

E. Franzke the Two-Faced Engineer

It all started before the terrible days of 1943.

It is not known how, but the religious Jews in the camp always knew when the holidays began. A rumour spread that one could pray in the "Synagogue". And what was its location? Małka Gutman testifies:

"It was at the engineer Franzke's. They said that his grandfather's father was Jewish. And he, Franzke, came out of the office on Yom Kippur and the people there prayed. A man named Herman organised the prayers."¹

Such a *mitzvah*? Unbelievable. After all, Franzke's very act testified to his generosity and the deep understanding which he showed regarding the most basic spiritual needs of the Jews. Is this possible? After all, he was a SS member.

Izrael Zylberglajt writes about that man:

"One day, a man called Franzke came to us. He was the devil incarnate. He wore the black uniform of a SS man, with the skulls. When he spoke to someone, we felt a hidden fear. When this Franzke smiled, it was as if he were wearing some kind of mask, a kind of devilish laughter. And we knew that, if Franzke laid a hand on someone, then it ended their life."

And Jakow Benclowicz adds:

"Franzke was an important figure in the SS. He participated in selections and sent many Jews to their deaths."²

The few details known about him do not add much information about the mysterious man. He was born in 1906, he graduated as an electrical engineer before the War and, in October 1942, found employment at HASAG-*Apparatebau* as chief foreman of several departments: *Rekalibrierung*, the electro-technical department and machine production. The latter department in particular was known as the "Franzke department"³.

In June 1947 he was tried before the court in Częstochowa. He was accused of two offenses - active participation in the selection of July 1943 and physical and mental abuse of Jewish prisoners. The defendant denied both charges, saying, "I could not be a member of the SS because of my age, partial paralysis of my right hand and because of doubt about my Aryan origins."⁴

As the main argument in his defence, Franzke emphasised his good attitude towards workers - Poles and Jews. This caused tensions between him and the director of the factory, and he was sent back to Leipzig in November 1944.

¹ Małka Gutman, YVA, 0.3/10701, p. 27.

² Jakow Benclowicz, Ermittlungsverfahren gegen R. Wendler, YVA, TR-10/2767-1, p. 21 (76)

³ Heinz Günther, Prozess Tschenschowau, p. 170

⁴ Record of settlement proceedings in the case of A.W. Franzke, 25/06/1949, AIPN, SO CZ, ref. 175, p. 44

He never hit anyone. On the day of the “great selection”, when he stood guard, the workers asked him for protection. On holidays, at the request of his Jews, he allowed them to pray in one of the rooms in his department and made sure that the *Werkschutz* would not be informed.

What characterises the testimonies of the Jews is the extremely negative attitude towards the accused. None of them worked in Franzke’s departments. Ela Lewkowicz said that Franzke was known as one of the executioners of HASAG. In the “great selection”, he sent two women to their deaths. Łaja Wajs added that Franzke chose five more women. Among them was Marysia Cukierman, who managed to escape from the truck that was driving to the cemetery.

According to the testimony of Mojżesz Wajs, Franzke would sometimes come to work drunk. When he caught some workers, who had fallen asleep, he would beat and kick them. Once, he took old bones from the kitchen and threw them at the workers, shouting, “*Ihr Hunde bekommt bald zu fressen!*” (“You dogs get to eat at once!”), and he kicked anyone, who came near him.⁵

In the face of this “brotherhood of opinion”, the Polish witnesses present a completely different position. Wojciech Kielarski, who knew Franzke back in 1942, admitted that, at that time, he behaved properly, not hitting anyone. More than once, he saw how the Polish and Jewish workers were idle during work and did not react at all. Because of this, Director Lütt and other Germans treated Franzke badly. The witnesses admitted that Franzke’s bad behaviour towards the Jews began in 1943 and, at the same time, his drunkenness increased.

Marian Rudnicki details the defendant’s attitude towards Jews:

“During the War I was a *Vorarbeiter* in HASAG factories... I remember that, one day, there was a selection of Jews in HASAG. I was subordinate to the defendant, but I did not notice the brutality in his behaviour towards the Jewish workers. There was a “shelter” in our department. Those, who worked in other departments, would come here to cook soup and bathe.

