

Szlojme Waga

The Fifth *Akcja*

On 4th October 1942, it was learned that all the remaining Jewish policemen were ordered to take part in the operation that would take place the next day at daybreak - the fifth *akcja*.

The fifth *akcja* began like the earlier ones, but it was at once apparent that a special plan had been prepared for it. Firstly, it was conducted at a faster pace than all the previous ones. The people were driven to the *Nowy Rynek* at an earlier hour than in the past. Also, more Jews were shot in the streets than in the other operations. The *Hauptmann* directed more energetically and sternly with his baton and, also, the blows fell upon the Jewish heads more often. The henchmen's assistants did not permit anyone to stop in front of the *Hauptmann* to beg for mercy. The railway wagons were filled sooner than during the earlier operations and the mountains of shoes of the people loaded onto the train piled up very quickly.

At the end of the march of the thousands of Jews to the wagons, Degenhardt ordered his chauffeur to take him and his aides to the ghetto. Once there, he first of all went to the assembly point on ul. Katedralna and ordered that the assembled be taken to the wagons. He then ordered that the Jewish policemen, who were being held under arrest at the school, be brought there with their wives and children.

Finally, the *Hauptmann* and his assistants went to the Jewish hospital and had all the doctors and nurses summoned to him. When these had assembled, he told them to inject all the patients hospitalised there with poison, to "finish them off" quickly.

The doctors attempted saving the situation with various excuses, such as not having the appropriate materials for the injections, etc. The commander replied to this, that if the operation was not executed within two hours, he would order all the doctors and nurses to be shot, along with all the patients.



Memorial service at the mass grave of the victims from the intelligentsia

After long and painful discussions, the doctors decided to put the patients to death by injection. The hospital's head physician, the surgeon Dobrzyński, gave out the first order. He told his mother to poison her mother, that is, his grandmother. His mother, who lived on the hospital's premises, put poison in a glass of tea and gave it to her mother to drink. When the old lady began writhing in agony, Dr Dobrzynski, her grandson, gave her an injection which put her to sleep forever. Her daughter's eyes welled with tears and she cursed her hands, if she had sinned by poisoning her own mother.

The sick were forced to receive the injections. Those who struggled were poisoned by force. The doctors and the nurses worked at hastening the deaths of the sick with tears in their eyes. When all lay already dead, the doctors and nurses stood by the dead people and wept for the deaths and the deeds they had done.

It was then reported to the *Hauptmann* that no patients remained in the hospital, only corpses, to which he replied, "Yes, that's good!"

A significant section of the hospital staff was then sent to the railway wagons, whereas the doctors and some of the nurses - the younger and more beautiful ones - were put in quarantine.

The commander then visited the hospital for epidemic diseases. Dr Kagan, the director of the hospital, had in the past operations endeavoured to have all the patients standing on their feet [during the *akcja*], in order to save their lives. But this time, he was unsuccessful as, on Degenhardt's orders, all the patients as well as the hospital staff were sent away to the railway wagons. Only a small fraction was sent to quarantine.

After liquidating the hospitals, *Hauptmann* Degenhardt turned his attention to seeking out Jews who were in contact with Germans. He found [Kolenbrener,] the well-known director of the Jewish housing office, who had been hiding for several days in a factory and ordered that he be sent to the railway wagons.

He then ordered to find Wajnryb, the renowned *Judenrat* member, who was well-connected with some of the Gestapo men - they had actually hidden him. Nevertheless, Degenhardt's men found him and brought him in. In response to his having concealed himself, the *Hauptmann* ordered that all Jews named Wajnryb be brought to him.

Men, women and children, the *Judenrat* member Wajnryb's entire family, his wife and children, his brothers, sisters and their families were brought directly and everyone was sent away to the trains. Also, others who had any connection at all with the Gestapo were found and sent to the wagons. Finally, the arch-murderer Degenhardt and his men went to the Craftsmen's House at Aleja 14. Immediately upon their arrival there, they bellowed for all to go down to the courtyard, leaving the doors of their apartments open. All the craftsmen and their wives descended, each holding their personal documents.

