

B. Turning Old into New

The term *Rekalibrierung* is no longer foreign to the reader and means -

restoring the shape and dimensions (*calibre*) of a used shell-casing, renewing it and turning it into a casing ready for re-use.

This process consisted of several operations:

- washing,
- renewing the previous shape,
- painting with lacquer,
- measuring and
- marking.

About 1,000 Jews worked in the entire sector, most of them women, a few children and a few Poles.

As for the German superiors, rotation was accepted in the *Apparatebau* and it is not always possible to determine, with certainty, their identity or name, because some of them were known only by their nicknames.

The head of the *Rekalibrierung* department was Alfred Wilhelm Franzke, an electrical engineer by profession.¹ Matthias, a tall, half-shaven man, is mentioned as the head *Meister*. More well-known was the foreman Wili Niziolek, and the one known as “Fajkosz”, because he smoked a pipe (*fajka* in Polish).²

Voigtlander is also mentioned, about whom Sara Edelist wrote, that he just passed by the department and looked, without saying a word. But, once, during a selection, he saved her from deportation.

There was also Körner, who was nicknamed “Berisz the Dumb” because he spoke little, and Klein, about whom no details are known.³ Until 1944, Herr also worked in the factory. Very popular was the night shift supervisor Alfred Schultze, known as the “American”.

¹ The minutes of the settlement hearing of A. W. Franzke, Sąd Okręgowy w Częstochowie, 25/06/1947, (AIPN, ref. 175)

² *Tschenstochau Prozess*, p. 98; *Churban Czenstochow*, p. 261

³ Lustiger, *The Ups and Downs of Life*, p. 351; *Churban Czenstochow*, p. 269 Sara Edelist, 0-33/6848

Rut Sztern says,

“In each of the departments, the relationships between people were different and mainly depended on the German department head”.

It also influenced the attitude of the Jewish and Polish supervisors towards the prisoners.

The description of the system of mutual relationships reflects the strange and complex reality within which the Jews of the factory lived. Here, they spent half their lives. Here, they not only worked, but also came into contact with the outside world, did business, cooked, bathed, did laundry and heard gossip about their *Meisters*. Here, they suffered beatings and, sometimes, they were rewarded with an extra slice of bread.

The *Rekalibrierung's* path of agony began from the moment the locomotive brought the wagons, which were loaded with boxes of casings that had arrived from the warfront to the factory yard. The Jews then began to unload the boxes from the wagons.

The labour was very hard and the *Werkschutz* did not spare curses and kicks, with “Hurry!” The overseers from the “Transport”, Milek Szperling and Icek Kadzidło, were not much better.

The boxes contained different types of casings and, after a first sorting, it was determined that these were suitable for reprocessing.

The next day, the boxes were transferred to the “washing hall” (*Wäscherei*). There were not enough porters, so some girls were recruited. Here, it was is fifteen-year-old Miryam Zalcborg together with her friend. With tears in their eyes, they are carrying the heavy boxes - “God, we can’t keep this up any longer!”

But the overseer Józek Dawidowicz shouts, “*Robić, robić!*” (Work, work!). What is the wonder, then, that they called him “Mad Józek”?

“He kept us running all the time and if we didn’t complete the ‘quota’, we would stay to work at night.”⁴

In the “washing hall”, which was run by *Meister* Wili Niziolek, the casings were cleaned in baths of soapy water and then in tanks with chemicals. The work, here, was very hard and men were employed to do it. But you can also see here Miryam Chen, twelve, carrying boxes of ammunition with her friend:

“It was terribly heavy and was always falling. The bruises on my legs remain to this day.”⁵

⁴ Miryam Zalcborg, *Moje przeżycia lagrowe*, YVA, 0-33/1646, III, p. 68

⁵ Testimony of Miryam Chen, YVA, 0.3/9616

After being treated in the rotating “drums”, which polished the casings, they were transferred to machines, which redesigned the internal structure and the primer. In this process, they were oiled and cleaned several times, until it was time to paint them in the “*Lakiernia*”.

This was a small room inside the large hall, where about seven people worked, including the sisters Miryam and Mila Szajkowicz, Rózia Gabel and others. Here, the casings were dipped into a lacquer and dried in an oven. The supervisor was a German named Kockon, who treated Niziolek rudely and squealed to him for every “offense”.⁶

And there was no shortage of those - cakes could be baked in the oven! This was done by Rózia Gabel, the sister of the *Kapo*, Estusia Tenenbaum. When the supervisor would leave for a lunch break, a baking sheet with a cake was immediately put into the oven.

The porter Kalman Szmulewicz also wanted to be among the bakers. But, once, he was not so lucky. A wonderful smell from the cake in the oven permeated the entire ward, reaching all the way to Niziolek’s office. The cake was confiscated and given to the hospital. Szmulewicz emerged from the affair unscathed, because the “boss” liked him.⁷

The painted casings were then moved to the “cleaning machines” department (*Putzmaschinen*). Until the beginning of 1944, a foreman, Herr, supervised this and “Pietrucha” was next to him.

