

A black and white illustration of a quill pen in an inkwell, with a scroll of paper unrolled behind it. The quill is positioned vertically on the left side of the page, with its tip resting in the inkwell. The scroll is partially unrolled, showing its texture and folds. The inkwell is a simple, dark, rounded shape.

**Volkovysk**  
**וואַלקאוויסק**  
**The Trilogy**

**Part II**

**זזרבין וואַלקאוויסק**  
**The Destruction of Volkovysk**

**Published by**  
**The Committee of Émigrés of Volkovysk**  
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## **Sons of Volkovysk!**

Fate has burdened us with the difficult and bitter mission, to set before you the awesome and earthshaking story about the loss of Volkovysk, the city of our birth, and of the extermination of its Jewish residents, our brothers and sisters – yours, parents, acquaintances and good friends, at the hands of the despised Nazis, whose like had until now never been seen in the world.

It has fallen upon us, to tell you, and the generations to come, what took place to the residents of Volkovysk in the way of the final awesome tribulations that they endured, the sons of our city that now no longer exists as a Jewish city, as it did from olden times onward.

We present this depressing folio of blood to you, in order to discharge our historical obligation: ***“Remember What Amalek Has Done To You!”***<sup>1</sup>

Our entreaty is, that this sad historical record be found in the home of every descendant of Volkovysk in the entire world, regardless of location, and that it be handed down as a legacy from generation to generation.

Adherence to this behest need not be only for the purpose of remembrance, but also in order to know how to react and relate to the murderers, their children and children’s children: ***“A War With Amalek from Generation to Generation.”***

And there is yet one further objective before us: This folio will serve as a memorial for the thousands of our brothers and sisters, from Volkovysk and its environs, that were exterminated in tragic, earthshattering ways, in Volkovysk, in Treblinka, and in Auschwitz, in the crematoria of the gas-chambers – and not brought to a proper Jewish burial, and of whom no trace remains...

Their anniversary day falls during the Hanukkah festival! Let every Jew throughout the world, whose origins are from Volkovysk, together with the Hanukkah candles – which themselves are a symbol of our national struggle and national survival – light a *Candle of the Spirit* in memory of the Jews of Volkovysk that were exterminated, and just like our early elders, who for centuries told our children of our heroic and the glorious history, so shall the *Candle of Spirit* convey to future generations, this great tragedy of our Days of Blood, ***“Woe, What Has Befallen Us!”***

The material in the first part of the folio, was written by people who themselves underwent all these terrifying events, and were saved only by a miracle, and came to the Land of Israel in order to start their lives anew.

Part of the material was transcribed by us on the basis of conversations we had with eye witnesses.

*Tel-Aviv, 1946*

*Organizing Committee  
Emigrants from Volkovysk in Eretz-Israel*

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<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 25:17

# The Destruction of Volkovysk

by Zvi Herschel Roitman

From my childhood on, I lived my entire life in Warsaw. I was raised there, educated there, worked there, and together with this, took an active role in the political and organizational life of the labor movement, *Poalei Tzion*. The war in 1939, put an end to this orderly way of life; it brought us a period of cruel and terrifying events of a nature that is beyond the capacity of the human imagination to conceive of them. I went through the siege of Warsaw; the city was bombed day and night, and had artillery shells rained down on it. Yet, the morale of its citizenry did not fall, and they conducted themselves with honor and heroism. Even the masses of the Jews of Warsaw stood in the front lines and in the first columns. After the capture of Warsaw by German divisions, I became convinced that I cannot continue to pursue my life under the regime of the Nazi murderers.

I left Warsaw on December 21, 1941 with my friends. At night, we forded the Russo-German border across the Bug River, not far from the town of Smiatycz. After blundering around for the night, we fell into the hands of the Soviet border guards in the morning. After a short interrogation and search, regarding the reason that we crossed the Russian border, and our purpose, they set us free. From Smiatycz we walked to Bialystock, where we enlisted to be sent to distant Russian for work. However, we couldn't wait for our turn, because of the extensive anger of the people, and we decided, for lack of alternatives and the poor conditions, to go to a smaller town where we hoped to find an easier arrangement.

We rode to Volkovysk, I and two of my friends: Epstein and Fantofelmacher.

From that hour on, my life and fate became inextricably bound up in the fate of the Jews of Volkovysk. One of my friends and I found lodging at Number 12 *Tatarski Gasse* on the hill, with the Gardener, Leibl Draznin, and his wife, Rivka Bernstein, at which location also lived Rivka's parents, Sarah Baylah and Reb Naphtali. They were originally from Amstibova. They were marvelous people, with dear souls of great substance. I got used to them very quickly, and their residence turned into my new home. Their children, and they themselves, soothed the yearnings I had for my own home, and for the dear kin that I held most dear. Rivka, was dark-eyed and a pretty woman, full of life and hope for a bright future, a symbol of everything good and charitable, possessing all desirable qualities. And Sarah Baylah, the typical Jewish mother, dedicated, with everyone's concerns on her, a *Balabusta* of unending energy, who worked from daybreak until evening, the entire time for the welfare of her grandchildren and children.

I obtained work as an electrician in the slaughterhouse, and from that point onwards, my life continued on an even keel, and peacefully in relation to the circumstances about me. Generally speaking, the Jews did not live badly, and the Jewish community of Volkovysk got used to the new conditions imposed by the Soviets. Collective work units were created, cooperatives and collectives. Every Jew found a means of sustenance under the new circumstances.

From a cultural point of view, we felt ourselves better off, more secure and established; there was no fear to appear [in public] as a Jew. We didn't have the fear of Polish anti-Semitism hovering over us. However, fate would not have it this way, because the martyrs sacrificed in the lands captured thus far, were insufficient. The murderers and harborers of [malevolent] designs thirsted for new rivers and cascades of Jewish blood.

The Russo-German war broke out. Volkovysk, by virtue of being close to the border was one of the first to

suffer from the war. Literally, on the first day of the war, German planes fell upon Volkovysk, and set the entire center of the city on fire, beginning from the small bridge to Zamoscheh, from one side, all the way to Karczyczna on the other side. The entire city was engulfed in flames. The Jewish homes burned for days and nights. The nights were lit up from the flames. The days were dark from the pillars of black smoke from the effort and energies of the Jews being burned up. People totally exhausted and out of energy from too many sleepless nights, ran around as if insane, with their children in their arms, from one street to the next, in order to escape from the tongues of fire and the asphyxiating smoke. The market square stores burn, the *Schulhof*, the entire *Wide Boulevard* is surrounded by fire. Botvinsky's house send tongues of flame shooting skyward. The fire reaches the edge of the *Grodzhensky Gasse*, part of *Tatarski*, *Kosciuszko Gasse*, – fire coming from every quarter, and there is no place to hide from it; the tongues of flame spread with lightning speed from house to house, entire streets are immersed in flame, as if they were burning torches. However, it appears that the Nazi sadists are not satisfied with this, because in addition to this, the German planes are dropping bombs on every house, on every wrecked structure. It appears that they had decided to wipe out everything, and not leave any stone standing on another stone. People hide out in the cellars of the burned houses, in the potato storage pits. However, even there, the murdering hand reaches them. They drop bombs on the wrecked homes, and people are buried alive.

The bombing began on the first day. First to be destroyed was Rosh, where they had been working for a week, day and night without stop, on constructing an air field, the bombing did not stop. On Friday, the cruelty reached its zenith. Near Shifmanovich's house, scarred by fire, a bomb hit the cellar underneath the burned house, and over thirty people were covered in earth and dust – men, women and children. This image is etched into my memory to this day. A shuddering picture. It will never leave me, forever. I am hiding in the cellar of a wrecked house, not far from Weiner's house. I hear the droning of an airplane flying very low, seeking targets for its bombs. There is a deathly silence for a moment, the house shakes, I wait with bated breath to see if the impact will reach me. Moments like this took place by the hundreds, every day. Suddenly, there is the noise of the drone of many airplanes – tremendous explosions. Everything is shaking, and once again, it is quiet; one continues to hear the sound of airplanes flying about. I peek outside, and I see a gigantic pit not far from me, created by the bomb that fell nearby, and a cellar that was near this pit, in which people were hidden, was completely covered in earth. The distressed sound of wailing can be heard – Jewish people, save us! Without paying any attention to the deadly danger from the low-flying airplanes overhead, Jews run, boys, the elderly, from their various hideouts, and with shovels and metal crowbars, digging even with their hands, literally cleaning off the dirt with their fingers, and dig out the covered people. Hands, feet, bodies on top of bodies, mothers with children in their arms – all these pressed together and mixed in with the earth. The wailing of the partially buried, begging for help, to be saved from the earth. And those completely covered in earth, partially suffocated, whose cries we are not certain we hear. The feeling of committing one's own life a feeling of kinship, was mixed into the will to survive. The danger is great, the pilots are shooting from the airplanes with machine guns. Despite this, people do not leave their places. Old people with hoary beards dig in the ground and pull out body after body. Were we able to conceive that a time so bad would come, that we would envy those who had the good fortune to be killed in those first days of the war? That those whom we did save, would curse the day of their salvation. And indeed, such an hour did arrive.

The first German patrols entered Volkovysk on Saturday. Everyone of the remaining Jews waited with their relatives in their hiding places, and waited with a fluttering heart of the unfolding of the events. Without victims and plunder, the remaining material assets were not enough. But we were accustomed to victims already; whoever died, was dead. However, whoever remained alive wanted to go on living. Those who were hidden began to confront the depressing results. The lives of the Jews centered on the *Neuer Gasse*; it was

the only street that was spared.

Because of the shortage of dwelling space, the crowding was great, several families to a house. A *Judenrat* was established headed by Dr. Weinberg and Noah Fuchs. A [new] chapter of arrests began, in which it was sufficient for a Pole to inform the police that a Polish Jew was a communist under the Russians, in order to cause him to be arrested, and shot on the morrow. And “good friends” among the Poles were never in short supply at any time – but at this point, a whole stream of prevarications and arrests commenced. On each and every day, buses loaded with Jews accused of transgressions were taken out of the city and to the forest, and there killed besides pits that had been dug in advance, and afterwards, they were buried at the hands of other Jews.

One of my very good friends, who worked with me at the slaughterhouse, was sent out in one of these groups. This was Markus. He was shot immediately in the first days. Despite all of this, people had the will to live. But the belly demands its needs; if so, this need creates a requirement for new sources of sustenance.

Living conditions became harsh, the decrees promulgated against the Jews deprived us of all privileges. Signs were introduced for Jews – the yellow badge. It was forbidden to walk on the sidewalks. Carrying on commerce was off limits. It was forbidden to own land or domestic animals. In one stroke – all forms of making a living were cut off. Despite this, we all lived; there were people who sold off a garment, and from the pennies that they managed to save during the holidays, from work, or black marketing, and there were those who died of hunger. However, despite all of this, they lived, some badly, and some very badly, but they lived; with fear and trepidation for tomorrow, always with an assured sense of hope for a better future. I immediately began to work at the same place I had worked under the Russians, at the slaughterhouse for export. In the initial period, I was the only Jew working for the Germans. They held on to me because they had great need of me. I worked as an electrician at the side of the machines, and there was no one else to take my place. I excelled at my work, and very quickly, I gained the trust of the Germans that ran the slaughterhouse. The Germans did not install a ghetto in Volkovysk; and not because the Jews of Volkovysk were better than others. The destruction of Volkovysk was so great, that there literally was no place left where a ghetto could be built. In order to put up a ghetto, it would have been necessary to drive out the Poles from a part of the property that remained intact in the city; Zamoscheh, Wola or Karczyzna – and they did not want to do this. These circumstances made it easier for the Jews to find a way to make a living.

However, circumstances got worse from day to day in any event. The levies and taxes imposed on the Jews by the Germans from one side, and the forced hard labor without pay, sucked the vigor and blood from the handful of Jews that survived. Poverty and want grew daily. On top of all this, our lives were made miserable by the auxiliary Polish police, who enforced the German decrees, and even those not promulgated by the Germans, with avenging detail. Every day, searches of Jewish homes were conducted, and they confiscated all items, whether they had any value or not.

In the summer of 1942, when the situation was so serious that the vicinity was plagued with outbursts of pogroms and mass slaughtering, and tides of Jewish blood were being spilled in Slonim, Baranovich, Lida, and many other places – there was relative quiet in Volkovysk. Despite this, a part of the young people perceived understood the seriousness of the situation, and they took stock of the imminent danger that was preparing to arrive. They decided to manifest a strong resistance through attack. We worked in secret, we organized and carried out an explanation of our intent. We managed to generate contact with a larger group of Russian partisans, that was located in the Zamkova Forest. The first ones to establish contact with the partisans were Sarah Rubin and her brother-in-law; they were active during this entire period. Once, Sarah’s

brother-in-law turned to me (this was before we started to work together), and asked me if I would go into the forest to repair a radio there that belonged to a group of partisans. I received this mandate with happiness; and my dream was realized, my desire to participate in a practical way with real partisans. During one of the days at the beginning of the week, I went into the forest, taking along tools suitable to repair the radio. It is superfluous to add that this step was fraught with danger, There was a standing order that any Jew found outside of the city was to be shot. As to entry into the forest, that goes without saying. There, it was forbidden even for non-Jews to enter. Anyone found in the forest or in its vicinity was taken for a partisan and shot on the spot. However, we reached the designated point without incident. A sentry from the partisans waited for us in the forest. I saw before me a sympathetic young Russian boy with a light machine gun in his hand. We identified ourselves, and afterwards we were taken into the depths of the forest to his group. After an hour of walked through byways and various paths, and contact with a variety of sentry posts, we reached a camouflaged location among trees that were low and close together. A number of tents stood on a small square . A campfire burned in the middle of the square, and a cheerful group of Russian men and women soldiers were carrying on a lively conversation. I saw that I was in a different world. The situation that unfolded before my eyes exceeded all my expectations, all the ideas that I ever had about the partisans. The sense of security, the vigor, the tranquility of spirit, all affected me, and inspired me. I presented myself to the commander, a tall pleasant looking fellow from Georgia,<sup>2</sup> who had the rank of Lieutenant. He was called Grisha. They showed me the place where the radio was, and asked me to repair it, because it had been several days without any news from Moscow, and because of this, they were cut off from the outside world. In a matter of several hours, I returned the radio to its normal state, and it began to function again. As can be understood, the joy was very great. They were very satisfied with the work that was done. This was a great day, and I had sufficient time to engage in conversation, and become familiar with their work. All of them were soldiers of the Red Army that had retreated. There were even a number of Jews among them. They were engaged in a great endeavor. Despite the extent of the work, this was a small group. They subjected the entire vicinity to their program of sabotage. A day did not go by without some incident; here they would tear up railroad tracks, there they would blow up a bridge, they attacked German airplanes and set fire to grain storage facilities. Each time it was something different, and always to the surprise of the Germans. The Germans had the impression that the area contained an entire army, a large force. It reached me, that the Germans at night, had to mount a watch of peasant farmers with staves along the entire length of the rail line, but even this was to no avail. In the mornings, they would find piles of peasant farmers from their district – stuck together like stamps to the ripped up rail lines. The role of young people from Volkovysk was far from minimal in these actions. They provided all the necessary materiel, starting with medicines, and ending with the tools for destruction. One of the most dedicated of the workers in connection with this important work, was the Smith, Bom Zuckerman, Lemkin's son, and others. The freedom, the sense of assurance, and the concept behind this so inspired me, that I was prepared to stay behind with them, and not to return to the city any longer. But here, it was not a case of personal preference; the need forced the issue. They decided that it was incumbent upon me to continue working with the existing group that already existed in the city, whose primary mission was to organize young Jewish men, and in a measured process, transfer them out to the forest. Apart from this: to organize all the young people in the city, in the event of a German action against the Jews, and to be able to mount a defensive attack. We also engages in provisioning the forest with all manner of necessities that they required to facilitate their work. Towards evening they escorted me out of the forest, and we returned to the city. The forest was the province of the partisans. In the forest, they felt safe, and no German had the nerve to even set foot in the forest.

Thanks to my work in the export slaughterhouse, I had the opportunity to procure many different things that

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<sup>2</sup> That is *Russian Georgia*, or Gruzinia.

were needed by the partisans. I was able to obtain the trust of the manager – his name was Talkes; He was, incidentally, the head of the Nazi division in Volkovysk. In the meat factory, I worked as an overseer of the machines and the electrical equipment. All the tools and keys and technical equipment were under my supervision. Because of this alone, I frequently traveled with the permission of the chief, to the storage warehouse (this was a warehouse where good and damaged equipment was kept, that was found in the vicinity after the Russian retreat). I would travel there to take various items that were necessary for the factory. It is understood, that my concern was to assure that there would always be a lack of various items. At every opportunity, I would take things that would be useful to the group. Various radio parts, tools, pliers, weapons parts, electrical parts, capacitors, oil, Vaseline and many other necessities. I would bring these things with me to the factory, and afterwards, send them onward, putting them in Sarah Rubin's hands, and she would get them to the right place. Several times, on Sunday, the day of rest, I would myself go into the forest. Largely, this was because I had been designated to communicate a specific mission. I became very friendly with the group. I felt wonderful and safe in the forest. They lived well, at the outset they had plenty of food. The work of the group was divided into two parts – one part dealt with carrying out the work of the partisans in the area of sabotage. The second part, a much smaller one, dealt with obtaining food. They would go at night to the peasants and force them to turn over foodstuffs.

Cooperative endeavor between the youth of Volkovysk and the partisans went on for a long time; many of the young people went into the partisan ranks in the forest. The group grew in recognizable measure. In that same time, conditions in the city grew steadily worse. The fire of Jewish slaughter blazed in the entire vicinity, with mass killings as a daily occurrence. Yet in Volkovysk at that time, there was relative quiet. Occasional survivors, who managed to escape the clutches of the murderers found, for the moment, a refuge and place to rest in Volkovysk. However, we all knew that the evil would not pass us by, that our turn would also come, and the tragic moment arrived. However, *to our great sadness*, not in the manner we had anticipated; there was not a mass slaughter. A punitive expedition of Ukrainians and Germans did not come to Volkovysk to carry out this work, as they had done in other towns like Dereczin, Zelva, and Slonim, and I emphasize *to our great sadness*, because in such an instance, we would have mounted a respectable resistance, and it is possible that a part of us could have been saved. However, the Evil began in an entirely different place. The process began in the ninth month [September] of 1942, a week before Rosh Hashana, with the arrest of all the Jewish doctors and dentists. That same night Sarah Rubin came and told me that I was being summoned, and I understood the meaning of these said words, and I immediately went. A Russian girl was waiting for me, and she told me to go along with her, because she is an emissary of the commander. I went without reservation. Any refusal was out of the question, because I was committed to the partisan cause, and where a mission was involved, its fulfillment took priority, and the punishment was death. The truth of the matter was, that the situation was not conducive to thinking things out, because on the following day, I was required to be at work, and that would no longer be possible, and not to show up for work to the Germans was called 'sabotage,' engendering a suspicion that something 'not kosher' was going on, and this also was tied to a death sentence. But a mission is a mission, and not only that – the commitment to the issue, and the desire not to fear going to battle, for revenge that transcends commitment, directed me to do this thing. When we left the city it was dark – the safest time; At night, the Germans were afraid to walk the Piesk Road because of the Zamkova Forest. The roadway was not familiar to me. She was the leader along the way, and I followed in her steps. We proceeded rapidly for a few hours, by different byways and paths, and on the way, many thoughts ran through my mind. In no way could I divine why I was being called for in so sudden a manner. My feelings were varied. Perhaps they want me to remain permanently with them in the forest – that would be good, except for the unpleasantness of being separated from my relatives. And maybe it has some connection to the arrest of the doctors. Or perhaps, they have lost their trust in me, in which case this is my last journey, because in this instance, the partisans don't fool around, and they don't

engage in extensive investigations. Thoughts by the hundreds consumed me, and with a fluttering heart I awaited the resolution of the matter. In the meantime, the road receded behind us, and we sank into the thick depths of the forest. We encountered a number of partisan sentries, armed from head to foot, and my guide exchanged various passwords with them. At about midnight, we reached the camp. Everyone except for the watch were already asleep. They showed me to a place where I could lie down. Only on the morrow would I be able to talk to the commander regarding the matter that I had been sent for. In the morning, after question about what was going on in the city, and other things, he told me that the radio had malfunctioned, and that I would have to fix it rapidly. The commander told me, that because of the large size of the group, and apart from this, because of the oncoming winter, the position of the group in a small forest in relation to bare trees, was not secure enough, and it is incumbent upon them to move to larger forests, with the intent of going to Bielovez. He told me to get ready, to provision myself with a variety of necessities, and with tools, and in the following week I was responsible to come on the day of the planned move.

I worked there until afternoon, and fixed the radio, and the day and location of the meeting was set for the coming week, at approximately one o'clock, one of them escorted me out of the forest, and from there I walked into the city. I did not know the way very well, because I had come out of the other side of the forest, not far from Rosh. The way was longer than anticipated, and I skipped over the roads, choosing to walk through fields, in order to avoid passing people and buses. When I arrived at the city itself, from the side of the slaughterhouse, very near to Volya, it was already five o'clock. Even before I entered my house, as I was walking along the *Grodno Gasse*, facing *Tatarski [Gasse]*, I met Fish'keh, a butcher who worked with me. He ran to me greatly upset; Roitman, where have you been? The Chief of Police is looking for you. A cold sweat covered me, and I thought, who knows where evil lurks for me. I told him that I had worked the entire day at Steinberg the Electrician, in connection with repairing a motor in the factory. Having calmed down, he then told me that today, in the afternoon, the Chief of Police was with the manager Taller, and asked that I be called. This was all that he related to me, and I didn't know what to do – or more correctly, I knew what to do – to return to the forest and the group; but [the question was] where were they now, and how to meet up with them? I always went with an escort of other people, who showed me the way, and I did not know the way myself; apart from this, with my disappearance in such a sudden manner, I endanger the members of my household; Draznin and the members of his family are likely to answer with their heads on account of me. And another thing, it was not clear to me that the summons by the Chief of Police had anything to do with what was worrying me. Amidst this plethora of thoughts, I decided to go home, and to see what was being discussed there. When I entered the house, they all surrounded me with one question: Herschel, where have you been? The Chief of Police was here looking for you. I apprehended that the matter was serious, because it was not usual for the Chief of Police (A German Officer, SD) to personally come for a matter of an arrest, but rather to send members of the auxiliary police. It became known to me, that in addition to arresting the doctors, they had yesterday also arrested electricians and several radio technicians, among them: Herschel Galiatsky, Polya, and others. The matter was totally incomprehensible to me. If they were looking for me, and it is possible that something became known to them, perhaps they were investigating me, perhaps I had been informed on, I didn't know what to think. There was no opportunity to think, because when he was in the house, the Chief of Police said that I had until 9:00PM to appear at the police station, and if not — there isn't more to say... the atmosphere in the house was like that of Yom Kippur, Sarah, Baylah and Rivka cried, and were already mourning me, because an imprisoned Jew was 99% certain to be lost. I was already calm, and I decided what was incumbent upon me to do. It was 7:00PM, and I still had two hours time. I hurriedly went to Rubin's brother-in-law to take counsel with him, however to my chagrin, I found not a person, I then went to Bom Zuckerman, and could not find him at home as well. And since I was not able to find anyone, I decided to go to the factory and talk to the machinist and see if I could extract anything from him in connection with the reason I was being sought, and in the event of a danger, I didn't want to return to the city

not knowing where they were. And that's what I did, and I approached the factory, and the machinist anticipated me, by asking where I had been all day? I gave him the same evasive answer, that I had repaired a motor in the city on behalf of the factory (a burned out motor indeed was at that time with Steinberg). The machinist told me the same thing that Fish'keh did, adding that the secretary to the plant manager was there and she had called for me. But he told her to tell the manager that just now, I had gone to the city to obtain an available machine part. We agreed among ourselves, that in the event that one of us should be absent, the second party would seek an alibi, and indicate that the sought party was away taking care of something, but the rest of his replies were not helpful. As it happens, the replies of the machinist actually proved to be more useful than ever. I decided to go in to see the manager and to advise him of what had transpired, and he liked me and had trust in me. His good attitude towards me, despite the fact that I was a Jew, came from the fact that I was very much in demand to do the work I did, and secondly, he had no one else to take my place. I came to him as if nothing had happened and I said, that the Chief of Police had been looking for me at home, and asked me to come at 9:00PM, with this, I gave the impression that I had been at work all along. He soothed me, and told me that I am very diligent in my work, and there is nothing to fear, that at the police station they will ask me something, and then let me go immediately, and in fact, I calmed down a little, but not because of the word of the manager, because I never believed the words of the Germans. I took comfort from the fact that I was convinced that he believed that his opinion was that I had been at work that day, just like on other days, and that I was not missing from work. In the meantime, nine o'clock had arrived, and it was almost that I had barely left the manager's office, when I see two Polish auxiliary policemen from Volkovysk coming at me, Chmienecki and Mihalczek, saying that they had a warrant to arrest me; they had already been to my house, and they were told that I was at the factory. There was nothing to do; all my plans went up in the void; under the barrels of two guns, it is hard to run away. I had a visceral feeling of regret that I hadn't done so previously, but in spite of this, I felt that maybe it was better this way, because were I to flee, I might save myself, but the people with whom I lived were condemned to be killed on my behalf. It was with thoughts of this kind that I was brought to the police station. There, I met up with four men who had already been arrested, two strangers whom I did not recognize, and: Galiatsky and Polya. According to the reception we got, I caught on immediately that this was not a simple interrogation, as the manager had indicated, but rather something quite serious. One of the three SS men, who were well-known in Volkovysk, the three Angels of Death, in whose hands lay the life and death of the Volkovysk Jews, said to Galiatsky: "Where have you been dog, with the 'bandits?'" (that what the Germans called the partisans). They asked me, why had I come so late? Where was I, I relied on my manager, and I said that I was busy at work, and they ordered me to go outside, and at a designated place where they got into the ordinary taxi of the three SS men, two got in and one drove. The second one, with pistol in hand, didn't take his eyes off me for a minute. We recognized the taxi only too well, it was the taxi with which they would take all the accused Jews of the city, to be taken out and shot with machine guns outside of the city in the nearby forest. They drove with us as well, away from the city. It is easy to understand how we felt. After a short hour of riding in the dark, he turned the car and entered a gate. We did not know in advance where they were taking us, but when the car stopped and they ordered us to get out, and they took us into an underground bunker (a cellar), we saw that we were in the Barracks extermination camp. This was the famous camp that the Germans put up in 1941 using Russian prisoners of war. There, there were tens of bunkers dug deep into the ground, covered only with a roof. At the outset, in 1941, the bunkers held about thirty thousand Russian prisoners of war. After a number of months, a number died off, almost all from starvation, filth and disease. The Russian dead were buried in mass graves, several thousand to a pit, not far from the Barracks near the stream to Kuvia, on the way from the Barracks to the export slaughterhouse. There, beside the Russian war prisoners, all our own near and dear ones found their eternal resting place later, who were fortunate enough to be killed before leaving Volkovysk. In that dark, damp bunker, we introduced ourselves to our new neighbors., these largely being Russians that the Gestapo had captured in various locations, and accused them of providing assistance

to the partisans. What became clear to us, is that we were also being accused of this in the same manner. It appears that it already was quite late at night. A deathly silence pervaded, all of us were packed together, and we shivered from the cold. Each one of us was sunken in his own thoughts. All of us knew what awaited us, we understood clearly and all arrivals do not return.

The one in the worst condition was me; what I want to say in this way that my ethical position was the worst. From the conversation that was carried on regarding the reason for our arrest, that each of us heard, it became clear to me that we were being [collectively] accused for the repairs that I had made to the radio of the partisans. It is self-understood, that not one of us had so clear position in this as myself. I understood that the intention was directed at me. I was especially concerned about Galiatsky, the oldest Jew among us, a sympathy and concern that didn't stop from our tongues: what do they want from me? I don't have a clue as to what this is all about, Polya would review the facts: if I were at least separated from them, it wouldn't have bothered me so much. I also had to feign ignorance, and was forced to give this impression in order not to arouse any suspicion. I say this with full honesty: I lied in front of my comrades. I lied, not because of any fear, not from any egoistic impulses, and also not because of any fear of death. It was clear to me, that should I confess, it is possible that the other three radio technicians might be set free, but along with this, I would provide credibility for another thing, *that the Jews of Volkovysk were providing assistance to the partisans*, and it was this that the SS worked mightily to prove with singular focus. This conclusion had the implications of causing extremely serious consequences for all the Jews of Volkovysk. For this reason, I held my own counsel, and concluded it was best to admit nothing. I was resolute in my conviction, that even under the heaviest assault, the most extreme torture, not to say anything. On the following morning at daybreak, we saw through the single tiny window that was above the door to the bunker, that was flat with the ground, that the doctors were coming out of the bunker opposite us. They took them under guard to a source of water to wash themselves. To our good fortune, the water source was close to our bunker, and it was in this fashion that we were able to exchange a few words through the iron bars on the tiny window. Dr. Weinberg told us in a few words that they were accused of providing medical help to the partisans. He related that a number of them had already been interrogated. On our part, we related that according to the charge we are being accused of repairing the partisan radio. In general the doctors presented themselves as not having fallen in their spirits. They looked tired, and without adequate sleep. However, in general, they appeared to hold themselves well. Especially Weinberg, who stood looking fresh and energetic. At that time we saw Dr. Weinberg, [Dr.]Velvelsky, Dr. Cantor, Dr. Tropp, Dr. Press, Dr. Sedletsky, and others. Afterwards, when the men had finished washing, they brought out the women. Among many Russian women, and also Jewish ones from the vicinity, we saw Rosa Einhorn and Piesikova.

That's how it started. The days seemed long and endless in the dark, perpetually damp and stifling bunkers, and with ceaseless retrieval that they came to take us, to be questioned and interrogated, and maybe to death. The routine tired us out quickly; at the beginning we would tell one another different things, everyone expressing his latest hopes. Later on, we became tired of this as well, and everyone sat silently, each sunk deeply in his own thoughts. The nights were much worse. We sat or slept on worn wooden bunks, we huddled together from the cold, with heart aching and stomach grinding from hunger. And this is the way we waited in a condition of limbo, with an uncertain tomorrow. We waited a few days, and no person asked about us. No person called to us. The Gestapo was in no hurry. They were sure of us, and we were in their hands. In the intermittent times, we did meet with the doctors. With the proceeding of the interrogation, their spirits fell. They were interrogated each and every day, and during the interrogation they were even beaten. They wanted to force them to confess in this way. The SS had certain evidence that one of the doctors helped the partisans and healed a wounded partisan, but they didn't know which one. The interrogation was stuck on this one unmovable point. Each one of the doctors argued that it was not his fault, that he has no

relationship whatsoever with the partisans. The situation was without hope. Weinberg let the city know, and asked of the *Judenrat* to make an effort from the outside, but he lacked resources. The only Jew who had any access to the three men of the Gestapo, whose hand was spread over the city, was Weinberg himself. , to whom they showed some measure of decency, perhaps not because of his own worth, but rather because of the sums of money he brought to them, the various taxes, the pennies from the last sweat of the local Jewish population, in order to at least postpone the enactment of one decree or another. He, the liaison, himself sat in the seat of the accused of an accessory in assisting the partisans. All stood on their morale, that is to say, from an ethical point of view. Because from a physical standpoint, they were already broken by a week of imprisonment. The appearance of their faces was bad. Age had jumped on them, because of a lack of sleep and lack of food. On the fourth day of our imprisonment, they began to interrogate us: the first one they took was Galiatsky, after several hours of being pressured with a variety of questions, and tortured, he returned to the bunker broken and spent. All of us jumped on him to find out what the question were that he was asked. It became clear that one of us had been accused of repairing the radio of the partisans. One of the important proofs in the interrogation lay in demonstrating that we were occupied for every day, working for the Germans, and by such, that there was no possibility of us being in the forest. Galiatsky proved truthfully and with reports that he had not lost even one single day of work. A less pressured situation was created for me, since I was called third. According to the fact that they had called Galiatsky and Polya ahead of me, I arranged my answers in my memory in order to support my 'alibi.' When I was called, I was received by two SS men. After recording my biographical information, up to the day of arrest, one of them said to me: were you not in the forest to repair a radio for the partisans? I felt my heart leap, but I quickly got control of myself, and I quietly answered with wonder in my voice: I know nothing about the partisans, on that day, as on all other days, I was at my place of work, and my manager, Mr. Taller can vouch for me. They showed me implements, pliers, keys, which I recognized quite well, they showed me a piece of antenna wire that I had put in place for the group in the forest. In all of the answers I gave, I was consistent, that I knew nothing of this matter. They threatened me, yelled at me, spoke gently and then badly to me, but always, I gave them the same answer. They pressured me for more than two hours, and in the end, indicated that they wished to terminate the protocol, because everything had been recorded in a typewriter. After a few days, we got a good report that they were letting Rosa Einhorn and Piesikova go free. This was the first instance of good fortune, that people, especially Jews, left the camp alive, and our spirits improved, and the spirits of the doctors improved; they began to believe in an auspicious future where they would be set free. But in this connection, their circumstance was much worse because the practice of medicine is 'free' and their work was not tied to a specific place of work, and because of this, they were unable to prove that they were always tied to their work. By contrast to this, we were all able to demonstrate an unbroken presence at our place of work. Three of my comrades were able to prove this as a matter of the actual truth, and I was able to do so by relying on an agreement with my manager that he would vouch for me being at work on that day. Despite this, the matter did not stop to bore into my mind for even a minute, how do they know exactly how all of this had happened? Various thoughts coursed through my mind. I thought that maybe a spy was in the midst of the partisans, and he relays all of this? Or maybe, there is someone in the city who is really in the ranks of the Gestapo (there were such people in other towns) and tells about everything, but then the question arises: what is the purpose of such an interrogation? Should they not have arrested only me? Everything that I considered in regard to this issue seemed like a paradox to me. A moment of breakthrough occurred: they sent for me a second time, they interrogated me for a short time, and then told me that I was free to go, that I could return to my work. It is hard to describe the feeling of good fortune that welled up inside of me; I could not believe my ears, it was as if I were in a dream. That this was the real outcome, was proved to me only when I made my second pass through the camp, and I was on my way, near the barracks. I thought to myself about the iron of the fate: I am the guilty one, and here I am free, and those that don't have so much as a clue, are still detained. In another day, they released Galiatsky, and three days later, all of the electricians were set free.

