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## Turn the pain and affliction into thinking about the beauty.

Teaching young women as a form of saving one's life in the  
light of memories from the all-female German Nazi  
concentration camp - FKL Ravensbrück of Wanda Póltawska,  
Urszula Wińska and Karolina Lanckorońska

### Zamienić ból na myślenie o pięknu.

Kształcenie młodych kobiet jako forma ratowania życia w świetle  
wspomnień z niemieckiego nazistowskiego obozu koncentracyjnego dla  
kobiet FKL Ravensbrück Wandy Póltawskiej, Urszuli Wińskiej  
i Karoliny Lanckorońskiej<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** Introduction: The article tackles the significance of the opposition of Polish women – the prisoners of the all-female German Nazi concentration camp - FKL Ravensbrück – to the practices of the German authorities (guards and the medical staff of that camp) used against the inmates. One form of the resistance against the Third Reich totalitarianism was the secret education. In FKL Ravensbrück the teacher-prisoners were educating their fellow inmates – the so called “Rabbits” [human guinea pigs – translator's note]. This term was coined to refer to the women who underwent some medical experiments at the concentration camp: 74 Polish women and 12 women of other nationalities. Prof. Karolina Lanckorońska joined the group of the underground camp teachers and collaborated, among others, with Dr. Urszula Wińska.

Method: The source base of the analysis are the published war memoirs of the imprisoned women, including prof. Karolina Lanckorońska, Dr. Wanda Póltawska and the source materials from the survey conducted right after the war by doc. Dr. U. Wińska and the team of her former fellow inmates.

Conclusions: The summary displays the issue of protecting the values of people who had been subjected to live in the extreme conditions against their will. The secret teaching organised in FKL Ravensbrück saved the physical life of most students by giving them faith in the inalienable right to life, human dignity, and in God.

**Key words:** suffering, medical experiments, World War II, German FKL Ravensbrück, Polish female prisoners – the “Rabbits”, secret teaching, values

**Abstrakt:** Wstęp: W artykule podjęto refleksję nad znaczeniem przeciwstawienia się polskich kobiet - więźniarek niemieckiego nazistowskiego obozu koncentracyjnego FKL Ravensbrück - praktykom niemieckich władz (strażnikom i personelowi medycznemu tego obozu) stosowanych

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<sup>1</sup> Artykuł w języku polskim dostępny jest na stronie:

<https://www.stowarzyszeniefidesetratio.pl/Presentations0/2021-4Filip2.pdf>

wobec uwięzionych. Jedną z form przeciwstawienia się totalitaryzmowi III Rzeszy było tajne nauczanie. W FKL Ravensbrück więźniarki nauczycielki uczyły współwięźniarki - „króliki”. Terminem tym określono kobiety poddane eksperymentom medycznym na terenie obozu: 74 Polki i 12 kobiet innych narodowości. Prof. Karolina Lanckorońska dołączyła do grupy obozowych, konspiracyjnych kadr nauczycielskich i współpracowała m.in. z dr Urszulą Wińską.

Metoda: Bazą źródłową analizy są opublikowane wspomnienia wojenne więźniarek, m. in. prof. Karoliny Lanckorońskiej, dr Wandy Póltawskiej i materiały źródłowe pochodzące z ankiety przeprowadzonej po wojnie przez doc. dr U. Wińską i zespół byłych współwięźniarek.

Wnioski: W podsumowaniu ukazano kwestię ochrony wartości przez ludzi poddanych – wbrew ich woli – życiu w warunkach ekstremalnych. Tajne nauczanie podjęte w FKL Ravensbrück ocaliło życie fizyczne większości uczennic poprzez wzbudzenie w nich wiary w niezbywalne prawo do życia, godność ludzką, w Boga.

**Słowa kluczowe:** cierpienie, doświadczenia medyczne, II wojna światowa, niemiecki FKL Ravensbrück, polskie więźniarki - „króliki”, tajne nauczanie, wartości

### **Introduction**

In 1940 Stefan Zweig wrote: [...] *the literature of the coming years will be more documentary than purely fictional and creative* [in terms of creating events and characters – B.F.'s note] (Zweig 1948; Filipowicz 2020). S. Zweig as an Austrian writer of the Jewish origin was one of the numerous victims of the German totalitarianism. Its terror and mass destruction were reflected on in literary works by many authors, inter alia, in the war memoirs of Wanda Póltawska née Wojtasik (born in 1921), Urszula Wińska née Wandasiewicz (1902 - 2003) and Karolina Lanckorońska (1898 - 2002). Before September 1939, Wanda Póltawska attended the Ursuline High School in Lublin. After getting a degree in philology at the Jan Kazimierz University in Lviv and at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków Urszula Wińska worked as a Polish teacher – first in Ropczyce, then in Bochnia. She obtained her doctorate degree in 1932. Karolina Lanckorońska was a Polish scientist, and a professor of art history. Before the German aggression against Poland and during the Soviet occupation she used to lecture at the Jan Kazimierz University in Lviv.

The article tackles the meaning of the personal involvement of the Polish female prisoners in the resistance against the totalitarianism of the Third Reich during World War II (Żaryn, Żaryn 2019). The persecution of the civilian population in the occupied Poland that had been planned by the German state motivated them to join the thousands of other Polish women who rebelled against the invaders. They were imprisoned by the Germans both in the so-called General Government, and, among others, in the German all-female concentration camp in Ravensbrück (hereinafter referred to as FKL Ravensbrück – Frauen-Konzentrationslager Ravensbrück), which was built 85 km from Berlin in 1938. This area was located in the private estate of Heinrich Himmler (1900 - 1945) – one of the main leaders of Nazi Germany (Manvell, Fraenkel, 2021).

The described resistance made it possible to survive a long series of extreme events that lasted for years. It gave them the moral strength necessary for the physical survival.

In “War Memoirs” by professor Lanckorońska (Lanckorońska, 2001) one may read about women and men, adults and children, who were deprived by the occupiers of the goods inherent to every human being – the good of physical freedom, the good of developing in health, and basic spiritual goods, such as human dignity, inalienable right to life, natural death and a dignified burial of the body of the deceased, the right to education, life with cultural goods, and the right to affirm God. However, apart from all that despair we also find in this literary work the code how to oppose evil. The said code – expressed as *dictamen rationis* – is an affirmation of values, virtues and laws dictated by reason, as taught in the realistic philosophy (Sertillanges, 1936, p. 267).

The experiences from the all-female concentration camp in Ravensbrück remembered by the women who survived it and wanted – after thirty three years – to take part in a survey prepared by a team of former prisoners under the supervision of Doc. Dr. Urszula Wińska, the scientist described in her publication “Zwyciężyły wartości. Wspomnienia z Ravensbrück” [“The values have triumphed. Memories of Ravensbrück ”] (Wińska 1985). An extended, second edition of these source materials was published 21 years later (Wińska 2006). Biographies and stories of friendship between the Ravensbrück women after the war were compiled by U. Wińska in the book “Więzi: losy więźniarek z Ravensbrück” [“Bonds: fate of the female prisoners from Ravensbrück”] (Wińska, 1992).

Wanda Póltawska, the youngest of the above-mentioned former prisoners of Ravensbrück, wrote her diary from the concentration camp in the summer of 1945: “immediately after the return, and until January 1961, it was left in a drawer – initially it was not intended for printing” (Póltawska 2009a, p. 7). She called it “I boję się snów” [“And I'm Afraid of Dreams.”] Together with 157 other women – former FKL Ravensbrück prisoners – she took part in a survey conducted by Doc. Dr. Wińska. The survey was sent to 400 women. As a respondent, she is listed under both surnames: Wojtasik-Póltawska. The list describing the participants of the survey included, inter alia, her camp number (7709), the year and place of the arrest, the year of being imprisoned by the Germans (1941, Lublin), the fact that she was a student at the time, the reason for the arrest (being a member of the Union of Armed Struggle [Polish Związek Walki Zbrojnej - translator’s note]) and her post-war profession – the doctor of medicine, the psychiatrist (Wińska 1985, p. 205). Years later, she reflected on her camp experiences in her memoirs called “Beskidzkie rekolekcje” [“The Beskid retreats”] (Póltawska 2009b).

Professor Karolina Lanckorońska was held captive by the Germans in FKL Ravensbrück from January 9, 1943 to April 5, 1945. Dr. Urszula Wińska was imprisoned in the period from September 9, 1941 to April 28, 1945. Wanda Póltawska was in captivity from September 23, 1941 to February 13, 1945. She was then evacuated to Neustadt-Glewe by the camp authorities along with the Auschwitz transport – under a changed name –

Henryka Daczyńska (83 175). She was imprisoned until May 2, 1945 (Póltawska 2019a ; Stefanek, Zaborowski 2018).

**1. The “Rabbit” women - Polish female prisoners - students of the secret classes in the German Nazi all-female concentration camp FKL Ravensbrück**

The analysis is based on the memories from the German Nazi all-female concentration camp in Ravensbrück by W. Póltawska, U. Wińska and K. Lanckorońska. Memoir written by Professor Lanckorońska right after the end of World War II, in 1946, was not published in Poland until 2001 (Kalinowski, Orman, 2001). In the light of the camp life realities, these documents present the ethical choices made by the Polish women. One of them was the so-called “upward convergence”. Dr. Wińska used this expression to describe the cultural and educational work organized secretly, especially for the female prisoners - the “Rabbits” (Wińska, 1985, p. 118). It aimed at diverting their attention from pain and moral suffering. The purpose of the methodically conducted underground education was, above all, to give the women subjected to the experiments a reason to rebel against the camp staff, to refuse the participation in operations, and to affirm freedom and dignity.

