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Cieszanów Labour Camp

There is, in the Lublin region, a small *shtetl* named Cieszanów, where the Germans created a labour camp for Jews. The Jewish Employment Office received a notification from the authorities to the effect that it was to provide 1,000 young men, aged between eighteen and twenty-five, for the Cieszanów labour camp. Officials immediately went out with notices and demanded that the young men to report, over the course of one day, to the Employment Office, in order to be sent from there to the workplace.

Meanwhile, the *Judenrat* took advantage of the opportunity to increase its funds and let the wealthier people buy their way out for money. Obviously, others were forced to present themselves in their places – those who were poor.

A few days after the young men had been sent away to the camp, we received letters, from there, in which it was communicated that the people, who had had the misfortune to end up in the labour camp there, were being tortured at work, beaten murderously and had nothing to eat. The parents of the young men raced to the *Judenrat* with the letters and demanded aid for their children. But, just like in all other cases, here too, the *Judenrat* could not help in any way.

From time to time, alarming letters would arrive from Cieszanów, with ever more terrifying news to the effect that people were being tortured to death. But the parents of the hapless ones, along with the *Judenrat*, were helpless and could do nothing. Thus passed the summer and, only in the autumn of 1940, did escapees arrive from the camp and we found out what had happened in Cieszanów

When the young men had been sent out of Częstochowa, they were taken, escorted by police, to Lublin. There, they were loaded onto cattle wagons and put under the charge of SA¹ men, who had specially arrived from Cieszanów to bring back the labourers/slaves. When they arrived at the location in the middle of the night, in darkness, the SA men drove them out of the carriages with iron whips, worse than cattle are driven, and chased them on in this manner for several kilometres under lashes and blows until [reaching] the labour camp.

When the SA men finally allowed the young men to catch their breath, they, the hapless ones, collapsed in exhaustion onto the bare ground under the open sky.

In the morning, when it began to dawn, they were first able to look around at where they were. It was a wide field in which roofless barracks had been erected. They had been prepared by the Jews that had been brought there before.

¹ [TN: "Sturmabteilung", Ger., lit. "Storm Detachment"; Nazi storm troopers.]

There was no time to look around for long, because their immediately ordeal commenced. They were given their daily food rations - ten *deka* [100g] bread and half a litre watery soup - and were taken to work in a nearby forest, where the Germans were secretly building fortifications next to the contemporary German-Russian border in the Lublin region. This was in 1940, while Germany and Russia were still in “friendly” relations.

Under the supervision of the SA men, the Jews dug pits. The *Spitzruten* [pointed rods], entwined with lead, flew over the Jewish heads during the work. With their *Spitzruten* and revolvers, the German murderers hacked at the young Jewish men’s heads, mutilating faces, gouging out eyes and knocking out teeth – and very often, after such “operations”, corpses were left lying at the workplace. The dead were immediately thrown into the pits and were covered with soil. To them, all the Jews had but one name - “Izrael”.

Jews chopped down trees in the forest and the Germans beat [them]. It made no difference whether one worked well or not – everyone, without exception, was beaten murderously. The Germans thought up different means of torture - an SA character could suddenly shout at a Jew, “*Hose runter! Arsch hoch! Leg sich hin!*”, which means “Trouser down! Raise the bottom part of your body up²! Lie down!” Such a twenty-odd-year-old young man would immediately lie down on the trunk of a chopped tree with his bare bottom up high and two comrades together, with whom the young man was working, were forced to take up two thin tree branches and beat their comrade with all their strength. If the beating was not to the killer’s liking, he would also order the two comrades to lay down next to the first one and when all three were lying down, he took a piece of wood and began flaying and lashing their bodies with all his strength until blood sprayed. Oftentimes, he beat them so long, that the victims ceased to scream and fell unconscious from the tree trunk to the grass, which became wet with blood. Any of them, who did not immediately get up, was thrown into a pit and at once was covered up. It once occurred that a young man stood up in the middle of the beating and asked the SA man, “Why are you beating me?”. That young man was frighteningly punished - they forced him to put his hands in his trouser pockets and, in this position, placed him standing in a pit and covered him with soil while still alive. They only let the hair protrude from the ground, so that the murderers could show what happened to someone who asked questions - “Jews”, they said, “have to do everything they are told and not ask.”.

