


no palcem na mnie i
ptaszek" - widocznie jestem w ich pojęciu
się jednak nieco lepiej, niż można było pr
cy inni pomaszzerowali do politycznego odd
erkennungsdienst!
lepiej - pomyślałem.
już zaczynałem rozumieć powody, dlaczego
ie z każdym krokiem.
yscy "Wäftlindzy" musieli pisać listy do r
który podali od razu po przyjeździe.
otko po przywiezieniu nas do Oświęcimia v
ie. Kazano mówić - (blok 17-a)
ażdeno. Av o adres, gdzie trzeba b
więźnia spotkał - jak
ażdego
em pyta
os wypa
mierają
Pod tym
na wszelki wyp
Ja podałem adres
wiadomości moja rodzina
Adres szwagierki podany
odziłem tu za kawalera, który nie ma niko
Pod podany adres napisałem tylko raz
zie jestem. I więcej listów nie pisałem, z
ści moja "znajomą" nie ponosiła odpowiedzi
Chciałem w ten sposób zerwać wszel
y gdzie wszedłem eskortowany przez ss-man
ba", a w drugim ~~Ważne~~ "postzensurstel
W chwili dalej pracy, cenzurowania
uowali idący za mną, zameldowa
kłamiesz! Jak to p
nie zwraca
dowody?
ss-man

**CAPTAIN WITOLD PILECKI'S
1945 AUSCHWITZ REPORT**

Preceding page:

A section of Pilecki's original
typewritten 1945 Report.

PUMST



S U M M E R 1 9 4 5

So, I am to write down the driest of facts, which is what my friends want me to do.

They have told me: "The more you stick to the bare facts without any kind of commentary, the more valuable it all will be."

Well, here I go...but we were not made out of wood, let alone stone, though it sometimes seemed as if even a stone would have broken out in a sweat.

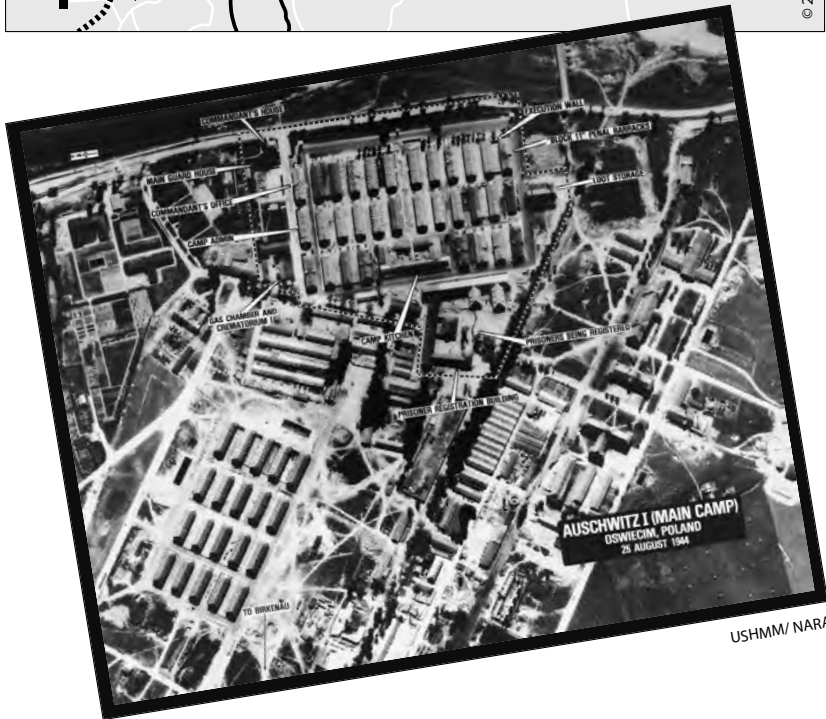
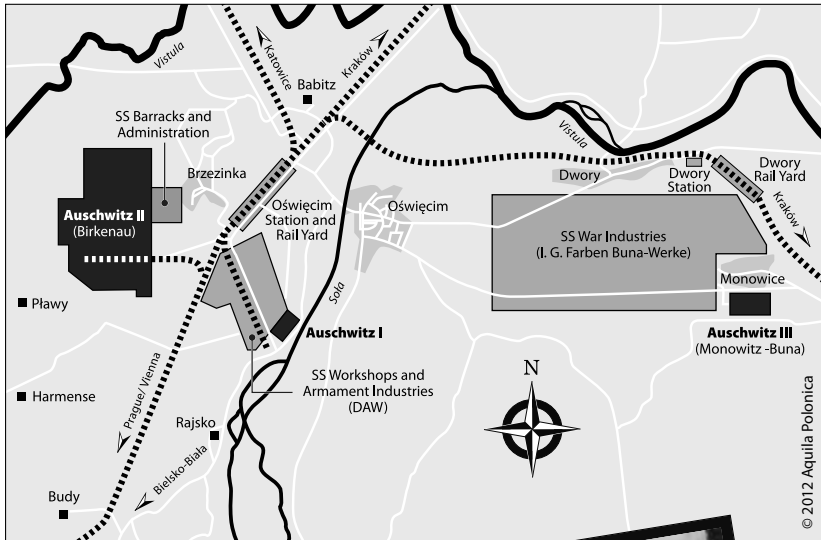
Therefore, now and again I shall insert a thought amongst these facts to indicate what one was feeling.

