

The Memoirs of Mordechai Bezdesky

Translator's Note

The "Memoirs of Mordechai Bezdesky" is one of several articles published in the [Yizkor Book](#) (Memorial Book) issued by the Yanove community in Israel dedicated in memory of the martyrs of our hometown Yanove. It is an authentic chronological eyewitness account of Jewish life in that town from the end of the First World War, 1914-1918, to the tragic end of its complete extinction in September-October 1942.

The aim of translating this article into English is to enable our townspeople, especially the young generation in America, who do not read Hebrew to acquaint themselves with the tragic facts of what happened to their unfortunate parents and grandparents, brothers and sisters, uncles, aunts and cousins in our home town. The story is typical of what happened in thousands of other towns and cities with a Jewish population, culminating in the greatest disaster of all times in Jewish history, the cold blooded murder of six million Jewish men, women and children for the only reason that they had been born Jews.

It is significant to note that the perpetrators of that crime belonged to one of the most cultured nations of our times and it occurred in the, so called, Twentieth Century of Progress. Mountains of literature have been and will be written in years to come dealing with that cruel and bizarre occurrence, but it is of little consolation to the dead and the relatives of the victims who had lost their dear ones.

-- J. Wall.

Mordechai Bezdesky

My Memoirs

In the heart of the region of Polesie 40 kilometers West of Pinsk is situated the town of Yanove. The town was linked with neighborly ties to the City of Pinsk and was known as Yanove near Pinsk to differentiate it from other towns in Poland by the same name.

Prior to the Second World War its population was approximately 39000 Jews, mostly middle class storekeepers, merchants and handicraft working people, and about the same number of gentiles consisting mostly of White Russians and a small minority of Catholic Poles.

The center of the town where the marketplace and the stores were situated was inhabited by Jews only; the side streets were inhabited by the gentile population, who were known as hard and belligerent people to get along with. They were engaged in agriculture, but a number of them also had a sideline of undertaking for repairs to churches whenever needed; with the consent of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, instead of receiving compensation, they were allowed to make

a collection among the inhabitants of the neighboring villages. It seems that this was not a bad business at all, since quite a number of them were attracted to it and owing to that occupation they were nicknamed "Yanove Labures" a nickname that was also imposed on the Jewish inhabitants as well by the neighboring towns. The Jews and gentiles lived peacefully side by side for many years without any unpleasant incidents and until the Second World War, the relationship between them was satisfactory. We were not afraid of them since the Jewish community consisted of hard-working people, types as portrayed in the writings of "Schneider," honest, hard-working and good-hearted, always ready to defend their Jewish honor even with deeds when necessary.

At the End of the First World War and After

Up to the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 our region was administered by the Russian Tzarist rules. Not long after the hostilities began our region was occupied by the Kaiser's German Army. In 1917 following the Russian Revolution, the Bolsheviks entered our region but did not remain long. After several battles the area was recaptured by the newly formed Polish Army which was notorious for its specialty of cutting Jewish beards. Their allies were the region of General Balachowich which consisted of the scum of the Ukrainian population who helped them in making war on the Bolsheviks. These barbarians were hardly fit or capable of fighting a war, but were great heroes in murdering and pillaging defenseless Jews. Refugees who came running from the villages to our town told stories of horrors inflicted by them on the Jews. They were robbed and murdered without mercy. One day they showed up in our town. I was then still a small child but I remember distinctly the fear and panic they caused to the Jewish population. Those who remained were locked in their houses awaiting the worst to happen. Luckily, they were ordered suddenly to move up to the front by the Polish Command stationed in Pinsk. The frontal towns and cities changed hands several times and finally remained in Polish hands.

In 1921 a civilian administration was established in town with various organized Administrative Bureaus. My late father, Israel Bezdesky who spoke the Polish language fluently and also knew to read and write Polish, was appointed mayor of the Jewish population. His main function consisted of representing the Jewish community before the Polish authorities. The Poles, overwhelmed with their victory, frequently imposed all kinds of demands on the Jewish population. It is understood that my father was not in a position to satisfy both sides easily. On one side he acquired enemies among a portion of the Jewish Community who thought that they had been wronged, on the other hand he was unable to satisfy fully the demands of the authorities with the result that he used to come home in the evening all exhausted and depressed.

To this day the following occurrence remains impressed in my memory. Once, we were visited by several soldiers under the command of an officer asking to see my father. When my mother told them that my father had gone with another group of soldiers they did not believe her and started to look for him in the attic, in the stable, in the yard and even in the closets. While searching they turned everything upside down and helped themselves to the poor belongings we had in the house. Meanwhile my father appeared and the soldiers started to beat him up mercilessly and demanded that he tell them where he had been. All his explanations and the crying of the family were ignored and they commanded him to raise his hands and march forward. They brought him to the neighboring yard and stood him up facing the wall. I ran to my

father, embracing him tightly, and cried bitterly. One soldier tried to separate us without success. (I was only eight years old at the time.) My Mother, my brothers and sisters and neighbors in town protested loudly and the whole town was in an uproar. Meanwhile, it happened that the landowner "Salkowsky" who was the Governor of our region passed by in his carriage. He left his carriage and entered the yard. When he saw my father standing facing the wall, he called to the officer, reprimanding, and sent my father home thus saving him from a certain death. Incidentally the governor Salkowsky was a sworn anti-Semite and a Polish super patriot. He and his sons participated in the Polish revolt and then became officers of a high standing in the Polish army. He knew my father from childhood. My grandfather used to lease land from his father and actually the children were brought up in the same atmosphere. A number of Yanove citizens remember well how he used to ride through town waving his cane in the air and yelling "Wahistko Nashe" (everything is ours). He caused a lot of suffering to the Yanove Jewish community and avenged quite a number of peasants in the neighboring villages. Under his command tens of peasants were shot on the accusation that they cooperated with the Bolsheviks. A short time after this he was removed from his position and in his place a Polish liberal by the name of Laskovsky was appointed who showed a human relationship towards the population. In time he established order in town and life returned to normalcy. My father was then appointed mayor of the entire community including the gentiles. He did have, however, a gentile assistant. My father remained in this position until the Polish-German war broke out in 1939. The Revival of Jewish Life in Town

Gradually, the town awakened and came to life again. The stores were reopened in the market place and small shop owners sold their wares which they produced. Fairs and Market Days took place frequently and commerce and industry started to flourish again. Quite a number of families made a living from activities at the Railway Station. Yanove became the connecting station on the main line Pinsk- Brest- Warsaw, and the small gauge line connecting Telechan- Yanove- Lubashov- Kamen Kashirsk, Wolynia. The forests, which were in abundance in our region, stimulated greatly the lumber industry. The partners Burstein, Gorodetzky and Feldstein constructed a lumber mill and factory near the Railroad station employing several hundred workers. Later that factory served as a training center for pioneers from various towns preparing to emigrate to Israel.

The cultural life in town also showed signs of an upgrade trend. A modern school exclusively in the Hebrew language was established by the name of "TARBUS" (Culture) and trained teachers and pedagogues arrived in town: to mention a few Starobinsky, Schwartz, Guttman, etc. They infused a new spiritual life in town. The traditional "Chedorim" which were mostly located in the synagogues gradually were emptied and the students transferred to the new Hebrew secular school. There existed side by side also a religious school, a kind of "Talmud Tora" under the management of the old experienced teachers where we youngsters learned Talmudic studies after we got through with our regular studies. Cultural societies and libraries were established in town. One of the latter, under the sponsorship of the cultural society "Tel Chai" belonging to the right wing of the "Poale Zion" possessed a great library of Hebrew and Yiddish books and a great reading hall where the young people assembled, especially during the long winter evenings, to listen to lectures on a literary topic or one of a political nature culminating in lively discussions. There also existed a sizable Workers Yiddish Library, sponsored by the left wing of the Poale Zion. The youth were anxious to learn and read a great deal.

The political parties which were active at that time in Poland also had branches in our town. Those branches conducted meetings in their clubs, of a political nature and frequently arranged public discussion meetings of a cultural nature, with the participation of delegates sent from the centers in Warsaw. During these public discussions or political lectures the emotions and spirits were frequently aroused to the extent that the local police had to interfere and reestablish order. On the following day however, after the hot discussions and vehement arguments peace reigned again among the debaters. After all it was only a quarrel among brothers. There were cases where members of the same family belonged ideologically to different party affiliations.

In those years a great emigration of the young took place to various countries of the world. Some went to Israel, some to North, South or Central America for the simple reason that there wasn't sufficient employment for them in their native land.

In the summer of 1929, a great devastating fire broke out in the Jewish center of the town in which a few streets were burned down and completely devastated. Thanks to the fire fighters that were brought from Pinsk the fire was contained. Tens of Jewish families remained without shelter and without means finding themselves in a helpless and desperate situation. Fortunately it didn't last for too long. The fire victims found refuge among relatives and friends whose houses remained intact. The Governor of the region, Danin Markowitz, who was a respectable and fine man did his best to alleviate the strain on the fire sufferers. Due to his recommendation the victims received liberal loans from the Government, in addition they received fire insurance and the town started to rebuild again. Instead of the old dilapidated houses that were centuries old, new comfortable structures arose. The owners of the huge flour mill Chaim Pomeranetz and his four able sons constructed an electric Power Station and the streets and houses in town were lit with electric lights. The wooden sidewalks that were sunk in the mud disappeared and new cement sidewalks were plastered in their place. In the same year the highway Pinsk- Brest was built which passed through the main street of the town. Yanove really took on the appearance of a city after all these improvements.

Commerce started to flourish and Yanove Jewish Merchants became engaged in exporting transports of corn, wheat and cattle to Congress Poland and to Danzig. The owners of the lumber factory, Burstein, Gorodetzky and Feldstein, manufactured wooden finished products and building materials. Merchants from great cities in Poland arrived in town to buy merchandise and salesmen for various goods manufactured in the country reached town to sell their wares. Parents with means started to send their sons to big cities to acquire an academic education. I also went to Pinsk to attend a technical school and learn a trade. It was a pleasure to watch youth assembling home for the summer vacation dressed in their uniforms of their respective academic High Schools.

Cultural activities and various organizations were formed in town. Sport competitions, evenings of literary reviews and criticism, lectures and discussions, bazaars for the Jewish national fund and all kinds of activities and appeals for the Zionist cause were progressing and the Jewish community donated their shares handsomely.

My Service in the Polish Army

In the year 1936, I was recruited into the Polish army. The experience of serving in the army, in time, turned out to be of great practical use for me. I was attached to a cavalry regiment which was stationed at "Bidgosch" near the then existing Polish-German border. The population of the city was mostly German. If I hadn't learned the lessons of anti-Semitism in my town, I learned them fully here. In that year Marshal Pilsudsky died. While he was alive the Polish hooligans dared not to attack Jews in the open but as soon as he disappeared from the scene everything changed suddenly and a wave of wild attacks against the Jews spread throughout the country. The minister of the interior General Skladovsky was hardly bothered with the fact that the Jewish stores were picketed and leaflets distributed saying "Don't buy from Jews."

In the Polish army we the Jewish soldiers also felt that the relationship towards us worsened suddenly. Abusive expressions such as "Dirty Jew" we heard at each and every step. We gnashed our teeth with anger and pain listening to their constant ridicule on our account. For instance, if a soldier did not ride his horse properly the officer used to yell at him "You are shaking on the horse like a Jew in the Succah," and this at a time when the Jewish riders were not less proficient than their gentile equivalents. On the contrary, the Jews even proved to be more efficient and better riders than the Polish "zslobes" (uneducated peasants). Quite a number of officers and sergeants were Germans and, as it was later revealed, they were German spies. In Bidgosch there was a rich Jewish community and their spiritual leader was Dr. Ephraim Sunenshein who also was the military chaplain of the local garrison. Thanks to his influence we were free from duty on Saturdays and holidays and we used to visit the synagogue. It was a reform synagogue with a female choir and an organ which, to me as a boy from "Polesie," looked and sounded very strange indeed.

In the streets of the city my comrades and myself could see how Jewish life and property in Poland were unprotected. Near the Jewish stores there were stationed pickets consisting of Polish students holding in their hands leaflets "Don't buy from the Jews, the traitors, Help your own Brothers" etc. The sidewalks were full of broken glass of the knocked out shop windows. From one store we heard sounds of weeping women and children. When we tried to enter the store, some young hooligans stopped us short and directed us to the store on the opposite side of the street belonging to a Pole. I treated one of them with a blow over his head so that he fell to the ground and my comrades attended to the others. In a few minutes the place was cleared of the hooligans except for some who remained on the street beaten up and wounded. In another few minutes we were on our way back to our quarters.

Anti-Semitic Incidents and our Defense Against them in Yanove.

When I returned home after I was dismissed from the army, I convinced myself that during my absence the situation of the Jewish community in our town had changed for the worse. Anti-Semitism in Poland grew from day to day and the epidemic spread from Congress Poland to our region. In addition to the high taxes imposed on the Jewish community, plans were in progress with the avowed aim of obstructing and ruining Jewish commerce and industry. Specifically, they created Government owned cooperatives so that the peasants would stop buying from the

Jews. The Polish newspapers spread poisonous agitation against the Jews and we used to read daily about attacks on Jews until finally it also happened in our town.

It happened on May 16, 1937. On that day great numbers of Catholic Poles used to assemble in our town for the annual memorial day observance in honor of the martyr, the priest Andrei Bubula. He had been tortured and murdered by the Cossacks in the year 1656 in Yanove and he had been canonized by the Catholic church as a saint. In the center of the market place a monument had been erected in his honor, and every year Catholics from the neighborhood and priests even from as far as Chenstochov used to arrive on that day for the memorial services. A religious procession was held in the streets, and at the monument fiery speeches were delivered by the Bishop from Pinsk and by other high religious functionaries. In those years their speeches were of an openly anti-Semitic character, and Jews tried as much as possible to avoid appearing in the streets so as not to provoke unpleasant incidents. In 1937, that day happened to fall on the eve of the Jewish holiday "Shovuoth" and Jews on that day went to their synagogues for services. The street was filled with Poles who had arrived for their holiday. I took a walk on that day with my friend Yankel Brestsky who was known for his extraordinary strength and heroism. He also had been released together with me not long before from service in the Polish army. Suddenly, we heard cries for help and we saw a few beaten up Jews running nearby. They were Yakov Leib Goldman, Samuel Gorodetzky and others pursued by two hooligans. One of them was a military man with the rank of Sergeant who held a knife in his hands. When they approached us, they stopped and asked us whether we were Jews. The sergeant hit me with his knife and I was slightly injured. In a minute the knife was in my hands and he was stretched out on the ground. I repaid him in kind for myself and the other Jews who had been beaten by the hooligans. Not far from this one the other hooligan was lying on the ground taken care of by my friend Yankel who then disappeared quickly from the scene. The Police arrived and I was arrested. The Police sergeant (also an anti-Semite) who wrote the protocol threatened me that I would rot in jail a long time for attacking a military man. I answered coolly that this will be decided by the court and not by him. The answer angered him so that he sprang up like a wounded animal. Meanwhile, my father arrived. He honored me with a fatherly slap in the face (I wish I could get it from him now), but after he heard my story he softened up somehow. When the protocol of the indictment was finished, I was freed and we both went home. On the way home he argued with me. The town "Kein Ein Hore" is full of young people so only just you has to be involved ... An additional police force arrived in town and the day passed by quietly without any further incidents. In about a month I was ordered to appear before a military court. The sergeant who had tried to attack me with a knife appeared in court armed with certificates from physicians that he had been under medical care since the incident. The other hooligan testified that a band of Jews had attacked them and beat them up. After listening to our arguments the president of the court who had the rank of major addressed the beaten sergeant as follows: "Relative to the defendant in this case I am very much puzzled. Lately we are accustomed to listen to complaints in the courts in which the Jews were always the plaintiffs since they were the ones attacked. In this case, however, the situation is reversed. The Jew is the defendant and two Poles are those attacked and one of them even in military uniform at that. It is hardly feasible that a Jew would attack a military man in the street." Then in a raised voice he said "this is not the first time that you have appeared before this court in connection with attacks on Jews, it seems to me that only a few months ago you appeared before me in a similar case. Is that true?" The hooligan admitted that five months prior to this date he had been tried for beating

up a Jew in Pinsk but at that time he did it under a condition of drunkenness. After a short deliberation the court sentenced the hooligan to three months in jail. I returned home very much pleased with the results. It was almost unbelievable that in such an anti-Semitic atmosphere that prevailed at that time I should have come out cleared entirely from that incident. A short time after another incident occurred, this time with the local gentiles of our town. On a Friday night after the Sabbath services a few gentile drunkards attacked Jews who were returning home from their synagogues. One of the gentiles, a known hooligan from the neighboring village Nakle, dared even to spill tar on the old Rabbi of ours, Joseph Kosowsky. This hateful act aroused the anger of our youth and many of them came out into the streets. After a short fight, the hooligans were dispersed on all sides and only one of them, the one that had spilled the tar, remained on the ground beaten beyond recognition. The very same evening, several of the Jewish boys were arrested: Yankel Resnick, the three brothers Gorodetzky, Abereham Gorodetzky and Shamai Wolfson. Some of them had not even participated in that encounter. The chief of police sent them to jail to "Drohitchin" and to dramatize the incident he marched them the following morning under a very heavy guard through the streets of the town to their destination. This aroused anger and grief among the entire Jewish community. The boys were held in jail a few months until their trial. Fortunately for them and the Jews of our town, the beaten hooligan remained alive, recovered and left the hospital. The court acquitted some of the boys for lack of evidence and some were sentenced to short terms in jail. The severest sentence was imposed on Yankel Resnick, who the court found him to be the main instigator in that incident. After a number of appeals and litigation he was also freed from jail. (All the above named boys were later murdered by the Nazis except Yankel Resnick, who was a partisan in the forests and is presently in the United States.)

