

# THE LITHUANIAN SLAUGHTER OF ITS JEWS

The Testimonies from 121 Jewish survivors of the Holocaust in Lithuania,  
recorded by Leyb Koniuchowsky, in Displaced Persons' camps (1946-48)



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Translated into English by Dr Jonathan Boyarin  
Book Compiled by David Solly Sandler

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## FOREWORD

This book contains first-hand accounts from 121 Jewish survivors of the Holocaust in Lithuania, recorded by Leib Koniuchowsky in Displaced Persons' camps from 1946 to 1948.

### HISTORY

Grand Duke Vytautas the Great ruled Lithuania from 1386 to 1430. Early in his reign he granted Jews formal privileges, which formed the basis of the legal, political and economic structure of Lithuanian Jewry until the end of the eighteenth century.

More than five centuries after Vytautas, however, Jewish life in Lithuania was abruptly ended. Lithuanian Jews were slaughtered en masse in the second half of 1941.

### HORRORS

The testimonies published here tell of the destruction of Jewish life in Lithuania. Perpetrators of the massacre, most of them Lithuanians, acted with enthusiasm and in many cases without help or supervision from the invading Germans.

The testimonies are not pleasant to read. They tell of the horrors and evils inflicted on Lithuanian Jews. Many echo the same pattern of degradation and slaughter: Lithuanians first attacked Jews morally and spiritually, imposing assorted humiliating labours, torture and other evils; then began their physical annihilation.

Armed bands of self-described "partisans" took control of Lithuanian towns as soon as the occupying Soviets left. Often, even before the Germans arrived, these bands started to terrorise and abuse the Jewish population: Partisans and others broke into Jewish homes and brazenly looted Jewish property. Jailings, torture, and summary executions began shortly afterward. First to be killed were Jews with Soviet connections; later, any perceived or invented offence could mean execution, or a Jew could be killed for no reason at all. Jews' non-moveable possessions were claimed by their Lithuanian neighbors, particularly the partisans and their families.

In towns and villages, new civilian administrations suddenly emerged from underground with the German invasion. Lithuanian mayors, police chiefs and civil servants worked hand in hand with the partisans and a few Germans. These new governments often worked to extort money, jewellery and household goods from the Jews.

Jews were harassed and subjected to harsh decrees. They were forced to wear yellow armbands, forbidden to walk on sidewalks, barred from trading or even talking with non-Jews, and permitted to leave their houses only at certain times each day. Jews had to report for forced labour that in many cases was designed to be demeaning, harsh and degrading. Guarded by armed Lithuanians, they were constantly tormented, humiliated, beaten and starved.

Jews were forced to remove Torah scrolls and holy books from synagogues and study houses and burn them. Rabbis were humiliated, often having their beards cut or ripped off. Jewish women were frequently raped, and often tortured and killed afterward.

Within several weeks of the German invasion, most Jews were forced out of their homes and confined in small, closed areas, without food or water, and subject to constant harrassment and torture as they were prepared for the final slaughter. Many died during this process. Often their former neighbors turned up to watch Jews being beaten and bludgeoned. In other cases, Jews were crowded into tiny ghettos in rundown areas. Hunger, thirst, and filth was common, and disease followed.

Eventually, the Jews were taken to pits dug in nearby forests to be shot. Amid the chaos of this organized slaughter, many were buried alive in the pits. At times partisans broke small children on their knees or bashed their heads on trees before throwing them, half dead, into a pit.

## **WHO COMMITTED CRIMES, AND WHO KNEW**

From the 121 testimonies published here, it is clear that the slaughter of the Jews was widely known. Townsfolk saw Jews being confined, tortured, abused and taken away. Peasants with wagons at times helped to transport Jews and their property.

Besides that portion of the population that actively participated in the slaughter of the Jews, or engaged in torture or rape, many local people appropriated or "inherited" Jews' houses. The same happened with household property, including the clothes Jews had to remove at the pits before they were murdered. Money and jewellery not taken by the Germans or by those in charge was extorted by townsfolk or rural people.

It was common for Jews to entrust their property to Lithuanian friends or neighbors, "until after the war." The mass slaughter meant that most often, this property was never reclaimed. In some cases Lithuanians later betrayed Jews who tried to recover their property.

On the other side, there were Lithuanians who were honest, and who risked their own lives and the lives of their family members to help Jews. Today we salute, honour, and thank them. Moreover, it is important to recognize that contemporary Lithuanians are not guilty of the crimes of earlier generations.

Yet the current Lithuanian government, unlike the German government, is reluctant to take full responsibility for genocide committed on its territory. Indeed, some of the perpetrators have been honoured as heroes for resisting the Soviet occupation. They have commemorative plaques and streets named after them. None of these "heroes" were prosecuted when alive.

The extent of participation in the genocide of Jews and collaboration with Nazis is still downplayed in Lithuania and the current Lithuanian government is seeking to legislate their responsibility away.

We hope that this attitude and honouring of criminals will change.

***David Solly Sandler***

## **IN MEMORY OF MY BELOVED**

FATHER MAUSHE-JOSEPH KONIUCHOWSKY  
MOTHER FRUME-LIBE KONIUCHOWSKY-DREJERMAN

Both shot September 10, 1941, together with the rest of  
the Jews of Alytus ghetto by Lithuanian murderers

## **FOR MY DEAREST**

SISTER SLOVE KONIUCHOWSKY (CHAZANOWITZ)  
Died September 8, 1936 in Alytus

HER HUSBAND JAKOV CHAZANOWITZ  
Shot at the end of 1941 in Alytus ghetto by Lithuanian murderers

BROTHER KOPL  
Died in Israel October 29, 1974

BROTHER EPHROJIM  
Died in Montevideo, Uruguay December 18, 1983

*Leyb Koniuchowsky*

## LEYB KONIUCHOWSKY

*Leyb was the author and collector of these testimonies and a survivor of the Holocaust in Lithuania.*



Leyb Koniuchowsky was born in Lithuania on 18 November 1910.

He graduated in 1928 from the Jewish Real Gymnasium in Vilkomir, and then studied civil engineering. He was an engineer by profession and resided in Kaunas (Kovno).

During the German occupation he lived in the Kaunas Ghetto and worked there until his escape.

He found shelter in a bunker at a farmer's home where he remained until the liberation of Lithuania by the Red Army in 1944.

From 1944-46, he wandered through the war battered towns of Lithuania, collecting testimonies from the few Jews that survived.

The testimonies focus on the extermination of the Jews and the destruction of the local towns and villages. Koniuchowsky was meticulous about the accuracy and authenticity of the information in the testimonies, and even had the witnesses sign their testimonies. The testimonies include the names of thousands of victims of the Holocaust, the names of their murderers and those who had collaborated with the Germans.

Koniuchowsky continued to collect testimonies in She'erit Hapletah DP camps in Germany, where he lived for a few years.

From Germany he immigrated to the United States in 1951 and settled in New York, with help from the HIAS organization.

He lived in Israel between 1975 and 1982 and then later lived in Florida. He passed away in 2003.

## AKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND THANKS

Leyb Koniuchowsky's foresight and diligence in collecting these testimonies deserves to be acknowledged, recognised and honoured. Hopefully this publication will help towards this.

The testimonies collected by Leyb have been in archives for decades and their publishing is long overdue. I have been honoured to have been given the opportunity to publish them and salute and thank Leyb Koniuchowsky for leaving this legacy for us and generations yet unborn.

Also I thank Antoinette Weber for proof reading the book.

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# THE LITHUANIAN SLAUGHTER OF ITS JEWS

## THE HISTORY OF THE JEWS IN LITHUANIA

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THE HISTORY OF JEWS IN LITHUANIA

*By Dr Mark Wischnitzer:*

THE OUTBREAK OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR;

*By Louis Stein*

JEWS IN INDEPENDENT LITHUANIA

*By Dr Mendel Sudarsky*

THE LAST YEAR OF JEWISH LIFE IN LITHUANIA

*By Dr Shmuel Grinhovz*

Note: All references are from the book *Lite: Volume I*, published in Yiddish in New York in 1951.

Translated from Yiddish manuscript by Jonathan Boyarin November 29, 1989 New York

# THE HISTORY OF JEWS IN LITHUANIA

*By Dr Mark Wischnitzer:*

To the northeast of the Baltic Sea an ancient people, the Lithuanians, have lived for many centuries. According to their origins and their language, they are a branch of the Indo-European family of nations. Lithuanian, an Indo-Sanskritic language, closely guarded the traces of its distant origins, both in regard to phonetics and syntax.

In ancient times the Lithuanians were divided into tribes. One of them settled the lower regions, and was called Zhemaitija. Another tribe occupied the higher portion of the country, extending as far east as Vilnius and as far south as Kaunas; these were called Lithuanians.

The Nevezhis River, which flows from north to south and empties into the Nemunas outside of Kaunas, was the border between the two tribes.

The people of Zhemaitija lived in isolation among their ancient forests, in scattered settlements near lakes or on the banks of rivers and streams. They had lived as an independent people for hundreds of years, with their own prince and army. The Zhemaitija people stubbornly clung to the nature religion of their great-great grandparents. Not until the sixteenth century did the Catholic church strike roots in Zhemaitija.

For many years the people of Zhemaitija conducted wars against their own brethren, the Lithuanians, and against the knights of the Livonian order.

In the thirteenth century Grand Duke Mindaugas, the first crown prince of Lithuania, succeeded in uniting all of the tribes into a single Lithuanian state.

Grand Duke Gediminas (1316-1341) ruled a huge realm. Thanks to his successful military campaigns and the matches he arranged between his children and neighboring grand dukes, his state grew larger and larger. Gediminas enjoyed the reputation of an intelligent, tolerant and kind-hearted duke. He remained faithful to the ancient Lithuanian religion throughout his life, but was friendly toward those who followed other religions. Gediminas realized that he needed a class of merchant and artisan middlemen. He welcomed foreigners into his expanded territories.

Jewish immigration to Lithuania began during Gediminas' reign. As early as 1349, Jews from Germany escaped to Eastern Europe. Gediminas' heirs continued their ancestor's policy of welcoming immigrants. In those years Lithuania became a major refuge and a new home for those escaping the German Gehennom. Germany and other parts of Europe were suffering the ravages of the Black Plague, and Jews were accused of causing the gruesome epidemic. The level of Jewish immigration to Lithuania increased in the second half of the fourteenth century.

Gediminas' sons, Algirdas and Kestutis, further extended the borders of Lithuania, which became a major power in Eastern Europe. Lithuania controlled large regions between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea.

## **Grand Duke Vytautas and the Privileges Granted to Jews**

Grand Duke Vytautas ruled Lithuania from 1386 until 1430. Early in his reign, in 1388 and 1389, he granted formal privileges to Jews. These formed the basis of the legal, political and economic structure of Lithuanian Jewry from the end of the fourteenth century until the end of the eighteenth century.

During the Middle Ages the Jews lived as a distinctive caste among the various sectors of the surrounding population. Legal privileges which were granted to the Jews, or which they managed to obtain through their own efforts, were the basis of their relations with the state and with the various sectors of the population.

The Privileges of Trakai, the first one granted by Vytautas, was a sort of "Magna Carta" granting personal protection to Jews. The rights enumerated included free movement through the country; full freedom to engage in trade and credit operations; overt defense of the Jewish religion and religious institutions. Specific provisions included the following:

- 1) Any Christian who killed a Jew was to be tried in the general courts, and his possessions would be confiscated by the Grand Duke.
- 2) Provision Number 32, perhaps the most important, concerned the blood libel. It stated that "Papal bulls have confirmed that it is forbidden to Jews, by their own Laws, to use human blood or any other blood. If, however, a Jew is accused of murdering a Christian child, the accusation must be confirmed by three Christians and

three Jews. If the Christian accuser is unable to back up his accusation, the perpetrator of the baseless accusation will suffer the same punishment the Jews would have suffered had he been convicted of the crime."

- 3) A Christian who vandalized a Jewish cemetery was to be punished according to the general statutes then in force, and his possessions were to be confiscated. The Trakai Privileges proclaim the autonomy of the Jewish community and the Jewish courts, which had jurisdiction over internal Jewish disputes.
- 4) In Point 19 of the Privileges, the authority of the Jewish community over its members is backed by the Grand Duke.

The Trakai Privileges were written in the Polish language, in the city of Lutzk, on June 24, 1388.

On June 18, 1389, Vytautas signed a charter of privileges for the Jews of Gardinas (Grodno) in the White Russian language. At that time White Russian was the official language of the Lithuanian government.

The strategic position of the expanded Lithuanian realm was constantly threatened by the tireless German "push toward the east." The murderous German crusaders, under the mask of Christendom, would attack the Lithuanian towns and villages, looting the farms, raping and robbing the women, and causing untold pain, suffering and human sacrifices among the Lithuanian people.

At the battle of Grunwald in 1410, Vytautas decisively defeated the Crusaders, putting an end to the German warriors' plans to occupy the East European countries. Polish military units assisted him in the battle. These events fostered closeness and unity between the two countries. The Jewish refugees from Germany in Lithuania could breathe more easily.

Given Vytautas' accomplishments in the political-strategic area, as well as the economic advances he encouraged, his reign (1386-1410) was considered by the Jews to be the Golden Age of Jewish history in Lithuania.

Among the prisoners whom Vytautas brought back from his military operations against the Tatars at the end of the fourteenth century were Jews and Karaites. These helped to strengthen the Jewish and Karaite elements in Lithuania.

After the death in 1370 of King Casimir the Great of Poland, the crown of Poland passed into the hands of the Hungarian King Ludwig. However, he did not rule for long. He died in 1382 without an heir. His daughter Jadwiga married the Lithuanian Grand Duke Jogaila. Through this match the ruling families of Poland and Lithuania were unified.

The King of Poland was simultaneously the Grand Duke of Lithuania. Jogaila permitted Vytautas to rule Lithuania for the rest of his life. Vytautas, like his grandfather Gediminas, was a tolerant ruler, unswayed by clerical fanaticism.

In the year 1386 the Lithuanian people, together with their Grand Duke Jogaila, accepted the Roman Catholic faith. Nevertheless, aggressive clericalism was held in check during Vytautas' reign.

After Poland and Lithuania were formally unified in 1386, contacts between the two countries became progressively closer. The relations between Jews in Poland and Jews in Lithuania also grew more intensive.

The Jewish community in Lithuania enjoyed normal growth and development through the 52-year reign of Casimir, King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania (1440-1492). Casimir refused to be swayed by Catholic clericalism, and resisted the anti-Semitic tendencies of high religious officials. His attitude was secular and tolerant, and had friends among the humanists of his time. In regard to Jews, Casimir continued Vytautas' policies. At that time the Jews were still the only middlemen in the country. The conditions weren't ripe for competition to arise against them.

During Casimir's reign, the Grand Ducal distilleries were run by Jewish contractors, and staffed by Jewish clerks, employees and guards. Jewish Franchisees ran guest houses along the main trade routes. The Jews loaned small sums to the peasants and the Tatars. The trade, however, was extremely poor. Jews often borrowed money from noblemen and priests in order to conduct business. Jews were very often forced to pawn household goods and clothing in order to borrow money for their commercial affairs.

By the beginning of the seventeenth century the Jews' struggle to earn a livelihood had grown still more difficult. Although the number of Jewish artisans grew, the Christian artisanal guilds forbade Jews from working for non-Jews. They promulgated special regulations affecting Jewish craftsmen. The competition between Jewish and Christian merchants became extremely sharp. Christian merchants and artisans frequently attacked Jews. In the year 1635 a pogrom broke out in Vilna.

The Jesuit Order had become powerful in Lithuania, and the education of youth was under its control. The seminary students harassed Jews, serving as the advance guard in pogroms. The Christian population was poisoned by anti-Semitic literature.

### **Destruction and Restrictions in the Wake of the Muscovite Invasion**

The anti-Jewish attacks in the Ukraine in 1648-1649 initiated a decade of pogroms, slaughters, and epidemics, which ruined a large portion of the Lithuanian Jewish population as well. In 1655 Tsar Alexei Michaelowicz captured Vilna and other parts of Lithuania.

Russian armies and Cossack units under the command of Bogdan Chmielnicki brought death, terror and destruction to the Jewish communities of Vilna and the surrounding region. The Christian population welcomed the enemy, joyfully taking advantage of the opportunity to murder Jews and rob their possessions. Entire Jewish communities in Lithuania were ruined. The survivors were in desperate straits.

The Jewish Council in Lithuania, the highest authoritative body of Lithuanian Jewry, did everything it could to revive communal life and assist individual victims. The Lithuanian rulers provided tax remission and other considerations in order to help the Jews. The Council and the community organs still had to obtain loans in order to pay government taxes and help the Jewish institutions. The impoverishment of the Jews steadily increased. The economic and political decline of Lithuanian Jewry continued throughout the eighteenth century.

Despite this general ruin, Lithuanian Jewry was remarkable for its internal strength, both from a biological and a cultural standpoint. Between 1648 and 1720 the Jewish population increased. The Jews made their way to far-flung towns and villages, where Lithuanian noblemen and peasants needed artisans, innkeepers, middlemen, storekeepers and peddlers. Throughout the eighteenth century the number of Jewish communities continued to increase. Over the course of exactly 150 years, more than a hundred new Jewish communities arose in Zhemaitija and the Vilna region. At the end of the eighteenth century the number of Jews in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was exactly a quarter of a million.

### **Lithuanian Jewry under Russian Rule**

The first division of Poland was carried out in 1772. Russia inherited White Russia, which had a significant Jewish population. During the second partition of Poland in 1793, Russia obtained the entire Minsk region. In the third partition, the majority of Zhemaitija and also Vilna were granted to the Russian Empire.

Those districts which comprised Lithuania were referred to by Nikolai I as the Northwest Region. Tsar Nikolai issued strict orders against the use of the term Lithuania. As far as Jews were concerned, their existing poverty only increased, and many Jews were forced to emigrate to other regions in Russia.

The history of Jews in the conquered Lithuanian territories was the same as that of Jews elsewhere in the Russian Empire. The Russian government forbade Jews from leasing village taverns, and ordered all the Jews to leave the countryside and move to cities.

At the end of the reign of Alexander I, in 1823, the forced evacuation of Jews from the countryside was renewed, and a blood libel was propagated in Velizh. The removal of Jews to the cities further worsened the economic situation of the urban Jewish population.

The Jews greeted the Russian Revolution of 1905 as a sign that better times were coming. There was a conference of Jewish representatives in Vilna, at which a decision was made to found a society "to achieve full and equal rights for the Jewish people in Russia." At the same time the Lithuanians began a struggle for their language, which had been forbidden between 1863 and 1904. Every segment of Lithuanian Jewry enthusiastically welcomed the historic national Lithuanian convention of December 4, 1905, which demanded broad national autonomy for the ethnically Lithuanian regions. Jews united with Lithuanians in the Kaunas regional elections for each of the four Russian dumas, or parliaments.

### **THE OUTBREAK OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR; *By Louis Stein* Lithuanian Jews Are Evacuated to Russia**

The First World War broke out on August 1, 1914. Small towns were burned to the ground, and many Jewish families were ruined. A large portion of the Jewish population was left without livelihood.

The Tsarist army, under the command of General Renenkamf, suffered a bitter defeat at the Mazurian Swamps in East Prussia. The defeat was a terrible humiliation, a stain on the honor of the Tsarist army. The commander in chief of all Russian armed forces was Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaievich. General Janushkewitz had been named the chief of staff. Both of these military leaders were out-and-out anti-Semites. In order to cover up the incompetence, thoughtlessness, robbery and backwardness in transportation lines which had led to the defeat at the front and doomed the Russian army, the general staff invented the idea of blaming "Jewish traitors" for everything that had gone wrong. The reactionary, anti-Semitic press acceded to the general staff's desires. It reported that the Jews had brought about the defeat through providing the enemy with secret information and signals, and that secret, conspiratorial telephone lines had been found inside Jewish homes and study houses.

At the very beginning of the war, while the Russian people were demonstrating in the street in a wave of patriotic fervor, the Russian general staff ordered local commandants to evacuate virtually all of the Jews from Lithuania. This terrible decree ripped out by the roots a Jewish population of nearly 200,000 souls, who abandoned everything they owned. Suddenly a sea of troubles were poured out onto the heads of the Lithuanian Jews. At 12:00 a.m. on May 5, 1915, not a single Jew remained in the area which the Tsarist high command had ordered them to leave.

Many of the Jews who were driven out were unable to ride. They made their way on foot, eventually arriving hungry and weary at railroad stations. The Russian newspapers refused to print announcements from Jewish refugees who were searching for lost children and relatives. The Jewish refugees were resettled in various parts of Great Russia. The Lithuanian Jews were considered exiles, and the Polish Jews as refugees.

### **JEWES IN INDEPENDENT LITHUANIA *By Dr Mendel Sudarsky***

The Russian revolution, which declared the right of peoples to self-determination, began in 1917. Self-determination was also one of President Wilson's famous "14 Points." The Jews and the Lithuanians organized themselves in order to determine the fate of Lithuania, even though Lithuania was still occupied by German military, ruined by battles and by the frequent marches of opposing armies back and forth across its earth.

The Lithuanian refugees in Petrograd (now Leningrad) assembled a parliament, which chose a temporary committee for Lithuania, known as the National Council. Three positions on the council were reserved for Jews. From a moral point of view, the council was successful as a representative of Lithuanian desires. Jews and Lithuanians began to co-operate with an eye toward the future wellbeing of their shared homeland of Lithuania.

The Lithuanians organized a convention in December 1917 in Vilna, which appointed a similar National Council, with the approval of the German occupying powers. The Vilna National Council proclaimed Lithuanian independence on February 16, 1918. The state was founded on democratic principles, with Vilna as its capital. Lithuania declared itself free of all previous obligations tying it to other states. Meanwhile the Brest-Litovsk peace conference was held, which separated Lithuania from Russia. The only organized authority was the Council, which did everything possible to accommodate the Jews and include them in the struggle for independence. The Zionist convention in Vilna in December 1918 decided to create the possibilities for Jewish national autonomy. Three Jews were delegated to serve on the Council: Dr Vigodski, Dr Sh Rosenbaum and Dr Rakhmievitz. These three demanded that the Council promise not to block the establishment of Jewish communal bodies, nor to prevent the creation of the necessary institutions of Jewish national autonomy. Meanwhile the three Jewish delegates were appointed to the first cabinet, headed by Dr Voldemaras. Dr Y Vigodski was the minister for Jewish affairs; Dr Sh Rosenbaum was the vice minister for foreign affairs and Dr Rakhmievitz was the vice minister for commerce and industry.

The powerful desire of Lithuanian Jews to achieve self-determination was a significant factor. Virtually every sector of Lithuanian Jewry was in favor of national autonomy. The government's declaration of December 28, 1918 includes the signatures of the three Jewish ministers. The first issue of the official Government News was published in Yiddish as well.

On December 19, 1918 the Germans left Vilna. In their stead the Council government arrived in Kaunas. The Jewish vice ministers Sh. Rosenbaum and Z. Rakhmievitz were with the Council; Dr. Vigodski remained in Vilna. Dr Max Soloveitchik was named in his stead as the minister for Jewish affairs. Thus began the free and fraternal co-operation between Jews and Lithuanians for the general welfare of Lithuania.

### **The Beginning of Jewish National Autonomy**

At the beginning of 1919 Dr L Motzkin headed a Jewish delegation which presented a memorandum to the Versailles Peace Conference. The fifth point of the memorandum demanded the recognition of Jewish minorities as

autonomous and independent, and as enjoying the right to create and run their own religious, cultural, philanthropic and social institutions.

On August 5, 1919 the Lithuanian delegation at Versailles sent an official letter to the Jewish delegation there. The letter has the character of an official declaration:

The Lithuanian government has adopted the following principles, which will constitute a segment of the basic laws:

1. The members of the Jewish nation, like all citizens without regard to nationality, religion or language, will enjoy full civil and national rights.
2. The Jews will be proportionally represented in the legislative bodies.
3. The Jews will participate in the government and in the legal institutions. A special ministry for Jewish affairs has been set up to deal with issues of particular concern to them.
4. The Jews will have the right to use their language freely at public gatherings, in the press, theater, schools, on various occasions, and in legal and government institutions.
5. The right of Jews to observe the Sabbath and other holy days and to carry out the laws of their religion shall not be directly or indirectly restricted.<sup>1</sup>
6. The organs of Jewish autonomy are:
  - a. the local community councils and the union of community councils;
  - b. elementary education in Jewish schools is universal, obligatory and free of charge, if such rules are also legislatively established for other elementary schools.

Paris, August 5, 1919.

Signed: Prof V Voldemaras  
Secretary, P Klimas."

In October 1920 Foreign Minister Puritskis confirmed that the Lithuanian government recognized the principles which are expressed in Voldemaras' letter of August 5, 1919.

On November 21, 1920 all of the representatives of the various factions in the parliament declared in a letter to the chairman of the Jewish National Council that they were fully in agreement with the principles expressed in the letter from the Lithuanian delegation to the peace conference. They added that they would see to it that these principles were incorporated into the national constitution.

All of these points were, in fact, incorporation into the national constitution.

In May 1922 the Lithuanian ministry announced to the League of Nations that Lithuania would accept the obligations listed in the charter of minority rights in the new states which were established after the world war. The declaration of May 12, 1922 explicitly emphasizes (in Article 6) that all citizens, without regard to religion or language, are equal before the law, and that there must not be any discrimination in regard to governmental positions, nor any limitations on the free use of their own languages.

### **The Establishment of the National Council**

After Dr. Soloveitchik was named Minister for Jewish Affairs, on October 21, 1919, the first convention of the newly established union of community councils was set for January 5, 1920. After the convention had confirmed the basic principles of national autonomy, the first Jewish National Council was elected, consisting of 34 members. The National Council was declared to be the highest authority vis-a-vis national autonomy, and it also confirmed the appointment of Dr M Soloveitchik as minister for Jewish affairs.

On January 11, 1920, an executive committee was elected. It was to be based in Kaunas. Dr. Shimen Rosenbaum was elected president; the vice presidents were Dr L Rakhmievitz and Oyzer Finklshteyn.

### **The Exiled Lithuanian Jews Return from Russia**

Weary from their five full years of wandering throughout the far-flung territories of Great Russia, the Jewish exiles returned to their ruined homes and began a new life. Not all of them returned. Some had died of various diseases. A small number stayed behind and lived in the Soviet Union. The Jewish population of Lithuania was smaller by almost half.

The situation grew terrible. Everything had been destroyed. The factories weren't working. The buildings were in ruins. Some of the machinery had been taken away to Russia, and some to Germany. Commerce was paralyzed.

There were terrible shortages of the most basic necessities. The returning Jews came back suffering from all sorts of diseases. Among them one could see barefoot, unkempt, half-naked and half starving people, who flitted like shadows through the ruined streets of cities and towns, looking for a place to rest and regain their strength. In these difficult circumstances the Jews set about re-establishing their communities. With their experience and competence in every area of economic and social life, they threw themselves into the challenging task. They were helped by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, and by relatives in America and in South Africa. With the tens of millions of dollars that were sent to Lithuania they rebuilt their destroyed homes, obtained farms, bought tools and set up workshops, businesses and small factories. Lithuanians, too, worked under similar financial circumstances. The former Jewish cities and towns were Lithuanianized. There was enough to go around for both Jews and Lithuanians. The relations between the two sectors of the population were warm and friendly.

### **Jewish Participation in Politics and Industry**

The Jewish cabinet minister Dr M Soloveitchik participated in the establishment of relations with a number of nations. Dr Sh Rosenbaum had been active during the negotiations in Moscow, trying to ensure that the Vilna region and the city of Vilna would be included in Lithuania (on June 12, 1920). American Jews of Lithuanian origin played an important role in obtaining United States recognition of Lithuania (July 28, 1922). In a short time, Jews managed to create jobs for thousands of unemployed people, and re-established commerce on a healthy basis.

Jews were pioneers of Lithuanian industry. Their initiative, combined with the financial assistance of African and American Jews, resulted in a functioning Lithuanian industrial economy. They began to produce everything needed in daily life. Jews also became the leading building contractors in Lithuania. They were also intensely involved in cultural work. Over the course of a few short years, the recently-ruined Jewish refugees raised a new generation, builders of a new, ambitious and varied Jewish life.

### **Decline and Disappointment**

The end of 1921 marked the high-water mark for Jewish national autonomy in independent Lithuania. More than eighty local community councils were selected in free elections. Many Jewish schools were organized and constructed. But by the end of 1922 the situation began to decline. It continued to worsen in 1923, and led to collapse over the course of the years 1924-1926.

As soon as independent Lithuania began to function, there began a major wave of migration from the countryside to urban areas. The country needed an urban intelligentsia to fill positions in the government. Industrial development attracted a stream of peasants coming to the city as workers, artisans, storekeepers and entrepreneurs.

The Jews fondly hoped that the history of liberated Lithuania would lead to the open road of a progressive democratic state, but in fact, Lithuania was the first of the small new states to abandon its commitments and destroy all the advances made by its devoted patriots, the Jews.

### **The Resignation of Dr Soloveitchik Over Language Rights; Jewish Representatives Form Their Own Faction in Parliament**

On April 10, 1922 the first parliament deleted from the constitution Paragraphs 80 and 83, both parts of the autonomy legislation, which were critical vis-a-vis the nationality ministries and minority language rights. Dr Soloveitchik resigned his cabinet post in protest at the weakening of minority rights. At the end of 1922, he left Lithuania and went to London, where he served as a standing member of the Zionist executive.

The Jews joined forces with representatives of other minorities in the struggle to protect national autonomy. They presented a joint coalition list of candidates to the second parliament in 1923. The minority nationalities thus received 14 seats, instead of the previous three. The Jewish representatives joined together into a separate faction which determined Jewish political strategies.

Nevertheless, the reactionary parties had a majority in parliament. The Christian Democrat Stulginskis was re-elected as president. The right wing did everything it could to change the minority rights laws and to liquidate the national autonomy. Reaction began to rage.

### **Harassment of Jews; the Defacers of Signs**

It began with an administrative check of passports, which had been invented as a way of depriving thousands of Jews of their Lithuanian citizenship. The windows in Jewish homes and shops also began to be broken.

In the middle of a night in February 1923 thousands of signs in Yiddish on Jewish shops and institutions, from large signs on the upper floors of apartment buildings to small signs outside doctors' offices were smeared with tar. The job required hundreds of people, equipped with tools, firemen's ladders and automobiles. It was all done at night, in full view of the police. The same thing happened in Panevezhys. The defacement of signs, along with the prohibition of the use of Yiddish which was enforced by local police in many towns, infuriated the Jews.

### **Liquidation of the Ministry for Jewish Affairs**

The Christian Democratic majority in parliament struck from the budget the sums devoted to the operations of the Jewish ministry, which had dozens of employees. Thus they effectively liquidated the Jewish administrative apparatus. Following a decision of the Jewish fraction in parliament, Dr Rosenbaum handed in his resignation on February 2, 1924 .

On April 18, 1924 an act was promulgated naming the members of the new parliament. It failed to mention the minister for Jewish affairs. In this humiliating manner the fate of national autonomy was sealed.

### **Liquidation of the Jewish National Council**

After the liquidation of the ministry for Jewish affairs, the Prime Minister introduced in parliament a statement questioning the legality of the Jewish National Council, which was based on Paragraphs 73 and 74 of the Lithuanian constitution. A special session of the Jewish National Council on September 17, 1924 was broken up by the police. The National Council was liquidated. The members of the executive appealed to the Jewish population, and were brought to court as a result.

Dr Rosenbaum and Dr Rakhmilevitz, humiliated and disappointed, both left Lithuania for Israel.

### **Liquidation of the Local Jewish Community Councils; Anti-Jewish Laws**

After the liquidation of the Jewish National Council, the Christian Democrats began their campaign against the local community councils. According to the law which was passed by the parliament, the community councils were deprived of the power to tax their members. At the beginning of February 1926, the minister of the interior called new community council elections. The council of representatives of the community councils unanimously decided to boycott these elections, which were to be subject to the control of the interior ministry, not to the Jewish National Council. This was in opposition to provisions of the Lithuanian constitution. On March 8, 1926 the Jewish community councils were liquidated at the command of the government. Thus the Jewish community councils of Lithuania ended their 500-year history.

The economic attacks promoted by the Lithuanian regime were intensified. They broke all of the promises contained in their declaration to the League of Nations as well as in the Lithuanian constitution. They forbade keeping account books in Yiddish, and passed a law enforcing Sunday rest, which made it impossible for Jews to conduct business 165 days each year.

The government supported Lithuanian co-operatives, and offered them several advantages which handicapped Jewish trade and labor. This contravened the provisions of Article VI of the minority rights declaration of May 12, 1922. Under the guise of agrarian reform, specific agrarian occupations which had been in Jewish hands, such as orchard leasing and milling, were abolished. No land was distributed to Jews.

### **The Fascist Uprising; December 17, 1926**

Elections to a new parliament were held in May 1926. Progressive parties, the Popular Socialists and Social Democrats, in coalition with the minority nationalities obtained a majority. Dr Grinius became president and Slezevicius was the prime minister.

A Fascist putsch took place on December 17, 1926. President Grinius was arrested. The new parliament was dispersed by a small group of officers. A dictatorship was set up by the smallest party in parliament, the Nationalists, who had only three elected representatives. Smetona was the president, and Voldemaras was the prime minister.

A new phase began for the Jews, during which all of their legal, political and socioeconomic accomplishments were demolished. Strict censorship was instituted regarding all published materials. Every lecture or meeting required a special permit from the police. The Fascist government regarded Lithuania as its own property, which had to be guarded against the deprivations of "those of foreign origin," as they called the Jews.

Meanwhile a new urban element arose. The young Lithuanians and some members of the middle class organized in a new group called "Verslas," whose slogan was: "Lithuania for the Lithuanians - don't buy from foreigners!" The Fascist government received strong support from these new elements, and began to carry out a range of anti-Semitic regulations. The Christian Democrats were the loyal allies of the ruling party, and helped to abolish the minority rights provisions remaining in the constitution, with an act passed on January 24, 1938. They demanded that the regulations enforcing Sunday rest be strictly enforced. The government passed a law requiring examinations for Jewish artisans. This forced a number of Jewish artisans to return to school as adults in order to learn Lithuanian, geometry and other subjects, just so they would have the right to continue patching shoes or building tables.

Jewish lawyers, like non-Jews, were obligated to perform an internship in court. But entry to the courts was forbidden to Jews, just as it was to all government institutions. Thus it was impossible for Jews to become lawyers.

The government monopolized the export of grain, wood, flax, produce and other merchandise, businesses which had earlier been controlled by Jews. The representatives of the Lithuanian co-operatives openly said that Jewish retailers were no longer necessary to the national economy. The number of educated Lithuanians seeking employment had grown. The jobs that were appropriate for them only existed in the city, and they were already occupied by Jews. Their intention was quite simply to take over the cities and the Jews' means of livelihood.

## **THE LAST YEAR OF JEWISH LIFE IN LITHUANIA**

***By Dr Shmuel Grinhovz***

On August 23, 1939 Ribbentrop signed the Soviet-German pact in Moscow.

On September 1 Germany attacked Poland.

On September 4, 1939 the Lithuanian government declared its neutrality in regard to the German-Polish war.

On September 17, 1939 the Soviet army occupied Vilna.

On October 10, 1939, an agreement between the Soviet Union and Lithuania was signed in Moscow, according to which Russia was to return to Lithuania the capital of Vilna. Lithuania had military ties with Russia and permitted the presence of Soviet garrisons. Through this development Lithuania fell within the sphere of Soviet Russia, which provided the Jews with a slight breathing space. For the moment, the Jews faced no direct threat from Germany.

Hundreds of Jewish writers, rabbis, political leaders and intellectuals from Poland entered Lithuania in the course of 1939. The Lithuanian Jews received them fraternally, with love and assistance. Every Jewish party was strengthened by new, first-class forces. There were lectures in Yiddish every day in Kaunas. This pause didn't last long. Political events in the world proceeded at a fast pace.

On April 10, 1940 Germany occupied Denmark and Norway.

On May 10 Germany invaded Belgium and Holland, and quickly broke through the French-English lines. The Western front collapsed.

At the end of May the Lithuanian premier was invited to Moscow. On June 14 the Lithuanian government was handed an ultimatum to permit the Soviet military to enter the country, and to set up a new pro-Soviet government.

On June 15 President Smetona escaped to Germany and Soviet military units entered Lithuania.. The head of the new government was the leftist journalist Justas Paletzkius. The members of the new government were the famous Lithuanian writer, Kreve-Mitskevicius; the former prime minister and wholesale merchant, Ernest Galvanauskas; the Lithuanian General Vitkauskas; and also various leftist Lithuanian journalists such as Ventzlovas, Pakarklis, Gedvila and Mitzkus.

The government also contained one Jew - Dr Kagan. Later one more Jew, Khayem Alperovitz, entered the government as Minister of Industry. There were only five Jews among the 85 deputies to the pro-Soviet parliament.

On August 3, 1940 Lithuania formally became part of the Soviet Union - the sixteenth Soviet Republic. A new council of people's commissars was appointed. There were no Jews in this new Lithuanian government. Alperovitz became a vice-commissar representing local industry. Dr. Kagan left politics altogether.

What was the situation of the Jews at this time?

All of the former Jewish political organizations were liquidated. The Zionist parties, clubs and newspapers were shut down. The Jewish people's banks, the central bank, aid funds and all economic organizations were dissolved into the general banks under Soviet control. The ORT school was transformed into general trade school Number

5. The Jewish libraries were dissolved into the general libraries. A number of elderly Jewish political activists were arrested, such as the editor of the "*Jewish Voice*," Ruven Rubinshteyn; the chairman of the Socialist Zionists, Leyb Garfinkel and the chairman of the Revisionists, Hirsh Levin. Rubinshteyn was deported to Russia. After the war he returned to Poland, and from there to Munich, where he became the editor of the newspaper of the Central Committee, Undzer Veg. The rest were released from prison the day the Soviet-German war began, and stayed in the Kaunas ghetto.

As far as economic life was concerned, the same transformation took place as in all of the Soviet states. The factories and the large businesses were nationalized. The small businesses collapsed of their own accord. Small storekeepers were treated as "non-working elements." Most of the intelligentsia who had formerly been employed received positions. The situation of the small storekeepers, however, was disastrous, because they were not accepted for government posts. The artisans organized co-operative workshops. Since the majority of the Jewish population consisted of merchants, the social transformation spelled a loss in status, and they were severely impoverished.

The specifically Jewish cultural institutions declined precipitously. All of them, except the schools, were dissolved into the non-Jewish cultural and educational institutions. The Jewish school system continued to function, but those schools teaching in Hebrew had to switch to Yiddish. Interest in specifically Jewish cultural activities dropped significantly. The new situation left no room for living one's life in Yiddish, and killed off the desire for Jewish education and culture.

In the nights between May 14 and June 17, 1941, the Soviet authorities arrested and deported to Siberia a large portion of the population of Lithuania: the leaders of the former political parties and of the military and economic organizations; former high officials; the higher police authorities; manufacturers; wholesale merchants; large landowners, and others.

Those responsible for conducting these actions were all non-Jews. The first arrest order was issued and carried out by the Lithuanian Communist leader and head of the political police, Antanas Snietskus, a Lithuanian. The second precise directive to establish a list of deportees was signed by the interior commissar Guzevitzius, a Lithuanian. The final directive was issued in June 1941 by Commissar Serov, who was not a Jew.

Of course, many Jews were deported as well. Among those who were deported were Zionist leaders such as Dr Berger, Dr Levitan, Dr Meshulem Volf, a large number of manufacturers and merchants and various employees and professionals. The number in Kaunas was roughly 1,200.

It is believed that no less than that were deported from Vilna, and that a large number were rounded up in the provincial cities as well. It is estimated that about 4,000 Jews were deported.

Our point here is not to offer evidence for anti-Semitic lies. We are concerned with the historical truth about the last years of Lithuanian Jewry. One thing is correct: During the time of Soviet rule, in 1940, a black cat ran between the Lithuanian Jews and the Lithuanian intelligentsia — and the black cat turned red from Jewish blood. There were pro-Communist and anti-Communist Lithuanians, there were pro-Communist and anti-Communist Jews. But there was a fundamental difference between the general standpoint vis-a-vis the Soviets of the Lithuanian intelligentsia and peasantry on one hand, and that of the Lithuanian Jews on the other. For the Jews, even anti-Communists, the Soviets were the force which protected them from the Hitlerite murderers. In the great contest between the Soviets and Hitler, the vast majority of Jews were on the side of the Soviets. The Lithuanian intelligentsia, which had lost or feared losing their positions and influence, as well as the Lithuanian peasantry, which feared losing its private property, stood on the side of Hitler Germany in its conflict with the Soviet Union. While the Jews trembled at the thought of war, these Lithuanian sectors dreamed of war.

This was the root cause of the extreme anti-Semitism in evidence among certain Lithuanian sectors in the years 1940-1941. Anti-Semitism was expressed in the particular zeal with which Lithuanian officials carried out the nationalization of Jewish possessions under Soviet rule. It was expressed during the first months of the war in the behavior of the Lithuanian partisans who killed thousands of Jews in the Viliampol pogrom, in the mass murders at the Seventh Fort in Kaunas, at Ponar near Vilna, in Shiauliai, in Zager and in dozens of small towns and villages.

This fundamental difference of psychological orientation - fear of war and reliance on the Soviets on one side, and desire for war and reliance on Hitler's Germany on the other - was the objective cause of Jewish-Lithuanian tension during the least year of Jewish life in Lithuania.

*Note: All references are from the book Lite: Volume I. published in Yiddish in New York in 1951.  
Translated from Yiddish manuscript by Jonathan Boyarin November 29, 1989 New York, New York*

# THE LITHUANIAN SLAUGHTER OF ITS JEWS

The Testimonies from 121 Jewish survivors of the  
Holocaust in Lithuania, recorded by Leyb Koniuchowsky,  
in Displaced Persons' camps (1946-48)

## THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS

## **THE SLAUGHTER OF JEWS IN THE LITHUANIAN COUNTY SEAT TELZH (TELSHIAI)**

- 1) Eyewitness testimony of Malke Gilis (nee Rabinovitz), born on December 10, 1912. Her father<sup>1</sup>'s name was Ruven, and her mother<sup>1</sup>'s name was Sheva. Malke's husband was Leyb Gilis. Their children were Ruvele, aged three and Reyzele, aged six months. Mrs Gilis was born in the town of Kul (Kuliai), near Gargzh dai. She lived in Telzh with her family from 1932 until the slaughter of the Jews of Telzh.
- 2) Eyewitness testimony of Khane Pelts. Her father's name was Gedalye Pelts. She lived with her family in Telzh until the Jews were completely annihilated.

### **The Cultural and Economic Life of the Jews**

Until the war 3,500 Jewish men, women and children lived in Telzh. The majority of the Jews were employed in trade and artisanry. Many of the young people of the town, along with others from all over Lithuania and even from overseas, studied at the great Telzher Yeshiva, famous throughout the Jewish world. The heads of the yeshiva were Rabbi Yitskhok Bloch and his brother, Reb Zalmen Bloch. In addition to the yeshiva there were also a strictly religious teachers' seminary, a Yavne gymnasium, a heder, an institute where young men prepared for rabbinical ordination, and a library. Most of the young people were involved in Zionist organizations. Until the war the attitude of the local Lithuanians toward the Jews was not bad. In the year 1939, when Hitler took Memel (Klaipeda), relations worsened daily.

### **The Outbreak of War between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, June 22, 1941**

Malke Gilis reports:

The religious Jews in Telzh were far from Communism and believed that no harm would befall them when the Germans came. A very small number evacuated toward the Soviet Union. The great majority escaped and hid in the villages. Among those who did evacuate, only a very few arrived in the Soviet Union, the rest were stopped at the Latvian border and sent back. The Germans arrived in town on Thursday, June 26, 1941. The Jews immediately began travelling back to their homes in town. Before the Germans came, Lithuanian armed bands began calling themselves "partisans" and lorded it openly over the town. The Jews found their homes robbed and vandalized.

On Friday, June 27 armed partisans drove all the Jewish men, women and children out of their houses, and led them off to a lake called Mastas, not far from Telzh. On Friday afternoon two partisans and a German came to the home of Leyb Gilis. They drove Leyb Gilis, his wife Malke, their two small children and Malke's mother Sheva out of the house.

At that moment Leyb Gilis was half-dressed. The partisans didn't even give him time to finish dressing.

