

# XLI

## “The Journey to Palestine”

On Saturday, 20<sup>th</sup> March 1943, at four o'clock in the afternoon, the *Hauptmann* came to the *Judenrat* and ordered *Judenrat* official Kurland to give him the lists of those registered to travel to Palestine.

The *Hauptmann* browsed through the lists and said that he now wished to compile a new list of the first group of Jews who would travel to Palestine. These would be those who had earned this with their performance - the doctors, *Judenrat* people, lawyers, engineers and others who had a higher education.

The *Hauptmann* ordered that all the men, with their wives and children, were to go out to the Small Market [May Rynek] for the new registration, which he wished to conduct personally.

The Jewish police went to seek out all the people to give them the good news. These families looked for one another and hurried to the happy meeting.

The president of the *Judenrat* [Leon Kopinski], with his wife and son, hastened to arrive as early as possible for the registration. His sister, together with her child, just barely managed to convince him that she, too, should be able to benefit from his merit, and he took her along to the registration. The lawyer [Szymon] Pohorile, with his wife and two children, went out to the marketplace. They were followed by the other *Judenrat* members – Adv. [Jeremjasz] Gitler, with his wife and two children, [Moryc] Kopiński, the president's brother, with his wife and children, [Dawid] Borzykowski, with his wife, [Moryc] Galster, with his wife and his married son with his wife, [Zelig] Rotbard, with his wife and a daughter, [Bernard] Kurland, with his wife and daughter, [Dawid-Nusen] Berliner, with his wife, and Zerke<sup>1</sup>, with his family.

The doctors also rushed, with their families, to the new registration - the very handsome Dr Epszajn, with his wife and two boys, Dr Lewin, with his wife, Dr Winer, with his wife and two children, old Dr Lipiński, with his wife and his son and the young Dr Lipiński, with his wife and their child on [his] arm. Doctor Kagan hastened, with his wife and son, the lady Dr Grunwald, Dr Falk, with his wife and child, Dr Praport with his wife and sons, Dr Kian with his wife and sons, Dr Warmund with his wife and sons, Dr Dobroszicki with his wife and child, Dr Rozen with his wife and child and Dr Branicki with his wife and child. Adv. Bratman with his wife, Adv. Wilczyński, Adv. Lampe, I with his wife, Adv. Wajnberg with his wife, Eng. Firsztenpel [sic Fersztenfeld<sup>2</sup>] with his wife and daughter, and yet others, who managed to “pull off” to be allowed into the “registration to travel to Palestine” sought out their wives and children and raced out to the Small Market in order not to be late.

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<sup>1</sup> [TN: As this *Judenrat* member does not appear in other *Częstochowa* yizkor books, we are unsure as to the exact spelling of his surname (it could have been *Dzierka*); we have rendered it phonetically as it appears in the original Yiddish.]

<sup>2</sup> [TN: The surname as it is spelt in the original Yiddish does not exist, whereas “*Fersztenfeld*” appears in the *Częstochowa* records; it seems obvious that the printers mistakenly added a point inside the second “*Fey*”, making it a “*Pey*”, and that they omitted the “*Daled*” at the end.]

Masses of people stood at the exit and by the barbed-wire fences of the “labour camp” and looked on, with envy, at how the city’s intelligentsia was lining up for the registration.

Everyone lined up in the marketplace by family, every man with his family. The *Hauptmann* went about, throughout the marketplace, and spoke here with one and there with another in a very friendly and pleasant manner. The *prezes* was emboldened by the *Hauptmann’s* amiability and inquired as to whether he should order his officials to compile a list of those present. The *Hauptmann* affably replied that that was not necessary - he had a good memory and did not need any lists.

Meanwhile, late arrivals came running, but the Ukrainian, who was standing guard, refused to let them in. The dentist Mrs Bresler created a commotion. She wished to go out to her friends [in the market]. The *Hauptmann*, upon hearing the tumult, went over to the entrance. Mrs Bresler apologised for her tardiness. She had been searching for her husband and had not been able to find him. He was also a doctor. The *Hauptmann* replied that it was a great shame, but he could not wait any longer. He was very kind and ordered the Ukrainian to let Mrs Bresler into the marketplace. She was soon gleefully standing amongst those chosen. Then, the physician Mrs Wajsberg arrived, the longstanding director of the Jewish Hospital. The *Hauptmann* asked her if she had children. No, she had none – the *Hauptmann* ordered her to stay [in the “labour camp”]. “It is already too late,” he said. She would travel with the second group, along with the current hospital directors, Drs Szperling and Wolberg, who had to still remain here [longer]. And here the convert to Christianity, Dr Kon, who was now called Wacław Konar, came running up – his wife had only just found him. The *Hauptmann*, however, did not permit them to go out into the marketplace. “You stay here for now,” he said, “After all, you cannot leave your remaining Jews without doctors. You will travel with the second group”.

Those assembled in the market listen to the *Hauptmann’s* words and smile at one another. They are saying, “We will be the first to travel”. Contentment pours over their faces, like those saved from a sinking ship.

