

The 51st Brigade

The History of the Jewish Partisan Group from the Slonim Ghetto

By Sarah Shner-Nishmit

Translation of *HaPlugah HaChamishim v'Achat*

Translated into English by Judith Levi

Originally published in Hebrew by

The Ghetto Fighters Museum Publication - The Israel Ministry of Defence

Published by JewishGen

**An Affiliate of the Museum of Jewish Heritage - A Living Memorial to the Holocaust
New York**

The 51st Brigade - The History of the Jewish Partisan Group from the
Slonim Ghetto

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First Printing: November 2015, Kislev 5776

Author: Sarah Shner-Nishmit

Translator: Judith Levi

Editors of the Translation: Zvi Shefet, Mike Levy

Layout: Sheldon Z. Lipsky

Map Production: Hila Shefet-Mashiach

Image Editor: Hila Shefet-Mashiach

Cover Modifications: Rachel Kolokoff Hopper

Indexing: Lynn Mercer

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Published by JewishGen, Inc.
An Affiliate of the Museum of Jewish Heritage
A Living Memorial to the Holocaust
36 Battery Place, New York, NY 10280

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Printed in the United States of America by Lightning Source, Inc.

Library of Congress Control Number (LCCN): 2015953752

ISBN: 978-1-939561-36-7 (hard cover: 400 pages, alk. paper)

Cover Credit: From the cover of the original Hebrew book

Original cover design, maps and sketches in Hebrew by Ofer Drori

JewishGen and the Yizkor-Books-in-Print Project

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The **JewishGen Yizkor Book Project** was organized to make more widely known the existence of Yizkor (Memorial) Books written by survivors and former residents of various Jewish communities throughout the world. Later, volunteers connected to the different destroyed communities began cooperating to have these books translated from the original language—usually Hebrew or Yiddish—into English, thus enabling a wider audience to have access to the valuable information contained within them. As each chapter of these books was translated, it was posted on the JewishGen website and made available to the general public.

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A list of all published translated Yizkor Books in the project with prices and ordering information can be found at:

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Lance Ackerfeld, Yizkor Book Project Manager

