

XXXI

Bunkers¹

In the ghetto, there were Jews who made, for themselves, bunkers in attics and cellars and in all possible places. A large number of bunkers were known to numerous people. Five, ten, twenty, fifty and also one hundred men, women and children sat hidden in each of them. They provided themselves with food products enough for a few days, thinking that the “bad time” would soon pass and that they would then be able to return to their homes. No one anticipated that, after deporting the Jews from their houses, policemen or Germans would be stationed to guard the residences. The fate of these Jews in the bunkers was very sad. Jewish policemen were also forbidden from approaching the streets from which the Jews had been driven out. There, only Ukrainians and gendarmes stood and guarded the dwellings from thieves and whoever they encountered there was shot on the spot. As a result, the Jews could not emerge from their hideouts. Their food ran out, they were without air and it was so hot there in those holes that people were forced to go about undressed. Small children were suffocated by their mothers, because their crying could become perilous. If the mother herself was unwilling to do this, others who were in the bunker did it.

No one knew what was happening in the street. They only sensed a stillness all around. Only from time to time, the heavy tread of military boots was heard and, if from some of the bunkers the Jews went out at night to have a look at what was going on in their homes, they only saw that the houses had been plundered and the men with the rifles, who were hanging about there, were guarding to such an extent, that it was impossible to emerge from the hideouts. They returned to the holes and continued to stay there without food and without air until the next night, when they once more crawled out – and thus it repeated itself for several days.

The relatives of these people in hiding, who were in the streets further down the ghetto, from which the Jews had not yet been driven out, feared that the people in the holes would die of starvation, because they already knew that the *akcja* would still continue for a long time. So, they told the Jewish policemen about the secret places and who was to be found there. For large sums, they helped transfer the Jews from the bunkers into the buildings where the Jews, who had not yet gone through the *akcja*, were. The policemen went to the bunkers with the gendarmes of their acquaintance and shouted into the holes, “*Yidn [Jews], we have come to save you!*” They made reference to their relatives, who had sent them there, and the hopeless people emerged, one by one, from their pits and holes. They were trembling with fear and looked terrible - unwashed, [their hair] overgrown, famished. They could barely stand on their feet. They were led away by a gendarme to the streets further into the ghetto.

Leading the Jews through the streets entailed great danger. If they were stopped by someone along the way, the gendarme leading them had to say that they had been hidden and he had found them by chance. Then their life depended on the one who had stopped them. They

¹ [TN: As explained in the book “Churban Czenstochow” by Dr B. Orenstein, in the chapter “Częstochower Folklore”, the word “bunker” was used in ref. to any hideout – not specifically to a specially constructed underground concrete shelter.]

could be shot on the spot or be taken away to where there were other Jews to be sent away on the next transport. But, first of all, they were prompted to give up money, gold and other valuables. In such perilous moments, understandably, no one thought of hiding the money, and [they] gave up the last [of their possessions].

The Jews, from the not yet “cleansed” streets, welcomed their guests with whatever they could in those days of hunger. Those [viz. the latter], on their part, envied the Jews in the closed buildings, in that they had not had to suffer so much in the hideouts and holes, from which not everyone emerged alive. Many children were left there and, also, not all the older people came back out of the bunkers.

Very rapidly, however, the newly arrived looked about [and saw] that there was nothing to be envious of anybody. They discovered that everyone was expecting to be herded into the carriages tomorrow or the day after. The newly arrived were advised to sleep well and fortify themselves with whatever there was, [so that] they would be able to walk with everybody and not trail behind, in order not to be shot by the murderers on the way.

Officers of the gendarmerie attacked the Jewish police’s station and searched all the Jewish policemen. The money and valuables, which were found on them, were seized and, in addition, they were given a good beating. The Germans, it seems, had found out about the deals which the Jewish policemen had been making lately. An ordinance was issued, to the effect that a Jewish constable was not allowed to walk in the street on his own, but with a Polish policeman or a gendarme. Thus, the “golden deals” they had seized upon came to an end. Three Jewish policemen (Parasol, Rubinsztajn and Rozenberg) received special passes from the *Hauptmann* to be able to walk in the ghetto streets on their own. They had a particular merit with the *Hauptmann*.

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The *Hauptmann* sent a gendarme to the Craftsmen’s House to fetch his tailor, Josef Gryn. A few hours later, the tailor returned alone – but no longer as a tailor, but in a cap of the Jewish police. Gryn had become a policeman and had received a pass giving him the right to come into the ghetto streets.

