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Prof. Dr Ludwik Fleck – bacteriologist

Ramat – Awiw, Beit Brodetzki

Production of the typhus vaccine in the Lvov Ghetto. – The ‘Schutzhaft’ of a group of scientists and doctors on the site of the ‘Laokoon’ factory in Zniesienie. – Professor Kudicke’s visit. – At the hospital lab of the Concentration Camp Oświęcim. – Dr Clauberg’s experiments. – The prisoners’ sabotage, the vaccine’s producers in the Concentration Camp Buchenwald. – A scientist being a witness in the L.G. Farben trial. The shameful experiments of Dr Mrugowski.

Professor Dr Ludwik Fleck, born on 11th July 1896 in Lvov, the son of Maurice and Sabina (maiden name Herschdörfer). He had two sisters: Henryka Fleck-Silber and Antonine Fleck-Kessler, however, his whole family died under the Nazi occupation. Prof. L. Fleck graduated from a high school in Lvov and then studied at Lvov University, Medical Department. He completed the studies in Vienna. After returning to Poland he started the research on typhus fever, syphilis and pustules. He dealt with general serology and streptococcus issues the research being aimed at creating the so called: ‘exantine sample’. Professor Fleck opened a medical analysis laboratory at 8 Ochronek Street in Lvov. He married Ernestine Waldman in 1923. Their son Richard lives in Kfar-Saba and works in Kupat-Cholm in Petah-Tikva. Before the WW II L. Fleck worked as a director of the bacteriology lab of the Social Security/ Insurance Institution in Lvov. When the war broke out Professor Dr Fleck was in Lvov. During the Soviet regime he worked as an associate professor in the National Medical Institute and a director of the Bacteriology Department in the National Microbiology Institute. He continued the studies on typhus fever and white blood cells and managed to create a unique method of making the typhus vaccine.

When the Nazi entered Lvov, Professor Fleck’s properties were taken over and he with his family driven out of their flat. While in the Ghetto, Professor Fleck was leading the works in the Jewish Lab at Kuszewicza Street, and at the same time carrying on with the studies on typhus fever, hoping to work out a way of producing the typhus vaccine in primitive conditions of the Ghetto. Among his co-workers were Dr Olga Elster, Dr Bernard Umschweif and Dr Anhalt. The scientists managed to produce the vaccine. This fact was further described

by the professor in the post-war Polish magazine 'Polski Tygodnik Lekarski' and the American 'Texas Reports on Biology and Medicine' of 1947, vol. V no 2.

In December 1942 Professor Fleck together with his wife and son were arrested and put in the suburban factory 'Laokoon' in Zniesienie. He was forced to produce the typhus vaccine there. 'Schutzhaft' was imposed not only on L. Fleck, but also on Dr Umschweif and his wife, Dr Ostern, Dr Kehlhofer and a veterinarian called Gelb. At the beginning of February 1943 Professor Fleck and his assistants were arrested and put in prison at Łackiego Street. After a week they were deported to the Concentration Camp Oświęcim. At first, Professor Fleck - prisoner's number 100967 - worked there as barracks cleaner, forced labourer doing menial jobs, yet after suffering from severe illnesses, caused by exhaustion and starvation he was moved to the hospital area, where he worked in the lab carrying out bacteriological studies for the inmates. In January 1944 he was deported to the Concentration Camp Buchenwald, where he participated in the sabotage activities organised by the camp's prisoners, doctors and scientists. On 11th April 1945 he was freed by the American army and in July 1945 returned to Poland. Prof. Fleck continued his research on white blood cells at the University of Lublin, which led to the discovery of the phenomenon known as: 'leukergy'. In 1948 Professor Fleck gave testimony as an expert in the trial against IG Farben in the Nuremberg Court. In 1952 he was moved to Warsaw, where he became a director of the Bacteriology and Immunology Institute. His contribution to the research on the diphtheria vaccine was the discovery of the method of production of the so called 'Anabac' preparation. In 1954 Professor Fleck became a member of the Polish Academy of Science and in 1956 the New York Academy of Science. In Warsaw professor Fleck worked in the 'National Research Institute for Mother and Child'. In 1957 he went to Israel in order to continue his research in the Biology Institute Nes-Zion.

