

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 of talking to Mrs. Helena Hegier-Rafalska by phone. She was one of the few living Polish victims of medical experiments conducted by German doctors at the Ravensbrück concentration camp.² Purposely, I did not touch on any topic related to World War II. Instead, our conversation turned to her few months' stay in the U.S.A. in 1959. She expressed her admiration for Americans, who in 1958-1959, on their initiative, organized and funded the medical treatment in the United States for her and the other thirty-one Polish victims of German medical experiments.³ After the phone conversation with Mrs. Helena Hegier-Rafalska, I decided to look closer at the genesis, implementation and circumstances dubbed by the editors and readers of the weekly *The Saturday Review: Ravensbrueck Lapins Project*. I decided to research available information regarding the origins, goals and effects of this great initiative of private American citizens. I wrote this article, titled "*Odzyskana wiara w ludzi*" (Regained faith in People), initially for Polish readers. The title comes from Mrs. Stefania Łotocka's article, where on behalf of all women who visited the U.S.A in 1958-1959, she expressed her gratitude to organizers of the *Ravensbrueck Lapins Project*.⁴ I cite a fragment of the article later in the presentation.

Hopefully, the presentation will bring the readers closer to the atmosphere of this remarkable initiative, presenting facts from the perspective of the American people of goodwill and Polish victims of barbarian experiments.

I sent a draft of this article to Mrs. Helena Hegier-Rafalska in Spring 2007. She was one of a few people to read it before its official publication. In response, she sent me a letter thanking, in warm words, for presenting the story of *Lapins* and their visit to the U.S.A. in 1959. She wrote:

I have read your paper. It touched my heart because it is not only about victims of crimes against humanity but also about people of "Big Hearts". Lovely Miss Caroline Ferriday, Dr. Hitzig, Norman Cousins - they were wonderful people and true friends in every sense of the word. They organized our stay in the U.S.A., which for us was the

¹ The poem's author is Grażyna Chrostowska (Translated from Polish by the author of the article). She wrote it on 13 April 1942 - five days before the Ravensbrück's camp firing squad executed Grażyna and her sister.

² Mrs. Hegier Rafalska died on 22nd May 2017

³ I explained, further in the article, why the official number was thirty-five Lapins visiting U.S.A.

⁴ Stefania Łotocka, *I Regained My Faith In People*; Dziennik Polski, March 20, 1959

fantastic realization of fairy tales from *One Thousand and One Nights*. We always will be honouring their memory. We thank so many Americans who opened their houses to us, and I would like to express my gratitude to those doctors from Beth Israel Hospital in Boston who saved my leg.

Encouraged by her response, I decided to send the article to the quarterly *Glaukopis*, where it was published in 2007. Since then, I have translated the original article to English and, after revision, posted it on my website at the University of Toronto in 2011⁵.

In the current version of the article, I added recollections of Mrs. Hager-Rafalska during her stay in the United States in 1958-1959.

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 crimes perpetrated by German Doctors. 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 inhuman dictatorial philosophy.

Leo Alexander, a medical consultant to the Chief Prosecutor at Nuremberg Doctors' Trial, in his famous article 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"⁶; Polish historian and social philosopher Feliks Koneczny puts it in reference to Nazi ideology: "the symbol of anti-Christian aspirations is a broken cross (this is Hakenkreuz)"⁷.

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"⁸.

Those 74 Polish women; patriots, deeply religious Catholics, and couriers of the Union for Armed Struggle (*Związek Walki Zbrojnej*) were sentenced to death without trials by Germans. Many synonyms can be found in historiography describing them; the SS called them *fanatische Polinnen* when walked them to executions at the camp wall; German Doctors called them *Meerschweinchen* (*Guinea Pigs*), the camp inmates called them *Kaninchen*, *Lapins*, English press called them *Nazi human 'Guinea Pigs' or Rabbits*, Polish press *Króliczki*⁹, the victims called themselves *Króle*.

On the one hand, this paper presents 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* by presenting facts from the period of World War II. The Cold War intertwined with the sufferings of the victims and their struggle to survive.

⁵ <http://individual.utoronto.ca/jarekg/Ravensbruck/Aftermath.html>

⁶ *Medical Science Under Dictatorship* by Leo Alexander, *The New England Journal of Medicine*; 1949

⁷ Feliks Koneczny, *Cywilizacja Żydowska, O hitleryzmie*

⁸ *Dialogue in Warsaw; Report on the Ravensbrueck Lapins* [The Saturday Review, June 28, 1958, p.9-11, 32-36]

⁹ Zygmunt Broniarek; *Króliczki z Ravensbrueck za oceanem; Za wolność i lud nr 7 (136); lipiec 1959 rok*

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 28 of June 1958. The third one is Dr. Hitzig's report, titled *A visit to Warsaw*, written on 20 October 1958. In the fourth part, describing a visit of Polish women to the U.S.A., I used the articles published in the Polish and American press. Additionally, I translated from Polish, Mrs. Helena Hegier – Rafalska's written recollection of the trip to the U.S.A. and present it in its entirety further in the article. 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*.¹⁰

Other passages, describing the circumstances of the brutal experiments carried out on the Polish inmates in Ravensbrück 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; Nuremberg Trials Project and made available on the Internet¹¹.

For readers who want a closer look at the subject of criminal experiments conducted on the 74 Polish women in Ravensbrück, 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*¹², more memoirs of other operated Polish women *Ponad ludzką miarę: wspomnienia operowanych z Ravensbrück*¹³, *Ravensbrück, kobiety obóz koncentracyjny (a chapter about Medical Experiment)*¹⁴ by the former prisoner Wanda Kiedrzyńska, and written by the former concentration camp prisoner in Neuengamme prof. Dr. Stanisław Sterkowicz, an expert on this subject: *Kobiety obóz koncentracyjny Ravensbrück*.¹⁵ The professor's wife, Mrs. Janina Sterkowicz was one of the *Lapins* who visited the United States thanks to *Lapins Ravensbrück Project*.

Many previously unpublished information about *Lapins* and pictures presented in the article I have received from Anna Hassa-Jarosky, living in the United States. Anna is the daughter of the late Mrs. Jadwiga Dzido-Hassa, who was one of the *Lapins* and represented them in the *Lapins Ravensbrück Project*.¹⁶

Why had Polish victims of the German medical experiments been invited to the U.S.?

Norman Cousins, the promoter of this philanthropic initiative, in the article mentioned above *Dialogue in Warsaw* describes establishing the organizing committee *Ravensbrueck Lapins Project*:

¹⁰ *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; vol. 1

¹¹ <https://nuremberg.law.harvard.edu/>

¹² *I boję się snów*; piąte wydanie, Święty Paweł, 2001

¹³ Wydanie trzecie; Warszawa, Książka i Wiedza, 1972

¹⁴ Wydanie drugie; Książka i Wiedza, 1965

¹⁵ *Kobiety obóz koncentracyjny Ravensbrück*; [Włocławek: Włocławskie Towarzystwo Naukowe, 2006]

¹⁶ A letter from Caroline Ferriday on behalf of *Lapins Ravensbrueck Project* sent to Jadwiga Dzido-Hassa on 19 November 1958

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 a 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.¹⁷ 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.¹⁸

Further in the article, Cousin describes how Caroline Ferriday, after meeting with Mrs. Piasecka, joined the effort to help *Lapins* living in Poland. She used all available diplomatic channels and contacts with various foundations to further the cause.

Caroline Woolsey Ferriday was born in 1902. Her father owned a large estate in Louisiana and was a wealthy merchant in New York. During her youth, she tried an acting career in theatre in Shakespeare plays and from the earliest years, she devoted her life to philanthropy. After 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 fundraising for orphaned children, whose parents, members of the French resistance movement perished 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. Anise Postel-Vinay, the former prisoner of Ravensbrück concentration camp, whose role in the project will be discussed later in this article, introduced two *Lapins* from Ravensbrück to Caroline, Nina Iwańska and Helena Piasecka. Since then, Caroline has devoted all her energy to helping *Lapins*, who lived 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 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 American volunteers, operating under a private foundation, *The Hiroshima Peace Centre 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, there was a meeting in mid-1958.

¹⁷ Mrs. Piasecka died in November 2006, is buried in the St. Mary's Cemetery in Cleveland.

