

Regained faith in people

*The suffering touched me too early,
I have burned myself out;
I am the bright ash without desire.
Now, only the silence endures dearly
while I am still standing in the fire.*¹

Introduction

In February 2007, I had the pleasure to talk to Mrs. Helena Hegier-Rafalska by phone. She is one of the few living Polish victims of medical experiments conducted by German doctors at the Ravensbrück concentration camp. Purposely, I did not touch any topic related to the World War II. Instead, our conversation turned to her few months's stay in the U.S.A in 1959. She expressed her admiration for American citizens, who in the years 1958-1959, on their own initiative, organized and funded the medical treatment for her and other thirty one Polish victims of medical experiments in the United States. After the phone conversation with Mrs. Helena Hegiere-Rafalska, I decided to look closer at the circumstances of the birth and implementation of the social initiative, dubbed by the editors and readers of the weekly *The Saturday Review* as *Ravensbrueck Lapins Project*.

The medical experiments conducted by German doctors on 74 Polish female inmates in the Ravensbrück concentration camp in 1942-1943, are more than just an episode in the history of Nazi crimes. The fate of the victims of these experiments forces us to reflect on the ethical concept of harm and its redemption; reminds us about Polish martyrdom, explains what can happen when human civilization is subordinated to dictatorial philosophy.

Leo Alexander, a medical consultant to the Chief Prosecutor at Nuremberg Doctors Trial, in his famous article on 14 July 1949 titled *Medical Sciences under the dictatorship*, writes "the guiding philosophic principle of recent dictatorships, including that of the Nazis, has been Hegelian in that what has been considered 'rational utility' and corresponding doctrine and planning has replaced moral, ethical and religious values".(see http://www.restoringourheritage.com/articles/nej_medicaldictatorship.pdf); polish historian and social philosopher Felix Koneczny puts it laconically in reference to Nazi ideology: "the symbol of anti-Christian aspirations is a broken cross (this is hackenkreuz)".²

For Norman Cousins, an American, editor in chief of weekly, *The Saturday Review*, the fate of Polish women subjected to criminal experiments in the concentration camp Ravensbrück "is not a glimpse into the bowels of an imaginary hell but part of our age and part of our world"³.

Many synonyms can be found in historiography describing those 74 Polish women; patriots, deeply religious catholics, couriers of Union for Armed Struggle (Związek Walki Zbrojnej), sentenced to death by Nazis without trials. The SS called them *fanatische Polinnen* when walked them to executions at the camp wall, the inmates: *Rabbits, Kaninchen, Lapins*,

¹ The author of the poem is Grazyna Chrostowska (Translated from Polish by Jarek Gajewski). The poem was written in the Ravensbrück concentration camp on 13th April 1942 - five days before Grazyna and her sister were executed by the camp's firing squad.

² Fleliks Koneczny, *Cywilizacja Żydowska, O hitleryźmie*

³ *Dialogue in Warsaw; Report on the Ravensbrueck Lapins* [The Saturday Review, June 28, 1958, p.9-11, 32-36]

Anglo-Saxon press called them *Nazi Guinea Pigs*, Polish press *Króliczki*⁴, the victims called themselves *Króle*.

This paper presents on one hand, the genesis of social and philanthropic initiatives of American citizens who had shown so much kindness to those heroic Polish women, on the other it attempts to show the historical background of the events surrounding the fate of *Lapins* presenting facts from the period of World War II and then the Cold War intertwined with the sufferings of the victims and their struggle to survive.

Canvas for the first and second part of this paper is the article by Norman Cousins *Dialogue in Warsaw* appearing in *The Saturday Review* on 28th June 1958, while the third is based on a report by Dr. Hitzig, titled *A visit to Warsaw* written on 20th October 1958. In the fourth part, describing a visit of Polish women in the U.S., I used the articles published in the Polish and American press as well private, unpublished memoirs by Mrs. Helena Hegier - Rafalska. Portions of the testimony of witnesses in the Nuremberg trials come from *Trials of war criminals before the Nuernberg Military Tribunals under Control Council law no. 10 ; Nuernberg, October 1946-April 1949*⁵. Other passages, describing circumstances of the brutal experiments carried out on the Polish inmates in Ravensbruck camp come from the original documents presented at the Nuremberg trials, then photographed in recent years by the staff of the Harvard Law School Library in the Digital Collection Project; Nuernberg Trials Project and made available on the Internet⁶.

For readers who want a closer look at the subject of criminal experiments conducted on the 74 Polish women in Ravensbruck, mainly from the victims perspective, I recommend great books: biographical by Wanda Póltawska who was one of the 74 victims of the medical experiments; *And I am afraid of dreams*⁷, memories of other operated Polish women *Ponad ludzką miarę : wspomnienia operowanych w Ravensbrück*⁸, *Ravensbrück, kobiety obóz koncentracyjny*⁹ (*a chapter about Medical Experiments*) by the former prisoner of Wanda Kiedrzyńska and written by a former concentration camp prisoner in Neuengamme prof. Dr. Stanisław Sterkowicz, an expert on this subject: *Kobiety obóz koncentracyjny Ravensbrück*¹⁰. At this point I would like to mention that the professor's wife Mrs. Janina Sterkowicz was one of the *Lapins* who visited the United States thanks to *Lapins Ravensbrueck Project*.

A lot of previously unpublished information about *Króliki* and pictures presented in the article, I have received from Anna Hassa-Jarosky living in the U.S. Anna is the daughter of the late Mrs. Jadwiga Dzido-Hassa, who was one of the *Króliki* and represented them in *Lapins Ravensbrueck Project*¹¹. Mrs. Jadwiga Dzido-Hassa was a witness in Nazi Doctors Trial in Nuremberg.

⁴ Zygmunt Broniarek; *Króliczki z Ravensbrueck za oceanem; Za wolność i lud* nr 7 (136); lipiec 1959 rok

⁵ *Trials of war criminals before the Nuernberg Military Tribunals under Control Council law no. 10 ; Nuernberg, October 1946-April 1949*; Buffalo, N.Y. : W.S. Hein, 1997; tom I

⁶ http://nuremberg.law.harvard.edu/php/docs_swi.php?DI=1&text=overview

⁷ *I boję się snów*; piąte wydanie, Święty Paweł, 2001

⁸ *Ponad ludzką miarę : wspomnienia operowanych w Ravensbrück* [redaktor Helena Klimek; Warszawa : Książka i Wiedza, 1969]

⁹ 2nd Edition; Warszawa, Książka i Wiedza 1965

¹⁰ *Kobiety obóz koncentracyjny Ravensbrück*; [Włocławek: Włocławskie Towarzystwo Naukowe, 2006]

¹¹ A letter from Caroline Ferriday on behalf of *Lapins Ravensbrueck Project* sent to Jadwiga Dzido-Hassa on 19 November 1958

I would like to mention polish website maintained by Dr. Janusz Tajchert and devoted to Ravensbruck's victims from where I have got lot of useful information.¹²

Why Polish victims of the nazi medical experiments were invited to US?

Norman Cousins, the promoter of this philanthropic initiative, in the aforementioned article *Dialogue in Warsaw* describes how the organizing committee *Ravensbrueck Lapins Project* was established:

Some of the human guinea pigs are still alive and are still waiting to be helped. The world in forgetting the horrors that were detailed at Nuremberg, has also forgotten the victims. It is a mark of my own forgetfulness or ignorance or both that I did not know of the existence of this problem until very recently. The gap in my knowledge was remedied as the result of a visit to the office of *The Saturday Review* by Miss Caroline Ferriday, an American who has concerned herself for some years with deportees' problems. [...] Some months earlier, Miss Ferriday had met one of the Lapins, Mrs. Helena Piasecka, who had left Poland in 1946, and whose husband had died in concentration camp. Mrs. Piasecka had the good fortune to be flown to France, where prompt surgical and medical treatment saved her life. Eventually she came to the United States and now is living in Cleveland.¹³ Year after year Mrs. Piasecka attempted to get help for the Lapins in Poland. More than anything else, she tried to institute the kind of action in the United Nations that would bring pressure on Germany. Germany has accepted its responsibility to pay compensation and pensions to thousands of concentration camp victims. But the *Ravensbrück Lapins* were overlooked.¹⁴

Next Cousins describes how Caroline Ferriday after meeting with Mrs. Piasecka, using all available diplomatic channels and contacts with various foundations, joined the action to help *Lapins* living in Poland.

Caroline Woolsey Ferriday was born in 1902. Her father owned a large estate in Louisiana and was a rich merchant in New York. During her youth she tried acting career in theater in Shakespeare plays. From the earliest years she devoted her life to philanthropy. After the outbreak of World War II she began work as a volunteer in the French Embassy in New York. Working with A.D.I.R. (Association des Déportées et Internées Résistantes) she organized a fundraising for orphaned children, whose parents, members of the French resistance movement were killed in fighting with the Germans. Caroline met many people from the French resistance including women, who for their work, were sent to the Ravensbrück concentration camp and after the war returned to France. Through people like Anise Postel-Vinay, whose role in the project will be discussed later in this article, she met two *Lapins* from Ravensbrück, Nina Iwańska and Helena Piasecka. Since then, Caroline devoted all her energy to help *Lapins* living in Poland.

She knew about the campaign to help the victims of Hiroshima named *Hiroshima Maidens Project*. The project concerned a group of 25 Japanese girls injured after the

¹² <http://tajchert.w.interia.pl/enter.htm>

¹³ Mrs. Piasecka died in November 2006, is buried in the St. Mary's Cemetery in Cleveland.

¹⁴ The Saturday Review, 28 June, 1958

explosion of the atomic bomb. They came to the United States, where they received plastic surgery. All costs of their stay and medical care were covered by a group of American volunteers, operating under a private foundation *The Hiroshima Peace Center Associates* established and led by Norman Cousins. Caroline Ferriday rightly assumed that the same group of volunteers could help Polish *Lapins*. First, she contacted Dr. William M. Hitzig, medical consultant of *Hiroshima Maidens Project*, and through him with Norman Cousins and so there was a meeting in mid-1958. This meeting became the nucleus of *Lapins Ravensbrueck Project*. At the meeting Caroline discussed how Polish women had been permanently maimed by the experiments of the Nazi doctors, for many of these victims, after fifteen years, conditions of their health were still life-threatening.

The aim of these horrible experiments, conducted against the wishes and open protests of the victims, was to try new pharmacological agents known as sulfonamides, which purported to prevent cases of clostridium perfringens resulting from injuries sustained by German soldiers on the Eastern front - it is the official version of the purpose of the experiment presented at the Nuremberg during The Doctors Trial. Later in this article an unofficial version of the atrocities will be presented when discussing Dr. Hitzig's report sent to Norman Cousins. In addition to these experiments the methods of bone graft and regeneration of muscle tissue, bone and nerve were tested. These experiments were conducted on Polish women and other 12 mentally ill prisoners of other nationalities about whom there is little information provided mainly by Polish witnesses. Initially, Norman Cousins could not believe what he heard at that meeting.

As I listened to Caroline Ferriday, I experienced a personal problem in comprehension. The terms "surgical experimentation" and "test person" were morally and mentally indigestible.¹⁵

Cousins asked Caroline Ferriday to provide any documentation about these experiments as well as information on current situation of *Lapins*. She did this the next day.

That evening after the meeting, Cousins read everything that was in his private library on the subject of Nuremberg trials. Medical experiments, which Polish women were subjected to in Ravensbrück were two types (Sulfonamide experiments and bone, muscle, and nerve transplantation experiments) of group of several experiments including: malaria, sterilization, typhus, insendiary bombs, with salt water, in freezing water, at high altitudes, jaundice, sterilization and many more - conducted by German doctors in other concentration camps. As noted by Cousins, the Nazi doctors did not deny before the Tribunal at Nuremberg that they conducted such experiments on humans. They did not feel, however, to be accounted for their actions. According to them they exercised only the orders of superiors.

The main sources of information on events which took place in the Ravensbrück concentration camp are the protocols of testimonies of the accused and witnesses, written at the time of the hearing before the American Military Tribunal in Nuremberg.

The accused, Dr. Fritz Fischer, who testified before the Tribunal in the first so called *Doctors Trial* (Doc. No. NO-228, Pros. Ex. No. 206 Description of Document: Affidavit of defendant Fischer, 19 November 1946, concerning sulfanilamide experiments conducted in the concentration camp Ravensbrueck.), explained the procedure of the first kind of experiments:

¹⁵ Ibid

The subject received the conventional anesthetic of morphine-atropine, then evipan ether. An incision was made 5 to 8 centimeters in length and 1 to 1.5 centimeters in depth, on the outside of the lower leg in the area of the peroneus longus. The bacterial cultures were put in dextrose, and the resulting mixture was spread into the wound. The wound was then closed and the limb encased in a cast, which had been prepared, which was lined on the inside with cotton so that in the event of swelling of the affected member the result of the experiment would not be influenced by any factor other than the infection itself [...] interruption of circulation usual in battle casualties could be simulated by tying off the blood vessels at either end of the muscle;

The above procedure was modified after the Surgeon General of Reich, Dr. Ernst Robert Gravitz insisted on shooting the victims from a firearm (sic), Dr. Gebhardt and his assistant, Dr. Fisher, in return, introduced appropriate surgical method.

The introduction of this element of the procedure in the experiments and the use of more aggressive bacterial culture, including tetanus in the case of Weronica Kraska, oedema malignum for Aniela Lefanowicz, Alfreda Kiecol and Zofia Prus, caused the death of all those three operated Polish women¹⁶. Later in the course of the "experiment", into the resulting wounds fragments of glass or wood chips were inserted, or both and the wound was infected with a microbial culture: streptococci, staphylococci and anaerobic bacteria that causes gas gangrene. Cultures of the bacterias were specially prepared for these experiments by Waffen SS Institute of Hygiene led by Dr. Mrugowski. Then, just filled with infected material, the wound was closed and the legs of the victims were put in plaster. One hour after completion of the operation 1 gram of sulfonamide was administered intravenously five times and after a few weeks, when infection tended to peak, wounds of the victims were opened by incision and sprinkled with sulfonamides. The *Kaninchen* in the control group were not given sulfonamides¹⁷.

