

## C. The Battle That Never Was

The events of June were a sign of bad things coming.

As mentioned, while trying to establish bases in the forest for the Jewish partisans, "Mojtek" managed to strengthen ties with the Polish officer "Langiewicz" and, on 18<sup>th</sup> June 1943, a meeting was arranged between them. Information about this meeting reached the Germans. In the battle that ensued there, "Mojtek" and Josef Kantor, who was with him, managed to escape. However, in his haste, "Mojtek" forgot his jacket at the spot.

"The Germans found the jacket and that was the reason for the rapid liquidation of the 'Small Ghetto'."

These were the words of Benjamin Orenstein, who simply kept quiet and did not interpret. What did the Germans find in "Mojtek's" jacket pocket?

It has already been mentioned that, on 23<sup>rd</sup> June, Dr Adam Wolberg was murdered. There is no doubt that the Germans were well aware of his connections with the underground in the ghetto, whose commanders did not expect and did not know that, in two days, its liquidation would begin.

This was not the only "Mojtek" mistake. Too many knew about the existence of the organisation and the digging of the tunnels. The command failed to eliminate the main perpetrators in time. The fighters, who lacked professional commanders, seemed to have forgotten who was standing against them - a well-trained military force equipped with rifles and machine-guns.

Degenhardt managed to keep the date of the operation a secret until the last moment, and the Jews did not have professional intelligence personnel, who were able to draw general conclusions from small details.

Even a mere girl, Henia Lustiger, understood why the disaster had happened:

"No one warned the Jews and the Germans worked efficiently."<sup>1</sup>

Thus, the initiative remained in the hands of the Germans, who were well prepared and managed to surprise the fighters.

On the morning of 25<sup>th</sup> June, the workers went to work as usual and nothing special was noticeable in the ghetto. Degenhardt had learned a lesson from the Warsaw Ghetto uprising and relied on the principle of surprise. Therefore, the Jews were not expelled from their homes, the Ukrainians did not surround the ghetto, and no orders were given to the Jewish police.

In the morning, most of the underground members remained in the ghetto and decided to take up positions and be alert. An orderly meeting was held in the central tunnel. Although the weapons were

---

<sup>1</sup> Lustiger, Pamiętnik, ch. 18, p. 7

distributed among the groups, most of the grenades remained in the warehouse. Everything seemed quiet and “Mojtek” cancelled the alert. He himself probably went to rest, because he was ill.

At around 16:00, he was awakened by bursts of shots from rifles and machine guns. The Germans suddenly arrived, like thunder from a clear sky, and immediately began shooting at everyone and everything, especially in the direction of the tunnel openings on ul. Nadrzeczna. Did they know their location from the traitor, the policeman Rozenberg, or from some other source? The members of the underground, who were surprised and ran back to the tunnels to take weapons and fight, did not have time to do so. **They were shot without a fight, from a distance.**

After the Germans took control of the weapons depot, their job was easy. The shooting continued non-stop and trucks full of corpses drove to the cemetery. Hundreds of corpses were strewn in the street. Several small groups (including Rywka Glanc’s group) dug in and defended themselves until the last bullet. A few units of five managed to escape to the forest through a side tunnel. “Mojtek” did not fall into enemy hands alive. He fought fiercely and saved the last bullet for himself.<sup>2</sup>

At that time, Director Lütt arrived at the ghetto and demanded that the nightshift be sent to the factory. Many Jews did not know what to do - to go or not to go? Among them was Frida Herszlikowicz, who was debating hard, because she did not want to leave her brother in the ghetto. In the end, she decided to go to work, in summer clothes. She did not imagine that she would never return to the ghetto.<sup>3</sup>

When they arrived at the factory, the *Werkschutz* directed the arrivals to a distant hall and did not let them meet with the dayshift. The shots were not heard in the factory. The evening rollcall, which was always held before leaving, lasted for hours.

