

# The Destruction of Częstochowa



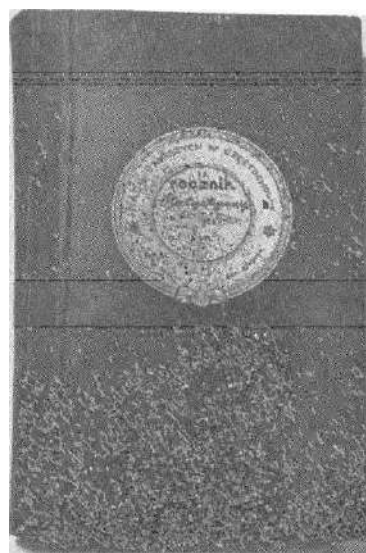
## The Community's Catastrophe

[A.]

At the outbreak of the War in 1939, Częstochowa numbered over 29,000 Jewish residents. The first one hundred Jewish victims fell on "Bloody Monday", 4<sup>th</sup> September 1939, when the Germans carried out the first pacification of Częstochowa. After that, the permanent tormenting of Jews began. Bands of Jews were taken away to work on a daily basis and, under blows from rifle-butts, women and men, children and youngsters, were forced to fill in aerial-defence trenches with their bare hands, carry countless bricks from one place to another, and to perform other [forms of] gruelling Sisyphian labour. The one who excelled the most in torturing via this work was the then chief of the Gestapo, [Friedrich-Wilhelm] Krüger<sup>1</sup>.



*Front cover of the 1940  
municipal year-book published  
by the Judenrat*



*The back cover*

On 16<sup>th</sup> September 1939, by orders of *Stadthauptmann* [City Captain] Wendler, a *Judenrat* [Jewish Council] of six men was established, which was to occupy itself with creating free kitchens for the poor.

On 9<sup>th</sup> October 1939, this council was expanded to a total of twenty-four men, who immediately began to busy themselves with all matters pertaining to the life of the Jewish community in Częstochowa.

On 15<sup>th</sup> November, a contribution of one million marks was imposed upon the Jewish population. Under the threat that hundreds of Jews would be shot, this contribution was to be paid up within ten days. After bribing the *Stadthauptmann* with 100,000 marks, the contribution was reduced to 400,000 marks.

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<sup>1</sup> [TN: SS and Police Leader (SS- und Polizeiführer) of the Generalgouvernement between 1939-1943.]

At the end of December 1939, under the direction of gendarmes, a small pogrom was carried out against the Jewish populace, which ended with the burning of the New, so-called “German”, Synagogue.

On a certain Friday night in January 1940, thousands of men, women, and above all young girls, were driven out in the middle of the night, half naked, from their dwellings. After holding them for hours in the snowy frost, those wounded and badly beaten were released. The rest were herded to one designated point. There, they all had to strip completely naked. The German officers and soldiers tortured them sadistically, raped some of the young girls, and then sent them off to various jobs. Besides taking Jews away to work within Częstochowa itself, many were also sent off to labour camps in foreign parts, which swallowed up no small number of victims.

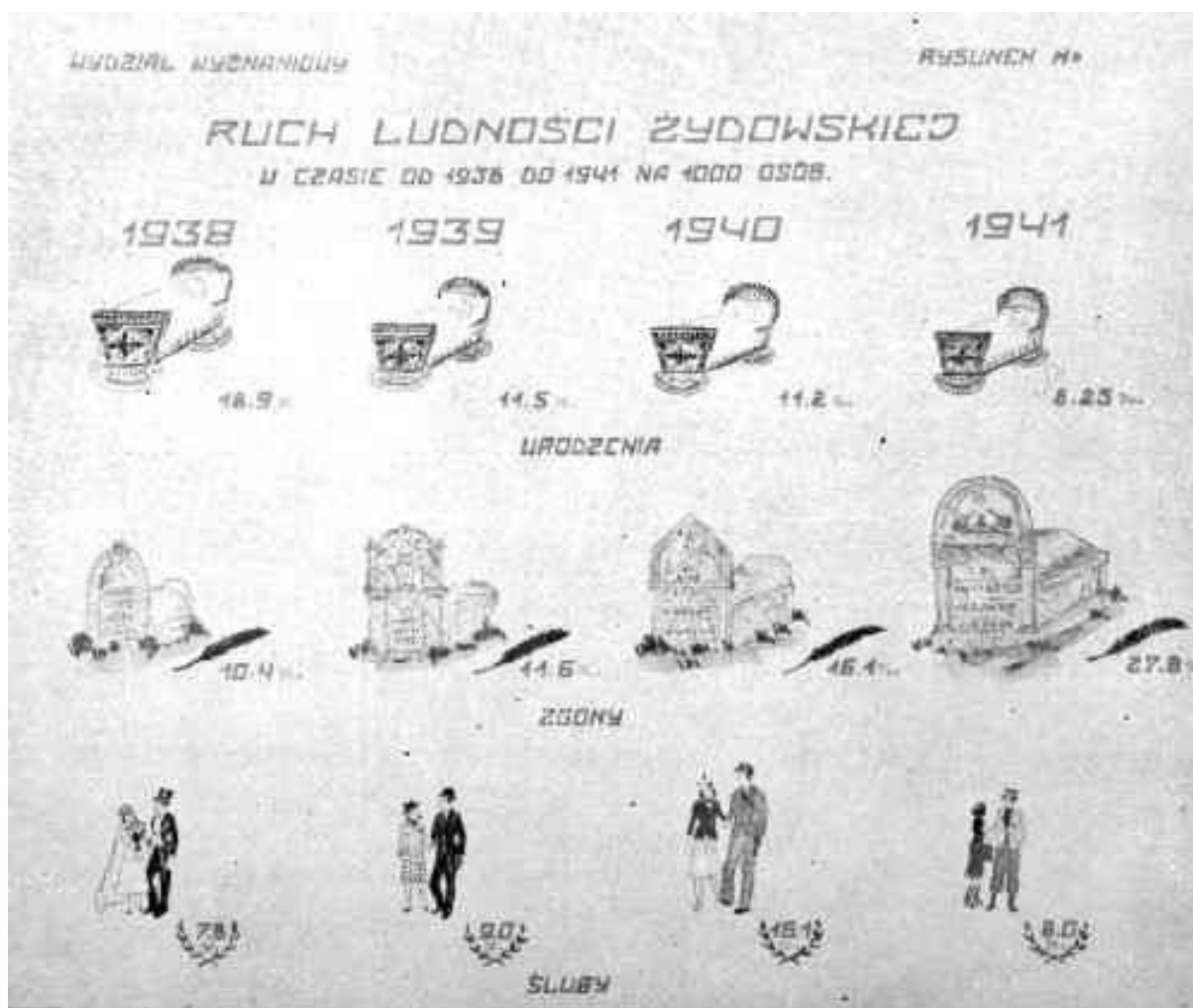
Very soon, the “*Aussiedlungen*” [resettlements] of entire streets and of individual buildings as well began. No one was sure whether tomorrow he would still be where today he built his new home. During each re-location, the Germans robbed for their State Treasury, but even more so – for themselves privately. All Jewish property was confiscated. From day to day, the Jews became poorer and the need deeper.