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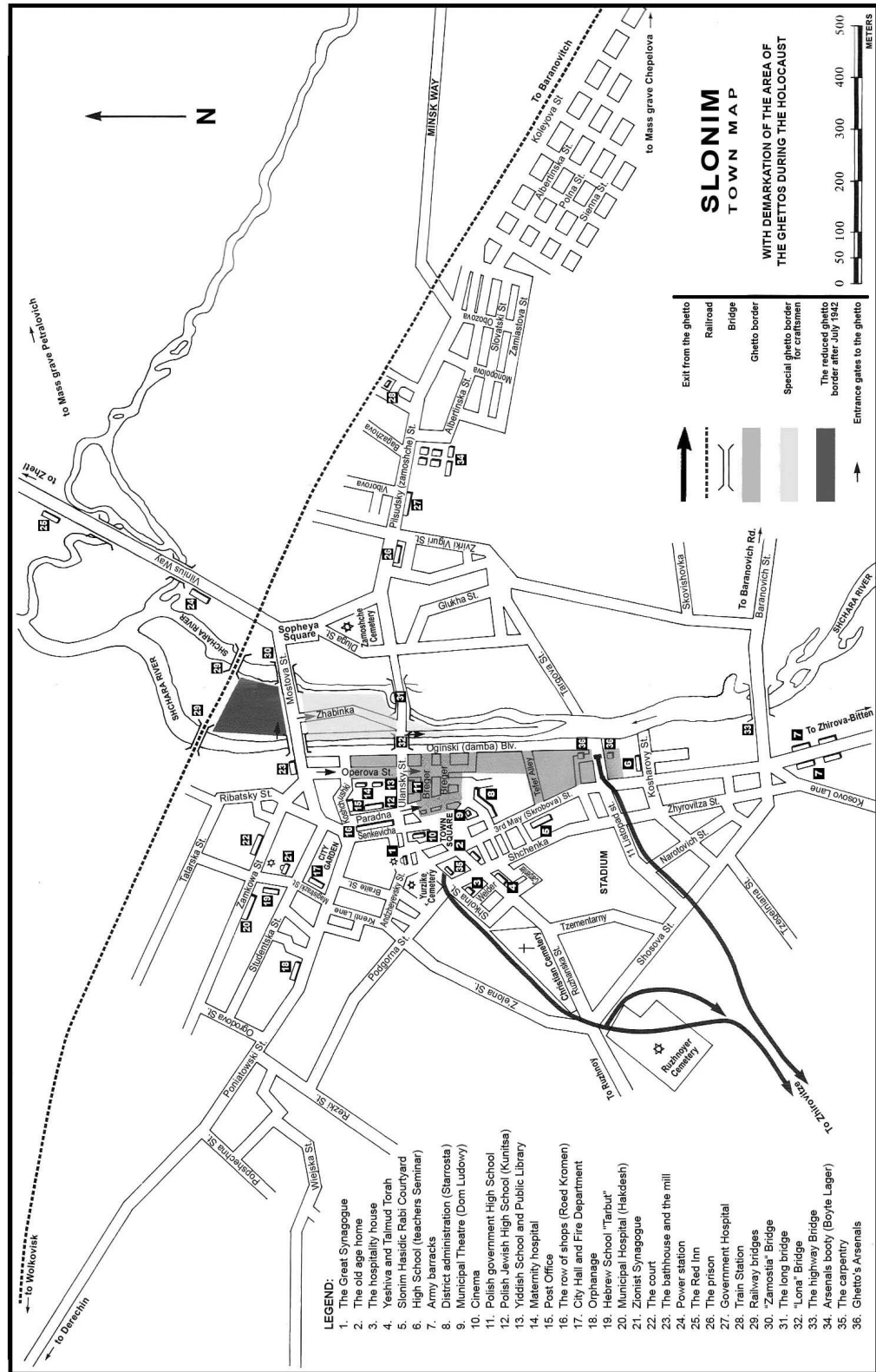
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Our goal is to make this history and important genre of Jewish literature available in English in book form so that people can have the near-personal histories of their ancestral towns on their bookshelves for themselves and for their children and grandchildren.

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Translation of the Title Page of Original Hebrew Book

Sara Shner-Nishmit

THE 51st BRIGADE

**The History of the Jewish Partisan Group
from the Slonim Ghetto**

Published by

The Ghetto Fighters Museum Publication - The Israel Ministry of Defence

Background

This is the story of the fight of young Jewish people from the town of Slonim and its environs, against the German murderers of World War II and their Belorussian and Polish collaborators. The book lays blame at the feet of Soviet partisans, who abandoned their comrades in arms and incited anti-Semitic hatred towards the Jewish fighters.

The Jewish troop called *Shchors*, on the banks of the River Shchara, marched along its battle paths, fought with courage and strength and distinguished itself in battle. They buried their dead, cared for their wounded, and never abandoned their old people and children.

Throughout this cruel war in the forests and forest edges they attacked police stations and military camps and blew up trains carrying German troops and equipment.

At the end of the war, people from Slonim and the area were recruited into the Red Army and advanced with the Soviet army into German territory. The soldiers who then remained immigrated to Israel and set up their homes there.

The writer Sarah Shner-Nishmit, one of the founders of Kibbutz Lohamei HaGetaot (Fighters of the Ghetto), was born in 1913 in the town of Siena, in the Sувалки district, Poland. In 1925 her family uprooted to Lithuania. She completed her studies in Classical Languages and Philosophy at the University of Kovno, Vilna, and in 1962 she completed an advanced level course in Archival Studies at the Hebrew University.

