

C. Welcome to Apparatebau

Even during the *akcje* in the “Big Ghetto”, hundreds of male survivors crowded into the *Metalurgia* yard. They had lost the most precious thing – their families. Among them were Jeszajahu Landau, from whom his wife and daughter were cruelly torn away, the young Symcha Moneta, who was left with only his brother, Ruben Munowicz, from whose entire extended family only his brother-in-law remained and there were many, many others.

Chaim Babiacki testified:

“We were terribly confused. They shot into the crowd, we saw dead people... I sat down by the wall with other people. We waited to see what would happen next. The chaos was extraordinary. People running, people shouting, Germans shouting, Germans running... It is difficult to describe what happened in those moments.”¹

Towards evening, as a supervisor of the HASAG factories, Fajwlowicz appeared, announcing that all HASAG workers should gather and that they would be returned to work at the factory, where they would be given accommodation on site. Among those who showed up were also new faces and the group numbered hundreds of people.

While everyone was waiting for the order to leave, the manager Lütt appeared and, from the ranks, took out several men whom he did not consider suitable, while reprimanding Fajwlowicz, “These are not our workers and tomorrow I will have to get more for work.”²

A selection was held in the yard where those, who showed up, were asked what their profession was. That same evening, about 400 additional men were transferred to the Apparatebau factory.

It seems that the abovementioned selection is referred to in the testimony of Szymon Gelbard, a carpenter by trade, who was also separated from his wife and children:

“When I approached the selection point, I was sent back, on the grounds that I was too old (I was thirty-three at the time). After a while, the call was heard again, ‘Who wants to come to HASAG-Pelcery?’ I stood in line again and, this time, thanks to the recommendation of Dr Sperling (a well-known surgeon in Częstochowa), Lütt agreed to add me.”

Thus, another 300 Jews were gathered and arrived at Pelcery. Here they learned that this group was intended for work in the foundry in Raków. More groups were added to the abovementioned shipments and, according to Benjamin Orenstein, a total of about 1,500 Jews were then transferred to Apparatebau.³

¹ Testimony of Chaim Babiacki, YVA, 0.3/8968.

² Landau, YVA, 0.3/5868, p. 14

³ Churban Czenstochow, p.95

Gelbard testifies

“At night, they brought us to the factory hall on the second floor, where they ordered us to lie down in our clothes on a concrete floor. There were no mattresses or blankets. There was nowhere to wash ourselves. Here and there, water taps were scattered, which barely made it possible to wash our faces. They did not distribute soap or give us work clothes. It did not take long for our clothes to turn into a collection of lice-ridden rags.

“A toilet was in the middle of the hall, and anyone who wanted to go to it had to inform the guard, ‘Sir, guard, I want to go to the toilet!’ We had to crawl to the bathroom on all fours, there and back. Many got urinary tract infections, so two more barrels were added. Although they washed them every day, it was known that, in the *Raków Hall*, the smells rose all the way up to the sky. This is how they reduced us to the level of animals.”⁴

The situation of other prisoners was no better. They, too, were forced to crawl to the toilet. Who came up with this strange decree? It was the chief engineer of the factory, Walter Fasold, of whom much more will be said – and all of this was to prevent escapes.⁵

The dire living conditions were well known to Director Lütt and, during one of his meetings, he found it appropriate to address the new workers with an “encouragement” speech:

“You must endure and work. I will provide you with a roof over your head. The German soldier, at the front, has no roof over his head. And, if you work well, then you have a chance to make it through the war.”

When he saw several prisoners without shoes, he ordered one of the Jewish *kapos* to make a list and provide shoes (with wooden soles) to all those in need. Warnings were also issued to potential escapees.

In general, Director Lütt, who was always neatly dressed, is described as a very impressive personality. It is no wonder that rumours spread about him, that in his former life he had been a professor and a member of the German *Reichstag*.⁶

Lütt’s encouraging words could not improve the bleak reality nor add strength to the exhausted prisoners. The food in the *Apparatebau*, in those days, consisted of black coffee in the morning, watery soup at noon and a ration of bread in the evening.

There was a kitchen, which was controlled by the Belgian *Volksdeutsche* “Monsieur Jose”, who was hated by the prisoners.

⁴ Testimony of Szymon Gelbard, YVA, 03/1574.

⁵ Testimony of Mordche Haberman, YVA, 915/M-1/E; Babiacki, Munowicz, as well

⁶ Testimonies from YVA: Juda Jedliński, 0.3/10350; Kalman Szmulewicz, 0.3/5801; Babiacki, p. 30.

It is no wonder that the Jews looked for different ways to find additional food and tried to sneak a little money or jewellery into their clothes, in exchange for which they could buy groceries from the Poles working in the factory. But the Germans knew this, too.

A few days after the Jews arrived, they were collected by the *Werkschutz* commander, SS-*Oberscharführer* Hermann Klemm, who, being lame and one-eyed, quickly earned the nickname "Lame Jew". At gunpoint, he ordered those who arrived to hand over all valuables. Suitcases of watches, money and jewellery were collected, some of which "wandered" to Klemm's apartment.⁷

In conditions of hunger and cold, various diseases spread among the prisoners, and this became known to Degenhardt.