From March 1940, the Jewish population became progressively larger, with thousands of refugees from the surrounding towns and *shtetls*, which had been annexed to the Reich. By the start of April 1941, the Jewish community in Częstochowa already numbered 48,000 residents.



*The map of the city, marking the ghettos and camps*

On 23<sup>rd</sup> April, the *Big Ghetto* was established. While, before the War, Częstochowa's 29,000 Jews had inhabited 9,000 homes, the 48,000 were now squeezed into 4,520 houses. Contagious diseases began to spread. Spotted typhus [viz. fever] and dysentery took a particularly heavy toll, especially among the mass of refugees. The blows were frequent, and progressively intensified. But, after each blow, people shook themselves off and continued pulling life's heavy wagon, as they awaited new blows.



*Movement of the Jewish population from 1938 to 1941 (proportion according to 1,000 people)*

There were also a few rays of light in the dark life: under the wing of *TOZ*, which conducted intensive activity from the beginning of the War and onwards, two hundred newly-trained paramedics threw themselves, with all their youthful ardour, into the war against the contagious diseases. The feeding point ("świątlica" [common room]), which the *TOZ* ran for two thousand starving children, thanks to the devoted and passionate youth, was quickly transformed into a warm, bright home for all the children in the ghetto. The youngsters lit up and warmed up the life and spirits of the poor and lonely children with their passionate hearts. The *TOZ* also operated a choir and a drama circle for adults. Under the editorship of Dr A. Wolberg, the *TOZ* also published an illegal periodical publication [titled] "*Rasta*" (abbreviation of *Rada Starszych* [Council of Elders]), in which the life of the Jews in the ghetto, [and] the activity of the German organs of power and the *Judenrat* are reflected - with contributions from lawyer J. Roziner, L. Brener and R. Fogel, as well as with the technical assistance of L. Kusznir and M. Kusznir.



and *shtetls*. As people with no use, these [points] would have to be their salvation.

The queues at the Bureau of Labour became longer every day. Doctors, lawyers, professor and students, directors, merchants and simple tradesmen turned into cobblers, tailors, locksmiths and brush-makers.

There were also enormous queues in front of the *Judenrat's* premises. Here, thousands of wretched skeletons, covered in rags, with hands eaten by leprosy, pushed their way to the little windows and tried to convince the officials that they had, for a long time, already been once affluent and no longer required anyone's aid, that they were also ready for work and [that], as useful elements, they, too, were fully entitled to further remain in Częstochowa.

The political parties began negotiations regarding a joint armed offensive, in case of some "*akcja*" [operation] on the part of the invader. Sadly, the most deciding conference pertaining to this matter - which was to be held on 21<sup>st</sup> September, with the participation of an emissary from the Warsaw ŻOB<sup>3</sup> and a local Jewish captain, Dr A. Wolberg - did not take place. Some of the delegates from the political parties, who were to have taken part in this conference, were apprehended by the gendarmes. On that same day, the unrest grew from hour-by-hour. The chief of police, the murderer Degenhardt, threatened the severest repressions for spreading false rumours and demanded of the *Judenrat* and the Jewish *Ordnungsdienst*<sup>4</sup> to put an end to the spreading of "rumours". On 21<sup>st</sup> September, at three o'clock in the morning, the streets in the ghetto were surrounded by Ukrainian and Lithuanian auxiliary police. Everyone already saw clearly that the *akcja* was beginning.

## B.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1942, at five o'clock in the morning, the *akcja* began. Thousands of people were running from house to house, from building to building and from street to street, like terrified ants from a destroyed anthill - one carrying a rucksack, one a pack of bedding and another a little tableware. Everywhere, they came up against gendarmes and Ukrainian auxiliary police, armed from head to foot. Under a hail of blows, each one is chased towards the metal factory, where the workshops are. Wives are separated from husbands [and] children from their mothers, and woe to anyone who dares say goodbye to his wife or child. A few with axes in hand, others with fists up high and also some who kneel and beg the murderers for mercy set themselves apart from the great mass of herded people. But they all meet the same end – annihilation.

The German hangmen and their destruction and death march amongst the hundreds of murdered corpses. [Those who] pay with their lives [are] the elderly, children and also those who dare not let themselves be separated from their wife and child. The streets are filled with horrifying lamentation. Mothers, mad with desperation, call their children who have become lost - and fall with shattered skulls. The cries of the children, seeking their mothers, tear through the air and rend one's heart. Those with contagious diseases flee the hospital and are felled at the gate. Human shadows, clasping little red books, supposedly confirming the holder's usefulness, stand in the dark in enormous queues, pressed one to the other, in front of the gates of the metal factory and move slowly forwards. Here, the cruel police hound, the chief of murderers, Degenhardt, walks about placidly, indicating with his stick, "*You to the right! You to the left!*", and so on.

The tattered little red books, in fact, end up in the wastebaskets, and the people are pushed into the cattle carriages, where each one is stripped of his pack, his shoes are removed and 120 of them are

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<sup>3</sup> [TN: Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa – Jewish Combat Organisation]

<sup>4</sup> [TN: "Order Service" aka the Ghetto Police.]

pushed into each carriage. Only a small number made it to the workshops, where some members of the *Judenrat* were already officiating.