She was imprisoned with the invasion of the Soviet Union by the German army in 1941, and fled from a German labour camp to the partisans in the forests. She was a nurse in the Soviet partisan troop until the liberation in 1944; from 1945 to 1947 she was one of the founders of the “Zionist Organisation for the Return of Jewish Children” from convents and Christian houses in Poland. From 1955 she was among the workers of “The House of the Ghetto Fighter” museum alongside her husband Tzvi Shner (director of the museum from 1950 to 1984). She published books and articles about the struggles of the Jews in the ghettos and the forests.

Originally published by Israel Ministry of Defence, House of the Ghetto Fighters

Acknowledgement for the Translation

The preface relating the history of the Slonim Jewish community which appears in this book, was written according to the monograph by the historian Ing. Kalman Lichtenstein, the principal editor of “The Slonim Notebook” (Pinkas Slonim, 4 vol.)

This book is published thanks to the funding from the “Slonim Notebook” editorial board and from the 51st Brigade veterans in Israel.

For organising the English translation, editing and publication, thanks are due to Sheila and Mike Levy of Cambridge, England. Sheila is a cousin of Abraham Bublacki, a member of the 51st Unit.

Thanks especially are to Mr Zvi Shefet, a former member of the 51st Unit and the promoter of editing the book and its translation into English.



Abraham Boblacki

Foreword of the Translation

The English translation of this book has taken years to come to fruition. Written in 1990, the monumental account of the tragic events in Slonim, was a work of great scholarship by the late Israeli historian, Sara Shner-Nishmit. She worked with former members of the 51st Brigade, the Jewish partisan group, principally people like Zvi Shefet who assisted her in gathering the testimonies.

My interest in the story of the Jewish hero partisans of Slonim began in 1998. My wife Sheila's Aunt Betty handed over four family photographs and a couple of wartime documents. Liverpool-born Betty knew that I was interested in history and was just starting out as a Holocaust educator in England. The small black and white photographs were obviously taken in the 1930s and featured Great Aunt Eva, the sister of my wife's grandmother. She is shown with what seem to be family members: two small girls – around 8 to 11 years old - and a young man.

The documents that accompanied the photographs gave some crucial information about the people shown in the grainy little snaps. One was an enquiry sent to the International Red Cross by my wife's grandfather some time during the Second World War. Writing from Liverpool, he wanted to have some information on family members from Slonim, their home 'shtetl' in Eastern Poland. Nothing had been heard of them since the occupation of the country first by the Russians, and after June 1941, by the advancing German army.

The document helpfully lists the family members living in Slonim and by implication, I could associate their names with the people shown on the photographs. The facts seem to be that some time in the mid 1930s, Great Aunt Eva, paid a visit from Liverpool to Slonim, possibly for a family wedding. Her sister (and of course that of my wife's grandmother), had stayed in Slonim when the other siblings emigrated to Liverpool in the late 1890s.

The mysterious people in the photograph appear to be the two girls: Lebe and Blumey Boblatski. A young man in a separate photograph turned out to be Abraham Boblatski, their older brother. A search of the Yad Vashem Central Database of Shoah Victims' Names revealed a record for Abraham who it seems died in 1943. The testimony was signed by Mr E Luboshitz from Israel who described himself as a former neighbour.

My next move set in motion a series of remarkable coincidences. An Israeli friend scoured the Israeli phone book for Mr E Luboshitz, rang a series of numbers and eventually spoke to a very old man who some years before had indeed written the testimony about Abraham Boblatski. He suggested, though, that I speak to a Mr Zvi Shefet who would know much more.

Mr Shefet was, and still is, responsible for the Association of Slonim Jews and was easily traced to an apartment in Tel Aviv. I sent a copy of the photograph of the young man to Zvi who confirmed that this was indeed Abraham Boblatski (or Bublacki). He also told me something that I had no idea about until that moment: Abraham was a partisan in the 51st Brigade. No one in my wife's family had heard of Abraham and certainly not that he had been a partisan. The next piece of news was if anything even more remarkable: Zvi was organizing a study trip to Slonim the following week. This

was July 2008. I dropped all plans, booked tickets and joined the Slonim tour as the only non-Israeli.

