

The Development of Events in the “Small Ghetto” and Its Liquidation

After each of Degenhardt and his deputies' criminal *akcje*, from them, there came a guarantee to the effect that nothing more would happen. On the contrary, they were interested in the existence of the “Small Ghetto”, because it affected their employment. Were the “Small Ghetto” to be liquidated, then they would be left without a job and would be sent off to the eastern front. The greatest Nazi murderers were, concurrently, great cowards and were afraid of the front.

When the attempts on Degenhardt's life failed and he had become aware that the underground movement had pronounced an unconditional death sentence upon him, he went about in constant fear. He said to Helenka Tenenbaum¹, “What will they get from leaving my wife widowed? I was just following orders. Such things will not happen anymore”. With lightning speed, these statements spread from Helenka's mouth to the “Small Ghetto”, but the more rational Jews and, above all, the youth, who were preparing for battle, did not believe such declarations.

Degenhardt was a most revolting individual. His external appearance was just as loathsome as his soul. His countenance reminded one of the physiognomy of a beast. In his dealings and cruelties, he would lose all human feeling. [Yet] despite his brutal and murderous attitude towards Jews, he chose for himself a Jewish lover - the twenty-four-year-old Helenka Tenenbaum, who had completed Axer's *gimnazjum* and was the daughter of the *Adonis* firm's chocolate manufacturer. She was the most beautiful woman in the “Small Ghetto”. She worked on ul. Garibaldiego, sorting the Jewish possessions which had become ownerless and she lived on ul. Kozia. Upon noticing her, Degenhardt took her away from her work and appointed her as governess to his children, as it were. In reality, she was his mistress.

There were two opinions regarding her - one positive and one negative. The positive opinion maintained that she had a great influence on Degenhardt and that, thanks to that, the “Small Ghetto” would be protected from further cruelties, selections and shootings. All the intercessions, which the police commandant Parasol wished to carry through with Degenhardt, were first discussed with Helenka, thanks to whose mediation everything would be carried out in a positive manner. There were even some who called her “the second Esther”².

The negative opinion of her was that she was a licentious woman. Already before the War, when she was an eighteen-year-old girl, she had been the lover of the director of the French Pelcery firm, and that she was committing a crime against her people by having a relationship with the arch-murderer of Cześćochowa Jewry, who had murdered her parents also. Degenhardt was far too cunning to impart certain plans to her. On the contrary, from her, he could find out different things to the detriment of the “Small Ghetto”.

¹ [TN: His Jewish lover, as follows below.]

² [TN: According to the biblical account, Esther, a Jewess, became the queen of Persia and, through her influence over her husband Ahasuerus (most probably Xerxes, who ruled between 486 and 465 BCE), she managed to avert the genocide of her people.]

In the “Small Ghetto”, there was another beauty - a twenty-two-year-old girl named Bela Kolska, who came from Łódź. (Before the War, her parents had a dancing school there.) She worked in the ghetto kitchen on ul. Nadrzeczna and lived on ul. Senatorska. The Jew-murderer Schimmel harassed her fiercely. At the first opportunity, when twenty-five professional workmen were sent away to Bliżyn on 7th March 1943, she was also transferred and, thus, the story of Bela Kolska and Schimmel came to an end.

The murderer of Jews, Willi Unkelbach, also chose a Jewish lover for himself. She was Sala Kempner, who worked as a cleaning lady in the gendarmerie on the III Aleja 75.

Life began to “normalise”. The religious Jews were mainly employed in the “Small Ghetto” as concierges and in the workshops. At the same time, they privately arranged a *minyan* at Isroel-Josel Kutner’s home, formed a *Chevra Kadisha* and officiated at wedding ceremonies when necessary.

Those wed were women who had lost, a few months earlier, their husbands and children, and vice-versa - such men who had lost their wives and children. This was one of the side-effects of life in the “Small Ghetto”, which had broken away from the ethics and morals of yesterday with which Jewish life was permeated before the War and, also, in the times of the “Big Ghetto”. In the tragic period of transition, people wished to forget the mass murders leading up to the establishment of the “Small Ghetto”.