It became clear that it was not our successful justifications that stood us in good stead, but rather the German managers for whom we worked, involved themselves in the matter, and indicated that our work was very critical for them. The elation in the city was substantial, and morale soared; the hope was created that the doctors too, would be released. A few more days went by, but not a single person appeared, the Gestapo brought a number of Jewish doctors from Bialystock for the city, in place of those who were arrested. This occurrence was a bad omen. With a fluttering heart, every one of us waited for the resumption of this issue and how it would play out, and the matter was not long in coming. On October 14, 1942, the Gestapo took a group of Jews for work on a special detail; it took them out to the Izavelin Forest, and forced them to dig a pit. When the pit was dug, they took them away to a distance of several hundred meters from it, a place from which they heard, after barely an hour, the sound of machine gun fire. When they were brought back to the pit, they saw what was covered with dirt, the writhing bodies of the most dear to us; they covered the grave...

There is no secret in the matter any longer, and there is also no reason for it to remain a secret, that Weinberg himself, the Head of the *Judenrat* gave the medical attention to the partisans. It is only a pity that there were so few like Weinberg! He understood that the only means left to us was to come to the aid of the partisans, and to make common cause with them, and if he did not confess under interrogation in order to save the other doctors from death – as it appears – it was not out of any fear, but because of the clear and correct thought, that in taking the blame on himself, he would be placing the entire Jewish community and Jewish people of Volkovysk in danger, For the sake of truth, this too, however, was of no avail, because in any event, all the Jews were exterminated after a short while.

The day on which the Jewish doctors died was a bitter and abrupt one for the Jewish populace of Volkovysk. With the sacrifice of the lives of the doctors, the end of the Volkovysk Jewry was initiated. The difficult condition became unbearable, the escalation of abuse rose to great heights, and the rights of the Jews and their entreaties amounted to nothing. The entire vicinity was roiled with the fires of Jewish massacres, and it was felt that our turn was drawing nigh. The contact with the partisans was broken off while I was still under detention. When I came out of arrest, I met a Jewish partisan whose origin was from Slonim. He had been with the partisans in the forest the entire time, and I recognized him from there; he related the following items to me, from which it became clear what the reason was for the arrest of the doctors and the electricians: seeing as the Germans could not find a way to take action against the partisans without knowing their exact location, they deployed Ukrainians in their ranks, and sent them into the forest, to pretend that they were Russian soldiers that had remained behind, who were seeking ways to affiliate with partisan groups, and after they found out the location of a group of this nature – they would communicate the details to the Germans. Such was the case with our group; Two Ukrainian spies entered the Zamovka Forest, and ran into a sentry guard of two partisans of our group; the Ukrainians acted friendly towards them, and said that they wanted to join the group, and on the strength of that, they toasted each other.... it is self-evident that the Ukrainians saw to it that the partisans got drunk, and that they didn't; And as the partisans got drunk, their tongues loosened up, and they began to talk about the exploits of their group. They told everything, including the episode about the Jewish medical assistance to the partisans, and the incident of the radio repair by a Jewish radio technician. As soon as this became known to the Ukrainians, they returned to the city, and told all of this to the Gestapo. And this was the day before the arrest of the doctors. At the time that we were in detention, under the direction of the Ukrainians, hundreds of SS troops and Polish auxiliary police surrounded that part of the forest where the partisans were, and with the help of tracking dogs, they found the location of the camp. To their good fortune, the partisans picked up the signs of the incursion very early, and opened up with machine gun fire, however the Germans had superior forces by a significant measure. The band of constriction grew tighter and tighter. They then made a daring move: they threw themselves with

all their might and shouts of ‘Hurrah!’ at one point of the chain, and broke through, creating an [escape] route for themselves. As can be understood, in a swift action like this, many things had to be abandoned, and it was from this that the many of the tools and implements came, that the SS showed us during interrogation. The one who told me this was present at that hour when it took place. During that time of retreat into the forest among the trees, the remnants of the group vanished entirely. He climbed up into a tree, and waited until the force of men participating in the encirclement to leave the forest at nightfall, and at night, came into the city. It appears that the partisans transferred themselves to the depths of the Forest of Bielovez, and this was how contact with the partisans was broken, and the Jewish youth began to feel itself even more alone and orphaned. Those that were killed, were killed, and for them there were no longer any questions. But those who survived, also wanted to live. And that is how the saying was created, that until his last breath, man does not cease to struggle for his existence.

The same was true with the our Jews in Volkovysk. The noose around the neck tightened further and further, and the calamity was unquestionably drawing nearer, and the noose was hung over our heads, it was just a case of not knowing exactly when it would happen. With no certainty about tomorrow, for that evening, or even the next hour, caused people to go about in a state of constant fear, they were afraid to sleep in the houses; when it barely had grown dark, they took all their belongings, crawled into a lean-to of wood, a potato storage pit, or a specially prepared hiding place. The Jews of Volkovysk especially had prepared hiding places. The most ingenious methods were employed in this regard; The art of constructing a hiding place or a bunker was done as a matter of preserving life. This was a battle objective of the Jews, and the core of their activity. For example, in our house, at Draznin’s on the hillock of the *Tatarski Gasse*, Leibl, Itchkeh and I, built an underground bunker, in which 10 people could fit. The pit was about a meter underground, in the form of an elongated tunnel. The height of the tunnel was a meter and a half, and two meters wide, and the walls and lookout posts were covered with boards, and leaned against the ends. There were two ways into the pit; one was an entrance from a room; in the middle of the floor, we had cut a trapdoor that was not detectable, and opened from the inside; on top of the trapdoor stood an armoire, and the cover to the bottom of the armoire was opened in such a way, that by entering the armoire, you could then descend into the bunker. The exit from the bunker was in the year, underneath the compost heap, and in this way it was possible to get out through the compost heap. This was just one of the ways in which bunkers were constructed.

As can be appreciated, these bunkers had to be built stealthily, and not only because of the Poles and the Germans, but also because of Jewish neighbors. The bunkers were provisioned with whatever we had, in case it was necessary to hold out for an extended period of time. And that’s how will lived for some time longer, and the time would not have seemed so long were it not for the troubles and abuses that continued without let up and without bounds. We were forced to work by day; Each day, the *Judenrat* received a list of workplaces, how many Jews were required, and where they were to report fro work, day in and day out. They performed all manner of hard labor, beginning with tearing down the walls of destroyed houses, and ending with digging trenches, and other types of military-related labor. The bricks of the destroyed houses were cleaned and smoothed; this work was reserved for the girls. The bricks were then sold by the Germans to the peasants. Trains of peasants by the tens, would stream into the city each day and take the remains of the Jewish houses out with them. A large group of Jews, numbering in the hundreds, went every day to work in Petroshovitsa, not far from central Volkovysk; the Germans had a rest and relaxation camp there for the soldiers who returned from the front.

The Germans paid no wages, to the contrary! We thanked God that they needed us to do work. This was the sole consolation and the sole hope, that as long as they had a need for us, they would not dispose of us. The

*Judenrat* was responsible for this matter, and was motivated to provide the correct number of people to the requirement. Opposite the Germans, the members of the *Judenrat* were viewed as the official representatives of the Jews, and after the death of Dr. Weinberg, it was headed by Noah Fuchs by himself. Botvinsky, Amstibovsky and Gallin worked with him. The Jewish police supposedly was there to serve the *Judenrat*, and the interests of the Jewish community of Volkovysk, but in reality, this was not the case. The reason for this, is that the Jewish police was staffed with people from the underworld; they took advantage of their power and the privileges accorded to them for personal advantages. I especially remember one, Khiller, שׁוֹחֵט , who deliberately cause Jews distress, who in his relationship and actions towards the Jews didn't put the Germans themselves to shame. There were many "Khillers" of this nature, who thought they could out-Pope the Pope, and at the expense of other people, they could save themselves.

After the Gestapo released me, I returned to work at the slaughterhouse and packing plant. In the meantime, several other Jewish workers were added, such as: Dud'zhka Botvinsky, who worked with me in the machinery unit, Katz, Fish'keh, Galai, and others. A total of eight of us were employed there. Relatively speaking, we were better off than other Jews elsewhere, because we would obtain provisions from the rejects, such as bones, feet, and like things. I felt well enough in this place; I looked upon the plant as my good fortune. I had worked in the same place for almost two years for the Russians. Consequently, I felt safer there than at home, and I frequently spent the night there, next to the steam stack, I would arrange a sleeping place for myself on a bench, and sleep the entire night; as understood, this was done without the manager knowing about it.

In the late fall of 1942, when the cold winds began to penetrate to the bone, and when endless rain would soak you to the flesh, and dark clouds would blacken the sky, as if it were an added abuse to the general suffering, the first phase of the calamity arrived. It was not an accident that the Germans picked this kind season for the time to implement their satanic plans. They were accomplished psychologists, and in every instance, they chose those times when the ambience was the worst, of hopelessness, fear and piles of snow, in order carry out their massacres and deportations, because at times like this, the morale of the masses of Jews was even worse than usual. On the one hand, there was the emotional suffering because the situation was without hope or rescue, because of the seemingly endless string of military victories of the Germans at that time, when with giant steps, the German divisions sped forward deep into Russia, and when the Ukraine and all of Byelorussia were enveloped in a brown shirt. At the gates of Moscow, Stalingrad and Leningrad, stood the partisan brigades, and when we saw that the world is being overrun, and we, beneath our wrecked houses, forgotten and rejected by the entire world, without protection, given over to disposal, without worth and having no assets in the face of this gigantic conflict, and when powerful unions, nations and lands fell; and the poverty, hunger, and cold, impaired the strength of spirit, and the will to live fell even further. It was at times like this, and under such circumstances, that the murderers carried out their program of extermination against the Jews without restraint. People were treated like cattle, and more than this, because an animal sensing danger will balk, and does not want to go to the slaughter, but people, even when they see the imminent danger, went into the arms of death, having given up, exhausted and tired. On November 2, 1942 a message was sent out that all the Jews of the city were required to assemble at noon near the barracks, in the camp previously used for the prisoners of war. Everyone was to take food for two days; and any Jew who was found outside the camp after the appointed time – will be shot! This was on a Monday. Even up to the day before, we knew nothing. The morale had actually improved, the Germans who had turned over their garments to Jewish tailors, were in a rush to retrieve the pieces of cut fabric that had not yet even been sewn, and partially sewn garments; Germans who had ordered shoes from Jewish shoemakers got them back incomplete; the reason behind this tumult was unknown. Being great optimists as usual, the Jews explained this in a favorable light; a rumor began to spread that the Germans were packing up their valises

and preparing to retreat to the rear, and it was because of this they were rushing to pick up their orders from the Jewish tradesmen. On Monday, when the announcement was spread about, I was at work already; it was my habit to get to work early, and so it was that by the time I was at work there was mourning and lamentation in the city already, not only I didn't know, but also others who worked with me, knew nothing. About an hour later, the manager entered the machinery area and said that I was required to go home, because today, a general search of the Jews was to take place; I and the rest of my comrades returned immediately to the city. Walking home, we observed that many Guards were about, and surrounding the city; we caught on that something was afoot, but we didn't know what it was. When we arrived in the city, the depressing truth became known to us; people with knapsacks on their shoulders, with children in their arms, or being led by the hand, streamed for the length and breadth of the streets and roads in the direction of Zamoscheh to the area beside the barracks. All the streets from Karczyczna to the barracks were filled with a living stream of humanity of wailing people. Women, old people, children, old and young with a slow step, stricken in spirit, and in a silence broken only by a wild outburst here and there by crying children, the stream slowly progressed further and further on, to the *Tatarski Gasse*, it passed the Gymnasium on the hillock, through the Wide Boulevard, through the Kolyuba to the barracks. And for the entire time, the stream moves as if it is one body, one feeling of being stricken, frightened and resigned. Fear of the uncertain tomorrow, what might happen, and no person could know what is imminent. The orders of the Germans were replete with deception and cleverness; the assault, the attack, always came from an unanticipated direction, and always without any apparent purpose. They said that the Jews were being assembled at the barracks in order to conduct intensive searches in the homes at that time; they also said that the Jews would live in the barracks, and a ghetto would be established there, and we would go to work from there. And all of these stories acted as a narcotic to the spirit, and when added to the Jewish conviction, that things would be all right at the last minute, served to facilitate greater calamities.

Bunkers and hideouts were constructed, but almost nobody was saved by using them, because everyone thought of a radical solution to the question of the Jews in Volkovysk. They imagined massacres similar to the ones that had taken place in cities elsewhere in the vicinity, and here came a seemingly routine order to assemble at the barracks. If so, there didn't seem to be any reason to hide, because one could not remain in a bunker for an extended period of time, and certainly not to live there, and so everyone left their homes and bunkers, and went to the barracks. When I returned to the city, I first went home, and there I found everyone ready to go. Leibl had already hidden everything of value in the bunker, closed the false door, and we left. The old couple, Sarah Baylah and her husband, and the young couple with their three children, Avreml, Yocheved and Nioma. Along the way, we met up with other families, the Meshengissers, Itchkeh, Liss, Rossman, Parmalnik, Rappaport, and many others, for whom did we not run into? All, all of them, all of them went. When we got higher, behind the hill, we could see the Christians standing by the houses, they incited us through the windows, smiling cynically, with expressions of satisfaction, they were gleeful about our plight, and were happy at the prospect that the hour was near when they could plunder Jewish possessions. German guards and Polish auxiliary policemen lined the way on both sides of the street driving the river of humanity in one direction. Through a high and wide barbed wire gate, the mass of people entered the camp. This was a camp of several tens of underground earthen pits, constructed five to a row, and the rows were fenced in with barbed wire. A few bunkers comprised a small camp in the middle of the larger camp. The entire camp was sealed off with a double fence, three meters high. There was a distance of two meters between each fence, and in the in-between space, there were piles of barbed wire nearly a meter high. Watchtowers stood in each area at a distance of several hundred meters apart, with searchlights and SS troops. The camp was under guard day and night. The bunkers were dug three meters into the ground, at a length of fifty meters, and ten meters wide. There were triple sets of lighting on both sides, bottom, middle and top, the bunker had no window, and light got in only through the door. On the top expanse, there was only

the roof. Between 600-700 people occupied such a bunker. When we entered the camp, SS troops stood in front of us, and they separated the men from the women. The bunkers for the men were fenced and sealed off from the bunkers for the women; and we did not know what was going to happen, what will be our fate? Regardless, we sensed this situation was bad. When all the people from Volkovysk were concentrated in this fashion, cohorts of Jews from the environs began to arrive. From all directions, and all roads, the Jews streamed in under the escort of SS guards, and they were driven into the Volkovysk camp. By that Tuesday at nightfall, all the Jews of Zelva, Porozovo, Amstibova, Piesk, Mosty', Svislucz, Ruzhany, Lisokovo and Izavelin had been concentrated in the camp. Twenty thousand Jews had been concentrated in the course of those two days into the concentration camp in Volkovysk. The people came torn, beaten, and exhausted, they were given no opportunity to take anything with them. The entire way, they went on foot, and only in exceptional circumstances were children brought by wagon. The worst journey was for the Jews of Ruzhany. Along the entire way, they were beaten, and made to run, and those that passed out on the way, were shot by the SS troops on the spot. Each town has a designated place in the camp. On the first day after the concentration, we were notified that we were confined to the camp, and we were to view it as our residence. The women, their husbands and children, were again brought together, and arranged themselves in the bunkers according to their families. The situation was very depressing; there was no food – they didn't take any with them – and it never occurred to the Germans at all to provide anything. The hunger grew more intense from day to day. Hand in hand with the hunger, the sanitary conditions grew worse from day to day; there was no water with which to wash. The few wells that existed served to still the thirst of so large a mass of people. The dirt and filth spread. After a few days, the appearance of the people grew so bad, that they couldn't recognize one another; disease broke out, and there were practically no doctors. The doctors from the small towns put together a dispensary in one of the sheds, but their efforts were in vain, seeing as there were no medicines and bandages. The camp was sealed, meaning that no person could go to work. This, despite the fact that various Germans, the managers of factories and businesses, demanded from the camp command that Jews be permitted to work for them. This matter was done for a practical purpose, that the camp was sealed off because of the diseases that were afoot within, and it was for this reason that no one was permitted to go out, in order to assure that the diseases would not spread. After a few days went by, a kitchen began to get organized; the Germans provided bread; peasants brought potatoes in accordance with German orders, and the kitchen began to operate. Sonya Botvinsky stood as the head and overseer of the kitchen in all matters pertaining to food, while Sioma Gallin and others assisted. This kitchen had to cook for the entire camp, for 20,000 people. During the day, a single portion of one liter of thin soup was given. There was a shortage every day, because the kitchen was insufficient, and complete bunkers of people did not receive their allotted rations. The hunger was so enormous, that if a train car of potatoes came into the camp under a strong guard, people took no account of this, and tore open the car in order to grab the potatoes alive. In instances like this, the SS opened fire, and people fell. But the pangs of hunger were great, and without giving heed to the danger, people continued to run to the train cars. It goes without saying that the death toll rose with each passing day. Rappaport, as one of the more observant Jews of the city, was occupied with burying the dead. There was a separate group of people, who engaged in the task of taking the dead out of the camp for burial, not far from the barracks, and bury them there in mass graves. After three weeks had gone by, the Germans began to take specific groups of Jews out of the camp for work/ I was one of the first ones. My manager was able to get me out of the camp after a considerable number of tries. He was pressed to have me at work. My elation was great, not only because of my own personal circumstances; I had enough to eat – but because of the idea, that from the outside, I would be able to help my friends. And I had many of these: first, there were all the people with whom I lived, who suffered from hunger along with everyone else. My heart was torn to pieces listening to the children cry without stopping; "Mother, I am hungry." And the mother, that good Rivka, who did so many favors and good things for other people, who helped me personally so much, didn't have the wherewithal in her hands to even divide up a piece of bread among her

children. Apart from me, Dodzhkeh Botvinsky also went out of the camp, and we worked together. Bakers were allowed out, those who were to bake bread for the Jews, wagon drivers, and part of the work force that did work for the army, such as: Red Cross and the administration. Rosa Einhorn went out, and others, all together about sixty people. All these people worked at their places of work during the day, and at night a policeman brought us back to the camp to sleep. We didn't sleep any longer in our camp, but rather in a Polish forced labor camp, that was in the municipal slaughterhouse. As can be understood, the situation of the Jews in the camp improved somewhat, because each of us did whatever we could to bring food into the camp. Life got better from the instant that a large portion of the Jews of Volkovysk began to leave the camp to do various kinds of work. Some took advantage of this opportunity, and went off into the forest. Things of this sort cannot be completely described in words. Winter, snow, freezing days. There is no place to disappear into, eyes are on you from all sides. The Polish and White Russian populace turned over every Jew that was found outside the camp to the police. Foodstuffs are not available, the peasants do not wish to offer support, and additionally point out infractions to the police. Despite this, a group did go into the forest. By many ways, they [ultimately] did not free themselves from the camp. Many got out with the dead, that is, they pretended to be dead, and naturally, with the complicity of the burial detail and the *Khevrá Kadisha*, they were taken out as if they were dead, together with the other bodies. At a distance from the camp, in a field, they arose, as if resurrected, and ran off into the forest. But what became of this, if not several days later, they would voluntarily, and sneak back into the camp among the people returning from work. And do you think this was for lack of courage, or yearning for the Camp? They returned because despite their best of intentions – and is there any stronger will than the will to live – because it was simply impossible to survive in the forest without food and without nourishment. There were large bands of partisans who had food provisions and who were armed, but where were they? Far, far from the forests around Volkovysk. Despite this, a group of our comrades did establish itself in the forest, they built bunkers in the earth, camouflaged according to the environment. And they were there for a long time, at night they stole into the city, and the bakery would provision them, they collected foodstuffs from the abandoned Jewish homes, and brought them to the forest. After some days, the forest watchman discovered their hiding place and informed the police. The police attacked them by surprise, and a number of the people were killed on the spot. Several escaped, and three were brought back to the camp alive, where they were shot to death at the cemetery, in the presence of the members of the *Judenrat*, Fuchs. Life in the camp settled into a pattern of sorts. This is not to say that conditions got better, but rather we became accustomed to the tribulations, the hunger, the filth, and we lived as we could, if you wish to call this living by any definition. On December 4, 1942, the camp commander came, an SS officer who commanded a storm trooper division, and told a gathering of thousands of Jews, that part of them will have to leave the camp, they will be sent with their wives and children deep into Germany, and there they will work and live normal lives. And that was the promise of the camp commander. Understandably, no faith was placed in such assurances, however this brought some relief to that segment of the Jews who were of an optimistic inclination. And there was no need to wait for long.

After several days, they ordered the Jews of the vicinity, specifically the Jews of Svislucz and Ruzhany, to pack up their belongings and prepare to travel. It was a freezing day in which snow was falling, and as soon as dawn broke, a large body of SS troops and police came into the camp, and they began to drive the Jews out the bunkers. They beat them with staves and rubber truncheons, and rushed them to the gathering place, not giving them an opportunity to take along anything larger than a small package that could be carried in hand. They were arranged in rows under a very tight guard. When the count of the people was filled, the train moved in the direction of the central station in Volkovysk. At a freezing temperature of 20°F, with a heavy snow falling, men, women and children, went, half barefoot, in torn and worn rags. The cries and wailing went up into the heart of the heavens. I was then in at work in the packing plant, this is about a kilometer from the track leading to the train station, and from there, I was able to actually see the train with the people

on the track. The train went along for hours, and we could hear the sounds that continued, unending. From time to time, we heard the sound of machine gun fire. The train reached the station, and there they loaded the people onto transport trains and sent them off, approximately 3000 at a time.

The suffering was immense, and by the method used to transfer the people, it was clear that this was no transfer to Germany to do work. However, we did not know where they were being taken. In every corner, it was clear that this trip was not a trip to life. This situation led to an upheaval, and illustrated the seriousness of the situation. They had barely completed one transport, when we received notification of a second transport.

This was to have been a transport of those people not capable of work, and among them partly some of the able-bodied workers from Volkovysk. The period of the transports had begun: The camp became emptier from day to day. By December 20, only five thousand people remained out of the original twenty thousand. These were largely Jews from Volkovysk and Svislucz. But even with this, it was not over. An order was issued that did not permit more than two thousand Jews, capable of doing work, to remain in the camp, who were engaged in various municipal and military jobs. The situation became serious; the decision as to who would be left in the ranks of the two thousand was put in the hands of the *Judenrat*. Of importance, these were supposed to be people from Volkovysk, because they were the ones who were employed in jobs of this kind. Among these, were to be included the ‘camp people;’ these were Jews from various towns that even before the camp was established, were in Volkovysk working on the railroad lines. I, Dodzhkeh Botvinsky, Katz, Sardetsky, Fish’keh, Galai and others had worked all this time in the slaughterhouse for export. I was able to get my former landlord, Leibl Draznin into the plant with me. Leibl and I didn’t move so much as a hand without the other. If we obtained any food, we immediately passed it on to Rivka, Draznin’s wife, and his family. This helped alleviate their circumstances to a degree. The children did not suffer from hunger anymore. The situation became worse in the extreme the minute we discovered that people who were unable to work, and those not engaged in specific jobs would be compelled to leave the camp to be sent out. Only 2000 people were to remain in the camp. It is understood that there was no room for children in such a camp. We began to make an effort to get Rivka and the children out, so they would not be sent away on the transport. We already understood the implications of this matter; we did not know clearly or with certainty, but we understood that this transport meant death. For this reason, the days before the transfer, especially for the Jews of Volkovysk – because this transport was only people from Volkovysk – very heated. In this transfer – a transfer to death, without doubt – the basest instincts for survival came to the surface; the most savage of instincts, of selfish egotism rather than consideration for the common good. Yet, among others, an extraordinary spiritual elevation, a boundless sense of self-sacrifice, and commitment for their kin, great feelings of affection, feelings of the deepest love and devotion to one’s fellow man. Leibl took advantage of every connection to the Germans, and did everything possible to get Rivka and the children to be nominated to stay behind; he convinced the manager of the factory to go to the camp commander, and ask him to let the wife and children of the gardener remain behind (he worked as a gardener at that time). But even this didn’t help. They agreed to let only Rivka stay behind. But under no circumstances would they permit the children to stay. You can imagine the condition of these people. They almost went insane, not knowing what to do, seeking advice from each and every person. It was not evident what to do; there were two possibilities: either to travel with the wife and children, or to remain behind without them; or in the best possible case, to convince his wife to let the children go, and stay behind with him. Could I offer advice to him, at a time that I was so close to Rivka and the children that they were no less dear to me than to Leibl himself? And please don’t think for a minute that Leibl was the exception here. Every man loved his wife and children, and everyone tried every conceivable way to get his own family out of the transport, however, not everyone had an equal opportunity. And do you think that such opportunity was in the hands of a man and his conscience? No, they were generated only through bribery, and the weight of silver and gold. To our

terrible chagrin, instances of this nature are found only too often as stains in the history of inflamed days of bloodletting during times of war and heroism. Pure feelings of commitment, affection, and closeness, are sullied by egotism, and the bestial instincts of a certain number of people. We must emphasize this matter, and review it in our minds, because what took place during these days of blood in our midst, needs to be made clear to coming generations. It is on this basis that we have the obligation to educate and teach our children. And it is incumbent upon us to recognize not only that which is good and beautiful, but also the bad and despicable. There were people, who in these tragic minutes, of confrontation with death, of monumentally deep resignation, of ethical suffering and physical wasting, took the opportunity to line their pockets. I will not recall names, because in any event, these people are no longer alive. At a time when the bellies in the camp were swollen with hunger, there were 'people' who brought bread into the camp for fantastically high prices, that only very few were capable of paying. The most despicable of these individuals were the ones who used their positions in the Jewish auxiliary police to carry out their most heinous activities. During the time of the transports, when people used every means to save themselves from being transported, these opportunists squeezed monies out of the unfortunates, with promises that they would get them off the list of those to be transported. During the time of the transport this repulsive group assisted in finding those who were missing to fill out the transport [quota]. They thought that by doing this, they would curry added favor with the Germans, and in this way would be allowed to live in the midst of the extermination. To our good fortune, these were only a small group of the filth of the group, who cannot besmirch the seal of the pure martyrdom of our dearest. I have said that everyone attempted to save their kin from the transport, but not everyone could accomplish this. And whoever did not succeed, did one of two things, either he gave up, and of his own free will decided to go along with his kin, or he left them to their fate, and remained behind alone. For example, Rak, an engineer at the electricity plant, could not arrange for his wife and children to stay. He was designated to stay, because they had a need for him. However, he did not want to stay without them, and voluntarily went with them. It is possible to count tens of such instances, that came to instances of the highest feelings of dedication and sacrifice in the face of death.

The motto spread: If we have to die – then together. There were other instances, for example, as in the case of the Meshengisser family: a father, mother and four children. The father and the two older children, Salia and Liova were selected to remain behind, because they worked, and the mother with the young daughter and son were designated for transport. They tried with all their might, but to no avail, and they went. For the sake of truth, one of the two boys, the youngster, hid himself at the last minute, because it became possible for him to remain behind; and because of this, the mother and one child went, and the father with three children stayed behind. Instances of this nature where families parted and were broken up, occurred by the hundreds. There were instances where mothers abandoned their children in an attempt to save themselves. There were reverse situations, where mature children left their parents and grabbed at a chance to escape.

Enormous complications beyond the imagination confronted individual families. It is far from easy to blame or justify one type of behavior or another in the case where families were broken up and separated. Whether a mother left a child behind to save herself, or a husband behaved this way to his wife, in the midst of trying to save her as well, first by all the available means, this does not mean that one should blame the husband who abandoned his wife, or the woman, her child, or that there was some shortcoming in the way they acted towards their kin. In order to be able to grasp this thing and assess it, it would be necessary to have found oneself in this same place under these same circumstances. All those who were not in the ghettos, concentration and extermination camps – apprehend these things from a different perspective, from the position of freedom, they do not take into account the negative conditions that caused one type of behavior or another. I will not dwell on these matter any longer. Even though they are of unending seriousness and importance if one wants to assess and analyze the behavior of the lives of the Jews in countries that were

captured by the Nazis.