Polish women, in an estimated number of over 34 000, constituted 25% of all inmates of the German all-female concentration camp FKL Ravensbrück. When on January 9, 1943, the Germans imprisoned Professor Karolina Lanckorońska in that concentration camp, the medical experiments had already been conducted for five months there. They were performed by German medical personnel on the selected prisoners, the vast majority of whom was Polish. Biographies of FKL Ravensbrück inmates, who underwent experimental operations, were prepared and presented by Wanda Kiedrzyńska - a former Ravensbrück prisoner, the author of the first Polish monograph on the foundation and functioning of the this camp. The said study comprises of the biographies of 74 women (Kiedrzyńska 2019, pp. 286-316). Hereinunder, in the testimony of Wanda Wojtasik there is a list of the female inmates (see photo no. 1; Stefanek, Zaborowski, 2018).

Most of them, prior to their arrest, had conducted some underground activities in the nascent Polish Underground State (Dąbkiewicz, 2018, Żebrowski, 2017). They took an oath in the Union of Armed Struggle. Among them were girl scouts, also the aforementioned Wanda Wojtasik. After being arrested by the Gestapo the women were physically and mentally tormented during interrogations. The so-called “researches” were carried out at the premises of the Gestapo in the so-called General Government. Women were incarcerated in different prisons, depending on the place of their arrest. It was either the women's unit of Warsaw Pawiak prison - the so-called “Serbia” - or the Lublin Castle. The first out of five *Sondertransport* of prisoners to FKL Ravensbrück from the Lublin Castle

was recorded on April 4, 1941 and consisted of four women. The second *Sondertransport* arrived on August 18, 1941. 18 women were transported to FKL Ravensbrück then. The third one left Lublin on September 21, 1941. It consisted of 150 women. The next transport from Lublin and Warsaw arrived on May 30, 1942 and brought 306 women. This group included 56 women who were imprisoned in the Lublin Castle. The last one left Lublin on May 22, 1944, and it is called the evacuation transport (Diera, Oratowska, 2015, pp. 82-83).

The German doctors from the FKL Ravensbrück prison staff used the second and the third *Sondertransport* to choose 74 women. 70 women came from Lublin, four from Warsaw. All of them underwent some medical experiments. Moreover, the Germans subjected to the experiments 12 women of other nationalities (Strebel, 2018, p. 329). The youngest prisoner to undergo the experimental operations was Barbara Pietrzyk. She was 16 years old at the time. The oldest one, Apolonia Rakowska, was probably a 45-year-old woman. She was shot dead at FKL Ravensbrück on September 28, 1943. Just like five other women, whose wounds after the surgery were still unhealed. Additionally, 5 Polish women and 12 women of other nationalities died immediately after the operations performed on them. Among those shot ones were: Maria Gnaś (in FKL Ravensbrück from September 1941, killed on February 12, 1943), Rozalia Gutek (in FKL Ravensbrück from September 1941, killed on September 28, 1943), Maria Pajączkowska (killed on September 28, 1943, before arrest and imprisonment in Pawiak, she had left her underage daughter Ewa at home) and Maria Zielonka (before her arrest, she had been active in the underground structures of the Defenders of Poland Corps [Komenda Obrońców Polski], imprisoned in FKL Ravensbrück from September 1941, killed on September 28, 1943).

The medical experiments conducted by German doctors on the Polish prisoners were carried out from the beginning of August 1942 to mid-August 1943. Operations type A and B consisted of: infecting a prisoner with e.g. staphylococcus aureus, by introducing it into the inmate wound or injecting the germs brought from the Hohenlychen sanatorium into their muscles (type A medical experiment), and bone grafting, cutting out muscle fragments and cutting out some nerves on the shank (type B medical experiment). The type of operation was recorded by the German medical personnel on a plaster placed on the female prisoners' legs (see photo no. 2) as described by doctor Zofia Mączka, a political prisoner from Krakow, imprisoned in FKL Ravensbrück and "employed" in the camp hospital as an X-ray examiner from July 24, 1942 to July 24, 1943 (Kiedrzyńska, 2019, pp. 194-199, see *ibid.* footnote 272; Mączka, 1947).

The first round of the operations was performed on six female prisoners on August 1, 1942: Wanda Wojtasik, Maria Gnaś, Aniela Okoniewska, Maria Zielonka, Rozalia Gutek and Wanda Kulczyk (Póltawska 2009a, pp. 73-74). The last round of operations was conducted on August 15, 1943: three prisoners were operated on for the first time – Helena Piasecka, Stefania Sieklucka, Joanna Szydłowska, and two inmates were operated on again–



Władysława Karolewska and Halina Piotrowska (Kiedrzyńska, 2019, pp. 196-198). Before being transported to FKL Ravensbrück, Helena Piasecka had given birth to twins who survived the war in the prison at the Lublin Castle. During the operation at FKL Ravensbrück she was subjected to some severe violence and great amounts of brutal torture, her mouth was gagged, her legs restrained by SS personnel.

Both Halina Piotrowska and other women were operated on in the bunker – the camp prison. It is important to preserve the memory of that, as it concerns the operation carried out after the rebellion of the Polish women who refused to passively undergo the experiment once again (Lanckorońska 2001, pp. 266-267; the account of Zofia Kormańska-Kolańska: Wińska 1985, pp. 307-309). The Germans concealed the fact that they had been conducting experiments. Neither inside nor outside the camp nobody was supposed to know about them. The inmates who underwent the operations were to be murdered (Póltawska 2009a, p. 109), the evidence – the women (!) who were used for the said operations – slated for execution (Maria Kuśmierczuk's account: Wińska 1985, p. 234). Carrying out the operation in the camp prison – the bunker, instead of in the camp hospital, the so called “sick room”, heightened the fear. The bunker at FKL Ravensbrück was located in the immediate vicinity of the camp staff office, the crematorium and the gas chamber (Lorens, Małachowska, 2020, pp. 57, 61). Women sentenced to execution were also sent there (Lanckorońska, 2001, p. 242).

After the second operation Halina Piotrowska went into hiding. Defending the operated prisoners by their fellow inmates of all nationalities during the so-called “catching the Rabbits” in the winter of 1945, was the result of the rebellion of female “Rabbit” prisoners. The “Rabbits” were sentenced to death right after the Germans collected the data on the operations results. Wanda Póltawska recalls escapes from the female German overseers, SS men, and the hiding places found for this “gruesome game of hide and seek”: a shelter in the attic of the barrack, in the boxes placed in the concentration camp street or in the undergarments warehouse; dressing up as an Auschwitz prisoner, a Ukrainian woman or a Gypsy woman, a shelter in a dug-out hole under the barrack, into which waste and faeces flowed (Póltawska 2009a, pp. 140-151).

The pre-classified list of the operated prisoners, written in some invisible ink on the inside of the envelope, was sent by Wanda Póltawska to her home address: “Frau Wojtasikowa Anna Generalgouvernement Lublin Lubartowerstr 32 at 25.” The letter had a red stamp showing Hitler looking to the side. Stamp value: 12 phenig (see Kiedrzyńska 2019, photo at the end of the book, no page number). The letter to the mother was dated to June 5, 1943 (see the photo from the Collections of The Museum of Martyrdom “Under the Clock”, the Branch of the Lublin Province Museum, after: Lorens, Małachowska, 2020, p. 31). Also Karolina Lanckorońska wrote the report: “180 words mainly about “The Rabbits”, executions”, the attitudes of the Polish women, the extension of the concentration camp infrastructure. She on the other hand drafted the report by dotting it in the Polish-

Latin dictionary. The document reached Gen. Tadeusz Bor-Komorowski in November 1943 (Lanckorońska, 2001, p. 271).

Władysława Karolewska, one of the many prisoners who underwent the operation, survived the war and testified as an eye-witness in the Nuremberg Trial (Lubecka, 2020; Lubecka, 2021). Her photo with the reference number 62 707, taken in Warsaw on September 13, 1945 by Antoni Kunicki, is in the collection of the Polish Institute of Source Research in Lund (Stanuch 2018, p. 76).

## **2. Teaching values as a part of the underground education organised by the Polish women at the German Nazi all-female concentration camp FKL Ravensbrück**

Professor Karolina Lanckorońska participated – as a prisoner – in the secret teaching, which was implemented from the very beginning of the war. In October 1939 the Secret Teaching Organization [in Polish: *Tajna Organizacja Nauczycielska*, “TON” for short – translator’s note] began its activity throughout the whole country, that had already been under the German occupation. It was a part of the underground structures of the Polish Underground State, its fifth division (Karski, 2014, pp. 256-257). Throughout the whole underground education process of the youth – pupils and students – over 10 000 Polish teachers were killed. To commemorate the underground education teachers in 2000 a granite monument was erected in the Kazimierz Park in Warsaw. It is located at the foot of the Kazimierz Palace and near the University of Warsaw Library (see photo no. 3). It was funded from teachers' donations. It is in the shape of an open book and was created by a sculptor – Antonina Wysocka-Jańczak (1942-2011). On the left “card” of this monument, in the upper corner, there is a symbolic window. During the war, the way of hanging a curtain in a window, opening a window or placing a flower pot on a window sill was a sign of safety or danger. After recognizing the content of this message, students or teachers of the secret classes were or were not able to enter a given apartment – the secret school. In the window of the monument there is a letter “P” – the sign of Polish Fight Symbol.