About the circumstances of the second kind of experiments regarding muscle and nerve tissues regeneration, we learned also from the testimony of Dr. Fritz Fischer presented before the Tribunal:

After the arrival of Doctor Stumpfegger from general head quarters in the fall of 1942, Professor Gebhardt declared before some of his co-workers that he had received

¹⁶ Harvard Law School Library Item, Digital Project Collection; Nuernberg Trials Project No.: 2034 Personal Author: Zofia Maczka (Dr., prisoner at Ravensbrueck) Literal Title: Information about the experimental operations which took place in Ravensbruck Concentration Camp. Descriptive Title: Affidavit concerning the sulfanilamide and bone/muscle/nerve experiments. Document Date: 16 April 1946 Evidence Code No.: NO-861 (Click for all versions of this document.); Language of Text: English Document Type: A non-trial evidence files document from which a trial document was derived. Evidence File Name: NO Source of Text: IMT/NMT Typescript--English Trial Transcript Citation: Trial Name: NMT 01. Medical Case - USA v. Karl Brandt, et al., English Transcript: p. 932 (2 January 1947) Trial Name: NMT 04. Pohl Case - USA v. Oswald Pohl, et al., English Transcript: p. 543 (16 April 1947)

¹⁷ Trials of war criminals before the Nuernberg Military Tribunals under Control Council law no. 10 ; Nuernberg, October 1946-April 1949; Buffalo, N.Y. : W.S. Hein, 1997;tom I. NO-228, Pros. Ex. 206; Tr. p. 774 Affidavit of defendant Fischer, 19 November 1946, concerning sulfanilamide experiments conducted in the concentration camp Ravensbrueck p. 371

orders to continue with the tests at Ravensbrueck on a larger scale. In this connection, questions of plastic surgery which would be of interest after the end of the war should be clarified.

Doctor Stumpfegger was supposed to test the free transplantation of bones. Since Professor Gebhardt knew that I had worked in preparation for my habilitation at the university on regeneration of tissues, he ordered me to prepare a surgical plan for these operations, which, after it had been approved he directed me to carry out immediately. Moreover, Doctor Koller and Doctor Reissmayer were ordered to perform their own series of experiments. Professor Gebhardt was also considering a plan to form the basis of an operative technique of remobilization of joints. Besides the above, Doctors Schulze and Schulze-Hagen participated in this conference [...] Since, I knew Ravensbrueck I was ordered to introduce the new doctors named above to the camp physician. I was specially directed to assist Doctor Stumpfegger, since, as physician on the staff of Himmler, he would probably be absent from time to time. [...] I had selected the regeneration of muscles for the sole reason because the incision necessary for this purpose was the smallest. The operation was carried out as follows: Evipan and ether were used as an anaesthetic, and a 5 centimeter longitudinal incision was made at the outer side of the upper leg. Subsequent to the cutting through the fascia, a piece of muscle was removed which was the size of the cup of the little finger. The fascia and skin were enclosed in accordance with the normal technique of aseptic surgery. Afterwards a cast was applied. After 1 week the skin wound was split under the same narcotic conditions, and the part of the muscle around the area cut out was removed. Afterwards the fascia and the sewed-up part of the skin were immobilized in a cast.¹⁸

In the second group the experiments (the nerve and muscle tissues regeneration) were also bone operations, which consisted of: fractures, splits and transplantations of bone. These operations had been carried out only on healthy Polish women.

Dr. Herta Oberheuser who participated in both types of experiments, the only woman indicted by the Tribunal, testified:

I helped Dr. Stumpfegger in the same way as I helped Dr. Fischer with the sulfanilamide experiments. [...] Before the operation I had to examine, as in the other case, the condition of health of the selected persons. [...] Dr. Karl Gebhardt was in charge of the sulfanilamide experiments and bone transplantations. I do not know whether he himself performed operations of this type. But I know that all these experiments were performed under his direction and supervision and upon his instructions. He was assisted by the doctors already mentioned, Dr. Fischer and Dr. Stumpfegger, and also by Drs. Schiedlausky and Rosenthal. Also only healthy Polish prisoners were used for these experiments. I can not remember that a single one of the experimental subjects used was pardoned after the completion of the experiments¹⁹

¹⁸ Ibid p. 392

¹⁹ Ibid p. 393, No-487, Pros. Ex 208

To illustrate what the victims felt and what did they think, and under what circumstances they were subjected to these experiments let me quote some passages from the book by Wanda Póltawska *I boję się snów*, as well, later on in the text, testimonies of three *Kaninchen* in the Doctors Trial before American Military Tribunal in Nuremberg. The following is a recollection of Wanda (Wojtasik) Póltawska, who was among the first six operated victims:

They came on Saturday morning at nine - 1 VIII 1942 – and took us out from *rewir*²⁰. The same six girls, the same left by us jackets, the same shots, only now Wanda [Kulczyk²¹] was brought back unconscious on a trolley, with foot up to knee in a cast on which a roman numeral *I* was printed. One by one, we were transported in a wheelchair, lifeless, powerless. In the corridor, before the operating room, Dr. Schidlowsky made intravenous injections to put us to sleep, before I lost consciousness, one thought flashed through my mind which I could not say: *Wir sind doch keine Versuchskaninchen*.

During the operation, apparently I was repeatedly shouting this sentence. Since Dziunia repeated them later as well and many others. No, yet we were not guinea pigs, we were human beings! But the name *Kaninchen* (*Rabbits*) stuck in the camp jargon. We called each other using that name. *Kaninchen* soon was used by the entire camp (Later on, we called ourselves proudly, *Króle*). So accurate was the name that it was accepted by all, including the doctors. [...] I started regaining consciousness. I thought about my leg in cast. I pushed the blanket – it was written on it *III TK*. I asked aloud: - *Girls, what do you have?* - They answered in succession: Aniela *I TK*, Rózia *II*, Gnaś *II TK*, Zielonka *III* and mine was *III TK*. What does this mean?²²

[...]Wanda's scream drilled into our ears, reaching brains. [...] Anielka's [Okoniewska²³] teeth hammered into a pillow's corner, and only rarely could be heard her prolonged groan. Maryśka Gnaś uttered curses quietly but like a trooper. A nurse [SS nurse²⁴] from time to time was standing in a door and watched us closely then without a word spoken left. (Only we, the very first group of operated, were in

²⁰ Camp hospital-author's note

²¹ Author's note

²² By roman numerals: I -bacterial infection of aerobic microbial culture, II - a bacterial infection caused by paratuberculosis, III- bacterial infection of the culture gas gangrene (gangrene variety) experiment objects from a control group were marked - those persons were not subjected to any sulfonamide, symbols with a large letter K before the Roman numerals mean the use of powdered sulfonamide substance called Katoxyn-Wundpulver, the letter T probably means tetanus; the bacterial culture of clostridium tetani mixed with soil - the most aggressive infection. See:

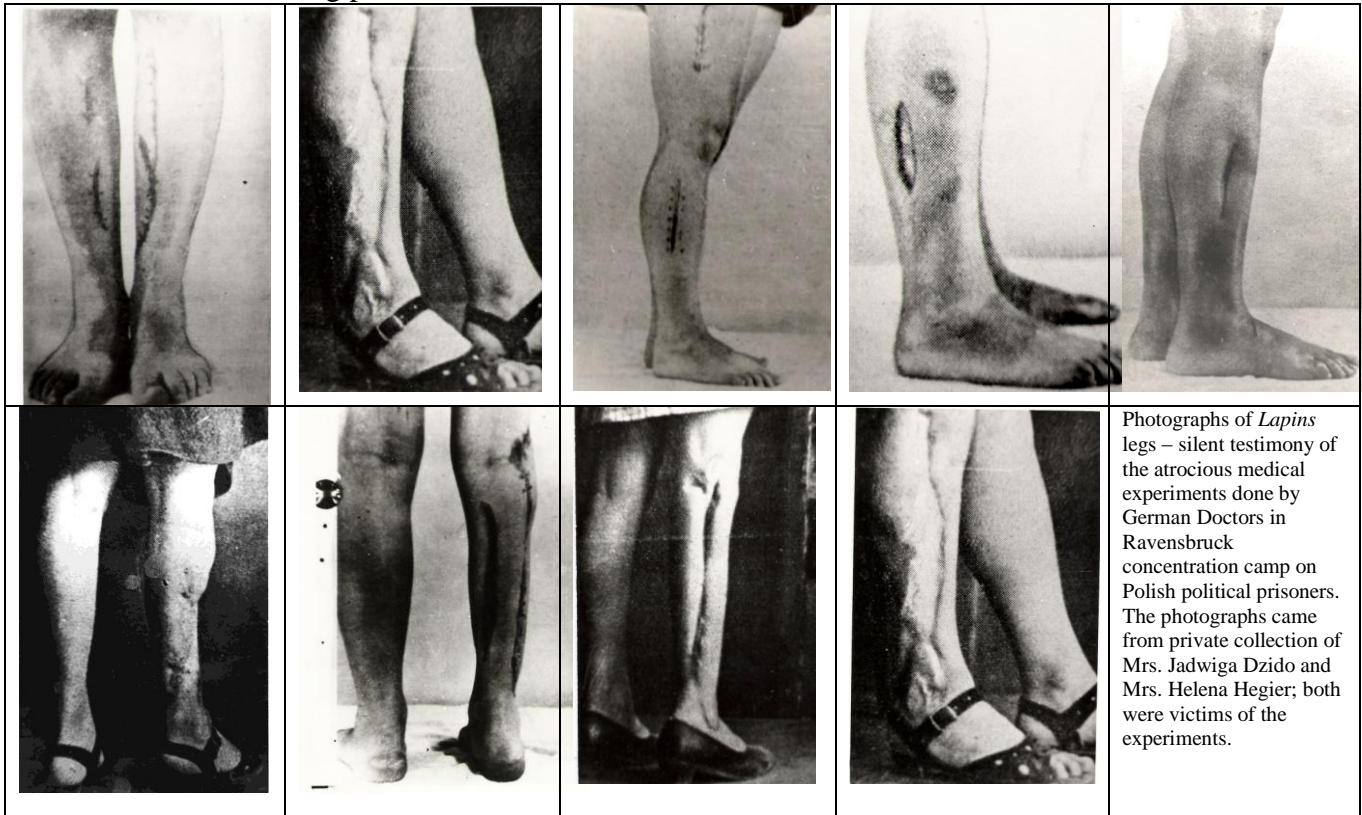
HLSL Item No.: 2340 ; Personal Author: Karl Gebhardt (Prof. Dr., officer in SS and Waffen-SS), Ernst Grawitz (Dr., Lt. Gen. Waffen-SS, Reich Physician SS) Literal Title: Subject: 1. Experiments by SS-Brigadefuehrer Gebhardt on the Combatting of Gas-Gangrene[.] 2. Experiments on the Treatment of Sepsis by bio-chemistry.

Descriptive Title: Report on gangrene experiments at Ravensbrueck. Document Date: 7 September 1942, 29 August 1942 Evidence Code No.: NO-2734 (Click for all versions of this document.)Language of Text: English Notes: The second report (on sepsis) mentioned in Grawitz's letter of 7 Sep 1942 is not included here. Document Type: A non-trial evidence files document from which a trial document was derived. Evidence File Name: NO Source of Text: IMT/NMT Typescript--English Trial Transcript Citation: Trial Name: NMT 01. Medical Case - USA v. Karl Brandt, et al., English Transcript: p. 10565 (1 July 1947) as well see: Schäfer, S.: *Zum Selbstverständnis von Frauen im Konzentrationslager: das Lager Ravensbrück* ; PhD thesis 2002, TU Berlin

²³ Author's note

²⁴ Author's note

relatively better situation because nurses were beside us during night shifts. The others, later on, were left unattended behind locked doors). [...] A nurse came to take a sample of our blood and urine; since then, it was being done every second day; she gave us thermometers and left. She was back to take readings. I looked at my thermometer and loudly read: - some notches above 40 degree in Celsius. – What? And I am still conscious? Zielonkova (Maria Zielonka²⁵) had 40°, the others the same; Wanda had lowest: 39.7°. [...] legs were swollen, red and hot. Mine was so swollen that plaster of my cast cut in my skin. Along the thigh up to the groin, ran a red streak ended with a painful tumor [...]. Now Dr Oberheuser winced when entering our room: - *Es stinkt hier*. – Oh yes, it stank! It was sweetly-nauseating stench of pus and rotting meat. Decaying narrow path was visible on Zielonka's leg where pus was flowing down slowly. Beside of a cut she had a loss of muscle tissues as a result of decomposing process in her leg. We felt pain in our legs. We had headaches. Morphine – was given to us three times, then two times a day – did not free us from excruciating pain.²⁶



Documents presented at the trial before an American Military Tribunal in Nuremberg are, in this text, a basis for discussing the circumstances of the crimes committed by German doctors on the Polish political prisoners at Ravensbrück. Please note that the American military Tribunal, which lasted from December 9, 1946 to 20 August 1947, took place after the other so-called International Military Tribunal, composed of Judges representing the four powers: the United States, Britain, France and the USSR. The International Tribunal tried

²⁵ Author's remark

²⁶ "I boję się snów" [fifth edition, Święty Paweł, 2001, p 83-109] – translated by the author

cases of major German war criminals. The American Military Tribunal in the 12 trials convicted Nazis who worked in different sectors of the Third Reich: doctors, lawyers, industrialists, etc. The Doctors' Trial was the first of the twelve, which took place before the Tribunal. It is worth to elaborate a while longer for the presentation of the atmosphere that has prevailed during the process. The biggest difficulty for the prosecutor to the American Military Tribunal was to find evidence and relevant witnesses on which the prosecutor could base his accusations. Evidence of the prosecutor was not sufficiently complete at the time of opening of the hearing on 9 December 1946 in order to guarantee the success of convicting defendants.²⁷ Indirect knowledge of witnesses was inappropriate. A counsel of the accused could, without any great effort, discredit testimony of such witnesses during cross examination. The mere fact that the witness was in a concentration camp was not a strong argument in the eyes of the judges. It happened before that a former prisoner of the camp was confabulating facts just to help the prosecutor. December 10, 1946, after a conversation with Dr. Franz Blaha, a former prisoner of Dachau, Dr. Alexander has written (*wrote*) the following note in his diary: "A disappointment. An obvious faker"²⁸.

The prosecution team, which was chaired by Brigadier General Telford Taylor, consisted of, among others, experts in the field of medicine, Dr. Andrew C. Ivy and Dr. Leo Alexander. Dr. Alexander and Dr. Ivy were co-authors of the Nuremberg Code – medical and legal standards, clarifying on one hand the circumstances in which medical experiments on humans can be used, and on the other what determines that such experiments may be pursued as a crime under international law. Besides 4 Polish women - aforementioned "rabbits" - testifying as a prosecution witnesses in the case of experiments with sulphamide and regeneration of bone, muscle and nerve tissues at the Ravensbruck concentration camp, there was one more person, father Leo Michalowski a catholic priest, a victim of the experiments with malaria and low temperature, conducted at the Dachau concentration camp.

