, 208 AR-Z, 252/59, Vol. 2, pp. 226-228.

[p. 227] *On 1). The Lemberg Ghetto was established in December 1941. At first the ghetto was not surrounded by walls or barbed wire, but it was surrounded by the German and Ukrainian police. Leaving the ghetto was prohibited under threat of death. In August 1942, the ghetto was surrounded with a 3m-high, double-board fence. Jewish alleys were Wrzybranowakiego, Mlynarska, Jakuba Hermiana, Akademicka, Legionow, Panienska, Zoltkiewska, Marcina, Balanowa, Kollontaja, Plac Smolski and others. The elder of the Jews was the lawyer Dr. Leib Landau. Schildhorn was the head of the Jewish Police. The Poles were allowed to enter the ghetto. I lived in the ghetto at 12 Wrzybranowakiego, had to wear the Star of David, and had to do forced labor. I wore a white armband with a blue Star of David. I worked in the Lemberg soap factory, Panienska 7, which was put into operation by the Germans. I worked as a master boiler in the factory and received no pay. Engineer Kaufmann was the factory manager. I worked there until I was arrested at home by the Gestapo on Aug. 16, 1942. I was taken to the Podzamcza military barracks, from where I was taken to ZAL [labor camp] Janowska with many other Jews. We were kept here for one night, and the next morning we were loaded into railway cars at the Kleparow Railway Station after we had been ruthlessly beaten.*

Ad 2). On Aug. 17, 1942, I was deported to the Belzec Extermination Camp. The place is not far from Rawa Ruska, about 20 km to the north. We were unloaded and had to strip naked. Skilled workers were asked to step out. I reported as a mechanic. Only 8 men were left behind, the rest were gassed immediately. We were about 4500 people in the transport. The camp commandant, Oberstabschefritzer Fritz I r r m a n n (he came from the Sudetenland) told us that we would be sent to work after having taken a bath. All the prisoners were taken to a large hut, where the heads of the women had been shorn. Then they were driven into a narrow corridor, there was a door with the label 'Bath and Inhalation Rooms.' In front of the door hang a flower pot with a flower. When the door was opened, there was another corridor, three doors on the right and three doors on the left, which led into 6 gas chambers. Each chamber held 750 people. The building was made of concrete. I know from my own observation that the gassing took no more than 20 minutes. A certain Heinz S c h m i d t was employed in the camp. He was an ethnic German from Latvia who became a German PoW from the Russian army and was doing the most terrible and atrocious work in the camp. The gas was driven through pipes by means of a machine in a small cabin. I operated a machine that shoveled the earth up from the pits that were to serve as graves for the gassing victims. I also had to drag the bodies out of the gas chambers and into the graves. For this latter work [p. 228] about 500 Jews were deployed. Every day 3 transports came with Jews, one transport each with 50 cars, a total of 12,000 to 13,000 people, and these people had to be buried by evening. I dragged the bodies by putting a strap on the wrist, and a second worker did the same, and so we hauled the bodies to the grave. We had to drag up to 500

meters. There were about 30 graves, each grave was 100 meters long, 25 m wide and 15 m deep. In my opinion, one could bury about 10,000 [sic] bodies in one grave. The corpses were placed up to 50 cm above the surface of the earth because the grave later settled. When the grave was full, the corpses were sprinkled with lime and covered with sand. I was also a bricklayer in the camp. *I r r m a n n* called me a stove fitter. *Reinhold F e i x*, *Oberscharführer*, was *Fritz Irrmann*'s accomplice. Both came from the *Sudetenland*. He was married and had two children at home. Sometimes he told me he was sending parcels home. I was spared because I worked a lot and was considered diligent, which I often heard. The *Belzec Extermination Camp* was guarded by 250 'askari,' i.e. Russians, Ukrainians, Mongols, in black uniforms (who had previously become German PoWs). We were kept in separate barracks, and were also guarded by the askari. At 3:30 am we were woken up by *S c h m i d t*, who was always drunk. *Schmidt* knocked out all my teeth with a pistol, with one blow. In November 1942, the extermination camp was inspected by *Him[m]ler* and by SS and Police General *K a t z m a n n*. They found the camp to be run first-class, the management of the camp, namely *Irrmann* and *Faix*, received high awards, and one street in the camp was named *Faix Street*. In November 1942, I managed to escape from the *Belzec Camp*. I fled to *Lemberg* and hid with my present wife. Back then, my wife's name was *Johanna Robak*, and she lived in *Lemberg*, *Sakramentek 5*. I was liberated there in July 1944 when the Russians occupied *Lemberg*.