Teaching at the German concentration camp FKL Ravensbrück took place at different locations. During the roll call, in the concentration camp streets, on the bunk-beds in the barracks. Day and night. The secret lessons in Ravensbrück were a phenomenon. They were so conspiratorial that even the fellow prisoners did not know about the girls receiving the education (Lorens, Małachowska 2020, p. 39). 110 Polish girls participated in these clandestine lessons. On February 25, 1945, an exam was held at the concentration camp. The commission that organized it consisted of the Polish teaching staff, the prisoners. When the war ended all the girls – female prisoners from the concentration camp FKL Ravensbrück – received school leaving certificates. One of them was Wanda Wojtasik.

How important was the secret education as a part of the camp's underground life was the first query asked in the second part of the questionnaire, right after the personal data. The said questionnaire was prepared in the summer of 1977 by the team of Doc. Dr. Urszula Wińska, which consisted of herself and her concentration camp colleagues (Wińska, 1985, pp. 393-394). The addressees of the questionnaire were the former female prisoners of FKL Ravensbrück. The women who had received the questionnaire and for objective reasons could not answer the queries were asked to return the forms and give reasons for not responding to it. More than a dozen women returned the questionnaire with such information. Apart from explanations that the participation in the survey was impossible due to some diseases, two young respondents wrote that the doctor had forbidden them to "return to the concentration camp experiences" (Wińska 1985, p. 8). After the war when they were getting back to life in physical and mental health, it was highly inadvisable to remind them the endured suffering. Therefore, it was necessary to exclude the circumstances provoking the occurrence of the post-camp syndrome exacerbation. Wanda Póltawska wrote about this syndrome that it kept her awake at night, especially during the spells of fatigue (Póltawska 2009a, p. 8). Suffering from this persistent ailment indicates the post-camp sickness (PTSD – post-traumatic stress disorder). The described problem is the central point of the logotherapy. During the therapy the sick person talks to a psychiatrist and has the opportunity to name and express one's own experiences. Thanks to the therapy the patient may undertake a conscious analysis of the impact of the experienced humiliation and physical pain on the devastation of one's mind (Ryn, 2019, p. 86; Póltawska, 2019b).

The refusal to participate in the survey and writing about its reasons by the respondents may therefore indicate that despite remembering their extreme experiences, these women had an internal sense of control, a sense of agency and the ability to assess the effects of participating in the survey. While analyzing the life priorities, and a life in the spiritual and bodily harmony is undoubtedly one of them, the value of choice and confirmation of the value of will and the meaning of life were presented. This feeling always requires the integration of the past experiences with the feelings and experience of one's present life (Frankl, 2020; Ruczaj, 2020a, pp. 323-325; Ruczaj, 2020b, p. 338). Hence, the information about refusing to participate in the study is valuable as the research material. With such an assumption Doc. Dr. Urszula Wińska published the results of the conducted survey (Wińska 1985, p. 8).

Among the respondents to Dr. Wińska's survey there were five women who underwent medical experiments at the concentration camp FKL Ravensbrück. The oldest of them was Joanna Szydłowska-Krusche, born in 1907, who was a teacher arrested and brought to the camp from Lublin in 1941 for participating in the underground activities of the Union of Armed Struggle. Her younger fellow inmate, Zofia Kormańska-Kolańska,



born in 1912, was also a teacher who was sent to the concentration camp in 1941 for belonging to the Union of Armed Struggle. She got there with the transport from Lublin, just like the other three women did. They were all the same age: Maria Kuśmierczuk, born in 1920, a student of pharmacy, imprisoned in the camp in 1941, Wanda Wojtasik-Półtawska, born in 1921, held captive in the Lublin Castle, imprisoned in the camp in 1941 and Genowefa Kluczek-Kącka born in 1921, a student, arrested and brought to the concentration camp from Lublin in 1942.

Dr. Urszula Wińska, Joanna Szydłowska-Krusche and Prof. Lanckorońska were teachers of the aforementioned young women. The memories of both groups concern the areas and values of the underground education.

Dr. U. Wińska, who completed the questionnaire, replied that she came to FKL Ravensbrück in 1941. From the very first moments in the camp, she understood that human reactions, such as helping the other woman, were punished in Ravensbrück. After staying in the camp bunker, she experienced aphasia and a lack of continuity in the logical thinking. That state changed the moment she had realized that she was needed, especially to those young female prisoners. The Polish women who were looking for a way to put a dam on the evil coming from the corruption surrounding them, exhibited, among others, by the German female inmates – prostitutes. Dr. Wińska to whom they turned to while asking for help understood that such a barrier should be built with thoughts. “It was a fight”, she wrote (Wińska, 1985, p. 23). Formed in the high culture of her family home, at the university, with former professional experience as the Polish teacher and involvement in some scouting activities in free Poland, she was aware of the urgent need to resist the concentration camp authorities in order to allow these younger women to be reborn despite being enslaved.

Their way to maintain the inner independence and escape the German oppression was to return to the models of beauty and values acquired before the war. Discovering the meaning of this cultural code, and the possibility of living it conspiratorially, prevented them from the destruction of their personalities. It enabled them to increase the forces of internal mobilization towards good. It allowed creating the bonds with fellow inmates, merging the spiritual potential of both individuals and the group. Being in a national group that shared a common language and recalled the same principles of the social life built the camp community. The feeling was enhanced even more when the women had realized that their struggle for spiritual survival was also the struggle for the survival of the entire nation (Wińska, 1985, p. 39). What united the strengths of individuals and the group was the feeling of togetherness as a nation, using recitation and vocal talents of the incarcerated mates. This was especially noticeable during the executions and when one had the possibility to live in the block with only Polish women: “Then we felt and understood what the bond

of the national community was" (ibid., p. 43), important for all the Polish women, especially for those with a death sentence who were waiting to be called for an execution (ibid., p. 74).

The organization of the secret education was a kind of answer to a philosophical lesson on the Absolute. It saved from the madness, the from suicide, from "pre-hell". It carried out the mission of the secret scout team "Mury" ["the Walls"] (Wińska 1985, pp. 92 - 93, 100). The original secret teaching structures at FKL Ravensbrück were created in 1940. Marta Baranowska (born in 1903) lists the names of the first teachers: Elżbieta Kotarska, Helena Salska, Kazimiera Głębocka, Renée Skalska, Halina Boltowa. It informs about the changes in the shape of the teaching implemented by Wanda Madlerowa, Maria Bujalska, Urszula Wińska, Janina Peretjatkowicz (geography and astronomy) and Julia Szartowska (ibid., p. 141). Wanda Póltawska also mentions Teresa Bromowicz, Halina Chorążyna, Helena Tyrankiewiczowa (physics), Zofia Mączka (anatomy), Karolina Lanckorońska (history of art) (ibid., p. 142). Renée Skalska recalls teaching girls together with Hala Ryffertówna, Lusja Miklaszewska, Marysia Deputowska and Wanda Pałęcka (ibid., p. 143).

Dr. Urszula Wińska devoted a separate query in the questionnaire to the secret teaching, calling it "education and upbringing" (Wińska 1985, pp. 140-155). She wrote about her lectures that they were a response to the need of the "Rabbits" to think about something specific, about something that would separate them internally from the camp life rhythm. One of her listeners was Wanda Póltawska. Despite the atrocities (medical experiments, forced labor, roll calls, selections to death by asphyxiation in a gas chamber, executions by shooting, burning corpses in a crematorium, punishments, hunger, diseases, thefts, lesbian rapes, the recruitment to the camp brothel), from December 1941 to April 18 of the following year, she worked with her students on the Polish literature of from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment period. The particular attention was paid to the works of the Romantic period. They used the patriotic literary works. The analysis proposed during a secret lesson conducted in the block was later on continued during some random or arranged meetings in the camp, during routine duties: on the way to the roll call, on the way to the cauldron with food, during working a day or night shift. They were discussing various problems and solving the literature and history riddles. During Sunday walks on the so-called camp street foreign languages were taught for example.

Teresa Bromowicz (born in 1912) in the fall of 1943 and in the spring of 1944 conducted a systematic literature course for the "Rabbits" (Wińska, 1985, p. 153). The number of schools was proportional to the teams formed by the groups of the "Rabbits". T. Bromowicz taught the mother tongue, and a story about the fact that it replaced Latin. She particularly remembered a lesson with high school students, conducted on the third floor of the bunk bed. The lecture changed the sense of reality and led the mind out of the camp. Thank to them the prisoners could immerse themselves in the rhythm of the ordinary life

prior the war. It let the inmates believe that the acquired knowledge would result in a better life after the war, and would open the gates to the higher-level education. In such circumstances, while discussing the literary works of Mikołaj Rej, the fellow prisoners brought some excruciating news concerning the plan to exterminate the "Rabbits".

