



*Polish Prisoner doctors giving medical support at the former infirmary of Gusen concentration camp after liberation, May 1945. Source: MM, 4/4/2/1.*

**Florian Guschl**

## **Antoni Gościński, Feliks Kamiński and the resistance of the medical prisoner staff in concentration camp Gusen**

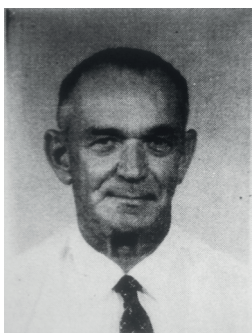
*This article examines the resistance of medical prisoner personnel in the Gusen concentration camp, starting from 1941. It raises the question of whether we can indeed categorize this resistance as organized or whether the actions were predominantly carried out by individual persons or small groups. In addition, this article deals with who the protagonists of the resistance were and how they proceeded in their actions. It also considers whether and to what extent the resistance of the medical prisoner personnel played a role in the liberation of the camp. Throughout the article, the focus is on the persons of Antoni Gościński and Feliks Kamiński, who are said to have played a key role in connection with the resistance group.*

*A central source for this research are the accounts of survivor Zbigniew Wlazłowski, whose insights on this topic have already been translated from Polish to English in the "Medical Review Auschwitz." These accounts are compared with various materials from the collections of the Mauthausen Memorial and testimonies from further survivors. Thus, this article aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the existence and operational capacity of the resistance among the medical prisoner personnel in the Gusen concentration camp.*

## Introduction

The idea of writing about the resistance of the medical prisoner personnel goes back to 2021, when the son of Feliks Kamiński, Karol Forycki, sent a request to the Collections Department of the Memorial asking for an overview about the imprisonment of his father in the Mauthausen-Gusen Concentration Camp system. At this time, neither side had any precise information about Feliks Kamiński and the role he played in a resistance movement in the "Revier"<sup>1</sup> (i. e. "infirmary") of the camp in Gusen. This was indicated by research done in the collections of the archive and further research carried out by Karol Forycki. Due to this mutual exchange, we were able to reconstruct the history about the resistance of the medical prisoner staff and the two physicians Dr. med. Antoni Gościński and Dr. med. Feliks Kamiński. As an introduction, a short biographical overview on the two physicians before their detention will be given. Another important aspect for understanding the work of the medical personnel's resistance is the description of the general situation at the infirmary of Gusen concentration camp.

### Antoni Gościński



*Dr. med. Antoni Gościński, before 1986. Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dr\\_Antoni\\_Go%C5%9Bci%C5%84ski.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dr_Antoni_Go%C5%9Bci%C5%84ski.jpg).*

Gościński was born in Posen (today: Poznań), on 4 January 1909.<sup>2</sup> He studied medicine in Poland and graduated in 1932, he received his Medical Degree from the University of Poznań.<sup>3</sup> Afterwards, he specialised primarily in the field of surgery. Before being imprisoned in different concentration camps, he had worked as chief

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- <sup>1</sup> The most appropriate translation for the so-called "Revier" or "Häftlingsrevier" in the Mauthausen-Gusen concentration camp system is "infirmary" or, alternatively, one could also choose the translation "prisoners' hospital". However, as this section of the camp had nothing in common with a hospital, we will not use this term in this article.
  - <sup>2</sup> Cf. Prisoner File Card of Antoni Gościński - Gusen Concentration Camp, KZ-Gedenkstätte Mauthausen | Mauthausen Memorial (subsequently MM), 2/2/7/1.
  - <sup>3</sup> Poznań, formerly part of the Prussian kingdom as Posen, was incorporated into Poland in the interwar period before it was occupied by the German Wehrmacht in 1939 and became part of the "Reichsgau Wartheland" created by the National Socialists.
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physician in a hospital near Poznań.<sup>4</sup> His wife Mia Gościńska (born: Piatkowski), whom he married on 16 December 1939, was not arrested and remained in Poland during WWII.<sup>5</sup> When WWII broke out in 1939, Antoni Gościński was a medical officer in the Polish army. He was arrested by the “Stapo-Hohensalza” and was deported first to Dachau concentration camp on 6 May 1940. On 2 August 1940 he was registered as prisoner in Gusen. His prisoner file card also mentioned that he was a physician but immediately after his arrival at the camp he was assigned to carry out forced labour in the quarries. Activity as medical staff in the infirmary of the camp is first mentioned from 1 July 1941.<sup>6</sup> This information is contradictory to his testimonies at the Dachau Mauthausen trials, where he stated that he worked as an assistant of the camp clerk until January 1941 and helped at the infirmary illegally before.<sup>7</sup>

KL.: Gusen 50088 M. 2  
6223

### Häftlings-Personal-Karte

Fam.-Name: <u>Gościński</u> Vorname: <u>Antoni</u> Geb. am: <u>4. 1. 09.</u> in: <u>Poznań</u> Stand: <u>verh.</u> Kinder: <u>2</u> Wohnort: <u>Stalowa Kr. Rogoźnica</u> Strasse: <u>Wartbergau</u> Religion: <u>r.k.</u> Staatsang: <u>Pol.</u> Wohnort d. Angehörigen: <u>Ghebran</u> <u>Michalska geb. Piatkowska</u> <u>Kalten. v. Gränzel. Kr. Hohensalza</u> Eingewiesen am: <u>13. 4. 40.</u> durch: <u>Stapo Hohensalza</u> in KL.: <u>6. 5. 40. 9a/ 2. 8. 40. 9a</u> Grund: <u>Pol. Sch.</u> Vorstrafen: <u>angekl. Keine</u>	Überstellt am: _____ an KL.: _____ Personen-Beschreibung: Grösse: <u>170</u> cm Gestalt: <u>mittelst.</u> Gesicht: <u>oval</u> Augen: <u>hell blau</u> Nase: <u>etw. gew. Frigol</u> Mund: <u>normal</u> Ohren: <u>gr. absteih.</u> Zähne: <u>2 fehlen 1 Goldz.</u> Haare: <u>d. blond</u> Sprache: <u>poln. deutsch, französisch</u> Bes. Kennzeichen: _____ Charak.-Eigenschaften: _____ Sicherheit b. Einsatz: _____ Körperliche Verfassung: _____
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Strafen im Lager:  
 Grund: \_\_\_\_\_ Art: \_\_\_\_\_ Bemerkung: \_\_\_\_\_

KOLL. D. I. H. - E. P. F. S. T. I.

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Prisoner File Card for Antoni Gościński, Gusen concentration camp. Source: MM, 2/2/7/1.

Elementar Beruf: Arzt - Chirurg zuletzt ausg. Beruf: \_\_\_\_\_ Arbeitsbuch Nr.: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Ausgebildet in der Zeit \_\_\_\_\_ im KL. \_\_\_\_\_ [Ausbildungsbetriebsang.]  
 als \_\_\_\_\_ Berufsgruppe: \_\_\_\_\_

Eingesetzt	1. vom <u>1. 7. 41.</u> bis _____	als <u>Bararbeiter Arztbei</u>	<u>Häftl. Revier</u>
2. "	"	"	"
3. "	"	"	"
4. "	"	"	"
5. "	"	"	"
6. "	"	"	"
7. "	"	"	"
8. "	"	"	"
9. "	"	"	"
10. "	"	"	"
11. "	"	"	"
12. "	"	"	"
13. "	"	"	"
14. "	"	"	"
15. "	"	"	"
16. "	"	"	"
17. "	"	"	"
18. "	"	"	"
19. "	"	"	"
20. "	"	"	"

No. 52625  
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Stp. P. Marica / 6845

Arzt Chirurg

(13640)

4 The information about when he received his degree varies between 1932 and 1934, depending on the source. It is also not clear in which hospital he was chief physician before WWII. According to research by his son, Karol Forycki, it was the hospital in Jarocin, 75 kilometres south-east of Poznań. The hospital in Strzelno is mentioned in his obituary.

5 Cf. Record of Testimony in trial of the United States versus Hans Altfuldisch et al., Mauthausen Main Case, No. 000-50-05, General Military Government Court, Dachau/Germany, 29/3/1946 – 6/4/1946, MM, pp. 599f.; Johnny Searle: Eulogy to Antoni Gościński M.D.O.B.E. In: unknown newspaper Belize, December 1986, p. 33, provided by Mary Alpuche - Belize Archives and Records Service.

6 Cf. Prisoner File Card of Antoni Goscinski, MM, 2/2/7/1.

7 Cf. Record of Testimony in trial of the United States versus Hans Altfuldisch et al., Mauthausen Main Case, No. 000-50-05, General Military Government Court, Dachau/Germany, 29/3/1946 – 6/4/1946, MM, pp. 599f.