The casings were arranged on long tables with a moving belt (*Laufband*) upon which the casings were sorted by type. They then moved on to marking, measuring and perforating. Rut Sztern and Bela Sandler also sat there:

“We worked at a small table, Bela and I, on each side of which was an electric drill. Our job was to use the drill to clean the holes in the casings, which had been clogged with lacquer.”

This department was the only one that worked only on a day shift.

The Poles in the hall worked together with the Jews in the first period. Orenstein mentions the names of two - Sobieraj and Czarny.⁸ They all received wages and food every week.

⁶ Zeugen Protokoll von Weinritt Sonia, 29.7.1946, YVA, M.21.1/54

⁷ Testimonies from YVA: Kalman Szmulewicz, 0.3/5801; Miryam Lewkowicz, 0.3/6856

⁸ *Churban Czenstochow*, p. 261

In the summer of 1943, an order was issued for the complete separation of Polish and Jewish workers everywhere, even in toilets.

The Jews were strictly forbidden to have conversations with them. But maintaining this decree was impossible, especially for girls. According to Rut Sztern, mutual relations were good. The Polish women bought them soap, a toothbrush and especially onions, which were the only source of vitamins. And, what was no less important, they brought books to read.

To Bela Sandler, things looked different:

“I saw the soup that the Polish woman, who worked with me, received. It was very different from my soup. Her soup had potatoes, meat, vegetables and was cooked in a different kitchen. I know that there were Poles, who gave their soup to the Jews. It never happened to me.

“None of the Polish women ever offered us free help. Any Pole, who wanted to help, could without any risk and I heard that there were some who did. I, too, once received an unusual gift - a pair of workers, a Jew and a Pole, worked next to us, called ‘Saba’.

“When the Christian holiday came, he brought a cake and told me to divide it among all the girls. We were so grateful to him!”

And Henia Lustiger looked at the Polish women with visible jealousy:

“How fresh they are, beautifully dressed. And what are they talking about? About the cinema, about a café, about home and family... and we?”

But there was no time for reflection, here come the boxes with the casings. They will still go through the “visual inspection” department (*Augenschein*), which will be discussed later.

Finally, they were ready for the most important stage - inspection at the “Land Corps Reception Office” (H-Abnst). This work was considered very important and, at first, only Polish women worked there as auxiliary workers.

From the “draft” (*Entwurf*) of the report for the spring months of 1943, we can learn about the changes that took place in the composition of the staff – if, in four production areas (including 2-cm casings) at the end of March 1943, a total of 2,279 workers (including 450 Jews) were employed, by 24th May, we already see a staff of 2,581 people, including 732 Jews.⁹

⁹ *Entwurf*, 24 May 1943, H-Abnst b. d. Fa HASAG-Apparatebau, APCZ, section 192/2, ref. 7, p. 106

The following table illustrates the increase in the number of Jewish workers between 1942-1943:

Employed in the "Reception Office"			Total	Total of factory employees	Date
of whom		Poles			
Jews					
%	Number				
68	450	210	660	2,279	25/03/1943
71	520	212	732	2,581	24/05/1943
83	895	181	1,076	4,197	26/07/1943

At first glance, it would appear that the factory had made impressive achievements in the field of *Rekalibrierung*. But, according to the report from 2nd April 1943, a different picture emerges:

"The firm HASAG (*Apparatebau*) has received, so far, 1,294,653 2 cm. casings for renewal. Of this quantity, in the initial sorting, 546,070 units were determined to be waste. Of the casings that underwent the renewal process, the following were used:

- A. 4,071 for live rounds
- B. 367,088 for training rounds
- C. 360,615 for blank rounds

"Since, according to the above data, the share of combat casings is extremely small, and since, in accordance with the overall result and compared to the amount of manpower required, it is **doubtful whether the entire process of renewing the casings would seem worthwhile** (F.K.: the highlighting is mine), the casing sorting procedure must be re-examined. It turned out that there is a particularly high demand for combat casings, a limited demand for training casings, while there is no need for idle casings at all.

"As a result, the H Abnst was required to report monthly on the production of 2 cm. casings. Based on the reporting data, it will be possible to decide whether renewing the casings is even worthwhile."¹⁰

These criticisms were alarming for the *Apparatebau* management. And the Jews saw hundreds of boxes returning to the warehouses and the frustrated *Meisters* and thought,

"If the German soldiers had no ammunition, would not the war end faster?"

¹⁰ Heeres-Abnahmeinspizient im GG, Bericht Nr. 23/43, 02/04/1943, APCZ, section 192/2, ref. 5, p. 2 (16)