

Memories from Hasag Warta in Czestochowa

Testimony given at Yad Vashem: Victor (Yeshayahu David) Klapholz

Victor (Yeshayahu David) Klapholz was born in Krakow in 1925. At the end of 1942, he was transferred together with another group of Jews, including his brother, Haim Hanoch (Heniek), from the Flaszow camp to forced labor at the Hassag Warta armaments factory in Czestochowa.

Victor and his late brother Haim Hanoch survived the Holocaust. The following are Victor's memories of his time in Hassag Warta in Czestochowa. An exact transcript of the testimony given in Hebrew by Victor at Yad Vashem.

".....When we were in the Plaszow camp, they took us upstairs one day to Gat (Amon Gat, the camp commander), may his name and his memory be blotted out. He welcomes us and tells us: 'You will stay here only for a few days and then you will be going to work somewhere else'. We of course didn't believe him. We didn't work upstairs for a single day. After 3-4 days, in the afternoon, in the blocks we are told: Everyone is to make his way to the Ostbahn to Appelplatz. We all go out and we are counted. The SS soldier goes down with Gat together to the ramp where the train is standing. I see that on the car is written the word 'Czestochowa'. Did we believe it? No, we didn't believe it. They put us in the boxcar. I think they gave each of us a quarter of a loaf of bread as well and we got into the cars within a few hours. I think that by the next morning we reached Czestochowa. There was a mattress factory there before the war, Polish-made mattresses which were manufactured with straw being stuffed inside of them. There were no barracks there. There was one big hall, so before the war there was the mattress factory and inside it we still found mattresses from which we later made pants and jackets for ourselves, because we were without anything. Later we knew that there were a few more such factories in Czestochowa. This was the Hasag Warta, and once again I repeat the same thing: I am sure it was already at the end of 1943 or October 1943. I think from there not a single box of pistol bullets and machine gun bullets ever came out. They put hundreds of the most expensive and newest machines in there, and they worked and worked, and 99 percent were rejected because we weren't able to do as they wanted and still the factory was not closed. Once again the same thing. 100 parasites lived there, and almost no SS men, except for the Bartensezlager chef who came from Skarzysko-Kamienna. Workshots were only Ukrainians. There were hundreds of civilians - engineers, technicians, young people, Germans. We knew. You see them walking around and doing nothing. This camp was very good, except for one thing - incomparable hunger. This hunger cannot be known except for the famine that was in Germany afterwards. There was such great hunger that I have something in mind, if I tell you then you will know best what kind of hunger it can be.

They made a toilet there, a hole in the ground, maybe 4-5 meters deep, maybe 8-10 meters wide. There were boards all around and these beautiful Germans who came there took pictures of us. They photographed from all sides, went down, went up

and took pictures of how the Jews... I remember like today, the hunger was so great, one stole from the other. If you didn't finish the piece of bread you were given instead - they would kill you. There were no Ukrainians there, only our Jews.

If we wanted to rest a bit, then we went to the latrine (toilets). You could sit there for 5-10 minutes. Often there was dysentery. We were sitting, and suddenly, one day, when we were sitting there, one guy shouted "My bread, my bread!" He was sitting and in his pants pocket he had a piece of bread and it fell in and the excrement was already maybe a meter deep. He pleaded mercifully: "Help me, help me take out the bread." We couldn't do it. So he said: "You know what? Grab me by my feet. I'll try to reach it." And I swear to you that thanks to our great effort he reached this piece of bread, he washed it and ate it and told us fifty times thank you very much. That was the only thing in this camp - the hunger. Day and night you just think about it. You just think about what you will be able to eat. You don't think about anything else.

There was a Bartenschlager, who from time to time also carried out murders, one Tenenbaum from Warsaw was a murderer, I remember it like today. He caught him that one Pole would bring him some potatoes. I remember it like today. Pipes with hot air came out of the factory, from the steam, so he put the 3 potatoes in something, in bags, next to each other, and looked 3 meters away, there was strong steam coming out of the factory. Suddenly around the corner comes this Bartenschlager and sees the Jew there and asks him: What is this? So he tells him that he found it somewhere. He murdered him on the spot. I mean they were able to, if he killed a few more Jews then he got another citation, he wanted to do it.

Question: Did you try to do it?

Answer: There were also other things. There were also stories that the commandant of the Jewish Police, from that camp, saved Jews. Suppose he went along with him and they saw something like that, so this Jew took him. It was one Gutman from Rzeszów, and said: What are you doing? And he gave him let's say one slap and one kick and told him: Disappear. And he disappeared. By the time the German came he was no longer here.

We were there until January 1945. At the beginning of January 1945, imagine what kind of hunger there was, we were together with Poles, as long as there was someone to sell, Jews came there from the Lodz ghetto, So they came out of the hunger of the Lodz ghetto for years. We were hungry for only a year, and they were hungry for years. They came like lords, literally with suits, because the ghetto was being emptied and emptied and everyone took what they wanted. All the time they had, so the Poles brought them a loaf of bread for it. Once he didn't have it anymore, then I didn't see a single Pole who ever gave me something for nothing. A German once gave me something. A Pole would never do that. I do not know why.

In January 1945 we worked with the Poles. Until Friday they worked with us. We were not told anything. We were disconnected. Maybe the protectionists knew. We didn't know. In the middle of the night, between Saturday and Sunday, it should have been the 10th of January, Apple. Names. I hear my name. My brother hears his name. Out everyone.

Question: Do they turn everyone away?

Answer: No, just the names. The protectionists from the camp made a list for them, and sent us. I ask the Ukrainian: Where are we going? So he says in an easy manner: "We are going to shoot you". They take us to the train tracks once again. Again we get to the train and get in. I don't think we got anything to eat there, because there simply wasn't anything to eat. For 3 days and 2 nights we traveled from Czestochowa to Weimar. In Weimar we were sent to Buchenwald. In Buchenwald they took us out of the cars. The SS man takes a head count with big punches and moves us to a police camp. In Buchenwald the German political prisoners were the ones who set the tone. We were in Buchenwald for a few days. They checked us out. It was there that I changed my name from Yeshayahu-David to Victor. They checked us all there. They take us underground and say they are going to give us a shower. They take us down and once again we have no idea of what is going on. Luckily for us it was just a shower. We left and were put in the small camp, which was just a transit camp. I know what happened there in the camp. We were all given 2-3 inoculations. I don't know what these inoculations were. The next morning 15 people did not get out of bed after having died during the night. To this very day I have no idea what they gave us. We were in Buchenwald for 4-5 days. They told us: "You are being sent to Dora". One of the Germans told us (not an SS man, but a political German captive who sat there for many years) that in Dora there is a 99 percent chance of death. That's how he told us bluntly without elaborating. (In Dora they manufactured the V1 and V2 rockets, and there all the factories were underground).....