While the Gilis family was being driven through the streets, local Lithuanians stood on the sidewalks enjoying themselves immensely. They threw stones, barbed wire and pieces of wood at the Gilises. The people who did this were Lithuanians from town with whom the Gilises were acquainted.

While they were being driven along, the Lithuanian murderers struck Malke's mother Sheva, aged 58, on her back with rifle butts, because she didn't walk fast enough. They did the same thing to other Jews. When they left their homes, the Jews had to leave them open; they were forbidden to lock the houses. From early morning until Friday night, they drove all of the Jews out of their houses, and gathered them together next to Lake Mastas.

As an excuse for rounding up all the Jews, the Lithuanians used a lie which was quite common at that time: they told the Germans that the Jews had shot at the German army.

All the Jews of the town, large and small, were at the lake. They were guarded by Lithuanians bearing machine guns under the direction of the Germans. The Jews were sure that everyone would be either shot or drowned at the lake. People took their leave of each other. Women lay on the ground, fainting,

with children in their arms. Every now and then the Lithuanian murderers aimed their machine guns at the innocent Jews and threatened to shoot them. Rabbi Bloch quietly ordered all of the Jews to say their final confession and take leave of each other. Quietly, so that none of the Lithuanians would hear, he comforted everyone, and ordered

them to be calm and proud, as is appropriate for Jews who are about to die for the Sanctification of the Name. Until twelve noon the Jews were kept at Lake Mastas. Then they separated the women and children from the men and allowed them to go to their homes. The men stayed at the lake. Many of the women asked to be allowed to stay with their husbands. The partisans didn't permit this, and even beat people for asking.

When they arrived home, the women found nothing left in their dwellings. Everything had been robbed and cleaned out. Nothing but the poorer furniture and the bare walls remained; the doors and windows were broken. The situation was the same at Malke Gilis' home.

The women and children spent the night there, until the morning of Saturday, June 28. On Saturday morning armed Lithuanian partisans appeared, and drove the women and children out of their homes into the compound at Rainiai. The women no longer had anything they could bring along to eat, and hungered along with their children. Many of the older women could not walk as fast as the Lithuanian partisans demanded, and were beaten. Many of them fainted as they walked. The women knew nothing about their children, fathers and husbands, who remained at the lake. During the day on Saturday, the women were taken to the Rainiai compound. The owner was Kipras Petrauskas, the well-known Lithuanian opera singer. There the women found their children, husbands and fathers, who had been brought from Lake Mastas to the Rainiai compound on Friday night. The compound was next to the Rainiai forest, four kilometres from the town of Telzh.

One bachelor, about 40 years old, had come from America to visit his brother and sister. His last name was Bay. His sister and brother had a bakery in Telzh.

While all the Jews were being taken to the lake he stayed at home, being sure that nothing would happen to him, since he had in his possession documents proving that he was an American citizen. Early Saturday morning, when the Lithuanian murderers drove the women out of their houses, he was reluctant to go, and displayed his American documents. The Lithuanian murderers shot him in his home. They also shot a 25-year-old student of the Telzh yeshiva at his home. Those were the first two victims in the town of Telzh.

### **In the Compound at Rainiai**

At first the men weren't allowed to go to their families. In the afternoon the murderers ordered everyone to find places in the cattle stalls. Everyone crowded into the stalls. Damp filth squelched underfoot. Everyone slept on this filth Saturday night. The next day, Sunday June 29, the Jews prepared places to sleep on top of the refuse.

A committee of representatives was created by the Jews in the compound. The committee included Hirshl Segal, a watchmaker; Rabinovitz, a pharmacist; Yitshok Blokh, a Zionist Revisionist; and a few others. They began to concern themselves with the improvement of living conditions in the compound. They took over a Russian military kitchen, and cooking began. But there was nothing to cook, except for rye meal boiled in water. In the morning everyone would receive 100 grains of black bread, twenty grams of butter and a few potatoes.

Eight or ten days later, the men began to be taken out to work.

### **Chicaneries, Torture and Bullying of the Men**

Before the retreat of the Red Army, a group of Lithuanian Communists, together with representatives of the Soviet security agency, had taken all of the political prisoners out of the jail at Telzh. There were 72 of these all together. The 72 were taken out to the forest near Rainiai. There all 72 were shot and buried.

Now the Jews were made to pay for this deed as well. The Lithuanian partisans spread false rumours that the Jews as well had taken part in it. The Jewish men in the compound camp were forced to exhume the 72 dead bodies. The Jews had to do everything with their hands.

The Lithuanian partisans tormented the men and beat them with their bayonets. They also forced the Jewish men to kiss the corpses or lick them with their tongues. Next the same men were forced to dig a pit at the Lithuanian cemetery. While the pit was being dug the Lithuanian murderers again beat the Jews. There were thirty men in the group. Because of the beatings, all of them immediately became invalids, their arms, feet and sides swollen. Among the men was the husband of Mrs. Malke Gilis, who provided this testimony. More than once her husband Leyb Gilis came home from work with his arms and legs swollen.

While the 72 murdered people were being transported to the Christian cemetery, the Lithuanian murderers gave them a huge funeral, including a parade. Peasants from the villages and from nearby towns came as well. The

thirty Jews who had worked at digging the pit were arranged in the middle of the street on their knees until the procession was over. Other groups of men and women were taken off to do various sorts of hard, dirty work. They were beaten and mocked. They were given nothing to eat in return; they had to bring their food from home. The Jews were forced to go to work on their knees with their hands high, four kilometres to Telzh.

The commandant of the compound camp was the Lithuanian resident of Telzh, Platakys. All of the guards around the camp were Lithuanians. Among them were the murderous brothers Yonas and Pranas Indzhilevicius and Jodeikys. At that time the head of the county was Romanauskas. Many of the murderers were still quite young men.

### **Threats and Looting**

The men were forced to go to work until the day they were slaughtered. That was Monday, July 14th in the evening. When they had been at the Rainiai compound ten or twelve days, an order came from the town of Telzh. All the Jews had to surrender their money, gold and silver, and other valuables.

The Lithuanian murderers Platakys and Jodeikys sent word for the Jews Motl Levin (director of the Jewish national bank), Yisroel Talpus (a merchant), and others to come to them. They announced the order to the representatives. They promised that everything the Jews surrendered would be stored at the Lithuanian state bank until things calmed down. The Jews were forbidden to keep more than one thousand rubles per family. They threatened to shoot any family that did not carry out the order according to their instructions.

Several days later Germans and partisans drove into the compound. The Jews had to surrender their gold, silver and money. The partisans packed up the better items in the trucks and drove off. The Jews were left with nothing. They had no chance of getting anything to eat without their possessions or their money.

Next began "visits" to the compound camp by the Lithuanian "intelligentsia". High school and college boys and girls accompanied by partisans began to demand wallets, shoes, umbrellas and the like from the Jews. The "intelligentsia" even took baby carriages from the Jews', throwing the Jewish children out onto the earth.

### **"The Devil's Dance" — Slaughter of the Men**

On Monday, July 14th during the day, partisans and Germans on motorcycles arrived in the camp. The Germans ordered the Jewish men to clear away all of the threshers and other machinery from the yard near the barns. Next they led everyone, men, women and children, out into the yard. The Lithuanians, accompanied by Germans, searched through the barns to make sure that no one had hid there. The sick and elderly were driven out of the barns - everyone, without exception. Those who couldn't get out quickly were carried out.

The women and children, including boys up to the age of thirteen, were driven back into the barns, and the doors were locked.

All of the men remained. The men were placed in a circle. Lithuanians with spiked sticks and whips stood in the middle and forced the Jews to run in a circle. They beat everyone without exception. The Jews had to run in a circle for a few hours, falling whenever one of the Germans whistled. When they got up, they were beaten on the head and sides. Several elderly Jews fell dead during this "dance." Among those who died were Avrom Itsikson, Meir Shav, his grandfather, and others.

A number of women and men among the Lithuanian population came from the city to watch the *velniu shokis*, the "Demon's Dance," as they called it. The Lithuanians from town came running to enjoy themselves, and applauded. After the "show" all the men - crippled, tortured, semi-invalid, with cracked heads, missing teeth and bleeding, swollen eyes - were driven back into the barns. Many of the wives and mothers began bandaging the wounds of their fathers, husbands and brothers. Other women did not recognize their husbands and fathers. The weeping in the barn was dreadful. Many mothers no longer saw their young children, because after the "Demon's Dance" the Lithuanian and German murderers had chosen eighty young, healthy men, gave them buckets and spades and took them away from the compound. The murderers insisted that they were being taken to work. They were taken to a forest, no more than 100 meters from the camp. Graves had already been dug there. The men were forced to empty the water from the graves with the buckets.

On the evening of July 14, all eighty young men were shot in the forest and tossed into the graves. The Jews in the barns heard the shooting in the forest quite clearly from up close. Yet it did not occur to them that the eighty young men had been shot.

At 1:00 a.m. on July 15, Lithuanian partisans came to the Jews with their rifles aimed, and ordered 24 men "to go to work." A short time later shooting was once again heard at the nearby forest. The Jews still did not understand what the shootings meant.

At six in the morning on Tuesday, July 15 1941, the partisans came once again and took away a large group of men "to work." Shooting was once again heard from the nearby forest. The Jews realized that all the groups that were being taken out "to work" were being shot in the nearby Rainiai forest. The men began hiding wherever they could in the barn.

At eight in the morning on Tuesday, July 15 the murderers came back once again to take men "to work." The men were already hidden wherever they could find a spot. The partisans threatened to shoot all the women and children if the men continued hiding and refused to go "to work."

The men left their hiding places. At eight in the morning the fourth group of men were taken away and shot 100 meters from the compound in the Rainiai forest. The group included Leybl Gilis, the husband of Malka, who provided this eyewitness testimony.

At around 10 or 11 the same day the Lithuanian murderers took away the fifth group of men "to work" and shot them as well at the same place in the forest. The fifth group included all of the rabbis from the yeshiva and their students. The beards of the rabbis had already been cut off or torn out during the "Demon's Dance."

### **Eyewitness Testimony of Khane Pelts**

In one group were the town rabbi, Rabbi Yitshok Bloch, his brother Reb Zalmen Bloch, Rabbi Azriel Rabinovitz, Rabbi Pinchas Elfand and several other pious Jews with long beards. Together with them were many students of the yeshiva. It was told that at the grave Rabbi Zalmen Bloch gave a speech to the Jews, telling them that they should die proudly for the glory of God's name, repenting for the sins which the Jewish people had committed over the course of many years. Yitshok (Iske) Bloch (not a relative) also made a final speech. He was a Revisionist. He said to the murderers: "You are sprinkling the trees with our blood, and the floors will be washed with your blood in revenge." Iske Bloch was sliced into pieces with knives. The rabbis' beards were torn out along with pieces of flesh, and then they were shot.

When one of the last groups was led off to be shot, among them was Gedalye Peltz, the father of Khane Pelts; the shipping clerk of Telzh, Avrom Levit; Khayem Yazgur; Nokhum Rostovsky; Zeydl Levin; Shakhne Rudman; Sheykhet Berkman; Tevye Leybzon; Shmuel Pelts, a brother of Gedalye Pelts; Merkin, a Hasid from Leipzig; the two brothers Yoselevsky; Zale Ordman; and others.

At the precise moment when they were already in their underwear and were supposed to go to the pit, powerful storm winds suddenly sprang up. Thunder and lightning began, and the Lithuanian murderers remembered God. The rain cooled them down. They ordered the men to put back on their underwear, and brought them back into the barracks. Fate decreed that these Jews who returned would be able to tell the world all of the terror and all of the brutality that took place during the annihilation of the Jews of Telzh. They didn't walk into the barracks; they fell in. None of them looked like he had before, like a person.

All of them were gray and half insane. Their relatives were joyful and simultaneously frightened. Dark clouds of animality were reflected in the terrified eyes of the men who had come back, and in the eyes of their families, wives, mothers and children. Gedalye Pelts told his wife and two daughters that he had seen his son being shot. He added that he was content that his son Fayvl had been hit by a bullet, and that Fayvl had immediately fallen dead into the pit. Leybzon recounted that he had had to bury his son alive. His son Berl, a fellow student of Khane's had begged his father: "Papa! What are you doing? I'm only wounded!" Yet the father had had to bury his son alive. Zeydl Levin recounted that he had had to shovel dirt over his still-living father. Gedalye Pelts' group returned to the barracks, and was able to recount everything. Gedalye's group of men had to bury those who were shot from a group before them.

Buckets of water poured outside. The flood from Heaven continued for some three hours. The thunder and lightning was awesome. "The Heavens interceded," the pious men said among themselves. The Lithuanian guards had real misgivings at that moment.

The men who had returned told of everything they had seen at the pits, and sat like lumps of clay, like congealed stone statues. The storm and rain continued thus for three hours. Gedalye's group of men was fated to live for

three more hours. These three hours were the most terrifying the men had faced in their lives. They all sighed, moaned and tore the hair from their heads. Yet it was impossible to run.

There was a heavy guard outside. In addition, all of them were physically exhausted. All of them had broken bones and torn muscles. None of them would have been physically capable of running away, even if it were possible. The rains came to an end. The skies cleared up, and the murderers appeared once again. They took the men who had returned from the pit back there once again, and shot them all.

Shmuel Pelts and a few other Jews who had returned from the pit temporarily, survived by hiding in the hay in the barrack. In fact, they all later recounted in more detail what they had lived through by the pits. It is also interesting that during the heavy rain, a bolt of lightning struck the barrack and caused a beam to collapse. But no one was hurt. This was on July 15, 1941. On that day almost all the men of Telzh and other towns near Telzh were shot. That day some 5,000 men were shot.

There were two Jews who were stabbed at the edge of the forest: Yakov Dambe and one other. In one group there were two boys, named Berl Vaynes and Avrom Desyatnik. While the group of Jews were slaughtered, two Germans were also present. Berl Vaynes and Avrom Desyatnik were still young, small boys. They managed to convince the Germans that they shouldn't be shot, because they were still young and didn't know anything. The Germans ordered them to get their clothes back on and run into the barracks. They recounted that everyone had been ordered to strip to his underwear and stand next to the pit, where everyone was shot. Avrom Desyatnik survived. He recounted that the Lithuanians wanted either to stab the men with knives, or cut their throats. The Germans were "humanitarians," and did not permit this. After the men were liquidated, a German came back into the barrack with a bloody knife. Waving the knife around, he announced that the men had to be shot, because they were all Communists. He promised to let the women and children live, and to establish a ghetto for them.

### **Testimony of Malka Gilis**

Many Jewish men and their families were in the villages, where they worked for the peasants.

During the night from Tuesday, July 15 1941 to Wednesday, July 16, some of the men and their families were brought on wagons from the villages straight to the Rainiai compound near the barns. The murderers gave the new arrivals an order to disappear into the barns in the space of five minutes. Everyone left his packages in the wagons and fell into the barns half-dead.

On Wednesday morning, July 16, 1941 men only were brought from the villages. Everyone came on foot. They were conducted past the camp. The doors of the barns were open. Malka Gilis saw the Lithuanian murderers tearing boards and poles from a porch and using them to beat the Jews on their heads, sides and all over their bodies as they passed by. After that all of the newly-arrived men went bloody, limping, with broken ribs and bones, directly to the pit in the Rainiai forest, where they were immediately shot.

On the same Wednesday morning the Lithuanian partisans drove out of the barns all the men who had come from the countryside on the night of Tuesday, July 15-16, 1941. In all there were about 25 men. They were all given spades and led off to the graves. The men had absolutely no desire to live anymore. They all wanted to die as quickly and easily as possible. That same Wednesday morning the 25 men were brought to the pits and forced to fill them with dirt over the bodies of dead men. After they had done so, they were shot at the same pit. After the shootings the murderers poured lime over the dead bodies as well as on the wounded who screamed in pain.

After the graves were covered over, the last group of men were forced to dig a pit for themselves, and they too were shot. That same Wednesday evening a Jew named Garb from Alsedzhiai, who had worked distributing Russian passports during the period from 1940 to 1941, was killed by the Lithuanian murderers with poles and boards next to the outhouse, not far from the barns. The Jew lay dead next to the outhouse.

On Thursday, July 17 Germans and partisans riding motorcycles arrived at the barns. They demanded that the women hand over money, gold, silver and other valuables. Everything had to be piled up at the doorway to the barn. Malka had a bundle of 17,000 rubles. She hid it under the doorway to the barns. The Germans took the money, gold and silver and left. They did not find Malka's money. Malka later took it and burned it.

Immediately afterward came two German SS men and partisans. The Germans had knives in their hands and ordered the women to hand over all their wallets, leather shoes, boots, fur coats, and so forth. The women handed these things over as well. One of the SS stood with a long knife in his hand and gave a speech to the women. He said: "Nothing will happen to women and children. But you will never see your men again." The women became utterly hopeless at the dreadful news about the death of their husbands, fathers and children.

On Thursday, July 17, 1941 the possessions of the men who had been shot were brought from the pits and laid out next to the camp command post, in the building owned by Kipras Petrauskas. The Lithuanian murderers ordered the women to go identify and take the possessions of their murdered fathers and husbands. The women ran out. Then their great wailing began. Women recognized possessions of their husbands and fathers. They found photographs of themselves, of their children. They recognized the overclothes. Everything struck blows into their terrified hearts. The women took everything to their places in the barn as mementos.

The Lithuanian murderers divided the better things among themselves right at the grave, after shooting the men. They brought the worst things back for the unfortunate wives and mothers so that they, the murderers, could see how women weep and scream at the cloudy sky and the Jewish God. The murderers wanted to demonstrate to the women that they had no reason to think about their men. It was a special sadistic tactic to amuse their murderous minds.

Every day and night the women had to withstand much trouble and various torments at the hands of the Lithuanian murderers. They would sneak in among the women at night, frightening and waking them. There were many cases of rape then. The murderers who had earlier murdered the husbands enjoyed themselves immensely as they raped the women.

Every night while the women lay asleep they would appear with knives in their hands. They would shine flashlights in their faces, frighten them and order them to come along.

On the morning of Friday, July, 18 Malke, her mother Sheva Rabinovitz and Lea Kopel went off to the pits in the Rainiai forest. They risked death for doing so. There was no close guard over the barns by this time. Only the drinking water, which was very hard to obtain, was guarded. The murderers had to have it for their personal use. When the women arrived in the forest they saw three pits, one next, to the other. Phylacteries, prayer shawls, hats and bits of brain were scattered around the edge of the graves. Passports, documents, photographs and so on were also scattered around.

As Malke relates, blood seethed over the largest pit. The pit looked like it was spitting blood. (Presumably owing to the still-active lime - L.K.)

Malke fainted at the pit. Miss Shapiro, a doctor at the Rainiai compound, came and revived Malke. The pits were no more than 100 meters from the barns. Malke came back to the camp barely alive and related everything to the rest of the women. The tragedy was terrible. Young women and mothers mourned for their near and dear ones with heart-rending cries and weeping.

There was also bitter hunger in the camp at that time. The women received nothing to eat, neither for themselves nor for the children.

### **In the Camp at Geruliai**

In the morning of Tuesday, July 22, 1941 partisans came once again and announced to the women that over the course of the next several hours all of the women and children would be transported to the Geruliai camp, nine or ten kilometers from the town of Telzh. A great panic broke out at the Rainiai camp. There were many women who no longer had any strength to pack their things and make the trip to the new camp, Geruliai. It was a market day. Many women pleaded with peasants passing by to take them along with their things. The Lithuanian murderers permitted them to ride on wagons. The stronger women, and the men who were disguising themselves in women's clothing (nine men - L.K.) went on foot. The Lithuanian murderers accompanied them to the camp at Geruliai. It consisted of six barns, where Red Army soldiers had lived before they retreated from Lithuania. The whole place was infested with big lice, who crept over the walls, through the straw, and everywhere. Some 4,500 women and children were crowded into the six barns. Together with the women and children from Telzh, women and children from nearby towns in Telzh County had also been placed.

The commandant of the camp at Geruliai was the Lithuanian murderer Platakys, the same one who had been the commandant at the Rainiai camp. The commandant had a military kitchen set up. The women and children received roughly a hundred grams of bread and black coffee in the morning. During the day they received half a liter of watery soup with no fat. Some of the women would steal out of the camp and exchange the last few possessions they had still kept with them. At first they were not sent to work. Epidemics began in the camp in the beginning of August 1941. Spotted typhus and scarlet fever daily took a toll in the death of dozens of children in the camp. It was impossible to withstand the lice. There was no soap. Very little water was given in this camp as well.

Every day the murderers came with more and more tragic news about preparations to annihilate the women and their children. Every day they announced new dates when the women were to be shot. The panic among the women grew constantly. All of them lost the desire to do something for themselves and their children. Rumors were spread that the shooting would indeed take place, but the only victims would be elderly women.

The younger were not going to be shot. The older women began doing everything they could to make themselves appear younger. They began wearing cosmetics and dressing up. The tragedy continued to grow.

When the Lithuanian murderers caught the women going into the village for food, they whipped and tortured the captured women. At the time of the epidemics Malke lost her six-month-old daughter Reyzele. Reyzele had caught dysentery. This was ten days after the shooting of Leyb Gillis, Malke's husband. Malke and her mother found Reyzele dead in the morning and buried her with their own hands. Later the older boy, Ruvele, who was in his fourth year, also grew sick. Malke and her son were transferred into a barrack for those with chronic diseases. They stayed in that barrack in the cold for a week's time. They suffered from hunger. Ruvele had caught diphtheria and typhus. Malke and her child were permitted to be transferred to the hospital in the city. Together with Malke other mothers and their children were allowed to be transferred. Some ten children were brought to the hospital in all at that time. They were taken to the hospital and placed in one room. The mothers were not allowed to go in, and they returned to the camp. But the Lithuanian doctors did not want to tend to the children. All they did was assure their death. Mrs Fayn also had a three year old girl in the hospital. She snuck in to see the children one time, and found many of them scattered dead beneath their beds. They only received food once a day. No one was concerned about them. They regarded the Jewish children as superfluous creatures, who were taking up space in the hospital. Through connections Malke received permission to visit her child. Once, on August 23, when Malke came back from the hospital to the camp, she felt a sharp pain in her foot. Four hours later the pain had spread from her foot throughout an entire side of her body, which suddenly broke out in lesions. With great difficulty, Malke managed to be accepted in the hospital where her child lay. But she could not go in to see how he was doing, because she was unable to walk.

There were 21 wounded Red Army prisoners in the hospital. They were treated at the hospital. After they were healed, partisans took them out of the hospital. In a pasture not far away all 21 were shot. Malke personally watched through a window as they were being taken out of the hospital. This was during the last week of the month of August 1941.

Mrs Yoselevsky had an eleven year old son named Khayem Moyshela in the hospital. He and Ruvele lay in the same room. Mrs Yoselevsky's boy died without receiving any medical assistance. Khayem Moyshela died during the day on August 27, 1941. Ruvele died during the night of Wednesday the 27th.

On Friday, August 29th Sheva Rabinovitz, together with Mrs Yoselevsky, took both children to the Jewish cemetery and buried them. Sheva Rabinovitz pleaded intensely with the doctor on duty to allow her to sleep next to her daughter Malke, who felt badly and still did not know about the death of her child. The doctor refused Sheva permission. Sheva went to the camp.

### **Young Women Go to a Ghetto in Telzh Elderly Women and Children Slaughtered**

In the middle of the night of Friday, August 29, 1941 Lithuanian murderers arrived, led by Jodeikis. They brought a number of bottles of whiskey with them, and got thoroughly drunk. Jodeikis gave a speech to the deadly frightened women and children: He ordered all of the women to pack up their bags and write the women's first and last names on the packages. He promised that all of the women and children would be brought into the city of Telzh. In the middle of the night Platakys and Jodeikis ordered the women to surrender their gold, silver and valuables. They threatened to torture any woman who did not surrender her gold, silver, money and other valuables. Rebbetzin Rashi Bloch, her sister Mrs Yasgor and another woman went from barrack to barrack in the middle of the night, collecting everything from the women. During the night they surrendered the collected money, gold and silver to the partisans.

At 5:30 a.m. of Saturday, August 30, 1941, the Lithuanian murderers drove all the women and children out of the barracks into the yard. The women understood well that they were going to be taken and shot, so they threw everything they still had into a swamp near the yard. All the women stood in the yard with their faces made up and with their best clothes on. All of them wanted to look younger and more attractive.

They hoped that perhaps the younger and healthier women would still be permitted to live. The murderers began choosing and separating out younger women on one side, and the older ones and those with children on the other

side. they chose five hundred of the younger women and immediately sent them to Telzh on foot under heavy guard. On the way, they heard shooting not far from the Geruliai forest.

All the rest of the women and children remained in the Geruliai camp. In the yard near the barracks the Lithuanian murderers took off the women's and children's shoes and overclothes. The women had to remove their better underwear as well. The women had to arrange these things neatly in one spot. Then they were arranged in rows, 75 to a group. The women and children were led off from the compound to a pit which had already been dug out very near the barracks. The women had to stand near the edge of the pit, and the Lithuanian murderers shot them from behind with automatics. In this manner they took away group after group of naked women and children, lining them up at the edge of the pit and shooting them. The women who were standing in the courtyard surrounded by armed murderers could see the shooting. They began pleading with the murderers to shoot them more quickly, rather than leaving them until the end. Other women still had valuables which they had hidden. They gave them to the murderers so that they would be shot first. That way they would not have to see women and children being shot, nor hear their wild screams before they were shot, and the cries of pain of the wounded. In this gruesome manner the Lithuanian murderers slaughtered the women and children at the Geruliai camp.

Together with the women and children the last of the men, who were masquerading as women, were also shot. The last of the men who were shot then were: Hirsh Broide; the brothers Gedalye and Shmuel Peltz; Merkin; Yoselovsky (Berl and his brother).

Among the men two survived: Henokh Ribovsky and Nokhum Rastovsky. Both of them escaped from the Geruliai camp.

1) Henokh Ribovsky was captured while escaping and brought to a small prison in the Telzh Ghetto. From there he was taken to the city prison. The murderers tricked Henokh into giving up the gold and silver which he had hidden in his house. After he handed over the gold and silver the murderers brought him back into the city prison. From the prison they took him to be shot. He convinced the murderers to permit him to dig himself a grave at the Jewish cemetery. The murderers satisfied his request, explaining that they were doing it on account of the gold and silver which he had voluntarily surrendered. He dug himself a grave, and they shot him there.

2) Nokhum Rastovsky made his way to the Shavl ghetto, where he also died.

3) Two boys aged thirteen or fourteen, Berl Vayner and Avrom Desyatnik, had escaped from Geruliai into nearby villages before the women were shot. Both of them hid and survived. Both of them were saved by a German from being shot in the Rainiai forest thanks to their youthful appearance, and returned to the camp.

4) A girl named Mery Shlomovitz, aged twenty at the time, a tailor by trade, went to the pit in line together with her mother. The mother was already weakened, and could not undress herself. Mery helped her mother to take off her overclothes. Her mother encouraged Mery to run away. Mery jumped over the pit full of women who had been shot and began running. The murderers shot at her but did not hit her. Near the pit was a thick stand of saplings. Mery threw herself among the saplings. The murderers shot in her direction, but did not hit Mery.

At night Mery left the shrubs and escaped to a village. Several days later she arrived at the Telzh ghetto. She related that while she was escaping she had disturbed dead bodies and had smeared her boots with blood.

She related everything that had taken place at the pit. All of the women had been brought to the pit in their underwear and shot with automatics. The women fell into the pit. Many were only wounded. The shrieks of the wounded mixed with the weeping and shouting of the women who were being led to the slaughter. The air trembled from their wild, tormented screams. But the murderers carried out their murderous work with a smile on their lips.

Mery also related that the murderers did not shoot the small children. As they explained while they were shooting, they didn't want to waste bullets on the children and threw them in the air over the pits. The children fell into the pits still alive. The murderers put an end to them with the butts of their rifles, or with their heavy, bloodied military boots. They grabbed many of the children by the feet, bashed their heads against rocks and threw them into the pit.

### **Testimony of Khane Pelts**

The women, children and the last of the men remaining in the camp at Geruliai were taken the same day, Saturday, August 30, 1941, to a canal in a field near the compound and shot. That day some 8,000 women and children, who had earlier been gathered from nearby towns, were shot. Those who survived the slaughter were: Nekhame Grin, Mrs Blank and her daughter Khane, aged 17; two sisters, Mikhele and Mushele Yasgur. All of these arrived at the Telzh ghetto. Several other women survived; these did not arrive at the ghetto, but hid in the villages. The female

survivors related in the ghetto that they had escaped while riding to the pit and hidden not far from the pit, in bushes in a small forest nearby. All of the female survivors who came into the ghetto told the same thing: They had seen with their own eyes the women being forced to strip completely naked, taken to the pit and shot in the back with automatics. They saw the murderers tearing the clothes by force off of women who did not want to strip completely naked. The murderers did not shoot small children. They held them by the feet, bashed their heads against a stone and threw them into the pit. There were cases in which they forced the mothers to take the child in their arms and go to the pit. At the pit they shot the mother and the child with a single shot. The cries and weeping of the innocent women and children only made the murderers work faster. The murderous work went on for an entire day. The murderers left over a number of women and children to be shot on Sunday morning.

On Sunday morning women accompanied by male Lithuanians came to the Geruliai camp from the ghetto to take produce from the warehouses in Geruliai. The murderers who were still busy shooting on Sunday dragged these women off as well to the pit, and they were about to shoot them. But their chief, Jodeikis, let them go, adding: "Let them live for the time being," Among the women who came from the Telzh ghetto and stood ready to be shot in Geruliai were Ruta Gurvitz; Roza Ziv; Leye Kopl; and others. When they returned to the ghetto they related what they had seen Mrs. Khayetovitz and her child lying dead in the pit. The barracks were full of blood. This was because the old and sick women, who could not even walk the 100 meters to the pit, had been shot in the barracks. The pit was full of the totally naked bodies of women and children.

### **In the Telzh Ghetto. Testimony of Malke Gilis:**

On Saturday, August 30 the five hundred young women who had been selected were brought into a ghetto on the Bathhouse Street, in the worst part of Telzh, on the edge of Lake Mastas. The ghetto was surrounded on three sides by a high wooden fence. On the fence were several rows of barbed wire. The fourth side of the ghetto was bounded by Lake Mastas. A gate had been built into the ghetto fence, through which women were let out to go to work. The ghetto consisted of small, low, old wooden houses, with neither windows nor doors. There were no stoves. These were ruins; the roofs were old and full of holes. In the middle of the ghetto was an old study house. There was constantly knee-deep mud in the ghetto street.

The next day, Sunday, August 31, four women accompanied by Lithuanian bandits rode on wagons back to the Geruliai camp to bring produce and some of the cheaper possessions back to the ghetto. The four women were: the mother of the Telzh Beitar group, Esther Bloch; Ruta Gurvitz (aged 20); Roza Ziv (17); and Leye Kopel. When the four women returned to the ghetto they related that many female bodies were scattered around the pit, because the pit was not large enough for all the women who had been shot. In the barns lay murdered women who had not been able to walk the short distance to the pit. There in the barn lay murdered old, sick women, and women who had begun to go into labor. The following pregnant women were thus shot: Taybe Kaplan (aged 25); Sore Tsvik (aged 28); Mrs. Elfant, born in Yelok, daughter of the rabbi in Yelok. As Mery Shlomovitz relates, Mrs. Heni Bloch (nee Blekman) had begun to give birth at the pit. The Lithuanian murderers threw the unfortunate mother into the pit while she was still alive. The little, half-born child was dragged along after its mother as she was thrown into the pit. The Lithuanian murderers were doubled over with laughter at this tragic scene. Mery saw this incident with her own eyes, while she was standing not far from the pit.

The four women who went to Geruliai on Sunday for produce and possessions returned to the ghetto half crazed from terror and anguish. They told everyone in the ghetto what they had seen near the pit and in the barns.

The women brought with them the cheapest possessions, which the Lithuanian murderers did not want. The Lithuanian murderers distributed the better things immediately after they completed shooting the women on Saturday, August 30, 1941. After the Jew murderers had distributed the better things, peasants from the city and the countryside came running. They pulled the better underwear off of the dead women and also robbed the better things that remained in the yard near the barracks. There was nothing left for the four women to bring into the ghetto.

Everything that they did bring was useless. It was only good as a memento for the mothers, sisters and children of the women still living in the ghetto. The possessions of the murdered people drove the women in the ghetto mad with pain and sorrow. Each of them sought a scrap of something which could serve as a memento. The women in the ghetto had nothing to eat. They sewed and repaired the bits of junk and exchanged them with Lithuanian peasants for bread. The women in the ghetto slept on the floor, on the cold earth. There was nothing they could use as bedding. There were no beds, no candles, nor any wood. Nor was there anything to eat. The autumn of 1941 was very cold and wet. The women went about barefoot, naked, discouraged, weeping, without a bit of hope of remaining alive. The women began tearing apart the old huts. They tore off boards with their hands, broke them with their foot and used them to make fires to warm themselves. There was absolutely nothing to cook. They were

given nothing. A week later they received 100 grams of bread daily per person, but the 100 grams of bread were not given every day. Sometimes it was given only a few times each week.

After they had been in the ghetto a week, the county head Ramanauskas, named as director of the ghetto Cepauskas, had come from Memel to Telzh in the year 1939. Until the war he had worked in the Telzh post office as an employee. The director's task was to take care of the ghetto. He allowed thirty women to go out into the city every day, but they had to wear two yellow stars, one in front and one in back. The thirty women went out into the street with packs on their backs, taking along things to exchange for bread. But since most of them no longer even had any junk left, they simply went from house to house begging food from the Lithuanian townspeople. The women in the ghetto called this means of obtaining food *shnorite* (begging). When the gates of the ghetto were opened, many women crowded together and pushed their way through the gate into the town.

Peasants in the countryside requested that they be given Jewish women as workers. The director Cepauskas assigned Jewish girls to work for the peasants. Every peasant could take as many women as he wanted to. But he had to guarantee that he would bring the women back to the ghetto after work. The peasants had to give their precise addresses and first and last names. For each woman, the peasants paid the director three marks a day. The peasants made the girls do the hardest kinds of work. Not all the women even received enough to eat from the peasants. Most of the women in the ghetto were still young, between the ages of fourteen and eighteen. They had to do the hardest kinds of work for the peasants. They went about barefoot all autumn. When they were digging potatoes, it was already quite cold in the morning. At times the water was covered with ice. The young girls had to work barefoot and half-naked on such cold mornings. The peasants would not let them into their houses to sleep after work. The girls had to sleep in the barns.

A wealthy landowner took ten young girls to work in the fields. He kept them for a certain time, until the work in the fields was finished. The wealthy peasant only brought five girls back to the ghetto. He explained that the other five had been taken away to do field work for a brother of his near the town of Trishkiai. A lengthy time passed, and the five girls did not return to the ghetto. The sisters who remained in the ghetto rode to the village to look for the five girls, but returned to the ghetto having learned nothing. Later it was discovered that the five girls had been raped, exploited for a while, and finally murdered in a horrible manner. (Those were the rumors among the women in the ghetto.) In general everyone knew that all the women in the countryside were forced to sleep with the peasants or their sons. Many women escaped from the countryside back into the ghetto. As Malke relates, most of those who were with the peasants in the villages were young girls, still children.

Several hundred women were working for peasants at that time. It was even worse in the ghetto. Every night drunken partisans (Lithuanian murderers) came into the houses in the ghetto, and terrified the women in the middle of the night. There were many young pregnant women in the ghetto then. Many were weak and hungry.

## **The Clinic in the Ghetto**

After the director came to the ghetto, he set up an office in one of the better houses. He spent the entire day there. At night the director left the ghetto.

After the director had been appointed, Dr Dovid Kaplan was brought to the ghetto from Varniai. He had remained in the small town after all the Jews of Varniai were slaughtered. His mother had been shot in Geruliai together with other women from Varniai. Also in the ghetto were Dr Moyshe Blat and his wife, Dr Mine Blat, together with their child and mother. Moyshe Blat was brought to the ghetto from Geruliai with the five hundred women.

Dr Dovid Kaplan, Dr Moyshe Blat, Dr Mrs. Blat and Dr Miss Shapiro, along with the dentist Dr Shrolovitz from Kretinga, set up a clinic for the ghetto, in the unfinished home of the Jewish shoemaker from Telzh, Fayn. There was a room for women in labor, a room for heart sufferers and for those with lung diseases. There were many births in the clinic at that time. But the children lived for a short time, and then died. There were more than a few cases of mothers dying in childbirth then. The mortality among the children, and to some degree of the mothers, was explained by the constant fear of death each day in the ghetto, the constant hunger and cold, and the tragic experiences in the Rainiai camp and then in the Geruliai camp.

1 . Miriam Vaserman, nee Rabinovitz, from Masheikiai, who had graduated from the Yavne Gymnasium in Telzh, gave birth to a girl in the ghetto, and contracted blood poisoning after her labor. Malke requested that Dr. Plechavitzius from the municipal hospital take Miriam into the hospital and examine her. A peasant's horse and wagon were rented, and Miriam was taken to Dr. Plechavitsius (the brother of General Plechavitsius). The doctor examined her, and decided that he could do nothing more for Miriam, and that she would soon die. A few day later Miriam died in the ghetto clinic. She was taken to the old ghetto synagogue. Miriam was still young, just nineteen. In death she was beautiful as an angel. Malke and a group of women received permission from the director to bury

Miriam at the Jewish cemetery.

2 . Several days later Hadasa Levin (nee Gershovitz) gave birth to a boy. In the ghetto everyone marvelled at the child. He was handsome, healthy and large. The child lived for about ten days, and then died.

3 . Several days later the child of Khasye Ortman (nee Bloch in Telzh) died.

4 . A few days later the child of Leye Shapiro died. (She is now Leye Rudnik; see the testimony about the towns of Laukuva and Shilale — L.K. )

Many small children died at that time. All of them were buried at the Jewish cemetery.

### **Rosh Hashana 1941**

All of the women in the ghetto gathered in the synagogue to pray and pour out their sorrows and pain before the Jewish God in heaven. A young woman, aged twenty, led the prayers. She prayed well and beautifully, just like a cantor. There was not a single man in the synagogue. The women prayed in the place of all the men who had been shot. On the morning of the second day of Rosh Hashana, the peasants in the villages had to bring all the women who were working for them into the ghetto. Thus on the second day of Rosh Hashana all of the women who were still living and who belonged in the Telzh ghetto were in the synagogue. The Lithuanian murderers' order to bring all the Jewish women into the ghetto caused a panic among all the women. They were certain that their moment of death had arrived. Everyone was certain of it. Seas of tears poured from the eyes of the surviving women that Rosh Hashana. They all pleaded with God for forgiveness, and repented of the sins that they had never even committed. It was a day for moral reckoning with God, and a moment of eternal parting with the world.

Dr Blat came to the synagogue for the afternoon service on the second day of Rosh Hashana. He was the only man in the synagogue on Rosh Hashana. Once again the young girl stood at the lectern and prayed instead of a cantor, instead of a man. Her sweet voice and prayer to God to save them from death called forth rivers of tears from all the women present. After Rosh Hashana each woman went back to her dark "home," waiting for death at every moment. After Rosh Hashana all of the women were forced to ride back to the peasants' homes.

### **Yom Kippur in the Synagogue in the Telzh Ghetto**

All of the women gathered together quite early. Miss Golde Hamerlan stood at the lectern instead of a cantor. Everyone without exception was fasting. Miss Hamerlan's voice threatened, demanded and tore its way into the dead heavens. In the afternoon many women lay on the floor in a faint. The stronger and healthier ones continued praying until nightfall. There was not a single man in the synagogue that Yom Kippur. It was a Yom Kippur with no-one but women and small children. Just like men they swayed back and forth, begging God for forgiveness, for a good year of life and livelihood, and so forth. In the back of their minds, all the women thought this Yom Kippur would be the last for all the Jewish women in the Telzh ghetto. And because of this their weeping was so heart-rending. They wept and complained and begged God to have mercy on them and on the children, and they wept when they remembered previous Yom Kippur days together with their families. The world had never seen a Yom Kippur like this, never! Who knew if the world would ever understand it, and remember, and recall it? Who knew?

### **Torture, Rape and Humiliation of Women - Rumors of Their Impending Slaughter**

At that time no one understood the reasons why the women had been brought from the villages.

At that time women who had a trade, tailors, seamstresses and the like, began to be taken out of the ghetto. Every Lithuanian had the right to take "specialists" out of the ghetto. They only had to pay the director three marks for a day's work. Many Lithuanian townspeople picked Jewish girls. The Lithuanians chose the best educated girls as servants, in order to take revenge on the Jewish intelligentsia. The women who had come from the countryside on the second day of Rosh Hashana related that the peasants were sucking the marrow from their bones, weren't giving them enough to eat, tormenting and mocking them. Some of the peasants forced the women to sleep with them. The situation of the women in the villages was no better than in the ghetto.

At the time of the holidays, various rumors about the date when the women would be taken to be shot began spreading in the city. Committees began to appear frequently, checking on hygiene in the ghetto. It was not difficult to figure out what conclusions the committees made. The women and children lay on the naked ground, with neither beds nor bedding. There was no soap with which to wash themselves. The mud outside was dreadful. The nourishment was minimal. The head of the committees was the Lithuanian Dr Mikulskis from the city of Telzh. He was the county medical officer; a thorough, committed anti-Semite.

The women in the ghetto clearly imagined the conclusions the committees might make, especially when Dr Mikulskis was the head of the committees.

A rumor spread among the Lithuanians in the city that various contagious diseases were going around in the ghetto, especially typhus and spotted typhus. The rumor was deliberately spread. The Lithuanian townspeople began driving out of their homes the women who came from four to six in the afternoon to beg. The situation of the unfortunate women grew worse. For a certain time women were not even taken into the city to work. However, the Lithuanian murderers knew about the false epidemic scare, and people began bit by bit taking the women back into the city to work. Yet various rumors about shooting the Jews were spread even wider in the city and in the ghetto.

Once, in the middle of the night between Saturday and Sunday, precisely at 1:00 a.m., a German entered the ghetto. He went from house to house announcing to the women that the "Lithuanian swine" were going to come the next day, Sunday, and shoot all the women. He left the ghetto, taking with him a girl named Rostovsky, aged 15. He took her to his hotel in the city. A few hours later he brought her back into the ghetto. She said that he had not bothered her at all. Many women escaped through the side open to the lake, from the ghetto into the countryside.

But nothing happened on Sunday, and the women suffered nothing worse than fear. Yet the women sought ways to save themselves. Everyone knew that finally the women and children would be shot. Many women succeeded in escaping from the Telzh ghetto to the Shavl ghetto. All of this was done in the greatest secrecy. Even the women's closest acquaintances knew nothing about it.

At that time Rebitzin Rashi Bloch and Mrs Feyge Pet, with a three year old child, escaped. The partisans spotted and chased them. Mrs Feyge Pet and her child were brought back into the ghetto. Rebitzin Rashi Bloch was shot. Yet the escapes from the ghetto continued just the same. Several dozen women arrived in the Shavl ghetto where most of them later died. Only a few of the escapees survived the war.

Malke Gilis spent some three weeks in the hospital. The behavior of the medical personnel was very bad. Yet a Russian nurse did everything she could for Malke. Malke did not take the medicines which the Lithuanian doctors did provide from time to time. The Russian nurse stole medicine and brought it to Malke. The Lithuanian nurses asked Malke to give them the few things she still possessed. Malke had to keep her clothes and boots under her pillow.

The Lithuanian doctor, a thorough anti-Semite and hooligan, told Malke about the shooting of the women in Geruliai with a sarcastic laugh: "All the Jewish women were driven out of the Geruliai camp and shot. Your mother is never going to come to you now." He told it with as much joy as if he had won a big lottery. The nurse, a Lithuanian woman, smiled as he said these words.

Malke's sores on her torso and leg grew a little bit better and she was taken to the ghetto. She spent another ten days in the ghetto clinic, and then, leaning on a stick, she went out into the ghetto. She had nowhere to go. She moved in with Hadase Levin. There were nine women and a two-year-old child, Yosef Levin, in the room.

### **Sick and Not Working Will Be Shot; Those Who Convert Will Be Allowed to Live**

Various rumors circulated to the effect that those who were sick and weren't working would be shot. Mrs Gilis went out to the city to look for a peasant who would take her to work in the countryside. The peasants and Lithuanian townspeople made financial deals with the unfortunate women. On one hand they took many valuable things from the women in exchange for taking them as workers; on the other hand the women worked hard and earned money for them.