¹⁸ *The Saturday Review*, 28 June, 1958

This meeting became the nucleus of *the Lapins Ravensbrück Project*. At the meeting, Caroline discussed how the experiments of the German doctors had permanently maimed Polish women. After fifteen years, many of these victims' health conditions were still deplorable and, in some cases, even 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 sulphonamides, which purported to prevent cases of clostridium perfringens resulting from injuries sustained by German soldiers on the Eastern front - this is the official version of the purpose of the experiments 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 12 mentally ill prisoners of other nationalities about whom there is little information available.

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.¹⁹

Journey into the heart of darkness

Cousins asked Caroline Ferriday to provide any documentation about these experiments as well as information on the 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 the Nuremberg trials. Medical experiments, which Polish women were subjected to in Ravensbrück were two types: sulfonamide experiments and bone, muscle, and nerve transplantation experiments. There were several other experiments including malaria, typhus, incendiary bombs, with saltwater, in freezing water, at high altitudes, jaundice, sterilization (done also in Ravensbrück on Roma girls) and many more - conducted by German doctors in other concentration camps on massive scale.

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 responsible for their actions. According to them, they exercised only the orders of their 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' Trial²⁰, explained the procedure of the first kind of experiments:

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ 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; vol. 1.

‘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’²¹

The above procedure was modified after the Surgeon General of the Reich, Dr. Ernst Robert Gravit, 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 Weronika Kraska, oedema malignum for Aniela Lefanowicz, Alfreda Kiecol and Zofia Prus, caused their death. Later in the course of the experiments, 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 cause gas gangrene. Cultures of the bacteria were specially prepared for these experiments by Waffen S.S. Institute of Hygiene, led by Dr. Mrugowski. Then, filled with infected material, the wounds were closed, and the legs of the victims were put in plaster.

One hour after completion of the operation, one 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 sulphonamides. The *Kaninchen* in the control group were not given sulphonamides.²²

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

‘After the arrival of Doctor Stumpfegger from general headquarters in the fall of 1942, Professor Gebhardt declared before some of his co-workers that he had received orders to continue with the tests at Ravensbrueck on a larger scale. In this connection,

Doc. No. NO-228, Pros. Ex. No. 206 Description of Document: sulfanilamide experiments conducted in the concentration camp Ravensbrück, Affidavit of defendant Fischer, 19 November 1946, concerning)

²¹ 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.

²² Harvard Law School Library Item, Digital Project Collection; Nuernberg Trials Project

No.: 2034 Personal Author: Zofia Mączka (Dr., prisoner at Ravensbrueck) Literal Title: Information about the experimental operations which took place in Ravensbrück 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)

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. 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 physicians. 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.²³

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

²³ 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

one of the experimental subjects used was pardoned after the completion of the experiments²⁴

To illustrate what the victims felt and what did they think, and under what circumstances they were subject to these experiments, let me quote some passages from the book by Wanda Póltawska *I boję się snów*. She was in the group of Polish prisoners subjected to sulfanilamide experiments. Later in the article, I provide testimonies of three other *Kaninchen* in the Doctors' Trial. They were in the group subjected to regeneration of bone, muscle and nerve tissues.

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*.²⁵ The same six girls, the same left by us jackets, the same shots, only now Wanda [Kulczyk]²⁶ 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; Dziunia repeated them later as well and many others. No, 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 *I TK*, Zielonka *III* and mine was *III TK*. What does this mean?²⁷

²⁴ Ibid p. 393, No-487, Pros.Ex 208

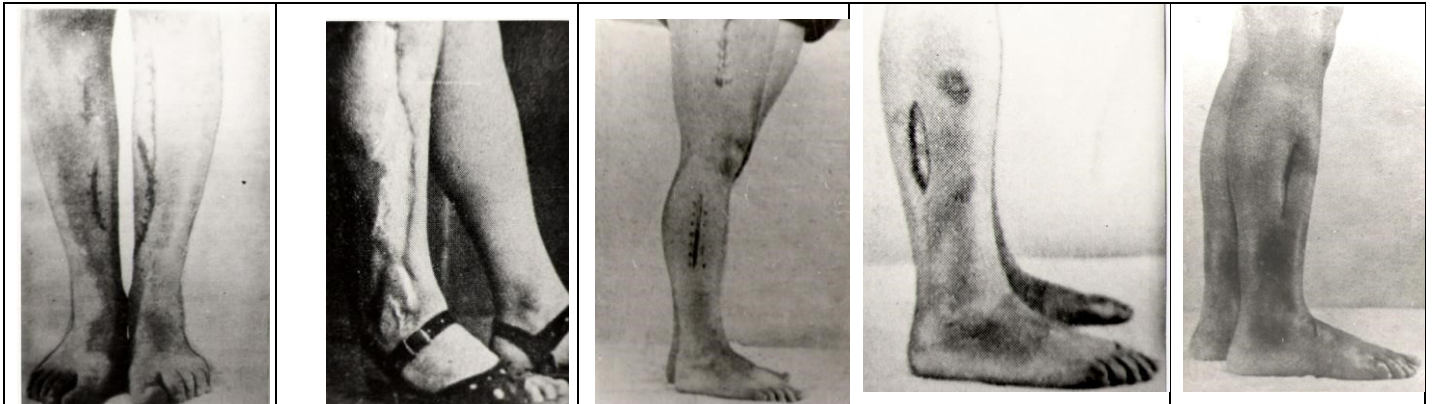
²⁵ Camp hospital- author's note

²⁶ Author's note

²⁷ 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: Schäfer, S.: *Zum Selbstverständnis von Frauen im Konzentrationslager: das Lager Ravensbrück*; PhD thesis 2002, TU Berlin see also: 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

[...] Wanda's scream drilled into our ears, reaching brains. [...] Anielka's [Okoniewska]²⁸ 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 nurse]²⁹ 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 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 degrees in Celsius. – What? And I am still conscious? Zielonkowa (Maria Zielonka)³⁰ 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 the 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.³¹



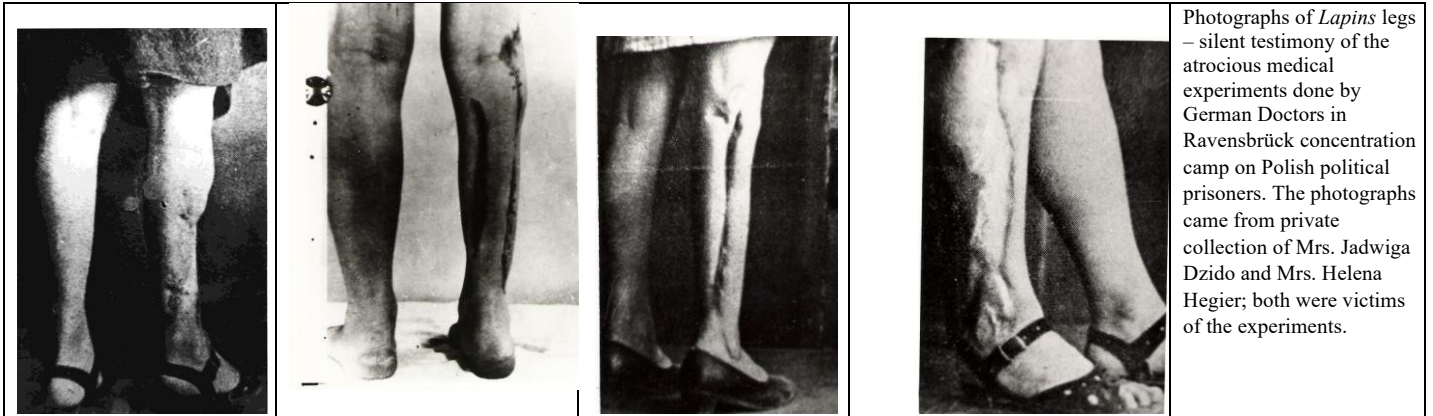
Type: A non-trial evidence files document from which a trial document was derived. Evidence File Name: NO
 Source of Text: IMT/NMT Typescript--English Trial Transcript Citation: Trial Name: NMT 01. Medical Case -
 USA v. Karl Brandt, et al., English Transcript: p. 10565 (1 July 1947) as well see: Schäfer, S.: Zum
 Selbstverständnis von Frauen im Konzentrationslager: das Lager Ravensbrück; PhD thesis 2002, TU Berlin

²⁸ Author's note

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ "I boję się snów" [fifth edition, Święty Paweł, 2001, p 83-109] – translated by the author



The Nuremberg Doctors' Trial

The documents presented at the trial before the 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. The American Military Tribunal, which lasted from December 9, 1946, to August 20, 1947, took place after the other trials before the International Military Tribunal, composed of Judges representing the four powers: The United States, Britain, France and the USSR.

