



## ARTUR RABLIN

On 12 August 1947 in Kraków, a Member of the Main Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes in Poland, Appellate Investigating Judge Jan Sehn, acting pursuant to a written motion submitted by the First Prosecutor of the Supreme National Tribunal, dated 25 April 1947 (file no. NTN 719/47), interviewed as a witness – this in accordance with the provisions of and procedure provided for under the Decree of 10 November 1945 (Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland No. 51, item 293), in connection with Articles 254, 107 and 115 of the Code of Criminal Procedure – the former prisoner of Auschwitz concentration camp mentioned hereunder, who testified as follows:

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Name and surname	Artur Rablin
Date and place of birth	3 May 1923 in Kraków
Parents' names	Andrzej and Zofia, <i>née</i> Sora
Religion	Roman Catholic
Citizenship and nationality	Polish
Occupation	a student at the Jagiellonian University
Place of residence	Kraków, Wola Justowska, "Dąbrowa" villa

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I was arrested in Kraków, at my parents' flat, in March 1940. I was detained at Montelupich prison in Kraków, while on 20 June 1940 I was sent by rail, together with some one thousand prisoners and a transport from Wiśnicz, to the concentration camp in Auschwitz. I was incarcerated at this camp continuously until the end of November 1944, whereafter I was put on one of the last evacuation transports to leave Auschwitz and deported to the camp in Ravensbrück, where I was incarcerated until March 1945.

In Auschwitz, I spent the period between the end of June and the end of July 1940 in quarantine, at the so-called *Stabsgebäude* [staff building]. I would like to stress that these



were the organizational beginnings of the camp in Auschwitz. I was given camp number 1021. For the next two months I worked with *Rollwagenkommando* [roller weigher squad I]. Thereafter, until the end of November 1940, I worked with the *Landwirtschaftskommando* [farm squad]. Between November 1940 and June 1941 I was employed in the *Außenkommando* [external squad] Porąbka. This comprised around 40 prisoners, and the Germans used us to build a pension for the SS men. The *Kommandoführer* [squad leader] was one *Oberscharführer* Franz Hössler, later promoted to *Lagerführer* [camp leader] of Auschwitz. Next, until March 1942, I was assigned to the SS men's kitchen. From March 1942 until March 1943 I worked at the prisoners' kitchen, while in March 1943 I was returned to the SS men's kitchen, where I worked until the end of 1943. While I was employed there, six of my colleagues who worked at the *SS-Küche* [SS kitchen] escaped. As punishment, 20 inmates from the squad, myself among them, were locked up in bunker no. 11 for a period of two weeks. Seven of us were released and reassigned to the SS men's kitchen, while towards the end of March 1943 twelve were sent in a penal transport to Flossenbürg (in all probability), where they worked in the quarries. Not one of them returned. I too, as one of the thirteen, was to go with this transport, however I managed to collapse to the ground feigning unconsciousness, to which my colleagues – prisoner-doctors – closed their eyes and instructed that I be taken to the hospital. After a few days I returned to work in the SS men's kitchen.

In the beginning of 1944 luck smiled at me, for I was assigned as an orderly to the camp commandant, Hössler. I owe this assignment to Hössler, who got to know me while I was working in Porąbka. I worked in his office right until the end of November 1944, taking care of various administrative and economic affairs, in connection with which I also frequented Hössler's residence, which was located outside the grounds of the camp. He gave me a pass which authorized me to move about the entire facility freely. During this period I was therefore able to get a good look at camp life and encounter certain of the SS men.