It is worth mentioning a Polish professor of Law Raphael Lemkin, who is deemed to be - not without some controversy²⁹ - the founder of the legal concept of genocide. Professor Lemkin knew Dr. Leo Alexander from the days when they both worked at the University of Durham in North Carolina. It seems that the concept of applying scientific methods to the destruction of human life called by Dr. Alexander *Ktenology* – science of putting people to death or *Thanatology* (from the Greek *thanatos* - death) is a special case of the concept of *Genocide*, which is attributed to Lemkin. Lemkin's concept has been adopted in international law. The legal concept of genocide was underlying the indictment against the German doctors in the medical process in Nuremberg. In other words, all 12 types of medical experiments - including abhorring experiments conducted on the 74 Polish women - for which the accused were held accountable, are considered a special case of genocide.³⁰

There were no indications, in the methods used by German doctors in their experiments, of taking into account the reduction in risk of death of Polish women. Five of them died immediately after surgery. It is the lack of respect for the life of the victims as well conducting the experiments without victims consent and despite their open protest which

²⁷ Ulf Schmit 'Justice at Nuremberg: Leo Alexander and Nazi Doctors' Trial'; Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2004

²⁸ Ibid p. 180

²⁹ James J. Martin; 'Raphael Lemkin and the Invention of 'Genocide' The Journal of Historical Review, Spring 1981 (Vol. 2, No. 1), str. 19-34

³⁰ Ulf Schmit: 'Justice at Nuernberg: Leo Alexander and Nazi Doctors' Trial p. 166

undermined *tu quo que* (you also) argument of defense - the argument based on the existence of the Allies' experiments on humans.³¹ The following are excerpts of Władysława Karolewska's testimony before Tribunal:

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." We did not get any answer; and we were not allowed to talk to the commandant.³²

Of the 23 defendants in the Doctor's Trial, seven - including four physicians have received the death penalty, seven were acquitted, five received life imprisonment, four a penalty of several years of imprisonment, which in turn was reduced until the early release. The fact that the two of Dr. Gebhardt's assistants, Dr. Oberheuser and Dr. Fisher "escaped hangman's noose" was the result of an examination of their case before the the U.S. Tribunal and not before British or a Polish court, as it was originally planed by Allies.

By the way, it should be mentioned here that, in connection with these plans, hearing of the *Ravensbrück's Kaninchen* by the Polish public prosecutor in 1945 and a medical examination of the victims held in the Gdansk Medical Academy in 1946, were aimed at gathering evidence by a Polish prosecutor for the planned trial of some Nazi Doctors before a Polish court. The plans ultimately were given up by the British authorities. However, these documents and the testimony of Polish witnesses were used in the Doctor's Trial.³³

So let's go back to the events that took place at the Doctors Trial at Nuremberg, it will give the reader an opportunity to know the historical truth in the perspective of judicial procedure. The following are excerpts from the testimony of prosecution witness in the process:

³¹ In 1940, in Chicago in the course of medical experiments, which tested the effectiveness of new medicines, 400 prisoners were infected with malaria. This is just one of many examples of documented unethical experiments conducted on humans in the U.S. before and after World War II. Many of U.S. post-war experiments were conducted by Nazi scientists imported to the U.S. after the war in the so-called *Paperclip* see: Hunt, L. *Secret Agenda. The United States Government, Nazi Scientists, and Project Paperclip, 1945 to 1990*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991. Import Nazi scientists after the Second World War on a large scale also occurred in the USSR [author's remark].

³² 'Trials of war criminals before the Nuernberg Military Tribunals under Control Council law no. 10'; str. 415

³³Ulf Schmidt: 'The Scars of Ravensbrück': Medical Experiments and British War Crimes Policy, 1945-1950 *German History*, Vol. 23, No. 1, 20-49 (2005)

MR. HARDY³⁴:

Witness, what is your full name? (*WITNESS*)*DZIDO*: Jadwiga Dzido.

Q. Do you spell that J-a-d-w-i-g-a, last name spelled D-z-i-d-o ?

A. Yes.

Q. Witness, you were born on 26 January 1918?

A. Yes.

Q. You are a citizen of Poland?

A. Yes.

Q. Have you come here to Nuernberg voluntarily to testify? [...]

Q. Witness, are you married?

A. No.

Q. Are your parents living?

A. No [...]

Q. What education did you receive?

A. I graduated from high school and in 1937 I started to study pharmacology at the University of Warsaw.

Q. Did you graduate from the University in Warsaw?

A. No.

Q. What had happened that you didn't?

A. I started studying pharmacology at the University and when I was in my second year, the war broke out.

Q. What did you do after the war broke out?

A. In 1939 I was working in a pharmacy during the holidays.

Q. Were you a member of the Resistance Movement?

A. In the autumn of 1940 I entered the Resistance Underground.

Q. What did you do in the Resistance Movement?

A. I was a messenger.

Q. Then were you later captured by the Gestapo and placed under arrest?

A. I was arrested by the Gestapo on 28 March 1941.

Q. What happened to you after your arrest by the Gestapo?

A. I was interrogated by the Gestapo in Lublin, Lukow, and Radzin.

Q. And what happened after that?

A. In Lublin, I was beaten while naked.

Q. Did you then receive any further treatment from the Gestapo, or were you released?

A. I stayed in Lublin 6 weeks in the cellar of the Gestapo building.

Q. Then were you sent to the Ravensbrueck concentration camp?

A. On 23 September 1941, I was transported to the Ravensbrueck concentration camp.

Q. Were you told why you were sent to the concentration camp in Ravensbrueck?

A. No, I was not told.

Q. Were you ever given a trial in any German court?

A. Never.

Q. Who sent you to Ravensbrueck concentration camp?

A. All the prisoners in the prison at Lublin were sent there, and I went with them. -

Q. Now will you tell the Court, Miss Dzido, in your own words what happened to you after you arrived at Ravensbrueck?

³⁴ Alexander G. Hardy, prosecutor from Boston – the author's remark

A. When I arrived in the Ravensbrueck concentration camp, I thought that I would stay there till the end of the war. The living conditions in the prison were such that we could not live there any longer. In the camp we had to work, but in the camp it was not so dirty, and there were not so many lice as used to be in the prison.

Q. What work did you do in the camp, Witness?

A. I did physical work inside or outside the camp.

Q. Were you ever operated on in the Ravensbrueck concentration camp?

A. I was operated on in November 1942.

Q. Will you kindly explain the circumstances of this operation to the Tribunal?

A. In 1942 great hunger and terror reigned in the camp. The Germans were at the zenith of their power. You could see haughtiness and pride on the face of every SS woman. We were told every day that we were nothing but numbers; that we had to forget that we were human beings; that we had nobody to think of us, that we would never return to our country, that we were slaves, and that we had only to work. We were not allowed to smile, to cry, or to pray. We were not allowed to defend ourselves when we were beaten. There was no hope of going back to my country.

Q. Now, Witness, did you say that you were operated on in the Ravensbrueck concentration camp on 22 November

A. Yes.

Q. Now, on 22 November 1942, the day of this operation, will you kindly tell the Tribunal all that happened during that time?

A. That day the policewoman, camp policewoman, came with a piece of paper where my name was written down. The policewoman told us to follow her. When I asked her where we were going, she told me that she didn't know. She took us to the hospital. I didn't know what was going to happen to me. It might have been an execution, transport for work, or operation.

Dr. Oberheuser appeared and told me to undress and examined me. Then I was X-rayed. I stayed in the hospital. My dress was taken away from me. I was operated on 22 November 1942 in morning. A German nurse came, shaved my legs, and gave me some- thing to drink. When I asked her what she was going to do with me she did not give me any answer. In the afternoon I was taken to the operating room on a small hospital trolley. I must have been very exhausted and tired and that is why I don't remember whether I got an injection or whether a mask was put on my face. I didn't see the operating room.

When I came back I remember that I had no wound on my leg, but a trace of a sting. From that time I don't remember anything till January. I learned from my comrades who lived in the same room that my leg had been operated on. I remember what was going on in January, and I know that the dressings had been changed several times.

Q. Witness, do you know who performed the operation upon your leg?

A. I don't know.

Q. Now, you say that you had dressings changed. Who changed the' dressings on your leg?

A. The dressings were changed by Drs. Oberheuser, Rosenthal, and Schiedlausky.

Q. Did you suffer a great deal while these dressings were being changed?

A. Yes, very much.

Q. Witness, will you step down from the witness box and walk over to the defendants' dock and see if you can recognize anyone in that dock as being at Ravensbrueck concentration camp during the time that you were operated on?

A. (Witness points.)

Q. Will you point to the person again that you recognized, Witness?

A. (Witness points.)

Q. And who is that, Witness?

A. Dr. Oberheuser.

MR.HARDY: May we request that the record so show that the witness has identified the defendant Oberheuser ?

PRESIDING JUDGE BEALS: The record will so show.

Mr. HARDY: Do you recognize anyone else in that dock, Witness? ³⁵

WITNESS DZIDO: Yes.

Q. Point out who else you recognize, Witness!

A. (Witness points.)

Q. Who is that, Witness?

A. This man I saw only once in the camp.

Q. Do you know who that man is, Witness?

A. I know.

Q. Who is that man, Witness?

A. Dr. Fischer.

MR.HARDY: Will the record so show that the witness has properly identified the defendant Fischer as being at the Ravensbrueck concentration camp ?

PRESIDING JUDGE BEALS :The record will so show.

Five Polish women, including two sisters, Wladyslaw Karolewska and Helena Piasecka (nee Karolewska) were operated on in the bunker. Here is an excerpt from the affidavit by Helena Piasecka, which constitutes the evidence for the prosecution, submitted before the Tribunal at Nuremberg:

I resisted and hit Trommer [dr Richard Trommer SS-Hauptsturmfürer³⁶] in the face and called him a bandit.

He called some SS male guards who threw me on the floor and held me down while ether was poured over my face. There was no mask.

I fought and resisted until I lost consciousness. I was completely dressed and my legs were filthy dirty from walking in the camp.

As far as I know my legs were not washed. I saw my sister during this time unconscious on a stretcher, vomiting mucous.³⁷ (NO-864, Pros. Ex. 229.)

For Helena Piasecka's sister, Wladyslawa, it was already the sixth surgery of this type. Here is part of her testimony before the Tribunal in Nuremberg. This passage concerns the last moments before the surgery done in the camp bunker:

³⁵ Trials of war criminals before the Nuernberg Military Tribunals under Control Council law no. 10; Extracts from the testimony of Prosecution witness Jadwiga Dzido p. 381

³⁶ The author's remark

³⁷ Trials of war criminals before the Nuernberg Military Tribunals under Control Council law no. 10;; Selection from the Argumentation of the Prosecution p.396, NO-864, Pros. Ex. 229

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.³⁸

After completion Wladyslawa Karolewska's testimony, judge turned to the defence counsel:
PRESIDING JUDGE BEALS: Do any of the defense counsel desire to cross-examine this witness?

DR. SEIDL (counsel for the defendants Gebhardt, Oberheuser, and Fischer): I do not intend to cross-examine this witness, but this does not mean that my clients admit the correctness of all statements made by this witness.

PRESIDING JUDGE BEALS:

Does any other of the defense counsel desire to examine the witness! (No response.)³⁹

Two days after the confrontation between victims and perpetrators before the Tribunal at Nuremberg, Dr. Fischer (apparently the only doctor among the litigants, who expressed remorse), visibly shocked by the testimony of Polish women: Maria Kuśmierczuk, a student of medicine, Wladyslawa Karolewska, a teacher, Mary Broel-Plater a bacteriologist and Jadwiga Dzido, pharmacy student, he confessed to Leo Alexander: "I was going to stand up and say, I did not take it anymore, hang me immediately".⁴⁰

Kaninchen outsmarted their German captors in Ravensbruck by providing information about the criminal experiments outside the camp. The information was published by London's BBC radio. This probably was the reason that the camp authorities hesitated for some time before they decided to kill all the victims of medical experiments. The last months before the evacuation, authorities of the camp decided to erase all traces of all their criminal activities, not only medical experiments. *Kaninchen* miraculously managed to save their lives (5 died immediately as a result of the experiments, 6 with still unhealed wounds were executed in the camp and the rest, 63 of them, miraculously survived thanks to help of other inmates of the camp). It must be remembered that just before the evacuation of the Ravensbrück, almost every day, thousands of camp sick prisoners selected by the authorities and camp doctors were killed in the gas chamber which was located near the main camp and their bodies were

³⁸ Trials of war criminals before the Nuernberg Military Tribunals under Control Council law no. 10; Extracts from the testimony of prosecution witness Miss Karolewska p. 409

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ulf Schmidt; Die Angeklagten Fritz Fischer, Hans W. Romberg und Karl Brandt aus der Sicht des medizinischen Sachverständigen Leo Alexander; footnote 37; StaNü, KV-Anklage Interrogations, Nr. F36, Vernehmung von Dr. Fischer und Dr. Gebhardt durch Prof. Dr. Alexander, SS-Section, am 24.12.1946, 11.30 bis 12.00 Uhr, Stenograph: Rudolf Wahl

later insinuated in the nearest crematorium. To picture what was like the “hunting for rabbits” please read the following fragment from the above-mentioned book by Wanda Póltawska:

Overseer [the camp woman guard] walked from block to block together with her entourage of the SS guards. They go to us with a separate piece of paper. We knew in advance whose names were written on it. Silence ... silence ... waiting ... close ... I grabbed Wladka's hand... the overseer at our door. Suddenly indescribable scream burst out. The lights went off. Black night fell suddenly and the howling of one thousand women could be heard; yelling like from the hell. Shura kept her word [She was in a group of Russian prisoners who were engaged in repairing electrical equipment in the camp.]⁴¹ For several days she did the same thing. For a week the light went out every day during a roll call, even though all the SS watched closely. In the darkness growing clamor and tumult prevented the counting and searching for us. We were determined to fight to the death. The Germans tried to catch us. They did extra *Zählapelle*, suddenly closing crossings, looking for us. The slogan "they are catching rabbits" has become widely understood and many times during the day raised the alarm. The whole camp participated in this game.⁴²

That way they survived, changing the numbers, hiding in underground shelters until the last day before the evacuation of the camp. There were also some other hunting for rabbits on their way back from the camp to "liberated" Poland in May 1945, this time by Soviet soldiers:

Men approached us without a word ... gloomy ... we hold our hands convulsively, we were standing densely clustered.

I told to the girls: Keep up with all your strength they can not rape us altogether...

[...] I thought with a sort of despair: What was worth those four years of surviving of the camp? And now, is it possible? O my God!⁴³

Póltawska's heroines survived again this time unharmed. Other women prisoners of the camp were less fortunate.⁴⁴

Let us return to the subject of the origins of *Ravensbrueck Lapins Project*.

At the next meeting with Norman Cousins editorial board Caroline Ferriday brought documentation which she collected on the *Lapins* in 1951. This documentation is now available in the Library of the Museum of Contemporary History in France and the Holocaust

⁴¹ The author's remark

⁴² 'I boję się snów' p. 155

⁴³ 'I boję się snów' p. 182

⁴⁴ Morrison, Jack G. (Jack Gaylord) in the book 'Ravensbrück : everyday life in a women's concentration camp, 1939-1945; describes how a group of French women from the Ravensbrück concentration camp, shortly after the evacuation, slept in a barn in the town of Waren. That night (30 April 1945), the town was "liberated" by the Red Army. Instead, French women lived to see the liberation of the sort which was more than the hell they experience in a concentration camp. The women were repeatedly raped by Soviet soldiers to such an extent that they were not able to continue their escape further west to their homeland. When Soviet troops "liberated" subsidiary camp of the Neustadt-Glewe, they raped all the women and girls: a Jewish woman, the Hungarian, German women. Jewish women in this case hoped that their emaciated bodies – their weighed 30 kg – would deterre Soviet soldiers. They were wrong.