The International Tribunal tried cases of major German war criminals. The American Military Tribunal, without USSR participation, in the 12 trials convicted Germans 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 elaborating a while longer to present the atmosphere that has prevailed during the process. The most significant difficulty for the prosecutor of the American Military Tribunal was to find evidence and relevant witnesses on which the prosecutor could base his accusations. Proof of the prosecutor was not sufficiently complete while opening the hearing on December 9, 1946, to guarantee the success of convicting defendants. Indirect knowledge of witnesses would make a testimony unreliable. A counsel of the accused could, without any great effort, discredit the 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 judges' eyes. It happened before that a former prisoner of the camp was confabulating facts to help the prosecutor. December 10, 1946, after a conversation with Dr. Franz Blaha, a former prisoner of Dachau, Dr. Alexander wrote the following note in his diary: "A disappointment. An obvious faker."³²

The prosecution team, which Brigadier General Telford Taylor chaired, 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 the one hand, the circumstances in which medical experiments on humans can be justifiable, and on the other what legal basis determines that such medical investigations are crimes under international law.

³² Ulf Schmit „Justice at Nuremberg: Leo Alexander and Nazi Doctors' Trial“; Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004

Besides four Polish women - aforementioned "Rabbits" - testifying as prosecution witnesses in the case of experiments with sulphonamide and regeneration of bone, muscle and nerve tissues conducted at the Ravensbrück 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.

At Nuremberg trials prosecutors used a new descriptive concept. It was introduced in 1944 by Polish professor of Law, Raphael Lemkin in his book *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*. Professor Lemkin deem to be - not without some controversy at that time - the founder of the legal concept of Genocide. Professor Lemkin knew Dr. Leo Alexander when they both worked at the University of Durham in North Carolina. The idea of applying scientific methods to the destruction of human life called by Dr. Alexander *Ktenology* – the science of putting people to death or *Thanatology* (from the Greek *Thanatos* - "death") is a particular case of the concept of *Genocide* attributed to Lemkin. Since 1948, Lemkin's idea became part of 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 particular case of Genocide.³³

In the methods used by German doctors in their experiments, there were no indications of the reduction in risk of death of Polish women. Five of them died immediately after surgery. The lack of respect for the victims' lives and conducting the experiments without victims' consent - despite their open protest - undermined the so-called *tu quo que* (you also) argument of defence, the opinion based on the Allies experiments on humans.³⁴ The following are excerpts of Władysława Karolewska's testimony before the 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

³³ Ibid p. 166

³⁴ 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 the 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 of Nazi scientists after the Second World War on a large scale also occurred in the USSR [author's remark].

prisoners." We did not get any answer, and we were not allowed to talk to the commandant.³⁵

Of the 23 defendants in the Doctors' Trial, seven - including four physicians- received death penalty, seven were acquitted, five received life imprisonment, four a sentence of several years of imprisonment later reduced to early release. The fact that the two of Dr. Gephardt's assistants, Dr. Oberheuser and Dr. Fisher, "escaped hangman's noose" was the result of examining their case before the U.S. Tribunal and not before British or Polish courts, as Allies originally planned.³⁶ The plans ultimately were given up by the British authorities.

In 1945, the Polish public prosecutor gathered testimonies of *Ravensbrück's Kaninchen*. Additionally, professor Kornel Michejda conducted medical examinations of the victims in the Gdansk Medical Academy in 1946.³⁷ Both events were aimed at gathering evidence for the planned trial of some German Doctors before the Polish court.

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

MR. HARDY:³⁸

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?

³⁵ „Trials of war criminals before the Nuernberg Military Tribunals under Control Council law no. 10“; str. 415

³⁶ Ulf Schmidt: „The Scars of Ravensbrück“: Medical Experiments and British War Crimes Policy, 1945-1950 German History, Vol. 23, No. 1, 20-49 (2005)

³⁷ Kornal Michejda, *Operacje doswiadczone w obozie koncentracyjnym Ravensbruck*, Biuletyn Główniej Komisji Badania Zbrodni Hitlerowskich w Polsce 2 (1947)

³⁸ Alexander G. Hardy, prosecutor from Boston – the author's remark

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 was sent with them. –

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

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 what 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 the morning. German nurse came, shaved my legs, and gave me something 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 fellow prisoners 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? ³⁹

WITNESS DZIDO: Yes.

Q. Point out who else you recognize, Witness.

³⁹ 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

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.

The Polish women, including two sisters, Władysława 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 Trommer⁴⁰ 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.⁴¹

For Helena Piasecka's sister, Władysława, 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:

Dr. Trommer 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 gave 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 Trommer saying, "That is all." [...]
I regained consciousness, but I don't know when. Then I noticed that a German nurse was taking off my dress, I then lost my 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 fever. In the

⁴⁰ [Dr Richard Trommer SS-Hauptsturmfürer]; the author's remark

⁴¹ Trials of war criminals before the Nuernberg Military Tribunals under Control Council law no. 10; Selection from the Argumentation of the Prosecution p.396

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.⁴² After completion Władysława Karolewska's testimony, judge turned to the defence counsel:

PRESIDING JUDGE BEALS: Do any of the defence 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 defence 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, Władysława Karolewska, a teacher, Mary Broel-Plater a bacteriologist and Jadwiga Dzido, a pharmacy student, he confessed to Leo Alexander: "I was going to stand up and say, I did not take it anymore, hang me immediately."⁴³

Kaninchen outsmarted their German captors in Ravensbrück by providing information about the experiments outside the camp. London's BBC published the report, which probably was why the camp authorities hesitated for some time before they decided to kill all the victims of medical experiments. The camp authorities erased all traces of their criminal activities the last months before the evacuation. *Kaninchen* miraculously managed to save their lives (5 died immediately due to the experiments, 6 with still unhealed wounds SS executed in the camp, and the rest, 63 of them, miraculously survived thanks to the help of other inmates). Just before the evacuation of the Ravensbrück, almost every day, the authorities and camp doctors were selecting thousands of sick prisoners to kill them in the gas chamber near the central part of the camp. Their bodies were later incinerated in the nearest crematorium. To picture what was it like the "hunting for rabbits," please read the following fragment from the book mentioned earlier 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 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 short, and we heard the howling of one thousand women, yelling like from hell. Shura kept her word [She was in a group of Russian prisoners

⁴² 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.

⁴³ 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

engaged in repairing electrical equipment in the camp].⁴⁴ 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 clamour and tumult prevented the counting and searching for us. We were determined to fight to 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.⁴⁵

That way they survived, changing the numbers, hiding in underground shelters until the last day before the evacuation of the camp. There was 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!⁴⁶

Póltawska's heroines survived again this time unharmed. Other women, prisoners of the camp were less fortunate.⁴⁷

Planning the project

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 she collected on the *Lapins* in 1951.

This documentation is now available in the Museum of Contemporary History in France and the Holocaust Museum in Washington.

⁴⁴ The author's remark

⁴⁵ „I boję się snów” p. 155 – translated by the author of the article

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 182 – translated by the author of the article

⁴⁷ 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: Hungarian, German women. Jewish women in this case hoped that their emaciated bodies – their weighed 30 kg – would deter Soviet soldiers. They were wrong.

Cousins had thus an opportunity to see the details of the CVs and the results of medical experiments of 53 *Lapins*, who lived in Poland.⁴⁸ Half of them had not been married. Most of them were teenagers or in their twenties during the medical experiments in the Ravensbrück 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 completed dentistry education, another two graduated from pharmacy school. One of them taught geography at the University of Lublin⁴⁹, another was a teacher in high school. Some of them were unable to work due to illness or disability. Experiments conducted by German physicians resulted in permanent disability for 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 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.⁵⁰

During the meeting, participants discussed why German physicians were not opposed to such experiments. It came out that during the trial in Nuremberg, at least 200 German doctors carried out the murderous experiments on humans in the Third Reich, and about 300 others knew about the existence of such investigations. Dr. Simon explained to the participants of the meeting that after the Nuremberg Trial, the World Medical Association extended the text of doctors' Hippocratic Oath 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*. Several questions remained unanswered: whether they want to come to the U.S.? Will American doctors offer some help to *Lapins* in addition to the one received from doctors in Poland? Cousins decided to investigate the situation on the spot in Poland personally and then pass the matter before the Committee of *Ravensbrueck Lapins Project* consisting of the following persons:

⁴⁸ 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 Ravensbrück camp.