Led by Zvi, the seven-day tour took us to the three sites of Jewish martyrdom in the forests near Slonim. We had a walk around the town including the site of the former ghetto, important landmarks in Slonim's Jewish history and the story of Zvi's astonishing escape from the Nazi murderers.

I also discovered the existence of this book – written in Hebrew, telling the story of the Slonim partisans (not least the part played by Cousin Abraham).

We spent many months trying to find a translator of the book and eventually a good friend from our home town in Cambridge (England), offered to take on the mammoth task without any charge. Judith Levi told us that to translate the book would be a mitzvah but it would take her time. It took her around a year of careful work fitting in the task whenever she could. Judith, a former resident of Israel, translated the book by speaking into a Dictaphone. We then gave the recording equipment to two audio typists who offered to transcribe Judith's words to text.

The translation that you see here was the work of Judith Levi who cannot be thanked enough for offering us this wonderful mitzvah. Thanks are also due to Ruth Greene and Jane Elia for working so hard on the audio transcriptions.

We hope that the translation of Sara Shner-Nishmit's magisterial work will open a relatively forgotten part of modern Jewish history. It is of course essentially a story of deep tragedy – most of the Jewish citizens of Slonim were murdered by the Germans and their collaborators.

It is to all the victims of the savage and murderous policy of the Nazis that we would wish to dedicate the English translation of this book.

Above all we dedicate this translation to Zvi Shefet, one of the most remarkable men I have ever met. Zvi has made the memory of the Jews of Slonim a lifelong task. He has been back to Slonim many times, ensured that the roof of the now derelict Slonim synagogue was repaired has organised a Jewish memorial site in the former cemetery there and three forest memorials marking the spot where thousands of martyrs were murdered.

This is a tragic story of victims, but also an inspirational story about heroism: Jewish heroism.

Mike Levy
Cambridge England, 2014

In memory of
The martyrs of the town of Slonim and its
Surroundings
Who perished in the Holocaust,
The fighters who fell in the ghetto, in the
forests
and in the liberation armies.



Map of Belarus with Slonim

Geopolitical Information:

Alternate names: Russian: Слоним. Belarusian: Слонім. Yiddish: סלאנים

Slonim is located at 53°05' North Latitude and 25°19' East Longitude
108 mi WSW of Minsk

	Town	District	Province	Country
Before WWI (c. 1900):	Slonim	<u>Slonim</u>	<u>Grodno</u>	Russian Empire
Between the wars (c. 1930):	Slonim	<u>Slonim</u>	<u>Nowogródek</u>	Poland
After WWII (c. 1950):	Slonim			
Today (c. 2000):	Slonim			

Nearby Jewish Communities:

Ozernitsa 13 miles W
Hałynka 15 miles NW
Byten 16 miles SSE
Kozlovshchina 16 miles N
Polonka 17 miles ENE
Derechin 20 miles NW
Zelva 21 miles WNW
Molchad 23 miles NE
Pavlovo 23 miles SW
Ruzhany 23 miles SW
Kosava 24 miles SSW
Dvoretz 24 miles NNE
Novaya Mysh 24 miles E
Ivatsevichy 25 miles S
Dzyatlava 27 miles N
Novoyel'nya 29 miles NNE
Baranavichy 30 miles E

Short Note about the Jewish Community of Slonim

Jews were living in Slonim as early as 1388. Beginning of the twentieth century there were about 11,500 Jews living in town, about 73% of the population. In 1940 at the time of the Soviet occupation there were about 35,000 Jews living in Slonim, half of them were refugees from the occupied Poland by the Nazi Germany. When the Nazi forces occupied Slonim in 1941 Jews were shot in the woods. Some hundreds survivors escaped into the forests or were hidden. About 200 survived the war.

Their stories are presented in Volume II of "Pinkas Slonim"

Today there are a few descendents of Slonim, especially in Israel. The once vibrant Jewish community of Slonim is no more. Today there are no Jews living in Slonim.

Note to the Reader:

Also please note that all references within the text of the book to page numbers, refer to the page numbers of the original book.