Suddenly, Lütt and Degenhardt entered the hall, accompanied by policemen. Degenhardt addressed the assembled people and announced that they were staying permanently at the factory and that the ghetto would no longer exist. To his speech, he added the “poetic” words:

*“Der schöne Mai ist vorbei, die Händlerei, die Schwindlerei (Beautiful May is gone, and along with it the trade and swindling) – You will remain alive as long as you work for HASAG and, as long as you live, you will work for HASAG!”*

Panic broke out in the hall. People began to shout and weep. After all, there were those here who had left a wife or child in hiding, or an old mother in the ghetto... Seeing the people’s reaction, Director Lütt began with a consoling speech:

*“Working in the factory is your future. After Germany’s victory, you will continue to work here... If you work well, no harm will befall you. You will not wear striped clothes (from concentration camps). They will not tattoo you. You will receive plates with a number.*

---

<sup>2</sup> Brener, *Resistance and Destruction*, p. 71.

<sup>3</sup> Frida Herszlikowicz, YVA, 0.3/6791

“Barracks are being built for you, they will be ready in two or three months... And, after Germany’s victory, your living conditions will improve.”<sup>4</sup>

The next day, 26<sup>th</sup> June, all the workplaces of the ghetto workers ceased to exist, except for the HASAG factories. Only a few dozen Jews remained in the *Enro* foundry and in the warehouses on ul. Garibaldiego. An order was given to the Jewish police to gather all the Jews of the ghetto in the Ryneček square. The order also included seventeen employees of Mrs Mosiewicz, who ran a men’s tailoring workshop in the city centre. The family of Pinkus Ajnhorn was also brought to the square, and his son Jurek describes the scenes of horror:

“On the way, we saw German police and gendarmerie units, armed with automatic rifles, surrounding the square and the ghetto, with cars with machine-guns and armoured personnel carriers at their side.

“What frightened the Germans so much, that they gathered such large and powerful forces against the “Small Ghetto”, where there were only 5,200 Jews, starving and terrified? The sight makes me fearful, but also proud.

“Until now, we had heard little about what was happening in the ghetto. Now, as we approached the square, we saw long lines of Jews standing in alert anticipation. From the side, overlooking the operation, a small group of Germans, in civilian clothes, and someone from the side whispering, one of whom is Lütt, director of HASAG.

“Now we see how a group of fighters are taken out from the ghetto gate. They are wounded and bruised, but they try to walk with their heads held high. The police forcefully push them onto the truck. And then first one and then the others begin to call out to us, ‘Don’t forget us! You must not forget! Take revenge!’

“The truck moves away and we hear more of their singing. They sing the song of the fighters and then ‘*Ha’Tikva*’... Yes, there is a big difference between the running of the unfortunates in the September deportation of last year and our standing today.”<sup>5</sup>

Is this description true or is the myth born again, another one of those that have always glorified the soldiers’ walk to the gallows? No one knows. And the selection continued.

A whisper passed between the rows, “They’re taking the children!” In the front row stands Henia Lustiger’s father with his son Oleś. Henia sees nothing, because she stands far away among the women, and the crowd hides the first rows. She does not see how Degenhardt stops in front of Oleś and, with a whip, shows him to get out of the line.

“Mr Commander!”, interrupted the father, “He’s a big boy and can work!”

---

<sup>4</sup> Testimony of Bela Sandler, YVA, O-33/6882

<sup>5</sup> Einhorn, *Wybrany aby żyć*, p.130

“I know you!”, replied the executioner, “You’re an electrician, and you’ll continue to work! We have no need for Jewish children!”

Then the father replied, “If so, then you won’t need me either!” And he went with his son to their death...<sup>6</sup>

Many did the same. The first truck, full of children and their parents, was already driving towards the cemetery.

But the tragedy was not over yet. A group of about thirty boys, aged ten to twelve, stood on the side lines. For Zygmusz Rozenblat, a mother was still waiting. Some of the others still had a brother or sister. The others were alone. Those standing nearby heard how the boys suddenly, as if on command, turned to Director Lütt and began to shout, “We can work!” “*Herr Direktor, wir können arbeiten*”.

Lütt then approached the surprised Degenhardt and demanded that the entire group of boys be transferred to the HASAG factory, because they were essential for the work. Degenhardt resisted, but had no choice but to give in, and the boys instantly disappeared between the lines... The crowd breathed a sigh of relief...

Who saved them? Some said it was Bernard Kurland’s intervention. According to Orenstein, it was one of the boys, Dudek Lenczner, who first approached Director Lütt and convinced him to intervene on their behalf.<sup>7</sup>

What were Lütt’s motives?