I do not know whether this must by definition devalue the description.

One was not made out of stone, though I often envied it; one still had a heart beating, sometimes in one's mouth, and certainly, running around one's brain was the odd thought which I sometimes with difficulty grasped...

I think that inserting a sentence or two from time to time about this is needed in order to present a true picture.

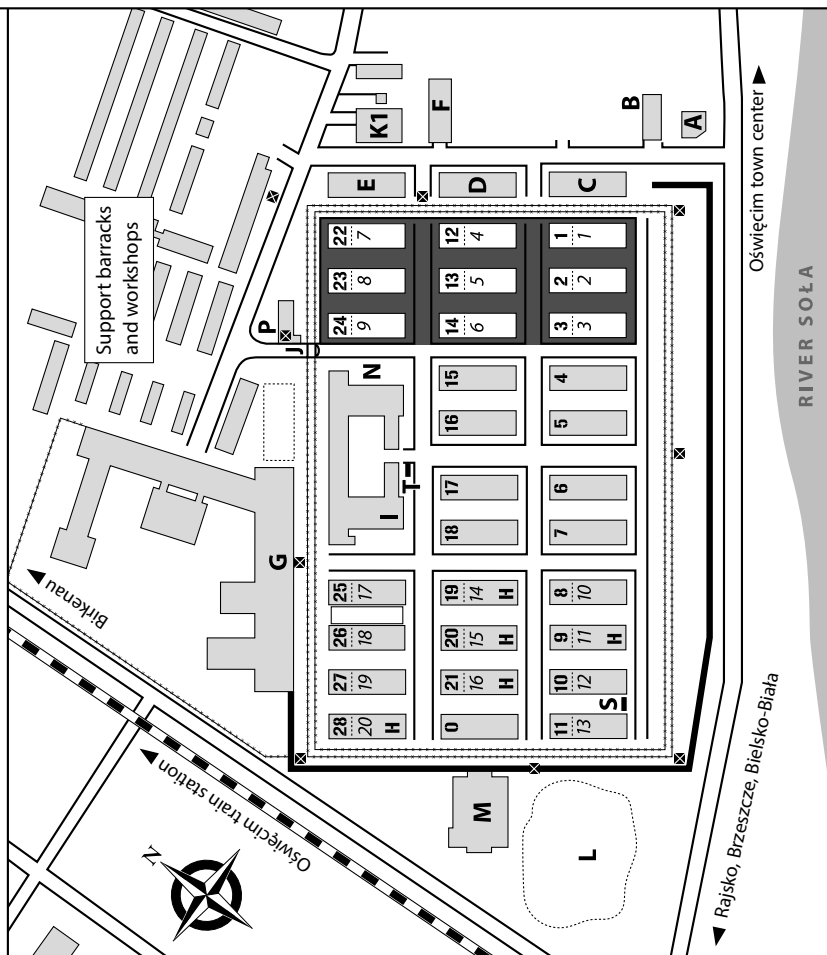
AUSCHWITZ AND ENVIRONS



Above: A schematic of Auschwitz and environs dating from 1944, juxtaposed against an aerial photo of the camp taken by Allied reconnaissance units in August 1944.

