

## The First Tortures

Częstochowa was one of the first cities in Poland occupied by Hitler's troops. Already, on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1939, the German military marched into the city. That same day, after eight o'clock in the morning, there were already various notifications, from the German military authorities, pasted up in the streets. Cautiously, the populace began to appear on the streets and read the announcements.

On the following morning, German soldiers went about the streets giving out pastries and chocolate to the population. The people began to calm down and to think that *"the Devil is not as terrible as he is painted"*. Therefore, they began showing themselves in the streets more boldly and frequently. That same day, at eleven o'clock before noon, the Germans opened fire on people, simultaneously in all the streets, without any "pretext". After this "prelude", the Germans started driving the people out of the streets and homes. Many buildings were also shot up. With raised hand, thousands of people were driven to these squares:

- in front of the cathedral (ul. Katedralna),
- in front of the Church of St. Zygmunt (New Market [Nowy Rynek], nowadays Plac Daszyńskiego),
- in front of the Brass\*\* factory (ul. Strażacka) and
- the large square in front of Town Hall.

All these locations were surrounded by machine-guns and armed soldiers. For hours, the herded people were forced to lie on their stomachs, motionless, and some were also shot at with machine-guns, rifles and automatics. Later, a command rang out, *"Rise!"*, and they started chasing the crowds of people. Once again, the running people were shot at. Those, who were in front of the cathedral, were driven inside it. Those, who were on the New Market, were herded into the Church of St. Zygmunt. Those, who were on ul. Strażacka, were driven into the Brass factory and those, who were on the Town Hall Square, were herded into the Church of St. Jakub. Exactly how many victims fell then has not been ascertained. Rumours went about to the effect that, in the square in front of the Brass factory, some 120 people fell; at the cathedral - more than 100; at the Town Hall more than fifty and about thirty individuals fell in front of the Church St. Zygmunt. Besides that, there were hundreds of casualties in the streets and courtyards, having been shot when the Germans were chasing the people to the designated locations.

Among the hundreds of shot and wounded, there were many Jewish victims. Many of the Jews, who were shot, were buried in the courtyard of the Crafts' School on ul. Garncarska. There, murdered people were flung into one large pit, along with the cows and horses that had accidentally also been hit by the German bullets during the course of the shootings.

In the annals of Częstochowa's history, this day went down as "Bloody Monday". When someone wished to note the timeframe of some event, he would express himself in no other

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\* [TN: This was said of the Nazi Germans by Joseph Stalin in his speech on the 24<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Revolution, November 7, 1941.]

\*\* [TN: This is a surname.]

manner than “that was still before ‘Bloody Monday’” or “that was already after ‘Bloody Monday’”. The *Stadtkommissar* [City Commissioner] at the time, [Karl] Drohberg, who had then been appointed by [Hans] Rüdiger (chief of the civilian management) as *Stadtkommissar* over Częstochowa and as *Kreishauptmann* [District Captain/Administrator] over the Częstochowa district, played a large part in “Bloody Monday”.

For a long time “Bloody Monday” was a day of horror for the entire Częstochowa populace. Much was also spoken of an announcement by the priest, [Antoni] Zimniak, which, by demand of the occupiers, had appeared that same Monday in the city. The announcement read,

“To the inhabitants of the city of Częstochowa:

I appeal to all the inhabitants of Częstochowa not to spread any panic and to avoid provocations, which may bring upon the entire city the harshest of punishments which, according to the martial law, could include the death penalty.”

Signed: Vicar-General A. Zimniak – Suffragan Bishop\*.  
Częstochowa, 4<sup>th</sup> September 1939.

On Tuesday, 5<sup>th</sup> September 1939, in the morning, captives aged fifty and over were released. The rest were taken to the military barracks and some were also imprisoned at the prison in Zawodzie, where many of them suffered physical and emotional anguish.

Only on Wednesday night did the Germans begin to release the detainees, retaining several dozen men as hostages, who were to be answerable in the eventuality that the city’s population would rise up against the Germans. Every German guard frequently made these hostages, too, feel that their lives were free for the taking.

Right after “Bloody Monday”, the permanent torture of the Jews began. Every day, multitudes of Jews were taken to work, where they had to endure various torments. Under blows from rifle butts and whips, women and men, children and youths were forced to fill in different diggings with soil, using their bare hands, to haul bricks from one spot to another with no purpose and also to carry out other arduous Sisyphean tasks.

During the work, everyone was forced to shed their outermost coats or *reklech*\* and throw them [all] down in one place. Under rain and, later, also under snow, they had to work in this manner until late into the night. As soon as they were released from the work, each one had to quickly seize up a coat and flee. Seldom did someone find his own garment. Men often grabbed women’s and children’s coats, women took the coats of men, and children - the heavy coats of adults. Many did not manage to get anything at all and they would scramble away from the workplace without an overcoat altogether.