On Sunday, December 20, 1942 we were told that the transfer would take place in a few days. It had been impossible to extract Rivka and the children at that point. A remarkable plan occurred to Leibl in connection with rescuing his wife and children. His wife could stay behind in a totally legal way, but the children had to go; she firmly refused to do this thing; she said that without the children, she had nothing to live for. And so, on Sunday, with the permission of our manager, we took a horse and wagon, and under the pretense (with the consent of the manager, naturally) that we were going to the camp to remove certain articles before the departure, such as pots and other things that the manager had lent for the use as camp equipment. At this opportunity, Leibl wanted to secretly hide Rivka and the children in the wagon among the equipment. When we arrived at the camp, we were distracted by the general suffering, and the fear that reached near panic proportions. In the general camp, there were two separate areas, one separated from the other with barbed wire. A gate connected one to the other. One part, the old section for the Jews of Volkovysk, this was the place where almost all the people designated for transport were located; the second part was where all those required for work were located, the Jewish machinists, assistants, that is to say, all those designated to remain behind. The SS Troops guarded the gate, to assure that nobody sneaked into the second part that had not been previously designated. Leibl got down by Rivka, and laid out his plan for her, but to his great despair, she refused to consent, she didn't want to leave her elderly father and mother behind; she argued that her parents did not deserve to be abandoned like orphans at such a tragic moment. She pleaded with Leibl to try and take all of them out together. We rode home alone, but with the hope of being able to save them, nevertheless. On Sunday night, before the dawn on Monday, we came to our camp, where about sixty people slept, city workers, police awakened us and ordered us to get dressed. They said that they had received an order to bring us to the camp. Under heavy guard, they led us to the main camp, and along the way, the voices of people who had given up hope reached us. We understood that the people were being taken out for transport. It is difficult to describe what was in our hearts at that moment. The idea that perhaps they would take us too, increased our fright, even though we knew we were among those selected to stay among the remainder because of our work. The closer we got to the camp, the cries became more and more distinct. But these cries were no longer from the camp, but rather from the central railroad station. Even more bitter to us, was when we were taken through the camp on our way to the central station; we no longer doubted our bitter fate. But what could we do? To try and extract ourselves from so strong a guard was denied to us. Everyone carried the deep sadness within, that our near and dear ones had been trod underfoot. However, in our calamity, we had one bit of fortune; when we had gone about half the way, a policeman intercepted us with an order for us to be taken back to the camp, seeing as we were counted among those who were supposed to remain behind. Apparently there was a misunderstanding, and we were included with the others to be transported by mistake. When we returned to the camp, and the immediate danger to us abated, everyone saw the true extent of the calamity. The camp, which up to yesterday had been teeming with people, a place where one saw life, heard a din, groaning and noise, was empty now, without a single soul, its appearance like that of a huge cemetery. At the side of the bunkers there was torn bed coverings, clothing, and pieces of cloth. From the bunkers, one could sense the fetid air still, laden with sweat and the odor of people that had just been driven out. One could realistically feel, and it seemed as if one could still hear the screams and cries of the mothers and children. Here, in this camp that had just been emptied, there was a small number of women, elderly people and abandoned children. All those who were not able to go under their own power to the transport, the SS troops gathered into one bunker, and afterwards put burning pots of sulfur into the bunkers and sealed them. The nominal reason for doing this was to rid the bunker of lice. The bunker was sealed for two days, and the suffocating odor of burning sulfur wafted all over the camp. When they opened the bunker, the people were naturally, dead. The Germans referred to this as elimination of lice. In the second section of the camp, where the assisting Jews were assembled, who worked in the various locations, there were

approximately two thousand Jews, mostly young men and women, almost no children at all. There were a few children that the women had managed to sneak in inside suitcases or bundles in moving over from the first section of the camp to the second. For practical purposes, it was said that there were no children at all. Everyone bemoaned his own fate, and there was enough to cry over. In one case, they had taken his wife, in another, his children, the third, a brother, the fourth, a sister, and so on, without end. I was particularly pained over Rivka and her children. Leibl stayed behind voluntarily; he was spent and broken from his great loss. His conscience nagged him for not joining them as well. After a few days, everything returned to an ordinary pace of sorts in relative terms..Everyone inured themselves to their pain; everyone made peace with the idea that he had lost everyone who was dear and beloved to him. There were those who took comfort in the hope that maybe they would not be exterminated, and that perhaps the camp commandant had told the truth, that they were being taken to do work. This feeling of conviction, and everyone's hope, acted as a healing agent, and served as a narcotic to the spirit, and enveloped the tragic facts in a mantle of illusion.

About two thousand people were left, almost all of which worked in the various different places outside the camp. All of them slept in the camp, including all of us who at one time had slept in the city, at the Polish workers camp. In the morning, Polish police would escort us to work, and at night, they returned us to the camp. The material condition improved, and food was not lacking as was the prior case, all those who came in contact with Christians during working hours bought necessary foodstuffs either with money or by barter. People did not lack for food to eat. We learned to live for the day, the person became like an automaton, all hopes and desires evaporated, only one instinct remained, the instinct to survive and to be able to witness vengeance. This will became sharpened and strengthened precisely in the hour when the danger to life was great. It goes without saying that under such circumstances, there was no room for ethical rules and social niceties. A principal ideal was to eat, and to eat well, this was the only issue in life. Despite the fact that from a material point of view things improved, the condition of the camp and the circumstances under which we lived became more and more worse. Because everyone had to leave and go to work, there was no one left to look after the sanitation and order in the camp. In the evening, on return from work, food was prepared individually or in small groups. The simple things to prepare a warm meal were missing. There were no ovens.

Outside, in front of the bunkers, on days of intense cold, when the temperature was between 15 and 20°F, and when the snow crunched underfoot, and a cold snowy wind cut to the bone, with teeth gritted tightly, a fire was lit for the entire day, after hard labor, between two bricks, with damp wood that used to be gathered during working hours and brought into the camp. The eyes would crawl out of their sockets by the time we had the privilege of seeing a few boiled potatoes or a little bit of groats. It is easy to understand that after this kind of an evening meal, amidst fatigue and dwindling energy, people were not too concerned about cleanliness. It wasn't only that they didn't clean out the bunker itself, but also the bedding on which they slept. Leibl and I continued to work at the export slaughterhouse; our situation improved somewhat; it was easier for us to get a hold of food, and apart from this, the working conditions were much better and easier. Evening upon evening, we were brought back to the camp to sleep, and in the morning they took us back. We were very isolated; he because his family was driven out, and I was also under this impression because of the bad news that I would receive from my home in Warsaw. I received a letter illegally from Warsaw, in which I was informed that they had driven out my mother and sister, and one of my brothers. Regarding Treblinka, we had finally learned something; The Polish railroad employees and locomotive drivers who traveled these lines, told us bit-by-bit about electric wires, and murders with electric current, about lime pits into which tens of thousands of people were thrown. You can appreciate that despite all the trouble we had gone through up till now, and despite all the tribulations we had endured under the Germans, we did not want to believe these things at all. The mind simply could not grasp it. Generally speaking, we believed that the

gentiles were intentionally spreading stories of this kind about, in order to aggravate us. In the camp, Leibl and I were devoted to one another; and the calamity that we shared, drew us even closer together. And this was not only in our case, but with everyone, where a greater feeling of friendship and relationship manifested itself. I was at that time very friendly with Meshengisser; Sali was a very good friend of mine, and tried by every means to help them out, given that their material circumstances were worse than mine. From the desperation of the circumstances in which we found ourselves, came the idea in connection with procuring Aryan papers, and thereby flee the camp. This was not one of the easiest things to do, it was dependent on large monetary outlays, and not many had the means to do this. Apart from this, it was wound up in great difficulties, because the Christians recognized each and every Jew and in every place they ran into them, they would inform on them. In the meantime, I created a plan for myself, in the event of a final transport, how to extract myself and run away from it. And I began to put my plan into action. The plan called for finding a small area, in the slaughterhouse for export, in which two or three people could hide for an extended period of time. I found such a place. Up above, on top of the slaughterhouse buildings, on four pillars, stood a large water tank that was surrounded by walls, in order that the water not freeze during the days of the winter, and between the walls and the water tank was a space of about a half meter around the water tank. This entire empty space was filled with straw, and there was no need for anyone to pay any attention to it, or go there. With it, I related the plan to the machinist who looked after the factory machines, and I was good friends with him; he promised to assist us for the time we would be hidden there. In the time that we planned to be there, he had to concern himself with getting us suitable [travel] documents. I made all the preparations, gathering a large quantity of food, and various items of clothing, shirts and other things. We took care of all the arrangements, and made it possible for us to remain concealed for an extended period. But fate didn't want it this way; not everything in life goes according to plan. From the extremely bad sanitary conditions in the camp, a typhus epidemic broke out; people sickened by the tens each and every day; and for the first time, the sick would not leave the well; they were afraid that the SS would find out, and seal off the camp and this would bring death from typhus and starvation. Much later, when the epidemic began to claim large numbers of victims, special blocks were set aside for the sick, they were the same earthen bunkers, but only for the sick. Leibl and I both fell sick with typhus; Dr. Epstein certified that we were ill, and we were taken to the sick block. Dr. Epstein was the most senior in this block. The conditions in this block were no better than those in the block where the healthy people were. We sizzled with a high fever for three weeks; there was no medicine; each patient was given over to the good graces of the Lord; either he would recover from it, or he would die, all according to chance. We hadn't completely recovered yet, and the temperature hadn't dropped even halfway from the point of delirium – when an order came that on January 26, 1943 the entire camp will be liquidated. Volkovysk and its surroundings must become *Judenrein*. As usual, we were promised that we were to be taken to a different labor camp, and there we will live ordinary lives in better conditions. On the evening of January 26, the camp was surrounded by reinforced guards of SS and German Army troops, and began the work of driving us out. The order said that the healthy ones will go on foot to the train station, and the weak and elderly will travel in automobile conveyances.

I see that last night in Volkovysk as if through a dark cloud; I lay sick, not completely conscious, totally bereft of any resources; the block was dark, and half the occupants were fevered; everyone was consumed with preparation for the transport. The word transport was recalled by everyone, and the fear it engendered was etched on everyone's face. I was still; various ideas, unconnected to one another, flitted through my mind. Transport, hideout, bunker, death, life, all of this filled the corners of my mind, and I babbled words that were incoherent, I spoke words without meaning. The friends that sat with me looked upon me pitifully, and attempted to help me in every way possible. The auto transports arrived. Liova and Sali carried Leibl and I to the vehicle, and took us together with the other people to the train. The auto sat by the train for a long time, and the assessment of the train car was that it was dark and dirty. The following day, at daybreak, when my

senses began to return to me, I saw the extent of our destruction: in the crowding of 60 people to a car, we lay pressed and bent up one against the other, rays of light streamed in from two tiny barred windows. The air in the train car was suffocating and rank, despite the fact that outside it was bitter cold. Thirst tortured us, and there was no water container. In the meantime, the train began to distance itself from the place where we had lived, moving with speed into a future that was not known to us. At the same time that others passed out from the heat and thirst, to my satisfaction, I felt my strength beginning to return to me. My mind was focused on me, and I became physically stronger. Some inner strength from below strengthened me against the seriousness of the circumstances. On Thursday, the train stopped moving; with bated breath and a fluttering heart, everyone waited for a resumption of the issue at hand. From the eyes of everyone, you could read the question, where have we come to? The doors opened noisily, and with our departure from the train car, we heard a menacing guttural voice: "*Schnell, schnell, alles raus! Paketten lassen!*" Upset, disturbed and intimidated, everyone jumped as quickly as possible from the train car. Those that couldn't, whose strength abandoned them during the trip, were thrown from the cars.

We went forward for the length of the path in a specified direction. From the rear we were pushed with blows and terrible beatings. The screaming and the tumult were so awful, until we filled all the spaces, frightened and confused. Several tens of meters ahead of us, stood a few SS officers, one with a short stick in his hand, who looked over each person that passed by, and then indicated with his stick in which direction to proceed – right or left. The young and strong were gathered to the right – and to the left, the older and weak. The ones on the right were arranged in rows of five, the ones on the left simply gathered together in an amorphous crowd. Leibl and I, both weak, stood on our own two feet with difficulty, as would be the usual case after a severe illness, approached 'The Broker' that is the doctor, if you will, who was doing the selection, the winnowing. As we approached him, he threw us a glance and indicated with his stick that we should go to the left, to the side of the weak and the old. It was hard to know which was better, but the heart foretold that the place indicated for us was a bad one. And in a moment, in an instinctive manner, without taking account of the consequences of what I was doing, I said to the SS doctor that I was an electrician, I know how to do good work. He looked at me a second time, and asked me my age, and indicated to me to return to the right. He did not permit Leibl to come along with me. All of us felt that those assembled to the left were in a worse situation, but even we didn't know what they would do to us. All of us were full of worry, despite the representations by the SS that those not feeling well would be taken ahead by automobiles to the camp, and that the healthy and young would walk on foot to the camp.

The screams and weeping were awesome. People ran from one group to another; under a rain of blows, several ran from one group to the next, out of a desire to be together with a wife, or a sister, and in the ranks there were 180 people, most of them from the first train cars, because these got off first onto the platform, and I was among them, from the first train cars, because I had been taken to the train as a sick person on a bus. An irony of fate – as a sick person, I now found myself among those standing to remain alive; and young men, such as – like young lions, who worked with me, such as: Katz, Mordetsky, Botvinsky, Siroka, and hundreds, hundreds of other healthy people, were sent to the left, because the quota of those people who would be allowed to live had already been filled.

180 people, we walked under heavy guard to the camp.

The camp was located about three kilometers from the Auschwitz railroad station, and it was called Birkenau. The Poles called it Brzezinka. Tired and spent, we were brought for the length of the way, to the steel and concrete perimeter that glistened in the distance from the rays of the setting sun, to the extermination camp, notorious for its sorrow, Birkenau.

Every minute, buses passed by our field of vision, crammed and packed with the Jews of Volkovysk, ours, our friends, dear ones, beloved ones. After each auto passed us, we no longer doubted at all the fate of those people. And not only those of us who were walking had given up hope, but from every passing bus, anticipating their end, there came heartrending wails born of hopelessness and lack of any alternatives. The road was littered with letters, pictures, currency, and torn clothing. They wanted to show, at least in this way, their protest against the monumental evil and sin that was being committed against them. The buses were escorted by the SS on bicycles, and behind all the buses, as an ending to the caravan of death – a Red Cross ambulance rode – the very white vehicle with large red crosses on all sides, that to the observer was there to serve as a visual narcotic, a device to calm the innocent martyrs – that is to say, that this ambulance was standing by to render assistance in case of an accident. The truth was, that the ambulance transported canisters of the poison gas, ‘Zyklon,’ in place of bandages and medicine, that was used to poison and suffocate tens of thousands of Jews.

Yes, their fate was swift and bitter. We felt that the minutes of their lives were numbered. We, who were fortunate enough to have been designated by fate to live, had no illusion that life in the camp was going to be good for us. We knew that what awaited us was a hard, driven existence – but at this instant, we didn’t believe that a time would come when we would envy these [victims], who were privileged to die immediately, without such extensive torture and suffering.

We entered the camp. Long rows of wooden bunkers, partly built, long and wide, without windows, and mine among them, better suited for horses, surrounded by electrified fences of barbed wire three meters high, imbedded in steel and concrete bases. We entered one of the blocks where we received the first assignment.

Jewish detainees in striped uniforms searched us in a set manner, and took everything from us. After the task of taking away our things, we were brought into the cellar. We stood in a freezing cold for five or six hours, gritting our teeth, and we waited for our turn to bathe. We certainly were not distinguished guests; many transports such as ours, arrived every day from all parts of Europe. Our turn to bathe arrived at midnight. And in this way, we also waited naked in the cold corridor, until we entered underneath a shower as cold as ice. Our clothing was taken away – and in their place, we received old, worn rags. Without jackets, frozen and without strength, they first drove us outside again. We thanked God that we had survived the ordeal, and here they brought us to complete the remainder of the additional formalities. We entered one of the bunkers, where we were registered in detail in ledgers, questioning each of us in detail, and transcribing it in German, afterwards, they tattooed a serial number on everyone’s arm. From that moment on, we ceased to be human beings with names: we had become living numbers. Carrying out the formalities lasted until 3-4AM; the purpose of this was the intake of the transported individual. Before morning, we were taken to “sleep” in a half-darkened block, whose air was fetid and asphyxiating, and with our entrance, that there is some forced suffocation in this place, because there was nothing to breathe. For the entire length of the block, against each wall, three-tiered bunks were built out of bricks, one above the other. On the bare concrete surface, dressed in rags, with shoes on their feet, people were in a deep sleep, pushed up one against the other, but it was not quiet.

There was no opportunity for extensive reflection; we had not been brought there for observation and thought. The shout of the head of the block was heard: “*Vshitsi na Buksi*” (everyone to the boxes) – and immediately there opened up a hail of blows with truncheons over our heads, such that everyone sought to quickly find their way to the inside of a box, by crawling over the bodies of the sleepers, and especially not to stand up in passing, and especially to avoid being hit. In the boxes, we also didn’t get a good reception. We were hit and beaten on all our extremities in order to keep the new arrivals at a distance, and disorient

him. As to sleep, there is nothing to say; before we managed to warm ourselves up properly – we heard the call to get up, and they shouted, everyone outside. We were the novices, they were called ‘Greens’ by us, and these required a beating in this manner. It is necessary for them to feel the meaning of Auschwitz and Birkenau on their hides. And this was the order of the day for every new transport that arrived. And there was someone to look after this, to make sure that it all took place. The designated block people and servants were appointed to do this. At every opportunity, and instances where there was no special reason, they were beaten about the head with truncheons. And unceasingly, we heard the refrain, “*You have been brought here to live!*” And it was from this that we began to perceive that one is not brought to Birkenau in order to live. And the longer we thought about it, our thoughts were confirmed more and more. More that it could astonish and anger us – but later on we grasped the matter – that among those who made our lives miserable, were also Jews. We did not understand why, and to what purpose, that in addition to the travails of one’s own brother, that a Jew should be prepared to strike a fellow Jew. However, the matter became clear to us, that these were the scum of the Jewish populace, that in their souls and polluted hearts, a beast lurked deep in their core, and this was the hour in which it could show its horns. Egotistic and sadistic tendencies came to the surface. They wanted to purchase their own lives at the expense of the lives of hundreds of other people. In order to curry favor with the SS, they murdered and tortured their own brethren. It was like a Sabbath in the ambience of the Good Lord, on the day we finished the formalities, and passed through the ranks of transit, in order to get settled in Auschwitz. We had three days of quarantine of sorts. This was not to enable us to regain some energy, but rather to sap us of our strength even more, before we went to work. During those three days our entire lives passed before us. From morning until late at night we stood in the frost and snow, believing all sorts of things. From all directions they beat us, and on top of this, hunger pained us to the point of death. A piece of bread of 150-200 grams in the morning, and a liter of watery soup at noon, and in the evening, only a quarter of a liter of cold tea. This was the daily ration. Our strength was sapped, and one could only stand on one’s own legs with difficulty. It was no wonder that everyone waited for the moment when we could all go out to work. We thought that once we started to work, they would treat us differently. We began to work. On Monday morning we were attached to different work groups, and we went out to work. In an arrangement of five to a row, we went off to work each day to the strains of a large orchestra. However, we had been mistaken in our belief that from now on things would get better. We worked at various forms of hard labor; building bunkers, digging for buildings, on roads, and other varieties of work, connected to the construction of the camp.

Half naked, we stood from morning until night in freezing snowy days with the shovel and spade in hand under these conditions of negligence; if they would have at least given us some rest at work. The *kapos* and the trustee prisoners looked after that (with the permission of the SS). They beat us terribly and cruelly. And whoever couldn’t stand it, or perform his work, was taken care of on the spot, such an individual was brought back to the camp dead. Day in and day out, the work group brought back dead bodies to the camp. Everything was done according to a precise deliberate protocol; at the entrance to the camp, it was forbidden for anyone to be missing, whether alive or dead, just so long as the count was full. A *kapo* that brought in the largest number of dead was designated as an excellent *kapo*, and his reward was a bonus of extra food. The *kapos* were Aryans, mostly Germans, who were in the camp on criminal charges. These people held life and death in their hands over us. It is no surprise, that as a result of working conditions like these, and it was no better in the camp, that our people began to break down. First it was from a morale point of view, and later from a physical point of view.

The general situation: the news that we received on a daily basis from new arrivals, from all ends of Europe, on the unending victories of the Germans, indicated that our circumstances were beyond hopeless. Many thought that there was no point to resist, because regardless of what we did, we could not hope for salvation.

From the second side, a life without purpose in the camp, the beatings, hunger and relentless pursuit, the low morale, lack of sanitation, and many other reasons, brought about the condition where people wanted to die. And whoever wanted to, found an easy way. Many ways led to a release of this kind. At that same time, in Birkenau, there was a block called "Seven." Everyone who wanted to find a redemption from his suffering simply had to apply to that block. This block was called the block of the sick, and there it was possible to "recuperate" quickly. From time to time, after the block filled up with people, in the space of a few days, vehicles would come at night to empty out the block, and the people were taken to the crematorium. Even though people were registered there every day, there were tens of volunteers. They could not stand living anymore. They no longer wanted to resist, or they simply had no more strength to withstand the torture. And this was not the only way to get out of the misery. At night, people would run into the wire – as we called it, that is to say, those who could no longer carry the burden of living, would run into the fence at night, and by coming in contact with the electric current – would be killed, or he was shot by the SS guards, in accordance with their duty. Similar to the seventh block for the men, the women had block "Twenty Five." The lives of the women did not differ from the lives of the men. The same condition, but the relationship to them was much worse, because of their generally weaker physical stature, they were more often unable to fulfil the physical demands of the labor in the same way as the men. If, after being in the camp for a while, a man could obtain something additional, that was called "Organization" – but most of the women were unable to achieve this, and were given only the ration of food allotted to them. Apart from this, the sanitary conditions of the women's bunkers were much worse than that of the men. And it is necessary to add to this, that the women were broken more often than the men. It was possible to see this from the rate of suicide among the women, which surpassed that of the men. The leprosy (?) and dysentery reached epidemic proportions, and caused the deaths of tens of thousands of women. Block 25 was always full and overcrowded, and was called the Block of Death. Every woman who went into the block did not come out alive. I once was given an assignment to work near that block, and I saw how tens of women were lying with arms and legs stretched out, near the block near death, and from time to time, the overseer of the block would come close to them, and move the heads of the half-dead with her foot, to ascertain which of them was already dead, so she could make out a death certificate. A sort of belt was thrown around the head of the dead, and in this manner, they would be dragged across stones to the cave of the dead. This work was carried out by women, the notorious daughters of Slovakia.

The selections were a forgettable event in the camps, with men as with women. There was not a Jewish holiday when the Germans didn't arrange for a selection to take place on the same day. Fear of the selection would destroy the equanimity of anyone who had been in the camp for the entire time. The motive of this process was known to everyone who was in Birkenau. The meaning of a selection was clear, and they would gather up the men, and a doctor would come, and looked at each individual with an eye to determining who would live and who would die. If a man was weak and incapable of doing work, his sentence was to death. In every selection of this kind, fifty percent of the Jews were registered to go to the crematorium. And two or three days did not pass before they were exterminated. The worst of it was, that everyone who was registered in this way, knew that he would be incinerated or gassed in two or three days.

Weeks went by, and circumstances did not change. We, that is to say, the people from Volkovysk, dwindled and went. Cedars, like Motkeh Koval, Shmuel Bayer, Ginsberg, Amstibovsky, Offenberg, Shereshevsky, Fish'keh the Butcher, Noah Fuchs, and tens of others, flickered from day to day like candles, and died in various ways.

On one of the days of hard work, in moving parts for the bunkers, and amidst exhaustion and oppression – we received the gladdening news that part of the men from our transport, and from Grodno and Bialystock,

will be sent to Buna to do work. My number was also among the fortunate ones. We did not know the type of work we would be doing, or what the conditions were like there, but as one, we were satisfied that we were leaving this Hell, and we could not imagine that there could be anything worse. Immediately on that day, we traveled to Auschwitz, where we underwent a physical examination. We were there for a few days, in which we rested a bit, and we then traveled to the Buna camp. Buna was a city in which they were building plants to produce synthetic rubber. 80 men traveled to Buna. We received without any sign of welcome. The Polish Commissar of the block gave us a speech, and promised us that we would not leave there alive, and finished by saying that Poland would erect a monument to Hitler for this alone, that he had helped to exterminate the Jews of Poland, a thing that the Polish people had carried in their souls for lo, these many years. This commissar was a famous Polish sports figure, a boxer. After assurances and encouragement of this sort, we went to work on the second day. There was not much to be disappointed in his words. The work was indeed very hard, much harder than in Auschwitz. After a few days, we realized that we wouldn't be here either for any length of time. In one way it was better for us here, in that we received food that was a little better. And then an incident took place where all the members of a transport caught typhus, and the entire camp was suspected of having this disease. And for this reason, we remained solitary in the block for a period of a week – we were idle – and this wasn't all bad. We rested in part, but after a week, an order came to have us returned to Birkenau as being suspect of carrying typhus. Just our bad luck. We knew what awaited us in Birkenau as sick people. If they were sending healthy people to the crematoria, what chance do sick people have? It is hard to describe our state of mind and the pain that we felt as we got on the train to go on our trip. Everyone was bitter-hearted, everyone counted off the last minutes of his life. Among ourselves and to each other, we had conveyed our last wills. We ate the portions of bread that we had quickly, to at least die full. However, not everything went according to plan with the Germans, and as it happened, when we arrived at Birkenau, instead of taking us to the crematorium, they took us to the camp and we remained alive.

In a short time, during which we were absent, there had been changes. In the same block where we lived, that originally held 800 people, there remained only 300 people. The rest were exterminated. Of the 180 men from Volkovysk, we saw almost none of them. We were detained in camp for three weeks, as suspect carriers of typhus, in a separate block. After three weeks passed, we resumed going to work. The hard labor began again, in various forms. I suffered through various forms of hard manual labor for four months. I was able to familiarize myself with the various aspects of the camp, and succeeded in getting myself attached to the electrical division. This was a great accomplishment, and was an issue that could decide between life and death. The facts proved that those who would survive were those, first of all, with skills in the various trades, because skilled work is always easier to do than hard manual labor. Even though they were small in number, several people from Volkovysk also were able at that time to join up to do other work of a lighter kind. Some as carpenters, others as cleaners – those that worked on cleaning out packages from all the train cars that arrived. That was called “Canada Command.” A number of doctors got work in the hospitals: Marek Kaplan and Epstein; one joined the orchestra, and a few others to other places, and that was all. For others, luck didn't work out, despite their skills and abilities. A famous musician from Warsaw, named Wiener, was with us, who had already traveled the world, had led an orchestra and had appeared in a number of European lands. The war brought him to Volkovysk, and from there he came with everyone else to Auschwitz, and did the hardest labor. Once, he was hit so hard, that he volunteered himself for Block Seven. He told me that he didn't want to suffer any longer, and he said it was madness to suffer, if there are no prospects to be set free one day. There were others who were unbending, and fought stubbornly to survive. Among these was Dr. Epstein, for example. In the first times, he slept in my area. He stood at the edge of annihilation. He was a bona fide ‘Muslim;’ a person who seemed to be made from only skin and bones was called a ‘Muslim,’ a living skeleton. He bore it all stubbornly, and maintained his position until they employed him initially as an assistant to the physician, and after a while, when he had a chance to demonstrate his skills, they

appointed him as the doctor. From that time on, his condition improved.

My work in the electrical division afforded me the best opportunity to become more informed about life in the camp and how it was managed. As an electrician for the arrangement and repair of electric lights in the camp, and for the SS, I had freedom of movement throughout all the camps. In Birkenau, there was not one specific camp. There was a whole row of different camps, built one next to the other. These buildings took up an enormous amount of area, and gave the impression of an entire city. Birkenau consisted of ten camps or more, separated from one another by electrified fences. Each camp had its own name; first according to the alphabet; A, B, C, D, and secondly by the type of people concentrated there. There was a quarantine camp for new arrivals. There were particularly poor conditions in that camp, because there they provided the means to sense the purpose of the extermination camp. After that, there was a Czech family camp, where the Germans brought about twenty thousand Jews from Theresienstadt, keeping them all together, giving their women and children especially better conditions, forcing them to write letters to Czechoslovakia that their circumstances were good, which made it easier for the Germans to round up the Jews of Czechoslovakia. Afterwards, when they no longer needed them, they poisoned them with gas and incinerated them in gas ovens. After it came the camp for the women of Hungary and Lodz. Then a work camp for men, then a 'Gypsy' camp, in which there were Jews from Lodz, Radom, Skarzchiski and other towns, brought together from other camps. There was a camp for the sick, and a camp for packages, where the Germans, with the help of prisoners, counted and packaged the contents of the goods brought by the Jews into the camp. And the Jews brought a lot, and that is no wonder: up to the last minute, the Germans misled them and fooled them by cunning means, causing Jews to drag along full chests and valises full of the most precious valuables, beginning with clothes and ending with a variety of household utensils. They believed that they were bringing this to work, because this is what the murderers represented. What's more, at the hour that the transport from Holland arrived at the Auschwitz train station, the Jews asked through the windows of the train cars – have we arrived yet at "The Auschwitz Factory?" Because that is what they told them in Holland, that they were going to work at a big factory. All of these bundles were counted, and every day, trains filled with Jewish booty – trains full of shoes, white goods, clothing, bedding, and other things, it really was a gigantic factory, of extermination, pillaging and murder.

These camps stood next to one another, each camp consisting of thirty and some blocks, Each block held between four and five hundred people; in the event of a large influx of people, even up to eight and nine hundred people. To the right of these camps were two large camps for women, and to the left of the camp, they were building a gigantic camp to surround all the previously mentioned camps – "Maxsik<sup>3</sup>", as it was

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<sup>3</sup> In the last phase of the war, when the armament industry required more and more slave workers, the deportees kept alive because they still were able to work, were transferred into a part of the camp which was called "Mexico". This section of Auschwitz-Birkenau was not completely finished. The inmates waited for a further transport to one of the labour camps. Since they should not remain in Auschwitz, they did not receive a prisoner's number typical for Auschwitz.

In this new camp section, the indescribable conditions which had such horrible consequences in the Birkenau women's camp and the gypsy camp, went on just the same. The lack of even the most primitive hygienic installations, the absence of water caused a high rate of mortality.

In the camp jargon, the new section was called "Mexico". The inmates neither had prisoners clothes nor blankets. They received blankets of different colors and styles from the stock-camp section "Canada", where all goods of the deportees were collected. Covered with all these blankets, the prisoners in that camp section appeared like Mexicans.

named by us. In this camp the Germans concentrated the women from Hungary during the great transports from Hungary.

Opposite all of these camps, by row, stood five large crematoria. Five wide and tall smokestacks spanned and watched over the camp, from above a grove of trees that concealed the secret of the attainment of twentieth century civilization. Five smokestacks that never vanished from the horizon of our life in the camp for two years. Day and night they belched forth fire and smoke, in to the high blue heavens. Here, tens of thousands of Jewish sacrifices were bound to the altar. Thick black clouds of smoke hid the golden beautiful sun during the day, and red shooting flames lit up the dark nights. "*Bad Anstalt*" was written beside the entrance to one of the crematoria. "*Soap Can Be Obtained Here,*" was written beside the entrance to a gas chamber. "*Pack Your Belongings Neatly, so nothing will get lost,*" they warned, and so up to the last breath, until they felt the burning gas beginning to press on the lungs, until the minute that they lost consciousness, they didn't stop to deceive them and lead them astray. And there were those who were so sent, who took the opportunity presented to them, and they rose up – there were many occurrences like this. In one incident, there was a woman from France, who when already in the gas chamber, forcibly took the pistol from the head of the troops of the camp, and shot him with his own pistol. Apart from him, several other SS troops were wounded. In instances of uprisings, the SS went took everyone into the bunkers, pushing with their rifle butts. When the bunker was full of people, they sealed it hermetically, and the SS then piped in gas through a special opening into the bunker, and after a few minutes, everyone was dead. And after this, the bodies were burned in the crematoria. Complete mountains of ash and human bones were created; in the construction of roads, they used the ash from people as a covering under the bridge. The various roads and alleys in the camp were "decorated" with human remains, Jewish remains. The supply, or more aptly, the supply of the amount of human ash, exceeded the demand for building requirements in the camp; then the ash was transported in mechanized vehicles to the Wesel River and dumped there; It was in this fashion that they tried to cover up the traces of the enormous killing [they had done]. When the transports arrived from Hungary, the crematoria could not meet the demand, and accordingly, they dug huge pits next to each crematorium and burned thousands of people in them at a time.

Despite the severe policing of the camp, an underground carried out its work. There were several organized escapes from the camp, as well as other instances of uprising.

The uprising of the *Sonderkommando* crematorium took place in the summer of 1944. People were being burned daily then. Part of them managed to escape. In 1945, a second uprising took place, and two crematoria were blown up.

During my entire time in Auschwitz, I carried within me a plan to escape. Many people conceived escape plans, but to carry out such a plan was not one of the easiest things to do. It was difficult to extricate oneself from the talons of death. In the meantime, I fell sick with a lung inflammation, and I lay with a high fever for several weeks, and once again luck was in my favor, and I got well. I then continued to weave my dream of escape.

In the month of June 1944, I brought my plan to fruition with tow of my other friends. We had escaped from the camp for several hours already, when the SS, assisted by Polish prisoners succeeded in catching us. They brought us back. To relate how they treated us is entirely superfluous. It is enough to mention that by the time

we got back to the camp, even our friends didn't recognize us. We thought we were sentenced to be hung, but to our good fortune, we paid for what we did with receiving a beating only, whose consequences we continued to feel for several weeks, and we were sentenced to the S.K., that is to say, the punishment division, such that for the remaining time we were in the camp, we had to work at especially hard labor. From that time on began a chapter of especially hard times, working hard ground, digging tunnels through swamps. They stood with truncheons over us to speed the work along. Inside the camp, we were kept separate from all the other prisoners that we knew. Our block was shut off and left alone. We could only live from the rations that were given to us. I suffered like this for close to five months, I was certain I would not be able to stand it in the coming winter. Fortunately, the time of liquidation of Auschwitz and Birkenau arrived, and even the SS were sent off in transports; after Oranienberg, Sachsenhausen, we were brought to Dachau, a branch in the Dachau vicinity. Our transport, consisting of about a thousand people, began to build a camp there for itself, and this was November 1944. From that point on a new chapter of different troubles began in our lives.