The day ended with 8,000 deported and several hundred murdered on the spot.

On the morrow, all the ghetto streets are heavily guarded. [There is] heavy gunfire in the quarter from which the Jews have already been sent away. Here, they are now murdering those Jews who attempted to conceal themselves. Frequent shots also echo in the still inhabited streets, which cut short the lives of those daring to look out a window or to show themselves on a balcony.

Everyone spends four days in intense apprehension. A thought of hope fleets through many [minds] — maybe, [just] maybe, nothing more will happen! This tense waiting continued for four days - [which seemed like] four long, horrifying years. On the fifth day, 27<sup>th</sup> September, the news came like a terrifying thunderbolt, that the Jews were being, once again, deported from a certain number of streets. All are herded into the large New Market Square [*Nowy Rynek*], where the “selection” is taking place. Thousands of Jews were put into two dense, long files. Dozens of gendarmes, with Gestapo men and hundreds of Ukrainians, encircle the square. A deathly silence reigns. Only the stammering voice of the cruel chief of police is heard - “*Who are you by trade?*” – and, without waiting for any response, he points at the heads with his stick. With his characteristic “*You to the right, you to the left*”, he decides the life and death of each individual.

This day, too, ended in 6,000 deported and many killed on the spot. Suddenly, a glint of hope - the gendarmes had brought a group of Jews, who had bribed their way, with gold, money and diamonds, to the workshops. Based on this, the *Judenrat* began collecting ransom money for the *Schutzpolizei*<sup>5</sup>. Jews relinquish their last possessions. People pay up everything they own - even jewellery that has been passed down generation to generation - if only to save those closest to them. Bundles with gold, jewellery and precious stones make their way to the gendarmes, and the tricked Jews – to the cattle carriages to Treblinka.

A mad dash of robbing ensued. People conned everything out from the living [and] tore out gold teeth and chopped off fingers with gold rings from the dead. Carts, laden with property and goods from the Jewish dwellings, stretch along the streets to the warehouses of the *Schutzpolizei*. The Jewish “guard” at the *Möbellager* [Furniture Camp], under the leadership of the able and daring Machel [Michał] Birencwajg, also transport mysterious wardrobes, sofas and coal-chests - this is not so simple. Inside these pieces of furniture are smuggled mothers and children, for whom bunkers have been prepared in the *Möbellager* - under the Germans’ very noses. In this way, seventy-three children and their mothers are saved.

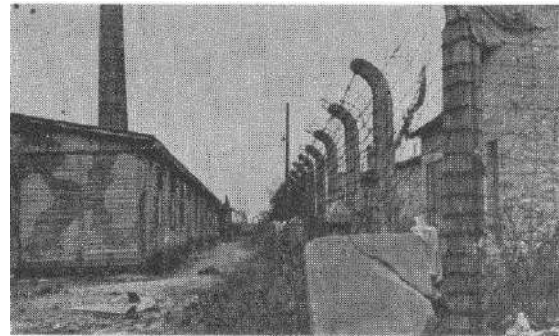
The murderous *akcja* dance continued for six weeks. Hunger and death raged incessantly. Nearly 41,000 Jews were sent to Treblinka and perished then and there, 6,500 were left in the workshops and in temporary labour camps, and almost 1,000 – hidden in cellars and in different bunkers.

The ghetto has already been cleared out – a deathly silence. Only the condemnatory, terrible melody of destruction, death and undoing passes through the wide-open doors and windows. Weeping are the walls of the *świątlica* which, during nineteen months, absorbed the soulful warmth of the youths and the joyous voices of the two thousand children who had their bright home here. Weeping is the orphanage which, during nineteen months, nourished, supported and warmed 150 little orphans, and which is, now, itself orphaned.

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<sup>5</sup> [TN: Official German uniformed police force.]

The situation for those remaining was gruesome. Those, who suffered the most terribly, were those transferred to the HASAG [an acronym for German manufacturer, *Hugo Schneider Metallwarenfabrik Aktiengesellschaft*] munitions factory. Here, pain, hunger and filth were their daily bread. Only someone, who had the courage to spare a little coffee from his daily half-litre ration, could wash his face a bit.



*A part of HASAG*

The police officers are triumphant. They have perfectly fulfilled their obligation to the "Great Reich". It is only now that they are, first, the true sons of a true "Nation of Heroes".

The *akcje* came to an end on 1<sup>st</sup> November. The remaining 6,500 Jews, from the workshops and the temporary labour camps, were transferred to the *Small Ghetto* - to remain in fear of death and further "selections".

### C.

The "Small Ghetto" – three small, filthy, parallel, narrow alleys, surrounded by barbed wire fences, [and] guarded day and night by *Schutzpolizei* and Ukrainians. Six and a half thousand gloomy shadows, who had stolen a little life from Fate, were locked inside a stifling cage. Six and a half thousand slaves, who had been robbed of everything, were crammed into 1,200 narrow, little rooms. Here those, who had been sentenced to life, were forced to build their new home. No one has any resources of their own. All are forced to work and to draw their pathetic sustenance from the kitchen run by the *Judenrat*.

Everyone has to be already on their feet from five in the morning. They march, in groups under guard, to the appointed workplaces outside the ghetto, where they are made examples of [with] pain, derision and mockery. At nine in the evening, the gloomy melody of the trumpet spreads, calling them to bed.

A melancholy spirit hangs over the skies of the ghetto like a heavy cloud. Indeed, all have lost everything and everyone. Mothers are dying of sorrow, calling to mind their children's bright, laughing, little eyes. Lovely Jewish children, miraculously saved, lie in dark bunkers crying their eyes out, longing for their mothers' delicate hand.

The groups are meticulously counted and inspected when they march out to work and when they return. The mood then is silent and grave. Nevertheless, from time to time, one hears the mighty singing of a group of workers, marching back into the ghetto. This is no song of drunkenness and merriment – it is how the two hundred workers of the *Möbellager* dampen the cries of the surviving children, whom they are now smuggling inside large bags of bread, from the outside bunkers, into the ghetto, where new bunkers have already been prepared for them.