The testimony taken by:

Dr E. Raba

Ramat-Awiw, 3.02.1958

The signature of the witness

Prof. Dr Ludwik Fleck

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Remarks:

The witness is a well-known scientist with outstanding achievements in the field of typhus and diphtheria vaccine research. The evidence on the Nazis occupation in Poland is given in an unbiased, concise and a matter-of-fact way. Each word of his eye-witness account is of great importance.

Apart from the mentioned Stefan Szende's book, there are two more works about Professor Fleck's activities in the Ghetto and Concentration Camps, namely 'Der SS-Staat' by Dr Eugen Kogon, a book published in Western Germany and 'The Scientists in the Camps' by Prof. Kirman, written in French. Professor Fleck's account sounded authentic and reliable. The witness got acquainted with, read and signed the testimony.

How we produced the typhus vaccine in the Lvov Ghetto.

Soon after invading Lvov, the Nazis started placing huge posters all around the city, informing that the Jews were the carriers of the typhus fever germs and warning everyone to avoid any contact with them. At the time I was working in the hospital lab in the Ghetto, at Kuszewicza Street. I carried on working on the typhus vaccine, the research I had started before the war. It was of major importance to work out such a method that would allow us to produce the vaccine in the primitive conditions of the Ghetto.

With the cooperation of Dr Olga Elster, Dr Bernard Umschweif and Dr Anhalt as well as thanks to great help from the hospital's director, Dr Kurzrock, I managed to create the typhus vaccine made from the urine of the patients suffering from the typhus fever. The vaccine saved lives of many people in the Ghetto as well as Janowska Concentration Camp, where we vaccinated the prisoners. The incidence of typhus fever was very high; it could be estimated at the level of nearly 100% of the whole Ghetto population. The mortality rate was high. The young, healthy and better-fed had apparently higher chances of survival.

In the hospital at Kuszewicza Street, together with Dr Kurzrock we were using the vaccine to protect the patients suffering from typhus fever. They were staying in separate rooms, and as providers of the urine used for the vaccine's production, they were not exposed to Germans' cruelty, who killed patients suffering from typhus fever. Occasionally, we made reports on the vaccine's production process and submitted them to the Gestapo officers. I was often asked by the Nazis: 'Is it possible to vaccinate the Germans?' I answered that it was doubtful, as they were of different race and the vaccine had been made from the urine of ill Jews...

(In the book 'Der letzte Jude aus Polen' – Europa-Verlag, Zürich-New York, the author Stephen Szende writes: 'The Germans utilized the Jewish invention and it was prohibited under the threat of death to produce and use the serum in the Jewish Ghetto.' When talking to me, Professor Dr Fleck denied that information. Moreover, the information given by S. Szende about the alleged murder of a group of scientists working on the vaccine is also inaccurate. The account of the fate of that group I shall present below in the testimony of Prof. Dr Fleck. – remark of the author E.R.).

In Laokoon in Zniesienie. Prof. Kudicke's visit.

In December 1942 I was arrested with my wife and son, or as the German authorities determined it: 'Taken into Schutzhaft'. Together with several other people we were taken to the suburban factory 'Laokoon' in Zniesienie. We were not allowed to leave the place and our task was to continue the research on the typhus vaccine. The manager of the factory was a

German, Schwanenberg. Apart from me, there were also: a chemist, Dr Umschweif with his wife, Dr Ostern, a veterinarian called Gelb and a lab worker Owsiej Abramowicz.

We had decent housing conditions, however we were prisoners, forced labourers. One of my duties was informing a German doctor – Dr Müller about the progress in the research on the new vaccine. Once, Prof. Kudicke, a German, the then Director of the National Hygiene Institute in Warsaw, paid us a visit. His behaviour was very arrogant. He did not take his hat off upon entering the room and in a rude tone of voice he interrogated me about the details of our work. He demanded that we present the methods of the vaccine's production and watched everything closely.

