

HOW THE JEWS OF ŁĘCZYCA PERISHED

testimony of Moshe SZERPINSKI, recorded and delivered by David WACHTEL z"l, Paris.

Shortly after the German march into Łęczyca area, harassment and decrees broke out, the aim of which was to terrorize, confuse and demoralize the Jewish population.

Later, the "*Judenrats*", "Elders of the Jews", and the Jewish police began to function.

In early 1942, in the ghettos of the so-called "*Warthegau*" (Łódź and part of Warsaw provinces) rumors were spreading that in the forests between Dąbie and Koło,

the Germans had set up a special camp, where they gassed and burned Jews. It was believed that the Jews were taken away from there -- and disappeared. Farmers in the Dąbie area said that in the village of Chełmno, 11 kilometers¹ from Koło, the German troops were bringing Jews, where they are being killed. Jews who used to work at the train station often noticed long freight trains, packed with Jews, who were being driven to an unknown destination.

¹ TN: original text said "110 kilometers", perhaps confusing with another town also named Chełmno, near Bydgoszcz. Correct one is "Chełmno nad Nerem", 11-12 km from Koło.

A young man, who managed to escape from the Chełmno death camp, told to the ghetto what he saw there. But no one wanted to believe him. He was considered insane or a provocateur. The Jews themselves threatened to hand him over to the Gestapo. In order to be convinced of the correctness of all the rumors, the Jews in the Łęczyca ghetto decided to send scouts to Koło, which was the last station for the Chełmno extermination camp. Using bribery, the "Elder Jew" was able to obtain from the Gestapo a special permit for two Jews to travel to Koło. The delegation came back with nothing. Beyond Koło, they could not pass.

The situation in the ghettos became tense, the control over the ghetto – everything got tighter.

On Purim 1942², the German assassins hanged ten Jews in each ghetto – a reference to the ten sons of Haman. The ghetto inhabitants were required to register: first once,

then twice daily. It became clearer that the situation was hopeless, the destruction was inevitable.

On April 12, 1942 (Nisan 24), the second day after Pesach³, when the Jews lined up one afternoon, as usual, in the market square, in front of the commandant's building, they were suddenly surrounded by Gestapo men. They were soon taken away to an urban sports field. They never returned to their homes.

In the morning, the city was surrounded by a group of SS men from Łódź. The eviction began. In groups of about 20-25 men, the Jews were driven and crammed into hermetically sealed cars, which drove them quickly to the Chełmno death camp.

At the same time, the final liquidation of all the surrounding towns took place.

² TN: 3 March 1942.

³ TN: April 11th, two days after the end of the Passover holiday.