⁴⁹ Krystyna Czyż-Wilgatowa, was a faculty member at University of Maria Curie-Skłodowska in Lublin.

⁵⁰ The Saturday Review, 28 June, 1958, p. 11

President: Norman Cousins, *Medical Consultant:* 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, *Buffalo:* 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 Viscount, 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 modelled 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 institutions associated with ZBoWiD. Norman Cousins explains to the readers of *The Saturday Review* that ZBoWiD is an organization of former concentration camp prisoners. He may not realize that the organization under the umbrella of the 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 to his readers that cultural event, supposedly to give them the impression that the idealistic hopes of achieving global peace had slowly yet finally materialized. He expressed hopes so many times in his publications. He supported negotiations on halting the nuclear arms race between the USSR and the U.S.

The next day, the American embassy had recommended Cousins an interpreter, Mrs. Frubowa, who helped him contact the authorities of ZBoWiD and some *Lapins* who lived in Warsaw.

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-storey block of flats where Jadwiga Dzido-Hassa lived, Mrs. Frubowa gave Cousins a 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 that the last war wasn't the first time the Germans spread death through Poland, which our history is full of that. We love our freedom. I think, we have proved that. But there is the feeling that people on the outside don't care very much. You will probably find out how powerful that feeling is in the case of the ladies who suffered from the surgical experiments fifteen years ago and are still suffering its consequences while waiting for help."⁴⁹

Norman Cousins was deeply impressed by what he heard from Mrs. Frubowa. Unfortunately, he missed Mrs. Dzido-Hassa, so he postponed the meeting to 6:00 PM at the Bristol Hotel. For Cousins, this was the first and most important meeting during his brief visit to Poland, and the second took place in ZBoWiD the next day.

As Cousins described them in his article, a closer look at both meetings will enable today's readers to understand those times' social and political climate. 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.

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 offer similar aid for Polish women. The answer he heard from both women expressed some suspicion and disbelief in the success of such an undertaking. Norman Cousins was not surprised by their reaction. Before Cousins' departure to Warsaw, his Polish friend had warned him that these women would suspect a trap. After so many years, people are vigilant about watching what is happening behind their backs in the occupied country.

Cousins was born a gifted negotiator. In 1957 he founded a *National Committee for Sane Nuclear Policy* (SANE) and became its first president. Thanks to his diplomatic talents, he mediated between the Vatican, the Kremlin and the White House in halting nuclear weapons testing. The diplomatic maneuvering led to the ratification of the agreement between the USSR and the U.S. in 1963. Cousins knew John Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev.

For his contribution to the reduction of nuclear arms, Pope John XXIII gave him papal medallion.

Cousins knew that medical assistance in the U.S. for *Lapins* living behind the Iron Curtain is possible only with communist authorities' consent. Several months before the arrival of *Lapins* to the U.S., he published *Dialog in Warsaw* in June 1958.

In order not to jeopardize the project, he could not write directly to American readers about facts, of which he seemed to be fully aware. For example, 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 communist Poland.

Although two years passed since a new leader of the communist party came to power, Gomulka, initially regarded by the West and many politically naive Poles as the herald of democracy, the political climate 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 article *Dialog in Warsaw*, readers may feel Cousins' great respect for Polish women. Because he 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 this had not been the only reason for his reverence for those courageous women whom he met in Warsaw. He knew the story of their struggle. He also understood 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: "*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 that what they had suffered from German doctors disgusted him but did not arouse hatred. After reading the testimony from the Nuremberg Trials, he just felt ashamed that he was representative of the human species. These criminals were not 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 their guilt.

No compensation from the Germans for the Polish victims of medical experiments in Ravensbrück also had another aspect which most clearly is illustrated by the history of the accused in the Doctors' Trial, Dr. Herta Oberheuser.

In her request for clemency, addressed in June 1950 to the U.S. High Commissioner John McCoy, she 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 and 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 had reduced the penalty of Herta Oberheuser from 20 years of imprisonment to 10. In April 1952, after spending only five years, she was released from Landsberg prison.

After Dr. Oberheuser left prison, a former Nazi, Dennhardt, a member of the postwar "Deutsche Partei," 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 got a job at a sanatorium in Plön and ran a private medical practice as a paediatrician in a nearby village Stocksee. One of the sanatorium patients, who was a former prisoner in this camp, recognized Herta Oberheuser. As a result of the protest of the survivors of the Ravensbrück camp, ballyhooed by the journal *Die Tat*, a criminal case was brought to court against Dr. Oberheuser in February 1956, for killing by lethal injection of 18 prisoners of the camp.

As a consequence, Dr. Oberheuser had to leave the sanatorium in Plön. However, the prosecutor in Kiel dismissed the case against her and Dr. Oberheuser did not lose her license to practice medicine.

Weekly *Die Tat* and former prisoners did not give up. In January 1957, the prosecutor began preliminary hearings against Herta Oberheuser. The higher regional court in Schleswig-Holstein, on September 5, 1957, acquitted her. As the legal basis for its decision, the court adopted the agreement reached in Paris on October 23, 1954, between the German Federal Government and the occupying authorities. Under which, no court can start proceedings against a person for the same offences, who was already sentenced for crimes at the Nuremberg Trial. Simply put, thanks to German courts biased leniency, Dr. Oberheuser avoided a “hangman’s noose” again.

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, under public pressure, revoked Dr. Oberheuser's right to practice the medical profession.

Dr. Herta Oberheuser felt a victim of a conspiracy of Communists and former prisoners in the Ravensbrück concentration camp. However, as a result of the appeal procedure and the Stocksee local population's support, Dr. Oberheuser could continue her medical practice.

Only after five years of the battle of public opinion and, after another confrontation in the judicial district court of the Land Schleswig-Holstein, on April 28, 1961, Dr. Oberheuser gave up her medical license. Her medical career had ended forever.⁵¹

Lapins living in Poland learned about compensations for victims of medical experiments in concentration camps awarded by the West Germany government from Nina Iwańska, Helena Piasecka, Jadwiga Kamińska and Zofia Baj-Kotkowska. Like many other victims of the criminal experiments residing outside of Poland, they received monthly financial support plus other compensations for imprisonment, hard work, and personal injury. Even those former prisoners of Ravensbrück who lived outside of Poland and were not subject to medical experiments received monthly compensations.

At the meeting with Cousins in Hotel Bristol, both women drew attention to the desperate financial situation of the victims of medical experiments 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 about \$ 0.93, you could buy one gallon of milk⁵² and a minimum hourly wage of workers in the United States, at that time, was \$1 dollar.⁵³

⁵¹ Ulrike Steenbuck, Herta Oberheuser - Ärztin in Ravensbrück. Biographie einer Täterin in „Ich habe mir Deutschland vom Leibe zu halten versucht. “Frauen im Nationalsozialismus und der Umgang „nachgeborener” Frauen mit dem Gedenken. ISBN 3-928794-24-8; Sabine Kock, Margot Kröger (Hg.)

⁵² Author’s remark – see: <https://www.classmates.com/blog/article/food-prices-in-the-1950s/>

⁵³ Author’s remark – see: <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/WHD/legacy/files/chart.pdf>

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, West Germany would not continue to discriminate against the Polish victims of the German doctors' crimes in respect of the reparations.

Cousins added that pressure against East Germany [GDR] was formally impossible for the United States. Launching the action plan Cousins proposed was still one obstacle to be removed, namely obtaining an official "blessing" from ZBoWiD.

That is why, the next day, he attended a meeting at the institution entirely controlled by Communist Party. Present at the meeting were Fuksiewicz and Matysiak representing ZBoWiD, and a lawyer representing *Lapins* in the negotiations with Germany, Dr. Adam Zacharski⁵⁴.

