

# **My great grandfather Jan Danielak (1891- 1944)**

Mira Danielak

My name is Mira Danielak. I am the great granddaughter of Jan Danielak. Jan Danielak perished at the hands of the Nazi regime on April the 11th 1944.

We shall never forget. We must continue to speak. Our words must not be forgotten.

“We must never forget- “Till the tenth generation.” – Tomi Reichental.

“And without the history of our ancestors, we are nowhere, as if in between.”<sup>i</sup> Roman Danielak, March 2003.



*Jan Danielak as a young man, 21 years old. Taken in 1912.*

Jan Danielak was my great grandfather. He perished at the hands of the Nazi regime. We must never forget.

Jan Danielak was born on April 13th, 1891, in Sewerynówka, district of Sokolow Podlaski, Western Poland. Jan graduated from primary school in Sewerynówka and then from the Junior High School in Siedlce. In 1921, he graduated from the pharmacy department at the University of Warsaw with a master's degree in pharmacology. Jan married Bronisława Marciniak in the year 1917. They raised 4 sons Jerzy, Janusz, Roman and Zdzisław. During the Bolshevik invasion (1920) Jan became a volunteer of the Academic Legion in Warsaw. He was a pharmacist in

pharmacies in Warsaw and Wloclawek. He then leased a pharmacy in Sosnowica, powiat Włodawa and then in Mokobody, before moving with his family to Kotuń, a small village about eighty km east of the capital of Warsaw. There he purchased his own pharmacy in 1928. Along with his wife Bronisława, Jan ran the pharmacy successfully. As president of the Volunteer Fire Brigade, the Maritime and Colonial League, the School Building Committee and other institutions, he was a very active member of his local community.



*Jan Danielak pictured with his wife, Bronisława Marciniak and his four sons. Front left: Janusz, Zdzisław, Roman and Jerzy. 1930.*

Germany invaded Poland on September 1st, 1939, marking the beginning of WWII. Poland capitulated and was divided between Germany and the Soviet Union<sup>ii</sup>. During this time Jan was a participant of the founding meeting of the ZWZ-AK in Kotuń. The largest of all Polish resistance organisations was the Armia Krajowa (Home Army, AK). It was the military arm of the Polish Underground State and loyal to the Polish government in Exile. Jan then became its soldier, whose task was to provide the ZWZ-AK outposts with sanitary supplies<sup>iii</sup>. In the years 1939 to 1943 he helped to get accommodation and funds for displaced Poles from the Poznan and Zamość region<sup>iv</sup>. There is no doubt that Jan Danielak displayed enormous courage during the invasion of Poland.

As the Nazis continued to extend their reign, invading the Soviet Union in (1941)- Poland had been destroyed. A German policy was developed that aimed to destroy the Polish Nation and Culture and to ruthlessly exploit the labour of Polish Workers, considering the Polish people to be fundamentally inferior. During this time Jan became exceptionally worried for his family's safety and was unaware that a

classified operation created by the Nazi forces used to inflict suffering on those who were educated in Poland was active. This operation was codenamed *Intelligenzaktion* and was created by the *Einsatzgruppen*, paramilitary death squads of Nazi Germany, and the *Volksdeutscher Selbstschutz*, an ethnic German militia recruited in Poland.<sup>v</sup>

The first phase of *Operation Intelligenzaktion* was code named “*Operation Tannenberg*” and began in 1937.<sup>vi</sup> It began with the German Reich’s compilation of 61,000 Polish names, identified as enemies of the German nation. All were identified as the intelligentsia of every city, town and village in Poland. The names were compiled biographically in the *Special Prosecution Book Poland*. The plan was finalised in May 1939. Following orders of Adolf Hitler, a special unit dubbed *Tannenberg* was created to track down and arrest all those listed in the *SPBP* (*Special Prosecution Book Poland*.)