Education during the secret classes was awakening the soul and it was the basis for the moral rebellion of the "Rabbit" women. Dr. Wińska described the revolt of mid-August 1943 in a survey by quoting aforementioned Zofia Kormańska-Kolańska (Wińska 1985, pp. 307-309). The participation in the conspiratorial lessons and lectures did not allow the women to give their lives without a combat, what was exactly what the Germans had planned. Owing to the education the "Rabbit" woman escaped from the yoke imposed on them. They had not allowed to break them out of the culture, the spirituality, and the supernatural sphere of the human life. Tormented while hiding from the camp authorities who were hunting them, despite their suffering and readiness to surrender, they were saved by their teachers, who endowed them with "undefeated inner freedom", which they themselves radiated with (Wińska, 1985, p. 357). The education that the "Rabbits" received, in accordance with the prayer poetry written by Dr. Urszula Wińska, led them – in freedom – to a free home, that they prayed for in the camp. The home they missed so much was their Homeland, Poland. In poetic terms, the way to their Homeland was through "the enlargement of the soul" (ibid., "Credo" and "Litania" ["Litany"], pp. 377-379). In the memories of the surviving women, like Zofia Kormańska-Kolańska, the education in the camp toughened up the character and taught a heroic attitude not to make a single reckless outburst, but to be persistent on a daily basis. It also shaped the women to be effective in battling the evil and stand firm against it, while at the same time be helpful and sensitive to the suffering of others (Wińska, 1985, pp. 351 - 352).

Prof. Lanckorońska while referring to the meaning of the secret education, emphasized that the mysteries of science explored by students who listened to the lectures transferred their thoughts elsewhere, diverted them from people, from Evil, and directed them towards the infinity, towards the cosmos – towards the ultimate order, which a man cannot destroy (Lanckorońska, 2001, p. 280). Remembering Sula, a law student from Thessaloniki, the girl who was the same age as the Polish "Rabbits" and came to FKL Ravensbrück with a transport of Greek women in late autumn of 1944, she wrote about an unexpected thread of mutual understanding. Sula's attitude reminded her the immortal Greeks. Despite her suffering she was proud. When she heard Homeric stanzas from Karolina Lanckorońska she confirmed her cultural and ancient origin. Without an invitation she joined in and recited the "Iliad". The women who listened to her, not knowing the Greek language, understood that the real, noble and indestructible world, which had been unexpectedly called from the heart and memory of a person, was there

somewhere outside the camp, beyond the “imprint of slavery” of Nazi Germany (Lanckorońska, 2001, p. 302).

The “Rabbit community” that was mentioned in the survey by Dr. Wińska Genowef Kluczek-Kącka (Wińska, 1985, p. 303) was a group who used to sing a lot, although singing was forbidden. They were prayerful, attentive to the words that meant life, all that despite the enormity of the suffering that surrounded them. The escape into cultural goods, into the philosophy of nature, into the metaphysics, into understanding the superiority of spirit over the matter, was a sought-after good, and the need for it was growing in FKL Ravensbrück. This demand continued in spite of the crematorium furnaces constantly being fueled with the victims of the German crimes (Lanckorońska, 2001, pp. 311, 324). Karolina Lanckorońska was aware that by offering lectures to her students, she was receiving just as much from them. Both sides were returning to the values in which they were born and raised. In the secret education it was the memory of the Nation that saved them. Without that memory, there would be no lifebuoy that they could throw to one another in the moments of despair.

The issue of suffering was tackled, among others, by professor Władysław Tatarkiewicz (1886 - 1980), who during the occupation, like many other academic teachers, was conducting the secret teaching at the University of Warsaw. The extreme events of the war influenced his book “O szczęściu” [“On happiness”] that he started writing in the 1920s and finished, as it seemed to him at the time, in August 1939. Due to the course of war a new, eighth chapter on suffering was added after the chapter VII on pleasures and chapter VI on happiness and misfortune. Drafted as a theoretical book, this work became a retrospective of knowledge about the man – confronted during the occupation of Poland by Germany and the Soviet Union – told in a literary language. Nevertheless, as in the case of war memories of Prof. Lanckorońska, memories of Dr. Półtawska and those prepared by Doc. Dr. Wińska, scientific theses in the field of philosophy – in a relation to the spirituality of the man, the world of values and the choice of values, “withstood the test of the unexpected experiences” brought about by the war (Tatarkiewicz, 2015, p. 10). Extreme experiences did not break the line of educating about values and living them. Clinging to the values became a way of defense against evil, in various forms, both for the teachers of the secret classes and their listeners.

Dr. Urszula Wińska asked the question about the participation of female respondents in the religious life. The query was connected with an attempt to undertake an analysis concerning the validation of values that protect the life and humanity of a person living in the extreme conditions. In the introduction to the publication of the survey results, she emphasized that in spite of the planned genocide and its implementation through the effective training of the German staff to use terror, destroying people and at the same time using them to achieve – at the lowest possible cost – some economic benefits, the Third

Reich did not foresee the possibility of internal, spiritual resistance of the incarcerated women" (Wińska, 1985, p. 13).

Wanda Póltawska after years of analyzes conducted for herself in order not to live in torment with memories from the prison and the German concentration camp, and also to be able to help her patients as a psychiatrist, pointed to the faith in God as a value that had helped people in such circumstances (Póltawska, 2009, p. 32).

The decision to adopt such a position was the result of contemplating the teachings coming from the Gospels, practicing the spiritual life, especially adoring the Blessed Sacrament and praying. Discovering the meaning of the borderline suffering by Póltawska did not happen in solitude. She was accompanied by people she loved: her husband, family, and friends, among them there was the priest Karol Wojtyła. In her memoirs published in the book "Beskidzkie rekolekcje" ["Beskid retreat"] Wanda Póltawska emphasized understanding the God's source of the dignity of the human body through the Incarnation of Jesus Christ (Póltawska, 2009b, p. 153).

Teaching the classical philosophy concerning the inalienable dignity of a human being in a relation to its body and soul brought, just like the Catholic theology based on philosophy - an answer to the question about the metaphysical value of the generally understood purity, and thus the purity of the bodies of the "Rabbit" women. Both the said value and the value of the imprisoned young women's lives were denied by German doctors and nurses: doctor Carl Clauberg, a gynecologist/obstetrician (1898-1957), doctor Fritz Ernest Fischer, a surgeon (1912-1980), doctor Karl Franz Gebhardt, an orthopaedist (1897 - 1948), Elizabeth Marschall (1886-1947), doctor Herta Oberheuser, a dermatologist (1911-1978), doctor Rolf Rosenthal, a gynecologist (1911-1947), doctor Gerhard Schiedlausky, the chief physician at FKL Ravensbrück(1906-1947), Vera Selvequart (1919 - 1947), doctor Percival Treite, the second, after doctor R. Rosenthal chief physician at FKL Ravensbrück (1911-1947) and the third chief physician of FKL Ravensbrück, doctor Richard Hans Trommer (1910-1945) (after: Lorens, Małachowska, 2020, pp. 81-82).

Secret teaching of the "Rabbit" women protected them from an internal annihilation, i.e. a sense of losing their humanity, what might have occurred due to all the suffering inflicted on them by the German doctors and the concentration camp staff. Also back in the General Government the prior tortures and deprivation of their right to life must have also been tremendous. Thus, the underground education in the concentration camp not only saved the memory of the standards that protected life but also the beauty of it (Lorens, Małachowska 2020, p. 39). Hence, an attempt to save the memory of what was good, sublime, familiar, left in Poland, was therefore a way to preserve the lives of these young women, even though they experienced excruciating pain and affliction due to the medical experiments and living in captivity of the concentration camp. Teaching the "Rabbit"



women incarcerated in Ravensbrück about the values, and taking actions in line with them saved those poor women from spiritual and, consequently, also a physical death.

### **Summary**

The inner world of values that is based on a reference to God may seem inviolable and permanent to a man living in the safe conditions, however, this belief can be seriously challenged when the person finds oneself in the oppressive surroundings. The attempt may involve more than just being exposed to the physical pain. It is also crucial to be aware that the values providing the basis for the physical survival, and constituting the moral strength of a person, are protected by other people or at least that one person who endures the suffering better, and is more resistant to life in the extreme concentration camp conditions.

The totalitarian plans and terror used by Nazi Germany against the Polish society (Mazurkiewicz, 2021, pp. 291-377) were battled by the Polish women, teachers, that were familiar with the laws of neuropsychology and human spiritual needs. After the end of the war, they kept their relationships alive by creating the Association of the Family of Prisoners of the German Concentration Camp Ravensbrück. One of its founders was Wanda Póltawska who was honored for that, inter alia, in 2019 with the title of "Custodian of National Memory" [*Kustosz Pamięci Naroowej* – translator's note] (*Nagroda...* 2020, p. 211). The use of family references by naming Maria Liberakowa (1899-1971) the mother, and the fellow prisoners – sisters, was vital for numerous reasons. It allowed these women to define the spiritual bonds that existed between them and indicated the essence of the family, which was perceived by them as the most crucial type of a social community. It rooted the women in the family values and desperately maintained – in conspiracy–the patriotic education received in Poland. It served – through education and the defense of values – to rebuild the nation. It indicated the role of care provided by spiritually stronger women for those who were weaker than themselves (Wińska, 1985, pp. 66-67; Lanckorońska 2001, pp. 222, 229, 239, 326-327, 332). After being released from the camp in April 1945 prof. Lanckorońska gained a new symbolic family, which was the 2<sup>nd</sup> Polish Corps. In Rome Prof. Lanckorońska was assigned to the Department of Education where she organized higher education for soldiers of Gen. Anders. After the conferences of the Big Three in Yalta (February 1945) and Potsdam (July-August 1945) their homes were in the territory influenced by the Soviet Union (Lanckorońska 2001, pp. 334-335; Davies 2015, pp. 513-533; Dybciak, 2021, pp. 30-33).

