

## The Nazi Murderer Degenhardt

Degenhardt held the rank of Lieutenant. He was of average height, with a hateful countenance, which expressed savagery and bestiality. His murderous deeds demonstrated that he was not a human being, with emotions and feelings, but a cruel beast and bloodthirsty animal, whose highest imperatives were pillage and murder. While he murdered masses of people without any remorse, he was a coward when it came to his own life. He never walked alone - he was always accompanied by other assassins from his entourage, all of whom carried loaded handguns. One of his permanent companions was his chauffeur, the murderer Willi Unkelbach, who was sentenced [on 11<sup>th</sup> June 1959], by the Western German court in Hanau am Main, to seven consecutive life sentences and the loss of all his civil rights.

### The First Test Run of the Gruesome Crime

During the “Big Ghetto” period, in June 1942, Degenhardt ordered a rollcall of the entire Jewish populace, between the ages of fifteen and fifty, on the squares of the Old Market [Stary Rynek], New Market [Nowy Rynek] and I Aleja. A total of 20,000 Jews presented themselves to the rollcall, with the *Judenrat*’s departments. It was said that this had been done in order to inspect the workplaces, but it was, in fact, the preparation for the great crime – a prelude to the subsequent deportations to the death camp in Treblinka.

### Degenhardt’s Promise

The Nazi regime, besides being totalitarian and military, was also godless. It perpetrated the majority of its criminal deeds specifically on the Jewish holidays, in order to display its godlessness. In Częstochowa, the Nazis particularly chose Yom Kippur. On that day, the ghetto in Częstochowa was literally as electrified, once the “black” extermination squads had arrived and a hundred cattle carriages were standing in readiness for the deportation.

The *Judenrat* began to intercede, and the *Stadthauptmann*<sup>1</sup> Dr Frank let himself be bribed with 100,000 złoty, promising that everything would be in order and that nothing would happen. That was on 21<sup>st</sup> September 1942 at eight o’clock in the evening. Two hours later, the Nazi murderer Degenhardt telephoned the *Judenrat* and the ghetto police and assured them that the disquiet in the ghetto was unfounded and nothing would happen.

### Degenhardt Orders a Rollcall of the Ghetto Police at Four in the Morning

Despite the promises, which Degenhardt had given at ten at night, two hours later, he called a rollcall of the ghetto police for four o’clock in the morning at the grounds of the *Metalurgia* factory on ul. Krótka. At this rollcall, Degenhardt explained that a rollcall would be held of the Jews living on the streets Kawia, Koszarowa, Rynek Warszawski, Warszawska up to ul. Garibaldi, Garibaldi and Wilsona. The purpose was to check the work cards. All were to present themselves at 6:00 a.m. sharp. Anyone failing to comply with this order would be shot on the spot.

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<sup>1</sup> [TN: Ger., “City Captain”; mayor appointed by the Nazis.]

### **The First Deportation**

On Tuesday, 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1942, at six o'clock in the morning, all the Jewish inhabitants of the aforementioned streets were herded to the *Metalurgia* factory at ul. Krótka 13. They were driven by gendarmes, "black" death squads, and all the formations in service of the Nazi forces, which were under the direct command of the Nazi arch-murderer, Lieutenant Degenhardt. The Jews were driven under a hail of shots from all sides. Jews, who were shot, fell in the streets and streams of Jewish blood flowed all around.

Degenhardt stood on ul. Krótka wearing white gloves and holding a baton in his hand, directing the deportation. Those whom he indicated to the left were immediately led further to the railway station to the whitewashed carriages, to be taken away to their destruction in the gas chambers of Treblinka. Those whom he motioned to the right were let into the grounds of the *Metalurgia* factory. What Degenhardt conducted, at the time, may be described in one phrase - "coldblooded mass-murder and slavery". On that day, seven thousand Częstochowa Jews were sent away, by Degenhardt, to their gruesome deaths in the Treblinka gas chambers. The bloody scenes, that were enacted on that day, the incessant shooting upon those unable to walk as quickly as Degenhardt's helpers drove them are simply impossible to describe. Rivers of blood streamed throughout the streets along which the Jews, whom Degenhardt had selected to die, were led.

Degenhardt ordered for a mass grave to be dug on ul. Kawia. During an entire day and late into the night, the people, who had been shot in the street – dead and half-dead, were collected onto carts tethered to horses and were taken away to ul. Kawia, where they were simply flung into the mass grave.

