

Warta

During the Nazi occupation of Częstochowa, all the Jewish factories were "Aryanised". The smaller ones were turned over to *Volksdeutsche*, while the bigger ones were rebuilt as munitions factories.

In the Warta jute factory, which before the War had belonged to Markusfeld & Kohn, HASAG set up a munitions plant. The valuable and costly machines were dismantled and, after the factory's halls were rebuilt, machines for the production of infantry bullets were installed. Two thousand Jews and several hundred Poles worked in this factory. The Jews were brought from the evacuated factories in Skarżysko and Dęblin, also including *Częstochowers* who had been left over from HASAG-Pelcery and other factories.

The Jewish workers came from various countries - from Poland, first of all, and also from Germany, Czechoslovakia, Ukraine and Hungary. The general administration lay in the hands of the leader of the *Werkschutz*, Bartenschlager - a murderer who has many Jewish lives on his conscience.

The Jewish administration was headed by [the Jew] Jolles, who was Bartenschlager's right-hand-man. He acted as if he had unlimited power over the lives and deaths of the Jewish inmates. He sold the food products that were destined for the Jewish inmates, giving a share of the money to Bartenschlager and keeping the rest for himself. He demanded that everyone greet him by taking their cap off their head - otherwise, the inmate was beaten by him.

While the Jewish inmates exhausted themselves and struggled at the arduous labour, suffering hunger and need, he, Jolles, was living it up, being a tyrant over his ethnic brothers and sisters and becoming rich at the expense of the Jewish misfortune.

Despite his brutal treatment of the prisoners, there was also a good side to him. Thanks to his strictness, the barracks were clean and everyone was required to bathe on a weekly basis - thus epidemics and illnesses were avoided. He had a strong influence over Bartenschlager. Consequently, there were no selections or individual shootings. There was only one instance of a Jewish worker being shot. As a result of his intervention, the Jews were freed from work on Rosh Ha'Shanah and Yom Kippur.

The [Jewish] police were run by Commander Jidl Frenkel and his deputy, Immerglik. This was a former fish-handler from Kraków and a known man of the underworld. These people were the leaders of the Warta camp.

The Jewish kapos and foremen were usually the same person. They did not play any significant role. On the contrary, they themselves were beaten by the head foremen. The duties of the kapos were to lead their group to work and serve them lunch. The bread and coffee were given out by the "*sztubowy*" (block attendants).

The camp consisted of five blocks. One block contained a hospital and a dispensary, headed by Dr Trejwicz from Dęblin, who hurt and bled due to the Jewish tragedy and always looked

out for the interests of the inmates. He showed his communal maturity at the right moment, and saved 2,000 of his ethnic brothers and sisters.

The meals consisted of 15-20 deka [150-200 grams] bread with black coffee in the morning and a watery soup for lunch.

The factory had the following departments - bullets, toolmaking, construction etc. The work was divided into two shifts. In the toolmaking department, they worked in three shifts. The attitude of the German foremen towards the Jewish prisoners was bad. The operations managers of the toolmaking department, Nagel and Döring, as well as the forewomen Pawłowska and *Hekse* (that is what she was called), stood out for their particular brutality. Nagel and Döring unrestrainedly gave murderous beatings to men and women, without distinction. Pawłowska worked in the toolmaking department, and her methods consisted of sending some ten Jewish female workers, every day, to the guardroom to be given twenty-five lashes with a rubber baton.

The *Hekse* worked in the bullet department. She sent the Jewish female workers to the guardroom to be beaten, besides standing two hours in the same position, with head bowed down and looking into the Warta River, guarded by a *Werkschutz*.

After the work and punishments, there were round-ups. Bartenschlager would seize people for fresh work - hauling beams, timber and parts of barracks, which took long hours and during which he turned his dogs on the inmates and thrashed them with his *spitzrute*¹.

There were Polish professional labourers who work in the toolmaking department - mostly such as had completed the technical schools. They treated the persecuted Jews decently. They brought foodstuffs and sold to the Jews.

The Jewish inmates had nothing - everything was taken from them during the frequent searches. Nevertheless, they still made money by manufacturing combs, *zapalniczki* (lighters), metal rings and other things. These articles were produced clandestinely, during the night shift in the toolmaking department. This occurred under the following circumstances: the German foreman of the night shift would lock himself in his office every night and sleep for several hours. During this time, one of the labourers was on the lookout in case some *Werkschutz* should arrive, and the Jewish workers then manufactured objects to sell. The one on guard would give the signal "*Sechs!*" [six], which meant "Careful, someone's coming!" Upon hearing this signal, the workers would get back to the factory's work.