On April 30, 2018 the documentation regarding the investigation of the Institute of National Remembrance in Szczecin concerning the crime committed against Polish women in the main German all-female concentration camp in Ravensbrück had 70 volumes

of files. (Stanuch, 2018, pp. 49-52). The accounts collected by the Polish Institute of Source Research in Lund has been a very valuable historical source in terms of this investigation as they complete the documentation concerning the values that guided the Polish women who, among others things, had conducted the secret teaching. This documentation was collected and published as a result of the survey conducted by Dr. Wińska and her team. Despite the said values being universal Nazi Germany had been deliberately eliminating them from their attitude towards the conquered nations in order to carry out the crimes (Polak, Galij-Skarbińska, 2019, pp. 276-278). The women who underwent medical experiments at FKL Ravensbrück were mainly Polish. They were sent to this particular concentration camp by the Germans as a punishment for their political activities that they had been carrying out in the occupied Poland.

The title of this research paper "Turn the pain and affliction into thinking about the beauty" is a paraphrase of a fragment from Wanda Póltawska's diary (Póltawska 2009a, p. 82) and it refers to the most basic human needs, which are the feeling of security and being loved. In the concentration camp Wanda Póltawska was tormented by the existential pain, even though she kept the memories of her family home, nature, and her beloved Rafał. The lifebuoy that kept her and her fellow "Rabbits" alive was participation in the organized clandestine education. The "Rabbits" had written a testament, and signed it as a group, where they expressed their will to establish "a large educational institution for women" as part of the compensation that the Polish state will receive from the Germans for the crimes committed against the Polish Nation. "It will educate and raise women who will not allow another war and any criminal experiments on people" (Póltawska 2009a, p. 133). Due to the secret education the camp memories do not only concern the struggle for the sense of existence, or the pain and affliction experienced by women subjected to surgeries, who had to live in an unspeakable misery. The underground teaching made them also the memories of the spiritual freedom of a human being (Szarek, 2019; see photo no. 4).

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This paper uses the memoirs published after World War II by the Polish women incarcerated during the occupation of Poland in the German Nazi all-female concentration camp FKL Ravensbrück. These women were political prisoners with a history of the underground activity undertaken in the first weeks after Germany and the Soviet Union had invaded our country in 1939. One of them was, among others, Prof. Karolina Lanckorońska, the art history lecturer at the Jan Kazimierz University in Lviv. When the war broke out she was 41 years old. The Germans imprisoned her in the camp for 27 months. Dr. Urszula Wińska, a Polish language teacher in Bochnia, was 37 years old when she was

sent to the concentration camp, where she was imprisoned for 44 months. Wanda Wojtasik-Półtawska, a student of the Ursuline High School in Lublin was then 18 years old and stayed incarcerated for 43 months. Doctor Wińska became one of the organizers of the secret teaching at FKL Ravensbrück. The underground education, that prof. Lanckorońska joined as well, was offered to, among others, the young women subjected to the medical experiments performed by the German doctors in the camp. One of 74 Polish women who were called the "Rabbits" because of these medical experiments they had undergone was Wanda Wojtasik-Półtawska.

The memories of the secret teaching show us how priceless the value of teaching humanism is. Its goal, despite the conspiracy and the constant threat of losing one's life, was to restore a sense of dignity and create bonds. This was achieved through the knowledge of the spiritual and physical unity of the human being, and the superior role of spirituality that has the power to enhance the physical strength and save one from death. The said value was confirmed by the results of the survey published by Dr. Urszula Wińska. The survey was answered by 158 Polish women who were the former prisoners of FKL Ravensbrück (out of 400 to whom the questionnaire was sent).

The war and concentration camp memories are the testimony of the historical events. They are used to teach about the practices of enslavement and destruction of the Polish Nation by the Germans. However, writing the memories also allowed the women to start a therapy. According to the science (see, inter alia, the works of Wiktor Frankl and Zdzisław Ryn – a student of Antoni Kępiński) telling the experience by giving a testimony allows us to name the experienced pain and affliction and identify its causes. It helps to alleviate suffering and restore the meaning of life.

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**Attachments: 4.**



„To  
the Main Commission for  
the Investigation of German Crimes

Wanda Wojtasik  
Lublin  
Lubartowska 29 m. 9

I was arrested on February 17, 1941 at 7:30 am. One uniformed Gestapo officer (a strong, dark-haired man with a scar on his chin, who was called Adolf by his companion) and a civilian who was his interpreter came for me. When I asked them why I should go with them, he said: “We are the Gestapo.” I was examined in the Gestapo building (at Uniwersytecka Street), what lasted until 2:30 am. Then I was taken to the basement. The same brunette man was conducting the examination and asking about my alleged affiliation with an anti-German organization. He tied me to the table in such a way that its corner was pressing hard against my left breast (what resulted in a huge ulcer). He was hitting my back and feet with his whip. After testifying he took me to a cell, where we slept on a wooden board in pairs (the cell was dark with a cement floor).

Two days later, without having finished the investigation, they took me to the Castle [Zamek] and I was shoved into a tiny cell no. 34, where there were six beds, and 22 people, half of which were the prisoners. In the prison we were given 250 grams of bread and half a liter of krupnik [the barley soup]. The most unbearable thing was the ban on going to the toilets – they released us from our cell only once a day for a couple of minutes. Apart from that there was a bucket in the cell, the capacity of which was not enough. We also received one bucket of water a day to wash ourselves.

On March 8, we were moved to the upper cell, which was brighter, but the situation was even worse, as there were 58 of us, and [illegible] only one bucket to share, which was of the same capacity.

Particularly sadistic was the Ukrainian guard Pogrebna, who gave us a really hard time.

I spent the next two weeks in a scabies quarantine in a tiny cell, the so-called “sekretka”. It was a very damp cell in the basement, next to the toilets. We used the cement as a bed. There were eight women in the cell. Excluding the three of us there were only prostitutes (one of them in the last, decaying stage of syphilis).

In July I was transferred with a group of political prisoners to the cell no. 38, which was ruled (literally) by a well-known Lublin prostitute (famous in the prison for having a reputation of a perpetual recidivist), Marysia Genca. Together with her court of bandits, she was harassing the political prisoners in particular.

On September 21, 1941, I was taken from this cell and put on a transport (154 women) to the Ravensbrück concentration camp, where I was given the number 7709. I worked there at digging turf (in the autumn, when the ground was already frozen), digging ditches,

moving the sand (we were guarded by aufseherkas with dogs), carrying soil and stones in the carriers, unloading stones from a ship, throwing bricks, carrying sacks of cement (60 kg), transporting coke and soil in the wheelbarrows, and then sewing large straw shoes for the guards (at first in eight-hour shifts and then in twelve-hour shifts, one week of work during the day, one week of night work).

Then since March 3, 1942, I had worked in the so-called *Sanitatzslage* – a workshop, where we produced some huge sheets for carrying the wounded. They were made of the three-layered paper. My job was to roll the enormously huge paper rolls (300 kg) and measure the sheets. As a result of this work I had an inflammation of the lymph glands in my left armpit, probably due to the excessive muscle strain. The camp doctor Oberheuser (SS) took care of that by cutting my arm in two places without the general or even some local anesthesia.

I worked in that workshop until July 27, 1942. On that day, our entire transport was called *nach vorne*, that is, to the commandant. The list was read to us and we were sent back to the block. Two days later we were called again, this time to the “sick room” (hospital), and the first ten of us were examined there (I was one of them). The examination was limited to parading naked in front of the doctor who examined our arms and legs, so we had an impression that it was about assigning us to work.

The next day they called only these ten examined women. I was sure we were going to be executed. We were bathed and ordered to go to bed (it should be noted that we had just completed a twelve-hour night shift). A moment later a nurse came and gave us subcutaneous injections containing five cubic centimeters of some light yellow liquid. The substance was injected into our right thighs. The said injection caused tremendous weakness, nausea, and an increased heart rate. I couldn't get up because I felt so dizzy. In a few minutes the nurse came back with the razor and shaved our legs up to the knees (we still had no idea what all of that meant). Then a trolley was brought into the room and one who was lying the closest to the door was taken away. She returned in about a quarter of an hour (as it turned out, the surgeon did not come that day). In the afternoon we felt better, I for example was able to sit. Then we were sent back to the block. The reaction after this injection was so strong that for the first time in my life after reaching the block, I fainted during a roll call. After three days I was taken back to the hospital, and again I was waiting and did not know what was going to happen. Then again we received the same injection and the operating trolley was brought in. We were put on that trolley one by one (we were so weak that I could not get up on my own), and then taken to the corridor and placed in front of the operating room. When I was there the local doctor Schiedlausky gave me an intravenous injection which worked so quickly that I did not even have time to start counting.