The Outbreak of the German-Polish War

During the year 1939 Poland mobilized part of her army reserves. From our town also quite a number of young men were called up, myself included. On September 1st, 1939 the war broke out in earnest. The Polish Government and army, which were rather occupied with persecuting Jews during the last years before the German attack, could hardly resist, let alone stop the mighty well armed German army and was defeated in a period of a few days. The Polish army which consisted mainly of cavalry units was good material, perhaps, for military parades, but not for fighting against tanks and heavy artillery. Whole armies were captured by the Germans and the country was occupied and soon disintegrated. I and my friend Alter Wolfson serving together in the same regiment succeeded in avoiding German capture and return home. Those who were captured were first tortured with hard labor and then murdered.

According to the Soviet-German agreement the German army halted near the river "Bug" which was established as a border line between Germany and Russia after the defeat and disintegration of the Polish state. Thousands of Jewish refugees crossed the river Bug and flocked to the regions Polesie, Bialistock and Grodno, thus escaping from the Germans. Our town Yanove was also full of Polish Jewish refugees who were received by us warmly, while the landowners and great numbers of Poles ran in the opposite direction, to the other side of the Bug, to remain under German Protection. At that time disorder and anarchy reigned in our town because the Soviets were not in a hurry to occupy the region. A temporary committee was formed composed of native Jews and gentiles to establish and keep order until the Soviet administration arrived. The

peasants of the region took advantage of the situation and attacked Polish landowners, robbed their homes and killed several of them. At that time the known landowner "Skirmunt from Poritze," who had served once as ambassador to London was killed, and the landowner "Falkovsky from Ostritze" who had been District Attorney in Pinsk and became notorious for his demanding in court heavy penalties and sentences on political prisoners. A number of landowners were hiding in Jewish homes for fear of being avenged by the peasants of the neighboring villages.

Yanove Under the Rule of the Soviets

On the day of Yom-Kippur the first Red army units reached our town streaming day and night from then on incessantly in the direction of Brest-Litovsk. The population greeted the Red army with open arms. Especially were happy the refugees from Poland who had a chance briefly to taste the harsh occupation of the Nazis and ran from them by just saving their living souls and leaving all their belongings behind them. Many of the officers and soldiers of the Red army were Jews and we conversed with them in the Yiddish language. They were interested to know how Jews lived under the Polish Fascist rule and told us how free and happy their life was under the rule of the Soviets. While we were talking with a high Jewish Soviet officer he pointed to the big house of Chaim Pomeranetz and to the factory in his yard and he asked to whom it belonged. We answered that it belonged to a Jew. Then he asked us "does he intend to stay in it for very long?" We looked at each other wondering the meaning of his words. When he noticed our confusion he said: "In the Soviet Union there do not exist any private manufacturers. Such factories are nationalized and are transferred to the ownership of the people," and then he added laconically with a smile, "shortly you will see for yourselves."

Promptly, order was established. The rich and well-to-do Jews received notices to vacate their houses. In these houses government offices were quartered and clerks with their families who arrived to us from the East. Workers were organized into Artels (cooperatives). Stores, business firms, the power station belonging to Pomeranetz and Burstein's lumber factory were all nationalized. Samuel Burstein was ordered to leave town. Well-to-do citizens and merchants of yesterday turned overnight into second class citizens, plain working people or insignificant clerks. The town was filled up with undesirable elements who were driven out from other towns mostly from Pinsk. Employment was found for them since in the Soviet Union unemployment does not exist. Then they started to distribute identification documents (passports). The so called undesirable elements received passports containing a special clause stating that they are forbidden to leave town without a special permit. Accusations against various citizens were filed by professional informers followed by arrests and investigations by the secret police. Several Jews were sentenced to long terms of jail. They never stopped cleaning the population of the so called "Enemies of the people." People were not sure what will happen to them overnight or tomorrow day. My father was forbidden to receive a passport altogether. His crime consisted of having served as a Polish official. My brother Zelig and myself received passports with the designation as "sons of a government official." My father was ordered to report twice a week to the Passport Bureau. He was then already a very sick man and once he told them in the bureau that he feels his visits are numbered. When he returned home his illness took a turn for the worse without any hope of recovery. Still they sent men to visit him and once in a cold night two secret

agents came with an order to arrest him. Noticing, however, in what condition he was, they departed quickly. On the following day he peacefully passed away. Honor to his memory.

Entirely different was the attitude of the authorities towards the people of the working class and the poor. Former workers turned momentarily into Government officials, managers of Artels, members of the council and chairmen of cooperatives. Gradually, we got used to the new order and it seemed that we were beginning to live a normal life. People worked and earned wages for a living. We could not afford luxuries but none went hungry. A great number of those who were dissatisfied at the beginning gradually became accustomed to the new life, especially after hearing rumors of what was happening on the other side of the Bug and the suffering of the Jews there under the rule of Hitler. But suddenly the town was again in an uproar. This happened on a Saturday night on June 21, 1941. During that night all of the so called undesirable elements, whose businesses were nationalized, were arrested together with their families. They were practically not allowed to take with them any of their belongings. They brought them to the Railroad station and deposited them in freight cars that were well guarded by sentries. We who remained behind were standing from a distance with tears in our eyes watching repeatedly the scene of a new family being brought and added to those arrested in the cars without even giving us a chance to say good-bye to them. Everybody cried bitterly, we who were standing on the platform and those who were arrested in the cars. Even the soldiers felt the tragic pain and had tears in their eyes. Finally the train moved. We returned to our houses broken up and confused. We were fearful even to talk to each other.

The German-Russian War

On the following day, on June 22nd, 10 o'clock in the morning, we saw groups of airplanes flying in an Easterly direction, some of them descended very low over our town. According to the markings we could easily recognize they were not Russian. The Soviet officials and military personnel also watched the skies and couldn't tell what happened. It didn't take long and we noticed on the faces of the officials that they were obviously disturbed. Right after we saw them start packing and loading on trucks files with records, office furniture and supplies, also valises with personal effects. Although our town was not bombed, we heard from a distance the bursting of bombs. A mobilization was proclaimed. The haste and confusion was great. Soviet officials with their families were sitting on wagons that were especially mobilized for them to enable them to depart hurriedly Eastward. In the afternoon there appeared in town units of the Red army which hurriedly retreated from Brest in the direction of Pinsk. There was no secret any more that Hitler Germany attacked the Soviet Union. The Railway connections were disrupted. The roads were filled with the Soviet army in full retreat but this time there were absent from view the heavy tanks and artillery they came with to us only two years ago. All those heavy weapons were captured or destroyed by the Germans. The army retreated in great haste and panic and was armed only with light weapons that could be carried by the soldiers themselves. Quite a number of young men which were mobilized on that day joined the retreating Red army, but returned home on the following day for the reason that the retreat was disorderly and no one paid attention to them. (All those young men were murdered after that in the ghetto.)

The retreat of the Soviet armies lasted three full days. On Tuesday night heavy shooting was heard in town. We locked ourselves in the houses and we felt that the German beast was

approaching us. On the following morning all quieted down and a few German planes flew low over town so that you could clearly see the piggish faces of the pilots. Someone said that a young man was killed near the stores in the marketplace. I ran there and was shocked when I saw that it was no other than my best friend Yankel Brestsky. He distinguished himself with his extraordinary strength (as I mentioned before). What he was looking for at the rows of stores remains a mystery to me to this day. Baruch Kobrick who lived opposite the stores told us that he heard him arguing with Soviet soldiers who, due to his athletic appearance, suspected him of being a German parachutist. He argued that he was a native of this town. They did not believe him and executed him by shooting on that spot. He was the first casualty in town. Honor to his memory.

After a short while, a German patrol of about fifteen soldiers with murderous faces riding on bicycles with their sleeves rolled up and armed with automatic weapons entered our town. In the streets you couldn't see a living soul. Through a small crack in the attic roof I watched how they blasted open the doors of the stores which were anyhow emptied before, due to the nationalization by the Soviets. Promptly a few gentiles appeared who led them to the store of P. Kotzikovitz where the Soviet cooperative was located after the owner was arrested and exiled to Russia. The doors were easily forced open and the soldiers robbed all kinds of wares. What was left was robbed by the gentiles. Suddenly the main force of the German army started to march in. The paved road actually gave in under the heavy load of the tanks and artillery. The wild outcries of the heavy Germans deafened the ears. A delegation of the gentile community welcomed them with bread and salt. On their cars sat the blond beasts and sang with enthusiasm, drunk with their victory.

The Beginning of the German Occupation

Night came and we locked ourselves in the houses that remained darkened without any lights, while the gentiles in a jolly mood came out into the street and conversed with the victors. Those that knew a few words in German were in seventh heaven. From the streets we heard the anti-Semitic Horst Wessel song: "Wan Yudish blut form messer spritzt" which we heard about from the refugees who reached us from Poland. Later, we heard yelling of Jews who were forced out of their houses and beaten up. Then the yelling subsided and we heard only heavy traffic of their machines on the road. After a sleepless night at dawn I finally fell asleep but heavy banging on the door woke me up from my sleep and two Germans entered the room and ordered me to come along with them. They brought me to their automobile that had two springs broken and ordered me to repair it at once. I told them that such springs can be found only in the machine shop where I worked. (After I graduated from the Technical School in Pinsk, I worked as an assistant to the machinist in Burstein's lumber factory.) They were infuriated and threatened to kill me. Later on, however, they softened up and we all went to the machine shop. Fortunately for me, I just found there the parts that matched their machine. On the way back they were more lenient towards me and even treated me with a cigar. They were interested to know how many Jews were in town and whether they were rich. They assured me that the "Wehrmacht" does not bother with the Jewish question because they had no time for that. This is the occupation of the S.S. Units who follow in their steps and they are those who will establish order. They brought me back near the Catholic church where their unit was resting. A great number of Jews were there cleaning and washing their automobiles. One group cleaned in the yard of the church enclosure

and the Germans themselves were spread out "Gemuetlich" on the grass and were eating (fressen). In addition there were a great number of Russian prisoners of war there. A small number of POWs were standing on their knees separated from the rest and were under heavy guard. In their faces you could recognize that they were Jews. The two Germans that brought me there also started to fress. They treated me with a slice of bread saying "Fross Yude do hast das heute verdant." (Eat Jew, today you have earned it.) Meanwhile I noticed that Mordechai Garbuz, who worked there approached and stopped near the Jewish P.W.'s. At once a German officer called him, and smacked him terribly in his face, so that he fell to the ground, then the German kicked him with his boots and yelled like a wild beast. The bread got stuck in my throat and I begged my two Germans to influence him so that he should stop beating him. One of them approached him and spoke with him and they ordered me to remove him from there. On my hands I carried his body, which was badly beaten up, to the house of Chaim Garbar where he was somehow revived. On the way home, I saw in the streets posters in three languages: German, Ukrainian and Polish. A few gentiles were standing around, one read aloud and the rest were listening with great pleasure. This was approximately its content: To the gentile Community, The victorious German army has freed you from the yoke of the communists and Jews. You are invited to help us to establish order in town. Those of you who know the use of arms are invited to report to the Commandanture and you will be accepted as policemen in the town's police force for a high compensation and other numerous benefits all on account of the Jews, the parasites. From now on you are obligated: 1) not to come in contact with the Jews. 2) Not to exchange greetings with the Jews. 3) Not to carry on any commercial dealings with Jews and not to sell them any food. Heavy penalties will be levied on those who violate these rules, signed, The town's Commandanture. On the sides were seen caricatures of Jews with long dirty beards, long curly earlocks, faces with long noses clad in capotes, arba canveses and yarmulkes, and nearby there was a kind of questionnaire that read as follows: Brothers Aryans: who sucks your blood? The Jew. Who accumulates money in the bank? The Jew. Who are you laboring for? The Jew. Who grabs the highest positions? The Jew. Who rapes your wives and daughters? The Jew. Who oppresses you? The Jew, etc. etc. At the end of the poster it says, now it is the time to avenge your sufferings. Beat the Jews; the victorious great German people are with you. The effects of these posters was felt on the following day. To the service in the police force reported the lowest types of Poles and Ukrainians, also ex-service men of the army under the notorious general Balachowich who all flocked from the town and its neighboring villages. They dressed them in special uniforms, armed them with weapons and authorized them to handle the Jews in any way it pleased them. Promptly, there appeared new announcements on posters that were addressed this time to the Jewish community, and this approximately was their content: Jews you wanted war, here you have it. From this day you are obligated to get used to the following regulations: 1) you are to elect at once a "Yudenrat" consisting of ten Jews who must report today yet to the German Commandanture. 2) Jews from the ages of ten years and above, males and females, shall put on the arm of their right hand a white band with a blue Star of David on it. 3) From six in the evening to eight o'clock in the morning Jews are forbidden to appear in the streets. 4) The sidewalks are reserved only for the Aryan population and Jews are forbidden to use them, Jews shall move around only in the middle of the streets like horses, cows and other animals. 5) Jews are forbidden to exchange greetings with gentiles or to come in contact with the gentile population. The penalty for violating the above regulations is death. More announcements will follow. Signed, Commissar of the region of Pinsk and vicinity, Julian Rempler.

After the posting of this announcement the town was in an uproar since no one wanted to become a member of the Yudenrat, but there was no escape from electing the ten representatives who were supposed to report at the appointed hour to the Commandanture. Finally, the following ten people were elected: 1) Alter Divinsky, chairman. 2) Simon Shlackman, assistant. 3) Aaron Hirsch Scheinbaum. 4) Chlavne Rozansky. 5) Yankel Resnick and five others. At the appointed hour they reported to the Commandanture and returned after a few hours very depressed. A meeting was called at once and Alter Divinsky told the assembled of the following German demands: 1) We must prepare an accurate list of all the Jews in town including infants one day old. 2) A separate list is to be prepared of all able-bodied people who are fit for work and a separate list of old people, the sick, and those unable to work. 3) The women are to cut off their hair. 4) The armbands on the right arms of all the Jews of ten years old and above should be exchanged for a yellow patch ten cm in diameter to be worn in front and back of the individual so that it can be seen from a distance. 5) In a period of two days the Jews have to bring in to the Yudenrat all their silver, gold, jewelry, fur coats and overcoats. 6) We must bring in all metals that are found in the household such as copper, nickel and all kinds of kitchen utensils made out of metal. 7) All radios and radio supplies should be brought in at once. If a radio will be found, the one in possession will be shot on the spot. 8) A Jewish police force should be formed at the service of the Yudenrat, who will execute all the demands and obligations that will be imposed on the Jewish community. The penalty for not fulfilling these ordered demands is death, first to the chairman and then also to the other members of the Yudenrat. After finishing, Alter Divinsky broke down and wept and with him bitterly wept all the assembled.