Almost every day, upon marching out to work, the camp leader - the hangman Überscher - stands about in the well-known Warsaw Market Square [Warszawski Rynek] and, with the crooked handle of his cane, like a dogcatcher, he seizes one here and there another by the neck, and drags him into the Meat-market [Street (ul. Targowa)]. From there, large groups are sent out to [the] Skarżysko[-Kamienna] and Bliżyn [munitions factories]. Entire groups are frequently taken from their workplaces and sent away. Each "*wysyłka*" [shipment] is accompanied by victims - in some cases,

because the slaves need to be taught some manners and, in others, upon jumping off the automobiles or carts.

With increasing frequency, people talk about new deadlines for a definitive liquidation. The nerves cannot withstand the constant disquiet and uncertainty. But the natural urge to live becomes stronger from day to day and from hour to hour. The aspiration to make a fortune, in order to be able to escape from the ghetto, becomes ever more alluring. Whole packs are stolen from the police's warehouses, where the looted Jewish possessions and goods are held, and they are sold outside. The uncertainty for tomorrow grows incredibly. People are rich and wish to blunt their personal suffering of yesterday and today. Life turns into debauchery. Gluttony and promiscuity become a cult. One has the impression of living in a dense, dark jungle.

During this same period, a second lifestyle develops - the life in the bunkers and the deep cellars. Here sit youth - men and women, regardless of political affiliation - shaping their feelings of revenge. They have grown weary of the burden of ghetto life. Here, those sentenced to death throw the yoke of pain and bewilderment off themselves, and forge their willingness for battle. Boys and girls, practically still children, transformed these cellars into a fantastic "wonderland". Here, the unhappiness has been turned into tender love, and the bewilderment - into hatred. Love and hate. Love for the memory of those so tragically annihilated, and hatred towards the German hangmen. People work here tirelessly, day and night. Revolvers are purchased [and brought] in. At the risk of life, bullets are smuggled in, for dynamite which is stolen from the German munitions factories. With almost no practical knowledge, with bare hands, homemade grenades are produced. A large tunnel is also dug, in case the necessity to retreat from battle should arise. Money for weapons is collected from the wealthier Jews, and traitors are liquidated. The spirits in the ghetto also gradually change, especially following the great defeat of the German Army in Stalingrad. The number of combatants grows from day to day and the work intensifies.

The *Schutzpolizei*, however, continues carrying out its work of annihilation. New decrees continue to arrive. It becomes forbidden for men and women to live on the same street. Each day brings new victims. Those on whose cheeks tuberculosis fever blossoms are shot. Men, who dare cross the thresholds of their sisters who live in the women's street - and vice-versa - are shot. Those who hide inside the ghetto and do not go out to work are shot. Mothers, who have lost their minds, are shot. Fourteen-year-old children, who do not go to work because they wish to watch over their crazed mothers in case they should try to commit suicide, are shot.

It is ten in the morning, on 3rd January 1943. Fully-armed Ukrainians and gendarmes are densely positioned around the perimeter of the ghetto. The ghetto is shaken. It is buzzing like a beehive. People run from place to place. One looks at the other with fear-filled eyes. The question, "*What more will come now?*", does not pass anyone's lips. The ghetto is filled with unrest. The gendarmes in helmets stroll unconcernedly about on the outside, close to the barbed wire, and watch what is going on inside the ghetto with indifference. Suddenly, the ghetto is filled with Ukrainians, *Policja Granatowa*<sup>6</sup>, gendarmes and Jewish *Ordnungsdienst*. Terrible cries and clamour spread forth from one edge of the ghetto to the other. Older people, fathers with children, are dragged out from the houses, cellars and attics. Some let themselves be led away without resisting. Others throw themselves on the ground and fight tooth and nail. The blood curdles in one's veins, looking upon this tragic wrangle. At night, the *akcja* is interrupted - but not finished. The following morning, the *akcja* is resumed. Whole groups of mothers and children are, once more, dragged from hiding places. Horrifying cries of grief are heard with almost incessant gunfire. Everyone in the ghetto is driven out to the well-known little market square. A new "selection" takes place. The fighters from "Wonderland" are tested for the first time - Mendel Fiszelewicz shoots at the gendarmes. Twenty-five

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<sup>6</sup> [TN: Pol., "Navy-blue Police"; popular name for the Polish police during the Second World War in German-occupied Poland.]



**Memorial plaque on the tomb of six ŻOB fighters who were shot (on 9<sup>th</sup> March 1943)**

Jews pay then with their lives [and] among them is Fiszlewicz's closest comrade I. Fajner, the old Bundist warrior Herszl Frajman and the member of the League for a Working Land of Israel, the lawyer Rozensztajn. More than 300 men, women and especially children, as well as young fighters, are sent, under heavy guard, to Radomsko, to complete the local transport to Treblinka.

The ghetto takes on a different appearance. People feverishly make ready to flee into the bunkers which they have prepared in advance at great expense. Grey-haired women and men get jet black hair overnight<sup>7</sup>. Young, charmingly dark girls and lads instantly turn blond. They flee with false passes to the Polish side and, with false "*Kennkarte*"<sup>8</sup>, smuggle themselves into Germany to work. Many of them are denounced or recognised, by chance, and perish. Nevertheless, the urge to flee becomes no smaller.

The youth do not rest and they prepare themselves feverishly. Groups go into the woods; groups go out on various diversionary missions. Many of them are killed, also taking unrelated victims along with them.

February 1943 - the news passes by word of mouth<sup>9</sup> that Jews, with relatives in Palestine, will be able to be exchanged for Germans, who are [being held prisoner] in England. A new ray of hope begins to brighten the moods of hundreds of the wretched. The *Judenrat* carries out the registration. Those without any relatives in Palestine "borrow" some from acquaintances and register themselves also. The registration is conducted for a fortnight and [then] interrupted. Hundreds of slaves live through a new disappointment.