### Feliks Kamiński

Kamiński was born in Klettendorf/Breslau (today: Klecina/Wrocław) on 31 January 1902.<sup>8</sup> He also studied medicine at the University of Poznań and received his degree in 1927. Furthermore, he had a master’s degree in physical education, which was awarded to him by the University’s Physical Education College in 1932. Even before the war, he taught anatomy and biomechanics there.<sup>9</sup>



Dr. med. Feliks Kamiński in 1927 as a graduate (see arrow). Source: Archive of the University of Physical Education in Poznań, copy at Private Archive: Karol Forycki.

After the violent occupation of Poland by the German Wehrmacht he was arrested by the “Stapo Posen” on 11 April 1940. On 25 April 1940 he was registered as a prisoner in the Dachau concentration camp. Like Gościński, he was registered as a Polish political prisoner. On 6 June 1940 he was transferred to Gusen concentration camp, where he was initially forced to work in the quarries. His occupation as a medical staff member in Gusen is also first mentioned on 1 July 1941.<sup>10</sup>

KL: <u>Gusen</u>	<u>H 9529</u>	Häftl.-Nr.: <u>3820</u>
<b>Häftlings-Personal-Karte</b>		
Fam.-Name: <u>Kamiński</u>	Überstellt	Personen-Beschreibung:
Vorname: <u>Felix</u>	am: _____ an KL.	Größe: <u>180</u> cm
Geb. am: <u>31. 1. 02. in Klettendorf</u>	am: _____ an KL.	Gestalt: <u>kräftig</u>
Stand: <u>zogh.</u> Kinder: _____	am: _____ an KL.	Gesicht: <u>oval</u>
Wohnort: <u>Posen</u>	am: _____ an KL.	Augen: <u>blau</u>
Strasse: <u>Glogauerstr. 72</u>	am: _____ an KL.	Nase: <u>gradl.</u>
Religion: <u>r. l.</u> Staatsang.: <u>P. l.</u>	am: _____ an KL.	Mund: <u>groß</u>
Wohnort d. Angehörigen: <u>Posen</u>	am: _____ an KL.	Ohren: <u>oval</u>
<u>erste geb. Sternchowa</u>	am: _____ an KL.	Zähne: <u>lückenl.</u>
<u>Posen, Reichwaldweg 14</u>	am: _____ an KL.	Haare: <u>abl. blond</u>
Eingewiesen am: <u>11. 4. 40</u>	am: _____ an KL.	Sprache: <u>poln.-deutsch</u>
durch: <u>Stapo Posen</u>	Entlassung:	Bes. Kennzeichen: <u>Schnittnarbe</u>
in KL.: <u>25. 4. 40 2a/ 6. 6. 40 Gu.</u>	am: _____ durch KL.:	<u>r. Brandrück, u. r. Zeigefg.</u>
Grund: <u>Frax. Sol. Maßnahme</u>	am: _____ durch KL.:	Charakt.-Eigenschaften:
Vorstrafen: <u>angeb. keine</u>	am: _____ durch KL.:	Sicherheit b. Einsatz:
	mit Verfügung v.:	Körperliche Verfassung:
Strafen im Lager:	Grund: _____ Art: _____ Bemerkung: _____	
		<u>19424</u>

Prisoner File Card for Feliks Kamiński (front and back side), Gusen concentration camp. Source: MM, 2/2/7/1.

8 Cf. Prisoner File Card of Feliks Kamiński - Gusen Concentration Camp, MM, 2/2/7/1.  
 9 Cf. Tomasz Jurek/Maciej Łuczak/Izabela Wyszowska: Uniwersytet Poznański (1919--2019). Akademia Wychowania Fizycznego im. Eugeniusza Piaseckiego w Poznaniu w latach 1950--2019. Poznań 2019, p. 70 (translated from the Polish by Karol Forycki).  
 10 Cf. Prisoner File Card of Feliks Kamiński, MM, 2/2/7/1.

Erlarnter Beruf: <i>Arzt</i>		zuletzt ausg. Beruf:		Arbeitsbuch Nr.:	
Ausgebildet in der Zeit		als		Berufsgruppe:	
als		im Kl.		(Ausbildungsrichtung)	
Eingesetzt					
1.	vom	<i>7. 2. 41.</i>	bis	als	<i>Prosektor</i>
2.	"	"	"	bei	<i>Pathologische Abt.</i>
3.	"	"	"	"	<i>Klinik Wars.</i>
4.	"	"	"	"	"
5.	"	"	"	"	"
6.	"	"	"	"	"
7.	"	"	"	"	"
8.	"	"	"	"	"
9.	"	"	"	"	"
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11.	"	"	"	"	"
12.	"	"	"	"	"
13.	"	"	"	"	"
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*Arzt* 19425

In contrast to Gościński's case, there are no official statements about him in trials or other post-war interviews. One reason for this could be that he returned to Poznań immediately after the liberation.



ID-Card Photo of Feliks Kamiński from 1954 or 1955. Source: Private Archive: Karol Forycki.

## Further personalities in connection with the medical resistance in Gusen

Antoni Gościński and Feliks Kamiński are not the only two important personalities included in the resistance at the infirmary in Gusen. In this connection it is necessary to mention further actors of this group. One of them is Adam Konieczny, also a physician born on 8 February 1902 in Posen, who had been a prisoner of Gusen concentration camp since 6 June 1940 and was also employed at the infirmary from 1 July 1941.<sup>11</sup> Konieczny did not survive; he died shortly before liberation on 25 April 1945. The death registers of Gusen state that the cause of death was a stroke.<sup>12</sup> In fact he probably committed suicide after not being able to prevent one of the last mass killings of sick prisoners in the infirmary before liberation.<sup>13</sup> Another notable personality is Franz Adamanis, also from Posen, who used to be a pharmacist. According to the entries on his prisoner file card, his official role was to be the clerk of the infirmary and later of Block 31, which was part of it.<sup>14</sup> Among other things, Konieczny and Adamanis tried to use their positions as medical staff at the infirmary to save tuberculosis patients, as well as to prevent the medical experiments of SS physician Helmuth Vetter.<sup>15</sup> One

11 Cf. Prisoner File Card of Adam Konieczny - Gusen Concentration Camp, MM, 2/2/7/1.

12 Cf. Death registers from the infirmary of Gusen Concentration Camp, 25/4/1945, MM, B/12/03/05, p. 423.

13 Cf. Stanisław Dobosiewicz: Vernichtungslager Gusen (Mauthausen-Studien, Vol 5). Wien 2005, p. 351.

14 Cf. Prisoner File Card of Franz Adamanis - Gusen Concentration Camp, MM, 2/2/7/1.

15 Cf. Dobosiewicz: Vernichtungslager, p. 158.

of the most interesting and antagonistic roles was taken by Emil Sommer, who was Kapo of the infirmary from 8 August 1941 until the liberation.<sup>16</sup> Although he knew about the crimes in the hospital and was probably, forcibly, involved in some of them, he seems to have tried to cooperate with the resistance as much as possible and to support them in their activities. Above all, he obviously did not betray these groups, which was something credited to him by other survivors after the liberation.<sup>17</sup>

### General situation at the infirmary of Gusen concentration camp

Originally there was no plan to build a separate infirmary in Gusen. There was only one barrack for prisoners who were too sick or too weak to work. The infirmary was meant as a venue for the selection and killing of prisoners. In fact, like in other concentration camps, the infirmary in Gusen was one of the biggest killing facilities in the camp. Prisoners there often fell victim to medical experiments, heart injections, were beaten to death or were transported to Hartheim Castle or to Mauthausen to be killed in the gas chambers there.<sup>18</sup>

The first cases of typhus in 1941 forced the camp administration to create a separate infirmary with comprehensively more barracks inside the camp. Otherwise, there would have been the risk of typhus spreading around the whole camp. This section was built in July 1941. It was divided into five different barracks, 27 – 31. These barracks were separated from the rest of the camp by a barbed wire fence. The infirmary included a surgery department, a dental outpatient clinic, a physiotherapy room, and a section for internal diseases. There were even individual rooms for tuberculosis patients and a separate section for incurable prisoners. The fact that the infirmary was better organised at that time does not mean that the prisoners were treated any better. Incurable or weak prisoners were still systematically killed and medical experiments were still conducted.<sup>19</sup> The situation for the prisoners in Gusen and, accordingly, the situation for the sick prisoners in the infirmary changed from the year 1942.<sup>20</sup> One of the reasons was an increase of epidemics in the camp, which were also very dangerous to SS personnel, especially typhus.<sup>21</sup> In such situations, SS staff avoided entering the infirmary because the risk of getting an infection was too high. It was likely also during a typhus epidemic in 1942 that, for the first time, prisoner doctors were officially permitted to perform their profession in the infirmary without direct supervision by SS physicians. Before that, some of those with medical training worked in the infirmary, but only as nurses or assistants. First it was a group of Polish prisoner doctors and, later, Russian, French and Spanish prisoners also worked as medical staff in the infirmary.<sup>22</sup> They tried to improve the situation for the patients, which was hardly possible. The SS physicians still had supreme command and held the power of life and death over the prisoners.<sup>23</sup> Another important reason for the improved medical treatment in the infirmary was the armaments production in the

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16 Cf. Prisoner File Card of Emil Sommer - Gusen Concentration Camp, MM, 2/2/7/1.