At the very beginning of my period of incarceration at Auschwitz I met the head of the quarantine block, Plagge, who at the time – if I remember correctly – was an *Unterscharführer*. His job title was *Sportführer* [physical education leader] at the quarantine block, which at the time had some 800–1,000 prisoners. Plagge conducted the so-called "sports" with inmates from early morning until late in the evening, with a short dinner break. As I recall, he acted on his own initiative. Plagge carried out the exercises personally,

and selected German *kapos* – criminals – as his assistants. We commenced "sports" without eating practically anything, for only some of the prisoners were able to gulp down the so-called coffee in the few minutes available to us. The remainder of the "coffee" would be spilled. The exercises conducted by Plagge were designed to bring about the physical exhaustion of prisoners and break them down mentally, for they were based on a sophisticated system of torments. After these "sports", some 30 to 40 prisoners would be carried off to the hospital daily – heavily beaten, wounded, bitten by dogs, and completely exhausted. We were unable to determine the fate of these prisoners, however the majority must have died, for they did not return to the blocks. Among others, Plagge ordered us to roll around on the ground in ones or twos, to run barefooted on land covered with slag and stones (this resulted in prisoners suffering painful foot injuries), to perform so-called spring bends and frog leaps, and also took us on exhausting marches accompanied by singing, etc. A "spring bend" consisted in extending your arms forward and doing knee bends very slowly, while at the point at which you felt your body weight most, Plagge would pause the exercise until the prisoners were completely exhausted, and was only satisfied when the majority fainted. During each day of exercises, Plagge walked around the prisoners in person, and beat them with his hand or – and this was more frequent – with a shovel handle, for no reason whatsoever. On a number of occasions he also fired his revolver at the groups of prisoners, wounding many. He ordered prisoners to jump out of a first-floor window.

I remember how once during exercises Plagge savaged the editor of the "Kurier Codzienny" from Kraków, Mr. Mróz, who died shortly thereafter. Somewhere towards the end of July 1940, following the escape of prisoner Wiejowski, Plagge was instructed by the camp command to organize a standing punishment that lasted all through the day and night. The day was very hot, and as we had not yet been issued with caps, a great many prisoners collapsed from sunstroke, while others suffered the opening of old wounds.

Plagge milled around the inmates with a group of SS men (amongst whom Palitzsch was particularly famous for his cruelty) and a number of *kapos*, German criminals, of whom Leo Wieczorek and Brodniewicz behaved with particular bestiality. During exercises Plagge shouted at the prisoners, and frequently rode around on a bicycle to inspect individual groups. He had at his disposal an Alsatian by the name of "Split", and he frequently set the dog on us inmates. Some suffered extremely painful bite wounds and lacerations. This dog was later used to guard prisoners in Porąbka. One of Plagge's favorite "sports" consisted in ordering prisoners to climb a post or a tree.

Plagge customarily smoked a pipe, and the prisoners soon nicknamed him "the Pipe". He was a typical sadist. I do not know the surnames of the prisoners who were beaten or killed by Plagge. Neither I nor my friends were ever able to determine whether a prisoner thrashed by Plagge and lying unconscious on the ground, sometimes for a good few hours, was still alive or had died, for inmates were not allowed to see or hear anything that went on at the camp or in its immediate vicinity. In any case, many of the prisoners beaten by Plagge and taken to the hospital did not return to the quarantine block. I no longer remember when Plagge was promoted. Whatever the case may be, I later encountered him when he was a *Rapportführer* [report leader].

I do not know whether Plagge was ever a *Blockführer* [block leader]. I would assume, however, that he was not, for he was one of the more important and trusted SS men, being friends with *Rapportführer* Palitzsch, *Oberscharführer* Moll – subsequently head of the *Sonderkommandos* [special squads] and crematoria, and also Stiewitz. All these men would receive special meals at the SS men's kitchen, and often made use of their visits there to carry out large quantities of foodstuffs. I was an eyewitness to such behavior during my period of employment at the SS men's kitchen. I also know that Plagge was for some time one of the heads of block 11, the so-called death block. However, I do not know what exactly his activities during this period consisted in.