I was in the camps under the name *Rudolf Reder*. In 1949, I changed my name to *Roman Robak*. Otherwise I have never given incorrect information about my personal details. I have not received any advance payments in the course of reparations for victims of National Socialism.

I affirm the accuracy of my statement under oath. I am aware that this affidavit is intended for submission to the compensation authority, and that submitting a false affidavit is punishable under law and can result in the loss of claims for compensation.

I make this solemn declaration conscientiously believing it to be true and knowing that it [sic] is of the same force and effect as if made under oath and by virtue of 'The Canada Evidence Act'.

signed *Rudolf Reder*
Roman Robak."

On December 7, in support of this application, *Reder*'s wife *Johanna Robak* also filed an affidavit, of which only the final part is relevant:²⁵

"One evening, towards the end of 1942, the applicant [*Reder*] came to my home. He was ragged, had broken teeth, swollen legs, and a body full of wounds. At night he had a fever of about 40 degrees [centigrade]. I hid him at

²⁵ *Libionka*, pp. 67f. This declaration, like the following ones, is also part of the *Belzec* trial documents, but I was unable to get photocopies of them, so we have to make do with these retranlations from Polish.

home in the attic, above the courtyard warehouse. He remained hidden there until July 1944, until the occupation of Lemberg by the Russians. He told me that he had fled from the Bełżec Camp. He was all bloated from starvation and looked terrible.”

1.7. The Testimony of January 26, 1956

As indicated earlier, the German judiciary had sent Reder/Robak a questionnaire with 12 questions (see Friedmann), which, in summary, asked:

1. How long was the witness detained in Bełżec?
2. Had he been detained in Bełżec itself or in a nearby camp?
3. What work did he have to carry out in the camp?
4. How many gas chambers existed in Bełżec?
5. Can he remember the name of the camp commandant?
6. Does he know the names of other SS men in the camp?
7. What crimes did he personally witness?
8. Does he remember an SS *Untersturmführer* Josef Oberhauser?
9. What function did Oberhauser perform at the camp?
10. Did he see Oberhauser commit any crime?
11. Can he name other former Bełżec prisoners?
12. Does he know former inmates from the Treblinka, Sobibór, Chełmno or Majdanek Camp?

Reder answered these questions as follows:²⁶

“I have been asked 12 questions, which I answer as follows:

- 1) I was detained in the Bełżec KZ [Konzentrationslager, concentration camp] from August 16, 1942 to the end of November 1942.*
- 2) At the Bełżec Camp there was no labor camp; there was only one large camp.*
- 3) Immediately after our arrival, our clothes were taken away, and we were already naked when they asked us who had a profession. I introduced myself as a machine operator. Some blacksmiths, shoemakers, carpenters, tailors, etc. also came forward, and we got the clothes back. The next day, I was immediately assigned to the machine that extracted sand from large pits, and had to operate this machine. We arrived by train at the Bełżec railway station, and then to a spur, and the train could enter the camp directly. The camp itself was located in a forest, in which an area of 1-2 km² was less forested. These large pits were in the camp grounds. They were to be used for burying the corpses of*

²⁶ Libionka, pp. 69-71. This is followed by a declaration by Reder/Robak of January 26, 1960, also made in Toronto, in which he recognized the man (presumably Heinrich Unverhau) portrayed in three photographs that had been sent by the German judiciary as the *Untersturmführer* he had described earlier (*ibid.*, p. 72).

those gassed. Every day, 3 transports of about 100 cars arrived, and in each car were about 100 people; when they arrived on the scene, some were already dead. So, every day we had to bury 14,000 people, that is, corpses. When the detainees got off the cars, they first undressed, and then they were pushed into a large hut, and there they were told they would go to the bath house. Women first had their hair cut. The gas chamber was disguised as a bath house by way of a sign placed above the door with the words 'Bade und Inhalationsräume.'