17 Cf. Dobosiewicz: Vernichtungslager, p. 137.

18 Cf. Zbigniew Wlazłowski: The Gusen prisoners' hospital. In: Medical Review Auschwitz (2020), pp. 1–27, here pp. 8f. Originally published as "Szpital w obozie koncentracyjnym w Gusen." In: Przegląd Lekarski – Oświęcim (1967), pp. 112–121 (translated from the Polish by M. Kantor); Dobosiewicz: Gusen, pp. 155f.

19 Cf. Dobosiewicz: Vernichtungslager, pp. 155f.

20 Cf. Wlazłowski: The Gusen prisoners' hospital, p. 4.

21 Cf. Dobosiewicz: Vernichtungslager, p. 157.

22 Cf. Dobosiewicz: Vernichtungslager, p. 157; Wlazłowski: The Gusen prisoners' hospital, p. 4.

23 Cf. Dobosiewicz: Vernichtungslager, p. 157.

camp, which started from February 1943. Accordingly, there was a higher demand for skilled workers – before killing the prisoners, their manpower should be exploited as much as possible.<sup>24</sup>

### **Resistance: Definitions and possibilities of interpretation in the context of the Nazi system and the concentration camps<sup>25</sup>**

When discussing the definition of resistance within the context of the Nazi regime, a distinction should be made between resistance in civil society and resistance within the concentration camp system. If one assumes the original definition that resistance presupposes an existing system of rules and power and if those in power violate the general rules of law and order, they lose their right to rule and the citizens are not under any duty to follow them any longer, consequently, resistance is not only permitted in these cases but even required. It is particularly relevant to point out that there are different forms of resistance and a variety of underlying objectives. For example, resistance can be violent or nonviolent, collective or individual, orientated towards limited goals or aiming to overthrow the system in general.<sup>26</sup> If resistance was only recognised as such if the individuals or groups involved had the aim of overthrowing the existing system of power, this would exclude the actions of those who, through the Nazi policy of persecution, were deprived of any possibility of resisting the overall system but who nevertheless resisted in various forms. This applies primarily to persecuted Jews, but also to concentration camp prisoners who were arrested for other reasons. What these groups demonstrably did attempt were other forms of resistance, for example collecting evidence of the crimes committed against them or – although they were forbidden to do so – by engaging in artistic or cultural activities.<sup>27</sup>

Accordingly, the term resistance does not presuppose that the actors are pursuing the goal of destroying an entire system. Rather, it can be also seen as resistance if the actors are trying to improve individual living conditions within a system. By analogy, one could define the actions of the medical prisoner staff in the Gusen concentration camp as resistance of this kind: collective, in the sense that it was probably initiated and planned by a group. It cannot be assumed that this group planned to destroy the concentration camp system in general because they were aware that this was beyond their capabilities. The intention was probably to save as many lives as possible and to improve medical care in the camp infirmary. From 1941 the Mauthausen-Gusen concentration camp system was classified as “Lagerstufe III” (“camp level three”), which meant as that the prisoners were to be murdered by means of forced labour.<sup>28</sup> In consequence, any action aimed at resisting this annihilation by labour for oneself or others can be defined as resistance.

24 Cf. Wlazłowski: *The Gusen prisoners' hospital*, p. 4; Christian Dürr/Gregor Holzinger/Stephanie Kaiser/Ralf Lechner (ed.): *Konzentrationslager Gusen 1939–1945|Eine Dokumentation*. Wien 2024, pp. 9–17.

25 I would like to take this opportunity to thank Peter Egger (Mauthausen Memorial) and Lea von der Hude (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften). They provided the key literature recommendations for this chapter.

26 Cf. Christopher Daase: *Was ist Widerstand? Zum Wandel von Opposition und Dissidenz*. In: *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, Vol. 64 (2014), No. 27, p. 3.

27 Cf. Peter Steinbach: *Zur Kontextualisierung des Widerstands von Juden. Exemplarische Überlegungen zum Widerstandsbegriff*. In: Julius H. Schoeps/Dieter Bingen/Gideon Botsch (ed.): *Jüdischer Widerstand in Europa (1933–1945). Formen und Facetten*. Berlin/Boston 2016, pp. 17–35.

28 Cf. Dobosiewicz: *Vernichtungslager*, p. 342.



In this context, it is also worth mentioning that the concept of resistance in concentration camps was long characterised by Hermann Langbein's definition dating from 1980. This assumes that actions within the camps can only be defined as resistance if they were aimed at preventing or restricting the plans of the camp leadership. This changed when the definition was expanded to include unplanned or individual actions.<sup>29</sup> As will be seen from the explanations and examples given in this text, the actions of the medical staff at Gusen cover most of these definitions. For example, taking targeted action against mass murders was very much a matter of preventing the essential plans of the camp leadership. But spontaneous, unplanned actions and examples of self-assertion also played a role in resistance by the medical prisoner staff.

### **Between collaboration and resistance – the ambiguous situation of medical prisoner personnel**

This topic cannot be dealt with without addressing the difficult situation of the prisoner medical staff, especially the prisoner doctors. It must first be noted that the medical prisoner personnel were persons deported to the concentration camps who had to carry out forced labour in the infirmaries. This took place under inhumane conditions and at constant risk of their lives. But it must be emphasised that, even if they offered resistance and showed solidarity with sick prisoners, they were still involved in the atrocious crimes committed by the SS physicians.<sup>30</sup> Prisoner doctors, like Gościński and Kamiński, as well as the rest of the medical prisoner staff were defined as "Funktionshäftlinge" (i. e. "prisoner functionaries"). This means that they occupied a higher position within the camp hierarchy than the other prisoners. Their position was associated with several advantages that greatly increased their chances of survival. These included a better supply of food, medicine and clothing, as well as better conditions for accommodation and sleeping.<sup>31</sup> Being in this – comparatively – privileged situation did not preclude them from becoming part of an underground resistance in the infirmary of the Gusen concentration camp. On the contrary, prisoners who were not in this privileged position had little opportunity to engage in organised forms of resistance. As the following remarks will show, some of the medical prisoner personnel used their position to organise themselves and to counteract the crimes committed by the SS.

### **Beginnings of the resistance in the Gusen concentration camp infirmary**

In retrospect, it is extremely difficult to reconstruct the exact time sequence. This is because the survivors' accounts do not correspond exactly with what is recorded in the archive documents. An attempt must therefore be made to break down and contextualise these contradictions as much as possible.

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29 Cf. Hermann Langbein: .....nicht wie die Schafe zur Schlachtbank. *Widerstand in den nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslagern 1938–1945*. Frankfurt am Main 1980, p. 58; Gerhard Botz: *Methoden- und Theorieprobleme der historischen Widerstandsforschung*. In: Helmut Konrad/Wolfgang Neugebauer (ed.): *Arbeiterbewegung. Faschismus. Nationalbewußtsein*. Wien/München/Zürich 1983, pp. 137–152, here p. 148.

30 Cf. Christl Wickert: *Zum Dilemma von Häftlingsärztinnen und -pflegerinnen*, online lecture, Department of Contemporary History of the University of Vienna, 12/3/2020, online at <https://phaidra.univie.ac.at/detail/o:1078877> (accessed 7/3/2024).

31 Cf. Hans Maršálek: *Die Geschichte des Konzentrationslagers Mauthausen*. Vienna 42006, pp. 109–115.



When the infirmary was separated from the rest of the camp in July 1941, professional medical staff from Poland were deployed in the labour detachments for these purposes for the first time. This can be recognised particularly clearly by comparing the file cards, on which this date appears again and again. This is also when physicians such as Feliks Kamiński, Antoni Gościński and Adam Konieczny were transferred to the infirmary for their respective medical activities.<sup>32</sup> In contrast to this, Gościński stated different dates on record in the Dachau-Mauthausen trials. When he started to talk about the course of his imprisonment, he stated that he came to Gusen concentration camp on 2 August 1940. This record is identical with the dates on the prisoner file card and the transport register from Dachau to Mauthausen-Gusen from this day.<sup>33</sup> When he started to point out the process of the forced labour detachments, he was interrupted and encouraged to talk just about aspects relating to Gusen after 1 January 1942. He complied with that and continued to explain that he was an assistant of the camp clerk during this time and that he worked in the “prisoner’s hospital” illegally. This is in direct contradiction to the notes on his prisoner file card, where it is noted that he had been a “Vorarbeiter-Arzt”<sup>34</sup> in the infirmary since 1st July 1941. Due to the fact that the infirmary was restructured in July 1941 and that this date also appears on his prisoner file card, it can be assumed that this is the correct date when he began to work as a physician in the camp. In his testimonies he either mixed up the years 1941 and 1942, or the recorders made typing errors. If he was an assistant camp clerk in January 1941, it is also more likely that he became a physician at the infirmary half a year later.

