



**Baranovich**  
**בארנאוויטש**  
**The Trilogy**

**Part III**

**המאבק לחיים**

של יהודי ברנוביץ

קובץ זכרונות על השואה של ניצולי גיטו ברנוביץ ולוחמיו

**The Struggle to Stay Alive**

**By the Jews of Baranovich**

A Collection of Memories of Those  
Who Survived the Baranovich Ghetto, and Its Fighters

**Publisher: Nechama Zukerman**

**Editors: Yitzhak Posner, Chana Bint**

**Graphics & Layout: Chava Matskin**

**Decorations: Abraham Sadowsky ז"ל**



**Published with the support of the  
Zukerman Family**

**Arieli Press**  
**5752 - 1992**

Copyright © 1992 by the Publisher in Israel  
All rights reserved.

Special permission has been obtained, from  
the Publisher, to translate this material, and  
include it in this Trilogy.

## **In Memory of The Martyrs of the Baranovich Ghetto and its Vicinity**



אברהם סדובסקי, פסל

**This Memorial Candle was rendered by Abraham Sadowsky  
Especially for this Volume.**

# Table of Contents

Table of Contents .....	i
Introduction .....	By Nechama Zukerman iii
Foreword .....	By Hon. Justice Ram Savir iv
The General Overview .....	v
An Overview of the Area .....	By N. Zukerman v
An Overview of the City .....	By Dr. Sh. Klass v

## Chapter I: The Ghetto

The Last Road .....	By Dr. N[ehemiah] Kroshinsky 1
A Diary of the Baranovich Ghetto .....	By Dr. Zelig Levinbook 1
The Baranovich <i>Judenrat</i> – Its Structure and Its Mission .....	By Dr. Shlomo Klass & David Nir 2
The Period of the First <i>Judenrat</i> .....	2
The Establishment of the ‘ <i>Judenrat</i> ’ and Entry into the Ghetto .....	4
The Structure of the ‘ <i>Judenrat</i> ’ .....	4
The <i>Judenrat</i> Head Office : Divided into Three Different Sections .....	6
The Work Places, or ‘The Good Ghetto’ .....	7
The Period of the Second ‘ <i>Judenrat</i> ’ .....	11
The Period of the Third ‘ <i>Judenrat</i> ’ .....	13
Table of Changes to the Positions in the <i>Judenrat</i> .....	14
Summary .....	15

## Chapter II: A Collection of Partisan Tales

A Doctor Among the Partisans .....	By Dr. Leon Berkowicz (Berk) 17
Book Review .....	17
Leon Berk: Destined to Live Australia 1992 .....	By Tim Metcalf 19
Yiddish poetry on the radio .....	By Jennifer Dowling 22
My Way to the Forests .....	By Hil’keh Borishansky-Bussel 22
A Tourist among the Partisans .....	By Chaim Stolovicky 25
The Hunt .....	36
The Operation to Move the Wounded .....	37
Our Thrust to Kobrin .....	38
The Train Sabotage Operation, the Night of the Rails .....	39
Edward Chacza – Poland .....	By Kh. S. 41

The Stories of a Partisan .....	By Noah Roitman	42
The First Period in the Forest .....		43
Getting People Out of the Ghetto .....		44
From the Life of the Partisans .....		45
The Desantist Paratroopers Arrive .....		48
From the Bunker to a Paratroop Unit .....	By Abraham Wolansky	52

## **Chapter III - After the War**

The Campaign Against the War Criminals .....	By Dr. Elchanan (Khonya) Narkonsky	56
Newspaper Excerpts .....		64
Excerpt from the Polish Newspaper “Western Daily” .....		64
Excerpt from the Newspaper, ‘ <i>Niederschlesia</i> ’ .....	By A. Ber (Yitzhak Turkov)	64
The Trial of Dr. Prawko .....		65
The Criminal Kalko .....		66
Regarding Kalko’s Deeds taken from Newspapers .....		67
From ‘ <i>Slowo Polskaya</i> ’ .....		67
Criminals Against Humanity from the Koldichevo Camp .....		67
War Criminals from Koldichevo, Bobko and Others .....		67
From ‘The Workers’ News’ 3/12/1957, Wroclaw .....		70
Endnote .....		71
Epilogue .....	By Dr. Leon Berkowicz	72
Testimony from the Present .....	After Yitzhak Szklar	74
A Baranovich Memorial .....		76

# Introduction

By Nechama Zukerman

In this collection, I have attempted to provide a Hebrew translation of testimony and chapters of things from the mouths of those who survived, the remnant, of the Baranovich ghetto and its fighters. Part of it has been written in Yiddish, part in English, and Hebrew. The translations and assemblages have done out of a sense of remaining close to the language and the spirit of those who are doing the telling.



With the passage of time, when eye witness accounts that encompass the horrors of the Holocaust become fewer, I assembled what I could directly from the mouths of eye-witnesses, who told of their experiences after a long period of suppression, and silence.

In my work, memory led me to recollect members of my own family, the Sadowsky family: My grandmother – Chana-Feiga, My mother – Manya (Miriam), and my sister Hadassah הדסה, who were killed in the Holocaust.

I am of the hope, that this collection, will encourage comrades to extract other eye-witness testimony, in order to tell, and to preserve the names of the martyrs and those we lost, who were not brought to a proper Jewish burial, and they have no memorial over their remains.

I am grateful to all of those who participated in this endeavor along with me, the tellers, the translators, and finally, most of all, my gratitude to my husband, Matityahu Zukerman, I would not be standing at this point of culmination.

## Foreword

By Hon. Justice Ram Savir  
(Relik Zablocky)

**M**uch has been written about the Holocaust, from the time that the smoke began to dissipate from the crematoria in the cities of extermination.

**M**uch has been written, and is yet to be written, because This People have a responsibility to fulfil yet an additional *mitzvah*: 'To Remember, and Not Forget,' and that each of us fulfils this *mitzvah* in his own manner.

**T**hose who documented their recollections here, fulfilled this *mitzvah*, and bequeathed a legacy to coming generations. They placed a monument as a memorial, to the city that will never again be, except as it exists in the pages of memoirs, in our hearts, and they also raised their arm in salute, to those who were exterminated.

**T**he book has been written by those who saved themselves, and are the remnants from the ghetto and from the forests of the city of Baranovich in Poland.

**T**he significance and importance of these memories, lies in the fact that they are documented authentic eye-witness testimony, of those that actually experienced the passing of what was in the ambit of an apocalyptic cataclysm.

**I**t is not within the scope of the human soul and mind, to grasp what it is that took place there, and for this reason, the value of these memories, and their preservation in written form, which can serve for those who remained alive, and for coming generations, who would seek to uncover historical facts, the consecutive living experiences of the people of the times.

**T**his collection of memories is similar to a torch that illuminates a dark time. And it is good that torches of this kind are lit.

# The General Overview

## An Overview of the Area

By N. Zukerman

The area in which the city of Baranovich is located in Byelorussia, today a republic that is part of the union of Russian nations, has had many masters. In the Middle Ages, the area was ruled by Lithuanian royalty and nobility. Their rule left behind a mark in the names of cities, such as Brest-Litovsk (called *Brisk-D'Lita* in Hebrew), or in the Hebrew nickname for Vilna as '*Yerushalayim D'Lita*.' And as it happens, even the Poles referred to this territory as 'Lithuania.' Adam Mickiewicz, the greatest Polish poet, was born in a village beside Novogrudok, which in those days, was the provincial capital for Baranovich, in his famous poem, '*Pan Tadeusz*,' wrote: 'Lithuania, the place of my birth...' Even Marshal Jozef Pilsudski, the international hero of Poland, came from the area around Vilna. He even left a will that his heart was to be buried in Vilna (his body was interred among the great leaders of the Polish nation, in Cracow).

Up to The First World War, Czarist Russia ruled this area. During the First World War, this area was captured territory, under German occupation. From 1920 to 1939, the area was part of the independent Polish Republic. After that, it went through a year and a half of rule by Soviet Russia. In 1941, the Germans invaded it, and they ruled it until 1944, at which time it was liberated by the Red Army. Today, it is one of the provinces of the Republic of Belarus.

Even though Russia and Poland ruled in these lands, with changes, numbering hundreds over the years, the Jews who resided in this area were thought of, and deemed to be 'Lithuanians' or '*Litvaks*.' The traditions, and the accent of the Yiddish here, were different from other parts of Poland and Russia, and the source of their pride is – classical Yiddish, and together with that, the language of the ordinary people.

By virtue of being in the Pale of Settlement since Czarist times in Russia, and possessing a highly dense Jewish population, the area became a source for tradition, organization, Jewish scholarship, and a center for commerce and industry.

## An Overview of the City

By Dr. Sh. Klass

The city of Baranovich, in the Novogrudok Province of Byelorussia, was founded in 1883. It developed rapidly, and by the time of the outbreak of The Second World War, the number of its inhabitants has reached about 30,000. As a new city, it had a modern face to it. Its streets were wide, and intersected in a straight rectangular grid.

By virtue of having in its vicinity, a railroad, running from north to south (Vilna - Lvov), and from west to east (Warsaw - Moscow), it had a recognized strategic importance. The city became an anchor for a widely-branched set of economic activities, and a center for commerce and industry. The abundance of forests in the area, contributed to the development of all manner of factories engaged in working with wood, (sawmills, etc.). Military barracks of the Polish army, in an area bordering on Russia, contributed to the development

of warehouses and services for the military. The Poles cared little for the local population, consisting of Russians and Byelorussians. The Jews represented a high percentage of the population. However, the head of the city was a Pole, but his deputy was a Jew.

From an economic standpoint, the situation of the Jews was relatively good. In the community, you had the usual institutions associated with the internal organization of Jewish life. It had synagogues, Yeshivas, institutions for charity and rendering assistance, an orphanage, an old age home, *Linat HaTzedek*, charitable food donations, etc.

Baranovich served as a center for education to the children of the nearby villages, and as a cultural center for them. There was also no lack of modern institutions: cooperatives, welfare societies, labor unions, commerce, and banking.

On the community political front, there were branches of parties and youth movements, who were active on the Jewish street throughout all of Poland, a network of independent education, beginning with the 'Heder' system, and Yeshivas, to the Hebrew 'Tarbut' gymnasium. The city resonated with cultural, community and political activities, of many sorts, whose most visible manifestation was that six weekly Yiddish newspapers were published on a regular basis.

On 22/6/1941, with the outbreak of the German-Soviet War, the German army overran the area, and within five days, the city of Baranovich was captured by them.

At the time of the capture of the city by the Nazis, about 12,000 Jews lived in the city, of which about 3,000 were refugees from western Poland.



# Chapter I: The Ghetto

## The Last Road

By Dr. N[ehemiah] Kroshinsky

*Sections of the poem, translated from Yiddish [sic: into Hebrew] by Shoshana Roczinsky.*

**The Reader is referred back to the translation of the original Yiddish into English, found in the first section of this Trilogy, starting on page 346.**

## A Diary of the Baranovich Ghetto

By Dr. Zelig Levinbook

**This highly substantial memoir, appears in its entirety, and translated into English, in the first part of this Trilogy under the title, 'The Destruction of Baranovich Jewry' beginning on page 384.**

*Page 8: Dr. Zelig & Manya Levinbook – 1940  
Below: Image of an Israeli Coin*

*Page 109: Remnants of the central prison of the concentration camp and death camp of Koldichevo, in which tens of thousands of Jews, Russian and Poles were murdered.  
The picture was taken by Chaim Stolovicky at the end of July 1992.*

# **The Baranovich *Judenrat* – Its Structure and Its Mission<sup>1</sup>**

**By Dr. Shlomo Klass & David Nir**

From the testimony that we have in hand, there is scant information about the structure of the *Judenrat*, its various divisions and its leadership. We derived a considerable amount of help from the focus of Michael Mukasey, who was able to testify, and, as the chief pharmacist in the ghetto pharmacy, was close to what went on in the *Judenrat* quarters, even though he was not a member there.

## **The Period of the First *Judenrat***

### **‘The Open Ghetto’**

Immediately upon the arrival of the Germans in Baranovich, the German soldiers burst into the houses of the Jews, accompanied by the local Poles and Byelorussians, to rob and plunder, and for purposes of abuse.

On the morrow, a roundup began of Jewish ‘communists,’ even if their connection to communism was happenstance. Many were totally innocent of this charge, but in spite of that, they were taken out to be executed. One after another, Jews were seized to do a variety of work, and their family had no idea whether they were taken for work, or whether they might have been murdered. There was also no lack of informing by neighbors, Poles and Byelorussians, in order to settle accounts over economic disputes, or in order to be able to seize Jewish assets. Merchandise and furniture were plundered. Many Jews were even forced to leave their homes on an immediate basis.

### **The Jewish Committee**

This condition of insecurity, to their lives and possessions, caused a number of men from the Jewish community to come together to take counsel. It was R’ Mendl Goldberg, who instigated the first meeting, which took place in the synagogue on Wilenska Street. Activists from past years were called to this meeting, from all branches of Jewish activity in the city: municipal officials, community leaders, with the lack of power of the economic institutions, and cultural institutions, and also the leaders of the parties. The natural course was that the impetus to new action came from the activists and workers because of their membership in the various offices. In the entire 21 months of the Soviet occupation, there was not any sign of such a form of Jewish community activity of this kind, and here, it seemed that in one step, there came ‘to life...’ in that meeting, a proposal to set up a committee, and to select its chairman, in order to try and come in contact with the German occupation authorities for purposes of resolving matters pertaining to security, procuring food, work and cessation of seizing people.

Yehoshua<sup>2</sup> Izikson was acclaimed as the Chairman. An office was established for the committee, in an ordinary house on the Wilenska Street.

---

<sup>1</sup> An independent translation of this chapter has since been brought to my attention, and may be found at: <http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/baranovich1/bar110.html>

<sup>2</sup> In the Yiddish texts, he is referred to by his ‘secular’ name, ‘Evsei.’

This committee immediately received the name of ‘the Jewish Committee,’ and it organized itself along the lines of the way the community of the past did. The structure and membership of this committee, with specific modifications, remained in force until the first ‘*aktion*’ in March 1942. It quickly assumed authority, both with respect to the Jewish populace in general in the city, and with respect to the ruling authorities of both the Germans and Byelorussians (this committee was in existence for three months, until September ‘41, when it was superseded by the Germans, and changed its name to ‘*Judenrat*’).

Chairman Izikson, upon his election, immediately undertook an effort of contacting people he knew among the Byelorussians, in order to access their means of reaching the German occupation authorities. The Jews, in the meantime, stayed living in their homes. This situation was referred to as ‘the open ghetto.’ In the center of the city, the better homes were taken away from their Jewish owners, who were forced to vacate them in a matter of a few hours. All their possessions were plundered. There were some Jews who, upon making a quick assessment of the situation, left of their homes of their own free will, and moved to the southwest section of the city, a section that was populated mostly by the poorer part of the Jewish population.

**Regarding Work** – In accordance with an order of the military authority, that was made public in the first days of the occupation, all of the populace was to continue doing their regular work. All those who work in critical locations, as delineated by the Germans (hospitals, flour mills, pharmacies, etc.) received work permits. The permit was a form of protection for the holder, against being seized to do other work.

Already, by the first week of the occupation, notices had been posted by the military authorities about wearing the yellow Star of David. Similarly, it became forbidden for Jews to walk on the sidewalks, but only in the middle of the street. They made it obligatory to take off one’s hat when in the presence of a German soldier.

All promissory notes and loan portfolios, whether of the Poles or the Soviets, had to be turned over to the German authorities.

From the hours of 19:00 to 6:00 a curfew was declared. Violation of the curfew – resulted in a death sentence.

The ‘Citizens Committee’ (a parallel municipal institution created by the Germans, composed entirely of Byelorussians) served as a conduit for passing along the economic demands of the Germans to the ‘Jewish Committee.’ Because this ‘Citizens Committee’ was interested in the homes of the Jews, it began to apply pressure to concentrate all the Jews in a ghetto, that was designated to be in a distant and run down suburb, called ‘Sakhalin,’ that was located outside of the city. Izikson was able to get the worst of this decree repealed through his intervention, and the use of bribery.

After approximately two and a half months (September 1941), the S. S. people appeared in the city, headed by *Obersturmführer* Adolf Lerner, as the district commissar. As head of the Jewish section in his office, a young aide was designated – Krampe – a Nazi scourge. Gestapo officials also arrived from Kovno, with the Nazi Amelung at their head, and as his aide, he had a young, brutal Lithuanian, Jozef Gurniewicz, nicknamed ‘the Lithuanian.’ In the same month, the German *Feldgendarmarie* arrived in Baranovich, to provide food, and organize a Byelorussian Secret Police, that entailed yet a different assault, headed by Duczenko.

## The Establishment of the '*Judenrat*' and Entry into the Ghetto

In September 1941, as was previously stated, the 'Jewish Committee' formally was changed to become a '*Judenrat*.' It was then that a firm basis was received regarding the intent of the Germans to create a ghetto. From the part of the Chairman, Izikson, a great deal of effort was invested in getting the designated area of the ghetto enlarged, and by the use of a great deal of bribery, they succeeded, with Krampe's help, to set the boundaries of the ghetto in the southwest part of the city – an area of dwellings that was populated in an excessively crowded condition.

The erection of a barbed wire fence, around the ghetto, of 2.5 meters in width [sic: height], encompassed in its entirety only 60 houses. They were supposed to accommodate 12,000 people – the overcrowding was terrifying, and the houses got the nickname of '*kolkhoz*'. 20-25 people were crammed into a room that was 4 x 4 meters in area, and the bunk beds were three tiers high.

The ghetto was in the middle of the city and had two gates: one, the main gate, on the Wilenska Street, and the second, in the cemetery.

The '*Judenrat*' and the police were concentrated beside the main gate, and opposite them, on the second side of the street, was the *Gestapo* building.

A strict guard was kept all around the ghetto perimeter. It included watchtowers, with machine guns. During the period of transition to the ghetto, almost all of the *Judenrat* members were occupied with keeping the people clam, and setting up residence arrangements for each family. the ghetto was closed on 12.12.1941.

## The Structure of the '*Judenrat*'

**The Chairman – Yehoshua (Evsei) Izikson** – Sone of a wealthy dry goods merchant. He was active in the community life of the city, a member of the municipal council, a member of the management of the merchant's bank, and accordingly, a member of the 'unaffiliated bloc,' that supported the Pilsudski régime. He had connections to Polish and Byelorussian people in public life in the city. He was also a man of pleasant appearance, and a skill for diplomacy. He was able to earn the trust of the Germans that worked the Jewish Street, without exception.

Izikson believed that he could save the lives of the Jews of Baranovich, based on his connections, the use of bribery, and his personal intervention. He, personally, conducted all negotiations with the Germans.

On 17/12/41, 72 Jews were arrested, and an indication was passed to the Jewish Committee, that it will be possible to save them by payment of a 'contribution.' (A fine), in the amount of 20 kg of gold, silver, jewelry and in addition – one million Rubles. The matter was made public, and to everyone's astonishment, the sum was raised rather swiftly. There were no demands imposed, and the Jews brought their valuables voluntarily. The payment was turned over to the Germans, despite the fact that nothing was heard from the people seized, because all of them had been shot on the day they were taken. This only became known afterwards.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Writer's footnote: A certain part of the sum collected remained in the hands of the '*Judenrat*,' and it was used for a variety of outlays. In the course of time, suspicions were raised in the Jewish street, with regard to the sums collected.

Izikson expressed his trepidations about the future not only once, but out of a belief in the possibility of survival, he said one time: ‘My friends, without ignoring our end in being wiped out, another month, several added months – the Germans will not let us remain alive. However, no price is too dear to extend the lives of 12,000 Jews for even an hour. What this means, is 12,000 additional hours of Jewish life, and this is more valuable than 20 kg of gold, Therefore, I say, let us give the gold, and there will be other demands–I am sure of that. But in the meantime, let us shut their mouths.’

On one occasions, the Byelorussian ‘Citizens Committee’ demanded that the ‘*Judenrat*’ provide 60 Jewish girls for the houses of prostitution for the German soldiers. Izikson succeeded, with the help of a Christian friend, to have this demand annulled. An emissary from Vilna sent 60 ‘professional’ Christian girls to Baranovich, and in this way, the ‘*Judenrat*’ discharged its obligation. Izikson announced that ‘Innocent Jewish girls I will not provide to you.’

It is worth citing here just a bit of Izikson’s deeds, and that of the entire ‘*Judenrat*,’ during the time of his leadership. He constantly argued ‘I will give you gold and silver – I will not give you the lives of people.’ In the city, both the Byelorussians and the Germans knew this.

The procedure in the work of the ‘*Judenrat*’ was authoritative, and the direction and authority of the ‘*Judeneldste*’ (Jewish Elder) Izikson were an order. Izikson, nonetheless, made it a practice to call the ‘*Judenrat*’ to regularly scheduled meetings, to consult them, and even to invite people of reputable standing and influence within the Jewish community, to these meetings.

Before The First Slaughter (‘*aktion*’), Izikson and Mrs. Zhenya Mann, his secretary, were invited to the office of the *Gebietskommissariat*, who had demanded of him, a list of 3,000 elderly and sick Jews ‘having no value’ with the promise that nothing bad would happen to them. Izikson strongly refused, [saying]: ‘You can demand everything you want, just not the lives of people. This is in God’s hands’ This answer doomed his fate, and he lost his life. No amount of extreme proposals helped, that he would pay for everything at a high price. Accordingly, both he and Mrs. Mann were taken to the slaughter pits, and there were witnesses to what happened there. They were the last ones shot.

**The Secretary** – Mrs. Zhenya Mann came to Baranovich from Rovno, after her marriage to Engineer Mann. After the establishment of the ‘*Judenrat*,’ she was invited to work in it as the secretary to Chairman Izikson. In her dedication to her work, which knew no bounds, she immediately earned the affection of all the ‘*Judenrat*’ members, and of all the Jews in the ghetto. Being skilled at interior decorating, she was invited to the houses of the senior German command, to be consulted in this regard. Her extensive connections helped get a number of decrees canceled, and others deferred. In her folksy character, she radiated compassion and trust, as a bulwark between the Jews of the ghetto and their terrible plight. She was known by the nickname of ‘The Mother of the Ghetto.’

Mrs. Mann received an offer from one of the German *Luftwaffe* Generals, when she worked at his home as an interior decorator, to transport her to the home of his parents in Germany, but she side-stepped this offer, and replied that she will share the fate of the rest of her people. As previously mentioned, she and Izikson were the last to be murdered in The First Slaughter.

**Deputy Chairman** – This was Shmuel (Muly’eh) Yankelewicz, the owner of a musical instrument and bicycle store. He was not part of the coterie of activists in the city. He agreed to work in the ‘*Judenrat*’

because he was known to be a man of integrity, and easy to get along with. He served as the Deputy to the Chairman. His area of responsibility were not circumscribed.

**Liaison** – As the person who was the go-between to the Gestapo and the Byelorussian Secret Police, the Chairman designated Shmuel ('Mulik) Jezereel. He was a young man who spoke a fluent German, who developed relationships with those around him, as well as the officers of the German authorities. Because of his position as a liaison, he took care to dress elegantly, something that angered many in the ghetto.

The opinions about him, because of his delicate position in regards to raising the contributions for purposes of satisfying the various financial demands, were different in different periods of the ghetto. Especially true was the increase in criticism leveled against him after the Holocaust. His connections to the Germans caused him to be suspect among many.

Over time, he developed connections to the *Feldgendarmarie*, and the person who was the contact was Yitzhak (Izzie) Fiedler, who worked in the labor section.

## **The *Judenrat* Head Office : Divided into Three Different Sections**

**1) Secretariat** – Joseph Kuriniec served as a secretary, who in the past was an editor of a weekly in the city. He was a student of the law, knew German very well, ready and able, serious and dedicated. He was not a member of the 'Judenrat,' but he participated in its meetings. The essence of his duties was to deal with the paperwork required by the city authorities, both Byelorussian and German.

**2) Treasury** – This was under the direction of Mordechai Schiff, who previously had been the treasurer of the Jewish community in the city. This was one of the most significant and sensitive positions in the ghetto, which had to function withing the trust of everyone that touched on these matters. He was a man of integrity, pleasant in his demeanor, who succeeded under difficult conditions, that were created, causing him to continue with his diligent work. Schiff too, was not a member of the 'Judenrat,' but rather an especially selected appointee. He, also, participated in the committee meetings.

Regarding the bookkeeping – it was Baruch Galay who was responsible for this, being a past community activist, a man of integrity, on whom it was possible to rely.

**3) Labor** – Joseph Limon stood at the head. He was a religious Jew, well received by all, and well-known in the community. He conducted his affairs with understanding. Everyone trusted him. His assistant and right hand was Yitzhak Fiedler, a student and son of a well-known doctor in the city, who stood out because of his organizational talents. In this section, an inventory of the entire Jewish population in the cit. When the news of the establishment of the ghetto reached them, this section initiated the allocation of the houses and residences, and this issue became easier during the time the ghetto under went a transition from being 'open' to being 'closed.'

As previously mentioned, those that worked in essential services, earned the right to passes, and those that didn't have steady employment, were obligated to present themselves, at the direction of the 'Judenrat', at an appointed day and hour, beside the 'Judenrat' building. This was an internal, independent method of organization, in order to keep people capable of doing work, at the ready, in the event of a need.

As to work that was ordered, the workers went out each morning, in an organized fashion, from the

'Judenrat' building, in accordance with the orders of the Germans. At the time that the ghetto was still open, a Jew stood at the head of the work contingent as it left, who was appointed to do this. At the time the ghetto became 'closed,' a German or a Byelorussian had assumed this position.

It was expressly forbidden to pay the Jews for their labor. Employers were required to turn over the salary equivalent to the labor division attached to the German *Gebietskommissariat*.

An incident occurred that one of the Jews, who worked as a tailor for a local man, asked for wages, and the latter turned him in to the *Gestapo*. That evening, all the Jews in the ghetto were assembled, and the tailor was publicly hanged for this 'transgression.'

House servants were a sought after job. By and large, they were dispersed all over the city. The attitude towards the servants was generally decent. More significantly, there was the opportunity to eat to satiety, and even to acquire some food to take back into the ghetto.

There were a few locations, in which several hundred workers were concentrated, such as the Air Force base – [which had] 350 workers. In the 'depot,' ( the workplaces of the railroad) there were 250 workers.

Over 5,000 workers would leave the ghetto daily, to go to work, all went – the young as well as the old – wanted to get out and go to work, in order to remain alive. The labor division was established immediately after the occupation of the city, and continued to function for the entire time the ghetto remained in existence.

## **The Work Places, or 'The Good Ghetto'**

In the ghetto area, several houses were set aside, and separately cordoned off. There, manufacturing facilities were set up. This thing was done at the initiative of the '*Judenrat*' with the consent of the Germans. There were about 60 -70 craftsmen that worked there, of the first class, who obtained their work at the personal orders given by Germans. There were seamstresses there, furniture makers, upholsterers, work places for glass making, etc. There was also electrical repair, and watch repair was done there. The organization was a wonder. In most cases, the Germans brought the raw material, and the work was done for free. This workplace was considered to be the safest of all, and many Jews put pressure on the '*Judenrat*' to be assigned there. It later became known, that after The First Slaughter, not a single Jew was taken out from that location to be killed.

**Sustenance** – Fishl Svjacicky headed this effort, who in the past had been the owner of a manufacturing establishment. In the past, he had not been active in Jewish community life in the city. In his position in the *Judenrat*, he stood out for his subservient and conciliatory nature, and responded to all the demands of the Germans out of fear of retribution of what might come otherwise.

**Premises** – It was Idelczyk who dealt with living space in the ghetto – a brusque young man, mostly, as has already been mentioned. The preparations for dividing up the living quarters had been done by Mr. Limon, from the Labor Division, before entry into the ghetto. Within the ghetto, this was one of the busiest of the areas because of the burden of the inadequate space, and the inability of the ghetto dwellers to alleviate the circumstances of their overcrowding.

**Provisioning** – The central issue surrounding the physical survival of the Jews in the ghetto was provisioning of foodstuffs. The Germans provided no foodstuffs at all, but they made it possible for the '*Judenrat*' to get

access to food. Food was obtainable only at exorbitant costs, which was facilitated by this section. Purchases were made with money, or money equivalents. It was necessary to overcome enormous difficulties both in acquisition and transfer. The access to food, and its equitable distribution, turned into a real trial for the 'Judenrat,' and they would distribute 120 grams of bread for each individual.

**Warehousing** – Beloskurnik was made responsible for this division. He was a brusque and energetic man. He had been involved in sourcing boots for the officers of the Polish army, and continued doing this, during the time of the German occupation, where he became a supplier of boots. It was from this vantage point, that he developed extensive contacts among the German officers.