20<sup>th</sup> March 1943, *Purim* - a sunny, beautiful day. A bit of holiday cheer is felt in the ghetto. It is especially festive in the family of the doctors who, today, are celebrating the birthday of the most beautiful child in the ghetto - of little Lili Winer. All the doctors, with their families, are now gathered at Dr Winer's house.

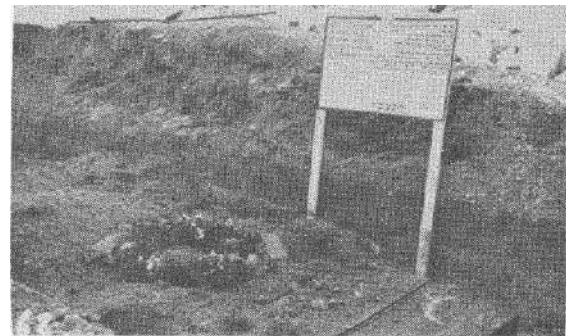
The men are having an animated conversation. Dr Winer recounts how he, as a transport worker, on 27<sup>th</sup> September 1942, amidst the very fervour of the deportation *akcja*, got himself into quarantine and, at great risk to his life, also had his wife and two children admitted; Dr Blumenfeld makes his pessimistic arguments as to the forthcoming fate of the few Jews remaining alive; the young Dr Lipinski tries to convince everyone that the Jewish doctors in Częstochowa will survive the War, because the hangman Degenhardt has a special weakness for doctors, and Dr Kijak entertains them with his humorous descriptions of Germany after the War. But the larger part of the guests is engrossed with the entertainment of the couple of dozen children. Everyone's attention is now riveted on the dance the little ones are performing. The children are radiant. Little Lili is especially radiant now. The little, black velvet dress, the white stockings on her slender little legs [and] the large snow-white ribbon in the thick, black hair on her little head gave her a special charm. Lili is now completely glowing. After all, today is *her* holiday – after all, today her seventh birthday is being celebrated! The guests cannot tear their gaze away from the delicate, beautiful and gorgeous child.

<sup>7</sup> [TN: To appear younger and be selected for work.]

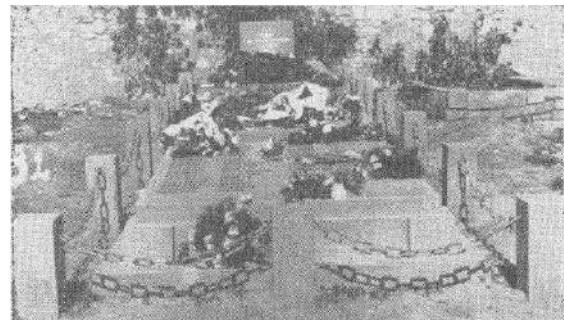
<sup>8</sup> [TN: Basic identity document in use inside Germany during the Third Reich era.]

<sup>9</sup> [TN: The expression used in the Yiddish original is "from ear to ear."]

Suddenly, new orders are heard from *Hauptmann* [Degenhardt]: the *Judenrat*, all the doctors and the intelligentsia, in general, are to present themselves, with their families, at the sorrowfully renowned, little, market square. The ghetto is, once again, in a great stir. The square fills up with men, women and children. The *Hauptmann* announces that they are being sent to Palestine. Large, freight lorries stand here in readiness, without guards. All must climb up into these vehicles. The lorries proceed slowly [and], on ul. Warszawska, they come to a halt. Armed gendarmes spring out from various hiding places. New vehicles arrive with gendarmes. The lorries now proceed speedily towards the Jewish cemetery. The victims perceive the peril that threatens them. Twenty-year-old W. Kopiński, a member of the ŻOB, is the first to jump off the speeding lorry. Many more jump after him, of whom only six manage to escape death. The other 127 people - the last remnants of the Jewish professional intelligentsia - are brought to the Jewish cemetery. *Werkschutz*<sup>10</sup> guards and Ukrainian auxiliary police were positioned throughout the entire cemetery. The victims are forced to take off their clothes and are shot, one by one. The gendarmes are the only ones involved in performing this "sacred duty". The parents are shot first. The German hangmen still have time for the children. With the children, one feels like playing a bit. After all, these here are children – and, after all, they themselves are fathers. They raise the children up by their hair or little feet with one hand and, with the other, they aim at their little hearts or heads. It does not matter that not all the children give their souls up immediately. That is not a problem - the earth also covers up those who are still able to cry out their last "Ma...".

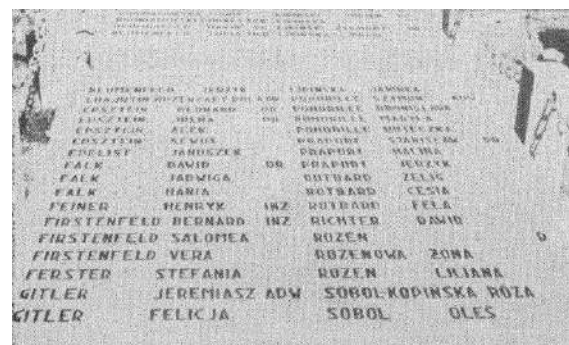


*Memorial plaque on the mass grave of the fallen on 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1943*



*The tombstone on the grave of the Częstochowa intelligentsia*

Little Lili is the last. They took everything from her. They only left her with the white ribbon on her head - a reminder of her holiday. The little one stands, in all her glory, and her huge, black eyes wander from one murderer to the other. It is hard to describe what is mirrored in the eyes of the small, slender child. The gendarmes, already satiated enough with blood, dare not raise a hand to shoot her. Each one wants another to put an end to the bloody game. A long pause - the tall, broad-boned camp leader, Überscher, cuts short his comrades' dilly-dallying. With a cry of "For the Fatherland!", he aims at little Lili's breast - who now seals the chain of 127 victims, on the seventh anniversary of her birth.



*Some of the names on the tombstone of the mass grave*

One hundred and twenty-seven individuals filled a new, mass grave, over which an unknown hand raised part of a damaged tombstone, on which was engraved, "Częstochowa Jewish Intelligentsia. Purim, 20<sup>th</sup> March 1943".