ZBoWiD representatives accepted Cousins' plan and reported to him that, together with *Lapins*, there were 100 victims of other medical experiments who lived in Poland. It is worth noting here that the number of other Polish victims of German medical experiments who submitted their claims for compensation was going to increase in subsequent negotiations with the West Germany government. Ultimately, in the seventies the number of claimants will be 60 times higher than that indicated to Cousins at the meeting at ZBoWiD headquarters. I will outline this issue more at the end of the article.

The remaining time of the meeting at the ZBoWiD's headquarters, participants devoted to creating the Polish medical commission, whose task was to perform a physical examination of *Lapins* and determine which ones can go for treatment to the U.S. The commission also had to provide a list of medications needed for *Lapins* once they were in America.

After these initial medical examinations, they agreed that the American medical commission would come to Warsaw and ultimately determine who among the victims required medical rehabilitation 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 men at ZBoWiD could not be more cooperative. Now, I can hardly wait to tell the ladies the good news."

In the last sentences written by Norman Cousins in his article *Dialogue in Warsaw*, there is a sense of well-fulfilled mission but also the desire to return to the family quickly:

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.

⁵⁴ Dr. Zacharski was a former concentration camp prisoner – author's remark

Preparations for departure

On 25 September, 1958⁵⁵ 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 32 of 53 victims of medical experiments living in Poland at that time to establish who might go to the U.S.A. for further treatment.

Dr. Hitzig's visit to Warsaw followed Caroline Ferriday's visit, 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 is worth noting 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 actual victims of medical experiments in Ravensbrück as "dyed rabbits" - were included in the group travelling to the U.S. under pressure from the communist party and ZBoWiD authorities. All three had nothing to do with *Lapins*.

Two of the three, the only ones 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 able to compare the two countries under the communist regimes and compare the political mentality of the various representatives of both societies, in the Polish People's Republic and the Soviet Union, in particular doctors. 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 the need for alleviation of human pain and suffering. [...] When I returned from Moscow, I became immediately aware, despite previous inconveniences and restrictions in Warsaw, that 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.⁵⁶

The spirit of hope, for scientific cooperation between the Polish and American doctors, accompanied numerous meetings of the 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 arthritis treatment.

Then the idea of training some of the women from *Lapin's* group in physiotherapy techniques led by Dr. Rusk's rehabilitation clinic was proposed. The techniques could be introduced later on in Poland.

⁵⁵ Based on the article in New York Times „Nazi Guinea pigs meet in Warsaw“ published on 28 September 1958.

⁵⁶ Report by Dr. Hitzig titled *A visit to Warsaw*; October 20;1958

However, when Dr. Hitzig came to Warsaw, the political "thaw," which started after October of 1956, was ending. In 1957, Gomulka, the head of the communist party, shut down the popular weekly "Wprost" published by students.

Apart from universities, communist authorities imposed censorship restrictions on animators of Polish culture. In such a political climate of so-called communists fight with revisionists, Hitzig had to maneuver to accomplish the social initiative of Americans - *Ravensbrueck Lapins Project*:

I had learned 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 that 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. I was told, that even the poet Słonimski could no longer maintain any clear communications with people from the West, especially from Americans.⁵⁷

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 a Western culture still existed in the largest Catholic country in Europe, and the relative sense of freedom in comparison with what it was before October 1956.

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. It is what Dr. Hitzig meant when at a gala dinner organized by ZBoWiD for the American delegation, 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 did the representative of ZBoWiD well connected with communist nomenclature have in mind? It's hard to say, but Dr. Hitzig seemed pleasantly surprised by that.

Taking into account the political background of then Poland, Dr. Hitzig, in his report to Norman Cousins, gave seven points to justify 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.

⁵⁷ Ibid

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 discouraged 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.
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-Dąbrowski, Hausmanowa, Kodeiszko, Kuligowski, Litwin, Łapiński, 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, located on Oczki Street, at a 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, they took one by one their 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. Theirs' were pale faces, sickly 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 betray the tragedy of their concentration camp days. Most of them, however, were unable to control their emotions.⁵⁸

Later in his report to Cousins, Dr. Hitzig presents what he heard from Polish doctors during the examination of *Lapins*. It is a detailed description in the medical

⁵⁸ Ibid

jargon of the savage mutilation of women's legs. Permanent deformations in victims' limbs affected the entire skeletal system, including the spine; famine and disease in the camp completely exhausted the gastrointestinal tract and blood of those women; the dystonia neuro-vegetative as the disorder of the nervous system caused psychological devastation. 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 the above-mentioned medical committee examined.



1st row standing from left: Stanisława Michalik, Wojciecha Buraczyńska-Zeiske, Bogumiła Bąbińska-Dobrowolska-Jasiuk, Weronica Szuksztul-Gołębiowska, 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 Gişges, 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-Lysakowska
 4th row sitting: Sophia-Mrówczyńska Stefaniak, Waclawa Andrzejak-Gnatowska,
 5th row sitting: Wanda Kulczyk-Rosiewicz, Władysława Karolewska-Łapińska, Stanisława Śledziejowska-Osiczko, Stanisława Jabłońska, 58 Halina Piotrowska-Wrochno, Krystyna Czyż-Wilgat.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ 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)



Dr. Hitzig examining Mrs. Jadwiga Dzido-Hassa in Warsaw⁶⁰

Dr. Hitzig could not get over how women with devastating 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 honour at the Bristol Hotel - laughing, full of energy, he asked himself; how these women may be able to conceal their mental 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 Ravensbrück 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.⁶¹

She was Krystyna Iwańska, *Lapin* from Ravensbrück, a thirty-year-old doctor full of beauty and magic whom Dr. Hitzig met during a short examination conducted with each of the victims after the presentation by the Polish medical committee.

During her examination, he discovered the thickening hardness of the tumour on the left side of her neck, indicating the existence of cancer. The Virchow tumour was a symptom of gastric cancer.

After completion of the examination of her, Dr. Hitzig shared his opinion of the Polish doctors in a whispering voice: "Her days are numbered; she has 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 an even better doctor.

Ten days after his return from Moscow, Dr. Hitzig had already visited Krystyna in

⁶⁰ Ibid.

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

Warsaw Hospital. X-ray and further tests showed clearly the existence of a vast gastric cancer that had spread wide on the entire abdominal cavity. Contrary to the recommendations of Dr. Hitzig, Krystyna insisted on getting the operation; she thought it was just a typical stomach ulcer.

She asked Dr. Hitzig to say nothing about this disease to her sister Nina. The latter lived in Paris, where Dr. Hitzig had to stop for a short time after he departed from Warsaw to Albert Schweitzer Lambarene in Equatorial Africa.

After arriving in Paris, Caroline Ferriday introduced Nina, Krystyna's sister, to Dr. Hitzig. It was a dramatic encounter with another victim of the Nazi experiments. Nina, thanks to French diplomats, managed to escape from communist Poland after the war. In Paris, after graduating from Sorbonne, she worked as a journalist. Any funds in her disposition have been exhausted by buying the costly injections containing animal cells to cure painful skin disease.

According to Dr. Hitzig, the condition, which had a rather psychological base, so-called *neurodermatitis*, was a remnant of the camp experiences. Separation from her sister and news about deadly cancer broke Nina. The only possibility of a meeting of the two sisters was Krystyna's trip to the United States. Nina's arrival in Poland was impossible for political reasons. A few days later, she spent the rest of their savings buying expensive drugs for Krystyna. 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 August 29, 1983 in Corconne, France.

In connection with the *Ravensbrueck Lapins Project*, Dr. Hitzig had also met in Paris Frenchwoman Anise Postel-Vinay, known as Danielle. During the war, Gestapo arrested her for participation in the French Resistance and subsequently deported her to the camp in Ravensbrück. Gestapo murdered her sister at the end of the war. Her brother also was in a concentration camp.

Anise, after the war, married a politician closely associated with General de Gaulle.

The following is what she told Hitzig about the circumstances in which she met Nina Iwańska at the concentration camp:

There were thousands of women at Ravensbrück, and amongst them were many Poles who had been members of the Resistance Movement in Poland. One of them was Nina Iwańska. We were both young. I was only twenty. I became ill with abscess all over my body. One day Nina Iwańska came to my bed and said „You are a French woman so you are 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 against 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”.⁶²

⁶² Ibid

Anise Postel-Vinay, under pressure from Nina, finally took medicine. Thanks to it, after a while, ulcers on Danielle's body receded. 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. *Lapins* sent information to London through the underground channels about medical experiments conducted by German doctors in Ravensbrück camp.⁶³ But there it was, at least initially, treated as the anti-Nazi propaganda.