*Operation Tannenberg* was followed by *Intelligenzaktion* soon after the German invasion of Poland, September 1939. The mass murder of *Operation Intelligenzaktion* killed 100,000 Polish people. Approximately 61,000 were Polish intelligentsia, those identified as political targets in *Operation Tannenberg*.<sup>vii</sup> The Polish intelligentsia, such as Jan Danielak were regarded as “Polish masters” an undesirable trait that may cause the Poles to disobey their “German masters”, Hitler himself declared. The Führer pointed out that “Poles can only have one master and that is the German.” In contrast to Nazi genocidal policy that targeted Poland’s 3.3 million Jewish men, women and children for destruction, Nazi plans for the Catholic majority focused on the murder and suppression of political, religious and intellectual leaders. The concept of *Intelligenzaktion* was also to prevent Polish elites from organising resistance.

In the spring of 1940, *AB-Aktion* (*Ausserordenliche Befriedungsaktion; Extraordinary Pacification Operation*), the final stage of the operation began<sup>viii</sup>. It is believed that some 30,000 Polish were seized, some 70,000 political and religious leaders, professors, and teachers being killed and the other 23,000 sent to concentration camps. Jan Danielak was arrested and imprisoned as a result of this campaign.

Jan Danielak was arrested on the 5th of December 1943 from his Pharmacy in Kotuń. On the morning of his arrest Jan was taken along with Kotuń’s parish priest and the local primary school headmaster.

On the 5th of December 1943 Jan was arrested by the Gestapo and imprisoned in Pawiak prison Warsaw, Poland, from where he was taken to Gross-Rosen concentration camp on the 17th of January 1944.<sup>ix</sup> The transport from Pawiak to Gross-Rosen on this date was a small transport consisting of no more than 75 prisoners. Such a number is mentioned in the laconic report from Pawiak dated January the 17th 1944.<sup>x</sup> Gross-Rosen concentration camp was originally established

in 1940 as a sub camp of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. The camp was named for the nearby village of Gross-Rosen. Now called Rogoźnica, the village is approximately 40 miles southwest of Wrocław in present-day western Poland.

On the 5th of February Jan Danielak was transported from Gross-Rosen to Dachau Concentration camp.

Dachau concentration camp was the first concentration camp opened in 1933 shortly after Adolf Hitler became chancellor of Germany<sup>xi</sup>. Within these walls thousands of victims died at the hands of the brutal Nazi regime. Located in southern Germany, Dachau was initially a camp for political prisoners; however, it eventually evolved into a death camp. Thousands died from malnutrition, disease, overwork or were executed. The SS, the elite guard of the Nazi party established the Dachau concentration camp in March 1933, on the grounds of an abandoned munitions factory near the town of Dachau in Southern Germany. The camps prisoners included members of groups Hitler considered unfit for the new Germany including artists, intellectuals, the physically and mentally handicapped and homosexuals. It is estimated that at least 188,000 prisoners were held there between 1933 and 1945. Upon arriving in the camp, each prisoner was given a prisoner number with which they would there on be identified with. According to official Dachau concentration camp records Jan Danielak was given the prisoner number 63284.<sup>xii</sup> It is unknown if this number was engraved on his arm or merely kept in the Germans' written records of camp detainees. Following written accounts from survivors of Auschwitz that I have read, I have learned that in some camps prisoner numbers were painfully engraved on one's arm. It cannot be ascertained if this procedure was executed in Dachau. I imagine the numbers 63284 indistinctly written on my great grandfather's arm. His new identity was the number 63284. From there on he had no name. Prisoners were forced to wear cloth emblems which served as a system of identification in German camps.<sup>xiii</sup> They were also used to identify the reason the prisoners had been placed there. The system of badges varied somewhat between the camps. Such emblems helped guards assign tasks to the detainees. For example, someone wearing an F could be called upon to help translate guards' spoken instructions to a trainload of new arrivals from France. There were six categories of identification. My great grandfather fell under the category of political prisoner as he was a protective custody prisoner. The additional designation he would have been given was Pole, a Polish person. He wore a red triangle to symbolise his categorisation of a political prisoner and in the centre a P symbolising his Polish identity.