Malke Gilis easily found work in her trade. She was a good milliner and everyone knew that she was a specialist in ladies' hats. The Lithuanian Mrs Kochanskiene took her on. The peasant woman was a widow; she lived with the German commandant of Telzh. All the Jew murderers used to come to her house. Among them were Jodeikis, Platakys, the brothers Indzhiulevichiai and others. At that time the woman ran a hotel, which had earlier belonged to the Jew Yoselovitz. She inherited all the possessions of the murdered Jew and his family. She also had many things belonging to women who had been shot; the murderers used to bring them to her as gifts. The women took orders for ladies' hats, and Malke did the work for her. She grew rich on Malke's labor. In addition she had considerable income from the hotel. She had gold, silver, and sewing machines belonging to murdered Jews which the murderers brought her. Only German military personnel lived in the hotel. Malke had to go down to eat lunch every day together with the Germans. The Germans did not know that Malke was a Jew, and they used to invite her to go with them to the theater and the cinema. Malke would think up excuses. Malke was able to purchase potatoes, bread and other food from the woman with money. She made these purchases for her friends in the ghetto. One time a Lithuanian woman noticed Malke sitting in the hotel eating lunch together with the Germans.

The woman, a tailor, was a steady customer of Malke's. The woman reported who Malke was to the German commandant, and warned him that Malke might poison the Germans in the hotel. Malke was forbidden to go downstairs to eat. She ate with the proprietress in the latter's room.

One time Kochanskiene offered Malke poison, so that she could poison herself while she was being taken away to be shot. The proprietress explained that she was a good woman, and believed that Malke should always have poison in her possession, because shooting is worse. The "good Lithuanian woman" would not leave in peace the boots Malke wore on her feet. At every opportunity she asked Malke to sell her the boots, and she added that Malke would not be needing them in any case. Once Malke slept at Kochanskiene's hotel. Malke heard the proprietress giving her maid strict instructions to be careful with Malke, and not to tell her anything about the preparations for a slaughter of the women in the ghetto. Malke left her, and went to work for a German woman who was a teacher in the Lithuanian gymnasium. The woman's name was Mrs Tornau. A son of hers worked in the German labor office; he brought Malke all the news. He was a young and worthy boy. Malke was there for a week, and then she was released from work.

A competition sprang up among the Lithuanians. Several people wanted to hire Malke. Of course, no one was thinking of Malke's welfare. No one had any sympathy for her. But having Malke as an employee meant having someone who earned well, and hence the possibility of growing rich on Malke's unpaid labor.

Malke arranged with the German labor office to be hired by a Lithuanian girl named Stase Baltmishkyte. While Malke was working for this girl, rumors began circulating once again that preparations were being made to shoot all the women in the ghetto; but that those who converted would be allowed to remain alive. An epidemic of conversions began. Most of these cases were young girls, who hoped that they could save their young lives through converting, and then return to the Jewish faith once the war was over. The converts had to go to church every Sunday. On Sunday morning they were let out of the ghetto, and just before noon they had to return. During the two hours from four to six p.m., when the women were allowed to go begging from house to house, the girls went into the church and converted. They immediately received baptismal certificates, and immediately put on crucifixes. The priests promised to save the girls from death.

The world will in any case never understand the terrible conditions in the ghetto at that time. It was in the autumn of the year 1941, which came early and very cold. There was no wood in the ghetto, nor anything to eat. The prospects of remaining alive were negligible. So it is no wonder that several women with a weakened will to resist temporarily converted.

### **The Executions of the Women and Their Children**

During the day on Saturday, December 21, 1941, a rumor was spread in the city and in the ghetto that the women and children in the ghetto would be shot very soon. Malke went to the German woman Tarnau to find out whether the rumors were correct. The German woman answered Malke: "We will all see each other in Heaven." Malke understood that the rumors were correct. She came to the ghetto and reported this to Dr Blat and also to Miss Dr Shapiro and Esther Bloch. They decided to announce this to all of the women in the ghetto. A short time later all the women knew that on December 25 all the women would be shot. On Sunday morning everyone noticed that the ghetto was surrounded by a reinforced guard of Lithuanian partisans and police. All the women began to be brought in from the countryside. All day Sunday and Monday the women were brought into the ghetto on wagons. The murderers promised the women that they were being taken for health examinations. The women thoroughly understood this "bloody joke." But many peasants prevented the women from escaping. They locked up the women and took them in horse-drawn wagons, their hands and feet tied up. Malke herself saw peasants leading women with bound hands and feet. The women shouted and wept. All of the roads were guarded by Lithuanian police and partisans.

During the night from Sunday until Monday women escaped from the ghetto. Some of them crept through the fence. Some of them went into the waters of the lake and escaped from the ghetto by wading. The panic was dreadful. The women saw death lurking over them every minute. Many of them went insane. Women strangled their children with their own hands, so that the children would not have to be murdered by the Lithuanians or be buried alive. The unfortunate women saw that they had no hopes of surviving. They cried in a heart-rending way, begging the murderers to let them leave the ghetto, but the partisans enjoyed themselves, laughing and joking. The women ran here and there, wringing their hands, their eyes staring at the heavens which were dumb to their weeping and prayers. Nevertheless several hundred women managed to escape from the ghetto. Most of them were caught while escaping and taken to prison. From there they were taken directly to the pit.

Between Saturday night and Monday evening women continued to be brought from the countryside. On Monday, December 23, 1941 in the evening, the murderers packed groups of women onto wagons, and drove them to the

forest near the Rainiai compound, not far from the spot where the men had been shot. The women and their children were taken to their deaths in groups.

Those who remained in the ghetto had to wait their turn. It was impossible to escape. Many of the village peasants brought the bound women directly to the pit to be shot. The shouts and weeping of the women and children did not frighten the murderers. They carried out their bloody task to the end.

On Tuesday December 24, 1941, the murderers finished shooting the women, and they immediately began preparing for their great, festive holiday of Christmas. The murderers celebrated that holiday with much liquor, wine, honey cake and music. The Lithuanian murderers of Telzh had rid themselves of the Jews forever. Nor did the girls who had converted save their young lives.

### **Murdered After the Slaughter of the Women and Children**

As Malke Gilis relates, many women escaped to peasants in the villages. The peasants kept them for a certain time, and then they themselves brought police who arrested the escaped women. There were dozens of such cases. There was no way to save oneself, no one to turn to. This was at the beginning of the war, when the peasants were certain of a German victory and couldn't keep themselves away from the Jews' "treasures," which they inherited from the dead Jews.

After Christmas 1941, there were 75 women in the Telzh prison who had been captured in the villages and forests. They too were taken to the Rainiai forest and shot. No Germans were seen during the slaughter. Everything was carried out by Lithuanians from Telzh and the surrounding area. Whose command it was to shoot the women of Telzh, Malke does not know.

- 1) In the winter of 1941 three young girls (aged 12, 13 and 14) were found leaning against each other, frozen, around a tree.
- 2) Miss Dr Shapira was found buried thirty centimeters underground. It was said that she had been murdered by a peasant with whom she was hiding. This was in the summer of 1942. Who murdered her, the name of the peasant and the village; Malke does not remember.
- 3) Esther Bloch, Gite Bloch, and Eydele Bloch (aged 16) made their way out of the ghetto and escaped to the peasant Kelbshys. They were discovered there, and all were shot in the Rainiai forest. It is not known who betrayed them. This was in the year 1942.
- 4) Mery Shilomovitz, who had escaped from the pit at Geruliai while the women and children were shot, made her way out of the ghetto. She spent some time with a peasant woman in a village. There she was caught and shot. It is not known who betrayed her and who killed her.
- 5) Five women who had managed to escape the ghetto lay hidden in a village with a church, six or seven kilometres, from Telzh. Among the five were the sisters Bine Borukhovitz, Feyge and Brayne Libovitz. Malke does not know the first or last names of the other two. They hid with a Russian for two years. All five died. Who betrayed them and how they died, Malke Gilis does not know.
- 6) Ruta Gurvitz, a twenty year old student, had married a Jewish engineer in the year 1940. Her husband was one of the first men shot. While she was in the Telzh ghetto she became acquainted with a Lithuanian from Telzh and married him. The two of them left Telzh. She bore a child and lived in a small town with her Lithuanian husband. A day before the Russian army arrived in Telzh she was recognized as a Jewish woman. Her husband shot her with his own hand, and then he shot himself.
- 7) In the summer of 1942 two women came to the peasant Juosas Baltmishkis. They were two sisters named Khaye Tugam and Mashe Libovitz. Mashe's husband had died with the rest of the men at Rainiai. There was a third sister named Libe together with these two. Libe was married. They escaped the ghetto together. All three sisters hid with Russians, all three with different peasants. Once they were spotted and betrayed. Two wagons carrying Lithuanian police came, and they found Libe at the home of a Russian. They took Libe into the yard and shot her on the spot. The second sister, Mashe, saw the murderers coming from a distance. She managed to hide under a porch. The murderers did not find her. The third sister Khaye did not manage to hide, and climbed under a bed. The Russian peasant threw a sack over her. The murderers searched everywhere. They did not find her. When the murderers had left the village, the Russians no longer wanted to keep the two sisters. Khaye and Mashe came to the peasant with whom Sheva and Malke Gilis were hiding. The two women had a few possessions, and gave them to the peasant Juosas Baltmishkis.

### **The Survivors: How Malke Gilis Survived**

Altogether, 64 women escaped the ghetto and survived. Dr Dovid Kaplan and Dr Blat, together with his family, also managed to hide and survived. Before the Telzh ghetto was liquidated, there were 500 women who had been

brought from Geruliai and 220 from the countryside. The 220 women had not been in the ghetto. They had worked for peasants, who had taken them from the Geruliai camp.

On the morning of Sunday, December 22, 1941, no one was allowed to leave the ghetto. Malke Gilis had a pass from the German commandant to go into the city to work. She showed it to the murderers, and promised to be back in the ghetto at 12 o'clock. Fortunately the murderers allowed Malke out of the ghetto, and she did not return there. The Lithuanian girl Stase Baltmishkyte hid Malke in her home. Eight more women came running to Malke from the ghetto; they too hid with the Lithuanian woman. All eight lay hidden under the beds and in an armchair. This was Sunday evening. When the police came looking for Malke, the young Lithuanian woman explained to the police that Malke had gone to the ghetto in the morning and hadn't returned. The police believed her, and they did not look around.

The women escaped further in various directions. Malke Gilis escaped Telzh, and mixed among the peasants who were coming from church. On Sunday evening it was quite dark and rainy. It was the Sunday before Christmas. Malke left the city. On the way to a village she met up with Sheva Bloch, who had run away from the ghetto the same night. On the way the two women encountered wagons which were bringing Jewish women from the countryside into the ghetto. The women in the wagons moaned and wept. The two women ran further. Then they saw people with flashlights. The women understood that these were police, and hid.

At that moment women who had escaped from the ghetto arrived. The police arrested the women. Malke and Sheva Bloch snuck into a forest. It was dark as the grave that night. The women wandered aimlessly, through mud and puddles. It was bitterly cold by then. Half the night the two women wandered through the forest. In the middle of the night they reached a peasant's hut at the edge of the forest. They knocked on the door. The peasant came out. He was an elderly peasant, aged 65.

He took the women in and temporarily hid them in a chicken coop. For several hours he dug, preparing a small pit near a pig sty. He placed a bit of straw inside. Then the women lay in the pit. The peasant covered the women with boards and shoveled dirt over them. A pipe carried a bit of stinking air to the women in the pit. For three days and nights the women lay in the pit with nothing to eat or drink, and without seeing any light.

On the morning of Monday December 23, Lithuanian partisans and police came to the peasant's home, looking for women who had escaped from the ghetto. But they found no one, and went away. Immediately afterward the peasant placed the two women in his house, in a side room, beneath the floor. There was an old storage space for potatoes there, covered with a tap door and covered with dirt. The two women found out that the good peasant they had happened to find was the father of Malke's acquaintance, Miss Stase Baltmishkyte, who was learning a trade in Telzh, and with whom the eight women who had escaped from the ghetto had temporarily hidden.

After New Year's came the peasant's son, a policeman in Telzh who had shot Jews. His father immediately told him about the two Jewish women who were hiding at his home. The policeman Vaclovas Baltmishkis did no harm to the two women.

The two women lay in the small cellar for a full six months. At one point the son proposed to the father that they put an end to the two Jewish women. The father was against it. The two women heard the conversation. The next day his daughter Stase came from the city. She had settled in a Jewish home in Telzh and done everything she could to become an intellectual. As she understood it, that meant she should become a milliner. Malke proposed to her that she take orders in the city and bring them to the country, where Malke would finish them and also teach Stase her trade. Stase liked the idea, and thanks to this the two women remained at the peasant's home. Stase kept for herself all the money earned for the work. She did not even give Malke a crust of bread for it.

One time the peasant announced that the women had been spotted, and he would not keep them any longer. He drove the two of them out to a bunker in the forest. The two women declared that they would both rather drown themselves. This was December 26, 1942. From a distance the two women noticed trucks full of Germans coming and surrounding the bunker. The two women remained at the peasant's.

The peasant's son often came and spoke about women who had been found in the forest or at peasant's homes. Once the son came from the city, quite satisfied, bearing a pack of goods. Malke Gilis herself saw a white bedspread in the pack, smeared with much blood. The rest of the goods were also partly covered with blood. Where had he gotten the things? Malke Gilis did not know whether he shot someone when he took these goods.

The old man often treated the women very badly. He tormented Malke for some time with the demand that she convert. Sheva Bloch had already converted in the ghetto, Malke resisted the peasant's demand. The peasant was a very religious man. More than once he shouted at Malke: "Cursed Jew woman!" Malke saw that the peasant's demands that she convert grew more and more intense, so she decided to leave the peasant. Yet the peasant was

not a bad man, and he did not let Malke leave. He also had material considerations for keeping her. Malke earned good money for the hats, and meanwhile the peasant's daughter learned a trade, which gave her a chance to become "an intellectual."

During the action against children in the Shavl ghetto, Mrs Shoshana Kagan (nee Gurvitz) escaped with her daughter Naomi, aged seven. A different peasant brought Shoshana to the peasant Baltmishkis, who agreed to hide and rescue her as well. At the peasant's home Malke worked on the hats. A second woman worked as a servant. They suffered considerable hunger, cold and fear. More than once the peasant drove them out of the house and even beat them. During the whole time they only received enough food to remain alive, though Malke earned enough money. More than once Germans with Lithuanian police, and later Germans and Ukrainians, came into the house. They looked around and inspected the peasant's home. The Germans had gotten word that the peasant was hiding Jewish women. But the murderers did not find the women, and all of them remained alive.

As the front was approaching the village, Germans made their quarters at the peasant's home. They were there for some two months. When the Germans left the house on maneuvers, the peasant gave the women food. The sound of Red artillery fire encouraged the peasant to save the five Jewish women. He hoped that things would go well for him "in the Red world to come" as well. A day before the Red Army arrived the peasant's son, the policeman, Leyb Koniuchowsky escaped to Germany.

### **The Long-Awaited Liberation**

The five women hid until the Red Army came and put an end to the suffering of all the Jews who were in hiding.

Why did the policeman, the peasant's son, not betray the Jewish women? Malke explains this with the fact that he respected his old father as well as his sister. In addition, it may be that he himself began to understand the huge crime that he had committed in shooting the Jews. He was afraid of possible punishment or revenge, if the Soviets returned. In keeping the women, the elderly father wanted to have evidence which would clear the family of the awful crime which the son had committed.

The peasant Baltmishkis kept the other two women because they had given him a gold watch, shoes, clothes and other things.

The defeats of the German army at Moscow, and later on other fronts, led the peasant to anticipate the possibility of a reward after the Soviet victory.

In general the truth must be told: the peasant risked a great deal. He was deeply religious and did everything to keep the women alive. More than once he gave the women some bread without his wife's knowledge.

The women were saved by the peasant Juosas Baltmishkis, and they will be eternally grateful to him. At that time the peasant lived in the vilage of Germunt, Telzh County, eight kilometers from the city. The good peasant saved five Jewish women, risking his life. He will be eternally remembered for the good.

*Translated from a Yiddish manuscript into English by Dr Jonathan Boyarin New York March 24, 1988*

### **Attestation of Malke Gilis**

I, Malke Gilis, born Rabinovitz on December 10, 1912, related to L. Koniuchowsky word for word everything that is written on 47 pages in this notebook. I signed each and every page, and each page is also stamped with the seal of the Cultural Office of the Landsberg Camp. All the facts, dates and names of places and people are consistent with the tragic reality of the past, and I attest thereto at the end with my signature: Malke Gilis [signature].

L. Koniuchowsky [signature]

Landsberg, December 11-12-13, 1946



## **The Slaughter of Women and Children in the Telzh Ghetto**

### **Khane Pelts relates:**

The 500 women and children in the ghetto were allowed out into the street for two hours each day to beg something to eat. The inhabitants regarded the shooting of the Jews as a small operation, like cutting off a growth from the Lithuanian body. There were also those who were sympathetic, but very few. In addition to the food they begged, the women often received some 100 grams of bread a day. The women were not taken to work. A month passed in this fashion. When the work in the fields and villages began and it was time to dig for potatoes, the peasants in the countryside were permitted to take Jewish women from the ghetto as workers. The women went to work eagerly, because they hoped to receive better nourishment. In addition they wanted to be useful, thinking they might be able to save themselves that way. The women worked for the peasants for more than two months. The women from the countryside used to come to visit the ghetto on Sunday, bringing food for their friends from the peasants. The women came from the countryside without any guard. They only had to wear yellow patches.

An order came that before Christmas all of the Jewish women who worked for the peasants had to return to the ghetto "for health examinations." Everyone knew what was really going on. Many peasants bound the hands and feet of their Jewish women and took them back into the ghetto. Those peasants who were a little bit late brought the bound women directly to the pits near the Rainiai compound. Those women who had remained in the ghetto were already exhausted or sick. Others who had small children could not escape.

Khane Pelts, her sisters Rokhel and Mine; Ida Aranovitz and her sister Rivke; Khave Kagan and her daughter Mine; Leye Pelts; all were permitted by the peasant to escape from his farm, and they avoided death this time. Other women managed to escape from the ghetto. The rest were taken away from the ghetto. This was on Christmas Eve. They were taken across Lake Mastas to the Rainiai compound. Pits had already been dug there. It was quite cold already; it was the winter of 1941. The women were forced to strip completely naked. For hours naked women stood in the cold near the pit waiting for death. One of the women still had a watch which she gave to the murderer Indzilevitz, so that he would not keep her in the cold but shoot her quickly. A friend of his, another murderer named Stulpinas who lives by the lake, related this himself in a boasting manner.

A twelve year old girl named Itele Shveid survived the slaughter; She went to the pit naked with nine other women. The murderers turned their backs for a while, and in just a shirt she escaped from them. Other women ran with her but these were shot as they ran. While she was running from village to village, she found an aunt of hers hidden in a village. The two survived together. Her aunt had not been brought back to the ghetto by the peasant, and was in hiding in the village. She was called Blume. Many girls ran to escape the shootings. But they ran naked and barefoot. The peasants did not want to let them into their houses. Their their arms and legs froze and they were caught and returned to the Telzh prison. When a large number had been assembled, they were taken away to the Rainiai pit and shot.

Many women escaped to the Shavl ghetto and died there. Nevertheless some 60 women survived in hiding by peasants with whom they were acquainted, and whom they paid with gold, money and other things. Others kept the women figuring that it would spare them from hiring servants, and they exploited the women with hard work. Many peasants saved young women on condition that the women lived with them. They made the women "wives" of entire groups of men. Others converted and were rescued by Christian believers. Many became prostitutes in the villages, and so forth.

### **How Did Khane Pelts Save Her Life and Survive Until the Liberation?**

Khane Pelts and her friends did not return to the ghetto, but escaped from the peasant for whom they had worked all summer. They went to a different peasant named Arlauskas in the village of Burnu. They gave him right away three women's and three men's watches, diamonds and other valuables. He promised to hide the unfortunate woman until the end of the war. He kept them no more than a week in an attic until he drove them out. The women were still terrified, exhausted and desperate. Only one week earlier their sisters and mothers had been slaughtered. There were no more Jews left. They wept, pleading with the peasant to keep them a while longer and let them gather their strength. The peasant would not agree to this. The women were left with no financial means. They could not believe that this peasant, who had brought them food in the ghetto, would treat them this way. He had done this in order to win the trust of the unfortunate women, and that was why the eight women gave him everything that they had. They asked him to return to them at least part of what he had taken from them, because they had no way left to pay another peasant who might take them in, hide them and feed them. But the peasant threatened that if they did not go away and stop asking for their valuables, he would bring them into the hands of his Lithuanian friends to shoot them. He ordered two prisoners who worked for him to throw the women out. At night all of the women left with no prospects, aimlessly, into a strange and hostile world, among unknown forests,

pastures and fields. Their feet burned with cold, wind and strangeness. They went into a forest, not far from the Geruliai compound. In the forest it was dark and cold. They all clung to each other, warming each other's bodies. Early the next day all eight went to the home of a peasant they did not know. They were all there for several days. Khane and her two sisters Mine and Rokhel went into the village Arindaytsh. The rest went to Laukuva. In the village of Arindaytsh they wandered until a peasant whom they did not know took them in and kept them for several days. The master for whom the eight women had worked during the summer, Ivashkevitsius, came there with a friend of his from near Krozhiai. But for the time being the peasant from near Korzhiai could take only one woman. The older sister Mine went to his place. He promised to come and take Khane and Rokhel a week later. Meanwhile they stayed with the peasant for three days.

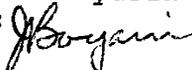
Every day he threatened to hand them over to the police. He demanded money from them. The two sisters still had a ring. They surrendered it, but he demanded more. They pleaded with him that they had nothing left. He took the two of them to a "cousin" of his near Luknik. There he left them in a forest to wait. He himself went off and hid. A while later he came out of the forest and said that his "cousin" had ordered them to go in. The girls asked the peasant to go with them but he refused. He drove them out of the wagon, and drove away himself. The two girls stood alone in the great cold. It was four a.m. They walked on another half kilometer and knocked on the door of a small house. The peasant, whom they did not know, gave the two girls a friendly greeting. They warmed themselves up, ate their fill and began relating the plan to hand them over to a certain "cousin." The peasant explained that the "cousin" was a famous Jew-killer. He added that this man would have shot the girls in his own house, without even taking them away to Telzh. They could not stay with this peasant, because a neighbor had spotted them.

From there they went off to the village of Yanapole in Varniai County. Thus they wandered aimlessly, spending a day here, a night there, under constant threat of being caught and shot.

The peasant who was keeping the older sister, Stradomskis from the village of Uzhkainai, came to take the two sisters, as had been planned. But the man with whom he had left them declared that the two had been captured in his house, and they had certainly all been already shot. In the winter of 1941, after long wandering through the fields and villages, they managed to find a hiding place with the priest Shapukas in the town of Pavandeny. They were there in the church for a few weeks. The two sisters found out from him about their sister Mine, who was still with the peasant Stradomskis in the village of Uzhkainai. The peasant Stradomskis took one more of the sisters, Rokhel and Khane went to a monastery which the priest had recommended. Eight or nine women were hiding in the monastery. The monastery was in the village of Koliainai. Rokhele stayed with the peasant Stradomskis for a few weeks, and then went on to a brother of the Koliainai priest. While she was there, a boy from Kelm named Yakov Zak found out about her. From that day on Rokhele, her sisters and the rest of the women in hiding were defended by armed Jewish boys. (See the testimony about the slaughter of the Jews in Kelm by Yakov Zak — L.K.) Yakov Zak found them in the spring of 1942. This is the conclusion of Khane Pelts' testimony.

Translated from Yiddish manuscript  
into English by

Dr. Jonathan Boyarin

Signature: 

New York, New York

March 24, 1988

# THE SLAUGHTER OF JEWS IN THE LITHUANIAN TOWN OF RIETAVAS

## Testimony of:

Yente Alter (nee Gershovitz), born December 24, 1924 in the town of Upinas. Her father's name was Shmuel Gershovitz, her mother's name was Beyle, Education: primary school. Since 1934 she had lived in Rietavas, until the outbreak of the war.

## The Jewish Population; Their Economic and Cultural Life

Rietavas is in Telzh County, forty kilometers from Telzh. The Jura River flows through the town. Until the outbreak of the war some 200 Jewish families lived in Rietavas. Most of the Jews in town were occupied in commerce and artisanry. A few Jewish families were occupied in agriculture. The economic situation, on the average, was not bad.

The larger enterprises and businessmen in town were the following:

- 1 . A mill and sawmill belonging to the Jewish businessman Borukh Rosenheym and his partner.
- 2 . A small leather factory belonging to the Jewish businessman Dovid Fridman. He also had a leather store.

Rietavas contained a Hebrew elementary school, headed by the teacher Perl Levinson from Telzh; a Hebrew-Yiddish library; and a heder. There was a large old synagogue and a study house. Some of the young people studied in the Telzh yeshiva and in the Hebrew gymnasium, Yavne. The majority of the Jewish youth were organized in the Zionist movement.

The relations between the Lithuanian population and the Jews in town were satisfactory. In 1939 it happened more than once that anti-Semitic groups spread leaflets calling for people not to buy from Jews, to avoid their company and so forth. The leaflets were spread by members of the "Verslas" society. The anti-Semitic agitation had its effect. The main leader of the anti-Semitic agitation in Rietavas was the veterinary doctor of the town. After the Red Army arrived in Rietavas in the summer of 1940, the anti-Semites superficially stopped their poisonous agitation against Jews.

In Rietavas there were large barracks where Red Army soldiers were quartered. On Saturday, a day before the war broke out; the army left the town on manoeuvres. The Jews in town sensed that something was going to happen in the immediate future. The Red Army soldiers confidentially told their Jewish acquaintances that a war was bound to break out soon. Rietavas lies not far from where the German border was at that time.

## The Outbreak of War between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union

On Sunday morning, June 22, 1941, people found out that there was war between Fascist Germany and the Soviet Union. The commanders of the Red Army hurriedly evacuated their families. Some of the Jewish and Lithuanian Communists and Communist Youth left with them.

Wounded Red Army soldiers immediately began to be brought to Rietavas from Gargzhdai. The Jews escaped from town into the villages, bringing along some of their better possessions. Some ten young people evacuated to the Soviet Union. The majority of the Jews in town did not believe there would be a quick advance by the German army, and decided to wait in the villages until the Red Army drove the Germans from Lithuania, when they would return to town.

While escaping from Rietavas to the villages, the civilian population was strafed by the German army. Several Jews were killed by the bombardments. Among them Yente remembers:

- 1 . Dovid London, in his thirties, a merchant.
- 2 . Efroyim Ripkin, about 35, a merchant.
- 3 . Ben-Tsion Milshteyn, a former yeshiva student.

At 12:00 on Monday, June 23, 1941, the Jews in the villages saw the town of Rietavas in flame on all sides. On that day, after a great battle including street fighting, the Germans entered the town.

On Tuesday, June 24, 1941 an order was given for all the Jews to leave the villages and return to town. Lithuanians were strictly forbidden to hide Jews. The peasants in the villages simply drove the Jews off of their farms. On Tuesday the Jews returned to town. A few Jews still remained in the countryside. Lithuanian partisans went from village to village forcing the Jews to ride back into town, so that by Wednesday, June 25, 1941, there

were virtually no Jews left in the villages. Some of the Lithuanians, who had fought with weapons, helping the German army against the Red Army, gave themselves the name of "Partisans." The entire town was burned down. Only a few houses near the edge of town still stood. All of the Jews settled into the few remaining houses. The civilian power in town lay in the hands of partisans.

### **Torture, Humiliation, Looting and Murder of the Jewish Population**

On Wednesday, June 25, 1941 the leader of the partisans announced to the Jews from town who had returned, that whoever wanted to could move and live in the countryside. He added that everyone would only have to come to town to work each day. The Jews happily packed up their things and rode to the country. But they were turned back to town by Germans. All the Jews were gathered into a barn belonging to a Lithuanian farmer named Steponkas.

As soon as all the Jews from town and those who had been brought from the villages were taken to the compound, the Germans and partisans lined up all the Jews, men, women and children, in rows. They themselves lined up in a row facing the terrified Jews, aiming their rifles, as if they were getting ready to shoot the Jews on the spot.

The panic among the Jews was great. Several of them began saying Psalms and final confession.

They took men out of the row, beat them and drove them around the yard with pieces of wood they had torn from the fence. The men had to undress until they were half-naked, and the partisans and Germans poured cold water on them. This went on for several hours.

On the evening of Wednesday, June 24, 1941 all the Jews slept in the barn on the bare earth. The barn was full of cattle dung. Everyone lay down to sleep on this refuse.

All day long on Thursday, June 26, 1941 the men continued to be tormented in various murderous ways. The town rabbi Shmuel Funder and Shmuel Gershovitz had half their beards shaved off by the Germans, who chased them around the yard together with the rest of the men. The torture of the men became a daily program for the German murderers and their loyal assistants, the Lithuanian partisans.

The men not only had to run around the yard for hours. They were forced to run, fall down, and get back up, and also to sing religious and Soviet songs. They were beaten with boards, beams, pieces of wood, and stones. This continued for exactly a week, until the middle of July 1941. From there all the Jews were driven to a second place, in a house belonging to the Lithuanian Rosozovsky. The crowding was terrible. Hunger tormented everyone. The Lithuanian partisans stood watch around the house, making sure that the Jews did not leave. No one was allowed in to see the Jews. The Jews in the house were fed spoiled bread which the Red Army had left behind.

The men and women who were able-bodied were taken every day to do various tasks. The main job was clearing the ruins away from the streets and cleaning Lithuanians' outhouses. Lithuanian townspeople asked the partisans to bring Jewish women to their houses to wash laundry and floors. Partisans stood on guard while the work was done.

One night one of the brothers Remeikis, who were partisans, came to the house and took away four Jews: 1) the butcher, Moyshe Katsj 2) the wigmaker Heshl Garber' 3) Nokhke Shmole and 4) Felix Radiskansky. The Lithuanian murderers took all four away nearby the Lithuanian cemetery and shot them.

It was said then that the murderer, who was also a butcher, had a grudge against these four Jews. A Lithuanian peasant woman from town, a servant of Nokhke Shmolkes, told about their death the next day.

There were lootings virtually every day. Any Lithuanian who wanted to, looted openly and freely. During the work the partisans tormented, bullied and mocked the Jews and their religion. They had a weakness for teasing, mocking and tormenting religious Jews. Once at work in the courtyard and park of the Polish Count Oginsky, Rabbi Shmuel Funder was forced to get into harness instead of a horse. The rabbi could not withstand this, and suffered a heart attack. He lay dead on the spot. This was July 2 or 3 1941.

Nor were the Jews left in peace at night. The partisans came into the house very often and took Jews out to clean outhouses in the middle of the night. They would also simply wake and terrify the hungry women, men and children. The Jews were kept in the house for about a week.

On Wednesday of the third week of the war the partisans ordered the Jews to prepare to move to Telzh. The elderly and sick were placed into wagons. The younger and stronger were forced to go on foot. The Jews placed

the last of their possessions in the wagons. Before they left the house the partisans ordered the Jews to surrender their money, gold, silver and other valuables. They threatened to shoot anyone who tried to hide anything. All the Jews surrendered virtually everything which still remained after the various lootings.

On the way the partisans beat and drove the Jews, who were already thin and exhausted. At every place along the way where the grave of a fallen German was found, the partisans forced the Jews to stop and kneel in front of the grave.

Yente adds that she suspects that the Lithuanian partisans would have done away with them along the way through various tortures, were it not for the several German guards, who in many cases behaved better toward the unfortunate Jews than did the Lithuanian partisans.

The Jews walked for two days. They walked at night as well. The way took a long time because it was terribly hot, and many of the women did not want to put their small children into the wagons; the children walked as well. The Jews arrived in Telzh during the night on Thursday, and slept outside, in a side street. The Germans did not return.

### **In the Vieshvenai Compound**

On Friday of the third week of the war the partisans from Telzh arrived with the Jews from Rietavas at the Rainiai compound. Jews from Telzh had been herded together in that compound. In the Rainiai compound the Jews from Rietavas were held a few hours, and then taken away to the Vieshvenai compound, four or five kilometers from the Rainiai compound. In Vieshvenai Jewish men, women and children from the following towns in Telzh County were herded together:

- 1 . Varniai.
- 2 . Tverai.
- 3 . Nevarenai.
- 4 . Zarenai.

Partisans stood on guard around the Vieshvenai compound. All of the Jews who had been herded together were forced into barns. The Jews were forbidden to leave the compound and go to peasants in the nearby villages. The Jews from the towns listed above were packed into five barns. The Jews "arranged themselves" on the ground, and slept on the bare earth. The small children wept and asked their weeping mothers for food. The noise and confusion was always great. The Jews in the barns went hungry for several days and nights. Hungry and desperate, people lay down to sleep at night, with no hope for a better tomorrow.

It was very dirty. Most of the Jews no longer had any clothes to change into. The lice were unbearable. The lice tormented the barely living Jews in the barns, consuming their last bit of strength.

The Jews in the Vieshvenai compound had a committee. The committee attempted to ease the sea of suffering and need experienced by the Jews. They also arranged the work details which went to Telzh. In all, the partisans took a few dozen young men to work.

Once, on the third day after the Jews from Rietavas were brought to the Vieshvenai compound, Monday of the third week of the war, the partisans took ten men and five women away from Vieshvenai to work in Telzh. Yente voluntarily went to work, hoping to get something to eat in the city for her hungry family. The Jews were marched off on foot some seven or eight kilometers to work.

When they had been brought to Telzh, the group of men and women were forced to remove weeds, including some with thorns, from a potato field. The partisans would not let them rest; they constantly drove the Jews to work faster. They worked until four o'clock, when a breathless partisan arrived and quietly passed a secret message to those who were supervising the work. Immediately work was stopped, and the Jews were hurriedly taken back to the Vieshvenai compound.

As they were passing the Rainiai compound, the Jews heard shooting coming from the nearby forest. They paid no attention to the shooting. When they had gone further past the Rainiai compound, a truck emerged from the forest. On it were armed partisans, who were drunk and happy.

They all pointed their rifles at the Jews and broke out laughing. The truck carrying the partisans drove off in the direction of the Vieshvenai compound. The troops leading the Jews obviously knew quite well what the partisans on the truck had accomplished at the Rainiai forest. One of them asked the other: "You understand?" The second answered: "Yes, I understand!" Yet the Jews still did not understand what it was that the guards were referring to.

## **Yente's Older Brother Shot; The Demon's Dance at the Vieshvenai Camp**

When they had been returned to the Vieshvenai compound, Yente and the rest of the Jews did not understand why there were no Jews to be seen at the compound. Nor were there any children. Dead stillness reigned in the barns. The group of Jews who had been brought back were driven into the barns. Yente's brother Yerakhmiel-Vulf, then thirteen years old, greeted her with the terrible news that their oldest brother Yakov-Ber had been shot. Their parents lay deep in thought and sorrow. A heavy, leaden deathly stillness covered their faces. Yente realized that her parents had been dreadfully affected by the tragic fate of her brother. All the Jews lay as if dazed by the terrible hours they had just lived through.

All of the men had been murderously beaten. Yente found out that while she and her group had been working in Telzh, all of the men had been driven out of the barns. They had all been herded into the compound, forced to run, fall and get back up again. All of the fences around the yard had been broken up. The Lithuanian scoundrels had beaten the men with boards, pickets and poles on their heads, sides and wherever the blows happened to land. The partisans forced the men to dance and sing, promising the Jews: "This is the wedding without music. A few days from now will come the wedding with music."

The men called the inquisition "the Devil's Dance." It was carried out by the partisans who had slaughtered the Jews of Telzh at the Rainiai compound a few hours earlier. The Jews who returned on foot had actually seen them driving away from the Rainiai forest in a truck, in the direction of the Vieshvenai compound. While Yente was on the way from the Rainiai compound to Vieshvenai, her brother Yakov-Ber was shot while the "Devil's Dance" was going on.

While the men were driven into the yard and being beaten, they trampled each other in order to avoid blows. The doctor from the town of Tver, whose last name was Traub, and the Jew from Telzh Itzikson, lay dead in the courtyard from the blows. One of them had suffered a heart attack. It is hard to imagine the confusion and panic among the deathly terrified men. While he ran, Yente's father Shmuel had seen his son Yakov-Ber lying on the ground. He thought that he had fainted and fallen. As he ran past he shouted to his son: "Stand up my child, they'll murder you!" Yakov-Ber answered in a weak voice: "I cannot get up any more, I'm done for." It turned out that for no reason at all one of the partisans had indicated that Yankev-Ber was a Communist. He had been shot in the head. An elderly Jew brought Yakov Ber's cap into the barn, soaked in blood.

The "Devil's Dance" took place Monday, July 14, 1941, during the fourth week of the war.

## **The Slaughter of All the Men at the Vieshvenai Camp**

On the evening of Wednesday, July 16, 1941 a truck carrying armed partisans arrived at the compound. Among them were a few Germans. They drove all the men above the age of thirteen into the yard. One German entered the barn where Yente's family was staying, and gave a speech to the women. He said "You won't be seeing your husbands anymore. Nothing will be done to women and children. I'm taking on the whole job with pleasure. Today the men will have a wedding with music."

All of the men were driven away from the compound on foot, to a nearby woods. A short time later shooting was heard. It continued for almost an entire night. The women and children in the barns were strictly forbidden to weep or to talk among themselves. Partisans stood in the barns and saw to this. No one slept that night. The women listened in helpless heartbreak as their near and dear ones were shot.

On Thursday, July 17, 1941, the killers came back looking for men who had hidden in the barns. They found a few young men who had been in hiding, who were able to pass as children. They discovered a few more children hiding in the various barns, and took them off to the woods, where they were shot.

That Wednesday Yente lost her father Shmuel, and a brother named Ben-Tsion, aged 15. Yente relates that Wednesday evening heaps of possessions of the men who had been shot lay in the yard near the barns. Yente and other women saw them through the planks of the barn.

All the next day, Thursday, Yente still saw the possessions lying in heaps; passports and photographs were scattered around the yard. None of the cries of the men who were about to be shot were heard in the barns. The spot where the men were shot is not far from the compound, about 300 or 400 meters in all.

That same Thursday evening, all the women and children were taken from the barns in trucks to the Geruliai compound. Before they were led out of the barns, peasants from nearby villages received permission from the partisans to take women to work for them. Some fifty women rode away to stay with peasants that day.

### **In the Geruliai Compound-Camp**

When they arrived at Geruliai they found the women from Telzh. The latter related that the men of Telzh had been shot that same week, Monday the 14th and Tuesday the 15th of July, 1941. The women moved into barns. There was no fence around the compound. Partisans kept watch. The guard's command post had been set up in a building in the compound.

The conditions at Geruliai were no better than at Vieshvenai. The women lived in five or six barns. The women did receive a small food ration, however, it was not enough to still their hunger. It was terribly filthy there. The women were not taken to work too often.

Some two hundred women were taken to do agricultural work in surrounding compounds, or for individual peasants. The women eagerly went to work in the village, because they were better fed in the villages, and also had a slight chance of helping their families in the Geruliai camp. An epidemic broke out among the children in Geruliai at that time. Many children died at that time. A committee of women was organized. They tried to care for the women's needs, and helped a great deal in arranging nutrition in the camp.

Exactly one week after the women and children were taken from the Vieshvenai camp to Geruliai, Jewish women and children were brought from a town called Laukuva. Laukuva is in Tawrik County, some thirty kilometers from Telzh. The men from the town of Laukuva had been taken to a camp in Heidekrug. (For more details, see the testimony about the Heidekrug camp - LK)

For roughly six weeks the women and children stayed at the Geruliai camp. During that time they suffered assorted chicaneries at the hands of the partisans. Sometimes the partisans would enter the barns at night with flashlights looking for women. There were many cases of women who had been raped. Various rumors constantly circulated in the camp, one more tragic than the last. It was often said that graves were already being dug, and the women and children would be shot.

Among the women were a few clandestine men, dressed up as women.

### **Women and Children Shot at Geruliai**

Everyone knew by now that the men from all the nearby towns and from Telzh had been shot. On Friday, August 29, 1941 (the sixth day of the Jewish month of Elul), a rumor circulated in the camp that all the Jews from the camp would be taken to a ghetto in Telzh on Sunday.

On Saturday, August 30, 1941 (the seventh of Elul), the camp committee announced that the commandant of the camp had demanded a "contribution" of 30,000 rubles from the women. The "contribution" had to be collected before 5:00.

The women on the committee went through all the barns, and collected the required sum. Esther Bloch collected the money in the barn where Yente and her family were staying. The money which was collected was handed to the camp commandant on time. After five o'clock that same Saturday, all of the Jews, women, children, old and sick, were driven out of the barns and lined up in rows near the camp command post.

One of the partisan leaders (Jodeikis) gave a speech to the women. He explained that the younger women would be taken to the Telzh ghetto on foot. The women with small children, the sick and the elderly would be brought into the Telzh ghetto in wagons a little later. Not all of the women believed the murderer's words. They were particularly suspicious because the murderer promised them that a special kindergarten would be arranged in the ghetto. After his speech he let everyone go back into the barns to pack their things.

Peasants from town and from nearby villages arrived in the yard with wagons. Everyone took their bundles out to the yard near the barns and waited.

The partisans then ordered everyone to line up in rows near the command post. The murderers commanded all the women up to the age of thirty to step out of line, and lined them up separately. The rest of the women and children were ordered to kneel immediately. At that moment no one knew what was about to happen, or which group of

women's lives were in danger. The younger among the women under thirty, a total of 500, were chosen. These 500 women were taken to the Telzh ghetto on foot by partisans.

In order to confuse and terrify the women, the partisans constantly shot into the air. After the five hundred women had been taken from Geruliai, shots were heard in the camp. Later the women in the ghetto found out that all of the women and children in the Geruliai camp had been shot and buried in pits near the camp command post. While the women were in Geruliai, a new cemetery was created for children who had died in epidemics. Pits were already prepared near the new children's cemetery. But nobody had known about that before in the camp.

That day (the seventh day of Elul), on the morning of Saturday, August 30, 1941, the partisans shot all the women and children in the camp at Geruliai. Yente lost her mother Beyle and four brothers, Yerakhmiel-Vulf, Khatse-Mikhke, Itsik-Hilel and Ayzikl, ranging in age from five to fourteen.

### **In the Telzh Ghetto**

The five hundred women managed with difficulty to settle into an area that was assigned to them. The huts were low, old and small. The lanes were constantly filled with mud. The crowding was terrible. It was never possible to clean out the dwellings on account of the mud. Everyone slept on the ground, without bedding. There was so little food that it was impossible ever to eat one's fill. There was no wood to heat the houses. In order to cook, the women used to tear up the wooden fences.

A barbed wire fence surrounded the area, and partisans kept constant watch. The partisans allowed each woman to go out into the market to buy something to eat once per week.

The women from Telzh had things which they had brought from Geruliai. They traded these things with the peasants for food. The situation of the women who had been brought from surrounding towns was tragic. They had neither possessions nor money left. Yente was 17 years old at that time. She clung tight to other women from Rietavas.

While the Jewish women were still in Geruliai, peasants from the villages had the right to take women to work. While the slaughter of the women was being readied, the commandant of the Geruliai camp had ordered all the women to be brought from the villages. The partisans had recorded the addresses where the women were working, before the women were released to the peasants.

The partisan who received the order to announce to the peasants that on that Friday, August 29, 1941 (the sixth day of Elul), they had to bring in the women, intentionally burned the list. Only a few women were brought to Geruliai on Saturday, August 30, 1941 (the seventh day of Elul). The rest continued working for the peasants.

The partisan who burned the list and saved dozens of women from death had a Jewish wife by the name of Fridman. Yente does not remember the partisan's last name. After the 500 women were brought into the ghetto, an order was issued that all converts had to leave Telzh and enter the Telzh ghetto. A similar order was issued throughout Telzh county.

Elderly converts from Telzh and from the surrounding towns came to the ghetto then. Among them were elderly men who left families behind at home. Among the younger women were three sisters named Fridman. All three had Lithuanian husbands. One of the three was the partisan from Telzh who had burned the list of names of women, who had been sent from Geruliai to work for peasants.