Museum in Washington. Cousins had thus an opportunity to see the detail of the CVs and the results of medical experiments of 53 *Lapins*, who lived in Poland.⁴⁵ Half of them had not been married. Most of them were teenagers or in their twenties during the medical experiments in the Ravensbruck camp. The youngest of the victims of these experiments, Barbara Pietrzyk was then 16 years old. Three of them graduated from medical school after the war, two finished dentistry education, another two graduated from pharmacy school. One of them taught geography at the University of Lublin⁴⁶, another was a teacher in high school. Several worked in office. Some of them were unable to work due to illness or disability. Experiments conducted by German physicians resulted in permanent disability in these women. Most suffered from various forms of heart disease, mainly in myocarditis and other conditions such as inflammation of the periosteum, anemia, hepatitis, tuberculosis, rheumatism, asthma and allergies of any kind against the background of neural disorders. However, permanent disability of legs in these women was the most visible effect of the operations done in Ravensbrück.

After reviewing the documents provided by Caroline Ferriday, Cousins called a meeting of the working group, which had previously dealt with women of Hiroshima. There were obvious parallels to the situation of the both groups of women, many of whom lived in poverty and needed medical care, social support, or ordinary human compassion. That is how Norman Cousins recalled the meeting:

Miss Ferriday's papers were then passed from person to person [].

The first question that came up was; why were these medical experiments conducted? What did the German doctors hope to learn that could not be obtained through other means? The answer, established by Nuremberg Trials, was: nothing. Not a single cure or medical research fact of practical value had been gained by the experiments.⁴⁷

During the meeting, participants discussed how it is possible that German physicians were not opposed to such experiments.

According to what was found on during the trial in Nuremberg, at least 200 German doctors carried out the murderous experiments on humans in Third Reich, and about 300 others knew about the existence of such experiments. Dr. Simon explained to the participants of the meeting that after the Nuremberg Trial the text of doctors' Hippocratic Oath has been extended by the World Medical Association by the following sentence: "I will maintain the utmost respect for human life from the time of conception, even under threat, I will not use my medical knowledge contrary to the laws of humanity;."

The rest of the meeting was devoted to determining forms of assistance to *Ravensbrück Lapins*. Number of questions still remained unanswered: whether they want to come to the U.S.? Will American doctors be able to offer some help to *Lapins* over the one received from doctors in Poland? Cousins decided to personally investigate the situation on the spot in Poland and then pass the matter before the Committee of *Ravensbrueck Lapins Project* consisting of the following persons:

President: Norman Cousins

⁴⁵ Out of the 63 victims who survived medical experiments at Ravensbrück 6 did not live in Poland at that time, 57 returned to Poland after the evacuation of the Ravensbruck camp.

⁴⁶ Krystyna Czyż-Wilgatowa, was a faculty member at University of Marii Curie-Skłodowska in Lublin.

⁴⁷ The Saturday Review, 28 June, 1958, p. 11

Medical Konsultatnt: dr William M. Hitzig

Public Relation: Julian Bach Jr.

Executive Director: Jeanne Benenson

National Committee: Erica Anderson, Irene Dalgiewicz, Lynn Farnol, Caroline Ferriday, Paul W. Freedman, Alexander Janta, Ludwik Seidenman, Paul Wagner, H. Donald Wilson

Baltimore: Mrs. Boas, dr Katherine Taylor

Birmingham: Emily M. Danton, Mrs. Stern

Boston: dr Leo Alexander

Bufallo: Mrs. Gilbert

Cleveland: Helena Piasecka

Denver: Alex D. Scott

Detroit: dr John M. Dorsey, Judy Reynolds

Fall River: dr Frank Lepreau Jr.

Los Angeles: Peter Charlton, Marye Myers, Aka Chojnacki, Sandra Johnston Winter

Phoenix: John P. Frank and his wife, W Horovitz and his wife.

Tampa: dr Richard Rogers and his wife, Frank Hornbrook and his wife.

Philadelphia: Harry Snellenburg Jr. and his wife, Emilie Bradbury.

San Francisco: Anne Watson, Marry A. Ross, Pastor Harry B. Scholefield and his wife.

New York: Val Janda

American in Warsaw

Two weeks later, Norman Cousins flew from New York via London to Warsaw. He describes the last part of his journey:

BEA Viscont, that flew us from London to Warsaw was only half full. Among flying companions were a half dozen Frenchmen several Englishmen a few Poles, and two Russians. The flight took three hours and fifteen minutes. Service and food were excellent. When the plane put down in Warsaw, there was a brief wait for customs inspection in order to accommodate another flight that had just landed. When our names were called, individually, we went into the room for customs. My bags were immediately initialed without inspection by an official. [...] A Polish porter speaking German took my bags and escorted me to a cab. [...] As we approached the city, I was stunned by a raw evidence of bombing from the war-still starkly visible after thirteen years. Not since I had been in Berlin in 1948 had I seen so many empty shells of buildings. When I commented on this to my Polish driver, he was amazed and said I should have seen it in 1945. Then, the entire city was just one mass of charred and smoking rubble. We neared the hart of the city. Rising from surrounding bleakness was a massive white skyscraper. It was not unimpressive in terms of sheer power but as architecture it was grimly inartistic. The driver called my attention to the fact that it was some forty stories high, was called the Palace of Culture, was modeled after Moscow University, and was a gift to the Polish people from Joseph Stalin. "Of course", he said wryly, "we paid for it."⁴⁸

Norman Cousins, during his stay in Warsaw, settled in hotel Bristol. From the first day, for 3 hours, he tried unsuccessfully to get through to the various individuals and

⁴⁸ Ibid

institutions associated with ZBoWiD. Norman Cousins explains to the readers of *The Saturday Review* that ZBoWiD is an organization of the former concentration camp prisoners. He may not realized that the organization under umbrella of Communist Party also included the "veterans" who, before and after 1945, fought with anti-communist opponents mainly members of the Home Army.

Resigned, he spent his first evening in the Polish capital watching the performance by *American Ballet Theatre* at the Palace of Culture. He mentioned that cultural event to his readers, supposedly in order to give them the impression that the idealistic hopes of achieving global peace expressed so many times in publications by him - a great supporter of negotiations on halting the nuclear arms race between the USSR and the U.S. - slowly yet finally materialized.

The next day the American embassy had recommended Cousins an interpreter, Mrs. Frubowa, who helped him in contacting the authorities of ZBoWiD as well living in Warsaw *Lapins*.

Cousins decided to meet with Mrs. Jadwiga Dzido-Hassa. She previously exchanged correspondence with Caroline Ferriday. Cousins also knew her name from the testimony at the Nuremberg trials.

Before they went into a four-story block of flats where Jadwiga Dzido-Hassa lived, Mrs. Frubowa gave Cousins resolute and concise introduction to contemporary Polish history:

"Don't be surprised if you have some difficulty in exchanging views with these ladies," she said [...]. You must understand this that the last war wasn't the first time the Germans spread death through Poland. This is what our history is full of. We love our freedom. I think we have proved that. But there is the feeling that people on the outside don't really care very much. You will probably find this feeling especially strong in the case of the ladies who suffered in the surgical experiments fifteen years ago and are still waiting for help."⁴⁹

Norman Cousins was deeply impressed by what he heard from Frubowa. Unfortunately, he missed Mrs. Dzido-Hassa, therefore, the meeting had to be postponed at 6:00 PM at the Bristol Hotel. For Cousins this was the first and most important meeting during his brief visit to Poland, the second took place in ZBoWiD in the next day. A closer look at both meetings, as they were described by Cousins in his article, will enable today's reader to understand social and political climate of those times. Cousins warmly presented to *Saturday Review* readers the impression made on him by two victims of criminal medical experiments: Mrs. Jadwiga Dzido-Hassa and Mrs. Stanisława Czajkowska-Bafia who arrived at his place punctually. Through the interpreter, Cousins explained the purpose of his visit to Warsaw. He mentioned the assistance provided by the Americans to Japanese girls called *Hiroshima Maidens*, and expressed hope that Americans want to provide the similar aid for Polish women. The answer he heard from both women expressed some suspicion and disbelief in the success of such undertaking. Norman Cousins was not surprised by that. Before Cousins' departure to Warsaw his Polish friend had warned him that these women will suspect a trap. After so many years, in the occupied country, people are vigilant about watching what is happening behind their backs. Cousins was born a gifted negotiator. In 1957 he founded a committee of the *National Committee for Sane Nuclear Policy* (SANE) and

⁴⁹ Ibid

became its first president. Thanks to his diplomatic talents he had been mediating between the Vatican, the Kremlin and the White House in talks on halting nuclear weapons testing. They were completed by the ratification of the agreement between the USSR and the U.S. in 1963. He personally knew John Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev. For his contribution on the reduction of nuclear arms Pope John XXIII gave him his personal medallion.

In the case of the Polish women whose legs were mutilated by the Nazis in Ravensbrück now living behind the Iron Curtain, Cousins knew that medical assistance in the U.S. could be attained only with the consent of communist authorities in Poland. The article *Dialogue in Warsaw* was published in June 1958, several months before the arrival of Polish women to the U.S. Therefore, Cousins could not write directly to American readers about facts, of which he seemed fully aware, that a hearing - in confidence - complaints from individuals by the security agents and then using it against those individuals was the norm of relations between the citizen and the authorities of the communist Poland. Although two years past since a new leader of communist party came to power whose name was Gomulka, initially regarded by the West and many politically naive Poles as herald of democracy; the political climate in the aforementioned aspect did not change at all. Norman Cousins has rightly pointed out in his article that: "Fifteen years is a long time; after one makes his peace with hopelessness it is somewhat easier to come to terms with reality"⁵⁰.

From the text *Dialog in Warsaw* readers may feel a great respect that Cousins have for the Polish women. Because, he who was the father of four daughters and one adopted; a former victim of the nuclear bomb from Hiroshima, he knew the psyche of women. But I do not think this had been the only reason of his reverence for those courageous women whom he met in Warsaw. He knew the story of their struggle for their lives. He understood also that the survival of biological life is not a license for a healthy mental life of the victims, survivors of heinous crimes. He once wrote this sentence: "*Death is not the greatest loss in life. The greatest loss is what dies inside us while we live.*"

Little by little, at this meeting, Cousins won the confidence of the *Lapins*. He realized that they were tough negotiators. He explained to them that what they had suffered from German doctors disgusted him, but did not arouse hatred in him. After reading the testimony from the Nuremberg Trials he just felt ashamed that he was representative of the human species. These criminals were not yet from another planet. The question bothered him: how to achieve peace of mind while knowing that those criminals were people like him?

Mrs. Dzido-Hassa and Czajkowska-Bafia in turn explained to Cousins that for them at the moment it was not a matter of hate or revenge. It was a matter of compensation for the harm caused to victims, which in itself would be the admission by the criminals of guilt without any doubt.

No compensation from the Germans for the Polish victims of medical experiments in Ravensbrück had also another aspect which most clearly is illustrated by the history of the accused, Dr. Herta Oberheuser. In her request for clemency, addressed in June 1950 to the U.S. High Commissioner John McCoy, Dr. Oberheuser argued that she did not take any responsibility for medical experiments at Ravensbrück - she only followed orders and should not suffer the consequences, being the 31-year-old doctor, in addition, a woman, she could not undermine the authority of her superior (Dr. Gebhardt).

In 1951, as the result of pro-German policy pursued by Americans during the deepening of the Cold War, U.S. occupation authorities have reduced the penalty of Herta

⁵⁰ Ibid

Oberheuser from 20 years of imprisonment to 10, than in April 1952, after spending only 5 years, she was released from prison in Landsberg.

After Dr. Oberheuser left prison, a former Nazi, Dennhardt, a member of the postwar "Deutsche Partei", who was a high bureaucrat in the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Land Schleswig-Holstein, helped Dr. Oberheuser in launching a medical practice. In May 1952 she obtained the status of *Heimkehrerin* - the person returning to their homeland, which entitled her to receive the interest-free loan amounting to 10,000 DM. Dr. Oberheuser quickly obtained a job at a sanatorium in Plön and also ran a private medical practice as a pediatrician in a nearby village Stocksee. In February 1956, as a result of protest of the survivors of the Ravensbrück, ballyhooed by the journal *Die Tat* - one of the sanatorium patients, who was a former prisoner in this camp, recognized Herta Oberheuser - a criminal case was brought to court against Dr. Oberheuser for killing by lethal injection of 18 prisoners of the camp. In the consequence, Dr. Oberheuser was immediately released from the sanatorium in Plön. However, the prosecutor in Kiel dismissed the case against her and Dr. Oberheuser did not lose a license to practice medicine. Weekly *Die Tat* and former prisoners did not give up. In January 1957 the prosecutor again began preliminary hearings against Oberheuser Herta. The higher regional court in Schleswig-Holstein on 5 September 1957, acquitted Dr. Oberheuser. The court as the legal basis for its decision adopted the agreement reached in Paris on 23 October 1954 between the German Federal Government and the occupying authorities, under which, no person may be tried again who had already been tried at the Nuremberg Trial. Simply put, the authorities in the Land of Schleswig-Holstein did not recognize the decision of the Court in Nuremberg in the Doctors Trial. The British Medical Association's annual convention in July 1958 published a protest against the attitude of the Schleswig-Holstein authorities. On August 11, 1958, the Minister of Home Affairs Lemke was eventually forced to revoke Dr. Oberheuser's right to practice the medical profession. Dr. Herta Oberheuser felt to be a victim of a conspiracy of Communists and former prisoners in the Ravensbrück concentration camp. As a result of the appeal procedure and the support of the local population Stocksee Dr. Oberheuser could still continue her medical practice. Only after five years of battle of public opinion and, after another confrontation in the judicial district court of the Land Schleswig-Holstein, on 28 April 1961, Dr. Oberheuser gave up her medical license. Her medical career was finished forever.⁵¹

The case of compensation from Western Germany for the victims of medical experiments was a well-known to *Lapins* living in Poland thanks to Nina Iwanski, Helena Piasecka, Jadwiga Kaminska and Zofia Baj-Kotkowska, who like many other victims the criminal experiments living outside of Poland, received monthly financial support and other compensations for imprisonment, hard work, personal injury. Those former prisoners of Ravensbrück who lived outside of Poland, who were not subjected to medical experiments also received monthly compensations. At the meeting with Cousins in the hotel Bristol both women drew attention to the desperate financial situation of the victims of medical crime now living in Poland. Benefits from ZBoWiD, social assistance and salary for those who can work altogether did not exceed \$ 20 a month. In comparison for \$ 1 U.S. you could buy four gallons of milk in the United States and so it was pay per hour for the lowest earning Americans.⁵²

⁵¹ Ulrike Steenbuck: 'Herta Oberheuser - Ärztin in Ravensbrück. Biographie einer Täterin' w „Ich habe mir Deutschland vom Leibe zu halten versucht.“ Frauen im Nationalsozialismus und der Umgang 'nachgeborener'

Norman Cousins had offered two types of assistance for the Polish *Lapins*. First, he offered them a trip to the United States for medical reasons. Secondly, he hoped that using diplomatic channels, through the presentation of the case at the United Nations and under the pressure of the American public, the West Germany will not continue to discriminate against the Polish victims of the German doctors' crimes in respect of the reparations. Cousins added that this type of pressure against East Germany [GDR] were formally impossible for the United States.

