

EHRI Online Course in Holocaust Studies

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The Holocaust in Ukraine – Auxiliary Administration and Police

Translation: Edmund Pyszczuk, Former Interpreter of the 295th Infantry Division, Recalls the Murder of Jewish Infants and Babies in Bila Tserkva and the Response of the Local Population, in a Questioning in Darmstadt on 5 July 1966

County Court Investigative Judge IV Darmstadt, 5.7.1966

- Js 4/65 (GStA) -

Present:

County Court Councillor Wagner
as Investigating Judge

Justice Employee Pathenschneider
Public Officer

Note:

Hearing duration: 07:55 – 09:30 am.

The pre inquest case against Kuno Callsen and others for murder - the named witness appeared in court after receiving a judicial summons.

The witness was made aware of the case charges. Subsequently he was admonished to tell the truth and made aware that his statement was to be attested by him on oath unless any legally defined or other allowed exception released him from doing so. He was explicitly instructed regarding the significance of his oath and the criminal implications of an incorrect or incomplete statement, whether made under oath or not respectively.

The witness was additionally advised that the oath taken also covered any statements made to questions regarding the witness himself and circumstances pertaining to § 68 StPO.

The witness was questioned as follows:

1). Identification particulars

My name is Edmund Simon Pyszczuk, born on 26.4.1904 in Stanislaw, residing in Lichtenstein in the Landkreis of Ebern ~~Bamberg~~, house no. 2, pastor, married.

Not related nor related by marriage to the accused.

Further identification particulars:

I was born in Stanislau, my parents died early. I was sent to an uncle and went with him to Belgium where I was a Catholic monk, later I returned to Stanislau and converted to Protestantism and became Protestant pastor in Stanislau.

In the year 1940, I came to Litzmannstadt during the course of the resettlement, became a German citizen and was called up to the 295.I.D. I can remember the Ia of the Division, Lieutenant-Colonel Großcurth, Harbeck, the O3 and the later Ic of the Division, Bechly, who was the IVb, as well as Dr. Reuß, the Catholic military chaplain. I experienced the Russian Campaign with this division. I was an interpreter, as Sonderführer Z.

I became a prisoner of war of the Russians in Stalingrad and was released from captivity in the year 1955. Since then I live in West Germany as a pastor.

Regarding the case:

Question: Pastor, please describe to me what you still remember of your experiences in Bjelaja-Zerkow.

Answer: In August 1941, the 295th I.D. staff were resting up in Bjelaja-Zerkow. The staff were housed in a building somewhat off the road and somewhat like a villa. Towards the road, the building had a veranda on the first floor. Under the veranda was a courtyard. One day I was walking through the town and saw a crowd of people near a wooden house. Out of curiosity I went there and asked the Ukrainians what was happening. I spoke to 2 guards, they were Ukrainian Hilfswillige who immediately allowed me into the house. The Ukrainians said there were children in the house and heeded my request if I could see the children by allowing me to go through.

Via a stairway I was able to reach the upper floor of the house. In a room lay toddlers and infants. The children were naked and covered with excrement and urine. They were crying. An older woman was nearby with whom I tried to converse but she did not respond. Despite my experience in Russian imprisonment, I have never been able to banish this desolate image from my memory. I did not count the children and therefore cannot say how many there were. The civilians, who stood on the street in front of the house, had told me that the parents of these children had been shot. I returned and reported this incident to Ia, Lieutenant-Colonel Großcurth.

I cannot remember what Grocurth arranged to be done due to my report. I have however a very strong memory that in that villa, in which the staff resided, still on the same day (or the next day), a SS-Führer turned up. This SS-Führer was a big young man. He had a heated discussion with Lieutenant-Colonel Großcurth. This discussion took place in the courtyard underneath the veranda. I was standing on some steps about 20 meters from the officers. Because of this I was only able to hear snippets of the conversation. I am absolutely sure that during the course of the discussion the SS-Führer said to Großcurth: "That is none of

your business!" He said this loudly and I assume that in this discussion it was about the fate of these children. Later I went into the town again. I am not sure if it was directly after the discussion or the next day. I went to that house again to see what was going on. In front of the house there was a cordon of guards in front of the courtyard. This cordon of guards blocked off the courtyard. A lorry covered with tarpaulins was parked in the courtyard. The children were loaded onto the lorry. I cannot say if the children were thrown up onto the vehicle. The side panels of the vehicle were open so that I could see the children. The cordon guards were all Hilfswillige. I cannot say anything about the number of children on the lorry.

I did not see the lorry drive away. Later I heard from Ukrainians, with whom I spoke to, that the children were shot. Which formation carried out the shooting was not said.

Question: According to documents I have, you inspected the house with the children on the 20.08.1941 at 16:30 pm together with Ord.Offizier Lieutenant Colonel Spörhase, the division Chaplain Dr. Reuss and the IA.

Answer: It is possible but I cannot remember. It is possible that after 25 years I have forgotten.

Question: Can you remember if there was an Abwehr officer of the 6th army in B.Z.?

Answer: I cannot say.

Question: Can you remember, whether you, when you were in that house, saw a Feldgendarm, who had a dispute with the Ukrainians?

Answer: No, I know nothing about that.

Question: Do you have any memory when visiting that house of a German speaking woman who said she was absolutely innocent, had nothing to do with politics and was also not Jewish?

Answer: No.

Question: Do you have any memory of whether a SS-Unterrführer ran around in the house?

Answer: No.

Question: Were the children lying on the floor or how else in the room?

Answer: On the floor and on window sills. There was no furniture in the house.

Question: Can you remember if water or bread was brought for the children later on?

Answer: No, I did not see anything.

Note: The report about the occurrences in B.Z. of 20.8.1941 were read out for the witness.

He was asked what he had to say about same.

The witness states:

I again want to emphasise that I am unable to remember if I was in that house together with Großcurth, Spörhase and Dr. Reuß. The first image imprinted in my memory came about when I was alone in that house. I think it is possible that I was there with Großcurth. That first image just happened to be the most impressive.

At the discussion that the SS-Führer had with Großcurth I was standing, as already mentioned, 20 meters away so that I could only hear snippets. I was not present at the conversation at the field commander and am unable to comment.

When mention is made that already in the afternoon a lorry with children was parked in the courtyard, that is correct. I saw the lorry.

The mood among the population was not favourable towards us. We were initially heartily welcomed all over in the Ukraine. It was my guess however, that in B.Z., the mood changed when this episode with the children took place. Numerous Ukrainians confirmed this in their conversations. One heard the Russian word "Sobaki" which means "dogs" in German. The people who did these things were referred to by this name.

Question: Did you hear anything about where these shootings took place?

Answer: I never found that out.

Question: Was there talk that the shootings took place near an old shooting range?

Answer: I am unable to remember that any more.

Question: What do you know about the shooting of the adults?

Answer: I never saw anything but only heard about it.

If I am asked who was Ic at that time then I am unable to answer. Harbeck must know.

I also do not know who kept the war diary of the unit.

At that time, when the children were shot in B.Z., I was the only interpreter in the division.

Note: The witness is shown the photo album, namely the photos 1 – 20. He is asked if he recognises anyone in these photos.

The witness states: I do not recognise anyone in these photos.

Note: The witness is shown the photo album, namely the photo supplement 2, 1 – 4. He is asked if he recognises anyone in these photos.

The witness states: I do not recognise this man.

Personally read, approved and signed:

B.u. Z.

According to § 60 StPO, the witness remains unsworn because the prerequisites for an oath are not present in the preliminary investigation.

Translated by Stuart Bennett and Giles Bennett