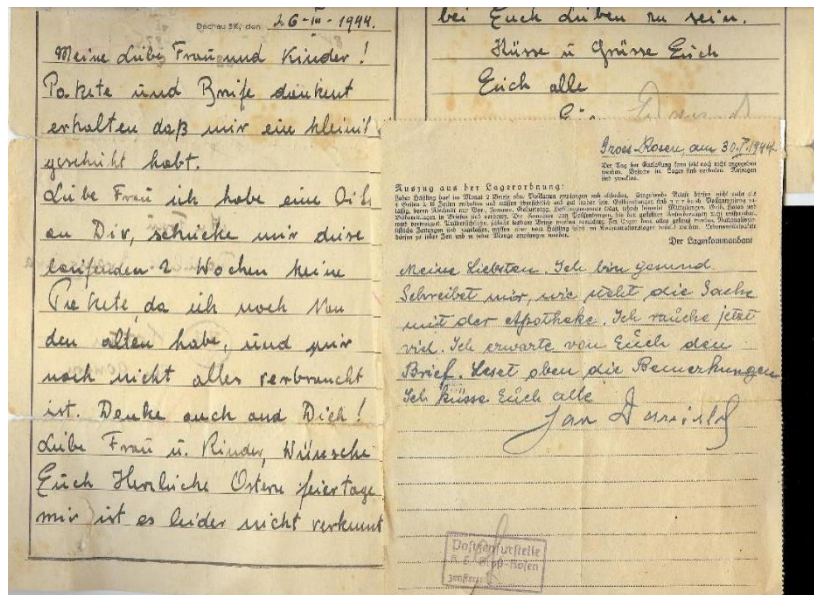
Following this procedure, Jan and other newly arrived prisoners were categorised and in some cases their disposition was described. According to official Dachau concentration camp records, Jan Danielak was placed in the category Sch.P. Following research from the Glossary of terms and abbreviations<sup>xiv</sup> produced by the "Holocaust Survivors and Victims' Resource Centre" Sch (Schutzhäftling) translates

to protective custody or protective custody prisoner. Sch in this case is followed with a designation of the prisoner's nationality. "Sch P" "Schutzhäftling Pole" "protective custody Pole". Red triangles marked "political prisoners (Schutzhäftlinge – Sch.), in other words, those who were imprisoned on the basis of a "protective custody order" (Schutzhaftbefehl) issued by a state police post. From February 1933 the Gestapo arrested individuals whom the Nazis believed could endanger the "people and state" according to the title of the Reichstag fire decree. They were sent to concentration camps as protective custody prisoners. Such groups that were arrested included the Polish intellectuals, this including Jan Danielak.

During the year 1944 a typhus epidemic occurred in the camp caused by poor sanitation and overcrowding. This outbreak caused more than 15,000 deaths. During this year the living conditions in the camp had become unbearable and were beneath human dignity. However bad conditions had been before 1944, they became completely intolerable due to overcrowding. Overcrowding occurred in the camp due to repeated transports from the front. Allied forces were gaining ground, forcing the SS to evacuate camps and send prisoners to camps such as Dachau located farther from the front in Southern Germany. Transports from the evacuated camps arrived continuously at Dachau. Prisoners who travelled for weeks in the cattle carts were exhausted, ill and near death. This ultimately contributed to the typhus outbreak. With little food nor water, lice infestations and no adequate infrastructure for the growing number of prisoners the death toll rose unbearably high. Barracks where the men slept were overcrowded, filled with the stench of unwashed bodies and sickness. Prisoners like Jan were forced to sleep on lice infested thin mats with a small strip of fabric that served as a blanket. Food rations were scarce, a drop of cold acorn coffee, a small chunk of bread, about the size of one's palm and lukewarm watery soup. As conditions deteriorated in the camp, food sources would be cut short, prisoners not eating or drinking for days on end. I picture my great grandfather suffering in these conditions. The gelid cold of the winter, the hours standing at roll call under the harsh camp lights, the SS and Kapos with their inhuman punishment methods. I picture the back breaking work he must have endured under the watchful eyes of the Kapos, with little a bite of food to keep him standing. I feel the bitter cold gnawing at his fingers as he stood for roll call at dawn, his heart beating as SS soldiers walked past batons and rifles in hand, I see his pain as he lived each day in Dachau hoping, praying his family, his wife Bronisława and his 4 young sons were alive.