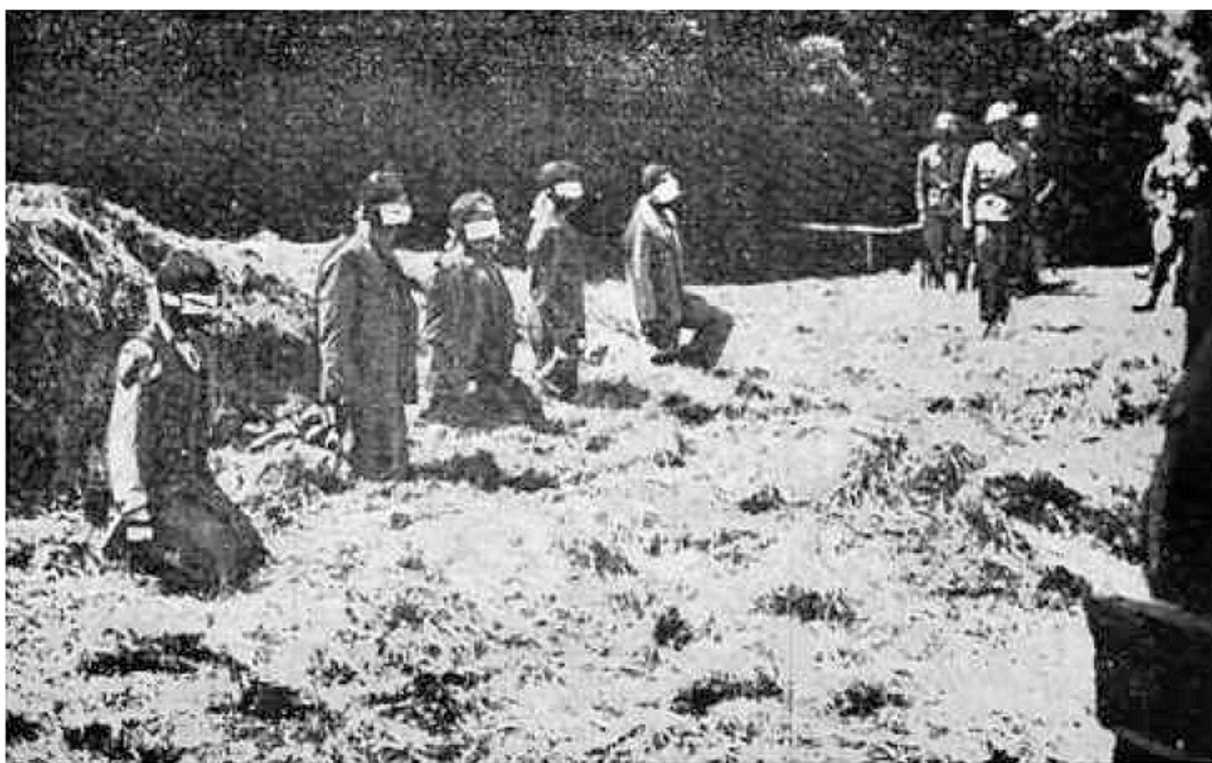
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\* [TN: In the Roman Catholic Church, a suffragan bishop is one who is subordinate to an archbishop, viz. a metropolitan bishop.]

\* [TN: A “rekl” is a type of frock coat worn on weekdays by Chassidic men, as opposed to the silken caftans worn on Shabbosim (Saturdays) and holidays.]



*[On the way] to the execution in the Olsztyn Forest*



*Before the execution*





*The execution*



*After the execution*

The one, who excelled the most in tormenting people at work, was the concurrent chief of the Gestapo in Częstochowa, Krüger. He would frequently order that women, who distinguished themselves with their musical capabilities, be sent to clean in the Gestapo and his personal premises. He would force them to clean the windows on the highest stories of his house and he would play a piano while they worked. Krüger also ordered that the *Judenrat* should see to it that there should always be two open graves in the Jewish cemetery in readiness for Jewish “criminals”. These graves were, in fact, filled frequently and fresh graves had to be prepared. Yet this, in itself, did not satisfy the Gestapo men, and they would often affect arrests amongst Jews, sending them to jail. They would then lead them out, along with larger groups of Poles, to the Olsztyn woods, where they were executed and interred on the spot.

A certain Szabelski (a *Volksdeutsch*, who had been a policeman in the days of the *Sanacja*) stood out among the *Gestapowces*\*\* with his distinct sadism and cruelty. This same murderer was not only the terror of the Jews over a lengthy span, but also of Poles, whom he tormented no less than Jews.

