

The Evacuation Transport from Częstochowa to Buchenwald

Every few minutes, groups of 100 Jews guarded by *Werkschutz*, were taken to the train. These were mainly workers from the Pelcery, Raków and Częstochowianka HASAG factories. The Jews were loaded eighty, ninety and even a hundred to one wagon. The train was hermetically sealed and guarded. A total of 1,500 Jews were evacuated with the first transport.

Almost no one knew where the transport was headed and why the evacuation had been in such haste - nor did anyone know that the Soviets were nearing Częstochowa. The reason for that was the horrific terror of Bartenschlager and his vicious servants, which put an end to any contact with the city and made it impossible to listen to the radio and read newspapers and illegal publications. The camp leader Goldstein, and the two policemen from Warta, helped spread the false reports regarding the supposed German victories. They were always saying that the Germans were marching forward and would seize the whole of Europe. Consequently, the Jews needed to adapt themselves to their ordinances - that was their opinion and what they advised.

They only knew what the factory's management explained - that all Jews employed in the HASAG factories were considered skilled labourers and, since the company had opened an entire array of new enterprises, the Jews were needed in those factories as professional workmen. To reaffirm this, everyone was told to bring all that they had along with them - and, above all, a bowl and a spoon for the food. It was hard to believe these declarations by the Germans, because they were always deceiving them. But there was no way out.

In sealed, unheated freight carriages, on a frosty winter's day, the train dragged along from one station to the next. Everyone was tired and hungry. There was no air to breathe and no place to sit or sleep. Bodily functions had to be discharged on the spot, because they were not allowed to leave the wagon.

The train proceeded - or better said, crept along. It always stood on sidings, because the military transports needed to be let through. In the evening, bread was given out to everyone. In the morning, the train slowly came to a station with the inscription "Weimar". At a distance, they could see a sign that said "Buchenwald". The disappointment in the German promises embittered everyone and made them despair. The tension grew from minute to minute, and the question "What next?" was on everybody's lips. Their tragic fate utterly shocked everyone.

From the nearby grove, shooting was heard. Involuntarily, the words tore out of Dawid Watenberg's mouth, "Jews, say *Vidui* - our end has come." A painful sentiment enveloped everyone. There was no time to think too much, because the train came to a direct halt and the command to disembark was given. Buchenwald, with its extraordinary appearance, came into everyone's sight. A city - a concentration camp - the achievement and work of Hitler: barracks, barracks, and, wherever the eye reached, barracks. The camp police appeared, who had already been informed of the transport. They [the prisoners] were lined up in rows of five and, as the custom was, they were counted. Everyone was led inside the camp. Tall towers, manned by armed SS men, encircled the concentration camp.

There was a babel of different languages in the camp - almost all the European nations were there, barring the countries to which Hitler's boots had not reached.

They were all taken to a building, where they were ordered to put down their packs. It was called out several times that, whoever had money, gold or foreign currency, had to give it up - otherwise, if anything was found in anyone's possession, they would immediately be a candidate for the crematorium.

Following that, everybody was taken to a bathing and disinfection complex. All were required to strip and lay their clothes out in full order. They were taken, as a group, to some sort of cellar. Fear fell upon everyone, sensing that this was their last journey. As it turned out, it was an electric haircutting facility. They shaved everyone's head and body. An SS man searched inside people's mouths and checked, in a gynaecological manner, whether anyone was concealing any object of value. After that, they had to go into the bath, one person at a time - first into a deep tub, filled with a disinfecting liquid, and then under a shower to wash. After the bath, they went up to the first floor, where they were given other clothes - a shirt, trousers, a coat, shoes and a cap. Once they were dressed, a registration was carried out, after which the police took everyone to a barrack. The [entire] procedure took some fifteen hours.

The *Częstochowers* were billeted in the so-called "Little Camp", in blocks 59, 61 and 63. The real name of the "Little Camp" was "Quarantine", or "death camp"¹. It was fenced off from the general camp with barbed wire.

After going through the procedure, people could not recognise one another. All were deathly pale and exhausted from the journey, the hunger and the disinfection, which had taken an eternity. The clothes changed everybody. One was given the cap of a ship's captain, another that of a mariner - and a third that of a chauffeur. Tall men wore short trousers and short jackets, while short ones wore long clothes, which hung down from them.

In the block, a fresh procedure of bunks and sections ensued. A bunk was made up of nine prisoners and a section of six bunks - fifty-five inmates, including a section leader. Over all these sections, there was a block orderly, a scrivener and a block elder. Those, who went to work, also had a foreman and a *kapo*. Over all of them, there was a camp leader and SS men, who watched over them. Besides these, there was also an [SS] *Blockführer* [Block Leader], *Rapportführer* [Report Leader], political department leaders and a whole bunch of just leaders - each murderer beastlier than the next.