The Yudenrat started its operations at once. First of all was the formation of a Jewish police force. Samuel Graiever as commander, S. Nimetzowich as assistant and secretary, and others. A secretariat with office workers was also organized with Zelig Schuster as the chief secretary. The Yudenrat was located at the house of H.B. Kaplan in the same location of the previous Folks Bank. Lists of the inhabitants and those that were able to work were prepared in accordance with the regulations. Also bread cards were prepared for 150 grams of bread per soul for a day. A rumor spread that the aged, ill and those unable to work would be eliminated, so the office hummed like a beehive from incoming and outgoing people. Elderly people were registered as younger than their age, and the ill registered as able to work. Meanwhile, Jews started to bring in their gold and silver. First, were brought in the religious articles from the synagogues such as Tora Crowns, candelabra and Tora indicators that were made out of silver. From their homes they brought their silver spoons, forks and knives. They departed placing them on the table with a sigh and with tears in their eyes. I was standing then in the office of the Yudenrat painfully observing what was happening. Meanwhile, Abraham the shochet entered with a bag under his arm and with tears in his eyes, he started to pull out and surrender the religious silver articles belonging to the Chasidic synagogue of the Rabbi reb Abele and among other items I saw him pull out a silver box shaped like a small prayer book "Sidur" which Rabbi Abele used on Saturday nights for the special "Havdala" prayers. That box was filled with various spices of a very pleasant odor. After the Rabbi's special blessing, the spice container was passed on from hand to hand by the Chasidim and each smelled the odor from it. I approached him and I asked him to give that spice container to me in trust and when the war would end and the situation would become normal again, I would return it to the synagogue. He gave it to me and said: Be careful "Mordchaile" in case they find it on you, in God's name, don't tell them that I gave it to you and broke down weeping like a child. The spice container is still in my possession to this

day. I carried it throughout the days of my tribulations and long bloody war of mine, but my promise I gave to Abraham Shochet I was unable to fulfill till this very day. The synagogue of Rabbi Abele burned down, and its Chasidim together with Abraham Sochet were mercilessly murdered by the wild German beasts. Frequently, I take the little box in my hands to reminisce about the Rabbi reb Abele and his fine bearded Chasidim who smelled the odor of the spices from this little box. The brick house of S. Rinberg was assigned as a collection point for the fur coats and warm clothing that the Jews were forced to surrender. A few S.S. guards were stationed there to supervise the robbery operation. Near the rows of stores were assigned a collection point for metal articles such as copper utensils, nickel beds and all kinds of articles made out of iron. In the house of N. Snitofsky all the radios and radio equipment were collected. Workers who were sent by the Yudenrat loaded all that on trucks, and the robbed goods were shipped to the victorious Reich. From this confiscatory operation obviously the local native gentile population also derived benefits who offered themselves as friends and took from the valuable clothing and jewelry pretending to safeguard those items for them and return them to their owners when all was over.

Promptly, the town was filled with policemen and clerks. Numerous gentiles of the town were appointed in managerial positions. As chief of town was appointed a local "Folks Deutche" by the name of Koyuk. Under the Polish regime his business was gardening. His assistant was a known anti-Semite Nazar Buzko, from the village of Ostrovok. A group of S.S. and S.D. known as "Einsatz Gruppe" also arrived in town. All these blood suckers confiscated the most comfortable houses of the Jews in town. The Yudenrat was ordered to repair those houses and furnish them. To the new tenants were given beds and bedding, clocks, changes of clothing even for men and women. The Yudenrat was forced to send young women to clean those houses where the new tenants used to "fress" and drink all night. Frequently, the women who had been sent there returned beaten because the tenants disliked them.

The situation became unbearable. We actually turned into suppressed and depressed slaves. Starvation was ominous in town. Jews reached to us from the neighboring villages where they were thrown out from their houses and remained naked and without means. News reached us that the barbarians had murdered all the Jews of the towns of "Motele" and "Chomsk" and a few young people who succeeded in escaping came to find refuge among us. The Yudenrat added their names to the list, although we all knew that our days were also numbered. Everyone hoped for a miracle to happen. Pious Jews prayed, fasted and recited the Psalms, but in vain, their prayers were not accepted. One day news reached us about the massacre in "Lachva" near Luninetz. It was known to us that there they had put up a resistance and killed a few Germans and that part of Lachva Jews fled to the forest. We understood that our next was getting near, indeed. Very soon we felt it in earnest. In July 1941 were murdered in the estate of Mohilna: M. Bekerman, M.O. Yuzok and L. Warshavsky. They were all sent there to work by the Yudenrat. In a few days were also shot on the road: A. Popitchke, P. Brestsky and F. Gutterson. They were sent by the Yudenrat with their wagons to transport Germans. N. Starobinsky, a lad of eighteen, a chauffeur by trade was ordered by a S.S. murderer to repair his bicycle and while he was busy doing it he shot him in the back.

One day in August 1941, in the late afternoon a pogrom atmosphere was felt in the air. The Polish-Ukrainian police grabbed Jews from their houses and brought them to the market place

near the rows of stores. The operation lasted till 12 o'clock midnight. Quite a number of Jews were dragged out from their beds and were delivered there in their underwear. All in all about 160 men were rounded up who were ordered to kneel. A heavy guard of Germans and police were guarding us under the command of a S.S. officer, and another S.S. officer was cruising back and forth on a bicycle. We felt that they were expecting the arrival of some superior to decide our destiny. Alter Divinsky came running and introduced himself as the chairman of the Yudenrat, he asked the S.S. officer what he intended to do with us on such a late hour. The S.S. officer told him that if he wanted to know, he should kneel also near us and then he would find out. About 2 o'clock at night, the S.S. officer on the bicycle returned whispered something in the ear of the S.S. officer who guarded us and departed in the direction which he came from. The S.S. officer ordered us to stand up. Those that had not stood up fast enough due to the fact that their feet were numb from long kneeling were beaten mercilessly by the soldiers and by the police. Then came the order to dance a Jewish dance. We did not understand first what they wanted of us and we exchanged among ourselves wondering looks, when the officer repeated his order with greater emphasis. Tuvie Kuzmak, who stood near me in his underwear only, put his arm on mine and said, let's dance the Horra. He started to sing "Am Isroel Chai" (Israel lives) and we, locking each other's arms formed a circle. We did what the wild beasts told us to do and to the sound of the song we danced the Horra. The murderers were standing near us and were heartily laughing from great enjoyment. Those that failed to participate were brutally beaten with their rifle butts or with rubber clubs. After the dance the order was given to sing, M.Y. Krupnick started first and with a sweet voice sang "Eli Eli lomo asavtoni" (God my God why have you forsaken me). The sadistic wild beasts almost busted from their wild laughing. At dawn, it seemed that the barbarians were fully saturated with our songs and dancing, and the order was given that we leave the place by running. After that experience, we found out that all night they were waiting for the S.S. major who gave the order to carry out that action. He personally was supposed to be present at the execution, but on the way he visited the Burgermeister. He became drunk and forgot about his ordered action and that is how we were saved that night from death.

The First Massacre

That bloodthirsty S.S. Major did not yield or retract from his sinister program. On the following day, the 12th day of Av, a S.S. unit of cavalry passed through town riding on their horses. They entered from Lubashov street and were riding in the direction of Pinsk. People related that the murderer ran after them on his bicycle, reached them and invited them to visit the town. They accepted the invitation and returned to town. With the help of the local Germans and the police, they surrounded the town and started to round up Jews pretending to send them for work. That action was applied only to males and took exactly two hours. With firearms in their hands they spread out and yelled like animals "Men from sixteen years and up to work." In a period of two hours they rounded up about 350 men. They brought them all to the market place and ordered them to sit on the ground. Wives, mothers, sisters and small children were standing from a distance and wept bitterly watching their dear and loved ones while the gentiles from our town were standing on a side amusing themselves watching that sight. From time to time we heard shooting from various directions of the town. These were the shots which the murderers were shooting at those who attempted to escape. Sick people, bedridden, were shot in their beds. In this action two women were murdered. One was Chantze Garbar who hung on to her husband and did not yield, and Hinda a girl of sixteen who embraced her father Pinchas Garbar and did

not let him go. The murderers shot them all on the spot without bringing them to the assembly point. Part of those who were lying on the ground fainted and two of them died on the spot, they were Leibe Kotliar and one of the refugees. They told that M.L. Zlotnick who felt nauseous asked of one S.S. to give him a little water. The S.S. man gave him a canteen of milk and told him: "Drink Yude for the last time in your life before they shoot at you." Mendel Tabatchnick appealed to the Major to free these people and for that he assured him that we would collect for him amongst them a lot of valuables. The murderer tried to understand that Mendel meant a full sack of gold and silver. His eyes started to shine like those of a hungry animal and he said, "Good, I am giving you a half hour's time to do it." Everyone emptied his pockets and Mendel succeeded in collecting gold rings, wrist watches and pocket watches and he brought it over to the Major. The murderer sprang up as if he were burned by boiling water. With a wild yelling as of a wounded animal he shouted: "What! Is that the sack of valuables you promised me?" and at the same time he kicked him with his boot into his face so that he fell bleeding to the ground. Exactly at two o'clock, the order was given to march. In row formation the victims were led through Pinsk street in the direction of the forest of Borowitze. The German heroes clad in colored capes were riding on horses and were circling around the Jewish mob. They beat over their heads with rubber clubs, and those who fell to the ground were shot on the spot. And so they brought them to the forest of Borowitze and there opened up on them with machine guns and shot all of them down like flies. From that action only one single person was rescued miraculously and that was Fivel Kaplan who resides now in Brazil. Here is the story that he told us: The road from the market place to Borowitze was stained with the blood of the martyrs. The murderers who rode on horses deliberately rode on top of old and weak people who slowed down and could not keep up with the rest. When the victims were felled to the ground by the jumping horses, the bloodthirsty murderers who were on foot shot them in their heads and killed them on the spot. The yelling of the German murderers intermingled with the cries for help and the prayers of the innocent victims. The three kilometers on which they were marched, under a rain of deadly beatings, seemed to them to be all eternity. Each one of the victims prayed that death should come sooner: a few youngsters who tried to escape were shot dead. Religious Jews were saying their confession prayers before death. Fathers and sons, brothers and brothers were marching together closely toward their end on their last journey. Among the victims were the most respectable citizens of town--elderly and God-fearing people who had not lost their trust in God to the last minute. When they reached the forest, the order was given to fire. The wild beasts opened up with a hail of bullets from machine guns. Those who were wounded and groaned from pain were shot again. Fivel was wounded in his face lightly. He knelt and fell together with all the victims and pretended to be dead like the rest. The German murderers, after finishing their murderous deed, mounted their horses. Their officer exclaimed "Heil Hitler" and the Teutons answered three times "Heil Zieg, Heil Zieg, Heil Zieg," and with wild German singing, the German heroes departed in the direction of Pinsk. Right after that, Fivel told us, there arrived at the place of the execution quite a number of gentiles and like hungry sharks fell upon the slain victims and started to rid them of their shoes and clothing. Fivel got up, came out from among the victims, and ran in the direction of the forest of Borowitze. The police shot after him but did not get him, and he succeeded in finding refuge in the stable of the local Borowitze priest, and thus remained alive.

After that action, the town remained orphaned. There hardly was one family that didn't lose someone in the massacre. Small children suddenly became orphans, and women without means

became widowed. The pain and the suffering were terrible. The men who remained alive ran out of town to the fields, hid themselves in the attics or in the cellars. On that terrible day, I was called to work in the dairy factory to repair the machines for the manufacture of butter. When I heard the sound of shooting I went out to see what was happening. Against me came running Nathan Schuster and his two sons yelling to my side: run for your life, they are killing us. Momentarily two Germans on horses were seen approaching and aiming in our direction. I jumped over two fences of gardens belonging to gentiles and I ran in the direction of Lubashov street. One gentile who stopped me on the way with the intention of capturing me, received from me a blow in the face knocking him down to the ground, and while on the ground he yelled to others to stop me. I ran further until I reached a field of potatoes. I hid among the foliage of the potatoes, where I laid myself down very low without any movement. Not far from my hiding place a few of the murderers passed by running without, however, noticing me. Frequently, I heard the sound of shooting and the yelling for help from Jews who were captured and beaten by the wild beasts. Then the shooting subsided. Suddenly, I heard very heavy shooting from the direction of Borowitze. I understood that something awful was taking place there. I closed my fist tightly from pain and grief. When it became dark, I overheard two gentile women relating about the murders of the Jews in town. From their talk, I understood that the murderers left town. I got up and I started to talk to them, when they first sighted me, however, they ran away hurriedly in panic. I also left that place, and through the fields I went in the direction of the lumber factory. I jumped over the high fence and I crept under a pile of boards and I fell asleep. When I woke up it was already midnight and I was very hungry. I approached the house of the machinist. (The machinist, a Pole, not necessarily a Yudophile, worked there for years. For the last few years I served there as his assistant. The relationship between us was friendly.) His two dogs ran along side of me barking, but soon recognized me and started to climb on me as if they felt in what condition I found myself. Scared, the machinist opened the door and when he saw me, he stopped for a minute aside--but relaxed quickly. While sitting at the table in the dark, he related to me what happened during the day in town. Since they have not murdered women on that day, he could give me regards from my mother. He saw her weeping near the house but he was afraid to talk with her. I sent a short letter to my mother through him. I provided myself with a bag of bread and other provisions, and I departed in the darkness of the night; through the fields I walked in the direction of the forest of Peredil.

On the following day, I met there other Jews who escaped and ran to the forest. I found my brother Zelig there and his father-in-law Meyer Lumasky, S. Plotnick, B. Pomeranetz, L. Mogilansky and his wife Chana and others. They were all tired and hungry, and the food in my bag actually revived them. I told Chana that she might return home quietly, since the action was aimed against men only. I gave them all the information I heard from the machinist. They all wept bitterly and the poet Berl Pomeranetz stood on a side and wrote something in his notebook. My brother Zelig could not dissociate from me. Someone told him that the Germans had pursued me and he was sure that I was no longer among the living.

Chana returned home to her two small children who remained in town, and we remained in the forest. When it became dark I went to the estate of Peredil and I brought back with me a pail of water, everybody drank quenching their thirst. The following day on Friday, N. Lumasky stood up near a tree and recited the Sabbath prayers publicly, since we had more than a quorum of participants. After the prayers, when it became dark, I walked back to the machinist. He gave me

a friendly reception and he told me in my mother's name that the chief of town, Koyuk, came to my home to look for me, and he assured her that I had nothing to fear. I should come to work in the dairy and he will guarantee my life. The machinist himself refused to give me any advice since in town, Jews were hardly visible except a few wanderers.

I provided myself again with a bag of food and I returned to the Jews in the forest. Chana, who returned from the town bringing some food for her husband, told us the same story, but did not dare advise me what to do. I saw for myself that there was no purpose in staying in the forest, since sooner or later they would discover and kill us on the spot. I said goodbye to all of them and I assured them that if I would remain alive, I should return to them during the night. Together with Chana I went to town, and on the way I decided to visit the town hall and report to the chief Koyuk who searched for me. We walked through Lubashov street and gentiles whom we met looked at me surprisingly as if I had come back from another world.

A few passers by whispered sideways: "Where are you going? Run from here." Youngsters ran after me yelling, "Yude." Suddenly, I was hit hard in the face. One of them, a boy of about sixteen, reached me from behind and threw a brick into my face. With the blood rushing over my face, I entered the bureau of the town hall. The clerks, mostly natives from our town, were actually scared when they looked at me. Meanwhile, the chief entered. He ordered to give me a towel and to go outside to the water pump and wash the blood off my face. When I returned, he asked me who was the one who wounded me. He marked down the name of the boy, and he assured me that no one would bother me again. He even prepared a certificate for me indicating that I was a useful Jew (Nutzlicher Yude) and told me that if someone tried to bother me, I should show him the certificate. He told me that I was free to go and that on Monday morning, I had to come to the dairy to repair the machines. He gave me a list of qualified workers and ordered me to let them know that they were to report to the bureau before 4 o'clock in the afternoon, since they were needed for work. He also promised to provide them with certificates as "Useful Jews." I remember that on the list were the names of A.A. Levine, shoemaker, Susitsky and Feldstein, tailors, M. Mednick and his son Moshe as tinsmiths and a number of others, some who were no longer among the living. As soon as I reached home, numerous female neighbors came to me to ask me whether perhaps I had met some of the missing from their families. Each one of them hoped mysteriously in their heart perhaps the missing in their family, husbands, brother, or son succeeded to escape. Then I left the house to let the workers on the list know that they had to report for work in the bureau of the town hall. A policeman who noticed me leaving the house ordered me to stop threatening me with his rifle. I showed him my certificate, but he was unable to read what was written there. He ordered me to raise my hands and march forward. He brought me to the rows of stores and there a sad scene was revealed before me. A large number of girls and young women were employed in wrecking and removing the interior walls on the rows of stores under the supervision of Germans and policemen. The German that the policeman brought me to read my certificate and ordered to let me free. I availed myself of the opportunity and I had a short talk with the women. A number of them acquired blisters on their hands from hard work. Men were not seen there. Those who were not murdered on the way to Borowitz were hiding in cellars, attics or any other available hiding place.

