

## Chapter Thirteen

# Do Brethren Dwell Together in Unity?

[TN: From Psalm 133:1.]

### A. The Price of a Bullet

Finally, everyone was together – the natives of Częstochowa with Jews from surrounding towns, who had already arrived during the period of the “Big Ghetto”. And there were Jews from Warsaw, Łódź and Kraków, who had fled here before the persecution. After the liquidation of the two ghettos, the “Big Ghetto” and the “Small Ghetto”, the remnants were absorbed into the Apparatebau camp. In 1944, “volunteers” from Łódź and Jews from Piotrków arrived at the camp and, finally, evacuees from the Skarżysko camp. Among the latter was a large group of Jews from Kraków (the names of seventy-eight of them are listed on one of the Internet sites)<sup>1</sup>.

A community of Jews from different places, differing in their origin and cultural background, gathered here. How did this situation affect mutual relations? Did the rift, which had been evident even earlier among the veterans, deepen or blur? Perhaps joint frameworks were established, and what were they? And what example did the German superiors set for their slaves?

Already in connection with the last question, the riddle appears - what happened to *Meister* Häussner, whom the prisoners called “Uncle Josel”?<sup>2</sup> He did not differ in any way special from the other *Meisters*. He was born in 1910, he grew up in a petty bourgeois family, studied engineering and was accepted to work in HASAG. In 1942, he was sent to Apparatebau and, here, he made good progress - from a simple overseer, he rose to the rank of *Obermeister* (chief manager) in the bullet finishing department. So, why did he suddenly have a fit of rage, beat the poor Fajgla and, in the end, seize a rifle and kill her??

In March 1947, Häussner was tried in the district court in Częstochowa, on a double charge - murder of the worker and the cruel treatment of Jewish workers.<sup>3</sup>

In connection with this matter, a year earlier, twenty-three Jews appeared at the offices of the “Central Committee of Liberated Jews in the American Occupation Zone” and made the following statement:

“We were all prisoners in the HASAG-Pelcery concentration camp in Częstochowa, where *Obermeister* Häussner was, who treated Jews in a bestial manner. He participated in the *akcja* on 28<sup>th</sup> July 1943 (F.K.: referring to the selection on 19<sup>th</sup> July) in which 750 Jews were murdered.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.shtetlinks.jewishgen.org/krakow.htm](http://www.shtetlinks.jewishgen.org/krakow.htm)

<sup>2</sup> *Churban Czenstochow*, p. 269

<sup>3</sup> The result of the trial of Karol Ernest Häussner, Częstochowa District Court, 14/09/1948, AIPN, SO CZ, ref. 274, p. 195

“Häussner helped tie the hands of naked victims who were thrown into a truck and he, himself, hit them on the head with a wooden hammer. He also participated in the executions.

Around November-December 1944, he shot a girl named Fajgla Flamholc - first he beat her and then he shot her.”<sup>4</sup>

Another statement, from the same date, given in the same office by three other Jews, contains almost identical wording. This means that twenty-six witnesses from the category could appear at the trial. But when the trial opened in March 1947, none of the twenty-six witnesses, who gave a statement in Bamberg, appeared. It is assumed that, under the influence of the pogrom in Kielce (which took place on 4<sup>th</sup> July 1946), the witnesses gave up travelling to Poland and appearing in court.

As a result, only five witnesses appeared at Häussner’s trial (who also testified at Alfred Franzke’s trial). They did not mention his participation in the July 1943 selection, and their opinions differed in their assessment of his personality. According to Ela Lewkowicz, Häussner’s attitude towards Jews was not bad, and this opinion was supported by Mojżesz Rozencweyg and Mojżesz Wajs, but Felicja Szajnweksler claimed that Häussner brutally beat men and women, and this opinion was shared by Chana Ehrenfried.

Regarding the course of the murder, all the witnesses agreed that Häussner killed the girl after he saw her idling. And, since the punishment of killing was disproportionate to the worker’s guilt, the question of what the background to the act had been remained open. The defendant himself stated that he had killed because of the negative assessment expressed by the factory management of his work and efforts.<sup>5</sup>

The truth was more complicated - with the Jews of the Skarżysko camp also came the foremen. These, all experienced professionals, were immediately assigned to key positions. As a result, Häussner was demoted from *Obermeister* to the position of shift manager in another department.

All the witnesses emphasised that this was a hard blow for him and a cause for his frustration. And Mojżesz Wajs concluded:

“After he killed the Jewish girl, everyone said that he did it to prove his diligence and hostility towards Jews and Poles. At that time, several foremen had to be fired, **and the less diligent ones were sent to the Eastern front.**”<sup>6</sup>

This is a plausible explanation. And the price of the murder bullet was high - fifteen years in prison.

The Häussner affair caused a stir among the Germans, who found themselves in a tight spot. On the one hand, they were required to encourage the prisoners to work, even by beating them and, on the other, some began to look for an alibi for themselves.