The Jewish workers' clothes were marked with a *szerylak* [??] on the chest, back and trousers, as were the women's clothes also. Besides these markings, each was required to wear a number. The numbers were in various colours. Each department had different colours, in order to prevent a worker from one department from entering another one. This was under the strict watch of the Jewish police. A Jewish policeman stood inside each work hall.

¹ [TN: Ger., also spelt "*Spießrute*"; a wooden rod used in the military punishment of "running the gauntlet", in which a soldier was made to run between two rows of soldiers who beat him with rods.]

² [TN: Possibly rhombuses, as the Yiddish word for diamonds (in cards) is "*sherl*".]

The number colours were as follows: toolmaking - brown and green; bullets - yellow and construction - yellow with a red line.

People kept abreast of world events by reading the clandestine newspapers that the Polish workers brought and from that which the doctor would tell those in his confidence. He went into town once a week to purchase medications in the pharmacy and always brought back political news.

On the Polish *Boże Narodzenie* (Christmas) of 1944, the factory did not work. On that evening, a concert of songs, recitals and dancing was held. Albert, a Jewish inmate, sang the songs which he had composed about life in the Warta camp; Mrs Rena, as well a *reżyser* [theatrical director] from Łódź, gave recitals and a young girl danced. The concert aroused a little cheerfulness in the dejected life of the camp and awakened a yearning and hope for a speedy liberation.

[Then,] the Soviet army embarked on its latest victorious offensive. Bartenschlager ran about like a deranged man. Three or four days before the liberation, he selected 400 Jewish men to be sent away to Germany. Immerglik, the deputy of the Jewish police, declared a curfew and, as a "farewell gift", he started tormenting the 400 Jews, making them perform punitive exercises. The majority of those, who were sent away, perished in the German concentration camps.

On Tuesday, 16th January, the factory was already not working. Lists were made, according to which two-thirds from all departments were to be sent away and one third would remain. Those whose names were called out from the lists were taken inside the iron workshop, which was [then] locked. Bartenschlager gave orders to his deputy that, after the Jews in the iron workshop were sent away, the rest of the Jews in the camp were to be shot. At three in the afternoon, the Soviets dropped a bomb on Częstochowa. Bartenschlager, seeing that the ground was burning under his feet, quickly fled, leaving behind his deputy Krautsch. The evacuation plan failed - everyone was let out from the iron workshop and taken back into the barracks.

A German secretary came and called Krautsch, Bartenschlager's deputy, who returned at seven in the evening. He was already afraid to enter the camp, so he just stood by the camp fence and called Jolles, giving him orders to drive all the Jews out of the barracks and to the factory grounds. Jolles sent out the Jewish police to carry out the command and he, himself, with his wife and son, went out to the factory grounds with their packs.

The moment the police began running round to the barracks to drive out the inmates, the doctor from Dęblin, Trejwicz, appeared and made a speech warning them of the consequences, to the effect that they would stand before a people's court, because the Soviets could arrive at any moment.

As it turned out, the doctor, who went to town every week to get medications from the pharmacy, was in contact with the partisans and was quite well-informed as to the situation. He also had several revolvers, which he immediately handed out to his confidantes so that they should take over the camp's security. To carry out their orders of driving the inmates out

of the barracks, the police shouted "*Wychodzić!*" (Come out!). Others stood at the entrance and pushed back in those who wanted to go outside. The result was that not a single prisoner left the barracks. Krautsch, Bartenschlager's deputy, upon seeing the state of affairs, fled at once. Jolles, with his wife and son, went back into the camp.

At ten at night, the inmates noticed that the watchtowers were unmanned. The *Werkschutz* men had also fled. A group of prisoners immediately went to the guardroom, took all the rifles and helmets and formed a self-defence unit.

In the camp stood a rostrum, which served for reports. At four o'clock in the morning, the doctor ascended the rostrum and delivered a speech in honour of the victorious Soviet armies and against the ways of Hitler and National Socialism. Shouts of "*Long live the Soviet army!*", "*Down with Hitler!*" and similar slogans rang out.

On Wednesday, 17th January, the Soviets arrived and the camp was finally liberated. The inmates ran about in the city and occupied the dwellings, from which the Germans had escaped. Those same dwellings had belonged to Jews before the occupation.

During the street warfare between the Soviets and Germans, who shot out from the churches, a Jewish girl was hit by a bullet and died.

The inmates handed over the former "ruler of the camp", Jolles, to the Soviet authorities. He was sentenced to long years of forced labour and was sent away to Soviet Russia.