I entered the house of A.A. Levine, where I was a steady visitor since his son Yosel was my friend from childhood. His wife Malka was afraid to tell me that he was alive. Using my own

judgment I went down to the cellar with which I was well familiar. I found there Avram Aaron and his sons and I told them what brought me there showing them my certificate as evidence. He suggested to me to step in to Moshe Leib the tailor and hear his opinion. I found Moshe Leib hiding in the attic and I told him what I came for. After weighing and considering the matter he decided to come with me to see Avram Aaron. They told me that Alter Divinsky called on them several times but they were afraid to go with him. However, now that they saw the certificate in his hands, they decided to go with me and believed what was told to them in the name of the chief of the town, namely, that Jews will no longer be murdered and what happened was due to the drunkenness of one of the officers. On the way I stopped at the house of Moshe Mednick and with difficulty I persuaded his wife Lea that we all should go with Alter to the township bureau. Finally, Moshe came out from some hiding place in the yard and we all went to the chief of the town. He received us gladly, expressed his regrets over our circumstances and assured us that what happened before will not happen again and that every one of us may quietly go to work. At once he prepared certificates for all present that they were useful Jews (Nutzlicher Yude). With these certificates on hand we left the bureau of the township and I went through fields to the Jews that I left this very morning in the forest. In the evening they all returned to homes.

On the following day (Sunday) few Jews were seen in the streets. The Yudenrat received an order to prepare a list of all Jews that remained alive. The Jews that were registered in the Yudenrat were obligated to register also in the township bureau. Passports were distributed with the stamp "YUDE" on it. Those that were murdered during the massacre were marked on the list as "died of natural causes." At the time of the registration, before a fat German "Landwirt" who was responsible for the bread cards that were distributed among the Jews, I remember the scene when the wife of Simcha Rinberg came to register her family. The clerk asked her where is "Simcha, Isia, Joseph and David," and she broke out crying and told that they were all murdered. The Landwirt furiously burst out yelling "Donner wetter, I have warned you not to say 'murdered' but 'died a natural death.'" The woman, weeping bitterly, hurriedly departed.

In a few days the full picture of the disaster was clear. There were missing more than 350 men. Numerous families remained without providers for a living because fathers and husbands were mercilessly murdered. In spite of all that, people continued to live their struggling and tortured life. They helped each other as much as it was possible and hoped that sometime there will come an end to such life. Day after day hundreds of people were driven in orderly lines to forced labor, to the Railroad station, to the lumber factory and to other places without any compensation whatsoever. The qualified workers were also employed by the barbarians without compensating them for their work. Every day the situation became more difficult. As if in spite, the winter of 1941 was the hardest in years. Wood for fuel was not available for many of them and their winter clothes were confiscated by the Germans before the arrival of cold weather. Small children were shivering from the cold. Adult men and women were led to forced labor hungry and freezing from cold. And so the winter dragged along in agony and sadness.

As commander of the "Einsatz Troopen" in town was appointed a S.S. officer by the name of "Lawrence" (may his name be cursed and obliterated), a German from the Sudeten Land who spoke the Czech language and a little Polish. He was a terrible sadist and blood sucker. As soon as he arrived he confiscated a Jewish house and the Yudenrat was ordered to furnish it properly, to decorate it with drapes and provide it with bedding and other comforts. Continually, new

demands were imposed on the Yudenrat. One day he stopped at the Yudenrat accompanied by a few S.S. legionnaires and gave an order to find for him on the following morning thirty young qualified workers from various trades who he had to send to the Brest fortress for a period of two weeks. Again there was a Commotion in town. The Yudenrat made up a list of thirty young men and the police brought them from their houses to the Yudenrat. The crying and weeping of the mothers was indescribable. The members of the Yudenrat consoled the families and assured them that the youngsters will return home in two weeks. Lawrence, who was standing on a side accompanied by other Germans, looked at the weeping mothers and cynically laughed. In the morning the youngsters were put on board a freight car which left for an unknown destination. Out of that group only two returned after several months. They were Kopel Wernick and Yitzchak L. Levine. They related that they were never sent to Brest but were shipped in the opposite direction. At each station the train stopped and picked up new groups of youngsters until they reached the city of Zitomir in the Ukraine. On the way there, they were beaten mercilessly. The Germans robbed them of their clothing, with the result that some of them were freezing in the cold. In Zitomir there were thousands who had been recruited for forced labor under inhuman conditions. They were employed there to clean up the debris of the city which was destroyed by bombing. Everyday people fell like flies. When the two boys convinced themselves that they had nothing to lose they ran away from the camp and walked through fields and forests during the night time until they succeeded in reaching home. The others did not have a chance to return.

Only a few knew that these two youngsters returned home. On the list it was marked that they were sent to work and for a long time they were hiding. Unfortunately, they were destroyed with the rest in the ghetto action. By order of the murderer Lawrence were shot Nusel Schuster and D. Komissartchik due to the following incident: A boy was carrying a radio in a sack when he suddenly noticed the chief of police, a Pole by the name Kuc, approaching (a most objectionable type). The boy dropped the sack with its contents and ran away. This happened to occur just opposite Nusel's house and he was immediately arrested. The chief of police testified that he saw the boy come out from Nusel's house yard. On the following day he was shot together with Komissartchik who was arrested before for some other so-called crime.

In February 1942, a large group of men and women were brought to Yanove from the town of Shershev near Pruzani, some of them with infants on their arms. They came barefooted, half-naked and starved. Their situation was awful. Although our situation was not much better, we received them warmly. The Yudenrat added their names to the list of the workers and provided them with bread card rations. The story they told us sounded awful. Their destruction was accomplished in a different manner called in German "Uberzudlung" (Resettlement). Their zone was attached to the third Reich (East Prussia) and they were accordingly ordered to leave their houses within twelve hours. Part of them were driven to labor recruiting camps, the other part was marched on foot in an Easterly direction. Those that slowed down and were unable to continue marching were shot dead on the road. In the cities and towns where they passed by, the local Jewish communities absorbed groups of them. Those brought to Yanove were physically unable to continue and remained amongst us until the destruction of the ghetto.

The situation became more difficult to the point that it was no longer bearable. Jews returned from work beaten up by the Germans and the police. There was no visible end to the sufferings

at all. The Teutons boasted that their armies were standing near Moscow and the fall of the city is a matter of days. We were very despondent and desperate, and so life dragged on until April 1942. On Passover eve the zone commissar from Pinsk, Julian Rempier (may his name be obliterated) suddenly arrived in town with a group of Germans. They took a walk through the muddy streets of the poorest section of town called the "Rosielitze," marked something on their papers, and ordered that the chairman of the Yudenrat and twenty workers provided with hammers and hatchets report to him at once. I was one of the workers that went with Alter Divinsky, the chairman of the Yudenrat, to report to the zone commissar.

Alter's reception was full of scoldings and yelling why it took us longer than the appointed time for reporting, and at once he came to the point. The commissar said that within twenty-four hours all the Jews must vacate their houses and move over to a ghetto which will be designated by him presently. The ghetto shall be fenced around with barbed wires three meters in height. Jews that leave the ghetto without a permit will be shot, "Understand?" the commissar asked Alter; "Yawohl, Herr Gebiets commissar" was Alter's answer. Then "to work," the commissar ordered. The zone commissar and his companions then marched forward, stopped at every ten meters and ordered the workers to knock in sticks in the designated spots. In one hour the borders of the ghetto were marked off and specified. After he finished doing his part, that parasite called the local Germans headed by Lawrence, gave them orders and specific regulations, saluted with the "Heil Hitler" and left with his companions in their cars in the direction of Pinsk. At once there were recruited additional workers and wooden posts replaced the marked sticks. The German barbarians and their underlings, armed with rubber clubs, pressed us so that we would work fast. In the evening the ghetto was already fenced around and ready to receive the depressed and unfortunate Jewish community.

On the following day the Jews left their houses. With bundles of bedding and clothing on their shoulders they walked in the direction of the ghetto. Difficult was the departure from their houses which were passed on from generation to generation, in which they grew up and were raised in an atmosphere of Jewish life, and that they presently had to leave behind unguarded. Opposite them were standing, like hungry sharks, the gentiles who were waiting for the minute they would break into the abandoned Jewish houses and rob their possessions accumulated during their owner's hard laboring years. Everyone knew that he was sentenced to destruction and would never return from the ghetto to his house. The weeping of those driven into the ghetto was heartbreaking. The bundles they carried on their shoulders were searched and part of their contents was robbed by the Germans. And so a good part of them entered the ghetto missing everything. In the evening we were already locked up in the ghetto and through the barbed wire fence we could look into the street where the Aryans were promenading, laughing and joking at our expense.

The congestion in the ghetto was enormous, fifteen to twenty persons in a room being typical. Wooden bunks were fixed for sleeping one on top of the other. Members of families mostly lived together. Young people found room in the attics, in stables or simply in the street. Every morning long lines of workers were formed near the Yudenrat which was located in the house of Asne Feldman, and from there through the gate of the ghetto they were led under heavy guard to various places for work. Before nightfall the workers returned to the ghetto tired, hungry and frequently beaten up. The qualified workers were recruited in the street of Markel the tinsmith.

The houses in this street that were vacated by the Jews turned into workshops. Here worked shoemakers, tailors, metal workers and other tradesmen that were exploited by the barbarians to the end with no compensation whatsoever. From time to time it happened that a good-hearted local gentile secretly gave to a worker a few potatoes, some flour or butter in exchange for work he did for him. Actually at the risk of their lives the workers used to smuggle that bit of food into the ghetto for their hungry families. Here I must tell of an occurrence that happened to me. I worked together with Markel the tinsmith and his son Moshe. We finished various orders that the township bureau imposed on us and at the same time we did some work secretly for good gentiles who compensated us for our work with provisions. We did work at that time for someone who lived in Pinsk street who was supposed to pay us with two sacks of potatoes. His terms, however, were that we have to come to his house and get them because he was afraid to deliver them to us. Two sacks of potatoes was an actual treasure at that time. I undertook it myself to bring it into the ghetto. In order to do that I had to jump over the barbed wire fence that bordered on the orchard of the Polish Catholic priest, a strong man of about thirty years old by the name Zolniewsky, who according to his appearance he looked like an executioner rather than a clergyman. He was a sworn anti-Semite, cooperated with the Germans and caused a lot of trouble for the Jewish population. He frequently arranged receptions in his house for high German officers and for the zone commissar, where they were eating and drinking to drunkenness. When a Jew was arrested by the Germans, that priest offered himself as an intermediary for a high compensation, pretending that he used his influence with the German authorities on behalf of the prisoner. After he squandered the received sums it turned out that his promises were worthless. Here, for instance, they arrested the watchmaker Kossartchich from Stolin who settled in our town. A gentile informer pointed at him accusing him of being a communist. Soon the saint appeared before his wife and promised her to free him in exchange for gold and diamonds. The naive woman handed over to that faker all her jewelry and other valuables with the hope that he would rescue her husband. When she dared to come to his house to inquire about the status of her husband, he chased her out of his house and threatened her that if she comes again he will shoot her. On the following day her husband was shot together with Nusel Schuster as I described above. Now, let us go back to our story: Through the clergyman's orchard I had to pass in order to bring the potatoes to the ghetto. At four o'clock in the morning I jumped from the ghetto fence. I quietly reached the gentile's house, filled the sack with potatoes and I started to return to the ghetto. As soon as I entered the clergyman's orchard he appeared in front of me as if from underground. With him was a large dog. He grabbed me forcefully and started to call in a loud voice for the police telling me at the same time that he had been watching out for me for the last hour, seeing me jump from the fence, and that he only wants to know who I received the potatoes from. I struggled with the two dogs (one on two feet) until I succeeded in freeing myself from them. I then ran to the fence of the ghetto and hurried into it. While I was running I heard him yell, "Wait you dirty Jew, I shall get a hold of you yet today." The sack of potatoes obviously remained in his orchard. In the morning when the people were coming out of the ghetto for work he was standing near the gate with a policeman and tried to find me, but I was not among those workers, since I was a qualified worker I did not belong there. Fortunately, he did not recognize me. For a time I tried not to come out from the ghetto too often so as to avoid a confrontation with him. (It was destined that four years later I should bump into him in one of the streets of Lodz and he did not succeed in escaping from my hands without punishment as it will be related later.)

I want to take a deep breath and continue my story. Life in the ghetto dragged on after all that. The hospital in the ghetto, which was located in the house of Chlavne Rozansky, was filled with sick people. People were losing their minds and in the yard of the hospital, tents were built to house the psychic cases. The Jewish doctors Grunwald, Vlodavsky, Saltzberg and others, who worked hard during the day outside the ghetto, used to attend to the ghetto patients during the night hours. Drugs were lacking and mortality was high. We the young were cruising around nights in the ghetto yards considering our situation and destiny. We felt that our days were numbered and that we were sentenced to death. There sprang up an idea to organize self-defense against the Teutons when they would come to kill us, but with what were we going to fight them? With empty hands? From where could we get arms? One came up with an idea that we should provide ourselves with bottles of Sulphuric acid and when the murderers come to the ghetto spill the acid on them. However this idea could not materialize for the reason that there was no source from which to obtain the acid.

One day in August 1942 the Germans came to the Yudenrat and demanded that within fifteen minutes they should deliver five young men provided with spades for work that would take only two hours. The Germans did not tell what kind of work it was. They just looked at their watches to see that the workers should be presented on time. At once five boys were rounded up and the Germans led them in the direction of the Railway tracks. My friend Ruven Resnick (now in the U.S.) who was one of them related to us what happened. Gentiles that guarded the Railroad informed the Germans that suspicious people put mines under the rails the night before. The Germans found out that actually the rails were mined in five places but were afraid to go near them. They then fell upon an idea; why should they risk their own lives, when there were so many Jews in the ghetto whose lives are unprotected. For that purpose they took the five boys and ordered each to remove one mine. The Hitler heroes themselves stood at a safe distance from the boys and aimed their rifles at them so that none should run away. Shaking with fear, the boys approached the mines expecting for sure to be torn to pieces when the mines exploded. But suddenly Daniel Chenerinsky, a boy of twenty who was one of the five, announced "Boys, stand where you are, I myself will carry out the mission." Cold bloodedly, he approached the rails and with the spade he expertly removed one mine after another and threw them into a nearby brook. Daniel had a chance to serve a short time in the Red army and he learned that specialty there. Thanks to him they were all saved, but unfortunately not for very long. Later they were all murdered in the ghetto except one by the name of Ruven Shnitzel.

We the young ones were a little encouraged. Sometime after this, we were informed that partisans had appeared in our vicinity. After a few days the mayor of "Worcewitz" was shot by partisans and was brought dangerously wounded into the hospital. Also after that we heard about the activities of the partisans in our region. We called a secret meeting and decided to contact them no matter what happens. For that purpose two of our boys, Israel Peretz and S. Karulinsky, sneaked out one night from the ghetto on a dangerous and unknown mission to look for and find the partisans. They returned one week later with promising good news. We congregated again secretly to hear their report. They succeeded in finding a small group of partisans who showed an interest in our situation and expressed readiness to come to our aid the minute we revolt and attack the "Einsatz Gruppe" and the police of the town. Obviously there were differences of opinions. Some were for a revolt while others argued that with empty hands we cannot do anything, and until the promised help would come we would all perish like flies. On the

following day we met again to discuss the matter, this time the group much larger. Suddenly, Alter Divinsky and a few other of the Yudenrat arrived and with tears in their eyes warned us as follows: "Remember well what you are going to accomplish. You will bring a misfortune on all of us. It may happen that a few of you will be saved but don't forget that on account of your action will perish your parents, your brothers and sisters and the small children." At the same time Alter told us that rumors were circulating that a few days before Soviet planes bombed the fortress of Brest. He expressed the hope that with God's help times will change for the better and asked us to disperse. Quietly and with heavy hearts, we dispersed with the hope that a miracle would happen.