I woke up in the evening (the operation was at nine in the morning) with some excruciating pain in my leg and some severe headache. My right leg was in a plaster cast up to the knee. In the evening I had a temperature of 40.1 degrees. I was given an injection of morphine in the evening (the nurse who gave it to us said that it was morphine). I was awake all night – just like for many others nights that followed the operation – the pain was

simply unbearable. By the morning, my foot had swollen to double its size, the plaster cast was cutting into my ankle and knee, my thigh was red and swollen, my leg started to smell terribly. After three days I received my first dressing for the wound. Immediately after entering the treatment room where the dressings were changed, a nurse told the doctor about me, that I was the one who understood German. They covered my head with a sheet and a doctor that I did not know (I saw him before they covered me) cut the cast and then I had the impression that something was being pulled out of my leg. It seemed like that I had two holes in my leg (I was wrong, it turned out later that I had only one wound) - one on the ankle and the other one somewhere above it, and that the doctor was pulling something from the inside. It was more than extremely painful. The next dressings were made every other day, and they were always done by the same unknown doctor. I still had a fever of 39.9-40 degrees, my leg was still swollen and red, and some brown, smelly liquid was literally continually dripping from underneath the plaster cast (which they put back on despite my leg being cut open). The next dressings weren't that painful anymore and after that I didn't have the impression that they were pulling something out from the wound.

This state lasted up to two weeks (I was healing the longest of our entire group, and there were six of us). During the first week, I didn't eat (literally) anything at all, we were given the so-called "diet" then (it consisted of some mashed vegetables and potato purée). After two weeks, my fever dropped a little (then, on August 14, 1942, the second group of nine people was operated on) and I started eating. The leg still ached as much as before. After two weeks, the plaster cast was removed completely. It turned out that I had one wound, deep to the bone, above the ankle on my right leg, about 8-10 cm long and as wide as a hand. The wound was green and yellow.

It is important that in the beginning we were constantly visited by various commissions - the military and civilian doctors. They were shown around by the doctor Oberheuser, who examined us every day and carefully inspected our legs every morning. We were numbered, there were numbers I, I T.K., II, II T.K., III, III T.K. (I was the last number - III T.K. - and my reaction was the strongest in my group). When I asked why we were operated on, Oberheuser replied that it was to make our legs stronger. Later on, when one of my colleagues (Jadzia Kamińska) asked why they had operated on us, she replied: "Because there is the greatest number of pretty women in the Lublin transport." In other words, they were simply dismissing our numerous questions by giving evasive answers.

It should be noted that we were strictly separated from the rest of the hospital. There was an empty room in front of ours, where a nurse that was on-call would stay. Moreover, our room was entered only by the SS nurses. The smell of the rotten meat coming from our legs was so strong that everyone who entered the room would back away and open the window. At first there was a nurse at night, then, when the fever had dropped a bit, and when the next ones were operated on, we were simply locked inside. After three weeks, when I was still weak and my wound was completely opened, I was sent to the block, where we had to sleep on bare straw mattresses without any sheets. My leg was festering so badly that I was leaving a puddle of pus behind me while I was going to change the dressing. For

three months, however, the leg was festering continuously, then it began to heal. Around December I started walking, limping a lot. It was not until the spring of 1943 that I started walking normally, but my right leg was still weaker and aching.

In the spring, we were taken to work, we were supposed to knit. All in all, we had the right to some lighter work, except for some occasional situations, like when we were taken to unload stones from the ship (then I had my first heart attack). Since the operation my heart muscle has been very strongly weakened (in accordance with the medical certificate issued by a Czech doctor who worked in the camp hospital). It levels off very slowly.

Until February 13, 1945, I was in the Ravensbrück camp, where the hygienic conditions were gradually deteriorating as the number of women was increasing (lice, fleas, bedbugs, German cockroaches, scabies). On that day I left the camp with the Auschwitz transport under the name of Henryka Daczyńska 83 175. It saved me from the execution, which was to take place on February 5, 1945 (I was in hiding with the other women who had undergone the operations in the concentration camp from February 5 to 13).

The last three months until May 2, 1945 I spent in Neustadt-Glewe, where we were kept in the most horrible conditions, crammed with 60 or more women in some small rooms, with no beds and no blankets. We slept side by side on the bare floor, and it was so crowded that neither day nor night we could straighten our legs (of course there were some enormous amounts of lice there). Once a day we were given some bread. At first it was a sixth, then an eighth, and in the last month a tenth of a kilogram of bread, which was often moldy. Additionally, once a day we also received a quarter of a liter of some dried turnip soup that had been cooked completely without any salt.

After such an insane hunger I became very ill with the so-called *durchfall* (starvation diarrhea), which I immediately healed from when I ate some groats after the Allies had entered on May 2 (it was simply a typical starvation disease).

As for Ravensbrück, 74 Polish women were operated on, five died right after the operation:

- 1) Zofia Kiecol (Chełm);
- 2) Amelia Lefanowicz (Biłgoraj);
- 3) Kazimiera Kurowska (puławski powiate);
- 4) Freda Prusówna (Zamość);
- 5) Weronika Kraska (she died with symptoms of tetanus).

All the women who died had septic operations, just like me. Additionally, there were also bone and muscle operations that were repeated up to five times. Six of the operated patients were shot:

- 1) Maria Pajęczkowska (the transport from Warsaw February 10, 1945);
- 2) Marianna Gnaś (the transport from Lublin) February 11, 1943;
- 3) Rozalia Gutek (the transport from Lublin, 20 years old) September 23, 1943;
- 4) Pelagia Rakowska September 23, 1943;
- 5) Aniela Sobolewska (the transport from Lublin) September 23, 1943;

6) Maria Zielonka (the transport from Lublin) September 23, 1943.

Moreover, one of the operated people, Jadwiga Łuszcz, was taken in June 1943 and allegedly sent to the Pawiak prison. Up until now there is no news concerning her whereabouts.

The second one, Aniela Okoniewska, was also taken away in June, for the forced labour. It took place after the pardon of her death penalty was read to her (in October 1942).

There are 62 women who were operated on (currently 61, Pelagia Michalik died in Lublin).

From our transport, which carried 154 people (from the Lublin Castle), about 35 were shot, including 13 political prisoners who were shot simultaneously on April 18, 1942:

- 1) Romana Sekuła,
- 2) Maria Apnio,
- 3) Maria Waśniewska,
- 4) Apolonia Chrostowska,
- 5) Grażyna Chrostowska,
- 6) Emilia Radecka,
- 7) Genowefa (?) Adamiak,
- 8) Renata Żytkowa,
- 9) Zofia Grabska,
- 10) Wersocka,
- 11) Maria Muckowa,
- 12) Maria Dobrowolska,
- 13) Kazimiera Banowa.

One person from our transport, Teodozja Szych, was killed with a lethal injection after a nervous breakdown.

I can support the presented figures with the evidence (the "illegal" lists), and supplement my testimony if it is not exhaustive enough. I want to emphasize that the worst period of all was the one when I was undergoing the operations. I did not know if I would ever walk again. Additionally, I realized that in this way I was serving them and contributing to their advantage. Nothing can ever compensate for the suffered moral loss.

If the Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes deems it necessary I am ready to give more detailed oral testimony. I believe that the most horrifying fact was that, in the name of "knowledge", doctors, people who seemed to represent a certain level, performed experimental operations on human beings, when in the same medical circles the issue of vivisection on animals was being widely discussed. It should also be noted that we were either tricked or forced to undergo these operations - despite our constant individual and collective protests.

Wanda Wojtasikówna,  
born on November 2, 1921, Lublin."



Ipn gk 182/164  
56 ob, OB. 56., 182/164

405

182

So

Główniej Komisji Badania  
Zbrodni Niemieckich.

Bożena Pauda  
Lublin  
Subartowska 29 m 9.

Aresztowano mnie dn. 17/II. 1941r. o godz. 7<sup>30</sup>. Przyszli po mnie jeden gestapowiec i mundurek (silny brzyt z ~~prze~~ brzożką na brodzie którego jego towarzysz nazwał Adolferem) i drugi cywil jako tłumacz. Na moje zapytanie dlaczego mam z nimi się posiedzieć „my som Gestapo.” - 1<sup>o</sup> Słuchacz Gestapo (przy ul. Uniwersyteckiej) po badaniach, które trwały do godziny 2<sup>30</sup> i moją zaprowadzono mnie do piwnicy Badania przeprowadził ten sam brzyt pytając o relację moją przy należności do anty-niemieckiej organizacji - przyznał mi do stołu w ten sposób że róg silnie zpijał mi się z lewą pierś (na skutek tego zformował mi się ogromny wród) - Bił mnie sam pięścią po plecach i stopach. - Po zeznaniach zaprowadził mnie do celi gdzie na desce spaliśmy po dwie - (cela ciemna z lementem posadzki). Po dwóch dobach nie kończąc śledstwa zawarli mnie na zamku gdzie spotkano mnie do maleńkiej celi nr. 34 gdzie było 6 łóżek a 22 osoby z tym 50% kobiet. - 1<sup>o</sup> przelicznik dawał nam 25 kg chleba i 1/2 lba kumpulu. - Najbardziej nie znali dać się nam zakaz nie wychodzenia do ubikacji - wypuszczano nas raz na dobę na parę minut poza tym w celi był kubek który objętością nie wystarczał. - wody do mycia dano nam jedno wiadło na dobę. -