To launch the action plan proposed by Cousins there was still one obstacle to be removed, namely obtaining an official "blessing" from ZBoWiD. That is why the chief editor of *The Saturday Review* visited the next day that entirely controlled by the Communist Party institution. The meeting was attended by Fuksiewicz and Matysiak representing ZBoWiD, and a lawyer representing *Lapins* in the negotiations with Germany Dr. Adam Zacharski⁵³.

ZBoWiD representatives accepted Cousins plan and reported to him that, together with *Lapins* there were total of 100 victims of medical experiments who lived in Poland. It should be mentioned here that the number of other Polish victims of Nazi medical experiments who reported their claims for compensation was going to increase in subsequent negotiations with the West German government and, ultimately, in seventies will be 60 times higher than that indicated to Cousins at the meeting at ZBoWiD's headquarters. This issue will be outlined more in the end of the study.

The remaining time of the meeting at the headquarters ZBoWiD was dedicated to the creation of Polish medical commission, whose task was to re-examine *Lapins* and determine which ones can go for treatment to the U.S. The commission also had to provide a list of medicines needed for *Lapins* once they are in America. It was also agreed that after these initial studies the American medical commission will come to Warsaw and ultimately determines who among the victims require medical rehabilitation hospitals in the U.S. The meeting was a success for all concerned. Here is how Norman Cousins describes his impression after leaving ZBoWiD:

After thanking the ZBoWiD officials, I left with Mrs Frubowa. As we walked back to the hotel, I noticed that a great change had come over Mrs. Frubowa. Her step seemed somewhat lighter. For the first time I observed a tone of racing enthusiasm. [...] she said, "The man at ZBoWiD couldn't be more cooperative. Now, I can hardly wait to tell the ladies the good news."

In last sentences written by Norman Cousins in his article *Dialogue in Warsaw* you may find a sense of well fulfilled mission but also the desire to quickly return to the family home:

Having found the answers to most of the questions that were part of my assignment in Poland, I checked with airlines, discovered that a nonstop flight to London, with connections to New York, was leaving within the hour. The flight to New York took less than a day - an aspect of an age in which physical distances had ceased to exist but in which the human separation had seldom been greater.

Frauen mit dem Gedenken. ISBN 3-928794-24-8; Sabine Kock, Margot Kröger (Hg.)
Dokumentation einer Veranstaltungsreihe vom 8. Mai 1995 an der Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel

⁵² Author's remark – see: <http://www.fiftiesweb.com/pop/prices-1958.htm>

⁵³ Dr Zacharski był więźniem Oświęcimia - uwaga autora

Preparations for departure

On 25 September, 1958⁵⁴ the delegation *Ravensbrueck Lapins Project* from the United States led by Dr. William M. Hitzig arrived for weekly visit to Warsaw. Dr. Hitzig and doctors from the Polish medical commission, chaired by Professor A. Gruca, examined 35 of 53 victims of medical experiments living in Poland at that time in order to establish who might go to USA for farther treatment.

Dr. Hitzig's visit in Warsaw was preceded by the visit of Caroline Ferriday, who previously established contact with *Lapins* in Poland and the ZBoWiD authorities. In this way, Mrs. Ferriday prepared the ground for other members of the U.S. delegation in Poland.

It should be noted that only 32 out of 35 women who eventually went to the U.S. thanks to the *Ravensbrueck Lapins Project* were "real" *Lapins*. The other three women - known in the jargon of the true victims of medical experiments in Ravensbruck as "died rabbits" - were included in the group traveling to the U.S. under the pressure from the communist party and ZboWiD authorities. They were: Janina Sufa and Jadwiga Kukiel - unknown to *Lapins*, and the person whose name could not be determined with certainty, also unknown to *Lapins*. Janina Sufa as the only one from the entire group did not return to Poland after treatment in the U.S.

Dr. Hitzig, during his stay in Poland, paid a short visit to Moscow. He was thus able not only to compare the two countries both under the communist regimes but also compare the political mentality of the various representatives of both societies; in the Polish People's Republic and in the Soviet Union, in particular doctors. So he wrote in his report the following interesting comment about Polish doctors:

[...] Their thinking, unlike that in the U.S.S.R., was not tainted either through fear or through constant exposure to ideological regimentation. They revealed instead, a common heritage with traditions of Western medicine, which brought joy in "doing for others", especially wherever there was need for alleviation of human pain and suffering. [...] When I returned from Moskow, I became immediately aware, despite previous inconveniences and restrictions in Warsaw, that, relatively speaking, grater freedom did exist in Poland – a country now hopefully veering more and more towards Western standards. [...] a sense of heaviness and exploitation seemed strangely lifted from my mind and body when I returned to Warsaw; I felt free to breathe more deeply once more – even if I chose to do so.⁵⁵

Spirit of hope for scientific cooperation between the Polish and American doctors was accompanied by numerous meetings of Polish medical community which Dr. Hitzig attended. Dr. Eleonora Reicher, Professor of Rheumatology in Warsaw, warmly invited American physical therapists to come to Poland to share their experiences and achievements in the area of arthritis treatment. Then the idea of training some of the women from *Lapins* group in physiotherapy techniques led by Dr. Rusk's rehabilitation clinic came up. The techniques could be introduced later on in Poland.

However, already in 1958, when Dr. Hitzig came to Warsaw the political "thaw" which started after October of 1956 was coming to an end. In 1957, the head of communist

⁵⁴ Based on the article in New York Times 'Nazi Guinea pigs meet in Warsaw' published on 28 September 1958.

⁵⁵ Raport by Dr Hitzig titled *A visit to Warsaw*; October 20; 1958

party Gomulka shut down the popular weekly "Wprost" published by students. Apart from universities, censorship restrictions were imposed on animators of Polish culture. In such a political climate of so-called by communists fight with revisionists Hitzig had to work in Poland to accomplish the social initiative of Americans *Ravensbrueck Lapins Project*:

I had learn earlier from my attempt to contact revisionist thinkers and journalists that their wings had been clipped because Gomulka regarded "Revisionism" as synonymous with bourgeois-liberal tendencies of a nature more sympathetic to the West[...] A journalist and prominent revisionist would not even talk to me on the telephone. She bluntly told my interpreter she could not be seen with an American no less talk to him on the phone since "One never knows whose telephones are being tapped and when". [...] I was shocked when she refused to accept a gift from an American friend for whom I had carried it this great distance unless I could quietly deposit it at a club for journalists in Warsaw. Even the poet Slonimski, I was told, could no longer maintain any obvious communications with people from the West, especially from Americans.⁵⁶

After all, Dr. Hitzig had seen the political situation in Poland as a specific phenomenon behind the *Iron Curtain*. According to him, there were several characteristics of this phenomenon: the moderate socialism, allowing private ownership of farms, the existence of the Catholic Church, the relationship with Western culture still exists in the largest Catholic country in Europe, the relative sense of freedom in comparison with what it was before October 1956 years.

For him and Norman Cousins as for many other American peace activists it gave a historic opportunity to the convergence of East and West in the era of the Cold War. This is what Dr. Hitzig meant when at a gala dinner organized by ZBoWiD for the American delgation he said to Mr. Banach representing ZboWiD: *Ravensbrueck Lapins Project* is only "a drop in the ocean" of the centuries-old friendly Polish-American relations. To which Mr. Banach replied that the initiative of the Americans is like a river flowing into the ocean. What the representative of ZBoWiD, who was certainly well connected with communist nomenclature, had in mind? It's hard to say, but Dr. Hitzig seemed plesantly surprised by that.

Taking into account the political background of the then Poland, Dr. Hitzig in his report to Norman Cousins gave seven points in the justification of the need for Polish victims of criminal experiments conducted by German doctors to go to America.

1. Visit of Polish women in the United States can have not merely medical but also psychological benefits for patients.
2. Plastic surgery may be recommended, but due to the irreversible destruction of muscle tissue and nerve, only in the few cases.
3. The presence of Poles in America will be a great opportunity to remind the world opinion about the atrocities of Nazi medicine. In this way, future generations may be dicouraged from committing similar crimes.
4. Skilfully played aspect of criminal experiments will give Polish women a chance to claim compensation from the German state, which has so far refused to comply with these claims.
5. The Poles who live behind the *Iron Curtain* will feel the presence of Poles in the USA. In this way the project will propagate the idea of a good will and fraternal friendship between the two nations based on respect and freedom.

⁵⁶ Ibid

6. There is a chance for some of the victims, during their stay in the U.S., to get an apprenticeship to professions that allow them financial independence after their return home.

7. *Ravensbrueck Lapins Project* is entirely an initiative of private citizens rather than government agencies of both countries. The fact that Ambassador Lacey, who led the U.S. department for relations between the countries on both sides of the *Iron Curtain* supported wholeheartedly this project, as well the authorities of ZBoWiD from the Polish side, is an additional encouraging factor to pursue this initiative.

The next morning, immediately after the arrival of the American delegation to Warsaw, the meeting of the medical committee composed of about 30 doctors was organized. It included, among others, professors of medicine and physicians: Gruca, Askanaz, Batavian, Bialecki, Chojecki Czyżewicz, Grzywo-Dabrowski, Hausmanowa, Kodeiszko, Kuligowski, Litwin, Lapinski, Malawski, Reicher, Rutkiewicz and Dworakowska, also present were representatives of ZboWiD, Polish Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Social Welfare.

In the conference room of Warsaw Orthopedic Clinic, then located on Oczki Street, along the long conference table sat eminent representatives of Polish medical community to show the American guests details of the individual medical cases of *Lapins*. Professor Gruca opened the meeting, after which patients waiting in an adjoining room were dispatched separately and then the medical history of each one was presented in front of the present 30 Polish doctors. The following is how Dr. Hitzig describes it:

As each *Lapin* appeared, she took her place in a chair. They ranged in age from about thirty to sixty years. They sat motionless, as if isolated from the world about them, and listened to a scientific recitation of the genesis of their scars - the length in centimeters, the depth and how their organs were affected by the presence of pus that oozed from their wounds over a long period of time. Their's were pale faces, sicly faces, tortured faces, embarrassed faces, faces bathed in tears as they followed a minute recital of the cruelties they had suffered. Only a few looked upon their situation stoically, probably compelled by sheer pride not to betrey the tragedy of their concentration camp days. Most of them, however, were unable to control their emotions.⁵⁷

Later in his report to Cousins Dr. Hitzig presents what he heard from Polish doctors after the examination of *Lapins*. It is a precise description in the medical jargon what is left after the savage mutilation of women's legs. Permanent deformations in the limbs of victims were not without effect on the entire skeletal system, including the spine. Famine and disease in the camp exhausted completely the gastrointestinal tract and blood. The degree of psychological devastation expressed in the disorder of nervous system known in medical term as dystonia neuro-vegetativa. Quite common symptoms in *Lapins* were post-traumatic reactions of the brain caused by blows on the head during interrogation by the Gestapo.

Below is a picture of *Lapins* who were examined by the above-mentioned medical committee.

⁵⁷ Ibid



1st row standing from left: Stanislaw Michalik, Wojciecha Buraczyńska-Zeiske, Bogumiła Bąbińska-Dobrowolska-Jasiuk, Weronica Szuksztul-Golębiowska, Krystyna Dąbska-Jaszak, Jadwiga Dzido-Hassa, ([Janina] Sufa - accompanying person), Leonarda Bień, Jadwiga Łuszcz-Feifer, Joanna Szydłowska
 2nd row standing from left: Eugenia Mikulska-Turowska, Genowefa Kluczek-Kącka, Irena Backiel-Sobolewska, Zofia Kawińska-Ciszek, Jadwiga Gisges, Maria Cabaj, Isabela Rek-Koper, Zofia Kormańska-Kolańska, Irena Krawczyk-Krasucka, Władysława Marczevska, Stanisława Czajkowska-Bafia
 3rd row seating from left: Helena Hegier-Rafalska, Maria Grabowska, Maria Halina Pietrzak-Skibińska, Janina Marciniak-Budziszewska, Pelagia Maćkowska, Stefania Sieklucka, Maria Nowakowska-Kwiatkowska, Maria Kaplon, Maria Karczmarz-Łysakowska
 4th row sitting: Sophia-Mróweczyńska Stefaniak, Wacława Andrzejak-Gnatowska,
 5th row sitting: Wanda Kulczyk-Rosiewicz, Władysława Karolewska-Łapińska, Stanisława Śledziejowska-Osiczko, Stanisława Jabłońska, Halina Piotrowska-Wrochno, Krystyna Czyż-Wilgat.⁵⁸



Dr. Hitzig examining Mrs. Jadwiga Dzido-Hassa in Warsaw⁵⁹

Dr. Hitzig could not get over how women with such a devastated physical and mental health can function normally in life. When he saw them at a ceremonial banquet given the following evening (27 September 1958) in their honor at the Bristol Hotel - laughing, full of energy, he asked himself ; how it is possible that these women are able to conceal their mental

⁵⁸ The photo comes from the private collection of Anna Hassa-Jarosky; image description prepared by Mrs. Adalberta Buraczyńska-Zeiske (also a victim of medical experiments in the Ravensbrück).

⁵⁹ The photo comes from the private collection of Anna Hassa-Jarosky

wounds?

Here is Dr. Hitzig's answer:

They are women who possess a heroic quality. They were privileged to have received the best schooling in the theatre of reality where life was dominated by hate. What they learned at Ravensbrueck was how to change rapidly from one role to another – and they knew that their ability to do so meant their ultimate survival. They knew that the slightest slip would mean their death. They survived only because they were the hunted animals who knew when and where to hide, when and where to laugh, to sing, to love and to hate. They escaped the gas chambers or firing squads only because they trained themselves to understand the narrow marginal differences between life and death and they played-acted accordingly. That is why they survived, all except one.⁶⁰

The one who already had no chance of further life, Dr. Hitzig described in a very poignant way. Krystyna Iwańska (she is not on the above photo) - *Lapin* from Ravensbrück, a thirty years old doctor full of beauty and magic whom Dr. Hitzig met during a short examination, which he conducted with each of the victims after the presentation by the Polish medical committee. During her examination, he discovered the thickening hardness of the tumor on the left side of her neck, indicating the existence of cancer. The Virchow tumor was a symptom of gastric cancer. After completion of the examination of Krystyna Iwanski, Dr. Hitzig shared his opinion of the Polish doctors in whispering voice: "Her days are numbered, she is suffering from a malignant cancer".

She was the last of *Lapins* examined that evening. With care and great hospitality she addressed the American delegation. As if touched by intuition, she hinted with a smile that she wanted to go to America to see the medical advancements, to be even better doctor.

