



Lajbel Bergman, Paris

***Częstochower Landsleit* at the Cieszanów Concentration Camp**

As soon as the Nazi army occupied Częstochowa, hell began for the Jewish populace. One of the constant plagues was the capture of Jews for forced labour. In August 1940, I was caught in the street and, before I realised what was happening, I was taken under guard to Kongrecki's factory on Aleja Wolności. The factory was surrounded by guards of the Nazi military, wearing helmets and with pointed rifles in full readiness for combat. There were several hundred other prisoners at the factory, who had shared the same fate. After spending a whole day in the factory, everyone was led away, under a heavy guard, to the railway station, where eighty people were packed into each freight wagon, which was at once hermetically closed.

The train began moving late at night and, after an entire night of travel, it arrived at an unknown location in an open field. Animal-like sounds and growls were heard from the outside. The doors of the wagons were opened and a ray of sunshine blinded our eyes. Sleepers stood, laid out, with Ukrainians in the service of the SS, holding stout clubs, who "treated" everyone to fearsome blows. That was our welcome.

From the open field, we were all led, under heavy guard, to Bełżec. There, a group of SS men encircled the entire transport and took everyone away to an open field, where there were gypsies. From exhaustion and despair, we all lay down on our bundles of trouble on the damp earth. It began raining intensely. Everyone was thoroughly drenched. We clung one to another in order to shield ourselves from the rain. Little groups formed, in order to be able to cover themselves, from the rain, with the things which they had to protect them.

I was in a group of five - Jidl Zylberberg (a brother of Symcha Zylberberg¹), Wolhendler, Klajn, Jochimowicz and myself. All of us huddled together in a single heap and covered ourselves with everything that we had with us. Nevertheless, we were all soaked through and through and, when it began to dawn, we were all lying in a river of water. Everyone gave off steam, as from the muddy soil².

A carriage arrived, containing spades, axes and picks. The orders were that everyone was to take two spades and a pick, and then report for a rollcall. For half an hour, we stood in our dripping clothes with the spades and picks, until a band of Ukrainians arrived and commanded us to march. It was a doleful march down unfamiliar roads and paths. It was a miserable march of men soaked by rain and famished. The Ukrainians constantly drove us to run uphill and walk down slowly, which terribly exhausted everyone.

¹ [TN: One of the leading figures of the Bund in Częstochowa before the War.]

² [TN: As mentioned above, this was in August, when it is summertime in Poland.]

There was nowhere to hide or flee, because it was an open field. Every couple of minutes, we heard gunfire from the Ukrainian destroyers, shooting those unable to keep up with the tragic march. The road was covered with the victims shot and with the streams of their blood.

In the evening, the transport arrived in the village of Ruskie Piaski³. Dozens of shot and beaten Jews lay there. Some were still moving, but were no longer able to speak, so that we could not find out anything from them. The pools of blood spoke for themselves as to what had occurred there. From that village, we continued marching until Cieszanów. There, everyone was led into the courtyard of a synagogue which had been demolished by the Nazis. There was also a *mikve* [ritual bathhouse] there. All of us were held for three days without eating or drinking, after which everyone was sent off to arduous labour. This was near the Soviet border and fortifications were being built.

The commandant of the Cieszanów camp was the black-hearted killer and monster Major Dolf⁴, who was always accompanied by his hound, which was bigger than himself. This dog would attend the rollcalls along with the inmates. Every day, the bloody murderer Major Dolf would ride up on a horse and look from afar. If someone tried to straighten his back for a minute, Dolf immediately rode over to him with the greatest gallop and struck him over the head and neck with a *Spitzrute* [Ger., pointed rod] or a spade. Those, who were beaten by Dolf, were not to be envied, for their hours of life were already numbered.

Once, at night, the following incident took place. A certain Kohn, from Częstochowa, approached an SS man during the night to permit him to go to the latrine. He allowed him and, as soon as the boy crossed the threshold of the barrack, he shot at him. The boy went back into the barrack and hid. A group of SS officers arrived at once. They sought out the boy and took a group of other Jews, led them out to the field and shot them all. Immediately afterwards, another group was taken to bury those shot.

On the following day, when everyone was returning from work, the guards did not take us on the usual route, but through an open field, which contained was deep water. They told everyone to leap across [it]. On the other side, watchmen were standing with pointed rifles onto which bayonets were fixed, so that everyone who jumped stabbed himself with a bayonet. Those, who were unable to leap across, fell into the water. On that occasion, dozens failed to return to the barracks and fell victim to the murderers. There was also a case of a *Częstochower*, who committed suicide.

On one occasion, an assassin from the Hitler Youth ordered a boy from Częstochowa to be buried alive. Fortunately, Bernard Kurland arrived then from Częstochowa and bought off the Nazi monster Major Dolf and took away all the *Częstochower landsleit*, and thus saving the boy also.

³ [TN: The only village by this name that we have found does not lie in the trajectory between Bełżec and Cieszanów, which are roughly 35 km apart, but some 65 km to the north of them, near Zamość.]

⁴ [TN: Although often mentioned in Yiddish sources as "Dolf" with an "F", his actual surname was **Dolp** - SS-Sturmbannführer Hermann Dolp.]