In the 'Judenrat' he attached himself to that group of Jews, that volunteered to serve the community in its time of distress. His image is subject to controversy. There are those who accuse him of being obsequious to, and even in collaboration with, the Germans. Other point out the conditions under which he had to function. In any event, the provisioning of foodstuffs required development of storage facilities, but in this case, they did not content themselves with storing just flour, groats, potatoes, etc. Rather, they expanded the ambit of their effort, that also came to include clothing and footwear. There were many sorts of craftsmen that worked at these warehouses, who provided assistance to the ghetto, in the form of shoe repair, clothing repair, and the like.

**Assets** – Those responsible for allocations, attempted to retrieve all Jewish assets that were outside the ghetto, in order to fund the acquisition of food. Along with this, they attempted to generate other sources of income by disposing of things that were not necessary. There were Byelorussians that were persuaded and agreed to pay specific amounts, apart from the fact that the house, the surrounding property, or the business would fall to them legally. It was Beloskurnik who dealt with all of this.

**Food** – As it happened, there was a store, in which food was allocated, and it was Moshe Litvak who was responsible for running it – a man of means, who in the past had been a community activist – who enjoyed a respected position, and engendered trust. This was one of the most sensitive areas of daily life in the ghetto.

**Food Provision** – Chaim Zukerman stood at the head of this section, and his deputy was Abba Zakin – both past activists in the community, whose reputation for integrity preceded them, as did their concern for the poor of the city, going back to the period of Polish rule. Their outlook could be summarized in the statement: 'In the Baranovich ghetto, no Jew will go hungry for lack of bread.' In accordance with this line of attack, they did great things, along with a coterie of loyal helpers, among them Mrs. Zhenya Mann.

Under the oversight of this Food Provision section, pairs of distributors would go through the city (during the period of the 'open ghetto'), and would gather money from those Jews who had means, for eventual distribution among the needy. In general, they had a good idea of who had what, and how much, or who had managed to succeed in getting a quantity of food into the ghetto from the outside.

In the ghetto, it was felt that there is an agency that is concerned with the poor, and is not inhibited from taking, even by force, if necessary, from those that had the means. And therefore, it becomes clear, from all of the testimony that has been given, that there was, indeed, no hunger in the Baranovich ghetto due to lack of bread. The work of the section was based on the work of volunteers, and after work, the volunteers continued to work in groups: one going to acquire foodstuffs, while a second went through, distributing these items.



**Health** – While the origin of the sections such as Sustenance, Food Provisioning, and Labor goes back to the time of the ‘open ghetto,’ and subsequently only changed or expanded their functions later, the section dealing with Health only was established with the advent of the ‘closed ghetto.’ Dr. Nakhumowsky stood at the head of this section, who was one of the veteran physicians of the city. He was renowned in the city, and throughout the entire vicinity, not only as a highly skilled physician, but also as a man of the people, who was quick to deal with issues, even with no compensation, and was very well accepted by the physicians of the city – Jewish and non-Jewish. There were three separate branches within this section: Healing, Sanitation, and Pharmacy.

**Healing** – There were ten doctors who stood at Dr. Nakhumowsky’s call, to assist him. In the ‘Old Age Home,’ of past days, a hospital was established, and a clinic. Medical help was delivered at no charge. Opposite this, was a small building that served as a hospital for infectious diseases. The great fear was regarding the potential outbreak of epidemics, especially of typhus, and it was from this that the importance of sanitation was derived.

At the head of this branch stood Dr. Svjacic, who accomplished great things in his area of responsibility. Among those in the ghetto, he was thought to be of the type who was ready to do everything, and especially not to incite the bloodlust of the Germans to kill. This contributed to an atmosphere of acceding to German wishes.

It was not possible to overcome the problems associated with overcrowding, and it was terrible. However, in the area of maintaining cleanliness, there were things that could be accomplished. Sanitation groups visited homes, and instructed the residents in those homes. They personally disposed of garbage, and brought order to those corners that had become filthy. In this regard, they cobbled together a machine to be able to de-louse clothing. A responsibility to bathe periodically was instituted. The fear of an outbreak of an epidemic – that could engulf the many – hovered over the heads of the Jews in the ghetto. The Germans were strongly motivated to take out and kill anyone who fell sick with an infectious disease. It is because of the efforts of this section, and because of the good will and cooperation of the people, epidemics did not break out. The Baranovich ghetto became a ‘Model Ghetto’ in the discussions of the Germans.

**Pharmacy** – This was a separate branch, headed by Michael Mukasey, a pharmacist, and a community person. It was very difficult to overcome the shortage of medicines, but despite this, because of the connections that they had with colleagues on the Aryan side, they succeeded in getting medicines into the ghetto, by way of a unique permit; they also were able to transfer boxes of medicines that had been held in Jewish pharmacies in a hidden cache.

By way of the testimony that was given by doctors that survived, it became clear that among the cadre of health care professionals (doctors and pharmacists), 57 people were killed. Two died a natural death, and only 7 remained alive, of which 5 reached the Land of Israel.

**Police** – This division was organized by Chaim Weltman, who volunteered, and stood at its head, until The First Slaughter. He was one of the most important activists of the city, the head of the craftsmen’s union, a member of the community and municipal councils, and was known as a spokesman for the poor. His home was open to all the needy. There were times when he neglected his own personal affairs, and he was completely immersed in his community work.

‘The police force in the Baranovich ghetto was unique of its kind,’ says Mukasey, ‘in comparison to those in other cities.’

Weltman assembled 40 young men about him, mostly from the 'Maccabi' group, that was not only a sports club, but also a center for group endeavors. During the period of the 'open ghetto,' the young people were utilized as 'messenger boys,' and were engaged in the delivery of notifications, invitations to meetings, sometimes as escorts to work, etc. Their mission became totally different after the establishment of the ghetto. They participated in standing guard at the gate. In addition to the Byelorussian police, they were very helpful to the Sanitation Division, in enforcing the maintenance of cleanliness in the 'Kolkhozes' and their environs.' There was no incident of any violence in the ghetto.' This is difficult to understand even today.

They had several bicycles at their disposal, and they were able to move about the city with permission. They would pass along notices to those returning from work, with regard to inspections that were to take place at the gate, with regard to bringing in foodstuffs. They warned the residents of the ghetto about surprise inspections by the representatives of the *Gebietskomissar* (the latter giving notice about a quarter of an hour before his arrival).

Their personal conduct led to no erection of a barrier between them and the rest of the ghetto denizens, but they were still called 'policemen.' but they acted as a band of helpers, that eased the suffering of their brethren in the ghetto. Accordingly, they earned a favorable assessment.

They helped people on the outside (farmers, in matters of barter, etc.) to gain entrance to the ghetto. From all testimony, the esteem of the ghetto police goes up, with regards to their behavior towards, and help to, the ghetto denizens.

On 4.3.42, the day of The [First] Slaughter, the *Kommissar* turned to Weltman, asking him to deploy 15 policemen at the 'Green Bridge,' (the location of the execution of the Baranovich Jews), to 'keep order.' Weltman turned to all of the policemen, saying: 'Boys, everyone is going up on the altar. We are traveling to *The Sanctification of the Name.*' The first stepped forward, and then all the rest of the young men went after him. After they had completed all the burials, in that Valley of Death, they were all shot to death, to the last one, by the Byelorussians.

**The Invited Ones** – In the fullness of time, a group was created of 'Invited People' who attended '*Judenrat*' meetings. These were recognized people who were accepted in the city, who were invited to various adjudications.

Dr. Isaac Bussel was present at almost all of the '*Judenrat*' meetings, without being a member, and was considered as one of the exponents of the intelligentsia of the city. He stood out in his opposition to all manner of self-organization involving arms. During the time of the Slaughter, an S. S. man approached him, and asked him his occupation. After hearing that he was an eye doctor, the S. S. man stabbed out his eyes, and only afterwards, shot him to death.

The *Dayan*, Niss'eh (Nissan) Scheinberg, was popular in the midst of the city's Jews, and not only in the religious part of the community. His brother was the young Rabbi of the City, who had inherited the seat from their father. Berezovsky lived together with them in the same '*kolkhoz*,' who served as an arbitrator for Jews at the time there were disputes to be resolved.

The Chairman, Izikson, would frequently come to them for consultation. He would consult with R' Niss'eh on every difficult question, before arriving at a decision. On their part, they too, would attend '*Judenrat*' meetings.

**Culture & Education** – There was not a division of this type in the structure of the ‘*Judenrat*,’ but despite this, it was on the venerable teacher and educator, Miszlewsky, that this responsibility was placed, to organize classes of instruction for the children: This teacher would go from one ‘*kolkhoz*’ to the next, during the day, teaching and giving instruction.

There is no testimony to the cultural life such as: plays, drama circles, Zionist activities, or just plain Jewish-oriented activities, in which the community usually engaged (such as 20 Tammuz – A special holiday in memory of Herzl and Bialik, on May 1, a holiday for people like Borukhov, etc.) Instance of these sort of events are known only in one ‘*kolkhoz*,’ or another, that was inclined to do this sort of thing as an internal event.

Yeshiva students, and many of the city elders, especially the more religious among them, participated in Torah study, and the study of the *Gemara* in the evening, in a number of the ‘*Kolkhozes*,’ and did so in the house of R’ Mendl Goldberg, where a *minyán* was even put together. Being personally an ardent supporter of *Agudat Israel*, he became known for his teaching of *Mussar* to both criminal and political prisoners. During the time of The Slaughter, that fell on Purim, he wrapped himself in his prayer shawl, ascended the freight truck, and called for the Jews to join together at this ‘Binding.’ And to the sound of the singing of ‘*Shoshanat Yaakov*,’ that burst forth from the truck, they made their way to the pit of death.

From the little we have been able to discover of the structure, initiatives, and work of the ‘*Judenrat*,’ we get a picture of an effort to organize a constructive and critical leadership, in which two central thrusts stand out: Externally – An effort to stem the tide of increasingly frequent demands for assets and money, but stopping short of turning over lives. Izikson’s mantra became the standard position: ‘No human lives.’

Internally – An endeavor to protect lives, based on the mantra of Zukerman and Zakin – ‘There will not be a single hungry Jew in the ghetto,’ and wherever possible, to provide the minimum required for survival, to the needy, without hesitating to take from those who had the means to give. From the standpoint of carrying out a mission, all matters were conducted as if it was within the same ‘family’ environment. At meetings, not only members of the ‘*Judenrat*’ participated, but also recognized and invited representatives. And while this did not cause them to excel in impact, nevertheless, the efforts of Izikson stood out, mostly because of the trust that he earned in carrying himself with pride to the outside, and not being obsequious in the face of the enemy.

## **The Period of the Second ‘*Judenrat*’**

On the day after The First Slaughter (*Aktion*), on 4.3.41, the survivors were compelled to immediately exit and go to their daily work places. At the direction of the Gestapo, a new registration was prepared, that counted 7,700 Jews. the area allotted to the ghetto was shrunk. Space was allocated at the rate of 70 [sq.] cm per person.

Conditions deteriorated, and the attitude of the gentile neighbors to the Jews worsened. The working conditions also grew worse. Also the illusion that we would remain alive melted away. The Slaughter had been carried out in the bright of day, and everyone knew exactly how, how many, and the way, in which this was all going to end. The strength of the escort to work was increased, and the inspections [upon return] at the gate became more difficult and intense. Despite this, the will to live, and to survive, grew stronger, and the ghetto began to organize itself anew.

It was Yankelewicz – Izikson's Deputy, who was nominated to become the Chairman of the Second 'Judenrat.'

The divisions were activated as they had been previously, but with a different outlook. The number of workers was decreased, and the work was carried out by people who clustered around these division, and with fewer helpers. Where in the time of the First 'Judenrat' there were 50 appointees, in addition to the 40 or so members of the police, in the Second 'Judenrat,' there were only 10 appointees, in addition to the 25 members of the police.

From among the eight members of the First 'Judenrat,' the following were killed: Izikson, Mrs. Mann, Weltman and Zukerman.

Yankelewicz, who was Izikson's Deputy, was appointed by the Germans to be the Chairman. Taking Zukerman's place ז"ק, was his Deputy, Zakin, with Warszawsky as his Deputy. All 25 of the policemen were new. The engineer, Goldberg, was added to the 'Judenrat.' In the tally, the new 'Judenrat' numbered 8 members. The changes in the membership were stark, but the real change came in its posture.

The new Chairman, Yankelewicz, tried as best as he could, but the behavior of several of his associates had changed. The influence of several central appointees rose to a higher level than was the case in the First 'Judenrat,' and not in a positive way. Svjacicky, Beloskurnik and Jezereel – were more tentative in their approach to the Germans, and was expresses in concession to each and every demand and request from them. By contrast, the wife of Svjacicky, who was the head of the activists among the women of the city, was a central group in the armed underground. This is how a gap developed between the nominal members of the 'Judenrat,' and those that had previously participated in its meetings, but now wielded greater influence.

The head of the police, Rutkowicz was involved in matters pertaining to the underground, and it was his deputy, Warszawsky that carried out the police direction. He was a member of the fighting resistance organization that had been established in the ghetto after The First Slaughter. Similarly, 17 of the 25 policemen were part of this underground organization, and were of great help to the organization and arming of this resistance organization. Without actually being members, both Zakin and Limon were secretly members of the resistance organization.

In the half year between The First Slaughter to the Second Slaughter of 22.9.42 – the change that stood out in the live of the ghetto was expressed in a number of areas. The construction of hidden bunkers increased in tempo, because there were many, who during The First Slaughter, hid themselves in such bunkers, and saved themselves. After the First Slaughter, the organization of the fighting resistance organization began. This endeavor received much attention and work from the younger cohorts of the populace. The introduction of arms, by all methods, intensified. The task was executed with relative ease, because in the many places where the Jews worked, there were substantial inventories of armament, that had been abandoned by the Soviets. The relations between the 'Judenrat' and the fighting resistance organization grew more tense (over the issue of the seizure of a member of the resistance, during an attempt to smuggle arms into the ghetto). During the course of the second half of 1942, the level of escape to the forests, and then joining up with the partisans, grew higher. News began to reach us regarding the murder of Jews in the surrounding smaller villages. Also refugees from other towns began to arrive, and their stories about the extent of the killing added to the unrest. Despite the prohibition to do so, the 'Judenrat' looked after providing these refugees with living space and food. Young people returned from the forests, to persuade their friends to leave and come join them. Preparations for an uprising intensified, but the second *aktion*, which came unexpectedly,

interdicted a meaningful execution. During the course of 10 days, the ghetto was sealed shut, and during that same time, the Germans took out and killed 6,000 Jews.

When the ghetto was divided into two parts, the Chairman Yankelewicz, and one of the policemen, Hillel Schindler, who knew where the bunkers were, went out during the nights, and transferred their occupants to the large ghetto. On one night they were caught, but they managed to get away, and both of them left for the forest on that same night, and joined the partisans.

In the second ghetto, as previously mentioned, the standing of Yankelewicz was not up to that of Izikson. This situation led to an adverse independence on the part of people like Jezereel and Beloskurnik, Dr. Svjacic, and others, to no good. Together with this, as was the case in the first ghetto, there were activists who continued to follow the dictum of 'There will not be any hunger in the ghetto.'

The bitter dispute that could not be bridged, was between those who favored an uprising, and escape to the forest, and those who held the view that such a move would bring a calamity on the rest of the ghetto denizens, reached a level to the point of revelation to the Germans. Despite this, the matter remained as a 'family dispute' between Jews. The circumstances thus created were difficult to say the least, hope just melted away. During the Second Slaughter, there was an increase in isolated incidents of individuals who rose up, assaulting, and in some cases, killing those who were trying to murder them. After The Second Slaughter, only 3,000 Jews remained out of the entire city population.

### **The Period of the Third '*Judenrat*'**

Among those members of the second '*Judenrat*' that survived The Second Slaughter, were: Dr. Svjacic, Svjacicky, Beloskurnik and Goldberg. In addition to these four, meetings in the '*Judenrat*' house were also attended by all the central appointees concerned with the protection of the ghetto. All of them pressured the engineer, Goldberg, to accept the position of Chairman. He, himself, was a refugee from Western Poland, a perceptive and energetic man, who knew German well, and was well accepted by the Jews of the area. And even the Germans showed him deference. The Germans encouraged this selection, and the election led to his appointment.

The appointment of the head of the police was much more complicated. Not a single person was left of the police from the second ghetto period. Many were killed, and others succeeded in fleeing to the forest, and as a result a severe pressure was brought to bear on the few of those, who were available to do the job, but steadfastly refused to do so. In the untenable circumstances that were created, Dr. Lubranicky arose, and clarified the fact that it is not conceivable to leave a ghetto with 3,000 Jews [unprotected] without a police force, and he volunteered. His offer was gladly accepted, not only because of the exigency of the moment, that had been relieved, but also because of his personality. He was a refugee from Lodz, whose brother had married a local woman, and who had managed already to flee to the forest.

The area of the ghetto was again reduced in size, as might have been expected. This time, the calculated space for each resident was worked out at 60 [sq.] cm. The shortage of food grew more acute, because most of the families had been torn apart, and were composed of widows, children, the elderly, and fragments of families (of those who had fled to the forest).

At this stage, there was no longer any talk of organized divisions. The work was done by a limited number of people, and the principal concern they had was to get access to foodstuffs for those who had remained alive. The new

Chairman, the engineer, Goldberg, applied pressure to get a transfer to the labor camp at the Koldichevo camp. He assessed this as the better chance to remain alive. As a result, and with his encouragement, many went off to join the partisans. ‘I see nothing, and hear nothing – do whatever you can to flee, everyone who can.’ He also helped the partisans faithfully, especially in obtaining medicines for their use in the forest. Despite the fact that Dr. Svjacic continued to fight against escaping to the forest, Goldberg’s approach stood. A particularly painful issue was the one of leaving families behind, because most of those who fled to the forest were men that left behind wives and children, or aged parents in the ghetto. After The Second Slaughter, the workers in the so-called ‘good ghetto’ were compelled, in the evening, to enter the ghetto and spend the nights there.

For close to three months, the Baranovich Jews continued to struggle for survival, until 17.12.42, when hundreds of *Gestapo* forces burst into the ghetto, as well as Byelorussian policemen, Ukrainians and Lithuanians, and amidst terror and murderous beatings, they concentrated all of the Jews in an area that was two hands breath in size. There a *selektion* took place, from which 400 Jews were selected, who were then attached to various places of work, while the rest, conveyed in freight trucks, were taken out to the pits at Grabowiec, where they met their death.

350 Jews were taken to the Koldichevo camp, among them Goldberg, Dr. Svjacic, Fiedler, Limon, and Beloskurnik. Jezereel was taken into the yard at the *Gestapo*, where he was tortured and executed on the spot. Dr. Lubranicky was also killed there in the same way. The liquidation of the ghetto, up to the elimination of the last Jew, continued for a month’s time. Many hid themselves in the bunkers, but yard after yard was searched rigorously, by the Germans and their accomplices, and in no small measure, in search for hidden valuables. Close to 200 people fled to the forest in an organized group, and after them, approximately another 500 people. Baranovich was declared *Judenrein*.

**At the end of The Second World War, out of all the Jews in the Baranovich ghetto, close to 400 survived.**

## **Table of Changes to the Positions in the Judenrat**

<b>Position</b>	<b>Judenrat I</b>	<b>Judenrat II</b>	<b>Judenrat III</b>
<b>Chairman</b>	Lawyer Izikson	Yankelewicz	Engineer Goldberg
<b>Senior Secretary</b>	Mrs. Mann	--	--
<b>Secretary</b>	Kuriniac	Kuriniac	Kuriniac
<b>Deputy Chairman</b>	Yankelewicz	–	–
<b>Police</b>	Weltman	Rutkewicz-Warszawsky	Dr. Lubranicky
<b>Food Provisioning</b>	Zukerman	Zakin	Zakin
<b>Labor</b>	Limon	Limon	Limon
<b>Labor Deputy</b>	Fiedler	Fiedler	Fiedler
<b>Work</b>	Svjacicky	Svjacicky	Svjacicky
<b>Health</b>	Dr. Nakhumowsky	Dr. Svjacic Beloskurnik Idelczyk	Dr. Svjacic Beloskurnik Idelczyk
<b>Treasury</b>	Schiff	Schiff	Schiff
<b>Bookkeeping</b>	Galay	Galay	Galay
<b>Assets</b>	Beloskurnik	–	–
<b>Food</b>	Litvak	Litvak	Litvak
<b>Premises-Warehousing</b>	Idelczyk	–	–
<b>Pharmacy</b>	Pharmacist Mukasey	Pharmacist Mukasey	Pharmacist Mukasey
<b>Liaison</b>	Jezereel	Jezereel	Jezereel

## Summary

Page 126: *A copy of the Sarovsky Candle*

In the First '*Judenrat*' there were 8 members, of which 4 were murdered in the First Slaughter.

In addition to them, were 10 senior appointees, of ongoing significant standing in the life of the ghetto.

In the Second '*Judenrat*' – there were also 8 members – Four of them had served in the First '*Judenrat*' and four others had been murdered. All of the senior appointees, the head of the police, his deputy and all of the policemen were new. Seven of the eight members of the second '*Judenrat*' were carry-overs, which testifies to personal compatibility of almost the entire group.

Despite this, as we have attempted to portray above, this continuity of personality – did not contain within it a continuation of the behavior inherited from the first '*Judenrat*,' neither with regard the Jews nor with regard to the Germans. In the first '*Judenrat*,' it was Izikson's leadership that stood out. His line of behavior and his personal stance were acceptable to everyone.

Yankelewicz, who was Izikson's Deputy, and worked as his right hand, this same Yankelewicz as a Chairman, was not as dependable as his predecessor.

According to all of the testimony at our disposal, in the first '*Judenrat*,' there was not even a trace of any underground organization, notwithstanding the news that reached us from the surrounding towns. A forced illusion reigned that the ghetto of a large city would not be attacked in this way.

Between the First and Second Slaughter, a change took place, and an armed underground began to be organized, the bringing in of arms, and plans for an uprising, or an escape to the forest, all served to change the subject of discussions, and the planning, whether of the second '*Judenrat*,' or the ghetto denizens themselves. Despite the existence of the underground, conversations were carried out openly in the beginning. Differences of opinion caused splits within families, between institutions, and within the '*Judenrat*.' The fact that 17 of the 25 members of the police belonged to the underground, bears witness to the scope of the organization, and the degree to which this [allegedly secret] underground was well-known out in the open.

During the tenure of the second '*Judenrat*,' as had been noted, the internal dispute over the underground with regard to resistance and escape to the forest, reached its highest intensity.

It was the Second Slaughter, that precipitated the escape of hundreds of Jews from the ghetto into the forest. It was not only young people, and isolated individuals, but also heads of families also left.

At a distance – about 20-30 km from the city of Baranovich, where there were stands of forest – the quandary was raised of separating members of a family; one of the causes, if not the central one, which was responsible for the small number of family men that left.

The third '*Judenrat*' encouraged, and actually assisted those wanting to escape into the forest. 'Whoever wants to save himself, should do this and flee,' said the Chairman, Goldberg.

The story of the Baranovich ghetto, before being thoroughly researched, have in its records the forms and methods similar to those of the large ghettos in Poland. There was an open ghetto and a closed one: three periods of the '*Judenrat*' some similar, and some different. A minimal amount of help from gentiles, as opposed to the cruelty exhibited by the majority of the local populace; the Jews of Czechoslovakia, Germany and Holland, who were hauled to be murdered beside Baranovich; a ghetto withing a ghetto, of the Jews of Mezerich, who were brought from Poland. The escape to the forest, and the military battles, serving in the '*Partizanka*;' most of those who saved themselves, and the remnants convey one great sentiment about the ghetto, being unique of its kind: 'We had people in the ghetto, all of whom were holy, and pure.. and their memory will remain in hour hearts forever.'



# Chapter II: A Collection of Partisan Tales

## A Doctor Among the Partisans

By Dr. Leon Berkowicz (Berk)  
Sydney, Australia

The Table of Contents of the Hebrew text identifies this as a work, originally prepared in English, and which was translated into Hebrew by Miriam Sokhowolsky-Bussel.

When researched a bit further, it was discovered that the 'excerpt' in this book, is derived from a much more extensive work written, in English, by Dr. Berk, which is available in the public domain.

It therefore did not seem meaningful to expend the effort to translate the Hebrew back into English, in view of the availability of an English text to the interested reader.

In lieu of such a translation, we present a number of interesting reviews of this work, which originally appeared in 1992, that provide a good summary and overview of Dr. Berk's work.

### Book Review

**Title:** *Destined to live*

**Author:** Leon Berk

**Publisher:** Paragon Press

**Place of publication:** Melbourne

**Year of Publication:** 1992

**Location of Book:** Sir Louis Matheson Library, Monash University Clayton Campus

**Cities/town/camps:** *Poland:* Baranovich, *Lvov,* *Italy:* Milan

Note: those cities/towns/camps underlined are those which are most central to the narrative

Leon Berk's compelling autobiography tells of his experiences during World War II, first as a medical student, then in hiding from the Nazis, and finally as a doctor working with the Russian partisans. The first 28 pages of the book deal with the pre-war years in Eastern Poland and Berk's travels to Italy and Lvov as a student of medicine. Some 62 pages recall the Nazi invasion of Eastern Poland and the formation of a ghetto in Baranovich. The next 126 pages relate Berk's flight from the ghetto, his time in hiding, and his life as a doctor with a Russian partisan unit. The remaining 15 pages describe liberation and Berk's subsequent migration to Israel, and later Australia. The memoir was first published in 1992.

Leon Berk, born Leonid Berkowicz, was a member of the Jewish community of Baranovichi, Poland, which came under Russian rule when Poland was divided in 1939. Berk, who had been studying

medicine in Italy, was in his hometown for the academic break when the Russians took power. He resumed his studies in Lvov, also in Poland, and graduated in 1941. Ironically, Berk had previously been unable to study medicine in a Polish university because he was Jewish. Shortly after he finished his studies, massacres of Jews began in Lvov. Berk and his friend, Shurka, walked for three weeks to get back to Baranovich.

His family confined to the ghetto, Berk spent his days working at a local hospital administered by the Germans. Soon enough, even the doctors were moved to the ghetto. Berk's friend, Shurka, as well as his brother-in-law, also a doctor, were killed in a rounding up of doctors by the Nazis, ostensibly to work at a P.O.W. camp. Berk escaped, and went into hiding.<sup>4</sup>

As news of the many atrocities taking place in the region reached Berk, he became despondent. Feeling hopeless, he felt that the only thing left to do was fight, but he had no weapons or contacts. Finally, with the help of his father, Berk managed to leave the ghetto for the house of a local peasant, Pashka, who promised to help him join the partisans. Unfortunately, the Polish partisans did not want him because he was a Jew. In the meantime, all of the Jews of Baranovich were murdered by the Nazis; Berk could hear the gunshots of the *Einsatzgruppen* for several days. After remaining in hiding, working for Pashka for a long period, Berk finally managed to join a group of Russian partisans.

Slowly, Berk was able to win the trust of the unit and become an integral part of the organization. He remained relatively secure amongst the partisans until liberation by the Red Army in 1944. Berk offers a detailed, disturbing account of partisan existence, emphasizing the simultaneous humanity and brutality of the partisans. He describes the difficulty of practicing medicine with limited means, and dwells on the ability of a universalistic, Communist ideology to overcome deep-seated anti-Semitism amongst the partisans. Although mention is made of other Jewish survivors and the existence of a Jewish family camp nearby, the focus of the account remains on the members of the partisan unit, reflecting the relative isolation of Berk's experience.

The book is written in descriptive, articulate, compelling prose. Every character appears as a multi-dimensional, complex person. The book's preface, originally published as an article in *The Age* newspaper, was written by journalist Vitali Vitaliev. Vitaliev describes how he came to read a manuscript of the book almost by accident, and was taken aback by its incredible lucidity and attention to detail. *Destined to Live* is a gripping, moving, eloquently written account of Berk's war experiences.

<http://arts.monash.edu.au/jewish-civilisation/resources/holocaust-memoirs/link.php?id=219>

---

<sup>4</sup> Dr. Alexander ('Shura') Izikson (son of the first [*Judenrat*] president who was killed) – Practicing Surgeon. Documented by Dr. Zelik Levinbook, in his memoir.

## Leon Berk: Destined to Live Australia 1992

By Tim Metcalf

Leon Berkowicz's tale of his life during World War II is harrowing. There is a relentless alternation of human warmth and darkness, superbly told, making it a powerful and very moving narrative. At times it is almost too exhausting to read, never mind to have actually experienced. As he says, though, the survival instinct is strong in animals.

