

Chapter 15

The Last Days of Apparatebau

*One year has passed and then another,
As torture – it has no end – continues!
But here something will appear;
It will come by surprise,
Interrupt the darkness of my days,
And disperse the gloom.
Enough lamentation and tears,
Our suffering has come to an end!
For us, the whole world,
Freedom and the sun's rays
Freedom awaits us!¹*

Minął rok, rok jeden, potem drugi
Jak strasznie męcząco długi.
Dni moich mrok
Przerwany czymś zostanie,
Czymś, co przyjdzie nagle
Niespodziewanie!
Dość już łez,
Nadszedł cierpień naszych kres!
Dla nas świat cały,
Wolność i słońca blask
Już wolność czeka nas!!

(Roma Nadelberg – Translation to Hebrew: Shira Yirmayi)

A. Director Lütt's Last Victory

At the end of July 1944, the commander of the Schupo and SD in the *Generalgouvernement*, Bierkamp, issued an order regarding the procedure for the evacuation of Jewish prisoners - they must be transported to concentration camps and, if the situation at the front does not allow this, it is necessary to shoot them and burn their bodies.

The same measures must be taken regarding **Jews who are still working in the armaments industry** and under no circumstances should they be allowed to be liberated by the enemy. Supervision of the labour camps during evacuations would be entrusted to the SS Security Service – the SD (*Sicherheitsdienst*).²

These instructions contradicted General Schindler's orders from July 1944 - armaments factories must continue production as long as possible. Expensive machines must be saved. No active factory must be left to the enemy, and the installations must be prepared for explosion.³

No order appears for the liquidation of the camps. On the contrary, in September 1944, after the evacuation of the military objects from the Radom district, of the nine remaining, six were HASAG factories, along with the camps.

¹ Roma Nadelberg, *Poems*, YVA, 0.76/155, p. 54

² *Documenta occupationis teutonicae*, VI, p. 519

³ *Kriegstagesbuch des Rue Kdo Radom*, 23.7.1944, MA, RW 23/18

In mid-1944, seven labour camps were established near the HASAG factories in Germany, and Budin wanted to keep his Jews in the *Generalgouvernement* and direct them to HASAG factories in the Reich. But the SS's economic office (SS-WVHA) was also interested in the prisoners' labour force. Therefore, most of the transports of men, leaving the *Generalgouvernement*, first arrived at Buchenwald and, only from there, were they directed to various private factories, in exchange for payment to the SS treasury. The women's transports arrived at Ravensbrück.

In this situation, Budin was forced to share his "slaves" with the SS, which was looking for any opportunity to maintain the remnants of its rule in the camps which still remained within the *Generalgouvernement's* territory.

This was the background to the mission of Fritz Bartenschlager, former commander of the *Werkschutz* in Skarżysko, who, together with his Jews and *Werkschutz*, was transferred to Częstochowa. Initially, his role was to supervise all HASAG camps in the city and, according to Benjamin Orenstein, his rule in Apparatebau began in November 1944.⁴

On the other hand, according to Liber Brener, the Apparatebau camp was officially transferred to SS control and became a concentration camp on 14th December, 1944.⁵ On 16th December 1944, the authorities issued a circular in the following verbiage:

"To all German administrative employees

Subject: Reorganisation of the Jewish Camp

By order of Mr [sic?] Führer, Mr Bartenschlager has been given the responsibility of reorganising the Jewish camp and of all the tasks connected with it. For this purpose, various basic assumptions must be established, which every German must take into account. Anyone violating the assumptions detailed below will be prosecuted.

A manpower recruitment system will be set up in the Jewish camp, which will ensure the orderly placement of a workforce and will be responsible for all requirements for the workforce. No German manager has the authority to withdraw or replace a workforce for himself. Any change required in the status of the Jewish workforce must receive the approval of Mr Bartenschlager.

From now on, the punishment of Jews by the managers themselves will be prohibited, and will be transferred to the authority of the *Werkschutz*.

To supervise the work, kapos will be appointed, who will be subordinate to the *Meisters* during working hours and to the camp management after working hours. To maintain the order and cleanliness of the entire factory, to the extent that Jews are employed in it, orderlies (*Ordnungsdienstmaenner*) will be recruited, subordinate to the kapos, and the German managers are prohibited from forcing them to leave their work.

⁴ Churban Czenstochow, p. 571

⁵ Brener, O pracy przymusowej, p. 59

Various people will be required for the reconstruction of the camp and the recruitment of the workforce, who must obviously be reliable. These persons will be appointed by Mr Bartenschlager and transferred from their current place of work.