### **Degenhardt's Mass Killings Were Linked to Mass Looting**

Degenhardt's mass killings were linked to the mass looting of Jewish property. Their orders were, that all those required to report for the rollcall had to leave their keys stuck in the door. It was forbidden to lock the doors. No one was allowed to take along any luggage, barring a small hand pack. At the railway station, the victims were forced to take off their shoes before entering the carriages. Degenhardt's helpers robbed the victims of all their valuables.

### **The Subsequent Deportations**

Following the same system as the first one, a whole series of deportations took place from other streets and areas of the Częstochowa "[Big] Ghetto" - all with the same cruelty and bestiality.

The second deportation took place on Friday, 25<sup>th</sup> September; the third, on Monday, 28<sup>th</sup> September; the fourth, on Friday, 1<sup>st</sup> October; and the fifth, on Monday, 4<sup>th</sup> October. All these tragic deportations took place in 1942, and all of them were conducted by the Nazi murderer Degenhardt.

### **The Jews Gathered at "Metalurgia"**

The operations managers came to "Metalurgia" to take the labourers who had worked for them prior to the deportation. Degenhardt would closely examine every group, during the course of which he would always choose himself a couple of victims and order his henchmen

to immediately shoot them. Such was the case when the commissar [viz. trustee] of *Enro*, Herr Kołłątaj, came for his group of labourers – Degenhardt winked at one of his murderous helpers, the gendarme Schott, who pulled out the seventeen-year-old boy, the son of the son-in-law of the Rabbi of Kamyk, from the line and shot him on the spot in front of everyone.

In the gruesome days of the deportations, some thought that, by being admitted to *Metalurgia*, they would avoid the misfortune of being deported to the Treblinka gas chambers. People began bribing Degenhardt himself and his aides, the gendarmes. During this period, the Nazi murderer Degenhardt and his henchmen robbed the greatest possessions of jewellery and valuables that had been passed down from generation to generation, some of which were antiques of inestimable worth. As a result, they [viz. the owners] were let into *Metalurgia*.

Under these tragic circumstances, a woman gave birth to an infant at *Metalurgia*. The gendarmes, at once, notified Degenhardt, who ordered that the woman and child be led into a hall in the factory, as well as all [other] women with small children, and [promised] that they would enjoy special attention and no evil would befall them.

There was, in *Metalurgia*, one family named Myski, whose [head] belonged to the *Chevra Kadisha* [Burial Society] and enjoyed so-called “special privileges”. Degenhardt gave him his “word of honour” that nothing bad would happen to him and his family.

Once Degenhardt had carried through the mass deportations and the “Big Ghetto” had been emptied, he conducted a selection of all the Jews, who had bought themselves off with him and his helpers for great valuables, all the women with their little children, the Myski family, and also an entire array of others - and sent all of them to their deaths in Treblinka. Myski called Degenhardt’s attention to the fact that he had given his “word of honour”. Where was his “word of honour” [now]? – to which the Nazi assassin Degenhardt replied that his word of honour did not bind him as regards Jews.

### **The Craftsmen’s House**

At Aleja (Najświętszej Maryi Panny) 14, there were around twenty workshops of the best Jewish professional craftsmen. Degenhardt, his aides and the [other] Nazis stationed in Częstochowa made proper use of these workshops for their own personal ends. There were 187 professional workmen officially registered at the workshops. They had the assurances of both Degenhardt and the *Stadthauptmann* that nothing would happen to them. On the day of the fifth *akcja*, Degenhardt arrived with his henchmen and conducted a lightning-fast selection, whereupon nineteen elderly people - parents of the craftsmen - were sent away on the deportation transport to be annihilated in Treblinka.

### **The Two Jewish Hospitals**

Degenhardt went to the hospitals and commanded the doctors and nurses to kill all the patients by way of injections. The doctors protested that they could not do this in accordance with the ethics of their profession and that, secondly, they did not possess such injections. Degenhardt flew into a wild, homicidal [rage] and declared that if, within two hours, all the patients had not been poisoned, all the patients, with the doctors, nurses and other hospital employees would be shot. Two hours later, all the patients had been poisoned - dead.

### **The “Small Ghetto”**

Following the mass deportations and mass slaughters, the ghetto was emptied. The survivors were barracked at the various workplaces under a cruel regime, with slave labour, under the worst sanitary conditions and, in addition, suffering from hunger and epidemic diseases.