From the Volkovysk transport, Joseph Kotliarsky and 'Nioma Levin from Svislucz came with me to Dachau. We didn't know at all whether other people from Volkovysk survived, who were in Birkenau up to the last minute, and were then sent away in other transports. Only after the liberation – when we came to Israel, did we come to know that Kossowsky, Epstein, Marek Kaplan, Tchopper, and Hochberg from Warsaw who came to Auschwitz on the Volkovysk transport, were located in various parts of Europe. Apart from this, Joseph the Dyer, Makosov, Lotte Wolfowitz from Dereczin, and one Munyaker Gershon survived.

Only a few young women from Volkovysk survived: Kaplan's sister, Shayn'eh Lifschitz, Sulka Lifschitz from Slonim, Chas'shkeh Boyarska, Gendler from Slonim, Alta Shidleovich from Svislucz. They are about the entire number who survived from the Volkovysk transport.

My memoir on the life of the Jews in the ghetto and the camp has a very narrow perspective. They are merely isolated lines in the shattering portrait of the Holocaust. It is but one drop out of the oceans of Jewish blood that were spilled during the course of the six years of the war. They are but excerpts from the awesome tragedy of the nation of Israel.<sup>4</sup>

In order to create an accurate picture, in order to know and assess the extent of the sorrow and annihilation, it is perforce necessary to multiply the dialogue many times.

Auschwitz-Birkenau – There was the instrument where almost the entire Jewish population of Europe was

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<sup>4</sup> As it is known, on the occupied territory during the World War II, Jews and Gypsies were the only two nationalities that were condemned by the Nazis to utter extermination. Till recent times 400,000 Jews have been supposed to have perished. The latest investigations give reasons to draw the conclusion that the number of perished Belarusian Jews constituted more than 800,000 people (*E. Ioffe. "But still how many Jews perished on the territory of Belarus in 1941-1945". The Belarusian Historical Magazine. 1997. N 4, p. 49-52*).

A total of 384,784 people were moved out to Germany for forced labor. Of them 260,000 did not return. How many of them perished? According to some data, more than 100,000 perished "*osterarbeiter*" were from Belarus. Proceeding from all the said, one may conclude that in 1941-45, Nazis and their accomplices exterminated no less than 2.3 million Belarusian civilians.

On the occupied, and bordering on the front-line territory, around 300,000 people died from starvation, air bombings, artillery bombardments, due to living conditions and exhausting work.

intermingled and exterminated. The story of Auschwitz is the story of the eradication of European Jewry.

My memoir is only a story of the life and extermination of a small group of Jews from one city; and how many cities and towns were there like this in Poland alone...?

The chronicle of this great Jewish tragedy are a matter for research and education, because it is on this base that we will educate future generations, how to hate and fight all manner of evil and sin, that they should be stout-hearted, and guard the rights of the Jewish people with honor and pride, that other forms of Auschwitz and Treblinka will never arise again.

The embers of the coals continue to smoke, the stench of the burning bodies is still about us. The cries of suffering mothers and children who had no recourse rings in our ears, and even after the liberation, Jewish martyrs continue to fall.

Alta Shidlevich, a young woman from Svislucz, when she came to Auschwitz with the Volkovysk transport, suffered for two years in Auschwitz, and afterwards, in tens of other camps in Germany, and she was lucky enough to come out free, traveled back to Poland after the liberation to discover, at least, if there were any traces of her family – was killed in Poland only because she was Jewish. And this was not an isolated incident, day by day there is testimony given on acts of murder perpetrated against Jews in various cities and towns of Poland.

And here are the remnant of the refugees, Jews, broken and exhausted, homeless, knocking at the gates of the Land of Israel in order to start here anew, wanting to build a healthy life on strong foundations. They want to be men among men, because their contribution to the development of human culture is not small by any means; they demand their right to live just like other nations – and the gates of their homeland are closed to them seven times over! Warships and His Majesty's crusaders keep watch lest any Jew who had the nerve to survive Hitler, try to enter the Jewish homeland, looking finally for a place of rest. Various committees have been created to "investigate" those refugees that require a home – if they really are serious about starting to live an ordinary life, if the tragedy was really that big. Six million Jewish martyrs are not enough for them! It is therefore incumbent upon us to stand at the watch, it is up to us to protect our rights. Absolutely nothing will stand in our way. The image of the contorted faces our beloved and cherished ones who were exterminated, perforce will always hover before our eyes. This issue will give us strength and resolve to realize our desires and ideals.

*Page 35: The Great Synagogue of Volkovysk*

# Volkovysk In Its Death Throes

By Dr. Noah Kaplinsky

On July 31, 1942 I reached Volkovysk by wandering, in search for “refuge.” On February 28, 1945, I left Volkovysk forever, as someone who had been “rescued.” The two and a half years are divided into three periods, I was in Volkovysk itself for twelve months; I lived through the entire destruction in the bunkers, and in the end, I saw Volkovysk when it was liberated, when the Germans had been cleared out, but also – rid of all its Jews...

The following lines comprising a bit of memory, will serve as a modest contribution to the handing down of the folio and to establish to facts about the awesome demise and eradication of a total Jewish community, men, women and children.

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As refugees from the Slonim ghetto, which at that very hour had drunk deeply from the cup of Hemlock, almost to its bottom, a group of eight of my relatives reached the outskirts of Volkovysk one Friday afternoon, by way of the Izavelin Road. One by one, or two at a time, we had left White Russia, where Slonim was located, by direct or circuitous means, crossing the border in the night, into the territory of the Third Reich where Volkovysk was located. “We had heard there was sustenance in Egypt<sup>5</sup>” – the spreading rumor said, over the border – or according to the practical designation, “East Prussia, Bialystock District,” that Jews were still living somehow; but in any case their lives were not hanging in the balance.

On entering the city, I ran into a Jewish man who recognized that I was not local, and who greeted me with a *Sholom Aleichem*: “Undoubtedly you are from Slonim, so be careful that you don’t run into a Polish policeman, who is worse than a German, come, I will take you through side streets.” Escorts were immediately found for all of us, and by various ways, we reached our appointed location without disruption.

Volkovysk was already in ruins after the fires that had burned for four days following the German bombing in the first week of the German-Russian War. There were only skeletons of building and gigantic bomb craters in the center of the city. Life went on in the outskirts of the city, The way to get from one part of the city to the other was through alleys overgrown with grass. This was a form of protection against a malevolent eye... and it was along such an alley that I hurried along, immediately after my arrival at the advice of the Jews. There, a committee had already been established to deal with the refugees from the Jewish communities of Slonim and Dereczin, that had been flattened to the ground.

The large yard on the *Neuer Gasse*, and the buildings surrounding it, was bursting with people. The daily life of the Jews of Volkovysk centered at that place. In the small white house to the left (the Jews joked: “The White House”) ... was the seat of the *Judenrat*. In the large building to the right were all the services. Further up the yard – the secretariat and the detention house of the ‘*Ordnung-Dienst*’ (the Jewish Police). Nearby, in a large stable, refugees waited to be settled. In the middle of the yard stood a kiosk, where the owner of the café, Spiegelglass, sold lemonade sweetened with saccharin, peculiar tasting juice, hard cookies that were baked from who-knows-what, and rolls with black seeds. This kiosk was the only public gathering place for

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<sup>5</sup> A biblical allusion to the observation of Jacob, during the onset of the seven years of famine, leading to a plan to have his sons travel to Egypt to purchase grain. See Genesis 42:1-3

Jews, the only open business... the only salvation were the seeds, which crackled in everyone's mouth, from the head of the *Judenrat* down to the smallest lad, who stood guard at the side of the gate, who was there to announce that a German 'Limousine' was there to assist in going down to the yard of the *Judenrat*...

I remained in Volkovysk for 28 days. Each day, I spent long hours at the *Judenrat*. This was the period when the lives of the Jews were subjected to a 'structure.' There was no ghetto in the vicinity. Only that Jews and Christians were not permitted to live under one roof. The Jewish houses were marked with a large, round yellow marker, that was hung over the entrance into a Jewish home. Jews worked in accordance with the allocation of the labor office of the *Judenrat*. Jews made their living from retail commerce (in fear and terror of the policeman – a Pole! – that he should not see that something was being carried under the handkerchief), and especially from barter: there were those that traded coins for their daily food, gold jewelry, and others who sold even a dress, a pair of socks, shirts. It was in this manner that the entire worth of the Jews streamed slowly but surely into strange hands. The last year – apart from victims of hunger, different forms of starvation – did not bring any upheavals; the yellow badges were worn, we went in the middle of the road, we worked at forced labor, we complied with the mad and uncivilized demands of the regime (the most peculiar demands at the *Judenrat*), and took comfort in the hope of redemption and liberation. Every 4-6 weeks, the lives of the Jews were imbued with fear by visits from the Gestapo. The news of such a visit spread with lightning speed through the Jewish dwellings that were crowded together. No person had the nerve to show his face in the street at those times. For a few days, life was tense, until these Angels of Destruction left the place, and the Jews would recite a blessing of salvation, that it was possible to get rid of them by buying them off with boots, suits, shades, watches, and like things.

As previously stated – the center of life was the *Judenrat*; it was that organization that presided over the external and internal lives of the Jews. Because of the extreme housing shortage, even this problem was solved also by the *Judenrat*, which allocated the dwellings under its control in proportion to the number of people. It looked after the work, distributed food, arranged for free medical care, inspected the hygienic and sanitary conditions, and in its time, looked after the refugees from White Russia (obtained documents for them, and largely spread them around to outlying cities and towns, especially to Bialystock).

The Head of the *Judenrat* was Dr. Isaac Weinberg, and his closest assistant in this work was – Dr. Yaakov Sedletsky. These two doctors – two opposites – complemented one another in a harmonious way. Weinberg – looking assimilated, with the appearance of a gentile, informal and aristocratic; Sedletsky – a man of the people, a lover of the masses, accessible; the common attribute they shared – integrity, dedication to the public, exacting and focused work, and by neglecting their own personal concerns – they were revered and respected by the entire Jewish populace.

If a rumor got started that someone in the *Judenrat* was being more concerned with himself rather than the general community – even the nerviest person, or a brazen individual, never even thought to question their integrity, or their clean hands, and the absence of any personal interest in these two doctors.

The head of the Secretariat was Noah Fuchs, who in his unique tight-fisted way, centralized all the work of the *Judenrat* in his own hands. The head of the labor office – Sham'keh Daniel; the Head of Supplies – Mulya Cantor; Liaison with the city; Berel Amstibovsky; Treasurer – Moshe Krapivnik. During the sojourn of the people from the Gestapo, Eliyahu Motya Ginsberg and Clara Niemchik would respond to all the demands they made of the *Judenrat*. Pidta dealt with the refugees. Apart from this, Sioma Gallin and Sonya Botvinsky were very active.

A great fright seized the Jews of Volkovysk when the refugees from Slonim and Dereczin began to bring news of the enemy and the terrifying massacres on the other side of the Zelvianka (which was the district

boundary). On the one hand, they wanted to convince themselves that things like this wouldn't happen in the *Third Reich*

("desire is the father of the idea"). And yet, it was difficult to accept the idea that Hitler would make a distinction among one group of Jews to another. We were in the habit of discussing this matter at great length, especially with Dr. Weinberg and Noah Fuchs. I drew a parallel between this and the lines that stood during the time of the Bolsheviks, waiting for sugar: if there is enough sugar, it will be divided among everyone, if the German will only have the time, he will kill all the Jews. However, no person in that area then thought that the Germans would plunder the area where we were for almost two more years, and even less than that, that Volkovysk waits in the line for sugar...

Exactly the opposite (and again: "desire is the father of the idea"), it was easier to believe that Divine Salvation was just an eye blink away, that liberation would come by next winter. Dr. Weinberg was already concerned about that, how will the Bolsheviks think of him, and who was going to be the head of the Jewish Community.

However fate freed the rest of the members of the *Judenrat* from this concern.

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In summarizing my impression of Volkovysk on the basis of having spent a month there, I do not have the capacity, as a refugee from the massacres on the second side of the Zelvianka, to speak about Volkovysk and its environs in an objective way, without comparison to what had happened 40-50 kilometers further east. In the ranks of the refugees, we were under the impression that there was an enormous difference. True there were depredations, pursuit and decrees; immediately after the German occupation, they "terminated" several tens of people. Among them, Dr. Feinberg, the lawyer Yoskowitz and his wife, Zohn-Mazyra, and others. However, just because Volkovysk was annexed into the territory of East Prussia, life took on the appearance of stability. There were instances where Jewish prisoners were released from jail, and apart from punishment by death, there were also monetary fines, whippings, a half year or a full year in jail; it was possible to move around the area, or even to travel by train to Bialystock, even if only by permission of the head of the city, which he would grant for bribes, riding in a single car which was marked, "For Poles Only." All of these privileges were available to those willing to pay a bribe, both on behalf of the Germans and the Polish police. The latter would circulate in the Jewish neighborhoods at every opportunity, on purpose, sticking out their hands. The Jews met the demands for bribery that were most mingled with helping the *Judenrat* meet the tax on the Jews, with the idea that the Jews needed to withstand this by whatever means, until the storm passes them over...

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At the beginning of September 1942, thanks to the *Judenrat*, I was well-supplied with passes and appropriate documents, and I left Volkovysk and traveled to the nearby town of Mosty', 32 kilometers from Volkovysk. Then, I did not imagine that by leaving Volkovysk at that time, I had managed to avoid a certain death. Because two weeks didn't pass before not only Volkovysk, but the Jews of Bialystock were shaken, by the news of the notorious simultaneous arrest of all the Jewish doctors, dentists, and a number of pharmacists in Volkovysk. I was no longer in Volkovysk at that time, despite this, I would like to dedicate a few words to this depressing chapter of history, at least because the husband of my sister, Dr. Yitzhak Honigstein was among them, and my sister was among them during their imprisonment, and after she was set free, she, together with my second sister, were among those that expended the greatest effort on behalf of the

imprisoned, so much so, that many details became known to me regarding these Ten Royal Martyrs<sup>6</sup> I was well-supplied, about whom I wish to write here.

The news of the multiple arrests made by the Gestapo and the police, spread quickly from mouth to mouth among the Jews at nightfall one evening. It immediately became clear exactly whom they were arresting: all the Jewish doctors and dentists (men and women) and they were the following: the Doctors, Weinberg, Sedletsky, Cantor, Velvelsky, Kaufman, Honigstein and his wife, and the doctor, Mrs. Galand (who came with her elderly mother as a guest from faraway Georgia [sic: Gruzinia]), the dentists: Tropp, Mant, Pshenitska, Einhorn, and Peisik. Afterwards, several radio technicians were added as well. The impact of these arrests was enormous. Hand in hand with them, many rumors and explanations circulated, which acquired wings of their own through the entire Jewish Populace, there were those who explained the occurrence by saying the Germans needed medical resources at the front... others thought they knew enough to tell about a factory for illegal medicines (a thing that simply was without foundation, just like the first explanation). However the real reason came from an unknown quarter. The prisoners were confined to two bunkers (out of the bunkers that later became so well-known as the 'Ruzhany Bunkers,') men and women separated. Despite this, the men and women were able to come in contact to exchange speech, from time to time, when they stood at the doors of the bunkers. They slept on wretched bunks, and food was permitted to be sent to them once in a few days.

The interrogation and questioning of the prisoners began on the third day. A nearby building was well appointed, and decorated as a command post, in which the Gestapo official conducted the interrogation. They went to the interrogation one at a time, each one of them several times. It was only then that it became known what this was all about.

In different ways, the Gestapo wanted to find out which one of the Jewish medical professionals had provided help to a partisan. The interrogation was conducted in a severe and crass manner. The doctors Cantor and Kaufman suffered especially badly; the former because of his stalwart behavior and tough responses, the second, because... of his athletic appearance (it was generally well-known that the Germans treated such Jews especially severely). In particular, they beat Dr. Cantor several times.

After the initial interrogations, the prisoners were informed that they would be given a week to think the matter over, and if one of them does not confess, they will all be accused of being guilty.

In the meantime, they released the radio technicians and all the women. It was only at that point that the Jews became aware of the situation, and they began to look in all directions for ways to obtain the release of the detainees. Special emissaries traveled to Bialystock on two occasions (Sonya Botvinsky and my sister) in order to enlist the help of the head of the *Judenrat* there, Engineer Ephraim Barash. After all this effort, it was communicated that the fate of the prisoners was under the control of the local Gestapo in Volkovysk. They succeeded in getting in contact with a high Gestapo official (much effort went into achieving this by Clara Niemchik), who promised to get them released. In time, the period of the 'ultimatum' came to an end, and the prisoners denied the charge, one after the other. The prisoners remained in confinement for a week after the final interrogation.

On October 11, the Gestapo officer had promised that all of them would be released on October 13 the latest. On the following day, the wives had a visit with their husbands and conveyed the news of their imminent

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<sup>6</sup> An historical allusion to the Ten Martyrs of the Princes and Scholars of Israel killed by the Romans, whose martyrdom is recollected during the *Musaf* Yom Kippur service.

release.

On the 13<sup>th</sup> of the month, a transport vehicle arrived at the bunkers with an armed Gestapo detail; they brought out the ten prisoners and ordered them to take off their jackets and leave them in the office. Jewish workers from the barracks were witnesses to the final journey of the ten. In addition to this, among the workers was the daughter of Dr. Sedletsky, Ida, who fell into embrace with her father, and father and daughter were separated forever in a heart-rending manner. They were taken without delay outside of the city to a low hill, and all of them were shot. At ten o'clock, when the wives of the prisoners arrived at the appointed hour to await the "release" of their husbands – not one of them was still alive...

How much truth there was to the facts on which the accusations were based? What was established in the confessions that the following took place: a number of days prior to the arrest, a Jewish doctor provided medical attention to a partisan in the Zamkova Forest. It was also known that one doctor refused to go into the forest for this purpose. One thing is clear, that Dr. Weinberg did this. Back while I was still in Volkovysk, when I was at his home (the last house on the *Vilna Gasse* beside the Piesk Road), he pointed out the adjacent Zamkova Forest and said, that in the end, his goal was to be there, in the forest. During the interrogation, he was, as it happens, treated rather well by the Germans, who did not suspect him of this 'transgression,' because of his important position. This led to him being the most optimistic one during the three weeks of their detention, full of hope for their eventual release, and in that conviction, he attempted to transmit that feeling to his comrades. But others saw the situation differently. Dr. Cantor (from Lodz) was especially pessimistic, as were Dr. Honigstein (from Volotzlavik), and Engineer Hirsch Putschkrenik from Vilna, a refugee from the Slonim ghetto, whom the Germans captured and killed along with the entire group. Dr. Cantor, who was broken and exhausted from the physical torture during the interrogation, decided to take the blame on himself during the time of the 'ultimatum,' but only after a considerable effort, especially Dr. Weinberg, they dissuaded him from doing this. Even Dr. Sedletsky was extremely worn down; in the face of this, it was Dr. Tropp the dentist, who stood out because of his stoic attitude, who would give encouragement to his comrades to hope for life in the last days. It is hard to know the reason why and for what reason Dr. Weinberg did not admit his guilt: possibly because of his apparent optimism, or perhaps he was persuaded that regardless of what he did, the situation would not change, but most importantly, that he did not want to place the *Judenrat* in danger, and thereby endanger the entire Jewish populace.

The Jewish population was as if suffering from a fever for these three weeks. Day by day, the Jews came to the offices of the *Judenrat* and gave money, gold and jewelry to obtain the release of the captives. Many of the Jews from the market sought ways and means to save the prisoners. It must be pointed out even here, that the *Judenrat*, whose two most respected members stood accused – did not involve itself in a direct manner in this issue...

The Jews of Volkovysk took a massive blow. The loss of the two doctors, Weinberg and Sedletsky was especially painful. The Jews felt themselves abandoned and forsaken, as if an iron bridge had crumbled away beneath them, and they refused to be comforted...

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At the dawn of November 2, 1942, a group of Jews (350 people) were taken out of their homes in ancient Mosty', a half town and half village, and gathered together near the bridge over the Neman [River], and arranged them in rows of five. The elderly and the children were loaded onto wagons that had been previously commandeered from the gentiles, and under a heavy SS guard with pointed machine guns, drove them over the bridge to the Volkovysk side. No person knew where the way was taking them. However, in an instinctive way, the Jews of Mosty' felt that while up till now they had lived in an untroubled way, that this was their last journey. And when this "host" moved from that place, amidst the indifferent stares of the

all the local peasants, who were dressed in their finery (what they wore for their holiday), and a Jewish woman called out: “Hey, goodbye to my birthplace” – all the hearts of the Jews that were pounding with fright senses, that not one of them would ever return...

After several hours, we reached Piesk. It was here that we saw that this type of “action” was not confined to Mosty’ only. The ghetto was surrounded by Germans and local police, shut and locked, in a condition of overcrowding: they were waiting for a group, for us. We were put into the crowded ghetto and we received notice, that tomorrow morning at 6:00AM, we would travel onwards. That night was a night of vigil. For those who showed some foresight in packing whatever they could for the journey, in the event that they would have to suffer a while; the elderly sat stonily, and smiled, taking stock of their lives in considering their fate; others by contrast – especially the young, paced back and forth like caged animals, and the entire accursed ghetto is surrounded with a heavy guard; and there were those that spoiled their money “at least let the remains for the murderers be decreased”: they poured oil on their food; they tore their jackets and clothes and threw them into the toilets.

At 6 o’clock the next morning, they began to organize us – with German thoroughness – men separate and women separate. First in pairs, and then in rows of five, taking the old out from among us (that is to say: those who needed to be conveyed by transport), putting them in lines, counting and enumerating and then repeated the process for long hours without end. Afterwards a long line of hundreds of gentile wagons were drawn up, on which they put the small children and their mothers, and the remainder they put into new rows and counted them again. Then the Germans ordered that the carried packages, that were rolling around in the streets, to be loaded onto the several tens of remaining wagons: walking sticks, pails, platters and pots. With this, the Germans enjoyed toying with us: they chose about ten young people, and forced them to run; beside the gate of the ghetto, stood two bordering rows of SS, that rained murderous blows down on the young Jewish men with rubber truncheons...

The preparations were finally completed at noon, and the procession moved from its place. At the head went the wagons that slithered along like serpents on the narrow road leading to Volkovysk, and after them, the women, five abreast, and to the rear, the men, They were surrounded on all sides by a net of armed SS troops. Tall German officers on bicycles or in cars arrived every minute for the purpose of getting information on the innocent journey of the Jews. They took pictures of us several times (it became known to us, that they subsequently presented these as pictures of captured partisans, or as the Germans were wont to call them – bandits).

Night had fallen by the time we reached Volkovysk after a tiring journey of eight hours. Here we saw that even Volkovysk had been emptied of its Jews. All the houses of the Jews were shut up and locked with locks and bolts. We passed through the entire city, and after passing by the railroad station, we were stopped after the barracks next to a large expanse that was fenced off with a high, double barb-wired fence on all sides – watchtowers, whose searchlights illuminated the entire surrounding (the previous day, they would punish us for every ray of light that shone through a crack in the blinds, a severe punishment for the decree to keep dark; but in the war against the Jews, the situation was different...) And we were again ordered to go back, and we were thrown into the crowded splinter groups of Jews that together with our last contingent, consisted of 20 thousand souls. The entire area was divided into blocks that were individually fenced off. There were from six to eight bunkers in each block, which was still inadequate to hold all the Jews, and so they threw the remaining Jews into large horse stables. The groups from Mosty’-Piesk, like the other final arrivals, got horse stables, of the kind that had three levels in the center. Close to two thousand people were crammed into a stable in the dark, and the screams were awful, the wailing of children looking for their parents, mothers, who with great difficulty, tried to hold onto their children around them, people crawling over each other, looking for a board on which to rest a little, one lost his bundle of food, a second,

his pack of personal belongings – several hours went by before everyone settled down in some manner. From time to time, one heard the whimpering of a child, the cry of a woman, an old Jew praying out loud, and in the middle of the night, the lights illuminated the shrieks of a woman in labor, who gave birth after several hours to a living Jewish boy, in the presence of the nation and congregation, whom together with [the mother] that bore him was brought to the death penalty...

It was only with the coming of the morning, that we were able to look around, and take stock of our new situation. It became clear that all the Jews of the Volkovysk district had been taken from their homes and brought to this area. This fact became clear in several ways. The fate of Ruzhany was the worst of all; apart from the fact that they had to walk fifty kilometers on foot, they were treated in an exceptionally cruel manner. They separated the mothers from their children, and during the course of the two days of this long walk, they permitted the mothers only one opportunity to go to their children to feed them. Along the way, the Jews were beaten horribly, and a hundred of them that gave out along the way, were killed. In Svislucz, the Commissar decided to play a “game:” From among the Jews that stood in rows in that place, he took out 200 Jews and simply shot every tenth one of them.

The Jews of Volkovysk were ordered to report to the bunkers in a matter of two hours, and in addition to this, they stationed police and SS troops at every corner of the city and at its outskirts, to keep an eye on everybody. The Judenrat was given the following order, that had been issued by the regime in Konigsberg: *“It is incumbent on the Jews of Bialystock District to assemble in central bunkers. Every Jew must take sufficient food for 48 hours, and work clothes. Money, jewelry and valuables may be taken without any restriction. The objective is to centralize labor.”*

Approximately twenty thousand Jews were divided up according to their place of origin: two blocks (15 bunkers in total) for Volkovysk. However, since each bunker was designated for use by five hundred people, the remaining bunkers were divided up for use by Amstibova and Yalovka. One block (six bunkers) – for Svislucz. Zelva, Piesk and Mosty’ – in two large horse stables. A separate block (eight small bunkers with low ceilings) for Ruzhany.

During the first few hours, rumors spread that we had been gathered together to be sent to Bolivia, which was prepared to take us... but that was not the case, Fuchs and Daniel from the Volkovysk *Judenrat* were called to the Commander of the camp, a lieutenant officer named Tsirka, and they received the following notice: this was a temporary concentration camp; from here, the Jews would be sent in transports of 3000 to a larger Jewish *labor camp*; this transfer would go on for six weeks; but for the time being, it is necessary to maintain order. Fuchs was appointed as the head, and Daniel his deputy; each bunker was supposed to have its own head, who would be responsible to provide a list of the ‘residents’ within, to look after order and to distribute the food. Each person will receive 170 grams of bread a day, and a bowl of soup; health and hygiene conditions in the camp were to be supervised by medical resources independent of the camp.

On the following day, a committee of senior Gestapo officers came to the camp, and among them there was even a district physician, the head of the city of Volkovysk, Winter. Because of the shortage of water, the head of the city promised to supply water to the Jews with the help of the fire truck, and a small supply of potatoes and groats from the cellars of the Jewish homes was also promised.

The Jews shrugged their shoulders. The pessimists once again argued that our fate was sealed: “They are treating us like fowl that is fed before the slaughter.” However, those who were seized by every spark of hope, ran off to once again build their blooming castles in the air, that everything will end up with us alive...

Of the things that were promised to us, we received a few canisters of whitewash for the toilets, and a few

boxes with bottles of insecticide for lice. After this, the matter of water was settled. Then the food that the Jews had provided for themselves ran out in a matter of two or three days, and immediately signs of hunger began to appear. In a matter of days, an epidemic of lice started to spread that grew to monumental proportions. It was late in the fall, and the Jews milled about between the bunkers, especially the young people. The elderly and the babies, and the nursing children all lay in exhaustion and hunger on the hard bunks.

The doctors divided the work between themselves, organized a dispensary, and after a fashion, a small 'hospital,' for the severely ill. It was only after a time, that the burden of responsibility of the doctors was heavily increased – but we will yet return to this subject.

A more relaxed air began to blow through the camp on the fourth and fifth day. First, they began to take young men out of the camp to do work, but this was a n illusion for the camp for a number of days, and secondly, this created an opportunity to procure foodstuffs. Yet, the hunger increased. And when only the news of a potato transport delivery reached the camp, starving Jews would fall upon the wagons, and everyone wanted to assure getting a couple of potatoes for himself. Immediately gunfire was heard, these being the shots of the German guards into the mass “disturbing the peace,” and the result of this were dead and wounded. Yet the hunger was greater than the fear of the rifle. These wild scenes took place several times a day, when hunger mad it necessary to put one’s life in danger for a few frozen potatoes...

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At that time, I was transferred from the Mosty’ stables to the Volkovysk bunkers, and I worked in the direction of the health services of the camp.

It was still dark outside, but the day had already started inside the camp. The workers were lining up in the yard at an early hour. The women are looking for ways to warm up a little water for the children. A great deal of movement is taking place near the toilets. The interior toilet in each bunker was set aside for the use of the elderly and the children only, and whoever could go outside, was not taken into account for purposes of bodily functions... outside., the situation was not any better, bit still it was a large facility, with room for twenty people. Two rows, one for men and one for women were created; after each group of men went in, the women went in, and anyone, who, God forbid, had to go back. A young man interjects to the women: “Come in, ladies, together with the men, don’t be ashamed, they are going to throw us all into the same grave...”

In the bunkers, everybody develops a routine after the night’s sleep. After that, one goes, one to bring water, and another to stand on line for the spoiled bread. In one of the bunkers, several tens of Jews gather for group prayer: the Rabbis have decreed a community-wide fast: the *Selikhot* prayers are recited, everyone prays with fervor, reciting *Avinu Malkeinu*, a line at a time. “*Send us salvation speedily...*” – the leader of the prayers weeps out loud, and the congregants respond. When they reach the phrase, “*Do this for those who suckle at the breast,*” and “*For the sake of the babes of the house of your people,*” – the cries penetrate the very heart of heaven. Jews stand this way, crowded and pressed together, standing in mud, in the half darkness, some in a prayer shawl, some wearing phylacteries – if he had only been concerned enough to take them at the last minute – and some without these, agonizing within himself, and from their very depths, and with their last enegies, knock on the Gates of Mercy...

Tsirka visits the bunkers several times a day. A silent murderer, slow, cunning and cynical. He takes an interest as if all are patients, in their care, and promises that in the new camp, conditions will be better...

Towards evening, the workers return. One carries a piece of wood, there will be one who happened to get a hold of some onions or beets, and even someone who managed to obtain a piece of bread from a peasant. Immediately with the darkness, they all enter the bunkers. Everyone lights his lantern according to his capacity to do so; one might have an oil lamp, another got clever, and used one of the jars of insecticide (a petroleum derivative), as a source of fuel. Everyone is crawling over the bunks, and after a period of time, each person arranged themselves for the remainder of the night, by sleeping on their side (there is no room for anything else). A Jew in the corner recited the Psalms by a flickering light, a second person recites the *Shema* out loud. A Jewish woman talked to herself incessantly. A suffering young woman rocks her frail, sick infant in her arms – this is the third straight day without stop – that she wails in a shattering and heart-rending manner: “...*I want to go home...*” Others haven’t finished lice removal. A sick person, short of breath, and breathing with difficulty, moans, and cannot find room for his ailing person.

When I wake up in the middle of the night, I have the impression that the picture hasn’t changed at all. The sound of the bunker hasn’t changed, as if frozen in place: one can still hear the anonymous sound of the *Shema*; the [other] Jew continues to go through the verses of the Psalms; the groans of the sick Jew still continue, and the shrunken and heroic mother, still rocks the baby and hums the tune to the same song: “*I want to go home...*”

\* \* \*

A new thing happened on November 11: the camp was closed up, and not a person went to work. And once again, one explanation chased after another. There were those who immediately connected this with some major political event (the most favorable assessment of this): they spoke of a German surrender(!), a Polish rebellion, and similar things. On the other side, the fear of a *liquidation* already hung in the air. After several hours, a committee arrived for the purpose of investigating the sanitary conditions in the camp. This was specifically related to the problem of lice. Three senior Gestapo officials, of esteemed rank – very well dressed, well fattened – came into the filthy rotten bunkers, and without hiding their revulsion for the ‘filthy Jews,’ looked at two or three individuals, and that ended the tour: the camp was infested with lice – was the outcome of the matter – and it was then necessary to put it under quarantine.

Later, it became clear that some of the soldiers in the camp fell sick, and they suspected that it was typhus, and it was a stroke of luck that a number of them got well in a few days, and the suspicion about the camp of the Jews was dropped.