KL. AUSCHWITZ I

- – Soviet POW camp (old block nos. 1–9), October 1941–March 1942
- ☒ – Watchtowers
- 24 – Camp block numbers
- 9 – Old block numbers
- A – Camp Commandant's house
- B – Main guardroom
- C – Camp Commandant's offices
- D – Camp administrative offices
- E – SS hospital
- F – Camp Political Department's (Gestapo's) offices
- G – Administrative Building
- H – Prisoners' hospitals
- I – Kitchen
- J – Main gate ("Arbeit macht frei")
- K1 – Gas chamber and Crematorium No. I
- L – Gravel pit—place of execution
- M – Storeroom of possessions seized from murdered people
- N – Spot where the camp orchestra played
- O – SS laundry hut
- P – Blockführers' (SS block supervisors') hut
- S – The wall of death
- T – Gallows
- — — — — Railroad



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SEPTEMBER 1940...

The 19th of September 1940—the second street round-up in Warsaw.

There are a few people still alive who saw me go alone at 6:00 a.m. to the corner of Aleja Wojska and Felińskiego Street and join the “fives” of captured men drawn up by the SS.

On Plac Wilsona we were then loaded onto trucks and taken to the Light Horse Guards Barracks.

After having our particulars taken down in the temporary office there, being relieved of sharp objects and threatened with being shot if so much as a razor was later found on us, we were led out into the riding school arena where we remained throughout the 19th and the 20th.

During those two days some of us made the acquaintance of a rubber truncheon on the head. However, this was more or less within acceptable bounds for those accustomed to guardians of the peace using such methods to keep order.

Meanwhile, some families were buying their loved ones' freedom, paying the SS huge sums of money.

At night, we all slept side by side on the ground.

The arena was lit by a huge spotlight set up right next to the entrance.

SS men with automatic weapons were stationed on all four sides.

There were about one thousand eight hundred or so of us.

The Auschwitz Volunteer

What really annoyed me the most was the passivity of this group of Poles. All those picked up were already showing signs of crowd psychology, the result being that our whole crowd behaved like a herd of passive sheep.

A simple thought kept nagging me: stir up everyone and get this mass of people moving.

I suggested to my comrade, Sławek Szpakowski (who I know was living in Warsaw up to the Uprising),¹ a joint operation during the night: take over the crowd, attack the sentry posts while I, on my way to the lavatory, would “bump” into the spotlight and smash it.

However, I had a different reason for being there.

This would have been a much less important objective.

While he—thought the idea was total madness.

On the morning of the 21st we were put onto trucks and, escorted by motorcycles with automatic weapons, were taken off to the western railroad station and loaded onto freight cars.

The railroad cars must have been used before for carrying lime, for the floors were covered in it.

The cars were shut. We travelled for a whole day. We were given nothing to eat or drink. In any case, no one wanted to eat. The previous day we had been issued some bread, which we did not yet know how to eat or to treasure. We were just very thirsty. The lime, when disturbed, turned into a powder. It filled the air, irritating our nostrils and throats. We got nothing to drink.

We could see through the cracks between the boards covering the windows that we were being taken in the direction of Częstochowa.

¹ Pilecki is referring to the Warsaw Uprising of 1944, not the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of 1943. Translator's note.

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Around 10:00 p.m. (22:00 hours) the train stopped somewhere and went no further. We could hear shouting and yelling, the cars being opened up and the baying of dogs.

I consider this place in my story to be the moment when I bade farewell to everything I had hitherto known on this earth and entered something seemingly no longer of it.

This is not an attempt on my part to use unusual words or terms. Quite the contrary, I believe that I do not need to attempt to use any irrelevant or pretty little word.

This is how it was.