In the case of Feliks Kamiński, the information in the survivor reports corresponds to that in the camp documents. It was probably the SS physician Friedrich Entress who made him head of the pathological department of the infirmary. Entress, who was also from Posen, studied at the university there where Kamiński is said to have been his teacher. These reports, combined with the information on the prisoner file card and the fact that Kamiński taught anatomy at the university in Posen, make sense.<sup>35</sup>

In memoirs regarding the resistance of the medical prisoner staff in Gusen, it is mentioned that the first actions were carried out in December 1941. According to these reports, the first meeting in which measures to improve the general conditions in the infirmary were discussed took place at that time. The participants are said to have been Antoni Gościński, Feliks Kamiński, Adam Konieczny and Franz Adamanis. The focus of the meeting was to discuss how the general situation in the infirmary could be improved. First and foremost, this concerned the restriction of the mass murders of invalid prisoners and generally enabling better health care for patients.<sup>36</sup>

Therefore, the first thing to do was to take actions against the block elders and Kapos in the infirmary who had a major influence on the treatment of patients. These actions probably represent one of the central points of the resistance but are no longer clearly comprehensible due to several divergences between the camp documents

32 Cf. Dobosiewicz: Vernichtungslager, pp. 154f.; Prisoner File Card of Antoni Goscinski, MM, 2/2/7/1; Prisoner File Card of Feliks Kamiński, MM, 2/2/7/1; Prisoner file card for Adam Konieczny, MM, 2/2/7/1.

33 Cf. Mauthausen Main Case, No. 000-50-05, p. 600; Transportliste Dachau-Mauthausen/Gusen, 2/8/1940, MM, 2/2/15/7, pp. 27–30; Prisoner File Card for Antoni Goscinski, MM, 2/2/7/1.

34 I. e. “foreman-doctor”, which means that he would have been a squad leader of a medical team.

35 Cf. Jurek/Łuczak/Wyszowska: Uniwersytet Poznański, p. 70; Dobosiewicz: Vernichtungslager, p. 159; Prisoner File Card of Feliks Kamiński, MM, 2/2/7/1.

36 Cf. Zbigniew Wlazłowski: Polish prisoner doctors involved in the resistance movement in Gusen. In: Medical Review Auschwitz (2020), pp. 1–11., here p. 4. Originally published as “Lekarze polscy w obozowym ruchu oporu w Gusen.” In: Przegląd Lekarski – Oświęcim (1969), pp. 92–95 (translated from the Polish by M. Kantor).

and the memoirs. Due to the large number of reports, there is no doubt that these actions actually took place in general. It can be assumed that in these reports, significant aspects such as definitions of terms and dating were recorded incorrectly. The following section attempts to resolve these differences as best possible and to place them in historical context. By comparing the two reports by Zbigniew Wlazłowski and Stanisław Dobosiewicz, one gets an almost identical account of how the resistance group took action against the Kapos, whom they wanted to get rid of because of their brutality towards the prisoners. According to them, there were four Kapos of the infirmary of Gusen in total, in this order: Fanz Zach, Heinrich Roth, Józef Bobrowski and Emil Sommer. The first three are said to have been killed under the direct influence of the resistance movement. According to these reports, Emil Sommer was the last Kapo of the infirmary and he probably remained in this position until the liberation.<sup>37</sup> In the following paragraph, the memoirs of the Polish prisoners are compared with original camp documents. The aim is to create, as far as possible, a coherent historical account in which the contradictions are explained and contextualised. Coming from Dachau concentration camp, Franz Zach was transferred to Mauthausen on 23 August 1938, which was the second transport of prisoners to arrive at this camp. It was a transport of around 150 people, all of whom were categorised as “P.S.V” and “BV” prisoners.<sup>38</sup>

“P.S.V.” stands for “Polizeiliche Sicherheitsverwahrung” (“Police Security Detention”). These prisoners were committed to a concentration camp by the criminal investigation department without any time limit. These were predominantly Austrians who were arrested during “preventive crime control” operations in the summer of 1938 because of their criminal convictions or because they “refused to work”. “BV” stands for “Berufsverbrecher” (“professional criminals”). This categorisation meant preventive detention, which was ordered by the criminal investigation department. Preventive detention was imposed – in the language of the National Socialists – on “professional” and “habitual criminals” as well as “public danger” offenders. This concerned persons who had committed the same offence several times or had been sentenced to at least three months’ imprisonment on at least three occasions. The basis for their deportation was the decree issued by the Minister of the Interior on 14 December 1937 on preventive measures to combat crime. The background to the wave of arrests was the need for additional labour for industry.<sup>39</sup>

Heinrich Roth was transferred to Mauthausen concentration camp, also from Dachau, on 28 September 1939. He was categorised under “Schutzhaft” (“protective custody”), which meant political prisoners.<sup>40</sup> Heinrich Roth, Franz Zach and Emil Sommer appear on the first general prisoner register of Gusen concentration camp, which was drawn up on 26 May 1940. This means that they were transferred to Gusen on this day by the latest, probably earlier.<sup>41</sup> Josef Bobrowski was probably transferred to Mauthausen concentration camp in August 1938, again from Dachau. His file card from Dachau states his profession as that of a paramedic.<sup>42</sup> Emil Sommer was transferred to Mauthausen concentration camp on 9 May 1939 and he also appears on the

37 Cf. Wlazłowski: resistance movement, pp. 3f.; Dobosiewicz: Vernichtungslager, pp. 136–138.

38 Cf. Metadatabase of the Mauthausen-Gusen concentration camp system, query by arrival in August 1938, MM (accessed 20/3/2024).

39 Volume 17 of the series Mauthausen-Studien was published on this topic in 2024: Andreas Kranebitter: Die Konstruktion von Kriminellen. Die Inhaftierung von “Berufsverbrechern” im KZ-Mauthausen (Mauthausen-Studien, Vol. 17). Wien 2024.

40 Cf. List of new arrivals, 28/9/1939, MM, E/13/16.

41 Cf. Prisoner register Gusen Concentration Camp, 25/5/1940, MM, B/12/9a.

42 Cf. File Card of Joseph Bobrowski from Dachau Concentration Camp, 24/5/1940, Arolsen Archives (subsequently ITS), 01010607 028.

first general prisoner register of Gusen from May 1940. The reason for his imprisonment is also noted as "Schutzhaft". Reports from other prisoners state that he was a political prisoner because of his communist activities.<sup>43</sup>

The fact that the accounts in some survivors' reports are not exactly correct can be recognised by comparing them with the camp documents. Especially the entries in the prisoner file card for Emil Sommer and in the death registers of Gusen concentration camp show that the sequences and dates as they are described cannot be correct: Emil Sommer became Kapo of the infirmary on 8 August 1941, while Roth, as well as Zach and Bobrowski, died at another point in time.<sup>44</sup> This does not mean that the descriptions are false in general. There is no reasonable doubt as to the fundamental accuracy of the information. Rather, it is likely that various prisoner functions were mixed up here and no distinction was made between the different positions of the prisoner functionaries and all positions were translated as Kapos. Emil Sommer was already the official Kapo of the infirmary from August 1941. Franz Zach, Heinrich Roth and Jozef Bobrowski may also have been "Blockälteste" (block elders) or "Stubenälteste" (room elders) in the respective barracks of the protective custody camp. In these functions, they would also have had a great deal of power over the treatment of the sick prisoners.<sup>45</sup> Emil Sommer is the only one who is actually referred to as a Kapo in the official camp documents. Therefore, from now on, those who can no longer be said with certainty to have been Kapos, block elders or room elders will be referred to as prisoner functionaries, as this was probably the case.