Replacing the “Big Ghetto”, Degenhardt implemented the “Small Ghetto” in three narrow alleyways, namely Nadrzeczna, Garncarska and Kozia. The Jews, barracked in the factories, were sent, under guard, to sleep in the “Small Ghetto”. This “Small Ghetto” became a daily arena for Degenhardt’s bloody spectacles.

### **Degenhardt Sends Away Częstochowa Jews to Radomsko for “Work”**

Under the pretence of sending Częstochowa Jews to the [labour] camps in Radomsko, Degenhardt sent away eight hundred Jews and six physicians with their families. Upon arriving in Radomsko, the deportation to the death camps took place there and everyone was sent to be exterminated.

### **Degenhardt Orders the Foundation of a Children’s Home for the Surviving Children**

Despite all the deportations and the searches for Jews in hiding and their capture, nevertheless they had managed to conceal an entire array of children in various hiding places. Their numbers reached 120. Degenhardt ordered a children’s home to be set up, where the children would receive better nutrition and no evil would befall them. This children’s home was indeed established and was run by good pedagogic forces, among whom was the former director of the Jewish Gimnazjum, Dr Anisfeld. Several weeks later, all the little children were murdered by [orders of] the Nazi killer Degenhardt<sup>2</sup>.

### **Bliżyn**

One of the greatest calamities was the constant deportation to Bliżyn. At first, professional workmen, mainly carpenters, were seized according to previously compiled lists and were sent away to Bliżyn in order to build barracks for the camp there. After that, Jews were regularly captured and sent there for arduous slave labour breaking rocks. On 17<sup>th</sup> March 1943 alone, 300 Jews were deported [there] from the Częstochowa “Small Ghetto”. The majority did not survive the hard work and hunger. At the start of 1944, the Bliżyn camp began to be liquidated and everyone was deported to the Auschwitz death camp.

### **Exchange of German POWs for Jews**

In February 1943, Degenhardt spread the news that the Nazi government had sealed a deal with the British authorities, via diplomats of neutral countries, regarding the exchange of German POWs in British captivity, for Jews, and that these Jews were to be sent to Palestine. The Jews entitled to this exchange were those who had relatives in Palestine. A registration with all kinds of preferential treatment ensued, and everyone provided proof that he had relatives in Palestine. The result was that a list of 157 names was compiled, which consisted practically of the entire living intelligentsia at that time. On 20<sup>th</sup> March 1943, all those listed

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<sup>2</sup> [TN: According to Dr Orenstein’s book “Churban Czenstochow”, p. 240, “Four weeks later, he [viz. Degenhardt] ordered the police to hand the children over, sent them to Radomsko and from there to the gas chambers in Treblinka.”]

were summoned to report for a rollcall. Instead of being sent to Palestine, they were all taken to the Częstochowa [Jewish] cemetery and were shot there.

### **The Days From 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1943**

On 1<sup>st</sup> May 1943, the “Small Ghetto” was surrounded by reinforcing Ukrainian guards. None of the workgroups were let out to work. It was clear to everyone that these were the last minutes of the “Small Ghetto’s” existence, and that the nearly 6,000 still surviving Jews would be deported to the death camps - to the Treblinka gas chambers.

What actually happened then? Degenhardt wished to annihilate the almost 6,000 Jews and to declare Częstochowa *Judenrein* [Ger., clear of Jews]. [But] the political directors of the HASAG factories (HASAG are the initials of “Hugo Schneider Aktiengesellschaft<sup>3</sup>”) opposed this, declaring they needed to have the Jews for work. A whole series of consultations were held with the higher authorities in Radom and Berlin, and the HASAG political directors brought Degenhardt’s new plan of mass murder to nought - for the time being. On 4<sup>th</sup> May 1943, all the inhabitants [of the “Small Ghetto”] returned to work. Degenhardt could not forgive the HASAG political directors, who had, [at least] temporarily, made his plan come to nothing.

### **Degenhardt’s Plan to Liquidate the “Small Ghetto”**

Degenhardt realised that, with the political directors – albeit that they were also Nazis, but with an interest in the industry – he would accomplish nothing. [So] he decided to liquidate the “Small Ghetto”. He would forfeit all the Jews kept as workers and barracked in the factories by the political directors, but he would kill off the rest.

On 25<sup>th</sup> June 1943, Degenhardt embarked upon liquidating the “Small Ghetto”. The dayshift [workers] were held at the factories and were no longer sent back [to the “Small Ghetto” after work]. A rollcall was held at HASAG-Pelcery. This was a few minutes after five o’clock [in the afternoon]. Degenhardt appeared and delivered an address.