We were struck over the head not only by SS rifle butts, but also by something far greater.

Our concepts of law and order and of what was normal, all those ideas to which we had become accustomed on this earth, were given a brutal kicking.

Everything came to an end.

The idea was to hit us as hard as possible. To break us psychologically as speedily as possible.

A hubbub and the sound of yelling voices gradually drew near. Eventually, the doors of our freight car were wrenched open. Lights shone in, blinding us.

“Heraus!rrraus!rrraus! . . . ,” the SS belabored us with epithets and rifle butts to our shoulders, backs and heads. The idea was to get out as quickly as possible.

I leapt out, managing somehow to avoid being hit, and joined the “fives” in the center of the column.

A larger group of SS was hitting, kicking and screaming: “Zu fünfen! [Form up in fives!]”

Dogs urged on by the crazed soldiery rushed at those on the outside of the column.

Blinded by the lights, shoved, beaten, kicked, and rushed by the dogs, we had suddenly found ourselves in conditions

The Auschwitz Volunteer

which I doubt any of us had ever experienced. The weaker ones were so overwhelmed that they simply fell into a stupor.

We were urged on towards a larger cluster of lights.

On the way, one of us was told to run to a post at the side of the road; he was followed by a burst of automatic weapons fire and mown down. Ten men were then dragged out of the ranks at random and shot with pistols as “collective responsibility” for the “escape,” which the SS themselves had staged.

All eleven of them were then dragged along by leg straps. The dogs were teased with the bloody corpses and set on them.

All this to the accompaniment of laughter and joking.

We approached a gate in a wire fence over which could be seen the sign “Arbeit macht frei” [“Work Liberates You”].

It was only later that we learned to understand it properly.

Beyond the fence stood rows of brick huts amidst which could be seen a large parade ground.

Entering between the rows of SS men right in front of the gate we experienced a short interlude of peace. The dogs were led away, we were ordered to form up by fives. Here we were carefully counted, the dragged corpses being added at the end.

The high, at that time only, barbed-wire fence and the gate filled with SS somehow brought to mind a Chinese saying which I had read somewhere: “Entering, think of the return, and on leaving you will be whole . . .” An ironic smile arose somewhere within me and died . . . there would be little use for that here . . .

Inside the wire, on the great parade ground we beheld quite another sight. In the somewhat eerie light crawling over us from the spotlights on all sides we could see beings resembling people, but whose behavior was more like that of wild animals (I absolutely see animals here, our language still has no word for such creatures). They were wearing strange striped

1940...



All those entering the main camp at Auschwitz were greeted by the sign "Arbeit macht frei" ("Work Liberates You").



A section of the electrified perimeter double fence surrounding Auschwitz.

The Auschwitz Volunteer



USHMM/Robert A. Schmuhi

Concentration camp inmates (here, at roll call in Buchenwald) were identified by their blue and white striped prison clothing. Also visible in this photo are the colored triangular patches called "winkels" with inmate numbers written on a white patch, which were stitched onto the left breast of the jacket and the right leg of the trouser.

The first Auschwitz inmates to have a number tattooed on their body were Soviet POWs in the autumn of 1941, and from then onwards all new prisoners not selected for immediate death were also tattooed. A program to tattoo earlier inmates did not start until the spring of 1943.

1940...

clothes, like those one had seen in films of Sing Sing, with what in the flickering light appeared to be medals on colored ribbons, with clubs in their hands attacking our comrades with wild laughter, hitting them over the head, kicking them on the ground in the kidneys and other tender spots, jumping on their chests and stomachs with their boots, dealing death with an outlandish giggle.

“So they’ve put us in a lunatic asylum!” the thought ran through my brain, “How fiendish!” I was still thinking in earthly categories. These were people who had been caught in a street round-up, and so even in the Germans’ mind not accused of any crime against the Third Reich.

The words of Janek W. [Jan Włodarkiewicz], spoken after the first round-up in August in Warsaw, lit up in my brain. “There, see, you’ve missed a grand opportunity, people picked up in round-ups are not accused of any political crimes; it’s the safest way to get into a camp.”