In 1943 I saw Plagge a few times; at the time he was a *Rapportführer*, or rather a *Lagerführer*, at the Gypsy camp. Once, I witnessed Plagge beating up a few Gypsies in the camp canteen. A few young girls from the Gypsy camp told me that Plagge, oftentimes drunk, took female prisoners from this camp and abused them sexually. The following had direct contact with Plagge in Auschwitz and should possess more information about his activities: Marian Toliński, the editor of the sports section of the "Dziennik Polski" from Kraków, Kołodziejczyk, a student of architecture, resident in Kraków at Rakowicka Street 8, Michał Skawiński, resident in Kraków, Michał Piękoś, resident in Kraków, and Edward Kaczmarczyk, also resident in Kraków (their exact addresses may be obtained from the association of former prisoners).

Looking at the photographs presented in the Market Square, I recognized *Rottenführer* Schumacher, whom I got to know quite well during my period of incarceration. I know him from when I worked in the prisoners' kitchen, sometime in the summer of 1942. At the time, Schumacher was one of the heads of the prisoners' foodstuff warehouse. This warehouse

was supervised by *Unterscharführer* Schebeck. It was located on the grounds of the parent camp and directly adjoined the prisoners' kitchen. From this location you could closely observe the activities of the kitchen chief and the various junior administrators. Prisoners employed in the kitchen would receive sundry products from this warehouse, mainly fats and marmalade, which they would then distribute amongst prisoners in the blocks. Schebeck together with Schumacher issued individual blocks with bread and additional products. Schumacher was in charge of a group of inmates, whom he would beat – either with his hands or a stick – on any pretext. I would like to add that the warehouses contained immense quantities of food, which often went bad and was taken to the pits in trucks (e.g. marmalade and bread). Schumacher preferred the food to go to waste than for inmates to get anything from the storehouse. It is therefore not surprising that the prisoners did not like him.

Schumacher's treatment of inmates from the other work squads, who came over to us or milled around the warehouse, was even more vicious, for he hit them strongly with his hand or a stick. Schumacher was also bribable, and he accepted valuables from the prisoners employed in the warehouse. But in his dealings with superiors, he was an obsequious toady, and carried out their orders to the letter in order to ingratiate himself. Frequently, for the most trivial reasons imaginable, he reported on inmates to Schebeck, informing of their purported offenses. Whenever he received such a report, Schebeck would think up some sophisticated torment and apply severe penalties.

I myself witnessed prisoners being beaten by Schumacher on a few occasions. But I did not see the incident when my friend, Liszka, was beaten by Schumacher; other colleagues told me about it. Furthermore, from what my friends told me Schumacher treated Jewish prisoners with particular loathsomeness. He would often carry out searches. He took the best items from the storehouse for himself. The following colleagues, former prisoners, may provide additional information about Schumacher's activities in the camp: Jerzy Wołasewicz, resident in Bytom, Piastowska Street 11, Jan Sarapata, resident in Katowice at the "Pokrząp się" restaurant, Leszek Wyrwicki, resident in Poznań at Mostowa Street 14a, Lucjan Sobieraj, resident in Gdańsk-Orunia at Raduńska Street 9, and Michał Piękoś, resident in Kraków at Felicjanek Street.

While I worked in 1944 at the office of *Lagerführer* Hössler, I got to know an SS man, Kurt Müller, who was employed at the *Arbeitseinsatz* [labor deployment office] as one of the

*Arbeitsdiensts*, while in the camp he was a *Blockführer* together with his friend, Kaduk. I met and talked with Müller practically every day, for he worked in the same building as I. I was also able to observe his activities. As the *Arbeitsdienst*, he could change work assignments for prisoners, and also submit various types of penal reports. From what I saw, Müller made such reports to Hössler rather frequently. He also took various bribes from prisoners.

