

Lernen aus der Geschichte e.V.

<http://www.lernen-aus-der-geschichte.de>

**Der folgende Text ist auf dem Webportal
<http://www.lernen-aus-der-geschichte.de> veröffentlicht.**

Das mehrsprachige Webportal publiziert fortlaufend Informationen zur historisch-politischen Bildung in Schulen, Gedenkstätten und anderen Einrichtungen zur Geschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts. Schwerpunkte bilden der Nationalsozialismus, der Zweite Weltkrieg sowie die Folgegeschichte in den Ländern Europas bis zu den politischen Umbrüchen 1989.

Dabei nimmt es Bildungsangebote in den Fokus, die einen Gegenwartsbezug der Geschichte herausstellen und bietet einen Erfahrungsaustausch über historisch-politische Bildung in Europa an.

Report by Jerzy Koszewski

In August, the Germans tackled the final dissolution of the ghetto. According to their principles, Białystok had to become a Jew-free town. I was then eleven years old and lived at the ulica Trochymowska 17 in Białostoczek, a quarter at the outskirts of Białystok (today Przytorowa).

It was a beautiful August morning when some Nazis drew up their motorbikes with a lot of noise on the lawn in front of our house, behind them a car with SS-men and Ukrainians in black uniforms jumping out. We were terribly scared because somebody had shot a Gestapo man shortly before. We thought now the Germans would hold us all responsible and take hostages. But after a while my mother, who always kept a cool head, looked out of the window and said that the Germans had formed a double line and were obviously leading somebody past our house.

After an hour of anguish and fear we saw to our dismay a column of wretched Jews approaching from the Białystok ghetto, yellow stars on their breasts and backs. Then we realised that their end had come.

We knew a great many Jews, and I had more or less grown up among them as we had lived in a mainly Jewish quarter of the town, until the ghetto was set up in 1941, and my father had been the janitor of the Jewish apartment block [sic!] of industrialist Notowicz.

Now they marched past our house in endless columns. When they came close to the forest of Pietraszy, where the Germans had murdered about 5,000 Jews in July 1941, they thought they were being driven to their execution and dropped their bundles with belongings and food on the path; for the Germans had said on the posters that had been put up in the ghetto that they were being brought to a different place to do some work.

I saw the Jewish policemen in their dark blue caps with yellow cords ransack these bundles and faithfully deliver all the gold and silver they found to the Germans, for the Jews had taken their most valuable belongings on this trip. Today, when I read about the great affluence of German citizens, I always see in my mind's eye this unspeakable plundering of belongings by Nazi henchmen.

The expelled inhabitants of the ghetto moved past our windows, most of them hardly alive for fear, they moved like robots and seemed to feel that they went to their deaths and not to a labour camp. A Jewish woman held her arms as if she were still carrying her child; she had not realised that she had lost it on the way already a long time ago... It had probably been trampled into the ground by the Jews, but she walked on with her folded arms ... I have to mention that the road, which had only been a mud track, looked like it had been tarmacked when all the Jews had marched by.

My heart grew heavy when I saw my playmates about six metres from our house. Acquaintances from the apartment block at the ulica Biała [White Street] and its owner, Notowicz, with his family went past, and we could not help them. My mother was crying and asked who we would work for now.

The Germans were leading a group of Jewish children from the field in the opposite direction, towards the ghetto – to make them point out the hideouts of their parents and friends, as we learned later on. There were women in the Jewish columns walking in the direction of the field, and among them were the mothers of these children, and they went out of their minds, they did not care, broke through the barrier of the Germans, threw themselves onto their children, hugging them, kissing them and crying, "Children! Children!" The Germans hit the women with their rifle butts and tore away the children with brutal force ... these were terrible scenes I will never forget ... ever.

The children who had been torn away from their mothers were driven into the ghetto and later, when they had pointed out the different hideouts, they were poisoned at the hospital at the ulica Fabryczna [Factory road], where the military hospital is situated today.

On August 16, shots were to be heard from the ghetto. A riot had broken out. Aeroplanes came, but they did not drop bombs. The Germans who had stood guard along the ulica Poleska withdrew behind the railway and directed their machine guns towards the ghetto. After a couple of days, the rebellion had been put down in blood and new columns of Jews were marching towards the field.

Several thousand Jews were camping on the open field, where the electric power station is today. The operation lasted for several days. It was August and cruelly hot, the people had no water and started screaming terribly, they actually howled for thirst. Finally the municipal waterworks were allowed to bring in water. My uncle Michał Koszewski was the driver of one of the water lorries, and he told us that the Germans sold this water for 50 Pfennig a glass to those who had money.

Thus many perished or committed suicide. The rest waited in agony for the trains to Treblinka, where they were killed in gas chambers. When the last transport had left, hordes of people rushed to the field to search the ground for valuables and gold that the Jews might have buried. Rumour has it that some people indeed made a fortune there. What remained of the Białystok Jews were empty fields and a path that had once been muddy and was now as smooth as tarmac from the thousands of feet that had walked it, and thrown away bundles of dismal things that were then overgrown by the grass.

Until the end of my life I will remember those masses of bewildered and helpless people walking to their doom without putting up any resistance. Surely if those thousands of Jews had fled into the forest of Pietraszy, they could have broken through the cordon of German and Ukrainian guards and escaped ...

Where to? Towards freedom ...