Survival, however the movies like to portray it, is not always a great thing. Berk introduces his memoir with an acknowledgment of his survivor guilt, and especially remembers the many people who died from light wounds that became infected with tetanus.

His tale begins as he leaves his Polish home for fascist Italy in 1936 to study medicine. In Milan he is forced to join the Fascist Confederation of Foreign Students, which for him begins the inexorable slide into the blitzkrieg of Poland in 1939. By the time Hitler invades, Leon is in the southern city of Lvov completing his studies. Hitler and Stalin agree to divide Poland, so that he finds his home town is on the Russian side. Observing that 'No-one foresaw the Holocaust', he completes his studies on the eve of the Nazis taking Lvov (having breached their treaty with Stalin). He finishes his exams, and on 5/7/1941 the Nazis summarily execute all the Polish Christian academics and their families. It is only a few days before the Nazis have stirred up long-standing hatred of ethnic Ukrainians against the Jewish population to create a pogrom lasting 3 days and in which 6,000 people died. Somehow Leon survives a crowd being driven against a prison wall and crushing itself to death as officers take photographs. Next he must avoid a fellow student (now, like him, a graduated doctor) who passes by wielding a stick and wearing an armband.

**Consider:** What is the best way to prevent doctors becoming agents for a destructive enemy? Should they or should they not have a political education?

Stunned by the sights he has seen, in hiding, and scared to ask for food, Berkowicz decides with a friend to walk 500km home to Baranovichi in north-east Poland. It is clear the Nazis have found a fast route to spread hatred of the Jews among rural peasants, in retrospect assisted by the beliefs of the Catholic population:

'What! Get on your way now! I don't help Jews who killed our Lord and started this dreadful war.' In more recent times Pope John Paul II was called to account for this by the secular left in Europe, as well as by some Jewish people. Berk, however, shows us the picture was more complex, especially when he relates an episode as a young boy when he joined in his peer-group trying to stone a local Jewish girl in love with a Christian boy. The argument over Romans versus Jews as the killers of Christ is recalled, to everyone's detriment. Later on, a Jewish merchant is shot by the Russians for selling methylated spirits to soldiers who tragically find it rapidly lethal.

In Baranovichi he gets assigned to the hospital surgical department. Colleagues under the Russian partition were friendly, but under the German's hostile, and he soon found himself wearing his

yellow star front and back. The sudden shunning of Jewish colleagues by other doctors proved a good survival technique for the latter, as the collaborators, helpers, and friends of all Jews and the military enemy were later executed (this was done on both sides).

‘To my great joy I found that Shurka had escaped the killing squads.

.....

We talked all the time and escape was our only topic. Then we learned that it was Dr Prawko who had given the order for the Jewish doctors at the hospital to be sent to the ghetto.

‘The man must have known he was condemning us to death, how could he do it?’ I asked Shurka.

It was a question I kept repeating. Though I had never had a high opinion of him it was almost beyond comprehension to find he was capable of this.

‘So he has no time for Jews as such but, damn it, we are all members of the same profession and we all took the same oath which binds us to respect the sanctity of life. We should be if not brothers, then at least allies in a noble profession’.

‘It’s wartime, Leon,’ said Shurka gently. ‘People do strange things in wartime.’

Prawko’s rather flexible interpretation of the Hippocratic oath under the stress of occupation is soon forgotten by Leon himself when he has the opportunity to handle some stolen weapons. He cannot wait to use them on some Germans, whose murderousness was becoming both methodical and continuous. The Rabbi who tells him off for creeping out of the ghetto and joining the underground, such as it was, is one of thousands executed and dumped in the trenches they had previously been forced to dig on the outskirts of town. Leon lies in hiding in a peasant’s pig sty and listens impotently for three days as the job, which includes almost all his family, is completed. He notes laconically that ‘The good are easy to deceive.’ How much pain is behind that simple sentence!

In 1942, after three months hiding from the Nazis in a pig sty and making black market vodka for Pashka the peasant who sheltered him, he finally makes contact with the Russian controlled partisans in the forests. After describing his first amputation he observes that:

‘I don’t know who invented the dum-dum bullet but I hope retribution awaits him somewhere.’

**Consider:** What sort of justifications do we hear for the manufacture of weapons such as those topical today: the anti-personnel land mines? What kind of person goes to work each day to make them?

Berk describes the medical system outside the cities:

A *Feldscher* was a regional phenomenon deeply rooted in Russian tradition. At the time of the Czars there were very few trained doctors so members of the community were chosen and taught how to

recognize basic illnesses and how to give injections; with time they gained a status between doctor and nurse. Fyedik had been one of them. Now his knowledge was being put to use. But as he confessed, he would have preferred to be a fighting man rather than a *Feldscher*. He certainly looked nothing like a doctor. He was wearing side-bulging pants tucked into high boots and the typical Russian *rubashka* — a long shirt which reached the knees and had four very large pockets.....  
‘Now,’ said Fyedik, ‘before we start seeing the sick, there are a few things to remember. First, if you don’t agree with my diagnosis don’t say so in front of the patient — they’re all damn fools anyway. And, second, never — do you hear — never question my treatment. Got it?’

**Consider:** Would you take this advice?

The narrative becomes exciting as the partisans go about killing Germans, ‘the race that taught us to hate’, ambushing and destroying rail lines; and by February 1943 the Red Army has secured Stalingrad after a stupendous battle and loss of life. But the fate of the captured enemy is grisly indeed, and the stories more and more desperate and horrific.

‘Look what they have done to my people. Look what they have done to me’ cries one woman reduced to raging hatred and violence. A partisan’s lover has a baby in the forest — Leon ‘puts it to sleep’. The brutal necessities of war exist in personal interaction and in state-directed rules, such as the orders to kill the sick if required (from the increasingly organized command structure emanating from the government in Moscow).

After another execution of a collaborator, a village elder who hated communists more than the Nazis, Leon records:

I had to go away. By now I thought I had seen it all; slaughter had become almost commonplace. ‘You will get used to it, Leon,’ I had been told, and I was sure I never would. I was wrong. The times were tough, the enemy was vicious; it was a case of kill or be killed.’

**An historical note:** George W. Bush rallied people behind the USA after the September 11, 2001 attacks with the same slogan Lenin used as he forged the USSR, and Stalin as he rallied the Soviet people to defeat the Nazis: ‘Those who are not with us are against us!’

### **References and Further Reading**

Berk(owitz) L (1992) *Destined to Live: Memoirs of a Doctor with the Russian Partisans* Paragon Press

<http://timmetcalf.com.au/home/readings-in-literature-and-medicine/leon-berk-destined-to-live.html>

## Yiddish poetry on the radio

By Jennifer Dowling

Date: Monday, April 19th, 1999

From: Jennifer Dowling

In: Volume 08.139

While I have not heard any of those radio broadcasts (08.135), I do know that Dr. Leon Berk ז"ר wrote a poem entitled "*Di Shikh*" while hiding in a barn waiting to be taken to join the partisans. It was later performed in Paris in 1946 by Jonas Turkov as part of a performance in the Sarah Bernhardt Theater. Dr. Berk (originally Berkowicz) was from Baranovich and was the chief medical officer with the "*Sovyetskaya Beloruss*" partisan unit. He later settled in Sydney, Australia.

Jennifer Dowling  
Sydney, Australia

<http://mendele.commons.yale.edu/wp/tag/jennifer-dowling/>

## My Way to the Forests

By Hil'keh Borishansky-Bussel

During the time of German occupation, I worked at the *Luftwaffe* armories. Across the area of the camp, there were piles of armaments, spoils taken from the Russians, some damaged, and there was a need to tally it. There were 120 people working there, from the ghetto, and among them were many young women. We went out of the ghetto every morning to work in that camp. The shattering events, of The First '*Aktion*' in the ghetto, aroused a decision in me, not to be passive in the face of the existing Nazi terror, and, in my heart, I said 'I will obtain a grenade, and I will detonate it by my body, together with the German that will come to kill me. Let my soul perish with the Philistines.'<sup>5</sup> I saw German pilots practicing the throwing of grenades, and from their moves, I learned how to use grenades.

One day, I said the following to one of my comrades at work: 'We have to do something. It is not conceivable that we just sit here, and wait, while doing nothing, anticipating the second *aktion*.' My comrade replied: 'They are already up to something. If you have a desire to join up, take two grenades, and hide them on your person, and take them into the ghetto.' It was in this fashion, that I learned of the existence of a resistance movement in the various workplaces, especially beside the ammunition dumps, done by small, secret cells.

Of the 120 people who were working there, only 10 or 15 were in on the secret of these matters. There were other secret cells, but I did not know the names of their members or where they were located. The Jewish leader of our work contingent was aware of the resistance organization, but did not interfere with its activity.

Among those most prominently active in the gathering of armaments, were Moshe Pupp and David Winter. They were not native to our city, but rather Soviet soldiers who had served in the vicinity at the time that the

---

<sup>5</sup> Echoing the utterance of Samson, in Judges 15:30

war broke out. Because the Germans searched for the Soviet soldiers, with the objective of killing them, these two fled the war prisoners' camp, and reached Baranovich. The 'Judenrat' Chairman, Izikson, looked after providing them with the appropriate ID cards, and they remained in the ghetto in Baranovich.

They began to get involved in the work of procuring arms. the men prepared the components of arms, and the women transferred them, hidden on their persons, into the ghetto.

Intermittently, inspections took place at the ghetto gate, in which they especially were looking for smuggled food. However, the Jewish policemen, who stood at the gate (together with German police), found a way to warn the women on those days when inspections were going to occur. During the time that the smuggling of armament was underway, we got in touch with a young Jewish lad named Kudewicky, who would take human waste out of the ghetto in a wagon, outside of the city, [to be dumped] beside the railroad tracks. He arranged for a double cover in the waste wagon, and he would hide the armament in the middle [of the wagon] that we would bring to our meeting point. There was a n instance, when a German soldier, who worked at the ammunition dump, saw me heading in the direction of the railroad tracks, with the outline of a rifle showing through my jacket. Despite the fact that I became frightened, I continued to walk. The German did not interdict me, but on the following day, in front of a group of the women, with a glance towards me, he said: 'We are aware that the Jews have arms in the ghetto.'

The amount of arms that members of the underground smuggled into the ghetto of Baranovich was relatively substantial. There was also a substantial organization in the labor camp beside the airfield, where 600 Jews worked. Together with the gathering of the parts of arms, and commissioning it, discussions were held, as to how and when an organized resistance should be initiated. The thinking of the members of the underground was, that with the commencement of the second *aktion*, it would be necessary to blow up the ghetto, and to begin a mass escape.. However, many suspected that any action against the Germans could precipitate the liquidation of the ghetto. there were always those, who held the hope in their hearts, that the war will end, and they will be able to survive. The 'Judenrat' knew of this organization, and they pleaded with us not to initiate any action that could result in the mass murder of the elderly and the children who would not succeed in fleeing. It was because of this, that many among the young were reluctant to engage in battle with the Germans.

The organization activity in my cell went on for about a half year. As best as I can remember, it was decided to defer the instant of the start of the uprising, until news would be received that the second *aktion* was imminent, with the hope that such a time would never come, but should the *aktion* commence, it would be the time to blow up the ghetto.

And then Yom Kippur of 1942 arrived. On the following day, October 12, the Germans began to assemble hundreds of people to go to work, as it were. I stood among throngs of people, and suddenly, we were surrounded by German soldiers carrying machine guns and with trucks. It quickly became clear that they were not talking about transport to work, but that this was an '*aktion*.' I jumped between the rows, and despite the bullets that began to whistle by me, I succeeded in getting away, and I reached the bunker where the members of my cell were awaiting news of what was going on outside. I turned to the head of the cell, Dr. Avra'sheh Abramowsky, and I said to him: 'There is an *aktion* underway outside, and your comrade stands in the first row, opposite a machine gun.' Abramowsky was so shaken that he said to us: 'Do whatever you decide to do; I am, at this moment, unable to function.'

The discussions continued all night long, without a decision being reached. In the dark of night, the group

went over to a larger bunker, in the other part of the ghetto, but most of the arms remained back in the previous bunker. During the aktion, the Germans sealed off that original part of the ghetto, and the arms remained behind.

In the middle of the discussions, one of the members stood up, Moshe (Mish'keh) Zalmanowicz, and said: 'I can see that you are going to be here discussing this for a long time yet, so I, in the meantime, will go out into the forest to find a way to reach the partisan divisions. In my opinion, we will not be able to accomplish anything here in the ghetto. I will return to extract people, so long as I am still alive. If I do not return in a week to ten days, you will know that I am no longer alive.'

He left together with a young man named Leib'l Zeitlin. the two of them took along a lot of arms, including a mortar that they had. After 3-4 days, Moshe returned to the ghetto. He assembled the cell leaders, and drew a map for them, of ways that led to the partisans in the forest. The unit head, was Moma Kapilowicz, the director of 'HaShomer HaTza 'Ir' was 24 years old, while all the others were about 17. After Zalmanowicz had returned, an attempt was made to do a night crossing into the sealed off section of the ghetto, where the weaponry had been left behind. However, they opened fire on our people, and they had to retreat to the small ghetto, and our attempt to regain the arms was undercut. In the second *aktion*, that started on October 12, 1942, my mother and sister Shoshana were killed. Mt father was killed in the third *aktion*.

My group, which numbered 11 people, 10 young men and myself, being the lone woman among them, were the first unit to leave the ghetto for the forests. We reached the partisans with a minimal amount of weaponry, and the partisans were disappointed by this. After Moshe had reached them, being well-armed, they had an expectation that every Jew that would reach them, would come well armed. Because this did not happen, they did not want to accept us into their ranks. These were difficult people, without any pity. They proposed to us that we organize a separate partisan unit.

At the outset, the partisans were not organized. there were some that consisted of Soviet soldiers, pulled off behind the lines, or Russian partisans from the vicinity. However, there were no lack of lawbreakers and criminal types among them. There were instances of robbery and murder among their ranks, and Dr. Abramowsky, who had left the ghetto carrying a variety of medical instruments with him, fell victim to them. His new boots fell into the hands of his attacker. Someone who coveted them, killed him, and took them off him. After this first period, leadership that parachuted in, arrived from Russia, and brought new orders with them. Among these orders was one to organize 'family division,' in the depths of the forest, where the scouting of the Germans would not reach. This was done in order to both concentrate and protect the women and children, who were wandering around in the forest without any protection. This involved both groups and solitary individuals, who had managed to steal out of the ghettos at the last minute. In the family divisions, the cooking was done, laundry washed, and the wounded were attended to. In general, women were not accepted into the fighting units. the knowledgeable among them, those that spoke several languages (German, Polish, and the like), worked in the partisan divisions as translators, secretaries, etc. I was transferred to a family division, where I was until the end of the war.

To the best of my knowledge, about 500 people succeeded in getting out of the ghetto, and joined up with the various partisan groups in the forests of Byelorussia. On their way, many were helped by the Pole, [Edward] Chacza, who resided on the outskirts of the city. In general, people left the ghetto in the morning, as if they were going to work. During the day, they hid themselves in Chacza's house, and at night, they continued on to the forests. He assumed the risk of great personal danger in these undertakings. Once, was he even taken for an interrogation by the Gestapo, and tortured by them, but he did not break, or admit anything, and was set free.



Incidentally, after the war, those very partisans, whom he had helped this way, invited him to Israel, and he received the award of 'Righteous Among the Nations' from *Yad VaShem* in Jerusalem. He was invited to the Independence Day parade of the IDF, and was even given a place on the honorary review stand. When the unit of women soldiers marched past, he burst into tears, and said: 'How many young Jewish girls did I see like these, going off to death.'

The Jewish partisans were happy to off to battle, and perform acts of vengeance. Many of them fell in battle, and among them was the head of our unit, Moma Kapilowicz. Out of the entire group of 11 that we started with, that left the ghetto, only two survived alive: Moshe Zalmanowicz and myself.

The reputation of the Jewish partisans spread far and wide. The objective of the partisans was to disrupt roadways, railroad tracks and bridges, and in this way interdict the military plans of the Germans.

With the liberation of the vicinity by the Red Army, in the summer of 1944, the partisans came out of the forests, and I returned with my comrades to Baranovich. All that were left were gigantic mass graves, a testament to the denouement and destruction of the Jews of the city, a city that was once a 'City and Mother in Israel.'

Not one member of my family survived. One day, I screwed up my courage, and went off to look at the house of my parents, and the yard of the flour mill that belonged to my family, on the Shosowa street. One of the older workers recognized me, 'The daughter of the Owner...' and asked for my address.

I left the place emotionally overcome. That evening, the worker brought me a bag of flour and said: '[This is] in order that you not hunger for bread.'

After a while, I left with my comrades on my way to make *aliyah* to the Land of Israel.

## **A Tourist among the Partisans**

**By Chaim Stolovicky**

*Page 192 (Top): Temporary Certificate of Recognition No. 58375: 'Chaim Stolovicky (ben Gedalyahu) received the decoration of a Partisan during the War for the Motherland, and for his courage demonstrated during the partisan struggle against the conquering Fascist Germans.'*

*Signed by the Commander of the Byelorussian Division, April 1945.*

*(Bottom): Chaim Stolovicky, Partisan Scout, 1944*

### **Memory Fragments from the Forest**

After The First 'Aktion' on Purim of 1942, an underground was organized in th ghetto, that sett itself the objective of assembling arms and ammunition to do battle with the Germans, at the auspicious hour, and to practice with arms, in order to increase the number of our comrades who would be knowledgeable in its use.

The members of the underground did implement training in the ghetto, and were in a state of constant readiness. They posted watches on the other side of the ghetto gate, and the fenced perimeter, especially before dawn, and at noontime, in order to sense and activity that involved a liquidation initiative, which was likely to be sprung on us by surprise.

This state of readiness was compulsory, because during all hours of the day, all those able to work, and among them many members of the underground – were on the outside, and only a few solitary young men remained in the ghetto, in order to remain close to the arms stores, should trouble arise.

The underground cell to which I belonged, was about 7-8 members, and among them were young men who were war refugees from Western Poland, that had reached our district in 1939, as were two young ladies – who were also refugees.

The armaments that we stood over, were concealed in an underground cache, in the yard of the Rudnikov family, on the Sadowa Street 20. It was a wooden two-family house, with an entrance from the center into a hallway that separated the two residences. Each residence had three mid-sized rooms, a not-so-large kitchen, and sinks surrounded by wood. The kitchen led to a rear hallway, that also served as a storage location. In its floor, there were stairs to the cellar, and there was an exit from the hallway to the yard, in the direction of the well, and the storehouse, all connected to the house.

With the closure of the ghetto in 1941, many families lived in this house, in overcrowded circumstances that is difficult to describe. Three-tiered wooden bunk beds were erected along the entire length of the walls. The older women, who did not leave to go to work, cooked the meager meals in the little kitchen, according to a schedule, and around the clock. It was necessary to be extraordinary careful about sanitation, in order to prevent disease.

In the three rooms on the left, the Sukharewsky family lived, the owner of the inn on the Szeptycki Street, his wife, there son, Shabtai (Szefer) and his wife Zuzya (my sister זװיזא); also my brother Moshe' leh משה' לה, as well as the Grodno forest merchant Strelec, who was uprooted to Baranovich. Strelec later became the translator of the Jewish section in the ghetto, with myself among them, who worked for a *Luftwaffe* (German Air Force) unit, on the Cmentarna Street. In this house, also lived Dr. Avra'sheh Abramowsky (one of the underground leaders); the nurse Mina Ljahozwiansky Galay; His (?) wife Rivka and their little son (now a lecturer at the university in Israel); The brother of Rivka, Akiva; Dr. Khonya Brawda, and his wife Manya (the sister of Dr. Leon Berkowicz), and their little son, and another family, whose name has fled my memory.

The Rudnikov house was in the vicinity of the gate to the ghetto, on the corner of Sadowa-Wilenska (the names of these streets until the outbreak of the war in 1939). To the left of the gate, was the station of the ghetto police, in a house that faced the Wilenska Street.

The police, approximately 40 in number, under the direction of Chaim Weltman, were derived from the best of the Baranovich young people, among them being married and single men, and most of them having served in the Polish army of the past. Among the policemen was also my brother-in-law, Szefer Sukharewsky זשעפער, Aron'chik Yakimowicky, Moshe Stoliar, and many others who were good. All of them, along with their leader, Chaim Weltman, were killed in the First 'Aktion' on Purim 1942. They were shot along with all the other martyrs of our city, and among them, Dr. Izikson, and Mrs. Mann, on the same day, and they were buried in pits beside the 'Green Bridge.'

The German officer in charge of the ghetto and the ghetto police, was the S.D. officer, Schlegel.

The bunker at our residence was dug during the nights, in great secrecy. Section after section, with clotheslines hung with sheets, obscuring the work from view. The entrance to it was accomplished through the cellar, as explained above. A secret door was created in the brick wall of the cellar, barred and covered in bricks, that opened in front of the bunker. The camouflage was complete. Benches for sitting were configured along the length of the bunker walls, with a ceiling window allowing air to funnel in from the hollow in the nearby well, and at the end, was an exit taking you out into the storehouse in the yard. The bunker was prepared to be a hiding place for the residents of the house, in the event of an *aktion*, and the intent was to flee into the nearby forests from there.

With the digging of the bunker, the possibility for escape was made easier. All the soil taken out was spread out in the local area, because the German watch would inspect all the spaces between the house properties. In this way, open areas for passage were created. The extent of the crowding caused the outhouse pits – built of boards, and vulnerable to being moved – to fill up quickly, and it was necessary to dig new pits, almost every week, and move them. The soil removed, in doing this, was co-mingled with the soil excavated in the creation of the bunkers, and spread about.

Arms were hidden in the bunker, and during daylight hours, we would practice in it. The heavy reports of the gunfire was swallowed up in the surrounding noise, and did not attract attention. During one such practice, a string of clothing was accidentally shot up with holes, that were prepared for the bunker by neighbors, at the time of concealment. It was from this that it became known to them that we were concealing rifles in the bunker, grenades and ammunition. they became very frightened, because they were afraid that if the Germans, God forbid, would discover that Jews were hiding arms on their property, they faced the threat of a certain death sentence, because at that time, the general will was to continue to hope, thinking that perhaps they could survive. The attitude of these residents spurred us on to try and find an alternative cache for the arms – perhaps less secure – but not to endanger unarmed Jews, and that it permit those who were involved with this matter to get out of it with relative ease, and to open fire, if the signal was given.

We moved the arms to the cellar of an old house, that faced the Wilenska street. The walls of the cellar were built from thick boards of wood, measuring 2 x 2 meters, Behind the walls, whose panels were movable, a hideout was dug that with considerable crowding, could accommodate about seven people, as well as their arms. The sum total of our arms in this cache, consisted of a number of sawed off Russian rifles, a number of military knapsacks with explosive Russian and German grenades, and an amount of ammunition rounds. The dilemma that faced us was, should utilize these arms in order to break out of the ghetto, and get out to the forests, or use it to smite the enemy with all our might, for purposes of exacting vengeance, in order that we not continue to live like sheep being taken to slaughter, and fall with the weapons in our hands.

Despite the certainty that the ghetto would eventually be liquidated, and could not be denied, since it was only a question of time, and since there was no other solution available to the community, involving making a stand with the arms and rebelling, the tendency was therefore to not delay and try to hold onto every possible spark of hope, hoping that the impossible might yet occur. Everything was organized for an uprising, but in their gut, remained the question as to whether it was morally proper for us to assume the responsibility for the lives of the women, children, and the elderly, would will [sic: very likely] not be able to flee, and therefore seal their fate immediately. It was necessary, therefore, to delay the move until an '*aktion*' was initiated, to then give battle, and flee to the partisans, to the extent that each individual was capable of doing so.

On that very *Yom Kippur* day of 1942, the cry that went up from the Jews, in the Baranovich ghetto, in their distress<sup>6</sup>, did not reach the Throne of Glory, and they were not privileged to be saved. Before the dawn of that following day, the ghetto was surrounded by German forces, S. S. troops, *Gestapo*, and the Byelorussian police, Lithuanians and Latvians, and this is how the Second *Aktion* (“Slaughter”) began.

Our unit went down into the cellar containing the arms, and we accommodated ourselves there under extreme crowding. After returning the walls to their proper positions, from the inside, we placed sacks of sand along its entire length, so that our position would not be revealed as a result of the insertion of a bayonet. From time-to-time, one of us would emerge out of the cellar, in order to observe, through the cracks in the door that led to the yard, what was going on outside. We heard the cry and the wailing of the Jews that had been discovered by the Germans, and their henchmen, in the cellars and attics of the surrounding houses. They were concentrated in an open space, and taken off in conveyances to the killing fields. The Lithuanians and Byelorussians came down also into our cellar, and attempted to force the barrels of their rifles and bayonets between the walls, but the sacks of sand on the other side prevented this from happening. Between the stabbing motions, we would hear words of summoning, Выхудйй, Выхудйй, Друг (Come out, come out, comrade), but luck was with us, and we remained undiscovered. Out of the extent of confusion, the signal to set the ghetto on fire and to open fire was not given.

Night fell, and with it came silence. We decided to establish contact with the remaining groups that had hidden themselves in bunkers, on the Wilenska and Sosnowa streets. Electric lanterns could be seen glowing in the ghetto, and random, solitary rifle shots could be heard, and we saw policemen and ordinary residents going through and searching the houses. We skipped through a number of the houses, in the hopes of encountering the people with arms, but we did not succeed in finding anything. Two hideouts that we uncovered were empty. We returned to our cellar, and decided that we would not act until we found out what happened to the other groups. The mood in the hideout became hard, both from the standpoint of crowding, and not having a place to take care of one’s bodily functions. We were eight in number, including two young women, in an area of about 4 [square] meters, a confinement that was suffocating and malodorous. The night of the second day fell, and we decided to exit, even if we were not to succeed, to connect with our other comrades. We came out of the cellar, and part of us remained to conceal the weapons in the hallway of the house in which we had been hidden. Along with two other of my comrades, we did an early reconnoitering of the area, in the direction of the barbed wire fence, that we would have to traverse, on our way to the forest. Along the way, I entered Rudnowsky’s house, in order to determine if there was anyone in our previous bunker there, which we had thought to be ‘secure.’ I was hoping to be able to find my sister there, among those in hiding (who had already been widowed), and my brother Moshe’leh, and the rest of our neighbors. The door to the cellar was open. The secret door to the hideout was also open. An electric light was shining on inside the bunker, and in the doorway, there was the body of a woman that had been killed. To their misfortune, the rather complete camouflage of the bunker did not stand up for them, and protect them from predation.

Later on, I learned that the woman I saw in the doorway of the hideout was responsible for its exposure. She had been living in the second half of the house, whose residents had also dug out a bunker. When the Germans entered the ghetto at the beginning of the *aktion*, she didn’t make it in time to get into the bunker on her side, since it had already been sealed from the inside, and wanted to find sanctuary in our bunker, which also was already sealed. She began to bang on the door and plead that the door be opened, and in the meantime, the murderers heard her, and descended into the cellar after her. It is enough to say that the people inside were forced to heed the German orders and came out of the bunker, to be led to their death. In days,

---

6

The writer invokes the metaphor of Psalms 118:5 in this description.

I found out from my friend Moshe Topf מֹשֶׁה טוֹפֵף, that my sister was not in the bunker I just described, but rather, had hidden herself in the attic of that house, which had also been set up to serve as a hiding place, by the construction of a [sic: false] third wall adjacent to the sub-roof under the main roof, and it was possible to hide a number of people between the two gables. Topf told me, once we had met in the forest after some time, that several days after the *aktion*, my sister emerged from her hiding place, and returned to her job with the Germans. After that, came the initiative to liquidate the 'remnants' in the workplaces that employed Jews, and my sister was executed in a gas truck (ДОВОЗОВКА). Moshe Topf מֹשֶׁה טוֹפֵף did not forgive himself for not taking my sister out along with him, when he left the ghetto. Before he parted from her, she gave him the warm flannel shirt of my brother-in-law יִצְחָק, to be given to me, if he should encounter me in the forests. I received this red shirt, with the blue decorations.

From the cellar, I went up to our room, and from the armoire, I took a number of necessities that had not yet been touched. These included white goods, family pictures, and also the winter short jacket (Куртка), that I had acquired during the Bolshevik period, from the green military uniform.

It was a clear and moonlit night, and cold. Towards midnight, our group started to move, with our arms, towards the fence, in the direction of the Catholic cemetery. In the meantime, a number of other boys joined up with us, among them Yaakov Malakhowsky (a blacksmith from Ostrowo), Chazanowicz, Vov'keh Gurwicz (the younger brother of a son of one of the returnees from the government gymnasium), Mott'ik Gurwicz, the young Vov'keh had training he received at a Soviet military school for operating mortars, and his military training subsequently was of use to us, in many of the partisan ranks. all together we were now about twelve people. Malakhowsky was the one who showed us the way, because he knew the vicinity quite well.

