

## Cross examination of Władysława Karolewska, victim of the medical experiments

### EXTRACTS FROM THE TESTIMONY OF PROSECUTION WITNESS MISS KAROLEWSKA\*

#### *DIRECT EXAMINATION*

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**MR. MCHANEY:** What is your name, please?

**WITNESS KAROLEWSKA:** Karolewska.

**Q.** And that is spelled K-a-r-o-l-e-w-s-k-a?

**A.** Yes.

**Q.** Were you born on 15 March 1909 at Yeroman?

**A.** I was born on 15 March 1909 in Yeroman.

**Q.** You are a citizen of Poland?

**A.** Yes, I am a Polish citizen.

**Q.** And have you come here as a voluntary witness?

**A.** Yes, I came here as a voluntary witness.

**Q.** What is your home address?

**A.** Warsaw, Inzynierska Street, No. 9, Flat No. 25.

**Q.** Are you married?

**A.** No.

**Q.** Are your parents living?

**A.** No, my parents are dead.

**Q.** Will you tell the Tribunal what education you have received?

**A.** I finished elementary school, and completed the training school for teachers in 1928.

**Q.** And what did you do between 1928 and the beginning of the war in 1939?

**A.** I worked as a teacher in a children's school in Grudenz.

**Q.** And when did you leave that post?

**A.** I finished my work in June 1939 and went on holiday.

**Q.** And did you go back to this position after your holiday?

**A.** No, I did not go back because the war broke out and I stayed in Lublin.

**Q.** And what did you do while you were in Lublin?

\*Complete testimony is recorded in mimeographed transcript, 20 Dec. 1946, pp. 815-832.

A. I lived with my sister and did not work at all.

Q. Were you a member of the Polish Resistance Movement?

A. Yes, I was.

Q. And what did you do in the Polish Resistance Movement?

A. I was a messenger.

Q. And were you ever arrested for your activity in the Resistance Movement?

A. I was arrested on the 13th of February 1941 by the Gestapo.

Q. Was your sister arrested with you?

A. Two sisters and two brothers-in-law were arrested with me on the same day.

Q. What happened to you after you were arrested?

A. I was taken to the Gestapo.

Q. And what did the Gestapo do with you?

A. The first day the Gestapo took down my personal data and sent me to the prison in Lublin.

Q. And then what happened? Just go on and tell the complete story about what the Gestapo did with you and where you went.

A. I stayed 2 weeks in the prison in Lublin and then I was taken again to the Gestapo. There I was interrogated and they wanted to force me to confess what kind of work I used to do in the Resistance Movement. The Gestapo wanted me to give them the names of persons with whom I worked. I did not want to tell them the names and, therefore, I was beaten. I was beaten by one Gestapo man, with brief intervals, for a very long time. Then I was taken to a cell. Two days later, at night, I was taken again to the Gestapo for interrogation. There I was beaten again. I stayed in the Gestapo office one week and then I was taken back into the prison in Lublin. I stayed in the prison till 21 September 1941. Then I was transported with other prisoners to the concentration camp Ravensbrueck, where I arrived on the 23d of September 1941.

Q. Now, Witness, before you continue, will you tell the Tribunal whether you were ever tried by any court for the crime of being a member of the Resistance Movement?

A. I was only interrogated by the Gestapo and I think that the sentence must have been passed in my absence because no sentence was ever read out to me.

Q. All right. Will you tell the Tribunal what happened to you at Ravensbrueck?

A. At Ravensbrueck our dresses were taken away from us and we received the regular prison dress. Then I was sent to the block and I stayed in quarantine for 3 weeks. After 3 weeks we were taken to work. The work was hard physical work. In the spring I was given other work and I was transferred to the workshop, which was called

in German "Betrieb." The work I did there was also very hard, and one week I had to work in the daytime and the next week at night. In the spring the living conditions in the camp grew worse and worse, and hunger began to reign in the camp. The food portions were smaller. We were undernourished, very exhausted, and we had no strength to work. In the spring of the same year, shoes and stockings were taken away from us and we had to walk barefoot. The gravel in the camp hurt our feet. The most tiring was the so-called "roll calls", which we had to stand several hours, sometimes even 4 hours. If a prisoner tried to put a piece of paper underneath her feet, she was beaten and ill-treated in an inhuman way. We had to stand at attention at the roll call place and we were not allowed to move our lips, because then we were supposed to be praying and we were not allowed to pray.