Sioma Gallin was the one who ran the kitchen in the camp, a well-known and popular personality in Volkovysk. Alert, exuding vitality, and never losing his optimistic conviction that ‘*we will yet bury them*’ – his favorite expression. When he got water once from the fire truck, he engaged the driver in conversation (a local Christian), and that person gave him a little bit of kerosene for the oven. However, the men of the Gestapo guard perceived this, they rushed to Gallin, knocked him to the ground, and rained so many blows on him with their rubber truncheons, that he had no more strength left with which to scream. When his was bleeding and swollen, they carried him to the bunker. At nightfall, the cold predator, Tsirka, came to the bunker and asked with warm concern about Gallin’s condition, and ordered the doctors not to leave him, “God Forbid.”

I visited him at nine in the evening. He lay suffering, breathing heavily, and saying a few words with great difficulty.

At eleven o’clock at night, the bunker was startled by the savage cries of Germans, who were at the entrance to the bunker: “*Gallin, Raus! Gallin, Raus!*” A Jewish policeman from the internal guard ran to Gallin, and

relayed to him that the Germans were demanding that he go outside immediately. Everyone raised themselves from their places, and a deathly silence reigned in the bunker. One could hear how Gallin was struggling to move his beaten body off the bunk. 500 eyes were glued to him. When he was beside the exit, he turned about and in a bracing voice, with all his strength he said: “*Peace be unto you, my fellow Jews!*” and he vanished into the darkness. Immediately the sound of blows were heard, mixed with the last cries of the victim. Suddenly three shot cut through the air – and then all was silent. Only a heart-rending scream from Gallin’s wife inside the bunker, served as a sign that Gallin was no longer alive; a form of death certificate...

The following morning, on arising, his sanctified body was found beside the entrance, the tortured body of the eternal optimist...

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For almost three weeks we did not know for what purpose we were being kept here. Tsirka spoke about the difficulties of transfer. In the meantime, they once again began to take out small groups of younger people to go to work. The local Christians took advantage of the opportunity to skin the Jews for a piece of bread, and the Jews would barter away gold coins for a little bit of bread, rings, or money. Despite this, there was hunger in the camp. The question of wood to keep warm was also a difficult one, and many were beaten – even shot – for several pieces of board from some fence, somewhere.

Until one of the late afternoon hours, an order arrived that at two o’clock in the morning, all the people from Ruzhany should be prepared to travel. Along with this, it was required to compile a precise list with family name, age and occupation (according to the order).

In comparison to the Volkovysk Jews, the Jews of Ruzhany got the low end. The block of eight small bunkers (one third the height of the Volkovysk bunkers); these were called the “Ruzhany” Bunkers. No doubt that the Jews of Ruzhany had the worst conditions. These two thousand Jews, with this terrible overcrowding, could not cram themselves into these bunks of Sodom, and hundreds of them were forced to live in the street (in the meantime, freezing days had arrived, along with some snowfall). If the death rate in the camp was high, especially among the elderly, it was particularly great among those from Ruzhany. There were days when the number of dead ran to twenty. The number of the sick was even greater there. They were also the first to go...

On the following morning, the Ruzhany block was empty, and the entrance locked. Only by the third day, were some young people taken there for purposes of “cleaning up” the block. Among the bundles, rags, and various utensils, there were also found several tens of coagulated corpses of sick and weak people, who were unable on that [previous] night to partake in the walk, and remained behind on the hands of the Germans in their quiet death throes, and when not one of them remained alive, the Germans ordered the block to be cleaned...

These dead – like all the others – were taken out under German guard to beyond the fence, and buried there.

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The second transport came three days later, and this was the turn of Zelva. This was the only transport that left during the daytime. In the space between the Volkovysk blocks (each one of them was fenced off with barbed wire) rows of four abreast of the Jews of Zelva and the vicinity were formed up. In the midst of mud, snow and rain, they stood there for several hours, covered in mud and exhausted, even *before* they could begin their journey. Almost all the residents of the Volkovysk bunkers gathered at the barbed wire fences.

It is hard to guess what thoughts were going through the minds of the people in these two groups. It is possible that the people of Zelva envied the people of Volkovysk, that they are yet remaining behind, although for a brief time yet; and – who knows – every day is an achievement. It is possible that the people of Volkovysk saw themselves in a mirror of their own very near future. And yet perhaps – since someone is saying *Sholom Aleichem* somewhere – they weren't thinking at all.

In the meantime, the idea occurred to one of the Volkovysk people “the lucky ones,” to give something, to those who were going, through the barbed wire. This suddenly became something for everyone to do: in one move, hundreds of people started to give something or another through the barbed wire to the Zelva people, who pressed against the fence by the hundreds, in order to receive a farewell gift. Agonized and shrunken hands by the hundreds, were pushed through the barbed wire, and everyone grabbed whatever came to hand: for one a piece of stale bread, for another a potato, a crumb or an onion. Being driven in to the hands of the prevailing hunger, and the great fear was more for the hunger of the next day, they cut their hands and wounded themselves to the point of bleeding, and because of this, the gifts so given were mixed with blood....

A shout from the Germans put an end to this “farewell party,” and the Zelva Jews dragged their tired bodies in the same direction that the Ruzhany Jews had gone a few days earlier...

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A little at a time, the bunkers and the stables of Porozovo, Mosty', Piesk, Yalovka and Amstibova were emptied out. At intervals of 3-7 days, thousands of Jews were taken out at night, and after several days, those who were left behind, “cleaned out” the vacated places, gathering up rags, broken pots, and coagulated bodies of those who died silently.

By the end of November 1942,[only] the Jews of Volkovysk and Svislucz remained. At the end of the month, another transport of several thousand Jews of Svislucz was driven away, along with two bunkers (approximately 1000 people), of people from Volkovysk. At the beginning of December there were still 5000 Jews in the camp, and 1000 Jews from Svislucz among them.

Towards the end of November, Noah Fuchs fell ill with a serious lung inflammation. The camp commandant Tsirka, came to ask about him a number of times (the members of the *Judenrat* lived in a wooden bunker). After such a visit, Tsirka let the doctors know in his usual cold and serious fashion, that “Fuchs must get well.” An important position awaits him, and he had it in mind to appoint him as a camp commandant in the new Jewish camp of 70,000 Jews.

And to where did all these transports go? This question did not stop nagging everybody. The *Judenrat* made an effort to get in touch with the employees of the Polish railroad. At first it became clarified that the direction of the transport was – to the west, and then afterwards north to the stations of : Bialystock, Malkin, and at the end, *Treblinka*. Our understanding about this extermination camp were not yet clear, but one thing we already understood: “All who arrive there will not return...”

Meanwhile, news arrived at the beginning of December that had the effect of a spark in a can of gunpowder. A group of workers from the bunkers worked in Petroshevitsa (a few kilometers from Volkovysk), and they were building a “Pithom and Rameses.”<sup>7</sup> Fuchs and Daniel had gone several times to the German supervisors

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7

A biblical allusion to the cities built by the Hebrew slaves for Pharaoh in Egypt, i.e. a major construction project.

of the work in Petroshevitsa, on the hopes that together, they could influence the central command not to liquidate the bunkers according to schedule, but to leave a detail of 1700 able-bodied young people, until the scheduled time of – August 1943. After additional negotiation, they succeeded in convincing them that there should be about 100 women among the 1700. They achieved nothing in connection with children. Immediately afterwards, Svislucz succeeded in securing several hundred places among the 1700 designated ones. However, there was much thought given over to this matter. However, the consideration of cases grew without bounds after people started to pay attention to the matter, when it was determined that the list of the 1700 young people (among them 250 from Svislucz) was to be compiled by the *Judenrat*. That is to say, the selection had to be done by the Jews themselves. There is no need to describe the chaos of those days. A war of life and death broke out (according to the bare and simple meaning of this phrase). On one side was Treblinka, which made it seem – that to stay in this wretched for another six months: the bunkers looked like paradise, six months – like an eternity. For a few days, hundreds and hundreds of people descended on the bunker of the *Judenrat*, each one asking for a favor for themselves, and afterwards, for their wife, a child, brother, sister. Fuchs and Daniel wrote things down, and then erased them. And then they wrote again and erased again: and it seemed they finally completed the list; then, on the morrow, came yet additional modifications, and so forth, without end. Here, an individual would succeed, after a tremendous effort, to be put on the list, and tomorrow he would refuse to go, because no place was allocated for his wife; one would go to bed, satisfied in the knowledge that he was to remain behind, and on the following day, found out that he was erased from the list. Somebody more important than him had been found. Blood relations, friendship, pleading, carrying on, screaming, crying – all of these were employed in the war to be able to remain in the bunkers. In this maelstrom of hope and fear, Tsirka walked about like an indifferent observer on the side, and from time to time, he would inquire whether the list had been completed.

On the seventh day, we were notified that all those selected were to go over from the Volkovysk bunkers to the Ruzhany bunkers. Along with this, groups at a time would also exit by way of the gate, under the watch of the Gestapo, and the Jewish organizers of the arrangement. Along with this, those going to the Ruzhany bunkers were searched incessantly, and many of the “illegals” were driven back after every search. People ran about, and back and forth as if they were crazy, trying by any means to gain entrance to the Ruzhany bunkers, the place for uplifting of their souls. Those that had children, gave them a quarter dose of Luminal and carried them while they were asleep, in sacks on their shoulders, and while still in the sacks, put them to bed on new bunks. The short December day went, and when evening fell, Tsirka came to the Ruzhany bunkers with two assistants in order to carry out the final count. The children were once again given Luminal powder, and hidden in sacks among the bundles. Several tens of “illegal” adults hid themselves in the mud, under the bottom bunks, and the remainder went outside, stood in front of the bunkers in rows of five abreast, and awaited the investigation. A vehicle immediately reached the place of the bunkers, that stood opposite the Jews, and with two searchlights, they illuminated the two groups of the “selected ones,” one who might have been separated from a relative, from a father, mother, brother, and sister, who were not given the privilege of being counted in the 1700. The dark of the night was cut by the lights from the bus, and the compressed snow in its tire tracks, and that didn’t stop falling into any opening, small or large.

The Gestapo men with rubber truncheons in their hands passed by the groups, and went to eat their dinner, leaving the designated investigation for afterwards. At this time there were groups of two hundred. The silence of frightened people pervaded the block. There were those who listened with a fluttering heart to determine if the effect of the Luminal might not have stopped working on the children, and there were others whose thoughts were with their relatives who had remained in the Volkovysk bunkers. The snow fell endlessly, and without end, since the objective had been delayed until Tsirka finished his evening meal. Only after two hours did the officials return, one went through the bunkers, and two counted each of the groups, that were then driven with rubber truncheons into the bunkers. After running the totals, and adding in the members of the Jewish police and the *Judenrat*, who had not yet arrived, Tsirka proclaimed that the count

was “in order,” and left to dispatch the others. At two o’clock in the morning, the members of the Jewish police and the *Judenrat* joined us, and with this, the selection was complete...

On the morning of December 8, a new and final period began in the camp. Out of twenty thousand Jews who had been here only a few months ago, only a little more than 1700 remained, who began to get themselves settled all over again. One of the former Volkovysk blocks was designated for the use of these remaining people, with eight bunkers and one building of wood. The transfer protocol was very slow, and took a week’s time. First, a German exterminator treated the eight bunkers, and afterwards, a few solitary groups were brought over from the Ruzhany bunkers to the bath house, and from the bath house to the bunkers that had been disinfected. This was the way they wanted to get rid of the lice.

I was among the first group to return to the Volkovysk bunkers. An awful sight was revealed to me: upon entry into the block, next to the *Judenrat* building, a pile of corpses had been dumped in a mound, one on top of the other, heads leaking blood, arms and legs sticking out, half naked and contorted – who had been killed in the final liquidation: inside the bunkers – bags, dresses, bedding, utensils – all scattered and mixed together. On many of these things, there were bloodstains; between the bunkers, an elderly woman ran about, gray-haired and exclaiming out loud: why did they not also take me? She ran to each of us and begged us to turn her over to the Germans so they would shoot her; all the bunkers were empty of people. Only in Bunker number 3, were we surprised to find a large number (over 70) old and sick people incapable of being transported. The larger part of them were already frozen; their eyes were fixed on one point, as if they no longer had any minds; others did not stop talking to themselves softly; others of them began to move a lot, upon seeing new people, begging for bread and water. Among the elderly was also a young man, about thirty years old, who was an amputee, who moved himself about with the help of his arms; a solitary, sick young girl, age 16, screamed without stopping, “Water, water,” even when they brought her something. About seventy Jews, who had been brought together from all the bunkers, not even worthy of Treblinka, were tossed into their own filth and that of others at that time.

After a few days, Tsirka summoned two doctors and demanded that they poison the “Third Bunker.” “After all, you do know,” – he said – “it is possible to kill them with machine guns very quickly, but to what end must we create a tumult like that...” the doctors refused to do this. “Well, we have some more time” – the cold, cynical wretch smiled, and let the doctors go.

In the meantime, the exterminator and his assistant processed one bunker after another, and more and more of the people were transferred over to their old-new locations. Before nightfall, they would seal the windows, doors and transoms, and in the corners of the bunker they would place two dishes of burning sulfur, they would burn them until the following morning, and then open up the bunker again, and on this basis, it was supposed to be rid of insects.

They carried out almost exactly the same procedure on Bunker Number 3, late one night, when all of the [other] bunkers were already asleep, and exactly after they had set the dish of sulfur aflame, they closed the doors tightly, leaving the seventy souls inside the bunker. What took place in the bunker on that night, is known only to those unfortunate victims. We were able to get an idea of what had transpired, on the following day, when the bunker was opened once again, and we learned of what had taken place here. The bunker was suffused with the familiar odor of sulfur. The first part of the dead were arrayed about in various postures of grimace and contortion. The terrible suffering was etched on their faces; a few were still hanging on with the last of their energies; the sick girl continued to groan “water, water,” almost inaudibly; the young amputee was head down into the plate, with his legless body up in the air; it was he who tried to stop the flow of the burning gas with his body. In this fashion, seventy Jews were wiped out by excruciating torture, with a gas that could kill lice and bugs only with great difficulty after 12 hours.

Tsirka celebrated his victory: he didn't have to rely on the assistance of a noisy machine gun...

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After several days, the period of the transfer was finished, the Gestapo guard was removed, Tsirka left. The camp was turned over to the *Wehrmacht* and the surveillance over the 1700 Jews who were privileged to be saved from the fate of the prior 18,000 went over to the hands of the [regular army] soldiers.

With each daybreak, the soldiers would come to take the men out to work. The *Judenrat* would remain in the camp, the Jewish police (about twenty people), the group of doctors, the kitchen workers, and the monitors in the bunkers. The food improved from this point forward, but the actual rations remained the same as before, but the members of the *Judenrat* had the privilege of movement about the city, and would buy bread from the Polish bakers, and the guard that accompanied them to bring bread was bribed, and turned a blind eye to the “dealings” of the Jews. The winter was already at its most intense, and the cold left its marks. The worst problem was a lack of shoes. The *Judenrat* arranged for a shoemaking operation, which provided some minimal relief from the shortage of shoes. In general, there was a feeling of improved circumstances, not heretofore found, in the new conditions; Jews installed iron stoves against which they could warm themselves, and cook something or another. The kitchen distributed warm weather twice daily; warm soup was provided at noon. However, without much delay, illness began to spread. First, dysentery; people would lose their strength from this, and could only stand on their legs with great difficulty. Immediately after this came the spotted typhus. The bunkers were infested with lice, and no amount of disinfecting helped, or any other remedy. The epidemic of the lice reached unbearable heights, and the result was not long in coming. It is enough to say that in the middle of January, examinations were held – before the illness or afterwards – of over 800 people. This was a special chapter that needs its own explanation. From 30 to 40 percent of the [allegedly] able-bodied workers were sick with this disease, and since it was forbidden to let the Germans find out, they didn't know. The dedication and commitment of the doctors and nurses is noted, who were infected first because of this (let the enormous work and the dedication of the doctors be recalled here: Yitzhak Resnick, Eliezer Epstein, Marek Kaplan, Joseph Wallach, and others). The organization of three bunkers as hospitals, disinfection processes, the provision of required medication, the concealment over in the second side of the camp, the minimal death rate thanks to all this – a major chapter, in the story of the Volkovysk bunkers, which demands a special record.

In one of the bunkers, there was found a group of 150 young men from the small town of Kamenitz<sup>8</sup>. During the summer season, they had been brought to Volkovysk to work, and ended up here on November 2 in their present condition. Their condition was far worse. They suffered from hunger and frost more than others. Many of them became swollen with hunger and were frozen to death. Only with our involvement did the *Judenrat* begin to give them personal attention. However, they were not helped much by this, and incidents of death were a daily occurrence.

The principal characteristic of that period was taking care of personal needs. The Jews got used to the idea that the camp was something permanent, and because of this, they tried with all their might to last out the winter. The hope was that spring should only arrive. As to what might happen when the spring arrived, not a person gave any thought to. But a spark of hope was thought of in connection with that event...

There were even arbitration sessions conducted by the *Judenrat*: here was a ruling about a young fellow age 16 with an older man concerning a piece of material goods. Both of them present their arguments to Fuchs

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<sup>8</sup> It is not evident if this refers to Krzemienica.

and Daniel. Thought are expressed such as: this was abandoned property, in the public domain – as if this were a Torah ruling. Another couple came to the court over a dispute about a watch. The judgement was supported by the Jewish police.

Six months went by against the count of “The First of August.” The doctors estimated that the spotted typhus epidemic (the epidemic was the central concern; in addition to illness, there was the hunger – under the best of circumstances, there was recognizably poor sustenance – the cold, and the hard labor out in the cold, among the minor issues) had reached its peak. According to the prevailing thought, the epidemic was to have run its course by the end of November. Suddenly, an end came to all the hopes and ideas. On January 23, 1943 it appears that our distinguished friend Tsirka had been in the camp. Even before we were told the purpose of his visit, a tumult reigned in the camp. The news of Tsirka’s arrival flew with lightning speed from bunker to bunker, and everyone instinctively felt that danger hovered in the air, the Angel of Death had come to the city...

He entered the *Judenrat*, and advised that all the initially transported people were settled. It was now our turn. Nevertheless – he added – it was difficult for them, but for us it would be much easier... He did not know the exact schedule of the trip. At this time, he demanded only two people to assist him in compiling a list of all the people in the camp, and a typewriter (according to the order: family name, age, occupation, as was the usual...)

The tumult increased from minute to minute. On the 25<sup>th</sup> of the month he notified that the transport will depart of the evening of the 26<sup>th</sup>. The news reached even the several hundred sick, who were lying in the three hospital bunkers (one bunker, and two wooden buildings). People began to dash about the area of the block, looking for some escape, but in vain. The sick, who obtained a place in the hospital only with great difficulty, summoned strength within themselves as if with a magician’s wand. With temperatures of 40°C [104°F], almost delirious, they left their mattresses, wandered between the bunkers, as if they wanted to demonstrate that they had the strength, out of fear that as sick people, they would be killed on the spot. The majority, despondent and oppressed, prepared themselves for the journey, attempting to provision themselves with an extra piece of bread or another bundle.

In speaking about the last 24 hours of the bunkers, it is my wish to also dedicate a few words to the question of “Bialystock.” From the time of November 23, 1942, when twenty thousand Jews were suddenly dropped, denigrated and suffering, into the most difficult and inhuman conditions, Bialystock, or more appropriately, Ghetto Bialystock, the acme of everyone’s dreams, the *Fata Morgana* of everyone, because there still – so to speak – one could seek refuge for oneself. The news that arrived by circuitous routs from there, told of ordinary living in houses, about sleep in beds, about enough to eat one’s fill, on organized work, and most importantly – the strong position enjoyed by the Jews of Bialystock that worked in the factories, whose perception led them to believe there was no danger. And indeed, during the first several weeks, it became possible for several tens of people to get to Bialystock; by themselves, by bribing Germans, as was the case of Smazanovich of Volkovysk, Dr. Meisel from Svislucz; Engineer Barash was able to bring a number of families over in a unique fashion, the Head of the Bialystock *Judenrat*, his relatives and Zionist workers: his brothers, Sonya Botvinsky, Messrs. Peisik and Berman, Shpiatsky, the widow of the Lawyer, Eliezer Bliakher and her son, etc. Even during the period of the 1700, there were those who sought means to get to Bialystock. However, in this instance, the *Judenrat* opposed them, who by virtue of their designated Jewish police, found out about these suspicions to leave, about which they were not aware. Prior incidents of attempted escape caused the *Judenrat* to look upon such attempts with severity. The leadership of the *Judenrat* took the position that it was people with money that were most desired to try to escape, and that this money could help to extend the time that the camp would continue to operate.

On the evening of January 25<sup>th</sup>, when it became known that the camp would be liquidated the following day, a great deal of movement was perceived among the families of the *Judenrat* members in the wooden bunker. The women began to pack bags – they dressed the children warmly. The guards picked up the activity, and they surrounded the wooden bunker, and after an exchange of sharp words, it became clear that the members of the *Judenrat* wanted to send their families to Bialystock, the head of the Jewish police simply advised that not a person was to leave the building, because in any event, nobody will get out of there. They deduced from this, that during all the time that others were being watched in case they attempted to escape, that this weaponry was now being turned back on those that used it.

The *Judenrat* and their family members spent the night under house arrest; “Authority” was transferred to the Jewish police. Characteristic Jewish humor surfaced even here: the fate of the government, the army has taken over the rule ( a hint to an illusion that this might be the way it’ll end with the Germans).

On January 23<sup>rd</sup> at three in the afternoon, my friend and companion, Dr. Resnick and I left the camp. Several hours before the liquidation, we managed to flee the camp in the company of a group of workers, and along the way, to run away from the German guard. To this day, I can see the camp as I left it. The wooden bunker of the *Judenrat*, full of people going back and forth, as if by listening ‘at the transoms’ they would find out something new; the block completely crowded with people, running from one to the other; the sick, wrapped in bandages, eyes fevered from the temperature, walking around like wraiths in an illusory world; slowly, slowly, walking like infants, they seem to try to accustom themselves to moving about; those that have recently recovered, walking around on their coagulated legs, waving their arms in the air as if looking for a point of support; in the hospital lay that part of the sick that cannot move; and others of them – quiet, resigned, as if they were already in another world. Among them, nervous types, angered ones, wailing and crying; In the ‘regular bunkers,’ – a tapestry of people who feel the sentence of death on their skin; women making the final preparations, packing up their baggage as best they can; all gripped by fear, with no options; an admixture of anger and despair — and outside, a freezing cold of 25°F, with wind and snow enveloping everything...

\* \* \*

Eighteen thousand Jews from Volkovysk were exterminated in Treblinka. From what is known to me, there is nothing comparable to the suffering of Treblinka. The last 1700 were taken to Auschwitz – but on the transport of suffering and the experience of Auschwitz, this will be revealed by those solitary [survivors] that were tried in this Hell and by some stroke of luck, were not incinerated.

\* \* \*

A small addendum at the end: What as been said above doe not constitute a *history* of this period of Volkovysk, and there was no intent to make it so. These are only a few scratches, and portraits of what I underwent, and suffered from everything suffered by the enormous sacrifices that were torn from me, and they were very enormous...

*Page 53: The Fire House in Volkovysk*

## **Eighteen Months in the Box** **(The Tribulations of one of the Scions of our City, Eliyahu Kushnir)**

**Transcribed By Eliezer Kalir**

I have nothing to be proud of: I didn't do great things, or bring forth creations, no acts of heroism; – this is how our scion of Volkovysk began his story.

My wife and I were saved from death by miracles, because of a variety of circumstances, or more appropriately – we survived because of Providence!

My family is, after all, known to all of you: My father's name was Moshe-Alter Kushnir; in the city, we were nicknamed the 'shinglers' (*kakhelnikehs*), because of the shingle factory that we had. We were a prolific Hassidic family that was quiet and worked hard; but what's the use of dwelling on this; their fate was the same as the fate of all the Jews of Volkovysk, and it is a pity over our unforgettable losses.

I remained one of eight children, now 35 years old, I completed a course of study for pharmacy at the Warsaw University, and I worked in Kurlandsky's Pharmacy on the *Wide Boulevard*. In 1934, I moved to Krinki, and there, I married into the Zelkind family, and I remained there. I was in that city when the war broke out.

Krinki was always a city of hard workers, of leather factories, with a revolutionary spirit. Even back in the days of [Czar] Nicholas, Krinki distinguished itself in its battles with the Cossacks and the Czarist police. They were forced to maintain a detail of Cossacks in Krinki to maintain order. Krinki once made its own holiday, and carried out a 'Krinkist' socialist revolution, taking control of the newspaper, the telegraph, threw the mayor (Пристав) in jail, tied up the village policeman (Урядник) and threw him into a pig sty. The famous revolutionary, Sikarsky who engaged in a life of rebellion, was a tanner from Krinki. And when they heard that the Red Army had crossed the border, the workers of Krinki did not hesitate, and immediately took control of the government, and while the Polish police were still in the city, the Red Flag already flew over the town of Krinki.

When the Soviets came into the city, there was great joy, and the Jews were fortunate, and even the sworn enemies of the communists – the wealthy, and the factory owners were content: to them, the essence of the matter was that a death sentence – the entry of the Germans – had been exchanged for life imprisonment. I worked in Zhokovitsky's pharmacy, a collective appointed me as the head of the pharmacy, and my boss – as my employee. At my effort, permission was granted for him to live in his house, where the pharmacy was located. A Soviet way of life began, and apart from the very wealthy, who were arrested and exiled to Siberia, the Jewish population was treated decently. They lived, worked, and waited for better times to arrive. They hoped – and their hope was realized – when on June 22, German airplanes appeared that began to bomb the city. Handbills were dropped from the planes, telling the population to go out into the fields, and put white handkerchiefs on their heads. The people went out into the fields, and sat there until June 28, six whole days – until a few planes started to fly in low, and as soon as they saw Jews, they gave a sign, and opened with cannon fire. Many Jews were killed, including my boss, along with his two daughters, who were remarkably beautiful.

The Germans had just but arrived in the city, and there was an immediate change to the relations between the Christians and the Jews. In this place, during the period of the Bolsheviks, relations were literally ideal, but now the Christians began to reveal the hatred and wrath they felt towards the Jews. They began to inform

on the Jews and to pursue them, helping with their capture and imprisonment, using the excuse that they were communists, and they were taken out for execution. The well-known decrees were issued, concerning the wearing of a yellow badge, being forbidden to address a Christian, to conduct commerce, to own a horse or a cow; apart from the murder of a Jew, which was necessary to them, the most severe punishment was a fine of five marks. I also put on the yellow badge, and remained at work in the pharmacy; there was no other pharmacist. I stood in my white overcoat, a yellow badge on the front and the back – and I prepared medicines. My profession saved me, and relatively speaking I was not bad off. I even was able to bring a brother and a sister-in-law from Volkovysk, to work with me in the pharmacy, and they stayed with me for about a year.

On December 13, 1941, they created a ghetto. They fenced off a quarter with barbed wire, and drove all the Jews into it. As it happened, the gate of the ghetto went through the yard of my pharmacy. This coincidence had great significance afterwards. Since it was not possible to bring anything in through the ghetto gate, the Jews who were taken to do work, and managed to get a hold of some food outside the ghetto walls – used to drop it off at the pharmacy, and we would throw the food over the fence into the ghetto. Meanwhile a typhus epidemic broke out in the ghetto. The overcrowding was unbearable. In addition, they drove the Jews of Berestovitz into the ghetto, and the overcrowding became even more difficult. I set up a pharmacy inside the ghetto, and upon my arrival there in the evening, I would sit and prepare medicines. But my Commissar did not rest and was not silent; he wanted to get rid of me at all times. And looked for someone to replace me. In the fullness of time, he was able to find a Polish professor of Agronomy, from the University of Vienna, who according to what he said, had an uncle who was a pharmacist, and was acquainted with the preparation of medicaments. The truth was, that this professor knew about as much about preparing medicine as a rooster can pass himself off as a human being. And even he made an effort to get me back to the pharmacy. Up til this point, life in the ghetto went along under the fear of death and nightmares. Rumors circulated about massacres in other cities. They told of ‘actions’ against children, ‘actions’ against the elderly in Lithuania and other places. On November 1, 1942, rumors spread throughout the ghetto, that ‘something’ was going to happen. What a tumult. When I returned home that evening, I found everyone possessed by confusion. The Jewish police of the ghetto had found out from the Polish auxiliary police that something was supposed to take place in the ghetto tomorrow. The members of the family implored me to return to the pharmacy. My mother promised me to watch the little boy – he had a good hiding place. Because I did not want to go alone, my wife was persuaded to accompany me, in the sure knowledge that she was leaving the boy in safe hands (the boy was 2 ½ years old). At night, both of us left the room, we threw a path across the barbed wire, consisting of rags; first I went over the fence, and afterwards, I helped my wife over; I entered the pharmacy, and we went up to the attic. We slept this way for the entire night. At six in the morning, we heard a loud commotion in the ghetto, wild screams, wailing and shooting. Afterwards, the sound of a whole camp of wagons reached our ears. We did not know what was happening. The pharmacy was not opened. Only at ten o’clock did I hear people milling about at the pharmacy. I came down very slowly, and peeked through a crack in the rear door into the pharmacy. The woman Christian assistant who worked in the pharmacy sensed my presence and came over to me. – send me the professor, I asked her; the professor came out, and when he saw me, he spread out his hands – Good sir, what are you doing here? They have taken all of them away, and not one of them remains. – My dear professor – I say to him – relax, we will leave this night, we will not stay here. I asked only one thing of you, that you take pity on me, please go to the ghetto and look around as ee what has happened to our family! – I have no need to go – the professor replied, there isn’t even a trace of anyone left. Please try to leave tonight, because I am trembling!

I returned to the attic, and remained there for the entire day, and with nightfall, when the professor left the pharmacy, I went back down there, and took with me doses of poison that would be sufficient for the both of us, and returned back up with the thought, that in the morning, before the arrival of the professor, we would settle the matter... however, upon arising, when dawn broke, we heard a cry and a wail: I had the

thought, could this perhaps be my son?!... We were taken aback; the implication of this fact was, were there still Jews in the town? I came down from the attic, and saw a Jew, named Joseph Holtz – a member of the *Judenrat* – running back and forth, with clenched hands, looking for the members of his family that had vanished. It became evident, that he and 240 people were left behind; 150 men to work in the leather factory, and ninety to clean out the ghetto. As to the rest of the people, they were beaten bloody, killed and driven out in the space of three quarters of an hour. The children were dragged and thrown onto wagons, and sent away. Within an hour, there was not a living soul left inside the ghetto. This was a pogrom conducted at lightning speed, in order that no person have a chance to save himself, since nobody had any idea as to what was happening. I called up to my wife to come down from the attic; the barbed wire was broken in many places from the intensity of upset, and the power of the movement that took place there – and with quick steps we turned and moved, entered the ghetto, and mixed in with the people who were gathered together there. How is it possible to describe the picture of what lay before us in the ghetto? Doors and gates left wide open, electric lights on; here a pot of food, half cooked; there a sewing machine; shirts that had not been completely sewn; the dough for a loaf of bread that had just begun to be kneaded, with three hand prints visible in it; a grater – a potato that had not been completely grated, a prayer book opened to the *Shemoneh Esrei* – at the prayer, *VeTekhezena Eineinu* (May our eyes behold your return to Zion with mercy...) – A *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer interrupted in the middle; A prayer shawl and phylacteries, the one for the head all wrapped up, the one for the arm still unraveled; the beds not made... people were driven out of bed, seized from cribs – this was in the morning – Jews getting ready to go on with their lives, the ‘normal’ life of the ghetto.

After several days of work in the factory, I approached the manager, and I presented him with a gift of a set sum of money that I had put aside from my work, and he appointed me as the medic for the camp, and my wife as a nurse, and in this manner, we were temporarily spared. Over time, I became more friendly with the manager, and we were in the habit of bringing him gifts frequently. There were no lack of such gifts. The energy and work [sic: property] of the Jews counted for nothing in the ghetto. It was possible to walk into a house, and take whatever you wanted. If a Christian took a serving dish from the ghetto, he was shot, but they did not bother the Jews. The reason, is they knew that sooner or later, it would all become theirs. It was upsetting and shattering to walk into these dad houses; wild cats would jump from under the pillows of the unmade beds...

