

## POLES TELL ABOUT THE KUTNO GHETTO<sup>1</sup>

*translated from the Yiddish by Shoulamit Auvé-Szlajfer*

*Tadeusz Bialecki, laborer, born in Malina, Kutner district, born 21/2/1919. Education: 4<sup>th</sup> grade in Public School (016/180). During the occupation, he lived in Kutno. The following narrative is based on personal experiences and observations.*

I was able to enter the *Konstancja* Jewish camp thanks to the fact that I provided food for the Stuczyński and Kapłan families. Until the ghetto was closed, I went inside, and later I only went to the gate, when it was already dark, where they waited for me and took the items I had brought. When the gate could not be accessed anymore at the end of the summer of 1941, on the advice of Mrs. Stuczyńska (who was hiding in Gąbin at the time and did not dare show up in Kutno, as the Gestapo was looking for her for illegally supplying meat to the ghetto), I used the last opportunity to deal and provide food, thanks to Helman, who on a meadow near the ghetto led to pasture the seven cows that belonged to Zisman Kapłan. This was the only Jew who could deal with a Pole.

I used to creep into a canal, which usually flowed from *Konstancja* into the river Ochnia but was completely dry this summer. I arrived totally bent to the meadow where he was sitting and, without getting out, discussed with him and then put the package away so that he could put everything in his pockets from there.

I managed to do that for a while, but one gendarme certainly noticed us and wanted to shoot Helman. This time, he let him live, but the cows could no longer graze there. This too became forbidden.

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*Dr. Bolesław Jędraszko, born in the village of Body, District of Pułtusk. During the occupation, he was in Kutno.*

Dr. Jędraszko, a district doctor, had a free entrance to the *Konstancja* Jewish camp until the ghetto was liquidated. The whole time he could come to the ghetto to cure the sick on flea-typhus. Only in the last three weeks after the liquidation of the Żychlin ghetto, the German authorities allowed him to see the Jewish doctors Julius Wajnzapt, who had lived in Krośniewice (Kutner area) before the war, and Dr. Brzuzka, whom the ghetto administration had brought to Kutno, with the permission of the authorities in Warsaw. The meetings took place in the ghetto's watch post, under the control of the SS men. This was probably done so that in *Konstancja* no one would be informed about the tragic fate of Żychlin.

One of the first typhus patients was Dr. Wajnzapt – and this is where Dr. Jędraszko's activity began.

Despite the determination of the bacterial institute in Poznań that it was a typhoid, Dr. Jędraszko proved with the help of the bacteriological institute in Łódź that it was surprisingly a flea-typhus. For this reason, the German authorities entrusted Dr. Jędraszko as a connoisseur of infectious diseases and gave him oversight of the ghetto hospital and the development of the epidemics. The supervision (or collaboration) lasted literally until the last moment.

The promiscuity of ghetto inhabitants, where almost all of them slept next to each other, which made it possible for the louse to move from person to person, in the absence of a bath, disinfection, preservatives, even water and soap, helped the epidemic develop to a large extent and there could be no discussion about eliminating it in those conditions. The small makeshift hospital, run by Dr. Wajnsztajn, was unable to accommodate all the sick and some of them had to remain amidst the healthy, creating new dangers of mass infection. The merits of Dr.

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Wajnzajt, in part also of Dr. Brzuzka and paramedic Aspersztajn, who have provided the hospital with a significant number of medicines and tools, must be emphasized, of course by means of money carefully collected from the Jews locked in the ghetto.

The Germans did not give any help. Quite the opposite, both doctors were always faced with obstructions, as well as Dr. Jędraszko. His request to get anti-typhus injections, however, met with a categorical refusal. He was told that there was no serum for Jews and Poles.

The epidemic broke out in the fall of 1940 and lasted until the ghetto was liquidated. One thousand cases of the disease were reported, of which 500 died. A large percentage of mortality must be charged on account of weakened organism (exhaustion).

The food at the hospital was adequate, thanks to the efforts of the Jewish ghetto administration (Elders' Council), but on the other hand the general diet was – starving. At the end, people were getting 100 grams of bread a day.

Artur Frankensztajn, the foreman of the hospital, fulfilled his task very energetically.

A few weeks before the eviction<sup>2</sup>, one case of suicide was noted by Dr. Nehemiah Landau.