Ten days after his return from Moscow, Dr. Hitzig had already visited Christine Iwańska in Warsaw Hospital. X-ray and further tests showed clearly the existence of a vast Krystyna gastric cancer which had spread wide on the entire abdominal cavity. Contrary to the recommendations of Dr. Hitzig, Christina insisted on getting the operation, she thought it was just a normal stomach ulcer. She asked Hitzig, to say nothing about this disease to her sister Nina who lived in Paris, where Dr. Hitzig had to stop for a short time after his departure from Warsaw on his way to Albert Schweitzer's Lambarene in Equatorial Africa.

After arriving in Paris, Dr. Hitzig was introduced by Caroline Ferriday to Nina a sister of Kristina. It was a dramatic encounter with another victim of the Nazi experiments. Nina, thanks to French diplomats, managed to escape from the communist Poland after the war. In Paris, after graduating from Sorbonne, she worked as a journalist. Any funds that were in her disposition have been exhausted by buying the costly injections containing animal cells, which were to cure a painful disease of the skin. The disease, which according to Dr. Hitzig had a rather psychological base so-called *neurodermatitis*, was a remnant of the camp experiences.

Separation from her sister and news about the deadly cancer broke Nina. The only possibility of a meeting of the two sisters was Krystina's trip to the United States. Nina's arrival to Poland was impossible for the political reasons. A few days later, she spent the rest of their savings buying expensive drugs for Kristina.

⁶⁰ Raport by Dr Hitzig titled *A visit to Warsaw*; October 20; 1958.

Eventually, the sisters meeting never took place. Krystyna died shortly after gastric surgery, just before the departure to the United States. Till the last moments of her tragic life, she believed that she would manage to go to America to meet Nina. Nina Iwańska died on 29th August, 1983 in Carconne in France.

In connection with the *Lapins Project*, Dr. Hitzig had also met in Paris Frenchwoman Anise Postel-Vinay, known as Danielle. During the occupation she worked in the French Resistance. Arrested by the Gestapo she was subsequently deported to the camp at Ravensbrück. Her sister was murdered by the Gestapo at the end of the war. Her brother also was in a concentration camp. Anis, after the war, married a politician closely associated with General de'Gauss. She told Hitzig about the circumstances in which she met Nina Iwańska at the concentration camp.

There were thousand (s) of women at Ravensbrueck, and amongst them were many Poles who had been members of the Resistance Movement in Poland. Amongst them was Nina Iwanska. We were bouth young. I was only twenty, then, when I became ill with abscess all over my body. One day Nina Iwanska came to my bed and said 'You are a French woman so you're going to live. I'm a Pole and I am going to die. Take this medicine, it will help you survive. I received it through the underground movement in Ravensbrueck. This medicine, I am told, has specific value aginst infection. My father sent it to me. He heard about the infections in my operated legs and he thought this would help them heal. It's no use to me if I am going to die – but I want you to have it. So you can live and tell the world our story. You must live to tell of the barbarism and cruelty of these experiments to which my people have been and are still being subjected at this camp.'⁶¹

Anise Postel-Vinay, under pressure from Nina finally took the medicine. Thanks to it after a while ulcers on Danielle's body receided. Fortunately, Nina also survived. Anise vowed that she would do everything in her power to make sure that the world learns about the atrocities of the German doctors. Information about medical experiments conducted by German doctors in Ravensbruck camp had been sent through the underground chanells to London.⁶² But there it was, at least initially, treated as the anti-Nazi propaganda.

A few months before the liquidation of the camp through the underground network, words spreaded that *Lapins* would be shot or gassed in order to erase all traces of German crimes. The prisoners of various nationalities, including French, such as Anise decided to save the Polish girls, hiding them and changing their camp numbers.

After the war, there were rumors that some French women who had exchanged their numbers with *Lapins* were gassed shortly before the liquidation of the camp. Nina Iwańska was convinced that a French woman who exchanged a number with her was gassed as well; For Nina it had become a reason for her feeling of guilt and, consequently, as suspected by Dr. Hitzig, of her illness.

Shortly after the war, through diplomatic channels Anise helped smuggle Nina Iwańska from Warsaw to Paris. That was the beginning of publicity of the case of *Lapins*, which found its climax in Nuremberg's Doctors Trial.

⁶¹ Raport by Dr Hitzig titled *A visit to Warsaw*; October 20; 1958

⁶² *Aby świat się dowiedział: Nielegalne dokumenty z Ravensbrück*; Wydawnictwo Państwowe Muzeum w Oświęcimiu; 1989

At the end of the report written for Norman Cousins, Dr. Hitzig had undertaken to formulate his own theories about true motives the German Doctors from Ravensbruck had in conducting useless medical experiments on *Lapins*.

Scars resulting in their legs were part of the medical puzzle, which in any way Dr. Hitzig, being himself an experienced surgeon, could not initially solve.

As it was established at Nuremberg, Dr. Hitzig assumed that from the standpoint of medical science, these experiments did not make sense. What then was a real motive behind those crimes?

After returning to New York, Dr. Hitzig met with Dr. Leo Alexander, who then lived in Boston. Dr. Alexander, in an interview with Dr. Hitzig, supported the theory that the reason of medical experiments on the Ravensbruck prisoners was a deadly attack on the Gestapo chief and governor of Bohemia and Moravia Reinhard Heydrich - newly promoted by Hitler and his future successor. In this way, next to the residents of Czech Lidice, Polish women indirectly become the victims of the assassination of Heydrich, who was mortally wounded by an explosion of the grenade specially built by the British experts in sabotage.

Despite the operations performed by the best Czech surgeons, Heydrich died of infection. Even two best Hitler's doctors: Dr. Theodor Morell – führer's personal physician and professor of medicine Carl Gebhardt failed to save him.

Professor Gebhardt at that time ran a clinic in Hohenlychen near the camp in Ravensbrück. He was a personal doctor of Himmler and his subordinate. It was an *offenes Geheimnis* (open secret) that a professor's "subtle" medical methods were used to eliminate Himmler's political competitors within SS. One of these methods consisted of the bacteria injection in the victim's outer thigh which caused innocent local purulent inflammation. Using a syringe, a substance from such an inflammatory outbreak, was sucked out and then injected again, this time in the victim's bloodstream. Over time, the content of the syringe in this procedure was tubercle bacilli - bacteria that cause tuberculosis.

After the death of Heydrich, rumors spread by Morell had reached Hitler that Gebhardt refused, contrary to the Morell's recommendation, to use sulfonamide that were intended to prevent infection of the abdominal cavity of Heydrich and ultimately prevent his death. Morell had at least two reasons to spread such rumors; first, unexplained deaths of some Nazi officials in the clinic of Professor Gebhardt, threw the suspicious light on him of being personally involved in the political game between Himmler and Heydrich. Secondly, Morell invested a lot of finance in pharmaceutical plants producing sulfonamides. Heydrich's death became the perfect opportunity for advertising, "miraculous" pharmacological agent used with great success by the Allies to prevent infection of gas gangrene - the main cause of mass deaths of German soldiers fighting on the Eastern Front.

The career of Gebhardt, who was Himmler's close friend and confidant, was suddenly suspended in the air. The only thing that could save him at that moment was a result of medical experiments which could indicate the ineffectiveness of sulfonamide in the fight against wound infections occurring at the battlefield. Gebhardt decided to "shoot two partridges with one shot" to disqualify sulfonamides and at the same time clear himself of charges of not saving life of the Hitler's pupil.

Time was pressing. At hand, in a nearby concentration camp at Ravensbrück was a reservoir of living human tissues. The choice fell on 74 Polish girls - courageous underground fighters against Nazi's Germany - who with suspended death sentences were incarcerated in

the camp. Under the direction of Gebhardt the medical experiments on *Lapins* started two months after the death of Heydrich.

Gebhardt manipulated these experiments in such a way that some of the victims to whom sulfonamides were applied would die regardless. It was not difficult after all. It was enough that the victim's limbs - purposely infected by Nazi Doctors with extremely malignant bacteria what in consequence created inflammatory swelling with pus formed after infection - were not dreinded by a simple incision. Such incision prevented purulent infiltration of infected wounds and increased the probability of survival of the battered women, hence the numerous puzzling scars from incisions on the legs of survived *Lapins*, who Dr. Hitzig saw during a presentation before the Medical Committee in Warsaw in 1958.

Application of sulfonamides did not have the slightest importance in the experiment and Professor Gebhardt- an expert in trauma surgery - knew that fact many years before these experiments.

About the results of Gebhardt's experiments, which clearly showed that sulphonamides have little or no importance in the prevention od *gas gangrene* German military doctors were notified in the paper presented by Dr. Fisher at the Third Conference which took place in the Military Medicine Academy in Berlin on from 24-26 May 1943. This paper was entitled: *Special experiments on the use of sulfonamides*. None of the participants at the conference has opposed the use of people for this type of experiments.⁶³

Moreover, as Dr. Alexander explained to Dr. Hitzig during the meeting, through these experiments, many German physicians like Fisher and Oberhauser became members of Nazis "*cosa nostra*" by committing or participating in the crime.

It can also be added to Dr. Hitzig hypothesis about the motives of Dr. Gebhardt's crime, that even the death of all operated patients, which was very likely due to the primitive conditions in which the operations were carried out, would still prove Gebhardt's theory about ineffectiveness of sulfonamides in the prevention of *gas gangrene*. It was win-win situation for him.

One thing that the criminal did not anticipate was a fact that the majority of these operated *Lapins* survived by becoming a living witnesses to the crime for which he got the death penalty. As already mentioned earlier, the victims who survived these experiments (63 out 74, the other 5 died after surgery and 6 were shot with unhealed wounds after operations) could only owe it to their extremally strong organisms and thanks to help and solidarity of fellow prisoners.

⁶³

Harvard Law School Library

A Digital Document Collection Item No.: 388

Personal Author: Fritz Ernst Fischer (Dr., assistant to Karl Gebhardt at Hohenlychen), Karl Gebhardt (Prof. Dr., officer in SS and Waffen-SS)

Group/Institutional Author: Conference (Congress) of Consulting Specialists (military medical services) Literal Title: Report on the Third Conference East of Consulting Specialists . . . at the Military Medical Academy . . . Special Experiments on Sulfonamide Treatment.

Descriptive Title: Report on sulfanilamide experiments, presented at a medical conference. Document Date: 24 May 1943 Language of Text: English Notes: The subtitle "Special Experiments" is taken from the second page of the document. Other reports, and a discussion, follow the report by Gebhardt and Fischer. The conference was held 24 to 26 May 1943. Document Type: Trial document; from the case files of documents prepared for use in the trial. Trial Name: NMT 01. Medical Case - USA v. Karl Brandt, et al. Source of Text: Case Files/English Defense Exhibit No.: Gebhardt/Oberheuser/Fischer - 10 Defense Document No.: Gebhardt/Oberheuser/Fischer - 3 Defense Document Book No.: Gebhardt/Oberheuser/Fischer - 1 Defendant: Fritz Fischer, Karl Gebhardt, Herta Oberheuser Activity: Sulfanilamide experiments (c. 1, 4) Trial Transcript Citation: Trial Name: NMT 01. Medical Case - USA v. Karl Brandt, et al., English Transcript: p. 4112 (6 March 1947))

In the following quoted text derived from top-secret document, written 28 June 1944 year by the Surgeon General to Himmler's Reich Grawitz'a on experiments on prisoners in concentration camps, you can read about a selection of the victims of the experiments:

To the proposal of the SS Gruppenführer Nebe to use gypsies for the experiment, I beg to raise an objection due to wit that gypsies being of somewhat different racial composition might possibly provide experimental results, which might not apply entirely to our men. It would therefore be desirable, if such prisoners could be used in these experiments, as are racially comparable to Europeans.⁶⁴

This document was issued later than the period in which the experiments on the Polish women in Ravensbrück took place, however, it reflects the climate of the mentality of German physicians of the Third Reich and further supports the hypothesis presented by Dr. Hitzig about the motives of these atrocious crimes.

At the conclusion of his report, Dr. Hitzig alludes to use his personal contacts to obtain compensation for *Lapins*. It turned out that Dr. Albert Schweitzer the great authority, social activist, Nobel Prize winner, a doctor and a pastor living in the Gabon in Lambaréné, with whom Dr. Hitzig stayed in time of writing of this report, had previously blessed a marriage of the first post-war President of Germany (*Bundespräsident*) Theodor Heuss. In this fact Dr. Hitzig also saw an opportunity to influence a cause of *Lapins* by using “a back door”.

At the end of his report Dr. Hitzig thanked Ms. Jeanne Benenson and Erice Anderson for their help in *Ravensbrueck Lapis Project*. Both participated in the American delegation, present in Warsaw in September 1958.

Lapins visit U.S.

In her unpublished memoirs, Helena Hegier-Rafalska recalls that *Lapins* scattered all over Poland learned on the radio about *Ravensbrueck Lapins Project* and a visit of group of Americans in Warsaw as well about an invitation to visit USA extended by American citizens to *Lapins*.

Not all of the 53 living at that time in Poland *Lapins* could go to the U.S. for treatment. Many of them due to age, health status, having young children or problems with obtaining a passport, could not go on half-year stay abroad.

In the article *The Lapins Are Coming* written by Norman Cousins and published in *The Saturday Review* on 25 October 1958, I found the following statement:

⁶⁴ Harvard Law School Library
A Digital Document Collection Item No.: 85
Personal Author: Ernst Grawitz (Dr., Lt. Gen. Waffen-SS, Reich Physician SS) Literal Title: Concerning: Experiments in the concentration camp instigated by the Chief of the Medical Service of the Luftwaffe. Descriptive Title: Letter to Heinrich Himmler concerning the seawater experiments. Document Date: 28 June 1944 Evidence Code No.: NO-179
Language of Text: English
Notes: Some annotations by Himmler are noted.
Document Type: Trial document; from the case files of documents prepared for use in the trial.
Trial Name: NMT 01. Medical Case – USA v. Karl Brandt, et al.
Source of Text: Case Files/English Prosecution Exhibit No.: 135
Prosecution Document Book No.: 5 Defendant: Karl Gebhardt Activity: Administration & organization (c. 1, 2, 4), Seawater experiments (c. 1, 4) Trial Transcript Citation: Trial Name: NMT 01. Medical Case - USA v. Karl Brandt, et al., English Transcript: p. 485 (16 December 1946)
Trial Name: NMT 01. Medical Case - USA v. Karl Brandt, et al., English Transcript: p. 8048 (23 May 1947)
Trial Name: NMT 01. Medical Case - USA v. Karl Brandt, et al., English Transcript: p. 8227 (28 May 1947)

[...]Dr. Hitzig and Polish specialists endorsed the trip to our country of twenty-two *Lapins*. Six others have been approved conditionally, depending on the outcome of further research. Date of their departure has not yet been determined. But they probably will arrive in late December this year.