Franz Zach is remembered as one of the most brutal prisoner functionaries in the history of the infirmary at Gusen concentration camp. In 1940 he probably was not the Kapo of the infirmary in Gusen, which was housed in Block 24 at this time, but was the "Stubenälteste" (i.e. room elder) of "Room A" in this block. At the same time, Heinrich Roth probably already had the same position in "Room B".<sup>46</sup> Franz Zach is described as very brutal, sadistic and unpredictable. It is reported that he starved the sick to death, drowned them, beat them to death or murdered them by other methods. Meanwhile, Franz Zach was transferred to the "Strafkompanie" (penal company) due to his alcohol consumption. After this he was a prisoner functionary in the infirmary for the Soviet prisoners of war, which was separated off from the rest of the infirmary. Thus, there is a high possibility that he held the position of Kapo in this part of the infirmary. There, he was probably significantly involved in the mass killings by heart injection ordered by SS physician Eduard Krebsbach, which took place in 1942.<sup>47</sup> According to the death registers of Gusen concentration camp, he died on 25 November 1942 from "Purulent colitis". According to survivors' accounts, he was killed on the orders of the resistance of the medical prisoner staff, a claim that can neither be confirmed nor denied with absolute certainty. What can be said is that infection with infectious diseases was probably often used to get rid of certain people in a relatively simple way.<sup>48</sup>

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43 Cf. New registrations Protective Custody-Prisoners, 9/5/1939, MM, Y/50/1/4/35; Dobosiewicz: Gusen, p. 137.

44 Cf. Prisoner File Card of Emil Sommer, 9/5/1939, MM, Y/HPK/Nara/S/1751; Totenbuch des KZ-Gusen, 1939–1945, MM, 1/1/6.

45 Cf. Dobosiewicz: Vernichtungslager, p. 136f.

46 Cf. Tadeusz Karolini: The beginnings of the prisoners' hospital in Gusen. In: Medical Review Auschwitz (2020), pp. 1–14, here pp. 4, 6. Originally published as "Początki rewiru w Gusen." In: Przegląd Lekarski – Oświęcim (1976), pp. 179–183 (translated from the Polish by M. Kantor).

47 Cf. Dobosiewicz: Vernichtungslager, p. 136f.

48 Cf. Dobosiewicz: Vernichtungslager, p. 136; Wlazłowski: Resistance movement, p. 3; Totenbuch Gusen, 7/11/1942, MM, 1/1/6.

Heinrich Roth is also described as very brutal and sadistic towards the patients in the infirmary. He was probably one of the most important prisoner functionaries there after Franz Zach had been transferred to the penal company. Roth was also said to have unpredictable fits of rage, which probably also made the SS personnel sceptical about him. He was murdered by an SS physician by an injection to the heart after members of the medical prisoner staff warned this SS physician that Roth could be a danger to him. According to the Gusen death register, he died on 28 November 1941 due to "abdominal typhus".<sup>49</sup>

In the case of the functionary Josef Bobrowski, the survivors' statements correspond best with the cause of death given in the death registers. He was one of the functionaries in the infirmary with a medical education as he was a trained paramedic. First, it is likely he cooperated with the medical prisoner staff, above all Antoni Gościński, who may have given him instructions for the treatment of patients, which he initially followed. However, after disagreements with the prisoner doctors he threatened to expose the activities of the resistance group. After blackmailing members of the underground movement, the members of the resistance probably decided to act against him. Otherwise he would have been a big threat to the resistance of the medical prisoner personnel. He was accused of trading alcohol and medicines from the infirmary. It is said that he committed suicide because he was afraid of being punished by the SS. He died on 23 May 1942. According to the Gusen death registers, he died due to "poisoning with medications". The stated cause of death makes suicide very likely.<sup>50</sup> This event can be seen as one of the key moments in the improvement of conditions in the infirmary. From now on, Emil Sommer was the central figure of the prisoner functionaries in the infirmary. Even if he was a witness and probably involved – because forced to – in mass killing of prisoners and medical experiments, it is said that he cooperated with the Polish prisoner doctors and helped to save prisoners who would otherwise have been murdered by order of the SS. After the liberation he was not killed by former prisoners, which can be seen as a sign that his efforts to help the underground movement were recognised by them.<sup>51</sup>

### Further measures by the medical prisoner staff

The murder of the prisoner functionaries whose brutality, attitudes or other behaviour posed a threat to the activities of the resistance movement laid the foundation for its subsequent ability to act, albeit on a small scale. Another important factor in improving the medical treatment in the infirmary was medical training for prisoner personnel. Therefore, an attempt was made to offer the medical prisoner staff a certain amount of medical training and further education. It appears there was success in teaching almost all areas of medicine, and this all took place without knowledge of the SS. Feliks Kamiński taught anatomy, Franciszek Adamanis physiological chemistry and pharmacy and Antoni Gościński surgery and gynaecology. Other lecturers were Adam Konieczny, Józef Markiewicz and Czesław Budny. Another educational measure was to try to organise language courses. This was intended to improve communication between prisoners of different nationalities. The languages offered were Russian, English and Spanish.<sup>52</sup>

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49 Cf. Wlazłowski: *The Gusen prisoners' hospital*, p. 15.

50 Cf. Wlazłowski: *The Gusen prisoners' hospital*, pp. 15f.; Dobosiewicz: *Vernichtungslager*, pp. 136f.; *Totenbuch Gusen*, 23/5/1942, MM, 1/1/6.

51 Cf. Dobosiewicz: *Vernichtungslager*, p. 137.

52 Cf. Wlazłowski: *The Gusen prisoners' hospital*, p. 20.



## Medical interventions by Antoni Gościński

The statement that Antoni Gościński, in his position as chief prisoner physician in the infirmary of Gusen, saved numerous lives appears in a large number of memoirs and witness statements. He is said to have intervened in incorrectly performed operations by SS doctors and is thought to have been very keen on organising better medical care and better food for the sick.<sup>53</sup> As in other concentration camps, in Gusen the SS physicians also performed medical experiments on the inmates. This began almost immediately after the camp was established and ended in the spring of 1945, shortly before liberation. The medical experiments and the SS physicians responsible are not the subject of this article. This topic was discussed in detail in Gregor Holzinger's presentation at the 2022 Dialogforum at the Mauthausen Memorial.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, it is important to mention the most important SS doctors in this context for the purposes of classification. Sigbert Ramsauer carried out the first experiments in the Gusen infirmary on typhus and tuberculosis patients in 1940. Hermann Richter was known for his efforts in trying to connect the colon and small intestine, which killed at least 32 prisoners in Gusen. The mass experiments on tuberculosis patients in Gusen started between late 1942 and early 1943. The physician responsible in this matter was Hermann Kiesewetter. Hermann Vetter took over this position in 1944 and continued the medical experiments. On his orders, hundreds of infected prisoners were murdered with injections.<sup>55</sup>

It is said Gościński tried to prevent these experiments and that this was partially successful. It is not clear exactly how he proceeded, but Wlazłowski writes that he pretended to the SS physicians that he could not perform certain surgical methods on the prisoners. He told the SS physicians that his methods were more effective than the operations (medical experiments) performed by them. In reality, Gościński's aim was to use gentler methods on the patients and thus save their lives. It is said that this procedure saved a high number of lives.<sup>56</sup> It is necessary here to rely on memory reports and testimonies, a statistical analysis is not possible. This also applies to the number of those who were murdered through pseudo-medical experiments. The reason for this is that the SS often entered the wrong causes of death in the registers in these cases.<sup>57</sup> Another great achievement of Antoni Gościński was that he secretly performed operations without the permission of the SS physicians. Thus, he saved the lives of many prisoners who would have had no chance of surviving the camp without him. Some of them wrote memory reports, or made court statements, where they thanked him for saving their lives. It should be noted that these were prisoners from different countries and different backgrounds. There is no evidence that he favoured or neglected certain groups or nationalities.

One interesting source that overlaps with these narrations is a memory report by former Russian civilian prisoner Fjodor Solodovnik. His statement gives an interesting insight into the activities of the underground resistance movement. He stated that he was transferred to the infirmary of the camp after being tortured by a member of

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53 Cf. Dobosiewicz: Vernichtungslager, pp. 158f.

54 Cf. Gregor Holzinger: Drug Tests on behalf of IG Farben at the Concentration Camp Mauthausen-Gusen, Dialogforum Mauthausen Memorial, 16/9/2022, online at <https://www.mauthausen-memorial.org/de/Aktuell/Vortraege-vom-13-Dialogforum-online-zum-Nachsehen> (accessed: 7/5/2024).

55 Cf. Dobosiewicz: Vernichtungslager, pp. 287–293; Record of Testimony in trial of the United States versus Hans Altfuldisch et al., Mauthausen Main Case, No. 000-50-05, General Military Government Court, Dachau/Germany, 29/3/1946 – 6/4/1946, MM, pp. 599-632.

