



The Liquidation of the Sosnowiec Ghetto

ETERNAL ECHOES

Teach and Learn About the Holocaust

The Liquidation of the Sosnowiec Ghetto

Slave Labour and Deportations

© U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum



Young women pose together in a vegetable garden in Sosnowiec. Lea Gleitman the second from the right hand side.

© U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Arnold Shay (Abram Szyjewicz)



Sosnowiec-Środula ghetto houses.

In October 1939 Sosnowiec along with the Zagłębie region were incorporated into the German Third Reich with the plan of deporting the local Jews to the east and proclaiming the city “Judenrein” (Nazi term meaning “free of Jews”). The deportation however proved impossible as no other German administrator wanted to take responsibility for the 100 000 or so Jews of Zagłębie.

Eventually in early 1940 ghettos were established in Sosnowiec, Bedzin and Dąbrowa. In late 1939, Sosnowiec had 23 000 Jewish inhabitants and was growing in numbers, becoming the central ghetto for Jews from Silesia and Zagłębie. To enable the workers of various factories and workshops to get to their work places, the ghetto was at first not sealed off. Those who could not find employment in the city were held in special camps known as “Dulags” to be used as slave labour in road construction or stone quarries. People started to disappear from the streets of Sosnowiec. This created a sense of fear and panic.

During the autumn of 1941, Nazi Germany planned the mass extermination of Jews in German Occupied Poland. The logistics of the process were agreed upon during the Wannsee conference January 20th 1942.

In Sosnowiec deportations were to be preceded with “controlled selection” in order to keep the young and healthy Jews for work. In April 1942 the *Judenrat* was ordered to gather 6 000 Jews without permanent employment for deportation. The people were to show up with 25 kg of luggage and food for three days of travel. Rumours started to circulate that the destination would be Theresienstadt.

The Liquidation of the Sosnowiec Ghetto

Despite the order only 300 Jews showed up on May 10th 1942. In the afternoon the Germans surrounded some houses in the Jewish district on Targowa Street and expelled all the inhabitants. Over the next two days and under German orders, the Jewish police gathered 3 600 people. All were transported on May 12th to the death camp Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Deportations resumed in June with over 2 000 people including children at the orphanages, elderly at the residential homes, and hospital patients.

As the Jews started to realize that deportation most likely meant death they tried to prove that they were good workers in order to be able to stay in the ghetto of Sosnowiec. At the same time, work exploitation intensified and new employment places were provided. In order to humiliate the Jews, the Germans forced them to clear the debris of religious buildings that had been destroyed.



Three boys with armbands in the Sosnowiec ghetto.

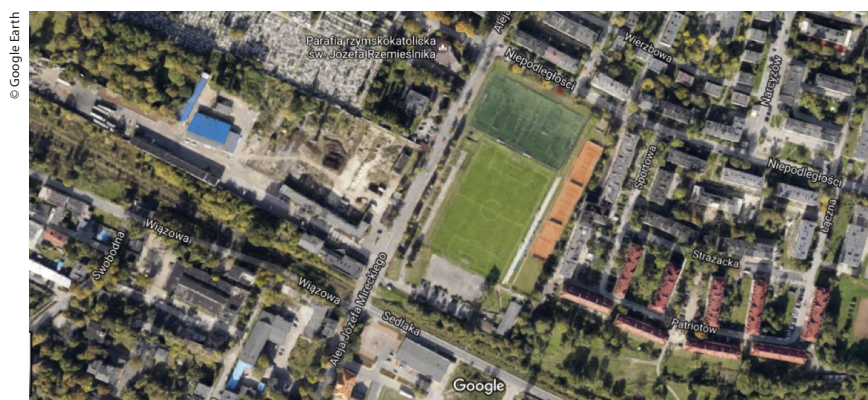


Jews in forced labour in Kamionka, Sosnowiec, are extracting stone from the hillside with the Jewish cemetery at the top.

© U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Chana Rosenbaum

© U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Faye Riva Cohen

Selections and Deportations



Contemporary Google Earth view of the Sosnowiec deportation soccer stadium.



Contemporary photo of the Sosnowiec soccer stadium from where the selections took place.