How naive we were there in faraway Warsaw about the Poles who had been shipped off to the camps.

Here on the ground you didn’t need to be a “political” to lose your life.

They killed whoever was at hand.

The first thing was a question thrown out in German by a striped man with a club: “Was bist du von zivil? [Hey you, what’s your civilian job?]”

Replying priest, judge, lawyer, at that time meant being beaten to death.

When asked, the fellow standing in the row in front of me replied in German “Richter [a judge],” as his clothes were grasped under his throat.

It was a disastrous mistake. Within moments he was on the ground being beaten and kicked.

The Auschwitz Volunteer

So, they were going out of their way to kill the professional classes.

After this observation, I changed my mind somewhat.

Perhaps there was a method to this insanity and this was some terrible way of murdering Poles beginning with the intelligentsia.

We were desperately thirsty.

Pots with some liquid arrived. These same striped murderers carried mugs with liquid through our ranks, asking “Was bist du von zivil?”

We got the desired and wet liquid by naming some manual job or craft.

Hitting and kicking, these strange “semi-humans” sometimes yelled: “Hier ist KL Auschwitz, mein lieber Mann. [This is Auschwitz Concentration Camp, my dear sir!]”

We asked each other what could this mean. Some knew that this meant Oświęcim, to us this meant only the name of a small Polish town, for the camp’s terrible reputation had not yet managed to reach Warsaw, nor was it known to the world at large.

Only some time later would this single word freeze the blood in free men’s veins and drive sleep from the eyes of prisoners in the Pawiak, Montelupich, Wiśnicz and Lublin prisons.

One of us explained that we were in the barracks of the 5th Regiment of Horse Artillery near the small town of Oświęcim.

We discovered that we were a *zugang* of Polish bandits, who had been attacking the peaceful German population and who were to receive their just deserts here.

Everything that arrived in the camp, every new transport, was called a *zugang*.

1940...

Meanwhile, the roll was called, the names we had given in Warsaw being called out, to which we had to reply quickly and loudly “Hier [Present].” This was accompanied by much harassment and beatings.

After roll call we were sent off in groups of a hundred for a grandly sounding “bath.”

That is how they greeted a transport of people who had been caught on the streets of Warsaw and who were supposedly to be sent for labor to Germany; that is how they greeted every transport in the first few months after the camp at Auschwitz was opened on the 14th of June 1940.

Out of the darkness, somewhere overhead, from above the kitchen, the butcher Seidler [Fritz Seidler],² spoke as follows:

“Let none of you imagine that he will ever leave this place alive . . . It has been worked out that you will survive for six weeks; anyone who lives longer . . . must be stealing, and anyone who is stealing, will be sent to the SK [Strafkompanie (Penal Company)], where you won’t live very long.” This was translated into Polish by the camp interpreter Baworowski [Władysław Baworowski].

The idea was to break us psychologically as quickly as possible.

On the parade ground we put all the bread we had into wheelbarrows and onto a cart which had been brought over. No one much minded doing this; no one was thinking of food.

Later, the mere thought of this moment made one salivate and curse. Several wheelbarrows and a cart filled with bread! What a pity we couldn’t eat ourselves sick . . .

Together with my hundred I at last found myself in front

² At that time, Fritz Seidler was Acting Deputy Camp Commandant. He later became Deputy Camp Commandant. Translator’s note.

The Auschwitz Volunteer

of the *baderaum* [communal washing facilities] (Block 18 using the old numbering system).³

Here we put everything into great sacks which had appropriate numbers attached.

Here our head and body hair were shaved and a few drops of almost cold water were sprinkled over us.

Here I had my two front teeth knocked out because I was holding my prison number written on a card in my hand and not between my teeth, as the *bademeister* [washroom supervisor] required that day.

I was hit on the chin with a heavy club.

I spat out the two teeth. I bled a little . . . Par for the course.

From that moment on we were just numbers. Our formal name was: "Schutzhäftling no. such and such . . ." ⁴

My number was 4859. The two thirteens (composed by the inner and outer digits) convinced my comrades that I would die; the numbers cheered me up.