56 Cf. Wlazłowski: Resistance movement, p. 5.

57 Cf. Dobosiewicz: Vernichtungslager, pp. 279, 280.

the SS. There he caught a cold, which turned into pleurisy, which could have been his death sentence. But a member of the resistance movement organised surgical intervention for him, which saved his life. During this operation a "Dr. Toni"<sup>58</sup> was present – there is no doubt that this was Gościński.<sup>59</sup>

Another memory report by Stanislaw Grzesiuk reports how Gościński saved his life and that of numerous other prisoners when they were suspected of having typhus. Gościński told the SS physicians not to kill them because they could still be used for forced labour and that it would make more sense "just" to kill the seriously ill, and this is what happened. So even though a few prisoners were still murdered, the lives of the majority of this group were saved: without his intervention they would have been killed.<sup>60</sup> When Grzesiuk came back to the infirmary in 1944, three years after his last stay there, he was surprised by the changed situation. Both the infrastructure and the medical care are said to have improved significantly. He also says that the staff had been professionalised. This is an important indication that the measures taken secretly by the Polish medical prisoner staff, such as medical education (see: p. 15 in this article), did actually have an important impact on medical treatment in the infirmary. In this situation, Grzesiuk wanted to feign appendix pain as he was already too weak to do forced labour and needed a break. Gościński knew this and helped him to escape the labour detachment in this way.<sup>61</sup>

Another source that proves the high reputation of Antoni Gościński is a post war statement which was made by a former US-prisoner of Gusen concentration camp, John Artur Carter, in September 1946. When he made a list of those prisoners who were either largely involved in acts of resistance and/or could be potential witnesses, he named the Polish physician first:

*"1. Doctor Anton GOSCINSKI (pronounced Goshtchensky) Pole. Age 38. The best known man in the Camp and in charge of the Revier (Hospital, accommodating about 1,600 patients). Did some wonderful work, saving hundreds of lives. His English is quite good. Must absolutely be found and interrogated [...]"<sup>62</sup>*

### Feliks Kamiński's position in the resistance of the medical prisoner staff

In second place Carter names Feliks Kamiński and while this does not prove that he was involved in acts of resistance, neither does it say that he took part in crimes against prisoners beyond what he was forced to do.<sup>63</sup> Kamiński's name is mentioned much less than Gościński's in connection with resistance activities in the Gusen concentration camp infirmary. According to Zbigniew Wlazłowski's reports, Kamiński was one of the leading members of the resistance group. Together with Anton Gościński he was

58 The nickname "Dr. Toni" appears frequently in sources, even for the period after liberation.

59 Cf. Memory Report by former Gusen-Prisoner Fjodor Solodovnik, 1946, MM, V/3/79.

60 Cf. Stanislaw Grzesiuk: *Fünf Jahre KZ (Mauthausen-Erinnerungen, Vol. 4)*. Wien 2020, pp. 284f.

61 Cf. *ibid*, pp. 424f.

62 J.A. Carter to War Crimes Branch, 12/9/1945, MM, Main Case NA RG 338, 000-50-05, Box 344, p. 116.

63 Cf. *ibid*, p. 116.

responsible for communicating with the other conspiratorial groups in Gusen concentration camp. Kamiński is said to have cultivated contacts with the other prisoner groups, especially the Russian prisoners.<sup>64</sup>

As leader of the pathological department, he was in a difficult situation, which is why his activities must be assessed in a differentiated manner. On the one hand, he had to carry out the orders of SS physicians. This concerned, among other things, the production of anatomical specimens. Some of these were sent to universities and medical centres, probably most frequently to the Medical University of the SS in Graz.<sup>65</sup> There are well founded assumptions that a large proportion of the specimens for the SS Academy in Graz came from the pathological department in Gusen. There are also statements that numerous medical specimens were found here after liberation.<sup>66</sup> As head of this department from 1941 until liberation, Kamiński must have known about these specimens, actively participated in their creation, and was probably even given responsibility for this task by the SS physicians.

Even though Kamiński was in a privileged position, he was still a forced labourer and a prisoner. He was in a very dangerous situation because he knew most of the killing methods and medical experiments performed by the SS physicians. Refusing their orders or being caught writing down the actual causes of death would probably have meant his immediate death.<sup>67</sup> Nevertheless, in Aldo Carpi's memoirs, which will be discussed later, there is one case of Kamiński refusing to obey orders: In April 1945, an SS man instructed him to kill a Soviet prisoner who had been caught stealing bread. The physician refused and paid his last respects to the prisoner, who had been condemned to death, by giving him a cigarette. The SS man then shot the prisoner.<sup>68</sup> Besides this, there are numerous statements that he and his assistants were a crucial part of the resistance in the camp. The pathological department was probably one of the most important rooms for secret meetings of the members because the SS physicians rarely entered this room.<sup>69</sup> Another aspect is that Kamiński obviously tried to determine the prisoners' actual causes of death, and this is how it was possible to establish that in many cases, the wrong causes of death were recorded. This information comes from the court statement made by Antoni Gościński at the Mauthausen Trial in Dachau. He stated that he was present during these autopsies. These autopsies played an important role in Gościński's court statement as he was able to describe some of the violent and medical crimes committed against the prisoners. This had a considerable influence on the later convictions of the SS doctors.<sup>70</sup>

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64 Cf. Wlazłowski: Resistance movement, pp. 2, 4.

65 Cf. Wlazłowski: The Gusen prisoners' hospital, p. 17; Dobosiewicz: Vernichtungslager, p. 159.

66 Cf. Herwig Czech: Von der Richtstätte auf den Seziertisch. Zur anatomischen Verwertung von NS-Opfern in Wien, Innsbruck und Graz. In: Jahrbuch 2015 des Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes (subsequently DOEW) (Vienna 2015), pp. 141–190, here p. 174.

67 Cf. J.A. Carter to War Crimes Branch, 12/9/1945, MM, Main Case NA RG 338, 000-50-05, Box 344, p. 116b.

68 Cf. Aldo Carpi: Tagebuch aus dem KZ Gusen (Mauthausen-Erinnerungen, Vol. 7). Wien 2023, pp. 159–161.

69 Cf. Wlazłowski: The Gusen prisoners' hospital, p. 17.

70 Cf. Record of Testimony in trial of the United States versus Hans Altfuldisch et al., Mauthausen Main Case, No. 000-50-05, General Military Government Court, Dachau/Germany, 29/3/1946–6/4/1946, MM, pp. 603, 612, 613.

## Prevention of planned executions

Another achievement of the resistance group of the infirmary was to save the lives of prisoners who were in danger of being executed by the SS. Thanks to contact with members of the resistance outside the infirmary, for example in the camp clerk's office, the medical personnel in the infirmary got information that allowed and helped them to save the lives of patients. The underground movement in the infirmary was able to save these prisoners by issuing fake death certificates. The names and prisoner numbers of prisoners who had already died were swapped with those of the prisoners scheduled for execution. This meant they were officially declared as dead and were no longer pursued by the SS.<sup>71</sup>

## Aldo Carpi's memories of Gościński and Kamiński

The resistance of the medical prisoner personnel also played a key role in Aldo Carpi's diary of the Gusen concentration camp, which was first published in Italy in 1971 and became a bestseller there. Aldo Carpi was an Italian painter who came to Gusen in February 1944. Due to his advanced age and his profession, he was not used to physical labour, a factor that reduced his chances of surviving the camp.<sup>72</sup>



*Feliks Kamiński (on the left) and Peter Pawlowski in the pathological department of Gusen concentration camp by Aldo Carpi from memory, undated. Source: Museo Monumento al Deportato, Collezione Aldo Carpi.*

He wrote down that he was introduced to Feliks Kamiński by another prisoner shortly after his arrival in Gusen. Kamiński was very interested in Carpi because he was very interested in art, an aspect also described by Zbigniew Wlazłowski, who explained that Kamiński harboured great passions for music and painting. Kamiński therefore made great efforts to help artists, musicians and scientists in the camp. It is likely he saved the lives of many of them.<sup>73</sup> According to the reports by Aldo Carpi, he was greatly weakened and ill from carrying out forced labour in the quarries when Kamiński illegally organised him a place in the infirmary. After his condition failed to improve, he organised an operation for him, which was performed by Gościński himself. Afterwards, Carpi describes how the two Polish doctors secured him a place in the infirmary for the next two months, during which time his health improved significantly.<sup>74</sup> Carpi

71 Cf. Memory Report by former Gusen-Prisoner Fjodor Solodovnik, 1946, MM, V/3/79; Wlazłowski: Resistance movement, p. 6.

