

B. The “Infantry” Men

The year 1944 did not bode well for the Apparatebau staff - the Eastern Front was advancing westward and the work pressure was increasing.

As early as July 1943, the machines were put into operation to produce 250,000 cartridges, and the first million rounds for infantry were to be ready in October of that year.¹

Less than a month later, Budin again sent a reminder to all HASAG factories in the *Generalgouvernement*, stating that, according to the instructions of the Minister of Armaments, Speer, HASAG factories in the *Generalgouvernement* are required to increase the production of infantry ammunition to 60 million per month!²

To meet the enormous demands, two more departments were opened in the “Infantry” division:

- 1) the department for cleaning cartridges – the “washery”;
- 2) the *Lakiernia*.

This is where Halina Barkani worked, and she left a precise description of her work:

“We were engaged in the production (F.K.: actually, in the renewal) of casings for rifle bullets, which were made of iron. As known, iron rusts so, in the *Lakiernia*, they went through a process of coating with lacquer and wax.

“The process was done in a kind of machine (we called it “The Monster”), in which chains moved non-stop day and night. Along the chains, there were hooks about fifteen centimetres apart. On these hooks were hung a kind of *combs* along the width of the machine. A casing was threaded on each *tooth* of each *comb*.

“There were people whose job it was to thread the casings onto the *combs*, and the full *comb* were arranged in boxes and placed next to the machine. My job was to hang the *combs* onto the hooks. It was gruelling work -bending down, picking up several *combs* full of casings, rising up and hanging a *comb* onto each hook; bending down again, lifting up again.

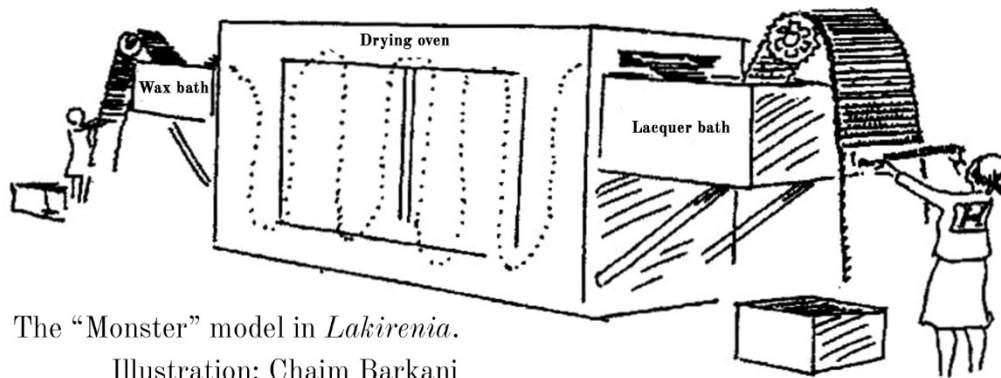
“It was forbidden to skip even a single hook.

“The threaded casings, dipped in lacquer, continued to move into the drying oven, then on the other side of the *monster* they were dipped in a bath of wax. A worker stood there, who took down the ready *combs*.”³

¹ Heeres Abnahmeinspizient im GG, Bericht No. 53/43, 24/07/1943, APCZ, section 192/2, ref. 5, p. 32

² An Hasag Tau Apparatebau, Abschrift, Leipzig 1.11.1943, APCZ, section 192/2, ref. 6, p. 21

³ Halina Barkani, *Duography*, p. 138.



The “Monster” model in *Lakirenia*.
Illustration: Chaim Barkani

In the *Lakiernia*, good relations were also established between the Jewish workers and the Poles.

With great excitement, Halina writes about Władysław Stępień, a simple worker, with a heart of gold, who tried to help the girls in every possible way. He himself was poor, but shared everything with them. He was the one who taught them to smoke cigarettes, rolled in newspaper, because “smoking eases hunger.”

Halina writes:

“We loved him very much and he loved us very much. One of the characters... who certainly influenced me and instilled in me a belief in humanity...”