The craftsmen treated the new policeman reservedly, but they wanted to know what the *Hauptmann* had said to him regarding the state of affairs in general and the situation of the craftsmen in particular. The tailor, however, did not want to say too much and we found out nothing from him.

A few days after the *akcja*, Inspector Lindermann appeared in the Craftsmen’s House. He went in to [see] the tailor Kac, and all the craftsmen immediately went in there. A familiar German, from the *Stadthauptmannschaft* [City Administration], who hitherto had had the craftsmen under his command, had finally showed up. Everyone wanted to know if they were still “his” craftsmen, of whom he and all his people had, until then, made good use. He recounted that there had been negotiations between the *Stadthauptmann* and *Hauptmann* Degenhardt regarding the Craftsmen’s House, and there was a hope that the building would still continue

under the protection of the *Stadthauptmann*, in which case nothing would change in the Craftsmen's House. In the coming hours, he would know for sure. And he asked to keep the matter a secret for the time being. Everyone formed a ring around him as if he were a person they knew and he expressed his distress over the expulsion of the Jews.

The craftsmen had strangers living with them, who had made their way into the building over the course of the recent days through the walls and fences. They did not appear in the lists of the *Stadthauptmann*, which were hanging on the walls in the workshops as confirmed professional workmen. The craftsmen asked the inspector to add these people to the lists. Inspector Lindermann promised that, on the following day, he would come with the stamp of the *Stadthauptmann*, under which he was authorised to sign, and he would gladly arrange the issue in such manner that all the people, who were at the moment in the building, would be legalised. He warned, however, not to let in any more new people – because the more Jews there were in the Craftsmen's House, the harder it would be to settle the matter with *Hauptmann Degenhardt*.

Following the inspector's visit, the craftsmen cheered up a bit. The hope, that their close ones would be able to be saved, raised their spirits to some extent. One promised another not to bring in anymore outsiders. However, when runaways arrived once again - putting their lives at risk, climbing in the night over walls and fences in order to make their way into the Craftsmen's House - no one could bring himself to not let in these hapless people.

On the following morning, Inspector Lindermann arrived with an official from the *Stadthauptmannschaft* and began to make a list of all the people who were in the Craftsmen's House, in each craftsman's home separately. Lindermann taught the craftsmen how to justify the newly-arrived people to the new official - that they were all needed for the work. A list was composed, which included 187 souls.

The two Germans declared that the Craftsmen's House would continue being under the management of the *Stadthauptmann* and the craftsmen would continue to be employed there.

The list was closed. Every craftsman received a note, in which his family and his workers/journeymen were enumerated. Each note was signed by Inspector Lindermann, under the seal of the *Stadthauptmannschaft*. This important paper was hung in the finest spot in each workshop, and the craftsmen believed that the *Ausrottung Kommando* [Extermination Squad] would have no power over them.

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On Sunday, 27th September 1942 in the afternoon, *Hauptmann Degenhardt* appeared in the ghetto.

Jewish policemen carried baskets with half-kilo loaves of bread. The Jews were led out of each building separately and each one, old or young, received half a kilo of bread. The *Hauptmann* stood by while the bread was distributed and pierced each one with his gaze. He asked some

people their names and what was their occupation. At others, he only looked, growling angrily like a dog. Each person took his bit of bread and went back into his house.

We, in the Craftsmen's House, were curious as to whether they would also call us to take bread, not because we were looking forward to that chunk of bread - in the Craftsmen's House, everyone could buy bread, and there was also no lack of money for that – but the thing was, that if the craftsmen still continued being under the authority of the *Stadthauptmann* and not of *Hauptmann* Degenhardt, we did not have to receive any bread. We were therefore surprised when a Jewish policeman began calling us to go down to the courtyard, stand in line and go out into the street for bread. This meant that we were considered just like the other Jews from all the other houses, for whom deportation awaited.

But there was no time for contemplation. Everyone went obediently out to the street. *Hauptmann* Degenhardt looked keenly at the craftsmen with their children and "journeymen"². They gave each of us the portion of bread and led us back into the building.

Meanwhile, the Jewish policemen, who lived with us in the Craftsmen's House, returned from their service and told [us] that they had been ordered to come again to the police station the following morning before daybreak and that, tomorrow, another *akcja* would take place, which would once more encompass thousands of Jews.

² [TN: These were obviously the non-professional newcomers that had infiltrated the Craftsmen's House.]