During the time of getting through the fence, we ran into a Byelorussian policeman, who called out to us to stop. Without hesitation, we shot in his direction and also threw a hand grenade. He fell, and did not get up. We broke out into a run, towards the Ljasnaja forests, in order to reach a trustworthy way to get to the village of Tuhovičy, from where the swamps of Polesia then spread out past it. Hunger began to gnaw at us, and since we had a little money, we paid for food that we were able to get access to along the way, from farmers. It began to get light, and we needed to find a place to hide, until the return of darkness, because we could only make progress at night. We selected a clump of trees in a relatively young forest, that was surrounded by a rather broad pasture area. A rain started to fall, and from the distance, we could see a herd of cows approaching, and we could hear the voice of the herders. It is possible that one of the herders detected us, or that after we killed the policeman, a pursuit of those who fled, was initiated, because in the afternoon hours, at about 4 o'clock, fire was opened in our direction, but at a substantial distance. It was random shooting, for the sake of feeling out the area only. We hid ourselves as best we could, and after a half hour, the shooting stopped. From there, we continued to walk for the entire night, until we reached the village of Rogacy.

At the same time, a group of partisans arrived at that village to gather food. A number of them were wearing Byelorussian police uniforms, and we sensed a need to exercise caution, and we remained hidden outside the village behind the houses. they too, sensed that we were there, but they did not approach us. One of our boys, who before had entered one of the houses to ask for some bread, came out to return, and in that split second, one of the partisans emerged from another house, in the uniform of a policeman. We fired in the direction of the policeman, but our lad was also hit and killed.

Along the way, we found it advisable to assume the character of a partisan group, with Yaakov Malakhowsky appointed as its head, and Gurwicz as his deputy. Part of the duties of the leadership was to be responsible

for guard duty and security, and to manage the relationships with the farmers, and to assure that what we demanded was the minimum we required for survival, all of this transacted for a price.

We also began to speak Russian, and use terminology like ‘товарищ Командир,’ and ‘товарищ Комиссар,’<sup>7</sup> in order to get the refugees among us, who had come from Western Poland, who did not know Russian, accustomed to the terminology, and thereby prepared themselves for the inevitable meeting with the real partisans.

We continued to walk, now by daylight, and at night, we lodged at the periphery of the forest. On the fourth day, we ran into a partisan roadblock in the thick of the forest. After a short interrogation, and inspection of our belongings, we were led to a Russian partisan group, whose name was ‘Group 112.’ In the group, there were also young Byelorussians from the surrounding villages, who were active in the communist party during the Soviet occupation, Russian soldiers, and officers that had escaped from German captivity, and a number of prisoners, who had gotten themselves free from Soviet imprisonment, with the German victory. These prisoners were sentenced to hard labor, and were so employed, until the outbreak of the [German-Soviet] War in 1941, in the construction of an airfield beside Baranovich.

When we arrived at ‘Group 112,’ it consisted of about 150 men. It was quiet in this vicinity, after the summer of 1942, in which the Germans had conducted a sortie to root out and corral the partisans of the region. The partisans inflicted heavy losses on them besides the ‘Tenth Dam’ (Called Десятый шлюз in Russian). Tens of Germans were killed, and drowned in the waters of the dam, and for a long time afterwards, the partisans would come to that location to fish out rifles and sub-machine guns from the water, as well as heavy armaments, like mortars. The reverberations of that battle reached us even back in the ghetto, during the months of July-August 1942. At that time, I was still working, by myself, for the *Luftwaffe*, as a locksmith, and in the ensuing days, the coffins of the soldiers from the unit, were brought into our courtyard, who had been killed in battle with the partisans. It was given to me, to prepare metal boards, on which the names of the dead were inscribed, and their army serial numbers, and to attach them to the coffins. The coffins were sent to Germany. Because of this, we were happy to understand the news that there was a substantive partisan force in the forest.

We had just arrived at this unit, and already, after the noon meal (a sumptuous meal of beef marbled with a lot of fat, potatoes and dried bread), a group was organized from among the past captives, and I was among them, to go to the air field at Baranovich, in order to arm ourselves with discarded Soviet arms, which were to be found in profusion in the storage compounds, housing the spoils of war. The captives, who had worked their prior to their escape, knew the area very well, and there were very good possibilities that their endeavor would succeed, but the matter never came about. We had not even gotten a short distance away from the camp, when we fell into an ambush by Byelorussian police. One young man was killed, and a few were wounded. The killed one, with his head blown open by a dum-dum bullet, we buried by the side of the road, in a wine colored woolen shroud. The plan was thus canceled, for the time being, and the *Otryad* (partisan brigade), left that location, which had now become dangerous. The last months of the fall were especially quite cold, but no snow fell. The brigade went through extensive movement in the forests, in changing the places where it would set up camp.

We went along like this for tens of kilometers, sometimes backtracking in order to avoid the trajectory of the German security forces, and the Byelorussian police in the area, and also the ‘*Samoakhova*’ – an organization composed of Byelorussian villagers, that received arms from the Germans in order to guard their villages

---

7

Comrade Commander, Comrade Commissar

against the partisans (a sort of citizens militia). They were not terribly effective fighters, but dangerous nonetheless, because they knew the area like the back of their hands, and were capable of setting ambushes in places without warning.

We continued to wander. Occasionally, we would requisition wagons and horses to convey what we had gathered to the camp. [This included] large vessels for milk that were used for cooking meals, filled with foodstuffs. At the end of December, snow began to fall. I remember an incident, that on one of the sorties made by a section, which had been charged with bringing fresh food, they were exposed by the people of the 'Samoakhova,' because they left behind tracks in the snow. It fell into an ambush that was set for them by the Byelorussians, and they failed to carry out their mission. His name was Shchukin, a Jewish-Russian who was a sergeant in the Red Army. His position in the 112<sup>th</sup> was as a 'Завхоз'<sup>8</sup> responsible for administration and provisions. He did not identify himself to the few Jews that were in the group.

There were 10 of us Jews in the group: Malakhowsky, Gurwicz, myself, the two Leskin sisters, Sasha and Sonya, from Baranovich, Esther (presently the wife of Engineer Warhaftig), and her husband, Abram (who had been drafted and served as a sergeant in the Polish Army). In February 1943, a group of Jews from Slonim joined our group, among them a young woman named Masha Moszkowsky (today in Holon), the Kitaywicz brothers, and other young women. Vov'keh Gurwicz was appointed as a section head, and afterwards to be responsible for a unit, and excelled in all of his undertakings. Malakhowsky was also appointed to head a section, but both of these were placed over non-Jews. In the summer of 1943, our group placed an ambush for a unit of S. S. troops, that were moving along the Brest-Moscow road. In the ensuing battle, from a crossfire that erupted, Vov'keh Gurwicz and the officer Chertkov fell, as did another number of partisans. Our comrade Vov'keh was brought back for burial at the outskirts of the village of Zhitlin, in the Ivacevičy district. The battle was crowned with victory, but it cost us heavily in terms of blood.

I attached myself to the section of scouts and communication. In days, I was transferred to the Dzerzhinsky Brigade, which was a cavalry unit that engaged in scouting and in establishing contact and communication with the people in the underground in the villages and towns, and those who were employed by the Germans, in train transport, etc., the purpose of which was to acquire as current information as possible for purposes of planning assaults [sic: sabotage].

For the sake of the truth, things 'went my way' for this entire period. It would appear that my command of Russian and knowledge of firearms, was recognized in my life in the forest, as well as the skill to manage horses, and to ride well, and my ability to participate in drinking of Самагон (the vodka that the villagers concocted from flour or potatoes<sup>9</sup>) stood me in good stead in all of the tribulations that I confronted among the partisans. In my role as a scout, when we would reach some obscure village overlooked by the Germans, which had not yet been put to the torch, it was always my role to talk to the assembled members of the village, who would gather in one of the houses, by the light of burning embers, giving them the latest news from the battlefields (последняя сводка). The villages would spin the flax on their wheels, singing along

---

<sup>8</sup> A superintendent

<sup>9</sup> Самагон (*Samagon*) is moonshine, or bootleg alcohol in Russian language. The word "Samagon" means "self-distilled," and can often refer to vodka that has been made by either typical ingredients, like grain or potatoes, or dangerous ingredients, like shoe polish. While not all samagon is inherently dangerous, like any moonshine alcohol, it does have the potential to kill.

with folk songs. The recognition, that I would imminently have to go ‘home,’ into the forest, on the frozen snow, and even the lice that would be moved to bite when they felt the warmth of the house, could not detract from the satisfaction that I felt during those hours.

Indistinctly, I recall the celebration of the secular new year of 1943. I was on a mission with two other scouts, coming to obtain news at one of the villages in the ambit of the partisans. The farmer and the members of his household had gone to the Russian Orthodox Church. On their return, they set their festive holiday table, and hosted us with vodka and songs. We had to be very careful, because even on trusting the master of the house, there were instances when neighbors would shout out to the Germans or the police, from the station in the nearby village, and a festive occasion for drinking like this, would be turned into a death trap.

Our company was formed at that same time, whose name was changed to Molotov (which before had been included in the Dzerzhinsky Brigade), the forests of the nobleman, Paslawski, about 14 km from Ivacevičy, beside the Brest-Moscow railroad line. The camp was located in a swampy area, at about 10 km distance, and the grasses of the swamp provided green fodder for the surrounding villages. Large piles of fodder stood their through the winter, because it was only possible to reach them with crawlers, only when the swamp froze over. Many of these piles remained standing on their location until the end of the war, because the Germans put a number of the villages in the vicinity to the torch, and liquidated their residents under the charge of aiding the partisans. Their bodies were thrown into the village wells, and only occasional cats, prowled the area, remaining faithful to the area. From time to time a row of partisan-driven wagons would pass by, through the burned out village, and afforded me an opportunity to look around quite a bit, between Wiado and Bobrovičy.

The second way through the swamp, a distance of about 12 km from our camp, was created by some solitary farmers, in the middle of the village of Svjacica, and consisted of a group of partisans under the command of a Russian officer, Pugachev. Most of this group were Jews, some of them scions of Baranovich. Not all of them had arms, and the commander, from my impression during my brief visits, treated them harshly.

In order to reach the Pugachev camp, it was necessary to ford the swamp. It was necessary to proceed carefully one step at a time, because of a danger of drowning. It was covered in high grasses and bush with the water reaching sometimes as high as the belt. The passage was particularly difficult at the end of the fall, when there was a thin sheet of ice on the surface of the water. The ice would break underfoot, and cause a great deal of pain.

At first I was invited because I was on a mission to Baranovich. I was happy to run into people that I knew, that were also among my comrades from our underground. Moshe Zalmanowicz and Moshe Topf were there, Noah Roitman, Fima (Fyvel) Lev, Khil’keh Borishansky, Ethel Wilensky, Shmuel Winiarnik, Eliezer Lidowsky, Liova Mandel, and many others. In the morning of the day, I arrived at the Pugachev company, and at that point, Yitzhak Medresh appeared from the direction of Svjacica (Baranovich, with a [German] *Schmeisser* mortar slung on his shoulder, escorted by two young women, these being Leah Baguza, and Freida Avramczyk. He had extracted the two of them from the ghetto, and thanks to him, they were saved.

The young people of our city, crammed themselves into a large granary, in the camp, onto straw-covered boards of wood, in an atmosphere almost like a summer camp.

In the camp house itself, the command took up residence: the commander and the commissar, their ‘attachés,’ and a number of their trusted aides. Vodka flowed like water, and the singing did not lag far behind; given



the circumstances, it was literally a 'Dolce Vita,' but in the end, it was not possible for me to continue on to Baranovich, because of circumstances that developed in the area, and I returned to my company.

I came an additional time to the Pugachev unit around the end of December 1942. Some sort of an accident occurred there, that caused the granary to go up in flames, and a dispute broke out among the people in the unit. There were those in favor of moving eastward, to 'winter quarters.' Their thought was that it would be easier to pass the severe winter months there, for m the standpoint of provisioning food. I can recollect that a group arose, that had most of the weaponry in its hands, and wanted to leave on its own.

We left them, and my comrade and I continued on to Baranovich. Not far from Svjacica, among the small huts of Lipsk, there was a small group of partisans that had left Pugachev, and built itself a *zemlyanka* (an earthen bunker). I spent the night with them on my way to Baranovich. The residents of that bunker behaved as if they lived in secure premises. As I later learned, there was no justification for this sense of security. the Germans uncovered the hiding place, attacked it, and killed some of them.

Yaakov Malakhowsky attached himself to me, and Kapilowicz (who was not a member of our company), and one other. Our forest was the residence of our contact person, Edek Chacza. We reached him before daybreak, and we waited until nightfall. At that point, each of us headed in their own direction. I went off to the house of Vov'keh (Volodya) Sopr, a Byelorussian who before the war worked in Tunkel's barber shop. I spent a long hour, waiting beside the Polish cemetery, in order to arrive at Vov'keh's house as late as possible. It was Christmas Eve, December 24. the house was located on the Holowki Street (this is the street where my own family's house stood, before it was torched by the retreating Germans). It was cold, and I was frozen literally down to my bones. In the pocket of my Куртка(short jacket), in which I left the ghetto, and was still serviceable, was a Russian explosive grenade, and a holstered Russian thin pistol.

I sidled up to the entrance gate, at the fence in front of the house. From all around, the sound of singing drunken soldiers, and the sound of gunshots could be heard. The units of the army were celebrating Christmas in their own fashion.

The concatenation of cruel events decreed that it was in those days, that the final liquidation of the ghetto was continued. It was the Third 'Aktion,' and the last of the Jews, who had managed to hide themselves for days, attempted to flee the city. Temporarily, they sought to hide themselves in the yards of houses on the outskirts of the city.

At a distance, I caught sight of a group soldiers, wandering about and singing, getting nearer to me. the gate was locked. With a considerable effort, I leapt over the fence, and flung myself inward into the yard.

One of the shutters on the house was not shut and tied down, and I could see Vov'keh's family seated about the feast table, with a guest beside them in the uniform of a Byelorussian policeman. It was later explained to me later that this was the homeowner's brother-in-law. I hid in the woodshed that was adjacent to the house, and waited for the guest to depart. In the meantime, I heard the sound of running between the houses, shouting and shooting. Vov'keh's brother-in-law came out on the run, circulated around the yard,, and got of a few pistol shots. When everything quieted down, and the policeman turned to go to his own nearby house, I peered warily through the transom. Vov'keh came out and stood struck dumb, as if he had seen some sort of spirit from another world. I was shivering from the cold, and only with difficulty could I get any sound out of my mouth. He and his wife took me down into the cellar of the house, and brought me a bit of food. I explained to him that I wanted to get in touch with a relative of mine, Ben-Zion Fodorovsky, who had

hidden himself in the cellar of his family's house, and with the help of his assistant Liza, from past years, this cellar was dug out under the floor of the bedroom of the house. A German officer was billeted in the house itself. When the officer would depart from the house, Ben-Zion would come out and get a bit of fresh air. I wanted Ben-Zion to come to us in the forest, seeing that he was a pharmacist, and his skill could be of considerable use to the partisans. I also wanted Liza to look after provisioning medicines, and also get her hands on newspapers and current German bulletins, that would serve as sources of intelligence. Towards the end of the day, Vov'keh returned from his mission with a negative reply in hand. Ben-Zion stubbornly insisted on remaining in his hideout inside the city. He was deathly afraid of the 'Reds.' The reason for this was, that in the civil war in 1919, during the Bolshevik Revolution, he was a medic in the army of Danikin with the 'Whites,' and suspected that if this was revealed, this will not count to his benefit. I was saddened by his refusal, and accordingly returned empty-handed, except for a number of packs of German cigarettes, and flints with which to light them. My relative was not destined to remain alive. During the German retreat, he went over to the village beside Milobidy, to the home a farmer known to him. At night, he lodged in the farmer's house, and during the day, he hid himself among the piles of hay near the house. Byelorussian police, that were fleeing the onrushing Red Army, detected his presence in the byways of the pasture, and shot him. He is buried in a plot on that farmer's family land.

On my way back on that same winter day, I got the idea of trying out the weapon that I was carrying, to see whether or not it would still be working when I needed it. Before my eyes, was a picture of oncoming Germans, and I pulled the trigger, and all I heard was a faint click. The cartridge failed to go off. the same thing happened to the rest of the cartridges in my bag. I took the grenade in hand, pulled the pin, and threw it. I heard the report of it falling, but the grenade did not explode. In any event, I had a Polish rifle bayonet in my side pocket, but I was not going to depend on it, if I came in contact with the Germans.

An important way station for the Jewish partisans, on their way to Baranovich, was a natural swamp, an area of about 2 sq. km. Surrounded by pasture grounds, belonging to the villager of Wilejka Luki, Malaya Luki, and to a group of farmers in their midst. We called it '*Die Blot'keh*' (A swamp). The Greiber family and the family of Rachel (Litvak) and Chaya Rabinovich, that were related, found a hiding place there. About a half km. from the hut of the Greiber family, was the hideout of Shmuel Yankelewicz, the last President of the *Judenrat* in the Baranovich ghetto.

'The Guest House' of the Grabber family, was a hut made of branches and green shoots, with a network of branches on the swamp. It was of great utility to us, and out contact in Baranovich, Ede Chacza, would come to meet us there, bringing us important news from an intelligence point of view, and occasionally provisions, such as cigarettes, medicines, and even vodka. Chacza also concerned himself with providing for the needs of Shmuel Yankelewicz.

In the fall of 1943, several partisans from the various groups, met at the '*Blot'keh*,' among them Yitzhak Medresh and myself. The two of us were on a mission to obtain news from the city. We needed to stock up on provisions for the trip. Yitzhak Medresh, and two others, left in the night to bring back food from the village of Baranovich (there was a village nearby with this same name). I did not join them, because I had to await the arrival of Ede Chacza. They loaded up a wagon with all manner of goods, and returned to us. Before dawn, a rain fell, and the ruts left by the wagon showed very clearly where the wagon had been unloaded, at the edge of the swamp. The farmers, who had been 'robbed' apparently had alerted the Germans, who came and took up a station in the middle of the village, and these troops reached the trail of the wagon with no difficulty. The group was still spread out on the grass, around the blanket, on which the food lay, with the bottle of vodka in the middle, preparing to have an early breakfast, when they were attacked by

surprise heavy gunfire, from automatic weapons. The confused diners scattered in all directions, but this laxity, that caused the partisans to lower their guard, cost the life of Zvi Plotnik, a youth from the city of Hancevičy, the husband of Rosa Narkowsky ז"ל. We buried him where he fell, at the edge of the swamp.

This period, which began with my escape from the ghetto in September 1942, and my joining the ranks of the partisans, until the liberation of the region by the Red Army in June 1944, a sum total of 22 months, entered my record as a victory, because I was immersed in it day and night, as if these were the entirety of my life, as if it had been written in the Passover *Haggadah*.

I have already noted that the beginning in 'Group 112' was difficult because of the conditions. It was a very cold winter, and we were harried by the Germans. There was loss of life, and an unending string of moving around. Daily life, or nighttime activities reflected the activity of constantly trying to procure food, at times, in circumstances of great danger, in standing watch in a rigorous fashion, in cutting of firewood for heating and for the kitchen.

The responsibility of standing guard was most onerous of all. You stand for hours, at a distance from the camp, focused on the noises coming out of the wet, or frozen, forest. You look at the moon peeking through the clouds, and no doubt think at those moments about those people located in areas where they do not know war. You wait impatiently for your relief to arrive, quietly giving the password, and then you will be able to tread quickly off to the *balagan*<sup>10</sup>, to sink into sleep beside the campfire that is within, until they will awake you for your next turn to stand guard. I always dreamt, that were I to stay alive, and that life would return to its former state, I will arranged for a fireplace in the living room, cut into the floor, and I will snuggle up to it in woolen sheepskins. I dreamt that I would be able to sleep the night without weapons in hand, and not feel the lice, who are awakened by the warmth of the fire, to do their dastardly work.

Conditions changed when 'Group 112' was transformed into the Molotov Brigade. The control of the partisans in this 'no man's land' continued to strengthen. Even the internal configuration of the brigade became more rational with emphasis on military discipline. there was no more Sash'keh, Anya, or Serozh'eh, but rather 'Comrade Unit Commander,' 'Division,' Battalion,' or 'Comrade Brigade Commander,' etc. It became routine to stand to attention with the entrance of a [senior] officer into a tent, or a residential bunker, from morning meals, to order drills, demonstrations of proficiency with all those weapons, that were in the possession of the partisans, and available to all soldiers.

The ambit of our activity spread to well-recognized distant locations. For purposes of sabotage, and derailing trains, we would go the entire length of the railroad tracks, from the station at Baranovich, to Ivacevičy, Kartuz-Bereza, all the way to Kobrin, in the direction of Brest-Litovsk. We also were active along the Baranovich-Luniniec line.

For a period of time, we engaged in action against the Byelorussian police and the German gendarmerie

---

<sup>10</sup> Author's footnote: '*Balagan*' in the parlance of the partisans – a tent in the form of a hut, whose frame was made from straight young pine trees, whose branches had been trimmed, with only residual projections sticking out. It was covered in layers of grass from top to bottom, so that each level served as a shield to the one beneath it, and the configuration prevented rain water from penetrating inside. The topmost part of the frame was left open, and served as a sort of smokestack for the fireplace inside. On the floor of the square tent – there was an enclosure of four thick wooden boards (about a meter square) in order to keep the fire from catching onto the straw mat that surrounded the fireplace, and it was on this that one slept.

beside Ivacevičy, Telekhany, Raczki, Swiataya-Wola, and the villages of Zhitlin, Adutiškis<sup>11</sup>, Olosowcy, and Peski. For purposes of acquiring foodstuffs, we would go into south to more distant villages, already into the area of Wolhynia, Obrowa, and Wolka Obrowska. In those mentioned villages, it was possible to get fruit, pigs, flour, salt, and even changes of clothing, because these locations had surpluses even before the war, and partisans would get to those locations less frequently. The territory was not guarded, and therefore dangerous. However, units that had military firepower were able to permit themselves free movement in that locale, being able to eat, drink, and also to take produce back, to the camp.

## **The Hunt**

Among the events that remains especially etched into my memory, was the great hunt conducted against the partisans, that the Germans organized in the last days of the fall of 1943. We has a more-or-less permanent camp near Ivacevičy, with heated bunkers dug into the ground, a pharmacy, a bath with a sauna, a stable for horses, and food storage facilities. I was already among the scouts, and our intelligence had detected that there was army movement that was out of the ordinary in the Baranovich-Ivacevičy area, both on the trains, and the traffic on the Brest-Moscow road. The Germans had completed a plan to uproot the partisan holds, in order to remove the threat of the disruption of communication, that caused heavy damage to the order of German weapons logistics, and the movement of trains, that were supplying ammunition and supplies to the front, and those that returned tens of thousands of wounded to the rear, in total disarray.

Approximately 2 divisions of S. S. troops were taken out of the front, in addition to brigades of Hungarian cavalry. In order to strengthen the ranks, were the able-bodied members of the forces in the rear echelons of the area. All these forces were deployed against the partisans in our vicinity.

Our camp was already in a state of readiness, although it was not our intent to pro-actively engage the enemy, because of our inferior circumstances. We mined all of the bunkers, food storage facilities, and all the surrounding roads. The partisans hid themselves at the roads that provided for retreat, and I was sent to the ?? point, beside a water channel about a kilometer from the camp, on the side of the road leading to Ljahavičy. I drew close, riding on my horse, about 150 meters from the channel, tied him to a bush. And began to move in the underbrush, to the other side of the channel. When I began to get up to the bank of the channel, I was greeted by mortar and automatic weapons fire. The bullets literally shaved off the blades of grass around me, and they kicked up clods of the swampy ground, that hit me in the face, as I lay concealed. I fell back to my horse, and galloped back to the abandoned camp. My hat got caught in the branch of a tree, and in this manner, I continued to ride bareheaded.

In the camp, a scout was waiting for me, with orders to remain in the rear, to report the place where the brigade had moved, to the command, and to monitor developments in the area. In the middle of our abandoned camp, there was a family camp of villagers, who among them had members among the partisans, or that were themselves members of the community party during the Soviet occupation. There were elderly, women and children among them, and there were a number of cows in the camp, horses, and chickens. The family camp also looked after provisioning vodka (Smarhon) made from grain or potatoes, that would be provided by the enlisted resident members of the families. With our retreat, this camp too, was abandoned, however a live inventory was left behind, and it was up to me to care for the horses (most of them having been brought from faraway villages), so that they not act up, and thereby reveal the location of the camp. I tied the reins of each of them up at a suitably high level, in order that their necks be oriented upwards – this

---

<sup>11</sup> Lithuanian, also called Haydutsishok, or Hoduciszki

was a situation guaranteed to help preserve the silence. It was sad that we had to spill out the vodka that was in the pipe stills. We drank to our fill, with two of the residents of the camp that had remained behind in the redoubt. We wrung the necks of the chickens, and tossed them into pails of boiling water. This was the first time in my life I had wrung the neck of a chicken, but as we have previously said, ‘necessity is the mother of invention.’

Now the really difficult period of my mission, in this area, began. Waves of unending gunfire began to be heard all around, and it sounded like a rolling thunder, rising and falling with each shift in the wind. The Germans combed the area row by row, as far as the eye could see, covering all tracts of the forest in which the camp was to be found, and after that, they dug emplacements for heavy mortar, along the entire length of the joining road that led to the burned out villages in the vicinity. The emplacements were manned by Hungarians who maintained an uninterrupted bombardment of fire, day and night. To permit me to retreat, I needed to reach a point by way of a swamp, frozen in its center, covered with a layer of ice and snow, at a distance of about 5 km. I left my horse behind in the family camp that I mentioned previously. At that time, I was also suffering from a plethora of carbuncles on my body (as a result of the cold, sweat, and also a lack of vitamins). And the wounds around my waist were especially painful to me, because it was against them that the belt holding grenades pressed. And so, in this fashion, I made my way across the ice, feeling the pus oozing from the cuts in my wounds, until I reached the forest. I gave a report to the appropriate parties, and it was only then that I noticed that I was burning up with fever. I got a bit of vodka, rested for a couple of hours, and returned the same way I came, with an elevated temperature, to enemy territory.

## **The Operation to Move the Wounded**

With the end of the ‘blockade’ (the siege) described above, the brigade rose up again – now as a brigade, bearing the name of Dzerzhinsky, that was to be counted along with a Brigade called Kalinin, and a brigade named Kautsky – in a new location, close to Telekhany. The command of the Byelorussian partisan movement issued an order to get all of the wounded ready for evacuation to be concentrated at a certain point, from which they will be flown to Moscow, away from the front. Our brigade provided about 30 people for this purpose, who were especially selected for this, and I was nominated among them. We traveled for a few days, also during daylight hours, in an intermittent fashion, out of concern for the well being of the wounded. It was a gigantic echelon, consisting of ten of wagons, and also the logistics unit. We reached a village called Sibrin, in the vicinity of a lake called Белое озеро (the White Lake). It was an overlooked village by the side of the road. About a kilometer before it, there was a hillock that was not high, and the villagers had designated that spot as a burial place for itinerant Jewish families, that had lived in the village, but were then liquidated by the Germans.

The goal was to prepare a temporary field for purposes of flying out the wounded. Immediately, a temporary hospital was organized in one of the houses, for purposes of caring for the wounded. Many of the wounded died in front of our eyes, because of a lack of both means and medicines or for lack of adequate medical attention.

It was necessary to smooth out the frozen ground for purposes of permitting the aircraft to reach us. A snow fell, and we drafted the local farmers to do snow removal, to wet it down with water, in order to facilitate the creation of a runway, that was lit for its length by skinny torches. With the completion of the work, planes began to arrive at night from Moscow. These were two-engine Lockheed Electras, whose pilots were jovial young men. They looked to us like creatures from some other world. They were happy to load up the wounded, and also take a number of sheep, as well as vodka, to hungry Moscow, and then to depart.

During the time we were in this village, we learned about the siege of Stalingrad, and the defeat of von Paulus' army there. By chance, I ran into one of the nurses there, who had escorted the wounded from the 'Sovietskaya Byelorussia' Brigade, and in our conversation, I discovered that she works with Dr. Leon Berkowicz – from our city, and a friend of mine – about whom I had not heard from the time that I secretly left the ghetto. I was very happy, and took advantage of the opportunity to convey my warmest and best regards to him, through her, and an indication that one of the other members of the ghetto that had been condemned to death, was still alive.

