

## **Part Three**

### **Change of Location – Change of Luck?**

## Chapter Nine

# The “HASAG Hot Springs” Camp

### A. We Arrived at the Barracks and Found Bedbugs

“Hasag-Zdrój” (“HASAG Hot Springs”) - this is the name that the Apparatebau inmates called their camp. Was the name justified? So, what were its advantages? Or was this title given to it merely as a mockery?

There are different versions on the matter of the size of the camp.<sup>1</sup> At the edge of the factory grounds, barracks of different sizes were built, separately for men and for women. The barracks were surrounded by a fence with a gate into the factory. In each hut, along the walls on both sides, long shelves were erected, on three floors with a narrow passage between them.

As Bruria Bejski testifies:<sup>2</sup>

“On each shelf, there were an average of sixteen ‘bunks’, i.e. sleeping places, next to each other, without a partition between them”.

Each prisoner was assigned a forty-centimetre-wide “living space”, the boundaries of which were marked by a mattress stuffed with wood shavings, a similar pillow and, sometimes, a thin blanket. Several nails were used to hang clothes and heating was provided by two stoves in the middle of the hut.

On average, there were about 300 people per hut. Each hut had a number and also a name, according to the place of work of its occupants, for example, the “Infantry Hut”. There were also privileged barracks, such as the “Clerks’ Barracks” (Barak urzędniczy), where there were two-story wooden bunk beds and where the overseers and several functionaries lived with their wives (see the factory plan, drawn from memory by former prisoner Symcha Moneta).

On the top floor of the *Rekalibrierung* factory there was a hall where only “protectionists” and their wives, including craftsmen who worked for the Germans, were allowed to live. To find some privacy, around their “apartments”, they built partitions made of cardboard, boards and rags. The sight was truly tragicomic and, indeed, they called the place the “Circus” (*Cyrk*).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Liber Brener, Kwestionariusz o obozach, Ankieta Sądów Grodzkich (ASG), Archiwum Akt Nowych (AAN) Warszawa, ref. 47, f. 50a; Leon Bojm, ASG, ref. 47, f. 1

<sup>2</sup> Bruria Bejski, YVA 0.3/8452

<sup>3</sup> Halina Barkani, “Duography”, p. 135.



As for the sanitary conditions, "latrines" were built for men and women. These were huts with a pit and a long plank with holes. At work, they used the factory toilets. Miryam Lewkowicz says:

"The catastrophe was at night, because it was forbidden to leave the hut. The *Werkschutz* would fire without warning. The women tried to get by with tin cans and, more than once, in the dark, the contents would spill onto the bunks below."<sup>4</sup>

Among the men were entrepreneurs, who would place a barrel in a corner and charge a fee for use.

The bathing arrangements were tolerable. A special hut had taps with cold water and sinks. Hot showers and a facility for disinfecting clothes were located on the factory grounds. They were run by Liber Brener with the help of engineer Burech Horowic. Bathing times were set for women and men.

In the next room, there was a sanitary attendant, who examined the entire body and, if he found lice, he shaved them mercilessly. For women, a similar arrangement was carried by a nurse.<sup>5</sup> Lice had a serious competitor - the fleas. To get rid of them, caustic soda was sprinkled onto the mattresses, which burned the prisoners' skin, but not the fleas.

However, the worst blow was the bedbugs. They arrived along with the old planks from which the huts were built. The general disinfection operations carried out, by order of the Germans, did not help either. The bedbugs held out and multiplied to alarming proportions. They fell like an avalanche from the hut ceiling onto those lying down. The people wore paper bags to sleep in and tied them around their necks, but the bedbugs got in everywhere. Not once were they found in the soup. The only place where the prisoner's miserable body could find some relief was the bath, where he occasionally received a piece of brown substance called "soap". Most of the time they received nothing.

The war against the various bloodsuckers had no chance of success, in the absence of disinfectants and replacement clothing.

The prisoners wore their clothes until they fell apart. The Apparatebau factory had a large clothing warehouse, where pieces of clothing, from the executed victims, were collected. Sometimes, thanks to a note from a foreman, a prisoner received some clothing from the warehouse.

There were also other ways - when the orderly Ruben Munowicz was sent to the warehouse to bring rags for bandages, he always took a double amount, from which he distributed things to friends. He also managed to organise the help of Mrs Rechtman, who repaired the clothes.

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<sup>4</sup> Testimony of Miryam Lewkowicz, YVA, 0-33/6856

<sup>5</sup> Kromołowski, Wspomnienia, pp. 739-742

Women managed better. They “organised” rags for cleaning machines, sewed and repaired. Once, Halina Barkani tells how she found a green sweater and unravelled it.

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Janek Lewkowicz (he was one of the boys saved by Director Lütt) made her four knitting needles and she knitted herself a pair of socks! In general, in Mirjam Zalcberg’s opinion, the girls of Częstochowa always took care of their clean and tidy appearance. On rare occasions, lorries would arrive at the factory with clothes from an unknown source, which were distributed among those in need.

The most terrible thing was hunger. Halina recalls:

“A person, who has never experienced the feeling of real hunger, will never understand it - hunger without a shred of hope, hunger that arouses hallucinations, desires and dreams. We would sit down in a group, and someone would ask, ‘What would you like to eat now?’ And then everyone would come up with a very imaginative menu”

And Marila adds:

“I would pick up discarded cigarette butts and smoke them. I was completely apathetic. In the morning, I didn’t want to get up for work. I just lay on the bunk and cried.”<sup>6</sup>

It was a feeling typical of those who were constantly hungry - apathy and indifference.<sup>7</sup> The most important thing was, of course, bread. Every day, eight bakers, under the guard of the *Werkschutz*, went to the city to bake bread. On the way back, the trucks brought sacks of bread to the main warehouse and, whoever succeeded, got a loaf of bread for himself.<sup>8</sup> Sometime after entering the camp, the bread ration was increased to half a kilogram. Even this did not save the young people from the horror of hunger, those who worked hard labour twelve hours a day.

*Meister* Walter Horn, who testified at the Częstochowa trial, gave details about the soup, which was cooked in the “Jewish” kitchen of the manager Jose:

“I ate the Jewish food only a few times. It was usually semolina soup, which was always dirty. The margarine never arrived in full for distribution. The head of the kitchen was a Belgian, who had a Polish staff. Everyone had a hand in everything. The potatoes were stolen. I saw that a considerable part of the food supplies was stolen in one way or another, even the potato peelers took a share for themselves. I brought the people bread. I put the leftover bread in the bag at the [?].”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Duography, p. 139; Marila Halperin 0.3/9886.

<sup>7</sup> YVA testimonies: Małka Ickowicz, 0.3/7941; Hela Igelberg, 0.3/7704.

<sup>8</sup> Testimony of Kalman Chęciński, YVA 0-33/6855.

<sup>9</sup> Prozess Tschenstochau, p. 57

Sometimes, there was cabbage soup or the famous “shoe-sole soup” (*zupa z zelówkami*) a hot brown liquid, in which slices of dried beetroot, as hard as shoe-sole, were floating. Still, there were few *Muselmänner* in the camp and people did not die of hunger. Was that enough to give it the nickname of a “health resort”? After all, dozens died here from diseases. And where did help come from?

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