Each marriage needed to be approved by Degenhardt, and the procedure was as follows - the interested couples filed a request with the Jewish police. The couples [then] stood for a rollcall as Degenhardt marched by, often asking questions - where they worked, about their parents [etc.] – and, with that, the procedure ended. The inhabitants of the “Small Ghetto” called these rollcalls “parades”. There were also some couples who, following the parade, arranged a religious *chuppah*, in accordance with religious law.

The “Small Ghetto” was in the permanent grip of tension due to the constant *obławy* [roundups/manhunts], the purpose of which was to capture workers for HASAG. All those who were caught had either a “B” or a “T”, painted with black paint, onto their coats (“B” was for *Baubetrieb* [construction department] and “T” for Transport). These painted letters were impossible to erase, even with benzene. This was done with the purpose of forcing the labourers to go work in HASAG, in either the construction department or in transport. This, however, was to no avail. Those caught, whose coats had been marked, did not wish to be subjected to the terror of HASAG. They threw away their coats and went to work in different workplaces.

In the life of the “Small Ghetto”, insecurity always reigned due to the possibility of being caught, on any day, in an *obława* for work or being sent away to die through a selection. One event chased another. On 7th March 1943, twenty-five professional workmen were sent to Bliżyn and, very soon afterwards, on 19th [March], there was a new *obława* and 300 Jews were sent away. A little later, at the end of March, the Purim *akcja* against the intelligentsia took place - 157 people, with [members of] the *Judenrat* at their head, were taken away to the cemetery to be shot. All these incidents caused everyone great bitterness. Every day, the “Small Ghetto’s” bleeding and aching organism sustained fresh wounds.

It took a couple of days for Degenhardt to reappear, whereupon he declared that it not had been his fault and that, now, everything would be peaceful. In place of the *Judenrat*, a ghetto bureau was appointed under the management of Icek Landau. Degenhardt granted an amnesty to Bernard Kurland, who had been found in a bunker. Kurland came back into the "Small Ghetto". Degenhardt guaranteed that nothing would happen to Kurland and that he would, once more, take over the position of manager of the *Arbeitseinsatz* [labour deployment], which is what happened – Bernard Kurland, once again, took over his position.

During *Pesach*, a unit of three³ combatants from the underground movement, [Awiw] Roziner, [Dawid] Altman and [Cwi] Lustiger, carried out an act of sabotage in derailing a train containing military [personnel] and ammunition. One of the combat trio fell at the time, and Degenhardt and Rohn conducted a selection of the entire Ostbahnhof group. Every second man was selected to be shot. More than twenty Jews paid with their lives for the operation. They were taken away in a freight lorry to the cemetery, where they were shot and buried in a mass grave.

In April 1943, the following incident took place - one of the workers of the *Heeresbau* [military construction (department)], Gutman, was late in the morning and missed going out with his work team. Not wishing to remain in the turbulent "Small Ghetto", he went along with the HASAG workers, intending to leave the group at Aleja Pierwszego Maja⁴ and to run to his work station. When the group came to the place in question, he left them. A *Werkschutz* ran after him and pulled out his revolver in order to shoot him. His brother-in-law, Moniek Epszajn, saw this and went out of the line, towards the *Werkschutz*, to stop him and to explain the matter. The result was a gruesome - the *Werkschutz* men, Hoffmann and Schiff, shot Gutman and his brother-in-law Moniek Epszajn in the street. They were later interred in that same spot. To this day, the two Jewish young men, whose breath of life was cut short by the Nazi terror, lie in the Aleja Pierwszego Maja.

The disquiet and insecure life continued until 1st May 1943. On that day, the trumpet was not blown. The labourers were not called to work. With lightning speed, the word spread that no one would be let out of the ghetto, and the guard around the fences was reinforced. Everyone sensed that this was bad and that a new tragic game was being prepared. Tension rose from minute to minute. People sought to save themselves by way of bunkers, arming themselves and by escaping to the "Aryan side".

Every few minutes, there were new rumours. The two main rumours were:

- 1) As a result of the German army's continuous defeats on the Soviet front, the Soviet authorities had declared that, if the Germans did not stop terrorising and killing the Jews, that they - the Soviet government - would apply the same methods in regards to the civilian German population in the cities in which they entered. The deadline given was 1st May, because this date was an expression of international solidarity and the fight for equal rights.

