

## The First Test Run

During the period of the “Big Ghetto”, in June 1942, Degenhardt conducted a test run to see what the deportation would look like. He issued orders regarding a general roll-call for the entire Jewish populace, between the ages of fifteen and fifty. Twenty thousand Jews presented themselves for the roll-call, headed by the *Judenrat*. The *Judenrat*, with its numerous officials, were arranged according to departments. The people were gathered at the Old Market [*Stary Rynek*], the New Market [*Nowy Rynek*] and the I Aleja. At first, the purpose of the roll-call was not understood but, later, people realised that this had been the first test run for carrying out the deportations and selections.

## Yom Kippur The First Resettlement<sup>1</sup>

On Yom Kippur, 21<sup>st</sup> September 1942, some of the Jews went to their work and others to the houses of prayer for the services. The mood was a very depressive one. Tragic and terrifying rumours were spreading. The prayers turned into spasmodic weeping. At eleven o'clock in the morning, news came that the “Blacks”<sup>2</sup> had arrived. The “Blacks” were a special murderous band for the killing of Jews.

The workers of the Ostbahnhof<sup>3</sup> group returned at two in the afternoon, saying that they had seen the death squad arrive, and that there were one hundred carriages standing ready to take the Częstochowa Jews to Treblinka.

By four o'clock in the afternoon, it was already evident that things were bad. The death squad was billeted in the building of the Piłsudskiego School and, confidentially, they mentioned that “the bloody game” would begin that night.

The *Judenrat*, with President Leon Kopyński, went to the *Stadthauptmann* [City Captain], Dr Frank. They bribed him with 100,000 złoty, and he promised that there would be no *akcja*. That was at eight in the evening.

Two hours later, the German murderer of Jews, *Hauptmann* [Captain] Degenhardt, telephoned the *Judenrat* and the Jewish police and told them that the unrest in the ghetto was unfounded and that nothing would happen. The individuals, who were spreading rumours and conducting *Gräuelpropaganda*<sup>4</sup>, would be punished. Based on this telephone call, the *Judenrat* made efforts to calm down the Jews. The *Judenrat*'s soothing information only had an external effect. Even though, in their hearts, no one believed these declarations of the Germans, they nevertheless wished to believe that nothing tragic would transpire.

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<sup>1</sup> [TN: “Aussiedlung”, or “resettlement” was the euphemistic term used by the Nazis for the deportation of people to the death camps.]

<sup>2</sup> [TN: Ukrainians with black caps, as mentioned in *Sefer Częstochowa*, Vol. II, col. 61.]

<sup>3</sup> [TN: Ger., “Eastern Railway Station”; in other historical sources, this workplace is mentioned invariably just as the “Ostbahn”, or the Eastern Railway.]

<sup>4</sup> [TN: Ger., lit. “atrocious propaganda”, viz. horror stories or scaremongering.]

In the evening, after the prayers, the Jews encourage one another with the wish that all the tragic news should end with just a fright. Suddenly, however, all the Jewish labourers who were working night shift in HASAG Pelcery, HASAG Raków, the *Papiererei* [paper mill] and all the other workplaces return to the ghetto. This happens a few minutes before midnight. At exactly twelve midnight, all the ghetto's border points are manned by the "Blacks". The ghetto is encircled by the black "*mechablim*"<sup>5</sup>. The first to find out about it are the Jewish police night shifts. A commotion ensues. They telephone from one police precinct to the other, sensing that the tragedy is about to take place. Hauptmann Degenhardt's orders that all the *Ordnungsdienst* men (Jewish police) are to present themselves at four o'clock in the morning for roll-call in the *Metalurgia* factory on ul. Krótka. This hits them like a bolt of lightning.

The Jewish population is set atremble. One runs to the other, wails and screams are heard. People run across the rooftops over to the "Aryan side". The first shots are heard, as the "Blacks" shoot at those fleeing and the first dead people are seen. It is in the middle of the night, but no one is sleeping. It seems as if the ghetto has been turned upside down. People consider looking for a way out and what to do.

