

Extract from the Written Evidence by Jacob Wiernik on the Extermination Camp At Treblinka*

...I stood in the line opposite my house in Wolynska Street, and from there we were taken to Zamenhof Street. The Ukrainians divided up the loot amongst themselves before our eyes. They fought amongst themselves, valued and sorted everything. Despite the great number of people there was silence in the street. A silent and cruel despair fell upon all. Oh what despair it was! They photographed us as though we were animals from before the Flood. There were also some who remained calm. I myself hoped that we would go home again. I thought they would check our documents. An order was given, and we moved off from our places. Woe to us! The naked truth was revealed before our eyes. Railway cars. Cars that were empty. That day was a fine, hot summer's day. It seemed as though the sun was protesting against the injustice. What was the guilt of our wives, our children, our mothers? What was it? The sun disappeared behind thick clouds. It is beautiful, warms and shines and does not wish to witness our suffering and humiliation.

An order is given to get into the cars. Eighty are pushed into each car. The way back is sealed off. I had on my body only trousers, a shirt and shoes. A backpack with other things and high boots had stayed at home. I had prepared it because there were rumors that we would be sent to the Ukraine for work. The train was shunted from one siding to another. I knew this rail junction well and realized that we were staying in the same place. Meanwhile we could hear the Ukrainians amusing themselves, the sound of their shouting and cheerful laughter reaching us. It was becoming increasingly suffocating inside the car, and from minute to minute there was less air to breathe; it was all despair, blackness and horror... With indescribable suffering we finally arrived at Malkinia. We stopped there all night. Ukrainians came into the car and demanded valuables. Everybody gave them up in order to preserve their lives a little while longer.

...In the morning the train moved and we reached Treblinka station. I saw a train that passed us and in it people who were hungry, ragged and half naked.

They said something to us but we did not understand them. The day was burning hot. The lack of air was terrible. As a result we were very thirsty. I looked out of the window. The peasants brought water and charged 100 zloty for each bottle. I had no money, apart from 10 gold coins. Also a 2, a 5 and a 10 in silver, with a portrait of the Marshal,** that I had kept as a memento. So I was forced to do without water. Others bought it. They paid 500 zloty for a kilogram of black bread. I was tortured by thirst until midday. Then the future *Hauptsturmfuehrer* came in and picked 10 men who brought us water. I assuaged my thirst a little. An order was given to take out the dead, but there were none. At four in the afternoon the train moved off. We arrived at Treblinka in a few minutes. It was only there that the blinkers dropped from our eyes. Ukrainians with rifles and machine-guns stood on the roofs of the huts. The whole area was strewn with bodies, some dressed and some naked. Their faces were distorted with fear and horror. They were black and swollen. Their eyes were frozen wide open. Their tongues hung out, brains were spattered around and the bodies twisted. There was blood everywhere. Our innocent blood. The blood of our children, our brothers and sisters. The blood of our fathers and mothers. And we are without hope, we realize that we will not escape our fate....

There is an order to get out of the cars. Belongings are to be left behind. We are taken into the yard. There were two large notice boards with orders to hand over gold, silver, precious stones and all valuables. Failure to do so would bring the death penalty. On the roofs of the huts were Ukrainians with machine-guns. The women and children were ordered off to the left and the men told to sit down in the yard, on the right. Some distance away from us people were working: they were sorting the belongings taken from the train. I managed to steal over among the workers, and began to work; I suffered the first lash from the whip of a German whom we called Frankenstein. The women and children were told to take off their clothes.

...When we carried, or more correctly, dragged, the bodies away we were made to run, and were beaten for the least delay. The dead had been lying there for a long time. They had already begun to decompose. There was a stench of death and decomposition in the air. Worms crawled on the wretched

bodies. When we tied on the belts, an arm or a leg would frequently drop off. We also labored on graves for ourselves until dusk, without food or drink. The day was hot, and thirst plagued us greatly. When we reached the huts in the evening each one of us began to search for the people he had known the day before - in vain - they were not to be found, they were no longer among the living....

* Wiernik took part in the uprising at the Treblinka camp. He succeeded in escaping and reached Warsaw in 1944. He recorded his evidence there, and it was first published by the Underground in Poland.

** The reference is to Marshal Jozef Pilsudski.

Source: *Documents on the Holocaust, Selected Sources on the Destruction of the Jews of Germany and Austria, Poland and the Soviet Union*, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 1981, Document no.165. pp.353-355.