“In our department (mechanical and electro-technical), no harm was done to the Jews. Workers from other departments tried to move to our department because, after work, they made pans, spoons and other products for them, which they later sold. I heard from the Jewish workers in the old boiler room that they gathered for a public prayer. The workers from the defendant’s department spoke of him as a good man. Workers from other departments were of the opinion that he behaved badly.

“I witnessed the defendant bringing bread to the Jews of Freitag. The defendant often drank vodka and, when he was drunk, he shouted at the people. I also heard that he participated in the selection of the Jews, while he was drunk.”⁶

⁵ There, pp.45-48.

⁶ There, p.49.

According to the verdict of 25th June 1946, Franzke was sentenced to fifteen years in prison. In its "reasoning", the court stated that he was found guilty of two charges - the selection of the victims sentenced to death and a hostile attitude towards Jews.

The verdict stated:

"It is self-evident that the accused, as a German, a member of the NSDAP and as a candidate for membership in the SS organisation... found such an attitude towards Jews to be binding on him as well... As for the severity of the sentence, the court took into account that the accused was an alcoholic, with weak willpower, did not excel in civic courage... For these reasons, he was not sentenced to death, but only to imprisonment"⁷.

The main dilemma that faced the court was defined by Ela Lewkowicz:

"They said that the Jews gathered here and there for prayers, but it is impossible that this was done under the auspices of the engineer Franzke, because these versions do not fit the personality of the accused."

Is it true? If you compare Franzke's list of sins with that of Karl Opel, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that something was wrong with Franzke's trial. Why is the verdict based only on the negative statements of the Jews? To where has the positive attitude of the Poles towards the accused completely disappeared? Why do none of the parties, including Franzke himself, address the issue of his Jewish roots?

Apparently, the key word to explain Franzke's strange behaviour at the factory is: **fear**. Not because of the alcohol, but because of the fear that his Jewish origins would be discovered. In my opinion, this point influenced the positions of all parties in the trial: Franzke neither denies nor confirms the matter of his roots, because he understood that the confirmation would not improve his situation.

The Jewish witnesses certainly did not want to highlight this point - a Jew who became a SS man, a servant of the devil? God forbid! Therefore, granting permission for prayers was also unacceptable.

The Poles showed a rather neutral attitude, but they also could not explain why Franzke allowed Jews to pray during the holidays. Nowhere is it mentioned that he took money from Jews in exchange for the permission. Or maybe his Jewish heart commanded him to give his consent to the prayers, and he had already thought about the future and the alibi. But Franzke felt that there was no way back and hence his frustration, which he tried to drown in vodka.

Another question remains: why did Franzke, despite the suspicions and strained relations with the factory management, stay at *Apparatebau* for two years and was not dismissed from his post?

⁷ Verdict in the trial of A.W. Franzke, 25/6/1947, There, pp.60-61.

The answer to this question is found in a telephone message dated 1st November 1943, delivered by Paul Budin to the Armaments Inspectorate in the *Generalgouvernement*, in which it was stated that, in light of the development plans of HASAG in the *Generalgouvernement*, there was a need to increase the staff of key German workers and professionals by at least 3%.

Budin noted that, a few days ago, it was agreed, in a joint conversation, with the Minister (Speer) and with representatives of the Wehrmacht **that the entire administrative and professional staff of HASAG employees would be retained for the future...**⁸

The interpretation here is unnecessary.

Despite the tense relations with the management of *Apparatebau*, Franzke was only sent home in December 1944. How could Budin afford to dismiss a professional electrical engineer and expert in electro-technics with considerable experience, supervising three departments in the factory?... Did he hear about his Jewish origin? It is unknown. But, from knowing Budin for several years, it seems to me that the good of production was more important to him than a few drops of Jewish blood. After all, in this factory, he employed over three thousand Jews of pure Jewish blood!

⁸ Abschrift, Hasag-Leipzig, 01/11/1943, APCZ, section 192/2, ref. 6, p. 21