72 Cf. Carpi: Tagebuch Gusen, pp. 8f.

73 Cf. Carpi: Tagebuch, pp. 48f., 210f.; Wlazłowski: The Gusen prisoners' hospital, pp. 17f.

74 Cf. Carpi: Tagebuch, pp. 46–99.



subsequently realised that he owed his life above all to the two doctors, especially Feliks Kamiński. Going into more detail, Aldo Carpi wrote that there was nobody to whom he was more grateful for surviving Gusen concentration camp than Feliks Kamiński, who took care of him while he was in the infirmary every single day.<sup>75</sup> Another interesting aspect is that he wrote that Kamiński had a secret storage room in the pathological department, where he successfully hid certain things from the SS. Shortly before liberation, he allowed Carpi to hide his diary there, which is the reason that it was not destroyed. It is worth remembering that it was strictly forbidden for prisoners to keep diaries. The main reason for this is that crimes committed by the National Socialists were documented here. By preserving Aldo Carpi's diary, Kamiński made an enormously important contribution to the rescue of a valuable document – at great risk to his own life.<sup>76</sup> The two paintings shown below were made by Aldo Carpi. They show Antoni Gościński and Feliks Kamiński and are an expression of gratitude towards the two physicians.



*Antoni Gościński playing violine by Aldo Carpi, Gusen, 1944/45. Source: Museo Monumento al Deportato, Collezione Aldo Carpi.*

### Situation immediately before and after liberation

The weeks before liberation were characterised by attempts by the SS to destroy evidence about the crimes committed and by orders for mass exterminations of prisoners. What should not go unmentioned is the mass killing of invalid and sick prisoners in barrack 31 of the Gusen concentration camp infirmary. According to the descriptions by former Mauthausen and Gusen prisoner Pierre Serge Choumoff, 659 prisoners were murdered with Zyklon-B gas between 21 and 22 April 1945.<sup>77</sup> Among others, this action was carried out by Emil Sommer. His participation is not mentioned by Serge Choumoff but by Stanisław Dobosiewicz. But in both testimonies is states that the prisoners involved were forced by SS personnel to carry out the orders under threat of death. Dobosiewicz wrote that at first, Emil Sommer wanted to refuse the order but in view of his own execution, he carried it out.<sup>78</sup> The resistance of the medical staff and the camp clerks likely tried to prevent this action as soon as they knew about these plans. Antoni Gościński and Adam Konieczny were probably the doctors most concerned with preventing the gassing of the invalids, but there was no possibility for them to be successful with this. The first group of invalid prisoners was killed on 22 April 1945, the number of victims was 330. The second group was registered as dead on the next day. What should be mentioned is that Jerzy Osuchowski, the clerk of barrack 24 – the barrack from which the second group was transferred to barrack 31 – was able to save around 26 prisoners. This was possible by secretly transferring them

<sup>75</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 210.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 175.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Pierre Serge Choumoff: *Nationalsozialistische Massentötungen durch Giftgas auf österreichischem Gebiet 1940–1945* (Mauthausen Studien, Vol. 1a). Wien 2000, pp. 126–129.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Choumoff: *Massentötungen*, p. 126; Dobosiewicz: *Vernichtungslager*, p. 261.

into other barracks (around 10 prisoners) and by providing them with the identities of prisoners who had already died. Adam Konieczny probably committed suicide after he was unable to prevent these mass killings.<sup>79</sup>

The exact role played by the prisoner medical staff immediately before the liberation can no longer be traced exactly. It can be assumed that resistance groups in other parts of the camp played a greater role in this case. Above all, this concerns the prevention of SS plans to kill all remaining prisoners in Gusen I and Gusen II.<sup>80</sup>

It is likely that the medical prisoner staff were involved in rescuing documents that prove the crimes committed by the SS against the prisoners between 1939 and 1945. Above all the death register of the Gusen concentration camp and the death register of the infirmary remain important sources in the investigation of Nazi crimes in Gusen. As these were kept in the infirmary, the prisoner medical staff must have been involved in saving these documents.<sup>81</sup> Furthermore, the prisoner medical staff is said to have tried to prevent the total collapse of the nutrition supply in the camp by distributing secretly stored supplies.<sup>82</sup>

For the medical staff, the final days before liberation were characterised by the permanent fear of being murdered by the SS because they were seen as witnesses who could testify the crimes committed in the camp after the war. For example, in Aldo Carpi's diary he describes how Kamiński was very afraid of being executed in the days before the liberation and therefore took precautionary measures. His fear increased when the SS executed prisoners who worked in the crematorium detachment. Stanisław Dobosiewicz also wrote about this situation and explains that eight members of this detachment were murdered on 2 May 1945. There was probably an order, made by the camp administration, to kill the prisoner medical prisoner staff before the end of the war. It is no longer possible to ascertain why this was not carried out. Franz Ziereis, commandant of Mauthausen concentration camp, claimed that he refused this order. It is much more likely that the order could not be carried out so close to the liberation because the medical personnel were able to hide successfully in the camp. Another factor is that members of the SS hoped this would reduce their potential sentences after the war.<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, Gościński was part of the interrogation of the former Mauthausen concentration camp commandant Franz Ziereis when he was taken into custody in Mauthausen on 23 May 1945. Gościński was one of the two people who wrote down his statements so that they could form a written record. The statements made here by Ziereis served as evidence in the post-war trials and contain numerous confessions to the crimes committed in the Mauthausen-Gusen concentration camp system.<sup>84</sup> Among other things, Ziereis admits the existence of a gas chamber in Mauthausen and also confirms that there was a van in which prisoners were gassed – he drove it himself. He also reported on the transfer of sick prisoners and those unfit for work to the Hartheim euthanasia killing centre, where they were gassed immediately after their arrival. Furthermore, he confessed that the execution of the entire medical prisoner staff of the Mauthausen-Gusen concentration camp system was planned before liberation. He also reported on the existence of the money-forging

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79 Cf. Choumoff: *Massentötungen*, pp. 127–129; Dobosiewicz: *Vernichtungslager*, pp. 262f.

80 Cf. Dobosiewicz: *Vernichtungslager*, pp. 309–313.

81 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 313f.

82 Cf. Wlazłowski: *The Gusen prisoners' hospital*, pp. 24f.

83 Cf. Carpi: *Tagebuch*, p. 187; Dobosiewicz: *Vernichtungslager*, pp. 313f.

84 Cf. Transcript of the interrogation of the SS-Standartenführer, Ziereis Franz, former camp commandant of the Mauthausen concentration camp, 24/5/1945, MM, P/18/2.

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detachment in the “Schlier” subcamp, as well as the numerous death marches – and the mass crimes committed in the process – in the final phase of the war. The Zierei protocol is a central source for coming to terms with the crimes committed.<sup>85</sup>

### Post-war biography of Feliks Kamiński

There are hardly any documents available which might provide insight into Kamiński’s post-war biography. According to Aldo Carpi’s diary, he left the camp immediately after the liberation.<sup>86</sup> In the following years, he had an impressive medical career. First, he worked as a physician in a private practice and was also chief physician of the Social Insurance Office and plenipotentiary of the Ministry of Health in matters of health services for the Poznań voivodship and city of Poznań. He taught anatomy and biomechanics at the University’s PE College in Poznań. He also taught anatomy and anatomical drawing to students of the Academy of Fine Arts. In the years 1951–1956, he was the first rector of the new University of Physical Education (WSWF) in Poznań, also teaching anatomy and biomechanics. During the academic years 1956-1958, he served as pro-rector. He published several papers on anatomy in print. His time in the concentration camp doubtless had an impact on his health for the rest of his life. Feliks Kamiński died in April 1958, probably due to heart defects. He is buried in the cemetery of the city of Poznan.<sup>87</sup>

### Post-war biography of Antoni Gościński

Antoni Gościński played an important role in medical care at the former Gusen concentration camp after the liberation. As former chief physician of the camp, he decided to stay there and to support the medical staff of the US - Army through his expertise. It should also be noted that the hospital was moved to the former SS buildings. The report of 14 May 1945 from the 131st Evacuation Hospital in Gusen also gives an insight into the medical situation after the liberation. At this time, there were around 6,625 former prisoners in the camp in need of medical support. Around 650 of them were seriously ill, while the rest needed support due to starvation and general weakness. Another 1,300 people were separated from the others to prevent the spread of infectious diseases. The most infections concerned typhus, tuberculosis and diarrhoea. The report also stated the important role of the former prisoner doctors in medical care.<sup>88</sup> After the 131st Evacuation Hospital in Gusen was closed, Antoni Gościński moved to Linz, where he worked as a physician for a Red Cross hospital.<sup>89</sup> One of his most significant achievements in connection with the Gusen concentration camp was in 1946, when he gave detailed testimony at the Dachau-Mauthausen trials about the crimes committed in the camp. He heavily incriminated some of the SS physicians, above all Eduard Krebsbach. He described in detail the process of the selections and the subsequent murder of sick prisoners by heart injections on the direct orders of Krebsbach.<sup>90</sup> Eduard Krebsbach was later sentenced to death and executed on 28 May