Perhaps, this time, the strict director was overtaken by his human feelings. And perhaps Lütt also made a simple calculation - the defeat of the Third Reich was approaching and it was worth writing something on the “righteous” side of the balance sheet. And, indeed, he was not wrong: the affair is mentioned in almost every testimony of the HASAG prisoners and, thanks to it, Lütt came close to winning the title of “Righteous Among the Nations”.<sup>8</sup>

An act of kindness was also performed by the German Mühlhof, deputy commander of the Raków *Werkschutz*, who managed to save several patients and bring them to Raków.<sup>9</sup> Only a few of the medical staff were saved.

When the mass murders ended, the Germans began searches. They did not forget to rob every apartment and rummage through every hiding place.

---

<sup>6</sup> Lustiger, *The Ups and Downs of Life*, p. 384.

<sup>7</sup> *Churban Czenstochow*, pp. 131, 255

<sup>8</sup> Oral testimony of Rut Sztern. Lütt was trailed after the war, but acquitted. See: Kromołowski, p. 697.

<sup>9</sup> Pietrzykowski, *Hitlerowcy w Częstochowie*, p. 192

The Jews, who were captured, were shot immediately. At his trial, Heinrich Köster admitted that he had shot 400 Jews during the liquidation of the ghetto.<sup>10</sup> Quite a few houses were burned down, along with the Jews who were hiding inside them.

With the liquidation of the “Small Ghetto”, the heroic story of the underground movement came to an end. Several opinions were expressed regarding the reasons for its failure.

Researcher Szmul Krakowski, in comparing the fighting underground in Warsaw and Częstochowa, sees the cancellation of the alert in the Częstochowa underground as a cause of its defeat without an actual battle.<sup>11</sup>

Adam Zilberstein points out two reasons for its failure. Firstly, the Germans knew how to use a different method in each *akcja*, which surprised the Jews. Second, the organisation had a defensive nature – it waited for an *akcja*, which did not come.<sup>12</sup>

To this, should be added the words of the German foreman Horn, who once caught two members of the underground engaged in illegal work: “If you don’t know the rules of the underground, don't start messing with it!”.<sup>13</sup>

And the main question: Why were the members of the movement unable to arouse the ghetto population to a general uprising?

In my opinion, the comparison with the ŻOB in Warsaw is not relevant in this issue, but the comparison with the rebel organisations in Kraków is. Both the “fighting pioneer” led by Dolek Libskind and the leaders of Hesiak Bauminger’s “Iskra” knew that there was no chance of turning the group’s rebellion into a general uprising.

Why? Because, close to the liquidation of the ghetto, the Płaszów camp was being built before the very eyes of the Jews of Kraków, which became their last chance for survival.<sup>14</sup>

**In Częstochowa, this role was played by HASAG factories – they became the last lifeline for the Jews of the ghetto and, at the same time, a major factor in the failure of the general uprising.**

The Jews of Warsaw did not have the same choice. They had to decide - either Treblinka or rebellion.

---

<sup>10</sup> Pietrzykowski, *Hitlerowcy przed sądem w Częstochowie* (Katowice: Śląsk, 1964)

<sup>11</sup> Szmul Krakowski, *Jewish Fighting in Poland Against the Nazis 1942-1944*, Poalim Library, Tel Aviv, 1977, p. 255.

<sup>12</sup> Adam Zilberstein, *The Ghettos*, pp. 111-115

<sup>13</sup> Brener, *Ruch podziemny*, p. 167

<sup>14</sup> Felicja Karay, *The Women in the Krakow Ghetto*, Yalkut Moreshet, Issue 71, April 2001, p. 125

What choice, then, was there for the youth in the Czestochowa Ghetto, the youth who dreamed of vengeance and war? Should they have given up any chance of fighting back in advance, and to fight only for survival?

The answer to this question is extremely difficult. Perhaps it can be found again in the words of Henia Lustiger:

“The members of the Kibbutz established contact with the Polish partisan underground, smuggled weapons into the ghetto and sent volunteer fighters to the fighting Polish underground. Almost all of them paid with their lives, and some of the ghetto residents also fell because of them...

“However, in their actions and in their very existence, they saved the remnants of our trampled national honour and demonstrated, to the Germans and to the entire world, the true character of our humiliated people.”<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Lustiger, *The Ups and Downs of Life*, p. 320. This sentence does not appear in the author's diary.