We were issued with blue and white striped prison clothing, the same sort that had struck us during the night.

By now it was morning (22 Sept. 1940). A number of things now lost their terrible nighttime appearance.

The "semi-humans" wore yellow armbands on their left arm with the black letters K A P O, and instead of what had seemed to me in the flickering nighttime lights to be colorful ribbons with medals, on their left breast they wore a colored triangle (here known as a *winkel*⁵) beneath which there was a

³ As the central camp expanded and eight new blocks were added in the summer of 1941, some of the blocks had their numbers changed: e.g., Block 18 became Block 26. Translator's note.

⁴ Technically, a *Schutzhäftling* was an inmate or prisoner held under indefinite detention pursuant to the Nazi German law of *Schutzhaft* (protective custody), while a *Häftling* was held for a definite term of incarceration. Except in formal situations, the term *Häftling* was generally used for all the inmates in Auschwitz. Translator's note.

⁵ *Winkel* in German and *winkiel* in Polish. Translator's note.

1940...



Pilecki Family

"My number was 4859. The two thirteens (composed by the inner and outer digits) convinced my comrades that I would die; the numbers cheered me up."



Wincenty Gawron (Pilecki's comrade—code no. 44) with the red triangular "winkel" of a political prisoner and his inmate number sewn onto his prison uniform.

JG

The Auschwitz Volunteer



Bundesarchiv - VB5 283 6055007598

Fritz Seidler in SS uniform.

**The SS Totenkopf
(Death's Head) cap
badge, 1934-1945.**



SM

1940...

small black number written on a white patch just as on the ribbon.

There were five colors of winkel.

Political prisoners wore a red one; criminals—green; those refusing to work in the Third Reich wore black; Jehovah's Witnesses⁶—purple; and homosexuals—pink.

All us Poles, who had been picked up on a Warsaw street supposedly to be sent to labor in Germany, were given red winkels, as political prisoners.

I must confess that out of all these colors, this one suited me the best.

Dressed in our striped prison uniforms, with no caps and socks (I was issued socks on the 8th of December and a cap on the 15th) and with clogs which kept falling off, we were led onto the parade ground used for roll calls and divided into two halves.

One group went to Block 10 and we went to the first floor of Block 17.

A group of *häftlings* [inmates] was accommodated both on the ground floor and first floor of individual barracks, each with its own arrangements and administrative support, forming a separate "block." To distinguish them, each upstairs barrack room had the letter "a" added to its number.

So we were sent off to Block 17a into the care of "Aloiz," later known as "Bloody Aloiz."

A German—a communist—with a red winkel, a degenerate who had already spent about six years in camps, he beat, tormented and tortured, with several corpses to his personal account every day.

A lover of order and military discipline, he would line up the ranks on the parade ground beating us with his club.

⁶ Also known as conscientious objectors. Translator's note.

The Auschwitz Volunteer

Formed up in 10 ranks our “block,” thus dressed in the military sense of the word by Aloiz running through the ranks with a great club, could have served in the future as a model of dressed lines.

This morning he ran through our lines for the first time.

He was forming our zugang into a new block.

He sought out amongst these unknown faces people able to maintain order on the block.

Fate decreed that he picked me, Karol Świątorzecki (a reserve officer from the 13th Uhlans), Witold Różycki (not the Różycki of infamous repute,⁷ but a decent fellow from Władysława Street in Warsaw) and a couple of others.

He quickly led us in and upstairs, ordered us to line up along the wall, do an about-turn and bend over.

He gave each of us as hard as possible “five of the best” with his club in that spot which is apparently there for that reason.

One had to grit one’s teeth hard to prevent the slightest groan escaping.

I think I passed the test well.

“Just so you know what it tastes like and just so you use your clubs like that, ensuring cleanliness and discipline on the block.”

So I became a *stubendienst* [room supervisor], but not for long.

Although we maintained exemplary order and cleanliness on the block, Aloiz did not care for the methods we used to achieve this.

He warned us several times himself and also through “Kazik” (an intimate of his), and when this got him nowhere,

⁷ Pilecki is here referring to Adam Różycki, a *Kapo* with a murderous reputation. Translator’s note.