In the camp, as a *Blockführer*, he zealously performed his duties, which consisted in searching prisoners entering or exiting the facility. Frequently, if he saw that a prisoner's number was sewn on incorrectly, he would beat him and tear his number off. Likewise, if he discovered that an inmate was trying to smuggle in food or clothes, he would beat him savagely and submit a penal report, which invariably led to the hapless bloke being locked up in the bunker or deported deep into the Reich. Imprisonment in the bunker usually ended in death or serious illness. While off duty, acting voluntarily and accompanied by Kaduk, he would ride around the outside *kommandos* on a bicycle and conduct flying inspections, searching for food and clothing. And if he did stumble upon what he was looking for, he would beat the prisoners and have them taken to the camp, where they would be placed between the wire fencing, and thereafter punished by being sent to the bunker or deported. The following prisoners may have additional information concerning Müller's activities: Jan Krokowski, resident in Nowy Sącz, Jerzy Fliegel of Ruda Śląska, Janasa Street 7, and Józef Wróbel, resident in Ruda Śląska, Krakowska Street 12.

While in Auschwitz, I also encountered – sometime in the summer of 1942 – Hans Aumeier, who at the time was a *Hauptsturmführer*. In Auschwitz, he took over the position of first *Schutzhaftlagerführer* from Fritzsche. When Aumeier was in charge, the degree of discipline and control increased. Prisoners would be locked up in the bunker for even the slightest infringements. Informers were rife – the regime that he introduced to the camp was much more severe than what we had grown accustomed to under his predecessors. Among themselves, the prisoners called Aumeier (due to his small height) "Elbow-high" or "Bumbo" (from the surname of a prisoner, a midget, who worked as a porter at the gate). Aumeier walked around the camp all day, always with his pistol, which he used to threaten prisoners and fire off warning shots; he also beat them with it. Equally frequently I saw him kicking prisoners. He was a well-exercised man. On a few occasions I saw Aumeier chasing after a prisoner and shooting at him, however I do not know whether he hit his target. He would also shoot towards the block windows, aiming at the inmates who were running away from him.



During my period of employment in the prisoners' kitchen, that is from March 1942 to March 1943, Aumeier would often come up to the prison kitchen and take large food parcels for his own private consumption, mainly meat. He would also enter the kitchen to taste the soup made for prisoners. The soup that was to be tried by the SS men was set aside in a special cauldron, which held approximately 30 litres; it was officially known as the *Probekessel* [test cauldron]. The soup boiled in this cauldron was not actually intended for prisoners, but for control purposes, and it would therefore be filled with the choicest portions of soup – the thick elements and fat – from the regular cauldrons. Furthermore, the soup in the *Probekessel* was specially seasoned to taste good, and food prepared in the kitchen prison for dogs would also be added to it. I would like to add that a triple portion of standard prison food was used to prepare that for the dogs. Thus, the soup boiled in the test cauldron was indeed good and could have tasted well to the SS men. It is therefore not surprising that in numerous instances the SS men who tried the soup from the test cauldron wrote down in a special inspection book that the prisoners' soup was better than the *Eintopf* [stew] for the SS men. I never once witnessed Aumeier sampling the soup from the regular cauldrons from which prisoners were fed. But I did see, and this on a number of occasions, how Aumeier while inspecting the test cauldron beat prisoners with either his hand or a ladle, and this for no reason whatsoever, simply because he did not like the face of a certain inmate who was standing nearby.

In the spring of 1942, when Aumeier was in charge, a large transport was executed by firing squad in the courtyard of block no. 11; these were in the main young prisoners, and there were some 300 of them. Aumeier personally led these people to block no. 11. He [also] took part in [their] killing. He was assisted by two of the *Rapportführers*: Palitzsch and Stiewitz. When Aumeier was in charge, public hanging executions of prisoners were rather frequent. The gallows was usually set up just in front of the prisoners' kitchen. Oftentimes the Germans would use a length of rail placed on two pillars for this purpose. As regards the surnames of the hanged prisoners, I have either forgotten them, or did not know them to start off with. I remember one incident, when 12 prisoners were hanged simultaneously. Towards the end of August 1942, also during Aumeier's tenure, a camp-wide typhus elimination action was implemented: more than 800 people who had or could have had typhus fever, as well as typhus convalescents, were taken in trucks to the gas chambers.