Yom Kippur Eve 1942, after a day of hard work, the Jews of the ghetto assembled for the prayer of Kol-Nidre. A part of them prayed in the stable of S. Snitofsky which was cleaned out and converted into a synagogue. A much larger crowd congregated at the Yudenrat where the Tora scrolls were brought from the synagogues at the time of entry into the ghetto. Pale and sad, Jews stood tightly together and conversed quietly. Occasionally, someone would burst out crying; at the same time they had to be careful so that the barbarians on the other side of the fence wouldn't notice the large crowd. A.H. Scheinbaum delivered the traditional sermon in the form of a courageous speech before the prayers. Among other things he said "The picture that presents itself here reminds us of the period of the Spanish inquisitions when the maranos used to say their prayers in cellars or other hiding places. According to the historic tradition the melody of Kol Nidre was composed during the period of the inquisitor Turkvimada." He appealed to the congregation not to lose their spirits and courage and consoled them with the thought that with God's help we shall survive and reach better times.

The time to say "Kol Nidre" arrived and it was evident that there wasn't a suitable person in the crowd to properly lead the services for that most important prayer of the year. The God-fearing and elderly Jews were mostly destroyed in the first massacre and among them the qualified leaders of the religious services. It came to the point that since there was no alternative I should be the one to lead the services. (To this day I still remember the melodies of the prayers from childhood when I sang in the choir of Mordechai Wolovelsky when he led the services for New Years and Yom Kippur.) Someone rendered a decision that, according to the law, a bachelor is not qualified for that position. For a while the situation was not clear when Moshe Velvel Levine suddenly appeared from one of the corners. With trembling steps he approached the alter, burst out crying and with a sad and sweet voice sang the traditional melody of "Kol Nidre." As long as I live I shall remember the night of that Kol Nidre prayer. Moshe Levine, who was not a frequent visitor to the synagogue, actually hypnotized us with his recitation of the prayer. We were astonished at his evident talent. We were all imbued with the uplifting spirit of his praying. Grown up people wept like small children. It was not a prayer but a confession of people condemned to death, before their execution. In the morning the day of Yom-Kippur proper, again the same thing repeated itself. Suddenly, Shimon Shlackman broke into the room yelling: "Brothers, we are lost." With tearing eyes he related that he was informed that large groups of gentiles from neighboring villages were recruited for work and were presently digging large ditches near the forest of Rutzk under the supervision of Germans and the police. The prayers were interrupted and a fearful weeping broke out. Alter Divinsky and a few others from the Yudenrat hurried to Lawrence, who was also bribed, to learn what happened. They returned very soon to tell us that Lawrence assured them that we have nothing to fear. The ditches were being

dug for military purposes only, as a place for fuel supplies. As long as he would be in town no harm would be done to the Jews. The congregation relaxed for a while and the prayers were resumed. The source of tears was exhausted, from time to time someone would let out a heavy sigh. When they reached the prayer, God our father "Kra Roa Gzar Dineinu" (Rescind the harmful sentence on us), the crying burst out anew with greater force. Broken hearted, tired and weakened from praying all day they departed from the Yudenrat house and a good number of them greeted each other with the blessing "Next year in Jerusalem" knowing well in their hearts that they were consoling themselves with illusions.

The Second Massacre

At the beginning of September 1942, a military unit of S.S. cavalrymen arrived in town which was quartered in the comfortable house of Nusel Snitofsky. For their horses they found room between the rows of stores in the market place which were converted into stables. Those were Germans, full faced and satiated who were moving around in the streets and imposing all kinds of work on Jewish laborers, especially on the shoemakers and tailors. To A.A. Levine, who was responsible for the shoemakers, they brought a large piece of leather and they ordered him to make boots for them. To Moshe Leib the tailor they brought skins of fur and ordered him to make leather jackets for them. On the skins were marked traces of Hebrew letters and we all knew that it was Jewish goods which they robbed before they came to our town. In the house of Zalman Gorodetzky was quartered a group of S.D. Service men. These were elderly Germans who wore special uniforms with the symbol of a skull on their helmets. Their appearance in the street was infrequent. The women from the ghetto who were sent there daily to clean their rooms and wash their laundry related that they were occupied with some kind of secret work and that their sole activity was writing. In the house there was a dead silence, they spoke very little even amongst themselves in the presence of strangers. In their murderous eyes one could notice sparks of bloodthirsty animals, but wouldn't hear a word from them. The women's only contact was with the administrator who took care of the order and cleanliness of the house.

The day after Yom Kippur we noticed that the commander of the S.D. accompanied by the S.S. were moving around the ghetto with papers in their hands. They would stop frequently and mark something on their papers, which looked very suspicious to us. Again Jews ran to the Yudenrat and as usual Alter Divinsky ran to Lawrence who was pretentiously bought off with bribes. The latter assured him again, that as long as he was present in town the Jews had nothing to fear as no harm would befall them.

In the afternoon the S.S. murderers came running to the street of the workshops and hurriedly took back their orders even when unfinished. I happened to be present in the workshop of A.A. Levine when the S.S. beasts told them that he needed only two more days to finish them, one of them answered him: "Someone will finish them, but not you, dirty Jew." His comrades the S.S. laughed aloud listening to his "clever" answer. On the way out they honored us with a slap in the face or a kick with the boot. At the same place appeared more craftsmen relating in astonishment that from them also the murderers took back their unfinished orders.

Sent low and depressed we returned after work to the ghetto. We noticed that the guard of Germans and police at the gate was strengthened, the movement in the street was great and the

German beasts ran around here and there. People wanting to come out of the ghetto were not allowed to do so. My brother Zelig who was the head bookkeeper in the lumber factory and who had a certificate as a "useful Jew," allowing him to move around in the streets freely, was also prevented from leaving the ghetto. From the gate were returned even those who were appointed for night work in various places. Our hearts predicted that a calamity was approaching. Evening set in and numbers of people came to the Yudenrat to inquire as to the extraordinary situation. The members of the Yudenrat didn't know anything and as usual advised us to relax, since Lawrence promised that no harm would be done to us. It was a sleepless night for all of us. Everyone felt that something terrible was going to happen any minute. We all stood guard.

About two o'clock that night a company of Ukrainian and Polish policemen clad in black uniforms spread out through the ghetto. The S.D. and S.S. murderers wearing steel helmets were circulating here and there announcing orders. Machine guns were placed every twenty meters and the ghetto was tightly surrounded making it impossible for anyone to escape. Some young boys who tried to jump over the fence were shot on the spot. In a short time with German punctuality everything was ready. The murderers were standing or lying near the machine guns ready for a sign to attack Jewish innocent children, women and starved men, the sick and unprotected, who were mostly sleeping, not knowing what calamity was awaiting them. Like others I also ran home to the room where we lived. I glanced at those that were in the middle of their sleep and I burst out crying. I woke them all up. In the house together were about fifty people, mostly small children and women. The mothers wrapped their small children in rags and all ran to the secret bunker that we had prepared in advance for such a contingency. I shall never forget the crying of the infants who didn't know why they were awakened from their deep sleep. When they were all in the bunker and well camouflaged, I ran to the Yudenrat to listen to what was happening. Over there were a number of S.S. murderers with the good Lawrence presiding. They were wildly shouting at some of the members of the Yudenrat who had begged them to rescind the order. We stood in a small group not far from the Yudenrat and were listening to what was happening. Suddenly Alter Divinsky came running out from the Yudenrat bleeding. Seeing us, he yelled "Brothers, the situation is grave, do what you can to save your lives." I lived in his neighborhood so we ran home together. On the way he told me that pretty soon they would butcher us all. I entered the bunker, locked the camouflaged door and together with the rest I squeezed myself into our tight and dark resting place.

Through a crack I looked outside into the street about eight o'clock in the morning. Suddenly, we heard shooting and the wild yelling of the Teutonic murderers. They started to call aloud "Jews, come out from your holes, we shall find you anyway." Here they were passing us by. They were chasing their victims who were trying to run away. We heard desperate calls for help from mothers and children. They were driving everyone out of the ghetto. Those who were trying to run away were being shot on the spot. I heard Malkele Sharf yelling for help after her two small children were taken away from her. In a clear German she pleaded with the murderers that they should have mercy and leave the children with her. We heard a shot from a revolver and then a groaning from pain and she fell dead. At the same instance I saw her two children running with two German "Heros" after them. Here passed by Hershel Resnick running. We heard yelling "Halt Yude" after that a shot rang out and Hershel fell dead. I saw a German leading Peshe Rachel Ruttenberg, an old woman who had no idea what they wanted of her. She mumbled something, we heard a shot and she fell. Here they were entering the house of Leibe Divinsky. In

this house lived a great number of families and there in his brother's house also lived Alter Divinsky and his family. I heard the voice of the good Lawrence "Divinsky, Come, Raus." As I said before, Alter went into hiding after he came out from the Yudenrat and now the murderers came to look for him. I heard them break closets and walls in their search for him. The crying of women and children from their hiding place in a bunker could be heard. Only a narrow corridor of three meters separated our bunker from theirs. A child of three years started to cough in our bunker and his mother closed his mouth with her hand so that the sound of his coughing would not reveal our hiding place. We felt heavy steps of horses over our heads. Two S.S. officers riding on horses inquired whether they had already found the chairman of the Yudenrat. When the answer was given in the negative, the order was given "Sofort finden zum Donner Wetter." I saw Hershel Glutzer standing near them half naked. On his feet he had only socks without shoes. He was a member of the Yudenrat so they had brought him here so that he could tell them where the chairman was hiding. I heard the sound of the rubber clubs lashing his body and his consequent yelling from pain. Here they reached the home of Michael Mednick where we lived in the ghetto, they searched in the attic, in the stable and in the pantry. Polish and Ukrainian policemen were running back and forth. Local gentile youngsters with arms in their hands were also participating in this action. One even announced my name and I should come out from my hiding, since they would find me anyhow. There existed in the house one more hiding place where there were hiding my brother Zelig, his wife and two year old son, Meyer Lumasky, Isaac Resnick with their families and others. The murderers discovered their hiding place. I heard the weeping voice of my sister-in-law and the other women and children who were being led through the yard. Here I saw my beloved brother Zelig, a child on his arms, and he was yelling to me "Mordechai, we are lost." I pick myself up from my place with the intention of running outside, but my mother lying near me held me fast and doesn't let me go. From a distance we heard the heartbreaking weeping of those driven to their death near the forest of Rutzk. They were now walking their last mile. All of a sudden it became quiet. It was twelve o'clock noon. All around us was quiet. We whispered to each other wondering for what reason. We suddenly heard the sighing of a wounded man calling for help. Even before we decided what to do we saw two policemen approaching dragging on their backs full sacks of robbed goods from the houses of the Jews who were minutes before driven out to the execution place. They stopped and one of them said, "why this is the shoemaker." At once we heard a shot and the sighing discontinued. It seems that it was Leiser Gruman the shoemaker that they just killed. Exactly at two o'clock the action was renewed. The intervening quiet respite was due to their stoppage for lunchtime. The Teutons are known for their punctuality. When lunchtime is reached, they eat, when lunch is finished, again to work and again the shooting and the desperate calls for help from the unfortunate victims. New transports were driven to their graves in the ditches and this went on till seven o'clock in the evening. We lie in the bunker tired and starved. The cold penetrates our bodies. Someone consoles himself with the hope that since they have not discovered us up to this time, they may leave us alone. Meanwhile, we heard the sound of a great explosion very near us, and right after that the crying of women and children. The skies were lit up and heavy smoke started to penetrate our hiding place. We felt that we were choking. For lack of an alternative I opened the hidden door. I took mama's hand and we went outside. After us the others followed and we spread out in different directions. The air outside freshened us up. We were hiding together with my mother in a dark corner behind a stable. Our house and the neighboring houses went up in flames. We ran into other people and together we observed the terrible sight all around us. A fire bomb was thrown into the house of Z. Odrizinsky and from there the fire

quickly spread to the side of the nearby frame houses of the ghetto. Fire bombs were also thrown into other blocks of the ghetto so that the entire ghetto went up in flames.

According to later explanations the murderers had not succeeded in capturing all of us so they decided to chase us out from our hideouts through fire. The murderers were experts in their profession. They knew how to force us out from our hideouts to the outside. A number of the victims did not come out and were burned under the debris or were choked by the smoke. Those who did come out in the open, some with their clothes burning on them, were shot while running with machine guns operated by the heroes of the third Reich who spat fire on the unfortunate, defenseless victims. I saw German officers standing on the porch of the synagogue of Rabbi Abele enjoying their heroic operation. Suddenly, a hail of bullets opened up in our direction. The murderers discovered us. We spread out in different directions. I grabbed my mother's hand and I dragged her after me. I felt suddenly that she was kneeling and falling to the ground. I took her on my hands and I continued running when I felt that my hands were wet from blood. I stopped at the house of Hanna Yoselowitz. I put her on the ground and I noticed that she was wounded in the belly. I tried to revive her, I embraced and kissed her, I wept, I heard her mumbling: "Run away," while her head rolled over on a side. My dear and devoted mother stopped breathing. The barbarians had robbed me of my dearest and best possession. Honor to her memory.

I remained lying near my mother, the dearest of all, and with tearing eyes I kissed her frozen face. The house of Hanna Yoselowitz went up in flames and a few people who were hidden there came out. The murderers, from the other side of the ghetto, opened up on them with a hail of bullets. The bullets were shrieking over my head. At once I separated myself from the place where my mother was placed. By jumping, I entered the burning house and I came out from the other side. I ran through yards and streets of the ghetto being tackled every time by dead or wounded bodies lying on the ground. I reached the cellar of Chlavne Rozansky and I intended to try to get out through there from the ghetto. The scene I had seen there, I shall not forget as long as I live. In that cellar there was a large bunker where a great number of people entered there sheltering themselves from the deadly bullets. A few children that tried to get in there with the grown ups were trampled to death. I yelled to them that there was no sense in hiding in a packed bunker and that it was better to try and jump over the fence of the ghetto. Unfortunately, each minded his own business and people lost their minds from fear and continued to push themselves into the bunker. I reached the barbed wire fence and started to climb over when that minute there opened up a hail of bullets and I fell down, tore my clothing and injured my hand. I ran along the length of the "Roselitz" until I reached the garden of Alter Divinsky and there I put myself down, after losing my strength, between the high grass. Suddenly, I felt the breathing of people near me. I understood that they were Jewish escapees like myself. I approached them by creeping and I saw they were Avigdor Gutterson and his brother-in-law Yosel Kotliar.

When I saw Avigdor it really surprised me. He was very active under the rule of the Soviets and was a member of the town council. In the ghetto we didn't see him at all. They related that he escaped to Russia together with the retreating Red army and here he suddenly appeared. But there was no time for talking, all our thoughts were concentrated on how to get over to the other side of the fence. Around us there was complete darkness. The fire lights of the burning ghetto did not reach here. The fence was right in front of us but there was a streaming brook and next to it was a marshy area with mud such that when you sink in it you might not be able to get out of

it. There was no alternative. I climbed over the fence and I jumped from it into the mud and sunk almost to my neck and with great effort I reached the other side of the brook. After me jumped Yosel. I gave him a hand and helped him to reach the dry land. Avigdor moved with some difficulty and until he climbed on the fence and decided to jump the guards noticed him and started shooting at him. The two of us started to run away from that place. Avigdor evidently was hit and fell into the brook.