Jan Danielak wrote letters to his family during the years 1944 whilst in Dachau and 1944 in Gross Rosen. Prisoners except for Jews and Soviet Prisoners of war of the penal company were officially allowed to send letters from the camp. Three such letters written by Jan have survived and are in my possession. These are the last items held by the Danielak family that have stood the test of time and they serve to remind us of our family who suffered at the hands of the brutal Nazi regime.



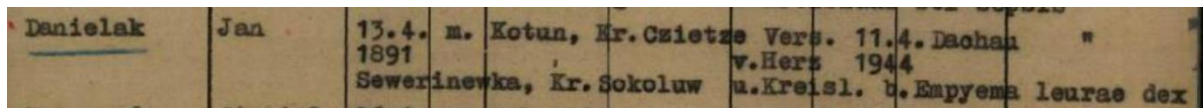


Jan Danielak's letters to his family.

The first letter was written by Jan whilst in Gross- Rosen concentration camp during 1944. Each document has been written in German. Polish is Jan's native language, but camp regulations stated that each letter sent must be translated into German. Each document has been translated to English for the purpose of this research. At the severe top of the letter, we are presented with the date the letter was written on along with the camp's name. "Gross Rosen 30/1/1944". This is followed by a brief statement. "The date of discharge cannot yet be specified. Visits to the camp are prohibited. Requests are free". This is followed with a set of rules Prisoners must adhere to when sending a letter and receiving a letter. "Each prisoner may receive and send 2 letters or requests per month. Money, photographs and picture inserts in letters are forbidden. Letters that are confusing and difficult to read are eliminated. Food packages may be received at any time and at any quantity" The camp commandant's signature follows. "Der Lagerkommandant". In this letter Jan Danielak begins by addressing his family "My dear loved ones". He follows with a simple "I am healthy". This phrase was required by the Nazi regime to be included in one's letter. Ich bin gesund "I am healthy". Jan asks his family to write to him about the chemist. "Write to me how things are with the chemist. "I'm now smoking a lot" he states. "I'm expecting a letter from you". The letter ends with one line "Kisses to all- Jan Danielak". The second letter written by Jan was written in Dachau concentration camp during the year 1944. The letter again begins with the date and camp name "Dachau 3k, den 26/3/1944" The letter is opened with a warm greeting. "My dear wife and children!" "Parcels and letters have been received". The next part of the sentence is illegible due to it becoming faded. I have managed to translate only half of the following sentence as again it was illegible. "2 weeks no parcels, as I still have the old one, everything is not used yet. I am also thinking of you". The third and final letter held in my possession was written by Jan whilst in Dachau. The date is illegible, however after translating the letter I have learned it was written during the month of April, Easter time. The letter begins with a warm wish. "Dear wife and

children, I wish you a very happy Easter.” The next line is short but heart- breaking. “Unfortunately, I can’t be with you.” It finishes with a “Kisses to you all”.

According to official Dachau concentration camp records Jan Danielak died on the 11th of April 1944, aged 53.<sup>xv</sup> On April the 15th 1944 the camp commandant’s office informed his family that Jan Danielak had died due to an empyema of the right pleura.<sup>xvi</sup> This is also stated on official Dachau concentration camp records. “Sterbeort” translates to place of death. Written beside this is “Dachau”. “Todesurschache” translates to cause of death. Written beside this is “empyema pleura dex”. However, I have reason to believe this is not the cause of Jan Danielak’s death. On a regular basis, false causes of death, or none at all, were entered in the documentation prepared after the death of prisoners. The exact date of Jan Danielak’s death may also be incorrect. When larger groups of prisoners were put to death or died of illness or overwork, the dates of death were falsified, so that they would be distributed over a period of 2 or 3 weeks, a dozen or so per day. During 1944 an outbreak of typhoid caused more than 15,000 deaths therefore leading to a high number of daily deaths. There may have been a possibility that my great grandfather died of typhoid as a result of the typhoid epidemic. However deep I may dig into numerous archives and documents, I believe I will never truly know the cause and exact date of my great grandfather’s death.



