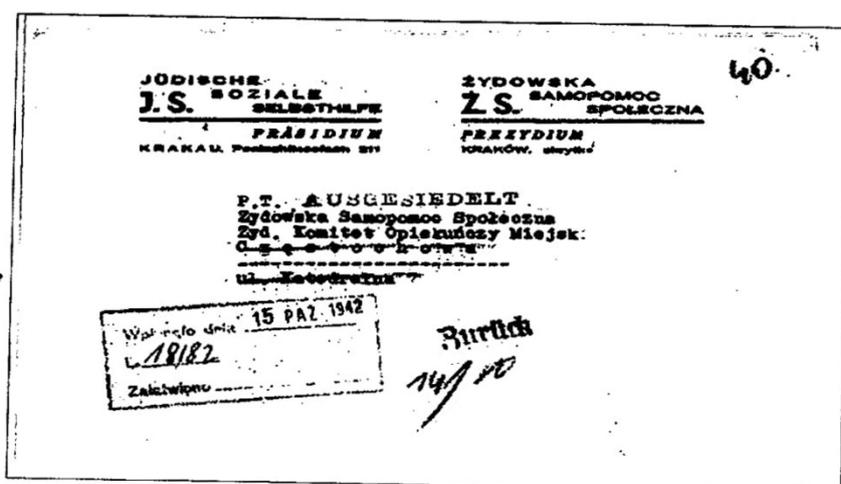


B. Commander Degenhardt's manoeuvres

On 31st October 1942, the "Jewish Office for Jewish Relief" (Unterstützungsstelle – J.U.S.) in Kraków sent a letter to the members of the *Judenrat* in Częstochowa with an urgent request to contact the office, since no news had been received from them for a long time.

The letters, sent to them, were returned. On the envelope of one of them was the chilling word "Ausgesiedelt" (deported).¹ Where?



The letter that was sent back to the J.U.S on 15th October 1942

That same October, a Jew named Brokman, who had escaped from Treblinka, appeared in the yard of *Metalurgia*. In word-of-mouth conversations, he described what he had seen with his own eyes - gas chambers and the cremation of bodies.

Slowly, slowly, the terrible truth penetrated the minds of those who heard it - the Jews were sent to their deaths.²

¹ J.U.S. Krakau, 31 Oktober 1942, Korespondencja z Żyd. Komitetem Opiekunów w Częstochowie, AŻIH, ref. 211/333, pp. 40, 50

² Pietrzykowski: W obliczu śmierci..., p. 73

Ostensibly, in accordance with Himmler's instructions, Degenhardt was to complete the entire deportation as soon as possible, and the Civil Administration in Częstochowa issued a similar demand.

In response to these demands, the SS commander in the *Generalgouvernement*, Krieger, as mentioned before, demanded that 8,000 Jews be left in Częstochowa for the needs of the HASAG armaments industry.

What was Degenhardt's position?

One of the witnesses of the period responds:

"Contrary to the position of the Franke Civil Administration, all police bodies such as the Gestapo, the *Schutzpolizei* and other auxiliary units were directly interested in the continued existence of the Jews in Częstochowa.

"Therefore, Degenhardt tried, with all his might, to obtain from his superiors in Radom permission to establish a labour camp (subordinate to him). This is not surprising, since the Jews and their property had long provided employment for hundreds of Germans evading military conscription - Gestapo members, Schupo officers, members of the SS and the SA, in addition to members of the Nazi Party."³

In accordance with the plan of the "Father of the Jews", as early as in September 1942, a place was determined for the establishment of the "Small Ghetto", which included three streets Nadrzeczna, Mostowa, Garncarska and several other alleys.

In addition to a group of Jews, who were responsible for collecting and cleaning up the abandoned property, workers, who were involved in fencing the area and setting up a public kitchen, were sent there.

Meanwhile, about 6,000 people, who remained after the deportation, were gathered in temporary places (warehouses, yards, abandoned buildings) such as *Metalurgia*, *Braland*, a furniture warehouse (*Möbellager*) and others.

Every day, squads were assembled there and sent out to various work sites in the city and, at the same time, selections were conducted, meaning that no one knew what would happen to them.

³ Kromołowski, *Wspomnienia...* pp. 563-564

Alfred Kromołowski was in a more serious situation. Due to his disability, he was awaiting certain death. Nevertheless, he managed to escape from *Metalurgia* and reach the ghetto area, which was still empty of residents. Alfred, who wandered through the abandoned houses in search of food, was surprised to see that the Germans had left a lot of furniture and household items for the use of the Jews, who would come to live here.

Towards the middle of October, several members of the *Judenrat* and the Jewish police arrived in the ghetto to look for houses for offices and residences. Houses were also allocated for two hospitals and a clinic.