³ [TN: Above, in the chapter "The Jewish Combat Organisation" (p.147), the author writes that five, not three, were sent on the mission, adding the names of Heniek Pesak and Hari Gerszonowicz. He also writes that the act was not actually carried out, and that Awiw Roziner and Hari Gerszonowicz were killed in the shootout that ensued with the railway guards.]

⁴ [TN: Nowadays ul. 1 Maja.]

- 2) The Jews of the "Small Ghetto" had been "borrowed" by the HASAG firm from the Radom district SS until 1st May and the term had ended. The Jews no longer belonged to the HASAG firm, but to the SS. Belonging to the SS meant being sent away to the gas chambers of Treblinka or being murdered in some different manner.

The atmosphere was one of agony, and it intensified from minute to minute. This tension continued for three days. On 4th May, in the morning, the trumpet once more summoned everyone to work. As it turned out, the second rumour had been true. [But] the director Lüth had held negotiations with Böttcher in Radom regarding giving over the Jews to his supervision in the HASAG factories, which had not been so easy to carry through. After three days of negotiations, he succeeded in receiving the Jews for unpaid slave labour.

The two months, of May and June, were months of preparations for the underground movement. "Fives" would continuously be formed and sent out to the woods as partisans. The production of hand-grenades also increased and German military uniforms prepared. A movement began in the "Small Ghetto" - whoever had the chance to do so, left the ghetto to be on the "Aryan side" with Polish documents. Those, who had a distinctively Semitic countenance, concealed themselves in bunkers.

During this same period, the following incident took place: a German chauffeur, who had been bought off by the Jews and had several times already driven Jews to various places in the direction of the woods or to bunkers, had inspired a certain degree of trust in him. Like all the Germans in the occupied territories, he agreed to everything and solemnly promised his service and assistance, declaring himself to be anti-Hitler. On that occasion, the members of the underground movement's high command, [Pinek] Samsonowicz, Hari Potaszewicz and Jakubowicz, travelled with him.

As it turned out, the driver had betrayed them and had informed the Gestapo about it. When the vehicle began its journey, the high command members noticed that they were being followed by a passenger car containing gendarmes in full battle array. The plan was ruined. They were to have travelled to the headquarters, in the woods, for an important organisational meeting. The high command members pulled out their revolvers and a skirmish ensued. Samsonowicz shot at the traitorous chauffeur and Hari Potaszewicz, with Jakubowicz, at the gendarmes. In the battle, Samsonowicz and Jakubowicz fell then and there. Hari Potaszewicz fell into the hands of the gendarmes, who tortured him horribly and demanded that he point out the other members of the underground movement and where the bunkers were, for which he would be pardoned and remain alive.

They brought him to the "Small Ghetto", making him stand at the window of the Jewish police on ul. Kozia and ordered a rollcall of all the Jews in the ghetto. The night shift and all the ghetto's employees were in the ghetto at the time, and all of them marched past the police [station].

Potaszewicz stood by the window, badly beaten and in a state of shock from all the tortures to which he had been subjected by the Gestapo. Nevertheless, he passed the test. He remained loyal to the fighting spirit and the solidarity towards his comrades in arms and his

brothers and sisters. The threats of the gendarmerie and their promises, that he would remain alive as reward for revealing the bunkers and his comrades, were to no avail.

The Gestapo men employed an especially sadistic method as regards Hari Potaszewicz. They tore off his clothes and wrapped him in wet blankets. After each beating, they threw the wet blankets on his wounds in order to make him last longer until he was [finally] tortured to death.

Individual shootings were a day-to-day phenomenon - for finding men, within the forbidden hours, in a dwelling that was designated for women, for finding an ID card in someone's possession, for hiding in a bunker, for not going to work, for finding someone on the "Aryan side" and for similar "transgressions".

On 17th-18th June 1943, a skirmish took place not far from the HASAG-Raków factory on ul. Kucelińska 61, at the rendezvous point with the officer of the Polish underground movement, Langewicz, who was to aid with the uprising in the "Small Ghetto" and lead the Jewish partisan groups. The clash started first with the Polish police and later [continued] with the German police. There, the Germans found a jacket belonging to Mojtek, who was the high commander of the underground movement in the Częstochowa "Small Ghetto".