A small part of the population had gone to bed, not knowing that it would be their last slumber on this earth. The majority was awake and did not sleep. A certain number managed to go over into the "Aryan side" by paying off the German power-holders. Others secretly took their valuables, via ul. Garibaldię, over to the "White House", deeming this building would be "untouchable".

At exactly four o'clock in the morning, the roll-call of the *Ordnungsdienst* (Jewish police) was conducted. Degenhardt explained the "purpose" of this roll-call. He said that a relocation was to take place. The working permits of all the Jews were going to be inspected. All the Jews living on the streets 1) Kawia, 2) Koszarowa, 3) Warszawski Rynek, 4) Warszawska up to Garibaldię, 5) Garibaldię and 6) Wilsona were to present themselves in that order. All the Jews from the streets listed needed to report, at six o'clock in the morning, to the *Metalurgia* on ul. Krótka, where they would be checked by the organs of power of the SS, Gestapo and gendarmerie.

This information spread throughout the ghetto with lightning speed. The fact that the "Black *mechablim*" were on guard convinced everyone that the coming minutes would be tragic and gruesome. Thousands of people went - one this way and one that way - everyone wished to be together with their family members and not to be separated.

The women, who had small children, were seized with terror over the horror that awaited them in the coming hours. The cries of the mothers and the frightened children exceeded any human imagination.

Adults packed their best possessions and put on their best linen, shoes and clothes, concealing money and valuables about their person. Elderly Jews, evaluating the tragedy that was immediately about to play out, packed their *taleisim*, *tefillin*, *kitels* and *siddurim*<sup>6</sup> pending the last march.

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<sup>5</sup> [TN: Heb., used in Yiddish to mean "destroyers", although in modern Heb. the term denotes terrorists.]

<sup>6</sup> [TN: Prayer-shawls, phylacteries, white gowns worn on the High Holidays and prayer-books, respectively.]

Deliberations were held in different homes. What should be done with the older people and the children? How to save themselves from the claws of the murderers waiting to take their lives? People began to look for hiding places and even to build bunkers<sup>7</sup> in order to conceal those most threatened.

At five o'clock in the morning, like every other day, the workers gathered to go to their regular everyday work. When they came to the gate of the ghetto, they were surrounded and put under the watch of SS men who spoke different languages. As it turned out, these were not only Germans, but also Ukrainians, Latvians, Lithuanians and others. People could not understand what they said, besides "Zurück! Zurück!" [Back! Back!]. The black murderers open fire on the crowd. Many fell dead. Everyone ran away and went in the direction of the assembly point at the *Metalurgia* at ul. Krótka 13.

At the same time, a group of thirty Jewish workers, under the supervision of *Oberwachtmeister* [Chief Constable] Ibischer [aka Überscher], was forced to dig large pits on ul. Kawia. Afterwards, those who had been shot dead were buried in those pits, including the wounded, half-alive Jews.

The *akcja* begins at six o'clock in the morning. Thousands of Jews stream to the gathering point - men, women, children, mothers with small suckling infants in their arms, and old people. Each one is holding his work card in his hand and hoping that nothing will happen to him.

The members of the *Judenrat* are immediately led inside the *Metalurgia*. These are Leon Kopiński, Moryc Kopiński, Maurycy Galster, Dawid-Nussen Berliner, Bernard Kurland, Landau, the lawyer Gitler and others.

At the entrance, at the gate of the *Metalurgia*, Degenhardt is standing with a group of SS, Gestapo and gendarmerie and they are carrying out an "inspection". Degenhardt holds a small stick in his hand and indicates to the right or to the left - thus delivering the verdict of death or temporary life. This is the same Degenhardt who, a few hours earlier, gave his word that nothing would happen. A small percentage is let inside the *Metalurgia* and the rest - more than 95% - are sent away to another point on ul. Wilsona, where the bus station [once] was.

Three or four hundred Jews manage to make it inside the *Metalurgia* - the other 7,000 come to ul. Wilsona. There, they are guarded by SS commandos, which consist of Germans, Ukrainians and Latvians. The savage degenerates and murderers start a "spectacle", the likes of which has no parallel in the history of mankind. They begin to shoot into the crowd. Many die of terror and many are shot. The street turns into a river of blood. Dead bodies cover the streets.