## Our Thrust to Kobrin

Our stay at the village stretched out. During the several months, we had the opportunity to go out from time to time, to conduct provisioning operations. In most of these instances, we worked together with other escorting units, in order to increase our force, and to limit the potential danger in the event that we should encounter Germans, or the Bandera Ukrainians<sup>12</sup>, that were accomplices to the Germans (because of their uniforms, they were called 'The Greens'). This area was also rife with the *Armia Krajowa*, who fought the Germans, and as you can imagine, the Russians and also the Jews.

Towards the end of the winter, in March 1944, all of the partisans concentrated in the Sveržan area, with the support of local partisan forces, took aim at Kobrin. On the way there, we conducted pitched battles with the Ukrainians, and also with the Poles, who we were able to repulse with our superior forces, without any losses to our side. We were able to capture Kobrin in one day. Here we are, walking on the city roads, most covered in boards (much like Baranovich in the twenties), in broad daylight. We are searching house to house, to see if there are police hiding there, and doing what we will there. We received permission to take clothing and boots, but only if it was a matter of survival. For a period of time, I was wearing a pair of 'Lavti,' made from the bark of an almond tree, and the homespun flaxen linen of a peasant. The 'Lavti' are tied to the leg by flaxen shoestrings, that are cross-tied, just like the peasants on the estate of Lev Tolstoy in Я́сная Поля́на<sup>13</sup>. I did succeed in organizing a pair of boots for myself, in my size, and these served me practically to the end of the war. With sacks full of goods, as was permitted, and only those clothes that were absolutely necessary, we returned to our marshaling point – the church square, in the center of the city. With the end of this operation, we were surprised to hear the screams of a young woman, coming from one of the houses. Her house had been plundered and some of her possessions taken. It later became clear, that one of the partisans from a local brigade, a young man of about 17, had taken a pretty kerchief from the house, wanting to bring it to his friend in the forest, and the young woman ran after him, shouting that he should be stopped.

To the misfortune of the young fellow, his officers were in the vicinity, and he was ordered seized, and tried for the abuse, to make an example of him. The sentence was handed down swiftly, and the judge ruled – that he should be take out and executed by rifle fire, in front of the brigade. It was a lovely sunny day, with

---

<sup>12</sup> The troops of Stepan Bandera (1909 - 1959), a Ukrainian leader whose loyalties during the Second World War were ambiguous.

<sup>13</sup> Yasnaya Polyana (literally "Clear Glade") was the home of the writer Leo Tolstoy, where he was born, wrote *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, and is buried. Tolstoy called Yasnaya Polyana his "inaccessible literary stronghold". It is located 12 kilometers (7.5 mi) southwest of Tula, Russia and 200 kilometers (120 mi) from Moscow.

everything green all around, and everyone was happy with the successful operation, even if this blond young man paid with his life for the kerchief, and was shot, opposite the cross with the crucified Jesus, that stood on the square.

In the middle of the winter of 1944, matters began to move with greater momentum. The Red Army began to roll up victories, and the German war machine continued to be broken up. We began to receive weapons and ammunition, and also some items of clothing (shirts, waterproof boots made of leather) That were parachuted in. We moved over to more modern automatic weapons (I received a P. P. Sh. in place of the P. P. that I had), and we received rifles to be used against tanks. For a while, I was responsible for such a ‘cannon,’ and I even tried it out on a train locomotive in motion (the name of the rifle was P. T. R. -- Противотанкове ружьё (A rifle with anti-armor capabilities).

## **The Train Sabotage Operation, the Night of the Rails<sup>14</sup>**

In honor of May 1, 1994, all of the partisan brigades went out covering the entire length of the Brest-Moscow railroad, that was in the area under German control. For this simultaneous sabotage of the rails, each partisan stood about 23 meters from his nearest neighbor. He had received a small charge of explosive with a fuse, which had enough force to destroy a piece of track and take it completely out of service. The operation was well planned. As a prelude, a hail of fire was rained down on the troops guarding the rail line, and the searchlights used to illuminate the track at night, were destroyed. All the approaches to the rail line were inspected for possible mines, and when the operation commenced, the night suddenly was transformed into a festival of fire sparks jumping out of an oven. Suddenly, the approach to the rail line was open – which in the past had always been so dangerous, when we would sneak up on it, to lay a charge under it. It was open, and there was no movement. the operation was crowned with complete success. All train traffic was interrupted completely for a period of time, As was the case with many operations of this kind, there was a large number of wounded from mines underfoot, that the Germans had buried on the roads leading to the rails, and we were not able to uncover them all.

After ‘The Night of the Rails’ the winds of liberty began to blow with added vigor. We were witnesses to the advent of a festive movement among the partisan forces, even those who had, in their time transformed

---

<sup>14</sup> On the eve of June 20, 1944, the partisans carried out a mass attack on all the key lines of rail communication, blowing up more than 40,000 rails. As a result, traffic was completely stopped in many sectors, including the Orsha-Borisov, Orsha-Mogilev, Molodechno-Polotsk, Molodechno-Lida, Baranovichi-Aspovičy, Baranovichi-Minsk, and Baranovichi-Luninets sectors. The enemy was never able to restore some of these sectors. During the offensive the partisans continued to strike at lines of communication. In three days alone (June 26—28) they blew up 147 military trains.

The partisans prevented the enemy from making an organized withdrawal by holding important lines and roads, thereby forcing enemy units to leave the roads, abandon combat matériel, and withdraw through the woods in small groups, suffering heavy losses. Byelorussian partisans liberated and held a number of populated areas, including Vidzy, Ostrovets, Svir’, Ilia, Starobin, Uzda, Kapyl’, and Karelidy. With the approach of tank units, they operated as tank-borne parties and took part in the liberation of Minsk, Slutsk, Borisov, Cherven’, Dokshitsy, Mogilev, Osipovichi, Klichev, Pinsk, Luninets, and other cities. The partisans helped Soviet troops to eliminate encircled enemy groupings, cover the flanks and rear of the units, and mop up remnants of defeated enemy units in the liberated regions. During the Byelorussian Operation the partisans killed more than 15,000 enemy soldiers and officers and captured more than 17,000.

themselves into a unit, like the force of General Kapusta<sup>15</sup>, who returned from a trip covered in victory, from the Carpathian Mountains, and conducted vigorous battles with the support of light tanks, cannon, and armor, against organized German forces. It was an inspiring thing to see the partisans under his command, armed with the best of weaponry, both Soviet and German, that had been taken as spoils of war, and the noble looking steeds that were taken from the Hungarian cavalry, along with saddles of expensive leather, stitched by skilled craftsmen, the brand new boots of the Hungarian infantry, and the spoils from the Magyars, Hungarians, Germans and Italians, etc., the heart leapt with joy, and was even slightly irregular – out of envy.

The day of leaving the forest drew nigh. Our brigade decamped in the town of Kosovo as a temporary armed force. We had to man the '*Kommandatura*' (The military administration) of the town, to place guards around the municipal buildings and man patrols. Together with this, we had to thoroughly inspect all of the residents of the town, and to look for Nazi collaborators. I remained in Kosovo for about a week. It was in my mind to immediately join up with the [sic: regular] army, and to continue in the war before it ended. I felt a terrible sense of loneliness, after my sister and brothers were killed in the ghetto, and I had no idea about the fate of my father and my sister Mir'eh, who, on the eve of the outbreak of the war, in June 1941, had traveled off to Pinsk for a few days. It was my friend Yaakov Malakhowsky ז"ל, who advised me of this. It was with a heavy heart that I gave up my personal weapon (a P. P. Sh. sub-machine gun) with the receipt of the liberation from the nearby Germans, and I ascended the platform of a freight train, headed in the direction of Baranovich. The rail line did not yet reach our city, because part of it was still in a state of disrepair. For the entire length of the journey, I saw the rail lines destroyed, with the ties uprooted and torn apart. The Germans sabotaged them during their retreat. For the entire length of this wrecked line, along the ways, there were bloated bodies of dead German soldiers. It was in this way that I reached Sanya, and from there in an army truck that was summoned, I got to Baranovich. My first direction was to the barber's house, Vov'keh, about whom I have already written before this. I was welcomed with open arms. They gave me food, an opportunity to bathe, and gave me a clean bed to sleep on. I slept for more than two days.

When I finally got up, I wanted to start again from the point when I was compelled to leave, upon arising to the sound of the birds awakening me on the early morning of June 22, 1941, to begin life anew.

Let me say a few warm words about my friend – my rescuer: Edek Chacza.

After a number of years went by, Edward was invited by those he rescued, partisans of the bygone era, to visit Israel. They spoke affectionately of his work, and heaped a surfeit of love on him, as well as expressions of gratitude. As understood, they underwrote his trip. He received the award of 'Righteous Among the Nations' at Yad VaShem in Jerusalem. He was invited to observe the march of the IDF in the Independence Day parade. As he sat in the reviewing stand, reserved for honored guests, he saw a marching division of young women. He burst into tears and said: 'How many young Jewish girls, young and beautiful like these, did I see, marching off to their death.'

The Organization of Émigrés from Baranovich in Israel maintained a strong and intimate tie with him and his family, offering him support in the form of food packages and medicines, when his wife fell ill. The writer of these lines continued to remain in contact with him via letter correspondence, when Chacza fell ill with throat cancer, and until he succumbed to it. He left behind a daughter and a wife.

---

<sup>15</sup> Major General Filipp Filippovich Kapusta, (1907 - 1973). Commanding Officer of the Slutsko Partisan Zone, and Chief of Staff of the Bialystok Partisan Zone.



The address of his family is Wlobzyk, Ulica Pocztowa 5/11, Poland. The date of the passing of Edward Chacza, Righteous Among the Nations is 6.10.1980.

## Edward Chacza – Poland

By Kh. S.

Copied from *Yad VaShem*, in Jerusalem



Edward Chacza, the Polish teacher, rescued Jews when the ‘*Aktionen*’ began in the Polish city of Baranovich. He would transport the Jews, one at a time, or in groups, from the ghetto, through the swamps to the forest, to places where there were partisans. He personally led 150 people out himself, and an additional 150 with the help of an ‘organization,’ that was composed of two or three of his Christian friends.

From the first ‘aktion in Baranovich, in the year 1941, until his arrest in 1944, put his own life in danger, as well as the lives of his own family members, first as someone who would save lives, and later on, by doing much more, after there was no one left to save, acting as a liaison between groups of partisans, in which those whom he had rescued, fought. His home was the first refuge station, for those fleeing from the sword, in which he fed them, and gave them drink. In his home he bandaged up the wounded, and gave refuge to anyone seeking it.

He was arrested twice. After the first time, he was released, and the second time, he was held prisoner until the end of the war. During his second imprisonment, he was beaten for days on end.

# The Stories of a Partisan

By Noah Roitman

## Experiences Lived Through in the Forest

From the first day of the German conquest, I wanted to flee from the ghetto. This came after I had gotten slapped in the face by a *Gestapo* officer who had ordered me to clean out latrines. After this, having reached the home of my parents, on the run, I let them know that I could not continue to remain here, 'with the Germans.' My mother began to cry, and said that she felt that she will never again see me alive, if I were to leave. Out of respect for my parents, I stayed. I began to work in the military camp of the Germans, *Feldzug B*, in inventorying arms. I looked after procuring food for my family, that being the little I was able to get, in those instances when I was outside the ghetto. However, the idea of escaping from the ghetto never left me. Along with a number of my comrades, we decided to dig a tunnel under our house, on the Orla Street (The Eagle Street), which will connect to a sewer drain that leads outside of the city, and could be used by us in a time of distress.

In the meantime, my family was on the receiving end of the first of the Nazi predations. My oldest brother, Mordechai was taken out to be killed with the group of 72 Jews. After this, the time of the first '*Aktion*' arrived, what was termed the 'First Slaughter.' The remainder of my family was murdered then, my parents, Esther and Yaakov, my sisters Rachel and Deborah, and my little brother Moshe'leh, as well as many of my uncles and their children.

Immediately after the *aktion*, several groups of young people organized themselves to engage in underground activities. I was a leader of '*HaShomer HaDati*' and 17 years old. Most of my comrades in the underground groups were in the age group of 17 - 25. Most of them were members of youth movements from all sides of the spectrum of opinion on the Jewish street.

The core of our activity at that time was to smuggle arms into the ghetto, and become proficient in their use. Together with these substantive actions, discussions were initiated concerning the timing and means of how we would act. Our concern for the residents of the ghetto, the inform and the children, dampened our will to open up an armed conflict in the ghetto itself. We, the young people, were ready to do anything, even if it mean certain annihilation by superior forces to which we were unequal. Especially, we were prepared to fight for our honor, that had been trampled underfoot, and to exact vengeance for the spilled blood of our parents and brethren.

Between the first *aktion* and the second *aktion*, was a period of about a half year. We were able to smuggle in a significant amount of arms into the midst of the ghetto, however, it was decided not to put it to use. However, at the moment that we would find out that an '*aktion*,' had been initiated, then our consciences would be clear – we would not have acted impetuously, and we would not have placed the lives of the ghetto residents in danger prematurely.

But the day after Yom Kippur of 1942 arrived. the Germans began to assemble people to go out to work, as it were, in accordance with their routine, and I was led out under deceptively false pretenses. In a short time, our liaison reached me, this being Khil'keh Borishansky, with the bad news on her lips, 'this is an '*aktion*,' and not an exit process for going to work.' We were on the roof of the hospital, with two young men, the young doctor, Avra'sheh Abramowicz, and Moma Kapilowicz, a leader in '*HaShomer HaTza'ir*.' There were

many other young people: Leib'l Zeitlin, Hillel Schneider, Khil'keh Borishansky, and others, whose names I cannot recall. We had a machine gun, and a sawed off rifle (we had modified the wooden rifle parts in order to make transfer into the ghetto easier). We waited for the signal to begin the uprising. For reasons that were not clear to me, the signal was not given, and the *aktion* continued in full force...

At night, along with other of our comrades, we went over into the other part of the ghetto, to the house of my family. We had decided to leave the ghetto. Only 7-8 people were in this group – a small group from out of many candidates. [We did this] in order to ease our movement through the various stretches of field and forest, before we will be able to reach the partisans, whose exact location and nature were not known to us.

On that same night, we waited until three in the morning. among those leaving, was Munya Latto, Yaakov Geller (a resident of Kleck, who reached our ghetto when the Kleck ghetto was liquidated), myself, and several others. We had three rifles, a number of pistols, and about 12 hand grenades. Most of the arms had remained in the other part of the ghetto. We drew close to the ghetto fence. On the other side of the fence, stood a Byelorussian policeman. My comrades hid themselves, and I approached him. I told him, that in the sealed off part of the ghetto, in the house of my family, there is gold hidden. If he will permit me to exit, I will bring him the gold. As we were in the middle of this conversation, my comrades fell upon him, there being among them, some who had received military training. They tied him up, and threw him into an empty house on the other side of the fence. We did not kill him. We shut the barbed wire gate, and with an effort, on the run, we got as far as the Polish cemetery. Our thought was that, it will not occur to the German to look for Jews there, and indeed that was the case.

In the meantime, dawn was breaking. Until nightfall, we hid ourselves in the cemetery, and at evening, we continued our trek towards the forests. We were set to go in the direction of Grabowiec, and from there, to the villages of Zalužža, and Svicjaz', in the forests of Kryvošyn, a walk of about a day or two. However, we lost our way in the forest, and we blundered about for ten days. We moved only at night, and hid during the daytime. We ate anything we could get our hands on: vegetables from the field, we drank the water of the swamps, until we reached the outskirts of the village of Snoy. The villagers took kindly to us, showing us how to reach the center of what we were looking for, and how to get around the watch posts and ambushes of the police.

## **The First Period in the Forest**

Finally, after a considerable amount of wandering, to our great joy, we reached the village of Zalužža, in a nearby forest. We ran into a group of comrades from our city. there were two groups of fugitives from the ghetto that had gotten there before us, totaling about twenty people. However, many that escaped from the ghetto, didn't reach the forests, because they fell at the hand of bandits. In that same forest, there was a band of Russian partisans, under the leadership of Zhurkin, and called '*Zhurkintzim.*' These were soldiers of the Red Army that were uprooted from behind the lines. They numbered about 40 men, and were well-armed. They were virulently anti-Semitic, who robbed and plundered the Jews that happened to come their way, and there were those who, apparently, murdered Dr. Avra'sheh Abramowsky, who had left well-provisioned with medical gear, for purposes of joining the partisans, and to serve them as a doctor. However, he went alone through the forest roads, and the bloodlust, and greed for spoils of those he encountered, overcame their sense of his utility to them, in his capacity as a physician.

At the beginning, the people of Zhurkin received the first two refugees from the ghetto, this being Zalmanowicz and Zeitlin, in a gracious manner. Their leader saw before him two young and strong lads,

armed with weapons and all its appurtenances. They thought that every young Jew, coming out of the ghetto, would be armed this way. However, when tens of Jews began to arrive, among them women, and the more mature (between the ages of 40 - 50), without any arms, they did not hide their displeasure. They did not accept them into their enclosure, and told them to organize a separate camp for themselves. They even took away the little bit of weaponry that they did have, and in place of that, gave them aged armaments, including rifles that didn't fire, and grenades that didn't explode. Zalmanowicz remained as the liaison between us and the people of Zhurkin.

We organized ourselves into a civilian camp, according to family. The womenfolk cooked and did the laundry( they used a form of burned wood black coal as soap), and also participated in guarding the camp on a steady twenty-four hour cycle. Food was in limited quantities, and we quickly began to suffer from the attack of lice. As a cover, we used trenches that we dug into the earth, covered with tree branches.

## **Getting People Out of the Ghetto**

During that same initial period in the forest, I went out several times to the ghetto in order to extract comrades from there. The first time, I went with Sevek Ravicz. We entered with the ranks of the Jews who were returning from work. Sevek went to his friends, and I came to my uncle, Yekhiel Roitman. I proposed taking him to the forest, but he refused, saying: 'They killed my wife and children, and I have no more taste for living.' There were many like him.

Despite this, there were many young people who wanted to get out. In that same initial period, among those I extracted into the forest was my friend Rozh'keh, my future wife. Rozh'keh was a refugee from southern Galicia, whose entire family was liquidated in the Kharkov ghetto. I settled with an additional ten people that after work, they are not to return to the ghetto, but should rather make their way to the Polish cemetery, and there, wait for me. And indeed, when I got there in the night hours, they emerged from their hiding places when I gave them the pre-arranged whistle signal, and we went to Chacza's house, the Pole who helped the Jews to reach the partisans. The following night, we continued onward to one of the villages. there, we hit in a grove of trees behind the house of one of the farmers, who helped us.

In the evening, we continued on to the village of Zalužža. As it happens, there was no one there particularly pleased with our 'visit.' They were under the influence of the people of Zhurkin, that complained that too many Jew were getting to the forest, and taking food that belonged to the poorer villagers.

As understood, there were other people working to get additional people out of the ghetto, among them Yitzhak Medresh, who came a number of times from the forests of Polesia. There, he was with a camp of Russian paratroopers.

The last time that I went to take out people from the ghetto, I did not know in how many hours the Third 'Aktion' would commence. to my sorrow, I was not able to take very many, but only a small group of people, among which were the girls Ethel Wilensky (Wineirnik) and Baylah Trobowitz. In the middle of the ghetto, I saw many Byelorussian policemen moving about, and the matter did not find favor in my eyes to say the least.

We continued speedily towards the gate. Along the way, we saw the frail Moshe Bezalel, a well-known person among students, the owner of a used book store (*Antikwahreit*). He was a *Hasid* from the Slonim *Hasidim*. He was clutching a Torah scroll in a hug, to his breast, and surrounding him stood policemen. They kicked

him, and struck him with their bayonets, and mocked him. What could we do, against tens of policemen? We continued along our way. When we approached the ghetto gate, I hugged the two girls close to me, as if we were going out for a leisurely stroll. No one stopped us, and no one asked us for our credentials. We continued on to the Polish cemetery. There, additional people were waiting for us, and from there, we continued on, in the usual direction, to our camp in the forest. It was only afterwards that we learned that on that very same day, in fact, shortly after we had left, the last *aktion* began. As it turned out, this was the [sic: final] liquidation of the ghetto.

Single individuals, and groups, continued to reach the forest. The group of Chaim Becker reached us, of Lidowsky. together, we were about 50 people. We had two machine guns, 30 rifles, and hand grenades. During that same initial period, our activity was centered on survival – obtaining food and standing guard.

## **From the Life of the Partisans**

The missions of the partisans were not yet organized. Groups wandered about here and there, with little in the way of weaponry. We went out to the villages to ask for food, or to take it by force. We always went in bad weather, at the end of a rain, or snows, in general, in groups of four or five of us. Among those who went were Abraham Szifris, Sioma Berkowicz, and Yaakov Geller. They had friends in the villages, who would get together provisions for us. There were instances when we had to take food with force and the use of violence.

There was an instance when we had gotten together 100 kg of salt, out of the expense and scarcity. We divided up the salt in our separate carrying bags, and a farmer's wife prepared a meal for us. Suddenly, one of our comrades looked out the window and shouted: 'Germans.' We broke the window, opened fire towards the Germans, and fled. We did not forget the salt, and took it with us...

Despite the fact that there were not yet organized partisan missions, I sought opportunities, and volunteered for all missions. As it happens, I was not the only one, there were always many volunteers among us, for all manner of missions.

The last words of my father reverberated in my ears, as the Germans took him out of the bunker during the First '*Aktion*.' He said: 'If one of my sons remains alive, let him not forget what they did to us.' Of his five children, only I survived. This drove me, and gave me courage during my entire service in the partisan movement, and the war that ensued afterwards.

I found it easy to get around the various paths through the fields and forests. I had spent time in these environs from the time of my earliest childhood. My father, Yaakov Roitman ר״י was a contractor for providing milk and dairy products in the estates of the 'nobility.' These were the Polish and Russian nobles in our area. He would prove milk and its derivative products such as cheese, etc., to the residents of the city. My oldest brother, Mordechai ר״י, and myself, would help him during our vacation time, in providing oversight for the proper sanitation of the dairy equipment. We also did inspections when the cows were being milked. We made certain that the women washed their hand and the pails. I was familiar with the argot of the villagers, and privy to their thinking. I enjoyed going out with my brother on sleds, or on horses, to the outskirts of the city for a ride.

When I reached the forest, and I was a partisan, I had connections in the villages that bordered on the forest. I knew how to obtain daily intelligence about the Byelorussian police, the Lithuanians, and Germans, where they were billeted, and where they were setting up ambushes.

Once again, I set out for Baranovich to acquire weaponry, and to get people out. We established contact with those Jews who worked in sanitation, and in caring for horses at the S. D. Among them were Noah Mandel and Sevek Bulszinsky. We made up with them, that they should prepare ways for us to get in, and that we would take all the weapons and horses, and get way with them, together with all the Jews that worked there.

We set out to achieve this objective with a well-organized group, consisting of about seven of our comrades, among them, David Winter, Moshe Topf, and the Wolochwiansky brothers. We reached Chacza's house, and awaited the young men from the S. D., but only two of them reached us, saying that it would not be possible to carry out the plan. The sum total of what they brought us was two rifles.

We would gather rifles and pistols one at a time. One time, we killed a German in the home of a farmer, and took his arms and uniform. Once we took rifles from two Byelorussian policemen, who shot into the air during a wedding that took place in a village.

One day, about two months after we had reached the forest, we learned that the Germans were planning a sizeable campaign against the partisans in 'our neck of the woods.' After some clarification, we agreed with the people in Zhurkin, that we will jointly set up an ambush for the Germans. We will be on one side of the road, with them on the other side, and we will catch the Germans in a crossfire. The Germans arrived, but the people from Zhurkin left us alone, against the attacking Germans. they literally picked up and left. We opened up with heavy fire in the direction of the Germans, until Moma Kapilowicz, our leader yet from the ghetto period was hit in the head by a bullet. Despite the fact that he was wounded, he managed to get off more fire, and killed one of the enemy soldiers, a Latvian, as indicated by his uniform. After this, we retreated into the forest. The Germans left as well. An hour later, we returned, and retrieved Moma's body. He was the only one who fell in that battle. We brought him back to the cemetery based at the camp, and we took our leave from our commander with the recitation of the '*Kaddish*.' We were in a bad state of mind, especially because of the loss of a comrade, but also because of the betrayal we had suffered by the people of Zhurkin.

On one night, we went out on a mission in a large group, the Lipnik brothers, Moshe Topf, David Winter, Tuvia Cyrinsky, Fin'keh Jasinowsky, Monik Dobkowsky, and others. We traveled on sleds. In one of our villages, they told us that five German policemen are scheduled to pass through there. We set an ambush for them on two sides of the road. We wanted to capture them alive, but we did not succeed in this respect, because they did not move together as a unit. We shot at them one at a time. Three were killed, and two managed to get away in the darkness of the night. In the midst of this action, a random shot came out of a solitary hut in the forest, and struck Tuvia Cyrinsky, wounding him mortally in the abdomen. We drew near the house from which this murderous bullet had come, we opened fire, and killed all of the inhabitants of the house, except for one, who managed to escape. After this, we set the house on fire. On the way back, our wounded comrade was suffering a great deal of pain from his wound, and he asked us, 'My comrades, don't spare a bullet, and just kill me.' Nevertheless, we hoped we would be able to save him, and we proceeded with all deliberate speed to the camp, in order to attempt to give him the appropriate care, and save him, but beside the village of Zalužža in the vicinity of the camp, he died of his wounds.

In the meantime, a group of partisans from the Pugachev brigade reached our area. The commander of this group was a sergeant in the Red Army, who adopted the name of the Russian hero 'Pugachev<sup>16</sup>.' The group

---

<sup>16</sup> Pugachev, Emelian Ivanovich, c.1742—75, Russian peasant leader, head of the peasant rebellion of 1773—74. A Don Cossack, he exploited a widespread peasant belief that Peter III had not actually been murdered. Claiming (1773) to be Peter III, he soon found himself at the head of an

came from the vicinity of Slonim, and had a number of Jews in it from Slonim and Byten.' there were a number of young women, and a Jewish doctor.

We organized ourselves along with the Pugachev people into formal ranks, and began to engage in substantive missions, such as the detonation of police stations and the killing of the Germans inside them. But, more importantly, we were no longer fearful of the Zhurkin people, because Pugachev stood behind us. I attached myself to a group of five people, who went out on horseback to gather intelligence from the villages. Once I was informed that Germans had reached a nearby village. I was sent out on a mission with a Russian officer. Before we left, the 'political commissar' of the division came to me and whispered in my ear that it was up to me to execute the officer, because he was suspected of being a spy for the enemy. I did not agree to this, and said 'after that, you will kill me.' 'If so,' he said, 'then come with him after the mission to a hut in the vicinity.' We went out, with the officer, on horseback. When we reached the river, he ordered me to leap over the water into the forest. He remained in his place. When I already reached the other side of the river, I saw Germans in the center of the forest, and I circumvented them by going around them, and eluded them. Was this by chance, or was this a set up to entrap me? I returned to the officer, and at a fast gallop, according to the instructions I had received, we reached the solitary hut. The political commissar was waiting for us there. 'You are a traitor,' he said to the officer, and shot him in the head. Afterwards, he took out a certificate on which was written that on that day, a traitor was executed, and he wrote me down on the certificate.

On this same subject, we had an occasion when 4 Russians came to our camp. Their behavior was suspicious. After two days, as we were sitting by the campfire, with our weapons, as usual, at hand, we disarmed them. We searched their belongings. And we found incriminating documentation on their persons. they admitted their guilt, and were taken out to be executed.

As early as 1942, when we had been in the forest for only a couple of months, we were advised by our informers that a Soviet aircraft had crashed near Pinsk. We went off with Sevek, who was an engineer, to search the airplane. We reached the location, and there was no trace of the pilot, to indicate if he had fled, or was taken prisoner by the Germans. People were afraid to approach the plane, on the chance that the Germans had laid an ambush nearby, or mined it. We went up to the airplane, and took out a machine gun, that was mounted inside, along with a lot of cartridges. We made a wooden housing for the machine gun, and returned to our camp feeling lucky. Moshe Topf and Sevek repaired the machine, and it served us much like a cannon.