And that’s how I became a medic. Jews would come to me with their ailments, with wounds – oh, help me! – and I would reply, but you know – I can’t – and they would say: do something, operate, what will be will be – but do something! And I must add, success was with me, I operated, I bandaged, I healed, and many illnesses persisted for a long time. I never sterilized a needle, because there was no antiseptic, and there was not a single instance of infection.

On one ‘bright morning,’ one of the auxiliary Polish police came over to me, and said that a peasant wanted to see me. I had no particular will to go out to him, because the peasants were in the habit of coming to buy things from the Jews. They wanted to buy everything that had any value: and overcoat, a jacket, a pair of boots: – for what purpose do you want to hold onto this, since you don’t need it anyway. I will pay you, and this will be food for several days; – despite this, I went out, and saw the peasant Pyotr Bigansky before me – the owner of our prior house. – (In the first year of my marriage, I lived in his house). – *Panie* Kushnir, he said to me, I came to you so that you can provide me with copies of the prescriptions you once gave me!.. I looked at him in astonishment: – what medicine did I prepare for you? – I asked in astonishment. When he saw that the policeman was eavesdropping on the conversation, the gentile winked at me – that was the medicine you once gave me for a stomach ache... – oh, I said, *that* prescription? I took out a piece of paper, I turned to the side, and began to write... listen to me, the peasant said – I heard from reliable sources that during the month of March the Germans are going to retreat, and because of this, I want to take you and your

wife to me. I have arranged everything for you... – well, I say, and what if they don't retreat, what will happen then? He says, we shall see, I am not a little boy, he continues to plead with me, and then asks whether I can obtain a black jacket for him, a pair of shades and a pair of women's stockings. I complimented him on his good heart, and I told him, good, let us see...

I always thought of my former landlord as being half-crazy. He loved to babble a great deal, and in addition to this he was a nervous man, and irascible. Because of this, I placed no value on his words, and I continued to remain in the camp. Despite this, I managed to get a hold of a black jacket, a pair of shades and stockings, and at an appropriate opportunity, had them sent to his house.

In the meantime, time did its own work. A month had not gone by since I met my landlord, when 'good news' began once again to get bruited about in the air, and a tumult arose in the camp.

On January 24<sup>th</sup>, they took away the tools from the Jewish workers, and from the surrounding ambience, it was recognized that the last hours are approaching. I went to the manager and put the question right on the line: will anyone remain in the camp after the liquidation, or not? He answered – if anyone remains, you will be among them!.. from this answer, I understood where we stood in the world. The tumult grew and grew, there were mostly young people in the camp, and they had a strong will to live! Young women, full of life, wanted to live! We want life! How does one change into a mouse and hide in a hole in order to survive!... And there were no forests and partisans in our vicinity.

My wife and I secretly told a number of our acquaintances that we had a hideout, but that we no longer had any faith in the person to whom we had to go, and on top of this, we had no money. The people began to talk to us, and to convince us that we had nothing to lose anyway, and strongly demanded that we should go – perhaps we would stay alive, and perhaps we would be saved and be able to tell the world what happened to the Jews of Krinki. – There was one Jew among them, named Wacht, a factory worker, who took it upon himself to get us out of the camp that was encircled by police. After much thought, we decided to undertake this effort, and that night we gathered in a dark corner of the camp. Wacht came to us, and called to the auxiliary policeman standing at the gate, and said: Listen Stashk, I will show you a bunker where a large amount of gold is hidden, and my share is half – but you move away from the gate for a couple of minutes, so that we can go out. The policeman agreed, made believe that he didn't see anything, and we exited the camp.

It was a dark night, and a driving rain was falling to the ground, and we walked through fields, we forded the little river and somehow or another, reached our venerable acquaintance, our former landlord. We entered the room, and my wife went to the window and quietly knocked on it. – who's there? A woman's voice was heard, who's there, but don't come in just now, because I am taking a bath. We went down into the cellar and sat there, full of fear. A great deal of water leaked into this cellar, and because it was a rainy night, the landlord came down into the cellar to bail the water, in order that the potatoes not get soaked... and when he saw us, he became tongue-tied, but immediately said: – it is good that you have come. However, when he lit a match and saw a third person, he grew pale, and balled up his fists – I said only two people, and what was I supposed to do now?! We felt responsible for him, because when Wacht told us he would take us through the gate, he had not indicated his desire to accompany us. And it was only on the way that he said, in any event, I am going with you, and perhaps stay with you. – We began to plead with the landlord, to kiss his hands: If it will be crowded, it is we who will be crowded. Until he finally agreed, and said: what can we do, what will be, will be. He took us into the house, gave us food, and took us back into the cellar. There, under a huge pile of potatoes, a cabinet had been prepared, about a meter and forty long, a meter wide, and a meter high. We would get into the cabinet through a small rectangular window, which was then covered by boards, and potatoes spread over them, that is to say, space for two people with their legs drawn up.

However, as it happened, we were three, and so we arranged that one of us would have to stand inside the cabinet. He brought us into the cabinet, covered us in potatoes, closed up the cellar. And...for days at a time, we didn't see a living soul. We sat, faint from hunger, not knowing where we were in the world. It was only at night that we heard a scraping sound. The landlord came, and explained that he hadn't brought food because he was very busy, he had a holiday, slaughtering a pig...he brought us into the house, and gave us from the slaughtered pig to eat, and told us about our daily routine: it was our responsibility to follow everything he said, not to ask questions, and not to speak at any length. His words were sacrosanct: there was nothing to worry about, he would take care of our concerns. We are to be careful with noise and movement, because we are surrounded by enemies on all sides. In particular his brothers, mortal enemies, and yet they frequently came to take their foodstuffs from the cellar. Every two weeks he would take us out of the cellar for purposes of taking a bath. He would bring us food each evening. When he would come to get potatoes for the cattle, he would take away the waste...

In this manner, our lives in the grave of the potato cellar began: we could not tell the difference between night and day, and we lost all sense of time; when the landlord came to us, we would ask him – *Panie gospodzha*, what is it now, day or night? In general, he was not in the habit of replying, and did not like to talk to us... every day, at the appointed hour, the window would suddenly open, a pot full of cooked food would be lowered in, and again covered in potatoes. This act was accomplished in the blink of an eye.

It was a big event for us the night we came out to bathe, once in two weeks: at evening time yet, the gentile would run all over the yard, looking in his brothers' windows, neighbors, checking to see that they were all home, or if one or another of them still has to arrive. And when he was finished reconnoitering the area, and was sure that everything was in order, he would give a signal with the word, *Jusz!* (Now!). Then we would speedily come out of the cellar and into the house. The room was already shut and locked, and the windows covered, the doors locked, and then we would bathe. The lady of the house, not a 'corpse,' but an angel, alert and generous in heart without measure, would prepare a meal for us. We would bathe, eat and grab a nap for a few hours in their beds. Oh! How lucky we were to stretch out our legs in a bed meant for a human being. During that time, the landlord sat and whittled, and he would sit with us and discuss ideas: when the war is over, we will all travel far, far away to a new village, and we will live there in each other's company, go to church together, and everything will be good... he was a very religious Catholic, and wanted us to convert, but nevertheless, when he heard a sermon by a priest in church that 'we' should be grateful to the 'Lord Jesus' that we got rid of the Jewish problem, he felt a great wound in his soul, and he stopped going to church. – this was not a priest to him, but some scum of a man, who could go to hell... this was how he expressed himself with the most severe of tongue-lashings, towards his priest. But a long time did not go by, and we were forced to give up our bathing. Once, while we were in the midst of bathing, there suddenly came knocks on the window. We were all like the dead ... to our good fortune, the lady of the house, always full of nerve and courage, did not lose her composure and answered as was her custom: wait, I can't open the door, because I am bathing. As it turned out, it was one of the brothers who had come looking for his horse, and had come to ask if anyone had seen him.

Our lives went on like this until the spring of 1943. At the same time, Wacht fell ill with Tuberculosis and developed a strong cough. His condition grew worse from day to day. The landlord decided to move us into an attic. But there, his condition continued to worsen. This was apparently from catching cold. He coughed so much, that it could be heard all the way into the street. He began to plead with the landlord that he should be taken to Bialystock. The ghetto was still in existence there, and he had friends there. This was fraught with great danger, but despite this, the landlord hitched up his horse, and putting his life on the line, brought him to Bialystock. What a strange thing! without even looking at the fact that the landlord suffered a great deal from Wacht, because we, for example, didn't ask anything of him, and whatever he gave us was fine, but Wacht would always ask for cigarettes, tobacco, and didn't give him any money; and despite this, the peasant

fulfilled his request.. And after all this, when the sick person was being taken by wagon, the sense of pity by the peasant farmer so overwhelmed him, that he asked Wacht to return after he got well. After having invested so much work in him, he was reluctant to see him lost. As we later learned, this is what happened: Wacht indeed got better, and was returning to us, but on the way, the Germans shot him...

After Wacht left, we remained in the attic. For the first time, we were abandoned, and we could be discovered at any time, but after the harvest of the green fodder and its transfer to the attic, the landlord constructed a new cabinet under the fodder, and began to provide us with better food, with a lot of fat, in order to strengthen us. It is necessary to add that some Christians who hid Jews, eventually killed them by themselves over time, because they got disgusted with them; but in our case, the longer our stay continued, the closer the landlord and his wonderful wife became tied to us. Our friendship went so far, that I permitted myself to ask him for something. It was a newspaper... I once crawled out of the cabinet in order to take a peek at a newspaper, and as I was standing there, a Christian came up to the loft, who was about thirty years old or so, and started to look for something... and when he saw me, he was thrown back pale, deathly, like someone who has seen someone from another world... he descended from the loft without uttering a syllable. We were seized with a shuddering, but as you can understand, we couldn't do anything to help the situation. The Gentile was not a bad person by nature, and not stupid, and simply acted ignorant, even in front of the landlord... but ever time he brought him honey from the beehives, he gave him a special portion of honey as a gift. – Why are you giving me this? the landlord would ask – Take it, take it, you need it! When a pig was slaughtered, he would bring meat. – For what purpose? – the landlord would refuse. – Take it, it's coming to you!....

Our situation grew most serious, when a Ukrainian police unit was established in our yard, along with SS troops that had fled from the front when the Russians drove the Germans out of the Ukraine. They immediately revealed their capabilities, finding three Jews in a bunker, and burying them alive... and we found out later that the landlord didn't even want to tell us about this.

Once, the landlord prepared a surprise for us: he had his own idiosyncrasies. A son was born to him, and he decided to hold the baptism in the loft. The room was very tight, and the loft was wide and spacious. He hung white sheets along the walls of the loft, laid out tables, invited guests, along with the neighbors and his brothers, the police, and they ate and drank all day, got drunk, and sang together, and we lay in the cabinet under the fodder, looking at this gentile equivalent to a circumcision. We listened to prayers offered to the Holy Jesus, the Virgin Mary, we looked into the unclean faces of the Ukrainians, murderers and traitors, wearing green SS insignias and thought: the gentiles are alive, and into their cups, eating, carrying on, and happy – the world goes on according to its way – and we have arrived at an end like this... and I was reminded of our vengeful ancient God, and I asked him: Why is this? Why did we deserve this? I was reminded of a prayer I would say with my father regularly in the synagogue, when I was a boy: *He who answered Daniel in the lion's den, he will answer us! Take pity on us and save us...as you rescued Daniel from the lion's den! Show us your mercy, for we are the last... the last...we did not believe anything else but that we were the last Jews in the world...*

In the evening, when the drunken crowd had dispersed, on wobbly knees, the landlord brought us something to eat: , whiskey, the bacon from the pig, and candies, and we were happy with him, and we offered our best wishes for a lot of *nachas* to our dear lady of the house, because we were certain that if there was a Garden of Eden, that the gentile woman, Nistra Bigansky would be seated at the head, together with the matriarchs, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah.

Again, we went through an period of fear, when the German police carried out a search for bootleg liquor throughout the entire city. Our landlord had several tens of liters of this beverage, which was hidden near

our cabinet. It's the same thing, he said: if they find you, they can find the whiskey already... but even this search passed peaceably: rested on top of the redolent fodder, and left....

In the meantime, the Red Army got closer and closer; the moment finally arrived when the Germans had to pull up stakes. But the snakes didn't want to run off just like that, and they ran from house to house, and threw in incendiary grenades, setting the whole town ablaze. The landlord ran around like he was crazed... what to do? He didn't care about his house, but rather, what would happen to *us*? He had invested so much in us, was he to stand by and watch us go up in flames? One evening, he came up to the loft as usual, and announced: Leave! I will go first, she, five paces behind me, step by step! He took us out into the field, taking us literally through the German artillery, until we came to his field. Here, he told us to lie down between the corn stalks, and he went off. We slept the whole night, and the noise of the German command reached our ears, we literally heard their every word, and thought: what will be our end... we had better get out of here... but in the morning, when I stood up and saw in front of me a sea of corn stalks waving – I understood that the gentile knew what he was doing, and we remained lying under the corn until the following morning, when the gentile arrived with the following news on his lips: – come out, the Soviets have already arrived... the landlord returned in the direction he had come, and in about a quarter of an hour we were back at his house, which had remained intact. When the neighbors saw us, they ran to the four winds. They no longer believed that there were any Jews alive at all, and they ran to tell the landlord: Panie Bigansky! Your former neighbors have returned! Owners of homes came out to us, offered us blessings of friendship, but falsely... they offered us the building where the police were located as a domicile, and we moved in there. We were swollen, blinded by our lack of being accustomed to the light, and our lips were in no condition for speaking...

However, very quickly, the secret of our rescue became known to the gentiles in the city, and they began to pursue the landlord and informed about him to the Soviet regime, telling all manner of lies. No time went by before they came to arrest him. He was forced to go into hiding. We ran to different officers and senior Soviet officials to plead for our landlord, and we told of his commitment, but they were of one voice: he should not hide, let him come, and we will see...but we didn't believe them – until a senior NKVD officer came through town, we went to him, and told him the entire story; our hearts were filled to the brim, and we shed tears a number of times in his presence... and he said, come now, you can be assured that so much of a hair will not fall from his head to the ground; I am Jewish myself, and I want to see this man who saved you, and to thank him! The landlord returned to his house. On the following day, the officer came with an entire troop; they called to the landlord and his wife: the officer gave the command: take off your hats! Took off his hat (among the Soviets, taking off of the hat, is the highest expression of respect that can be offered), and embraced the landlord, kissed the hand of the lady of the house, and thanked them for saving our lives. And this was the arrangement: every officer or high official who came through this town, would ask about this landlord, and pay him a visit, shake his hand, while offering him thanks.

And so, 5 months went by. We brought the eight surviving Jews in the town to our house. It was warmer for us... but after not a long time, we began to sense the air in the town getting close about us...the gentiles simply could not forgive us for remaining alive, nor to our landlord, who had saved us!... at every instance of confiscation from anyone, of an imprisonment, they didn't stop their refrain of blaming us...*Zydy, zydy!*

We decided to leave the town and travel to Bialystock. There were very few Jews left in Bialystock. It was a period of wandering of the greatest sort in the history of the Jewish people, and that the community affection among the people should be so great. If two Jews met in the street, even if they didn't know one another, they would fall into each other's embrace, kiss and cry... everyone thought he was the last Jew in the world...

Our landlord came to visit us a number of times in Bialystock. So long as we were in town, no evil befell him, but as soon as we left, his situation became bad. The gentiles plotted against him without rest, and we received no answer to the last of our letters. Who knows what possessed this gentile, one of the righteous people of the world, with his resourceful wife, the righteous lady, who put her life on the line, not to win any prizes, and not for purposes of personal advancement, but simply because of that sacred human feeling to save another person's life, and what they took from us for 18 months, hurt for us, feared for us, and with us! Who knows!

*Page 61: The Jewish Hospital in Volkovysk*

# **The Tribulations and Heroic Deeds of “The Hero of the Soviet Union,” The Partisan, Eliyahu Kovensky**

**Transcribed By Eliezer Kalir  
Member, The Committee of the Organization of Emigrants from Volkovysk**

I am 35 years old today, and I was born in Zhetl, in the Slonim District. Sixteen years ago, I was taken into military service, and as a soldier, I entered the third regiment, *Sluzhb Konyikh*<sup>9</sup>, that was stationed in Volkovysk. At the end of my military service, I remained in Volkovysk, and I married a daughter of the Kraselnik family, known by the nickname, ‘*Die Brukirer*’<sup>10</sup>. I arranged for independent domicile, and lived all the while on the *Neuer Gasse*. As a first class craftsman<sup>11</sup>, I had a good living, and was able to amass a good amount of wealth, and I had the plan of buying Feinstein’s house, whose plan was to emigrate to the Land of Israel. I had a good life with my wife, and derived much *nachas* from our wonderful children: from our daughter – who was beautiful – literally like a doll, and from our son, who was already eight years old, and excelled in intellect and appearance. All fathers are proud of their children – but this boy enchanted all the neighbors, acquaintances, and the schoolteachers, who were quick to round out the praise for his many talents.

I was a member of the fire fighters, and on the last day of the Polish regime, we, the fire fighters, with Khantov as our head, received control of the city; – the Polish Army did not stop retreating. The last to leave were a cavalry detachment, who burst into the city at night, with sabers drawn, and for the entire night, “retreated” from the city, amidst plunder and abuse, killing seven Jews – among them – Makov, Itchek the Dancer, Yos’keh Galiatsky, and other innocent victims. By “fortunate circumstance,” the pogrom didn’t last long, they were forced to flee quickly for their skins and their lives: – The following morning, there wasn’t a trace of them left. The tanks of the Red Army began to roll into the city. The impact made by these tanks was as if they had fallen from heaven, and will never leave me forever. Menaker the Shoemaker (the head of the communists) climbed up on one of them, and rode through the city like a ‘conqueror.’ On that same day, this seventy year old Jew, with a rifle on his shoulder, went to the notorious anti-Semite – Timinsky – who had organized the pogrom, arrested him, and turned him over to the Soviet regime.

A Soviet way of life was introduced, with all of its virtues and shortcomings; – Jews became used to this new life, assumed positions, worked and lived. There were ‘purges,’ arrests, the rich were exiled to Siberia (among them Yoss’l Ain, Bogomilsky, Dr. Bebuchuk, Meir Seletsky), but in general, you could not say that the Jews were without rights. – It was felt, that we could survive the dark war under these conditions, and we will get to better times. But this was just a dream. On June 24, 1941, the bitter and harsh day arrived: – over Volkovysk, a row of German planes appeared, and they began to bomb the city mercilessly: there were air battles that lasted for six days. Volkovysk was bombed not only as a city that had military targets, but as the fortress of Verdun! Day and night, without surcease, and all of their targets were in the Jewish quarter. Only the Jews. They were killed, buried in cellars by the hundreds. In the cellar of Moshe Margolis, so many people were killed, that it took three consecutive days to bury all the dead, without being able to identify who

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<sup>9</sup> This is a cavalry regiment. As a *Rimmer*, this was a logical assignment for Kovensky.

<sup>10</sup> Derived from the trade of laying stone bricks to make a roadway.

<sup>11</sup> From what we see later, we can deduce that Kovensky was a *Rimmer*, or a fashioner of leather harnesses and reins for horses. It may also account for the fact that he was a capable horseman as well.

was killed. The entire city, the entire Jewish center, the *Wide Boulevard*, the *Schulhof*, the circle of stores, *Kosciuszko Gasse*, *Grodno Gasse*, *The Train Station Gasse* – all went up in flames; – Only the *Neuer Gasse* remained, part of the *Novogrudsky Gasse*, part of the *Grodno Gasse*, the part at the ‘foot of the hill,’ a large part of hub of the city – in particular the Christian – and the Jewish – was completely destroyed; – to the extent that if you stood in Zamoscheh at the soda store of Nye’cheh – you could see the white jail house! ... this entire area, made up of Jewish homes and businesses, synagogues, factories, establishments – a place where Jewish commerce and labor flowered – was transformed into a islands of wreckage. In this manner, the situation was created by which the entire Jewish population concentrated itself on the *Neuer Gasse* and its environs. Every little room – a family, and there really was no need to drive them into a ghetto. The ‘ghetto’ came about ‘naturally.’...

Immediately after the Germans entered the city, a severe hunger set in, and there was nothing to eat. The gentiles plundered the stores abandoned by the Russians, and they had their pick of everything, and the Jews, scarred by fire, missing everything, would go to ask for foodstuffs from the gentiles. Many young people were arrested immediately on the excuse that they were communists – and they were taken outside the city and shot; – if it became possible for one of these young people to get away and flee – the gentiles apprehended him, and turned him over to the Germans. All Jews over the age of six were forced to wear a white band with a blue Star of David on their arm. – afterwards, they were changed to yellow badges; a prohibition to walk on the sidewalks was enacted, only in the middle of the street with the horses, cattle and wagons. Commerce was forbidden, it was forbidden to own a horse, cow, etc. A *Judenrat* was established, which had as members, Dr. Weinberg, Dr. Seletsky, Noah Fuchs, Berel Amstibovsky, Sham’keh Samiel, and Israel Gurevich. The office of the *Judenrat* was also on the *Neuer Gasse*, opposite the house of the rag merchant. Its job was to provide conscripted labor to fill the various filthy orders of the German regime. Beside the *Judenrat*, there even was an auxiliary Jewish police, initially with Khantov at its head, and afterwards headed by a Galician Jew named Glatt. Clouds of darkness spread over our heads, as they began to abuse the Jewish populace and specific individuals. They used Jews to punish Jews, and with the help of Jews. Only God to take pity on us. But he was far from us – very far!

On my street, on the *Neuer Gasse*, a bomb fell, and the children were covered with shards of glass. I extracted the children, and fled with them in bare feet to a field in Karczyzna. In my haste, I took only the bicycle. The house was on fire. I also had a cow. She was in the pasture. Towards evening I waited for her on return from the meadow, and I took her with me into the field, in the place we had bedded down in Karczyzna. There, one of the employees of the railroad approached me, and proposed that I sell him the bicycle. I did a deal with him. I gave him the bicycle in exchange for a blind horse and wagon. I tied the cow to the wagon, and together with my wife and children, we set out in the direction of Zhetl, where I had a father, four brothers and two sisters. The Germans were there already also, however they hadn’t handled people badly. And after the tribulations of Volkovysk – I breathed easier here. In this way, about a week went by. On the eighth day, they ordered all the Jews from age seven to seventy to gather in the marketplace square, to form rows, and they told them to sing and dance. This went on for three hours. The Christians stood beside their houses, on their balconies, holding their hands to their bellies and rolling with laughter. After three hours of this, they chose 120 men (from what we learned later: they were sent to Novogrudok and shot them to death), ordered everyone to put on yellow badges, and to return home. After a short while, another order was issued to turn over gold, jewelry and money: – and when the Jews were brought together on the market square, for purpose of turning over their assets and what they had worked for so hard – a German felt around in the pocket of one woman, and found a gold ring, and he then shot her to death in front of everyone else. At the same time, they organized work details that worked for the Germans, and in this way, 8-9 months went by. We had already heard about the massacres in Slonim, Kozlovshchina, and in the towns of the vicinity, but we thought the evil would pass us by: we worked for the *Wehrmacht*, and our ‘Overseer,’ was not all bad. In the meantime, a ghetto was put into the town. They assembled the Jews into

two streets, fenced them off with barbed wire – at the height of a man, with a gate, and we would have to pass through it on our way to work, under police guard.

On May 1, 1942, the ghetto was surrounded, and they ordered everyone to go out to the old cemetery for the purpose of receiving new ‘papers.’ Part of the people hid themselves in ‘hideaways,’ that everyone had prepared individually in the ghetto. At seven in the morning, when the Germans reached the place, and saw that very few people were coming – they went to the houses and took them out of their hiding places and gathered together three thousand people. My family and I lay in a hideaway, and they didn’t find us. On the square they ordered that people form up in rows, and they began a selection: right, left! It became clear that this was a matter involving death – but they didn’t know which way was death – to the right side, or the left side!... they gathered 1800 people together, and took them for a distance of a kilometer – to the outskirts of the town – and there they saw huge pits, ready. Gentiles from the two villages had dug them during the night, and machine guns stood not far from them... they started to bring twenty people at a time.. They shot them – into the pit... except for the last 60, there was no room left in the pits – so they sent them back to town, and they told how people tore their hair out, pulled out their teeth, went crazy, how the air was shaken with the screams and wailing, how the elderly Rabbi of Zhetl did not stop praying, reciting verses of the Psalms from memory, the confession of *Avinu Malkeinu*, and of *Ashamnu, Bagadnu*; But when he saw with his own eyes, that they were killing people by shooting them, and tossing them into the pits like slaughtered cattle, he had a change of attitude, and began to rail against the heavens, shouting with his last strength: here, is this the justice of the Law, here, merciful and considerate God, what has my precious and pure congregation done to deserve this?!... he pulled out the hair of his beard, tore the shirt on his back, and with hands outstretched to the heavens – was taken to the slaughter!

My uncle Leizer Kovensky, a jolly and alert Jewish man, one of the people from whom advice was sought in the city, and my uncle Shmuel Kovensky, with his father – had a bottle of whiskey. They drank the whiskey, recited their confession, lay down together, and were shot. The entire process didn’t take more than two hours!

The survivors returned to their homes with broken families, without husbands, without wives, without children; those that were in hiding came out, and were forced to go back to work.

Eight weeks had not gone by, when they again surrounded the ghetto, and ordered everyone out onto the market square. My family and I, and 50 other people, were hidden in a bunker, but this time they found us, and took us all out to the marketplace square. When we arrived at the marketplace square, we met five hundred people already there, who lay with their heads on the ground, with boots off, they also made us get down on the ground, telling us to take our shoes off as well, and let us lie there for a half an hour. Afterwards, they ordered us to get up, arranged us into rows, and told us to go in the direction of the pits. Along the way, wives became separated from their husbands, their children, struggling, screaming, insanity... trapped together, we were led along the street to the cemetery... on our way, we ran into those who were already killed – men and women – lying in the gutters. At the corner of the street stood the SS commander – the overseer of the slaughter, with a detachment of Germans, and they chose a quantity of people from the rows. When he saw me – he said snappily: – *Rimmermeister!* – *Kopfhier!* My wife and children held onto me, and didn’t want to let me go... and at that moment, they shot my wife... she fell at my feet like a sheaf of grain... the boy begged – don’t shoot me, I am only 8½ years old! A bullet ended his begging. They dragged me and threw me into a stable, a place where there were already several hundred people – and they locked us in for two days. The rest of the people were taken to the pits, and they killed every last one of them. The ground heaved for three straight days, and the blood did not stop from running out of the pits – that’s what the peasants told us. In the town, not a single Jewish soul remained alive. I, along with 212 people who had been detained in the stable, were sent to a camp in Novogrudok that had approximately 4000 people in

it, who were divided up into detachments and did a variety of work for the army. After being there for eight days there – and seeing that the whole deal was leading to oblivion – they gave no food, and treated us with cruelty – 14 of us organized ourselves, and we escaped into the Zhetl forest in the middle of the night, from behind the wires.

When we escaped, we had only one pistol among all of us. During the day, we would sleep in the forest, and with the night, we would get up and go to look for bread and anything else in addition to it. – because we knew the area well, we knew which of the peasants had Soviet arms; we would come at night, wake him up from his sleep, and ask him to give us his rifle, – and if not, we told him to grab a shovel and start digging a hole for himself. In regards to food, we didn't run into difficulty, but regarding armaments, we had to deal pretty harshly with them, to the point where the children would start to cry and beg: father, give them the rifle – so that they don't kill you... in this manner, we accumulated arms for 14 men. After being 12 days in the forest, we decided to send 5 men to make contact with the larger groups of partisans, about whom we had heard, and who were partly composed of Jews who had fled the massacres, and Red Army personnel who had stayed behind. I and four others went out on this expedition to a certain village, and asked a peasant who was known to us, whether anyone from the partisans comes there at night; the peasant showed us a path, and according to the tracks, we entered the forest, and after a few hours of wandering around the forest, we ran into the watch – a Jew with a rifle.

When he saw us approaching, he aimed his rifle at me...

Hold on there, my fellow Jew, I rebuked him. After so many slaughtered Jews – you're the first Jew ready to fire a bullet! Blessings upon you, and please tell us, how can we reach your commander? – I related to him who I was, and he gave me a password to the commander. Deeper in the forest, around a campfire, there were several hundred armed men, Jews and soldiers, with the commander in their midst – a Russian Lieutenant. I came up to him, and explained to him where I had come from, and that with me there are fourteen men, all armed. He told us to come, and that we would be together. I sent 2 men and they brought the nine others. Once we were together, we decided what we have to do from now on: we sent people into the forest, and gathered together all the small groups, and in a short time, we had organized about us a complete brigade of 1000 men – all of them armed from head to toe. – The Russian Army had sunk a great deal of weaponry in the Shchara River – so we dragged a great deal of weaponry out of the river, including even a couple of tanks. In our area, another group of Jews from Dereczin were active, headed by the well-known Dr. [Yekhezkiel] Atlas. They did not want to join us; they were beautifully organized, and operated their own forces. The name of the group was: The Atlas Battalion. Once, Dr. Atlas came to us with five men, and proposed that we go blow up the bridge across the Neman River. Our commander agreed, and appointed me to go with another person from Zhetl – Medvetsky – to support Atlas. We fished out underwater shells from the river, dried them out, and from the villages, we obtained from the peasants gunpowder and six bottles of turpentine, and in the middle of the night, we went to the Bilitz Bridge. In our stealthy approach, the first thing we did was roll the German sentry into the river, he should only be known to the wolves living in that river, and then after the blessing of 'Bowray Me-owray HaEsh,<sup>12</sup>' we blew up the bridge. This sort of work was very pleasing to Dr. Atlas, who came to ask the commander to transfer me to him as a battalion commander. With his consent, I transferred to Atlas, and became head of the battalion. It happens that in that battalion, there were many Jews from the town of Kozlovshchina. When all the commanders got together, we established that we had forces required to launch an attack, and on one clear morning, we fell upon the town, and fought the Germans for four hours. I used a 'Maxim,' the machine gun with 259 cartridges of 13 caliber. The Germans put up a stiff resistance – but we broke into the center of the town, set fire to it on all sides, we

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<sup>12</sup> From the Saturday night *Havdalah* Blessing prior to lighting the ritual candle.

killed 30 military police, and we captured the SS commander who had conducted the massacre, and brought him alive into the forest. In the forest, we untied him, and from the same rope, we fashioned a stout noose, and hung him like Haman from the first tree we could find that was suitable... it was in this fashion that the Jews of Kozlovshchina took revenge for the spilling of the blood of the Jews in Kozlovshchina, and the aging Rabbi of Kozlovshchina, whom they dragged behind a wagon, and afterwards was buried alive. This attack was lead by a Russian Lieutenant Bulat, who was missing one hand.

In the meantime, the groups grew daily, and in time, the strength of the partisan forces grew substantial in the forest, and it created earthen bunkers, equipped itself with horses, cattle, a great deal of weaponry and cannons. After a time, an attack on Dereczin was organized. We surrounded it on all sides, and we set the streets on fire, we killed many Germans and took them prisoner, we captured horses and armaments. Towards the end of 1942, the Germans sent a very strong force against us. They surrounded the forest, and we carried on a battle with them for three straight days. We lost many men, among them Dr. Atlas, the Jewish Hero with such a gentle soul, the fearless warrior commander. May he rest in peace! He died beside me, and his last words were: be strong and take courage, my brother, take vengeance for the spilled blood of our brethren, of our unfortunate people! We brought him to final rest on a hillock in the forest, and we honored him as a partisan, and we surrounded his grave with shell casings – the Jewish partisans knew where the final resting place of their commandant was – and perhaps some day, they will bring him to be buried in Israel. Seeing that the German forces were superior to ours, we set ourselves a course, and retreated back into the forests of Slonim.

During the siege, we sustained ourselves with a few potatoes, or from small handfuls, and the people were ravenously hungry. The Russian officers sent [troops] into the surrounding villages to bring food – however, little was given to the Jews. Then I sent several men from my group to bring food. However, along the way, the Germans rained down a hail of bullets on them, and they returned empty-handed. Out of intense anger, I returned to the forests we came from with my group. The following morning, the commander came to me all heated up: who gave you permission to leave the battalion!? I answered him, that when I saw my group was hungry – therefore, I could not be with him. Meanwhile, he sensed that two of the women partisans did not have their arms. – Where are the rifles? – he turned and asked. They explained to him, that in their escape from the siege, they threw their rifles away. He took down his rifle, and shot the two girls on the spot<sup>13</sup>, and pointed his rifle at me. – Shoot, I said to him, if I deserve it! He relented from using the rifle... – True, he said – you don't deserve it, and just remember that this time I forgive you!