On 14th October 1942, the gate was opened for the thousands of Jews, who had been brought from previous collection points.⁴

In front of the camp gate, the German commander of the ghetto, Überscher, was waiting for them with an entourage of police. Inside, dozens of “locals” were already crowded, and they saw how hundreds of men and women, pale and exhausted, hesitantly entered and looked about.

Alfred was also among those waiting. Where was his wife, Stella? He did not know what had happened to her.

“There was noise all around... Among those, who came, were those who had only just learned of the loss of their relatives... How touching this picture was. Here those full of joy who hugged and kissed, and next to them the unfortunate ones, whose faces were streaming with tears.”⁵
And here was Stella! While hugging and kissing, they both felt how happy they were to be together again.

In November, Herbert Böttcher arrived for a visit, to inspect the condition of the ghetto.

It was decided that the total number of Jews, who would be allowed to remain alive, would not exceed 5,000 people and that, from now on, the “Small Ghetto” would become a “forced labour camp for Jews” (*Zwangsarbeitslager für Juden*).

A large plaque with this inscription was hung near the camp gate. The Labour Bureau (which Bernard Kurland continued to manage) was tasked with keeping an accurate record of the workers and each worker was assigned a number - it was a metal plate with a number and a Star of David, attached to an outer garment.

A precise agenda was set- at 05:00 a.m., a trumpet sounded to rouse all the workers, who were gathered at the exit gate. Here the police counted and registered each workgroup which, after the inspection, marched to their workplace, accompanied by the *Werkschutz* [Ger., factory security]. Each returning group underwent a more severe inspection at the gate.

⁴ Testimony of Ester Epstein, YVA, M.1./E/513, p. 13.

⁵ Kromołowski, *Wspomnienia*, pp. 547-548

On 5th December 1942, there were 2,832 legally employed people (2,474 men and 358 women) in the ghetto, working in 27 workplaces outside the ghetto.⁶ In addition, there were a number of people employed in various services inside the ghetto and employees of the “White House”, who remained in their previous positions.

In fact, despite all the restrictions and the barracks lifestyle, it was a ghetto and not a camp, and that is what the Germans themselves continued to call it. People lived in houses, the *Judenrat* and the Jewish police remained (albeit in limited numbers), there were meetings between women and men, contacts with the outside world, and remnants of social and cultural life remained.

So why a “camp”?

Because, according to Himmler’s instructions, with the liquidation of the ghettos in the *Generalgouvernement*, Jews were only given the right to exist in camps supervised by the SS (the only exceptions were the “factory camps”, which were mentioned earlier). Therefore, the local SS men, who did not want to part with their occupations, in every large city (such as Kielce, Radom, and others), tried to leave a kind of residual ghetto (*Restghetto*) after the deportation, where they kept a few hundred professional Jews, who worked for them in the workshops.

As mentioned, formally, such a ghetto was a forced labour camp subordinate to a local SS commander.⁷

In Częstochowa the situation was different, because here was the HASAG company, which Krieger stood behind, and this made it easier for Degenhardt and his colleagues to maintain their domain.

The camp was obliged to be financially independent. The factories, which employed the Jews, paid a fee for each worker, which went into the camp coffers, i.e. the coffer of the *Schutzpolizei*. With this money, electricity and water bills were paid to the municipality and food supplies were purchased for the ghetto residents.

On this occasion, the Schupo men stole considerable sums, because they bought poor-quality supplies. The cooks, who cooked bad soups in the general kitchen, followed suit and they kept the good food supplies for themselves. As a result, the ghetto residents received watery soup, a quarter of a loaf of black bread, and chicory water called “coffee.”⁸

⁶ Liber Brener, *Resistance and Destruction in the Częstochowa Ghetto*, published by the Pedagogical Technological Center, Tel Aviv, 1998, p. 52.

⁷ Felicja Karay, *Death in Yellow*, Skarżysko-Kamienna Labour Camp, Yad Vashem Tel Aviv University, Jerusalem, p. 94.

⁸ Kromońowski, *Wspomnienia*, pp. 560-561

With all the shortcomings, it was clear to the Apparatebau manager, Ernst Lütt, that living in the “Small Ghetto” would be preferable to the factory halls, where there were no accommodation arrangements.

However, when he turned to Degenhardt in September with a demand to leave the men who were to work in HASAG in the ghetto, he was refused, claiming that the ghetto fencing had not yet been prepared.

Left with no other choice, Lütt decided to bring all the Jews, allocated for HASAG, to the factory.⁹

⁹ Die Erschießung von 20 kranken Juden im Oktober 1942, YVA, TR-10/585, B. II, pp. 174-178.