The building was made of cement. In the center there was a corridor and doors on each side. The people were pushed from the corridor into the 6 chambers, standing, until the chambers were filled; then the doors were closed, and the gas was put in. However, the chambers also had doors to the outside, and after the gassing, these doors were opened, and the corpses were pulled out. The gassing lasted about 20 minutes.

Since, as I mentioned, about 14,000 people were gassed every day and had to be buried, I and others were engaged not only in excavating the pits, but also in removing the corpses from the gas chambers and transporting them to the pits.

We had received leather straps that were tied to the hand of the corpses, and so they were thrown into the pit. When a pit was full, we sprinkled the corpses with liquid lime and covered them with sand. Because the corpses settled, we arranged the corpses in a heap about one meter above ground level. Before we received the lime, the ground had leveled out. We carried out this terrible work every day, without taking a break. We had to leave the huts at 4 am and worked until night.

4) I repeat, there were 6 chambers, but in one building.

5) I don't remember the name of the commandant. He didn't come to the camp often and lived near the train station. I saw him for the first time when the gassing device stopped working, and the people were half-gassed. He was called by phone at his home, and I saw that he gave orders.

6) I remember the name of an Oberscharstabsführer, I correct myself, Oberstabsscharführer Fritz Irrmann, from the Sudetenland, of Oberscharführer Arnold Faix, also from the Sudetenland, of a corporal from Latvia named Hinz Schmidt. I know that Irrmann and Faix were originally from the Sudetenland because I took packages addressed to their families to the post office.

7) The three SS men mentioned above and also the rest did not send the elderly and the children to the gas chambers at all. These had to sit at the edge of the pit with their faces towards the pit, and they were shot in the head and fell dead into the pit. We too were tormented and beaten bloody, although we followed his orders.

8) An Untersturmführer was the camp's deputy commandant. I don't remember his name, but I can describe him, and I should be able to recognize him. Photographs for evidential purposes were promised, but ultimately not attached. He might have been 33-34 years old then. He was tall, strong and

wore an SS uniform. He came continually to the camp and directed the extermination. He gave all the orders, was present when the transports arrived, and also observed the shootings.

At the camp there was also a Ukrainian weapon, I correct myself, a guard unit, which was composed of 250 men, and this Untersturmführer was the commander of the guards. As I have already said, the Obersturmführer was not often in the camp, and the Untersturmführer did everything.

10) I saw the aforementioned criminals with my own eyes.

11) I don't know of any ex-prisoners who left Belžec [alive].

12) Among my acquaintances there are no witnesses from Treblinka, Sobibór, Chełmno and Majdanek.

I would like to correct a spelling mistake that appears in the third paragraph. A transport consisted not of 100, but of 50 cars.

Since I also built stoves for the guard quarters, they called me a stove fitter [zdunem]. The defendant [Oberhauser] therefore may not remember my name, but he can remember me as a 'stove fitter.' I also want to point out that, when we dragged the corpses, there were dentists along the path with pincers, and they tore out [their] gold teeth or gold crowns.

I also want to describe how I managed to escape from the camp.

In November it was already cold, and the guards needed stoves in the huts. The stoves were built, but the chimneys were lacking, and Irrmann asked me where he could get sheet metal, since there was no such material in the vicinity. I told him that I was from Lwów, and there I knew where to get the material. The next day he ordered me to get dressed, because I had to accompany four guards and a non-commissioned officer on the way to Lwów. The aforementioned were all armed, so that for my part an escape was not expected. We left with a truck, arrived in Lwów in the evening; I was handed over to the Gestapo for the night, and [the next day] I was picked up and went to the office, where we were given vouchers. We received a voucher and also some material, and we had to go back at noon. We stopped at a restaurant, and the non-commissioned officer with the guards went to town and ordered the fourth [guard] to watch me. I sat next to the driver's seat, with the guard behind [me]. The others stayed in the restaurant for a long time, and when I turned around, I noticed that the Ukrainian guard had fallen asleep. I assumed that [the others] would have had a good time during the [previous] night, and that they would be tired. When I realized that he had fallen asleep and even heard him snoring, I decided to flee. I opened the door, moved slowly, got out of the truck very quietly, and ran away to [my] acquaintances.