Danielak	Jan	13.4. m. 1891	Kotun, Kr. Czietze	Vers. 11.4. Dachau	"
			Sewerinekka, Kr. Sokolow	v. Herz 1944	a. Kreis. b. Empyema leurae dex

*Document from the rural district Dachau containing Jan Danielak’s name, date of birth, place of birth, place of dwelling before death, cause of death, date of death, place of death, precise indication of burial place.*

In conclusion the Nazi Intelligenzaktion campaign and the AB- Aktion Operation ultimately brought about the death of Jan Danielak. I conclude and state categorically that Jan Danielak was murdered as a result of being a learned man, a member of the Intelligentsia.

The Danielak family have suffered tremendously at the hands of the Nazi Regime. Previous to my research, there were many unanswered questions circulating around the capture and death of Jan Danielak. I wished to uncover the answers to these questions and provide my family with the information they had long since sought. Jan Danielak will forever remain in my thoughts. He was my great grandfather, and I shall never stop telling his story.

“We must never forget- “Till the tenth generation.” – Tomi Reichental



*Jan Danielak at work in his pharmacy in Kotuń, Poland.*

At the request of the “World Union of Home Army Soldiers Warsaw” the East Municipal square in Kotuń was named after Bronisława and Jan Danielak.

The square is named “Bronisława and Jan Danielak Square.”



*My granduncle Roman Danielak during the naming of the East Municipal square Kotuń, 2010*



For his activities during 1937 Jan Danielak was awarded the Gold Cross of Merit, a medal awarded for exemplary public service or humanitarian work that goes above and beyond the call of duty. My granduncle Roman Danielak wrote of his father Jan's life in his autobiography, "Standing Outside My Story."

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<sup>i</sup> Autobiography: "Standing Outside My Story" by Roman Danielak (page 2.) Published 2017.

<sup>ii</sup> Website: Invasion of Poland, Fall 1939 | Holocaust Encyclopedia (ushmm.org)

<sup>iii</sup> Website: fotopolska.eu - Poland in the photo

<sup>iv</sup> Website: Z kart historii gminy Kotuń - Muzeum Pożarnictwa w Kotuniu (muzeumpozarnictwakotun.pl)

<sup>v</sup> Website: Intelligenzaktion... - Polishnews.com

<sup>vi</sup> Website: Intelligenzaktion... - Polishnews.com

<sup>vii</sup> Document: Main Commission For The Investigation Of Nazi War Crimes, Warsaw, Poland. Non-Jewish Victims -- Poles (ushmm.org) (page 9-11).

<sup>viii</sup> Document: Microsoft Word - 5710.pdf (yadvashem.org) (page 1.)

<sup>ix</sup> Arolsen Archives- Prisoner register of the CC Gross-Rosen - 1943 - 1944 - (postwar compilation)

<sup>x</sup> Report: 00062291\_-\_Historia-Ludzie-Pamiec.pdf (cyfrowemazowsze.pl) (page 212).

<sup>xi</sup> Video clip: Dachau Concentration Camp, produced by "United States Holocaust Memorial Museum." May 7th 2020. Dachau concentration camp | Holocaust Encyclopedia (ushmm.org)

<sup>xii</sup> Arolsen Archives: registry office card of the Concentration Camp Dachau.

<sup>xiii</sup> Website: System of triangles / Prisoner classification / History / Auschwitz-Birkenau

<sup>xiv</sup> Website: Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations (ushmm.org) (page 224)

<sup>xv</sup> Arolsen Archives: Death certificate of Jan Danielak.

<sup>xvi</sup> Autobiography: "Standing Outside My Story" by Roman Danielak (page 230.) Published March 2017. Dachau Concentration Camp Death Book