

Herszl Rozenblum

From Rottleberode to Gardelegen

- in memory of my fallen comrades and friends -



Introduction

Herszl Rozenblum is a Częstochower landsmann.

Following the liquidation of the "Big Ghetto" and the "Small Ghetto", he was barracked in HASAG-Pelcery. On 15th January 1945, he was deported to Buchenwald, then to Dora and, from there, to Rottleberode.

In this article, Herszl Rozenblum describes the last stage of the road of suffering - the death transport and death march from the Rottleberode concentration camp to Gardelegen.

The Editor

In the German heartland, in Rottleberode, there was a concentration camp with over a thousand slave labourers of various nationalities. The V-1 and V-2 rockets and flying [bombs] were produced there.

On Wednesday, 4th April 1945, the camp was evacuated and the death march ensued. At a distance, we could see that Nordhausen was in a blaze of flames from the bombs of the Allied aeroplanes.

In horrific, inhuman conditions and under a hail of blows, everyone was driven all night to the railway station. At the same time, all the other camps in the vicinity were also evacuated, and the number of inmates reached 8,000. Everyone was under the stringent watch of SS men, who packed 100 and 120 prisoners into each open wagon.

The transport dragged along for seven days and seven nights and no one received any food or even water. This resulted in mass mortality, due to hunger and cold. Every evening, after the sun went down, the corpses were thrown off the wagons and into the fields. On the seventh day, the train came to a stop, because the movement of trains had been utterly cut off by the attacking Allied armies.

The SS killers drove everyone out of the wagons and, at the headcount, the number of inmates was about 2,000. More than 6,000 had given up their souls during that sorrowful death transport.

Under the strict guard of the SS assassins, a march down a narrow road, through a forest, ensued. Everyone resembled skeletons, living corpses and, when someone could no longer march and sat down, a murderous SS bullet immediately perforated his head and, like a hewn tree, a life of horrific pain came to an end.

Despite the stringent watch and constant shootings, a large number of those marching fled into the woods.

When the entire transport reached the locality which, for the survivors, bears the so sorrowfully renowned name of Gardelegen, the number was already no more than 150 emaciated and depleted skeletons.

It was already obvious then that the guards did not know what to do with the still remaining 150 living corpses.

In Gardelegen, it became clear to us what had happened there half an hour prior to the 150 skeletons' arrival. The SS murderers had conducted a hunt for those who had escaped, captured them and brought them to Gardelegen. In a barn, they soaked the straw with petrol, drove everyone into it and burned them alive.

As it later emerged, on 12th April 1945, three days prior to liberation by the American army, 1,015 (one thousand and fifteen) martyrs of various nationalities perished in that horrifying manner.

After the American army marched in, they ordered the German mayor to make a special cemetery for the burned victims.

In the town of Gardelegen, which is nowadays in Eastern Germany, there is a cemetery with 1,015 tombs, which symbolise German and Nazi barbarism.

As one of the sixty-eight survivors of the transport, I wish to accompany this brief piece with the words:

“Honoured be their memory!”

