

II

“Bloody Monday”

On the following day, Monday, the fourth day of the War, the first German ordinance was issued, to the effect that all the shops be opened. The city's inhabitants began to move about in the streets. Passers-by were suddenly shocked when they saw how German soldiers, with pointed rifles, were leading away a large group of people, under heavy guard, with raised hands. Many of these people were half dressed. This image made a harrowing impression on everyone, because it had become clear that the terror was beginning.

Two hours later, when we were sitting in my apartment, we heard shooting, which intensified with every minute. Fear engulfed all of us. Suddenly, we heard knocks on the door and desperate cries of *“Have mercy! Let us in!”*.

We immediately opened the door and several Jews entered our apartment. They told us that the Germans were chasing people and shooting at the passers-by. Before long, the Germans burst into the private residences and drove everyone out into the street.

They also did not pass by our apartment. Knocking on the door with rifle butts, they ordered us to let them in. When I opened the door, they entered the apartment and a soldier's command rang out, *“Hands up, everybody out!”*

We were hastily driven out into the courtyard where our neighbours already stood. We were driven out onto the street, being led away exactly like the people whom we had seen in the street before noon.

The streets are full of troops. Their guns are pointed at us and, when our eyes meet theirs, they laugh into our faces. When they recognise a Jew, they hit him over the head with the rifle butt.

Marching through the streets, we met other groups who had also been driven out of their homes.

They immediately began sorting us - men separately and women separately. The Germans then counted out two hundred people from our group and, forcing us to hold our hands up the whole time, they quickly drove us to the Municipal Administration building. Next to large pits which had been dug there and which were to have served as air-raid shelters, German military personnel already awaited us, holding machine-guns. One of them loudly called out, *“There they are, the dogs! All of them will directly be shot and thrown into the pits...”*

Fear seized us all. We were too tired to keep our hands up high, so they fell onto our heads. Hardly moving our lips, we asked one another whether these were actually our last moments. Some of the men prayed silently.

At this point, the following characteristic episode should be mentioned. It unfolded there during those horrifying moments - a young Jewish man, some thirty-odd years old, standing in the row with all of us, was trembling terribly, during which urine began streaming down his trousers. One of the officers, who was standing near us, noticed this. He approached the young man and asked him, "Why are you shaking, you swine? Now you're afraid. Why did you shoot at our troops?"

Upon hearing such words, all of us immediately realised what was [now] our standing in the world. Our musings were quickly interrupted when a Pole, who also stood with us in the row, suddenly called to the officer in broken German, "Cursed Jew, he is guilty, we are innocent". However, the officer immediately reassured him, "We will soon be finished with the Jews".

After holding us in a standing position under the burning sun for nearly two hours, without allowing us to move from our places, ten military men emerged from the Municipal Administration building and began to search each of us. Whoever was found with a razor, a pocket knife or any other sharp objects on his person, was forced to immediately jump into one of the pits, which were surrounded by soldiers who continuously shot at the people inside them.

If a person had no sharp objects in his possession, his fate hung with the soldier who was searching him - viz. whether the soldier found him pleasing or not. The selection of people for death was done at such a pace that queues of people, awaiting their doom, had already formed near the pits. Seeing the executions before their eyes, the men wrung their hands, tore out their hair and flung themselves to the ground, screaming and crying out for help with their last strength.

I was standing in the middle of the group and awaited my turn to be searched. Some secret force drove me out of the line. I went up to a German, who seemed to me to have a more lenient appearance. I unbuttoned my overcoat and emptied out the contents of the pockets - a pencil, a pen, a wallet and a handkerchief and, giving everything over to the German, I said to him, "See, I have nothing more with me. But I've left my elderly parents, a wife and a child at home, who cannot survive without me".

The German glanced at me and told me to stand to the left, viz. among those who were to be left alive. I breathed more freely.

Standing thus in the group of those who had been saved, with our hands raised and facing the pit where the first Cześćochowa victims had been killed, I noticed how the Pole, who had given away the trembling Jew from our row, was pushed into the pit and a German immediately shot him, whereas the trembling young man was put in the group of the saved.

The young man, who was religious, could not believe his luck and said, "God had mercy on me and punished the wicked man who gave me away."

Barely a third of the people, who had been led with us to the pits, remained alive.

In the meantime, new groups of people were brought from different parts of the city and they shared the same fate as our group.

Who knows how long the executions would have continued, had not a very loud air alarm and shooting at the Polish airplanes, that appeared over the city, suddenly been heard? The Germans ordered everyone to lie on the ground. The German soldiers also did the same and got down on the ground, with their guns pointed at us, at which point a command rang out, *"Whoever moves from his place or lifts up his head will be immediately shot!"*

We tried to bury our heads in the soil. The shooting became ever stronger and stronger. Literally, bullets whizzed over our bodies and we were sure that, either way, we would not emerge alive. Jews called out *"Shema Yisroel"* and recited Psalms. The Christians also called to their saints for aid. All feared lest the Germans should hear their prayers and become upset.

When the shooting, which lasted a long time, had finally quietened down, we were ordered to stand up and go towards stables, where horses stood. But not everyone arose - there were casualties in our group.

Upon entering the stable, we collapsed, exhausted, on the horse manure and fell asleep. The Germans locked the stables.

The mass execution that we had experienced was not the only one in the city. The Germans carried out similar executions in different parts of the city, including in the courtyard of the Jewish Crafts School at ul. Garncarska 19. The same types of hunts, with suchlike executions of the Częstochowa residents, also took place in the churches, schools and in all public buildings and squares.

They even set fire to entire houses and burned them down with the residents, who were not allowed to leave them. If someone tried to jump out of a window of a burning house, he was immediately shot.

The Germans set up machine guns across the entire city and the military shot, without warning, at anyone who appeared on the streets.

Thus transpired the first "Bloody Monday" in Częstochowa.