

SIX DAYS IN ŁĘCZYCA CAMP

by Yosef GOLDBERG, Montreal

In the summer of 1939, I worked in the Łack forest not far from Gostynin. A magnificent building was built there – a sanatorium for Polish emeritus government officials. At that time, the war broke out. The Germans were still far across the border, that we continued to finish the building. Only the German planes got us out of work...

On the way home to Kutno, I stopped at Gostynin. Here the population did not feel the war at all, because the Gostynin district had large percentage of citizens of German and Polish ethnicity.

Meanwhile, Kutno had been burned. In bright flames, the distillery stood like a torch, whose light reached as far as Gostynin, 21 kilometers from Kutno.

The next morning, I met the German army in Kutno. The fear was great, although the Germans had begun trade,

even with Jews. With the Poles, they had no common language. Everything went smoothly, until one day, two weeks after the Germans occupied Kutno, there was an *obławę*¹ of all the men in town. Those who were captured were taken to the church on the old market. The church in Kutno was large enough to accommodate several thousand people. I, too, was thrown into it. Inside, I stayed at the door because there were already a lot of people. Squeezed like herring into a barrel. The general mood was that it was the end. Anyway, one bomb would be enough to finish with us...

Around 1 o'clock in the morning, the door opened. People rushed to the exit. As I found myself at the door, I was also pushed out. Outside, a number of trucks stood ready. No more than 21 men were allowed in each. Some

¹ TN: Polish for "round-up".

armed soldiers were watching, to prevent escape. Nobody recognized where we were being led. I myself, a native of Kutno, knowing well all ways, was surprised not to recognize any. They led us by dirt roads.

The cars were left standing in front of a larger building. Each room accommodated up to 60 people. The soldier with the candle in his hand (because there was no electric lighting), ordered an absolute quiet until the morning. In the corridor, we heard the commotion and laughter of the German soldiers.

The door finally opened in the morning. With shouts, we were chased out into the large building, where in a corner was found a place for human needs. Everyone hurried to the place. Arriving there, we were immediately chased back. This was a sign of horrible sadism.

... I belonged to the first 60 men. Painters immediately appeared with small brushes and white paint and painted numbers on the chest and back of the detainee. My number was 5 in the first company.

And again, we witnessed a horrible event: a man, not a Jew at all, did not unbutton his coat for the painter so quickly. It was enough for the man to be shot, for not opening his coat quickly. Standing on the big square, I first saw how many hundreds of people were marked with the numbers. On the building I see an inscription: "Classical Public-School 7 J. Piłsudski in Łęczyca". At that moment, I understood where I was.

No one spoke about feeding us. Nobody cared about that. In the morning, coming home from work, everyone received three small potatoes in a bowl, which were immediately swallowed. The hunger was great.

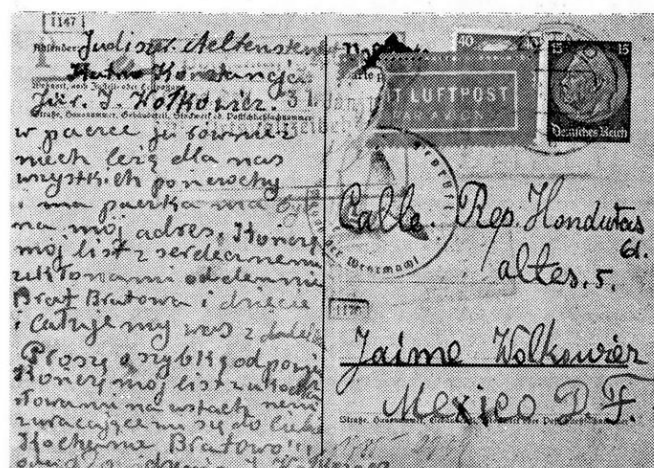
On the third day, I remember, coming back from work, everyone got a big salted herring, again the same thing: no one managed to leave a piece of the herring for later, or for tomorrow. This caused an extraordinary thirst, but it was forbidden to take water. Water was guarded. Again, the sadists used their knowledge.

On the fifth day, we surrounded a fence with barbed wire. I stood on the fence with a hammer and nailed the wire. The hammer fell out of my hand and hit the standing nearby SS-man. A little blood appeared on his forehead. I remained frozen with the hammer handle in my hand. A cry of the German. I remained standing in front of him, tense. He took out his revolver and shouted "Run!"... I ran – he did not shoot. I do not remember when I stopped running. I just remember how my company congratulated me and added that I would surely survive the war.

We were not taken to work on the sixth day. For a whole day we stood ready for every call, in the main square of the synagogue. We learned that we were being sent back to Kutno. Suddenly, at the entrance of the square,

I recognized my wife Pola. I come to her and she gives me a package... a loaf of bread and an over-garment. She and two other Jewish women learned that their husbands were in Łęczyca. I tell my wife that we will probably be taken back home. She decides to go with me. Led by a civilian, we are brought back to Kutno. On the road, there was a lot of Germans. Nobody annoyed us. My wife was by my side and on the other side was my cousin, Yoel Goldberg. My wife was wearing a hat I gave her, so that no one would notice that there was a woman among so many men.

On the way to the town near Łęczyca barrier, we



Postcard from Kutno to Mexico – 1940

were shot at. No one died, but blood was shed. Soon the lamps made the scene clear, we were ordered to walk in rows of three, with our hands up. They led us to the German commandant's office in "Holzman's Palace". At the entrance to the courtyard, my wife was recognized. The guards arrested her. Everyone's pockets were searched, to take whatever they wanted, without holding back the blows. I heard my name called. The German asked who was the woman. I could not tell anything but the truth. This also confirmed what my wife said. They threw my wife out and I, with my hands up, was sent back to the site. Meanwhile, Jews' beards were cut there – up to their flesh. What happened to my wife? – I do not know.

After a day's work in the barracks of the 37th Infantry Regiment, I was let go, on the condition that I enlist myself the next morning. At home I met my wife.

My experiences of the few days have sounded unnatural. Not all believed it. My opinion was that no one would be able to live with the murderers. The only one who agreed with me was my wife Pola. We were looking for ways to escape from the Germans...