

C. The Hangman's Watch

That day, Karola, Jurek Ajnhorn's graceful aunt, was unlucky. And up until now, she had been doing quite well. While still in the "Small Ghetto", she had married, was in the camp with her husband and had also taken a good "job" - she was the coordinator (Kapo) of a group of female workers in the *Rekalibrierung* hall.

But that morning, one woman was missing and Karola did not know why. When the German supervisor known as "Pietrucha" found out about this, she sent Karola to the *Werkschutz* guard station (*Wache*), with a note that she must receive a flogging.

What happened to Karola that day, no one knows. This time, no screams or cries were heard behind the closed door of the *Wache*. After a while, the door opened and two prisoners were ordered to take out Karola, whose appearance was indescribable. She was taken straight to a hospital, where Dr Szperling treated her for two weeks. He noticed severe internal bleedings, which meant she could never give birth. Karola survived the War and never told anyone what happened that day in the *Wache*.¹

Flogging was an indescribable fearsome punishment. The accepted minimum for men was twenty-five lashes, sometimes fifty, for women fifteen to twenty-five.

Halina Barkani, who also went through the terrible experience, writes:

"The ritual was fixed and known in advance", "I had to lift my skirt, take off my underwear, lie my upper body on the table, and then one of the executioners whipped me with a whip for the prescribed number of lashes. I did not scream so as not to give the Germans satisfaction. In the barracks, this was also a regular custom. A friend was already waiting with wet rags for compresses on the buttocks. The marks remained for a long time and we had a special Polish name for it: 'dupa w kratkę' (chequered bottom)."²

All the *Werkschutz* were extremely hated by the prisoners. Their abuse of the prisoners knew no bounds. Once, one of them caught two men and beat them to urinate on each other. Only the complaints of other prisoners to the foreman stopped the shameful spectacle.

Ukrainian women also worked in the factory, who were very keen to please the German managers. Once they added "*schmeltz*" (damaged produce) to the boxes with the finished produce, so as to accuse the Jewish women of "sabotage" and several of them received a flogging.

Among them was Natka Glazer, who did not want to beg and was given a six of the best. Nevertheless, she came out on her own and began to whistle ... the well-known motif from Beethoven's Ninth

¹ Einhorn, *Wybrany aby żyć*, p. 137

² Halina Barkani, *Duography*, YVA, p. 137.

Symphony!³ Years later, her friend, the poet Irit Amiel, immortalised the entire affair in her poem *Beethoven's Ninth*⁴:

Beethoven's Ninth Symphony

*She was always slow;
She never managed
to finish her quota.
So, they beat her,
That she should
cry and beg
for her soul.
But she just laughed
In their faces;
So, they beat her more.
Once they wearied, up she got;
And dragging herself
All bruised and sore;
She raised her bright head
And whistled the "Ode to Joy"*

*From their Beethoven's "Ninth".
(Irit Amiel)*

Apart from dispensing "official beatings", the role of the *Werkschutz* personnel was limited to guarding the factory and the camp, conducting inspections at the gates and barracks, arranging morning and evening rollcalls, making arrests and carrying out executions on a limited scale.

Initially, it was the Armaments Inspectorate that took care of the recruitment and maintenance of the *Werkschutz* personnel in military factories. But, from September 1941, all powers regarding admission, dismissal and supervision of discipline were transferred to the managers of the factories that employed them.⁵ The candidates had to undergo a three-month training course. The *Werkschutz* lived in a separate building in the "colony", and they had their own kitchen and servants. Their starting salary was around 32 zł. per week.⁶

³ Testimony of Natka Glazer (Gold), YVA, 0.3/9479.

⁴ Irit Amiel, "Beethoven's Ninth", from: *A Test in the Holocaust*, "Sa'ar" publishing 1994, p.19.

⁵ *Rü In im GG*, Krakau, 29/09/1941, betr. *Ukrainischer Werkschutz*, MA, RW-23/6a, Bl. 122

⁶ Ivan Romanko file, YVA, 53/65-0, p. 254.

According to the "factory card", in June 1943, about thirty-five *Werkschutz* personnel in total, mostly Ukrainians, served in the Apparatebau. They wore dark blue uniforms with berets and were armed with rifles. Those, who rose in rank, who were awarded the title of *Oberwachmann* (senior guard), received a round green cap and a carbine. The *Werkschutz* commander and his deputy were always Germans.

Until the autumn of 1943, the position of *Werkschutz* commander was held by Hermann Klemm. More famous than him was his deputy, Walter Stieglitz. There was no prisoner who did not have a few "warm" words for him in his testimony. His appearance completely contradicted the conventions of Nazi ideology in regard to the appearance of the "Master Race". Stieglitz was a dwarf, with a large, monstrous head. He walked proudly in the uniform of an SA member, and his madness was famous throughout the camp.

He had three "accomplices" - the German *Werkschutz* Steininger, with a small, deformed body, the fainting parrot that sat on his shoulder, and his large dog called "Mensch" (man).

But Stieglitz was mentally sound and knew how to harass the prisoners. It was said that he liked young men, which did not prevent him from visiting the women's bathhouse and enjoying the sight of naked bodies. But, during the great selection, when Miriam Chen stood with her four miserable friends like her and awaited the death penalty, Stieglitz let them all pass! By the way, it was known that he received a **fixed monthly salary from the Jews**.

There was not a day when some affair related to the *Werkschutz* was not heard.

One Sunday, when Izrael Zylberglajt and his friend Perlmutter were resting on the common bunk, a *Werkschutz* suddenly entered the barracks to catch people to unload wagons. Perlmutter escaped through the window and the *Werkschutz* demanded that Zylberglajt give him the name of the escapee. But Izrael refused and, in return, was punished with a whipping. Wounded and bruised, they brought him to the barracks. Then, Perlmutter appeared and gave him half a slice of bread, saying. "I don't have any more... I would probably have been killed, and you saved my life...".

After the War, only a few guards were tried in the District Court (*Okręgowy Sąd*) in Częstochowa.

Among them was the Ukrainian Michał Tkalenko.⁷ He spoke Polish and Yiddish well. The list of charges against him included the murder of the Jew Liberman and severe beatings of prisoners.

The case of Mietek Goldberg was very typical. In December 1944, Tkalenko searched him and found a gold ring. Later, in the *Wache*, he stripped him of his clothes and added a beating, robbed him of all his jewellery and, finally, handed Goldberg over to the Gestapo.

What, then, was the only way to somewhat curb the cruelty of the *Werkschutz* men? Jankiel Zajęc answers this, "The *Werkschutz* men had to be bribed or to do business with."⁸

⁷ File of Michał Tkalenko, Częstochowa District Court, 1948, AIPN, ref.no. 340, k. 4

⁸ Yad Vashem testimonies: Jankiel Zajęc, 291/M-49/E. Mietek Goldberg, 4878/M-49/E

And indeed, Tkalenko also did business with Jews and sold them groceries at inflated prices. In a verdict, dated 22nd November 1948, the court found him guilty and sentenced him to life imprisonment.⁹

⁹ Wyrok, Akta Tkalenko, *ibid.*, k. 92-94