### **“The Beautiful May Has Passed for You”**

The contents of the speech were as follows:

*“The beautiful May has passed for you. You live as long as you work in HASAG, and you work as long as you live.”*

The Political Director of HASAG went to the “Small Ghetto” for the Jewish labourers of the nightshift, whom Degenhardt was reluctant to let go. The two forces were at odds - blood and exploitation – and HASAG’s Political Director, Lüth, managed to receive the nightshift workers from the “Small Ghetto”.

### **Liquidation of the “Small Ghetto”**

Degenhardt set out to liquidate the “Small Ghetto”. He ordered all the Jews of the “Small Ghetto” to immediately report for a rollcall, and those failing to comply with these orders would immediately be shot. This time, no one obeyed him - they did not carry out his command. On the contrary - all the Jews concealed themselves in different hideouts in cellars and attics.

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<sup>3</sup> [TN: German word for a corporation which is owned by its shareholders, whose shares may be traded on a stock market.]

### **Degenhardt Gives His Officer's Word of Honour**

Through his associates, Degenhardt made it known that he gave his officer's word of honour to the effect that he had declared an amnesty, for all those who reported of their own free will, until the following day at two o'clock in the afternoon. All those, who reported willingly would not be punished in any manner, and they would be sent to work in the HASAG factories.

Despite all the numerous mass-murders that Degenhardt had conducted by way of various deceitful assurances and promises, there was still a group of Jews, who voluntarily presented themselves to be sent to work at HASAG. The disappointment, however, was not long in coming. At the appointed hour, viz. two o'clock in the afternoon, Böttcher, the Chief of SS District of Radom, arrived and commanded the Jews, who had reported willingly, to be taken away to the cemetery and shot. Böttcher was captured immediately following the War and was sentenced to death by the Polish Tribunal in Radom – a verdict which was carried out by hanging.

### **The Definitive Liquidation of the Częstochowa "Small Ghetto"**

Searches for Jews in hiding continued for several days. Degenhardt issued an order to blow up the houses with dynamite. The most gruesome scenes, which human fantasy cannot envisage, were then played out. Fragments of houses, intermingled with body parts of the hidden Jews, flew up in the air.

All those Jews caught in various hiding places, and also on the "Aryan side" were burned alive on a pyre on ul. Garncarska. Five hundred Jews were burned at the time. One of Degenhardt's aides, who carried out the gruesome act of burning Jews alive, was apprehended immediately following the War in Wrocław and was brought to justice in Częstochowa. The Polish tribunal in Częstochowa sentenced Degenhardt's cruel assistant, [Heinrich] Kessler<sup>4</sup> [Köster], to death by hanging. The verdict was carried out in Częstochowa.

In the days from 26<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> June 1943, during the final liquidation of the Częstochowa "Small Ghetto", Degenhardt caused two thousand Jewish victims.

### **The Subsequent Selections**

Following the liquidation of the "Small Ghetto", all the Jews who were alive then were barracked in the HASAG factories. Only a group of professional Jewish workmen were barracked in a house on ul. Garibaldięgo. Degenhardt wished to liquidate this workplace, too, by carrying out a selection, murdering some of them and sending the rest away to HASAG-Pelcery. Degenhardt did not wish to suffice just with that – he also wanted to carry out a selection within HASAG-Pelcery itself.

### **The Selection at Ul. Garibaldięgo**

Under the pretext of sending them away to HASAG-Pelcery, Degenhardt conducted a selection at ul. Garibaldięgo and a hundred Jews men and women were chosen. That was on 20<sup>th</sup> July 1943.

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<sup>4</sup> [TN: Also spelt "Keßler" in Dr Orenstein's book "Churban Czenstochow", p. 245; as the murderer's surname appears as "Köster" in several other sources, it is unclear whether Kessler/Keßler is erroneous or an alias which the criminal went by.]

### **The Selection at HASAG-Pelcery**

At the same time, Degenhardt forced a selection to be made at HASAG-Pelcery, which was carried out by the Nazi foremen on that same date, 20<sup>th</sup> July 1943, at ten o'clock at night. Three hundred Jews were then selected. As a group, they were encircled by the *Werkschutz* men and led away to the cellars of the so-called "colony"<sup>5</sup>.