We returned again to the brigade.

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<sup>13</sup> *Shelovsky, Feyge* - (Fanya), Daughter of *Yitzhak & Rachel*. Born in Dereczin. Fled with her family into the Lipiczany forests, and joined the *Pobeda* Brigade.

During the sortie, she participated in all battles. When the pressured partisans were surrounded, many hid their weapons, lest they fall into German hands. When her unit returned to its base, she was asked for her weapon, and she explained where she had hidden it. The commander, *Bulak* sentenced her and her companion, *Bella Becker* to death, while other non-Jewish partisans, who had left their weapons behind, were held free from harm.

*The Dereczin Memorial Book*, p. 317 (see also, p. 310)

The account by Kovensky varies from that found in the DMB. In a conversation with Gutka Boyarsky-Salutsky on 27Aug01, she favors the DMB account, which states that the girls were first taken back to camp and then shot. Gutka remembers Kovensky very well as one of her partisan comrades in the Naliboki Forest.

In a short while, a group of paratroopers reached us – 112 men, directors, officers and troops. They took over the leadership of the partisan movement completely. They asked the leadership for four people who know the area very well, the roads and the rail lines. The leader designated me as one of their escort. In this manner, I was transferred to the paratroop battalion, in which I participated in various partisan actions, I blew up 19 German trains, I destroyed rail lines, and when the Red Army crossed the border into Byelorussia, we delayed the German trains for two straight weeks between Minsk and Baranovich. Under the command of the paratroopers, a standing partisan army of approximately seventy thousand men was organized, in the wastes of [the] Naliboki [Forest], between Baranovich and Stalovičy, that encompassed entire districts, that would regularly receive arms and tools for sabotage from the air, directly from Moscow, and transport the wounded to Moscow, where they could be treated in Russian hospitals.

In 1943, the Germans launched a mighty siege against the Naliboki wastes. Through espionage, they discovered the extent of our forces, and on one bright morning, a full German Division surrounded the forest, with tanks and planes. They went through the entire forest, and we fought them for fifteen days. Being a good fighter, I excelled in many of battles, and I was awarded with the Medal of Honor, First Class of the partisans, and the Red Star, and an Order of Battle for the Fatherland, Second Class. In 1944, I was awarded the Order of Lenin.

On July 19, 1944, during a battle with the German guard near Stalovičy, I was designated with storm troopers to blow up German bunkers of concrete and steel. After exchanging fire for four hours, we could not get the upper hand over the Germans, who dug themselves into their bunkers, and rained heavy fire down on us – we received an order to attack the bunkers frontally with hand grenades. We stormed the bunkers and succeeded in getting two grenades inside, against the tanks that were inside the bunkers, where 18 Germans lay. All of them were blown into the air. In running from this bunker, I was fired upon with a machine gun from a second bunker about five meters away, and the fingers of my right hand were shot off. Because of swiftness, I was able to mount my horse (I was a horseman), forded the Neman, with a boot full of blood – and I swam to the rapid aid provided by the partisans, which was on the second side of the Neman. They bandaged my hand, and brought me 10 kilometers deeper into the forest, where there was a sanitary station. My fingers were supposed to be amputated, and there was no anesthetic to put me to sleep. Out of great pain, I gritted my teeth to the point where they broke slightly. Then, my partisan comrade Boruch Levin came over to me, and with a fist placed near my mouth said: take and bite my hand – and to the doctor – cut!....

When I got a little better – they sent me to our aerodrome station in the forest, and from there, by plane to Moscow. There, I lay in various hospitals for eight months. My hand was operated on twice. As a Hero of the Soviet Union, I enjoyed the best attention and care. After my recuperation, I returned to my home areas, which had by then already been liberated. However, I met not a single person, only one grave after another. I came to Zhetl with a cluster of the partisans that remained, and we erected a memorial to our exterminated brothers and sisters, above their common grave. From Zhetl, I walk to the city where I had spent the best of my years, where I had married my wife, and where my beloved children were born, who were so dear to me. The heartwarming city of Volkovysk. But there, I did not even find graves! All the Jews of Volkovysk had been turned into ashes in the crematoria of Treblinka and Auschwitz... It was in my heart to simply spread myself out, down on the ground, and weep without end... A familiar gentile (Bulyash Sharyika) ran into me, and asked me into his house, to sit down, and asked if I wanted something to eat? No, I said, I am full, you're welcome; but out of our friendship, give me a little ashes!... I took the ashes, and spread them on my head, I went out to the street and sat on a rock. I sat *Shiva* for my wife, my children, and the dear Jews of Volkovysk... The gentiles looked at me in sympathy for my sorrow. Well, I said to them, now you have it good, there are no more Jews – will you now live forever? They attempted to justify themselves: we are not responsible for this thing, we did not get involved... in the place where the hammer and sickle reign – there is still some respect for the Jew, and his life is not entirely forfeit!... I went out to look for the solitary Jewish

partisans, who had remained in the city, I took my leave of them, threw my knapsack over my shoulder, and went out on the road. Through cities and towns that had been destroyed, towns without Jews!...It was like Yom Kippur – as if all the Jews were at synagogue during *Kol Nidre* – east to the Alps, through the Alps is the way to Israel!

*Page 68: The Partisan Eliyahu Kovensky at the Time He Left the Forest*

# Memories

By Shayna Lifschitz

Enough has been told about the tragedy of Volkovysk, and there are more important people than I to write about the different details; but I think that what is appropriate beyond the sorrow, is to remember our martyrs, and to memorialize a different set of fact, that the Jews of Volkovysk, wherever they may be found, need to know about the measure of faith and the gentle feelings that their brothers and sisters revealed particularly on the doorstep into oblivion, under the sword of the murderers, the low, bestial Nazis.

The first war objective of the Nazi beasts in Volkovysk was the Jewish population; even before a Nazi foot stepped into the city, they bombed, burned, wiped out and murdered specifically Jews, Jewish houses, the *Schulhof*, and everything that belonged to the Jews.

From the first day of their conquest, they assured that there would be no help from our “good friends,” in the non-Jewish populace, and from previously prepared lists, they ordered daily arrests of alleged communists, as it were.

They would incarcerate the arrested people in the white jailhouse, that remained intact after the bombing, and when a set number of people were accumulated, they would take them out to the Mayak groves and kill them by shooting. There were previously dug graves there, prepared by Christian workers, and afterward by conscripted Jewish labor, who were forced to dig graves, and bury our martyrs afterwards.

Among the victims were: Leizer Bliakher, Shaul Markus, Elkeh Gamm, Michael Mazya, Panter, Tzirulnitsky, Khvonyik, Manya Movshovsky and her husband, Berman (who was a bookkeeper in the Kolontai company), Kalir, Novick and others.

By coincidence, I happened to be present when Novick received an order to present himself to the police. Seeing that his first name was not on the order, I suggested that he should send his father, because it was possible that the Germans would send an older man home. The elder Novick also thought this was the case, and he requested that his son give him the “invitation,” but he didn’t want to hide behind his elderly father’s ‘apron’ and forcibly made his way out of the house and went to the police, and as you can understand, he never returned from there; and not many days went by before the elderly Novick, נ"ץ died from sorrow and anger.

Pes’sha Gamm (Galiatsky). After Gamm fled with the Soviets, she remained in Volkovysk with her darling wonderful child. Her sister-in-law Elkeh Gamm lived with her. When the police came to ask for Elkeh Gamm, Pes’sha argued that she didn’t know anything about her, and when the murderers threatened her and her child with death, if she doesn’t reveal the whereabouts of Elkeh, even then, she did not stop denying any knowledge of her whereabouts... but Elkeh was in the second room, and listened to the entire conversation; she understood the seriousness of the Nazi threats, came out of the room, and turned herself over to the hands of the murderers...

In one of the transports that they were in the custom of taking from the jail for purposes of shooting executions, there were less than a full quota of people. The murderers, it seems, wanted to save themselves some work, in handling prisoners for this purpose. In this connection, they notified the *Judenrat* that by a given hour, they had to provide a specific number of people... after a tragic meeting, the *Judenrat* decided to provide a number of insane and crippled people, and it was in this way that they filled the order...

I must add here, that during the time of the worst of these troubles, when it was sufficient for a Christian to utter the name of a Jew, and that would immediately cause that Jew to be thrown in to Jail to await his fate; after the decree to wear yellow badges, the prohibition to walk on the sidewalks, and all the other perverted

rules that were in full force, and when forced German [house] searches were conducted, despite all of this, Volkovysk was like a “Garden of Eden” compared to other cities in Byelorussia, Lithuania and the Ukraine.

The first death blow that Volkovysk received by the standards of the times, came with the murder of the Jewish doctors. I will not dwell on the details of this murder, which has been covered adequately, but to relate the incident of the tragic end of Fanya Tropp, the wife of the refined and quiet Dr. Tropp פ"ע: After the murder of the doctors, Fanya Tropp was left with two lovely children, twins. She didn't rest or relax in her sole desire to get her children settled, and to end her own life, which had no value to her without her husband.

The murdered Tropp had developed a good relationship with a former municipal official named Falko, a Christian. This Christian had been killed by the Germans even before the murder of the doctors, because he had been informed upon that he was a high official under the Soviets. After Fanya Tropp remained in the same situation as Falko's wife, the Christian woman was willing to take the Tropp children to her, because they had already announced the transfer of the Jews to the bunkers near the barracks. However, it seems that this Christian lady could not stand up to the objections of her Christian neighbors, and she was forced to return the children to their mother. The latter, did not, under any circumstance, want to allow herself to be relegated to the bunkers and simply wait there for death. She then grabbed her children and went up to a German policeman and begged him to shoot them all. However, the German forcefully told her that he would not do so without an order... in the midst of a resolute conviction to put an end to this sort of life, Fanya Tropp hurried home, took three doses of poison from the medicines that belonged to her husband, and took her children to the destroyed Schulhof, where she herself swallowed a does of poison, and quickly wanted to give doses to her children, but the children, aged 6-7 wanted to live, and thought their mother had gone mad... they tore out of her half-dead grasp, and ran to tell the neighbors about the poisoning of their mother, and that she wanted to poison them as well... Mrs. Shalakhovich, the aunt of the children, was forced, to her great sorrow, to take the children, and bring them to the bunkers... how terrifying it was to see how good people, hungry and in a state of exhaustion themselves, nourished the orphans of Dr. Tropp, from their own rancid remnants of bread...

Apart from a few incidents of egotism and selfishness, the Jewish Volkovysk populace conducted itself with dedication and self-sacrifice in the highest degree, in particular during the most terrifying times of the transports, in the compilation of the lists of the ‘unnecessary’ Jews that were supposed to be loaded up to be taken to Treblinka...and the able-bodied Jews, capable of work, who were to remain behind to do work...

Strong, and healthy young men, like the Gandz brothers, Avreml Yunovich, and many others (because of my own bitter experiences later in Auschwitz, I have forgotten their names) were, according to the rules, able-bodied, and could remain in the camp, but their courageous position from which they could not be dissuaded was: we are going together without wives and children, or without parents. Even those who remained behind, did so only because of the intense pleading, the weeping and begging of their families, who out of the great love for their husbands, sons or wives, did not want to drag them along as well to death, so long as the murderers themselves did not demand it.

Yes, there once was a city called Volkovysk, in which lived a variety of people, good, better, bad, etc. But the end was the grave, the crematoria, and despite all other manners of death, fate had demanded of us, the few survivors, to witness their willingness to give, the selfless personal sacrifice of our martyrs from Volkovysk.

May their memory be for a blessing.

*Tel-Aviv, Passover Eve 5706 (1946)*

## The Night of the Seder In Auschwitz

### From a Conversation With Joseph Kotliarsky

Today is the first day of *Khol HaMoed* of Passover. One meets with acquaintances, shakes hands, exchanges 'Happy Holiday' blessings, and 'Festivals for Happiness' greetings, and the question immediately arises as to how the *Seder* was conducted, and how was the *Haggadah* recited, did the *knaidlach* turn out well, etc.

And here comes Joseph Kotliarsky, the first one to tell us exactly about the destruction of our city, and its dear Jewish residents. He comes now from *Kfar-Saba*, where he conducted his first *Seder* in Israel together with his family.

Him I do not ask how the *Seder* went this time around. But I am eager to find out how the *Seder* was conducted beforehand.

Yes, he says, last year I was in Dachau for Passover, but you won't be interested about the *Seder* in Dachau, because like on all other nights, also on "this night," we looked through the garbage for a potato peel, and if two or three of us saw such a peel, every one of us wanted to have this great find.

Probably not of you thought, that in conducting the *Seder*, and in eating the *knaidlach*, that especially now, as you carry out the *Seder* ritual, and recite the prayer, 'let those who are needy [come and eat]...' that you preserve the names of the Jews on a piece of potato peel.

Two years ago, during Passover, I was in Auschwitz, and I don't have anything to tell about the *Seder*, because in place of *Matzo*, *knaidlach*, a *Haggadah*, and related items, we received beatings, hard labor, selections, and the recognition that sooner or later all of us would serve as fuel for the huge crematoria, and this recognition was so deeply instilled in us, that we didn't have the will to think as to whether we had any relationship to life. However, in the Passover of three years ago, the first Passover in Auschwitz, after Volkovysk, I sat at the *Seder* and didn't even eat any leavened food for all the days of Passover...

The first day of Passover at that time fell on a Monday, and on Friday, the eve of *Shabbat HaGadol*, a larger transport of Jews was brought from Greece. As you can understand, the Jews brought *Matzo* with them, raisins, and other Passover things.

On that same *Shabbat HaGadol*, the murderers had already brought the Greek Jews to the crematoria, and among their possessions that the Jews counted, there were those who managed to snatch a little *Matzo*, and some raisins...

There were 8 of us people, who were designated to run a *Seder* in our block...

As usual, everyone was forced to go to bed and to put out all lights by nine o'clock in the evening, and heaven help the individual that the block supervisor, the Pole Leon, found [even] a couple of minutes after nine, and not lying down in his bunk...

And so, at precisely nine, we went to lay down on our bunks, and with an excited heart, we waited for the appointed hour. At ten o'clock, when there was nobody was around that would cause someone to endanger their lives by leaving their bunk, we all came down, and with great care, slipped several sticks into the stove – so that in the worst case, we could justify our presence by claiming we were trying to warm ourselves up near the fire – and we started the *Seder*... We had succeeded in obtaining two *Matzos* and some raisins that we had soaked in water in place of wine, and an old worn out *Haggadah* that we had managed to secure in advance, that we had rescued from amongst the books that used to be thrown about after their owners were incinerated...

When we sat down to the 'Dinner Table...' on the ground... we looked at on another, and we all burst out into bitter tears... However, even this was a form of luxury for us, because our crying was likely to attract the attention of the brutal Pole, Leon.

We remained sitting silently, and mumbled a blessing over the *Matzo* and wine, quietly to ourselves...

And so we sat until half past midnight, and the subject of our conversation was about life in Auschwitz. One asked the other, what they were willing to pay to get free. One would say he was prepared to let them take a had, or a foot, while others said that they were prepared to give up their lives, so long as they would be allowed to die like human beings, and not to have to die by such macabre means, along with tens of thousands of their brothers and sisters, that are being brought on a daily basis from all corners of the earth...

The transport of the Greek Jews was a large one; and they did not manage to incinerate all of them on *Shabbat HaGadol*, and Sunday was a holiday for the murderers, and literally in those same moments when we were arranging our *Seder*, we saw the bright flames of the furnaces in the distance, where the Jews from Greece were being burned, who because of their *Matzo* and raisins, we were able to perform the *mitzvah* of eating *Matzo*...

Before dawn, at approximately five o'clock, we went out to work as usual, and we tried hard for them not to detect any tiredness in us from the sleepless prior night of the *Seder*.

On that Passover, I conducted a great many transactions in the camp; I traded my bread for potatoes with various people, and with great difficulty, managed to fulfil my decision not to eat leavened food.

*Tel-Aviv, 1946*  
*Sh. B.*

# It Will Not Be Believed If It Is Not Told

By Joseph Kotliarsky  
Volkovysk – Auschwitz – Tel-Aviv

Is this all true?... Can it be possible that such a thing happened? – Yes, 10, 20, 50 Jews, but all of Volkovysk without an exception – the *Dayan*, the *Shames*, the *Shokhet u' Bodek*<sup>14</sup>, the Rabbi, the Zionist, the communist, the old, the young, grandmothers and grandchildren, and the cream of Volkovysk youth, all of them without exception?... Yes, yes, it did happen, everything and everybody were massacred by the uncivilized accursed murderers, who trod on them with their bloodstained boots. In an accelerated short time, and with a deliberate speed, starting with November 2, 1942 on Monday morning, when the wild shout reached our ears in Volkovysk: Everyone is going to the bunkers, (special pits dug out of the ground without a window or door), we understood that this was the beginning of our slaughter. Our hearts did not permit us to believe that it would happen in the way it finally did, but we did suspect that something of this nature would occur. I “saw the Slonim Massacre,” these are strange words, “to see” a “massacre?” What did you see with your own eyes? – By what means did you get there? The truth of the matter is, that I don’t really know how I got there, apparently by mistake, but when I cast a glance at my left arm, and I see the number tattooed there, I begin to understand myself a little, and I begin to recollect what I saw with my own eyes, impossible things, that took place there in a routine manner, they distinguished between the young and the old, between men and women, that is to say, between those who could perform work, and those who could not, the divided up and deceived the congregation, and the congregation deceived itself because the will to live did exist, and life seems to be hateful to you, and is being stripped from those around you and from yourself. It was perceived that the area in the ghetto was better, more secure – and because of this, some fled there. Others [ran] from there to here, thinking it was better here – rushing to get here. Making themselves a source of mockery and derision to the murdering Germans, because they know that there is no escape from them, because wherever they are found you are, *Jude* – his religion is to be put to death, and in order to deceive us, they turn a blind eye, and let us flee, and in exchange for this, they take bribes, several kilograms of gold, jewelry, suits, boots – this is openly; and secretly, they take everything from women’s stockings to Singer sewing machines. All of this takes place in the context of an ongoing ‘action,’ and not the result of isolated incidents, until the energies of the people are sapped from running about and over-exerting themselves – then they approach their final goal, they load all these goods on buses ... and send the Jews to do work... ‘*In himmel kommando...*’ that is how they would express it.

In Volkovysk, which was in the occupied German territory that was part of the Third Reich, they did things differently, that is, they plundered and abused the Jews in a different way, people deluding themselves, because they wanted to live... they tell us that the Jews of Slonim, with the Rabbi at their head, were all communists, and that is why they were sent off to work ... far away... but you, from Volkovysk, are counted in “Our Third Reich,” and we need you here, and you are only required to gather into the bunkers adjacent to the barracks, and from there, we see how to get you settled... and people are taken in by this deception...because the will to live is powerful, yes, the reader will find this totally incomprehensible: how could one place any faith in murderers like these, and why could they not see that their intention was not to provide work, but something else entirely? But, the old maxim applies: ‘Don’t judge your neighbor until you have stood in his place.’ Indeed, I was in this condition, and I suffered through all of it, consequently, I am

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<sup>14</sup> The ritual slaughterer (*Shokhet*), who was also the inspector of the resulting animal parts (*bodek*) to assure suitability for consumption under the rules of *Kashrut*.

afforded the privilege of making an assessment; not to pass judgement, but rather to cast some light on the circumstances, and what happened there. People, parents of little children, and the grown children of aged parents, if something bad happens in the family, then everyone gets together, and one participates in the sorrow of the relative, even if not in a large way, then at least with a good word, or advice; if something more serious occurs, then the needed task unifies everyone. Now let us examine what took place there. I am reminded that very morning, the weather was actually quite pleasant, the fall was constantly rainy, but this day was nice, as if to frustrate the sun from breaking through the clouds, in order to watch how they were driving us into the bunkers; she is not ashamed at all the sight of what is being done to “The Chosen People,” on the contrary: she is an ally to the Poles, Byelorussians, and those watching the expulsion. All of us are walking, without any purpose of sense, all together, being driven, complete families, elderly and infants, and even the residents of the Old Age Home, if they are only capable of walking; they are walking to the bunkers, hugging each other, and calling out, Oh, how good! At least [we are] together. Look father, give me your hand, and we will go together, where?... for what purpose?... to whom?... no man knows, just everyone together. The grandfather exchanges kisses with his grandson, Ber’eleh, are you here too – and a tear falls from the grandfather’s eyes, as he thinks: well, I’m am after all old, I have already lived out the skein of my life, and is not life a struggle on the face of the earth, what to do, my life is pushing on, I saved penny by penny, I raised my sons, I was privileged to see grandchildren, Ber’eleh goes to *Heder* already, and can read Hebrew properly already, and is beginning his study of the Pentateuch, it was perhaps the time to enjoy a little *nachas*, and suddenly, there is a war, the Nazis invade, they tell us to go, and here we are going. The heart of the old man does not foretell of any good to come of this, and his pity is totally for his young daughter with her dear infant, the little pure and unsullied cherub. But there is no time to contemplate the doings of the Almighty, don’t probe that which is beyond you, and the grandfather and grandson walk on. The Nazis hit us with their truncheons, but despite this, there is a good feeling for being all together, because, if we are all together, they won’t assault us as an entire group... or so we try to tell ourselves, because we yearn to live.

But when we arrive at the rancid bunkers, and encounter approximately 20,000 Jews, that is to say from the entire Volkovysk District, entire towns, with their officials, rich and poor alike, relatives meeting one another, in-laws one has not seen in a while. The pious see a sign from heaven in this, ‘the world is like an island,’ and if the forced travel requires separation from one’s in-laws...The groups of young people look at one another ashamedly, young health and able young people, with no hope, everyone from our city was someone capable of doing anything, but here, they are paralyzed; What had essentially happened. At that moment, nobody took stock of the situation, because we weren’t disposed to do so, because all our thoughts were focused on how to obtain some potato peelings and keep the infants alive, or a little bit of water to wash one’s hands. A buyer is sought, perhaps a gentile, who would be willing to take a pair of boots for two glasses of milk and an egg, and when the boots are already in his hands, he doesn’t give the egg, crying out that he had already given it; the Jew is not as willing to raise his voice, because this ‘transaction’ requires a bullet in the head. Despite this, the man walks off with the half bottle of milk in his hand, barefoot, but satisfied: – his young wife has a frail young boy, and such an item is nowhere to be found. The milk is looked on as if it were a remedy sent from heaven, and then we think: hey, only together, it is good that we are together. Not like in other places. And this is a sign that they need us. And once again, they allow themselves to be deluded. Until the end of November and the beginning of December, slowly, but surely, we extract this stupidity from our minds, and we begin to change our view, we start to understand that we are fooling ourselves. Nevertheless, entire families are together, with in-laws and relatives, and after all, they tell us we are all traveling together, going to work. And this is a bad sign. All of us going to work? – Eighty year-old women, little children, pregnant women, and women with newborns, to work? This is paradoxical, impossible, there is no more desire for self-delusion, and the depressing future is now perceived with open

eyes. Rumors start spreading through the bunkers that they are first taken to Bialystock and then to 'Treblinka,' and what was there, nobody knows, except there is a feeling that this is somehow connected to the work, called 'himmel kommando.' We were lodged in the bunkers for a total of 3-4 weeks, and no one was able to recognize even his own neighbor. And there is no wonder at all in this: Has any one of you tried to live in an earthen cellar for four weeks along with 600 people, that can only hold 80-90 people, without air, water, in hunger and cold, in a constant war with lice and crawling vermin... and it was no wonder that we didn't recognize one another. And with the trip, our gladness increased, because we were making the trip together in one train (even though these train cars were for horses and had no windows). Nobody knows how long the ride is, but despite the travails of the journey, we hoped it would go on forever. There was a perception, that with this trip, we were escaping something bad, and going on to something better. I have to tell you, that the minute that the train stopped, hearts stopped for a moment. We held on, and began to look at one another, as if this were the last time, with the faces of people who did not expect to be alive in another half hour. But everyone was afraid of this idea, afraid to utter a sound. The looks everyone gave each other were communicated suspicion, we look and keep quiet, through the cracks in the train car sides, we see a clear, bright world, and how dark it is for us. How did we sin, what was our transgression, and if we indeed did sin, what did these children do? There is a great desire to scream, to overturn worlds: why are you silent there, why is no one paying any attention to the mother who is kissing the little child, how an elderly grandfather is taking leave of his grandson; but we are afraid to breathe too deeply. We are too afraid to even cry, we believe that if we behave more normally, it will be better for us. The silence lasts only an hour. We hear the footfall of soldiers, and suddenly the train cars are thrown open, and with a marauding wild shout, 'Alles Raus!', we see before us an SS camp of young plundering murderers, with machine guns, and in addition to that they are holding truncheons with which to urge the people on to move more quickly, and a rain of blows descends upon us, one does not see family, one does not recognize if we are together or not, the only thing one sees are the truncheons and beaten heads and blood; The SS troops are running through the trains, creating mayhem, searching about to make sure that no Jew remains behind, or an elderly woman, they need everyone, and after they have determine that all the cargo is off the train, empty, they line them up in rows, and indicate with a finger, who shall remain alive and who shall go to death. The person doing this designation was a Gestapo doctor, with senior army officers. This was more important to them than the front at Stalingrad. Because the Jewish Front was top priority... And it served their purposes that 280 people are selected from the Volkovysk District, that is to say, less than 1½ %, and 98½ % can ride on the buses! We do not know which among us are the fortunate ones, and who is not, there is just one thing I recall precisely, that behind the buses came a Red Cross ambulance, which caused a doubt to enter my heart that maybe they are really taking them to work, and the evidence is that first-aid is accompanying them. But to our chagrin, we discovered later that this ambulance was carrying the 'gas' to poison the Jews. Yes, they deceived us in the most appalling fashion. Our eyes grew dark when we saw the giant flame 200 meters from the camp, and those that had preceded us pointed to the fire and said: There, look, there your dearly beloved and best are being burned. We didn't grasp at all that this was the case. We thought we were on the planet Mars, at the end of the world, that does not belong to this world. It was difficult to believe that in our world, there were to be found people in normal circumstances that were unaware of what was going on here, because if they did know, it didn't seem reasonable that they would remain silent. We cannot demand anything important from others when we are not completely settled within ourselves. Because in order to address the chapter of history that resulted in the extermination of a third of our people, we have to gird our loins, and to read the stories and the facts that have been transcribed. These are not the sort of stories that one reads and then sets aside. The Mandate of the Hour is to 'tell them diligently unto thy children,' the responsibility of those smoking embers rescued from the worldwide conflagration, to pass on the facts, episodes "for a complete accounting," – to learn and understand, as reference tool to help maintain vigil, that what happened here will never be altered in the slightest, forever, in the history of our people.

# Volkovysk

By Rabbi Yitzhak Kossowsky  
Johannesburg, South Africa

*Page 80: Visit of [Vladimir] Ze'ev Jabotinsky to Volkovysk*

I have been asked by my close friends of the Committee for the Organization of Emigrants from Volkovysk in our Holy Land, to participate in the publication that they are preparing to publish, in memory of the beloved home city in which they were born, that was destroyed, along with the remaining sacred communities in Poland, Lithuania and the other lands of Eastern Europe, that to our awesome misfortune, were lost in the implementation of the extermination plan emanating from the decrees of the cruel Nazis, the *Amalek* of modern times, may their names be forever eradicated. In my capacity as Rabbi of this important city, where I had the honor to occupy the pulpit for a period of nearly ten years, from the time I came there in the year 5685 (1924) to take the place of *Rabbi Gaon [Abba Yaakov] Borukhov* זצ"ל, after he made *aliyah* to Jerusalem (may she be rebuilt and redeemed) in his older years, and until I left at the end of the year 5693 (1932), when I was called to take the leadership of the group of communities in the Transvaal, I thought to myself that this is a responsibility, to dedicate a few words to the memory of that magnificent community, which was full of wise people, and scholars in the full meaning of the word, and to add my tears to that vessel of tears of those of my beloved who come from our city, on the loss of their dear birthplace; and may the Master of all Consolation, blessed be His Name, comfort all of us in the comfort of Zion and Jerusalem, and may He wipe away our tears, as it is said: "And wipe away, O Lord, our God, tears from all faces!"

The community of Volkovysk was renowned and distinguished in glory, because of the great Rabbis who were *Gaonim* of great repute throughout Jewry, and from the mouths of the city elders, who were still alive when I came to live there, more than twenty years ago, I heard much about the great Rabbis from the generations that came before me. One who excelled especially in the telling of many stories was my good friend and close confidant, the venerable elder, *Reb Yitzhak Novogrudsky*, ז"ל, who was called *Reb Itcheh Shmuel Jonah's*. He was a highly respected man, "Of pleasing appearance, with a long beard, sweetened by his knowledge of the world,"<sup>15</sup> and being a neighborly man, quick to be stimulated, with a strong sense of community, he always took a major part in all community endeavors, and with a playful smile on his lips, he loved to tell about all that he had seen or knew from his life. He was a close neighbor to me at the *Bet HaMedrash*, and at frequent intervals, spoke at great length about the great Rabbis of the past, and I learned many details about them from him. I do not remember all of them right now, but this I do know from him, that before *Rabbi Borukhov* זצ"ל, the *Gaon Rabbi Jonathan Eliasberg* זצ"ל, who died prematurely young, was the Rabbi of the city, and his seat remained vacant for seven years, until *Rabbi Borukhov* זצ"ל came to take his place, and to serve in his stead with honor. Apart from being a formidable Torah scholar, *Rabbi Jonathan* זצ"ל was one of the *Gaonim* of the past generation, wise, a scholar and a man of reason, and all of the wise people of that generation, the exponents of Torah scholarship and the Enlightenment, corresponded with him, and his word was heeded by all of them. Between the pages of one of his books, that came to me from the landlord of the house in which he lived, I found a letter written to him by the *Rashi Fin* of Vilna, one of the very few of the members of the past generation who followed the Enlightenment, and one of the Zionist leaders of that time, who were known by the name, *Hovevei Tzion*, and in that letter, there were some very interesting things in regard to one important meeting that was called prior to the first Zionist Congress in

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<sup>15</sup>

A quote from a line in the *Hineni* prayer from the prologue to the *Yom Kippur Musaf* service, when the Cantor beseeches the Almighty to look upon him as someone with these virtues.

Katowice, nearly sixty years before. When I received a visit from my colleague and friend, Rabbi Moshe Berlin, שליט"א, the head of the Mizrachi in Israel, I gave him this letter, to be turned over to the care of the international library in Jerusalem. Rabbi Jonathan Eliasberg זצ"ל, inspired the people in his city, through his spirit, to cherish the noble idea of a love for Zion among themselves, and Rabbi Borukhov זצ"ל maintained this perspective, and thanks to the influence of the two of them, the Volkovysk community was among the ones who stood from the remaining cities in the area for its dedication to this nationalist ideal. This caused a large proportion of the people to make *aliyah* to our Holy Land, and they settled there many years before the great calamity in Europe, and in this manner, were saved from death and destruction. Before Rabbi Jonathan זצ"ל, the Rabbinat of the city was held by the Rabbis and *Gaonim*, Rabbi Abraham Shmuel Diskin, זצ"ל, Rabbi Boruch Mordechai Lifschitz זצ"ל, Rabbi Yekhiel Heller, זצ"ל, and Rabbi Yitzhak Isaac Khaver, זצ"ל, the author of *Bet Yitzhak*, which was published in Siedliska in the year 5596 (1836). I do not remember the order in which they served, or the length of their service, and it is possible that I have them out of order, and for this, I beg a thousand pardons from their sanctified remains. It is possible that there were several other Rabbis among them, whose names have escaped me over time, and I ask for those who are familiar with these details to come after me, and fill in what I have omitted, and I will recognize them with my thanks and blessing.

There always was a distinguished Yeshiva in Volkovysk, headed by leading Torah scholars, and many students were drawn there from the cities in the area. The many *Batei Medrashim* in the city were filled with boys and young married men, who concentrated on their Torah study, and the townsfolk supported them in a respectable fashion, since the love of Torah was deeply rooted in their hearts. Many great exponents of Torah scholarship came from the *Batei Medrashim* of Volkovysk, that became beacons of Jewry, and it is especially worth mentioning the name of the Gaon of Israel and its leader, the Gaon, Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Spektor, זצ"ל, who went from a bench in a *Bet HaMedrash* in Volkovysk to rule Jewry, and from Izavelin, the little town near it, to Kovno, to be the Leader of the entire Diaspora and the Leader of his generation, and his glory reflects on Volkovysk!