We sat down to rest in the field. Around us there was darkness. From far away we saw the ghetto burning and we heard the yelling of the victims that were being tortured to death. The shooting continued. The night was cold. We were wet to our bones and shivering from cold. We started to walk in the direction of the forest of Werchustche which is four kilometers from town. We arrived at the forest. Around us there was darkness and dead silence. Here we were free. We sat down under a tree and considered our situation. The hunger started to press on us. I started to feel the wounds I received at the time of climbing the fence. I felt a pain in the lower part of my right foot. Dawn started to arrive and it became evident that we were sitting near a main highway, in a place that we could easily have been detected. We entered deep into the forest and we hid among the bushes. Only then I discovered that I had a hole in my boot and that the place near it is where it hurts. When I took my boot off I noticed that I had been lightly wounded by a bullet while I was running in the ghetto. A clear morning arrived. While we were hidden among the bushes, we heard the sound of steps approaching and then we noticed three Jews wandering in the forest. They were: Faivel Kaplan and the brothers Ruven and Chaim Resnick, the two younger sons of Moshe Mendel. We called them to us. We embraced each other and we all burst out in tears. They also had succeeded in escaping miraculously. (To Faivel it was already the second time that he had escaped death by a miracle, as I related before, he was the only one escaping from the first massacre near Borowitz.) The first day we stilled our hunger with berries in the forest. We decided to move from here to the forest of Kritishin which is larger and much further away from town. There was no sense in remaining in a forest where all kinds of raids were made to find us.

In the Forest

We were listening to the talk about yesterday's happenings in our town from the peasants passing by on the road not far from our hideout. Some related it with joy and laughter and some with an expression of regret. Night came; I warned my comrades that we would still have to cover the distance of sixteen kilometers until we reached the forest of Kritishin. On the way there, we also must provide ourselves with food. Out of necessity we might have to resort to robbery in order to assure our physical existence. We should not get frightened even if in self defense we might be forced to kill a man since otherwise, they would kill us. We started out on our way. Our first action was at a schoolhouse in the village of Klionok which was separately situated on the road behind the village. I took with me Ruven, a boy of eighteen years old, and together we approached the schoolhouse and knocked at the window. (The rest of us remained waiting at a distance near the road.) The schoolteacher jumped from his bed hurriedly in his underwear trembling all over with fear. I demanded that he open his window and he, having no alternative, responded to our demand. I told him that he has nothing to fear and that we only wanted food for ten people and after getting that we would depart peacefully. Immediately he filled up a bag with bread, butter, cheese and other provisions and with trembling hands he handed it over to me. After we ate and relieved our hunger we proceeded further on. On the way we visited a few

isolated peasant houses and we collected more food. Some gave it to us willingly but from some we had to obtain it by force. Loaded with sacks of food and provision, we walked through the fields which were permeated with water, until before dawn we reached the forest of Kritishin.

There we were in the forest, tranquility all around, the birds flying over our heads, one could hear from a distance the wailing of the cows taken to pasture. They all enjoyed God's beautifully created world. Only we, the five Jews that had miraculously escaped death, were hiding in the bushes deep in the forest fearing death in case of discovery. Temporarily, we had food that would last us for a few days, but what was going to happen after that?

We began to plan some kind of a program for the future. First we decided to make a tour of the forest in order to get acquainted with our new environment. While touring we discovered half burned wood and signs of a bonfire proving that a short while before people had been warming around it. We continued walking and suddenly we observed Aaron Pomeranetz coming out from behind the bushes together with a few more Jews from our town: Chaim Lumasky, H. Aronowsky, the brothers Schuster, M. Shulvitz, Hanna Odrizinsky, Berl Zarutsky, and a few refugees who lived in the ghetto. We all embraced each other since our number of people that all escaped from a certain death had been increased. We also had among us a few children. Night came, and somehow we established ourselves in the bushes. A group of eight people, myself included, went out in the darkness of the night to look for food for our clan. From a distance we could see the shining lights of the farmhouses and we could hear the abrupt barking of dogs. We went in the direction of the farmhouses. On the way we bumped into covered mounds of potatoes. For us this was a most important commodity and a few of us remained to open the mounds and provide ourselves with potatoes, the others continued to walk to the farm to beg for food. All of us returned to our headquarters in the forest loaded with sacks of potatoes, bread and provisions. We had not forgotten to bring along with us a few hatchets, spades and pots. We decided not to stay in this place and we moved to a different place in the forest which proved to be a more suitable location. We spread out on the grass and we appointed a guard around us.

On the fire we fried potatoes eaten with great appetite and we examined our situation. One of our guards informed us that two men were approaching us. We knew both of them, one was Gregor Dorogokupetz the ex-chairman of the village of Kritishin, the other one was his son who was known as a sworn communist. They were forced to hide in the forest because the German and Polish police considered them Soviet agents and were in search for them. They were glad to meet us and told us that there were a few more groups of Jews in the forest. They would make it possible for us to meet them. They returned into the forest and emerged later accompanied by Chaim Yudel Resnick, his nephew Israel, M. Angle, D. Serchuk, M. Popitchke, M. Mittel and others. Chaim Yudel was known in town as a strong and brave man. (A short time before the war he was involved in a fight in town between Polish hooligans and Jews. He single-handedly inflicted on the hooligans such a beating that one of them remained on the ground with a fractured skull. He was indicted for this and the trial cost him his freedom for a while and a fortune of money plus aggravation) His coming encouraged us all. As a cattle merchant and as a small landowner he was well acquainted with the vicinity and the local farmers and many of them were glad to see him. Gregor told us that he had met more Jews in the forest and he advised them to move to the other side of the canal to the forest of Zawishe which was much larger and safer because of its further distance from the town. He also advised us not to concentrate in large

groups because the Germans quite often make raids on partisans. He wished us good luck and promised to bring experienced fighting partisans along with him tomorrow.

We sat down on the grass and everyone of us related how he succeeded in escaping from a certain death. Israel Gorodetzky, a boy of thirteen years, related: The Germans grabbed me and my three brothers between the ages of 10-17 and my mother Hanna (daughter of Mordechai Leib) and brought us to the market place. Over there were standing arranged in lines the unfortunate Jews from our town, men, women and children, some of them beaten and wounded. We were joined to one of the groups. The S.S. murderers counted us exactly and recorded the number of captured victims. Every few minutes they led away another group of Jews under heavy guard in the direction of Lubashov street to the prepared common grave near the forest of Rutzk. The turn of our group arrived, after they counted us carefully the order was given to march. In tight rows we all marched against death. Those that were too weak to follow received murderous beatings with rifle butts from the police and Germans that guarded us. Our mother held us all together and we all pressed against her. On Lubashov street one of the policemen pushed my brother Chaim. My mother jumped out of line, grabbed the policeman's rifle, felled him to the ground and shouted: "Children Run." Panic broke out, people jumped out of the lines and started to run in different directions. The murderers opened up on us with a hail of bullets. My mother was murdered on the spot with numerous other Jews who tried to escape, among them my three brothers Chaim, Abraham and Yudel. I succeeded in jumping over a fence to hide in the grass, and here I am now. Meyer Angle who was also in that group related the same story. Thanks to the daring and heroism of Hanna he also jumped out of the line and was rescued together with Israel, and both reached us here in the forest. Moshe Mittel also ran away from the line and escaped death.

When we were children we learned in our history class about Hanna and her seven sons who died a death of religious martyrdom defying the order of Antiochus, the cruel tyrant. That Hanna had been sanctified and perpetuated in Jewish history. Let us sanctify and perpetuate the name of our contemporary Hanna for her heroic deed in this book that we are dedicating in memory of our Yanove martyrs. Honor to her memory.

Next Yakov Nagel, a blond young man with the face of an "Aryan" who was a refugee from Warsaw and whose wife and child had been murdered in the ghetto, related: Myself, Levi Mogilansky and two more Jews whose names I don't remember, broke out of the lines at the assembly point in the market place and started to run away. Quite a number of others ran with us but were shot down while running. The four of us successfully escaped and we reached the fields behind Lubashov street. A gentile native by the name of Victor Chala ran into us and invited us into his stable promising us to hide us there till it became dark when we could depart quietly to the forest. There was no sense running away during daylight since they would capture us anyway and kill us. We believed him and entered the stable. The door closed behind us and in a few seconds we heard him put a lock on it. We didn't like the idea, but we had no alternative and so we remained locked in the stable. It didn't take long and the gentile returned accompanied by police and Germans, opened the door and handed us over to the murderers. After they gave us a severe beating they put us in the jail that was located in the yard of the town council. Here we found out that we were not alone, more Jews were sitting there, many of them members of the Yudenrat including Alter Divinsky, who were captured while trying to escape. They were all

sitting and crying. I had not lost my power of thinking. With a penknife that I had in my pocket I made a small opening in the ceiling of the jail. I succeeded in sticking my hand outside and I was able to pick two boards of the ceiling. When it became dark I climbed through the opening of the jail. The roof was covered with shingles. Carefully, I removed a few shingles. I jumped cautiously from the roof and I ran in the direction of the village of Mohilna. The policeman on guard noticed my escape and started shooting at me. More policemen helped chase me and kept shooting and yelling "Halt." Due to the darkness of the night they missed their target. I wandered in the darkness through the fields until I arrived here in the forest.

The storytelling ended. We remained in all thirty souls who had escaped death and none of us knew what was in store for us. In the morning appeared Gregor with two armed partisans; they greeted us heartily. They were two Red army men who escaped from German captivity. (One of them Seryoza became later the commander of a unit of a partisans regiment.) We had a friendly talk with them and they asked us whether we possessed any weapons. When they were convinced that we had none they suggested that we move to the forest in Zawishe because without weapons we were in great danger due to raids by the Germans and the police. They themselves belonged to a partisans unit that kept contact with the anti-German population in the vicinity. They carried out military actions against the Germans and agitation among the peasants in the region. From them we heard that in town remained about seventy Jewish souls that the Germans temporarily allowed to remain alive. They were Doctors, nurses, pharmacists and dentists, also a few useful handicraft workers were concentrated on a street called the Little Ghetto. The partisans advised us not to concentrate in large groups and to escape as soon as possible to the forest of Zawishe.

After their departure we consulted among ourselves as to what to do. Some objected to the suggestion of moving to the Zawishe forest because this involved the crossing of the canal which was well guarded by the Germans. There were some who feared life in the forest and when they heard that some Jews remained in town they hoped to return and live with the remaining rest in the little ghetto. We were a group of fifteen who left the forest of Kritishin on the following morning and turned towards the side of Zawishe. At night we reached the canal. We approached in hiding to a hut at the edge of the canal; when we were convinced that the inhabitants of the hut were fast asleep we unhooked a rowboat and in two crossings we all reached the other side of the canal. We welcomed the rain that fell during the night because it greatly helped our escape. We walked trampling deep through mud and fields permeated with water. We visited on our way a few isolated farms where we provided ourselves with food and tools such as hatchets, spades and saws. Before dawn we reached the forest of Zawishe. Between entangled bushes we picked a suitable spot and immediately began the construction of trenches for underground dwellings. We knew that there were more escaped Jews in the forest. In the morning a few of our comrades armed with hatchets went out to investigate the big forest to get acquainted with the environment. On that day we found the two brothers Meyer and Samuel Resnick with two of their sister Sarah's children and another child, a son of a refugee who escaped from the ghetto. In our group were the two younger brothers Chaim and Ruven Resnick. The meeting of the four brothers was emotional and moving. We all cried watching the scene of the meeting. From them we heard about more escaped Jews who were presently in the forest of Zawishe and we decided to find them sparing no effort.

In the vicinity where we built our underground dwellings we found no trace of human steps ever passing by there, not even trails were found there, a sign that people visited that place very seldom. We decided to remain in this place temporarily. We strengthened the foundations of our bunkers and covered the roof with thicket branches and earth so it shouldn't rain in. We built for ourselves some kind of resting place to sleep from boards and we decided to struggle here for life and existence. During the night we visited farms and villages for the provision of food and clothing and during the days we hid in the forest.

One day we returned to the forest from one of our "Pochods" (the name given to our night actions), we observed from a distance two men trying hurriedly to avoid us after they noticed us. Quickly we all spread out, circling chainlike and finally capturing them. They were two young Gypsies scared and trembling with fear. When they found out that we were Jews, they told us that their camp was in the forest a few kilometers from where we were and they have a few Jews among them. When we heard that a few of us went with them and we really reached a Gypsie camp. There were about forty people: men, women and children also and wagons. They were lying in Gypsie tents and warming themselves around bonfires. With them were Fivel Schuster, his two small children and his brother Itzel. At once, we befriended the Gypsies and we found them to be our brothers in sorrow. The sons of the superior Teutonic race persecuted the Gypsies in the same manner as they did the Jews. From then on we were in close connection with them. Together we used to go out with horses and wagons for night actions; the spoils we shared equally. The Gypsies were well acquainted with the environment of the forest and told us of a large group of Jews living on the western side of it. One day we went there and found the brothers Yitzchak and Israel Garbar, David Kagan, Leiser Portnoy, M.J. Chenerinsky, and A. Karulinsky, S. Berezowsky and M. Garbar. They worked in a tannery on the outskirts of the town and from there they succeeded in running away to the forest. With them were two Soviet partisans "Sashka" and "Yourk" armed both with rifles and pistols. This group lived in the bushes under circumstances similar to ours. There was only one difference, they had weapons and used them whenever necessary. Not far from there we found Beilke Resnick and her four children. Shloime Weiss was also there. The Resnick family was fed by gentile friends. (Their father Pinchas owned the tar factory in the Zawishe Estate. He and his daughter were killed in town.) From then on we were all closely connected. Together we participated in night actions. The fact that we were now in possession of weapons gave us a feeling of total confidence. Quite often new groups of Jews reached the forest. Those that were with us in Kritishin also arrived here. Among them were the engineer Sholesh Rimland and his sister Esther, Isser Appelbaum, the known Hebrew poet Berl Pomeranetz, Leiser Ratnovsky and others. One day, Dr. Kotel Vlodavsky and his brother Chone also arrived together with Rachel Resnick. Dr. Vlodavsky, who was my schoolmate in Yanove, had studied medicine first in Berlin and then in Italy. After graduation he returned home and established himself as a reputable practicing physician. When the barbarians destroyed the ghetto they spared his life, as a "Nutzlicher Yude." He then became the chief physician of the hospital. Rachel Resnick worked there as a nurse and his brother Chone succeeded on the day of the massacre in hiding in the hospital building. During one night Dr. Vlodavsky took along with him some medical supplies and together with Rachel and his brother ran away from town and reached us in the forest.

The number of people in our group increased. There were also added on a few Jews from the town of Lubashov and we were now faced with the serious problem of providing our group with

food and clothing. Winter was approaching and many of us were barefoot and clad in rags. One morning when our group returned from a night action we found our comrades all saddened and depressed. They told us that Leiser Ratnovsky who had gone out with a group for an action (all-not-armed) was captured by the peasants of the village of Chamitchevo and had been tied up by them, the others of the group succeeded in escaping. We at once departed for the village in order to free him. Unfortunately, Germans armed with machine guns were already there, and we were forced to retreat in a hurry. After a while we heard the rattle of shooting in the forest and on the same day we found Leiser dead. We buried him under a tree in the Zawishe forest and the poet Berl Pomeranetz eulogized him at the open grave. We were informed later that his captors, after having his body tied up, called on the Germans who were stationed nearby and handed him over to them. The Germans under torture tried to find out from him about the hiding places of Jews in the forest. It seems that he took them far into the forest and then he tried to escape. While pursuing him they shot and killed him. Honor to his memory.

With the arrival of winter our situation greatly worsened on account of the footprints in the snow we left after us when moving around. In case of a raid those footprints could lead the Germans to our hiding places. When we returned from night action we tried by all possible ways and means to erase our footprints. Our group, which was partly armed, frequently crossed the canal and brought with them horses, cows and wagons full of food and clothing. I remember once after we returned from such a night action riding on horses and bringing with us a herd of ten cows, we were questioned by the poet Berl Pomeranetz, who always kept on lecturing us that we should behave and act with justice and consideration, as to whether we hadn't robbed, God beware, from poor peasants. When we told him that we took it from the estates of landowners, his conscience was gratified. In general Berl did not succeed to acclimatize to life in the forest, not once did he leave the bunker. He was depressed and schizophrenic, and we often saw him marking something in his pocket notebook.

