

Raków

Raków, four kilometres from Częstochowa, was one of the largest ironworks in Poland. Both the locality and the ironworks were called "Raków". The ironworks belonged to a company, one of whose largest shareholders was the Radomsker Rebbe. Once the Germans had marched in, the factory passed into the hands of the German company HASAG - Hugo Schneider's munitions production enterprises, whose headquarters was in Leipzig.

There were 6,000 Polish labourers working in the ironworks - most of whom were forced labourers, who were forced to work there as punishment. Jews were also taken to work there. In the times of the "Big Ghetto", some 300 Jewish men were taken to work there every day. They were mostly employed in transport work - in loading and unloading carriages. The labour was arduous and dirty and, on top of that, they had to march eight kilometres each day (four kilometres to work and four back).

During the period of the bloody *akcje*, "resettlements", selections and executions, the Raków workers were barracked in HASAG-Pelcery, from where they marched, early every morning, to work and back in the evening. When the HASAG-Pelcery workers were relocated to the "Small Ghetto", the Raków Jews came with them. Once the "Small Ghetto" was liquidated, some 400 Jews were barracked in Raków, including 55 women. At first, there was nowhere to sleep. The barracked Jews slept in common cowsheds on rotten straw. After five or six weeks, four barracks were built, with which life somewhat improved for the Raków Jews. In barrack №1, the "*crème de la crème*"¹ slept - the foreman and their families. Barrack №2 was a general one - 200 men slept there. Barrack №3 was used for sanitary purposes, and that is where the married couples lived. In barrack №4, sixty individuals slept - [all] men.

The Jews were employed in the following departments: blast furnaces, steelworks, rolling mills, transport, home maintenance and in the boiler department. The work was hard and, in the first three departments, was divided into three shifts. In the others, people worked for ten hours. The work in the blast furnaces, steelworks and pressing mills was done under tremendous heat. The temperatures reached several hundred degrees, because the iron was brought to a molten state². Work in the home maintenance department was in construction, carpentry, glazing and other tidying-up jobs. The transport work consisted of unloading carriages of coal and other materials. Every Jew working in transport was required to unload at least ten tonnes a day.

The inside Jewish administration was made up of camp leader Heniek Gliksman, his deputy Binem Erlich and the head foremen of each individual department: blast furnaces - Marek Berman; rolling mills - the cantor Orzynski; steelworks - Berkowicz, and transport - Heinrich Landau.

The ironworks produced rails, wire and nails. The majority of the foremen were Poles.

¹ [TN: The expression used in the Yiddish original is "the topmost (spice) of the mortar".]

² [TN: The melting point of iron is 1,538 °C, which could certainly have raised the temperature of its immediate surroundings to several hundred degrees.]

Doctor Glater ran the sanitary system along with Dr Opatowski and the two nurses, Polcia and Dr Glater's wife, as well as the medic Śliwka.

The meals were just like in all the other camps, with the exception that there was a common kitchen for both the Polish and Jewish labourers. Four Jewish women worked in this kitchen. The kitchen's manager was the wife of the chief of the steelworks (a German). She treated the Jews objectively, and even protested against the *Werkschutz* men, who treated the Jewish inmates in a brutal manner. Her husband, on the other hand - the chief of the steelworks - was a hard-bitten antisemite.

Pfeifer, the leader of the *Werkschutz*, involved himself little in the affairs of the Jewish inmates. This he entrusted to his deputy Mühlhof and to the inside Jewish administration - the camp-leader, Heniek Gliksman.

As a German, Mühlhof³ was an exception to the rule - he was a man with a heart, emotions and feelings. He was the only one [of them] in Częstochowa who never did harm to any Jew. He looked on, embittered, at the crimes which his ethnic brethren were committing and foresaw their imminent downfall. His *Werkschutz* underlings did beat Jews, but only when he was not around. The *Werkschutz* men were Germans, *Volksdeutsche* and scum of all sorts.

The territory of the ironworks was large and bordered with wastelands - which afforded good opportunities for some escape and for others to infiltrate it. There was always movement of some leaving and others arriving. It was thus that contact with the partisans in the woods was also clinched.

Religious life was also not neglected. On the [High] Holidays of Rosh Ha'Shanah and Yom Kippur, public prayer services were held. Dawid Orzynski and Rachmiel Landau led the prayers as cantors.

On 15th January 1945, the Jews of Raków were evacuated to Buchenwald and, from there, to other concentration camps. Many of them did not withstand the torments and died of starvation or the arduous labour.

The few individuals, who hid at the time of the evacuation and remained in Raków, were liberated, at night, on 16th January 1945.

³ [TN: See *Sefer Częstochowa*, Vol. II, col. 209 regarding this individual: "And in the ocean of hatred, destruction, and annihilation, there was one German named Mühlhof, who was in charge of our camp. Mühlhof travelled to the ghetto, as if to fetch equipment for the camp, and, risking his own life, succeeded in taking several people out from the burning ghetto and bringing them to the camp. He recounted how they were bombing one house after another, dispatching the sick, [and] extricating people who had hidden in bunkers and throwing them alive into the flames. But his humanistic attitude doomed him. When his actions became known to the Germans, he was very soon sent to the front - and killed."]