In Buchenwald, the *Częstochowers* were not sent to any work, but the supervising authorities already saw to it that everyone should be busied from early morning to late at night. The rollcalls began in the early morning, and [there were] examinations, injections, lice inspections and various other nuisances throughout the entire day. The food rations were no

¹ [TN: "The 'Little camp' had horrific conditions, particularly exacerbated by overcrowding; on occasions over 2,000 people were crammed into space intended to hold fifty horses. Tents were also erected within the 'Little Camp' as an increasing number of people were sent to this sub-camp. No sanitary facilities were available, leading to high mortality rates from disease and exposure." (source: The National Holocaust Centre and Museum, <https://www.holocaust.org.uk/buchenwald>).]

worse than in HASAG-Pelcery, but sleeping conditions were far worse, because everyone lay packed in and could not move from their place. In addition to all that, there was another great plague - the cold. Buchenwald belongs to the hilly Jena region, where the wind is acute. In January 1945, there were terrible frosts and, without proper clothing, it was impossible to hold out.

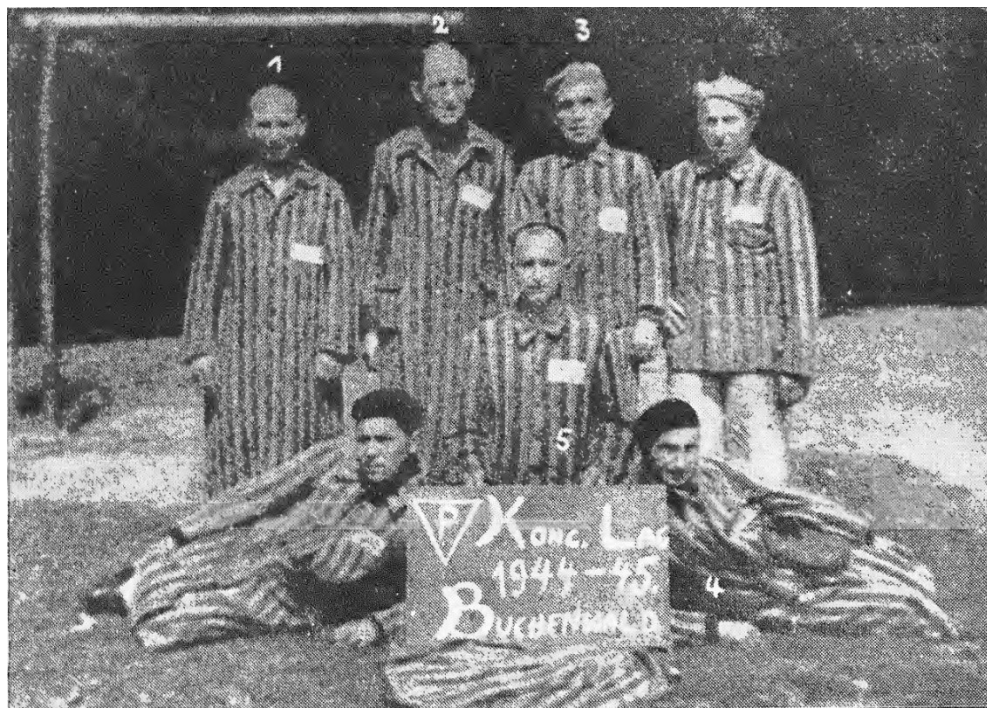


Photo №23: A group of Częstochowers in the Buchenwald concentration camp.
This picture was taken directly following Liberation.

The camp's management decided to send the *Częstochowers* to a factory. Lists were made of those who had been examined and, on the eighth day, those enlisted were summoned and taken to the cinema-hall for the transport. Transferring them was not so easy, due to the lack in means of transport. They all stayed sat in the cinema all night long. To everyone's astonishment, a film was shown, like in a proper cinema. But it all looked like a distorted mirror - films and music on one side, and the gallows and crematorium on the other.

After a whole night of sitting at the cinema, the command was given, "*Eintreten!*" (to fall in to formation to march away). The frost was fierce and everybody was trembling from the cold. Everyone was led out, in tight formation, to the branch railway line, [where they were] loaded eighty people to each wagon, and transported to an unknown destination. There was an SS man in each of the wagons, who guarded the prisoners.

After a journey of 12-14 hours, the transport finally arrived in Untersachsenhausen [sic Nordhausen]. As they later discovered, this was a journey of just 65 kilometres, which should usually have taken two or three hours [at most]. For the time being, they found themselves in the [Mittelbau-]Dora concentration camp, a satellite camp of Buchenwald. From the train, they marched six kilometres to the camp, which presented the features of a locked-down world.