

From the Testimony of Jack Oran about Arriving in Auschwitz-Birkenau

When we got off the train there was sort of a relief to being outside in the fresh air. We didn't know what it meant, to the right or to the left. Little did we know that to the left meant going...to the left meant elderly people, young people. To the right, we didn't know what it's going to be with us when they marched us into Birkenau, into the camp. In Birkenau we enquired among other people that were there and they told us: "You see that fire that's burning far over there? That's where they burn the bodies of the people."

When we came into Birkenau we were stripped of our clothing and our belongings and we were tattooed under the most brutal conditions.

Q: You can describe that?

A: Well, they had a needle, a man sat there and he had a needle, several men, and they tattooed our hands with a number. It was bleeding, it hurt and it was cold and for the first time one felt that one is alone, all alone in the world. The beating started right there. If you didn't stay straight, you got beat. If you opened your mouth and asked questions, you got beaten up. It was the most horrible, horrible experience that one could participate in. It was beyond any imagination. Very cruel. One had to adapt himself quickly, harden himself and to be able to exist and digest all what is around oneself. We were told by other people what happened to the men, elderly men, women and children, what happened to their fate. That is the first time we knew of gas chambers. First time we knew of crematoriums. It was beyond our imagination that something like this could ever happen, but indeed it did happen.

The barbed wire that surrounded the camp was also electrified with high voltage. People ran to the wire, threw themselves on the wire, got electrified, burned to death, because they couldn't take the cruel conditions anymore. They couldn't take the beating, they couldn't take the way the Kapos and the blockovas treated them. They couldn't take the working conditions in the day.

Source: Yad Vashem Archives 0.3- 8181