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*Kiszelewski Mieczysław, born in Kutno in 1910, has High School education, a clerk (016/185). He lived in Kutno throughout the occupation. Recounts on the basis of his own observation and experiences.*

The S.S. Josef Schneider, a German official in the city administration, beat and tortured at every opportunity. Schneider's assistant was Wilhelm Sauer.

The *Judenrat* included Sender Falc, Opoczynski (a painter). The Jewish police were not in uniform. They wore a Star of David on front and back and were only armed with sticks. The members of the Council of Elders wore white-blue armbands.

During the year 1940, the Jews used to come to town unofficially to buy food. Unlike the members of the *Judenrat*, who must have had a special permit. Zimkowski, Stuczyński Leon and a Pole from the village of Walentynów provided meat and food for the ghetto. Mordechai Stuczyński took the goods inside the ghetto. The first three were murdered in Włocławek in 1942.

At night, someone came from the ghetto with a cart and collect his goods (valuables, which he had hidden in the city).

The Germans provided bread, potatoes and horse meat of the worst kind. Food was entering the ghetto by day, after bribing of the guards – German gendarmes, *folksdeutsches*.

They confiscated furs, gold, and jewelry. In 1941, some young people were said to be taken to work on the railway. This information was confirmed.

In August 1942, the Jewish population of Żychlin and the surrounding area was taken by carts to the Kutno train station and loaded into wagons. Mostly at night, by car, or at dawn. From that time, every few days, the transports were off to Chełmno near Kłodawa. The children were murdered on the spot, in Żychlin. Only about 200 people were left to sort the items, which were later divided among the Germans, or sold. Despite the said typhus, they were not afraid to take things.

Up to March 1943, those killed were mostly youths. They were shot in the ghetto itself, or taken to the Jewish cemetery, where the Jewish gravediggers had dug graves into which they were later thrown after being shot. The last three, who were allegedly to be sent to another camp, were shot shortly afterwards in front of the gate when, at the command of the Germans, they were let on the way with their packs. Among them was Zakszewski, 23, an acquaintance of mine. Metal Leibish with his family, a binder, my neighbors, for whom I forwarded correspondence with their cousin Temerson in England, were also deported in 1940.

In the ghetto, the Germans ordered shoes and dresses from Jewish artisans, paid for with money or products. They (the Jews) found themselves in dire conditions, but still believed that they would survive thanks to the quick end of the war.

In the town itself, the mood was depressing. The population already knew about it from other places and in the ghetto, no one had any illusions. The Jews often tore money. Attempts were made to escape from the wagons, the cars and from the camps, but without success.

The fugitives were killed on the spot in the most heinous way. The children's heads were usually smashed against a wall, holding them by the legs. Among the killers were Germans, *folksdeutsches*, gendarmes, Security Police, Customs Officers, German Labor Front and the S.S.

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*Śpiewankiewicz Kazimierz, a locksmith, born in Kutno 19/2/1890. Education 3rd grade Public School (016/183 – 016/184). During the occupation, lived in Kutno. The following narrative is based on his own observations.*

The transport of the Jews from Żychlin was the responsibility of one chief of the guards of the Kutno ghetto, Warnike. He was helped in that task by an S.A. In one of Warnike's transports, there was a seriously wounded person. There, besides women, there was a man who looked like being mad.

A few weeks later, the Jews from Kutno began to be deported. The last Jews seen there: the Manczesters, the Zylbers, the Kibels, Opoczynski. Elders Council's president Bernard Holcman, Manczester and others were shot dead on the spot.

In general, the Jews did not believe that they were going to perish. They believed that Hitler would use the

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<sup>2</sup> TN: difficult to know if it is the eviction to the ghetto or the liquidation of the ghetto to Chełmno.

Jews as labor for the time being, because as long as the watch was held by the *SchuPo*, the Jews worked for them. Of course, that was with their materials and unpaid.

One of the last Jewish policemen was Gurker<sup>3</sup>, apparitor at the Kutno Town Hall. After the Jews from Kutno were deported, Jews from Łódź were brought in, to sort out the leftovers and furniture. After the killing of the former, they started searching for treasures. This work, including breaking floorboards, smashing furnaces, and digging to find gold – was carried out under the supervision of Kowal's *folksdeutsche* Imrot. The valuable items were taken to the storage of N.S.D.A.P., to be distributed to Germans. The non-valuable items were burned.