<sup>10</sup> [TN: "Work Security"; Nazi guards in the forced labour camps and workplaces.]

Between 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> May, the ghetto is locked in. No one is allowed out to work. No workplaces are operating. “The Jewish problem is above everything [else]!” Spirits in the ghetto are crushed. Different commentaries are made. Some are of the opinion that this is a prelude to a definitive liquidation of the ghetto. Others interpret this as a means to prevent Jews and Poles from meeting together at the workplaces on these festive days of 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> May. Meanwhile, there is hunger in the ghetto. The anxiety is great. People are smuggled out inside bins of filth and, in the same bins, bread is smuggled in. On 5<sup>th</sup> May, before daybreak, the trumpet calling to work is heard once more. The moods calm down a little.

Another couple of weeks drew on in this manner, with life [following] its “normal” and tragic course.

In the second half of June 1943, the *Schutzpolizei* make a raid on the Jewish workers at the *Möbellager*. Victims fall. A few days later, all the smaller workplaces are liquidated. The skilled Dr A. Wolberg is dragged [out] and murdered. Some twenty<sup>11</sup> workers, who are employed in the police warehouses, are also murdered. The forced labourers in the ghetto comprehend that the last and decisive act is coming for the ghetto.



***A delegation of the Częstochowa ŻOB and members of the Warsaw ŻOB lay flowers on the mass graves in the Small Ghetto (June 1945)***

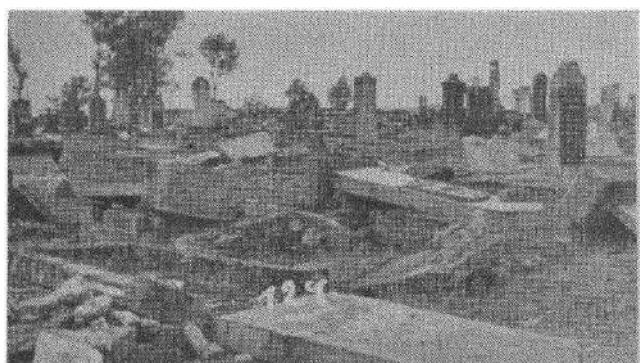
On 25<sup>th</sup> June 1943, in the afternoon, the *Small Ghetto* is encircled and fired upon. The bunkers with weaponry are uncovered, and the fighters in the bunkers perish. Night fall, and the *akcja* is interrupted.

It is 10am on 26<sup>th</sup> June. All the men are herded to the well-known little market square, which is surrounded by gendarmes, Gestapo men, *Werkschutz* guards and soldiers. [There are] carts with dead bodies in the middle of the square. Whoever has money or jewellery must - on pain of death - surrender them to the gendarmes. All those,

who have been living in the houses where the bunkers with armaments were found, are dragged out of the lines. Elderly Jews and fathers with children are also pulled from the lines. Under blows from rifle butts, they are loaded onto large freight vehicles. The cries and the dreadful laments of the women in the ghetto, who look on and realise what is happening here, are unbearable. The packed lorries set off in the direction of the Jewish cemetery and the rest of the men are taken away to the nearby HASAG munitions factories.

At the same time, *Schutzpolizei* and Gestapo besiege the exit of the tunnel outside the ghetto. The battle is brief and decisive. All the young combatants fall, but the Gestapo and *Schutzpolizei* also give up their sacrifices.

Now comes the women’s turn. Mothers with children, under the lamentations of the other women, are packed into freight vehicles and taken away to annihilation. The rest of the women, who have no children with them, are taken away to the munitions



***Part of the destroyed cemetery***

<sup>11</sup> [TN: “Two tens” in the original; although we usually render the Yiddish “tens” as “dozens,” here we have opted for “twenty.”]

factories, like the men before them. On the following day, 27<sup>th</sup> June, the arch-hangman Degenhardt declares an amnesty for all those still lying in hiding inside the ghetto. The Jewish *Ordnungsdienst* carried the “tidings” of the amnesty across the deadened ghetto. Eighty-four mothers, sixty fathers and nearly one hundred children crawl out from their hideouts. They are allowed to comfort themselves with the amnesty for two days. On the third day, their hopes are cut short forever. Mothers and children further increase the number of mass graves in Częstochowa.

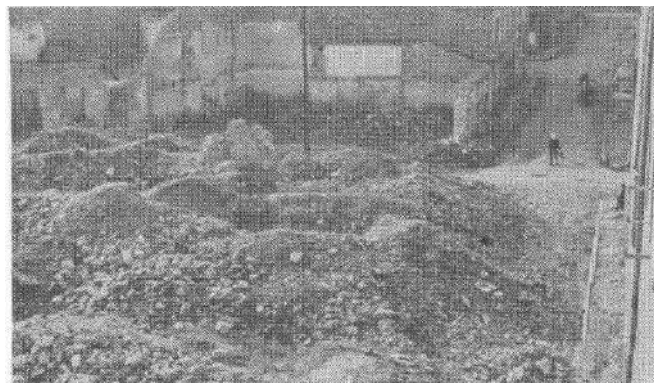


*The place where the Old Synagogue once stood*

House after house is blown up with dynamite. Hundreds of those in hiding are killed under the ruins. Dozens, who emerge from the bunkers after the “amnesty”, are shot on the spot and burned. Many are thrown alive into the blaze. Noble dreams turn into smoke and ashes. Human torches are borne to the heavens upon tongues of flame and, in the gleam of these flames, the German murderers - the sons of the “*Herrenvolk*” [Master Race] - perform their gruesome dance of annihilation in honour of the “Third Reich.”