One day, the *Werkschutz* men announced that all patients must report, and many Jews responded to the announcement. According to eyewitness testimony from two "Transport" workers, Dawid Gold and Dawid Lewkowicz, the *Werkschutz* men ordered the twenty patients to board the lorry and brought them to ul. Kawia. The pit was already ready.

At Degenhardt's command, the patients alighted and the *Werkschutz* men ran them around the pit. Terrified, Lewkowicz noticed among the runners his fiancée's brother, Mojsze Zajtman. Dawid Gold also saw several acquaintances. Degenhardt took the machine gun from one of the *Werkschutz* men and shot the running Jews.

At his trial, he denied the charge, claiming that he had no authority to give orders to the *Werkschutz* men, who were subordinate to Director Lütt. But the court reminded the defendant that he received his authority to control the Jews from the commander of the district SS, Dr Böttcher and, therefore, he was entitled to give orders to the *Werkschutz* as well.⁸

At that time, Director Lütt had bigger concerns than the living conditions of his Jewish employees.

On 20th October 1942 a meeting of representatives of the Wehrmacht and the armaments industry was held in Berlin, where the attendees were informed that "in view of the military situation, it is necessary to bring the production of ammunition for infantry to a peak level in the shortest possible time."⁹

In the *Generalgouvernement*, this demand was addressed to the HASAG company. The Skarżysko factories were already operating at full-steam and production had also begun at the "Granat" factory in Kielce. In Częstochowa, even before August 1942, feverish preparations had begun in the "Pelcery" factory.

⁷ *Churban Czenstochow*, p.9

⁸ Die Erschiessung, see note 12 above.

⁹ Kriegstagebuch von 1. Oktober-31 Dezember 1942, der Rüstungsinspektion im Generalgouvernement, MA, RW 23/2, Bl.23

For the Jews who became construction workers, this was their first acquaintance with a munitions factory being built right in front of their eyes. Disorderly, in constant chaos and movement, the old walls of Pelcery fell and collapsed, the installations were dismantled and old machines were removed. Work did not stop day or night. Most of the Jews were employed in the “factory construction” department (*Betriebsbau*), and Symcha Moneta describes their work:

“At first, we broke down the walls of the old buildings. The work was very hard, with jackhammers, with wheelbarrows. The foremen were bad people, especially the department manager, who was called ‘Morsch’ (meaning Karl Opel - P.K.). He was given this nickname because he constantly shouted ‘*Morsch, morsch*’ [TN: *Instead of ‘march’.*] at the workers and did not spare any hammer blows on their heads.

“Cranes and wagons, with iron, appeared on the factory premises. Tin and machines began to arrive, with building materials weighing dozens of tons. Railway tracks passed through the factory.

“For a while, I also worked in the transport. We would unload wagons day and night. The person in charge was the manager Artur Uhlig, who was a good man, took care of people and taught them how to work. Among the men, who arrived, were the two Wojdysławski brothers, Adek Brand and others. They became workers at the factory, a few remained policemen. Józek Winter oversaw them and Chaskielowicz assisted in conducting rollcalls.”¹⁰

In the autumn of 1942, a group of 50 police officers arrived at the factory. They were sent to Apparatebau to work. In the factory, they became workers, a few of whom remained police officers. The police officers’ wives were the first women in the factory and were sent to work in the kitchen, laundry and garden and were given accommodation in a barrack. Among them was Gustawa Turowski who, after the *akcja* in September 1942, married a police officer in a fictitious marriage.¹¹

Chaim Babiacki was given such a varied career. At first, he carried building materials for German builders. They were excellent professionals, and their young assistants were treated quite well. Later, he volunteered to work with the pneumatic hammers.

“I couldn’t imagine what it was... at the previous textile factory, there were huge water tanks made of concrete, and we had to destroy them. I want to say that if, back then before the War, they built with concrete, it was concrete! Real stone... it took a long time until we managed to get a piece off them. Until we got used to it...

“So much so that we learned to sleep while the hammer was working. How? We tied down the handle of the hammer and the German master, who was standing two floors below, was pleased that the work was continuing... When the compressor suddenly stopped, we would wake up...”

¹⁰ Testimony of Symcha Moneta, YVA, 0-33/6845

¹¹ Testimony of Gustawa Turowski, YVA, 0-33/6836

Eventually, Babiacki joined a group of plumbers and, this time, his luck improved. It was a group of eight young men, well-organised and friendly, helping each other. The German master, Moritz Braunschweig, who had never seen a Jew before, was pleasantly surprised when he found two excellent professionals in the group - Mietek Mintkiewicz and Staszek Glasman, the group leader. Also in the group were Josl Tendler, the builder, and Mietek's brother, Kuba. Rotsztajn, a tailor by trade, ended up not working in plumbing, but sewing clothes for the foreman and his wife.

The group's job was to build the piping throughout the factory. Babiacki wrote:

“When the foreman called me and Staszek and said, ‘Here you need to remove and here you need to connect’, I thought that I was going to faint. I had no idea what it was. But Glasman taught me and, within a year, I had become an excellent professional.”

In November 1942, the new departments were built and, at the same time, new workers, men and women, arrived from the “Small Ghetto”. They brought with them stories about the wonders of the ghetto, where there were still regular houses, with rooms where you could sleep on a normal bed and even bathe in hot water! In the evening, they would return to the ghetto. The veterans had no choice but to sleep on a concrete floor and continue to struggle for their existence.

How did they hold out?