I make this solemn declaration conscientiously believing it to be true and knowing that it is of the same force and effect as if made under oath and by virtue of 'The Canada Evidence Act.'"

1.8. The Interrogation of August 8, 1960

This and the following statement were made by Reder/Robak to the public prosecutor's office at Munich, again in the context of the pre-trial investigations leading up to the trial against Oberhauser:²⁷

*“Munich State Archive
Munich, August 8, 1960*

Ref.: 1Js 423/60

Present: Chief Prosecutor Dr. Lehmann

Prosecutor Heintl

Court Clerk Gatty

Interrogation protocol:

Mr. Roman Robak testifies voluntarily. After having become aware of the subject of the interrogation and having received the exhortation to make truthful statements, the witness stated the following:

About the person: Robak Roman, formerly Reder Rudolf, born April 4, 1881 in Dębica, Lwów District/Poland, citizen of Canada, chemist by profession, currently retired, married, resident of Toronto/Canada, 174 Lippincott Street, without any relationship or affinity with the defendant.

On the subject: I was born on April 4, 1881 in Dębica in the Lwów District. I operated a soap factory on Panieńska Street in Lwów. After the occupation of Galicia by the Russians in 1939, at first, I continued to run the factory without hindrance, until the outbreak of the war between the Germans and the Russians.

Immediately after the outbreak of this war, Lwów was occupied by German troops. This was in late June or early July 1941. Right after the invasion by German troops, the factory was taken from me. I couldn't even enter its grounds. From this moment until August 16, 1942, I lived in hiding in Lwów in various places with my daughter Zofia. On August 16, 1942, the Gestapo arrested me and took me to the Janowska Street Camp. My daughter managed to escape and hide in Krakow. My daughter went with her husband to England. Now her name is Smith, and she lives in North Wembley at 18 Baxford Road.

The next day, I was taken from the Janowska Street Camp to the Bełżec Extermination Camp with a transport of about 5,000 Jews. It was a transport of about 50 railway cars, and about 100 Jews were crammed into each car. My son Bronysław was already arrested on August 10, 1942. I never saw him alive. Then in Bełżec I learned that he had been killed before I arrived in Bełżec.

When I arrived in Bełżec, the camp was already in full swing. The camp was divided into two parts, the actual death camp and the labor camp. The two camps were strictly separated from each other; people who were in one camp

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 73-76. This is followed by observations on the SS camp staff (pp. 77f.), which I address in Chapter 2.9.

were not allowed to go to the other and vice-versa. During the time I was in the Belżec Death Camp, there were only women in the labor camp. All these women were from the Zamość Concentration Camp. At the Belżec Death Camp, there were four or five huts for Jewish helpers and three huts for Ukrainian guards. The Germans of the camp lived outside the camp. Also at the death camp, there was a large hut with the gas chambers. In the hut there were 6 gas chambers in all, that is 3 and 3 along the corridor that extended throughout the hut. At the end of the hut there was a small room in which the machine was located, whose exhaust gases were fed into the 6 gas chambers through pipes. The pipes through which the gas was fed into the chambers were installed on the ceilings of the gas chambers. Near this death hut there was another hut in which people had to undress and in which women had their hair cut.