A few months before the camp's liquidation through the underground network, words spread that *Lapins* would be shot or gassed to erase all traces of German crimes. The prisoners of various nationalities, including French, like Anise, were involved in saving the Polish girls, hiding them and changing their camp numbers.

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

Genesis of the barbaric medical experiments in Ravensbrück according to Dr. Hitzig.

Professor Gebhardt ran a clinic in Hohenlychen near the camp in Ravensbrück. He was a personal doctor of Himmler and his subordinates. It was *offenes Geheimnis* (open secret) that the professor's "subtle" medical methods, from time to time, liquidated 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. A substance from such an inflammatory outbreak was sucked out using a syringe and then injected again, this time in the victim's bloodstream to simulate septic-pyemia.

Since it did not cause death, Gebhardt's assistant improved the procedure by intravenously introducing tubercle bacilli - bacteria causing tuberculosis - into the blood of undesirable high-ranking officials.

After Heydrich's death, rumours, spread by Morell, had reached Hitler that Gebhardt refused, contrary to Morell's recommendation, to use sulfonamide to prevent infection of the abdominal cavity in Heydrich's body, ultimately causing his death.

Morell had at least two reasons to spread such rumours. Firstly, unexplained deaths of some Nazi officials in the clinic of Professor Gebhardt would throw a 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 sulphonamides called ultraseptyl. Heydrich's death became the perfect opportunity for advertising that "miraculous" pharmacological agent. Allies used sulphonamides extensively to prevent gas gangrene infection, which was the leading cause of mass deaths of German soldiers fighting on the Eastern Front.

Gebhardt was Himmler's close friend and confidant, yet his medical expertise, became questionable. In consequence, he received orders from his superiors, Himmler and Ernst

⁶³ *Aby świat się dowiedział: Nielegalne dokumenty z Ravensbrück*; Wydawnictwo Państwowe Muzeum w Oświęcimiu; 1989

Robert Gravitz, to prove the efficacy of sulphonamides in preventing gangrene among wounded soldiers on the battlefield. Gebhardt decided to "shoot two partridges with one shot" to disqualify sulphonamides and, at the same time, clear himself of charges of not saving the life of Hitler's puppy.

Time was pressing. At hand, in a nearby concentration camp in Ravensbrück was a reservoir of living human tissues. The choice fell on 74 Polish girls - courageous underground fighters against Nazis Germany - who, with death sentences, Himmler 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 so that some of the victims to whom sulphonamides were applied would die regardless. It was not difficult. It was enough that the victims' limbs - purposely infected by doctors with extremely malignant bacteria, which in consequence created inflammatory swelling with pus formed after infection - were not drained by a simple incision.

Such incision prevented purulent infiltration of infected wounds. It 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 sulphonamides 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.

Dr. Fisher presented the results of Gebhardt's experiments to about 200 German military doctors in the paper he read at the Third Conference. The results clearly showed that sulphonamides have little or no importance in preventing *gas gangrene*. The conference took place in the Military Medicine Academy in Berlin from 24-26 May 1943.

The paper was entitled: *Special experiments on the use of sulphonamides*. Allegedly, none of the participants at the conference has opposed the use of people for this type of experiments.⁶⁴

Moreover, as Dr. Alexander explained to Dr. Hitzig during the meeting, through these experiments, many German physicians like Fisher and Oberheuser became members of SS "*Blut-Kit*" (*Blood-cement*) 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 sulphonamides 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 living witnesses to the crime for which he received the death penalty. As already mentioned earlier, the victims who survived these experiments (63 out of 74, the other 5 died after surgery and 6 were shot with unhealed wounds after operations)

⁶⁴ Ulf Schmit, 'The Scars of Ravensbrück: Medical Experiments and British War Crimes Policy, 1945-1950

could only owe it to their extremely strong organisms and thanks to help and solidarity of fellow prisoners.⁶⁵

In the following quoted text derived from top-secret document, written June 28, 1944 by Ernst Grawitz regarding 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.'*⁶⁶

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*

⁶⁵ 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 Defence Exhibit No.: Gebhardt/Oberheuser/Fischer - 10 Defence Document No.: Gebhardt/Oberheuser/Fischer - 3 Defence 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))

⁶⁶ 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)

by using “a back door”. At the end of his report Dr. Hitzig thanked Ms. Jeanne Benenson and Eric Anderson for their help in *Ravensbrueck Lapins Project*. Both participated in the American delegation, present in Warsaw in September 1958.

Lapins visit U.S.

In her recollections, Helena Hegier-Rafalska said that *Lapins* scattered all over Poland learned about *the Ravensbrueck Lapins Project* from a radio announcement. It was surprising news about a group of Americans in Warsaw and their invitation to visit the USA extended by American citizens to *Lapins*. Not all of the 53 *Lapins* living at that time in Poland could go to the U.S. for treatment. Due to age, health status, having young children or problems with obtaining a passport due to political reasons, many of them 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, is the following statement:

[...] *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.*[...] ⁶⁷

Thanks to the generosity of Americans - individuals and businesses - financing and organizing the stay of Polish women in the U.S. was gradually taking shape. By October 1958, 300 readers of *The Saturday Review* sent about 6,000 dollars to the *Ravensbrueck Lapins Project*. 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 clothing line for the coming *Lapins*. Additionally, *Rogers* of Boston and the *Converse Rubber Company* in Malden, Massachusetts, gathered a collection of footwear. The National Catholic Welfare Conference provided monthly allowances for the *Lapins*. The Danforth Foundation and the Albert A. Lasker Foundation gave key grants.⁶⁸

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.

⁶⁷ The number of the first and second group of *Lapins* changed till December 1958 – author’s comment

⁶⁸ Norman Cousins, *The Ladies Depart*, *Friends Journal*, August 8, 1959

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 an 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 Suła. In the second row from the left: Władysława Karolewska-Lapińska slightly above her Stefania Sieklucka, Genowefa Kluczek-Kącka, Jadwiga Dzido-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 accommodated 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.



In the photo sitting from left: Maria Pietrzak -Skibińska i Czesława Kostecka , standing from left to right: Władysława Marczevska , Helena Hegier-Rafalska⁶⁹

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

⁶⁹ The picture comes from Mrs. Hegier-Rafalska private collection

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]⁷⁰ 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 glasses for us. 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 nourishment 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 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.

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. 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 the program taking into consideration the professional interests of Polish women. For Krystyna Czyż -Wilgat, a geographer, special trip with

⁷⁰ Author's remark

geographic and geological activities conducted by University of Phoenix had been organized by the University of Phoenix, Arizona. For Mrs. 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.⁷¹

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 faces 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.⁷²

⁷¹ The photo comes from the private collection of Anna Hassa-Jarosky

⁷² The Saturday Review, 13 June, 1959, page. 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 top row: Janina Marczevska –Sterkowicz, Władysława Marczevska, Jadwiga Kukiela, Waclawa 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-Łapińska, Jadwiga Gisges, Stefania Łotocka, Stefania Sieklucka, Leokadia Kwiecińska ⁷³

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 almost all major attractions of America before their departure to Poland.

The start of the tour took place in Palo-Alto, California. On May 1, 1959, the Grey Hound bus took Lapins on a long trip through California, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas and Tennessee.

The first route ran along the Pacific Ocean shore by San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara. Then in Los Angeles, Polish women visited Hollywood, the U.S. capital of the film industry- and then Disneyland Park in Anaheim. In Arizona, they spent one day where they had a chance to see the Hoover dam and Grant Canyon. Then, in Albuquerque, New Mexico, *Lapins* visited the Indian reservation.

In Texas, 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.

⁷³ Ibid.



*Lapins during their stay in Yosemite National Park. In the background Yosemite Falls*⁷⁴

Along 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 the 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 jackpot. "Americans are nice to us," - she added.

Mrs. Hegier-Rafalska's recollection

The following is Mrs. Hegier-Rafalska's recollection about her, and other *Lapins'* stay in the U.S.A. They enjoyed their time, disturbed by the reminiscence of the past.