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<sup>4</sup> Central Committee of Liberated Jews, “Protokol”, Bamberg, 19/04/1946, AIPN, Akta “Bd”, ref. 1955, k. 9,9

<sup>5</sup> K. Häussner court judgement, *ibid.* pp. 196, 264-267

<sup>6</sup> Judgement, *ibid.* p. 266

For example, Ruben Gil testifies that, during his time, he never saw *Meister* Niziolek administer blows!

With the arrival of the *Meisters* from Skarżysko, things changed. They tried to take a position, like Bernhard Kramer, who wanted to prove, at all costs, that “With us in Skarżysko, things were done differently.”<sup>7</sup>

And Henia Lustiger explains:

“The new *Meisters* from Skarżysko were all scoundrels and they showed our foremen how to treat Jews.”

An example of the “new times”, was Marianne Tietge, She was an ardent Nazi, an expert in kicking groins, which she did to both women and men.<sup>8</sup> With her competed Erich Espenheym, who picked on blonde women in particular.<sup>9</sup> As always, the prisoners tried, with the help of bribes, to find some *modus vivendi* with the new *Meisters* but, by 1944, most of them no longer had any money.

#### **How did things turn out with the supervisors?**

In late 1943, Director Lütt and the commander of the *Werkschutz*, Klemm, called all the supervisors in the factory to a general meeting. According to the testimony of Szymon Gelbard (who was also a supervisor), Lütt demanded that the supervisors protect the workers better and encourage them to work – with beatings, if necessary.

In return, he promised those assembled food and additional clothing. Gelbard, who was a well-known Zionist activist (of *Poalei Zion*), decided to act and, on his initiative, a general meeting of the supervisors was held in Zylberszac’s office.

Here, he addressed the “doubtful” ones with a warning not to follow Lütt’s instructions,

“.. as the war will be over and their end could be similar to that of the Jewish police.”<sup>10</sup>

Whatever the reasons may be, the fact is, that the testimonies do not contain complaints about beatings by the supervisors.

With the arrival of the Jewish policemen from Skarżysko, the situation changed. Rina Sztul writes:

“In the summer, a group of people arrived at the camp with their overseer, Jakub Śniatowski, and his friend Harry. Jakub was a former butcher. He became head supervisor over my *Kapo*. He beat the people and urged them to work. I didn’t agree to be a supervisor, I was just a *Kapo*.

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<sup>7</sup> Tschenstochau Process, p. 40

<sup>8</sup> M. Dauman, YVA 1/2621

<sup>9</sup> G. Holcman, YVA, 21/2-27-M

<sup>10</sup> Szymon Gelbard, YVA, 0.3/1574, p. 34.

“Jakub and Harry were constantly collecting money from among the prisoners, to buy gifts for the *Meister*. The women in my group complained to me, so we decided to rebel and no longer give any donations.”<sup>11</sup>

Policeman Imerglik, Pantel and others were similar to Jakub. It must be admitted that the local overseers were not impressed by their pugnacious colleagues and they quickly “silenced” them.

The atmosphere of competition also permeated the “regular” prisoners.

At first, there was great admiration. Ester Halperin wrote:

“What food! I was with my sister. We were given a loaf of bread for two days - it was a treasure. Half a kilo of bread a day – we didn’t understand what that was! And the soup was a bit thick, almost porridge. The Messiah had arrived!!”<sup>12</sup>

In Tola Chudin’s testimony, a different tone already creeps in:

“When we arrived in Częstochowa, we found the local population and also people from nearby towns. The locals had their own clothing, lived in good barracks and were divided family by family. They received us very well. Their financial situation was good, because they came straight from their homes to the camp. They probably had savings or valuables, since they didn’t need the local food which they received at the factory and they would distribute it to us. This helped us a very much.”<sup>13</sup>

Marilla Lieberman took a critical line:

“In Częstochowa. we were already foreigners. There were many locals there. They were the veterans and we were the newcomers. They controlled everything, we were nothing.”

And Majer Wajsblum concludes:

“The separation into veterans and newcomers really bothered us in Skarżysko and Częstochowa. I think it’s been a contagious disease since then and to this very day... How was it possible to manage the abnormal life in the camps?... The things we are talking about here are an expression of the dissatisfaction that existed among the people.”

The “old-timers” were not left behind. Henia Lustiger was glad that more Jews had come, but over time, the food portions were reduced, the good additions almost disappeared, the general overcrowding was disturbing everywhere, the number of sick people was worrying. Rumours even spread that the “newcomers” had brought the bedbugs with their belongings!

And most importantly, the small selections happened more often.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Sztul, YVA, M-49/E/1126.

<sup>12</sup> Testimonies from YVA: Ester Halperin, 0.3/9609; Malka Icikowicz, 0.3/7941

<sup>13</sup> Testimony of Tola Chudin, YVA, 0.3/6628

<sup>14</sup> Lustiger, *The Ups and Downs of Life*, p. 405.