Among those shot was Chief Cantor Fizel. His wife and three daughters shared the same fate and perished in Treblinka. Only one daughter was saved, being in Łódź with "Aryan papers".

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<sup>7</sup> [TN: The term "bunker" is used very loosely in Yiddish, and refers to all kinds of elaborate hideouts – not necessarily reinforced underground war shelters.]

Following the bloody massacre on ul. Wilsona, the remaining people were taken in rows of five, watched over by bestial guides, through the streets Berka Joselewicza, Nowy Rynek, I Aleja and Piłsudskiego, towards Mirowska and Zawodzie, to the new Kielce railway line.

This was one of the most horrific and tragic marches in human history. Embittered, drained people, with rucksacks on their backs and bundles in their arms, make their way apathetically and resignedly through a hail of bullets and blows from rifles on their last march. The elderly and the children, who were unable to keep up the pace, were beaten or shot by the guards.

The artist has not yet existed who could paint the tragic experiences of those who marched on their last road, the inner spiritual struggle playing out in their minds and hearts, and the misery glistening forth from their gazes.

When the approximately seven thousand Jews marching to their deaths reached the railway line, there were already carriages there - like for cattle.

The carriages had been bleached with chlorine, which causes asphyxiation. They made every Jew take off his shoes. There were wagons standing with Polish policemen, who loaded the shoes onto the carts. Then, they loaded the Jews onto the carriages - one hundred people in each carriage. Many of those in the carriages suffocated from the chlorine fumes and the cramped condition.

As tragic Fate willed it, the day after Yom Kippur, Tuesday, 22<sup>nd</sup> sept 1942, was a bright and sunny one - and it seemed as if the heavens and nature had emptied their cruelty over Częstochowa's Jewish populace.

The loaded transport of Jews, numbering 7,000 people, was sent away to the gas chambers in Treblinka.

During the "resettlement", the heroic Jewish boxer Zylberberg - the son of a sock manufacturer at ul. Garibaldi 16, who was known in the sports circles as "Hans" and had been Częstochowa boxing champion multiple times - put up some resistance, as follows:

When the SS men entered his home, wildly shouting "*Heraus!*" [Out!], he threw himself at them and hit them, retorting, "*I will not get out of my house!*" The SS men shot him three times, as a result of which the twenty-four-year-old Zylberberg ended his life at home and avoided the various torments on the way to Treblinka and the gas chambers.

That is a summary of the tragic date, 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1942, the day after Yom Kippur - the first deportation, which lasted from six to eleven in the morning.

In the afternoon, a group of Jews was called away from the *Metalurgia*, together with Jewish policemen, to perform certain tasks. The work consisted of digging pits in the empty square on ul. Kawia in order to inter the bodies of the victims that lay in ul. Wilsona and all the other streets.

On the following day, 23<sup>rd</sup> September, exacting inspections were carried out in the liquidated area. The SS and Jewish police had received strict orders to seek out all those concealing themselves in different hiding places in the liquidated streets.

A hunt ensued throughout the dwellings, attics and cellars. Any Jews they found, regardless of gender and age - babies, women, men, youths, adults, elderly and the severely ill - were shot on the spot. There were many instances of bestial, sadistic deeds on the part of the SS. They took up suckling infants by their little feet and killed them by smashing their little heads forcefully into the wall. "It's a shame to waste a bullet", the cruel murders cynically explained.

Numerous cases of suicide, by means of narcotics, were also confirmed. These helpless and despairing Jews, unwilling to be murdered by the criminals, brought their own lives to an end.

A large number of those in hiding were taken away to ul. Kawia, where the pits had been dug. There, they were shot and buried. A certain number of captured Jews bought off their "catchers" by giving them different valuables and were thus set free.

The searching and inspections continued for two days, until 24<sup>th</sup> September. The liquidated streets were immediately separated from the ghetto, and the water, gas and electricity were cut off there.