The leader of the camp was a major named Dolf³. In the opinion of the Jews who slaved under him, the major had earned well the title “King of the Sadists”. One of his favourite “games” was to line up a row of men and aim his revolver between his victims’ eyes. But the Jews had already become so indifferent to death that it already made no impression on them when the sadist called them to this “game”. Dying by a bullet was a “luxurious death” – it was preferable to be shot than to be beaten with crowbars or to be buried alive.

Major Dolf visited the workplace on a daily basis and, in every department, he left several young men dead. Major Dolf had a son not far from camp, who would often come on a visit to his father. The younger Dolf enjoyed sports and, in particular, loved boxing. He would line several Jews up in a hall and “teach” them boxing, beating them between the eyes, knocking out teeth and breaking noses. And, when the Jews already lay battered on the ground, he

² [TN: “*Arsch hoch!*” literally means “Arse high!”]

³ [TN: Although often mentioned in Yiddish sources as “Dolf” with an “F”, his actual surname was **Dolp** - SS-Sturmbannführer Hermann Dolp.]

beat them over the head with a piece of wood and chased them out of there, after which he brought in others to replace them. Thus, the “game” would be repeated several times. The younger Dolf, just like his father, was also fond of practising shooting. But instead of between the eyes, in the centre of the head. He did this in the following manner - he ordered a Jew to run and shot after him for as long as it took him to hit the centre of his head. Each time, he came to the camp, he had to engage in this type of “sport”, for as long as it took him to hit with a bullet the exact centre of a “clever” Jewish head, as he would say.

Major Dolf and his son had large, trained dogs, that they would set on the Jewish workers. These hounds would savagely attack the victims and tear pieces of flesh from their faces and limbs. After carrying out this bloody work, they would be caressed and patted by their masters.

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New transports with Jews arrived every day from the surrounding cities and *shtetls*. Older Jews also started to arrive. There were surely no more young people in those towns. Things in camp worsened increasingly. The masses of people were tortured [to death] and new ones came in their place. There were no sick people here, everyone was healthy and strong. When Dolf inspected the Jews every morning and asked who was ill, no one reported sick, because the sick would be shot.

One summer night, several SA men burst into a barrack holding metal whips. The Jews were lying on the bare ground. Upon hearing the tumult, they rose to their feet. The SA murderers, who were very drunk, ordered one hundred Jews to stand naked in the yard. Several Jews were shot on the spot, the others were given the command to march into the *shtetl* Cieszanów. Upon arrival in the *shtetl*, the Jews were forced onwards naked to the cemetery. Only three young men managed to escape along the way. When the tortured men arrived in the cemetery, their limbs were skinned from the whips and burnt like in a flame of fire from the lashes that had constantly hailed upon them while being forced on the way. The killers ordered them to dig pits, but there were no spades. They drove the hapless people into a swamp and shot all of them there.

Several young men in the barrack decided to flee to the Russian side. For several days, they worked diligently, so as not to arouse any suspicion. On one dark night, they cautiously left the barrack. They went into a forest and crossed to the Russian side. After wandering about for several hours, they were stopped by the Russian border guards, which took them for a hearing before a military commission. The young men were interrogated regarding the horrendous conditions in the labour camp with the Germans and their declarations were recorded. But they explained to them that, according to an agreement with the Germans, the Russians were not permitted to let anyone illegal across the border and that the young men, therefore, needed to be sent back to the Germans. No weeping or begging was to any avail and, on a dark night, they were taken back to the border by Russian soldiers.

The despairing young men were forced to sneak back into the camp, where they joined a different workgroup, thus erasing their traces.

The parents of the young men, who were working in Cieszanów, upon learning that their offspring were going about ragged and tattered, made efforts through the *Judenrat* to be allowed to send them packages with necessary items. The authorities, this time, showed “understanding” and granted permission. But half of the things they sent were immediately seized on the spot. [Then] the SA men in camp took their share of what was left and [only] scraps reached the camp labourers.

With the onset of winter, the work in the fields, digging pits, ceased. At this time, the SA men, for large sums, looked the other way when a Jew stole out of the camp. In this manner, some were saved. But the camp continued to exist and a large number of Jews remained there.