

## The Evacuation from Dora to Bergen-Belsen

The block elders affected rollcalls and marched [the inmates] to the central food depot. From a distance, great billows of smoke were curling up. All the documents, questionnaires and books were being thrown from the windows of the Labour Deployment and Political Department into specially-made bonfires. In this manner, the Nazi regime wished to wipe out the traces of its deeds, so that the world should not find out about the more than 110,000 prisoners who had perished in Dora.

An array of clothes and shoes were thrown out of the central clothing depot. Those, who could push their way through, seized [clothes] and covered the emaciated corpses with them.

The *kapos* ran about with thick sticks and kept "order" at the depots, beating people murderously in so doing.

The evacuation trains were standing within the factory grounds. The SS, as always, were counting the people as they left the camp's gate and before they boarded the wagons. They crammed 100 people, and one SS man to watch over them, into each wagon. The trains departed from the Dora factory grounds in great haste. In reality, it was a fantasy to emerge alive from Dora. Until that day, nearly 70% of the total number of prisoners, who had been there, had not survived.

The train travelled through different towns, often remaining standing for long hours and travelling back and forth. By chance, from a conversation between SS officers, we found out that the transport was being taken to the port in Hamburg. Based on that, a rumour spread that a bureau of the Swiss Red Cross was active in Hamburg and that it would take over the transports and feed everybody. In the train, no one was given any food - neither bread nor water. From time to time, American planes flew by unhindered, but they did not attack the evacuation train.

After two days of travel, the train arrived in Hamburg. From the wagons, we saw the port, the deep sea [viz. river], the many cold storage facilities and the destroyed buildings in the city. To everyone's disappointment, the rumour - like all the rumours in the ghettos and camps - was completely groundless. After stopping for a couple of hours in Hamburg, the train set off, once again, in an unknown direction. The prisoners began to die of hunger and exhaustion. There was a revolt in one of the carriages - everyone started beating on the doors and demanding bread. Two SS men entered the wagon, brandishing revolvers, and exclaimed, "*You want bread? Here's bread!*" - and they shot two people. An empty wagon was hitched onto the train, and they threw - literally *threw* - the dead into it.

To everyone's astonishment, on the fourth day, the train was once again in Hamburg and, once again, travelled away. On the eighth day, the train finally came to a station, where we were told to get off. There was no more space in the corpse wagon, so that there were also dead people in every wagon. The "living" were also half-dead, because eight days without bread and water had depleted everyone. Upon alighting at the railway station, the mortally hungry people saw turnips and beetroots. A free-for-all ensued. But [Josef] Kramer, the

bloody ruler of the Bergen-Belsen camp, arrived and positioned guards everywhere, with rifles ready to shoot for the taking something to eat. Once more, they began to count us - but the numbers did not add up, because every couple of minutes another person fell dead.

The transport was led into the Bergen-Belsen camp, which five kilometres from the railway station. The whole road became littered with the corpses of the prisoners, who died of exhaustion. Eventually, the transport dragged itself to the camp. No one could stand on their feet, and everyone lay down on the spot. Here, the counting took a couple of hours. The *Częstochowers* were quartered in blocks 88 and 89. Earlier, there had been a military school there, which had been evacuated. Fifty people were packed into each small room. For the time being, we were not given any straw sacks or anything to eat. Everyone's lips were not just dry, but burnt. Faces were drawn and as white as chalk and bodies were shrivelled, as if the skin had been stretched taut over the bones. After a couple of hours, they finally brought soup, and everyone received a little something warm.

There was nothing more to eat, because the camp kitchens were unable to cook for the arriving transports and the bakers had no flour with which to bake. There was no talk at all of going to work, because everyone was barely alive and could not even drag their feet.

In the meantime, there were new happenings on all the fronts, where the German resistance force was completely destroyed. The SS men gradually fled. The watch around the camp was kept by Slovaks, who were in the service of the Germans.

On 14<sup>th</sup> April 1945, we saw that the German tank, which had stood in Bergen-Belsen, had been painted all over with white paint, and that the remaining SS men and also the Slovaks, who guarded the camp, had put on white bands. This was the sign of capitulation, but no one believed it, because, after so many disappointments and being fully spent physically and mentally, no one was capable of thinking about it. Nevertheless, we understood that these were deciding days - but whether we would live to see it, was a big question