For security reasons, we were, as I mentioned before, spread out in smaller groups in different places in the forest. On one wintery day we suddenly heard the rattling of shooting at a distance of about half a kilometer from us. We left the bunker and we hid ourselves deeper in the forest. After a short while the shooting stopped. We heard unidentified sounds and the noise of passing automobiles further from our place. When night came a few of our comrades approached the bunker and were surprised to find it in its place. The horses remained tied on to the trees as before and the pot of food that was cooking on the fire also remained standing in its place. Suddenly, David Goldstein came to us crying bitterly telling us that in the morning their bunker had been suddenly surrounded by the police who fired on them. Under a hail of bullets he succeeded in escaping but his wife, three children and his father Leib were shot; Berl Pomeranetz who was also with them was shot dead. Goldstein called attention to the fact that with the police there had been a Jewish boy from Lubashov who also escaped the shootings. We found out later, after meeting the boy that he, the brothers Meyer and Ruven Resnick and Baruch Krupnick had entered during the night into the house of a gentile in the village of Hurniewitch. Immediately the house had been surrounded by police and they were all captured. The police tried by all means of terrible torture to get information out of them about the hiding places of Jews in the forest. When the murderers became convinced that they were unable to get a word out of the prisoners, the boy related, they shot his comrades. He couldn't see any other way out and he agreed to go with them to the forest and take them to the Jewish bunkers. During the shootings

he succeeded in escaping. Our anger and provocation at the boy were immeasurably great and a few of us wanted to kill him on the spot. The boy fell at our feet and started to beg for mercy on his life. At the end we decided to chase him away from our sight and warned him that he should never return to us. (After that the boy was shot and killed by the partisans.) After this occurrence we changed our location and we looked for a hiding place in another part of the forest.

With the Partisans

On one wintery morning at the end of November 1942, we noticed a group of about ten people well armed approaching our bunker. Panic broke out among us at the thought that they were Germans or police tracking us. A few of us started to run away and then we noticed one of them running to us and yelling in Yiddish "Don't run; you have nothing to fear." We immediately recognized our comrade Shepsel Berezowsky armed with a new rifle and hand grenades. After him the entire group came over. It was a partisan unit well armed with rifles, revolvers and hand grenades. Each one of them had a map and compass. They were dressed in military tunics and on their hats they wore the symbol of a five pointed star. They were Soviet citizens who were parachuted for the purpose of organizing partisan units in the vicinity of Pinsk. In the group we recognized one by the name of Sashka Berkovitz, a boy from Kiev who had been the secretary of the Komsomol in Pinsk during 1940-1941. Still on the same day we assembled at a previously appointed place and there, after listening to a few fiery speeches, the partisans picked out from amongst us the younger and more active ones and explained to us that from now on our mission will be to intimidate and spread fear among the Germans and to kill off as many as possible of them and the Polish-Ukrainian police force. Our aim should be to obtain as many weapons as possible and to recruit more and more fighters in our lines. Very soon we succeeded in establishing contact with the peasants of the region and new fighters came with us in the forest every day. Among them were ex-Soviet army men partly armed with weapons. The Soviet recruiting delegation searched through the forest looking for other small partisan groups that were engaged until now in making raids on the civil population in the region or in killing defenseless Jews who they ran into in the forest.

There were partisans who were not ready to join our ranks willingly; the parachuted unit killed them off mercilessly, a very strict discipline was introduced. During the nights we attacked police stations and visiting German soldiers, killed them off and took away their weapons. Partisans who were unarmed cut down telephone poles and disrupted telephone communications so that the attacked could not put through an alarm call for help. Following such attacks the Germans and the police carried out raids on the partisans and ambushes on the roads and the villages. In one of those raids two of the parachuted partisans fell in battle. They were the above mentioned Sashka Berkovitz and Diada Niemitov, both of them known communists. Thanks to them, the Jews in the forest had a feeling of total confidence. They saw to it that enough food was provided for the elderly and those who were less active. We were very much grieved by their deaths and right after that the situation of the Jews in the forest became aggravated. As I said before, numerous local peasants from the region mobilized in the forest who were affected by the poisonous anti-Semitic propaganda and their relationship to us was therefore hostile. Many of them actually couldn't stand the fact that Jews were living in the forest. Quite often they used to challenge us: "You handed over the gold and silver to the Germans, but to us you came to save your lives." These elements were not always subject to the supervision of the

commanders who were partly moved to the forest of Bilin in order to contact the partisans of that vicinity. They also accused the Jews of being the cause of the German raids on the partisans due to their night actions and attacks on peaceful citizens in the villages. They started to demand of Jews that they encountered in the forest to leave the place and wander further to another location. We found in the forest bodies of Jews killed by these partisans. Unfortunately, we were unable to determine exactly who were the murderers. Meanwhile, new commanders appeared in the forest who were partly influenced by the inhabitants of the region and among them was Vania Gurian and his unit who, as people related, murdered many Jews who his group met on their way in the forest.

Two boys, Yankel Divinsky and Yudel Schuster, who could not acclimatize themselves to the hard life in the forest made up their minds to return to the little ghetto. They were seized and shot as soon as they arrived. After several days the remaining few in the little ghetto were also murdered by the Teutons.

A group of partisans once came over to our bunkers and started to repeat the old song refrain: the last remnant of Jews in town has already been destroyed while you came to live under our protection. The gold and silver you have handed over to the Germans but here you live at our expense. Nevertheless, this group advised us that we could not continue that way for very long, and if we wanted to live we must obtain for ourselves weapons. They even pointed out the name of a village where a wedding was to take place and where undoubtedly a few policemen would participate. Our mission was to kill the police and rob them of their weapons. The commander called on me and said: "You are the commander of this group: Here I am giving you two rifles and you choose a few of your comrades and start out on your way. You have in front of you a distance of about twenty five kilometers. In the morning the day after tomorrow we shall come here to see what you have accomplished. If you return without weapons, you will not recognize your place here. For the two rifles you are responsible with your head, without them there is no sense for you to return to the forest." They wished us luck and departed.

With the rifles in my hands I turned to comrades asking them who was ready to come along with me for that mission. The first one who volunteered was the engineer Sholeh Rimland, although he never in his life had handled a rifle and didn't know how to use it. After him Luba Nagel, Moshe Fitel and Moshe the smith from Kozelitchin volunteered. Berl Feldman who was well acquainted with the neighborhood in that region came along as a guide. I gave one rifle to Nagel who was an ex-officer in the Polish army and besides that a strong and responsible man and the other rifle I left for myself. It was a freezing and snowy Saturday night when Sh. Rimland said goodbye to his sister and we all proceeded on our way. In the morning we were already lying well camouflaged on the side of the road leading to the village. About ten o'clock in the morning the wedding party passed by accompanied by music and song and among them, two armed policemen. All day we spent lying in the snow; from the village we heard the sound of music and dancing. We divided among ourselves our missions: I, rifle in hand and Sholeh Rimland were supposed to enter the room of the wedding. Nagel with the second rifle and the remaining comrades were to remain outside and to make noise as if the house was surrounded by scores of partisans. When evening came we began our action. Myself and Rimland entered the room and by loud shouting I ordered all present to keep their hands up. A policeman who was sitting near the bride grabbed his rifle which was hanging near him on the wall and jumped through the

window outside. At once we heard from the outside a shot and the yelling "Hurrah" We did not have the time or interest to observe the scared peasants standing with their hands up. We ran outside and there we saw Nagel wrestling with the policeman on the ground and the snow near them was stained with blood. I immediately struck the head of the policeman with the butt of my rifle and I put a bullet in him. In a minute his rifle was in our hands. I was greatly gratified to see Nagel getting up still in good health and in one piece. The blood in the snow was that of the policeman Nagel had shot and I had only finished the job.

The wedding was disrupted and the previously celebrating peasants left in a hurry and locked themselves in their houses. The second policeman succeeded in escaping in the darkness. We did not remain in the village very long because only two kilometers from there was a German guard. After we returned we heard shouting and shooting from the village but we succeeded with rapid steps to approach the edge of the forest and here we were practically home. We were informed later that the policeman we shot had participated in the raid in which Berl Pomeranetz and others were murdered.

On the following morning the partisans visited us and when they found out that we had brought back a captured rifle and after they heard our story, the commander complimented us with the saying "molodtzi Rebjata" (brave boys), and wishing us well they departed. The relationship changed a little for the better, they having been convinced that Jews also are capable of accomplishing things. In December 1942 raids were carried out in the forest by the Germans. The armed partisan forces in the forest of Zawishe mostly moved to the forest of Bilin and took with them only a few of us, Dr. Vlodavsky who was useful to them as a physician, his brother Chonon, Aaron Karulinsky as a butcher, and Sh. Berezowsky who owned a revolver. Again the partisans ordered us to obtain weapons, otherwise our life was not secured in the forest. The Soviet commanders moved over to the forest of Bilin and in the Zawishe forest there remained only partisans of the local population, who, as I mentioned before, had a hostile relationship with Jews. One day their group attacked the bunker where Sholesh Rimland and his group were located and brutally stabbed to death with their bayonets twelve Jews: Sholesh Rimland and his sister, two children of Dr. Batlin, Baruch Gertman, A. Gorodetzky and others. From that group there remained alive only Sh. Eisenstein who was also stabbed but not fatally. After the murderers departed he somehow was able to reach another group although he was seriously wounded and bleeding. In that group he found Simon Feinstein and his sons and others who gave him aid and comfort and so saved his life.

We reorganized into a group of fifteen people and we decided to quit the forest of Zawishe that had swallowed up a considerable number of Jewish victims. Chaim Yudel Resnick who was well acquainted with the geography of the region led us in a wintery night in January 1943 to the forest of Bilin. We again constructed for ourselves bunkers in a forsaken corner in the bushes of the forest. Again we felt the lack of weapons and as in the first days after we had escaped from the ghetto we were wandering nights in the neighborhood looking for food and clothing in the isolated farms and villages.

One night when together with two other boys we were trampling in the snow around the farmhouses of Smulnik. We suddenly heard the footsteps of conversing people approaching us. Our ears became more attentive and surprisingly it was clear to us that the people in the group

were conversing in Yiddish. Who could those people be? How could Jews reach a place where human footsteps were so seldom seen? Here they were near us, but were unable to see us for the reason that we were hiding behind trees covered with snow. We could no longer restrain ourselves and we jumped in front of them. Flabbergasted, they remained standing not knowing who we were. Soon we fell into each other's arms, embraced and kissed each other. In that group were: N. Kotzиковitz, Nachum Eisenstein, the brothers Bertzik and Itzel Odrizinsky and Neftali Feldman. Till then we had not known anything about them nor did they know anything about us. They had an opportunity to escape from the lumber factory where they worked under heavy guard and came here in the forest. Every one of them was hidden by gentile friends but they were constantly in contact with each other. Once a week they used to meet at an appointed place during the four months they were hiding. Fate wished it that we should meet in one of these encounters. We were standing for a long time in the snowy field and told each other our adventures. At dawn we separated and each group went its way, but only after making an appointment to meet again. Our comrades in the bunker were very happy to hear when we told them about our previous night's meeting. After a month's time we succeeded in finding partisans among whom were old acquaintances from the forests of Kritishin and Zawishe. Here we also met a few boys to this date we had only heard about such as Yankel Resnick, M. Rosengarten, N. Baum, S. Kirz and Zivia Cechanovsky. After they escaped from the ghetto they ran into a group of Soviet ex-clerks in Yanove armed with weapons and thanks to them they avoided all the tribulations we had to go through in the forest till then.

Our situation improved. The forest kept filling up with new fighters. A large group of Soviet prisoners of war who had worked on the harbor of Pinsk succeeded in reaching us one day bringing with them a great quantity of weapons. A unit of about thirty Germans, which came from Yanove to the village of Kursin under the command of a supply officer (that officer had caused us untold suffering in the ghetto) for the purpose of requisitioning cattle for the German army, was surrounded by the partisans and killed like dogs. All their light weapons including machine guns were captured by the partisans. In this battle especially Dr. Vlodavsky distinguished himself. The provisions officer, who knew him well from the ghetto, kissed his feet and begged with tears "Herr Doktor, haben sie mitleid ich habe eine frau und kinder zu house." (Mr. Doctor, have mercy I have a wife and children at home.) It is proper to note that this miserable creature was active and instrumental in murdering our women and children at the time the ghetto was destroyed. Dr. Vlodavsky shot him like a dog. After that we captured a large group (about sixty people) of Bulbovtzi, and after their weapons were taken away from them they were honored with "special treatment." The aim of the units of the Bulbovtzi, who were composed of Ukrainian traitors, was to fight for an independent "Ukraina," but at every opportunity they killed defenseless Jews they ran into in the forest.

I remember that right after that the commander of the partisan regiment came to our camp accompanied by a few Partisans and officially signed me up for the regiment. Before that Rachel Resnick and Bobo Sulivian were accepted as nurses. The separation from my comrades was very hard on me since we had gone through our mutual sufferings for the last six months together. I realized, however, that the situation had entirely been changed. In the regiment the discipline was very strict since the Soviet commanders introduced military regulations and partisans who wanted to go outside of the camp were obligated to provide themselves with a permit from the staff. At that time a small group of Jews from Drohitchin reached the forest. They escaped from

the camp of Radostov near Drohitchin where they were engaged in forced labor. All the Jewish groups were now under the protection of the regiment and thanks to that, they could move around freely in the region without fear and were not afraid of attacks by traitors as had happened before, during the first months in the forest of Zawishe. When I reached the partisan camp I saw a large group of fighters with wagons loaded with food provisions, clothing and live inventory. They had just returned from an action in the town of Lubashov which was already "Yudenrein." The Germans who were in town at the time of the raid were hiding in the old Capusin monastery, which due to its thick walls it was impenetrable for the fighting partisans with their light weapons. After the Germans' wires were severed and cut, the partisans spread out over the town and loaded on wagons anything and everything that came into their hands. During their retreat from the town German reinforcements arrived from Kamen-Kashirsk and a skirmish developed in which the young partisan David Odrizinsky was wounded. I was sitting near his bed and talked to him but he was unable to recognize anyone and after a few days died.

We received the news about the defeat of the Germans near Stalingrad. Daily, new fighting units joined the partisans in the forest. The regiment turned into a brigade under the name of Molotov that was composed of five regiments and each regiment had its own zone of operation in which destruction and attacks on the German occupation forces were carried out. Quite often we used to capture German prisoners who always argued that they were innocent. There was no lack of weapons and each partisan was armed. Our brigade was in close contact with the staff of partisans of White Russia. Our brigade captured the entire region south of the canal that connects "Pripiet" and the "Bug" and which was known as the "Partisan Zone." Near the canal we constructed fortified trenches and partisans manned them so the Germans could not cross the canal to our zone. Frequently, there occurred skirmishes between the partisans and German military units which were retreating and suffering losses. They battered the forests with long range rockets and bombed them from the air but without success. Hitler's heroes did not dare enter our zone while partisans were able to reach even the town proper.

One night a group of partisans entered the town aiming at the capture of the commander of the police, the Ukrainian traitor Peterenco, in order to bring him alive to the forest. They discovered him in the village of Mohilna. A battle developed with the police in which the sought commander was killed but the partisans returned without casualties to their bases. This action greatly aroused the anger of the Germans and on the following day they bombarded the forest but as usual without results. This daring action aroused fear among the Teutons in town. As we were informed, their forces in town received reinforcements of military units fearing repetitions of such raids.

Yankel Resnick and David Kagan one day discovered in the forest of Werchustche a group of about fifteen Jews who lived in hiding under inhuman conditions. By actually risking their lives they brought over that group to the Jewish camp in the partisan zone. They had to walk a distance of thirty kilometers and to cross the railroad tracks which were well guarded by the Germans and then ferry the group across the canal. In that group there were also children who were too weak to follow, but with their last strength they all reached their destination. In the Jewish camp they were soon rehabilitated and some of them were accepted as fighters in the partisan units. In the camp a tannery was established and Jewish tanners produced leather for the manufacture of boots for the partisans. In the village of Odrizin Jews worked in the flour mill

and milled flour for the regiment. Zivia Cechanovsky was informed that her uncle Zion Volovelsky was hiding in the stable of a peasant in the village of Ossiewitz. Together with Hioma Baum and a few more partisans they reached the village and brought her uncle Ben Zion from there together with a few other Jews who were hiding with him in the stable. They looked wretched and swollen from hunger and cold after staying in the stable almost a whole year in filth and without sunlight. They also were rehabilitated and received again the look of human beings. At that time a group of about forty Jewish partisans reached our brigade from the zone of Brest mostly from Wlodava and partly with weapons. They were heartily accepted and were distributed among our regiments. While wandering in the forests I frequently ran into Jewish partisans who fought with weapons in their hands against the Nazi beasts.