Dn. 8/III - przeniesiono nas do górnej celi gdzie zpradznie było widniej ale sygnacja była jeszcze gorsza bo było nas 58 a

strona: 0182

183

Iph. gk 182/164  
56. ob. OB. 56., 182/164

był to jeden "ten sam lubi".  
 "Specjalnie sadyżymie na stajoni" była oddzielną "uradnia"  
 Pogrzebna, która dała nam się mocno we znaki.  
 Następnie dwa tygodnie spędziliśmy na lewariantowaniu i wierzbowej  
 w maleńkiej celi w t. zw. "Selwete" w piwnicy, celi b. wilgotnej  
 w sąsiedztwie klozetów, cement, jedno łóżko, mas 8, a oprócz  
 nas trzech same prochytki (jedna z ostatnim rozkładającym się  
 stadium syfilisu).  
 W lipcu przenieśliśmy mnie z grupy politycznych do celi 38 gdzie  
 panowała (dostojnie) znana lubelska prochytki (znana na terenie  
 więzienia jako "niezła rezydencja") Marysia Genia która wraz  
 ze swoim dworem bandytek specjalnie szykanowała politycznych.  
 dnia 21/IX. 1944 roku z tejże celi zabrano mnie transportem  
 (154 kobiety) do Obozu Koncentracyjnego w Ravensbrück, gdzie  
 dostałam numer 7709 - Pracowałam tam głównie przy  
 kopaniu darni (w jesieni, gdy ziemia już była zamrznięta),  
 kopaniu rowów, przesypywaniu piasku (piłworany nas Aufseherin  
 z psami) noszeniu ziemi i kamieni na wózkach, wyładunku  
 kamienia ze statku, rucaniem legier, noszeniu rowów cementu  
 (60 kg.) wożeniu koksu i ziemi w barakach - a potem przy  
 szyciu dwóch stoniaranych butów dla warkowiczy (napięcie 8  
 a potem 12 godzin na dobę na zmianę, jeden tydzień dzien-  
 nej, jeden wiecznej pracy) - Następnie od 3/III. 42 roku praco-  
 wałam w tak zwanym Sanitätslager - w warsztacie gdzie robiło  
 się z potrójnego papieru ogromne płachty do przewożenia  
 rannych - moja praca polegała na tworzeniu ogromnego rątu  
 papieru (300 kg) i odmierzaniu arkuszy - Przy tej pracy  
 wyizolowało mi się prawdopodobnie na skutek niedwigniowego  
 forsowania mięśni zapalenie guzów limfatycznych pod żebrą  
 pachy - w doktora obozowa Oberhäuser (S.S.) rozkazała pre-  
 inować mi żebrę w dwóch miejscach bez maskowania a na-  
 kół bez miejscowego znieczulenia.

strona: 0183



IpH gk 182/164  
56 ob. OB. 56., 182/164

Warszacie pracowałam do 27/VII - 1942 roku - 27/VII - 100.  
masz transport bezwano "nach vorne" j. zu. do komendanta  
odwytano listę i puszono z powrotem na blok - po dni dwóch bez-  
wano nas znowu tym razem do kelim (szpitala) i tam zbadano  
pierwszy dzień (ja byłam wśród ludzi) - Badania ograniczyły się  
do przedziobania nogo przed lekarzy która oglądają ręce i nogi.  
Taki ze odnośnymy wrażenie ze chodzi o wybór do pracy -  
Następnego dnia bezwano tyłu do zbadania 10<sup>2</sup> - Byłam pełna  
ze idziemy na egzamin - wykapano nas i kazano pociągnąć się  
do Toru (trzeba zamazać ze byłymy wtedy po 12-ty godzi-  
nach nowej pracy) - Za chwilę przyszła Siostra i zrobiła nam  
podskone zastrzyki w piase nado po piaci mi<sup>3</sup> jankozji jano-  
zółtego piym - zastrzyk wywołai szalone ostabienie, miedzi  
przyppieszenie kłna - nie mogiam wstai bo mi się szalenie  
klegato z głone. Za parę minut przyszła znowu Siostra z bryst-  
ką i ogłita nam nogi do kolan (wiggie nie miałyśmy  
pojjie w to wszystko ma zamazi) - Następnie zjechał Toru  
i pierwszy z brzegu zabrano - za jakiś krandaus kłona  
(jak się okazało chimoz tego dnia nie przyjechał) - Po po-  
tudniu umiysimy się o hyle lepiej ze ja mogiam usigic  
wtedy puszono nas znowu na blok - Reakcja po tym  
jakimis zastrzyku była taki silna ze ja po raz pierwszy  
w zymie po dojściu na blok na apdu kiebnyu zemdla-  
Tam - Po trzech dniach wręto mnie znowu do szpitala  
i znowu to samo nekianie nie wiadomo na co, znowu  
tali sam zastrzyk i zjechał Toru operacyjn, bolejnio  
wiadomo nas na Toru (byłyśmy tak ostabione ze  
ja nie mogiam wstai o trasyuie wstadi) zamieriono na  
konstare przed salej operacyjn gdzie lekarz miejscowy  
Szydlauski zrobił mi zastrzyk dozylny kade piomnijsco

strona: 0184

IPN GK 182/164  
56 ob. OB. 56, 182/164

185  
nie zdgiziam zarzki linyi -  
Obudziłam się nad wieczorem (operacja była o 9<sup>15</sup> rano) z szalonymi  
bólami w nogi i głowę - Pręga w nogę miałam do kolana i gips  
się - wieczorem miałam temperaturę 40° 1', dostałam na noc  
zastawkę morfiny (mówiła siostra która nam dawała) całą noc  
jakiś szereg następnych nie spałam, ból był i prost potroiny - za  
rana stopa spuchła mi do podkończonych rozmiarów, gips wyrwał  
mi się w kostkę i kolano, udło było nerwowe i obrzęknięte  
nogi zarzta cudzoci - Po trzech dniach pierwszy opatrunek  
zawsz przyjeżdża na szpital opatrunek, siostra przedkazała mi  
że do tego co rozumie po niemiecku - przybyli mi głowę przed-  
ciadkiem i lekarz nieznamy mi (zobaczyłam go zanim mnie przy-  
jeżdża) rozciął mi gips i potem miałam wrażenie, że coś wy-  
ciągnął mi z nogi, wydarło mi się, że mam dwie dziury  
(możliwe okazało się potem, że miałam jedną ranę) jedną  
na kostce, a drugą wyżej i że on coś ciągnie ze środka  
to było bardziej niż bardzo bolesne - następne opatrunki  
były robione co drugi dzień i zawsze robił je ten sam  
okazy lekarz - Gorączka miałam ciągle 39° 9 - 40° - noga  
była ciągle spuchnięta i nerwowa, a z pod gipsu (który na-  
mówiano mi miemu rozciąć) wielka deformacja i szkieletowa  
na uchwycenie ciała - następne opatrunki nie były już takie  
bardzo bolesne i już potem nie miałam wrażenia, że  
mi coś wyciągają - Stała się tak do dwóch tygodni (u  
mnie najdłużej z powodu całej naszej grupy, było nas 6)  
z pierwszym tygodniem w ogóle nie (dostanie) nie jadłam - dawała  
nam wtedy 20. dietę (pocieranie jarzyn i puree, z kartofli)  
Po dwóch tygodniach gorączka trochę spadła, po (tedy zoperowa-  
no 14/III. 42 roku drugą grupę 9 osób) i zarztałem jeści - noga  
ciągle jednakowo boląca - po dwóch tygodniach zdjęto mi

strona: 0185



Ipn gk 182/164  
56 ob. OB. 56., 182/164

całkowicie owarata się wtedy, że miałam jedus rana do łos-  
ci powyżej łoski na prawej nodze długości około 8-10 cm a 320  
roku na drugiej rana była zielono-czarna. 186

Ważne jest że na początku wogóle przychodziły nas oglądać róż-  
ne komisje - lekarskie mundurowi i cywilni - oprowadzani ich lekar-  
ka Oberhäuser która nas codziennie oglądała i starannie codzie-  
niano oglądała nasze nogi - Byłyśmy poumieszkane, były  
numery I, I T.K., II, II T.K., III, III T.K. - (ja byłam  
numer ostatni III T.K. i u mnie reakcja była z mojej strony  
najcięższa. - Na moje pytanie dlaczego zostaliśmy zoperowane  
Oberhäuser odpowiedziała żebyśmy miały silniejszą nogę - a  
poimie na zapytanie jednej z koleżanek (Jadzi Kamińskiej)  
dlaczego nas operują odpowiedziała dlatego że w transporcie  
libelskim jest ciężkiej Tądnych kobiet - jednym słowem słaby-  
kawaś nicem nasze wielokrotne pytania. - Trzeba zauważyć  
że byłyśmy ściśle odseparowane od reszty szpitala przed nami były  
puszki polowej gdzie miała dyżurni siostra, a do polszoj naszego  
wchodziły tylko siostry z nogi naszymi był taki potężny  
zapach zgnitego mięsa że każdy kto wchodził cofał się i  
okrzykiwał oho - oho mój z początku była siostra potem gdy  
gorgulus trochę spadła i gdy zoperowano następnie zamknię-  
to nas poprostu na łóżku - Po trzech tygodniach siadła  
i z superłecznym obractw rana wystrano mnie na blok gdzie  
mnie zostały spai na gotych siennikach bez przesładek -  
dłoga ropiała mi tak bardzo że gdy wracam na opatru-  
niei zostawałam za sobą kątówkę ropy. - Przez trzy miesiące  
bez przerw moja ropiała potem zausta się goi - około goni-  
nie zausta dwojki moim lulejki, a dopiero na wiosnę  
- 43 roku zausta normalnie chodzi z tym że przez pra-  
zgi miałam wogóle ślabszą i bolącą.

