

## Myszków<sup>\*)</sup> (Fragments of a Diary)

It was on Saturday - the second day of the Second World War - that we began to notice, by the hurried retreat of the Polish Army, that the German Army was approaching. The inhabitants of Myszków - Jews and Poles alike - began to abandon their place of residence, heading towards Żarki and further east. Jechiel Siwek, my father z"l, loaded all of us onto a wagon, having decided that it would be better to join his brother Majer Siwek and his brother-in-law Jankel Granek, who lived in Żarki. We managed to reach Fuks' flour mill but, from there, it was already difficult to proceed onwards, as the road was blocked by a huge number of carts and people. Meanwhile, several more people jumped onto our wagon, because a great many walked on foot, due to the lack of carts.

As we neared Żarki, we suddenly heard a great noise and the humming of aeroplanes, which numbered about ten. The horses were so startled that they began rearing onto their hind legs and we leaped off the wagon in order to find any shelter. Just a few seconds later, we saw Żarki engulfed in smoke and fire.

Father decided not to proceed on to Żarki, but to return to Myszków – only, this time, in the dark and on foot. At night, we began moving towards Myszków but, along the way, we came upon people fleeing from there, who warned us not to return, as the Germans were expected to enter at any moment. Nevertheless, we resolved to continue heading homewards, under the assumption that the Germans would also reach us anywhere else. When we entered Myszków, the *shtetl* seemed like a graveyard and there was no one to be seen on its streets. We only encountered a squad of Polish soldiers, who arrived riding bicycles to blow up the bridge in Mijaczów<sup>1</sup>. We came to our house but, fearing bombardments, we did not remain there and, after taking a few things with us, we moved to our neighbour the butcher Dawid Kawon's cellar.

During the preceding night, Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> September, the Germans entered. In the cellar, there were many Jews and also one Polish Gentile, who later became one of the *Volksdeutsche*. He was the first to emerge from the cellar on Sunday morning and, upon his return, he brought us the "glad" tidings that the Germans were looking for Jews. Upon exiting the cellar, we found the town - and the railway station square in particular - full of Germans, who were engaged in hunting for Jews, who were immediately recruited to repair the bridge which had been blown up. Meanwhile, saddening news arrived regarding the murder of Jews in Żarki, which was corroborated by refugees from Żarki, who came to us on Monday. In our *shtetl*, there were many instances of robbery, but there had not been any killings yet. The Germans established the "*Kultusgemeinde*" [Religious Community, viz. *kehilla*], imposing a poll tax on the Jews - and this was in addition to the gold, silver and copper that everyone was required to turn over to them. The border between the protectorate of Poland and the Reich passed between Myszków and Żarki, and family members literally met along the border, which was still permitted at the start of the occupation.

In November 1939, orders were issued to the effect that the Jews were required to wear, on their sleeves, a blue Star of David on a white background. At the beginning of 1940, they began systematically recruiting Jews for forced labour. In April of that year, the Germans dispersed the children from the schools and the situation began to worsen increasingly. I recall one meeting on the border, between our family and those of Majer Siwek and [Jankel] Granek. Along with them, our grandmother from Żarki also came. During the conversation between my father z"l and his mother, one of the Germans came up to grandmother, took the wig off her head [and] drove her with all her

---

<sup>\*)</sup> Myszków – a town and a railway station, which also served Żarki.

<sup>1</sup> [TN: A hamlet one mile from Myszków, which is nowadays part of the town.]

family away from the passage. He arrested my father and took him with him to clean the bungalow where he was staying.

In August of that year, Jewish refugees from Czechoslovakia came to us and the *kehilla* was tasked with arranging accommodation for them in the Jewish houses. In October, mobilisation orders arrived for men aged 18-45 for forced labour inside the Reich. In this context, Mojsze Merin from the Centre<sup>2</sup> in Sosnowiec visited in Myszków. 110 bachelors and married men were recruited and sent to labour camps, where they suffered hunger and required parcels from their families in Myszków. From then on, people began evading the recruitment to work and began hiding. Connections with Żarki were severed and contact with Żarki residents was punishable by death. We interred our dead in Żarki and no more than twelve family members were permitted to take part in the funeral procession. It was just around that time that rumours reached us of the establishment of ghettos in Łódź, Warsaw and in other cities and towns.

In the winter of 1941 - in March - the Germans laid siege on Myszków, in order to recruit Jews for the labour camps. In June of that year, when the war with Russia broke out, the siege was repeated and six men, who were charged with belonging to the Communist Movement - and among them Awreme'le Siwek, Honigman, Dr Melcer and others, were sent to Auschwitz. Sometime later, their relatives received their clothes and their ashes, after they had been burnt in the Auschwitz crematoria. From day to day, our plight worsened and the food situation was the worst of all. Nevertheless, circumstances were better than in Żarki where, besides the hunger, a typhus epidemic was also wreaking havoc. My father, who worked together with Poles at the Bauretz [?]<sup>3</sup> Hospital, would send food with them for our family in Żarki. In November 1941, the mobilisation of women aged 17-35 was ordered and they, too, were sent to labour camps in Germany. At this point, all communication between those sent to the camps and their families in Myszków ceased.