We stayed in 'Laokoon' till January 1943, and then the whole group, joined by Dr Seemanowa, her husband and child were taken to prison at Łackiego Street. After a week we were deported to the Concentration Camp Oświęcim.

Oświęcim – the experiments of Dr Clauberg

Upon the arrival at Oświęcim I was given the number 100967 and placed in the barracks No. 20. My wife received the number 34967 and was placed in the barracks No. 10. Exhausted because of the hard, forced labour (cleaning the barracks) and starvation I went down with typhus fever. Thanks to taking the vaccine produced in the Lvov Ghetto I managed to recover from the rather gentle case of the illness. Since the Camp's guards murdered those suffering from typhus, with the help of the inmates I was trying not to reveal my state.

Polish doctors – Dr Ławkowski and Dr Feikel - gave me medical treatment. After typhus I suffered from the inflammation of the gall bladder, myocarditis and I had stomach oedema. At last I was transferred to the Camp's hospital section.

My task was to carry out bacteriological research for the prisoners. I received the numbered samples and was to provide the results. It was an ordinary work, typical of any bacteriological lab, and but for the constant selection made at the hospital, and the people who were taken to the gas chambers, you could have thought that the blood, urine and faeces samples had been taken to cure the patient. However, it was only another of the many devil nonsense that the life at the Concentration Camp Oświęcim posed. There were a lot of drugs, medicines brought by the Jews coming from the West, unaware of the fact that they arrived to face extermination.

I heard a lot about Dr Clauberg's experiments during my stay in Oświęcim. He sterilized Jewish women in the barracks No. 10. These surgeries were said to have been carried out in an extremely brutal way, having ignored all the asepsis requirements. I had no personal

contact with Dr Clauberg's victims. Dr Umschweif and his wife died in the Camps. Out of the Lvov group only the Seemans, their child and Owsiej Abramowicz survived. In January 1944 I was deported to the Concentration Camp Buchenwald. My wife stayed in Oświęcim, then she was deported to the Concentration Camp Ravensbrück and then to the Concentration Camp Malechowo.

The sabotage in Buchenwald

In the Concentration Camp Buchenwald I was a prisoner number 4934. I was assigned to work in the hospital lab. Here, I was also supposed to carry out research on the new typhus vaccine. Moreover, I was to prepare to habilitation Dr Ding, the lab's director, an ignoramus, who had been granted the PhD title for his services for the party. His lack of knowledge of science was very useful in the sabotage activities that were soon undertaken by a group of doctors and scientists from the Concentration Camp Buchenwald.

In the Camp the Nazis selected a group of people that was supposed to produce the typhus vaccine for the SS, according to the Giraud procedures. The production manager was Dr Marian Ciepielowski. We were consciously producing a non-active vaccine. The samples sent for the control analysis, however, were always active. Ding, the idiot never wised it up. The members of the group were, among others: Prof. Van Linden, Dutch and Dr Makowiczka, Czech (currently serving in the Czech army).

When it comes to the reprehensible experiments carried out on prisoners, I had an opportunity to give a testimony on that matter in the Nuremberg Court, where I was called as an expert in the trial against I.G. Farben. I gave evidence on what I knew about the tests that had been carried out by the SS doctor, Dr Mrugowski. These experiments were done on a large scale. It was all about testing a vaccine produced by I.G. Farben and a French man, Giraud. In order to do so, prisoners were infected with typhus fever and then given the vaccine. Professor Waitz from Strasbourg, whom I befriended during our stay in the Camp, was also a witness in the Nuremberg Trial.

(Professor Fleck is showing me a letter of thanks for his substantial assistance in the trial against I.G. Farben, which he received from the Prosecutor's Office for the War Crimes in Nuremberg. – author's remark E.R.).

(Übersetzt von Anita Żytowicz)