After some time, a change in attitude took place on the part of Pugachev towards the civilian cam, whose majority were Jews. He began to look with disfavor on a large encampment of women and older folk in the forest, beside his division. He decided to leave this location, leaving the family encampment behind, and to attach only 70 actively fighting men to his ranks, and move off to the east. I received an order to move out

---

army and of a revolutionary movement. His followers – Cossacks, peasants, runaway serfs, Tatar bands, and serfs from the mines and factories – all belonged to the lower classes, whose rights and liberties had been increasingly curtailed in the past two centuries. Pugachev announced the abolition of serfdom. His army overran the middle and lower Volga districts and the Ural region and took Kazan and several fortresses, committing barbarous excesses and threatening the throne of Catherine II, who was waging war on the Ottoman Empire. However, the rebels lacked experienced leadership and were ultimately defeated. Pugachev was betrayed, taken to Moscow, and beheaded. As a result of the rebellion Catherine introduced the administrative reform (1775) that increased the central government's control over outlying areas and more firmly entrenched the institution of serfdom.



with the rest of the fighters, but in my heart, I was not at peace with this idea, of leaving this large encampment of Jews, among which was my friend, Rozh'keh. Without provisions, no protection from the Zhurkin people, and no protection from a possible German attack. But an order is an order. We then went out in a large echelon, on sleds and wagons hitched to horses. There were four people to each sled. At night, a heavy snow began to fall. I disembarked from a sled with one other Jewish comrade, as if to light up a cigarette. The echelon continued ahead, and we went back behind it. Amid the darkness and the heavy snow, our absence was not detected. We went back along our tracks to the camp to our friends, and there was no end to their joy.

We needed to organize ourselves in a new configuration. We had altogether [only] two rifles. We began to organize provisions obtained from the villages, and to get our hands on weaponry by all manner of indirect means. For about a month, we sat and did nothing, except engage in our missions to secure food. One time the people of Zhurkin came, and killed two of our comrades, Velvel Green and Sioma Rayak. They attempted to steal what little weaponry we had, and in very blunt terms, they told us to get out of the area. Once, they opened fire on us, when we were on the way to a village in search for food. We were greatly angered by the fact that we were being driven away, but we had no choice. We left that location. In our group we had about twenty women, ten elderly, and about thirty young people. We suffered from the neglect by the villagers. One of our young women was seized by the Germans and tortured to death, however, she did not reveal the location of our camp.

## **The Desantist<sup>17</sup> Paratroopers Arrive**

In March of 1943, a change in the order of the partisans in the forest took place. Groups of paratroopers arrived with suitable weaponry, medicines and sophisticated methods of communication, that connected them directly to the headquarters in Moscow.

The two commanders, Orlovsky (known by the nickname Myxa – meaning a fly– who worked as a spy going back as far as the days of the Polish régime, in the border area, and Nikolsky. Immediately they began to organize the partisan groups in the area that were spread out. Names were given to units, like a brigade named for Grizhobov, in which there were three battalions. I was attached to a battalion named Matorsov, that was in the brigade. After training, I was assigned to control a machine gun, in which I was ‘number two.’ I sensed no anti-Semitism from the Desantists. They took all the people found in the forest under their aegis, including the family camps. We now had enough weaponry and food, and we did not fear the Zhurkin people any longer. They were warned that they would be punished to the fullest extent of the law, for every violation, accordingly.

About 200 Desantists reached our section of the forest. Many members of the Pugachev group returned as well, who has sustained defeats at the hands of the enemy. Among those who returned from our ghetto, were

---

<sup>17</sup> The airborne, air-assault, and amphibious troops of all services are referred to as *desantniki*, which literally means “those who land”. The term *desant* is defined by Radzievskii as: *Troops intended for landing, or which have already landed on enemy-occupied territory for the purpose of conducting combat operations. According to the transportation method used, a landing force may be amphibious, airborne, or combined; and according to its scale and purpose, such a force may be strategic, operational, or tactical.*

The concept of *desant* is linked with the Russian doctrinal emphasis on flanking maneuvers.

Moshe Zalmanowicz, Leib'l Zeitlin, and Ahar'eleh Gursky.

One day, we went out on a mission near the village of Babbin. Our objective was to blow up a train, however, there were strong German patrols with dogs. Despite the strength of the patrols and the dogs, we succeeded in planting charges under the rails, and to set them off. After the explosion, heavy fire opened up towards us, and we holed up in a tree grove near the scene, from which we could not pull back because of the heavy fire. We lost four people, two Desantists, a young man from Slonim and a young girl who had come along to handle the explosives. The mission succeeded, but we took a heavy blow and lost people.

On day, when I was scouting on horseback beside the village of Lipsk, I saw a group of Jews from Baranovich, of about fifteen people. Among them was Rena Bloszinsky (Rabinovich), and her brothers. They fled the ghetto at the last minute. There were people from Zhurkin beside them, who had stolen their possessions and made sport of them. I jumped off my horse and threatened them with my rifle. 'Get out of here, or I will kill you,' – I said to them. They saw the look on my face, and they left. When the news of this group of refugees from the ghetto became known, Pugachev did not agree to accept them, because he was told that these were people who had worked for the Germans (in their workplaces). The group continued past Pinsk, and found refuge with a different partisan brigade.

After this, in the summer of 1943, a group of about fifty Jews arrived, that was well organized and suitably armed, also possessing horses and cows. In this group were Lejzor Siegel, Yud'l Wisznir, and Velvel Ogulnick, and these were taken into our brigade.

One of the major missions undertaken by the Desantists, in which I participated, was against a contingent of five hundred German soldiers, that had begun to assert control over the villages in our area, and confiscate their livestock. We reached a small villages, and the Germans were in the houses, eating and resting, with their arms outside. We opened fire from all sides, and despite the fact that they were not ready, they returned fire. One bullet wounded Orlovsky in the hand, and since he was holding a grenade in his hand, both of his hands were severed right on that spot. Medics began to tend to him immediately. He gave an order to continue the mission, and turned to our camp. After this, he was sent to Moscow for care. Tens of Germans were killed in the village. A few managed to escape into the forest, but even those were subsequently captured and killed.

One day, when we returned from a scouting trip with Itcheh Lovzowsky and his friend Peretz, we were detained under the order of Nikolski. Our effects were searched, and ten ruble gold piece was found among Itcheh's belongings. They found nothing in my possession. I had neither money, nor gold. We were brought before Nikolski, who asked me if it was true that we had stolen a sewing machine in a village, and traded it for the gold. In the middle of his discourse, Nikolski took out his pistol and aimed it at me and said: 'If you do not tell me the truth, I will kill you on the spot.' I told him that there is no gold, and I had no gold, but that I had taken a sewing machine from a small village, but that we had wanted to trade it for weaponry, because in his time, the Zhurkin people had taken away our arms. Chacza, in whose house the negotiation regarding the weapons issue took place, would be able to vouch for this. An order was given to undress me and drop me into a deep pit, from which only my head would protrude. Moshe Stolovicky stood above me, with his rifle to the ready. This was in the month of March, with the winter at its peak intensity, and I am practically naked in the pit. They took Itcheh and Peretz out to the forest. I heard several shots. It is not hard to figure out what their fate was.

The officers about Nikolski whispered among themselves. Even the members of the partisan group, from what was evident, attempted to vouch for me. They said that I was a brave partisan, loyal, and prepared to volunteer

for every mission. 'It would be a pity to kill him,' they said. 'It is possible to send him on dangerous missions for purposes of rehabilitation.' The order was given to take me out of the pit.

Immediately after this, I was sent on a mission to Baranovich to blow up a brick factory. We were given two weeks to complete the task. One of the officers, named Buchin, who apparently like me, lowered his pistol, and handed it to me, saying: 'Go and be successful.' Two of my comrades, Leib'l Sanovsky, and Noss'ik Switicky, volunteered to accompany me on this mission. They were familiar with this factory and its surroundings, because they had worked there prior to leaving the ghetto. We received ten kilos of dynamite, mines with plastic explosives, and English fuses, that the Desantists had brought with them. We set out on the road. At the house of Chacza we sought to get a better understanding of the work schedule and the guard arrangements at the factory. We got to the location at ten o'clock at night, after the workers had already left for some time.

In the darkness, using a small pocket flashlight, we mined the entire factory. I attached the dynamite, and set the timer, and we then went off at a distance from the place. All about, it was empty. A light rain began to fall, and we found some shelter in a very tall stand of scrub brush. We went into it like gophers, and the waiting for the explosion seemed like an eternity. We thought that perhaps we had incorrectly put together the materials for the explosion. Suddenly, explosions erupted, the Germans arrived immediately. They ran hither and about the burning scene. they even got as far ast the pile of the scrub grass in which we were hidden. They stabbed into them with their bayonets. To our good fortune, their bayonets were short, and didn't reach us.

We remained in our hiding place until everything about us quieted down. We wanted to circumvent the city. Along the way, we found a small house, out of which there suddenly emerged a German. He shouted out 'Halt!' and said 'I know that you are partisans.' We attacked him, and while we could have killed him, it was dangerous to do so. He had not taken his rifle off of his shoulder. We left him, and proceeded on to Chacza's. On the following day, we asked him to go into the city, and clarify the extent of the damage done to the factory. Chacza returned, and he related to us that there was a lot of destruction, with any bodies strewn about the area.

We returned to our division in the forest at the end of four days instead of the two weeks allotted to us for this mission. Nikolski sent messengers to investigate whether or not the mission was carried out in the manner that we described.

I had the feeling that Nikolski wanted to get rid of me. It appears that he thought I would not return alive from a mission this dangerous. During this period, a group of Desantists reached us from the Pinsk area, who were from Siberia. They were of stout spirit, and belonged to the Igor command. They were given the nickname of 'Igorniks.' Nikolski gave me an order to go out with them on an intelligence gathering mission in the area. They were well armed, and I had no weapons. I asked why they did not give me arms, and they replied that 'You are under suspicion, and are in a trial period.'

I was sent with them, because I knew the villages and roads in the area very well. We wandered about for a week's time. I brought them to every location, and I introduced them to the village contact people. They created maps of the rail lines and bridges, and did not engage in any attacks. After this, we returned to a designated place in the swamps of Polesia. I did not return to my comrades and my unit.

From the time of the incident of the pit, and my assignment to the Igor troops, I had the feeling akin to 'the

selling of Joseph.’ I used this opportunity to leave the area that I knew so well, and all my comrades, and to go off to distant and unfamiliar places. My new comrades gave me clean clothing, and invited me to eat with them. When I reached their camp, I encountered familiar faces: the three Wolansky brothers, scions of my city. They were very happy to see me. I went on many missions with the youngest of them, Avra’sheh, which he will describe in a later chapter. This was an elite paratroop unit, and we would deploy 4-5 people at a time, going through the swamps. We went along with Wolansky. The water from the swamp would get into his mouth, until we get there. there were no Jews in this unit, all of them were either Russians or Ukrainians.

In time, the Igor command assessed our commitment and strong will to go out on missions, and to prove ourselves. I always volunteered to go out at night on missions of sabotage. We went out in threes, two with the explosives – Wolansky and I, and a third to do the camouflage. At the outset, the people were reluctant to accompany us. ‘Who knows what these Jews know about sabotage?’ they said. They were very skilled, but after a number of missions, they willingly came along.

Planes from Moscow used to arrive at our camp, and we had radio contact with them. The planes parachuted down supplies and weaponry to us. We would light bonfires to signal the planes with regard to our location. The Germans did not manage to ever ambush the planes. When we saw Germans milling about the area, we would notify them by communication not to come, that the danger was close by. An instance occurred when a non-combat plane crashed. It was caught in the high branches of the trees and burned. There were four who were killed in it, one wounded (a Jew) and someone from the person from the Kirghiz.

One day, we received an order to cease carrying out the partisan missions, and to move in the direction of Sluck, for a meeting with the Red Army, that was moving forward. We set out on foot and in wagons. An accordion was played out of great joy. Between Sluck and Bobruisk, there was an emotional meeting between the men of the Red Army, and hundreds of partisans. Shouts of joy and hurrahs were heard from all sides.

The organization and sorting out of the partisans started anew. Many were immediately sent to the front. One of the army officers, a Jew named Nikolai Bilmus heard my name ‘Roitman’ and asked, ‘Are you Jewish? Come, there are other Jews here.’ He transferred all of us to a course in attacking tanks with mortar fire. The course went on for about a month. We were given the rank of sergeant, and sent to the front, under General Zhukov, the commander of the Byelorussian front. I was a member of the 498<sup>th</sup> Battalion, division 99. We drew close to Warsaw. There we were held up until we received the order to move towards Berlin.

The entire way to Berlin was filled with heavy fighting. The Germans fought for every hilltop and every bridge. We progressed in the face of daily fighting, and on occasions, fighting face-to face. Many of us were killed, but in the end, we reached Berlin!

The Germans continued to fight, even in the center of the city. In the streets of Berlin, I saw one man, with a large Star of David on his back. This was a Jew who had hidden himself for the entire duration of the war, and now, exposed himself for all to see with a Star of David on his back. He followed me and asked, ‘Are you Jewish?’ He would not leave me, and proposed a liaison with people who would get me to the Land of Israel. I did not want to leave my comrades behind. I returned to my battalion, which, in the meantime, had moved on to Dresden, and from there to Leipzig. I served as an instructor and expert in the artillery corps. One day, against my wishes, I received an order to run a canteen for the soldiers. In the meantime, I created a connection with my fellow city residents who were in Lodz. My friend Rozh’keh was there also. I requested a furlough from the army, in order to travel and locate relatives. I received a two month furlough. I reached Lodz, and there, I joined up with my friends, in their organized journey to the Land of Israel through Bavaria and France, on the refugee ship ‘Negba’ – and I reached the Holy Land.

# From the Bunker to a Paratroop Unit

By Abraham Wolensky

During the first period of the ghetto, our entire family lived together in our house, our parents, and eight children.

Our entire family survived the first *aktion*. We hid ourselves in a well-camouflaged bunker that was beneath the floors of the house. We heard the voices of the Germans, as they moved about in the house, saying: 'There is no one here.' the first *aktion*, called 'The Slaughter' in Yiddish, lasted for one day.

On the following day, we returned to our work. My two older brothers and I worked at a soda factory that, up until the war, had belonged to our family. After that, the enterprise was shut down, and we went over to work at a similar operation that belonged to the Svjacicky family, outside the ghetto on the Ulanska Street.

The second *aktion* commenced without warning, on the day after Yom Kippur. We were all at home. My two sisters, Sarah'leh and Trein'eleh, who worked at the hospital, were loaded onto a truck, as if they were being taken to work. However, they were being taken with the intent of never coming back. My younger brother, Yaakov-Getz'l (we called him Getz'l) had previously been seized and sent to work at a Oshmiany camp near Vilna. He was only twelve years old, but looked older, was a large, and strapping. After some time, we found out that all the inmates of that camp had been taken out and murdered.

Unlike the first one, the second *aktion* lasted for a whole week. My mother encouraged us, and urged us to flee, and save ourselves. On the second day of the *aktion*, my two brothers and I made a decision to leave for the forests and join the partisans. I was not hesitant in going out into the forests, because their various paths and byways were familiar to me. I was a member of the *Betar* youth group, and a frequent participant in hikes to the camps of the area. As is still the case to this day, I have a good sense of direction. With the fall of darkness, six of us left, heading in the direction of the village of Grabowiec. At night, we saw a heavy movement of police beside the village, and we also heard a hail of gunfire. We quickly grasped that we were heading right into the extermination process of the killing fields there.

We immediately reversed ourselves, and headed for the Jewish cemetery, on the other side of the city, but in that time, dawn began to break.

There were carpentry works in that area, in which tens of Jews worked, among which was someone that we knew, Mr. Abramowicz. This workplace was outside the ghetto. We entered the workplace, and let Abramowicz know of our intentions. He told us to wait until all the other workers in that location would return to the ghetto, and that we could then join up with them. For the entire period, that the *aktion* was being implemented, the workers remained on the job, and we along with them. It was only after a week, when the killing stopped, and we no longer heard any gunfire, did all of us return to the ghetto, under Byelorussian police guard.

We again returned to work at the soda factory. There were about six of us Jews who worked there, among them Svjacicky, who was a member of the *Judenrat*. With his knowledge, we decided that we would build an underground bunker there, well provisioned, with electricity, so that we could hide there until the war was over, when the central objective was to bring over our family members from inside the ghetto.

We took a gentile Byelorussian into our confidence, whose name was Jozef Nackewicz, who was loyal to Svjacicky, because he had worked for him a long time. He was left-wing, and he hated the Germans. Jozef was delegated the task of gathering provisions during periods of need, and to serve as a liaison with the external world. We had no weapons.

One day, Svjacicky notified us that he would be unable to conceal himself in the bunker. As a man of the community, and a member of the *Judenrat*, he had an obligation to return to the ghetto. The Germans had let it be known, that if anyone of the members of the *Judenrat* goes missing, the entire population of the ghetto will pay with their lives. He and his wife returned to the ghetto. Before this, he sent off his little son, Moshe'leh, to his father in Brisk, out of the belief that somehow, the little boy will be able to save himself there. This did not turn out to be the case, but his daughter Chava, who had been sent by her father to live on the Aryan side of Warsaw, she did manage to survive, and today lives in Israel (as Chava Strich).

We were still returning to the ghetto at night to lodge with our families, but we always waited for a column, or a group, of Jews, that were returning to the ghetto under police guard.

One day, we waited and waited, but not a single person came. We remained behind, to sleep the night at the workplace, because it was forbidden to be outside of the ghetto without an escort. The following morning, we went up onto the rook for the workplace, and we saw that the ghetto was encircled by soldiers and police. It was clear that an '*aktion*' was about to commence. this was the third *aktion*, of December 1942.

We immediately notified Jozef that we were going down into our hideaway, and we dispatched him to the ghetto to see if it were possible for him to bring our families to us. He returned after noon, and brought our little sister Mir'ehleh, aged nine. My mother had sent her to us. In a similar manner, Shmuel Nussbaum reached us, the brother-in-law of Svjacicky.

We descended into the bunker and hid there for five months. During the day, Jozef looked after getting us provisions, and during the night, we came out to get a breath of fresh air.

This same Jozef had a step-brother named Kola, who was in the Byelorussian police force. We do not know if he deduced that a group of Jews were hiding at the workplace, or there was some other reason, but one day, Jozef arrived and said that we must vacate this location, because the situation had become perilous. Having no choice, in May 1943, we left our hideout, and went out to find refuge in the forests. We had decided to go out of the bunker in pairs, at various intervals of time, in order not to attract any attention. We were dressed as woodsmen, carrying axes and saws. Our sister went with another woman, again, in order not to arouse suspicion. It was more natural that a little girl would be walking with a woman than with a man. We had set it up to rendezvous at the Jewish cemetery. We exited in the dead of the night, and everyone got to the rendezvous point except for the two women. We re-traced our steps back to the factory to look for them either there, or along the way. It was completely bare there, with no trace of the woman or the girl. Jozef did not know what to tell about their fate. Perhaps they had decided to return to the ghetto? When I returned to Baranovich after its liberation, I looked for some sort of answer to this riddle. How did my little sister vanish? Many thoughts coursed through my mind, and one of them was that perhaps Jozef or his brother the policeman felt that if they will grab the two women, they won't have to endure the torture, and maybe they will reveal where, or with whom they hid them, and perhaps those involved in this decided to shut them up forever.

On that same day in May, when we left the bunker, we struggled with ourselves a great deal, and after delays, we decided to continue on into the forest, to the partisans.

We reached the village of Zavineya where there was a group of partisans that had come to take food from the resisting farmers. When we saw them, we immediately said ‘We are Jews,’ and they ordered us to raise our hands, and to get down on the ground. They took our good clothes, and gave us their garments full of lice, and said: ‘We don’t need you, go find yourselves another group of partisans.’

We continued, and when we were on the road to the village of Tohowiec, that was a village under the aegis of partisans, emissaries from the commander Nikolski reached us, and they too said ‘we don’t need you. Continue on to the Polesia swamps.’ The villagers in the area told us, that in the Pinsk area there is a family camp under the command of an officer named Bobrov, a Jew from Pinsk, and he would take us in. We wandered about the swamps for about a week, until we reached the Bobrov camp. There were about fifty men and women there, among them, a number of young people. These were Jews from the vicinity around Pinsk and Mott’leh. There, I also encountered people from my city. After having been in the Bobrov camp for about ten days, the commander Igor arrived, he being in charge of the ‘Desantist’ paratroopers, who had put in command of this entire area.

His division was well supplied, and in continuous contact with Moscow. He personally was a very strict man, and rigorous. It was not only once that he sentenced partisans to death for infractions that were only suspected.

When Igor arrived at the Bobrov camp, a mustering was executed in his honor. He looked at me and said: ‘I am taking you to me.’ I don’t know where I got the courage, mixed in with no small amount of nerve to say: ‘I have two brothers here, and I cannot go without them.’ He looked at me slightly startled. I could have paid for this with my life, but he said: Good, you will be in a fighting unit, and your brothers can work in supply, and provisioning of the battalion.’

We were looked upon with respect in the Bobrov camp. It was considered to be a great honor to be part of commander Igor’s group, to be among the ‘*Igorniks*,’

As soon as we reached our new camp, we received new clothing, and the satin undergarments of paratroopers. There was an elderly Jewish tailor there, from Pinsk, who looked after the clothing needs of the partisans.

There were three groups in the camp. Two would go to carry out missions, and one would always be in camp, resting up, and standing guard. The main part of our missions was to sabotage and attack trains. With some speed, my comrade, Noah Roitman arrived from Baranovich. At the outset, the members of the group were not quick to go out with us on these missions of sabotage. They had the feeling that we Jews will not know how to properly make use of the explosives involved, and accidentally blow them up by mistake. However, after a number of these missions, when they saw the competence with which we handled the ammunition and dynamite, we were like one with them.

We would go out as a division of thirty men, spreading out through the swamps and forests of Polesia. There were occasions when we went through swamp up to our necks, with rifles held above our heads.

The trains that we attacked contained military supplies and German troops. I had an anti-tank machine gun, and I always aimed it at the train locomotive. When the locomotive was blown up, they would send for a second locomotive, to bring the train cars back. We would then blow up the second locomotive. In the meantime, German soldiers would arrive and open fire into the forest, but they never entered the forest themselves, and we would evacuate the area, continuing our activities according to the plans set out by our command.

The surrounding villages provided us with food, in accordance with schedule specified by the partisans, including meat, bread, potatoes, milk and its derivative dairy products.

In the meantime, the Red Army began to make westward progress. We, the partisans, got closer and closer to the trains of the retreating German army. The Red Army had already crossed the principal roads past Pinsk, and we received an order to move in the direction of Sluck and Bobruisk. In a grove, there was a fateful encounter, and the re-ordering and training of the partisans began. The officer in charge of taking a census was a Jewish officer from Odessa named Nikolai Bilmus. After all of his family had been seized in Odessa, he was very happy to encounter other Jews. He was our age, about twenty some odd years old. A friendship developed between us, literally, like a fraternal order. First of all he sent us to a sergeant's course in artillery. He always invited us to his house for conversations and meals. We concluded that after the war, we would all travel together to Palestine—the Land of Israel. In the same fashion, that we were all 'brothers' to Rozh'keh, Noah Roitman's girlfriend, who in the meantime, had returned to Baranovich from the forests. Bilmus even traveled to Baranovich for purposes of making her acquaintance, and visiting her. We let the army command know that we were her brothers, to assure that the army had an address for purposes of notification of nearest kin in the event of someone being wounded or, God forbid, killed. There was no other way, because there was not a single person left from any of our families. It was therefore, to our greatest sorrow, that after some time, Rozh'keh received notification that Bilmus himself had fallen in battle on the road to Berlin.

After a period of instruction, all of us were sent to the front. Noah Roitman and my brother Eliyahu were in one detachment, and my brother Simcha and I in another. I was sent to the Warsaw front. The battle for Warsaw began on January 15. After three days, I was seriously wounded in both my legs. After spending some time in several hospitals, and undergoing a number of operations, I was discharged from the army. I was given a letter, indicating that in every city and settlement, the army should extend help to me, and to offer me assistance.

Despite the fact that I knew not a single person from my family remained in Baranovich, I traveled to the city where I was born. On my way there, I cried like a child, for having to return to the house of my family, in which not a single person was waiting for me. From Baranovich, I traveled to Lodz. there I met up with Rozh'keh and additional friends.

She had received a letter from my brother Eliyahu, who was to be found in Prague, in Czechoslovakia. I wrote to him, asking that he travel immediately to come to Lodz, and he did this. Noah also reached there. Together, the four of us – Rosh'keh, Noah, my brother Eliyahu and myself, embarked on a long journey by road and sea, in refugee ships, to the Land of Israel.

Here in The Land, my brother Simcha was waiting for me, who had gotten here earlier on the ship 'La Spezia,' and my sister Shifra, who had made *aliyah* before the war.



## Chapter III - After the War

### The Campaign Against the War Criminals

By Dr. Elchanan (Khonya) Narkonsky

Page 210: Dr. Elchanan Narkonsky and Hirsch Mukasey, Wroclaw, Poland

On the eve of the outbreak of The Second World War, August 31, 1939, I was drafted into the Polish Army as an officer in the medical detachment. I was inducted into the detachment of General Krok-Paszkowski<sup>18</sup> (a resident of Baranovich), that took up a position on the northwest border of Poland beside the city of Mlawa. On September 1, 1939, the Germans attacked us. Against our battalion, which was a cavalry battalion, came tanks and armored vehicles. In the midst of bitter fighting, we began to retreat. The Poles were brave soldiers, good riders, and well-trained in face-to-face combat, but not of this could stand in their favor, in the face of so well-armored an enemy. The entire division was captured on September 8, which included our [sic: medical] unit in its entirety, beside Tomaszow-Lubelski. The regular soldiers were set free, but the officers – and I among them – were detained, and locked up in a giant tobacco warehouse (this was a tobacco processing region). In the first roll call, in this ‘*Stalag*,’ an S. S. officer faced us and asked, ‘Are there any Jews among you?’ Everyone responded as one, saying ‘There are no Jews among us.’ I was the only Jew, but I decided not to respond [sic: affirmatively] to the question. He asked a second time. Despite the fact that I stood in the first row, directly across from the interrogator, I continued being silent. The companion to the S. S. officer, that was standing by his side, then explained to him that the Poles did not recruit academic Jews into the army, and did not make a place for them in officers’ school. There was a great deal of truth to this, because there was a very tiny percentage of Jewish graduates, with a diploma, that were drafted into the Polish Army. Towards nightfall, we were again locked into the storage facility, under the guard of two stalwarts, armed with automatic rifles, that we had previously known to be in the Polish army. In the small hours of the night, we decided to kill these two stalwarts, and escape. One was killed quietly, using the ‘skill’ of one of the imprisoned officers. The second succeeded in fleeing. We got control of the open doorway, and with all deliberate speed, we sped ahead to cross the front lines, that was only a few kilometers away. We heard the reports, and saw the flash of the gunfire. We ran for all we were worth through the tobacco fields, under a rain of gunfire from the Germans that were pursuing us.

Only part of us succeeded in reaching the Polish lines. First, we were detained by the Polish military police, who turned us over to the commander of the front. We were received with contempt regarding the fact that our division had been captured, but immediately on the next day, we were assigned to the retreating fighting forces. We were in a state of continuous retreat, until we reached the outskirts of the city of Zamość. In the meantime, the German armor was stranded without gasoline. However, the absence of the gasoline did not impede their rapid advance at the front. Their armored cars and tanks could not move, and at that point the Poles had the upper hand in battle. The latter fought with bravery and heroism. Many victims fell on both sides. The sides of the roads became filled with the bodies of those killed, and wounded. Many of the officers in my battalion were hit, and it fell to me to assume command, even though I had no combat experience. After

---

<sup>18</sup>

This would appear to have been the Polish 45th Infantry Division, under the command of General Henryk Krok-Paszkowski

a battle beside the village of Wysoki<sup>19</sup>, (beside Zamość) we retreated in the direction of Wolhynia (Ukraine), in order to be able to continue fighting. We had no radio or telephone, and we did not know what was happening, even a short distance from us. The intelligence that we gathered from the surrounding villages was sharply encouraging, 'The Russians are coming.' We decided to divide ourselves up into divisions. I took 27 captured German prisoners with me, and at the head of this division, I reached the city of Tyszowce. The sergeant of the division proposed that we execute the prisoners, however, it became clear that there were no S. S. troops among them, and I did not agree to take part in the execution of these prisoners.

The city of Tyszowce was without a controlling authority. The Poles had fled, and the Soviets had not yet arrived. I found a field hospital set up in a local school building. The hospital was full of severely wounded, neglected, and exuding a fetid odor, lacking doctors, medics or nurses. I recruited two doctors from the local citizenry, one Jewish and one Polish, along with several volunteer Polish women, and we began to attend the sick. On the following morning, a Russian scouting unit arrived. Its soldiers burst into my room, took away my weapons, and brought me to a neighboring village, which served as an assembly point for those captured, especially officers. To our dismay, the Russians freed those German officers that we had taken prisoner. As you can understand, we did not know about the secret agreement that had been consummated by the foreign ministers Molotov and Ribbentrop, that transformed the two nations into allies, and that is why they liberated the German prisoners, In a like manner, they also freed the Polish soldiers.