Conditions in the ghetto grew worse from day to day. Women sought every means possible to get away from the ghetto and work for peasants in the countryside. For six weeks ten women worked in various villages digging potatoes for peasants. The women received better food for working. The women who were working did their best to be useful and to please the peasants. All ten women were young girls from Rietavas. Yente Gershovitz was one of them.

When the potato harvest was over, the ten girls came back to the ghetto. They brought back food from the peasants' places. Yente was in the ghetto for exactly a week. It was already cold outside; the mud in the ghetto was deep. The conditions were dreadful.

A peasant from a town called Nevarenai took Yente to do agricultural and domestic work. At first the peasant treated her well. Later the mistress of the house demanded too much work and gave Yente too little to eat. Then Yente went to a second peasant, one kilometer from town.

Three girls who had been taken from the Telzh ghetto worked for the priest in that town. All three were also from Rietavas. The three girls had in fact let the peasant know about Yente. The peasant had no children, and took Yente as a worker.

When she had been with him a few days, the peasant rode off to sell produce at the market in Telzh. Yente wanted very much to know what was happening in the ghetto, and rode with the peasant. When they arrived in Telzh, Yente immediately went to the ghetto to see how her acquaintances were doing.

Yente discovered a mood of dreadful panic in the ghetto. All of the women were saying that preparations were being made for the slaughter of the women in the ghetto. An order had already been issued that all the peasants must bring the Jewish women from the villages "for health examinations." The partisans promised meanwhile that immediately after New Year's the women would be able to return to the villages.

None of the women believed the assurances of the partisans. The partisans threatened to punish peasants who did not bring the women in on time. Most of the women were brought to the ghetto by the peasants.

There were many cases of peasants bringing women to Telzh by force, bound hand and feet.

One hundred and twenty women from the ghetto were working in the Degatziu compound. Some of them returned to the ghetto. Fifty or sixty women remained in the compound. The economic director of the compound was a very good man, and he sympathized with the Jewish women. His name was Levgaudas.

Yente and her girlfriend Peshe Kerl, from Rietavas, understood that the lives of the women in the ghetto were in danger, and decided to escape. Many women escaped through the ghetto fence at that point. Yente arrived in the ghetto on December 21, 1941. It was a Saturday. On Sunday, December 22 Yente and her girlfriend left the ghetto. That same day they arrived in Degaitziu. All the fifty women were still there. They knew everything that was going on in the ghetto, and could not decide what to do.

On Monday morning Levgaudas made a special trip into Telzh to find out what was happening with the Jewish women in the ghetto. When he came back, his eyes were full of tears. He related that he had been able to ascertain that the women in the ghetto were to be shot, and that all the peasants were to bring the Jewish women to the ghetto. He advised all of the women in the compound to escape and hide. He explained that he was not afraid, and would know how to answer to the partisans for his actions.

All the women escaped from the compound in groups, and hid in the nearby forest for the time being. The women were in the forest for exactly two full days. It was already winter; the famous cold winter of 1941. There was deep snow on the ground, and it was already quite cold. The young girls sat in the brush huddled together, frozen, hungry. They were surrounded by an alien world, a murderous world, which sought to kill the remnant of the young women who had escaped from the Telzh ghetto.

Partisans set off in search of Jews who had escaped and survived, as if they were going hunting. Every glance cast by a stranger meant death to the women in hiding.

After their escape from the Degaitziu compound into the forest, the women knew that all the women in the Telzh ghetto had been taken to the Rainiai forest and shot together with the children. Christians told the women in the forest about this. All the women in the Telzh ghetto were shot on Monday, December 23rd and Tuesday, December 24th, 1941. Of the five hundred women in the Telzh ghetto, some four hundred were shot then.

### **How Did Yente Alter (Gershovitz) Survive?**

Yente and Peshe went away to a spot near the Latvian border, three kilometers from the town of Lackauve, eleven kilometers from the town of Pikeliai, and not far from Mazheikiai. Their goal was to escape from the bloody soil of Lithuania and reach Latvia. On the way they were assured that all of the Jews in Latvia were alive, and they would be able to survive more easily there. Peasants suggested this idea to the two girls.

For two full days the two girlfriends wandered across various villages, fields and forests, until they arrived at the home of a peasant named Petras Mickus in the village of Judeikiu. The two girls stopped at the peasant's home to warm themselves, get something to eat and find out how they should proceed.

The peasant talked the two girls out of going into Latvia. He insisted that all of the Jews in Latvia had been slaughtered as well, and the only place there was a ghetto was in Libave. He advised them to stay where they were

and find protection from village peasants. He decided to keep the two girls for several days. The two girls stayed with the good peasant for two weeks.

The village of Judeikiu is not far from Mazheikiai, in the Zhydikiu district. There were two other brothers named Mickus in the same village. All three brothers hid the two girls from New Year 1942 until Passover. The two girls spent a certain amount of time with each of the brothers, frequently shifting places so that none of the surrounding peasants would have a chance to grow suspicious. But they spent most of the time with the first brother, Petras Mickus. They spent most of the time in the house, because it was extremely cold in the barn.

While they were in hiding, the girls tried to be helpful to their rescuers. They knitted socks, plucked feathers, patched old clothes, peeled potatoes, and so forth. Of course, they also suffered a certain amount of hunger.

By Passover 1942 the three brothers Mickus no longer wanted to keep the two women. Fourteen kilometers from the village of Judeikiu and twenty kilometers from Mazheikiai, in a village near the Lusu forest, a peasant named Andrijauskos took the two girls into his home. The peasant was a close relative of the brothers Mickus. The situation of the two girls was good at this peasant's home.

The peasant set up a hiding place for the girls. He did not feed them badly. The two girls were there until after Shevuoth of 1942, and then they returned to Petras Mickus. The two girls wandered from one peasant to another. All that time the two girls received news of the Shavl ghetto. When they had been with Petras Mickus for six weeks, the two once again returned to the peasant Andrijauskos. The peasant's wife no longer wanted to keep the girls, and sought a way to rid herself of them.

During the day the girls hid in the forest, near the peasant's farm. They received very little food. Nothing was brought to them during the day. At night the girls came to the farm and lay in the barn to sleep. The peasant woman or her husband brought them supper in the barn. They were there for two or three weeks.

While they were with Andrijauskas the girls found out that two Jewish girls who had escaped from Telzh had been caught in a nearby town. On account of this Andrijauskos and his family became frightened, and they decided not to keep Yente and her girlfriend any longer.

In a nearby village lived a partisan who very often came to visit the peasant Andrijauskos. The partisan was in love with the peasant's wife.

One night in July 1942, when the two girls came from the forest, the peasant woman refused to let them into the barn for the first time ever, instead politely inviting them into the house for dinner. While they sat eating supper at the table, a partisan suddenly came in. It was the peasant woman's lover. The partisan searched the two girls for weapons, and did them no harm. It was clear that the peasant woman had told her lover about the Jewish girls, and asked him to take them to the Shavl ghetto. The girls were terrified of the ghetto, and begged not to be taken there. The partisan promised to take them away to do agricultural work in a compound.

At 2:00 a.m. the partisan led the girls out of the house and took them in the direction of Mazheikiai. When they reached the Ruzgu compound near Mazheikiai, he took them into the headquarters of the partisans of Mazheikiai County. The leader of the partisans, an infamous Jew murderer, received the two girls politely, and wrote a report that didn't reflect badly on the girls.

The girls were brought from the compound into the prison at Mazheikiai and held there for two full days. From Mazheikiai they were brought to the Viekshtnai prison. They spent one night there. While they were in prison they were visited by a peasant woman who told them that a Jewish girl from Reitavas who had escaped from the Telzh ghetto had hidden with her. The girl stayed at the peasant woman's home until Passover, 1942. A certain "Communist" had found out about this and told the authorities. The girl had been shot before Passover. The girl's name was Hadasa Mogilevsky, aged 20. The peasant woman was acquainted with the prison guard and came to visit the two Jewish girls who had been arrested.

From Viekshtnai the two girls were brought to the town of Akmene to Papile and then to Shavl prison. The two girls spent two days in the Shavl prison. The council of elders in Shavl found out about them. Before the girls were let out of prison, they were taken to the German security police, given five lashes, and then released into the Shavl ghetto.



Everything Leyb Koniuchowsky has written on exactly fifteen pages concerning the slaughter of the Jews of Rietavas, Varniai, Tverai, Nevarenai, Zarenai, Alsedzhiai and Laukuva, as well as women and children from Telzh -- was personally related by me, Yente Alter, nee Gershovitz, and I attest thereto with my own signature on each page.

Signature: Yente Alter-Gershovitz.

The report was written by Engineer Leyb Koniuchowsky. [Signature]

Feldafing, Bavaria  
September 21, 1947.

The chairman of the camp committee, E. Reif, attests to the signature of Mrs. Jenta Alter (nee Gershovitz), who lives in the Feldafing camp.

Signature: E. Reif

Feldafing, September 21, 1947.

Attestation page translated by  
Dr. Jonathan Boyarin  
Signature: *J Boyarin*  
New York, New York  
April 5, 1988.

## SLAUGHTER OF JEWS IN THE FOLLOWING LITHUANIAN TOWNS IN TELZH COUNTY

- 1 . Nevarenai.
- 2 . Varnai.
- 3 . Tverai.
- 4 . Zarenai.
- 5 . Liplauke.
- 6 . Alsedzhiai.

The eyewitness testimony of Khane Golemba, who was born in the town of Varnai on May 4, 1907. She completed five grades of elementary school in Varnai.

In 1931 Khane and her husband Mikhe-Yosl Golembo settled in Telzh. They lived there until the outbreak of the war, June 22, 1941. Her father's name was Borukh Gandz. Her mother's name was Hinde, born Eydelovitz, from Kvedarna. Until the war, Khane's mother, her sister Mashe Katz with her husband Zalmen-Meir and three children, and a brother named Ayzik, his wife Meyte and four children, all lived in Varnai.

### **Navaraenai**

Navaraenai was a small town sixteen kilometers from Telzh. Ten or twelve Jewish families lived there, among a large number of Lithuanians. The Jews were occupied in trade and agriculture. All of the Jews in town owned land, kept cattle and lived like rural peasants. The town had a synagogue, a rabbi and a slaughterer. Some time before the war, many more Jewish families lived in town. They had dispersed to larger towns in Northern Lithuania.

### **The Outbreak of War Between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, June 22, 1941**

On Monday, June 23, 1941 German aviation bombarded Telzh. The Jews hurriedly began to leave the city, and hid in the surrounding villages and towns. A few managed to evacuate to the Soviet Union.

Khane and her family escaped from Telzh to the nearby town of Navarenai together with Sheyne Mayzl (nee Grinker), the daughter of Reb Abraham, the rabbi of Navarenai.

When they arrived in the town, Khane and her family found all of the Jews prepared to evacuate temporarily into the surrounding villages. The peasants in town assured the Jews that immediately after the German army marched in, all of the Jews would be sent away to Lublin. The next day the town Jews left their homes and rode into the countryside around the town. The town rabbi's family and Khane's family left town and settled into a barn a few kilometers from town, at the rabbi's farm. The Jews stayed at the barn until Wednesday, July 2, 1941. During that time partisans (in civilian clothing and bearing rifles) appeared in the countryside and began robbing from the Jews. Peasants came into the barn together with the partisans and began taking all of the Jews' better possessions. They acted as if everything belonged to them. The prayers and tears of the helpless Jews were of no avail.

Then the partisans announced to all the Jews in the barn that there was an order for everyone to leave the countryside and settle in town once again. On Wednesday, July 2 all the Jews returned to town and settled in their own homes.

The Soviets had already left the town. Nor were the Germans there. All power in town was in the hands of the partisans. The leader of the partisans in town was a local farmer named Brentzys, about 25 years old.

As soon as the Jews came into town the partisans arrested all of the Jewish men over the age of fourteen, and herded them into a stall belonging to a peasant, near the police station. It was extremely crowded. A guard was posted around the stall. The women ran to Brentzys to plead with him to free their husbands and fathers from the stall, Brentzys told the women that this was nothing that the most important thing was yet to come. An order was issued that all the Jews were to prepare to evacuate to Lublin, a city in Poland. The men were freed from the stall that day.

Peasants received papers permitting them to confiscate cows, horses and agricultural inventory belonging to Jews. Peasants with whom the Jews were acquainted came into their stalls and led away the Jewish farm animals. They happily promised that they would return everything to the Jews after the war. Nor were the peasants ashamed to take the better possessions from the Jews' homes.

The Jews spent one night in town, after they returned from the villages. The next day they were all herded together near the police station. There the better possessions the Jews still had were taken from them. They were permitted to pack their poorer things onto wagons. Under a heavy partisan guard, all of the Jews from Navarenai, men, women and children, were brought into the compound of Vieshvenai, seven kilometers from Telzh. The compound contained large barns, into which the Jews of Navarenai were herded. Before the Jews were taken from town the partisans arrested two Jewish girls who had been Young Communists during the period of Soviet rule. One of them was named Leye Fritzal, aged 19. The two girls were taken to the Telzh prison, where both of them probably died.

Dozens of Lithuanians from town and from the surrounding villages took part in the murderous looting of Jewish possessions in Navarenai. Khane only remembers the two infamous murderers Brentzys and Shudent, both farmers from the town of Navarenai. While the Jews were being taken from town, the priest stood and laughed with the partisans. Brentzys assured the priest that he was cleaning up the Jewish garbage from the streets of the town. The priest was very pleased with this explanation, and burst out laughing.

Khane asks that it be emphasized, that while her family and all of the Jews were being driven out of Navarenai, there were no Germans in town yet. On the way from Navarenai to Vieshvenai, they saw armed Germans for the first time, riding towards them on bicycles and motorcycles.

## 2 Varnai

The town is located 31 kilometers from Telzh, not far from Lake Lukshio. The majority of the population was Jewish. About two hundred Jewish families lived in town. The majority of the Jewish population was engaged in trade and artisanry. A very small number were occupied in agriculture. There were a number of Jewish peddlers.

Until 1940 Varnai had a Jewish national bank, a Hebrew-Yiddish library, a Hebrew elementary school, a study house, a small prayer house and an old synagogue. After completing Hebrew elementary school, some of the Jewish youth studied in the Hebrew Yavne high school in Telzh, or in the teachers' seminary. Most of the Jewish youth were involved in Zionist organizations.

The attitude of the Lithuanians in town and in the countryside was anti-Semitic. When the Red Army arrived in Lithuania in the summer of 1940, the anti-Semitism grew even greater, but it was forced to hide in the background, owing to the Soviet laws, which punished anti-Semitism.

While Khane and her family and the rest of the Jews of Navarenai arrived in the Vieshvenai compound, they found all the Jewish men, women and children of Varnai already assembled. In the compound Khane found her mother, sister and brother, and their families. Her mother, sister and brother related the following to Khane: The German artillery had bombarded the barracks in Varnai. The Red Army had retreated from the town in a hurry. Before they left the town, they smeared many houses with pitch and ignited them. The population barely managed to get out the most important items out of their houses and escape from town. The Jews settled in surrounding villages at the homes of peasants with whom they were acquainted, and on Jewish farms in the countryside. (There were Jewish farmers living in several villages around Varnai — L.K.)

Armed Lithuanian peasants appeared in the town. They calmed the Jews, and forced them to return to Varnai. The town had been completely burned down. The returning Jews settled into the intact houses near the edge of town. Many moved in with the Jewish farmer Leyb Krengl, in his house, in his stalls, in barns and in the yard.

But the Jews were not in town long. The partisans ordered all the Jews to prepare to evacuate to the Vieshvenai compound. From there they were to be transported to Lublin together with other Jews. The partisans placed all the Jews in wagons and brought them into the Vieshvenai compound.

A tailor named Shmuel Sher lived in Varnai with his family. One of the partisans who had a grudge against him shot him. The Jews buried him at the Jewish cemetery in Varnai. Sher's wife Ete tried to commit suicide several times at Vieshvenai by drowning herself. Her children guarded her constantly.

Three Jewish families were permitted to remain in the town of Varnai by the partisans. They were "useful Jews." The three families were: Dr Dovid Kaplan (a graduate of the Jewish Real-Gymnasium in Wilkomir — L.K.); the family Nayerman, Khayem, his wife, children and father, owner of a beer bottling plant, a tanner and his family. One day before the Jews in the camp at Geruliai were slaughtered, the family Nayerman and the tanner's family were brought there by the partisans. They were slaughtered as well. (Concerning the liquidation of the Geruliai camp, see the report of Malke Gilis — L.K.) After the ghetto was set up in Telzh for the five hundred surviving women, Dr Kaplan was brought to the ghetto from Varnai. His mother was brought with all the Jews from Varnai to Vieshvenai.

Several Jewish families brought their animals to Vieshvenai. Peasants living near the compound received permission to confiscate the cattle from the Jews. Khane still remembers well that her brother had brought a horse and a goat from Varnai. A peasant woman received permission to take the goat. Khane<sup>1</sup>'s brother wouldn't give it up. She came a second time. Khane's brother was working in Telzh then. The peasant woman wanted to take the goat. Khane's brother's children tore the rope out of the peasant woman's hands. The peasant woman struck them. The children stood weeping bitterly, seeing the peasant woman taking away their beloved goat.

### **3 Tverai**

A small town not far from Varnai. Exactly twenty Jewish families lived there. They were occupied in trade and agriculture. In every respect the life of the Jews in town was similar to the life of the Jews in Navarenai.

The Jews did not run away from town. Four days after the Jews of Navarenai were brought to Vieshvenai, the Jews from Tverai were brought to the compound as well. Before the Jews were brought from town, all of their possessions were confiscated. Peasants took the Jews' animals, promising to return them after the war ended.

### **4 Zarenai**

A small town 21 kilometers south of Telzh, A few dozen Jewish families lived there. They were occupied in trade, artisanry and agriculture. At the outbreak of the war, they did not run away from town. At the same time as the Jews of Varnai were taken to Vieshvenai, the Jews of Zarenai were also brought to the compound. The Jews of Zarenai and Navarenai "settled in" to an attic in one of the barns.

Among the women from Zarenai were the wife of the town rabbi and Mrs Esther Shnayder, whose husband ran a guest home. The two women told Khane everything that had taken place in the town of Zarenai.

The rabbi's wife related that her husband, the rabbi of Zarenai, had been shot by a partisan near the rabbi's stall. He was buried in the stall. One young man was shot by the partisans because peasants had a grudge against him. Apparently he hadn't wanted to sell them liquor on credit. His name was Ruven Shnayder. His wife Esther was left with her two small children. All of the Jewish men, women and children were brought to Vieshvenai.

### **5 Lieplauke**

A monastery compound, not far from Telzh. Five Jewish families lived there. Everyone was brought to the camp at Rainiai, near Telzh.

### **6 Alsedzhiai**

This is a small town northwest of Telzh. Some 25 Jewish families lived there. There was a study house, a rabbi and a slaughterer. The Jews were occupied in trade, artisanry and agriculture.

The priest of Alsedzhiai treated the unfortunate Jews of the town very well. He gave a speech in the church, saying that no innocent Jewish blood should be spilled. A group of partisans from town, among them Olesys Vagdaris, took a group of Jews out of town at night and shot them right on the town priest's field. This was their way of responding to the priest's moral admonition not to shoot Jews.

After the men in the camp at Rainiai and Vieshvenai were shot, and after the men who had been brought from peat work at Geruliai had been shot, the Jews of Alsedzhiai, men, women and children, were brought to the camp at Geruliai. (See the testimony of Dvoyre Zif — L.K.)

### **Torment, Looting and Murder in the Compound Camp Vieshvenai**

The compound of Vieshvenai is seven kilometers from Telzh. There were stalls and barns at the compound. All of the Jews were brought together there. The barns and stalls were full of animal droppings.

The Jews had to "settle in" on this refuse with their small children. Some of them "settled in" in the attics. The partisans who guarded the Jews lived in a house. There was no fence around the compound. Partisans guarded

the compound day and night. They were careful to see that none of the Jews left the compound to seek food in the village.

A military kitchen was also set up in the compound. In the morning the Jews received black coffee without sugar and a piece of bread. During the day they received groats and potatoes. Supper was once again black coffee. Everyone was constantly terribly hungry in the camp. There was nothing at all to give the small children to eat. There were cases in which Jews went out to get something to eat for their children in the village. They were, caught and murderously beaten so badly that everyone trembled at the thought of leaving the camp. Even children were viciously beaten if they were caught going out into the village.

A small number of Jewish men and women were taken to Telzh to work every day. At work the Jews were tortured and beaten. More than one returned from work so badly beaten that he had to lie down immediately. Nor did the partisans spare women. Peasants from the countryside also took Jews to work. All of the Jews eagerly sought agricultural work in the countryside, hoping that they would be able to eat better themselves and also bring food to their wives and children.

The Vieshvenai camp was under the control of the commandant of the Rainiai camp, where the Jews from Telzh had been assembled. (See "The Slaughter of the Jews of Telzh," by Malke Gilis — L.K. )

A group of Jews would receive a paper from the partisans at Vieshvenai permitting them to bring produce from Telzh. But the paper had to be signed by the commandant of the Rainiai camp, a Lithuanian. A partisan accompanied the group both ways when they went to pick up the produce.

After the Jews had been in the Vieshvenai camp for exactly two weeks, the Lithuanian commandant of the Rainiai camp came and ordered all the Jews to come out into the yard. He stood up on the porch of a granary and announced that all the Jews had to surrender their gold, silver, money, valuables, watches, rings and so forth. He warned in a strict tone that anyone still found in possession of these items would be shot on the spot. The Jews obeyed the order partially, and brought everything to the office of the partisans in the yard. The commandant drove away contented.

Around the middle of the month of July 1941, in the morning, the partisans drove all the men out of the stalls and barns. They chose twenty-odd healthy, strong men. The rest were permitted to return to the barn. The twenty-odd who had been chosen were led off, supposedly to work in Telzh. But on the way, they were directed to turn off the main road, and taken into a small forest not far from Vieshvenai. The men did not return to the Vieshvenai camp any more. Among the twenty-odd who had been taken away was Khane's father-in-law Zalmen-Meyer Katz, Yiitskhok Khananye, Hirshe Magid, and Shapiro, all from the town of Varnai. Khane does not remember the first or last names of the rest.

Khane's sister Mashe Katz sneaked away to a peasant in a nearby village to get milk for her child. The peasant woman told Mashe that the twenty-odd men who had been taken away had been forced to dig pits not far from the compound in a wood. After the pits had been dug the Jewish men were immediately shot. Khane herself went to the peasant woman to confirm this. She took along a bit of material to trade for potatoes. The peasant woman declared: "It isn't worthwhile to buy from you anymore, because it's going to be left behind anyway. A law was already issued that all the Jews are to be shot. A group of Jewish men dug long, deep pits, and then they were immediately shot." She related this to Khane with an incomprehensible indifference. Khane and her sister told all the Jews in the barns and stalls about this.

Khane's brother Ayzik Gandz had their mother summoned her. When Khane came to him, he declared to Khane in desperation: "My dear sister, forgive me! Perhaps I offended you often. I know that my moments are numbered. You are very energetic. Help my wife to take care of the children."

Khane comforted him, saying that he would survive and be a father for his children. He embraced Khane, kissed her and added that he knew everything, and there was nothing to hope for. Khane left weeping.

Groups of men stood in her brother's barn, whispering among themselves. They did not allow the women to hear. "Women don't have to know what men say to each other," the men explained, asking the women to go away.

### **Horrible Slaughter of All the Men in the Vieshvenai Camp**

Roughly during the third week of the Jewish month of Tammuz (in the middle of July 1941), a truck with partisans on it drove into the courtyard. They drove all the men out of the barns and stalls and closed the gates and doors. The women saw a terrible sight through the gaps in the walls: The men were arranged in a circle. Then they were

forced to dance, jump and run constantly. The "performance" was accompanied by beatings of the men with coils, poles and sticks.

Whoever tried to stand still was immediately beaten especially hard, until he bled and fainted. The older ones couldn't keep up with the younger, and therefore received most of the blows. One man from Telzh who had escaped to Navarenai when the war broke out, and been taken to Vieshvenai together with the rest of the Jews, asked a partisan whom he knew to shoot him rather than torment him. The partisan agreed to this "favor" and immediately shot him. The Jew was Avrom Itzikson. During the "performance" the doctor from the town of Tverai and a young boy from Rietavas were shot. (See the testimony about the slaughter of the Jews of Rietavas by Yenta Alter-Gershovitz. The boy who was shot was a brother of Yenta. L K )

After all the men had been terribly beaten and bloodied, they were herded back in with their wives and children. The women saw flecks of blood on the heads and faces of their husbands and sons, and a bitter wail began. All of the women looked for their husbands and sons and had trouble recognizing them. The men were pale, exhausted, and bloodied as they climbed into the attic or gathered together in the corners of the stalls and barns. It was very hard to converse with them.

Later the Jews found out about the three who had been shot. Khane went out into the yard to see the three who had been shot. They all lay without shoes or overclothes. After the "performance" the partisans had immediately taken the clothes off them. Terrible scenes took place near the three dead men who were recognized by their families.

The three men who were shot lay in the courtyard for two days. Khane's brother had already harnessed a horse and wagon, in order to take the three dead men away to the Telzh Jewish cemetery. At that moment a truck full of partisans appeared in the yard once again. They were the same ones who had come the first time for the "Demon's Dance," but there were others with them. Like wild animals they broke into the stalls and barns and drove out all the men over the age of 14. The old men who did not move quickly enough were thrown out of the attics. In the yard the partisans arranged the men in a row and the terrible "Demon's Dance" began once again. This was the name of the inquisition in the camp.

All of the men in the barn felt faint. The screams of the children were dreadful. The women heard the men running constantly, along with the blows from sticks and poles, and echoing shouts: "Hear O Israel.

The "Demon's Dance" came to an end. Elderly people lay on the ground. Khane does not know whether they had fainted or been murdered. The rest of the Jews, bloodied, were lined up in rows of four. The stronger ones had to bring along the men lying on the ground, as well as the three corpses remaining from the "performance" (this was the expression used by the Lithuanian murderers — L.K.) The column of men who had been horribly bloodied and tormented began to move in the direction of the nearby forest.

At that moment the wife of the Jewish doctor from Rietavas, Dr Zaks, tore open the door of the gate, and holding a small child in her arms, wild and furious as a tiger, she ran toward the retreating column and her husband. She tried to tear her child in half with her own hands. The partisans prevented her. With a heart-rending cry she turned to the partisans: "Remember murderers, this will not pass in silence! The world will not be silent! I am a Communist! I want to go and die with my husband!" The partisans tore the child away from her.

She threw herself at them with her fists. They gave her the child and led her off with the men, including her husband. Exactly a half hour later shots were heard in the forest. No shouts or weeping were heard. That day all the men were shot not far from the Vieshvenai compound. Dr Zaks wife and child were also shot that day.

The day after the men were shot partisans came into the barns and stalls and began searching for men in hiding. In the stall where Khane Golemba was, the partisans found four men, all of them from Zarenai; two brothers, a brother-in-law and a cousin.

In a second barn they found two Jews from Varnai, a father named Mikhe Pivarnik and his son Yitskhok, aged 18. They found one Jew dressed in women's clothing. His last name was Shnayder. His son was shot in the town of Zarenai before the Jews were taken to Vieshvenai.

The Jews who had been caught had to leave the stalls with their hands in the air. They were bitter, pale, frightened and hopeless. A terrible inquisition began when they were taken out into the yard. Some ten Lithuanian partisans in civilian clothing, wearing clothes belonging to the murdered Jewish men, began getting the seven unfortunate Jews "ready for death" with whips, sticks, and pieces of steel coil. The whistling of the whips, the blows on the heads of the men were mixed with dreadful cries of "Shema Yisroel!" Blood began to pour from the mouths, noses and ears

of the men. Their clothes got wet. They were all beaten for a long time, until their heads and faces looked like one mass of bloodied flesh. Several fell faint.

After the seven men had been "readied" for death, the stronger ones had to pick up the Jew Mikhe Pivarnik off the ground. They were then led off to the pits. About a half hour later shots were heard in the woods.

The wives and children of the unfortunate Jews saw what took place in the yard. Their shouts could be heard all around. Some tried to go out of the barn to help their relatives, and attempt to beg mercy of the partisans. The murderers stood with a murderous look on their faces, warning that whoever left the stall would be shot.

The women and children in the stalls and barns tore their hair after they heard the shooting. Some beat their fists against their heads. Some struck their heads against the walls. Many fainted.

After this dreadful execution the partisans came in to the women and children in the stalls and barns. One Lithuanian from the region of Memel announced in German that all of the men were already dead, and would never return. The women and children, he promised, would be kept free from harm and would remain alive. But he strictly commanded that everyone must hand over the money, gold, silver, new shoes, better underwear, overclothes and coats which they were still hiding. After his speech the partisans, their eyes staring, reddened with the bloodiness of their murder, raced up to the attics and forced the women to surrender everything they had. The women brought together in each attic their better clothes, wedding rings, earrings, valuable possessions and underwear. The partisans took new boots from Khane and her fifteen year old son. Khane had a large golden wedding ring. She told a partisan that she could not get it off her finger. The partisan threatened in all seriousness to cut off the finger bearing the ring. Women helped Khane to get the ring off her finger. The partisans packed all the collected items into sacks and left satisfied.

The next morning the peasants brought into the yard a wagon loaded with the clothes of the men who had been shot. One woman, Sheyne Katz from Varnai, recognized her only son's pants and underwear on the wagon. She fainted. Other women noticed the clothes of their murdered children, husbands, fathers and brothers on the wagon. The clothes were thrown into a granary in the yard.

A few days later Khane saw hundreds of peasants with their wives and children coming into the yard. They selected clothes belonging to the murdered men, and contentedly set off for home with the bloodstained clothing. The partisans divided the better clothing amongst themselves.

Khane asserts that both during the first "Devil's Dance" and during the second, as well as when the Jewish men were being driven to the pit, there were only Lithuanian partisans dressed in civilian clothes, some with leather jackets. German clothing was worn by one man who spoke to the women in German, when he demanded that the women surrender their valuables, money, gold and silver.

Khane Golemba does not know who gave the order to shoot all the Jewish men in the Vieshvenai compound.

After the men in the Vieshvenai compound were shot, a dreadful life began for the women and children. The women had to take care of their children on their own. Their mourning for their husbands was weakened and interrupted by their daily worries over the lives of their children. Women began to risk their lives, going more frequently to the village for food, a bit of bread and milk for their small children.

The dirt in the stalls and barns was great. Most of the women no longer had any clothing for themselves or their children. They all became dirty and lousy. Every morning the partisans took groups of able-bodied women off to work. Sunken in mourning for the murdered men and in their daily worries, the women remained in Vieshvenai for some two weeks after the men were shot.

### **Geruliai Camp - Hunger, Torment and Tears; Men, Women and Children Shot**

One morning it was announced to the women that everyone had to prepare to be transported to a camp at Geruliai, nine kilometers from Telzh.

The partisans had requisitioned peasant wagons, which stood in the yard. The older women and women with children sat in the wagons. The rest went on foot. One woman from Rietavas died on the way. She was buried next to the Geruliai camp. She was mourned by two young daughters. The tragic caravan of hopeless women and children going to the Geruliai camp was guarded by Lithuanian partisans.

Barns with bunk beds had been prepared for the Jews in the Geruliai camp. There was no straw on them. The women and children "settled in" on the bunk beds.

At Geruliai Khane found her husband's sister, Mrs Leybzon, and other women from surrounding towns whom she knew. The women, along with a large number of men, had been brought just one day previously from the village of Dusheikiai, where they had been working at digging peat. All of the men who had been brought were shot the same day next to the Geruliai camp. Among those who were shot was Khane's husband, Mikhe-Yosl, and her brother-in-law Heyshl Leybzon.

Who were the Jews who had been brought from working at digging peat?

Three or four days after the Jews from all the towns had been driven into the Vieshvenai compound, partisans arrived and selected 150 men and women. In the Rainiai camp as well 150 men and women from among the Jews of Telzh were chosen that day. The total of men and women from the two camps was roughly three hundred, all healthy and capable of working. They were all taken away to the village of Dusheikiai to dig peat. Among them were Khane's husband, her brother-in-law Heyshl and his wife, Sore Leybzon.

After the men were shot in Vieshvenai, Sore had stayed with a peasant in a village not far from the work site at the peat bogs. The peasant told Sore about the slaughter of the Jewish men in Vieshvenai. When she arrived at the camp, Sore told all the Jews about it. Neither her husband nor Khane's husband believed her, believing that she had lost her mind. The Jews continued working with the peat under terrible conditions. From all sides they received news about the tragic end of the Jewish men in the camps at Rainiai and Vieshvenai. But most of the Jews would no way believe in such a mass murder. The rest were doubtful.

A few weeks later, after the men in Vieshvenai had been shot, that is one day before the women and children had been brought from Vieshvenai to Geruliai, all three hundred men and women were brought from the village of Dusheikiai to the Geruliai camp. The men were separated from the women and shot the very first day, next to the camp. The information concerning the life in the village, the work in the peat bogs, and the shooting of the men at Geruliai, was related to Khane by women who had worked in the peat bogs. Among them was Khane's sister-in-law Sore Leybzon.

Khane went to the commandant of the Geruliai camp, a Lithuanian, and with tears in her eyes convinced him to let her go to her husband's grave.

Khane, Mrs Fleysher, Khane's mother, Mrs Hene Kleyn and other women went to the mass grave of the men who had been shot one day earlier. Not far from Geruliai there is a forest. On their way to the forest the women had to cross a deep stream. In the forest, along a narrow path, the women found torn shirts, ritual fringes, camisoles. When they went deeper into the forest, the women found a new mass grave. Around the grave were scattered passports, photographs and various documents. The women recognized a number of photographs and passports belonging to the men who had been shot.

Several days after the men from Geruliai had been shot, partisans brought all the women and children from the town of Laukuva (in Tawrik County). The Jewish men of Laukuva had already been taken away to the camp at Pagegai. (Heidekrug camps — L K )

After those from Laukuva all the Jews from the town of Alsedzhiai, men, women and children, were brought.

The life of the Jews was no better in Geruliai than in Vieshvenai. Hunger was a daily plague. The dirt was dreadful. The crowding was horrible. All the partisans from the Rainiai compound, together with their commandant and the partisans from Vieshvenai, moved to the Geruliai camp, where no-one disturbed them from bossing around the unfortunate Jews.

There was no fence around the camp. But partisans with machine guns kept watch around the yard. No one was allowed to leave the camp without permission of the partisans. Khane's fifteen-year-old son Yoynele went to the village once to get a bit of potatoes. Yoynele noticed that a Gentile boy was wearing his murdered father's cap. He burst out weeping. The Gentile boy told him that the hat had been bloody when he had torn out the lining. The Gentile boy had pity on Yoynele and gave him back his murdered father's hat as a memento.

Yoynele lay on his cot in the barn all day and wept.

One day the partisans selected all the boys aged fourteen and fifteen and took them out of the camp to dig a grave for a woman who had died. Yoynele was among the boys. Khane followed them. All the boys were taken into the forest, not far from the mass grave. There they were forced to dig a grave. The partisans frightened the boys,

shooting automatics over their heads. Khane reached the children, who were happy to see her. They were all pale and frightened.

The partisans were very angry at Khane and threatened to shoot her. They demanded that Khane tell them who had permitted her to come. Khane lied, saying that the children wouldn't be able to bury the women, and the commandant had permitted her to help them. Khane took the shovel out of Yoynel's arms, and helped dig the grave. In Khane's presence the children felt more secure. She was a mother, in whose presence they felt protected against the Lithuanian murderers, who constantly shot in the air, hurrying the children to dig the grave faster. After the woman was buried, everyone returned to the camp.

The partisans took some of the women who were capable of working to work in the city. Peasants in the villages received permission from the commandant to take Jewish women to work. The women went to work quite willingly, because of the hunger in the camp. (For more details about the life of the Jews in the Geruliai camp, see the testimony of Malke Gilis, Mrs. Fleysler and Mrs. Zak —L K )

On Friday, August 22, 1941 (the sixth day of the month of Elul) in the evening, partisans at Geruliai brought two Jewish families from Varnai: Khayem Nayerman, his wife and children and Khayem's father, and the tanner's family. The women in the camp already knew during the day that something terrible awaited them. Peasants asserted that the partisans were getting ready to shoot all the women and children at the Geruliai camp. Most of the women did not believe this. When the two Jewish families were brought from Varnai, the panic of the Jews in camp only increased.

On Saturday morning, August 30, 1941 (the seventh day of Elul), the partisans announced that all of the Jews had to pack, and would be transported into a ghetto in Telzh on wagons. Everyone was ready with his packages in the yard.

An order was issued for everyone to line up in rows. The partisans selected five hundred of the younger and healthier women from the rows, and placed them separately. No-one knew for certain what was happening. The partisans promised the women that they would arrange a kindergarten for the children. The partisans shot several women who did not get into the rows properly.

The partisans led away the five hundred women to a ghetto in Telzh. The rest of the women and children were shot next to the Geruliai camp, and there they were thrown into one mass grave. (For more details on this, see the report about the slaughter of Jews in the town of Rietavas by Yente Alter-Gurshovitz and the testimony of Malke Gilis about the slaughter of Jews in Telzh — L K )

Khane's relatives who died at Geruliai were: Her mother Hinde, two sons named Yoynel and Aron-Shloyme; her sister Masha Katz, with her three sons Yosel-Shloyme, Moyshe-Khayeml (aged four) and Minele (aged six); a sister-in-law, Meyte Gandz and her four children Sholem (aged fifteen), Shime-Yankele (aged ten), Minele (aged five), and Merele (aged eight); Khane's mother-in-law Gite Golembo; her sister-in-law Alte (a sister of her husband), and her six children. In addition close relatives of Khane died in Geruliai, including uncles, aunts and so forth.

Khane requests that an interesting incident be recorded in this testimony.

On Wednesday, the fourth day of Elul, in the middle of the day, women noticed a terrible phenomenon in the heavens just above Geruliai. Massed clouds gathered in the heavens, in the image of heaped heads of adults and children. In the camp there were rabbis who said Psalms together with the few children in the barn. The women told the rabbis about the heaps of large and small heads in the heavens. They came out into the yard to see this phenomenon. The following conversation took place among them:

First rabbi: "It is a sign of evil decrees from Heaven."

Second rabbi: "It is a sign of the coming of the Messiah."

Khane stood near them and overheard the conversation. The Jews in the barns grew extremely discouraged.

### **How Did Khane and Her Daughter Survive?**

Khane and her daughter Zlate were among the five hundred women in the Telzh ghetto. They experienced all of the suffering and torment of the women of Telzh. (Concerning the women in the Telzh ghetto see the testimony of Malke Gilis and Yente Alter-Gershovitz — L K )

Peasants used to come to the ghetto and take Jewish women to work. Before the women were taken out of the ghetto, the partisans would record the first and last names of the women as well as the first and last names and addresses of the peasant.

Sore Leybzon, Khane's sister-in-law, also worked for a peasant named Antanas Shaukis in the village of Gudishkiai near Luoke. This Antanas was a partisan, and had shed more than a little Jewish blood. He took Sore to work from the Geruliai camp, and she was away during the shootings at the camp. After the women had been in the ghetto for a week's time, Antanas came to take more women to work. Khane knew him from before the war, and he took her and her daughter as well.

Khane, her daughter and Sore worked very hard for the peasant. He exploited them in every way. The women had to do the heaviest kinds of work, even man's work. They were fed very poorly, because none of them would eat anything non-kosher.

Three days before the slaughter of the women in the Telzh ghetto, a policeman came from Telzh and told the peasant that all three women had to be brought to Telzh for a "health examination." That same day, Sunday evening, the peasant brought the three women to Telzh. When they arrived at the edge of town, Khane saw a Jewish woman with a child in her arms running through the street. The woman warned Khane not to ride into the ghetto, because anyone who could was escaping from the slaughter that was coming any day. With tears in their eyes, the three women begged the peasant not to take them into the ghetto, but to go there himself first to see what was happening there.

The women stood waiting next to the wagon, and the peasant went to the commandant of the ghetto and explained that all three women had run away from him during the night. When he returned, he didn't tell the women everything. But the women already understood anyway. The peasant agreed to take the three women back to his place, on condition that they would no longer stay there. When they returned to the peasant's place the three women hid in the straw in the barn, so that Antanas thought all three women had escaped during the night. For seven days and nights the women hid in the barn, without food or drink. All they had to still their thirst was snow which the wind blew in. Outside it was already bitter cold; it reached -28 degrees Centigrade. That was late in the fall of 1941. Khane held her child the whole time, warming her with her body. Her own feet froze. The women could no longer bear the hunger, thirst and cold, and began moving in the barn. The peasant spotted them and asked them into his house.

That same evening the peasant rode into Luoke to determine whether it was possible for him to keep the women. As he was taking the three women from the barn into his house, Antanas related that all the women had been shot. Before leaving for Luoke, he ordered the three women to remain in the house and to be careful. Two captured Red Army soldiers worked for him. Before leaving Antanas ordered them not to let anyone into the house. The peasant's wife, who was also a partisan, had gone away visiting. The three women remained in the house.

A peasant named Jakubauskas lived nearby to Antanas. The whole time the women worked for Antanas they went to Jakubauskas regularly to buy food. Apparently he had seen the women leaving the barn. He came and wanted to go into the house to see the women. The prisoners told him that there was no one in the house and the master had gone to town. But Jakubauskas insisted that he had to go into the house to see the three Jewish women, concerning a very important matter. The women left the closet where they had been hiding. Jakubauskas "mourned" for the women and warned them to leave the house as fast as possible, because police would soon come from the village looking for them. He told them to bring as many things as possible and come to his place. The women had hidden their things at Antanas' place before riding to Telzh. The women took everything they could, and went to Jakubauskas. The peasant promised to help them until the end of the war, and reassured them.

At night all three women lay in one bed. The peasant and his wife lay down in the other bed. The three women got no sleep that night. In the middle of the night the peasant and his wife went out into the kitchen and whispered between themselves for a long time. Khane went into the kitchen and saw the peasant sitting with his wife. Near them lay a long, freshly-sharpened knife. Khane returned in terror. The peasant followed immediately. Khane sighed deeply.

The peasant asked her why she was sighing. Khane told him how bitter and unfortunate their situation was. The peasant casually answered that this was nothing and soon it would be worse for them, because partisans were coming to arrest everyone. The women began weeping and pleading. But the peasant explained that anyone who handed over a Jew received 500 marks. "So why shouldn't I hand you over?" the peasant asked the three unfortunate women, his face flushed.

After they had briefly wept and begged, the peasant took all three women's shoes, took their better possessions and drove them out of the house. He chased them for a while with a post. A strong, cold wind whistled and twisted

outside. Their feet bare, the women ran through neck-deep snow. Khane herself does not remember how far they ran. When they turned, they no longer saw the peasant.

In the distance, through the eternal cold darkness, they saw a small fire flickering. The women began running towards the fire. When they came into a village they knocked on one peasant's door and then another's, but no one allowed them into the house. To stand and rest would have meant freezing their limbs off. Little Khane had no more strength, but Khane forced her to keep going. They knocked on the door of a small hut on the side of the road. An old peasant, his wife and a young Gentile boy were in the house.

When they saw the three women, they became very frightened to see their appearance. There the three women rested. The peasant and his wife were pious; they constantly crossed themselves and mourned for the bitter, tragic fate of the Jews and of the three unfortunate women.

The women warmed themselves there, drank hot water and got their strength back. At daybreak the peasant asked them to go further.

Before they left he found them some wooden shoes, gave them rags to wind around their feet, and showed them where they should go. But the other peasant did not want to keep them either. In the evening a peasant woman promised to take them to an American Lithuanian who would certainly hide them. She took them into a deep forest, and refused to guide them any further for free. The women gave her silk stockings. Sore gave her a golden chain. The peasant woman took these things and led them a bit further into the forest, and then again refused to lead them any further. Sore took off and gave her a wool sweater. When they came to the edge of the forest, the peasant woman indicated where they should go. When they knocked at the American's door, he would not let the women into the house. It was already dark out. They continued on to another peasant's home. Women sat spinning in the warm house. They all burst out weeping when they saw the three women, and began getting food ready.

