

## Weliczker Wells, The Janowska Road, excerpts

Quotes from: Leon Weliczker Wells, The Janowska Road, NY 1963, 2014 edition

### Excerpt 1: The dialogue with the prisoner Brill

*»I turn to Brill. "What are we going to do?" "I would like to die," he says, and starts to tell me of the happenings of the day. He talks very slowly and haltingly - as if he were convincing himself that he, Brill, still existed. After each word he sighs "Oi." Often, in the middle of a sentence his voice trails off and he heaves a deep "Oi." Everything that has happened is beyond his belief, incredible. "I worked at the firm of Feder und Daunen at 5 Zrodlanej Street with my two daughters. One was seventeen, the other fifteen. After the liquidation of the ghetto we were hidden in the company's building. The director of this firm took everything away from us. Then the Gestapo came and brought us here; my two children and I." A long pause. "This was a few days ago. Today they took us, together with you, to the "sands," and I was separated from my two daughters." Pause. He went on: "I, as everyone else, went down to the ravine. After a long time, about fifteen people were selected and taken to the place where we left the women and children in the morning." Pause. "And there-there" (in a terrible moaning voice) "all, and my two daughters among them, were lying dead... shot. What girls, beautiful, intelligent - what I wouldn't have done for them ... They told us to make a fire, and we threw all the bodies into it, my children, too." He was saying something more, moaning, gesturing with his hands and feet, like an insane person. But I didn't listen any more. How could I help him?«  
(p. 151)*

### Excerpt 2: Work organization in the death brigade

*»This is how the work at the three pits is done: three men, with a hook go down into one of the mass graves, and two, with another hook, stand at the top. The three who are in the grave put the hook into the corpse and pull it out of its original position. Afterward, the two on the top pull hard and this sinks the hook deeper into the body. Then they pull it up. One has to be very careful while sinking the hook because the corpse, already in an advanced stage of decay, might break in two. Another group, the carriers, now put two to four corpses (depending on their size) on the stretchers that were brought here yesterday. Two inmates work with each stretcher and carry it over to the nearby fireplace. Here a mass of corpses is accumulated. The chief fireman now pours gasoline and oil on the wooden foundation, and starts the fire. The carriers, with their stretchers, climb the steps and toss the corpses into the fire. On one side one pair goes up and on the other side another pair goes down ... The carriers continuously rub their hands in sand, because their hands as well as the handles of the stretchers become slippery from the bodies. The chief fire tender is black from the soot, and singed, and he has a rod in his left hand with which he stirs the fire and directs the traffic ...  
Standing near the fireman is his assistant and the tabulator. The fireman's assistant*

*shovels the ashes formed of burned bones, and continuously adds more wood. When all the bodies are pulled out of the grave, a special group now searches the graves. With their hands they pick up each bone or hair, putting it into a pail, and afterward they throw it into the fire. After examining and collecting everything, they report to the Untersturmführer, who inspects the pit. This group now sprays the walls of the pit, which are greenish from the bodies, with chlorine, to kill some of the odor. Now the pit is covered and leveled. Afterward, we plow the ground, but instead of horses we pull the plows ourselves. The grounds are seeded, and after a few weeks one cannot tell where the pits were. This is the final effect the Germans want. No one must ever know what has gone on here.» (p. 164f.)*

### **Excerpt 3: Air-raid warning**

*»Suddenly, the washing is interrupted. They tell us to get into the bunker and to cover the entrance with a coat. It is an air raid, they say. The Schupos warn us that if they notice any of us looking out, they will shoot.*

*Suddenly we hear hounds barking and then the stamping of feet and the cracking of whips. We listen. We hear the command, "Ausziehen!" (Undress!) Some of us peer through the cracks in the roof and report to the others what is happening; there is a large group of people undressing themselves. Schupos surround them, carrying whips, and they are beating them. We hear yelling: "Los! Los!" (Faster! Faster!) ... The Scharführer from the concentration camp stands near the fireplace. He holds a handkerchief delicately to his nose to bar the stench. The rows of fives advance. The SS men stand behind the victims and shoot them in the backs of their heads, kicking the bodies forward ... After half an hour, all is over. We hear the voice of the Schupo who keeps guard near the gate: "Herches, quick!" Herches gets out, and then yells, "Everybody out." We all step out, and Herches gets an order to form a brigade of twenty of the strongest men, plus the fire-chief and his assistant. This brigade then has to toss all these bodies into the fire. Four inmates are sent to sort the clothing and search the pockets. The Schupos watch delightedly. One requisitions a pair of shoes for himself, another, a suit. All told, we collect four pails of money, silver, gold and diamonds. Somehow many of the inmates were always able to hide some of their valuables from the Nazis, to the very end. An hour later all the bodies are aflame. They number 275.» (p. 169f.)*

### **Excerpt 4: The bone mill**

*»As I have already mentioned, at the first working site of the Ash Brigade, in the large ravine, there remained a gray heap of small bones that couldn't be crushed or burned. For many months we could devise no method for disposing of them. But the Untersturmführer found a solution for this problem too. One day a machine is brought to the site. It looks like a cement mixer and is run by a diesel engine. Inside the body of this mixer are large iron balls. These at last successfully crush the bones. At the bottom of the mixer is a sieve that filters out the fine bone dust, holding back the still uncrushed pieces of bone, which are then returned to the mouth of the*

*mixer. The fine dust is strewn in the neighboring fields. The inmates who are assigned to work the new machine are covered from head to foot by the dust of the bones, which is black. They look macabre.» (p. 185f.)*

#### **Excerpt 5: Training courses**

*»I should mention here that we have become expert indeed at our work here - just as our German masters have become in theirs. Every day now, different groups of SD's arrive here; they come from different parts of Poland to study the German method of execution and our expertise in the burning of corpses. Normally they stay with us for a few weeks, and afterward leave to open their own places of death. When we are asked by such "outsiders" how long we have been here, we say "less than twelve days." We have been instructed to say this because, of course, we shouldn't have been allowed to stay alive for more than fourteen days.» (p. 203)*