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Seizing people for work was a daily phenomenon. A Jew, showing himself in the street, was in danger of being caught for work and of returning home late at night beaten up. Walking down the street, everyone shuffled close to the walls, in order to be able to sneak through a gate and disappear at a moment of danger. Even inside the homes, no one was sure whether he would manage to make it through the day without pain.

On 14<sup>th</sup> September 1939 (the first day of *Rosh Hashana*), multitudes of Hitler’s men appeared in the densely populated Jewish neighbourhood and drove out, for work, the Jews from all the buildings. Driving them out to work was accompanied by insults. “*Faules volk, sie haben krieg gewollt!*” [Lazy people - they wanted war!], the tormentors would yell, as they dispensed murderous blows. Dante-like scenes were played out at the bridge connecting the city centre with the suburb of Zawodzie. Here, groups of Germans stood on either bank of the river with rifles readied to shoot. One part of the Germans, with blows from their rifle butts, forced the Jews to crawl, undressed, into the water and to pull up stones from the bottom with their bare hands. In another place, next to *Częstochowianka* (a textile factory), the Germans similarly forced the Jews to drag heavy, long beams out of the water and to pull the nails out with their teeth. For not wishing to carry out this command of theirs, they shot the twenty-four-year-old Judl Granek<sup>1</sup>. This was the first bloodied victim at work, who was to serve as a warning for everyone that no one should dare wriggle out from fulfilling their orders.

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\*\* [TN: Polish Yiddish term for Gestapo officers.]

#### Footnotes [Sources]

The documents presented below were mostly collected and hidden by the author during the occupation. They are currently already to be found partly in the archive of the Jewish Historical Institute in Poland and partly in the [author’s] private archive.

<sup>1</sup> Reported, at the time, by the eyewitness Chaim Birenholz.

Jews were caught in the streets. They were dragged from the homes and from hiding places in attics and cellars. No one knew to where he was being taken, when he would return, how he would come back or if he would return home at all. Oftentimes, the same people, after a whole day of work and pain, were dragged out of their beds at night and were, once more, driven to work. For the most part, the groups of those led out to work were forced to march in rows and sing. Those, who could not sing also moved their lips, so that the torturers should not notice, Heaven forbid, that someone was daring not to carry out their demands.

One frosty Friday evening in January 1940, the gendarmes of the 72<sup>nd</sup> *Polizeibataillon* [Police Battalion], which was stationed at the Narutowicza school, under the leadership of *Hauptmann* [Captain] Ambros, with his close aides, *Hauptwachtmeister* [Chief Constables] Zangerl and Kabak, encircled a few streets, densely inhabited by a Jewish population, and with shouts of, "*Juden raus!*" [Jews out!], they set upon the Jewish residences.

They pulled out thousands of men, women and, above all, young girls from their beds and herded them half-naked over to the large square of the New Market [Nowy Rynek]. After detaining them for hours in the snowy frost, the wounded, badly beaten and frozen people were allowed to go home. All the others, who did not have the "luck" to have been beaten, wounded or to have frozen limbs, were taken away to the large building of the Narutowicza school. Here, everyone was forced to strip completely naked. The officers - and also the simple gendarmes - laughed at them in a sadistic manner. Gendarmes conducted gynaecological "examinations" of the women. Only in the morning were some of the Jews released from there and the rest were detained for various jobs. It was only on the following day, in the evening, that they were allowed to go home. Five men failed to return then and all traces of them have disappeared.

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The eviction of Jews from their homes started as soon as the Germans occupied Częstochowa. Later, frequent relocations began from individual buildings and also of whole streets, which were made *judenrein*. No one was sure whether, tomorrow, he would still be in the place where only yesterday he had settled anew. The eviction of Jews from their homes took place in the following manner - all the Jewish tenants of those buildings were driven out into the courtyards and were held there for as long as it took the Germans to rob everything they pleased from the dwellings. Only afterwards could the Jews take, from their homes, whatever the Germans allowed them, and then leave the buildings - without having any designated place where to go live. The evicted Jews were forced to leave the furniture and other household items inside the relinquished residences.

Besides the fact that Jewish property was robbed during the relocations, individual Germans would also "visit" Jewish homes on their own account and take anything that was to the liking. At first, there were still naïve Jews, who tried to seek justice from the German governmental organs, for which some even paid with their lives. That is what happened with a certain Jew, Pelta from Mstów, and with one woman, Genendla Baremherycyk, who requested that the household items, which gendarmes of the 72<sup>nd</sup> *Polizeibataillon*, had taken from her house on 28<sup>th</sup> December 1939 be returned to her<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Handwritten appeals from the Pelta and Baremherycyk families to the *Judenrat*.