#### D.

HASAG<sup>12</sup> has— two munitions factories, Pelcery and Raków. This is now the concentration camp for the 3,990 Jews, still surviving in Częstochowa. Meanwhile, the *Schutzpolizei* has borrowed 230 of them to be at their disposal. The spirits of the survivors are crushed. One has lost his last child, and another - his last friend. All are strangers to each other. Everyone feels lonely. With embitterment, a few speak about those who dared prepare themselves for battle, hastening this new misfortune. The few remaining fighters also feel a little guilty and strange. Guilty – in that perhaps they actually have hastened the misfortune. And strange, because they read the painful vexation from some of the glances. Hunger lets itself be sorely felt. The twenty *deka* [200 grams] of bread and bit of watery desiccated beetroot soup (“sole soup”, in the HASAG jargon) that are given every day to each person cannot satisfy anyone. Nevertheless, people gradually begin to become accustomed to this, also. The thought steals in, “Maybe, at least here, we will continue to live? After all, this is a munitions factory - and they do need hands for work!” Hungry, broken, but with the glow of a new hope, they live through three weeks and two days in this manner. Three weeks and two days starving, devoured by



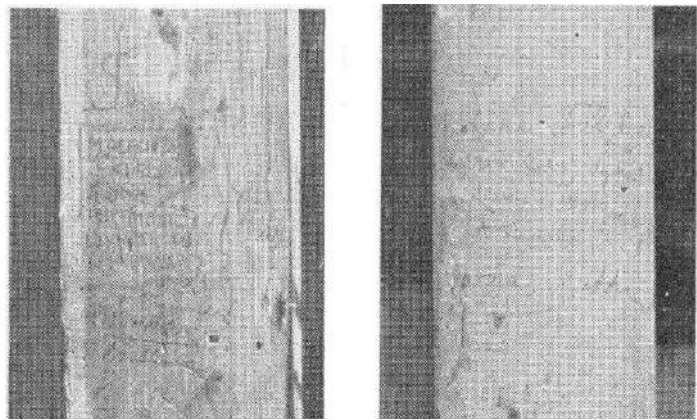
*Parts of the “Small Ghetto”*

<sup>12</sup> HASAG: an acronym for the German metal goods manufacturer, “Hugo Schneider Metallwarenfabrik Aktiengesellschaft”

lice - and three weeks and two days believing that they will already continue to live, because the manpower of the slaves is now necessary for the “Sieg” [victory].

On 19<sup>th</sup> July 1943, at eleven o'clock at night, everyone is driven out into the street. All must march through a narrow alleyway, where a new “selection” is taking place. This time, the “selection” is conducted by the factory foremen and the leaders of the *Werkschutz*. The *Schutzpolizei* only assist them. They look into the face of each individual and evaluate [him]. Whoever is, in their opinion, too old or too young, is set apart. Each foreman also points out which of his slaves are to be sent to annihilation for being “*Faulenzer*” [layabouts]. A dreadful lament passes through the whole factory. Those, who are now going to their deaths, wail. Those who, for now, remain alive weep no less. All are now convinced that even the munitions factory is less important than the “Jewish problem”.

Two hundred and sixty people are thrown into a dark cellar and are now living through the last night of their horrifying nightmare. Two hundred and sixty people now await their only salvation - death. In the early morning of 20<sup>th</sup> July, the entire Jewish *Ordnungsdienst* and their families are thrown into that same cellar. The *Schutzpolizei* also contribute 130 of their slaves to this “sacred” cause. On that same day, at eleven o'clock before noon, a terrific struggle takes place in the cellar. More than 400 sentenced to death fight against the foremen, who stun each of the victims with a hammer, before throwing them onto the lorries. This time, too, the victors are the German hangmen.



*Inscriptions by the murdered to their families, which were scratched by the hands of the victims onto the walls of the cellars in HASAG and in the ruins of the Jewish Police's guardhouse in the “Small Ghetto”, before they went to their deaths.*

The survivors still weep silently and, with them, weep the dark cellar walls, with inscriptions by those who have just been annihilated:

*“Rubinko Feldman, goodbye my son. Keep well! - your mother, Ch. Feldman.”*

*“Dear Rubin, I go in peace. I kiss you —your mother Chana.”*

*“Dear daughter Jadzia, I go peacefully to my death. Do not lose hope! I kiss you – your mother Moszkowicz.”*

*“I go in peace – Józek Jung.”*

*“Zosza Windor says goodbye to her husband Kalman. I go in peace – Zosza Windor.”*

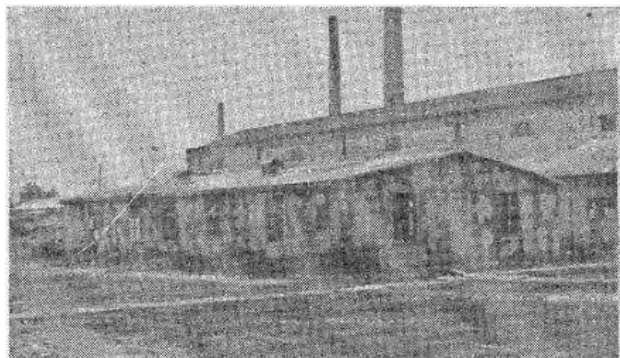
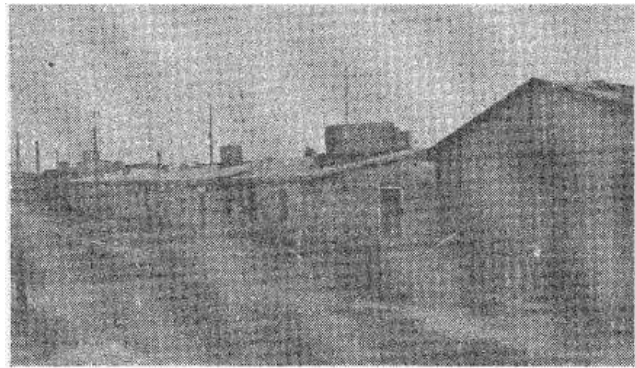
*“I am weary of constantly fleeing Death. I go in peace. How will my children live? What will happen to them? – Ch. Sz.”*

Once again, the Jewish cemetery was enlarged with a great mass grave of over 400 people. The foremen - the lame *Werkschutz* leader Klemm and his aide, the 140-centimetre-tall cripple Stieglitz - had showed that they knew the "sacred" work no worse than the *Schutzpolizei*.

