

The First to be Barracked in HASAG-Pelcery

From the *Metalurgja* assembly point on ul. Krótka, 1,500 young men fit for work were selected, put in rows of five, and led under a heavy guard to the former large wool factory of the French "Pelcery" company. The factory was taken over by the HASAG Hugo Schneider munitions firm, whose central office was in Leipzig. The wool factory's machinery was dismantled and the factory was rebuilt for the production of ammunition.

Of these 1,500 workers, every day, one group went to the ironworks in Raków and another group to the stone quarry near Bór. The rest remained in HASAG-Pelcery, dismantling the [old] machines and doing construction work. In Raków, the Jewish workers were employed in the most arduous forms of labour and tortured on top of that. Their easiest job was unloading wagons¹ of coal. During the work, supervisors, foremen and the *Werkschutz* [factory security guards] stood by. They goaded them to work [harder and faster], mocked them and beat them.

The Raków ironworks had belonged to a company. Before the War, one of the main shareholders in this company had been the Radomsker Rebbe². He and his whole family were shot in their home in Warsaw, on ul. Smocza. During the *akcja*, he had resisted the Germans and refused to leave his home.

The workers, who went to Bór, took the dismantled machinery there. They left every morning under guard and returned in the evening.

The regime at HASAG-Pelcery was horrific. The two German foremen – [Karl] Opel, who was nicknamed "Morsz"³ and the other one, who was called "Piaskarz" or "Zamdziarz"⁴ - were distinguished for their bestiality, tyrannising [sic] the workers.

The working hours in HASAG were non-stop, from early morning to late at night, with beatings a very frequent phenomenon. Meals consisted of 12-14 *deka* bread with black coffee in the morning and for lunch, a watery soup. The manager of the kitchen was a Frenchman - a *Volksdeutsche* with the surname Jose (Rzoze). He took advantage of the vulnerability of the Jews and he stole even that which was given out to feed the Jewish workers and sold it in town on the black market.

The living conditions were even worse. The Jewish workers lay on concrete floors. They could not undress, and there was nothing to put underneath or with which to cover oneself with. During the night, German Wehrmacht soldiers were on guard. If someone wished to go to the toilet at night, he had to report lying down - otherwise, he risked being shot. There was only one toilet for 1,500 people and no tap with which to wash oneself. In order to access the

¹ [TN: The term "wagon" in Yiddish can also mean "railway carriage".]

² [TN: Rebbe Szlojme-Henech Ha'Cohen Rabinowicz (1882 – 1 August 1942) was the fourth and last Grand Rabbi of the Radomsko Chassidic dynasty.]

³ [TN: According to the book "Czenstochov" (1958), p.67, "Opel was called "Morsz," because every morning after rollcall, he would take his group of labourers, make them stand in one file, and give them the order to "morch" (instead of "march").]

⁴ [TN: As Professor Dariusz Stola has advised us, "Piaskarz" was the name once given in Polish to one whose occupation was to mine sand by digging it out from riverbeds. The second nickname, "Zamdziarz", was apparently a half-Yiddish-half-Polish term for the same line of work, as the word "zamid" in Yiddish means "sand", as does "piasek" in Polish.]

latrine, one had to stand in a queue for a couple of hours. Washing oneself was impossible. No one could make it to the tap, because directly after getting up, everyone was taken to work.

On the third day after being barracked, a search took place. A roll-call of all the Jews was made. Gendarmes and SS-men were present, accompanied by [Ernst] Lüth (the political director of HASAG) and the leader of the *Werkschutz*, Klemm. The SS officer, holding a pistol in his hand, declared that everyone had five minutes to hand over gold, money, *dewiz* [Pol., foreign currency], watches and other valuables. Whoever was found with any valuables on his person after the five minutes would be immediately shot. In order to scare everyone, one of those present by the name of Altman was taken and searched. He was stripped completely naked and beaten in a terrible manner. The result was that all the possessions and goods that the 1,500 Jews had were robbed. The SS took away whole crates of valuables and foreign currencies.

One day later, one of the guards shot a Jewish worker without any reason, with the excuse that he had attempted to escape. The victim lay in a pool of blood all day long and everyone was forced to march by right next to him.

The hunger and filth were unbearable. After six weeks without washing and without undressing, the 1,500 Jews were taken to be bathed and disinfected at the bathing facility on ul. Garibaldi⁵. [Then,] these intolerable conditions continued for [another] three months. After the three months, the workers were once again taken to the disinfection facility and, from there, to the "Small Ghetto".

The HASAG workers were called "*Hasagowces*". They were all in tatters, clothed in the worst possible manner, starving, exhausted and drained. In the "Small Ghetto", a new chapter begins, one of struggle, pain and suffering.

⁵ [Ed: Presumably, this refers to what was, before the War, the Mikveh.]