They transferred the officers on foot to Chelm, and from there, to Lublin. From Lublin, a group of the prisoners were sent off to the east, to Smolensk, and they loaded us onto cattle cars.

As food, we were given a loaf of bread, a half head of sugar, and two salted fish, without any water. It appears that they gave us the salted fish in order to intensify our thirst, and to abuse us. Along the entire length of the rail lines, and in the stations in the cities, many people waited for the return of their relatives from the army, and the front. The train in which I was riding, passed through the station at Baranovich. Through the window shutters of the cattle car, in which we were being transported, I saw my brother Itz'l. I called out to him. He saw me, and immediately turned to the military guard, and asked for me to be released. This request was 'sweetened' by the offer of a wristwatch. the soldier took me out of the train, but conveyed both of us to the emissary in command, and told him that he had received an under-the-table gift of a watch, on condition that I be set free. The commander was very moved by the honesty of the soldier, and as a reward, he permitted him to keep the watch. They released by brother, but I was returned to the train, where I was placed in jail cell, and made to lie on the floor, with a soldier putting the point of his rifle into my back. My brother rushed to inform our parents, that I was to be found on a train heading in the direction of Smolensk. My mother ran, pleading with Rubinczyk, the Jewish militia commander in the city. He was a communist of long standing, who, during the time of the Polish régime, was under arrest for his communist activities. With the arrival of the Soviets in 1939, his star rose, and he was given the appointment of militia commander. Rubinczyk, wh knew me from lectures that I had given on matters pertaining to health, at a variety of labor institutions in the city, responded to my mothers plea, and turned to the central division secretary, a man named Tur, and the latter promised to work at getting me released. However, by the time that his helped arrived, the train had already moved on to the east. The telephone intervention by Tur, along the entire length of the railroad line, retarded my movement in one of the stations near Smolensk. I was returned, under guard, to Baranovich. There, my parents, and Rubinczyk were waiting for me, who was decked out in his full military regalia. In this

---

<sup>19</sup> The village of Wysoki is nearly 100 miles from Zamość. Consequently, it is likely that the writer refers to the village of Wychody, which is about two miles outside of Zamość towards Szczepieszyn.

way, I was saved from the fate of thousands of Polish officers, who were sent off this way, and who afterwards, were taken out and massacred in the Katyn Forest, beside Smolensk. I was released in Baranovich, and returned to the bosom of my family, and to my work as a doctor in the city of Rovno.

With the passage of a year and nine months, on June 22, 1941, the Germans made a surprise attack against Soviet Russia, their prior ally. In the operation known by its code name, '*Barbarossa*,' a panicked evacuation began by the residents of the western districts of Byelorussia and the Ukraine. My family and I got on board horse-drawn wagons, and fled, in the direction of Kiev, ahead of the rapidly advancing German forces. In Kiev, we succeeded in getting on a train of refugees, and we wandered off into the wide expanse of inner Russia, through train stations without number, until we reached Kazakhstan. As a complete surprise, I ran into my brother, Fyvel, in Kazakhstan, face-to-face. Among the millions of refugees, that were wandering through the Russian expanse, such a meeting, with one of my own brothers (we were eight children in our household), was surely within the ambit of being a miracle. Both of us could not believe our eyes. After spending a short time together, I continued to travel to Siberia, though I remained in contact with my brother Fyvel until the end of the war, and as you can understand, also afterwards. I will not detail all of my tribulations and wanderings in Asiatic Russia during the war, this is not relevant to the subject of my memoirs here.

After the war, I left with the repatriation of Polish refugees, in which most of the refugees that I traveled with were Jews. On my way to Poland, I stopped off in my home city of Baranovich. I stood speechless beside the mass graves, and beside the killing pits of the Jews of the city, among whom were my immediate family, my parents, brothers and sisters. It was unbearably difficult to see all the houses of the Jews, standing on their hillocks, and everything inside of them, furniture, clothing, sometimes even the pictures on the walls, in the hands of the surviving gentiles, who in some instances were even accomplices to the murders that took place. In the marketplace, prayer shawls were being sold as head kerchiefs, and the scrolls and wrappings of Torahs were being sold as insoles for the Byelorussian villagers. The hats of the Hasidim (the *shtrymels*) were being sold throughout all of Russia. After each *aktion*, gentile peasants would descend, like a flock of predatory birds, on the spoils in the Jewish houses, and plunder for everything that came to hand. The Germans had promised the Jewish assets to the Byelorussians. For themselves, they reserved works of art and jewelry, which they sent back to Germany. All of the possessions that belonged to the Jews, remained in the hands of the local Byelorussian populace. I paid a visit to the [sic: Jewish] cemetery, where there was a mass grave of those martyred in one of the *aktionen*. At that time, the headstones were still in place, among them, the grave of my grandfather, watched over by a Byelorussian watchman.

I could not remain under these new conditions, with all of these horrible memories in my city, now empty of Jews. I stayed there for only ten days. For the entire ten days, I asked and researched the question of what and how it had happened, how could such a travesty take place under the full glare of the sun? Is it possible that this will simply pass, without any punishment, without vengeance being exacted? I came to the general conclusion, that I will hunt down the guilty and bring them to justice.

I began with researching details, in which I was assisted by a number of people, Jews and gentiles. Rubinczyk, the former commandant of the local militia, returned to Baranovich from the heart of Russia, where he had fled to at the beginning of the period of German occupation in 1941. He connected me to a profusion of sources. With the return of the Soviets in 1944, he returned to Baranovich, and remained there until his death in 1989. He was one of the 'Last of the Mohicans' of the original Jews of Baranovich, who remained to live in the city. One Jew, by the name of Nahum Wolochwiansky, who came on a visit from Moscow, to look for any survivors from his family, also was one who helped me a great deal. In a similar fashion, I was assisted in my research by a Pole, by the name of Stanislaw Jakubowski, who was a postal clerk by occupation, from

Ljahavičy, from a noble Polish family that had lost its possessions. Before the war, he had married a Jewish woman, and during the German occupation, he hid her and her children, because both she and her children were considered Jews, and their fate was sealed by Nazi edict.

From what Jakubowski and others had to tell, the names of the Nazi war criminals, who were active in the vicinity, surfaced. the Germans - Amelung and Jorn; The Lithuanian - Gurneiwięc, and many Byelorussians: Bobko, Kalko, Senko, Diro, Golub, Pyszczynski, Sienkiewicz and others, a collection of vermin – those who committed crimes against humanity; participants in mass murder, the torture of innocent people, Jews, Poles, and Soviet partisans.

Amelung was the head of the S. D. in Baranovich, and his deputy, Bobko was the head of the concentration camp and death camp at Koldichevo, beside Baranovich. Kalko was the head of the Byelorussian police in the city. They were Byelorussian police of various rank. In 1944, when the German retreat began all along the entire eastern front, and the Red Army drew near the city, The German, Amelung, head of the S. D. fled westward to Germany, where his trail vanished. to the extent that is known to me, he was never captured. A trip to Germany, for purposes of searching for war criminals was burdened with many difficulties, and there was nobody searching for him specifically. to our chagrin, the majority of those who were accomplices, police, civilian officials, etc., succeeded in escaping together with their masters, to Germany, where they found refuge in refugee camps put up for them as ‘displaced persons,’ as it were, who were suffering because of their anti-Soviet sympathies. In time, it was made as easy as possible for them to reach the countries of North and South America.

Gurneiwięc as well, the deputy to Amelung, left the city. Originally, he was a Lithuanian named Josephus Gurnewicius who volunteered for the S. D. in the city of Kovno (Kaunas), the Lithuanian capital. After a period in which he underwent training, he was sent to Baranovich, where he married a pretty Polish girl named Lala, the daughter of the former Chairman of the Polish Socialist Party in the city. He adopted the Polish name Jozef Gurneiwięc. In the Baranovich ghetto, he rapidly acquired a set of nicknames, such as ‘Bloody Jozef’ and ‘The Bloodthirsty One,’ and also ‘Pretty-Boy Jozef,’ because he was handsome. With the oncoming of the Red Army, he fled to the west along with the family of his wife, in a train car full of the spoils taken from Jews. However, he did not get as far as Germany, as did his superior, Amelung, but like many Poles from the eastern provinces (today it is Western Byelorussia), he traveled to Silesia. Jakubowski’s Polish friends whispered that Gurneiwięc’s father-in-law, the ‘Socialist,’ had promised to protect him from all assaults, if he would only remain in Poland. It is told that a letter was received from the son-in-law in Wolow, a small town near Wroclaw. My decision pointed me to pursue him in Lower Silesia, and to track down this war criminal, especially since I had found out that ‘Bloodthirsty Jozef’ had killed my brother Yitzhak (Itz’l) with his own hands. During one of the aktionen, Jozef had found my brother, with two other Jewish boys, in a bunker, in Rogoznicki’s flour mill, on the Pocztowa Street. He brought them to the statue of the Unknown Soldier, and shot them there.

Wroclaw (Breslau) was a city that had a German population, until 1944. During the time of the war, the city was destroyed by allied bombing from the air. With the approach of the Red Army, the German residents left, fleeing before the Russians. The city was transformed into a focal point for refuge, for all of those whose house had been destroyed during the war –many were from Poland, and there were gentiles among them who were trying to hide from the vengeance of anti-Nazi laws. they took up residence in the areas that had been taken back from the Germans, such as Silesia, Eastern Prussia, and the Baltic coast, where they would not be recognized or identified.

In Wroclaw, there was an old hospital that was 500 years old, in which there were 1500 beds. I began to work in the hospital as a doctor, with two assistants, one Jewish and one Polish. However, the main motivation that I saw in my work, was in the ‘U. B.<sup>20</sup>, the Polish secret police’ for apprehending the war criminals and their accomplices, and bringing them to justice. Upon my arrival in Wroclaw, I turned to the district attorney’s office of the province, and told them of the purpose of my coming, and how I was a doctor and an officer in the Polish Army, and one of those sent to Katyn, (I was saved from the Katyn Massacre beside Smolensk, where over 10,000 Polish officers were murdered in 1941), and I was received in a respectful manner. The prosecutor in the office of the district attorney’s office, a man named Polano, that Jozef had, at one point, been detained by the U. B., the testimony that had brought about his detention being that of a Polish teacher from Baranovich, who had taken up residence in Katowice. However, Jozef was freed by the court in Sosnowiec after several weeks, for lack of eye witness testimony. Polano complained that no people came to testify, because they feared him and his friends. He even showed me a Polish newspaper, that documented the short internment of Jozef. I made up my mind that I would not relent from pursuing him, until he was apprehended. From the information that I had gathered here and there, I learned that his family was living in Wolow, but he only visits them infrequently, and in secret. He works on a train, and most of the time he is on the move, traveling, and in addition to this, he is a member of the Polish underground, of the ‘National Armed Forces,’ (N. S. Z.<sup>21</sup>). this was an organization that fought the communist régime in Poland, and engaged in murdering Jews and communists.

I benefitted from the cooperation of Mali in the U. B. Many of the workers there were Jewish, in whose hearts there raged the fire for vengeance. Yet the Poles, also, wanted to see the war criminals punished, as well as the collaborators with the Germans, because Poland suffered terribly under the German occupation. My comrade, Jakubowski, the Pole from Baranovich, also got to Wroclaw, and continue to help me in my searches, and investigations. He was a man who was loyal to me, and together with this, he was an intermediary among the ranks of the Poles who were returning from the east. It is possible, that because of the less an careful move to this location, that the wife of ‘Bloodthirsty Jozef’ learned that I was attempting to pick up his trail. One day, Jakubowski came to me, and told me that Jozef’s wife had turned to him and pleaded for him to influence me, that I abandon my intention to seize her husband and bring him to trial. In exchange for this, she offered me the sum of one million zlotys, a huge sum in those days. This proposal caused me rage and embarrassment simultaneously. I refused even to see her, because I feared I would kill her out of losing my own self-control.

Despite the intelligence that we had about Jozef, it proved difficult to seize him. He was a master of elusiveness. I was warned that he is dangerous, and was totally capable of killing me before I might succeed in capturing him. Following the counsel of the head of the U. B., I armed myself with a Browning automatic pistol, and I always carried it with me in the streets of the city, on entering my house, and in the hallway with the stairs. My finger was always pressed against the trigger. Incidentally, my wife knew nothing about what

---

<sup>20</sup> *Urząd Bezpieczeństwa*

<sup>21</sup> Narodowe Siły Zbrojne (English *National Armed Forces*, **NSZ**) was a Polish, anti-Soviet and anti-German paramilitary organization which was part of the Polish resistance movement in World War II, fighting the Nazi German occupation of Poland in the General Government, and later the Soviet puppet state known as the Polish People's Republic. It was associated with the pre-war National Democracy political camp.

I was doing at the U. B. I did not want to worry her. I would tell her that I needed to go early to the hospital, or that I had night duty.

One day, we received a piece of information, that in one of the villas in the expensive suburb of Oforow, that served as a residence for high ranking Germans, during the time of the German occupation, there is an N. S. Z. cell, where even Jozef is to be found according to the gatekeeper. I conveyed my desire to participate in an ambush of the villa. That night, a force numbering about 20 men went out to Oforow, and surrounded the house. We knocked on the door, and announced that 'We are the U. B.' And we demanded that the door be opened. As an answer, machine gun fire came out through the windows. The bullets whistled about us, yet Jozef, who was undoubtedly there, managed to elude us, and vanished once again. Several months went by. All that time, I stayed on his trail, but because I did not know him personally, I suspected that were I even to encounter him face-to-face, I would not recognize him, the prosecutor Polano and other people described him to me, and told me that a very prominent feature was a black wart on his upper lip. I once found out that a city landsman of mine, Herschel Mukasey, a resident of the Baranovich ghetto, had reached a DP camp near Warsaw, and knew Jozef by sight. He could help me in identifying him, and apprehending him. I immediately wrote to him, telling him that I am on the trail of this criminal. I asked him to come to me, and even live with me, to help in the apprehension of Gurneiwiec. Herschel responded with passion. The following day, I received a letter from him, telling me he was on the train coming to me.

In addition to my researches at the U. B. we began to reconnoiter the city, with our eyes and ears open. One day, the two of us were riding in electric train Number 1, and we were standing by the entrance to the first train car, and here, behind the train conductor, stood a man with a black wart on his upper lip.

Herschel turned slightly and whispered 'this is the man.' The two of us watched dispassionately until we reached the town square, and there, I told Herschel to debark and fetch the first policeman that he might encounter, and to tell him that we are holding a war criminal. I remained in the train car in order to keep an eye on him, and not permit him to disappear. Jozef did not recognize me, because I took care to remain dispassionate, and remained calm, even when he peered at me. My hand was placed over the trigger of the pistol for this entire time. In a matter of a few minutes, Herschel returned with a train policeman. I took out my U. B. credentials, and ordered the policeman to place Jozef under arrest. The latter turned ashen pale, and argued that there must be some mistake taking place. And while he was in the process of arguing with the one detaining him, the muttering began among the Polish passengers in the train; 'Again these Jews are assaulting a Pole...' I had no choice but to threaten him with my pistol, and to quickly get him off the train. We led him off in the direction of the U. B. offices that were in a building used by the *Gestapo* in the past. It is interesting that all of Wroclaw was destroyed by Allied bombing, but the *Gestapo* building, and the two prisons were not damaged. At the U. B. offices, Jozef fell to his knees and begged before me 'kill me immediately.' He knew the *Gestapo* well, and saw himself as his second running of the gauntlet. He preferred a quick death in place of the 'handling' he was anticipating that would be similar to the ones he caused to be visited on his victims. When I saw his face, I was almost driven to commit murder. It was with great difficulty that I held myself back from shooting him right then and there, because before my eyes, the faces of my family who were tortured, kept appearing before my eyes, especially my brother Yitzhak, who was killed at the hand of the man, now standing in front of me. Jozef began to talk. There was no tone of regret to be heard in his voice. Rather, it was the normal excuse of a war criminal, attempting to defend himself, by claiming he had no part in making decisions, and was just following orders. He told that he related to all people, treating Christians the same way he treated Jews. As an example, he told that he had killed a Roman Catholic priest, by using an iron rod which he inserted into his mouth, and through which he passed an electric current, and other stories like this. Among his many stories, he told that he had taken off the expensive fur coat from Yehoshua Izikson, the first

President of the *Judenrat*, before he killed him. ‘The fur is to be found with my wife,’ he told me. I ordered him to write to her, and instruct her to send the fur to me. Apart from this letter, Jozef was not given permission to write or receive any letters, and except for his defense attorney, he had no contact with the outside world. Once I had the fur in my possession, I turned to the elderly father of Izikson, the sole survivor of that entire richly branched family, of all his children and grandchildren. He was in Russia, where good people from Baranovich were taking care of him. After the war, along with other refugees, he had returned to France, and from there, on to the Land of Israel. I wrote to him, that I had his son’s fur coat, and I wanted to transfer it to him. He replied to me by letter, in which he pleaded with me not to return the fur coat of his tortured son, because his heart would be broken all over again, anew, when he laid eyes on the jacket...

The investigation of Jozef continued for several months. I was interested in both widening and lengthening it, in order to have the means in my hand to assemble witnesses, and to prepare the case for the prosecution, so there would not be a recurrence of what had happened in the first trial, when he was released for lack of eye witness testimony. The interrogators from the U. B. did not spare him any beatings, and other silent treatments. He confessed to his crimes, and also informed on his criminal associates, on Bobko, Kalko and others. Immediately after the liberation from the German occupation, it was accepted to have short investigations of war criminals and summary execution by firing squad. Many collaborating Poles, were seized by the U. B., and did not emerge alive. In Jozef’s case, the investigation continued on.

I brought in many Jewish witnesses, from all the ends of Poland, to Wroclaw. Most of the witnesses were Poles, as well as the few Jews who remained alive after their encounter with Jozef. In their time, many of them were accomplices to the Nazis. I warned them that I was aware of the entire truth, from the testimony of other Baranovich people who were interrogated, and if they lied, it will cause them to be brought before the bar of justice, where they will be tried, and receive their just punishment. I found out about a young Jewish woman who was a medical student, from the Liss family in Baranovich, whose father was murdered by Jozef in front of her own eyes. At that time she was residing in Gdansk (Danzig) with her two daughters. I invited her to testify. She was the only Jewish witness for the prosecution. Her testimony was vigorous, and forceful, and lasted for nearly three hours. Of the seven sentences to death that the criminal received, five can be directly attributed to her. Witnesses came from faraway places, from Gdansk, Jalna Gora, Walbzukh and Warsaw.

Barncewiz, a young Pole who was in the Polish Air Force, came from Warsaw to be of assistance, in giving his testimony. During the time when we were preparing for the trial, Jakubowski received many threats directed at me. I was threatened that I would be killed, if I continued with my investigation. I was neither frightened, nor was I deterred. I personally interrogated the witnesses and made sure to receive truthful testimony. Occasionally, I had to make use of threats of my own, in order to obtain reliable testimony. The trial lasted for three days, in accordance with all of the prevailing procedures. The family of the accused hired a Jewish defense attorney, by the name of Stanislaw Dumnyewsky. There was not a single Polish lawyer who would take the case. Dumnyewsky himself was a Holocaust survivor, but in exchange for a fee of one million zlotys, he agreed to defend the criminal, the murderer of his own people. I said to him: ‘As a Jew, and Holocaust survivor, at the very least, limit yourself to defense, and don’t do any more than is required of you in representing your client.’ At the end of the hearing of all of the eye witness testimony, and after the defense attorney’s summary, Jozef Gurneiwicz was sentenced to death seven times. He was taken by the police to prison. At that time, the prison did not possess separate vehicles for transporting dangerous prisoners, but rather they were open autos. Tens of police guarded the prisoner. Despite this, he managed to leap between his guards in one of the turns along the way, and fled into the wreckage of a rather large house, that had stood ruined since the days of the bombing of the city. He entered the cellar on the run, a cellar that resembled a labyrinth. The U. B. personnel immediately surrounded the house. It appeared that the criminal had managed

to escape from the law. the police said to me: ‘Nu, Dr. Narkonsky, you will be the first to pay for the consequences of this judgement... for your own safety, we advise you to move, and come to live in our premises.’ Suddenly, we heard a shot. One of the young officers, who had pursued Jozef into the cellar, ran into him, face-to-face. Jozef was stronger than this officer, and in the scuffle that ensued between them, he wrested the rifle from his hand. But the officer had other weaponry at hand – a pistol. He quickly fired the pistol and shot Jozef in the leg, and only after wounding him this way, was he able to overpower him. This time, he was put in irons, put back into the car, and thrown into a cell on the Death Row of the prison, where he lay, without receiving any medical attention for his wounded leg.

*Page 220: The Criminal, Jozef Gurneiwiiec, apprehended by Polish security forces, after he attempted to escape, immediately after he was sentenced.*

Taken by Dr. Narkonsky

*Page 221 (Top): An Invitation to Dr. Narkonsky to come to Court, in the matter of the trial of Gurneiwiiec.*

*Page 222 (Bottom): A Newspaper Headline: ‘Mr. Jozef,’ 27.11.47  
The Hangman from Baranovich is Hanged*

On the following day, I received a letter from the prosecutor, that I was to be prepared, in a substantive way, to participate in the implementation of the sentence, which was scheduled for 26.11.47. This was merely two days after sentence was passed. Jozef was taken to the gallows with his leg bandaged, in the wake of his being wounded, and he was suffering from fever, and pain from the filth, but was fully aware, and he recognized me and said: ‘Now your vengeance will reach its climax.’ I promised him in one of my interrogations, that I would be present at his hanging, and indeed, now that had come to pass. But this chapter had not yet run to its conclusion. The gallows stood in the center of the prison yard. On its bottom, was a moveable platform, operated by an electric switch. The hangman was masked (I knew who it was), and he put the noose around the neck of the criminal, and pressed the button. Night was beginning to fall. The sentenced individual fell into a pit. After five minutes, I peered into the pit, and to my dismay, I noted that he was still alive. I drew near to him, and noted that the noose was bent over his chin, and not his throat. I turned to the hangman and said: ‘You do not know your craft,’ and the hangman took off the noose, and put it around the throat of the criminal. When a number of minutes had gone by, I confirmed his death. His body was not turned over to his family, but burned on a dung heap.



The local Polish papers were full of descriptions of this trial, as was the case with other war criminals.

## **Newspaper Excerpts**

(Sources turned over to Yad VaShem in Jerusalem)

### **Excerpt from the Polish Newspaper “Western Daily”**

Dated 4/5/47 in Wroclaw (Translated from Polish).

‘In one factory, Jozef murdered 20 workers suspected of being members of the underground. On one occasion, he hung 11 partisans at the liberty memorial. He abusively assaulted women and children, and devised various bizarre tortures for them. In interrogating the accused, Narkonsky was assisted by Hirsch Mukasey, who was also a Jew from Baranovich. In addition to war crimes, Jozef continued to be active in the illegal underground, whose objective was to bring down the presently sitting government in the country of Poland. Using his contacts through the auspices of the Sztarna family, he developed a relationship with a member of the underground named Baran, and gave him a pistol, with the knowledge that he would use it to engage in armed robbery for the purpose of obtaining money for the activities of the underground. Baran was captured during an attempted robbery assault against the house of Dr. Szwarka in Wroclaw, and was sentenced to life imprisonment. The conspirator, Eugenia Sztarna, was sentenced to seven years in prison.’

### **Excerpt from the Polish Newspaper ‘*Slowo Polskaya*’**

Dated 20/10/47 (Translated from Polish).

‘Jozef was active in the years 1941 - 1944. At first he worked as a translator, being fluent in the languages, Polish, German, Lithuanian and Russian. However, in reality, he was the one who organized the Baranovich ghetto. He rose in the ranks to become an officer of the S. S. At the same time, he took up residence in a lavish villa, furnished with furniture taken away from the homes of Jews. He took part of this in the ‘*aktion*’ of the killing of the Jews of Haradzišča, where 2,000 Jews were killed. In a like fashion, he participated in the killing of Jews in a number of towns near Baranovich: Njasviz, Kleck, Stoubcy.

The first *aktion* in the Baranovich ghetto commenced on March 4, 1942, in which there were more than twenty thousand people. ‘The man of blood’ ran from house to house, extracting people from their hiding places, and shooting them. Fifteen witnesses give testimony and verify his crimes as an executioner, and an accomplice to the Germans, in great detail.’

### **Excerpt from the Newspaper, ‘*Niederschlesia*’**

**By A. Ber (Yitzhak Turkov)**

(Brother of the well-known actor, Turkov)

[Dated] 5/10/47 (Translated from Yiddish)

‘For an extended period of time, Jozef managed to elude the hand of the law and justice. He even tried his luck after he was sentenced to death, in his attempt to leap out of the car that was taking him to prison. But in this case, luck did not shine on him, his end being – on the gallows. It is possibly that we would not tarry at great

length over the details of the incident. There are thousands of ‘Jozefs’ still walking around free. Many of them are in the process of achieving prominence in the eyes of the Americans and the British, who, with the help of such ‘Jozefs,’ who bathed themselves in Jewish blood, want to ‘rehabilitate Germany.’ We give special prominence to this incident, to underscore the role of the witness who helped bring Jozef to stand before the gallows. This is a man of substance, in his professional life, searching for traces of the murderer, exposing him, and turning him over to the institutions of the law, gathering the evidence about all of his criminal acts, finding the witnesses, and becoming the informal prosecutor on behalf of 30,000 exterminated Jews. He stems from the Baranovich Jewish community, this is Dr. Narkonsky of Wroclaw. It is clear, that his effort in bringing Jozef, the murderer of our fellow Jews, to the gallows, cannot heal our wounds, but the essence of the matter is, that in the curse of dealing with our day-to-day concerns and issues, these wounds sometimes can be forgotten. The ‘Jozefs’ place their hopes in such forgetfulness. Accordingly, it is important to emphasize, and also to bless the dedication and commitment of Dr. Narkonsky, and those like him, who resist such forgetfulness. They are not only avengers, they arouse and stimulate our conscience, and the conscience of the world.’

\*\*\*

Jozef was hanged, but many of his comrades still walk around free. During the course of the interrogations, Jozef told me a great deal, and gave me material that helped me get on their trail. I continued with my investigations, and even though I was the director of the hospital, my work at the U. B. was more important to me. I would get there early in the morning, and pursue each and every piece of news, every bit of information, or rumor, about war criminals that were being sought, and especially the ones from the Baranovich district.

## **The Trial of Dr. Prawko**

One morning, a pleasant woman appeared in my office, wiping a tear from her eyes, and introduced herself, ‘I am *Doktorowa* (the wife of Doctor) Prawko, a ‘colleague’ of yours from Baranovich. I did not know Dr. Prawko, because he was younger than I. the woman continued to speak and told me that she was the daughter of a Russian Orthodox priest, and that her husband was also the son of a priest. These priests were friends, and accordingly so were their children. Her husband, a good man, that could not harm even a fly, was friendly to Jews. At this point, a red light went off in me. Many war criminals would aver that they had Jewish friends, and saved many Jews from death.