Many great people in Jewry came from there. Great in Torah scholarship and wisdom, and great in deeds, whose names remain forever in the annals of the Jewish people. It is especially worth recalling the two distinguished families from Volkovysk, the *Einhorn* family and the *Heller* family. The first produced among Jewry, great Torah scholars, and great scientists, and on his mother's side, the last *Gaon* of Vilna, Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzhensky זצ"ל, was related to them, whose great name lives with us even to this day, and his memory will remain forever in the chronicles of our people, as a leader of the Jewish people, and an outstanding Torah scholar. And the second [family] that produced the *Gaon* Rabbi Yekhiel Heller, זצ"ל, produced tens of distinguished people, who pursued the giving of charity and goodwill, who gave generously from their wealth to the various charitable institutions of the city, and even after they left her because of their large scale businesses, and went to live the great capitol cities, Warsaw and Berlin, they did not forget her, and continued to support the institutions of their birthplace city with a spirit of charity, venerable institutions in which they took great pride to their glory, until they were destroyed in our suffering at the hands of the *Amalek* of our generation, may their name be forever erased.

A glorious Jewish community existed in Volkovysk, with a sizeable population of great worth, with synagogues, *Batei Medrashim*, and a variety of educational institutions, and its residents were largely important people of precious value. Understandably, I cannot detail everything about each and every scion of this city, but in these few words, I want to present a permanent memorial to a few of those of my friends and relatives there, whom I found there on my arrival to take up residence there, and the memory of them

is permanently etched into my heart, despite the distance in both time and place. From them, there are two from the world of Torah, and two from the practical world, and they are the *Dayan*, Rabbi Yaakov Berestovitsky, and the Rabbi, Reb Yerachmiel Daniel, the Headmaster of the Yeshiva; Rabbi Israel Efrat the Lawyer and Reb Eli Abraham Markus, the owner of the leather factory. May all their memories be for a blessing!

The first was a man whose Torah was his faith. A man who occupied himself with Torah with great diligence, and didn't vary from it in the slightest. Being full and brimming with what he learned and saw in different books, and having a prodigious memory as well, literally a container that doesn't lose a drop, he became an accomplished facilitator. He was appointed as *Dayan* of the city by my predecessor, The Gaon Rabbi Abba Yaakov HaKohen Borukhov זצ"ל; and when I came to occupy the pulpit there, to my great elation, I found in the *Dayan* Rabbi Yaakov זצ"ל, a loyal, dedicated friend, who was literally my right hand for all the days that I lived there. Together, we did all the religious work of our community, and we were bound to one another with bonds of loyal friendship. When I left the city towards the end of 5793 (1933), he remained in residence, to handle the affairs of the city, until his passing a few years later. May his memory be blessed!

The second, Reb Yerachmiel, the Headmaster of the Yeshiva, was a prodigious scholar, possessed of a sharp mind, alert and diligent, and apart from being very busy with his Yeshiva, in which he inculcated Torah into many students, he was almost always occupied in matters of dispute between people, that is to say, in matters requiring mediation and in Torah rulings, because he was the one selected by protagonists to adjudicate and mediate their disputes. Apart from this, he was by nature a very community-minded person as well, a person who took part in community affairs; his manner was pleasant, and his words were heeded, because everyone saw in him a man of established and seasoned knowledge, and related to him with the proper respect. These two, Rabbi Yaakov and Rabbi Yerachmiel, the Headmaster, were those left from the prior generation, educated in the great Yeshivas who were raised with Torah, and their work was in Torah, and passed away leaving behind a good name, without leaving anyone behind to take their places, and even before the destruction of the entire Jewish community in Poland and Lithuania, the centers of Torah learning in Jewry, their loss was irretrievable. It is of them that it is said, "Woe, woe is our loss, and we will not forget them!"

The Lawyer, Reb Israel Efrat ז"ל, was an excellent example of an enlightened Jew of the prior generation, the type of person who has practically vanished from the ranks of the enlightened in our generation. He also was full of and brimming with Torah and wisdom, a man, who although he had never studied at a university, and not even a gymnasium, he nevertheless surpassed all those of his age in his knowledge of the law. He acquired his common sense and comprehensive knowledge through his own energies, working tirelessly and diligently, and thanks to his outstanding intellectual capabilities, attained the position of 'Certified deputy lawyer,' and secured a very important position among the ranks of lawyers and judges of that time. Were it not for the restricting decrees of the malevolent regime of the Czar in Russia, before the First World War, he would have achieved the rank of Certified Lawyer, and could have even obtained an important government post, but he was handicapped by being a Jew. Despite all this, he was a Jew who was loyal to his faith and his people, and would take part in all community affairs, not only in his city, but for Jews throughout Russia in general. He was an ardent and dedicated Zionist, and stood at the head of the Zionist work in his city and that area, and at all major gatherings in which he participated, his words were always accorded the proper respect. Together with this, he took part in all municipal matters, and after the Rabbinate of the city was vacated, with the departure of the Rabbi *Gaon* Borukhov, זצ"ל, when he made *aliyah* to our Holy Land in his old age, and the people of the city appointed a Selection Committee, Reb Israel Efrat was selected to be the head of this committee, and thanks to his influence, and extra patience, the committee carried out its work

smoothly, and to the satisfaction of most of the members, most all who saw in him the right man, suitable to head this community endeavor in their important community!

For all the time I resided in Volkovysk, Mr. Efrat, ע"ר, was a frequent visitor in my home, and I always took great pleasure in his pleasant company, to discuss matters of Torah and wisdom with him. And when it came time for me to leave the city, my parting from him was very difficult, and when I found out two years later, that Mr. Efrat k"z had passed away, (I do not remember the exact day he died, and that is a shame), I was saddened deeply in my heart, and I mourned for him a great deal, because he was truly a man that stood above the common folk, and he was as his name proclaims, Efrat – ‘An Efrati, Adorned with good manner,’ (*Yalkut*).

I knew Reb Abraham Eli Markus ע"ר, well even before I set foot on the threshold of that city, because he was one of the two distinguished delegates who came to the city in which I was then living (Yagustov), at the beginning of the year 5785 (1924), to offer me the invitation in the name of the committee to come and serve as the Rabbi in their honored community, and I immediately recognized the attribute of this man, imbued with the spirit of Torah, that is not found in ordinary *balebatim*. And after I came to settle in the city, and became familiar with its distinguished residents from up close, I found Reb Abraham Eli Markus ע"ר, to be a man of outstanding good among the distinguished people of that community. His place was not among the wealthy, and he was constantly busy to earn a living for his household, and despite these many busy things, he always set aside time for Torah study, and he had a regular lesson in which he studied seven pages of the *Gemara* each week, in order to complete the entire *Shas* in seven years, and he would have a large holiday feast on the occasion of finishing the cycle of the *Shas*. And whatever was missing due to his business during the middle of the week, he made up for on the seventh day. The Holy Sabbath for him was set aside for Torah, and he would sequester himself at home, and study through the night, and then all day with enormous diligence, without going outside, and without involving himself during that day, in community matters, which he attended to faithfully during the remaining days of the week, being one of the important community leaders, whose word was listened to with the appropriate respect at all public gatherings.

He was gifted with a pleasant voice, and when he would lead the congregation before the Ark (not as a cantor, who makes his living this way, but rather as one of the *balebatim* who volunteer), he would literally capture hearts with his pleasant mode of praying, that would come out of his mouth in a manner that caused wonder. During the *Musaf* service of the High Holy Days, he would lower his prayer shawl over his face, and would pray with enormous conviction, closed eyes streaming tears, when he would read all the prayers and poetry *by heart*, and it was a source of wonderment to everyone who watched him, and listened to him, and they were greatly moved by his prayer. As I recollect the man and his conversation after these many years – and his praying, his great conviction in leading prayer at the Ark, I quickly sense the great loss sustained by our people, after they did away with having lay people lead prayer, and replaced them with professional cantors and their choirs! He was privileged to make aliyah to the Holy Land in his old age, before the war broke out, and he died there at a ripe old age. May his memory be for a blessing!

These are but a few lines from this distinguished congregation, the congregation of Volkovysk, which was a wonderment for all Jewry in its distinguished people and institutions. What an enormous calamity has befallen our people with the loss of these sacred communities, for which there are no replacements. We have been orphaned and turned over in a manner as terrible as death itself, in losing a third of our nation, and of even greater tragedy, in the taking from us of that part of our people that was the strongest in spirit, the settlement in Poland and Lithuania, that was a bulwark and crown of Judaism and Torah, woe is unto us, for we have been plundered! Our misfortune is as great as the sea, and who is to comfort us, and we have no one

to lean on but our Father in Heaven, for it is He who will avenge the spilling of our blood, and say to our oppressors, enough; he will bind up our wounds, and mend our fences, and in comforting all Zion and Jerusalem, he will comfort us all speedily, as it is said, “For the Lord has comforted Zion and all that is destroyed about her!”

## **About The Volkovysk That Is No Longer**

**By Yaakov Rabinovich**

*(From Things That Have Been Said)*

The glory days of Volkovysk past, that of great and famous Rabbis, and scholars who later became great Rabbis outside of her, was for me also a thing of the past. I know about this only from word of mouth. Those who were there at my time, were not from the level of the ‘originals.’ Despite this, Volkovysk was a city full of Torah even in my day.

Volkovysk was also a city that brought up or produced from her Batei Medrashim, enlightened people and writers as well, and famous writers that maintained contact with her from many sides.

She was also full of charity. There were marvelous incidents of this nature. Yeshiva boys that studied there, and Jewish soldiers that worked there – valued its generosity and character.

She was then also a working city. In essence, the entire district was a working area. In my youth, there was not a single craftsman in the city who was not Jewish. There were also Jewish smiths. The maids in Jewish homes were all Jewish. There hardly was a form of work in which the Jews of the area did not engage in. After the great fire of 5646 (1882), Volkovysk was re-built from scratch with brick houses, and all the construction was done by Jews, in which practically no stranger had a hand.

In a transition period, there was still Torah there, even though the attentions and the inclinations of the younger generation had changed. At the beginning, the children from the better families learned to work out of idealism, and those generally went to America afterwards. After that came a time when the city filled with the *Bund* and Yiddish, even while work was declining more and more. A time finally arrived when not only were the gentile stores in the majority, but there were also gentile craftsmen. The emigration to American and to the Land of Israel took workers out [of the city], and even the houses were full of Polish and Russian maids. There practically were no more young Jewish women [for this work].

And yet once again, after the prior war [sic: World War I], there was again a change in mood. Zionism grew strong, together with connections to the Land of Israel, and the education took place mainly in *Hebrew*. A Hebrew Gymnasium, including Polish subjects, a Tarbut High School, and as a result – a generation was raised that knew Hebrew, even though most of the teachers were from Galicia Volhyn.

When I visited in 5785 (1933), after having been absent for 26 years, I found great changes. The community was standing as if on the exit threshold, especially the young people. While the *pioneering spirit* could not be sensed in the city, the inclination to go to the Land of Israel was widespread. There was not a family who didn't have someone in Israel. And the will to emigrate to Israel engulfed Bundists and non-Zionists. I happened on an interesting phenomenon: Bundists, simple ordinary people, were sending their children to *Hebrew* schools, while the intelligentsia preferred a Polish education. I had the impression that even in the *Yavneh* school, there was more Polish than Hebrew.

The use of the Polish language spread among the Jews more so than Russian had in the prior period. In my letter to the newspaper, *Davar*, I dwelt on this phenomenon in connection with the Polonization of the Byelorussian base – Polonization of the entire youth.

In the Jewish section of the city I didn't recognize any buildings or extensions. In this location, the city was built practically as a new Polish city, and parts of it were beautiful indeed.

Despite all the changes that had come that were not good, nevertheless, there was a feeling of a *Jewish settlement*. A city with a Jewish legacy, with Hebrew education, with Zionism, with charity, and in general, like most of Poland, and especially like Polish Lithuania, and Volhyn – Judaism with a clear desire for a Hebrew-based culture and the Land of Israel. The older generation, even if the Rabbis fell under the influence of the *Agudat Israel*, were not jealous of their prerogatives, tolerant, pleasant and inclined to the Land of Israel.

The heart tightens when one remembers both the cemetery with all those dear Jews would found their resting place there. What was its fate? It is difficult to think about all this. I spent some good times in Volkovysk, even in these last hours. It is hard to speak, and it is not easy to write. The pain is very great.

## **A Letter from Our Townsman Chaim Itzel Tchopper**

To: The Committee of the Organization of Emigrants from Volkovysk In Israel  
Tel-Aviv

My dear friend, Shlomo'keh!

I received your letter of 4.1.1946, and Mulya's letter of 4.2.1946 together, yesterday, on the same day: also Zapoliansky and Kossowsky both received their packages in good order. I received my package four weeks ago, about which I have already notified you. We thank you very much.

Imagine what our yesterday was like, how great was our celebration. It was like a brightness coming into our dark lives; two letters in one day, and the packages! We read the letters during the whole day, and our pride on that day knew no bounds. Because whoever came in to see us, we told that we had received two letters that day from those who are nearest to us, and who today is closer to us than you? You today serve as our brothers and parents. We do not need to describe our condition, which we have already explained previously. Even the circumstances in which we find ourselves today, without seeing an end to it, at least for whatever years we have left allotted to us, we will live in our own area. We so much want to come to you and to cry without stopping, because here, the heart is like stone, and we only wish that we could speak from the heart, perhaps that will make it easier for us. And there is a great, great deal to talk about. I am perhaps one of the very few, who remembers in chronological order, what happened to our community, and I remember the dates that are significant in the extermination of our beloved ones. I would like to preserve the days of their years, but I think I will do this when I get to my proper location. And any scion of Volkovysk that wishes to know details about his family, let him turn to me, and I will respond to him.

Yes, now the writer is girded with patience, seeing as how we managed to survive those "good times." It is true, but the fact of the matter is different. Originally there was only one concern, and that was, how would we reach the day that we could leave the camp, and there, the need was to fight hunger, and all manner of

other things, such as selections, and like things, stemming from the Nazi hatred in the camps, especially towards the Jews, was of such a nature that there was no time to think; each day brought its fresh decrees; Kotliarsky can tell you about this, he knows exactly where I was in the camp. He was in the habit of saying to me, that I was the only one who mad a stand in the camp in the face of trying conditions, by going all the time to the 'Command.' But, I had much more nerve in those days than now. How did this all happen? However, now that I am 'free' and when I think to myself, all the thoughts float around in my head. I see how I was lost, and to what level we came to. And this caused the most intense suffering. Because in the camp, there was no real opportunity to stop and think about it. But there is a folk saying that man is stronger than steel, and we can overcome anything. I think that now, you will understand our state of mind.

You write to let you know if we have received any added material. To this day, we have received nothing except the packages and the newspapers [that you sent us]. When we receive the balance, we will let you know immediately. We received the packages that contained shirts for everybody, socks, new underwear, razor blades and cigarettes. You are writing to Shipiatsky. I heard that he is in Lodz. Itcheh Botvinsky is new to me, because it is some time since I received a letter from America from his murdered father, that I have written to him. I have heard about the rest.

Shlomo'keh, you ask that I write immediately, and I am doing that. In this connection, I ask that you do the same, because it encourages me. It is then that I see that I am not alone by myself, that I *still* have good friends. Yes, write to me about everything and about everyone. Write to me about the questions that are of greatest interest to you, and I will reply in future letters, and I will give you a specific accounting of the losses to our community. Please send our best regards to our comrades who were with us in Auschwitz. They also can write to us. All those from Volkovysk that reached Israel, especially Lashowitz, he owes me a letter. Please convey regards to my aunt, and tell her that I never received more than one letter. Also, my cousins the Lifschitzes, tell them not to refrain from writing. I thank Mendel Green, and Yehuda'i (I don't know which one) for the newspapers. I have just received the dictionary.

I will write a separate letter to Mulya Schein this week. Altogether, I have received only two letters from him. Kossowsky asks for the address of his cousin, Fruma Kavushatsky. Zapoliansky asks to convey the special letter to Ahar'itchkeh and Shlomo'keh Markus.

A hearty regards to all those from Volkovysk. Write about everything.

In the name of our fellow townsmen Shmuel Zapoliansky, and Joseph Kossowsky  
Your townsman and friend,  
*Itzel Tchopper* .

Page 87:

*Three survivors from Volkovysk in Italy.*  
*Left to Right: Chaim-Itzel Tchopper, Shmuel Zapoliansky, Joseph Kossowsky*

## Letter Received on Completion of the Book

Our dear brothers, much peace be with you,

There are five survivors from Volkovysk here: Benjamin Bashitsky, Daniel Lemkin, Malka Polonsky<sup>16</sup> (granddaughter of Shalakhmones), Zvi Epstein (Chas'sheh-Leah's granddaughter), and Shmuel Rosenbloom. We are recollecting the past, and we are telling details of the great calamity that befell our people in general, and the residents of our city in particular. We are few who have remained, a small number of people to be counted. We are writing this letter from the home of a young woman from our city; she is married already, and her name is Reizl Plotnitsky (a relative of Gurevich) and used to live on the *Svislucz Gasse*.

In the coming days, *Tcherneh Rusianska-Shereshevsky* is supposed to reach Poland from Russia.

The following still remain in Volkovysk: *Mottel Shifran, Malka Rutchik, Zelig Kryer, Eliyahu Bayer, Isser Rosenbloom, Yitzhak Botvinsky*, one of the *Perekhodnik* daughters, *Mordechai Gamm, Malka Kaplinsky, Raphael Geller, Yitzhak Gallin, Zlata Rubin, Chava Rubin*. It appears that there are other survivors, but there is as yet, no news of them. Chaya Pisetsky has remained in Moscow. In Otovchik, Dr. Shlackman, Dr. Bebhuk, Izzy Mazya, In Szczucin, can be found: the wife of Berel Kaplan, and her daughters, Sholom Zlotnitsky, Vinogradsky-Lemkin, Chaim Brichbach, Lazarovsky, Sholom Galai, the Reznitsky brothers, Hanokh Pick, Jedediah Katz. Rivka Rothford is found in Belsko.

Malka Polonsky asks if her aunts and relatives can be located: Malka, Rachel, Ronya, Ephraim Polonsky from Kobrin.

You are probably aware of the conditions in Poland, and the desires of our *landsleit* are known to you as well. Very shortly, there will only remain a handful of Jews.

Dear brothers, you realize how difficult it is to write and tell everything; the heart aches, and there are simply no words to convey everything that we think. First we want to offer you our encouragement that you will keep strong, and that you will succeed in your war to free the homeland, and that you will soon see us, the survivors of Volkovysk in your ranks.

In the name of all the people here from Volkovysk, we thank you for the help you have sent for the scions of our city, and we sent you are best regards for all that is good, with the hopes of seeing you in the Holy Land.

In another couple of days, Daniel Lemkin and Zvi Epstein will be leaving for Vienna, and from there with some measure of probability, to Israel.

Signatures

In the letter of Chaim Lemkin of 5.8.46 a list of those from Volkovysk found in Poland is conveyed:

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<sup>16</sup>

In this volume, the name seems to be rendered Malka *Polonskit*, which is a Hebrew feminization of the name Polonsky.

Sholom Zolotnitsky, Izzy Zohn-Mazya, Lazarovsky, David Falevado, Rivka Rothford, Eliezer Sukenik, Be'ereh Shalrovich, Hirsch Volsky and his family, Gershon Resnick, Sholom Galai, Riva Rubinovich, the wife of Chaim Rubinovich, Shmuel Kaplan, Meir Melamed, Beileh Kaplan, and the daughters, Nota and Paulia, Eliyahu Lemkin and his family, Herzl Epstein, David Lifschitz, Katz, 'Nioma Bashitsky, Polonsky (Shalakhmones), Bebchuk, Shlackman, Joseph Ain, Tzila and Nechama Schein, Vena Bogomilsky, Volodya, and their sister Genya and her children.

*Page 89: The Committee with Two of the Survivors and the guest, Dr. Moses Einhorn, New York Right to Left:*

*Standing: A. Kalir, H. Roitman, A. Broshi, J. Kotliarsky, Sh. Schein*

*Sitting: Sh. Bereshkovsky, Y. Yehuda'i, Dr. M. Einhorn, and the Chairman, A. Shykevich*

## Financial Accounting

24.4.1945 – 31.7.1946

	Income	Expense
1. According to the list of contributors #1, published in The Volkovysk "Pamphlet," July 1945	188,000	
2. According to the list of contributors #2, published in The Volkovysk "Pamphlet," August 1945	34,000	
3. According to the list of contributors #3, published in The current edition	145,200	

### Donations from Abroad:

5. Dr. Moses Einhorn, New York (\$100)	24,680	
6. Rabbi <i>Gaon</i> I. Unterman, Liverpool <sup>17</sup> (STG 8)	7,875	
7. Mr. M. Moorstein, New York	9,820	
8. Rabbi <i>Gaon</i> Y. Kossowsky, Johannesburg	5,000	
9. Rabbi <i>Gaon</i> M. Kossowsky <sup>18</sup> , Johannesburg	2,000	
10. <i>Volkovysker Verein</i> of Philadelphia (\$300)	73,740	
11. Mrs. Chaya Kass, Elkeh Ogulnick, Mereh Karashinsky, Fanny Birnbaum, and Elkeh Ben-Zvi from Montreal (Canada) through the Bialystock Center (\$C300)	66,420	

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<sup>17</sup> This is *Rabbi Isser Yehuda Unterman*, who would become Chief Rabbi of Israel.

<sup>18</sup> This is Rabbi Mikhl Kossowsky, the son of Rabbi Yitzhak Kossowsky. Rabbi Mikhl Kossowsky was the last Rabbi of Zelva, and barely escaped from the Nazis (see Yitzhak Shalev's memoir in the *Zelva Memorial Book*, p. 92).

12. The Volkovysk Center, New York, via Saul Barash (Shlomo Bereshkovsky) (\$1000)	246,590
13. Volkovysker Friends, New York, via Mrs. Sima Lev, Zanitz, etc.	18,485
14. Abraham Ain (of Svislucz), New York	12,179

### [Expenses]:

1. Packages sent to Volkovysk	92,500
Packages sent to Russia, Italy and Belgium	63,953
Monies sent to Poland	20,000
2. Assistance to Volkovysk refugees for Initial Settlement	145,000
Assistance to the above for finding work, domicile, furniture, etc.	249,085
3. Loans for constructive purposes	25,000
4. Telegrams and mail expenses	22,265
5. Expenses for the first meeting of Volkovysk emigrés	
Tel-Aviv, on 24.4.1945 (Hall, notices, etc)	9,240
Expenses for the second meeting of Volkovysk emigrés	
Tel-Aviv 30.8.45 (with the participation of Dr. Einhorn)	9,580
6. Expenses for publication of the Volkovysk Pamphlet #1 - July 1945	20,750
Expenses for publication of the Volkovysk Pamphlet #2 - August 1945	4,500
7. Expenses for publishing this folio[ Hurban Volkovysk]	30,000
8. Various small expenses	4,566
Bank Account as of 31.7.46	137,860
Totals	834,299

*Yitzhak Yehuda'i*  
*Treasurer*

Note: This accounting does not reflect expenses incurred after 31.7; [this includes] transfer of 65 Israeli lira to Poland, in connection with the return of our townfolk from Russia; the printing of this folio, and its distribution.

## Accounting of the Work of the Committee

In our first pamphlet of July 1945, we gave an accounting, in summary form, of the activities we had done to that date, with an outline of our plan for future activities. We provided additional details in our second pamphlet of August 1945.

At the end of August 1945, the second meeting of our townfolk in Israel took place in Tel-Aviv, with the participation of our distinguished guest, Dr. Moses Einhorn from New York, who arrived by air, in a special way, for the purpose of gathering news about Volkovysk here in the Land [of Israel].

At this meeting, Dr. Einhorn spoke at great length, and conveyed regards from our *landsleit* in America. In the process, he recalled interesting facts about Volkovysk during the period of the First World War, and afterwards, when he got there several times as a representative of American Jewry.

At that meeting, Messrs. Joseph Kotliarsky and Herschel Roitman also spoke, who were in Volkovysk from the beginning of the Nazi conquest, were sent with the last transport to Auschwitz, and were among the first to reach the Holy Land after being saved from the Nazi dragnet. These latter talks are recorded in this document, in the form of eye witness reports.

The principal activities of the Committee centered about the following:

**1. Packages.** Packages were sent by mail and other means, such as via the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, etc. to Volkovysk, Russia (to addresses of our townfolk that had reached us), Italy, Belgium, Germany, and Poland. In a like manner, we sent packages to Lisokovo, from where we had received a letter asking for help with a few addresses of Jews that survived there.

The Packages included clothing, foodstuffs, underwear, sewing tools, razors, soap, etc. We received confirmation from every location that the packages were received, but to our sorrow, we have not received such a reply from Volkovysk or Lisokovo as of this time.

2. With the return of the Polish Jews from Russia, lately, several tens of our townfolk arrived in Lodz, Lower Silesia, and other places in Poland, and according to the information in hand, a committee of Volkovysk townpeople was established in Lodz, due to the efforts of Mr. Chaim Shipiatsky and others.

Because of the bitter experience we had in sending packages to Volkovysk and Lisokovo, and after we researched the matter of sending packages to Poland, we received a reply from the scion of our city, Ch. Shipiatsky, telling us that it was not worth doing this, we did succeed in transferring specific sums of money to our landsleit who had arrived from Russia, and it is understood that given the condition they were in, this required larger sums of money to alleviate the terrible suffering they had endured.

**3. Communication by Mail and Telegrams:** A very important objective was to arrange contact by mail and telegrams and were necessary by telegrams, with the survivors from Volkovysk and its vicinity. Hundreds of letters and telegrams were sent and received by us, and from this, it became evident as to how important this connection to the unfortunate ones was, who by this, were able to see a ray of light penetrate their terrible suffering, in the receipt of news from their townfolk who had decided to encourage them and extend them help.

**4. Assistance to the Refugees from Volkovysk in Searching for their Relatives:** With the initiation of our work, we understood that there would be a need to search for the relatives of our refugees, for most of whom, all they know is that they have a relative either in Israel or in some other country, but they usually do not know an address, and in a number of instances, not even a name, because most of the survivors are from the younger generation who had never even seen their relatives.

To this purpose, we created a complete list of our *landsleit* in Israel, and sent a copy to the Volkovysk Center in New York, and with the help of Dr. Einhorn and Mr. Nakhumovsky, we received a folder with the addresses of our *landsleit* in New York.

Because of this, we have the capacity to frequently convey the address of relatives to one refugee or another, and immediately after receiving any sort of response from him, at the same time to immediately notify the respective relative about his surviving relative.

It is worth saying that our landsleit, who are long-time residents in Israel, are in the habit of frequently assembling our address lists here, and in America, family matters and things of this nature.

**5. Aid to Refugees Who Reached Israel:** A special responsibility, no less important than other responsibilities, was to assist those survivors who succeeded in reaching the Holy Land, especially at a time when we are able to see more precisely the results of our work in this area. In our first desire, even before they got themselves settled, and on occasion to help them get settled. In the financial accounting, it is necessary to add only that apart from financial assistance, which undoubtedly has its own importance, it was very important to give emotional support, so that they see that they are not abandoned to their own devices, and that they have an address where to go regarding all the issues that burden them, and by this means, to ease their loneliness, and their difficult emotional state at the outset. This approach gives them encouragement, and arouses them to rebuild their lives anew in the homeland.

**6. Arranging for Work and Making a Living:** A lot of effort and initiatives are undertaken by a number of the Committee Members of the Volkovysk Organization to find work and a living for our survivors, and we can state with confidence, that all the survivors that have arrived in Israel to date – are properly taken care of.

*Page 92: Dedication of a Kiosk for the Partisan, Eliyahu Kovensky in Petakh Tikva.*

*Right to Left: A. Kalir, Abraham Shapiro, one of the founders and defenders of Petakh Tikva, E. Kovensky.*

## List of Volkovysk Survivors Reaching Israel At This Date

- 1) Joseph Kotliarsky, Tel-Aviv, 9 Pines Street
- 2) Zvi Roitman, Tel-Aviv, 9 Pines Street
- 3) Shayna Lifschitz, Tel-Aviv 9 Nachmani Street
- 4) Katriel Lashowitz, 9 Arnon Street
- 5) Eliyahu Kovensky, Petakh Tikva, Chafetz Chaim Street
- 6) Eliyahu Kushnir and his wife, Holon, a new settlement near Tel-Aviv
- 7) Dr. Noah Kaplinsky, Mikve Israel
- 8) Esther Yerushalmi, Tel-Aviv, Maon Ha'Ishah

## List of Volkovysk Survivors Known At This Time

Note: According to hearsay, the brother and sister of Khvonnik are to be found in Pruzhany.

Page 93:

*A Maccabi Celebration in Volkovysk in 1933*

<b>A</b>	Itzkowitz (from Volkovysk, worked in the kitchen)	Meir Melamed Mordechai Mendelevich (Lisokovo)
Joseph Ain		
Dr. Eliyahu Amstibovsky	<b>K</b>	Mezheritzky (Lisokovo)
Shlomo Anshi and his family (the Bialystoker Baker)	Baylah Kaplan (wife of Berel Kaplan)	Pesha Mezheritzky and her daughter (Lisokovo)
Shayna (Tcherneh) Applebaum	Dr. Marek Kaplan Nionia Kaplan	Natan Minkowitz Meir Mushatsky
<b>B</b>	Nieta and Paulia Kaplan (daughters of Berel Kaplan)	Zalman Mushatsky
Basia Bayer		
Dr. Bebuchuk	Shmuel Kaplan	<b>O</b>
Yaakov Becker (Zelva)	Malka Kaplinska	Yaakov Oyvitz
Pesach Bintovich (Lisokovo)	Shaul Karpivnik	<b>P</b>
Grisha Bogomilsky (?)	Jedediah Katz	Yaakov Panter
Itchkeh Botvinsky and his family	Chaim Khvonyik (Lisokovo)	Chaya Pisetsky
Hasia Boyarsky	Joseph Kossowsky	Joel Pomerantz and his son (Lisokovo)
Jonah Borukhansky (Lisokovo)	Esther Kravchik (Lisokovo) Zelig Krier	<b>R</b>
<b>E</b>		Rivka Rappaport
Shmuel Epstein	<b>L</b>	Dr. Resnick
	Lantzevitzky	Isser Rosenbloom
<b>F</b>	David Lazarovsky	Shmuel Rosenbloom
Elkeh Feitelevich	Daniel Lemkin	Zlata Rubin
	David Lemkin (son of 'Nioma Lemkin)	Riva Rubinovich (wife of Chaim Rubinovich)
<b>G</b>	Eliyahu Lemkin and his family	Eliyahu Rutchik,
Shlomo Galai	Miama Levin (Svislucz)	Malka Rutchik
Isaac Gallin (son of Sioma Gallin)		
Mottel Gamm		
David Geller	<b>M</b>	<b>S</b>
Dr. Goldberg		Homa Schein
	Ida Mazover-Rak	Tzila Schein (daughters of Herschel Schein)
<b>I</b>	Yehoshua Mazya	

Natan Sedletsky		<b>U</b>		<b>Z</b>
Meir Sedletsky and his family				
Berel Shevakhovich and his family	David Uryonovsky			Eliezer Zamoschansky
Natan Shifran				Shmuel Zapoliansky
Chaim Shipiatsky		<b>V</b>		Gita Zeitlin-Slapak (Svislucz)
Ruth Shipiatsky				Aharon Zlotnitsky
Yerakhmiel Shipiatsky	Eliyahu Velvelsky			Bom Zuckerman (son of Herschel Zuckerman)
Boris Shalakhovich	Mina Volsky			Joseph Zuckerman (son of Meitzig Zuckerman)
Dr. Shlackman	Moshe Volsky			Mrs. Zuckerman (wife of Meitzig Zuckerman)
Smeizik				
Leizer Sukenik		<b>W</b>		
	Chaya Weiner			
	Eliyahu Weiner			
	Tamara Weiner (daughter of Dr. Weiner)			
<b>T</b>				
Chaim Itzel Tchopper				