American press every day published articles about us, many interviews, meetings and private invitations. On the streets, strangers greeted us with words and smiles. Boston in March, bathed in the rays of the sun. Our hearts filled with happiness, and our spirits soared high. Spring in the air brings a ray of hope for a better future. Walking on the street, we exchange smiles and friendly glances with passing pedestrians. We stopped in front of a shop display. Looking at us were "Easter Bunnies." Made of plush, colourful and some made of chocolate. Suddenly, the word Bunnies changes in our minds into Rabbits, "Kanninchen aus Ravensbrück."

The echo of our tragic past returns for a moment vividly. I see a big room in the camp hospital. On beds lay young girls, unconscious, their eyes wide open, you can see despair and suffering. In convulsions, they hurt their mutilated buddies even more. From time to time, you can hear "Mother!", "Mother, rescue me!". From under the carelessly thrown blankets, you can see the legs; wrapped with paper bandages through

⁷⁴ Ibid.

which green pus oozes. They lie lonely because no nurse or doctor comes. Professor Gebhardt and his assistants did their job; they made deep cuts inserting deadly bacteria, and crushed those girls' bones. Half-conscious girls cry for water. Water Please! But no one wants to listen to them. The youngest of the lying girls, with difficulty getting up from the bed, having both legs in plaster, limped to the jug of water standing on the table, grabbed it and gave it to the thirsty. They looked at her captivated, and this tiny girl, like a ghost in a white and grey shirt, almost crawled in its bloody plaster boots, leaving bloody stains on the floor. Then all night long, she would throw herself in fever, crying, "Mother! I don't want to die!" This brave girl survived; she returned to the country after the war and soon died. Suddenly, flashes of horror faded away, and I returned to reality. The Easter Bunnies were still smiling from the shop window at us. Colourful and made of chocolate as if by winking and squinting the eye, they assured: "The tragedy of Polish women - Kaninchen aus Ravensbrück, will never happen again."

In Paulo-Alto, June 1959. The small, beautiful town on the Pacific Ocean, gave the impression of a little sleepy, indolent. Not too wide streets lined with trees, maybe not of the first youth, but they gave a lot of shade, which was valuable in these conditions. White, clean houses were standing close to each other, surrounded by carefully kept gardens full of lovely flowers. In this charming place, the organizers appointed "rendezvous" for the entire group of Polish *Lapins* now living in California, to take them by the Greyhound bus on the way back through many states to New York and from there to Warsaw. Excellent mood and buzz prevailed over the whole company. All the ladies are laughing, happy and full of humour - just changed. Each of them had a lot to say. It is hard to believe that these women survived such a terrible hell in this cruel Ravensbrück camp. But can they forget, can they forgive the perpetrators of the SS doctors who carried out criminal experiments on them, making them lifelong cripples with cruelly broken and disfigured legs? Jadzia Dzido-Hassa, always cheerful, smiling, captivating with a sense of humour, energetic, intelligent, sharp-witted and at the same time with a big heart, helpful and responsible. She never complained about being badly hurt and mortally exposed, but she always comforted others. Although she miraculously saved herself in Ravensbrück, after returning home, she did not find any of her family - they all died during the German occupation. Somehow, Jadzia was able to heal her broken heart. She came to Warsaw to continue her pharmaceutical studies interrupted by the war. She moved to a dormitory, and despite hunger and near poverty, Jadzia was able to graduate. Her mutilated leg, however, could not be repaired by doctors, despite many surgeries. Like, Marysia Kuśmierczuk, Czesia Kostecka and many others, whom German doctors infected with gas gangrene, their legs looked like lightning-shattered trees that nobody could save. Until the end of their lives, they will carry the stamp of German nationalism that persecuted Poles. Staszka Śledziejowska stands a bit further, lively as real silver; everywhere is full of her and her heartfelt smile. Arrested as a 15-year-old girl, a schoolgirl, she was an example of health and youth before the war. As an officer of the Polish army, her father was in German captivity as a POW, and her mother died when Staszka was a child. She had four deep scars on her legs, 14 cm long, on both thighs and lower legs. Despite everything, she raised four wonderful sons, but the effects of her camp experiences disturb her peace and life. I'm looking at Czesia Kostecka. Her big black eyes are still looking sad, and

there is rarely a smile on her lips. She had been in the Ravensbrück for five years, worrying for the fate of three young children left under the supervision of their grandmother. Her husband and three brothers were arrested by the Gestapo together with her. SS killed them in Auschwitz. Her eldest already 16-year-old daughter was waiting for her return from the camp. She was abandoned with her child by her scoundrel husband. Czesia took all, this time, four of them and went to the west of Poland, where she set up a new home. Although she was sick and in need of care, she went to work to support herself and the children. When her friends in the office asked Czesia why she didn't eat breakfast, she replied: "I am on a diet." Even in the USA, she couldn't shake off the nightmares that haunted her. But Marysia Kuśmierczuk was above all of them. After returning from Ravensbrück, this beautiful girl with a cruelly damaged leg and an open wound (gas gangrene) graduated from medicine and became an oncologist. So far, every transplant procedure has failed. Marysia is always smiling and willing to rush to help others. But what is going on in her heart? Can she forget and forgive? Of our entire group, Pela Maćkowska looks the most beautiful, in a white hat with a white brim, in a white suit with a bouquet in the lapel, always adorable. When we met during a medical examination in Gdansk at the Medical Committee in 1946, she was sad and depressed. She experienced deeply the death of her husband and her two underage sons, 16 and 17 years old, murdered in Auschwitz. "I have to live for my boys and my husband - because the world is so big and so beautiful and they had to die," she said in a trembling voice and with tears in her eyes. It's good that she accepted her fate because, at first, she was very depressed. Can she forget and forgive? These are just a few *Lapins* from a group of 74 Polish women subjected to brutal pseudo-medical experiments in Ravensbrück done against the fundamental principles of humanity and moral values. Our beautiful stay in the USA is coming to an end, and a beautiful fairy tale thanks to lovely people of goodwill ends. We thank them with all our hearts, and we will never forget them.

With the following motto, Mrs. Hegier-Rafalska ends her recollection. "No more war. Overcome evil with good!"

After arriving in Washington, *Lapins'* visit became the subject of headlines next to the Geneva conference on Berlin and nuclear disarmament. What particularly interested reporters were the issues of pensions and compensation from the government of West Germany for *Lapins*.

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 honour 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. The following senators participated in the discussion: Kenneth 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, Thaddeus J. Dulski from the state of New York and John Lesinski from the state of Michigan.

After lunch, the Polish women from the public gallery watched a working session of the Senate. In this way, they had the opportunity to see firsthand 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 German medical experiments. He mentioned on 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 payment; therefore, there is no question of a precedent in this case.

Senator Edmund S. Muskie, whose father escaping 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*.

The Senator mentioned that Bonn had 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.⁷⁵

Senator Javits expressed his hope that the West German Government overcome, in 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 was undeniably real.

The last of the eight who spoke were 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, one of the *Lapins*. In the end, the Polish embassy in Washington had organized a reception for Polish women. Polish Ambassador Romuald Spasowski invited several members of Congress; the invitation also included the journalist Walter Lippmann.

Two weeks before departure, the entire group of *Lapins* stayed in New York. On June 7th, they 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 them a medallion blessed by Pope Pius XII. As mentioned earlier, the Catholic Welfare Services, part of the National Catholic Conference Welfare, assisted in financing this visit. On June 8th, 1959, 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 the German Federal Government began to pay compensation for Polish victims of medical experiments.

A \$ 27.000 check was attached to the letter to cover medical expenses during *Lapins'* stay in the United States. Norman Cousins ends his article *The Ladies*

⁷⁵ 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

Depart commenting on the letter content: "Even more important is a statement in the letter to the effect that German Government is now *thoroughly and urgently examining possibilities for further relief*. If this means that Ravensbrück Ladies may receive adequate pensions and compensation, then the prospect is a happy one indeed."⁷⁶

The Cousins' wishes had never materialized 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 - ranging from \$1,200 to \$1,500 - pensions for Rabbits came to nothing.⁷⁷

Besides one-time lump payments, *Lapins* had not received permanent disability pensions for the medical experiments. The situation changed, in respect of compensations, after 1989. Only 20 *Lapins*, living in Poland at that time, received monthly pensions for work done in Ravensbrück concentration camp.