The Jews of Łódź were not provided with food at all, so they starved to death. Those who carried the dead did not return. They were buried in the Jewish cemetery.

The Jews had to pay for the disinfection of the grounds with their money. Among the Poles who helped in the robbery: Igielski of Kutno and Waszikowski, a former representative of the company "Leszczków" in Kutno. They also plundered the Poles, with the help of the Germans.

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*Wojtysiak Stanisław, born in Kutno. Middle education, driver-mechanic. During the occupation, he was living in Kutno. Recounts based on his experiences.*

From spring 1940, I was employed as a driver in the police (*SchuPo*), assigned to First Lieutenant Weissborn. When the ghetto was established in June of that year, Weissborn was appointed chief of the ghetto guards and remained in office until 1941. First Lieutenant Weissborn was in charge of controlling the ghetto and guarding it. He needed to check that no illegal trade was being carried out, but since he alone got *łapówka*<sup>4</sup>, he used to close his eyes and even facilitated it. Mayor Schürmann, who wanted to live long enough to see the starvation death of *Konstancja* as soon as possible, seeing that the ghetto had existed longer than he had anticipated, was shocked by the reason for this – and began coming to the ghetto. He shot the Jews he met in town in front of the ghetto gate, and he was constantly at war with Weissborn. Finally, in 1940, with the help of the party, he removed the watch command from Weissborn and brought guards from Poznań, who quickly became famous for their atrocities. There could be no more talk of illegal trade and there were more and more victims. I never drove to the ghetto again and a while later, Weissborn was transferred.

After a few months, I was with the new chef going away from *Konstancja*, after the closing of ghetto. I arrived just as they were deporting the last 50 Jews from Łódź. It is hard to imagine the cruelty with which the pale, hungry and tired Jews were loaded onto a kind of truck, which could hold a maximum of 20 people. The Hitlerite forces pushed in 50 of them. They were tortured and beaten to death and there were two victims on the spot. They could not bear the blow on their heads. After they had been charged, actually crushed, the soldiers were walking around the trucks and where an elbow or a head protruded from the tarpaulin, they were beaten with sticks. When they had finished their degrading work, the sweat of their faces was wiped away triumphantly. They were tired of... beating. The truck with the last, painfully crying inhabitants of *Konstancja*, drove in the direction of Koło<sup>5</sup>.

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*Stefan Janczewski, born in Kutno 25/8/1903. Education: 7<sup>th</sup> grade in Powszechna<sup>6</sup> School, farmer. During the occupation, he lived in Kutno. Recounts on his own observation. Address: Podczachy, Powiat Kutno.*

Janczewski worked as a foreman in the dairy and delivered milk to the ghetto every day. At the gate, under the supervision of the German guard, the milk was picked up by the representative of the milk cooperative, Meir Kapłan. Bringing milk there, Janczewski enabled an illegal trade, through the mediation of Kapłan and Abraham Helman. But it did not last long. Before the liquidation of the ghetto, which was then called a "cooking camp", due to the large number of deaths, the watch of the "*Boleks*"<sup>7</sup>, or the SS-men, changed, and the supply was strictly controlled. They rummaged into the milk jug, listened to the conversations. The smuggling stopped.

At the beginning of March 1942, trucks began to take off in the direction of Krośniewice<sup>8</sup>. This lasted until April 1942. Eventually, 40 men were left to make arrangements. Among them were Helman, Opoczinski, Praszker, Mendel Warszawczyk, Kirsztajn, Frankenstajn, Celemski, and others whose names I do not remember.

They were tortured terribly. Inside the ghetto, by the gate, they were beaten with sticks and the food was very scarce – a few turnips. There was not even mention of other products, e.g., bread and skimmed milk. Regarding their horrific fate, they made it known with notes that were sent with a slingshot, when they saw an acquaintance. Nobody had access to the ghetto anymore. At one point, they were killed. The Jews who were seen later were already strangers, probably from the Łódź ghetto.

<sup>3</sup> TN: Noah Gurker. See article on page 292 of this book.

<sup>4</sup> TN: Polish, "bribe".

<sup>5</sup> TN: i.e., where they were transported to Chełmno and gassed in the gas-vans.

<sup>6</sup> TN: mixed Polish-Jewish school.

<sup>7</sup> TN: nickname of the watchguards.

<sup>8</sup> TN: and so, in the direction of Koło. See note number 5.