On 25<sup>th</sup> September 1939, the first day after Yom Kippur, young uniformed Germans began to demolish the Old Synagogue on ul. Mirowska. Many young *Volksdeutschen* and other scum actively participated in the demolition and the looting of all that was inside the synagogue. This “sacred” work took three whole days. On the fourth day, all that was left of the synagogue were only the walls. Even the doors, windows and floors were ripped out.

On 25<sup>th</sup> December 1939 (“*Boże Narodzenie*” [Christmas]), under the direction of gendarmes from the 72<sup>nd</sup> *Polizeibataillon*, a pogrom was perpetrated upon the Jews. As soon as it started becoming dark, hundreds of scum let loose on the Jewish neighbourhood and, with wild yells, set upon Jews who were in the street, hurling stones at them and beating them with skates and sticks<sup>3</sup>. Many of the assailants also began looting the shops and houses. Over the course of one hour, 1,000 windows were smashed and three shops were completely looted<sup>4</sup>.

At that same time, the only Jewish cigarette stand, of war invalid Kawan, was set on fire. Frenzied scum (probably German gendarmes, who had changed their clothes) began to shout that, in the Jewish synagogue (the so-call “German *Shul*”) on ul. Wilsona, Jews had a hidden arms depot. Under this pretext, the gendarmes blew up the synagogue and began demolishing its interior fittings. At about nine o’clock in the evening, the young scum set fire to the synagogue and the gendarmes hurled grenades into the fire for so long, until the whole building was engulfed in flames.

At the same time, while the tongues of fire were rising to the heavens, those same gendarmes arrested twenty men, among them also Jews, upon whom they cast blame for the events. On the following morning, nineteen of the detainees were freed, and the twentieth - a certain Stanisław Deregowski, aged sixteen - they handed over to the court-martial for having taken part in the looting<sup>5</sup>. As punishment, it was also ordered that the curfew hour be shortened [viz. made earlier]<sup>6</sup>.

On the following day, the 26<sup>th</sup>, *SS-Hauptscharführer*\* Dittmann sent over a report of this pogrom to the Radom district *Sicherheitspolizei* [Security Police - the SiPo]. The report ends with the assertion that

*“Those who, for the most part, come to mind as the perpetrators of these transgressions, are such people as are considered plebeians and seek such opportunities to rob and plunder.”*

Dittmann writes further in his report,

*“The possibility cannot be excluded that, on the night of Silvester\*\* , similar events should repeat themselves”<sup>7</sup>.*

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<sup>3</sup> Written report of the 72<sup>nd</sup> *Polizeibataillon* from 26<sup>th</sup> December 1939.

<sup>4</sup> Written report of the *Stadthauptmann* from 17<sup>th</sup> [sic 27<sup>th</sup>] December 1939.

<sup>5</sup> Written report of the Gestapo from 27<sup>th</sup> December 1939.

<sup>6</sup> Written report of the *Stadthauptmann* from 26<sup>th</sup> December 1939.

\* [TN: Ger., lit. “Head squad leader”; the second highest enlisted rank of the SS after *Sturmscharführer* (Storm squad leader).]

\*\* [TN: German name for New Year’s Eve, named for Pope Sylvester I, who served as pope in Rome from 314 to 335 and whose feast day is on 31<sup>st</sup> December.]

<sup>7</sup> Written reports of the Gestapo and the 72<sup>nd</sup> *Polizeibataillon*.

The contemporary *Hauptmann* [captain] of the 72<sup>nd</sup> *Polizeibataillon* (the factual leader of the pogrom) [also] sent out a large report. Among other things, it is written in this report:

*"The atmosphere of hatred towards Jews is explained by [the fact] that Jewish businessmen take advantage of the New Year's holiday to raise prices and also because the number of Jews in Częstochowa is constantly increasing through continuous migration."*

In continuation, that same report says:

*"The intensification of the fire in the synagogue, simultaneously in multiple points, makes it impossible to carry out the search for munitions there<sup>8</sup>".*

In the report from the *Stadthauptmannschaft* [city administration] to the chief of the Radom district, on its part, it is written that the pogrom had been carried out by former students and that it had probably been a result of the preaching on Jasna Góra during the mass that was held on 25<sup>th</sup> December<sup>9</sup>.

Thus appeared the official explanations of the Germans, who had organised the pogrom themselves and had carried it out with the aid of young scum. The aim of the German pogrom provocations was a threefold one:

- firstly - to terrorize the Jewish populace and concurrently cast a fear also upon the Polish one,
- secondly - to sully, abroad, the name of the Polish people, and
- thirdly - the old, well-known method to "divide and conquer".

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<sup>8</sup> Written reports of the Gestapo and the 72<sup>nd</sup> *Polizeibataillon*.

<sup>9</sup> Written reports of the Gestapo and the 72<sup>nd</sup> *Polizeibataillon*.