Commemorative stone established at the soccer field in 2016 in memory of Sosnowiec Jews deported to Auschwitz.

In August 1942 the *Judenrat* was ordered to gather all the remaining Jews in one of the soccer stadiums in Sosnowiec. In spite of the youth organizations' involvement to act against this order by convincing people not to follow it, at 7am on August 12th, close to 22 000 Sosnowiec and Silesia Jews showed up at the soccer field.

People were terrified. They waited in the scorching summer sun observing the new arriving columns of Jewish workers from other locations in Sosnowiec. Occasional panic broke out, only to be brutally suppressed by either the Jewish police or the Germans.

In late afternoon the soccer stadium was surrounded with additional German forces. The Jewish police pushed all the people to one side of the soccer field. The leader of the *Judenrat* Moshe Merin together those who administered slave labour exploitation were in the centre of the field conducting selections. Jews were divided into four groups and sent into four different stadium corners. In the first group there were *Judenrat* members, employees and Jewish policemen, in the second – youths aged 16 to 24, in the third – work permit holders, and in the fourth group – families with children and the elderly.

Selections continued until late at night with the first and third group being released to go back home. The second group of youths was taken to the local labour transit camp. The fourth group stayed in the soccer field throughout the night as the selection was interrupted by very heavy rain. In the morning of August 13th Moshe Merin addressed the exhausted people at the soccer field telling them that he had managed to stop the deportations and that all people should return to the ghetto.



© Yad Vashem

Deportation of Jews from Sosnowiec Central train station.



© U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Arnold Shaj (Abraham Szejewicz)

Sosnowiec-Środula ghetto house, 1942.

Two large city blocks at Targowa and Kolataja streets were horribly overcrowded with close to 5 000 people. On August 15th all of those Jews were forced into rail cattle wagons and deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Those who remained in the ghetto understood clearly that their life was only worth as much as the labour they could provide.

From autumn 1942 until spring 1943 the Germans started to create a sealed-off ghetto in Środula, the northern Sosnowiec district. Those Jews who were sent there were work permit holders. Those unable to work were mostly placed in the centre of the city close to the railway station. On March 15 1943, the ghetto borders were closed and 14 000 Jews were locked in Środula ghetto and 6 000 in Sosnowiec ghetto. Although there were no walls erected, crossing the ghetto boundaries was punishable by death.

The German Nazis planned the final liquidation of Sosnowiec ghetto for summer 1943. In late June some 1 200 people were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau and on August 1st the German units entered the ghetto to deport the remaining Jews. The youth organized in the Jewish Fighting Organization took up the fight with almost no weapons against some 800 German soldiers and policemen. Many people tried to go into hiding. This deportation was extended till August 8th. Within a week 30 000 Jews of Zagłębie Ghettos (Sosnowiec, Środula, Kamionka and Dąbrowa) region were transported in cattle wagons to Auschwitz-Birkenau.

The last Jewish workers from Środula ghetto were deported in December 1943 and January 1944.

© 2018, 2019 the author and the Swedish Committee Against Antisemitism

Text: Tomasz Cebulski, Ph.D.

Graphic design: Cecilia Undemark Péterfy

Sources:

Sosnowiec – Encyclopaedia of Jewish Communities in Poland, t. 7: Poland, [w:] JewishGen [online] http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/pinkas_poland/pol7_00327.html [hämtad: December 22, 2016]

Studencki Z., ABC sosnowieckich Żydów, Sosnowiec 2008.

Onyszko G., Dzieje społeczności żydowskiej, niemieckiej, rosyjskiej i innych narodowości w Sosnowcu (do roku 1939), [w:] Regionalizm w szkolnej edukacji. Wielokulturowość Zagłębia Dąbrowskiego, red. D. Rozmus, S. Witkowski, Sosnowiec–Dąbrowa Górnica–Będzin 2009.

Namysło A., Zanim nadeszła Zagłada... Żydzi w Zagłębiu Dąbrowskim w okresie okupacji hitlerowskiej, Sosnowiec 2008.

Jaworski W. Żydzi w Zagłębiu Dąbrowskim. Zarys dziejów, Sosnowiec 2006.