At the start of 1942, the Jewish shops in the *shtetl* were impounded. In February, the recruitment of women was renewed and many of them hid. But the Germans threatened that, in cases of circumvention, the entire family would be sent to the labour camp. This happened following the first deportations from Żarki. In 1941, the Germans lay siege to Myszków, searching for any Jew they could lay their hands on - young men and women, the elderly and infants. They sent the young ones to labour camps and the old and frail - to Auschwitz. My father was also among the latter. As many remained in hiding, the Germans commanded everyone to present themselves, as anyone remaining after these orders in Myszków would end up being killed without further warning. Those emerging from their hideouts were transported to Zawiercie, where they were housed in the homes of the Jews who had been sent to Auschwitz the previous day. The Rabbi of Myszków, Rabbi Epszajn, was also among those sent to Auschwitz but, as a result of the intercession of various parties, he was taken out of the rows at the last moment and transferred to Zawiercie. The majority of Jews remaining in Zawiercie were employed in the German air force.

In August 1942, a new *akcja* occurred in Zawiercie and the same images were repeated - the young and the strong to the labour camps, and the old and the frail to Auschwitz. This time, even Rabbi Epszajn could not escape and, together with several members of his congregation in Myszków, he was sent to the Auschwitz crematoria. A few of the Myszków townspeople, who were considered excellent workers, travelled daily to Myszków. Among them were the tailors Izrael-Icek Warszawski and Majerowicz and the tinsmith Dawid-Josef Siwek (my uncle). Following my father's murder, our family's situation was difficult. I was left with my mother and sister, without means of sustenance. My late father had, over time, distributed many goods from our shop amongst the peasants of

---

<sup>2</sup> [TN: Viz. the Nazi-appointed Central Office of the Jewish Council of Elders in East Upper Silesia (*Zentrale der Jüdische Ältestenräte Ostoberschlesien*), of which Merin was the leader.]

<sup>3</sup> [TN: באורץ in the original Hebrew.]

Myszków. I made efforts to be sent out to work with my uncle in Myszków, hoping to receive, from the farmers, food for the merchandise that had remained with them. At last, I managed to go out to Myszków, arriving there three months after its Jews had been deported. It is difficult for me to describe in what situation I found our house, which stood in front of the railway station. It had been completely emptied and only religious books and family photographs remained, strewn about on the floor.

Among the Poles, there was some who returned, to me, goods that my father had given them for safekeeping. Every day, I took a part of them with me to Zawiercie and they served us as a means of existence. One day, a Pole came to us from Żarki, bringing my uncle [Jankel] Granek's daughter with him, so that she should hide with us as, this time, Żarki was facing total liquidation. Żarki's bitter day arrived - all the Jews were deported to the extermination camps and those, who remained in hiding, [simply] faced a slower death. Thus, for instance, my two uncles Majer Siwek and Jankel Granek hid with a Pole named Golomb. He probably received money from them and should have taken care of them, but he turned them over to the German gendarmerie and they were murdered in Żarki. Similar reports reached us from Będzin, Sosnowiec and other localities. Groups of deportees were sent out in freight carriages, according to the demands from the extermination camps. We knew our end was quickly approaching.

In May 1943, they fenced off the Jewish quarter in Zawiercie and turned it into a sealed ghetto. From time to time, they sent groups of the elderly off to Auschwitz. We knew that the whole of Oberschlesien [Górny Śląsk or Upper Silesia] was already devoid of Jews (*judenrein*). In Zawiercie, some 5,000 Jews from various localities, including from Myszków, still remained. In the month of Elul [September<sup>4</sup>], our turn came. They loaded us all onto death carriages, after the majority of the elderly and infirm had been shot on the spot, and they took us to Auschwitz. Here, too, they selected the younger people to be sent to work, and the elderly and the children to the Auschwitz camp. I was sixteen at the time and I was added to the children's group. In the darkness of night, when one of the SS men in charge of guarding the camp turned the back of his head to me, I dashed over from the group of elderly and children to that of the young people, and thus I was miraculously saved from the fire of the incinerator.

Our group was sent to a transition camp in Birkenau. There were several other lads from Myszków with me. Every week, a SS doctor selected the ailing and the frail to be sent to Auschwitz. After about three months, some of us were sent to the Warsaw camp. Here, there were only three of us Myszków lads left - Herszl Astrajcher, Jankel Turner, and myself. Turner could not withstand the suffering and he died in the camp. [As for] us, they sent us from one camp to another, until the yearned-for Liberation reached us.

**Josef Siwek**  
Ramatayim

---

<sup>4</sup> [TN: In the year 1943/5703, the month of Elul coincided with the month of September, as both months started on the very same day.]



*The Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair cell in Myszków*