strona: 0186



Iph gk 182/164  
 56.ob. OB. 56, 182/164

zabrano nas do pracy niemieckiej w dniach. -  
 W pierwszym razie niemieckiej pracy poza sp-  
 radycznymi wypadkami jak np. wtedy kiedy nas zabrano  
 do Taborowa kamieni ze statku (po czym miało miejsce  
 w innym celu sercowy) - Po operacji zostało mi bardzo złe  
 osłabienie mięśnia sercowego (zeding onowienia lekarki uszki  
 pracującej w szpitalu chorobnym) - co się bardzo powoli wyrobiło.  
 Do 13/II - 1945 roku byłem w obozie Ravensbrück gdzie wa-  
 runki higieniczne starczy się w ten sposób w miarę jak  
 przybywało kobiet (wzry, pluty, pludry, pmsaki, siwek) -  
 A 13/II. wyjechałem z obozu z transportem oświeceniowym pod  
 nazwą Słoneczka Sanktowa 83175 co miało miejsce  
 przed egzekucją jako miała się odbyć 5/II. 45 - (od 5-13  
 całego ulżyciem się w ten sposób z innymi operowanymi na  
 terenie obozu) - Ostatnie trzy miesiące do 2/V. 45 roku  
 spędziłem w Neu-Stadt Głowe gdzie byłem w naj-  
 okropniejszych warunkach stowione po 60 i więcej kobiet w  
 małych pokojach bez łóżek, bez łazienek - spanie na podłodze  
 na górze podłogi a było tak. uamno że ani w dzień  
 ani w noc nie można było wyprostować nog - (Wahwał-  
 nie wsiły w szalonych rękawach) - Zawano nam najpierw  
 świeży, potem ćwiec, a ostatni miesiąc jednog dziesiętę.  
 litogramna dleba weso spleśniałego raz na dobę i  
 raz na dobę 1/4 litra zupy z mrozonej białej gotowanej  
 zupełnie bez soli. -  
 Po takim szalonym głodzie zapadłem na t. zw. "durchfall"  
 (głódowa biegunka) z tego wskazywał się 2 miejsca, gdy po  
 złobieniu gwałtownie 2/V - zjadłem trochę kawy (prosił być  
 to typowa choroba głódowa) -

Ipn gk 182/164  
56 ob., OB. 56., 182/164

Podzi o Ravensbrück - operowanych było 74 Polek, 5 umarło <sup>188</sup>  
 po operacji: 1) Zofia Kiecol (Ametu) 2) Aniela Stefanowicz (Białogóra)  
 3) Kazimiera Kurovska (początek puławski) 4) Freda Piusówna (Zamość)  
 5) Perowina Krasia (umarła z objawami tyfusa) - wszystkie zmarły  
 miały tak jak i ja operacje zakrzepic, oprócz tego były operacje  
 na klatce i usunięcie portazanc do pęcherza - z Operowanych  
 zostało wzrzelanych: 1) Maria Paździorkowa (transport warszawski  
 10/II - 1943 r.) 2) Guai Marianna (kr. lubelski) 11/II - 1943 roku  
 3) Rozalia Guteli (kr. lubelski lut 20) 23/IX - 1943 r. 4) Pelagia Ra-  
 wowska 23/IX - 43 - 5) Aniela Sobolewska (kr. lub.) 23/IX - 43 r.  
 6) Maria Zielonka (kr. lub.) 23/IX - 43 r. -  
 Poza tym jedną z operowanych Jadwigę Suszcę zabrano w Berlinie  
 1943 roku i zamieszkała w Zakopanem - dotąd nie ma  
 o niej żadnych wieści.  
 Smęgi Aniela Okoniewska zabrana także w Berlinie na wózek  
 po uprzednim (w październiku 1942 r.) odcięciu jej całej wątroby  
 i klatki -  
 Pozostało 62 operowane (o tej chwili już 61 jedna Pelagia Oli-  
chalik zmarła w Lublinie) -  
 Z transportu naszego który liczył 154 (z Zambon lubelskiego)  
 wzrzelano około 35 w tym 13 polichizowanych jednocześnie dnia  
 18/IV - 1942 r.: 1) Romana Selinta 2) Maria Apis 3) Maria  
 Pasniowska 4) Apolonia Chrostowska 5) Grazyna Chrostowska  
 6) Emilia Radecka 7) Genowefa(?) Adamiak 8) Renata Zyskowska  
 9) Zofia Grabka 10) Persocia 11) Maria Chuchora 12) Maria  
 Sobrowolska 13) Kazimiera Banowa. -  
 Jedną z naszego transportu Teodorę Szuch zabito za strykiem po  
 ataku nerwowym. -  
 Cytuj które podają mogą popniei dorodami („leże” liż) a zermania  
 wampierami o ile są mało wyprzedzające - Podkreślić chęć że ma-



Ipn gk 182/164  
 56 ob, OB. 56., 182/164

był dla mnie okres operacji, kiedy nie wiedziałam czy  
 nigdy chodziła i kiedy zdawałam sobie sprawę, że w ten sposób  
 staję im i przyczyniam się do ich śmierci - Strachy moralnej  
 nie jest o stanie nic nigdy myślnie -  
 jeżeli Komija B. Zbr. Wian. uzna to za potrzebne gotowa jestem  
 usłuchać złośliwych zarzekań bardziej szczerze - uważam, że naj-  
 potraźniejszy był fakt, że w imię "wiedzy" lekarze ludnie zda-  
 wano się na pewnym poziomie dochodził do operacji ośmiadwul-  
 nych na ludziach, gdy przecież w tych samych warunkach ko-  
 tach kwestia zniszczenia na zewnątrz była szeroko dyskutowana -  
 Trzeba zauważyć, że na operacje mózgu mas albo podstępem  
 albo siłą - mimo naszych ciągłych protestów indywidualnych  
 i zbiorowych -

Wanda Wojtasikówna  
 w. 2/XI-1921 r. - Lublin.

1. A photo of a testimony of Wanda Wojtasik (Półtawska), "Zapisy Terroru" [at: [ZapisyTerroru.pl](http://ZapisyTerroru.pl), access: 10 XII 2021], [original in: Archive of the Institute of National Remembrance in Warsaw, IPN GK 182/164, k. 182-189].



2. A photo of Sylwia Rostecka's drawing showing the leg of the operated prisoner – Wanda Wojtasik-Półtawska – in FKL Ravensbrück. Source, with the consent of the publisher: Stefanek, T., Zaborowski, L. (2018). *Zarysy pamięci*, Warsaw: Institute of Solidarity and Bravery Witold Pilecki.





3. A photo of a monument commemorating the Underground Education Teachers in the Kazimierz Park in Warsaw. *Photo by Bogusława Filipowicz*

Text on the monument:

“W hołdzie polskim nauczycielom organizatorom i uczestnikom tajnego nauczania w latach 1939- 1945 – Związek Nauczycielstwa Polskiego. Listopad 2000”. Na odwrocie głazu ze znakiem “P” widnieje wyryty podpis: 2000 AWJ. [“In tribute to Polish teachers, organizers and participants of the secret teaching in 1939-1945 – The Polish Teachers Association. November 2000.” On the back of the boulder with the “P” symbol there is an engraved signature: 2000 AWJ.]





4. A photo of the memorial plaque of the Polish female prisoners of the German Nazi concentration camp FKL Ravensbrück from the courtyard of the Pawiak Prison Museum in Warsaw. *Photo by Bogusława Filipowicz*

Text on the plaque:

„Jeśli zapomnę o NICH, Ty Boże na niebie Zapomnij o mnie” – Adam Mickiewicz III cz. „Dziadów”. PAMIĘCI 32 000 bohaterskich polskich kobiet, dziewcząt i dzieci, zamordowanych lub zmarłych z chorób i głodu, pozostało na zawsze w piaskach Maklemburgii – Ravensbrück w latach 1939-1945. Hołd Ich Cieniom składają te, którym los pozwolił wrócić do Ojczyzny. Klub b. więźniarek obozu koncentracyjnego Ravensbrück. Warszawa AD 2000.

[“If I forget about THEM, Forget me Our Father in Haven” – Adam Mickiewicz “Forefathers' Eve” part III. IN MEMORY OF 32 000 heroic Polish women, girls and children, who were murdered or died of disease and starvation, and remained forever in the sands of Maklemburg – Ravensbrück in years 1939-1945. The tribute to their heir Shadows is paid by those whom Fate has allowed to return to their Homeland. The Club Of Former Prisoners Of The Ravensbrück Concentration Camp. Warsaw AD 2000.]

*(Translator: Agnieszka Wiesenthal)*