A completely different figure, who stood out among the workers of *Lakiernia* was Jakow (Janek) Lewkowicz. His wife, Miryam, tells us about him:

“My late husband, Jakow, did not talk much about his experiences. He was only ten years old when the war broke out.

“During the first *akcja* in the Częstochowa ghetto, he hid in a bunker with his brother Henio and his father. The mother perished. When the ‘Small Ghetto’ was established, the father and his two sons entered it. Here, the father managed to make contact with a Polish farmer in a nearby village, who agreed to give them a hiding place. All three of them moved to the farmer’s bunker and were joined by two cousins.

“After a while, the Gestapo learned about the bunker. Janek was not in the bunker when the police arrived. He climbed a tree and, from there, he saw how the Germans were taking everyone out of the bunker. Janek returned alone to the ‘Small Ghetto’. During the liquidation in June 1943, he was in the same group of children, who had been saved by director Lütt.

“In *Apparatebau*, he was sent to all sorts of jobs - he was also a goose herder. In the end, he received a job in *Lakiernia*.⁴ Here, his brilliant technical skills were discovered, when he became an expert on the *Monster* and always knew how to fix it.

“And fortunately, he became very friendly with Halina, who became a big sister to him and even learned how to fix his trousers that were torn from absorbing lacquer...⁵

The whole group in *Lakiernia* was controlled by a German, whom they called “*Stary piernik*” (“Old geezer”). Halina Barkani continues:

“It was amazing to see what happened to this man. At first, he knew nothing about what was happening to the Jews but, on Sundays, the Germans had meetings and, under their influence, his behaviour changed... He became a mad, beating monster.”

In principle, a Jew had no influence on the choice of a workplace, but some succeeded.

Arje Edelist met Menachem Birenholc, *Meister* “Morsch’s” overseer and, through him, he arranged a transfer to the construction department together with his brother Menachem. Arje complains:

“Even in this new workplace, I licked no honey. I was a concrete supplier. They tied a tin container to my back and, next to the mixer, they poured concrete for me and I carried it to each floor by climbing scaffolding and ladders. When I got to the place, where concrete was needed, I bent over with the container, and that’s how the concrete would *spill* over my shoulders. The weight of the concrete container on my back was sixty kilos.”

And where did the two young men get their physical fitness? Arje explains:

“When the work on the building was finished, they sent me to dig trenches near the barbed wire fence. Beyond one section of the fence was a large field and, from a distance, I saw a shepherd. I motioned for him to come to me... I asked him if he would be willing to buy me bread and I would pay him. He walked up to the fence and said, ‘What will happen if I bring you bread and you don’t pay me?’ I offered him money in advance for a loaf of bread, plus a fee for the trouble.

“Finally, I got him to trade regularly with me and, almost every two or three days, I gave him money across the fence and he came with a few loaves of bread in a sack and placed them near the fence. I carried the package towards the inside of the fence, after digging the soil under the fence.

“The difficulty was getting the bread to the barracks area... I took my brother to help me and both of us took a loaf or two under our armpits and covered ourselves with a coat or a large rag. But they caught my brother Menachem with the bread and he got a decent dose of lashes.

⁴ M. Lewkowicz, YVA 03/6856.

⁵ A booklet in memory of Jakow (Janek) Lewkowicz, published by the family.

“After a few weeks, the same thing happened again, but this time I didn’t let my brother go and I went and ‘managed’ to get my share of lashes in his place. The main thing is that, from smuggling bread and selling it, we had bread left to eat and we didn’t suffer hunger.”

At the end of the excavation work, Arje became a builder’s assistant, an elderly German, who allowed him to sleep on the scaffolding.

“Every now and then, he would bring me food from their canteen and added a warning that I should not tell anyone.”

But during this work, Arje fell ill with uraemia and was treated by Dr Przyrowski.

“After the illness, I decided that I would not return to work anymore... My work was concentrated on cleaning the barracks and, by doing so, I freed my father from these jobs.”