On the following day, 21<sup>st</sup> July 1943, the 100 selected Jews from ul. Garibaldiego were brought to the "colony" grounds and added to the 300 selected Jews. All 400 were tortured in a bestial manner<sup>6</sup> and taken away, on trucks, half-dead to the Częstochowa [Jewish] cemetery, where they were shot and buried in a mass grave.

After the War, twenty-two of the Nazi foremen at HASAG were caught and brought to justice. The trial took place in Leipzig in May and June 1949. Four of them were sentenced to death and eighteen to life in prison.

### **How Many Human Lives Degenhardt Has on His Conscience**

First of all, it needs to be established that an entire array of Jewish communities was deported to Częstochowa - namely, those of Mstów, Bodzanów, Wieluń, Koniecpol and Królewska Huta. Refugees also arrived from various cities, such as Otwock, Działoszyn, Warsaw, Łódź, Lublin, Płock, Kalisz and Kraków, as well as from the territories that had been annexed to the Third Reich. These arriving refugees did not register themselves, in order to avoid the unpaid forced labour, persecutions and repressions.

According to the statistics [report] of the Częstochowa Municipality, which encompasses the period up to 30<sup>th</sup> July 1942, there were 43,290 registered Jews – but, in a statement, the Town Hall cautions that about 20% of the Jews were completely unregistered. There were 995 Jews, who were registered with the *Judenrat* but not with the Municipality, because the Nazi *Stadthauptmann* forbade the Municipality to register Jews after 30<sup>th</sup> July 1942.

It must also be taken into consideration that transports with Jews were brought to Częstochowa directly to the HASAG factories, numbering 12,000, and they were from the Łódź Ghetto, Płaszów (a camp near Kraków), Skarżysko-Kamienna, Bliżyn, Piotrków and Dęblin.

This sum of fifty thousand victims [as shown below] relates exclusively to the Jews who were in Częstochowa during the Nazi occupation.

The statistics are therefore as follows:

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<sup>5</sup> [TN: From other mentions of this "colony" in Dr Orenstein's book "Churban Czenstochow", it is evident that it was part of the HASAG-Pelcery complex but not inside the camp itself. It was most likely the temporary quarters (thus the name "colony") of the factory's non-Jewish operators and/or labourers.]

<sup>6</sup> [TN: Each of the 400 Jews was first stunned by a heavy hammer blow to the head and then stripped naked and thrown into the freight trucks (see "Churban Czenstochow", p. 233).]

1.) Officially registered at the Municipality until 30 <sup>th</sup> July 1942	34,290
2.) Registered at the <i>Judenrat</i> in August and September 1942	995
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	35,285
3.) The Municipality's assertion that 20% of the Jews were unregistered	7,057
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	42,342
4.) Transports of Jews brought directly to the HASAG factories and camps, namely HASAG-Pelcery, HASAG-Warta and HASAG Częstochowianka	12,000
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	54,342
5.) Unidentified	3,858
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	Total: 58,200
Those who survived the concentration camps	8,200
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Direct victims of Degenhardt's gruesome crimes in Częstochowa	50,000

After committing the mass murders, Degenhardt disappeared from Częstochowa - and who knows how many [more] mass murders he perpetrated until the downfall of the Nazi regime?

### **Why Was Degenhardt Not Captured Immediately?**

How is it possible that the mass murderer Degenhardt was not captured immediately after the War? There is not a single Jew, who was in Częstochowa, who does not know the mass murderer Degenhardt. Each one would have recognised him at once, if only due to his hateful appearance.

The answer is as follows:

In the second half of 1944, when the Nazi forces began suffering one military defeat after another, the news spread among the Jews in the Częstochowa HASAG camps to the effect that Degenhardt had been sent away to Greece to lead the fight against the Greek partisans. The Greek partisans found out about his criminal deeds in Częstochowa and immediately pronounced a death sentence upon him, which was immediately carried out.

It occurred to no one that this news had been purposely "produced", and everyone took it for a certain truth.

The Nazi mass murderer Degenhardt, as said, is concurrently a coward for his own criminal life. He would always deceive the Jews with various lies. This time, also, he thought he would manage to fool everyone as regards his criminal past.



Degenhardt was, nevertheless, apprehended and, even though he feigned insanity and was for a long time under observation at a mental asylum, the doctors determined that he was pretending and turned him over to face West German justice<sup>7</sup>.



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<sup>7</sup> [TN: On 24<sup>th</sup> May 1966, Paul Degenhardt was sentenced in Lüneburg, Germany, to life imprisonment.]