Several days later, on 23rd June 1943, Dr Wolberg was summoned, by a gendarme, to ul. Garibaldię 28 in order to provide first aid. The moment that Dr Wolberg entered the building, he was shot on the spot. As it emerged, the Germans had discovered that Dr Wolberg, formerly an officer in the Polish army, belonged to the AL (Polish underground movement) and was in contact with it. Dr Wolberg, a captain of the Polish army, was the first victim of the liquidation of the "Small Ghetto".

During that same period, the Jewish policeman Rozenberg betrayed the underground movement, informing the German authorities about the preparations that were being made and its caches of munitions, clothing and food products. All these events brought about the definitive and unexpectedly quick liquidation of the "Small Ghetto".

On 25th June 1943, the day-shift workers in HASAG-Pelcery and Raków and all other workplaces were halted. At two in the afternoon, several squads of SS, Gestapo and the gendarmerie marched into the "Small Ghetto" and opened fire with machine-guns. The shooting was directed at the underground movement's depots at ul. Nadrzeczna 86, 88 and 90. Two hundred victims fell as a result of the terrible gunfire.

Just then, Lüth, the political director of the HASAG firm, arrived and requested that the night-shift workers be let out to him. It was immediately announced that the HASAG night-shift workers were to go out to the Stary Rynek [Old Market Square]. Everyone needed to present the permit which confirmed that he was actually in the night-shift. But a certain number of people, without the night permits, still managed to get out of the "Small Ghetto".

The day-shift, in HASAG, knew nothing of what was happening in the "Small Ghetto". After finishing work as usual, like every day, they all presented themselves for the rollcall in order to return home. (There was a rollcall when they arrived and when they left.) To everyone's

astonishment, Degenhardt entered the rollcall hall with a group of gendarmes with helmets on their heads and fixed bayonets, ready to shoot and stab. Lüth, the political director, also appeared. People sensed that it was bad and that something tragic was about to happen.

Degenhardt began to speak, "The beautiful May has passed for you. You live as long as you work in HASAG, and you work as long as you live. You will no longer return to the ghetto. You will remain here for the rest of your lives".

These words electrified everyone and threw them off balance. A lady had an attack of hysteria and she had to be immediately taken away in an ambulance. This new decree was a catastrophe for everyone, because no one had taken anything with them upon leaving for work - they had left everything for the taking in the "Small Ghetto".

Degenhardt and his armed rogues left. In their place, armed HASAG *Werkschutz* appeared. Director Lüth began to speak, putting forth the plan of barracking, viz. forming a camp in the factory for the Jews. Barracks would quickly be built, where each one would sleep comfortably. In the meantime, everyone would need to put up with sleeping badly, because there was no other option. Each department would form groups of thirty people, headed by a leader - a *kapo* - who would be tasked with seeing to his group's meals, clothing and sleeping [arrangements]. With that, the rollcall came to an end. The women were led away to a different hall. The men were left in the same rollcall hall. Physically and emotionally spent, they lay down to sleep on the concrete floor.

The night shift arrived from the "Small Ghetto" two hours late. No one was allowed to approach them, so they could not find out directly what had happened there. On the following morning, Director Lüth went to the "Small Ghetto" and selected people for work. All the workplaces were dissolved, barring "Enro", because the Jewish workers there were professionals and the firm barracked them there. The professional workmen and those who worked at ul. Garibaldi were barracked in their workplace and were employed in clearing out the "Small Ghetto".

In the early morning hours of 26th June 1943, Degenhardt and Laszynski carried out a selection. The Jewish police helped drive out all the Jews from the "Small Ghetto". First, all the people living in the buildings on ul. Nadrzeczna 86, 88 and 90, where the points and depots of the underground movement were located, were set apart and, afterwards, were taken away in freight trucks to the cemetery to be shot. After them, all the sick and weak people, the elderly and children were also taken away to the cemetery to be shot. Director Lüth took all the other men and women fit for work, and also a group of thirty youths, whom Degenhardt wanted to murder. [Lüth] ordered the *Werkschutz* to lead them away to the factory.