Thanks to the generosity of Americans - individuals and businesses - financing and organizing the stay of Polish women in the U.S. was taking shape gradually. By the end of October, 1958, 300 readers of *The Saturday Review* sent to account of *Ravensbrueck Lapins Project* about 6,000 dollars. In addition, many of them sent clothes and medicines for incoming Polish women. To this end, Leo Cherne made available room, where things were ordered, transferred and stored. The *Shop Lane Bryant* in New York and the magazine *Seventeen* prepared a line of clothing for the coming *Lapins*. Additionally, *Rogers* of Boston and the *Converse Rubber Company* in Malden, Massachusetts, prepared a collection of footwear.

On December 18, 1958, a group made up of 27 Polish women flew to New York. The second group of eight women arrived in March 1959. Various factors delayed the arrival of the second group. Three persons had to remain in the hospital; Mrs Kulczyk-Rosiewicz had to arrange care for her young children; for Mrs. Śledziejowska, at the beginning, the Polish authorities refused to issue a passport.

Flight of two groups both ways had been funded by the U.S. airline *Pan American World Airways*; it was a great humanitarian gesture and a clever advertisement of the air travel services for prospective passengers.



The above picture shows a welcome moment after arrival of the first group of *Lapins* in the New York in the office of Pan American World Airways. The company funded tickets for all *Lapins* who came to the United States. In the middle in the first row sits Norman Cousins, surrounded by Polish women, from left: Wacława Andrzejak-Gnatowska, Maria Cabaj, Stefania Łotocka, Janina Sufa. In the second row from the left: Stefania Sieklucka, Władysława Karolewska-Lapińska, Genowefa Kluczek-Kącka, Jadwiga Dżido-Hassa, Dr Hitzig, Pelagia Maćkowska and Jadwiga Gisges.

After four days of acclimatization and medical examination conducted by Dr. Hitzig at Mount Sinai hospital in New York, just before Christmas, Polish women were separated into

several groups, which were accomodated in various cities across the United States: Boston, Baltimore, Buffalo, Birmingham, Detroit, Fall River, Cleveland, Denver, Tampa, Phoenix, Philadelphia, Los Angeles and San Francisco. They remained there for almost the entire duration of their stay in the United States.

A special program was planned for each group, which included not only medical care which was a priority, but also it took into account the psychological, social contacts and professional development of the Polish women. They lived in private homes of Polish-American families, specially selected by the Committee.

Money for current expenses for sponsored women was founded by *National Catholic Welfare Conference*. Basic funds, which covered the cost of staying in the United States for Polish women came from two foundations: *Albert A. Lasker Foundation* and *The Danforth Foundation* and, as mentioned earlier, from readers of *The Saturday Review*.



In the photo sitting from left: Maria Pietrzak -Skibińska i Czesława Kostecka , standing from left to right: Władysława Marczevska , Helena Hegier-Rafalska, who had remained on treatment in Boston

Stefania Łotocka and three others lived in Detroit. In the article *I regained my faith in people* published in the expatriate *Polish Daily* on 20 March 1959, Mrs Łotocka describes their stay in Detroit:

On December 23 we flew [from New York] to Detroit. I will never forget the welcome we met at the airport there. I was moved, sick and tired. At one point, I have come across a look of Dr. John Dorsey [Wayne State University] and under his influence I had mastered a sense of security - an impression which I had not experienced since leaving the camp at Ravensbrück. Judy Reynolds smiling and so very dedicated to us, picked us from the airport. That evening, I met a few ladies from the Committee [the local committee organizing a stay for four *Lapins* who came to Detroit]⁶⁵ again, people with huge hearts like Mrs. Harvey Barcus, Mrs. L. Gussow, Mrs. E Gaska, and many others who took us under their caring wings. Far away from homes we spent Christmas with mixed feelings. Immediately after the holidays, each of us, depending on the type of treatment, was taken into personalized medical care. I learned that each of us was cared by doctors who offered their work and valuable time free of charge. Committee Chairman, Dr. Dorsey surrounded us with fatherly care. Doctors: Krystal, T. A. Petty, Ph.D. C.A. Domzalski, Kozłowski, T. Sadowski and Żurkowski carefully healed our diseases. Dr S.J. Roman after careful examination of our eyes decided to buy for us glasses. Dr. A.F. Pazdol, Dr. Drabkowski, Dr. J.L. Toton, Dr. Jerome Krause, Dr. A.C. Sawicki and Dr. S. Łączyński - dentists, who made of our poor teeth the wonderful dental monuments. Thanks to Professor E. Ortega using the Berlitz method, we were able to communicate in English. ...

At the end of the article Mrs. Łotocka writes:

From many people with whom we lived and we had any contact, we encountered countless proofs of friendship, so that till the end of my life this will provide food for my soul. *I regained my faith in people.* ...

The eminent Polish-speaking psychiatrist at Wayne State University, Dr. Victor L. and Thaddeus Koszłowski Stockfish, working with a team of researchers led by Dr. John Dorsey, played an important role in overcoming the trauma of *Lapins* staying in Detroit.

Maria Kuśmierczuk and Jadwiga Dzido were treated by the renowned American specialist in the field of rehabilitation Dr. Howard Rusk in the Institute of Rehabilitation Medicine at Mount Sinai hospital in New York. It is worth mentioning at this point that in 1983, Dr. Howard Rusk was awarded *the Pacem in Terris* from the *John Paul II Center of Prayer and Peace Studies* in Manhattan.

For Maria Kuśmierczuk, a doctor of radiology at the Medical Academy in Gdansk, an opportunity was created to deepen her professional interest in the application of isotopes in medicine. Additionally, Orthopedic Department led by Dr. Rusk prepared for her a special prosthesis.

In turn, Mrs. Hegier-Rafalska had a reconstructive surgery on a leg and surgery on a gall bladder both effected by medical experiments conducted in Ravensbrück concentration camp. The surgery on the leg was done by Dr. Jacob Fine from Beth Israel Hospital in Boston.

⁶⁵ Author's remark

In this hospital -where it became necessary- reconstructive surgery of legs of other women in this group were done as well.

Organizers tried to individualize a program taking into consideration the professional interests of Polish women. For Krystyna Czyz -Wilgat, a geografer, special trip with geographic and geological activities conducted by University of Phoenix had been organized by the University of Phoenix, Arizona. For Ms. Joanna Szydłowska - artistically talented – there was an opportunity to spend most of time in museums and art galleries in New York and California. Women who were interested in working in the health services attended medical courses. Mrs. Władysława Karolewska-Łapińska stayed with her sister Helena Piasecka in Cleveland. One of the women had been placed in the National Jewish Hospital in Denver the best hospital in America, in which patients were treated for tuberculosis.



Christmas in 1958 in the family home of Caroline Ferriday in Connecticut. After the death of Mrs. Ferriday this house was transformed into a museum.
On the above photo from left: Władysława Karolewska-Łapińska, Maria Kuśmierczuk, Caroline Ferriday, Władysława's sister Helena Piasecka and Jadwiga Dzido-Hassa.

Marye Myers, who hosted four other ladies of the Polish group in Los Angeles recalls:
I watched these four women descend from the plane bearing them from another existence. I watched their feces in the days, weeks, months, following. I watched the miracle of faith restored, of love triumphant. And as I told each good-bye, a very real part of me dissolved and went along. It could not be otherwise. As their life was enriched by the goodness of others, so my life has been doubly enriched by illumination they have brought to me.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ The Saturday Review, 13 czerwiec, 1959, str. 26

A surprise to *Lapins* was a meeting with an American citizen Mrs. Aka Chojnacka (in the photo below in the middle in the first row), a former prisoner of Ravensbrück. She was released earlier from the camp due to tremendous efforts by the U.S. She was first who informed the U.S. authorities and eventually the whole world about criminal medical experiments carried out in Ravensbrück concentration camp.



In the photo, taken during the stay of Polish women in California from the left: Władysława Marczevska, Janina Marczevska –Sterkowicz, Jadwiga Kukiela, Wacława Andrzejak-Gnatowska, Joanna Szydłowska, Maria Karczmarz Łysakowska, in the middle row: Stanisława Młodkowska-Bielawska, Maria Pietrzak-Skibińska, Stanisława Czajkowska-Bafia, Jadwiga Dzido-Hassa, Wanda Kulczyk- Rosiewicz, Maria Kuśmierczuk, Pelagia Maćkowska, in the first row from left to right: Maria Grabowska, Helena Hegier-Rafalska, Czesława Kostecka, Genowefa Kluczek-Kacka, Aka Chojnacka (L.A. Kalifornia), Władysława Karolewska-Lapińska, Jadwiga Gisges, Stefania Łotocka, Stefania Sieklucka, Leokadia Kwiecińska

At the end of the *Lapins* stay the Committee organized a tour for the Polish women from California to New York. The Americans wanted to show the guests prior to their departure to the Polish, almost all of America. A start of the tour took place in Palo-Alto, California, where on 1st May 1959 Grey Hound -bus company, took Lapins on a long trip through the states of California, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas and Tennessee. First route ran along the Pacific Ocean shore by the city of San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara. Then in Los Angeles, Polish women visited Hollywood -the U.S. capital of film industry- and then Disnayland Park in Anaheim. In the state of Arizona they had a chance to see the Hoover dam and Grant Canyon, where they spent one day. Then, in Albuquerque, New Mexico *Lapins* visited the Indian reservation. In Texas City they had a chance to see Amarillo and Dallas. After a stay in Memphis, Tennessee, on May 20, the route ended in Washington DC, where the plane took them to New York.



Lapins during their stay in Yosemite National Park. In the background Yosemite Falls

On their tour *Lapins* met with residents of small towns and big cities, getting to know the daily lives of Americans at work and during their leisure time. Among other things, *Lapins* visited a small, at that time, town called Las Vegas in Nevada. There they encountered a happy adventure. Bravest of the ladies, Maria Kuśmierczuk, overcame shyness of the whole group, caused by a stunning glow of neon advertisements and entered the casino games. There, after throwing a ten-cent coin she pulled the handle of the machine. A moment later they heard a loud crunching sound. "It would be better if we leave the place because I probably messed up the machine" - said Mrs. Kuśmierczuk. To the delight of the whole group as it turned out, what they heard was a terrifying noise of pouring out coins. Ms. Kuśmierczuk won the jack pot. "Americans are nice to us" - she added.

After arriving in Washington, *Lapins* visit became the subject of headlines next to the Geneva conference on Berlin and nuclear disarmament. What in particular interested reporters was the issue of pensions and compensation from the government of West Germany for *Lapins* who were subjected to medical experiments conducted in Ravensbruck concentration camp by German doctors.

The issue also raised interest among a large group of U.S. congressmen and senators who met with *Lapins*. On 19th May 1959, Senator Jacob Javits of New York received *Lapins* on a specially organized in their honor a formal dinner at the restaurant located in the building of the Senate. Congressman Thadeus M. Machrowicz of Michigan chaired a meeting with the Polish women. In addition, the meeting was attended by senators: Keneth B. Keating of New York, Edmund S. Muskie of Main, Congressmen John D. Dingell of Michigan, Clement J. Zablocki of Wisconsin, Emanuel Celler, Herbert Zelenko, Thadeuss J. Dulski from the state New York and John Lesinski from the state of Michigan.

After lunch, the Polish women were invited to a working session of the Senate, in this way they had the opportunity to see firsthand from the public gallery how the legislation in the world's largest democracy worked. The guests reacted with emotions when Senator Frank Carlson of Kansas broke the protocol of the Senate by interrupting deliberations to commemorate the presence of the victims of Nazi medical experiments.

He mentioned on the occasion the historical background of these victims of World War II. The senator said that no amount of money could compensate for the suffering of these women and that so far, these ladies had not received any pension or compensation from the German state. He added that other victims of concentration camps received such compensation therefore in this case there is no question of a precedent.

Senator Edmund S. Muskie, whose father forced by Russian tyranny had to emigrate to the United States fifty years earlier, presented to the Senate a chronology of the effort undertaken by a group of Americans led by Norman Cousins and Caroline Ferriday in obtaining compensation from Bonn for *Lapins*. By the way, Senator mentioned that Bonn has offered \$ 1.000 for each of the 30 out of 34 *Lapins* who visited the United States. The Polish women rejected the offer. At that point the negotiations with the German government [led by lawyer Benjamin Ferencz, who represented *Lapins*] had stalled.⁶⁷

Senator Javis expressed his hope that the West German Government overcomes in a good faith the current obstacles and pay compensations for the victims.

Senator Thomas J. Dodd of Connecticut reminded that at the trial in Nuremberg, German doctors responsible for medical experiments did not deny the existence of those crimes and confessed to committing them, thus the claim of the Polish women were undeniably real.

The last of the eight who spoke were the senators: Pat McNamara of Michigan, and J. McCarthy of Minnesota. Paying homage to the *Lapins* warned that the world was still not safe from the extreme evil, which also existed in Ravensbrück.

Then Polish guests went to the White House, where Homer H. Gruenter accepted on behalf of Mrs. Eisenhower a ring made by Joanna Szydłowska who was one of the *Lapins*.

At the end, Polish embassy in Washington had organized a reception for Polish women. Polish Ambassador Romuald Spasowski also invited several congressmen and the journalist Walter Lippmann.

Two weeks before departure, the entire group of *Lapins* stayed in New York. On June 7th, Polish women met with Cardinal Spellman, Archbishop of New York at his residence. "I am pleased to see how your dedication and sacrifice were recognized here." - said the Cardinal to his guests. He handed each of the ladies **medalion** blessed by Pope Pius XII. As mentioned earlier, the Catholic Welfare Services, part of the National Catholic Conference Welfare, provided assistance in financing a visit of *Lapins* in the U.S. On June 8th, 1959, the American World Airways took the Polish women back to Warsaw.

A few days later, the German Embassy sent a letter to *The Saturday Review*. The letter assured the Committee of the *Ravensbrueck Lapins Project*, that German federal government began steps to pay compensation for Polish victims of medical experiments. To the letter was attached a check in the amount of \$ 27.000 to cover medical expenses which occurred during *Lapins* stay in the United States. Norman Cousins ends his article *The Ladies Depart* in which he comments on a sort of pressure the Americans succeeded in Bonn:

If this means that Ravensbrueck Ladies may receive adequate pensions and compensation, then the prospect is a happy one indeed. (*The Saturday Review*, 13 June 1959 roku).

The Cousins's wish have never fulfilled as expected. Also, long-term efforts of *Friends of A.D.I.R* led by Caroline Ferriday seeking to obtain from the German Government monthly -

⁶⁷ The full report of Senator Muskie is available on the Web: http://www.muskiefoundation.org/esm.index/1959/fpol_8459.htm. The report says about 34 and not 35 *Lapins*. Precise information about the circumstances of the negotiations led by Ferencz are in the archives of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum Library, Benjamin B. Ferencz Collection: Correspondence and related records Regarding restitution for Victims of medical experiments, 1957-1981; Call number: RG-12.012; 1994.A.0037

ranging from \$1,200 to 1,500 - pensions for Rabbits, came to nothing.⁶⁸ Beside of one time lump payment, *Lapins* never received a permanent disability pensions or full compensation (for example, for long-term slave labor in concentration camps.) As a matter of fact none of the Nazi doctors still living at that time did appologized the *Lapins* for subjecting them to horrible medical experiments. Situation changed, in the respect of compensations, after 1989. About dozen *Lapins* living at that time in Poland had been receiving monthly pensions for work done in Ravensbruck concentrantion camp.