All were ordered to line up with their families in front of their individual workshops. The *Hauptmann* did not even glance at the papers they held, but asked each his age and profession.

He separated the young from the elderly and the children and put them in different groups. He then announced, "You are all going! The old are going to a camp and the young will work. You will not necessarily be engaged in your own professions. You will be able to do other jobs too."

This news shattered everyone. Their faces paled, and they were rendered speechless. A deathly silence prevailed. Just then, steps were heard and here came Mrs. Moszewicz. She stood awhile, until the commander approached her, upon which they conferred privately for several minutes.

Degenhardt then returned to us, with slow steps, and began searching through the rows of the old people.

The atmosphere was charged with tension and we sensed that the lot had fallen upon the elderly.

Following the selection of the old people, he ordered us to go back home and help them prepare for the journey, so that they should stand again in the courtyard within ten minutes. "They are leaving!" he added.

Heart-breaking scenes ensued in the homes of the elderly, who had been selected for transport.

Standing by the windows, we saw how Degenhardt first looked at his watch and then turned his glance up to the windows. A gendarme instantly shouted, "*Herunter* [Come down]!" And the master craftsman, in charge of the knitting workshop, Fajgenblat and his wife came down to the courtyard. They wiped their tears and waved their hands to the windows at which their two sons stood with their wives and beautiful grandson, who was ceaselessly crying out, "Zaydeshi! Bubbeshi! [Granddaddy! Granny!] Stay here with us! Don't go away!"

The child's shrill voice cut through the gruesome silence of the courtyard, where the *Hauptmann* and his men ambled about. The tailor Brandlewicz then joined the old couple, with his wife and ten-year-old grandson, whose parents had been deported in an earlier *akcja*. They also waved up to the windows where their dear ones stood. From the other exit came the devout seamstress, dressed in her *shaitl* [wig worn by religious married women], together with her husband, the son of the Rabbi of Kłobuck. They walked weeping. They were still very young - what did the murderer want from them?

The old Frank [surname], who had come here to visit his sons, joined them. And next to them [stood] a tall, powerful man about fifty years of age - he was Wolfowicz, the corset maker's husband. The commander had asked him what his occupation was, to which he had replied, "My wife makes corsets." Everyone knew that he was a locksmith. What had happened was that he had been startled and was so distracted that he did not know what to say. The commander had not found his answer satisfactory, so he selected him to be sent away.

A little later, we saw Grin the tailor's father-in-law and mother-in-law descend to the courtyard with packs on their shoulders. It seems that [even] the fact that their son-in-law, [who was also] a policeman and had a good connection with Degenhardt, had not stood them in good stead.

The group of people in the courtyard grew constantly larger and everyone was ordered to line up in a row. (They were also joined by the tailor Lenkinski and Chaimke, the renowned women's tailor.)

When the children wished to approach their parents and speak with them, the gendarmes prevented them from doing so. They were only allowed to give them money and things which they had forgotten to take with them.

Suddenly, a commotion broke out. This was due to the fact that the gendarmes had discovered four women and a boy of twelve hiding in one of the cellars. They were brought out of their hiding-place and were added to the group standing in the courtyard.

In all, the group consisted of nineteen people. The gendarmes counted them and ordered them to exit the yard, with the teary eyes of their sons, daughters, brothers and sisters accompanying them.

The following day, Mrs. Moszewicz told [the craftsmen] that the *akcja* had transpired “relatively well” for the Craftsmen’s House.

She revealed that she had, at the very last moment, convinced the *Hauptmann* to take only 10% of those destined for deportation. As 190 people were registered for deportation, he took 19. Had she not arrived, he would have taken 90% and he would have sent 10% to the workshops, thus liquidating the Craftsmen’s House. She had explained this to him at the last minute and he had agreed that the Craftsmen’s House should continue functioning.