None of the German doctors still living did apologize to the *Lapins* for subjecting them to horrible medical experiments.

Efforts undertaken by a handful of mutilated women by German doctors from Ravensbrück and their American friends from *Ravensbrueck Lapins Project* became an icebreaker.

It started opening the new 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" processed 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)

The *New York Times* published the article *73 Polish Women, Nazi Victims, To get Indemnities from Bonn*.⁷⁸

The article speaks of 73 Polish women, victims of German medical experiments. The number seems to be misleading since only 55 *Lapins* from Ravensbrück were living in Poland at that time. By 1965 there were only 51 alive.⁷⁹

The process of granting the indemnities was extremely stringent and involved following steps:

The Commission of Investigation of Nazi Crimes in Poland, in cooperation with the communist veteran association ZBoWiD collected the claimants' applications registered by Polish Red Cross.

Claimants' presented statements, relevant documentation, and medical examinations to the Polish court. After that, International Committee of Red Cross in Geneva subjected them to preliminary analysis and conducted individual interviews with applicants in Poland.

⁷⁶ The Ladies Depart, *The Saturday Review*, 13 June, 1959

⁷⁷ *Summary of Comments by Miss. Caroline Ferriday, Concerning Work of Friends of A.D.I.R., Inc.* December 20, 1957

⁷⁸ *The New York Times*, 13th November 1961

⁷⁹ Kiedrzyńska Ravensbrück wyd. 2, 1965, str. 219

After such a strict procedure, the independent so-called Neutral Commission established by ICRC decided to pay individual assistance in form of lump-sum awarded by the German government. The decisions of the Commission were presented individually to applicants by the International Committee of Red Cross. The assistance grants awarded were paid into claimants' accounts of the Polish bank PKO.

The amount of lump-sum payment was from 25 to 40 thousand Deutsche Mark per person. In this way, over the next ten years up to 1971, Polish citizens submitted 6.5 thousand applications. Of this number, the Neutral Commission accepted 1,357 claims and granted payment of 39,440 DM per claimant.⁸⁰

It is worth mentioning, at this point, that each of *Lapins* on their initiative contributed from 1 to 2 thousand dollars from the lump-sum payment they received from West Germany to a fund. They meant to help finance 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.

Since then, even though the West Germany government considered the issue closed, the number of Polish claimants increased dramatically. Therefore, through negotiation under an umbrella of the normalization of relations, communist Poland and West Germany signed an agreement on 16th November 1972 between the *Minister of Health and Social Welfare of Poland* and the *Federal Ministry of Economics and Finance of the Federal Government West Germany*. Under the agreement, the Polish Government, on behalf of the 6,000 Polish victims of the German medical experiments, had received 103 million DM. Three million of that money were to be used to cover administrative costs associated with distributing the fund—the rest of the amount supposed to go to the victims of the experiments. I want to emphasize that this procedure of compensation for victims of medical experiments lasting from 1972-1987 excluded *Lapins*.

The Communist Government did not distribute the obtained money directly to Polish victims of medical experiments as initially intended. This 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 owned by the government, and then - under the confidential decisions of the Council of Ministers of May 1974 – was deposited on the government Foreign Exchange Reserve Fund.⁸¹

Then the communist government using its quasi-judicial system, processed the victims' claims, paying them in the local devaluated currency of Polish Złoty– 75% of the rest in foreign currency so-called "dewizy." The established procedure for distribution of the payments did not have a proper legal basis, violated basic judicial principles and was prone to shameless corruption.

The government led by a communist Piotr Jaroszewicz and his party colleagues from the pseudo veteran association ZBoWiD appropriated the compensations from the victims. In that corrupted scheme of processing claims, some people applied who were "false *Lapins*." They included those who were not prisoners of concentration camps and those who were not subject to medical experiments defined at the Nuremberg Doctors' Trial.

⁸⁰ Problems Reparacji, Odszkodowan I Swiadczen W Stosunkach Polska-Niemieckich 1944-2004, Tom 1; Studia pod redakcja Witolda M. Goralskiego, Warszawa 2004

⁸¹ 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

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

Please keep in mind that concerning 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.⁸²

The distribution of compensation for the victims of Nazi atrocities left a deep feeling of injustice among many of them. The unlawful action of the Polish communist government caused a sense of shame and anger among many Polish citizens for those who got such compensations unjustly.

In conclusion, on the subject of the outrageous distribution of indemnification, 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.⁸³

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

At Ravensbrück, the "luxury" camp, where Lapins had their dignity and where we cared more about the school and a book - both forbidden and punishable - 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.⁸⁴

Conclusion

Norman Cousins said that history is a great early warning system.

⁸² Paul Weindling „The Nuremberg Medical Trial, 1946/47: Transcripts, Material of the Prosecution and Defence, 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)

⁸³ *I boję się snów*; piąte wydanie, Święty Paweł, 2001 str.150

⁸⁴ Ibid; p.166

For many politicians, journalists, scientists, doctors, and medical students 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 in April 2005. The paper focused on the medical experiments, including sulfonamide and tissue regeneration carried out on 74 Polish inmates in Ravensbrück concentration camp and the impact of the experiments on establishing the Nuremberg Code.

The paper written by Agnes Hassa, a granddaughter of Mrs. Jadwiga Dzido-Hassa, has raised great interest among the participants.

In Wolfgang Weyers's book: *The abuse of man: An illustrated history of dubious medical experimentation*⁸⁵ a last chapter is titled: *The end of Story?*

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

In 1991, shortly after the fall of communism in East Germany, experiments conducted on men, women and children came to light. 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, an 18-year-old man from Tucson, Arizona, died due to the tests associated with the development of gene therapy. These tests were conducted by researchers at the Medical University of Pennsylvania. Researchers did not inform the man 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 was ever devoted to the history of Ravensbrück *Lapins*. The extensive documentation of the 74 Polish women from Ravensbrück spreads in archives worldwide: at the Swedish University of Lund; the Polish Institute of National Remembrance; the French Museum of Contemporary History and the Holocaust Museum in Washington.

It is a big topic where issues of medical ethics are only a part of it. For the Polish people, it is a diamond of Polish martyrdom. It brings out into the light, shimmers of distinct colours of heroic attitudes of Polish victims.

⁸⁵ Ardoe Scribendi.Ltd.,2003

German doctors conducted experiments on Polish women in Ravensbrück for many reasons, yet lacking the fundamental one - ethics. For a historian and bioethics scientist, it is a clear example of the essence of crimes against humanity.

How ever scattered all over the world, the excellent documentation mainly exists thanks to the victims themselves and other people of goodwill and conscientious spirit. They are reminding the world repeatedly about the ethical and legal concept of harm and indemnification as a necessary element for regaining faith in the goodness of humankind.

At the core of this tragic story are: The German occupation of Poland, genocidal experiments carried out by German doctors and the fate of *Lapins* and others like them under the Soviets' harsh rules after WWII.

Cordiality American citizens showed through *Ravensbrueck Lapins Project* to Polish victims of the experiments gives the appearance of the happy ending to the story.

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

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

Internet is a powerful medium influencing millions of people around the world. It became virtually the only encyclopedia read by them. What they might find online becomes their shared knowledge, including the understanding 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 of the fact (in any language) that Polish women were the largest group of prisoners incarcerated, 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 biographical memoir *Wspomnienia wojenne: 22 IX 1939-5 IV 1945* ⁸⁶ 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)⁸⁷ 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.

⁸⁶ Znak, 2001 p. 242-243

⁸⁷ Remark of the author of the article

Lanckorońska's historical knowledge allowed her to associate these two events, distant in time and give them deep and timeless meaning. It is worth noting 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 gathering documentation for obtaining compensation for Polish 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 its nation's history - in particular, by commemorating the nation's martyrdom.

There are some exhibits in the museum of the Ravensbrück concentration camp: two black plaques with printed names of Polish women, including the names of victims of medical experiments - political prisoners who SS executed in this camp, some thirty-two photographs of the victims, and a sculpture made by a former prisoner of the camp Zofia Pociłowska-Kann with a large inscription in Polish that reads: *IF THE ECHO OF THEIR VOICES GET SILENT, WE WILL PERISH.*⁸⁸

Jaroslav J Gajewski
Ottawa, 29 November 2021

⁸⁸ *Jesli Echo Ich Glosow Zamilknie - Zginiemy*