The activities of the partisans became stronger and more numerous from day to day. In a camouflaged place in the forest we built an airfield and Soviet planes parachuted there weapons and equipment and newspapers and periodicals. In the partisan staff there were a few radio installations and we used to listen to the news of the fronts. They also printed special bulletins about the happenings on the front and circulated them among the population.

In January 1944 the movement of trains increased sharply carrying back from Russia in a western direction retreating and beaten units of the German army. One night a large group of our partisans was ordered to cut and destroy the railroad tracks. Each one of us received a primitive homemade explosive mine. We approached the tracks and when a German guard noticed us he hurriedly ran away after we started shooting at him. Every one of us put the mine under the rails and on order we lit the fuse and we stepped back a distance. We watched from a distance the flaming fuses eaten up by the fire and after that we heard the explosions that cut the Railroad and we returned to the forest. From afar we heard other similar explosions which were the work of another partisan group. During the night the railroad tracks on the Pinsk-Brest line were cut in a number of places and a few trains filled with troops were derailed and destroyed. Actions like these disrupted the retreat of the Teutons. In February young soldiers of the Red army reached us who were received with tears of joy. They were sent directly from the front.

March 1944, the roads were covered with the retreating Hitler army. Like wounded animals they ran in a westerly direction. Every day we heard over the radio announcements telling about cities and towns that had been cleared of the occupation. The front was nearing our town and our partisan units were not sitting with folded arms but impeded and destroyed the retreating broken up German troops. The railroad tracks were cut and they moved with their heavy weapons and equipment through water absorbed fields and side roads. When the retreating German army reached our zone, a heavy battle developed between us. The forests were surrounded, sprayed with heavy weapons and bombed from the air. We retreated east in the direction of the territory that had already been recaptured by the Red army. A bloody battle developed near the river Stir in which many partisans were killed, among them our Dr. Vlodayvsky. Pursued by the wounded and angry German beasts, we escaped through swamps and waterways. Our only possible rescue would be to escape through the front lines and join up with the Red Soviet army. When we began to hear the thundering of the Soviet artillery, we knew that our rescue was near and that increased our strength in the heavy battle. In April 1944 we met face to face with the armed units of the Red army. The jolly and good-hearted soldiers received us heartily. After a short rest, the young and able-bodied partisans joined up with the regular Red army and we were distributed

among the various units. We parted with each other but we were happy. Now the slogan of the Red army which was to destroy the Nazi beasts in their lair was nearer to being accomplished. The Soviet troops were successfully pursuing the German beasts who were running in panic leaving behind them multitudes of dead bodies which were strewn on each and every step. I could see the German prisoners of war in the thousands as ugly and miserable creatures. The bloodthirsty and clean-cut officers of the third Reich, of yesterday, were now scared creatures and ugly as to squeal on each other and pointing out on one or another as being a S.S. officer.

On January 14, 1945 we attacked Warsaw. Soviet tanks and the Red air force strafed and bombed the city. Brutal battles took place here because the German army tried to put up resistance, but it was of no avail. In this battle I was wounded and was taken to the hospital there. I found out a few days later that Warsaw had been taken. I was wounded in my arm and after I was operated on I was given a short furlough which I used for visiting the neighboring towns such as Otvotzk, Garvlin, Ossaitzk and others, towns that were once full of Jewish life and culture. In the houses of gentiles in these places I saw all kinds of Jewish property such as furniture, clothing, and silverware that was robbed from the Jewish homes whose owners were massacred in such a tragic way, and here I saw Jewish gravestones used as sidewalks near the houses. When I started a conversation with the local Polish residents they were wondering how a Soviet soldier was capable of conversing in fluent Polish. When I told them that I was Jewish, they felt as if burned with scalding water. I pointed to the gravestones and I told them: "It seems that it wasn't enough that you robbed the property of the Jews that they left in their houses when they were still alive, you also robbed the dead and sacrilegied their graves." That is something that will not be forgiven and I chased them out of my sight. The spirit of revenge in me was even more strengthened.

After two weeks I was again on the front this time on German territory. Berlin was not very far away and every soldier knew that with the fall of Berlin the war would be at an end. I was attached to the Eighth army which was under orders to capture Berlin. Here we were standing near the river "Oder," the last German line of defense. Brutal battles were being fought here. The German beasts were fighting here stubbornly before their agony of death. They bombed and strafed from the air and numerous casualties fell on both sides. Finally we succeeded in crossing the river and from then on the operations were easy. Long lines of thousands of prisoners on their way to Soviet Russia snaked along on the roads. I observed them and I wondered, "are these the animals, that not long ago had thrown the whole world into fear, chaos and destruction?" I remembered the day in 1941 when they entered our town. Then, they sowed death and destruction on each and every step. They had destroyed the world and caused the death of millions of innocent people, murdered six million Jews, and now ... Now they were lying here in front of my eyes like lepered dogs. This was the chosen superior race, these were the heroes of the future 1000 year old Reich. How little, humiliated and helpless creatures they had become now.

I remember our entry into Berlin at the beginning of May 1945. Here we were marching in the streets of Berlin and our hearts were gladdened by the sight of the destroyed city. Whole blocks were turned into heaps of destruction and underneath were the rotted bodies of the inhabitants. Here and there you could hear a shot. In the streets you didn't see a living German. We found them hiding like mice in their bunkers or cellars. We chased them from there into the streets,

many of them masked in women's clothing with which they covered up their military or S.S. uniforms.

Soon a cease fire was announced and after the surrender agreement was signed, my unit was transferred to Saxony.

In 1946, I returned home knowing well that I wouldn't find anyone there, but the will and curiosity was aroused in me to see again the place where I was raised and where for many generations existed a Jewish way of life in which through joy or sorrow Jews brought up their children continuing the long chain of the eternal Jewish people. When I stepped down from the train, I felt that my heart started to beat much faster. I had been absent for a period of four years. It seemed that the time was not so very long but the change was conspicuous, that I was unable to recognize the place. My God ... Where was I? Was this Yanove? Around me there existed a kind of emptiness and horror. The Railroad station which was always bustling with Jews was no longer there. The good-hearted horse and wagon drivers who had found employment at the Railroad station were gone. The Burstein Gorodetzky factory that employed many Jews was not there. I was standing deepened in my thoughts and I felt choking sobs in my throat. A gentile who recognized me embraced me in his arms and kissed me. With him I traveled to town and on the way he informed me that there wasn't even one Jew left in town. Some Jewish boys visited the town, like myself, they were soldiers from the front but where they had gone from here he did not know. Rain started to fall as if the heavens were crying together with me. Darkness came and the gentile invited me into his house. A few neighbors assembled there, all of them old acquaintances who were glad to see me.

I lay on my bed but I could not fall asleep. The next day very early in the morning I was in the streets of the town. Here in front of me was the market place which used to be the Jewish center in town, all burned as if entirely erased from the earth. No longer were in existence the houses on the round porches of which used to sit Jewish mothers surrounded by their children, and talking among themselves pleasurably or gossiping a little about this or that. No longer were here the good-hearted and tired working people and merchants. There was none of the Jewish youth who evenings filled the streets with song and laughter. I didn't see any more the storekeepers sitting at the doors of their stores looking in at a newspaper when the time allowed or discussing the political situation of the world. All around there was dead silence, grief and desolation.

Local gentiles who knew me were passing by and stopped near me, extending greetings and contemplated with sorrow and grief the destruction. Others passing by looked at me sideways and put themselves in a position as if they didn't see me. I am certain that they knew me well but their conscience was not clear. They and those like them robbed Jewish property and appropriated Jewish houses that had remained intact. An officer of the Soviet secret police who passed by and noticed a large crowd of people around me asked what was happening here and for my identification papers, but soon we recognized each other. He was one of my ex-commanders in a partisan unit. We entered the house that once belonged to Nusel Snitofsky. In this house where numerous offices had been established, I met a number of partisan comrades who held high positions. These were not on the front but were appointed to various local missions after the town was cleared of the Germans. In their company I felt comfortable. I told them of everything that had happened to me since we parted. My chest was decorated with

medals and I told them the occasions on which I was awarded with them. I spent the day in their company. In my memory there was impressed a list of names of local gentiles who collaborated with the Germans and who had now to account for their deeds. My friends informed me that all these had long ago been sentenced and exiled to places of no return, thanks to the testimony of Jews who were here before me, among them Rachel Resnick, B. Kubal, I. Garbar, B.Z. Feinstein and others.

In the evening we were going to the movie performance. We reached the great synagogue which was converted into a moving picture and house of culture. I felt that my heart stopped beating in me. A huge crowd of gentiles, men and women, young and old were streaming to the synagogue. The hall filled to capacity. I sat on my seat among my comrades who were talking to me but I was dumbfounded and was unable to answer them. I felt that in another minute I would collapse and start to cry hysterically. My heart became heavy and I recalled that tonight was Saturday eve and all kinds of reminiscences came to my mind. Here I was going as a child with my father to the synagogue. At that time the house also was filled, but entirely with different people. Here I saw them all standing at the Eastern wall of the synagogue, respectable citizens, the most venerable and sophisticated in town. The Sabbath lights were burning, and the Cantor was standing with great respect at the altar and with the traditional melody sang the Sabbath prayers, Jews were receiving their approaching Sabbath and we children were standing near our parents and praying together with the congregation.

Suddenly, the lights were extinguished, the hall remained dark and the performance began. I took advantage of the darkness and when no one noticed me I sneaked outside and broke out in bitter tears. I found a seat at the destroyed house of Sh. Baruch the Shochet which is opposite the synagogue and I mourned the destruction of my town. From across the street sounds of laughter and amusement reached my ear; seemingly the film greatly pleased the viewers. At once I got up and I decided to get out of there. I could not remain there any longer. I must leave this place forever and the sooner the better. On the following day I again visited my comrades and they asked me where I had disappeared to, since it was a delightful film. I told them that I didn't feel well, but they knew that I felt brokenhearted. They tried to console me and offered me a good position. I told them that I had to go to Pinsk for a few days and then I would return. On the same day I departed from Yanove forever.

I arrived at Pinsk; that city was also not recognizable, that city that was famous in the world for its great Rabbis and for its extraordinary great personalities was almost now "Yudenrein." There was no trace of the great Jewish center. I met wandering Jews, all of them soldiers, who demobilized from the army. I found here also a few Jews from Yanove: Yitzchak and Samuel Garbar, Fivel Kaplan, David Tabatchnick and Nachum Eisenstein. They had also visited Yanove before me and they were of the same opinion that they couldn't get used to and live in the place where thousands of our brothers and sisters had been murdered by the German beasts.

At that time we heard rumors of a Soviet-Polish agreement according to which former Polish citizens would be allowed back to Poland and from there obviously there was the possibility of wandering further into the great world. The feeling of nationalism was aroused in us, perhaps after all we shall succeed to reach the shores of the land of Israel. The arrangement of the necessary formalities took a few months and after receiving the permit we left for Poland. Our

first stop the city of Lodz, where Jews that succeeded being rescued and who remained alive, were concentrated after the bloody war. In Lodz were also concentrated Jews who were exiled at the beginning of the war deep into Russia and when the war ended they started to return from there. Among them were also families from our town who were exiled to Siberia a few days before the German-Russian war broke out.

The atmosphere in Lodz was decidedly homelike. There existed a Jewish committee and there were there representatives of the "Joint Distribution Committee" that cared for the rescued Jewish remnant. Among the Jews concentrated in Lodz were many who were rescued miraculously from the concentration camps and from the gas chambers, most of them ill and weak needing medical attention. For all those the committee provided help as much as possible. The Polish population generally was not pleased with all that and most importantly with the fact that Jews still remained alive and frequently they organized attacks on them. From here the Jewish refugees wandered further into conquered Germany where in the captured zone existed "UNRRA Camps" and there the refugees could rest for a length of time, and rehabilitate themselves with the help of UNRRA, Joint and other establishments, and from there finally to reach some shores of hope, be it, the land of Israel or the United States of America, Australia or South and Central America.

On one of the few days before I left Poland I was confronted in one of the streets of Lodz with the Polish priest from Yanove about whom I related earlier. Seeing his face, my blood started boiling in me. This creature had caused us so much aggravation and suffering in the ghetto and I personally was involved in it greatly. I started to shadow him and not to let him out of my sight. I was alone and it wasn't a simple matter to stop and arrest a priest in one of the main streets of Lodz. Fortunately, two Jewish boys happened to pass by and I asked them to alarm the police. Before the police arrived the priest noticed that he was being shadowed and by a sharp turn he entered a side street and then into one of the courts. For a minute he disappeared from my sight but soon I discovered him again hiding in a Rabbi's house. Here he asked me in Russian "what I want of him." I answered him "It is already five years that I have been looking for you, you bloody dog and now you shall not escape." He went back into the street, ran into a church and was hiding behind one of the icons. At that time the two boys and a Russian patrol arrived, a few soldiers headed by an officer. Myself, I was still clad in a uniform decorated with many medals. After I told them in short about the activities of this creature during the German occupation, we started to search him out in the dark church but without success, the fugitive had meanwhile disappeared. Suddenly, I noticed an open door leading to stairs to the next house. I climbed those stairs and I found him there in company with two more priests. He tried again to escape but this time I grabbed him fast and with the help of the soldiers we brought him to the Commandanture. Aaron Pomeranetz and N. Eisenstein who were at that time in Lodz immediately went to the Commandanture and testified as to the activities of this traitor in our town. We were invited a few more times to the investigation before the court. In between, I myself left Poland, but as I was told later by Aaron and Nachum, he received the punishment that he deserved according to Soviet justice.

We live now in our land in our independent democratic country as free citizens of a free land. We cannot forget our parents, brothers and sisters who to our great sorrow were not destined to this free life. Every year on the thirteenth day of "Tishre" we the Yanove community here in

Israel assemble to commemorate the martyrs of our town so that our children and grandchildren after us shall remember what the German murderers have done to us.

REMEMBER WHAT THE AMALEKITES HAVE DONE TO YOU.

Haifa: 1959-1960.

-- Translated from the Hebrew by J. Wall, 1971

-- web edition by D. Holladay and C. Navy, 1993

1993 Afterword

The name for Yanove on modern maps is Ivanovo. The town of Ivanovo is 25 miles west of Pinsk. It is 75 miles east of Brest (which itself is just inside of the Russian-Polish border). Ivanovo is 18 miles east of Drogicin (Drohitchin). (The interest in Drohitchin is that some of Mordechai's American relatives came from Drohitchin.)

Mordechai Bezdesky lived in Israel after World War II. He married and had a son. Mordechai died in the early 1980's.

The Einsatzgruppen

Just before the German invasion of Russia, the Nazis organized a special force within the S.D. called the Einsatzgruppen ("special duty" group or "striking force" group are the best translations). This organization of 3,000 men was in charge of murdering all the Jews in the zone of the invasion of Russia. The Einsatzgruppen murdered between 1.5 and 2 million Jews, mostly by shooting. Jews in the rest of Nazi occupied Europe were mostly sent to death camps.

The Einsatzgruppen were divided into 4 units, designated A, B, C, and D. The A group worked in the Baltic states and Northern Russia, the B group worked in the zone containing Yanove/Ivanovo, the C and D groups worked in southern Russia.

From the Affidavit of Otto Ohlendorf, November 5, 1945, which is quoted on page 170 of Lucy Dawidowicz's book "The War Against the Jews 1933-1945":

"[The unit assigned to killing the Jews of a given place] would enter a village or city and order the prominent Jewish citizens to call together all Jews for the purpose of resettlement. They were requested to hand over their valuables to the leader of the unit, and shortly before the execution to surrender their outer clothing. The men, women, and children were led to a place of execution which in most cases was located next to a more deeply excavated anti-tank ditch. They were then shot, kneeling or standing, and the corpses thrown into the ditch."

Martin Gilbert's book "Atlas of the Holocaust" shows the slaughter of at least 1,000 Jews in Ivanovo on September 24, 1942. The book mentions that on the Day of Atonement in 1942 and on the following day, 30,000 Jews were murdered in eastern Europe.

-- D. Holladay