At that moment a forester came into the house with a revolver in his hand. Apparently the American Lithuanian had sent him. The forester arrested the three women and took them out into the forest. When they had gone a certain distance in the dark forest, he took them into a house. About ten men sat at a table getting drunk. They were "pleased" to see the three Jewish women and began making jokes at the women's expense. Each one proposed a different kind of death for the women. They made various suggestions: to cut out the women's tongues, to put out their eyes, and so forth. When they had mocked the women for several hours, the forester and four others led the women out into the forest. They assured the women that they would all soon be shot. When they reached a pit meant for storing potatoes, they stopped the women and threatened to shoot them. They took the women further on through the dark forest and brought them to the forester's house. He telephoned the Luoke police. But no one came from Luoke to arrest the women. The murderers kept the women at the forester's home until the next morning. All night the peasants and the forester threatened to murder the women with an axe, with a shovel, and so forth. When it grew light, the forester took the three women to the police in Luoke on a wagon. When he brought the three women to the police chief, the forester boasted about his great achievement. To his great disappointment, the police chief promised him a solid punishment instead of a reward.

The police chief was a very good man, and knew Khane well from before the war. When he saw the three women, he clutched his head. He cursed the forester roundly for his "heroic achievement." He put the three women in jail, where he later sent them food and gave them a chance to heat up the stove in the cell. All the guards in the prison immediately noticed the positive attitude of their chief to the three women.

At night a policeman brought the three women from prison to the police chief's house. There he fed the women well, and gave them the address of his father-in-law, a Russian who lived in the countryside ten kilometers from the town of Luoke. A policeman accompanied the three women out of town and pointed the direction from the village to the Russian's house. Outside it was dreadfully cold. The women did not feel it. Outside it was pitch dark, but the women did not lose their way. However, they did not find the peasant's house that night, but spent the night with another peasant. The next evening they arrived at the Russian's home with a note from the police chief. The peasant gave the women a friendly reception, and gave them food and drink for three weeks. He could keep them no longer, because neighbors began to suspect the house.

Once again the women began wandering through a strange landscape, in a strange world full of enemies, full of deadly risks. There were a few good peasants, but it was hard to find them. Near the Russian's home was a village called Genten, fourteen kilometers from Luoke. The peasants from that village were all pious and all related to each other. In that village the three women hid with peasants all winter, several weeks. During the spring and summer of 1942 they survived in a nearby forest in a rye field. The peasants knew they were there and brought them food. Of course, they suffered a great deal of hunger. Sometimes they had to fast six or seven days at a stretch.

The Telzh police found out about the three women who were hiding. Frequent searches began through the region. More than once the three women were close to death, and escaped by chance. The police chief from Luoke advised the three women to leave the area.

Wandering further among peasants in unknown villages, they arrived at the home of a nobleman named Jonas Dulkis. He owned two compounds; he kept the women in one compound for three weeks, and in the other for four weeks. The women worked hard in the compounds, trying to please the nobleman. One of the nobleman's workers reported them to the Telzh police. A telephone call was made from Telzh to the police in Luoke, telling them to arrest the three Jewish women. The policeman who came from Luoke knew the women well; he was the one who had accompanied them out of Luoke that winter. The nobleman was a very good man, and had pity on the women. He arranged with the policeman that the woman should be freed, and he would be arrested. The policeman brought the nobleman to Telzh under arrest. He was kept in prison for a week and tortured. Priests spoke up on his behalf and he was liberated.

When they came to arrest the three women, Sore was in the forest. When she found out that a policeman had come to arrest Khane, she escaped from the forest. She only met Khane again after a year of wandering through the countryside.

During the summer and winter of 1942-1943 Khane and her daughter were once again with peasants in the village of Genten. A peasant named Pranas Trilikauskas from the village of Vaishlaukiai took in Khane and her daughter, and kept them until the Liberation. The good peasant immediately prepared a hiding place in his barn, where Khane and her daughter hid during searches. In general however the peasant kept them in his house, where they did various tasks for him. The peasant was very satisfied with Khane. They experienced various dangers at the peasant's home as well. More than once they were forced to spend a night and a day in the forest with nothing to eat or drink. More than once they spent a winter's day hiding in the forest. But the peasant did everything he could to save the two women. Sore Leybzon found out about Khane and her daughter, and came to visit them once. They met again after the Liberation.

After long battles, the Red Army appeared like an angel from heaven. This was in the summer of 1944. As if by some bizarre miracle, officers and soldiers from the Red Army came to look at the two women, who had spent the last weeks lying in hiding day in, day out in the pit at the peasant's barn. With great affection they helped the women regain their strength, and took care of all their needs.

*Translated from a Yiddish manuscript into English by Dr Jonathan Boyar New York, 7 April 10, 1988*

#### **Attestation of Khana Golembo**

I, Khane Golembo, personally told L. Koniuchowsky about the slaughter of the Jews of nine towns at Vieshvenai, at Geruliai and in the Telzh Ghetto. I precisely related all of the facts, dates, names of persons and names of locations, and I attest thereto with my signature on each page.

Eyewitness Khane Golembo (Signature)

The testimony was recorded by:  
Engineer L. Koniuchowsky  
Bad-Reichenhall  
Bavaria  
December 18, 1947.

The signature of the resident  
of the Jewish D.P. Camp Bad-Reichenhall  
Khane Golembo is attested to by the  
General Secretary of the Camp Committee, Jakob Ross (Signature)  
Bad-Reichenhall, December 19, 1947.

*Attestation translated from Yiddish into English by Dr Jonathan Boyar New York, April 10, 1988*

# THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS OF LUOKE

Related by Dvoyre Zif

Dvoyre Zif was born May 25, 1927 in Luoke. She finished the Hebrew elementary school there. From 1939 until 1941 Dvoyre studied in the Lithuanian gymnasium in Telzh, completing three grades. After the war Dvoyre completed gymnasium in Munich. Her father's name was Khayem, and her mother's name was Beyle Grad. Until the outbreak of the war, Dvoyre lived in Luoke, where she survived the slaughter of the Jews of her town.

Luoke is located 23 kilometers from Telzh and 30 kilometers from Shavl. Two kilometers from town flows the small river Virvyte. Until the outbreak of the war between Germany and the Soviet Union, some 500 Jews lived in Luoke. The Jews were mostly occupied in commerce. A small number were artisans, and only a few did agricultural work.

Among the larger enterprises must be mentioned a mill, along with a sawmill and a wool-combing workshop belonging to the brothers Berl, Yankl and Moyshe Lesem. Luoke had a Jewish national bank until the summer of 1940; a Hebrew elementary school; a library and a new synagogue.

Most of the Jewish youth were Zionists. After the Red Army entered Lithuanian in 1940, Jewish young people threw themselves wholeheartedly into the life of the political organizations. The Jews were given government positions, which was impossible under President Smetonas' regime.

After the war broke out on June 22, 1941, some 25 Jewish families, mostly young people, evacuated with the Red Army to the Soviet Union. Almost all of the Jews in town escaped from town to the countryside, in order to avoid a possible battle for control of the town.

In the evening of Thursday, June 26, 1941, the Germans were already in town. Bit by bit the Jews began to return to town from the surrounding villages. They found their homes looted and vandalized by the Lithuanian inhabitants of the town, who had not escaped town.

On the morning of Saturday, June 28, 1941, several Germans and partisans (armed Lithuanian murderers) arrested the town rabbi, Rabbi Kravitsky, and took him to a forest near the town in a car. There they tormented the rabbi dreadfully, and demanded that the rabbi show them where Red Army soldiers lay in hiding. Some time later they brought him back home, barely alive. They forced the rabbi's wife to carry a huge mattress, and beat her while she was doing so. The partisans began taking the able-bodied Jews off to do various kinds of work, and tormenting them.

As soon as the Germans arrived in town, a complete civilian administration emerged from underground.

## The Situation of Jews Under the Civilian Administration

A Lithuanian who had been imprisoned in the Kovno jail during the Soviet period became mayor. At the outbreak of the war he escaped from prison and came to Luoke. The chief was a Lithuanian merchant from the town named Mironas. The commandant of the partisans was a farmer from a nearby village and his wife, was a teacher in the Lithuanian elementary school in town. The name of the commandant was Vincas Venckus.

At the beginning of the second week of the war the partisans demanded a levy of 30,000 rubles from the Jews. In order to make the Jews assemble this amount on time, they took hostages. Among them were the mother of this witness, Beyle. Kalmen Blank, Shloyme Novik and Yehudis Kravitsky. They collected the sum demanded of the Jews and brought it to the commandant of the partisans.

Only a few Germans remained in town at that time. The partisans ordered the Jews around at will. The hostages were freed with the help of a German major in town, even before the demanded sum of money was brought to the partisan's headquarters.

Every Lithuanian who had a grudge against a Jew seized the opportunity to betray the Jews to the partisans. For the most part they accused the Jews of sympathy for Communism. Thus the partisans arrested Jewish men and women on account of false accusations. Dvoyre remembers among them:

- 1 . The two Lesem brothers;
- 2 . Mayerovitz, owner of a restaurant;
- 3 . Kalmen Blank, a lumber merchant, with his wife and two children; as well as others whose first and last

names Dvoyre no longer remembers. All of those arrested were thrown into the cellar in the home of the peasant towns woman Dambrauskiene, in whose home the headquarters of the partisans was also located.

Roughly a week after the German army entered the town, partisans ordered the Jews to leave their homes within half an hour. They permitted the Jews to take along hand-held packages. The partisans locked the houses, and herded the Jews into the marketplace. The partisans threatened to shoot on the spot anyone who remained in his home more than half an hour.

Wagons had been gathered together in the marketplace, and on them the Jews were taken to a compound called Gudishke, one kilometer from Luoke. The compound had been nationalized by the Soviets, and the owner had been taken away to Russia.

That same day the partisans brought all of the arrested women and children from the cellar into the compound. The men remained confined in the cellar under terrible conditions.

### **Torment and Suffering in the Camp Compound Gudishke; Women Raped; Men Shot**

The partisans herded all the Jews in the compound into a barn on a little bit of straw. The compound was heavily guarded by partisans. In the barn they took the Jews' valuables. They threatened to shoot anyone who withheld the valuable items which they demanded. The commandant of the camp was an agricultural worker in a compound seven kilometers from town. His last name was Storpishtis. His employer's name was Shalkauskas. Under the Soviets he had been arrested and imprisoned in the Telzh jail. Before retreating, the Soviets had taken Shalkauskas and many other arrestees out of the Telzh prison into the Rainiai forest and shot them.

At 4:00 each morning the Jews were forced out of the barn to roll call. While counting the Jews, the partisans would torment and beat them. The camp commandant Storpishtis was outstanding in his cruelty. After roll call the Jews were taken out to do various tasks in town and in the countryside. Every day the Jews buried Red Army soldiers who had died of their wounds. Dozens of wounded Red Army soldiers who did not receive any medical attention lay in various places at that time.

The Jews in the camp did not receive food. Every night the partisans took young, pretty girls out of the barn and raped them. In the morning they were brought back to the barn. With tears in their eyes, the women related their awful experiences. Dvoyre still remembers the following girls and women who were raped by the Lithuanian degenerates: Hene Lazer, aged 18; Yehudis Kravitsky, aged 22; Ele Milner, aged 17; and Mrs Sandler, aged 30. They used to come into the barn drunk and shine flashlights into the women's faces. They beat their victims murderously in the barn, and forced them to come along.

A Jew named Leyzer Ziv lived with his wife and children on a farm in the village of Kaunotava, twelve kilometers from Luoke. The partisans brought him and his family to the compound of Gudishke. They took everything from him, and found a pillow with a red cover. They thought up the false accusation that he was getting ready to make a red flag out of the pillow cover, and planning a Communist uprising against the Germans.

The Lithuanian murderers drove all the Jews, men, women and children, out of their barn into the yards, and lined them up in rows. They placed Leyzer's family opposite the rest. The camp commandant Storpishtis gave a "speech" in which he accused all the Jews of preparing a Communist uprising. The partisans whipped Leyzer's entire family, even his two year old child. Leyzer was taken out of the compound the same day, and no one saw him again.

In the morning of Monday the 19th of Tammuz (July 14th, 1941), the partisans announced that they were going to take all the Jews to the Rainiai compound near Telzh. They gave the Jews four hours to get ready. The Jews loaded everything onto wagons. All the men from the cellar in town were brought to the compound that day.

About five in the afternoon two Germans on motorcycles arrived in the compound, along with a truck filled with drunken Lithuanians armed with automatics and rifles. They drove the women and children back into the barn and closed the gate. One German went in to the women in the barn. He promised that no harm would come to them or their children.

He assured them that his weapon had never been stained with the blood of women and children. The men, he explained, all had to be shot, because they were all Communists. (See the testimony of Yenta Alter-Gershovitz concerning the annihilation of the Jews of Rietavas — L K )

After this "speech" he left the barn and went out to the men in the yard. With mad fury he accused the Jews of responsibility for all the world's troubles, and then there immediately began a dreadful inquisition against the unfortunate Jews. All the men had to run after each other in a circle. The Lithuanians stood around, beating the Jews with whips and poles. The German whistled with a whistle very often. After each whistle, the Jews had to fall and then quickly get up and run again. Anyone who did not get up quickly enough was murderously beaten by the partisans. The Lithuanians called the inquisition the "Demon's Dance" (Velniu-Shokis). Through the cracks in the walls the women and children saw all the gruesome torment, which lasted for over an hour. Then the men were forced back into the barn. They were all beaten and bloodied. None of them said anything. They all sat with their heads bowed, and maintained a sorrowful silence. Their wives, children and mothers stood near them weeping, caressing and kissing them.

At two o'clock the same night, partisans began calling individual Jews out into their headquarters. The men were summoned until five in the morning, until all of the healthy men capable of work had been taken out of the barn.

On the morning on Tuesday, July 15, the Lithuanian murderers took all the men out to a nearby forest and shot them. The women in the barn heard the cries of the men at the pits, and then shooting, followed by the dying groans of the victims. The women and children remained in the barn roughly a week longer. The sorrow and pain of the women and children cannot be conveyed in words. The partisans "comforted" them by saying that the men had been taken to work.

On Thursday, July 17th the partisans who guarded the barn took the few remaining old, sick men, shot them in the same forest near the compound and threw them into another pit. The second group included roughly ten men, all elderly and invalid.

### **How Dvoyre and Her Sister Roza Survived**

Several days after the second group of men were shot, the women and children were taken to the Vieshvenai compound on wagons. On the way the partisans beat them. At the Vieshvenai compound the women and children were kept for about a week, and then they were taken to the Geruliai compound, together with women and children from other towns around Telzh. (Concerning the life of the women and children in the Vieshvenai and Geruliai compounds, see the testimony of Malke Gilis and Yenta Alter-Gershovitz.)

Dvoyre's mother and brother Velvele died at the Geruliai compound when all the women and children were shot there, on August 30, 1941. Dvoyre and her sister Roza were among the five hundred women who were brought from the Geruliai compound into the Telzh ghetto. The two were in the ghetto for about three weeks until they were taken away to work in the Degaitziu compound. (Concerning the life of the women in that compound, see the testimony of Mashe Rikhman about the annihilation of the Plunge Jews.)

Late in the autumn of 1941, when there was less work to do at that compound, most of the women were brought back into the ghetto. Dvoyre and her sister continued working in the compound with a few dozen other women. But Dvoyre grew sick, and had to leave for the ghetto with her sister, where they lived for some time under very bad conditions.

Some ten girls had been assigned as policewomen in the ghetto by the partisans. Their task was to keep order as best as possible in the ghetto and to see to it that all the able-bodied women appeared for work assignments on time. They wore white armbands as insignia. They treated the women in the ghetto well. The Lithuanian commandant of the ghetto, an infamous murderer, once babbled to the policewomen when he was drunk, that preparations were being made for the slaughter of all the women in the ghetto. The girls immediately told all the women about this. A terrible panic arose in the ghetto. Everyone sought ways to escape.

Dvoyre and her sister ran away from the ghetto to a peasant woman in Telzh whom they knew. A nun named Rupeikaite from the village of Kalnenai, three kilometers from Telzh, rode to the peasant woman's home. The nun demanded that the two sisters convert, in exchange for which she took the two of them to her home in the village. Roza left and went back into the ghetto. The day the women were taken away to be shot, she escaped the ghetto and joined her sister Dvoyre. For several days the two sisters stayed in a forest, with the nun's knowledge. The nun took Dvoyre to the peasant Shiaulis in the village of Kalnenai. Dvoyre was there for eight months, and her sister was in the same village at the home of the peasant Godelis for about six months.

Shiaulis took Dvoyre to the Lithuanian wigmaker in the town of Plunge. She lived there with Aryan documents for six months. A peasant from Luoke noticed her there and immediately recognized her. It was dangerous for her to remain any longer, and she returned to the village of Kalnenai to the peasant Rupeika, a worker in the compound

owned by the Lithuanian businessman Kazlauskas. She hid there for exactly one year. From there Dvoyre went to a peasant named Kontrimas in a nearby village, where she spent four months.

Constant searches for Red partisans began in that region. A large number of Jews who were in hiding died at that time. Dvoyre left the area and went closer to Alsedzhiai to a peasant in a village where her sister Roza was hiding. She was there for several days, and the good peasant took her close to Alsedzhiai to a village near the holy Lithuanian town of Kalwarye, to the peasant Olesys Vagdarys, a partisan who had taken part in the shooting of the Jewish men in the town of Alsedzhiai. Dvoyre spoke Lithuanian very well, and the murderer did not know that she was Jewish. More than once he boasted how he himself had helped shoot the Jewish men of Alsedzhiai. Dvoyre worked very hard for the peasant as a servant for about a year. She left him and went back to the village of Kalninai to a peasant woman named Kazlauskiene, where she stayed until she was liberated by the Red Army in the fall of 1944.

Dvoyre worked very hard for all of the peasants with whom she stayed. She tried very hard to please her Lithuanian masters, who exploited her greatly.

Fifteen women from Luoke were in the Telzh ghetto before all the women there were slaughtered. But most of them died in various ways:

- 1 . Mrs. Mel and two young sons hid until the fall of 1943. Ukrainians caught and shot them during a search,
- 2 . Three sisters, Taybe, Yehudis and Miriam Kravitsky, were still in hiding in the villages a short time before the liberation. They died. Dvoyre does not know any details concerning their death.
- 3 . Two cousins, Sore Brill and Khane Lazar, had hidden in the town of Luoke and in the countryside. Dvoyre does not know the details of their death.

The survivors from the town of Luoke were: Roza and Dvoyre Zif; Esther and Musye Blekher; Lesim and her daughter-in-law Reyzl Lesim; Toybe Ziv, from a settlement at the village of Kaunotava. All of them hid in the Lithuanian countryside. Some fifteen families of Jews from Luoke returned from the Soviet Union; most of them settled in Vilna.

The Lithuanian murderers who took active part in slaughtering the Jews of Luoke stemmed from all of the classes and categories of the town and rural population. Dvoyre remembers the following:

- 1 . Two brothers Vaitkus, one a tailor and the second an agricultural worker, both from town;
- 2 . A wealthy farmer Bagusha from a village not far from Luoke;
- 3 . Rimkus, a hooligan from town;
- 4 . Vincas Wenckus, the commandant of the partisans;
- 5 . Venekiene, the commandant's wife, a former teacher;
- 6 . Vladas Mazheika, a worker from town;
- 7 . Stankus, a farmer from town.
- 8 . Griushiai, three brothers, farmers from the village of Jusiu, near the town;
- 9 . Savickiai, two brothers, owners of a restaurant in Luoke;
- 10 . Vigdaravicius from the village of Kaunotava, twelve kilometers from town;
- 11 . Janusha, a laborer from town.

*Translated from a Yiddish manuscript into English by Dr Jonathan Boyar New York, April 10, 1988*

### **Attestation of Dvoyre Zif**

I, Dvoyre Zif, told all the foregoing to Leyb Koniuchowsky, including all of the dates, facts, names of persons and of geographic locations, and I attest thereto with my signature on every page.

Signature: Dvoyre Zif (Signature)

The testimony was recorded by  
Engineer L. Koniuchowsky (Signature)  
Munich, March 27, 1948.

The signature of Dvoyre Zif is  
hereby attested to:  
(Signature)  
Engineer A. Shuster  
General Secretary  
of the Union of Lithuanian Jews

*Attestation translated from a Yiddish into English by Dr Jonathan Boyar New York, April 10, 1988*

## **THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS OF PLUNGYAN (PLUNGE)**

Eyewitness testimony of Mashe Rikhman, born September 8, 1924 in Plunge. Mashe completed elementary school there. She finished the Hebrew gymnasium in Shavl in the year 1939. Her father's name was Dovid. Her mother's name was Malke Garb, from Plunge.

Plunge is in Telzh County, 29 kilometers from Telzh and 40 kilometers from Kretingen. The small river Babrungas flows through the town. There is a station at Plunge on the Shavl-Memel railroad line.

Some 5,000 people lived in Plunge, including about two thousand Jews. Most of the Jewish population was occupied in trade and artisanry.

The larger enterprises in town included:

- 1 . A mill, sawmill and a power station belonging to the two brothers-in-law Khatski Zaks and Zvulun Khazan.
- 2 . A mill and a woolen bristle factory belonging to the Jewish owner Yank Karbelnik.
- 3 . A pig's hair factory belonging to the partners Yitskhok Metz and Nosen Shor.
- 4 . A candy and tile factory belonging to Shloyme Bukhbinder and his brother-in-law Tokson.
- 5 . A lemonade factory belonging to Dovid Rikhman.
- 6 . A wool-spinning factory belonging to Moyshe Polivnik.
- 7 . Large tanneries belonging to Yankl Zin and Fayve Kesl.

The economic life of the Jews in town was not good. Most of the population lived on support sent by relatives overseas.

The town possessed two libraries, one Yiddish and one Hebrew-Yiddish; a junior high school called "Tarbut," consisting of six grades, a Hebrew elementary school; a reading room; a large synagogue; a new study house; and three new small synagogues.

Until the Red Army arrived in Lithuania, there was a Jewish national bank in Plunge. A large proportion of the Jewish youth were grouped around the illegal Communist party during the time of President Antanas Smetonas.

Before the Red Army arrived in Lithuania in 1940, there was open anti-Semitism in Plunge. In the Lithuanian gymnasium the Jewish students suffered greatly at the hands of their anti-Semitic teachers and at the hands of the students. The Lithuanian organization "Verslas" created much bad blood in town, calling on the Lithuanian population not to buy from Jews. In many cases they even agitated against the Jews, inventing various false accusations against them.

Therefore it is no wonder that a large number of the Jewish youth happily greeted the Red Army when it entered town in the summer of 1940.

A large number of the Jewish youth felt like equal, free citizens and took part in the economic and political life of Plunge.

### **The Outbreak of War between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, June 22, 1941**

The next day, Monday, June 23, 1941, all of the Jews and a large number of Christians left town and hid in surrounding villages. Some five hundred Jews managed to evacuate by train, and arrived safely in the Soviet Union. Most of these were young people who had actively taken part in political life or had held positions under the Soviets. But the ordinary Jews did not escape. The majority only temporarily left town in order to avoid the fronts.

Mashe, her father and two brothers, Yankl and Moyshe, travelled on a wagon hoping to be able to escape to the Soviet Union. They and hundreds more Jews arrived at the border on Thursday, June 26, 1941. But the border was closed. At the same time Lithuanian and Latvian partisans were already active, disrupting the retreat of the Red Army and of the Jews. On Sunday, June 29, a group of Jews arrived at the Latvian city of Mitave, where they were chased by the German army and forced to return to Lithuania. They were in Zhagare, and from there they went to Telzh. The Lithuanian partisans detained all the Jews returning to Telzh, and took them to the Rainiai compound near Telzh.

All of the men, women and children of Telzh had already been herded together into that compound. All of the Jews who had been caught while still on the roads, and all those who had returned, were taken by the partisans to the

Vieshvenai compound. Some sixty men, women and children from Plunge who had been detained near Telzh while returning, were herded into that compound.

Nearly all the Jews of surrounding towns in Telzh County were gathered in that compound. (About the life and death of the Jews in that compound — see the testimony of Yente Alter-Gershovitz, concerning the slaughter of the Jews in Rietavas — L K )

### **The First "Demon's Dance"**

On Monday, July 14, 1941, partisans and several Germans rode into the compound. They drove all the men out of the stalls into the yard. One of the Germans gave a speech to the unfortunate men, in which he accused the Jews of all kinds of crimes. Then he began to order the Jews around. They had to run one after the other in a circle. With a whistle, he commanded them to fall and get back up. They were forced to keep going by the Lithuanians, who beat them with poles and with their rifle butts. Whoever didn't get up off the ground quickly enough after falling down was murderously beaten. During the "Demon's Dance" one of the partisans broke a pole over the shoulder of Mashe's brother Yankele, who was then fourteen years old. During the course of the "Demon's Dance" the partisans shot three men: a man from Telzh named Itzikson; a doctor named Traub from a town called Tverai; and the son of the slaughterer from Rietavas (Yakev-Ber Gershovitz — L K ) After the "Demon's Dance," as partisans called this torture, they selected a group of younger men and led them off in an unknown direction.

### **The Second "Demon's Dance" - Preparations for Death**

On Wednesday July 16th trucks carrying armed partisans and a few Germans drove into the yard. First they looted everything in the barns, and then they drove the men out to the yard. Mashe dressed her brother Yankele in short pants. He looked like a child, and did not go out of the barn.

The torture of the men began in the courtyard. The second "Demon's Dance" was even worse than the first. The women in the barns could not go out into the yard. A German kept watch in one barn and comforted the women. Seeing the torment of the men in the yard, he wept and comforted the women, saying that no harm would come to them. Some of the women thanked him for the words of comfort.

During the torture one elderly Jew lost his strength and could no longer run around. A German took a rifle from a partisan and shot the old Jew.

The second "Demon's Dance" was a "preparation" for the men's death. Tortured, weakened and beaten, they were taken out of the yard in groups in the direction of a nearby woods. The women in the barns already understood everything, and dreadful wailing began. The wife of Dr Zaks from Rietavas ran out of the barn with her child in her arms and ran toward the group of men which included her husband. The partisans blocked her way. She shouted at them: "We will take revenge on you yet! You haven't won yet!" She and her child were shot together with all the men.

Several days later Mashe found out that the group of men who had been selected on Monday, July 14th, among them her brother Moyshe, had been forced to dig the pits in the forest, after which they were all shot. This was on July 16, 1941.

The next day all the men remaining in the compound were shot, including Mashe's father Dovid; they were buried in the pits which had been prepared. After all the men in the Vieshvenai compound had been shot, the women and children were transported to the Geruliai compound, where the women and children from the Rainiai compound were also brought.

### **The Geruliai Camp - Women and Children Shot**

Women and children from other towns in Telzh County were brought to that compound. (Concerning the life of the women and children in the Geruliai compound and their slaughter, see the testimony of Malke Gilis, Yenta Gershovitz and others — L K )

A total of 150 men and women, some with children, including Mashe and her brother, were taken away from the compound to do agricultural work at the Degaitziai compound, four kilometers from Telzh. During the Soviet period there had been a collective state farm at that compound. The living conditions there were very bad. Everyone was quartered in a barn. When it grew colder, everyone slept in a house on the floor.

The women worked very hard. But they were satisfied, because they avoided the terror and torture of the Geruliai camp. The women continued working at the compound until late in the fall of 1941. They were in the compound while the Geruliai camp was being liquidated and the women and children there were being shot, August 30, 1941.

Mashe's brother Yankele had been hiding there from the beginning, because according to his age he should have been shot. Mashe kept him hidden in the barn. Lithuanian partisans found out about this, and Yankele began going to work with the women. He was an unusually good child and a good, capable worker. Everyone in the compound liked him. In the autumn, when there was less work to do and most of the women had already been sent to the ghetto, Mashe remained thanks to her brother, whom the supervisor in the compound liked very much.

The last supervisor, Laugandas, was an anti-Semite. Twenty three women remained working in the compound in all, and their situation was not bad. He arranged beds for them to sleep in the house and took good care of them.

A few days before the women in the Telzh ghetto were slaughtered, the partisans announced that the 23 women had to come "for health examinations." They all understood that preparations were being made to kill them. Laugandas went to Telzh and found out that all the women in the ghetto were to be killed. He told "his" women about this, and advised everyone to escape. He excused himself to the partisans by saying that all the women had escaped at night.

### **In Latvia, and the Return to Shavl, Lithuania**

Some of the women escaped from the compound and began wandering through the countryside with the intention of reaching Latvia. After wandering for some time they arrived in Latvia. But there they discovered that just as in Lithuania, all of the Jews outside the major cities had been slaughtered.

Everyone returned to Lithuania. After a long, hard struggle against bitter cold and deadly risks, after a march of 180 kilometers on foot, Mashe and her brother, together with other women, reached Shavl and entered the ghetto. Mashe and Yankele were in the Shavl ghetto until September 20, 1943.

The situation in the Shavl ghetto became dangerous for the Jews, and Mashe and her brother escaped from the ghetto to the village of Degaitzciu Kaimas near Telzh. The supervisor Laugandas placed Mashe with a peasant named Rimgaila in the same village. She did various kinds of work in the fields there for exactly ten weeks. Then Mashe went to a peasant woman named Laurinaitiene in Telzh, where she stayed until the Liberation.

Mashe's brother Yankele had hidden with a second peasant in the village of Degaitzciu. Partisans captured him there and took him to the Shavl ghetto. Together with all the Jews of Shavl, he was evacuated to Germany. He survived the concentration camp, was liberated and still lives.

### **More Details about the Slaughter of the Jews of Plunge**

Mashe stayed in her birthplace Plunge for five months after the Liberation. There Mashe found an uncle of hers, Yankl Garb, who had converted to Christianity. The priest and peasant friends had saved his life during the German occupation. He told Mashe: The Germans entered Plunge on Thursday, June 26, 1941. There was no battle for the town. The Jews returned from the countryside and moved back into their homes. The partisans and former policemen set up the civilian administration. Sadauskas, who had been a policeman in Plunge during President Smetona's administration, became the chief of police. The commandant of the partisans was the Lithuanian farmer Pabriezha, from town. The partisans began to rule the town.

On the day the Germans entered the town, the partisans spread a rumor that the Jewish doctor and the staff of the pharmacy in town had been poisoning Lithuanians for years.

The partisans arrested the Jewish Dr Levin and his wife, the pharmacist Efroyem Izralovitz and his colleagues Marek and Miss Khaye Shlomovitz.

All of the arrestees were taken out of town by the partisans, under the leadership of Pabriezha, to a forest near the village of Kalnishkiai, where there had formerly been summer houses. They were shot there.

That same Thursday, the partisans assembled all the men, women and children in the synagogue, which had been requisitioned by the Soviets for military uses and was surrounded by a barbed-wire fence. The Jews had to leave

their things in their houses, where Lithuanians from town and new arrivals immediately moved in. The heads of the partisans settled into the better houses.

The synagogue was guarded by partisans, who let no one out. The crowding was terrible, and everyone was tormented by hunger. The Jews were driven to various kinds of dirty work, and they were tormented in various murderous ways. Mashe does not know exactly how long the Jews were kept interned in the synagogue until they were shot. She does know that they were not kept long.

A short time before the Jews were shot, a fire broke out in a side street which had been occupied by Jews before the war. The Lithuanians accused the Jews of having set the fire when they went to the street to get water.

Peasants and townspeople whom Mashe knew told her that the Jews had been taken out of the synagogue in family groups, several at a time. All of those who were taken away were brought to the freethinker's cemetery, some five kilometers from Plunge in the direction of Kretingen. There they were all shot.

The peasant from town Petratis, a tailor, told Mashe that he had had to ride out of town with a few shovels to dig the pits. Kegs of beer and many bottles of liquor were on the cart. The Jews had to dig the pits themselves. Between shooting one group and bringing a second to the pit, the partisans got drunk. They began shooting on a Saturday afternoon, and they finished on Sunday morning. Mashe Rikhman does not remember the dates.

None of the Jews managed to escape, neither from the synagogue nor from the pits. Mashe asserts that the Lithuanians shot roughly 1,200 men, women and children at the freethinker's cemetery.

*Translated from a Yiddish manuscript into English by Dr Jonathan Boyar New York, April 11, 1988*

#### **Attestation of Mashe Rikhman**

I, Mashe Rikhman, told Leyb Koniuchowsky everything that is written on six pages about the slaughter of the Jews of Plunge, and I attest thereto with my signature on every page.

Eyewitness: Mashe Rikhman (Signature)

The testimony was recorded by:  
Engineer L. Koniuchowsky (Signature)

Munich, March 19, 1948

The signature of Mashe Rikhman, residing in Munich, is attested to by the General Secretary of the Union of Lithuanian Jews in the American Zone.

General Secretary Engineer A. Shuster (Signature)

March 19, 1948

*Translated from a Yiddish manuscript into English by Dr Jonathan Boyar New York, April 11, 1988*

## **THE SLAUGHTER OF JEWS IN THE LITHUANIAN COUNTY SEAT RASEINIAI**

### **The collective testimony of:**

1 . Dvoyre Lazarsky (nee Yankelevitsh), born May 6, 1909 in the town of Ariogala, 28 kilometers from Raseiniai. From 1920 until the outbreak of the war, on June 22, 1941, she lived in Raseiniai, where she completed six grades of gymnasium. She was a milliner by trade. Her father's name was Perets Yankelevitsh.

2 . Frida Praz, born in the small town of Vaiguva in Shavl County, on October 15, 1924. Her father's name was Nokhum Praz. She lived in the town of Ushventis, Shavl County, from 1928 until 1931. From 1931 until 1938 Frida lived in the small town of Krazhiai. There she completed six grades of Lithuanian gymnasium, and then she moved to Taurage, where she worked as a cashier in a textile business. Frida lived in Taurage until the outbreak of the war. In the morning of Sunday, June 22, 1941, she fled along with hundreds of other Jews, to her uncle Lazarsky in Raseiniai.

### **The Geographical Situation of the Town, The Economic and Cultural Life of the Jews**

Raseiniai is located 90 kilometers from Kaunas, 22 kilometers from Jurbarkas and 90 kilometers from Shavl. The highway between Kaunas and Klaipeda, known as the Zhemaitiu plantas, runs through the town. Until the outbreak of the war the population of the town was 10,000, including 4,000 Jews.

The majority of the Jewish population belonged to the middle class. All of them lived relatively well from the economic standpoint. The majority of the Jews were small merchants and artisans, and there was also a small number of farmers.

The cultural life of the Jews was maintained at an adequate level; it was well organized and had been solidly established for decades and centuries. There was a Hebrew gymnasium, until the arrival of the Red Army in Lithuania on June 15, 1940. After the arrival of the Red Army in Lithuania the gymnasium was combined with the Lithuanian gymnasium. The Yiddish and Hebrew library had a large number of books in various languages. There was one large synagogue in Raseiniai, along with a study house and other smaller synagogues. The latter were organized along artisanal lines, such as the tailors' synagogue, the tanners' synagogue and others. The Jewish national bank, headed by the director Schugam, was closed after the arrival of the Red Army in Lithuania.

The majority of the Jewish young people studied in the Hebrew gymnasium. A smaller number studied in the Lithuanian gymnasium. Until the arrival of the Red Army in the summer of 1940, they were members of Zionist organizations. A small number were members of the Communist Party, which was illegal during the rule of President Antanas Smetona.

In general the attitude of the Lithuanian neighbors to the local Jews was not bad — but this was only superficially true. Jews fraternized with the Lithuanians, met with them at social events and often spent time together with them at the Raseiniai "Citizens' Club." Relations worsened sharply and quickly after the arrival of the Red Army in Raseiniai in the summer of 1940.

After the arrival of the Red Army the Jewish youth began to accommodate themselves to the new social situation, which was similar to the Soviet system. For a considerable portion of the Jewish youth, who were unemployed and had an uncertain future, the system opened many new possibilities. Some of the Jewish youth threw themselves into social life body and soul, while several joined the Communist Youth and the Party. Many of the Lithuanian youth did the same thing. But precisely the participation of Jews in the new life, and the possibility they had to be citizens with almost equal rights, aroused the subterranean anger of the Lithuanian population of the town. The latter were repeatedly propagandized by illegal Fascist underground movements. The anti-Semites were bitter enemies of both the Soviets and the Jews. But the Soviet iron fist "bound" the hands of the bandits and put a "lock" on their mouths. Thus, during the year of Soviet rule (1940-1941), the Jews did not openly feel the hatred of their Lithuanian neighbors.

### **The Outbreak of the Second World War; Looting of Jewish Possessions; Decrees and Torture of Jews**

Early on the morning of Sunday, July 22, 1941, the Jews of Raseiniai suddenly observed Jews hurrying toward Raseiniai from the surrounding towns located closer to the German border. The Jews from Raseiniai found out from the refugees that war had already broken out between Hitler Germany and the Soviet Union. Most of the refugees came from Taurage on carts, trucks and by foot. There was a terrible panic in Raseiniai.

The Soviet military authorities immediately ordered the civilian population to leave the city, because heavy aerial bombardment by the German air force was expected. By 1:00 on Sunday, everyone had already left the town for the nearby villages. At 2:00 the same day an air attack on Raseiniai actually did begin. The Hitlerite murderers dropped dozens of bombs on the very center of the city, where most of the Jews lived.

Dvoyre and her husband Yakov, her parents and her brother Leybl, ran away from the city into a village. At night (Sunday, June 22, 1941), they saw Raseiniai burning. Dvoyre's cousin Frida Praz (now Miller), arrived in Raseiniai as a refugee from Taurage on Sunday morning.

After a desperate battle, the Germans entered Raseiniai on Tuesday, June 24, 1941. Many houses, for the most part Jewish, were destroyed either by the bombardment or by the desperate fighting for the city. Dvoyre and Frida relate that as soon as the war began, and before the Germans entered Raseiniai, armed Lithuanians began calling themselves "partisans," displayed Lithuanian national flags, and joyfully greeted the German army details. The partisans, who had secretly armed and prepared themselves thoroughly, shot at the backs of the Red Army soldiers as best they could, while the latter retreated in panic. Hundreds of Jews from Raseiniai and other towns used every means possible in attempting to evacuate to the Soviet Union, but they were unable to do so. Everywhere the Germans caught up with them.

The women in the Jewish families which had gone to the villages returned to the Raseiniai, "to see how things were." The men were afraid to show themselves openly, because there were many partisans everywhere. They immediately dressed up with white bands on their arms, and began controlling all the roads. But the Jews were not secure with their lives in the countryside either. Nevertheless, the day after the women departed, all the men returned to Raseiniai.

Several Jewish families packed themselves into the few Jewish houses which remained. The crowding was dreadful. People spread out into the intact Jewish barns, stalls and yards on Vilnius and Nemakshitsiai Streets.

Dvoyre's father-in-law was robbed by the civilian Lithuanians on Friday of the first week of the war. The Lithuanians responded to Dvoyre's father-in-law's protests: "Before it used to be yours, now all of it's ours"

The Lithuanian neighbors in town, amongst whom the Jews had lived for hundreds of years, now openly and brazenly robbed and requisitioned from the Jews everything their hearts desired. Some of them did it "morally," pretending to be friendly. They suggested that the Jews hide their more valuable possessions with them, so that no one could steal them. In exchange they promised to bring food to the Jews, and also to hide them when the time came. In general the Lithuanians knew that preparations were being made to slaughter the Jews. So many of them made an effort to become the "heirs" of their Jewish neighbors.

There were Lithuanians who sought to provoke Jews, in order to inherit their possessions. This happened to Frida's uncle Lazarsky. Peasants from town reported to the Germans that Jews had set fire to their own houses before the Germans came to town. They added that Lazarsky wanted to burn down his house. Frida spoke up and declared to the Germans that the house was her uncle's own, and that the Lithuanians wanted to take it over. This provocation was unsuccessful. There were many such cases in town at that time.

Civilian authority passed into the hands of the Lithuanians at the beginning of the war. They had prepared themselves thoroughly in secret before the war broke out, even though this was illegal during the year of Soviet rule in Lithuania. The mayor in town, for three consecutive years before the war, including under the Soviets, was the Lithuanian from Raseiniai Jodko. Before the war he had been a liberal man, and the local Jews used to vote for him. He was a member of the Lithuanian intelligentsia in town. Now he lives in the city of Hanover in Germany, where he pretends to have been taken for forced labor, although he actually came as a refugee fleeing from the Red Army. His assistant was a Lithuanian German from Raseiniai named Ernst Schmit, who later became the commandant of Raseiniai.

The police force was recruited from the ranks of those who had been policemen during President Smetonai rule, from some of those who had been in the militia during the year of Soviet rule, and from among the partisans who had worked illegally during the Soviet period, and who had shot at the retreating Red Army.

The Jews were forced to do various tasks in and around Raseiniai. The work consisted of clearing away from the streets the rubble of the bombed houses, repairing the streets and highways, cleaning the marketplace. There were many Lithuanians who took Jewish girls as maids. They did this not for the sake of the work, but to have a chance to bully and order around the more educated Jewish women, who themselves had Lithuanian servants before the war.

All men and women above the age of fifteen years had to go to work. Armed partisans kept watch, bullied and

teased the Jews at work. The Jews received no pay for their work. Nor did they receive any food.

The Jews were still permitted to go buy food at the market. There were peasants who brought food from the countryside to the homes of the Jews, because the Jews had to pay higher prices. The peasants sought to exchange goods for food.

Once, a few weeks after the beginning of the war, after everyone had assembled at the market to go to work, the partisans selected the pious Jews and arranged a "performance." The bandits forced the Jews to dance in a circle, and to sing Soviet and religious songs. Afterwards the Jews had to run and fall, stand up and repeatedly fall, crawl on their bellies like snakes, and so forth. Quite a few townspeople stood and joyfully observed the "performance." There were also several Christian women who wept when they saw it.

Frida relates that while she was being taken to work together with a group of girls, they were guarded by armed partisans, who teased the women: "You've lived well long enough, now it's time to start working!" Frida felt very insulted at that point and responded: "This is nothing, we'll survive you!"

The partisans selected the younger and prettier women and took them to clean out the ruins. They took the rest away to pick potatoes. Germans took the younger and prettier women into a house and they were given dishes to wash. The Germans promised regularly to give the women easy work. They asked questions, wondering why the Lithuanians were so brutal to the Jews. After the day's work the women all went away, without being guarded, to their homes.

From the very beginning of the war a series of regulations began to appear. Jews were not allowed to walk on the sidewalk; there were set times when they were able to go out into the street altogether; they had to put on a white patch; and so forth. But even in these conditions, the Jews made their peace with the fact that that was how it had to be, and there was no way out. Everyone expressed their wishes for each other's well-being, hoping that all would survive the plague of Hitlerism and its Lithuanian fellow travelers. But the Lithuanian murderers and their German overlords had already thought up something different for the Jews.

This was about six weeks after the outbreak of the war. The Lithuanian "notables," decided at a meeting to create a camp for the Jews.

The Jews found out from the townspeople that something evil was in store for them. The mood of panic grew constantly. The "good Lithuanians'" proposals to hide the valuables of the Jews until after the war were repeated more and more-often, and only increased the Jews' suspicions.

### **The Monastery Camp; the Judenrat**

Not far from Raseiniai, an old building had been standing for a long time. It had been used by the priests as a store house. Some of their farm machinery was there as well. During the previous year the monastery (as the building was called in Raseiniai) had been occupied by Soviet military, who had also built barracks there. Their airstrip was located next to the monastery.

A group of Jews were taken to work at that site for a certain time. The Jews cleaned out the barracks and repaired the bunks which remained from before the war. But none of them knew what the barracks and the monastery were to be used for. They did not imagine that they were preparing a camp for themselves.

One morning during the sixth week of the war, before the Jews went out to work, partisans went to all the Jewish houses, conveying strict orders for all the Jews to come to the yard of the town church. At the appointed time almost all of the Jews came. There all the Jews were registered, and permitted to return home. The Jews sensed that a storm was coming. The panic grew even greater. No one knew exactly what the next day would bring for the hopeless Jews. No one slept peacefully.

Early the next morning announcements appeared in the streets of Raseiniai, declaring that every Jewish man between the ages of fifteen and fifty-five, and women from sixteen to forty-five, had to move to a camp at the monastery. They were allowed to take along two sheets, a pillow, three sets of underwear and a coffee cup. They were given only one day following the appearance of the announcements.

The Jews, with packs on their backs, began moving into the camp. They all went on foot. The scene of the wandering Jews was tragic. All of them were gloomy, their heads bowed, as they left their homes. Heart-rending scenes took place as they took their leave of close friends and relatives who had the right to continue living in the city; with tears in their eyes the Jews kissed, embraced and said goodbye to their near and dear ones. There were

even Lithuanians who wept as well, and accompanied the Jews to the camp. Yet some of them, while weeping, did not forget to suggest that the Jews leave their better things with them "until after the war."