Towards the end of March 1943, six prisoners employed in the SS men's kitchen escaped, and sirens were soon turned on to alert the whole camp. Suddenly, Aumeier jumped into





the SS men's kitchen – where I was working at the time – and started savaging the inmates until they bled, using his hands, legs, and a stick, whereafter he ordered that we be sent to block no. 11, where he ordered us to undress and declared that we would all be shot. Our group numbered 20 prisoners. Seven of us were released on the same day and taken back to work in the SS men's kitchen, while the remaining 13 were kept in the bunker for a whole two weeks. I was among those sent to the bunker – which was intended to hold no more than four people. Throughout this period of two weeks we received hardly any bread, only some water and bread crust. What is worse, we were completely unable to sleep, for literally all the walls and entire floor of the bunker were covered with bedbugs, which were incredibly bothersome. The bunker was dark, and we saw light for no more than a few seconds, while we were being given water or crust. During this time we would be taken for interrogations to the Political Department, where they tried to delude us into believing that we had cooperated with the escapees; we were severely beaten and bruised. When I was waiting in the corridor of the Political Department to be interrogated concerning this escape, right before the office in which Grabner and Boger held their examinations, I witnessed the interrogation of prisoner no. 63, whose name was Jan Lupa. He was from Kraków. This man was suspected of having received food from civilians from outside the camp. Both Grabner and Boger thrashed him mercilessly, using the most sophisticated methods of torture, whereas you could clearly hear the inmate's groans. When he was thrown out into the corridor, landing practically at my feet, I saw that blood was pouring out of his ears and nose, and his flesh was literally dropping off from the bones. His backside, in particular, was very heavily beaten. I was instructed to take Lupa to the bunker, escorted by the SS man accompanying me. Along the way, I got soaked with the victim's blood. Lupa died in agony three days later. During my own interrogation, I was beaten by one of Boger's and Grabner's assistants, an *Oberscharführer* whose surname I do not know. He used his hands. During my period of detention in the bunker I frequently witnessed Aumeier come up and select prisoners to be shot. I heard, for example, how with the help of Grabner he dragged a few prisoners from the neighboring cell, screaming at them: *Alles raus! Zum Erschießen!* [Everybody out! To your deaths!]. At night, we heard shots ringing out for more than an hour. In all probability, the number of prisoners shot at the time was greater and had been taken from at least a few bunkers. Usually, the prisoners would be led out to their deaths in groups of five. There were instances when prisoners earmarked for shooting executions tried to fight back. For example, the whole camp got to know about one of the Gypsies who threw





himself at Aumeier and wrestled him to the ground. And he would have killed him if not for the intervention of a prisoner-guard who was on duty at block no. 11. Aumeier also shot some of the people at block no. 11 himself.

Because I was being detained in the bunker and interrogated at the political department, in the spring of 1943 I encountered the head of the political department, Grabner, whom I already knew both by sight and by surname. Grabner usually walked around dressed in civilian clothes. His name struck terror into the hearts of the camp population. Basically, he was responsible for the number of prisoners incarcerated at the camp. He has thousands of people on his conscience, people whom he sentenced to death whenever an opportunity presented itself. He was a sadist and known for his bloodthirstiness, particular as regards Poles. Grabner carried out selections of prisoners himself, and would personally shoot them at block no. 11. When I was locked up in the bunker of that block, I would often see Grabner, alone or in the company of Aumeier, deciding about the life or death of prisoners detained at block no. 11. One specific incident of which I am aware concerns Grabner's fatal beating of inmate Lupa, which I have already recounted.

The report was read out. At this point the hearing and report were brought to a close.