These workers will, in any case, be released by the German managers. The work to which they will be assigned is much more important than the work which they are currently performing at the machine. If difficulties arise, the project organisers must be informed.

There is a strict prohibition on bringing Jews who are professionals, who perform certain work, to the German or Polish residencies. These principles were established with the consent of the factory manager. It is everyone's interest to help ensure that the Jews are well organised and that all Jews present are truly utilised as a labour force.⁶

Project preparation – Bockelmann

What was the innovation in this “project”?

The management of the factory remained in the hands of Director Lütt, and the rumour spread that he had given the SS men an absolute ban on killing prisoners.⁷ The work office, with Zylberszac, also remained in place.

But, in addition to the local *Werkschutz*, special enforcement officers (according to Orenstein, this meant a kind of police force, which had been re-established) were selected and directly subordinate to Bartenschlager. They were recruited from the fire department and their commanders were Icek Kadziło and Milek Szperling.⁸

All the “reforms”, which were introduced by Bartenschlager, were intended to increase terror and prevent any possibility of escape.

The prisoners' freedom of movement was severely restricted. An order was given to paint red stripes on their outer clothing. Prisoners were forbidden to walk in the yard between the barracks. Permission to sleep in the “Cyrk” and in the warehouses was revoked. “Cooking stoves” that had been set up in the yard were eliminated. Each rollcall was accompanied by “gymnastic” exercises, including leapfrog, lying in the mud, etc.⁹

In Apparatebau, the actions of the “dictator” were viewed with open suspicion. None of the veteran German workers were happy with his antics. Lütt was furious, all the innovations and rollcalls interfered with work. He saw Bartenschlager's takeover as an infringement of his authority. The *Werkschutz*, especially its commander Hermann, could not stand their competitors.

⁶ Arbeitsvorbereitung, 16 Dez. 1944, Dokumenty i materiały, red. N. Blumental, Obozy, Łódź 1946, p. 36; Führer – The reference is probably to Hans Führer, Member of the board of directors of HASAG-Leipzig.

⁷ Herman Binem, YVA, 0.3/8755.

⁸ On fire engines, see Chapter Ten, Section Three.

⁹ Brener, O pracy..., p. 59

Meisters complained that the workers were unable to work due to excessive fatigue. But the *Meisters* were also afraid of the SS and had to adapt. The camp took on a different appearance - now all the kapos, firemen or policemen wore a red or green ribbon on their arm.¹⁰

It is not clear as to why, after a while, Bartenschlager disappeared from Apparatebau. Perhaps the episode, which Jurek Ajnhorn describes in his book, explains the background – namely that, after the arrival of the new *Werkschutz* from Skarżysko, a train arrived with their personal furniture and belongings. Bartenschlager and his *Werkschutz* woke up the nightshift workers and, with shouting and beating, they rushed them to the station to unload the furniture.

It is said that Stieglitz called Director Lütt. He arrived at the station, ordered Bartenschlager to be brought before him and told him quietly, but in a way that the others could hear,

“This is not a kindergarten, Mr Bartenschlager, this is a factory. The prisoners must work tonight. Who gave you permission to wake them up? I ask that you stop this childish act immediately!”

According to eyewitnesses, Bartenschlager and his *Werkschutz* were not allowed to enter the factory premises the next day and remained at the Warta factory.¹¹ **This was Director Lütt’s last victory** who, until now, had successfully fought against the SS’s foothold in HASAG factories in Częstochowa.

As mentioned, in mid-December, the SS took over Apparatebau. From the Płaszów camp (which had also become a concentration camp), a group of SS men arrived, as well as Goldstein, a German Jew, who was now appointed “Camp Elder”.

Several prominent Jews also arrived, including the policeman Liebhaber, who recounted, that they had been tasked with preparing the Apparatebau camp for its transfer to the control of Amon Goeth, the former commander of the Płaszów camp.¹²

Now the real hell began.

They went to work according to barracks and returned the same way. They also arranged for the rollcalls according to this format. This change eliminated the connection between the prisoners, and the underground activity. The rollcalls became a nightmare. They started an hour earlier, at 5:00 in the morning. The drills with the hats began: *“Mützen auf! Mützen ab!”* (Hats off! Hats on!). The SS men demanded that the kapo orderlies arrange the prisoners in tight columns and, in this way, they had to march all the way to the factory. Each kapo had to stand in front of Goldstein, shout his name and the number of prisoners in his group. Every step was accompanied by beatings.

How did they survive in this hell?

¹⁰ *Churban Czenstochow*, p. 273

¹¹ Einhorn, *Wybrany aby żyć*, p. 159

¹² Maryla Liberman, YVA, 0-33/7184.