1940...

he exploded and kicked several of us out into the main camp for three days saying: “Just so you see what it tastes like to work in the camp and get to appreciate better the comfort and peace you have here on the block.”

I had noticed that fewer people returned from work every day, and I knew that they had been “finished off” at one task or another, but now I was to discover the hard way what a day “in the camp” looked like for a normal *häftling*.

Everyone had to work.

Only the *stubendiensts* [room supervisors] could remain on the block.

We all slept side by side on straw mattresses laid out on the floor. Initially we had no bunks at all.

Everyone’s day began with a gong at 4:20 a.m. in summer and at 5:20 a.m. in winter.

At this sound, summoning us with its seemingly inexorable command, everyone came to their feet.

We quickly folded our blanket, boxing it carefully. The mattresses had to be carried to one end of the room where they were grabbed by the “mattress orderlies” to make a mattress pile. On leaving the room we handed in our blanket to the “blanket orderly.” We finished dressing in the corridor.

Everything was done at the double and in a rush, for Bloody Aloiz, shouting “Open the windows,” would charge into the room with his club and we needed to hurry to get in line for the toilet.

Initially we had no toilets in the blocks. We all ran to a number of latrines where there were very long queues, sometimes of one hundred to two hundred men. There were few actual toilets. Inside stood a *kapo* with a club who counted to five and hit over the head anyone slow getting up. More than one *häftling* fell into the latrine.

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After the latrine we all ran to the pumps, of which there were a number on the parade ground. Initially, there was no *waschraum* [washroom] on the blocks.

Several thousand people had to wash under these few pumps.

This was obviously impossible.

You forced your way to the pump and caught a little water in your canteen.

However, in the evening we had to have clean feet. The block chiefs, going around the room in the evening while a “room supervisor” would report on the condition and number of *häftlings* lying on their mattresses, would simultaneously check the cleanliness of our feet, which had to be held up from under the blanket so that the sole was visible. If a foot was not sufficiently clean, or if the block chief thought it was not, the culprit was beaten on the table. He would receive between 10 and 20 strokes.

This was one way to wear us down, all under the beautiful cloak of hygiene.

Another way to wear us down was the destruction of our constitution in the latrines by having to do everything at the double and to order, or the nerve-jangling chaos at the pumps, or the endless rush and *laufschrift* [doing things at the double] employed everywhere during the camp’s initial phase.

From the pump everyone ran to the block for so-called coffee or tea. A warm liquid was brought into the room in large pots—a pale imitation of these beverages.

A wretched *häftling* hardly ever saw any sugar.

When I saw that some of my comrades who had been there for a few months had swelled faces and feet, the medical men whom I asked told me that this was due to a surfeit of liquids. Kidneys or the heart were failing. The body’s enormous effort

1940...

when doing physical labor while ingesting only liquids: coffees, tea, *awo* [a sort of broth] and soup; I resolved to avoid liquids which brought me no benefit and stick to just *awo* and soups.

One had to control one's desires.

Some did not want to forgo warm liquids, on account of the cold.

Smoking was even worse. Because, during the initial stages of his time in the camp, a *häftling* had no money, for at first letters could not be sent. He waited a long time for that. Then before any kind of reply could arrive, about three months would elapse.

Anyone who could not overcome this and who sold bread for cigarettes was "digging his own grave."

I knew a great many like this; every one of them died.

There were no graves. All the bodies were burned in the newly constructed crematorium.

So I did not race back to the block for hot dishwater; others pushed their way through, earning blows and kicks.

If a *häftling* with swollen feet then managed to get a better work assignment and food, he regained his strength and the swelling would subside, but suppurating boils would form on his feet, oozing a stinking fluid and sometimes phlegmon, which I saw here for the first time.

Eschewing liquids, I successfully managed to avoid this.

Before everyone had managed to get some hot dishwater, the "room supervisor" was using his club to empty the barrack room, which had to be tidied up before roll call.

Meanwhile the mattresses and blankets had been arranged according to the style in fashion in that block, and the blocks competed amongst themselves in arranging their "bedclothes."