

ON THE BEGINNING OF SECOND WORLD WAR

by Zvi LASMAN, Givatayim

One morning, as I was walking out into the street, I came across people running, screaming, and making noise. Wounded soldiers were carried off the trains, which were bombed by the Germans, and mobilized soldiers were also deployed. The panic was great. The city was bombed by Hitlerite planes and the people were scattered on all sides.

It is said that the Germans approached through Piątek, where major battles had taken place. They should have already taken over the city.

I do not remember exactly the day when the Hitlerites marched into Kutno, but those hours are well remembered by me.

As soon as the Germans entered the city, they began to implement their "order". A call was issued for all men, Jews and Christians, to gather in the new market. The first thing they demanded was that the people hand over their weapons to the new government. Second, they told us that a curfew was being introduced in the city – from five o'clock in the afternoon until six in the morning.

Early in the morning, the Germans captured Jewish men at work occupying public places. I was among the captured men.

Many people tried to hide, one in a basement, another in an attic, but to no avail. Everyone was caught.

I tried to hide under a blanket in the basement, but I was also caught and taken to the group of detained men.

The whole crowd of people was driven by the Germans to the church, which was already overflowing with Jews and Christians. The suffering of the detainees was indescribable. I did not get any food, no drink, the hunger was terrible. We had to relieve ourselves inside the church, side by side...

When I received a package of food from my family, I was attacked from all sides, so that nothing was left for me.

After three painful days of being locked up in a church, people began to be released. They were divided into groups: those on the left were packed on trucks, and those on the right were sent off for work. The old people were left at home.

My fate was to be among those who, like beasts, were carried on lorries, under a strict guard, to Łęczyca. There we were locked in a school, surrounded by barbed wire. In the courtyard of the synagogue were already gathered old Jews with beards and wigs, whom he had specially assigned the dirtiest works and at the same time they were beaten.

All Jews wore order numbers on their chests and shoulders. My number was 640. Everyone had to stand by the numbers, all day long – from early evening.

In the morning, we first got a little soup, mixed with horse-bran. For dinner, we had three potatoes with salted herring, without water. After the herring, thirst was great, but only on the second day, for 1,400 men, just one barrel of water was brought in. As there was nothing to drink with, they found a chamber pot, washed it and immersed it in water for drinking. This went on for several days.



Registration of Jews at the town hall in Kutno

One morning a German officer came in and asked who wanted to go out for work. Me, Opoczinski and four other Christians volunteered for the job.

Instead of horses, we were put in a truck and taken out to the field to dig up potatoes, load them on the cart, and take them to the camp. We were not given any food.

On the last day, Polish prisoners of war were taken and we were sent back to Kutno on foot, under the escort of ethnic Germans. When we entered the city, it was already dark, and the German guards, not knowing who we were, opened fire on us.

With raised hands, we were ushered into Holcman's palace, where the German staff was located. When we

were introduced to staff, each of us was asked his name and was beaten with rubber sticks. Of course, I was not spared the blow either.

In the same house, among the crowd of Jews, I noticed the old Aurbach of the new market. In the presence of his son, he was tortured in a sadistic manner, tearing off his beard and sideburns. Blood was flowing from him.

It is noteworthy that the old Jew endured the torture, not even groaning.

At night we were taken to church with our hands raised. In the morning, we were taken to the 37th Regiment's barrack, which was transformed into a hospital.

The first job we got was to burn the regiment's documents. Then we were forced to clean out the toilets with our bare hands.

I was assigned as a nurse.

One time, as I was walking among the beggars, asking which of the sick people wanted something, I suddenly heard someone calling me by name. As I turned to the side of the bathtub, the voice came to me and to my amazement, I saw a blindfolded man among the sick.

It was Yechiel Meir Bigelajzen. He told me that while running home, he was hit in the eye by a shrapnel and soon became blind. His suffering was indescribable. He died together with all the saints.

Finally, after fifteen horrible days in the hospital, I received permission to go home.

The joy of my family, when I crossed the threshold of my home, is hard to imagine. Everyone, my family and our neighbors, watched as I endured all the troubles and survived.

It is not for nothing that it is said that a man is stronger than iron...