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85 Cf. *ibid.*

86 Cf. Carpi: *Tagebuch*, p. 210.

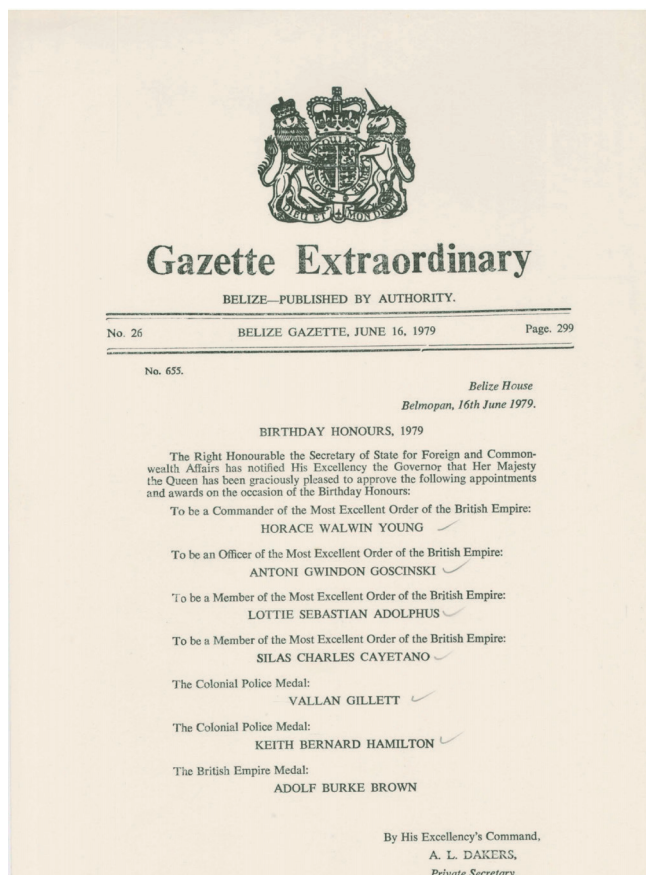
87 Cf. Jurek/Łuczak/Wyszowska: *Uniwersytet Poznański*, p. 70; Information provided by his son, Karol Forycki.

88 Cf. Carpi: *Tagebuch*, pp. 186, 236, 375; Special Sanitary Report on the Concentration Camp Gusen #1, in the vicinity of Mauthausen, 14/5/1945, MM, U6/9b.

89 Cf. Wlazłowski: *The Gusen prisoners’ hospital*, pp. 25f.

90 Cf. Record of Testimony in trial of the United States versus Hans Altfuldisch et al., Mauthausen Main Case, No. 000-50-05, General Military Government Court, Dachau/Germany, 29/3/1946 – 6/4/1946, MM, pp. 599–632., here pp. 602–604.

1947. This was made possible in part by statements such as that of Gościński, who, as head prisoner doctor of the infirmary of the Gusen concentration camp, had a detailed insight into the events.<sup>91</sup>



*Announcement of the award of the "Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire", 16/6/1979, in: Belize Gazette Extraordinary – Published by Authority. Source: Belize Archives and Records Service, provided by Mary Alpuche.*

Gościński probably joined the medical section of the British Army in 1946. After spending some time in Italy, where he was presumably reunited with his wife, he was transferred to the UK, where he worked as a physician in a hospital in Liverpool for the next few years.<sup>92</sup> In January 1950 he was transferred to the then British Honduras (now Belize), where he served as a medical officer.<sup>93</sup> After fulfilling his duty as a medical officer for the British Empire, he and his wife decided to stay in Belize. He opened a private practice there and became a highly respected member of the local community. He was well known for his medical expertise and his commitment to his patients.<sup>94</sup> For his service as a physician in Belize he was made an "Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire", which is an order conferred by the monarch, on 16 June 1979. In this connection, he and his wife were probably introduced to Queen Elizabeth II while she was on a visit to Belize.<sup>95</sup>

91 Cf. Review and Recommendations of the Deputy Judge Advocate for War Crimes: United States of America v. Hans Altfuldisch et al. – Case No. 000.50.5, S. 48f.

92 Cf. Johnny Searle: Eulogy to Antoni Gościński M.D.O.B.E. In: unknown newspaper Belize, December 1986, p. 33, provided by Mary Alpuche - Belize Archives and Records Service.

93 Cf. British Honduras Monthly Bulletin, January 1950, Belize Archives and Records Service, 13/48.

94 Cf. unknown author: Belizians pay finale tribute to Dr. Antoni Gościński OBE. In: unknown newspaper Belize, 21/12/1986, p. 13, provided by Mary Alpuche - Belize Archives and Records Service.

95 Cf. Belize Gazette Extraordinary – Published by Authority, 16/6/1979, provided by Mary Alpuche - Belize Archives and Records Service.



Antoni Gościński died in Belize on 11 December 1986. The cause of death is not mentioned in local newspaper articles but these state that he had struggled with health problems for quite a long time. When he passed away his wife was still alive; they had been married for 47 years and had three children: Annie, who predeceased Anton Gościński, Eva and Sonia.<sup>96</sup>

## Conclusion and evaluation of the activities of the prisoner medical staff

First, it should be clarified, that the prisoner medical personnel were not in a position to prevent the mass killings and the medical experiments in general, and it can be assumed that the people involved were aware of this. However, after the restructuring of the infirmary in 1941, it became possible to bring in educated medical personnel, especially from Poland. This was accompanied, at least in part, by an improvement in medical care. By eliminating the prisoner functionaries who were dangerous to patients, at least one of the sources of danger for the patients was greatly reduced. Since the accounts that Zach, Roth and Bobrowski served consecutively as Kapos and were murdered in this order do not match the information in the camp documents, it can be assumed that there were translation errors in the survivors' reports, which were mostly in Polish, and that some of those mentioned were not Kapos but prisoner functionaries in different roles.

A comparison of various survivors' accounts shows that there were different forms of resistance in the Gusen concentration camp infirmary. However, the extent to which this took place is difficult to trace, as is the exact number of lives saved. According to the reports of Zbgeniew Wlazłowski, it must have been at least a thousand or more, while J.A. Carter speaks of several hundred. What can be said with certainty is that Antoni Gościński made great efforts to prevent medical experiments on and mass killings of prisoners. It is also obvious that the medical prisoner personnel was in contact with other resistance groups in the rest of the camp. Feliks Kamiński probably played the key role here – presumably because he spoke several foreign languages. This enabled the exchanges with prisoners from other nations. Another important aspect is that it was possible to save several lives by swapping the prisoner numbers of prisoners in danger of being executed with those of prisoners who had already died, thus preventing further persecution of those in danger. Furthermore, training in the medical field, which was carried out illegally, was also a form of resistance. Feliks Kamiński played a central role here, partly because he presumably provided the premises in the pathology department and partly because he was one of the lecturers. Antoni Gościński probably saved hundreds of lives through his operations, which in many cases were carried out illegally. It should also be emphasised that he recorded the crimes of the SS doctors during his imprisonment, with the help of Feliks Kamiński, and testified against them in the post-war trials. Documenting crimes in concentration camps is also an act of resistance. Finally, it should also be mentioned that illegal works of art were created in the infirmary, as can be seen from the example of Aldo Carpi. The production of art can also be seen as self-assertion on the part of the prisoners and thus as resistance.

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<sup>96</sup> Cf. Johnny Searle: Eulogy to Antoni Gościński M.D.O.B.E. During the research for this article attempts were made to find any living ancestors of Antoni Gościński. By May 2024 this search remained unsuccessful. Any references regarding this would be much appreciated.

Because all these processes mentioned not have been carried out by individuals and a far-reaching network must have existed, the resistance in the Gusen infirmary must be categorised as collective and organised. The fact that the resistance could not take place without violence can be seen from the example of the murder of the prisoner functionaries. And that after the liberation, numerous members of the medical staff were still involved in the medical care of sick and weakened former prisoners shows that they used their privileged situation to save human lives, even after the liberation.



*Cheering prisoners after liberation of Gusen (fourth person from the right could be Antoni Gościński), May 1945. Source: Collection Rudolf Haunschmied.*

**Quotation:**

*Florian Guschl: Antoni Gościński, Feliks Kamiński and the resistance of the medical prisoner staff in concentration camp Gusen. In: coMMents (2024) Heft 2, S. 23–45.*

DOI: <https://www.doi.org/10.57820/mm.comments.2024.02>

*coMMents – chronicle of the Mauthausen Memorial: current studies is the open access eJournal of the KZ-Gedenkstätte Mauthausen | Mauthausen Memorial. It is published in German and English.*

ISSN: 2960-4303

DOI: <https://www.doi.org/10.57820/mm.comments.2024>

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