

IN GHETTOS AND IN CAMPS

by Abraham LIFSZYC, Ohio, USA

I consider it my duty to share my bitter memories in our book of remembrance. These are my personal experiences in the dark years of the German occupation. I will start from the year 1940, because this year is deeply etched in the memory of the Kutno survivors. This was the beginning of the Kutno Holocaust...

The rapid evacuation of any constituency began with a shooting by the Germans, in order to intimidate the crowd and lead them to a state of panic, disorientation and nervousness. Arriving in the small area of the former sugar factory, the Jews of Kutno suddenly saw their tragic distress and loneliness. They packed for a long time – and could hardly bring what everyone could carry on their own. Living conditions were appalling, with only a small percentage able to get a stone-covered roof over their heads.

The ghetto was not just lacking apartments. There was also no work, no medical help, no food to spare. And in winter, the cold, the cold and the snow made the bitter life even more bitter. One could only dream of wood and coal to heat the apartments.

The illnesses in most cases ended in death. Every day people died in the streets. In the ghetto, people could hear conversations about who died today, who was ill. The healthy have felt that the day is not far off, when they too will lose their strength.

Under such conditions, I decided to escape from *Konstancja*. Together with some acquaintances (among them – the shoemaker Moshe Buksztajn) we took

advantage of the moment when the week changed, and fled through a crowded canal on the other side of the ghetto fence. I got out first. Suddenly I heard some shots. I did not look back, but I did not see any of those who had escaped with me. I later learned that they had all been captured and shot.

Now my journey began – from village to village, over forests and fields, through side roads and paths, where there was always a mortal danger to the persecuted Jew. Obviously, I managed to reach Łęczycą. There, I met Kutno Jews: Mordechai Buksztajn, Fudałowicz, the Grziwach family. They welcomed me warmly, provided me with an apartment, with work. This has been a great help and encouragement to me. From my earnings I was also able to help my family in the Kutno ghetto.

My joy did not last long. Within a few weeks, I fell ill with typhus. Fearing that they would become infected, I forbade my friends to take care of me. I went to the hospital, stayed in a few months and I was out in good health. The Germans wanted to send me back to Kutno. I fled to Grabów, from where the Jews were deported to forced labor in the camps of Poznań. Together with the Grabów Jews and refugees, I was sent to a concentration camp in Poznań. I tried from there contacting in writing with Kutno ghetto, but got no response. I later learned about the liquidation of *Konstancja* and its inhabitants.

I spent a year in the Poznań camp. I worked, I was hungry, I did not have the freedom – but there were no gas chambers, I have not been shot, or have been especially

tortured. This too did not last long. We were sent to Auschwitz. This is where the true hell began.

Crowded in barracks, hungry, bewildered and tormented, it was known that in Birkenau-Auschwitz, the crematorium awaited us. On a certain day, during the appeal, I was taken out of the ranks with a large group of detainees, loaded into wagons, and taken away. We arrived in the ruined, burnt and desolate Warsaw ghetto, in order to put that neighborhood in order, clean up the dead, and try to erase the traces of the uprising and destruction of the Jewish Warsaw. Those days in the Warsaw ghetto will forever remain in my memory. We needed to pull out the gassed and burnt bodies of men, women and children from bunkers.

Here too, I came out after a year time. We were interned in a camp on Gęsia Street¹. As we approached the capital of Poland from the front, we began to evacuate to Dachau, in deep Germany. The whole, very long way, had to be traversed on foot. And the German killers have already made sure that we do not get any food or any water on the way...

The death march has begun. We arrived in Łowicz, crossed the Bzura River and thought that here one would at least be able to wet the lips with dirty river water. Our guards, however, placed machine guns on both banks, and whoever bowed to the water to have a drink – paid with

his life. More than once, the Bzura River has been stained with red bloodshed. Hundreds were killed in the Łowicz waters.

We continued to drag our feet and we arrived in Łęczycza. Here, people were allowed to drink unlimited. Three days and a half were held in Łęczycza. The next bloody mess led to my hometown of Kutno. I march across the main streets. See also *Konstancja*... No trace of a Jew, where only a few years ago around eight thousand brothers of the Israelites thought they were going to overthrow Hitler. The Jewish Kutno was one large cemetery. I got used to it at the time – until we were pushed into freight wagons to get to Dachau.

The journey was no less a hell than the foot march. Dirty and wasted, with crumbling clothes, which smelled very bad, without food – we arrived in Dachau a few days later. But the whole road was littered with our victims, camp Jews, who could not stand the horrible conditions and died *en masse* in the wagons. We didn't stay in Dachau for a long time, only a few days. We were transferred to a small camp in Mühldorf. Compared to Auschwitz, this was a pension for us. Here, too, I managed to stay for about a year, until the liberation by the Americans.

After my release, I met some of the surviving Kutno Jews in Germany. In Ulm, in 1945, we held a memorial service to commemorate the murdered Jews in our city...

¹ TN: Warsaw concentration camp (KL Warsaw) and its prisoners' death march is a mostly unknown episode of the Holocaust.