When they arrived at the camp, the partisans separated the women from the men and settled them into different barracks. The Jews settled onto bunks in the barracks. The camp had already been surrounded from before with scanty barbed wire, and there were two gates for entering and leaving.

The commandant of the women's camp was Norbutas, and the commandant in the men's camp was Grigelevitsius. Both of them were Lithuanians from Raseiniai, both respected leaders of the partisans. Both of them behaved and treated the Jews as they wished. Dvoyre and her cousin Frida were among those who entered the camp.

That same day the police chief of Raseiniai, Rubshaitis, arrived at the camp. All of the Jews were driven out of the barracks and mustered in the yard. The chief of police gave a speech, concluding thus: "If anyone has any complaints, or anything to say, they should step forward from line and say whatever they want to."

More than a few people who were sick and weak stepped forward. They were immediately formed into a separate group.

Norbutas had known Dvoyre well for many years. He approached her as she stood in line and asked if she wanted something. Dvoyre complained that her mother and father were old and sick, and now had no one to look after them.

Norbutas consulted with the police chief about this, and Dvoyre was freed from the camp. Other Jews were freed in this manner, or in other ways. Dvoyre brought food almost every day to her husband, brother and sisters-in-law. It was not hard to enter and leave the camp.

The Jews were taken to work under guard from the camp, just as they had been from the city. Often the Jews were even permitted to go home from work for lunch. Dvoyre's husband and brother came home from the workplace to eat lunch almost every day. On Sunday and Saturday there was no work.

As soon as the Jews settled into the camp, the Lithuanian partisans suggested that the Jews organize a Judenrat. The Jews hoped that the intervention of such a committee would do something to alleviate the situation, and that it would have the opportunity to bribe the Lithuanian bosses. The Judenrat consisted of five persons. Among them, Dvoyre remembers the lawyer Fridlander and the owner of a saw mill, the farmer Faynshteyn.

During the roll call on the second day in the camp, Fridlander turned to the Lithuanians: "We are no criminals, and even if we are, even criminals are given food. We work, and we are not fed." The partisans promised to arrange to get food to the Jews in the camp. But that same night all five members of the Judenrat were taken out of their bunks and taken to prison. At the prison there were already youthful arrestees, who had belonged to the Communist Youth under the Soviets, as well as ordinary Jews who were the victims of libels invented by the Lithuanians, or who had been denounced as Communists. The Lithuanians didn't need any evidence to support their charges or libels. And the Jews were unable, forbidden to respond or to demonstrate their innocence. The Jews were taken from prison to the heaviest kinds of work, and they were given no food.

### **The Gruesome Slaughter of Jews**

Early on Saturday morning, July 26, 1941, the third day of the Jewish month of Av, all of the men and women were ordered to appear in the yard of the camp for roll call. Everyone was ordered to surrender his gold, silver, money and watches. The murderers threatened to shoot anyone who did not hand over these goods. Everyone surrendered almost everything.

That Saturday Dvoyre's brother Leybl did not come to the house. The next day, Sunday, he did come into the house, where he related his watch, too, had been taken; Dvoyre had once given it to him as a present and memento. Leybl was very depressed. He explained that it wasn't the watch he was concerned about, but he considered it a sign that things were not well with the Jews in the camp.

On the morning of Monday, the fifth day of the month of Av (July 28, 1941), Jews were taken away to work just like every day. That day Dvoyre's brother worked at clearing away the ruins. Dvoyre came to the work site to talk with her brother. But the partisan who was on guard did not permit this, and beat Leybl with his rifle butt. Leybl was very agitated, and cried out: "What, don't I have a right to talk to my sister?" Leybl was beaten again with the rifle butt, and went off to work.

Dvoyre relates: "The Jews regularly worked in town until after six in the evening. That Monday, however, the work was stopped at half past three. The Jews were driven past our house, and I saw my brother for the last time through the window. After the Jews were taken away to the camp, Jewish political arrestees were also led off in the direction of the camp. The Jews were made to stop near the camp. 350 men were assembled next to the camp.

"It may be that among the 350 were a number of men who were brought directly out of the camp while those who were brought from the city were next to the camp. The 350 men were immediately surrounded by a large number of guards and taken away down Jurbarkas Road, eight kilometers from Raseiniai, into a forest near the village of Zhuvilishkiai. Graves had already been dug for them there. All 350 men were shot that Monday evening, the fifth day of Av."

Dvoyre relates further: "On the evening of the same day, I personally saw armed partisans driving down Jurbarkas Road into town. They were all cheerful and enthusiastic, and they were singing.

Christians told me later that some of the men had been killed while wearing their clothes. The rest were forced to undress next to the pit. Nearby peasants later explained that the majority of the 350 men were not shot, but simply-beaten to death with military shovels.

The Lithuanian murderers carried out the horrible mass murder with the complicity and under the direction of Germans. This is clear because, before the men were shot, two automobiles with Germans riding in them arrived at the camp, and the Germans consulted with the Lithuanians about something.

Yet the partisans reassured the Jews, both in camp and in the city, that the 350 men had been taken away to work somewhere. Among the Jews there was discussion of letters which had been sent by the men, written in Yiddish. In the letter the men asked for food, clothing and so forth. Later it was said that the Lithuanian murderers had forced a certain Jew to write such letter. However, he was not among the 350.

On Tuesday, the sixth day of Av, Frida's cousin, Fradl Lazarsky went away in the same direction in which the 350 men had been taken, and interrogated the peasants. Eventually she met a peasant woman who lived not far from the spot where the men had been shot.

The woman told Fradl everything that had happened to the men in precise detail, assuring her that they all lay shot and murdered, in a pit in a forest, not far from where she lived. The woman was sick after this experience, because she had heard the cries of the men.

Later Fradl related this information to the Jews in the camp and in the city. But not everyone believed her; rather they assumed that Fradl had gone out of her senses. Most people believed her, but they had no way to save themselves.

The day after the men were shot, Dvoyre's husband arrived in town. He told Dvoyre that the previous evening, Monday, 350 of the younger and healthier men had been selected and taken away. He explained that the Jews in the camp thought that they had been taken away to work somewhere.

Frida Praz who was in the camp the entire time, relates concerning the 350 men: "On Monday, the camp commandant Norbutas, assisted by Grigelivitsius, drove all the men and women out into the courtyard of the camp to go to work. It was two o'clock in the afternoon. They chose 350 of the youngest and healthiest men, and distributed spades and shovels to them. They announced that they were taking the men who had been selected to do a special job. Before the men were organized, two automobiles filled with Germans arrived in the camp. The Germans had a conversation with the Lithuanians. Later a truck full of armed partisans drove into the camp. They sang Lithuanian songs. The men who had been selected were led out of the camp and driven along the Jurbarkas Road on foot, where they were all shot."

Frida and her cousin Dvoyre explained while this report was being written that some of the 350 men actually were taken out of the camp, while the rest were selected from among those who had arrived at the camp from work, but were not taken into the camp. Among the latter was Dvoyre's brother Leybl Yankelevitsh.

A few days later the murderers in the camp shot Mrs Gitl Shmulovsky. This woman had been slightly mentally disturbed since before the war. In Raseiniai she was considered to be not altogether normal. During the summer she used to have episodes of madness. This woman was accused by the Lithuanians of "attempting to set fire to the barracks" in the camp. She was shot by Norbutas.

During the time of the war between Hitler Germany and Poland (in 1939), the entire population of the Kamenetz Yeshiva — the students and their teachers — had arrived in Raseiniai as refugees from Poland. A large number of

them were later taken into Russia by the Soviets, in 1940. The rest wound up in the camp with the Jews of Raseiniai. Many of them died during the slaughter of the 350. The rest of them gradually died, together with their teachers, in the course of various mass killings.

The slaughter of the 350 men was only the beginning of the total annihilation of the Jews. Almost every day the murderers Norbutas and Grigelivitsius sought out young people who had belonged to the Communist Youth, or who had occupied positions during the year of Soviet rule. They took them out of the camp and shot them by themselves, without a trial, without an investigation.

Later they stopped checking and selecting altogether. They would take altogether innocent men and women out of the camp, and shoot them at Zhuvelishkiai.

In addition to the daily murder, every week — always on Wednesday — there were "official actions" which were carried out exclusively by Lithuanians. Hundreds of Jewish men and women lost their lives during these "actions." The shootings were carried out at Zhuvelishkiai.

Yet the Lithuanian murderers constantly reassured the unhappy Jews in the camp and in the city that everyone who was taken away from the camp was working at various locations.

The number of Jews in the camp decreased sharply and steadily. But those who remained were still taken to work in the city every day, as if nothing were happening in the camp. The "man-eater" Grigelivitsius, the commandant of the men in camp, was exceptional for the dreadful murder he committed.

The rabbi of Raseiniai, Rabbi Katz, was not in the camp. He sat in his home and studied day and night. With a broken heart, he observed the annihilation of his congregation. But he could not help them. The heavens, to which he shouted and pleaded for mercy from the depths of his heart, remained mute.

Lithuanian partisans once came to the old man's house. They found him sitting and studying. They ordered him to get dressed and go along with them. He categorically refused to go along and announced that he knew where they were taking him, and that he was ready to be shot in his home. The murderers spared him two times, and went away. The third time, two partisans came and forced the rabbi to leave his house.

Dvoyre personally saw the rabbi being taken away in the direction of Jurbarkas, to Zhuvelishkiai. The rabbi went slowly, marking his steps, his head bowed down low to the ground. The murderers took the rabbi to Zhuvelishkiai, and there they shot him.

When the number of Jews in the camp was greatly diminished, the murderers began taking Jews to their deaths, from town as well. The only ones remaining there were the elderly, the sick and women with small children. The sick, weak and elderly were driven out of their homes by the murderers, placed into wagons and taken to be shot in Zhuvelishkiai. There was a terrible panic in the city. Everyone closely and fearfully examined every movement of the murderers in the streets of the town. No one was sure of his or her life anymore, and everyone waited for death in fear.

Dvoyre's father Perets was sick at home at that time. Once the partisans came to take him. With his eyes pleading and filled with deathly terror, Perets looked at the murderers and at his daughter Dvoyre. With tears in her eyes, Dvoyre begged the murderers to spare her sick father, and promised them anything they desired in return. The murderers left Perets, and went away. But Perets understood well that his reprieve was only temporary.

He was already sixty years old, and he was intelligent. He understood that he would be unable to avoid the tragic fate of all the Jews in town. He suffered from heart disease. He drank an entire bottle of medicine, hoping to die of poisoning. But the fluid in the bottle was too weak to tear the thread of his life. Dvoyre herself experienced the dreadful anguish, suffering and pain of her father. She decided that she would help her beloved father to die, and free him from his suffering, from his bitter, hopeless struggle for life. But she had no poison.

At night the partisan, who had left Perets alone during the day came and demanded what had been promised to him. Dvoyre told him to take everything he wanted. The murderer packed two suitcases full of various items. He promised to help her father as much as possible, and went away with the suitcases. But Dvoyre understood that the elderly and sick were not secure in their homes. In addition to her father, her mother and mother-in-law were also in the house.

By now there were few Jews left in town, and in their loneliness and terror they sought protection together with acquaintances. They clung to each other like sheep terrified of wolves. All of the Jews from the other streets moved to Nemakshtsiai street. They did this partly because the Lithuanians had begun some time earlier, to speak about

creating a ghetto in that street.

While Dvoyre's mother-in-law was being taken to Nemakshtsiai Street she suddenly shouted, "Oy!" and fell dead. She died like a saint, and had an easy death. She was buried at the Jewish cemetery in Raseiniai.

After the burial, Dvoyre found her mother, who lay hidden in a depression in a garden. A peasant woman whom she knew, a neighbor, spotted her and took her coat. In exchange she gave Dvoyre's mother food. Dvoyre took her mother to Nemakshtsiai Street as well.

Perets was very afraid of appearing in the city. Sick, he crept from garden to garden on his belly, until he arrived at Nemakshtsiai Street, at the home of his female cousin Kumpinsky (nee Flaysher).

At that time Dvoyre discovered that in the Lithuanian hospital there were sick Jews from Raseiniai, who had remained undisturbed the whole time. Dvoyre went to see Dr Kovalersky, and managed to get her father Perets admitted to the hospital.

One Sunday morning five Jews received permission to come to town from the camp. Among them were Dvoyre's husband Yakov. The partisans detained the five Jews, lined them up against a wall with their hands up, and threatened to shoot everyone. With tears in their eyes, Dvoyre and other women convinced the partisans not to shoot the men. The murderers took the five Jews to the camp, and threw them into the camp prison.

Dvoyre was well acquainted with a Lithuanian, a neighbor named Zhemaitis. She asked her neighbor to go to the camp and give Grigelivitsius 12,000 rubles to get Yakov released from prison. Zhemaitis knew Grigelivitsius. Zhemaitis had a large farm, a compound in a village called Dublaukiai, 28 kilometers from Raseiniai. Zhemaitis rode to the camp in his carriage, and requested several Jews to repair the barns on his farm. Grigelivitsius came out to see him. Zhemaitis asked him to assign him several Jewish workers, including Yakov Lazarsky.

Grigelivitsius understood Zhemaitis' intentions, and declared, "Your efforts are useless. You won't be able to save Lazarsky in any case. There's an order to wipe out all the Jews. If I let him out today, he'll be shot tomorrow." But Zhemaitis insisted, and gave Grigelivitsius the 12,000 rubles.

Yakov was freed from prison. Grigelivitsius apparently split the money with his friend Norbutas. Several times the two men saved Yakov from "actions." Before one "action" Grigelivitsius spotted Yakov and shouted: "What are you doing here? I sent you to feed the horses!" Yakov understood, and left the camp. He never returned there.

Apparently the murderers didn't want to lose the friendship of Zhemaitis. Yakov found a place in a village seven kilometers from town, with a peasant named Vasilevsky, and hid himself there temporarily.

## **The Escape from the Camp**

Frida Miller (nee Praz) decided to run away from the camp after the 350 men were shot. She believed everything her cousin Fradl Lazarsky had said when she returned to the camp after interrogating peasants concerning the fate of the 350 men.

Norbutas, the commandant of the women, had known Frida for many years before the war. There began to be rumors about a list of women who were going to be taken away from the camp. It was during the third night after the 350 men were shot, when everyone already lay on their bunks. Norbutas summoned Frida, and offered to help save her. He explained that all 350 had been shot, and that a list of younger and prettier women to be taken away and shot had already been prepared. Frida understood that he would exploit her and later shoot her. She pretended to accept the help he offered her, and arranged where to meet him the next day, after leaving the work place.

Frida came to the barrack and told all the women. A panic broke out. The women lay and wept. Some of them said goodbye and kissed each other. No one knew whose fate had already been settled by the murderers. But some of the women did not believe, and comforted each other.

The next day all the Jews were taken to work in town, like every day. Frida escaped from the work site, together with her cousin Shifre Lazarsky. An entire day the two spent lying in the attic of the home of a peasant woman Lazarsky knew. At seven o'clock in the evening, the two women dressed as Lithuanian girls. A peasant woman named Janushkeviciene from the village of Pashaltonis, seven kilometers from Raseiniai, placed Shifre next to her on her wagon. Frida walked behind the wagon carrying a bouquet of flowers. Three kilometers from town, Frida got into the wagon herself. The two girls reached their destination safely. The Janushkevits family were Polish; all of

them were good people. The family took care of the two girls until the arrival of the Red Army.

That same day a larger group of women escaped from the work site. They split up and hid in the villages, fields and forests. Several dozen women escaped in all that day.

1 . Ten women who spent that day lying hidden in town, in the bushes and in the grain fields, were caught by the partisans and taken to the camp prison. The murderers were still stuffing themselves and getting drunk in celebration of the murder of the 350 men. It was the third day after the shooting of the 350 men. The Lithuanian degenerates raped the ten women that night, and shot them on the spot in the camp.

2 . A certain girl named Mine Khvaydan escaped that day. She hid first in the city until the evening, and then went to the country. She survived.

3 . Mine Khvaydan's brother also escaped from the work site that same day, and hid at the home of a Lithuanian friend of his from the Lithuanian gymnasium. The Lithuanian gymnasium student pretended to receive his Jewish comrade in a friendly way, and asked his mother to give his friend food. He himself went off to call the police and partisans, the latter immediately came, took the young Jew out of the house, and shot him on the spot. The Lithuanian gymnasium student immediately inherited the murdered boy's coat. Later the gymnasium student occupied a prominent position among the partisans.

4 . Among the escapees was the young, pretty woman Golde Kaplan. The peasants found her hiding in the grain, and raped her. In the middle of the night the rapists brought her to her home in the city. She lay unconscious in bed for several days. Golde remained in the city from then on. The murderers extorted a large sum of money from Golde's father.

5 . Khane Vinik and her sister were well acquainted with the murderer Norbutas. He gave both of them a chance to leave the camp. The two of them went away to the Kaunas ghetto and survived. The escape from the camp aroused the anger of the murderer Grigelivitsius. His behavior toward the women in the camp became unbearable. There were only young women left in the camp. Their anguish, pain and constant deadly terror forced the women to appeal for help from the German commandant of Raseiniai, the Lithuanian German Schmit. The murderer Grigelivitsius decided to take his revenge on these "nervy women" who had gone to complain to the commandant. Once, in the middle of the night, he woke all the women up for a roll call. After the roll call he lined all the women up in rows, and under guard by armed partisans, he led them from the camp in the direction of Zhuvilishkiai. Several machine guns were carried along on a wagon. Outside of town he stopped the women and threatened to shoot everyone for going to complain. The women took advantage of the dark night, and many of them ran away into the fields. The partisans captured some of them and brought them back in line. Grigelivitsius announced: "If you have the nerve to go and report on me again, I'll really shoot you."

All of the women were brought back into camp. A large number of the girls who had run away at night never returned to the camp. The various threats of the Lithuanian murderers didn't help. They were forced to liquidate the camp, and released the remaining Jews from the camp to go live in town. The Jews in the city lived freely for exactly a week and a half. They were free to move about in the market and in the street, and they lived in relative calm. The optimistic Jews developed the impression that no one else would be taken away and slaughtered. It was in the murderer's interests to create this impression.

Dvoyre remembers well that before the Raseiniai Jews moved into the Biliūnai compound, a truck full of Jews, mostly women, was brought from the surrounding towns. They had all been captured after the slaughter of the Jews in the small towns. All of the Jews who were brought were taken to prison, and they died during various actions, while Raseiniai Jews were taken from the monastery and the city to be shot. But there were no special shootings of those who had come to Raseiniai from the surrounding towns, except for a few who had come to Raseiniai at the beginning of the war, and remained there.

### **The Total, Horrible Slaughter of the Jews**

On the morning of August 26, 1941, an order was issued directing that all the Jews were to leave the city and settle in a compound called Biliūnai, eight kilometers from Raseiniai. They were given very little time to make the move: all the Jews had to be at the compound by 1:00 p.m. on August 27.

They were allowed to take along whatever they considered necessary. The pessimists believed that this was to be their final journey. But there were quite a few who were very optimistic.

On the 25th, Dvoyre was with Mrs Dr Perlow. She was feeling very cheerful, and guaranteed that no one had been shot, that everyone who had been taken away was alive and working. "We mustn't make life harder than it is in reality," she admonished Dvoyre.

The dentist Mrs Khazanovitsh and Mrs Dr Perlow rode to the compound and looked everything over themselves.

When they returned, Mrs Dr Perlow announced: "The camp is set up for people to live in." The two doctors even had permission to set up their offices in the compound.

Bearing their baggage, the small children, the sick and elderly on wagons, others on foot with their packs on their backs, the Jews made their way from town to the Biliūnai compound. It was a very tragic scene. Everyone's eyes were red from weeping, and their heads were bowed. They sensed that it was their final path. Even the optimists felt depressed, seeing the tragic caravan of women, children, the elderly and sick. Precisely at the set time, on Wednesday August 27th, all the Jews had arrived in the compound.

There was no fence around the compound. But as soon as the Jews arrived, a heavy guard was posted around the compound, made up of well-armed partisans. The Jews immediately sensed that they had entered a deadly trap, from which they would be unable to make their way out and survive.

On Thursday, August 28, 1941, several dozen partisans came into the compound singing. They were all well armed. The women and children, along with the few remaining men, were taken away from the compound to pits which had been dug nearby, and there they were shot. That Thursday the murderers shot all the Jews who were in the compound.

On Friday the 29th, the sick Jews were brought from the municipal hospital directly to the pits next to the Biliūnai compound, and everyone was shot. Later it turned out that while the Jews were making their way from town to the compound, the pits had already been dug.

Neither Frida nor Dvoyre knows the exact location of the pits. They do know, however, that the location is near the Biliūnai compound.

The murderers divided up the clothing of those who had been shot. The cheaper things they distributed or sold at auction.

On Thursday, August 28, 1941., the sixth day of the month of Elul, and on Friday, August 29, 1941, the seventh day of the month of Elul, the old, well-known Jewish community of Raseiniai eternally ceased to exist.

Very few Jews survived. Jews in hiding, who found out about the ghetto at the Biliūnai compound, left their hiding places and voluntarily went to the compound, where they died. Only a few managed to escape the compound.

Those who survived at that time were: Sorele Furmansky, aged 16, and her cousin Reyzele Lurye; Khavive Goldshteyn; Mrs Dine-Zise Floym; and a few others.

### **Those Who Died After the Slaughter at the Biliūnai Compound**

Before the Jews moved to the Biliūnai compound, Dvoyre received a letter from her husband Yakov through the peasant Vasilersky, with whom he was hiding. In the letter he wrote, in addition to other things: "If you can't come to me and you go to Biliūnai, I will come to you."

Dvoyre was suddenly faced with a dreadful question: "Whom to choose?" To let her mother go to Biliūnai alone, and leave her father sick in the hospital, or risk the life of her husband and write to tell him to join her in Biliūnai: this was the terrible problem Dvoyre quickly had to make up her mind about. She went to see her father in the hospital. Her father was already about sixty years old, and very intelligent. He understood the terrible problem which was tormenting his daughter.

With tears in his eyes, Perets declared to Dvoyre: "If Biliūnai is a place where people will live, you will always be able to come to the compound; if, God forbid, it is a place where people will die, then why should you die young, when you wouldn't be able to save me or your mother in any case. Go to your husband!" Perets burst into tears.

Dvoyre had to promise him that she would obey him, and go to her husband. Dvoyre then helped her mother to pack her things, and with a poisoned, broken heart she accompanied her to Biliūnai, where her mother died. Her father was taken from the hospital together with other patients, and shot near Biliūnai.

Dvoyre's husband Yakov, his father Moyshe-Mordkhe and his sister Fradl lay hidden at the home of a peasant named Saslevsky in a village seven kilometers from Raseiniai.

Fradl no longer wanted to remain in hiding in a potato cellar together with her father and brother, and wandered through the villages, forests and fields for a week. A neighbor spotted Yakov and his father in the potato cellar in

the field. He approached them and warned them that partisans were expected to come to the area to look for hidden Jews. He himself went to Raseiniai and reported the two Jews to the police. When the partisans and police came searching, Yakov and his father had already gone away to hide in the forests and fields. There Yakov lost contact with his father.

One of the partisans decided that he had to catch them. Every day he went into the forest with a friend of his to look for them. Once the murderer spotted Yakov and shot at him. Like a poisoned mouse, if the comparison may be excused, Yakov desperately sought a way to hide from the murderers and save his life. His cap was full of holes from the bullets the murderers aimed at him.

Yakov sent a note to Dvoyre by way of a peasant. He complained that he had no place to stay. Dvoyre convinced Zhemaitis to permit her husband and sister-in-law to join her in the compound in the village Dublaukiai. Dvoyre promised the peasant that she would leave the compound as soon as her husband and sister-in-law arrived. Zhemaitis agreed. Dvoyre sent a note to her husband by way of the peasant, and asked him to come as soon as possible. In the letter she did not fail to emphasize to her husband that he shouldn't go through the town.

For incomprehensible reasons, Yakov and his sister, whom he had met in the forest, went to the compound through Raseiniai. Yakov and his sister hid in a cellar in his own house. Zhemaitis met them, and they begged him to bring them a drink of water. When the peasant brought them water, they were already gone. Both of them had run away from the cellar, and hid in a hay barn in a farm called Rukio Mokykla. In the morning a Christian woman spotted the two of them and shouted out loud: "Lazarsky and his sister are lying in the hay!"

Yakov ran away from the barn in the direction of the Jurbarkas Road and hid in the bushes. The peasants surrounded and captured him.

Frida escaped and hid in the attic of a stall on her farm. She too was found. Both of them were taken to the town prison, where they were kept for several days. There were other captured Jews in the prison. They were taken from the prison to Zhuvelishkiai in a truck, and everyone was shot.

Zhemaitis came to his compound and told Dvoyre that Fradl had been badly beaten when she was captured. The murderers found fifty American dollars in her possession. Fradl managed to tear them to pieces. That was why they beat her so murderously. He also told her exactly how Yakov had been captured.

Dvoyre's father-in-law Moyshe-Mordkhe Lazarsky nowhere found a possibility of hiding, and went toward the Kaunas ghetto. Partisans noticed him and shot him. He was on the road to Girkalnis. The murderers buried him there. After the war his surviving daughter, Shifre, exhumed him and reburied him at the Jewish cemetery in Girkalnis.

### **Hopeless, Dvoyre Makes Her Way to the Kaunas Ghetto**

Dvoyre lay hidden at the home of Zhemaitis in town. But there her situation was insecure, and the good Lithuanian advised Dvoyre to move to his wife's parents' compound. Early in the morning she dressed like a Christian woman. She pretended to bandage her mouth so that she wouldn't be recognized. Then she went outside of town. The peasant woman went first, and Dvoyre followed her. They walked the 28 kilometers until they arrived at the compound. The date was August 28, 1941. As soon as they left the city, partisans surrounded the entire city and searched for Jews.

It was hard to convince the elderly peasants in the compound to hide Dvoyre. But when they had agreed, they behaved well toward her and took good care of her.

After she lost her husband, nothing interested Dvoyre any longer. She became apathetic, and lost interest in continuing the bitter struggle for life. The peasant woman watched Dvoyre to make sure she wouldn't commit suicide, which would have caused considerable difficulty for her family. It would have been discovered that she had been hiding Jews.

One time Dvoyre was not cautious enough, and she appeared at the window. A neighbor noticed her. At the same time, the police chief in Raseiniai summoned Zhemaitis' wife and reported to her that he had received a complaint that she was hiding Jews. Of course the peasant woman denied this, but she rode to the compound on a bicycle and told Dvoyre everything. Dvoyre's situation became desperate, and she decided to commit suicide. A Lithuanian female doctor whom Dvoyre knew lived in town.

Dvoyre sent the peasant woman to her to ask for poison which she could take and die painlessly. In town, however,

Zhemaitis did not permit his wife to go to the doctor. Dvoyre was brought back to town from the compound in a carriage, and she hid at Zhemaitis' house. She remained hidden in a child's room, and she had every comfort there. However, Dvoyre always slept ready, in her clothing.

A young Lithuanian began to come frequently to Zhemaitis' home. It was absolutely impossible to get rid of him. They began to suspect that he was spying out the house to see if there were any Jews there.

One time a little Lithuanian girl found a revolver wrapped in a cloth at Zhemaitis' lumber shed. No one knew where it had come from. It became impossible for Dvoyre to stay where she was any longer.

Meanwhile Dvoyre found out that there was a ghetto in Kaunas, where Jews were still alive. She decided to go away to the Kaunas ghetto. After surviving a dangerous journey, Dvoyre arrived in Kaunas on the day of the "action" against the residents of the "small ghetto." At night Dvoyre learned that the fire which could be seen in the ghetto came from a burning Jewish hospital, which Germans and partisans had ignited and exploded, and where the patients and staff had been burned together.

Here again Dvoyre found Death hovering over innocent Jews, and she altogether lost interest in continuing to live. She believed that in any case the few Jews remaining in the ghetto would be slaughtered in a few days. The peasant woman understood what Dvoyre was experiencing and proposed that she return home immediately. She promised Dvoyre that she would do everything she could to save her life.

At night the peasant woman arranged for Dvoyre to spend the night in Kaunas. The next morning Dvoyre entered the ghetto with great difficulty and at great risk. That morning, at the fence of the ghetto, a woman was shot. She had been taken from the "small ghetto" to the Ninth Fort near Kaunas, where the Jews who were taken away were shot. This woman had managed to run away from the Ninth Fort. When she tried to sneak back through the fence into the ghetto, she was shot.

In the Kaunas ghetto Dvoyre shared the agonies of the Jews of Kaunas. She was there until October 20, 1943.

The participants in this testimony, Frida Praz and her cousin Shifre Lazarsky, were hidden by the peasant Janush Janushkevitsius.

They avoided the slaughter of Jews at the monastery camp, and again later on in the city and at the Biliunai compound. The head of the family, Janush Janushkevitsius, a Pole, and his family were among the righteous Gentiles of that time. They sacrificed themselves for the two girls who had run away from the camp, shortly after the 350 men were shot. The family consisted of the mother, Michalina; a son named Janush and two daughters, Aldona Gricko who had two children, and Janina, who was unmarried.

### **Frida Praz: Her Heroic Struggle to Remain Alive and Tell the World about the Slaughter of the Jews of Raseiniai**

Frida managed to acquire Aryan documents, and continued living freely. She spoke perfect Lithuanian and looked like a Lithuanian girl. On the other hand, Shifre Lazarsky had to hide. After a certain amount of time she went away to the Kaunas ghetto.

Frida did everything in her power to please her rescuers. She learned how to do every task there is on a farm, and helped out everywhere: in the kitchen, in the field, milking the cows, feeding the cattle, etc.

Not one of the relatives and acquaintances of the family Janushkevitsius imagined that their maid, Onute Dambrauskaite, was Jewish. In such circumstances, Frida was able to observe the moods of the peasants in the countryside and their attitudes toward the Jews, who had already been annihilated throughout Lithuania.

She had the opportunity to become convinced that the vast majority of Lithuanians were happy that the Jews had been annihilated.

The best and most educated among the Lithuanian peasants were of the opinion that it was not necessary to slaughter the Jews, but as long as the job had been started, no witnesses should remain, or else the Lithuanians would pay dearly. She observed no sympathy on the part of anyone for the Jews whose lives had ended through various unnatural deaths. But everyone was very caught up in the fear of responsibility, in case the Germans lost the war.

Frida experienced a number of threats to her life. After the annihilation of the Jews of Raseiniai had been completed, the partisans began actively seeking the Jews who had survived and were in hiding. Their slogan at the time was: "Look for hidden Jews, Red partisans and moonshiners." Once a work party of peasants (*talka*) was working in the fields. All the neighbors were there working. Armed partisans arrived on bicycles. Frida thought that the last minutes of her life were approaching. She was certain that someone had betrayed her, and that she was going to be arrested.

The mistress of the house and her daughters laughed sarcastically at the partisans: "You're looking for Jews here? But you're not going to find any." The partisans responded: "We've shot all of them, there aren't any left!" Frida didn't raise her head, so that no one would notice her terrified expression. The partisans rode further. Frida breathed more easily, making sure no one noticed. Frida lived through such moments more than once.

Frida often found out about Jews who had been in hiding and were then caught. She always took the news very hard. Not one of her acquaintances who told her about such thing could be permitted to hear the beating of her bursting heart, as she listened to all the stories about Jews who had been caught, or about the horrific murders when the Jews were annihilated.

In the winter of the year 1942 the peasant woman Pakarkliene, an acquaintance of Frida's from the same village, had a birthday. A partisan named Jonaitis, also from the same village, was at the birthday party. Eventually the conversation turned to the subject of Jews. Everyone became an "actor," trying to demonstrate how Jews used to walk, how they used to talk. Everyone showed off their best imitations of Jews. All the rest were helpless with laughter. Frida also laughed through tears.

Jonaitis related how they had captured a hidden Jewish family in the fall of 1942: a husband, a wife and a six-year-old child. Apparently the family was on their way from one village to another looking for a place to hide. Jonaitis, Jablonski and two other partisans came upon them and took them to the Raseiniai jail. From the prison, Jonaitis and a few others had taken the family away to be shot.

He saw that the child had fine shoes on its feet, and took them off the child" "It was cold by then. The ground was frozen, and the child stood first on one foot, then on the other complaining: 'Mama! I'm cold!' The mother hid her eyes and said to the child: 'It's nothing my child, soon we will be warm. They spoke perfect Lithuanian, just like Lithuanians. All three were shot. I never had any pity on the Jews, but I can't forget the child's words. Who knows, maybe we really shouldn't have slaughtered the Jews.' — he finished his tale, with an ironic smile. But a while later he gritted his teeth again, and expressed his wish to meet a Jew.

Frida had to listen to this and remain calm, so that no one would suspect her.

Another time Frida was told that a driver from Raseiniai was carrying a load of leather. On the way an old peasant woman asked the driver for a lift. When she got up into the truck, she stepped on someone's foot. At first she pretended not to notice. In the town of Girkalnis she got off, and immediately reported that the driver was carrying a hidden Jew under his load of leather. The police caught up with the truck, arrested the Jew and took him to prison. Later he was shot. (He was a Jew from the Kaunas ghetto.)

To avoid the company of the cursed Lithuanians was awkward and even dangerous for Frida. And so she had to suffer. Her hope to remain alive and later to tell the entire world about the slaughter of the Jews in Raseiniai, about her beloved parents, relatives and friends, gave her strength and courage to fight for her young life.

With all the pain her heart could hold, she followed the news about the life of the Jews in the Kaunas ghetto, and through letters she remained in contact with her cousins Shifre and Dvoyre Lazarsky. She followed with suspense the political and strategic events taking place throughout the world and at the fronts. She was most interested in "her front" in the east. Every defeat of the Red Army caused her pain, regret and despair. Every loss for the German army strengthened her hope and her will to fight for her life, for a better future.

The bad news from the Kaunas ghetto in the fall of 1943, during the time of the infamous "Estonian action," made her very uneasy. She thought mostly about those in the Kaunas ghetto to whom she was close, about Shifre, Dvoyre and a cousin from Verbaln, Miss Cvikaite, who was also in the Kaunas ghetto. She managed to convince her employer to bring the three women out of the Kaunas ghetto. The peasant brought all three of them. All three hid in the attic of the barn, and Frida brought food to them and took care of them.

The women thanked the peasant for his generosity in every way they could. He kept hidden the possessions of their families, which had been placed with him at the very beginning of the war. In addition Dvoyre gave him one hundred gold rubles as payment for produce.

In the spring of 1944 the Red Army rapidly approached Raseiniai. Unfortunately, the front stopped not far from where they were. They had to survive living in a battlefield. They lay hidden in trenches, and survived to be liberated. On August 3, 1944 they were liberated by the Red Army. Raseiniai was completely demolished in the final battles.

Translated from Yiddish manuscript  
by Dr. Jonathan Boyarin

Signature: *Jonathan Boyarin*

New York, New York  
August 3, 1988

#### Attestations of Frida Praz and Dvoyre Lazarsky (nee Yankelevitsh)

We, Frida Praz and Dvoyre Lazarsky, personally related to L. Koniuchowsky everything written on 25 pages concerning the slaughter of the Jews of Raseiniai. We both testified as to all facts, dates, names of persons and geographical locations, and we attest thereto with our signature on every page.

1. Dvoyre Lazarsky (Signature)

2. Frida Praz (Signature)

The report was written by  
Engineer L. Koniuchowsky (Signature)  
Zeilsheim, Germany  
July 30, 1947

The signatures of the residents of the Zeilsheim Jewish camp, Dvoyre Lazarsky and Frida Praz, are attested to by the chairman of the Jewish Committee in Zeilsheim.

Chairman of the Committee  
S. Meldung (Signature)

Zeilsheim, July 31, 1947

Translated from Yiddish and German  
by Dr. Jonathan Boyarin

Signature: *Jonathan Boyarin*

New York, New York  
August 3, 1988

## **A SUPPLEMENT CONCERNING THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS OF RASEINIAI**

### **(Excerpts from the testimony of Yeshayohu Kromas and his daughter Rivke).**

Yeshayohu Kromas was born in Raseiniai on December 5, 1900. His father's name was Aron (Hortshik). Yeshayohu lived all his life until the outbreak of the war in Raseiniai. He was a farmer by occupation. His wife's name was Hene Kromas.

Until the war broke out on June 22, 1941 about 4,000 Jews lived in Raseiniai among a larger number of non-Jews. After the war against Poland in September 1939, Poland was divided between Hitler Germany and the Soviet Union. Thousands of Jewish refugees came to Lithuania. A yeshiva was established in Raseiniai for the 275 yeshiva students who were refugees from Poland.

The majority of the Jews in town were occupied in trade. A significant number were artisans, and many were engaged in agriculture.

In Raseiniai there were three sawmills which belonged to Jewish owners:

- 1) Leiba and Lozer Perlow;
- 2) Feivl Kagan; and
- 3) Polunsky.
- 4)

There was an electronics workshop which belonged to the Jewish businessmen Nisanelis and Perlow.

There were three tanneries, which belonged to Jewish owners:

1. Khayim Aleksnansky and Block;
2. Berl Veis;
3. Sheras.

Raseiniai had a recently built Hebrew gymnasium with eight grades. The large, beautiful gymnasium building and the elementary school had been built by the Jews of Raseiniai and paid for with their own resources. Until the summer of 1940 the principal of the gymnasium was Dr Zilber, and the principal of the elementary school was Levin. Until the summer of 1940 there was a Jewish national bank in Raseiniai. The last director was Shugam.

Raseiniai contained two large old synagogues and five small synagogues. The Yiddish-Hebrew library in town was very popular among the Jewish population. The town considered itself religiously oriented.

Materially, the Jews of Raseiniai were not poor. There were also a small number of paupers. The attitude of the non-Jewish population to the Jews in town was satisfactory.

After the arrival of the Red Army in Lithuania in 1940, the Soviet economic system was introduced to Lithuania. The Jewish elementary school was closed, and the large new Jewish gymnasium had to unite with the Lithuanian gymnasium. Superficially, the attitude of the Lithuanian population remained as it had been before. But the hidden dissatisfaction of a large number of Lithuanians with the Soviet order was directed against Jews in general by the politically anti-Semitic propaganda of experienced agitators.

Weeks before the sudden attack of Hitler Germany on the Soviet Union, the Soviet secret police, assisted by the Lithuanian Communist party and government, arrested nationalized and declassé Lithuanian and Jewish families, and took them away in transports deep into the Soviet Union. They did the same thing to leaders of Lithuanian parties, as well as to Zionist leaders, whom they suspected might turn into a fifth column for Hitler. Twenty-eight Jewish families and 100 yeshiva students were taken away from Raseiniai on that occasion.

Although a relatively much higher number of Jews were deported, nevertheless Fascist, anti-Semitic illegal parties and organizations spread false, deceitful rumours that Jewish Communists had established the lists of Lithuanians to be arrested and transported. Unfortunately, this lying propaganda had a great success among the masses of the disappointed and desperate among the Lithuanian people.

### **The Outbreak of War Between Germans and the Soviet Union**

As soon as the war began, Yeshayohu Krom, his wife and daughter escaped from Raseiniai into the village of Dubise, on the Dubise River, nine kilometers from Raseiniai. Krom and twelve other Jews stayed there until the German army arrived in the area. The peasants became afraid of keeping the Jews, and all the Jews in the area, together with Krom and his family, went away to a town called Shimkaičiai, where Yeshayohu's parents lived, with

a married sister named Peshe and a married brother named Leyzer. Yeshayohu stayed there with his family for one day. Yeshayohu left with his family and all the rest of the Jews in town, because that very day armed Lithuanians gave all the Jewish men spades and forced them to run a few kilometers out of town. There the Jewish men buried two fallen Red Army soldiers. On the way back, the Lithuanians once again forced the Jews to run and fall, and then get up again. The Jews from Raseiniai thought at the time that things were only this bad for them in this particular small town, and they went back to Raseiniai. Krom found a room there, and moved in with his family.

As soon as the German army arrived in Raseiniai, armed Lithuanians appeared in the streets. They joyously greeted the German troops and immediately took over control of the town. A committee of Lithuanian partisans was immediately established. The head of the committee was a former policeman in Raseiniai during President Smetona's rule. His name was Ruikis. Another active member of the committee was Sabalauskas, who was a former government employee.

The German army passed through the town and went further. Several Germans remained in the town, maintaining order.

For roughly three weeks after the beginning of the war, Jews lived in their wrecked houses, or with relatives and friends whose houses had not been destroyed.

Every day the newly established police force and the partisans led the Jews away to do various tasks. While mustering the Jews out of their houses, they would beat the Jews. At first the work consisted in burying the dead bodies of the fallen Soviet soldiers. The Jews also had to gather up arms which had been discarded in the fields and on the roads. The Jews had to clear all the debris from the roads. This work was always accompanied by whippings and beatings with sticks, which the Lithuanian guards took great pleasure in using. In addition to the physical work, there was morally insulting work. The Lithuanian bandits forced the Jews to roll empty barrels for fifteen kilometers at a stretch. The guards were overjoyed at this spectacle. The Jews had to clean out all of the outhouses in town. The better educated Jewish women were forced to wash the floors in the homes of the Lithuanian intelligentsia, and in all the offices belonging to the Lithuanian partisans and to the Germans. After work, the Jewish men and women returned to their homes. At work the Jews received nothing to eat. The men who were working far from town gathering up weapons, hauling away broken automobile parts and so forth, were brought back to town every evening and permitted to disperse to their homes.

Cultural life died as well. Everyone tried to sit at home, and avoid meeting up with Lithuanians. Religious life continued. Every day groups congregated to pray in people's homes, but everything was done discretely, in order to avoid arousing the Lithuanian population.

During the third week of the war, a flood of anti-Jewish regulations began. An order was promulgated which stated that all Jews of both sexes and of every age had to wear a white patch on the right side of their chests. Jews were strictly forbidden to walk on the sidewalk. Jews had to walk in the gutters. Jews were forbidden to go out into the marketplace, and even the least conversation with non-Jews was forbidden. Jews were forbidden to appear in the street altogether from sunset until the morning. All of these regulations were announced in printed posters which were hung everywhere in town, and which were signed by the county chief at the time, Sabalauskas from Raseiniai. Not all of the Jews could accommodate themselves to such regulations; sometimes they would forget, and walk on the sidewalk. The Lithuanian murderers would use their whips to drive the Jews into the gutter.

Anyone who left home during the curfew was arrested and taken to prison. It was announced that all the able-bodied men and women within specified age ranges now had to report to a certain place for work of their own volition.

### **The Camp Monastery; the Terrible Slaughter of Jews**

The fourth week after the war began there was an order stating that all the Jewish men and women above a certain age had to come by themselves to the monastery located on the road to Jurbarkas, one half kilometer from Raseiniai. This was a compound resting on sixty hectares of land. There were large stalls there, along with barns and a wooden, two-storey house. The place was designated as a camp into which the Jews had to move no later than the end of the month of July 1941. As soon as the Jewish men and women arrived in the compound, forty armed Lithuanian partisans and police began to keep watch so that the Jews would not be able to escape from the camp. They warned that anyone who was caught hiding at home would be shot on the spot. There were very few who were bold enough to hide and refuse to go to the camp. Some were found hiding by the Lithuanian bandits, who took them away to the camp or to prison by force.

Some 2,000 Jewish men and women were driven into the camp at that time. Those families which did not want to

separate from their men had the right to come along into the camp. The Jews began to settle in. They arranged themselves into the barns, pig stalls and so forth. Early the next morning the Lithuanian murderers forced all of the Jewish men to shave their heads and wash themselves thoroughly. There were rabbis in the camp as well; they had to cut off their beards and shave their heads.

After that, five automobiles bearing Germans arrived at the camp. The commandant of the camp was the former captain in Smetona's army, Rubshaitis from the village of Papartsiai or Busginishkiai, in Shimkaitsiai County. His assistants were Grigelevitsius from the city of Raseiniai, a former policeman during Smetona's rule, and the local Lithuanian Kostas Norbutas. They drove all the men out of the barns and stalls, and selected 393 of the younger and healthier men. The rest of the men were driven back into the barns and stalls. The first and last names of the 393 men were recorded, and they too were allowed to return to the barns. Before the 393 men were allowed back into the barns, the Germans inspected them. The Lithuanians did not provide any explanations that day. Everyone thought that the healthier men had been signed up for a special task. The date was July 27, 1941.