I can describe the actual killing system as follows:

During my stay at the Belżec Death Camp, 3 transports of 50 cars arrived every day, in each of which 100 Jews were crammed. These trains arrived at Belżec Station, from where a German train operator took them [over] and drove them into the middle of the camp on a spur. I do not know the name of this machinist; he was a short, stout man with a thick, protruding [long] black mustache. He was about 50 years old then. This machinist always checked that the Jews were not hiding in the cars, and when they tried to hide in them, he chased them out. When he found Jews who wanted to escape death this way, he always handed them over to the volksdeutsch Christian Schmidt or the camp commandant Jirmann (Irmann), and the latter immediately shot them or beat them to death. After the cars had entered, the Jews were told that they would go to work, but first they would have to bathe and undergo inhalation because of the danger of contagious diseases. Immediately after leaving the train, men and women had to strip naked. The women were taken to the hut mentioned above where their hair was shorn off. Then they went to the death hut, where a sign with the words 'Bade- und Inhalationsräume' hung on the door. Also above the door hung a flower in a vase [a vase with a flower]. The camp administration formed an orchestra of 8-10 Jewish inmates who played all day. Irmann gave a speech at the arrival of each transport during which he told the people that they would be put to work. Therefore, no Jew refused to enter the alleged bath house and inhalation rooms. For as long as I was in Belżec, only once did a woman escape from the gas chamber, but the volksdeutsch Schmidt immediately shot her in the courtyard. When all the chambers were full, they were locked from the outside, and the machine was started. The killing process took about 20 minutes. After the doors were closed, the Jews who were in the rooms began to understand what was meant to be done with them, and they began to cry and shout. But after a few minutes, everything was quiet. After 20 minutes, the outer doors of the gas chambers were opened, and the bodies of the Jews were taken to the mass graves. For this purpose, about 500 Jews were kept [alive] in the Belżec Camp, who were to carry out this

work. We had to drag the corpses to the pits, two of us per corpse, with the use of leather belts around the wrist, by first wrapping these belts around the wrist of the dead.

The Jewish group dug the graves by hand. On the edge of the pit there was a machine with a conveyor, onto which the excavated sand was poured. These pits were 100 meters long, 25 meters wide and 15 meters deep, so that each pit could contain 100,000 corpses. At the time of my escape from Belżec, 30 such pits had been created. Until my escape in November 1942, 15 or 16 pits were already full, liquid lime had been poured into them, and they were covered with sand, which subsided after a few days, so that the pit was [became] even with the surface of the ground.

Small children up to 3 years old and old people were not killed in the gas chambers, but were placed on the edge of the pit, facing the pit, and Irrmann shot them from behind. Irrmann, Feix and Christian served as executors.

One day so many Jews were gassed that our normal group of 500 men was not enough to bury the corpses. Therefore, another 100 additional Jews were selected from one transport, who were to help us carry the killed Jews to the grave. When this work was done, these 100 Jews also had to perish. Since it was probably not worth killing these 100 Jews in the gas chambers, Schmidt ordered them to go to the pits, and he shot them from behind with the automatic pistol. When he was finally out of ammunition, he took the handle of a pickaxe and beat the last of the Jews with it, hitting them on the head with the thick end [of the handle]. On the way [to the pits], Jewish dentists checked the corpses, opening their mouths with pincers and looking for the gold teeth. The gold teeth were extracted from the slain, the gold was delivered, melted and cast into small bars, which were brought to Lublin.

Whole railway-cars full of sacks of hair shorn from women were sent to Budapest; it was said that mattresses were made with this hair. Clothes, shoes and underwear were also collected and taken to a large shed at the Belżec railway station. There was a group of Jewish men, led by an SS man, who sorted and shipped these clothes. I don't know what this SS man's name was; he didn't beat me, but the other Jews he did [beat]. When we took the clothes, shoes, underwear or women's cut hair from the death camp to the train station, guards always accompanied us.