**Q.** Now, Witness, were you operated on while you were in the Ravensbrueck concentration camp?

**A.** Yes, I was.

**Q.** When did that happen?

**A.** On 22 July 1942, 75 prisoners from our transport that come from Lublin were summoned to the chief of the camp. We stood outside the camp office, and present were Kogel, Mandel, and one person whom I later recognized as Dr. Fischer. We were afterwards sent back to the block and we were told to wait for further instructions. On the 25th of July, all the women from the transport of Lublin were summoned by Mandel, who told us that we were not allowed to work outside the camp. Also, five women from the transport that came from Warsaw were summoned with us at the same time. We were not allowed to work outside the camp. The next day 75 women were summoned again and we had to stand in front of the hospital in the camp. Present were Schiedlausky, Oberheuser, Rosenthal, Kogel, and the man whom I afterwards recognized as Dr. Fischer.

**Q.** Now, Witness, do you see Oberheuser in the defendants' dock here?

**INTERPRETER:** The witness asks for permission to go near to the dock to be able to see them.

**MR. MCHANEY:** Please do.

(Witness walks to dock and points to Dr. Oberheuser.)

**MR. MCHANEY:** And Fischer?

(Witness points to Dr. Fischer.)

**MR. MCHANEY:** I will ask that the record show that the witness properly identified the defendants, Oberheuser and Fischer.

**PRESIDING JUDGE BEALS:** The record will show that the witness correctly identified the defendants Oberheuser and Fischer.

**MR. MCHANEY:** Witness, you have told the Tribunal that in July

1942, some 75 Polish girls, who were in the transport from Lublin, were called before the camp doctors in Ravensbrueck.

WITNESS KAROLEWSKA: Yes.

Q. Now, were any of these girls selected for an operation?

A. On this day we did not know why we were called before the camp doctors and on the same day 10 out of 25 girls were taken to the hospital, but we did not know why. Four of them came back and six stayed in the hospital. On the same day six of them came back to the block after having received some injection, but we did not know what kind of injection. On the 1st of August, those six girls were called to the hospital again; those girls who received injections were kept in the hospital, but we could not get in touch with them to hear from them why they were put in the hospital. A few days later, one of my comrades succeeded in getting close to the hospital and learned from one of the prisoners that all were in bed and that their legs were in casts. On the 14th of August, the same year, I was called to the hospital and my name was written on a piece of paper. I did not know why. Besides me, eight other girls were called to the hospital. We were called at a time when executions usually took place and I thought I was going to be executed because some girls had been shot down before. In the hospital we were put to bed and the ward in which we stayed was locked. We were not told what we were to do in the hospital and when one of my comrades put the question she got no answer but an ironical smile. Then a German nurse arrived and gave me an injection in my leg. After this injection I vomited and I was weak. Then I was put on a hospital cot and they brought me to the operating room. There, Dr. Schiedlausky and Rosenthal gave me the second intravenous injection in my arm. A while before, I noticed Dr. Fischer, who left the operating theater and had operating gloves on. Then I lost consciousness and when I revived I noticed that I was in a proper hospital ward. I recovered consciousness for a while and I felt severe pain in my leg. Then I lost consciousness again. I regained consciousness in the morning, and then I noticed that my leg was in a cast from the ankle up to the knee and I felt very great pain in this leg and had a high temperature. I noticed also that my leg was swollen from the toes up to the groin. The pain was increasing and the temperature, too, and the next day I noticed that some liquid was flowing from my leg. The third day I was put on a hospital trolley and taken to the dressing room. Then I saw Dr. Fischer again. He had on an operating gown and rubber gloves on his hands. A blanket was put over my eyes and I did not know what was done with my leg but I felt great pain and I had the impression that something must have been cut out of my leg. Those present were Schiedlausky, Rosenthal, and Oberheuser. After the dressing was changed I was again put in the regular hospital ward. Three days later I was again

taken to the dressing room, and the dressing was changed by Doctor Fischer with the assistance of the same doctors, and I was also blindfolded. I was then sent back to the regular hospital ward. The next dressings were made by the camp doctors. Two weeks later we were all taken to the operating theater again, and put on the operating tables. The bandage was removed, and that was the first time I saw my leg. The incision went so deep that I could see the bone. We were told then that there was a doctor from Hohenlychen, Doctor Gebhardt, who would come and examine us. We were waiting for his arrival for 3 hours, lying on our tables. When he came, a sheet was put over our eyes, but they removed the sheet and I saw him for a short moment. Then we were taken back to our regular wards. On 8 September I went back to the block. I couldn't walk. The pus was draining from my leg; the leg was swollen up and I could not walk. In the block, I stayed in bed for one week; then I was called to the hospital again. I could not walk and I was carried by my comrades. In the hospital I met some of my comrades who were there after the operation. This time I was sure I was going to be executed because I saw an ambulance standing outside the office, which was used by the Germans to transport people intended for execution. Then we were taken to the dressing room where Doctor Oberheuser and Doctor Schiedlausky examined our legs. We were put to bed again, and on the same day, in the afternoon, I was taken to the operating theater and the second operation was performed on my leg. I was put to sleep in the same way as before, having received an injection. This time I again saw Doctor Fischer. I woke up in the regular hospital ward, and I felt a much greater pain and had a higher temperature.