On July 28, 1941 in the afternoon, three automobiles bearing Germans came once again. There were about ten Germans. Rubshaitis called off the names of all 393 men, and ordered them to line up in the courtyard. A large number of the men were given spades, and sixty well-armed partisans and policemen herded them along down the Jurbarkas road. Not one of the Jews in the camp knew where the men were being taken.

The Jews in the camp believed that they had been taken away to some kind of heavy labor. Together with precisely 100 Jews taken from the prison and from the work sites in the city, all 393 men were taken five kilometers away from Raseiniai along the Jurbarkas road. There were gravel pits there. Next to the gravel pits trenches had already been dug, and there the nearly five hundred men were shot. While leading the men, the Lithuanian murderers had gotten drunk. Three automobiles went along behind, carrying Germans. The gravel pits where the men were shot were located in a village called Zhuvelishkiai. In the evening the Lithuanian murderers drove back from the pits singing. They were all happy and cheerful. Among the sixty Lithuanian murderers who were involved in the shooting of the men, there were local Lithuanians as well. Among them were the following Lithuanians from Raseiniai: Rubshaitis, Kostas Norbutas, Grigelevitsius, Jablonskis, Kaupas, Anuliai (three brothers), Endrikis, Shimkus, Stravinskiai (three brothers from Shimkaitsiai), Kapatsinskas, and Savitskiai (two brothers). There were also others whose names Yeshayohu does not remember.

After this, there began a constant search and seizure of Jews in the streets of the city and from the hospital, where there were a large number of Jewish patients. The murderers would seize a large number of men and women, and no one knew exactly what happened to them. In addition to the groups of Jews whom they seized in the city, they also brought Jewish men from the camp. No one in the camp knew the exact fate of the groups which were taken away. During that period women in the camp received cards and letters from the men, in which it was written that the groups of Jews who had been taken away were living in agricultural compounds. In these letters, the men who had been taken away asked for bedclothes, food and finally money, gold and diamonds. Many people understood then that the murderers had forced the Jews to write these letters before they shot the Jews, so that the murderers would be more easily able to extort the hidden Jewish valuables and jewelry. Mrs Reykhl Kagan, nee Fish, received such a letter in the camp at that time. Mrs Khveidan received a letter from her husband, asking her to send him several suits. The elementary school teacher, Mrs Yofe, received a letter from her husband asking her to send him a suit by way of the Lithuanian partisans, along with a watch and bedclothes. Many naive women believed that all of the groups of men and women who had been taken away were alive and working on various compounds for Lithuanian landowners.

The number of Jews in the camp and in the city declined steadily. The panic among the Jews was terrible. No one knew exactly what the coming night would bring. No one knew whose turn was coming next. This situation continued for a few weeks.

But every day people were taken from the camp to work in the gardens of the priests' compounds, to excavate broken telephone poles, and so forth.

Yeshayohu Krom and his family were among those who were taken to the monastery camp.

When the 393 healthy, strong and young men were chosen, Yeshayohu Krom was included. His name was recorded on the list. The Lithuanian murderer Norbutas knew that Krom was a good agricultural worker, and took him out of the line. The murderers were acquaintances of Krom's, and they permitted him to leave the camp. Krom immediately went to see the county chief Sabalauskas, and the commandant of the town, Tsiurlys.

Both of them were well-known to Krom for several years. The commandant also knew that Krom was a former volunteer in the Lithuanian army; he had fought in Lithuania's war of independence against the Bolsheviks, and

later against Poland. Tsiurlys gave Krom a special attestation, and also gave him an attestation stating that Krom had excelled in the struggles for Lithuanian independence, and that he had a medal.

Yeshayohu Krom went to his own room in the city, and the same day he went to work in the field. The next day Krom drove past the camp with his mowing machine to work. Krom's field was not far from the camp.

The Lithuanian murderer Grigelevitsius stopped Krom and brought him back into the camp, where his wife and daughter were also located. This was the day after the 393 men from the camp were shot. The murderers confiscated the horse and mower. On the same day Krom escaped from the camp into town, to the home of the peasant Grigelis, where he hid the entire day. In the evening his daughter Rivke came and told him that the commandant of the camp, the police chief Rubshaitis, had ordered Krom to come before him with his attestations from the commandant in the city. Krom went to the commandant of the camp and showed him his documents. There were also Germans present. The Germans interrogated Yeshayohu Krom concerning his activities before the war. Krom insisted that he was only a farmer. The Lithuanian murderer corroborated Krom's story. One German said then that Yeshayohu Krom would be the only Jew who survived. Yeshayohu Krom then asked what would become of his wife and daughter, the German drove Krom out with a shout: "Out of here, you cursed Jew!"

The Jews in the yard of the camp were in line at that point. Krom told the Jews everything. Then it was clear to everyone that Krom was telling the entire tragic truth about the fate awaiting the Jews. A while later the Germans and the Lithuanians came out and announced that Krom could take along his wife and daughter, and return to his home and work his land.

Krom lived there with his family, and they survived the destruction of the Jews of Raseiniai, suffering sorrow and terror. Yeshayohu could not work. The news about the destruction of the Jews in the surrounding towns and in Raseiniai did not permit him to live or concentrate on any task. Night and day Krom's family heard shouts, weeping and shooting. In the camp there were rapes committed against women and girls. No more than forty men remained in the camp by then, along with 2,000 women and children. Then it was announced to the Jews that everyone could return to the city and live in their own homes. The murderers promised that nothing bad would happen, and no one would be taken away. The surviving Jews returned to their ruined homes. But this was only to be for a short while.

### **The Camp in Biliūnai Compound; The Horrible Slaughter of the Last Jews**

One day Mrs. Khveidan came to Krom in his workshop, along with the daughter of Mrs. Risha Zolin, who was married to Mr. Knebl. They related that an order had come down, saying that all of the Jews had to leave the city and settle in the compound of the wealthy landowner Bilevitsius, five kilometers from Raseiniai. The women asked Krom to go to the county chief, and get him to allow the camp to be set up in town instead. Krom and Mrs. Knebl went to see the county chief Sabalauskas. The county chief showed Krom a paper sent by the Germans, stating that a camp had to be established for the Jews outside of town, so that there would be more dwelling places available in town. Furthermore, Sabalauskas announced that the authority over the Jews was now entirely in the hands of the local Lithuanian Grigelevitsius, and that he himself no longer had any authority over affairs concerning the Jews.

Grigelevitsius had to do everything. Krom asked if his own life as well was no longer dependent on the county chief. The county chief replied that Krom had to deal with the new master of the Jews Grigelevitsius in this matter as well.

Krom and Mrs. Knebl told everything to the Jews, who did not all take the matter very seriously. Those who understood the situation escaped the city and went to the ghettos in Shavl or Kaunas. Mrs. Dr. Perlow, nee Blumental, reassured the Jews, predicting that the new camp would be a good place, where everyone could live peacefully. She absolutely did not believe that Jews were being shot. There was no way she could be convinced.

In the city of Raseiniai and in the larger villages announcements were posted, stating that all the Jews from Raseiniai and from all the villages had to move into the compound belonging to the landowner Bilevitsius, called Biliūnai. On the poster there was also a warning that anyone caught outside the compound would be shot on sight. All the Jews had to assemble in the compound by August 27, 1941.

All the surviving men, women and children from Raseiniai, and also Jews who lived on their own farms in the villages, gathered together. In all, there were two thousand Jews in the compound, women and children for the most part. In the compound the Jews began to settle in as best they could. But no one imagined that they would only be there for a short time.

Mothers took care of their small children, trying to make the spots they had chosen in the barns as comfortable as possible. On August 29, 1941, heavily armed partisans arrived in the compound on trucks. The guard around the barn was reinforced. The murderers took out groups of women and children and placed them onto the trucks. No one knew exactly where they were being taken. The trucks quickly returned empty, and took away new groups. This was repeated several times.

The trucks took the Jews in the direction of the town of Girtigola. There is some brush there. Pits had been dug among the brush, where the Jews who had been brought were shot. The pits are located nine kilometers from the town of Raseiniai, and two kilometers from the towns of Girtigola in "Pushyne."

Not far from the pits there is a village called Revai. The peasant Tamashauskas from that village hid not far from the grave and saw everything that happened there. The peasant told Yeshayohu Krom that the women and children were forced to strip stark naked next to the pits as soon as they descended from the trucks. Naked, they were beaten and driven to the edge of the pit, where they were shot. The women fell into the pit dead or wounded. Their cries were terrible and frightening. There were the cries of the women and children who were forced to strip stark naked, and the cries of the wounded in the pit. Tamashauskas saw small children being thrown into the pit alive. Other children's heads were bashed against trees, and then the children were thrown into the pit. The peasant related that he had fainted when he saw this. Five large trucks took the Jews from the barn. Before they brought new groups from the barn, the ones who had previously been brought had been shot. The peasant also related that several of the women were calm and quite proud. He related that several women had brushed their hair before going to the pit. It took all day until the Jews were all brought from the barn and shot.

The clothing and possessions of those who were shot were brought back to camp on the trucks by the murderers. From there the goods were brought to Raseiniai. They kept the better things for themselves. They distributed the cheaper goods to the civilian population for free. A few peasants who shoveled dirt over the pits filled with dead bodies later told Krom that before she was shot, a Jewish woman whose maiden name was Dvoyre Bank had born a child. The Lithuanian murderers killed the mother and threw her into the pit together with her new-born child.

## Temporary Survivors

1. There was probably no one who managed to survive being brought to the pits. But a yeshiva student by the name of Blumschtein hid in the hay in the barn of the compound. He was a refugee from Poland, who had come to Lithuania in the year 1939, after the war between Germany and Poland, and had been studying in the yeshiva at Raseiniai. Blumschtein lived in the barn for three days. In that barn the murderers packed up the clothes and possessions of those who had been shot, and they posted a heavy guard to protect the goods. Blumschtein had to lay hidden deep in the hay without food or water. On the fourth day the goods were taken out of the barn, and the guard was removed. Blumschtein began hiding in a barn on Krom's farm.
2. In the village of Pashaltonis, Raseiniai County, six kilometers from Raseiniai, in a potato cellar, two yeshiva students from amongst the Polish refugees were hiding. After the last Jews of Raseiniai were slaughtered, the two boys lay in hiding for three months. The winter was terribly cold. The two boys sent a note to Yeshayohu Krom by way of a peasant woman. It was written in Yiddish. The two boys asked Krom to help get them food, and to send them clothing and a bit of money. They indicated the precise location of their hiding place in the note. Krom put together a good package of food, and also packed two pairs of woollen boots and other clothes, and sent them by way of the peasant woman. Blumschtein also went to join his two comrades.

Blumschtein helped to carry the package from Krom. The boys stayed no more than three kilometers away from Krom. A few weeks later Blumschtein returned to Krom to stay in the hay in his barn. Blumschtein understood the great danger he represented for the entire Krom family, in case he was found among the hay in the barn. But Blumschtein had no other option. He didn't want to go to the Kaunas ghetto, and he was afraid to do so. His comrades did not want to go to the Kaunas ghetto.

3. Dr Kahan from Memel (Klaipeda) survived. Kahan was a popular dermatologist, and had a certificate from the German Army during the First World War. Kahan had been a doctor and an officer during the previous war. The doctor lived and worked in the Lithuanian hospital in Raseiniai.
4. The Jewish doctor from Raseiniai Khazanovitsh performed an operation for appendicitis before the last Jews were slaughtered, and he remained living together with Dr Kahan in the hospital.
5. The great specialist, the locksmith Joreiach, was needed. He received a certificate as a "useful Jew" and lived in his home in Raseiniai together with his wife. His children had already been shot.
6. Colonel Tsiurlys was no longer the commandant of the city. Two days before the last Jews in the Biliūnai compound were shot, he visited Krom in his farm, and suggested that he hide for several days. Krom and his wife and daughter hid at the home of a Lithuanian neighbor of theirs named Macikevitsius in the village of Anulinas, four kilometers from Raseiniai. Krom lay with his family among the hay in the peasant's barn for four days.

Those were four terrible days. Mrs. Krom constantly said Psalms. Rivke was also terribly nervous. The family kept receiving fresh news about the terrible slaughter of the Jews, and about the dreadful sadistic murders at the pit.

Krom and his family returned to their farm, and the boy remained lying on the hay in Krom's barn. The boy received enough to eat and drink, and he quickly recovered. But it was dangerous for the entire Krom family to keep the boy at their barn, because Krom himself was not sure of his life. He was waiting for the day when they would come for him and shoot him. But the boy did not want to depart from the barn, and from his good host.

### **Those Who Died After the Slaughter of the Raseiniai Jews**

1. Avrom Mayerovitsh, a landowner near Raseiniai with a wife and five children, lay hidden at the home of a neighbor near Raseiniai. Avrom Mayerovitsh kept his possessions and valuables hidden with that neighbor from the very beginning of the war. The peasant kept the Mayerovitsh family for four weeks after the last Jews were shot, and finally the peasant reported them himself. The Mayerovitsh family was arrested and placed in prison in Raseiniai. The name of the peasant was Jasulis. He lived near Raseiniai.

A nephew of Avrom's, Moyshe Mayerovitsh (an unmarried youth) and Meyer Bank had set up a hiding place in a barn on Avrom's farm. The same Jasulis brought them food in the hiding place. When Avrom's family were arrested, the barn was surrounded and Lithuanian murderers called out the first and last names of the boys in hiding, ordering them to come out. They threatened to set the barn on fire. The hidden Jews came out of their hiding place and began to run. The Lithuanian murderers shot both next to the barn. One of Avrom Mayerovitsh's workers told Krom about this.

2. Yankl Mel was hidden at the home of a peasant, together with his wife and children. There were ten Jews there in all. They were with a Lithuanian peasant in the village of Bagdonishkiai, eight kilometers from Raseiniai. Krom does not remember the first or last name of the peasant. Yankl Mel and the rest of the Jews remained in hiding at the peasant's about four weeks. They were discovered, and they were all arrested. Krom knows for sure that all of the possessions of the ten Jews were hidden at the home of the peasant with whom all the Jews were hiding. The ten Jews were arrested and taken to the prison at Raseiniai.

3. The two Jewish doctors who worked in the Lithuanian hospital, Dr Kahan and Dr Khazanovitsh, together with all the Jews who were imprisoned after being caught hiding among peasants, were taken away down the Jurbarkas road to the village of Zhovelishkiai. There everyone was shot next to the graves of the first 393 Jewish men from the camp who were shot. This was after the Jewish holidays, about the end of September 1941,

4. Before New Year's 1942 the locksmith Joreiach and his wife were arrested in Raseiniai. The two of them were taken to the Jewish cemetery and shot there.

Krom took this as a signal that his life and the lives of his family as well were in great danger. After the locksmith was shot, Krom went to Colonel Tsiurlis to find out where he and his family stood. The colonel advised everyone to separate. He offered to take in Rivke. He wanted to put Krom's wife up with his brother, Engineer Tsiurlys, near Kaunas. Mrs Krom didn't want to separate from her husband and daughter. The Krom family remained on their farm and continued waiting for death.

5. After New Year's 1942 the Jewish landowner from Raseiniai Yoysef Tats was found hidden at the home of a peasant in a village near Girtigola. His brother Leyb was also hiding with the same peasant. Leyb managed to escape. Yoysef was kept in the prison of Girtigola for a week. Then he was brought to prison in Raseiniai. As people told it at the time, and as Leybl Tats now relates (he lives in Raseiniai now), they were betrayed by a second peasant, a neighbor of the peasant with whom he and his brother were hiding.

6. At the same time, not far from the town of Vidukle (ten kilometers from Raseiniai), a family named Gurvitsius was arrested. The Gurvitsius family; a father, a mother, a son and a daughter, had been hiding at the home of a peasant near Vidukle since the first weeks of the war. At the home of the peasant with whom they hid, they were also keeping their possessions. Mr Krom does not know who it was that reported the family. Everyone was arrested and taken to prison in Raseiniai. They were arrested by Lithuanian partisans.

Yoysef Tats and the Gurvitsius family, together with a two-year-old girl, were taken from the Raseiniai prison to the Jewish cemetery and they were all shot there. This was at the end of January 1942.

7. The two-year-old girl was the daughter of the Jewish dental technician Josimas from Raseiniai. His wife was a dentist (nee Miss Margolis). The dental technician Josimas hung himself at home after the 393 men from the monastery camp were shot. Josimas found out that after the 393 men were shot, all of the Jews were supposed to move to the camp. He decided to commit suicide, and hung himself in his office.

8. Mrs Josimas gave her small daughter to a peasant. A servant who worked for Mrs Josimas personally brought the two-year-old girl to prison. The director of the prison, Mishelis, personally told Yeshayohu Krom about this.

## The Krom Family in the Jaws of Death

The Krom family stayed on their farm until March 8, 1942. One morning three Germans from the Gestapo came riding on sleds to the Kroms, together with three Lithuanian policemen from Raseiniai. At the head of the group was the Lithuanian Rubshaitis, the head of the police. They took all of the valuables belonging to Krom and his family, including their watches and rings. They packed other belongings into sacks. Krom, his wife and daughter were placed into a sled and taken to the Jewish cemetery in Raseiniai. Krom took the reins and turned toward the city. Krom begged the Germans to let him say goodbye to his good friends in the city before he was shot. The German agreed, on condition that the three Jews stay quiet and not dare to call out while they were driving through the city. Krom promised not to shout. There was a market in Raseiniai that day. As soon as Krom and his family were taken into the city, all three of them began weeping and shouting. Hundreds of peasants from town immediately recognized Krom and his family, and began following the sled, shouting and protesting. They all demanded that the Jew Krom and his family, whom they knew well, not be shot. A large number of people followed the sled. Krom and his family were taken to prison. The men who had fought at the front during the battle for Lithuanian independence in the First World War found out about this. The local Lithuanian Rimkus, the chairman of the former soldiers at the front, along with the warden of the Raseiniai prison Mishelis and the head doctor of the Lithuanian hospital, Aleknevicius — all of these, together with others who knew Krom well went to the German Gestapo, and convinced them not to shoot Krom's family, but rather to send them to the ghetto in Shavl or in Kaunas. There was a Lithuanian named Gilis who lived in Raseiniai. He had a beautiful wife, with whom the head of the, German Gestapo, Broshke, fell in love. Mrs. Gilis lived with the head of the Gestapo and had a great deal of influence over him. Krom had known the family for years, and they got along very well with each other. The Gilis family had lived in Krom's house before the war. Krom asked the peasant woman to come visit him in prison. The intermediary was the warden of the prison, Mishelis. Krom asked Mrs Gilis to convince the head of the Gestapo to permit his family either to go free, or to go to one of the ghettos.

The woman insisted that if Krom could offer a bit of money and some valuable items as a gift for the chief, it would help him achieve his speedy liberation. Krom received permission to make a phone call from the prison to the priest in the village of Kalnu. He asked the priest to make the effort to give a message to Mr Morgnholts in the same village, who was to bring the gold and money which he was hiding for Krom. The next day all these things were brought to the prison. Krom immediately sent for Mrs Gilis, and sent the things with her to the head of the Gestapo, Broshke. A few days later Mrs Gilis informed Krom that the head of the Gestapo had decided to free Krom's family altogether, and to give them permission to occupy and work on Krom's farm. After this announcement, Krom's family still remained in the prison for about two weeks.

One time, about 1:00 a.m., footsteps were heard in the corridor. He also heard a Jewish voice. The next day, as he passed by the neighboring cell, Krom saw the yeshiva student who had been hidden in his barn. Krom immediately understood the grave new danger which had suddenly befallen his entire family. The warden of the prison came into Krom's cell and related in an agitated voice that the boy had been captured in Krom's barn, and that under interrogation the boy had told the entire truth — that Krom had hidden him, and given him food and drink. A report had already been written about this.

Krom convinced the warden of the prison Mishelis to have the entire report destroyed, and to convince the police to write up a different one. Mishelis summoned to Krom's prison cell the policeman who had the written report. The policeman agreed, and the report was torn up.

A second report was written, saying that the boy had escaped from the Shavl ghetto, and wanted to join his relatives in the Kaunas ghetto. Blumschtein signed this report.

Four weeks passed, with no change in the situation. Meanwhile two Jews were caught at the home of a peasant seven kilometers from the town of Betigole, and both of them were brought to the Raseiniai prison. These Jews were Ziv and Aranovsky. They were brothers-in-law from Betigole. In prison they told Krom that the Jews in the town of Betigole had been slaughtered, and that both of them had escaped from the pits during the shooting. The two Jews were brought to prison beaten and bruised. The two Jews told Krom that the police chief of Shidlava, named Jasulis, had interrogated them, beating them murderously with sticks. The murderer had demanded that the two Jews tell him where their gold, silver and valuables were hidden. The murderer also demanded that the Jews tell him where they had been hiding the entire time. The Jews were kept for two days without food or drink, and then they were taken to the Raseiniai prison. The Jews remained in the prison, hoping that they might still be sent to the ghetto in Shavl or in Kaunas. They stayed together in prison for four weeks. They did not lack for food, because Krom's peasant friends brought enough food. The warden permitted food to be brought for Krom's family and the rest of the Jews.

The prison in Raseiniai is not far from the Jewish cemetery. Krom's daughter Rivke constantly looked out the window at the Jewish cemetery to see whether graves were being dug. Rivke was extremely nervous, and more

than once her father had to tie her down. The days and weeks passed in this fashion. On April 25, 1942 Rivke saw through the window that graves were being dug at the Jewish cemetery. Their panic was great. As always in such situations, Mrs Hene Krom turned to her large prayerbook and read Psalms. Rivke began to go into such severe convulsions that she had to be tied down. The watch over the arrested Jews was strengthened. Krom asked for the warden to come. Mishelis came to Krom, bringing with him a liter of liquor. He added that the graves were indeed being prepared for Jews, and comforted Krom by saying that he was hurrying to Kaunas to plead that the Krom family not be shot. Dr Aleknevitsius and Mishelis went to see the Lithuanian General Kubiliunas in Kaunas to request that Krom's family be taken to the Kaunas ghetto.

In the evening Mishelis returned directly to Krom's prison cell from Kaunas and reported that they had not found General Kubiliunas, but that they had convinced the German Gestapo not to shoot Krom's family, but rather to take them to the Kaunas ghetto. Mishelis made Krom promise not to say anything to the Jews who were to be shot.

On the twenty-sixth of April, it rained the entire day, and the Jews were not taken out of the prison. Krom was no longer permitted to walk freely through the corridors of the prison, and no longer saw the three Jews.

On April 27, 1942 in the evening, the three Jews were taken out of the prison. Krom was with his wife and daughter in their cell at the time. He held his daughter's hand, and tried to prevent her from weeping and screaming loudly. All three Jews were taken to the Jewish cemetery and shot.

The yeshiva student Blumschtein and the two Jews from Betigole, Ziv and Aranovsky, had hoped all along that they too would be taken to a ghetto. While they were being taken out of prison into the courtyard they were very content that they had the chance to stroll around the yard a bit.

### **The Krom Family Is Brought into the Kaunas Ghetto**

The next day, April 29, 1942, a truck arrived at the courtyard of the prison. The Krom family thought that they were facing the same fate as the three Jews had met the previous day. When it was announced to them that they were being taken away from prison to the Kaunas ghetto, they still did not believe it.

When the Krom family got into the truck, they finally began to hope that perhaps they really would be taken to the Kaunas ghetto. When they were close to the town of Girtigola, they once again suspected that they might be shot near that town. Three hearts banged from terror and fright, until all three were actually brought to the Kaunas ghetto.

They were accompanied by a German member of the Raseiniai Gestapo and two Lithuanians. The German was quite polite and decent to Krom's family, and spent time with Krom's young daughter Rivke, who was fourteen years old at the time. All of the Jews found out about their arrival in the Kaunas ghetto, and marvelled at the fate of these Jews from Raseiniai. Under the conditions at that time, it was simply incredible and incomprehensible. How was it possible that under such circumstances the Krom family had escaped prison and a certain death?

Krom explains this by saying that he had been a farmer and a lumber merchant, and he had also bought grain from the peasants in the surrounding villages, so that Krom had many friends among the Lithuanian population of the town and countryside. Krom had a large compound, where the peasants could stop with their horses and wagons. Krom and his wife Hene got along very well with everyone, and they received the peasants very hospitably in their home. The Krom family was very well liked among the peasants.

All of the higher posts in town were occupied by Lithuanians who had been good friends of the Kroms for many years before the war. Thus, for example, Colonel Tsiurlys had been a visitor to Krom's house many years earlier. Mishelis was a captain in a regiment during the rule of President Smetona, and Krom had provisioned the regiment, so that they became good personal friends. Krom had quite a few such good friends.

In the Kaunas ghetto the Krom family suffered all of the pain and sorrow shared by all the Jews at that time.

### **The Escape from the Kaunas Ghetto**

On Yom Kippur 1943, Krom and his family escaped from the Kaunas ghetto back to Raseiniai County. A Jew from Vilon named Nakhman Krakinovsky escaped together with the Krom family. This was at the time when the Jews in Kaunas began to be interned in camps.

For thirteen months Krom and his family hid with peasants in the villages. He had many good friends. During those thirteen months, Krom's family stayed with peasants in various villages. Among them were two who constantly knew where the family Krom was located, and who constantly protected and intervened on behalf of Krom's family. These were the peasants Jonas Milushis in the village of Anulinas in Raseiniai County, Raseiniai Township, and Stepas Golumbauskas in the village of Bebirviu in Raseiniai County, Shimkaitsiai Township.

These two peasants were the sturdy right arms on which the hopes and lives of the Krom family depended. Thanks to the fatherly concern of these two good peasants, the family Krom managed to survive.

On account of the Krom family and their connections with the Kaunas ghetto, a good peasant from the village of Patasupiu in Raseiniai County named Jonas Bakshys lost his life. The Lithuanian Gestapo in Raseiniai found out that through his intervention, Jews were escaping from the Kaunas ghetto. Some ten Jews escaped from the Kaunas ghetto to that peasant. From there the brothers Feinshtein from the town of Shtakiai, along with Moyshe Vinik from the same town, took the Kaunas Jews to friendly peasants.

The Lithuanian Gestapo suspected the peasant Bakshys. Once they went to his house. The peasant was quite drunk, and he told the Gestapo agents that Jews who escaped from the Kaunas ghetto came to his home, as well as Red partisans from the forests. Nor did he neglect to mention the Krom family. Just one day earlier Yeshayohu Krom had been in the peasant's house.

The peasant was arrested and badly beaten. He betrayed the good peasant Jonas Milushius. The peasant Bakshys was interned in the Kaunas prison for some time, and then he was shot. The peasant Jonas Milushius managed to buy off the Gestapo for a large sum of money. Three months before the arrival of the Red Army he got out of prison. All the teeth of the peasant Milushius were knocked out in the course of various investigations.

### **The Long-Awaited Liberation**

The Krom family hid with peasants until the front approached Raseiniai, in the spring of 1944. Krom and his family were close to liberation then, but even closer to death. The Germans evacuated the peasants from the region. The front remained in the area for precisely three months. All the villages, fields and forests were full of German military details. They were in all the peasant houses. Krom's family began hiding in the nearby forests. The front was three kilometers from their location, the thunder of the Red artillery angrily announced the coming liberation.

The peasants from the surrounding countryside also ran away to hide in the forests. Many of them were Krom's friends from Raseiniai. He separated from them, and began wandering through the forests, facing a grave danger of being shot by the German military, who were everywhere throughout the forest.

One time Krom and his wife wandered into a forbidden zone in the forest, where the German soldiers were practicing their shooting. Krom lay hidden in some brush with his wife, watching the Germans shooting over their heads at a target. After they shot, they would run to see how well they had done. They ran just a few meters past the brush in which Krom and his wife were hiding. Such dangers were a daily phenomenon. There was nothing to eat. It was deadly dangerous to leave the forest and go into the villages. Fortunately, Krom's daughter Rivke was not with her parents at the time. Krom had delivered her to a friendly peasant, who had evacuated and taken Rivke along with him. The liberation was near, but Krom and his wife were exhausted from laying in the forest day in, day out, without food or a drink of water. Krom had already decided once to hang himself and put an end to his suffering.

But his wife demanded that he kill her first. In the morning the two of them would lick the dew from the wet grass in the forest. While suffering thus, they met "Red partisans," who were also thirsty and hungry. The "Red partisans" helped Krom to get his wife settled into a well-camouflaged bunker. At night Krom and the "Red partisans" went into the village for food. One morning a group of German soldiers engaged in clearing the forest of Red partisans went past the bunker. They stopped right next to the bunker. Krom and his wife held their breath, waiting for death to come. But the Germans did not notice the bunker, and they went away.

Krom felt that he had been burdened with more mouths to feed. Everything he managed to beg, he had to share with seven more mouths. This forced Krom to separate from them and seek out a new place. Krom also found out that the seven were not Red partisans, but escaped conscripts from the German army — Ukrainian former prisoners, who had volunteered to fight against the Red Army. It was very hard to get food. Nevertheless Krom managed to find a place to stay with a poor peasant, where he and his wife stayed for a week.

One time a cow was stolen from the German army. Germans came to search the peasant's barn. Krom and his wife barely managed to get in among the straw, when the Germans entered the stall. Krom and his wife left the peasant after that incident and went into a nearby forest, where they stayed for three days. They were surrounded by shots coming from various weapons. The Red Army Katyusha rockets thundered throughout the area. The

"concert" of various arms stopped, and Krom went back to the peasant to get food, it turned out that the Red Army had been in the village a day earlier, and were already chasing the cursed German Fascists further. Krom immediately ran to bring his wife from the forest, out into the long-awaited freedom which the Red Army brought all Jews like Krom and his wife, on August 3, 1944. Four days later Krom met his daughter Rivke and they all went to Kaunas.

Krom attests that the 393 Jews in the monastery camp were killed under the supervision of Germans. The rest of the Jews were slaughtered without the presence of German representatives or German observers. Yeshayohu Krom does not know who gave the order to annihilate the Jews of Raseiniai.

Translated from Yiddish manuscript  
by Dr. Jonathan Boyarin

Signature:

New York, New York

August 4, 1988



#### Attestations of Yeshayohu and Rivka Krom

I, Yeshayohu Krom, in the presence of my daughter Rivke, related to L. Koniuchowsky everything that L. Koniuchowsky recorded on twenty-two pages concerning the slaughter of the Jews of Raseiniai. All the facts, dates, names of persons and geographical locations, agree with reality, and I attest thereto with my signature on every page.

Yeshayohu Krom (Signature)

Rivke Krom (Signature)

Recorded by L. Koniuchowsky (Signature)

Landsberg/Lech, Bavaria, January 9, 1947.

The signature of Yeshayohu and Rivke Krom is attested to by the director of the Landsberg cultural committee.

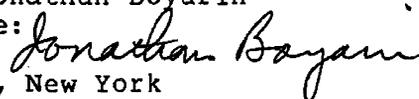
Director of the cultural committee  
Milshteyn (Signature)

Translated from Yiddish manuscript  
by Dr. Jonathan Boyarin

Signature:

New York, New York

August 4, 1988



## THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS OF THE SMALL LITHUANIAN TOWN SHIMKAITSIAI

### The testimony of Yeshayohu Krom of Raseiniai. (See "The Slaughter of the Jews of Raseiniai.")

The town is located twenty kilometers from Raseiniai and twenty five kilometers from Jurbarkas. The town is on the Raseiniai-Jurbarkas- Smalininken Highway. Six Jewish families lived in town. They were all occupied in trade. Krom's father Artshik (Aron) was also a farmer. The Jews in town lived far apart from the wide world, far from politics.

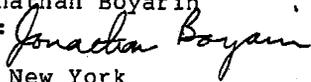
As soon as the Germans arrived in town Stasys Skuzhinskas became the chief in town. There were only about thirty Jews in town, and all the Lithuanians knew them. The Lithuanians in town immediately armed themselves and began lording it over the Jews. There were no Germans in town at all. The few Jews went through the same experiences as the Jews of Raseiniai. After the 393 men in the camp at Raseiniai were shot, the healthier Jewish men in Shumkaitsiai were selected, and they were taken to the gravel pits near the village of Zhuvelishkiai, close to Raseiniai. The Jewish men from Shumkaitsiai were shot there. Among this first group of Jewish men who were shot was the Jewish doctor in town, Galand, the pharmacist, a Jew from Memel; Leyzer Krom (Yeshayohu's brother); Yankl Frank; Aron Kremer, and others. Peasants from the countryside were brought to bury the Jews who had been shot. Leyzer Krom was buried, but he had only been wounded in the shoulder and foot. As soon as the murderers left, he got out of the pit. Before the men were shot, they were stripped stark naked. Leyzer got an old shirt and a pair of pants from a peasant, and ran to a spot in the forest not far from Shimkaitsiai. Leyzer sent a Christian woman to his parents in Shimkaitsiai. Leyzer's mother Brayne came, bringing her son something to eat, and bound her son's wounds. Leyzer stayed in the forest, and Brayne returned to town. A brutal Lithuanian murderer named Lukoshius stopped Brayne on the road, and began to beat her viciously to get her to tell where she was coming from. Lukoshius beat and tortured Brayne until she told him that she had gone to the forest to see her wounded son Leyzer. Brayne was seventy years old at the time. Leyzer was taken to the monastery camp at Raseiniai together with his mother Brayne.

They weren't kept in the camp long. The day they were brought to the camp they were taken to Zhuvelishkiai. Both of them were buried alive. Juozas Radziunas, one of the peasants who was forced to bury them alive, personally told this to Yeshayohu Krom with tears in his eyes. Juozas Radziunas related all the details of the gruesome death of Yeshayohu's brother and mother, because he and others had personally performed the burial. Before the two of them were thrown into the pit, the murderers beat the mother and son so brutally that neither could move. Then they were thrown into the pit alive.

The rest of the Jews in town were all herded into a single house. A Lithuanian guard watched the house. For four weeks the Jews were kept in that house. Every day they were taken to do various tasks, tormented and beaten.

During the slaughter of the last Jews in Raseiniai, the Jews from this small town were also taken to Zhuvelishkiai. There they were all shot on August 29, 1941.

Those among the local Lithuanian murderers who were outstandingly sadistic were Antanas Shimkus; Lukoshius; Stasys Skuzhinskas; and the three Stravinskiai brothers.

Translated from Yiddish manuscript  
by Dr. Jonathan Boyarin  
Signature:   
New York, New York  
October 27, 1988



## THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS OF KELM

The testimony of Yakov Zak, born February 3, 1920 in Kelm. He completed seven grades of Hebrew elementary school. He was an electrician by trade. The name of Yakov's father was Azriel, and his mother's name was Sore. Until the outbreak of the war on June 22, 1941, and until the annihilation of the Jews of Kelm, Yakov lived in his native town.

Kelm is on the highway between Shavl and Raseiniai, 55 kilometers from Raseiniai and 43 kilometers from Shavl, between the streams Krazhante and Villena.

### The Population and Their Occupations

When the war broke out, some 2,500 Jews lived in Kelm, along with a smaller number of Lithuanians. By far the majority of Jews in town were occupied in trade, less in artisanry and even less in agriculture.

Among the largest Jewish enterprises must be mentioned:

- 1 . A sawmill belonging to the Jewish businessman Yitskhok Shapiro.
- 2 . A sawmill belonging to the partners Mende Rozin and Nokhum Udwin.
- 3 . An electric power station belonging to Moyshe Udwin (Nokhum's father).
- 4 . A starch factory belonging to the Jewish businessman Khonon Rubikovitsh.
- 5 . A candy factory belonging to the Jewish businessman Meyer Mordkholovitsh.
- 6 . A variety store belonging to the brothers Meyer-Mote and Leyzer Shtern.
- 7 . An iron business belonging to Moyshe Shafer.
- 8 . An iron business belonging to the Fridman family.
- 9 . A textile business belonging to the Jewish businessman Yisroel Gurvitsh.
- 10 . A textile business belonging to the Jewish businessman Shabsay Beker.
- 11 . A tannery belonging to the Jewish businessman Efroyim Milner.
- 12 . A tannery belonging to the Jewish businessman Avrom Podles.
- 13 . A tannery belonging to the Jewish businessman Zalmen Orl.

The economic situation of the Jews was not bad. One source of income for the Jews in Kelm was the famous yeshivas, where boys from various cities and towns in Lithuanian and from the entire world, especially from America and from Israel (at that time still Palestine), came to acquire both Torah and worldly knowledge.

In and around Kelm there were the following Jewish agricultural compounds:

- 1 . Belonging to Zunde Lunts, in town.
- 2 . Belonging to Efroyim Milner, in town.
- 3 . Belonging to Avrom Zaks, in the village of Veidszhia, between Kelm and Shukian.
- 4 . Belonging to Shimen Osher, in the village of Madzhiunai.
- 5 . Belonging to Yankl Kholozhik, in the village of Lucinawa.
- 6 . Belonging to Berman, in the village of Kablovcisne.
- 7 . Belonging to Khatzl Kushelevski, in the village of Paduole.
- 8 . Belonging to Moyshe-Leyb Mendelovits, in the village of Blekharne.
- 9 . Belonging to Moyshe Gelman, in the village of Lukodeme.

The attitude of the local Lithuanian population toward the Jews was good until the outbreak of the war, on Sunday, June 22, 1941. After the arrival of the Red army in Lithuania in the summer of 1940, the compounds, larger enterprises and houses were nationalized. But the economic situation of the Jews on the whole did not deteriorate.

### The Cultural Life of the Jews

Until the arrival of the Red Army, Kelm had a Hebrew elementary school with seven grades, a large yeshiva and a school for further rabbinic studies. After completing the yeshiva, the students entered the advanced school, and when they completed studies there, they received rabbinical ordination. The head of the yeshiva was Rabbi Sadovsky, and the head of the advanced school was Reb Daniel Movshovits (Siderer). The yeshiva occupied the large study house and the synagogue. The advanced school had its own building. In the courtyard of the study house stood a large, old wooden synagogue with a wonderfully carved Torah ark. In addition, Kelm had a study club for religious young men with its own separate building.

After completing the Hebrew elementary school, some of the young people would go off to study in the Hebrew gymnasiums in Kaunas and Shavl, or continue their studies at the local Lithuanian gymnasium. The great majority

of the Jewish youth were members of Zionist organizations. After the arrival of the Red Army, a small number of Jewish youth took active part in the new political and economic life. The Jews in town were strictly religious, and they remained so after the arrival of the Red Army. Before the arrival of the Red Army, Kelm contained a Jewish national bank, a free loan association, and other mutual aid organizations.

### **The Outbreak of the War**

On the day the war broke out, Sunday, June 22, 1941, refugees from Taurage arrived in Kelm. Their arrival caused panic in the town. Many Jews locked the doors and windows of their houses that day, and fled the town.

On Monday, June 23, the panic was even greater, because the Communist Party personnel and the Soviets quickly evacuated from Kelm. In the course of two days nearly all the Jews of Kelm fled to stay with peasants whom they knew in the countryside, or to Jewish farm compounds around Kelm. On the road to Shavl hundreds of Jews from Taurage and Kelm hurried on foot and in wagons, aiming to evacuate deeper into the Soviet Union. The highway was blocked, and interfered with the rapid retreat of the Red Army. The civilian populace were forced to abandon the highway, and precisely on account of this, many did not manage to evacuate.

When they arrived at the Padubisis compound, Lithuanian peasants stood on the highway, bearing Lithuanian flags decorated with swastikas. Some of them attacked the escaping Jews with axes, scythes, poles and other objects, and prevented the Jews from escaping. They met the Jews with slogans: "Cursed Jews, the day has come when we're going to kill you all!"

On Monday, June 23, peasants from the Padubisis compound murdered a Jewish family from among the Taurage refugees, consisting of a woman, and man and two children. The Red Army was still in the area at that time.

On Wednesday, June 25 the German army marched into Kelm, which had been completely burned and ruined. The Germans caught up with some of the Jews, who began to return to their burned homes. A number of Jews stayed with peasants whom they knew in the villages, or at Jewish compounds.

### **The Civilian Administration; Decrees and Torture of Jews; The Barn Camp in Kelm**

As soon as the Germans arrived in town, hundreds of armed Lithuanians from the countryside appeared in town. They called themselves partisans, and began to enjoy unquestioned authority. The civilian administration in Kelm consisted of these partisans. The man who became the mayor of Kelm was a Lithuanian named Tsesnys, a farmer from a village five kilometers from town. He had been the mayor of Kelm during President Smetona's rule. During the year of Soviet rule he had been removed from his position.

The assistant to the mayor was a Lithuanian German named Shidlaudkas, who lived in Kelm. The head of the newly-created police force was the Lithuanian Barkauskas, a farmer from the village of Kokhinishkis, three kilometers from Kelm. He had been a policeman under President Smetona. the leader of the organized partisans was the Lithuanian Rickus, a tailor from the town of Kelm.

They issued an order stating that all Jews had to settle in Jewish compounds, and were forbidden to be found among Lithuanian peasants in the villages. Any peasant who continued hiding Jews was threatened with being shot together with his family. Nearly all the Jews settled in the surrounding Jewish compounds.

On Tuesday, July 1, 1941 the partisans issued a strict order, stating that all the men between the ages of fourteen and sixty had to move into a camp which had been established in a barn belonging to the Jew Zundl Lunts, which was located at the edge of town. Some of the Jewish men did not carry out the command, but remained with their families at the Jewish compounds. Policemen and partisans would come riding to the compounds, and violently herd the Jewish men into the camp compound.

Before the men were driven into the camp, they were herded into the market place and a German delivered a poisonous anti-Semitic speech to them and to the Lithuanians. He declared that the Jews had to be interned in camps because they bore the primary responsibility for the Second World War.

The barn-camp was surrounded by barbed wire, which had been in place before the war. Armed partisans stood guard around the camp. A military kitchen was established in the courtyard. Generally the Jews received black coffee and a piece of bread in the morning, and then black coffee again for supper. Lunch consisted of a soup of potatoes with water, without any fat.

Every morning the men were taken under heavy guard to work at various hard tasks, clearing away the ruins and taking rubble away from the street. They also had to take care of all the heavy, dirty work that needed to be done in town.

The men slept on the ground in the barn, but because of overcrowding, the younger men slept on boards in the attic of the barn. They were woken up at 6:00 a.m. After they drank black coffee, they were immediately taken out to work. The partisans very often forced the Jews to pray out loud and to sing religious hymns. This made the partisans helpless with laughter. At lunch time the Jews were brought into the camp for an hour. They were forced to work until six p.m.

Armed partisans kept watch while the Jews worked. They forced them to work faster and faster, teased them and bullied them in various ways. The partisans very often took the men to the stream Krazhante after work, so that they could bathe, and drove them into the water with their clothes on. On the way back, the Jews had to be cheerful and sing various Soviet and religious melodies.

The women, children and older men, along with a number of sick or weak people, remained in the Jewish compounds, where they helped out with the farm work. There were no guards at these compounds. But very often it turned out that the partisans would "visit" the compounds, and rob the Jewish women and children.

While the Jewish men were being herded into the camp, they were forced to mark themselves with yellow Stars of David on their chests.

The Jews living in the Jewish compounds had to do the same. In rare cases women received the opportunity to visit their husbands in the barn camp.

## **The First Jewish Victims**

1. On Thursday, the day after the Germans arrived in town, they arrested a yeshiva student named Moyshe Benyash and tortured him to death.

2. A young boy named Binyomin Orl, a tanner, fell out of the attic of the barn camp at night. He sprained his foot, and the Lithuanian doctor in town, Zhemaitis, released him from work and ordered him to lie down. This was Thursday, July 10, 1941.

The Jewish supervisor in the camp was the optician Morgnshtern. Every day, one Jew remained in the camp, cleaning up and straightening out the camp.

On Thursday, July 10 Yakov Zak returned from work to pick up some tools he had forgotten at the camp. In the yard he found a Lithuanian named Jurgelis, a shoemaker in Kelm; Merkelis, a farmer; and Matulevitsius, a student in the Kelm gymnasium.

The Lithuanians were investigating why Binyomin had not gone to work. A Jew named Shimen Shevelovitz remained behind that day to clean up the camp.

The three Lithuanians forced Yakov and Shimen to dig a pit near the barn. They ordered the invalid Binyomin to crawl on his belly to the pit, and shot him. They ordered Binyomin to be buried while he was still alive. The Jews from the camp managed to bury Binyomin in a Jewish grave at the Jewish cemetery. The Jews were given ten minutes to exhume the deceased. Yakov was present while the grave was being dug. Binyomin was found turned over, with his face down, because he had been buried while wounded.