The story of taking charge of the thirty youths - all boys under the age of fifteen - was as follows. During the clashes at ul. Kucelińska 61, first with the Polish and later with the German police, twelve-year-old Dudek Lenczner fled. (They called him *Dude'le* - he was Mania Lenczner's little brother and was hiding there in a bunker). For several days, he wandered about in the woods, looking for Jewish partisans - but did not find them. He decided to return to the "Small Ghetto".

At the moment of his arrival, the final liquidation was taking place. He saw some 3,000 Jews standing in the sorrowful renowned Warszawski Rynecek, when the selection was being conducted. Youths, adults and old people were loaded onto trucks to be taken away to the cemetery to be shot. Dudek, seeing the tragedy, made ready to escape. [Then] he saw Director Lüth and, without thinking for too long, he approached him in the presence of the murderers of Jews, Degenhardt, Laszynski and SS men, and told him that all the youths, who had been set apart [to be shot], were capable of performing different types of work and that he was, therefore, requesting the director to take them to the factory, to save them in this manner from Degenhardt, who wished to murder them.

Director Lüth refused to believe that these Jews were really being taken away to be shot. Dudek pleaded with him to follow the freight lorries and see for himself. Lüth got into his car and went after them. He returned convinced of the tragic reality. He appealed to Degenhardt to leave the boys, in order for them to work in HASAG. The Jew-murderer Degenhardt refused, and a sharp exchange of words ensued between him and Director Lüth. The result was, that Dudek and the rest of the boys were sent to HASAG. Thanks to Dudek, the youths were saved from certain death. Dudek Lenczner is currently in England, where he is studying in a school. When he completes his studies, he will travel to his uncle in Tel-Aviv.

Following the selection and the transfer to HASAG, Degenhardt declared an amnesty for all those who, voluntarily, presented themselves by two o'clock. All those hiding in bunkers, who reported of their own free will until the appointed hour, would be sent to HASAG. Degenhardt gave his "officer's word of honour" as guarantee. A large number of Jews presented themselves, believing Degenhardt's "officer's word of honour". As it emerged, at the appointed time, Böttcher, chief of the Radom district SS, arrived and ordered the Jews to be taken away to the cemetery to be shot.

Following this last mass murder, the finale of the "Small Ghetto's" liquidation ensued. A battle flared up with the members of the underground movement. The majority of the members of the underground movement, who had been at their workplaces a day earlier, were being held and could not return. They had, unexpectedly been barracked. No help arrived from the Polish side either. Nevertheless, the small number of ghetto fighters defended their positions with courage and honour in the desperate struggle against the bestial and tyrannical foe. Mojtek Zylberberg, the commander of the underground movement, with two automatics, shot at the murderers from the munitions depot and did not let them approach him. The SS hurled grenades into the bunker and also shot into it. But it was all in vain - the bunker defended itself.

Mojtek Zylberberg fell in the bunker during the heroic battle, as did Masza (Rywka Glanc) and many, many other members of the underground movement, who constituted the vanguard of Częstochowa Jewry.

On Tuesday, 30th June 1943, the Nazi criminals built a pyre in the hospital and burnt alive all the Jews, who had been captured in the bunkers, hideouts and on the "Aryan side" - about 500 people in total. Among others, Dawid Altman, an active member of the underground movement, was caught. The Jewish policemen threw him into the blazing fire.

On that same occasion, the following incident took place. The twelve-year-old girl Lipszyc, a sister-in-law of Szymon Jesionowicz, ran away from the "Small Ghetto". Poles captured her and brought her back to the "Small Ghetto". The child's fate was a gruesome one. She was thrown into the fire and burnt there. The same thing happened to the Jews who tried to save themselves by fleeing and were caught outside the ghetto.

At the end of the Nazi atrocities, Hitler's murderers blew up the houses, where the members of the underground movement had lived and had put up a resistance and those where the caches had been located. When the houses exploded, scenes played out that were so horrifying that the human imagination is incapable of conceiving - the heads, arms and feet, of the Jews who were hiding there, flew into the air.