The symptoms were the same. The leg was swollen and the pus flowed from my leg. After this operation, the dressings were changed by Dr. Fischer every 3 days. More than 10 days afterwards, we were again taken to the operating theater and put on the table; and we were told that Dr. Gebhardt was going to come to examine our legs. We waited for a long time. Then he arrived and examined our legs while we were blindfolded. This time other people arrived with Dr. Gebhardt, but I don't know their names, and I don't remember their faces. Then we were carried on hospital cots back to our rooms. After this operation I felt still worse, and I could not move. While I was in the hospital, Dr. Oberheuser treated me cruelly.

When I was in my room I remarked to fellow prisoners that we were operated on in very bad conditions and left here in this room and that we were not even given a chance to recover. This remark must have been heard by a German nurse who was sitting in the corridor, because the door of our room leading to the corridor was opened. The German nurse entered the room and told us to get up

and dress. We answered that we could not follow her order because we had great pains in our legs and we could not walk. Then the German nurse came into our room with Dr. Oberheuser. Dr. Oberheuser told us to dress and come to the dressing room. We put on our dresses; and, being unable to walk, we had to hop on one leg into the operating theater. After one hop we had to rest. Dr. Oberheuser did not allow anybody to help us. When we arrived at the operating theater, quite exhausted, Dr. Oberheuser appeared and told us to go back, because the change of dressing would not take place that day. I could not walk, but somebody, a prisoner whose name I don't remember, helped me back to the room.

Q. Witness, you have told the Tribunal that you were operated on the second time on the 16th of September 1942? Is that right?

A. Yes.

Q. When did you leave the hospital after this second operation?

A. After the second operation I left the hospital on 6 October.

Q. Was your leg healed at that time?

A. My leg was swollen up, caused me great pain, and the pus drained from my leg.

Q. Were you able to work?

A. I was unable to work, and I had to stay in bed because I could not walk.

Q. Do you remember when you got up out of bed and were able to walk?

A. I stayed in bed several weeks, and then I got up and tried to walk.

Q. How long was it until your leg was healed?

A. The pus was flowing from my leg till June 1943; and at that time my wound was healed.

Q. Were you operated on again?

A. Yes, I was operated on again in the bunker.

Q. In the bunker? That is not in the hospital?

A. Not in the hospital but in the bunker.

Q. Will you explain to the Tribunal how that happened?

A. May I ask permission to tell something which happened in March 1943, March or February 1943?

Q. All right.

A. At the end of February 1943, Dr. Oberheuser called us and said, "Those girls are new guinea pigs"; and we were very well known under this name in the camp. Then we understood that we were persons intended for experiments, and we decided to protest against the performance of those operations on healthy people.

We drew up a protest in writing and we went to the camp commandant. Not only those girls who had been operated on before but other girls who were called to the hospital came to the office. The

girls who had been operated on used crutches and they went without any help.

I would like to tell you the contents of the petition made by us. "We, the undersigned, Polish political prisoners, ask the commandant whether he knows that since the year 1942 experimental operations have taken place in the camp hospital, under the name guinea pigs, explaining the meaning of those operations. We ask whether we were operated on as a result of sentences passed on us because, as far as we know, international law forbids the performance of operations even on political prisoners."

[...] On 15 August 1943 she was taken by force to one of the cells of the camp prison, the so called "Bunker"

Dr. Trommel took me by the left wrist and pulled my arm back. With his other hand he tried to gag me, putting a piece of rag into my mouth, because I shouted. The second SS man took my right hand and stretched it. Two other SS men held me by my feet. Immobilized, I felt somebody giving me an injection. I defended myself for a long time, but then I grew weaker. The injection had its effect; I felt sleepy. I heard Trommel saying, "That is all."

I regained consciousness again, but I don't know when. Then I noticed that a German nurse was taking off my dress, I then lost consciousness again; I regained it in the morning. Then I noticed that

both my legs were in iron splints and were bandaged from the toes up to the groin. I felt a severe pain in my feet, and had a temperature.

On the afternoon of the same day, a German nurse came and gave me an injection, in spite of my protests; she gave me this injection in my thigh and told me that she had to do it.

Four days after this operation a doctor from Hohenlychen arrived, again I was given an injection to put me to sleep, and as I protested he told me that he would change the dressing; I felt a higher temperature and a greater pain in my legs.

Source: Trials of War Criminals before Nuernberg Military Tribunals under Control Council Law No. 10, Vol 1, Nuernberg, October 1946 – April 1947, pp. 409-417 (extract).