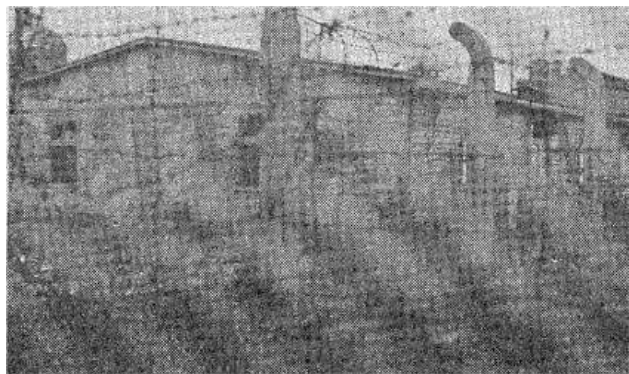
In an area of nearly one square kilometre, surrounded by barbed wire, heavily guarded by *Werkschutz* guards from all sides, wooden barracks are quickly built. These are the living quarters for 3,000 people. Each day takes its toll of victims - some are shot by a *Werkschutz* guard for no reason, and others by the Gestapo for some offence - some for attempting to escape, and others by the foreman, for being "*Faulenzer*". When a child is born, it must immediately be put to death. If someone is gravely ill, the "Lame" deals with him, too.

All the days in the camp were the same. Every day, at five in the morning, everyone had already to be at the head-count. The cripple Stieglitz then makes a circus for himself - for being late to roll-call, he forces older women to kiss with young boys, and young girls, with older Jews. For that same offence, he also punishes with ten, twenty or more lashes. Others are also given lashes - whole groups are taken every single day by the foremen to the guardroom of the *Werkschutz*, to receive their number of lashes for not having completed the [required] quota of work. Some emerge only with a "*kratka*" [Pol., checkboard pattern] (in the HASAG language - markings on the lower part of the body). Others tramp from the guardroom straight into the hospital.

The group of Jews here have become one large, numbed mass of gloom. The forced labour between the grey factory walls, the murderous foremen, the heavy machines with which one has to work for twelve, fourteen and more hours, standing up, and the hunger [all] deliver their results. One encounters dried-up people, whose skin barely keeps their bones from falling apart. One also encounters some [so] swollen with hunger, that they [can] barely drag their feet. Typhus and tuberculosis have a very generous cut here. Ragged clothes and wooden shoes, brought from different liquidated camps, are the normal vestments here. As time went by, apathy and resignation began to spread more and more.



*Slave labourers' barracks in HASAG*



*Part of HASAG*

The political parties, however, gradually start to be revived anew. The PPR, Bund, Left-wing *Poalei Zion* and other Zionist groups form small cells. Understandings are reached with Polish workers, who smuggle food in for the Jews and various legal and illegal newspapers for the cells. The comrades from the outside make contact with us. They send in letters, bulletins and brochures (A Year in Treblinka by [Jankiel] Wiernik, the Bund's bulletin with Artur [Szmul Mordechaj] Zygelbaum's last letter and others). They also send in literature and letters from abroad. In the same manner, we also started to receive financial aid. Two illegal kitchens were immediately organised - one for the sick and the other for children and juveniles. Individual aid is also organised for all those of whom we can be sure. The comrades from the outside communicate [the news] of liquidations of various concentration camps (Trawniki, Pionki, and others), and warn us against illusions.

An inter-party commission of five members is appointed, which concentrates all the organisational and political activity in its hand. Plans for resistance are prepared, in case of some "*akcja*". Three plans are worked out:

- 1) To organise groups of five in the barracks, who [will] prepare implements which they will to put to use upon going out to battle.
- 2) To blow up the factory by setting fire to the stores of dynamite.
- 3) To organise 125 individuals who are prepared to sacrifice their lives and attack the guardroom of the *Werkschutz*, disarm them, [and] control the factory for a certain time, to enable a large number of people to escape.

The masses in the barracks are revived. The cells grow from day to day. A particular revival is noted on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1944, when the press brings the news of the attempt on Hitler's [life]. The cells of the PPR and Bund are especially intense.

One certain day, the *Werkschutz* attack the barracks and confiscate all the collected implements. The first plan has fallen through. Twice, fire was set to the dynamite stores. But both times, the fire-fighters were able to contain the blaze. Nevertheless, no one's spirits fall. The Red Army's victorious march forward strengthens the will for battle. Therefore, we prepare for the third and deciding offensive. The group of 125 is doubled.

Meanwhile, the number of Jews in the Częstochowa camps progressively increases. Jews are brought from Łódź, Skarżysko and Płaszów. There are already 11,000 in the Częstochowa camps. Spirits gradually begin to change. The constant affirmation, "Never again shall I go to the woods", is heard no more. The greater part is convinced that, if they sent the Jews over to Częstochowa from other camps without finishing them off, in Częstochowa, too, they will not annihilate the Jews. The people's will to fight weakens. The inter-party commission reaches the conclusion that, under such circumstances, an attack is doomed to assured failure - and it disbands. The relief operation, however, continues to be run. The comrades from Warsaw and Kraków do not step down and, following a lengthy hiatus due to the Warsaw Uprising, they take advantage of every possibility to assist us further. They also request - if we are not going to fight - that the active members escape, for the peril is also now no less threatening than before. The active [members] of all the parties decide not to flee, in order not to endanger the lives of everyone in the camp.

The mood in the camp is constantly changing. The news, that the press which is smuggled in brings every day about the Red Army's victories, encourages every individual and strengthens the faith that everyone will very soon be liberated.

On 15<sup>th</sup> January 1945, when the Red Army began nearing the gates of Częstochowa, the SS officers and *Werkschutz* guards managed to evacuate nearly 6,000 people from the Częstochowa camps. The *Werkschutz* and SS were already unable to evacuate the remaining 5,200 people. The majority break

out of the barracks and let themselves loose on the factory. The directors, SS officers and *Werkschutz* guards start pulling out of the factory, only dragging a few dozen Jews along with them. On 17<sup>th</sup> January 1945, before daybreak, 5,200 people opened the gates of the camp and went out into freedom.

5,200 slaves with death sentences in their pockets - of whom 1,518 were Częstochowa residents (1,240 born in Częstochowa), and the rest from different towns and *shtetls* - had won back their life and liberty.

5,200 people were liberated - 5,200 living tombstones over the vast, endless graveyard of our tragic reality.

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