Dr. Prawko worked in the Baranovich hospital, and was engaged in his professional work, which was humanitarian, according to her description. After the war, he worked as an ordinary doctor, a gynecologist, in Zylonka beside Warsaw, however, he fell victim to malign accusations on the part of Poles, and currently is in prison. She heard that I am investigating war criminals, and is turning to me for help in vindicating her husband, who is innocent of wrongdoing. I told her that I do not know her husband, despite the fact that we came from the same city, and are members of the same profession. I required about two weeks time to investigate the subject in a fundamental way, and after that, I will give her an answer. I immediately wrote to Israel, to Dr. Zelig Levinbook, informing him that Dr. Prawko was imprisoned, under the accusation of being an accomplice to the work of the Nazis, and I required testimony concerning his conduct during the time of the German occupation. I received an answer in about two weeks. To my surprise, in place of a letter, I received a package full of testimonials, with the address of the sender being in Polish script, from Allenby Street in Tel-Aviv, and it was to her that Dr. Zelig Levinbook turned, Dr. Leon Berkowicz, and another Jewish man whose name I no longer remember. They provided tangible evidence, which I transcribed, and sent to the court in Warsaw, where the trial was being conducted. I was taken aback by the testimony, because I

suspected that Prawko was no saint, as his wife made him out to be. Among the many details supplied, there was one that was particularly terrifying. During one of the 'aktionen,' a number of Jewish doctors, that had worked at the hospital, hid themselves, among the excrement waste receptacles, among them Reuven Salutsky, his brother, the engineer, Lejzor Salutsky, and some other physicians. They paid money to the attendant, to cover them in excrement, and not to reveal where they were. The attendant took the money, and immediately afterwards, notified the director of the hospital, Dr. Prawko, about the people who were hiding. The latter went over to the waste bin, and moved the excrement aside, that covered the Jewish doctors, and turned to them abusively, saying: 'you are despicable Jews, and you have found a refuge here with us! Your place is somewhere else.' He ordered the attendant to contact the *Gestapo*, indicating that they should come, and take away those who were trying to hide out. As can be understood, they were taken out to be executed. This was just one of the things that Prawko did. It was known to everyone, that, along with another doctor, by the name of Neumik, he was an accomplice to the Germans. These two Byelorussian doctors, would bring jewelry, with pieces of human flesh attached to them, from ears and finger, that had been removed from Jewish victims, to the jeweler Pszakwic. After the war, Neumik disappeared as if the earth had swallowed him up. I searched without success. I concentrated on the Prawko trial. I found out that the name of the prosecutor in Warsaw was Bitensky. The name sounded familiar to me, and it became clear that he was also from my city, a young Jewish man from Baranovich. The prosecutor Bitensky, the son of a tailor, had graduated from the law faculty in Vilna, and since that time, as always, he was a communist. I got in touch with him immediately, and I presented to him with the matter of Prawko. In this trial, I participated only as an observer. After all, I did not interrogate him, nor was I a witness to what he had done. A row of witnesses appeared. This time as well, as was the case in the Gurneiwięc trial, Dr. Baroncewicz testified, who had lived in the city during the occupation period. One of the witnesses was the jeweler Pszakwic. He had received, from the Germans, the jewelry store and the equipment of Dobrowkin, a Jewish jeweler and watchmaker. I looked upon Pszakwic with suspicion. He had accumulated a substantial fortune during the occupation period, and accordingly, he was a model of what it meant to be a German collaborator. My personal role in the trial was to prepare the testimony, and organize the trial, that included discussions with the prosecutor, on the one side, and with the defendants and their counsel on the other. However, we needed Pszakwic's testimony. I positioned him as a sort of 'state witness,' and I warned him that if he did not tell the truth, his own blood would be on his head. Pszakwic testified, that Prawko would bring him a great deal of jewelry, and from these, he made gold ingots. He went out of Baranovich in a train car, supplied by the Germans, with a great deal of booty. Mrs. Liss also appeared to give testimony, this being the same Mrs. Liss who testified at the Gurneiwięc trial, the scourge, in Wroclaw. On the basis of the testimony, Prawko received a sentence of 15 years of hard labor in the coal mines. He did not receive the death sentence, because even though he participated in the German undertakings, he personally did not kill any people. fifteen years of hard labor in the coal mines is a severe enough punishment in its own right, and not many emerge from such an ordeal alive.

## **The Criminal Kalko**

Another war criminal, about whom I worked in compiling evidence against, was Kalko. He was a murderer with the appearance of some malign animal. He was a Byelorussian from Swicilowicz, who was sent by the Nazis to an officer's course in Minsk, and he returned from there to become head of the Byelorussian police of the city.

## **Regarding Kalko's Deeds taken from Newspapers**

### **From 'Slowo Polskaya'**

From the 27/10/48 Edition in Wroclaw  
(Translated from Polish)

'Two war criminals were captured. Mikolaj Kalko, who had taken up residence in Lowak, and Mikhail Zalwa from Wroclaw...' 'Kalko was the head of the guards at the Koldichevo camp beside Baranovich. From 1943, until the entry of the Red Army into the area, approximately thirty thousand Soviet prisoners of war were exterminated. In the period of 1941 - 1943, Mikhail Zalwa worked in agricultural properties in Germany, becoming an accomplice in the work of the Gestapo.' Kalko's trial was short. It lasted for three days, from morning till night. He confessed to everything, but he pleaded not to be sent back to Baranovich. Alongside every branch of the U. B. there was a representative of the Soviet N.K.V.D. War criminals that had worked in the Russian sector, were taken to the location of where they committed their crimes. It was there that an additional trial took place, and the sentence was carried out. As understood, all of Kalko's pleading didn't help him, and he was sent to Baranovich, and there, he was taken out to be executed.'

### **Criminals Against Humanity from the Koldichevo Camp**

From 'The Workers' News' 11May 1956  
(Translated from Polish)

'Koldichevo was a Hitlerist extermination camp, 18 km from Baranovich, beside Haradzišča, a place where, between the years 1942 - 1944, more than twenty thousand people, Jews, Soviet partisans, Polish doctors, priests, and lawyers, were murdered. The Koldichevo camp will remain etched in the memory of all those who experienced the Gehenna of the German occupation in the cities and towns of the Baranovich district. In history, the name of this place will be remembered, with obloquy, among the places where the 'murder of a people' was implemented, against the Jewish people, as a tragic place of torture and death, of victims, innocent of any wrongdoing.

Immediately after the liberation, in the year 1944, a special national investigation commission went out to this location, from the Soviet Union. In the camp, an enormous mass grave was found, in the configuration of the letter 'T,' 35 meters long, and 3 meters deep. In it, the bodies of men, women and children were found. In the course of the excavation, the bodies of 500 adults and 14 children were disinterred. The adults were shot in the back of the head, at the time that their hands were tied with barbed wire. The children were pushed into the pit while they were still alive and covered with earth. Close by, on a parcel -- that the local populace calls Lazy -- a crematorium was found. Additional mass graves were found beside it, on which trees had been planted, and were growing. Pits and graves were found in many locations throughout the Baranovich district. To our great pain, not many [sic :living] witnesses remained. The leaders of this Hitlerist camp made an effort not to leave any traces behind...'

### **War Criminals from Koldichevo, Bobko and Others**

From 'The Workers' News' 3/12/1957  
(Translated from Polish)

'From the trial proceedings in court, it was established by eye witness accounts, that in 1942, Bobko was

appointed to build the Koldichevo camp, which at the time, was considered as a camp dedicated [housing] Poles and Jews who were forced laborers. He was appointed by the S. D., in accordance with the decision of the official in charge in Baranovich, the German Amelung. His deputy was Leiusz. At the time that the pursuit of the local populace intensified, Poles and Jews, the labor camp was transformed into a death camp. In the verification of the guilt of the accused, the court relied on witnesses who knew Bobko, Warnik, and Leiusz very well, even before the war, and afterwards, as the command of the camp guard.’

\*\*\*

‘In a hall that was filled from end-to-end, a trial was conducted against a Byelorussian national, Victor Diro, who was captured inside Polish territory. Diro was accused of war crimes, in the Koldichevo extermination camp, in which he was a junior officer of the camp guard. Diro was sentenced to death. A short time after Diro’s trial, the security forces arrested another person in Lodz, named Golub. He, too, was one of the guards at the Koldichevo camp, and served under the leadership of the ‘Senior Commander’ Bobko. Diro received a punishment commensurate with his crimes.’

\*\*\*

During this very period, when trials were going on in Poland against the war criminals from the Koldichevo camp, the Soviet security forces succeeded to arrest and imprison several of the guards of the camp in the Baranovich district, that had heretofore managed to conceal themselves, in isolated shacks in the depths of the forest. In a like fashion, several members of the Byelorussian police were arrested who were members of the ‘*Schutzmannschaft*.’ Among those detained was Leonid Sienkewicz, Bobko’s deputy. An eye witness to many of the crimes told that he saw Bobko and Warnik shooting and killing 100 Jews from Baranovich. After all of the testimony was given, and they returned to Bobko’s name, he was accused of the entire list of war crimes, according to the special decision of the decision of the government of the Soviet Union. One person, named Peisczni, gave testimony before the Soviet prosecutor, that already in the year 1941, Bobko was a member of the police, and together with the Germans, and detachments of Lithuanian nationals, went into the forests, around Baranovich and Haradzišča, and there, shot groups of Jews. Bobko, the Byelorussian was the commandant of the Koldichevo camp. It was he who gave the orders that people were to be shot to death, and even personally shot people completely innocent of any wrongdoing. He stood at the head of a detachment that engaged in pursuit of Soviet partisans. He participated in the liquidation of the ghettos at Baranovich, Njasviz, and Moucadz’.

\*\*\*

All these facts were established by the court, on the basis on the testimony of reliable people who were detained at the former camp, or were residents of the area. During the trial, the accused confessed. Bobko confessed to having arranged *selektionen*, and that he was present when people were taken out for execution. Warnik confessed that he killed a woman in the camp kitchen. The accused justified themselves, by stating they were enlisted to do this by force, by the Byelorussian police, and afterwards by the S. S. where they received orders from the Germans to guard the Koldichevo camp and to participate in taking people out for execution.

A long time after many war criminals were seized and tried, Bobko still walked about free. His comrades offered testimony that in the winter of 1944, he was transferred from Koldichevo to Wilejka. There, he was the head of Unit 13, known infamously as the dregs of the S. S. and Byelorussian forces. On February 28, 1956, members of the security forces detained a man named Stepan Bokowski, who was suspected as having complicity in the acts of murder in the Koldichevo extermination camp. He immediately admitted that his name was not Stepan Bokowski, but rather, Sergei Bobko. Similarly, he admitted that he was, indeed, the head of the ‘labor’ camp (according to his words), in Koldichevo. For 12 years, he had managed to hide from the law, and thanks to his name change, succeeded, along with his wife and two children.

Bobko admitted his guilt, but only in a partial manner; it is true that the German Amelung recruited him, in promising him to be head of the city of Baranovich, back then, to serve in the S. D., and tasked him to organize a 'labor' camp, and to this end, he selected the tract of Koldichevo. True, he was the officer and wore a German army uniform, and took part in the killings of the Jewish ghetto of Baranovich, Njasviz, and Moucadz'. And he even participated in the pursuit of Soviet partisans in the Naliboki forests. His unit did not have an important role in these pursuits, according to him, because the unit reached the Neman River, but was unable to cross it, not having any boats. It is not correct that he had participated in personally in the murder of the Jewish populace and Soviet partisans. This was what Bobko's first confession was like, before the officers of the U. B. in Wroclaw, after several days of interrogation by the district prosecutor in Wroclaw. From the line of questioning, it became clear to Bobko that there existed a large body of evidence that proved his guilt. The evidence was based on the testimony of war criminals that had been caught before this time. He attempted to deny these charges, and said that he didn't remember names and dates, and does not recognize people named Diro or Golub. However, it was remembered that in the year 1943, according to the German Jorn, he killed a Jew who was trying to escape from the camp. The removal to execution was public. To his mind, this was a mercy killing, because the hapless victim had been wounded by the camp guards during the attempted escape. Bobko also 'remembered' that orders were given to shoot at people who attempted to escape during this period, when the Baranovich ghetto was being liquidated. He personally did not see the deed, but afterwards, he saw 'several bodies.' In order to prove that what he was saying was true, Bobko referenced Dr. Levinbook, who, in the years 1942 - 1943, was the camp doctor, and now was living in Tel-Aviv. He had submitted testimony to the Polish Consulate in Tel-Aviv, verifying that he was, indeed, the camp doctor, and knew Bobko well as a cruel executioner, that caused the death of many innocent people. In was in this way, that the testimony of Stepan Bokowski-Sergei Bobko was brought to light. The issue remained as to what was the nature of Bobko's deeds, from the year 1944 onwards, from the time that he left the Koldichevo camp, and traveled in the direction of Wilejka, where he participated in the murder of the populace in that area, and in the liquidation associated with the Warsaw uprising. After this, he retreated along with the Germans, and even fought against the Soviet army in the Wroclaw area. Was Bobko in this battalion at the time? As of today, Bobko is in prison in Wroclaw, awaiting the continuation of his trial.'

\*\*\*

One policeman named Leiusz, along with other police, brought the inmates to execution a short time before the liberation of the camp by the Soviet army. At the same time, there was not a person to direct Leiusz in what to do, and did not give him any order to investigate whether the inmates had been taken out for execution. In his zeal, he consulted the roster of the inmates, and found that one was missing. He brought the rest of the police together, and found the detainee who had attempted to hide himself, and they killed him. Among the others who testified at Bobko's trial was Julian Tarlowsky, an inmate of the camp in the past, having been in the camp for three months, and recognized the malign nature of the place, feeling the lash of Bobko's cruelty, and that of his accomplices, on his own hide. As an example; Every night, one of the prisoners was designated as a guard for his area, and was responsible to report to the official guard in the Byelorussian language. One time, an elderly, frail man was on guard, who in no way, had mastered the required regulations in Byelorussian. Bobko arrived while being drunk. The words of the elderly man did not please him. He ripped open the face of the man, using the whip in his hand, on striking him over, and over. On one occasion, a witness saw that two trucks full of people had arrived, adults and children. They were thrown off the trucks. In less than an hour, they were loaded up again, with the hands of the adults bound. The children were thrown into the center of the trucks like stacks of wood. the camp guards, with spades in their hands for digging, escorted the trucks.

The women of the camp were in great danger. Attempts were made to bring them clothing and food. Tarlowsky's wife, who brought him clothing to the extent she could get anything, Warnik confined within the camp. She succeeded in escaping. A different woman, who also had brought her imprisoned husband food, was seized, together with her husband, and shot to death. The witness Tarlowsky was both emotional and nervous, with his lip trembling, and tears in his eyes. The nightmare of those months, despite the passage of so many years, had not been erased from his memory. One witness, Daniel Schwamm, was a Byelorussian partisan. his unit was beside Koldichevo. both the name and deeds of Bobko were known to the partisans, and they were pleased to teach him a lesson and kill him. The command of the unit had sentenced him to death [sic: in absentia], although it was not possible to penetrate the camp. It was suspected, that in such an awesome attempt, the entire unit would be wiped out. However, there were rumors that they had attempted , as it were, to influence Bobko through his father, a resident of the area, that he should join the partisans. It is correct that attempts were made to influence people not to participate in the agenda of the Germans, and that rather, they should join the partisans, but this did not work in Bobko's case. The direction of this criminal was not to the 'ranks of the partisans' but rather to the ranks of the dead... in this trial against three accused: Bobko, Warnik and Leiusz,<sup>12</sup> witnesses did not appear for no reason that was satisfactory, and with no justification [for their absence]. The prosecutor demanded that they be made to appear, in accordance with the law. In a like manner, the prosecutor demanded this of the reading in of the testimony, that were submitted to the court of the State of Israel. The defense objected on procedural grounds. his line of reasoning was, that there is no treaty between Poland and Israel on matters of law. The prosecution did not accept this argument, and the Israeli testimony was accepted with its full force. The testimony from Israel was that of Dr. Zelig Levinbook, and Dr. Leon Berkowicz, two doctors from Baranovich. By the end of the trial, the guilt of the three accused had been proven. They took part in the murder of innocent people, in the ranks of the Germans, participated in *selektionen*, organized the taking out of people to be executed, guarding those sentenced to death, 'so they not escape,' and in conveying people to their death.'

## **From 'The Workers' News' 3/12/1957, Wroclaw**

(Translated from Polish)

Page 231: *The War Criminals: From the Left, Bobko, Kukhta, Karalewicz, Sienkewicz*

Picture Taken from the Baranovich Archive

'The District Court, headed by the Judge, Czieslaw Wilsucki, and the judges, Teofil Kowalczyk, and Tadeusz Znaiewski, announced their judgement against Bobko, Warnik and Leiusz. The court issued a sentence of death, and the permanent revocation of their citizenship rights. The accused, Bobko and Warnik received their sentences in relative calmness. Only at the time that the reading,, and pronouncement of the sentence took place, was Leiusz overcome, and he fainted, while Warnik covered his face with his hands. Only Bobko sat for this entire time, erect, with his head held up. After sentence was pronounced, the three were sent off to Baranovich, for a repeat trial, and to be taken out for execution.'

## Endnote

In Wroclaw, which served as a way station for many Jews on their way to the Holy Land, Jewish refugees milled about, who had returned from Russia, and those who had survived the concentration and death camps, and that very few that had saved themselves by being hidden by gentiles. Almost at every step, I ran into children, who had Jewish eyes, but were in the company of adult gentiles. These were Jewish children, who were turned over by their parents, prior to their own final departure to the death camps, to gentile neighbors or friends, in order that they be saved. These children were seen especially on Catholic holidays and on Sundays, when the 'adoptive parents' were punctilious in taking them to churches. There were isolated instances of Righteous Among the Peoples of the Earth, who saved Jewish children and afterwards turned them over to relatives, or Jewish institutions. The Bishop Szeptycki, one of those Righteous Among the Peoples of the Earth, ordered his priests to save Jewish children at all costs, and to conceal them in monasteries. The priests fulfilled his order, and zealously guarded the names of the parents and relatives, with the intent of turning them over to their families after the war. After the liberation by the Russians, the priests were directed to turn the children over to orphanages run by the state., where they were not educated in the spirit of the Christian religion. However, the régime did not raise any objection to giving the children back to their Jewish families, although, to our great sorrow, only very few of these remained alive to insist on taking them back into the bosom of Judaism.

In the hospital where I worked, there was a large maternity ward. Many of the delivering mothers were single Polish women, who had children whose fathers were soldiers, from the Red Army, as well as the German army. More frequently than not, these mothers would leave the hospital, and leave their children behind. The welfare department of the city was not equipped to gather and give shelter, to all of these abandoned infants, either in children's homes or orphanages. The director of the welfare department placed the burden on me, to place the children up for adoption to the best of my judgement. Formalities were expedited in a swift manner. When the matter became known publicly, they turned to me, among others, also Jews who had lost their families in the Holocaust, and wanted to adopt children. Many of them made *aliyah* to the Land of Israel. In the city, there was an agency called 'The Youth *Aliyah*,' headed by an individual named Feldenkreis, that dealt with abandoned Jewish children, and organized their *aliyah* to Israel. I had a substantive connection with the 'Youth *Aliyah*,' and it was not only once, that I escorted families and the adopted children as far as the Czech Carpathian [Mountains], on their way to Austria or Germany. The children that traveled, without adoptive parents, were taken in, by-and-large, by the kibbutzim. Entire groups of Jewish refugees passed through Wroclaw on their way to the Land of Israel, or to the West. Among them, could be counted those who left my city, Baranovich, and its environs. I helped them to whatever extent I could, whether in my capacity as a physician, or as a worker in the U. B. security office. I also cooperated in my work with the emissaries from the Holy Land, from the standpoint of implementation. I assisted them in getting medical help for free, from the hospital that looked after the sick – who were pending *olim*. We also procured the appropriate 'documents' for them. Having strong ties to the Israeli officers in Warsaw, with the officer Barzilai, and the secretary Dagon, I was designated by them as a doctor, who was responsible for all matters, pertaining to *aliyah*, in Lower Silesia.

During the 11 years of my stay in Wroclaw, I was privileged to see 11 war criminals receive the punishment that was due to them, death by hanging, or imprisonment in Russia, where they had carried out their crimes.

During this entire time, I was in contact with my sister, and my relatives and friends in Israel. My two brothers, Fyvel and Leon, made *aliyah* from Soviet Russia by way of Poland. The nature of my position did not permit me to leave Poland, and I waited for the right moment. That time arrived when the head of the



country at that time, [Wladyslaw] Gomulka, decided to permit the *aliyah* of the remnant of Jews from Poland to Israel. That *aliyah* acquired the nickname of the ‘Gomulka *aliyah*,’ by the émigrés from Poland. The Pole, Jakubowski, who was loyal to me, joined this wave of immigration. His Jewish wife had influenced him to make *aliyah* to Israel.

I made aliyah in the year 1957 with my family, my wife and child. Not a trace of any member of my profusely branched family remained on Polish soil. I turned over the material used in the Gurneiwic trial, which I had worked so hard to compile, to to Yad VaShem.

## Epilogue

By Dr. Leon Berkowicz

My dear friends,

We are still too close to the Holocaust, and because of this, we cannot comprehend the magnitude of our calamity.

For me. this is, not history and nor will it ever be for me. This is a part of me, and I do not want to forget this, I cannot! Even it causes me pain, I owe some of this agony to the deceased. I will continue to remember, and it will not matter how painful the memories are. This is my sacred obligation to the martyrs!

I am filled with rage, when the Poles say, ‘But we too, lost three million people!’ And the Russians lost twenty million people in The Second World War. The facts are correct, but it means little. For the Russians and the Poles this was ten percent of their population, terrifying enough, in its own right, but for us, for the Jews of Poland, this was ninety-five percent of the people. Most of the Russians and Poles were killed in combat, while our people were put to death by gas, man, woman and child. For our dead, there are no graves. We were victims of an ideology, whose core purpose was the extermination of all Jews. A bureaucratic structure was created, whose sole purpose was to exterminate a people, using the possible means. In 1903, a pogrom was carried out in Kishinev, in the course of which, forty-nine Jews were killed. forty nine!

I could not fall asleep that night, in which, as a lad, I read Bialik’s poem, ‘In the City of Slaughter.’ Six million Jews were killed in the Holocaust! A satanic agenda was created, whose effect was to inflame the latent enmity of the local populace, to such a level, that this very populace aided the Germans with ardor, in their satanic agenda for our elimination, and we were degraded and abused at first, and exterminated much later on.

Frequently the question comes up; why did we not defend ourselves, why did we not rebel and kill? The question is simple, but not so the answer. It is understood that there were several uprisings in the ghettos, and a number of rebellions in the camps, but they were modest, and much too late.

It is worth understanding why this was the case, and I will attempt to shed some light on several facts. When you stand against a powerful and cruel force, that is impervious to all feelings of compassion, that harbors only the thought to exterminate you, and when there is no place to run to, you are suppressed and made to capitulate. You do not think of rebellion, but rather hope for a quick death.

When I was surrounded by Ukrainians in the prison in Lvov, when the slaughter was continuing all around,

with no end in sight, I did not plead for salvation, but for a quick death. When the Jews reached Auschwitz in sealed cattle cars, after five - ten days of Hell, without food or water, without air to breathe, they encountered troops of the S. S. on debarking, with their dogs, ready to leap, to wound and to maim. Even if they knew about the gas chambers (many of them did not know), even if they breathed in the choking stench of the bodies being burned, it was enough to see the murderous countenances of the Ukrainians, their satanic smiles, and the rifles they had aimed at the ready, to know that not one of them, or their children, could hope for salvation.

The mothers hugged their children, and the old people, and quietly went their last way, *'die letzte veg.'* The strong adults, were left to live temporarily, were sent to an energy-sapping labor, that inflicted wounds on them, and in a short while, they lost all of their strength. Their will to live simply flagged, with every eruption of the terrifying cloud of smoke that issued forth from the smokestacks of the crematoria, a harbinger of no good. When you are weak and hungry, with a number tattooed on your arm, your head shaven, and wearing wooden shoes, in an area that is unfamiliar to you, a menacing local population – you don't think about escape. You become ossified, struck dumb, and aligned with your fate.

In the first days of the war, hundred of thousands of Russian soldiers fell into German hands, and only rarely did they show any resistance. The unexpected blow was so strong, so uncompromising, to the point that their very will was broken. Strong and robust young men, who had gone through military training, and had a very strong love for their Motherland, simply folded under the devastating assault. As a result of this, when they were incarcerated in prisoner-of-war camps, under frightful conditions of hunger, beatings and periodic degradations, the resistance should have come from them, and forward. They had neither the strength nor the will to fight (out of five million prisoners-of-war, only one million survived alive). We stood against a mighty and intimidating satanic force, with no hope of being saved, not a spark of possible rescue. In the ghetto, it was easier to die than to live.

The Germans and the police trapped the Jews in the cities, and the peasants combed the villages and their surroundings. The word of the day was: *'On Sunday, we go to church, and on Monday we go to kill Jews!'*

The hate, that had been pent up for centuries, burst out with a viciousness that has no peer in all the annals of history.

The pogrom carried out by Chmielnicki three centuries before (in 1648) extracted one hundred thousand victims. During the ensuing generations, we thought of this as the avatar of all pogroms. From the *'Umschlagplatz<sup>22</sup>'* in Warsaw, over four times that number were sent to the gas chambers. Auschwitz by itself, slaughtered more than thirty times as many living people. The thirst for our blood can only be compared to the lust for our possessions. Nothing was cheaper than the life of a Jew. Nothing was more attractive than a Jew's clothing.

If you are subjected to the stepwise process of de-humanization (isolation, hunger, physical and emotional torture), you are not thinking about engaging in a fight, but rather, how to depart this depraved world, in the fastest way possible.

Despite all this, despite all of the difficulties that we were not given to overcome, there were uprisings, and instances of heroism in the ghettos.

---

22

The gathering point.

For me, and for many others, there was no question of survival, but only the desire to die a death with dignity. Saving your life was not the issue, but rather, taking the life of a German with you.

The Holocaust was – a wellspring of earth-shaking, in a measure that was unnatural. It was a happening without precedent, and liberated the beast within Man, in all its cunning and cruelty. Evil ruled in everything! There was no pity, no compassion.

There is nothing that can be used to compare to what *Amalek* wreaked upon us.

## Testimony from the Present

After Yitzhak Szklar

Baranovich 1990<sup>23</sup>

Jewish Baranovich – up to the Second World War, a city that possessed a vibrant Jewish community, institutions of education and charity, synagogues, Yeshivas and Jewish schools – no longer exists.

Only an occasional family remains living there, from the native Jewish families of the city. Despite this, about 2,000 Jews live there, who reached there from various places in the Soviet Union, but there is not a trace of those Jews who established the Jewish community in the city.

Since to time of the Nazi German conquest, only mass graves remain, with no indication of what they are, and without grave stones. The memorial marker, over the mass grave of the 3,000 Jews who were the victims of the first *aktion*, that took place in March of 1942, has been taken down – a monument that was erected by Jewish partisans, beside the ‘Green Bridge’ after their liberation from the forests. The remains of the bodies and bones of the victims of the slaughter were taken off to some unknown location.

The memorial tablet and monument, placed over the mass grave of the 6,000 victims of the second *aktion*, of September 1942, has been taken down. In its place, a military camp has been erected. On the surface of the ground there, there is no trace of the killing pits, and the enormous mass graves.

The old Jewish cemetery of the city has been razed, and its grave stones plundered, in order to be used as building material, by the gentiles of the vicinity, and also to construct a road. The names written on these stones are still clearly legible to the naked eye. Over a mass grave – beside the old cemetery – the mass grave of the victims of the third *aktion* of December 1942 – has been paved over by a road. No trace remains of the generations of Jews that were buried in that place, up to The Second World War.

To commemorate the Holocaust, only a single memorial stands on its hillock in the heart of the city, beside the ‘Green Bridge’ on the Stolpce-Minsk Road. There, 3,000 Jews from Czechoslovakia were murdered, who were brought there by the Germans, and shot.

The monument was erected by the government of the Soviet Union in the year 1969. At the unveiling

---

<sup>23</sup>

Editor’s Footnote: Excerpt by Nechama Zukerman

ceremony, representatives of the government of Czechoslovakia participated. On it, there is no mention of 'Jews,' but rather 'Citizens of Czechoslovakia' that were murdered by the Nazis.

In the design of the monument, there is a bell, that rings with each breeze that wafts through it, and sends out reverberations, of its sorrowful tolling, to the distances.

Baranovich, that city and 'Mother in Israel,' was swallowed up in the Holocaust than descended on the Jewish people, in the murder of a nation, implemented by the Germans and their accomplices, in the years 1941 - 1945, during the period of The Second World war.

And the world saw this, and remained silent.

*Page 238 (Top): A Memorial placed to a group of Czech Jews, who were brought to Baranovich in 1942, and murdered close to the 'Green Bridge,' on the Stolpce-Minsk Road.*

*(Bottom): A close-up of part of the [Czech] Memorial*

*Page 239 (Top): The old Jewish cemetery in Baranovich, before The Second World War.*

*(Bottom): Location of a mass grave of part of the victims of the Third Aktion, beside the old Jewish cemetery, which was razed during, or after, The Second World War.*

Photographed by Yitzhak Szklar

*Page 240: At Yad VaShem, in the 'Valley of the Destroyed Communities,' monuments were erected to memorialize the communities exterminated in the Holocaust, among them being Baranovich, and the surrounding cities.*

## A Baranovich Memorial

The following illustrations are of a Baranovich Memorial created by various members of the Zukerman family, as part of their commitment to preserve the memory of their community that once was, but is no more.

The construction of the monument was supervised by Matityahu Zukerman (husband of Nechama) and his son, Gad. The actual design pages of the memorial were designed by Benjamin Barak Zukerman, an architect, who is the son of Haim Zukerman, a nephew to Gad, and a grandson of Matityahu.



The epitaph on the gravestone bears the following legend, in both Hebrew and Russian:

**Here Lies Buried  
The Skeletal Remains  
Of 12000  
Baranovich Jews Gathered  
Into the Killing Fields  
Who Were Murdered at the Hands of  
The Germans and Their Accomplices  
And Exterminated in the Holocaust  
In the Year 5703 1942**

