

My Last Meeting With



the Jew-Murderer Degenhardt

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In the first days of summer, on 24th June 1943, when the sun showed itself in the skies in its full radiance and splendour, bringing joy and happiness to all living systems in the world, I, tired, physically spent and spiritually downcast, after a hard day of work along with all the forced labourers, was preparing to go home from HASAG-Pelcery to the "Small Ghetto".

The "procedure" of going home was not such an easy one. It entailed an "Appell" [Ger., rollcall/headcount], and being counted under the guard of the *Werkerschutz* Chief Klemm and other "yachsunim"¹ of the tyrannical Nazi regime.

On that day, the *Appell* was not held in the factory yard, but in the big hall, where the *Werkzeugbau* [Ger., toolmaking] Department was later located. To everyone's surprise, the Jew-murderer *Hauptmann* Degenhardt appeared and called out names. All those who were called had to go out from the rows and present themselves. The first name was mine - Epsztajn - then Szmulewicz and Dawidowicz. Eight women reported. All were questioned as to their personal details - four were sent back into the rows, and four were detained. Those arrested were myself, my cousin Heniek Epsztajn's wife Marysia, who is now in Zeilsheim near Frankfurt, Henryk Lustiger's wife, née Szmulewicz, who now lives in Regensburg, and Mrs Dawidowicz, of whom I have had no word.

Concurrently, Józek Winter and Moryc Wodzisławski were [also] arrested. They were led away to the jail, and executed shortly thereafter.

Degenhardt explained to me that we, namely the four women, would be examined by the Gestapo on the following morning, and then would be sent back to the work in HASAG-Pelcery. We would be spending that night at the ghetto hospital.

Meanwhile, the dayshift was led away to the ghetto. We were handed over to murderous gendarmes, headed by *Meister* [Ger., Foreman] Hochberg.

Hochberg and the gendarmes rode bicycles and we, the women, were forced to run several kilometres to the "Small Ghetto". Tired and exhausted from a whole day of arduous labour, this running was much worse and more bitter than death.

In the "Small Ghetto", Hochberg handed us over to the supervision of the Polish police *przodownik* [Pol., chief] Paruzel and the commander of the Jewish ghetto police, Parasol.

We were taken to the ghetto hospital on ul Jaskrowska. Mrs Marysia Rotsztajn, the wife of the engineer Samek Rotsztajn, was also there. We were guarded by the Jewish police constable Malinak. I had a bad feeling, believing that now was the end of my life - and who knew if this time I would be able to dodge death, as had happened on 20th March 1943, on the day when the entire professional intelligentsia was killed, in the so-called "Purim *akcja*".

Malinak, the Jewish policeman, who was guarding us, knowing we had nothing to lose, as death awaited us either way, feared we would escape during the night. He begged us to have pity on his wife and children and not escape, because he could pay for it with his life.

I assured him we would not escape, as we had family members in the "Small Ghetto" and, by so doing, we would put them in peril.

The sun's last rays disappeared from the heavens. The moon and stars began to reign, bringing with them a secretive night. For me,

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¹ [TN: Heb., plu. form of "yachsan", from the word "yichus", meaning pedigree or noble descent; viz. privileged and important individuals.]