The *Hauptmann* approaches those assembled and notices that they are cold. They are lightly dressed. After all, they have only come to be registered - just a few minutes, they had been told. The *Hauptmann* passes by in front of each one, looking keenly into their faces. His smile has disappeared. He no longer says a single word to anyone. When he was already at the end of the line, in which he had counted off 147 people, he gave a shout in the general stillness to his *Wachmeister*, *Überschär* – “*Alle auf die Wache!*” [Everyone to the guardroom!]

All the assembled, the intelligentsia and learned people, suddenly shuddered. They looked<sup>3</sup> as if the ground had suddenly opened up under their feet and they were sliding down into an abyss.

Also, those who were standing by the barbed-wire fences of the “labour camp” and had earlier looked at the “lucky ones” with envy, that they would be torn out of the murderous

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<sup>3</sup> [TN: “Received an expression as if”, in the original Yiddish.]

German hands and travel to Palestine , they, too, were shaken by the *Hauptmann's* four words, "*Alle auf die Wache!*"

Everyone already knew well that those who went "to the guardroom" never returned.

Soon, gendarmes and Ukrainians approached the assembled and ordered them to [start] walking. The people, who had just now been happy, looked across to the "labour camp" with despairing gazes and envied the masses by the barbed-wire fences.

The *Hauptmann* stood in a triumphant pose and perceptibly derived pleasure from the hellish spectacle. He remained thus, on the spot, until the gendarmes had led the 147 victims into the guardroom.

Half an hour later, large, empty freight lorries drove up and came to a halt, one hundred metres from the guardroom. Soon, the people were chased out of the guardroom by strong squads of gendarmerie and Ukrainians. The trucks took on the passengers and quickly drove off with them.

Everyone in the "labour camp" was curious to see the direction that these lorries would take. We soon saw they were travelling in the direction of Olsztyn. The Jewish cemetery also lay on this road.

The people of the "labour camp" looked on speechlessly. One understood the other without words. Regardless of the earlier envy towards the "better people", whom a "journey to Palestine" awaited, now a shudder went through everyone. The "labour camp", confined within the three filthy alleyways, all of a sudden felt as if orphaned - no more were the educated, intelligent people, among whom there had been many who would console and calm the spirits in difficult moments.

The "labour camp" felt as if the murderer Degenhardt had now hacked its head off.

At half past seven o'clock in the evening, a group of Ukrainians approached the entrance to the "labour camp". They were the same ones who had accompanied the trucks.

It soon became known that the 147 people were no longer alive.

The three alleys of the "labour camps" became filled with people. All were out in the street. A sorrow enveloped everyone. Not only those close to the victims, but all wept with hot tears. Everyone felt the agony and everyone felt profoundly sickened and, perhaps in a certain manner, insulted by the vile comedy which the sadistic *Hauptmann* had enacted.

For the time being, no details could be elicited, because the Ukrainians did not wish to recount anything. We only found out that the *Hauptmann* had ordered, over the telephone, that the residences of those murdered be immediately guarded.

The *Hauptmann* himself soon arrived in his car at the “labour camp”. He personally saw to it that the residences of the slain were bricked up. He sauntered about in the alleyways and looked at the Jewish policemen with a cynical smile.

During the next few days, everything was taken out of the dwellings and transferred to the storerooms at ul. Garibaldi; but, before that, the *Hauptmann* himself searched the residences and, according to what the Jewish policemen recounted, in the house of the *prezes* and of a few other members of the *Judenrat*, he found diamonds and gold coins, as well as large sums of money, which he took.

Jewish policemen, who were acquainted with some Ukrainians, elicited details from them regarding how the 147 people had been killed.

They had been taken away, in the vehicles, to the cemetery. The victims were seized by a fear of death and did not wish to come out of the trucks. They were beaten with rifle butts and flung down to the ground. The children were lined up on one side and the older ones on the other. Heartrending scenes took place during the separation of the children from the parents and, here too, it did not go through without a beating with the rifle butts. The children were lined up next to large pits. Several metres further off stood a machine-gun and fired at the children, who immediately fell into the pits. The parents watched this horrifying image and tore the hair from their heads, tearing their garments off themselves in despair. But they, too, were also immediately chased there to the pits. Standing on the edge, some embraced each other, two or three people together and, when the machine-guns began firing, they fell thus embraced into the pits.

One Ukrainian ended the description in this manner:

“There was a mass of people in the pit - dead and alive. Groans were heard, some stretched out their hands, others were muttering something. The gendarme set his machine-gun up by the pit and shot into it, until it became quite still. Then, we sat in the trucks and drove back.”

On the following morning, Sunday, 21<sup>st</sup> March 1943, two Jews travelled out to the cemetery to bury a deceased person, who had died in the “labour camp”. They saw fresh, large pits covered with fresh soil, without a mound, but flat, even with the level of the ground.

Everything looked peaceful, as if nothing had happened here on the previous day.



*The desecrated Częstochowa [Jewish] cemetery*