In November 1942, I had to build small chimneys for the stoves. That is, I also worked in the camp as a stove fitter. So, I told Irrmann that there were large sheet-metal warehouses in Lwów, and that you could get it there. The next day I had to get changed and go to Lwów in a truck. In the truck between the driver and me there was a group of guards and a non-commissioned SS officer, and the fourth man was a Ukrainian Wachmann [guard]. We arrived in Lwów in the evening; I was handed over to the Gestapo to stay overnight, and the next day I was taken back. Then we loaded the sheet metal, and at noon the NCO and all but one of the guards went to eat. The Wachmann who was left on the truck fell asleep, then I took advantage of it and ran away. I fled to my

present wife. Although the Gestapo had its own office in the house where my present wife lived back then, I was able to hide there until the Russian reoccupation of Lwów. My wife worked for the Gestapo as a cleaning lady, so in the aforementioned house there was a two-bedroom apartment with a kitchen and a bathroom, and she hid me in turn once in the attic, once in the basement. Since my wife also had to take care of a dog that belonged to the Gestapo, she received a lot of meat from the Gestapo men, and she fed me with this meat all the time.

After the Russians returned to Lwów at the end of 1944, I first reopened my soap factory. But I couldn't operate it for long, because it was expropriated by the Russians. From Lwów I went to Krakow as early as 1945. There, too, I opened a small soap factory. I was able to keep this factory until 1949. Due to problems with the financial office, that is, due to the accusation that the soap manufacturers in Krakow used edible grease to make soap, one day all the soap manufacturers in Krakow were arrested. I had to spend 3 months in preventive arrest, and this was the cause of my emigration. My wife paid a bail deposit of 400,000 zloty to the Polish investigative court. The Polish authorities in a sense collected this bail as a fine on the grounds that I had allegedly used edible fat for the production of soap. In addition, I had to pay a tax of 1,200,000 zlotys. Since I didn't have this much money, I turned to a lawyer, who advised me to change my name and leave. The district authorities gave me permission to take the name of Roman Robak. With the name of Robak, I then obtained passports for my wife and me for emigration to Canada."

1.9. The Interrogation of August 11, 1960

"Munich State Archives

StanW33033/10

IJs 423/60

Public Prosecutor's Office of Munich I

Munich, August 11, 1960

Present: Prosecutor Heintl

Court Clerk Gatty

Interrogation protocol:

The witness Roman Robak testifies voluntarily. After having become aware of the subject of the interrogation and having received the exhortation to make truthful statements, the witness stated the following:

About the person: Robak Roman (Reder Rudolf), born April 4, 1881 in Dębica, married, retired (former soap manufacturer), citizen of Canada, residing in Toronto/Canada, 174 Lippincott Street.

On the subject: As I said in the course of the interrogation of August 8, 1960 to the prosecutor's office of Munich I, after the German troops entered Lwów,

where I was living at the time, I was arrested on August 16, 1942 by the Gestapo and first taken to the labor camp at Janowska Street in Lwów. From this moment on, I was able to live hidden in Lwów. As I said earlier, the Janowska Street Camp was a Labor camp for Jews. At the same time, it served as a collection and transit camp for Jews who were deemed unfit for labor and who were then taken to the Belżec Extermination Camp located not far away.”

The interrogation concerned the Janowska Street Camp and the German shootings in Lwów, a subject that is not part of the present study. I translate only the first part:

“Having been asked about the main officials of the Lwów Gestapo, I remember, in order, first General Katzmann, who resided in the Lwów city office and to whom, according to my information, the entire Lwów Gestapo was subordinated. The commandant of the Janowska Street Camp was the Gestapo man Weber, and the Gestapo functionary Rokita was his deputy.”

Among other things, they are said to have selected in the Janowska Street Camp the Jews unable to work and thus destined for Belżec (Libionka, pp. 79-81). In a note, Libionka specifies that the commandant of the camp was SS *Obersturmführer* Gustav Willhaus, that SS *Untersturmführer* Richard Rokita was the “camp leader” (*Lagerführer*), and that Heinz Weber was the head of the department of “labor deployment of the Jews” (*ibid.*, Note 141, p. 79).

* * *

In the subsequent critical analysis of Reder’s statements in Part 2 of the present study, I refer to his statements simply by giving the respective dates (format dd.mm.yyyy):

1. = 22.9.1944
2. = 1.11.1944
3. = 1945
4. = 29.12.1945
5. = 1946
6. = 1954
7. = 1956
8. = 8.8.1960
9. = 11.8.1960.