Efforts undertaken by a handful of mutilated by Nazis women from Ravensbrück and their American friends from *Ravensbruck Lapins Project* became an icebreaker, which started opening the way for mass compensations to other Polish victims of medical experiments, this time with the money obtained for this purpose from the government of West Germany. Such payments were carried out by the Polish government in the seventies and eighties. In the period 1973-1987, polish government "quietly" prosessed compensation applications for other victims of medical experiments. *Lapins* were excluded from the process entirely. In this way, they became again victims of the regime, this time a communist one.

Scandal in Polish People's Republic (PRL)

In 1961, as the result of an agreement between the Polish Red Cross and the International Committee of the Red Cross, the West German government commenced the payment of personal, lump-sum financial benefits granted to Nazi victims of medical ekperyments living in Poland. On that occation the *New York Times* published the article *73 Polish Women, Nazi Victims, To get Indemnities from Bonn*.⁶⁹

It is worth mentioning that the article speaks of 73 Polish women, victims of Nazi medical experiments. The number seems to be misleading since only 55 *Lapins* were living in Poland Rabbits from Ravensbrück. By 1965 there were only 51 alive.⁷⁰

Processing of applications of individual victims was done by Main Commission for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes in Poland in cooperation with the commuinist veteran assossiation ZBoWiD and the Polish Red Cross. It was a very strict forensic-medical investigation. After that, the applications were forwarded to the appropriate International Committee of Red Cross in Geneva, who subjected them to a preliminary analysis and has conducted individual interviews with applicants in Poland.

Only after such a strict procedure independent Commission established by ICRC had taken a decision on the amount of the payment of individual assistance grants awarded by the German government. The decisions of the Commission were presented individually to applicants by the Red Cross. The assistance grants awarded were paid into an account of the Polish bank PKO.

The amount of lump-sum payment was from 25 to 40 thousands of Deutsche Mark per person. In this way over the next ten years up to 1971, 6 and half thousands claims from Polish citizens were submitted. Of this number only 1,357 were accepted and financial assistance grants were paid up to a total of 39,440 thousands DM.⁷¹

⁶⁸ *Summary of Comments by Miss. Caroline Ferriday, Concerning Work of Friends of A.D.I.R., Inc.* December 20, 1957

⁶⁹ *The New York Times*, 13 listopada 1961 rok

⁷⁰ Kiedrzyńska Ravensbruck wyd 2, 1965, str 219

⁷¹ Problem reparacji, odszkodowań i świadczeń w stosunkach polsko-niemieckich 1944-2004, Tom I, Studia pod redakcją naukową Witolda M. Góralskiego, Dominik Sołtysiak, Podstawy prawne i implementacja odszkodowań niemieckich dla ofiar eksperymentów pseudomedycznych w latach 1945-1989

It is worth mentioning at this point that each of *Lapins* on their own initiative contributed from 1 to 2 thousand dollars from the lump-sum payment they received from West Germany to a fund used to help financially other former prisoners of Ravensbrück who did not receive any compensation from West Germany and lived in poverty in Poland.

Thus, the period of payments to Polish victims of medical experiments ended.

Then the West Germany government decided to close the case of payments for the increasing number of Polish claimants. Therefore, through negotiation under an umbrella of the normalization of relations between the governments of communist Poland and West Germany, on 16th November 1972, an agreement was signed between the Minister of Health and Social Welfare of Poland and the Federal Ministry of Economics and Finance of the Federal Government of West Germany under which the Polish government had received on behalf of the 6,000 Polish victims of the Nazi medical experiments the sum of 103 millions of DM. 3 millions of that money were to be used to cover administrative costs associated with distribution of that fund among the victims of medical experiments. It should be emphasized that the payment of the assistance grants excluded *Lapins*.

Based on the known facts, which occurred after 1971, it can be concluded that the communist government using the moral aspect of compensation for the atrocious medical experiments carried out on the Poles by Nazi doctors, has negotiated a lump sum of money from the government of West Germany, which closed any further claims from the victims. The Polish communist Government, led by Piotr Jaroszewicz, used a short cut in negotiations and instead of pressing German government to pay monthly pensions for victims the Polish government negotiated only a single global allowance paid on the behalf of the victims to the government in two installments.

The money thus obtained, the Polish government had used for own purposes, not linked to compensations for Polish victims of medical experiments as it was originally intended. These 103 million DM instead of going to the Ministry of Health and Welfare, as it was in the agreement, was transferred on interest-free account of Bank Handlowy SA, and then - under the confidential decisions of the Council of Ministers of May 1974 - was deposited on the government Foreign Exchange Reserve Fund.⁷²

Then the communist government using its own quasi judicial system processed claims of the victims in local devaluated currency of Polish Zloty.

The government led by a communist Piotr Jaroszewicz and his colleagues from the pseudo veteran association ZBOWID stole the compensations from the victims. In that corrupted scheme of processing claims some people applied who are referred to as "false *Lapins*". They included both those who were not prisoners of concentration camps and those who were, but had not been subjected to medical experiments defined at the Nuremberg Doctors' Trial.

At that time, an anecdote circulated about an applicant who submitted a claim for compensation in connection with the fact that at a time when he was a prisoner in a concentration camp he was forced there to wear tight shoes. If the documentation of the claimant exists we would be able to verify whether it actually existed and whether the claimant received the compensation.

⁷² Iwona Jurczenko, Ofiary eksperymentów; Prawo i Życie nr 9 z 1990 roku; str.4-5 oraz Teresa Kuczyńska, Po prostu wstyd, Tygodnik Solidarność 46 (113) z 16 listopada 1990 roku

It should be kept in mind that in relation to 12 and then 15 types of experiments that the American Military Tribunal defined as a crime against humanity and war crimes, the following criterion was used:

These experiments were not isolated and random acts of individual doctors or researchers, taken on its own kind of responsibility but were products of a coordinated policy and planning at senior levels of government, the army and the Nazi party pursued as an integral part of an overall effort to run the war.⁷³

What was left of the idea of full compensation for the victims of Nazi atrocities is a sense of injustice among many of the victims at the unlawful action of the Polish communist government as well the feeling of shame among many Polish citizens for those who got such compensations unjustly.

In conclusion, on the subject of the outrageous distribution of indemnations, let me quote the following excerpts about *Lapins* from the book "*And I'm afraid of dreams*" by Wanda Póltawska:

[...] the skinny, starved women, skeletons, wild crowd who threw themselves wildly at everything that one could eat. [...] in these women seemed to be extinct any remains of humanity. They threw themselves at the cauldron of soup, poured it in a fight, and then fell to the ground and licked food crumbs and dust from the street. [...] we were not able adapt to the inhuman environment.⁷⁴

The following is another passage about the transit camp to which the author was marched along with thousands of other women during the so-called "death marches" after the evacuation of the main camp:

At Ravensbrück, the "luxury" camp, where Lapins had their dignity and where we cared more about the school and a book than a soup, the struggle for food was something foreign to us. We did not know how to fight for food. So even not once we did get food.⁷⁵

Conclusion

Norman Cousins claimed that history is a great early warning system. For many politicians, journalists, scientists, doctors and medical students who are guided by this maxim, the ethical aspects of past and current medical experiments on humans are still subject to heated debate.

I recently had the opportunity to read a paper *The Power to Kill: Medical atrocities and Nuremberg Code*, presented at the 14th symposium of the Canadian medical students at the University of Calgary in Canada, which took place in April 2005. The paper focused on the medical experiments, including sulfonamide and tissue regeneration carried out on 74 Polish

⁷³ Paul Weindling 'The Nuremberg Medical Trial, 1946/47: Transcripts, Material of the Prosecution and Defense, Related Documents.' English ed., on behalf of the Stiftung für Sozialgeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts, ed. Klaus Dörner, Angelika Ebbinghaus, and Karsten Linne, in cooperation with Karl Heinz Roth and Paul Weindling (Munich: Saur, 1999), microfiche ed., fiche 262, frame 23 (hereafter NMT)

⁷⁴ *I boję się snów*; piąte wydanie, Święty Paweł, 2001 str.150

⁷⁵ Ibid;p.166

inmates in Ravensbrück concentration camp and impact of the experiments on the establishment of the Nuremberg Code. The paper written by Agnes Hassa, a grand daughter of Mrs. Jadwiga Dzido-Hassa operated in Ravensbrück has raised great interest among the participants.

In the Wolfgang Weyers's book: *The abuse of man: An illustrated history of dubious medical experimentation*⁷⁶ a last chapter is titled: *The end of Story?*

In it, the author explains that it would be naive to think that carrying suspicious and ethically dubious medical experiments on humans has not been taking place after the WWII. Weyers says that during the reign of the Khmers Rouge (in years 1975-1979) in Cambodia near Phnom Penh, in prison for political opponents, victims were bled to death then experimentators submerged their bodies in a tank of water and then took notes about the length of time in which victims bodies showed up on the surface. In Communist Romania, unknown treatments for AIDS were tested on orphaned children in a hospital near Bucharest.

In 1991, shortly after the fall of communism in East Germany experiments conducted on men, women and children came to light, in which steroids were tested - they were supposed to increase the performance of athletes of this country. Victims were not asked for permission to participate in such tests.

In 1998, medical experiments with biological and chemical weapons were conducted on 95 prisoners at Abu Ghraib in Iraq.

In September 1999, 18 year old man from Tucson, Arizona died as a result of the tests associated with the development of gene therapy. These tests were conducted by researchers at the Medical University of Pennsylvania. The man was not fully informed about all the consequences of this experiment.

In June 2001, 24 year old Ellen Roche working as a technician at Johns Hopkins University, died of asthma after the experiments conducted on her by researchers at the university. The victim agreed to carry out experiments however she was not informed that the medicine used in the experiment had not been approved by the office of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. In all the examples mentioned above at least one of the rules of the Nuremberg Code was broken.

No monographic study ever was devoted to the history of Ravensbrück Lapins. The vast documentation of the 74 Polish women from Ravensbrück is spread in archives around the world: at the Swedish University of Lund; the Polish Institute of National Remembrance; the French Museum of Contemporary History and the Holocaust Museum in Washington. This is a big topic where issues of medical ethics are only a small part of it. This subject is a diamond of Polish martyrdom, not only because it brings out into the light shimmers of distinct colors of heroic attitudes of Polish victims, not only because for a historian it is a clear example of what is the essence of crimes against humanity, but above all because of the excellent documentation which mainly exists through the efforts of the victims themselves. The topic from historical perspective exposes the ethical and legal concept of harm and the concept of indemnation as necessary element for regaining faith in the goodness of human kind.

At the core of this tragic story are intertwined: the German occupation of Poland; genocidal experiments carried out by Nazi Doctors and the fate of Lapins enslaved under the Soviets rules after WWII was ended. Cordiality which American citizens showed through

⁷⁶ Ardoe Scribendi.Ltd.,2003

Ravensbrueck Lapins Project to Polish victims of the experiments gives the appearance of the happy ending to the story.

There are still people who are proposing to close once and for all the subject of Polish martyrdom. Some of them are children of the victims of Nazism. They argue that the martyrdom of Poles was not the only one in the history of mankind.

But, I am afraid that as a result of this reasoning it may be that the generation of Poles born after the WWII will know little or nothing about the medical experiments conducted in German concentration camps on Polish citizens. Polish government, in the seventies and eighties of the XX-century, showed complete ignorance when determining the number of Polish victims of the medical experiments. Let us hope, that the young generation of Poles will not make the same mistake.

In the West, the subject of medical experiments in Nazi era is popularized by the powerful campaign commemorating Holocaust. However, Polish martyrology of the *WWII* period faded away from popular historical knowledge of that time.

English and German historiography devoted quite a lot to the issue of the medical experiments in Nazi era. The best example is the monumental collection of documents prepared by German historians and titled *The Nuremberg Medical Trial, 1946/47: guide to the microfiche-edition*, KG Saur, 2001.

Internet is a powerful media influencing millions of people around the world. It became virtually the only encyclopedia read by them. What they might find on line becomes their common knowledge including the knowledge of history. It is ironic that on the official internet portal of the museum Mahn- und Gedenkstätte Ravensbrück

<http://www.ravensbrueck.de> there is no mention about the fact (in any language) that Polish women were the largest group of prisoners who were kept, executed and died in the camp.

Knowledge of history is needed to understand the present time and predict the future. Polish art historian countess Karolina Lanckorońska in her book biographical memoir *Wspomnienia wojenne: 22 IX 1939-5 IV 1945*⁷⁷ describes an event related to the execution of Polish women, political prisoners, which took place at a time when she was a prisoner in a concentration camp in Ravensbrück:

At that time, I understood, how practical were Germans. Instead of murdering these young and healthy Polish girls after their arrest in Poland, they brought them here, make them work hard for Nazi Germany a year or two, then just shoot them ...

That day Cetkowska told me the details of the death of her niece, Kęszycka. This was done always in the same way: the girls before going into the bunker (where they were shot - the author's remark) frantically seek professional hairdressers, who in the camp were few and made a very nice haircut. Then after that they went there... Jesus Christ, I thought, after all, Herodotus wrote about the Spartans who before the battle of Thermopylae combed their hair so carefully, knowing very well that they must die! Messengers of Xerxes, who tried to persuade them to surrender, could not understand that.

Lanckorońska's historical knowledge allowed her to associate these two distant in time events and give them a deep and timeless meaning. It should be noted that Karolina Lanckorońska, shortly after the evacuation of the camp in Ravensbrück, provided a list of 74 Polish women operated in the camp to the International Committee of the Red Cross in Switzerland. In the process of gathering documentation for obtaining compensation for Polish

⁷⁷ Znak, 2001 p. 242-243

victims from the Federal Government of West Germany, on 23 April 1958, the authenticity of this list was confirmed and notarized by Carl J. Burckhardt, former president of the organization.

Loss of homeland, illness, separation and loss of many members of their families represents the tragic fate of nearly all Poles of the WWII generation. To learn from the experiences of previous generations is a necessity for the continuation of a nation's spirit.

Thus, each succeeding generation has a moral debt of knowing the history of its own nation. In particular, the debt might be repaid by commemorating of the nation's martyrdom.

In the hall of the Polish section in the museum of the Ravensbrück concentration camp, there is a sculpture made by a former prisoner of the camp Zofia Pociłowska-Kann and are two black plaques hanging on the wall with printed names of Polish women; among them names of some on whom medical experiments were done, all of them political prisoners who were shot in this camp. To the right of this list appear thirty-two photographs of the victims. Then there is a large inscription in German that reads: *IF THE ECHO OF THEIR VOICES GET SILENT WE WILL PARISH.*

Jarek Gajewski
Toronto, May 2011