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Terror and Destruction



Relations between the Poles and Jews in Częstochowa, in the last years before the War, were quite stressed. The Christians quite simply said, "Wait, wait, Hitler will come and show you already".

For a few years already, the Jews did not go to any parks and, particularly late at night, it was terrifying to go out on the street. It was often heard that, here and there, a Jew had been stabbed. Flatt was stabbed, in broad daylight, on his way to work.

It was in this pogrom-like atmosphere that the War broke out.

On Friday, 1st September, at five o'clock before dawn, German aeroplanes were already flying over Częstochowa. That same evening, the Polish army retreated and approaching Jewish soldiers reported that the Germans were marching forward with great forces. Upon hearing the tragic tidings, more than half the city's Jews began walking and travelling to Mstów. Many of them then returned and those who were on the roads were shot by the German planes. Dozens of victims fell in this manner.

The Germans entered Częstochowa on a Sunday (the third day of the War) and, already on the morrow, they perpetrated the "Bloody Monday" [massacre]. Leibel Kac was shot in the Nowy Rynek. In the evening, all [sic] the Jews were herded into the cloisters and shot from behind. I, myself, was in the church in the Nowy Rynek. Next to me, on the floor, sat Reb Awigdor's son, Jakób-Icek. He hid his head, so as not to see the Christian religious paraphernalia.

The following day, we were taken to the barracks of the 27th Regiment, where we were held till Thursday under inhuman conditions. Leaving the barracks, we passed through the square and saw a hound chasing down Szyja "Tzimmes", tearing live flesh from him. This made a horrifying impression on us - the Germans looked on and laughed.

"Sisyphean"¹ Labour

Then men and women began to be captured for work - not for any productive work, but just to torment and humiliate. Thus, for instance, we carried bricks all day long from one place to another and then back in the Town Hall Square. Such was also the case for a group of youths, who were sent to Przyrów to supposedly "regulate water" [divert the course of a river]. But, in truth, this was all just to torment them - to break the people's morale.

In September 1940, the *Judenrat* was ordered to present a few hundred men to be sent away to carry out a job. No one knew where.

Notices were sent to unemployed youths and I, also, found myself among them. On the morrow, we were conducted, under a heavy guard, to the train and thrown into the freight wagons. In the

¹ Editor's note: this term for a task that is endless and ineffective. It derives from a Greek myth, where Sisyphus was punished in Hades for his misdeeds in life by being condemned eternally to roll a heavy stone up a hill.

morning, we arrived in a concentration camp in Lublin, from where the Germans sent us to perform a task.

We walked some 30 kilometres on foot to this work and, to further embitter our lives, to our group, they added a couple of elderly Jews who hadn't the strength to make even one step. Those who stopped on the road were beaten. Many fell from exhaustion.

In Bełżec

After marching an entire day, we arrived in Bełżec. There, we were let into a large square among gypsies, under the open skies. The whole night, a torrential rain poured down and we clung to each other because of the cold and wet. In the morning, we walked on and arrived in Cieszanów. Here, a new chapter of torture began. We walked several kilometres to work every day, escorted by Ukrainian bandits who beat us murderously.

For *Kol Nidrei*, everyone assembled at the synagogue, which was within the camp, and Srebrnik from Częstochowa, with a heavy heart, recited *Kol Nidrei*.

Our plight in Cieszanów became known in Częstochowa and the *Judenrat* sent out a delegate, Mr Bromberg. He came to us and was unable to utter a single word. The tears choked him, seeing our misery. Sorrowfully, his Jewish heart did not hold out for long.

On our journey homewards, we were made disembark for another couple of days of labour in Bełżec. Mostly Jews from Lublin worked there - elderly Jews with long, white beards. The Germans intentionally gave the older Jews the heaviest tasks. They stood in water to their beards. It sent a shudder through one to look at them.

After nine weeks of hard labour, we returned home, physically and mentally broken.

The "Big Ghetto"

In 1941, the "Big Ghetto" was set up in a small area, into which were driven the more than 45,000 Jews from Częstochowa, including newcomers. At once, they ordered all Jews to wear the Star of David symbol and we were not allowed outside the ghetto.

The first victim apprehended by the Germans outside the ghetto was Mojsze Janowicz, a son of the leather-merchant in the Stary Rynek (in Bajgele's building). At the Town Hall Square, a German ordered him to run home and, as he did so, he shot him from behind. This was a warning to the Jews to not go far from the ghetto.

In the summer of 1942, news began reaching us from other cities, that the Germans were liquidating the ghettos and sending the Jews to death camps. The people of Częstochowa fooled themselves with the illusion that this would not happen in our city, because the Germans had set up factories and they would need workers. But the tearful reality nullified all hopes.

On Rosh Hashana 1942, German soldiers burst into the synagogues and began murderously beating the worshippers. On Yom Kippur, we no longer gathered, but prayed silently in small groups. At eleven o'clock, word spread that the ghetto was being surrounded by the Ukrainians with the black caps and, by the close of Yom Kippur, we already knew that the liquidation of the ghetto was beginning.

Later, the "Small Ghetto" was set up in Częstochowa. The borders were on ul. Mostowa (the side of Gittel Esterl), ul. Senatorska (Majer Biczner's side), to the *gubernia* [seat of government?] and the

Warta River, from the “crates” to Polak’s building. The “Small Ghetto” was, in truth, a labour-camp, to which the people from most of the workplaces came to sleep.

On Erev Purim, 1943, a notice was published that the intelligentsia were to present themselves, supposedly to travel to Palestine. But they were all taken to the cemetery and shot there. Dr Bresler, who was from Płock, was delayed with a patient, thus being saved from certain death. His wife, *née* Nowak, jumped from the moving vehicle midway there and was also saved. Kurland also saved himself by jumping off. Before long, the “Small Ghetto” too was liquidated. The young people were sent to “HASAG”, whilst the older – to the death camps.