3. A young girl named Frida Keltz had been a Communist during the Soviet period. When the war broke out, she escaped to the nearby town of Laukuva. Lithuanians who knew her spotted and arrested her, and took her to Kelm. She was brought to the Lithuanian gymnasium, where the partisan headquarters was already located.

Yakov Zak and his friend Emanuel Rozenfeld were working cleaning out the rooms in the gymnasium that day, and they saw Frida. Two Lithuanians named Mykolas Jokubaitis and Vylautos Butkus, both from the tenth grade in the Lithuanian gymnasium - Frida's schoolmates - beat her murderously. The two Lithuanians took her outside of Kelm into some sand pits, and shot her. Before she died they let her smoke a cigarette. The two Lithuanian murderers boasted about this to everyone later. Nearly every day Germans came into the barn camp to "have fun," forcing the Jews to sing various religious hymns, forcing them to beat one another, and to perform various painful acrobatics. One time the Germans shaved off half of the beard of Meshulakh Kaplan. They forced him to gather the prayerbooks, holy texts, phylacteries and prayer shawls belonging to all the Jews in the camp, and burn them in the middle of the yard.

4. At the beginning of July 1941 several partisans came into the barn camp and said that any sick Jew who wanted to go to a doctor should speak up. This was a Sunday. The Jews weren't taken to work that day.

Eleven Jews responded. The armed Lithuanians took the eleven Jews away to the Jewish cemetery, forced the Jews to dig a pit and then shot all eleven of them. Several days later, Yakov Zak had the occasion to see for himself the mass grave which was located on the slope next to the stream that flowed nearby the Jewish cemetery. The Lithuanian Stasys Bartkus who lived next to the Jewish cemetery, personally saw the eleven Jews being shot,

and he later related the episode in more detail to Ydkov Zak.

Among the eleven Jews who were shot were Binyomin Pupki, aged 50; Moyshe Shafer, aged 55; Shloyme-Itshe Shamesh, aged 46; Yoysef Adelevitsh, aged 33 or 35; Zalmen Orl, over 50; Hirshl Levin; Shmuel Shamesh; Yisroel-Leyb Podles; and the former director of the Jewish National Bank, Mr Mer.

### **The First Mass Slaughter**

On Sunday, July 27, 1941, partisans registered men who wanted to go to do agricultural work in the surrounding compounds. The majority of the men in the camp seized on the proposal, hoping to get better food in the countryside, and to meet with their families in the Jewish compounds.

Seven Jewish men from the camp, including Yakov Zak, had the special task of repairing the telephone lines on the road between Kelm and Skaudvile. The seven men slept in the villages. They worked under the supervision of a partisan. On Monday, July 28, they went out to work the same as every day. When they had worked for one hour, an employee of the Kelm post office arrived on a motorcycle with an order to bring the seven Jews to the camp. The Jews did not guess what awaited them, and went back to the camp, where they found out about the registration the previous day, July 27. That Monday, July 28, 1941, all the Jews in the camp still went off to work.

On Tuesday, July 29, 1941, the fifth day of the Jewish month of Av, at 4:00 a.m., two armed Lithuanians arrived in the camp and asked for twenty young, healthy volunteer workers. They explained that the twenty men would have to deepen a lake in the village of Dirvonukai belonging to the peasant Jonas Kareivis. The two Lithuanians promised that the twenty men would have to work only from four until eight a.m., and they wouldn't have to work all day. All of the men in the camp volunteered, because in town they had to work hard all day long. In addition all of them wanted to be in the country.

The two Lithuanians selected only 25 men, all of them young and healthy. They were taken not far from the Kelm compound belonging to the Lithuanian landowner Gruzhevsky, among the sand pits, and forced to dig a large pit. When the pit was finished, the 25 men were shot. Shooting was heard in the barn camp, but no one understood the horrible truth. Among the 25 men were Kopl Udwin; Yeshayohu Baksht, a son of a rabbi from Shavl; Tevye Pras; Meyne and his brother Shmuel Margolis; Dovid Tartak; Sher Kleyn and his brother Velve, and others.

The two Lithuanians who took the 25 men from the camp were Juosas Merkeles, a farmer from a village one and a half kilometers from Kelm, and his friend Mikalauskas from the village of Pupsiai, three kilometers from Kelm.

At nine in the morning that same Tuesday, July 29, 1941, eight armed Lithuanians came to the camp and took sixty men from the camp, assuring them that they were taken to nationalized government compounds to do agricultural work. The Lithuanians took the sixty men to the sand pits and shot them.

At eleven a.m. that same Tuesday, armed Lithuanians took away a third group of forty men. They too were given assurances that they were being taken to do agricultural work. But they were taken to the gravel pits and shot.

At 1:00 or 1:30 p.m. the same Tuesday, armed Lithuanians took away a fourth group of forty men and shot them at the same spot. This continued until evening. There were no more than 36 men remaining in the camp, and they had no idea that the men taken away "to work" had been annihilated, it was quite common to hear shooting continuing for hours all around the town. The Jews thought that the shootings that day as well were "innocent."

One young man left the camp every midnight to go to work in the Kelm dairy, and returned in the afternoon. When he returned from work on July 29, 1941, he reported that all the groups of men who had been taken away had been shot at the gravel pits. This was told him in secret by a Lithuanian friend of his. Only then did the men in the barn camp understand that the Lithuanians had deceived them, taking the men not to farm work, but to be shot. Among the Lithuanians who took Jews away and shot them on that tragic Tuesday, Yakov Zak remembers the following:

1. Adomas Jurgelis, a shoemaker in Kelm.
2. Vylautas Baratsevitsius, a gymnasium student in Kelm.
3. Alekna, a clerk in the municipal offices, from Kelm.
4. Rickus, the leader of the Kelm partisans, a man from town.
5. Jonas Bartsauskas, from the village of Ginayke.
6. Tily, an office worker at the Kelm co-operative.
7. Meshkauskas, an office worker at the co-operative.

There were many more who took part, whose first and last names Yakov Zak does not remember. At six o'clock that same Tuesday evening the Lithuanian Shpukas, a student at the gymnasium in town, arrived with Mykolas

Jakubaitis, a tenth grader in gymnasium. They requested that eight men volunteer for a special task. The 36 men, who by now knew exactly what had happened to the groups of men who had been taken away, began hiding. Everyone wanted to be the last. The two gymnasium students told them that everyone taken away that day had been shot. Shpukas, who had been a childhood friend of Yakov's, said that Yakov's father had been shot by the Lithuanian Jonas Pikturnas, a mechanic from Kelm. Shpukas also said that all the Jews, men, women and children from the nearby town of Vaiguva and a large number of the Jews who had been staying in the Jewish compounds, had been shot at the gravel pits that day. He also said that the rabbi of Kelm, Kalmen Benushevits, who had escaped to Vaiguva at the outbreak of the war, had been brought together with the Jews from Vaiguva. He had been forced to kneel next to the pit the entire day. He had quietly whispered a prayer, watching while the Jews were shot. After all the Jews were shot, he was shot as well.

The two gymnasium students took eight Jewish men out of the barn and herded them into the yard of the town gymnasium. Among the eight men was Yakov Zak. In the gymnasium courtyard stood four wagons loaded with the possessions of those who had been shot. The eight Jews had to carry the possessions of their murdered fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters into a cellar in the gymnasium.

Yakov recognized the suit and coat of his father and those of other Jews whom he knew well. While the Jews were unloading the wagons, all the Lithuanian murderers who had been shooting Jews all day arrived.

All their sleeves were rolled up. Their arms, clothes and boots were bloodied. There was a well in the courtyard. They washed their faces, arms and boots. Red water flowed next to the well.

After the Jews brought the things down into the cellar, the eight Jews were brought back into the camp.

In the courtyard next to the well, Yakov saw all the local Lithuanians he knew. They were all drunk. They said that a few hours earlier they had finished shooting the Jews of Vaiguva, those from the Jewish compounds, and all the men who had been taken away from the camp. But they promised not to shoot the 36 surviving men.

Vytautas Baratsevicius related that the popular Dr. Kagansky, who came from a compound near Vilkovitch, begged to be left alive before he was shot, saying that he had often tended the families of the murderers without charging them. He promised to continue treating them without charge. When he saw that his words had no influence, he tried to escape from the pit, and Baratsevicius shot him.

That same evening, about nine o'clock, the eight men were again taken out of the barn and forced to carry beer from a nearby warehouse up to the second floor of the large hall in the Lithuanian gymnasium. The murderers arranged a ball in the auditorium in honor of the mass murder of Jews.

All kinds of delicacies were laid out on gaily decorated long tables in the auditorium, just like for a rich wedding. The murderers and their families, dressed up in the clothes of those who had been murdered, sat down to gorge themselves. All of the Lithuanian intelligentsia of the town came, headed by the mayor, Tsesnys. It was smoky and stifling in the room. They all sang Lithuanian songs, drank and ate. The room was full of drunken voices and even a phonograph and a radio. The Jews had to bring beer for the murderers who had shot their near and dear ones. One of the gluttonous partisans, seeing the Jews coming, shouted out: "Look there are still some Jews left!" He grabbed his revolver. His comrades calmed him, and forced the eight Jews to drink a glass of beer. Tears poured from the eyes of the eight Jews. Meanwhile the drunken crowd was helpless with laughter.

Afterward the eight Jews were taken back to the barn camp. The guards changed frequently at the barn. Several of them related that the men and women had been forced to strip to their underwear while standing by the grave. They tried to imitate how the Jewish women had kneeled by the pits, begging in a broken Lithuanian not to be shot. Each one of them imitated the expressions of the women, while the rest of the murderers held their sides and laughed heartily.

Stuffed, drunken, new guards came from the ball telling various details about the shooting of the men. Thus, for example, the murderers Shpukas, Jakubaitas and Baratsavicius related that during the shootings, two Germans stood nearby. They didn't do any shooting, but they filmed the entire incident. They also related that small children would fall into the pit half-dead, and began to kick wildly with their little legs. Several older children had their heads bashed against a stone, and were then thrown into the pit.

The next day, Wednesday, July 30, partisans took the remaining possessions of the murdered people out of the barn.

The partisans took Yakov Zak and his friend Emanuel Rozenfeld away to do field work in the village of Vanagina, at the home of the peasant Klimas. Not far from the spot there were two Jewish compounds, where the surviving

women and children were working. They helped the Jewish farmers do their work. The thirty-four Jews from the barn camp were taken every day to clean out the ruins, repair the roads, and so forth.

Almost every evening the partisans came to the Jewish compounds, robbing everything they chose to.

The front was already far away. There were no Germans in Kelm. The fate of the surviving Jews was in the hands of the local Lithuanians.

On Wednesday, August 20, 1941, Yakov rode to the town of Ludovan with his employer to get lime. In Ludovan and in the Jewish village of Padubisis there were Jewish camps, the residents of which were informed by Yakov about the annihilation of the Jews of Kelm. The panic in the Jewish village was great. Many Jews escaped the village. The German commandant of the region found out about this. Yakov was arrested and interrogated. The commandant ordered that he be sent back to the barn camp in Kelm. Before he was returned to the camp, the partisans kept him interned in prison in Kelm until Thursday morning, the next day. Then he was brought back to the men's camp at Zundl Lunts barn.

## **The Second Mass Slaughter**

The next day, Friday, August 22, 1941, at four in the afternoon, they began bringing Jews from the Jewish compounds near the Kelm compound, to the gravel pits. The men in the barn camp saw the possessions of the Jews in the compounds being brought on wagons. Behind the wagons walked masses of women, children and old men. A short time later shooting was heard near the sand pits, followed by individual shots.

The Jews in the barn camp had been joined by fourteen men who had been working the whole time in peat bogs at the village of Narushiai for the peasant Antonas Jankaustas. It became clear to the men in the barn camp that they were completing the final moments of their lives. Their panic was great. They all began destroying their valuables, breaking their watches. The guard around the camp was strengthened. The gate of the barn was open. The partisans warned that they would shoot anyone who tried to approach the gate. They also warned that they would shoot anyone who wept out loud. Nevertheless the following men managed to escape from the camp that day: the Jewish farmer Yakov Kholozhin, Yisroel Nokhomovits; Khonon Levin, and Hirsh Shevelovits, who worked as a butcher in town.

At six in the afternoon the same Friday, the men were taken from the barn camp to the Kelm compound. Twenty-odd men, among them Yakov, were locked up together in a barn. Jews from the Jewish compounds were taken into the same barns. These groups were first led into the barn, and then taken to the field next to the pit. From a distance an entire field filled with Jewish women, children and old men could be seen, guarded by Lithuanian partisans. The shooting of machine guns, along with the shouts and weeping of women and children, could be heard. This dreadful execution continued until evening. The gloom of evening echoed with the cries for help of the women, children and men at the pit. Rain dripped down. The sky was heavily overcast. The compound of Kelm, in which Yakov and his friends were interned, was located exactly one-half kilometer from the spot where the dreadful executions were carried out.

At 7:30 p.m. partisans began taking the last groups of Jews from the barn away to the pits. A group of ten men, Yakov's comrades, were taken away. They went away depressed, their heads bowed, their eyes filled with tears. Only ten men remained in the barn. At the gate stood two guards armed with automatics and grenades. The two guards were Shpukas and Merkelis, both of whom Yakov knew well. They promised that the remaining men would not be shot.

Yakov agreed with his comrades that he would go to the gate to have a talk with the two guards. When he gave the signal, they were to attack the two Lithuanians, drag them into the barn and strangle them. That was the arrangement. But while Yakov was talking and smoking with the two Lithuanians, the men failed to respond when Yakov gave the agreed signal. Later they excused themselves by saying that they didn't want to remain alive while their families had already been shot.

It was already dark outside. The rain did not stop. Four partisans came to the barn and took away the last ten Jews, among them Yakov. Yakov and his friends were physically exhausted, desperate, full of resentment toward everyone and everything, and little interested in life. The last ten men slowly moved forward, dragging their exhausted feet through the mud. At that moment Yakov thought about his beloved ones, who certainly lay dead in the pit. An "unnatural" impulse moved Yakov to try something. The will to remain alive suddenly began to possess his entire being. He convinced his comrades that they all should begin running at once. The Lithuanian murderers forbade Yakov to speak Yiddish.

"I'm about to die, and I have the right to speak Yiddish to my comrades for the last minutes of my life!" Yakov protested bitterly.

The Lithuanians stopped interfering in Yakov's conversation with his comrades. He proposed to everyone that they begin running in different directions, so that everyone would have a chance to survive. Whatever God wants, that's what will happen! - That was the men's response to Yakov's proposal.

The ten men were brought to the field next to the pit, where a few dozen Jews still stood waiting for their turn to be shot. Some were forced to strip to their underwear, some still stood in their clothes. The partisans drove the naked Jews to the edge of the pit, and shot them from behind with automatics. The cries and weeping of those brought to the edge of the pit were so dreadful that only someone who saw and heard them can have any idea of the terrible suffering of the victims. Many of them fell into the pit wounded. The wheezing and moaning of the dying and wounded could be heard coming from the pit.

It was dark already. A heavy rain fell. On both sides of the pit lamps had been set up, and they cast rays of light on the victims who had been brought, on the edge of the pit and on those who had fallen into the pit. Everything around the pit looked like a slaughterhouse at night.

Yakov and his comrades were guarded by the Lithuanian Mikalauskas from the village Pupsiai; he stood close to Yakov. The Lithuanian struck a match to light a cigarette. In the light of the burning match, Yakov saw Mikalauskas' murderous face. Suddenly the idea came into Yakov's head to act, to try to escape and remain alive as a witness to the entire world against the Lithuanian murderers. Lightning quick, he grabbed the automatic from the Lithuanian and brought it down on the Lithuanian's head. The Lithuanian fell. With his last strength, Yakov began running in the direction of the nearby forest. But the inhuman experiences of the previous hours had exhausted Yakov's strength. He jumped over a ditch by the side of the road, and threw himself down in a potato field. There was a commotion among the Lithuanians at the pit, and immediately afterward they began shooting in the direction of the woods.

Yakov lay pressed against the ground among the potatoes. He heard his heart banging loudly. The murderers ran past him in the direction of the forest. In the darkness, they failed to notice Yakov. Yakov lay a few dozen meters from the pit. The agitated Lithuanians quickly ran back to the pit, apparently because they were afraid that the rest of the Jews would escape from the pit.

Yakov clearly heard the shouts and weeping of those brought to the pit, then the report of automatics and wheezing and moaning from the pit.

Yakov carefully crept on his belly to the edge of the forest. From there he heard the cries of his nine comrades, with whom he had been taken out of the barn. Again automatic fire was heard, and the cries of the last nine Jews at the pit were eternally silenced.

Yakov watched from a distance as the Lithuanian's prepared to leave the pit. They gathered the possessions of those who were shot, took down the lamps next to the pit, and returned to Kelm.

For a few hours Yakov continued lying at the edge of the forest. Everything around him was mute, and wrapped in a leaden darkness, soaked with light drops of rain. In the thick, dark air Yakov still heard the echo of those Jews whom he knew and loved, who had been silenced forever, whose bodies filled the pit. It was a pit from which Jews and Lithuanians had excavated gravel over the course of decades, for use in various construction projects. The buildings which had been constructed belonged to the Lithuanians now, and the dark pit belonged to the Jews of Kelm.

Later tragic details about the executions at the pit became known. While wandering through the villages, Yakov heard the following heart rending details from peasants:

1. The peasant Gajauskas from the village of Pakartzama, five kilometers from Kelm, was forced to carry Jews to the pit with his horse and wagon from the Jewish compound of Katelaushishke, which was located next to his home. Many peasant wagons carried Jews to the Kelm compound. In Gajauskas' wagon was his Jewish neighbor, the owner of the compound, Mr Berman, and his pregnant wife Dvoyre (nee Kaplan, from Vaiguva). Dvoyre's brother Yudl Kaplan and his wife Ida Markowitz were in the same wagon. Berman was well-liked by all the peasants nearby, and Gajauskas quietly advised him to escape from the wagon and try to survive. But Avrom Berman refused to make the attempt, explaining that he loved his wife and couldn't leave her alone at a time when she was expecting to give birth any day. On the way the partisans assured the unfortunate Jews that they were all being taken to the Jewish village of Padubisis, where they would all live in a camp. When they were brought to the Kelm compound, all the Jews understood that they had been brought to the slaughter.

And in those tragic hours, Dvoyre felt that she was going to become a mother. She asked the partisans to bring her a doctor. "Lie quiet, frog, and fight it out with death. Soon you won't need a doctor!" the partisans viciously shouted at the pregnant woman.

Some of the Jews were already at the field, not far from the pit. Dvoyre lay on the ground, twisted in pain. Tears poured from her eyes and with a deep, pained sigh, she looked at the Jews who were preparing to die. She heard the shootings and the moaning of the dying and wounded Jews in the pit. She turned to the partisans standing nearby and begged them to shoot her before she bore the child. The murderers ordered her: "First give birth to another little Jew for us to shoot!"

After she gave birth, Dvoyre was shot and thrown into the pit. The Lithuanians threw the new-born child into the pit alive after its dead mother. The Lithuanian partisan Juosas Merkelis, a neighbor of the peasant Gajauskas, had related this all proudly and in precise detail. The peasant Gajauskas later told it to Yakov Zak.

2. The Lithuanian Kariauskas from the village of Lukodeme, three kilometers from Kelm, shot his Jewish neighbor Borukh Lunts with his own hands. Borukh fell wounded into the pit, and tried to climb out. The partisans Kariauskas finished him off with his revolver. Yakov heard about this incident from peasants to whom Kariauskas himself had boasted.

Jews from the nearby villages of Lial and Vaiguva, and Jewish families from the Jewish compounds, were shot together with the Jews from Kelm. They were shot not far from the Kelm compound. One pit is located directly in the gravel pits, and the second not far from the gravel pits. The second pit was dug by peasants from surrounding villages.

### **Those Who Died After the Mass Slaughter**

A small number of Jews escaped from the Jewish compounds before the second mass slaughter and hid with friendly peasants in the countryside. But few of those who escaped in this fashion survived. Quite a few were betrayed by the peasants or captured by the Lithuanian police and partisans. Yakov was able to relate the following cases:

1. A girl named Leye Kelts was brought to the Telshiai ghetto, together with her mother and other Jewish women from Laukuva. When the women in the Telshiai ghetto were being slaughtered, Leye escaped and returned to Laukuva. There she went to a peasant whom she knew, who took her to a second peasant. But the second peasant did not want to keep Leye. At the time of Christmas in 1941 she went to the good peasant Mikolas Jashinskas, who took Leye in and immediately reported this to Yakov and his comrades, who were wandering through the area. It was dangerous for Leye to stay with the peasant Jashinskas for a long time, because police were in the region searching for Yakov and his comrades.

Leye found a place to stay with a peasant whom she knew named Butkus, where she stayed for seven months. There she had time to heal her damaged feet and gather her strength. Leye's cousin Rivele Mendelovitch, who had converted in order to increase her chances of survival, lay hidden no more than half a kilometer from Leye. Rivele had some of the remaining possessions of Leye's parents, which were kept at the home of another peasant, also named Butkus. Leye went to her cousin to ask for some of the things belonging to her parents. Rivke proposed to Leye that she convert, too. Leye refused to do this. As a result, Rivke refused to give her anything. Leye went to the home of a second peasant to see Rivke's sister Frida Mendelovitch, in the village of Zakhelishok, not far from the Jewish village of Padubisis.

In the village of Zakhelishok there were nuns. They gave the two Jewish girls a place to stay, and taught them Christian dogma, preparing them for conversion. The two girls had no other choice. Every Sunday they went to church. One Sunday, on her way from church, Frida became acquainted with a Lithuanian boy, who accompanied her home. The next day the Lithuanian reported her to the Lithuanian police in Raseiniai, who came to the village and arrested Leye, Frida and a third girl from Kelm, Yakhe Gilvitsh. Some time later peasants related that the three girls had been taken away to the Ninth Fort near Kaunas, where they were killed.

One of the nuns later told Yakov that the three girls had been arrested and kept in the prison of Shidluva, in Raseiniai County. The nun and the town priest were in the prison, where they converted the three girls. The priest was completely unable to rescue the three girls from death.

Rivke Mendelovitch survived until the liberation, and settled in her father's compound in the village of Blekharne.

2. A girl from Kelm named Monke Milner escaped from a compound before the Jews were taken to the Kelm compound. In March 1942, Yakov came across her wandering around at night. It was terribly cold. While walking with his comrade Hirshke Kholozhin - both by then armed with automatics - they spotted someone coming toward them in the darkness. They ordered whoever it was to stop and raise her hands. When they came closer, they recognized the Milner girl. The two men took the girl to a peasant whom they knew named Mikolas Niutautas in the village of Shirvidukai, eight kilometers from Kelm. This peasant was a good man, but very poor. Monke was to wait at the home of this peasant for a few days, until the two friends found her a more secure place. But Monke didn't wait, and left instead. She went to a peasant named Kazimeris Rakauskas in the village of Ganiprovas, in Krazhiai Township. A neighbor named Zacharas saw Monke Milner. He reported her to the police in Krazhiai. The girl was thoroughly chilled and exhausted, and fell into a deep sleep. Early the next morning the police surrounded the house and arrested her. She was brought to Raseiniai Prison, and after she was kept there for some time, she was shot. Yakov has no further details about her death.

3. Mine Leybovits escaped Kholozhin's compound before the second mass slaughter, and hid at the home of the peasant Damanskis in the village of Berzhinishkis, eight or nine kilometers from Kelm. Mine had hidden some of her possessions there. He kept her for a week, and then reported her to the police in Kelm, who arrested her at the peasant's home. The police took her out into the peasant's fields, and tortured her to death in various sadistic ways. She was buried in the peasant's field. The peasant Damanskis exhumed the body of the dead girl and reburied it in a different spot, on a different peasant's land.

4. An elderly woman named Basye Broyde, Dvoyre Meyasnik and her daughter Frume, Tsipe Karabelnik and other women all escaped from the compound at Ludinova. They too hid with the same peasant Damanskis, where they had hidden their things. The women stayed in a nearby forest. The peasant would bring them food. He supported them for one week, and then decided to inherit their goods.

On the day Mine Leybovitch was arrested, partisans surrounded the forest and arrested all the women who were in hiding. They were kept in the prison in Kelm for some time and tortured. A priest converted the Jewish women in prison. In exchange for a large sum of money and valuables given to the partisans, the women were released from prison. They survived until the liberation.

5. Emanuel Rozenfeld, his brother Moyshe and their two aunts, Ane Zilberg and Toybe Shapiro, hid with the wealthy Lithuanian peasant Solomon in the compound of Grauzhiai, three kilometers from Kelm.

For exactly two weeks after the second mass slaughter the Jews hid with the peasants into whose care they had given their possessions. The peasant, Solomon, wanted to inherit their goods, and reported the hidden Jews to the Kelm police. They were found hiding in the attic of the peasant's barn and shot next to the peasant's farm. They were buried on the spot. Yakov was told about this incident by the peasant Vladas Urbelis from the village or Pakartsama.

6. A youth named Katz from Krazhiai, who had survived the slaughter of the Jews of Krazhiai, went one night in the summer of 1942 to the home of the peasant Pranas Kasperas, in a village a kilometer and a half from the town of Vaiguva. The youth wanted to get something to eat. Pranas was a partisan, and he shot Katz next to his farm. Yakov was told about this incident by the peasant Petrauskas from a nearby settlement.

7. The owner of the farm near Kelm, Zundl Lunts, was at the Lukodeme compound, owned by Moyshe Gelman, together with his family.

While the Jews were being taken from that compound to the second slaughter, Zundl Lunts escaped from the compound together with Moyshe Gelman, his two sons and a daughter, Sore Gelman. Sore went to the Shavl ghetto, where she died. Moyshe Gelman and his two sons, together with Zundl Lunts, hid for some time after the second slaughter at the home of the smith Meshkauskas in a village near the Gastiniai compound, six kilometers from Kelm.

Partisans found out about the hidden Jews, and found them hiding on Meshkaushas' farm. It seems that the Jewish arrestees were taken to Kelm and shot next to the mass graves at the gravel pits. This incident was described to Yakov by the smith Meshkauskas himself, and also by neighboring peasants. Yakov is sure that the smith Meshkauskas did not betray the Jews, and that it is suspected that neighboring peasants knew about the hidden Jews and reported them to the police in Kelm.

## **Yakov Meets the Jewish Family Kholozhin**

After escaping from the pit, Yakov lay in the nearby forest until Sunday evening, August 24, without eating or drinking. Yakov knew the peasants living nearby, and he was very careful not to encounter them. Yakov went to the peasant Pranas Balsis in the village of Auksaiishkis. Yakov stayed there for two weeks. He found out from the peasant that the police and partisans in Kelm were searching for him intensely.

Yakov got a rifle and ammunition, along with a revolver, from this peasant, and went to another peasant named Vladas Urbelis in the village of Pakartsama. This peasant was an acquaintance of Yakov's, and received him very warmly. Yakov stayed with the peasant for twelve days. Meanwhile the peasant often went to Kelm, and returned with the news that there was an intense search for Yakov. The peasant grew afraid of keeping Yakov any longer,

and found him a place to stay with his fiancée's mother, the peasant woman Kasperiene in the village of Berzhiniskis, eight kilometers from Kelm, Yakov hid for more than two weeks in a granary. A neighbor of Kasperiene spotted Yakov, and he was forced to go to the peasant Kazlauskas at the Navestron compound, nine kilometers from Kelm. Kazlauskas had known Yakov's father well, and received Yakov warmly. At Kazlauskas' home Yakov found things which his parents had left there before they died. Yakov took some of the things. He gave the rest to the peasant as payment for hiding him. Yakov stayed among the straw in the peasant's barn for exactly two weeks. From there he went to a brother-in-law of Kazlauskas named Mikolas Jasinskas. He stayed there for three days, and then returned to Kazlauskas.

Yasinskas told a smith named Stabokas about Yakov. This smith knew that Shmuel Kholozhin was hiding in the area with his father and brothers. Yakov Kholozhin had owned the Ludinave compound for three years, and had gotten along very well with the smith Stabokas.

There was a camp for Jews at Yakov Kholozhin's compound. While the Jews were being taken from the compound to be shot, he managed to escape from the compound together with his wife, three sons and two daughters. Shmuel Kholozhin found out about Yakov Zak from the smith Stabokas. Exactly two months after the Jews were annihilated, Shmuel Kholozhin met Yakov Zak. They were both overjoyed.

That same night the two comrades went to join the Kholozhin brothers and sisters. Then everyone went to join the Kholozhin parents, who were hiding with the peasant woman Kasperiene in the village of Berzhiniskis. It was impossible to stay together. Yakov went away by himself. The Kholozhin brothers and sisters divided into small groups. Yakov returned to the peasant Kazlauskas. A week later, Hirsh Kholozhin came there seeking a place for his sisters. Shime Kholozhin was a good seamstress. Kazlauskas took her onto his compound as a seamstress. She worked in secret.

Yakov and Hirshl went to the peasant Jasinskas and convinced him to provide a place for the Kholozhin parents. Yakov Kholozhin and his wife were there for a few weeks. The peasant was poor. The location was not secure, and the Kholozhin parents went to the village Shirvidukai, to the peasant Ravinskas, where they stayed for exactly four weeks. Meanwhile the good peasant Jasinskas found a place for the Kholozhin parents in the village of Opshkalis at the home of the peasant Povilas Valtsiukas, where they stayed for more than a year.

Valtsiukas was a poor man, with a family of seven. Yakov Zak and the Kholozhin brothers did not have a steady place to stay. They divided into two groups, and frequently met. Yakov wandered with one of the three Kholozhin brothers, usually Hirshl Kholozhin. Here a day, there a night the four boys wandered through the hostile countryside. It was very hard for them during the first winter, 1941-42. But they were all armed. They often stole produce and brought it to the peasant Valtsiukas, who hid the Kholozhin parents.

More than once the youngsters harnessed peasants' horses to wagons which didn't belong to them, and stole entire wagonloads of produce for the peasant Valtsiukas. After completing a "job," they would bring the horse and wagon back to the original spot, so that the peasant wouldn't know about the mode of "transport."

### **The First Act of Revenge**

A peasant whom Yakov knew named Jonas Kareivis lived in the village of Dirvonukai, one half kilometer from the pit where the Jews had been shot, and one and a half kilometers from the town of Kelm. Yakov's father Yisroel and his uncle Velvl Eliashevits had left quite a few of their possessions there. Yakov knew about this. Late in the autumn of 1941 Yankl Zak and Hirsh Kholozhin went to the peasant to get some of the things. On the way they went by the mass grave of the slaughtered Jews. Before entering the peasant's house the two comrades hid their rifles, and with their revolvers in their pockets they went in to see the peasant, who pretended to give them a friendly greeting and fed them. Yakov complained that he was having a hard time from a material standpoint because he had no possessions, and he asked the peasant to give him some things. The peasants gave him only part of the goods.

But Yakov knew that the peasant had his uncle's gold watch, and asked him to hand it over. The peasant resisted. Yakov took out his revolver and threatened to shoot the peasant. The peasant handed over the gold watch.

He asked them to come another time, promising that he would dig up everything and surrender it. Kareivis then complained to the Kelm police that Yakov (Izraelkuk), together with fourteen Jews and Russians, had attacked his farm in the middle of the night and robbed him. The Lithuanian police and partisans began hunting for Yakov and his comrades. Special announcements were hung in Kelm, stating that whoever captured Izraelkuk (Yakov), or provided information about his whereabouts, would receive a bounty of 5,000 marks and eighty ration points.

## **The entire surrounding region trembled in fear of Yakov and his comrades.**

At the end of 1941, Yakov and his friend Hirsh Kholozhin decided to take revenge on the peasant Kareivis. They took along a peasant woman named Bronia Niutautaite, a Lithuanian girl from a distant village whom they knew well. They came late at night in her wagon to a spot a half kilometer from Kareivis' home. The Lithuanian girl stood waiting with her horse and wagon in a nearby forest. The two comrades approached the peasant's farm. When they arrived in the yard, the two noticed a room which was brightly lit. Around the table sat a large number of peasants eating supper. There were a total of fifteen men and women. On the table stood bottles of whiskey. In the yard stood a threshing machine. That day there had been a *talka*, a gathering of peasants who threshed the grain together. Yakov suggested that they come again a second time.

But Hirshke disagreed, and came up with a plan to get the things from the peasant. Yakov stationed himself next to the front door with his revolver in one hand and a hand grenade in the other. Hirshke went to a back door and knocked. One of the peasant's workers appeared at the door. Hirshke pointed his revolver at the man. The worker swore that he knew nothing, assured Hirshke that there weren't any police or partisans in the house, and promised to send out his boss, as Hirshke demanded. The worker went away. A while later Kareivis came out. Hirshke whistled. Yakov ran to Hirshke and announced to the peasant that if he didn't surrender Yakov's father's and uncle's possessions, he would be shot like a dog. The two comrades forced everyone present to gather in a corner, and ordered them not to leave the room, "because more of their friends were outside," and would "shoot anyone who went close to the door." Yakov and Hirshke led the peasant and his worker out of the door. In the granary in the courtyard, the two comrades found the things and took everything they found, even things that didn't belong to them. They took all of the pork and fat, along with a sack of white flour. Hirshke beat the peasant badly for having betrayed the Jews to the police.

The two comrades brought the peasant and his worker back into the house. Before they left, they threatened to shoot and burn the farms of any peasant who dared to leave in less than an hour. They threatened to shoot the entire family and burn the farm of anyone who reported them to the police.

Hirshke brought the peasant girl with her horse and wagon, and they packed everything up. At midnight they arrived at the peasant girl's farm. The peasant Valtsiukas received one of Yakov's father's suits as payment for hiding Hirshke's parents.

Nevertheless, the police in Kelm found out about this incident. A determined search for Yakov and his comrades began. The two comrades were forced temporarily to abandon the region, and they arrived at the home of the peasant Butkus in the village of Gedvainiai, who was well acquainted with Yakov's family. The peasant agreed to hide Hirshke's second sister Libe Kholozhin. The comrades immediately brought both sisters to the peasant Butkus.

The other two Kholozhin brothers wandered separately, a day here, a night there. The young people stayed in contact through the Kholozhin parents and through peasants whom they knew well.

One kilometer from the peasant Valtsiukas, where the Kholozhin parents were staying, was a large compound called Pakeviuk. The owner of the compound Macijewsky, a Pole, openly sheltered a Jewish girl from Telshiai named Khane Pelts (at present Yakov's wife). Khane spoke Lithuanian and Russian fluently, and was a nanny for the landlord's children. A Soviet prisoner told Yakov Zak and Hirshke about Khane. The two comrades met Khane, and another young girl was added to the group of survivors. This was on Saturday, March 13, 1942.

## **The Tragic Death of Hirsh Kholozhin and His Parents**

On Monday, March 15, 1942, the three Kholozhin brothers met, conversed and separated again. Yitskhok and Shmuel went to their sisters, while Yakov and Hirshke went to the Kholozhin parents.

On the morning of Tuesday, March 16, 1942, the peasant Valtsiukas rode to Kelm with a load of requisitioned hay and straw. The peasant returned in the evening. Yakov went out to feed the cattle, and saw two civilians with rifles going into the peasant's house. Hirshke immediately came to Yakov in the stall and told him that the two civilians had looked at him suspiciously. The two civilians asked the peasant woman about Hirshke. The peasant woman assured them that he was a friend of hers. The two civilians asked why Valtsiukas hadn't brought in the requisitioned goods. They took him and asked him to show them his cattle. But they didn't take the peasant to the stall; instead they took him to Kelm. Valtsiukas was arrested. Peasant neighbors coming from Kelm corroborated the information that Valtsiukas had been arrested. Yakov proposed that they immediately abandon the spot, which was entirely insecure. Hirshke and his parents refused, saying that Yakov was panicking, and adding that they had no place to go in any case. They comforted themselves by saying that the peasant would be interrogated about his

failure to bring the requisitioned goods on time, and then he would be released.

All night long, Yakov pleaded with them to leave the place temporarily, and trying to show them that the peasant's failure to return was a very bad sign, Yakov and Hirshke loaded grain onto the wagon and got the peasant's wife ready to take it to Kelm in the morning to make up for the requisition they still owed.

At 1:00 a.m. Hirshke went to sleep. But Yakov couldn't sleep. He was deeply worried about the arrest of the peasant and about the possible danger to the Kholozhin parents.

At 5:00 a.m. Yakov once again proposed to his comrade and Hirshke's parents that they temporarily go away, until the situation became clearer. They refused, declaring that they didn't have anywhere to go. With regret and fear for their lives, Yakov took his leave of them, and made up a meeting place with Hirshke. The peasant's wife rode away to town with the grain. Hirshke, feeling very tired, went up onto the large, warm oven and fell into a deep sleep.

At 8:30 a.m., Wednesday, March 17, 1942, an automobile bringing Lithuanian policemen and Germans from Raseiniai drove into the village and surrounded the entire area. Two of them went into Valtsiukas' house and asked the children where their parents were. They noticed Hirshke sleeping on the oven. Hirshke woke up and saw two revolvers pointed at him. The policemen took Hirshke out of the house with his hands raised, and led him away from the house. Apparently Hirshke understood that he was being taken to be shot. Lightning fast, he took out his revolver.

A rain of automatic fire riddled his body. His intestines fell out of his belly. The unknown Jewish hero did not lose his presence of mind during the last moments of his life. He opened fire and wounded one of the Lithuanians. The policemen ran away from him. Hirshke emptied his revolver, shooting the last bullet into his own head. The Lithuanian bandits were angry as tigers on account of Hirshke's unexpected resistance. They entered the house, and with the help of their loaded revolvers and beatings, they managed to get the children to tell them where the Kholozhin parents were hiding. The latter were arrested. They were both taken to the Raseiniai prison, where they died.

While this horrifying tragedy was being played out at the home of the peasant Valtsiukas, Yakov Zak was at the home of a second peasant, a kilometer and a half away. Yakov heard shooting, and understood the tragedy that had befallen his friend and his friend's parents. That same night, Yakov met the two brothers and sisters of the murdered Hirshke and his parents. The sorrow Yakov and the children suffered was terrible. Yakov had lost his loyal comrade Hirshke, who had been a great support in the difficult struggle for life.

The peasant Povilas Valtsiukas escaped from the police and hid for nineteen months in the forests, until the arrival, of the Red Army. All of his possessions were confiscated. The peasant was one of the few whose goodness cannot be described in words.

Everyone in the surrounding area spoke about the incident with great fear. Peasants who were hiding Jews were afraid to continue keeping them. The partisans' and policemen's hunt for hidden Jews was intensified. The mourning Jews separated. Yitskhok Kholozhin and his sisters remained with the peasant Petrauskas. Yakov Zak and Shmuel Kholozhin went to the village of Jungyre in Uzhvent Township.

### **Yakov and the Kholozhin Brothers Fight for their Lives**

Yakov Zak and his comrade Shmuel Kholozhin were well armed. With decisive, determined steps they marched throughout the region, mocking with every tread the laws and plans aimed at the surviving Jews who were still in hiding. With their rifles pressed close to their bodies, the two comrades marched into an unknown future. Enemies lurked nearby on every side, in the peasant homes and the villages, in all the shrubs and forests. Every bush, every bit of earth was foreign to them. Hardened by the various privations and threats to their lives, they wandered through the villages determined to live until the liberation.

Yakov Zak was dressed in a leather jacket and high boots. His comrade Shmuel Kholozhin wore peasant clothes and a coat. They had a bitter struggle against the cold and snow in winter, and against the rain, heat and wind in summer.

Shmuel became Yakov's comrade who suffered along with him and accompanied him in his struggle for life. In the village of Jungyre peasants found out about the two comrades, and were afraid of them. The two comrades went to the priest Macijewsky in the village of Kolainiai. The priest's brother was a well-known landowner in the village of Pakeviuk in Vaiguva Township. At the priest Macijewsky's home they found the elderly Mrs Basye Broyde in hiding. For several days the two comrades rested at the priest's home, and then they went to the home of their peasant

friend Petrauskas. They picked up Yitskhok, Shmuel's brother, and returned to the area of Krazhiai. The two Kholozhin sisters stayed with Petrauskas.

There Yakov took his leave of the Kholozhin brothers with a heavy heart. If they all stayed together, it was harder for them to find resting places with peasants, and the danger of being caught was also greater. For about three months Yakov spent a day here, a day there in Vaiguva township. Nevertheless, he met with the Kholozhin brothers several times during that period.

### **With the Red Partisans**

In the year 1943 peasants in the villages received permission to use Red Army prisoners as workers. Quite a few of them later escaped from the peasants into the forests. Many prisoners escaped from the camps, and wandered through the villages and forests. Yakov met them and became friendly with them.

In the spring of 1944 Yakov found out that Red partisans had begun operating in the region of Kelm. These groups were made up of Red Army prisoners who had escaped from POW camps. With the assistance of Red Army prisoners who worked for peasants, Yakov managed to make contact with the Red partisans. Yakov was sent to work with a Russian group.

At the same time a Jewish group began to be organized. The leader of the group was an older lieutenant in the Red Army, who had escaped from internment. His name was Victor.

A new period began in the hidden Jews' difficult struggle for life. They were full of hope that they would live to see the liberation and to take revenge against those who had murdered the Jews.

Five Jewish women were hidden by the Polish landowner Lenberg, in the village of Budkishka. The five women were Mrs. Gutman and her sister, the two Kholozhin sisters and Yakov's sister. Shmuel Kholozhin was always close to the compound, guarding the five women from possible dangers. The Polish landowner was a very good man, and greatly assisted both the women and the Red partisans. At the landowner's home the Red partisans prepared the explosive materials for various diversionary actions.

Yakov's knowledge of the peasants in the area and his competence in the geography of the area, were both of great use to the Red partisans, who became fond of Yakov. Yakov took part in more than one conflict with the Lithuanian partisans and Germans, angrily aiming his bullets at the heads of the murderers of the Kelm Jews. Yakov was trusted by the Red partisans and a constant collaborator with their reconnaissance group. Yakov acquired from the peasants whom he knew, all the information which the Red partisans needed. Living in the forests with the Red partisans gave Yakov a chance to rest and calm his nerves, which were frayed from all his suspenseful experiences.

At the end of the spring of 1944 the Red Army rapidly began advancing toward Lithuania. The peasants began flattering and smiling at Yakov and the Jews in hiding. They wanted to acquire a place in the Red "world to come."

During those hopeful days Yakov remembered his acquaintance from Telshiai, Khane Pelts. Once, in the middle of the day, Yakov rode to visit her in the village of Muzhkalnis, in Krazhiai Township, at the home of the peasant Stradumsky, a Pole.

While riding back Yakov heard the news that the Red Army had already taken Krazhiai. Peasants in the villages escaped from the front. Quite a few Jew-murderers ran in confusion like poisoned mice.

At the home of the peasant Ulinsky, a Pole in the village of Gorainai, Yakov met a Jew whom he knew who was in hiding. The man's name was Froman. He had escaped from the Shavl ghetto with his wife, child and mother-in-law. Yakov and Froman decided to travel to Krazhiai with the peasant's horse and wagon. When they approached Krazhiai, they saw heavily armed German military detachments instead of the Red Army. They quickly turned around and stayed for two days in the village of Pakaviuk, at the home of the peasant Girkantis, who lived at the edge of the forest. All night shooting could be heard. Canon shells exploded in the forest. The next morning there were Red Army soldiers in the area. Yakov was overwhelmed with joy. He looked at every Red Army soldier with great love, wanting to kiss and thank them for the long-awaited liberation. With joy and pride they told the Red Army soldiers that they were among the few Jews who had survived Lithuanian and German Fascism. But their joy was contained within the frame of their sorrow for their murdered friends and relatives. The Red Army soldiers were very friendly to the two Jews. They all went away except for one, a young Jew. The young Red Army soldier conversed with the two liberated Jews in a Lithuanian Yiddish. He rebuked the two liberated Jews for having volunteered the information that they were Jews. "It would be healthier for you if you pretended to be Lithuanians!"

the Jewish Red Army soldier insisted.

Like a storm in the middle of a bright, sunny day, like a sudden eclipse of the sun - such was the effect of the young man's speech.

The two liberated Jews looked at each other in great sorrow, understanding the significance of the young Red Army soldier's speech. A dark black cloud suddenly blocked the bright sky of freedom and joy which had just appeared before the two liberated Jews. The two Jews who had lived through so many trials well understood what the Jewish soldier had said to them: "Does that mean that even the liberators hate Jews?" - they wondered.

A short time later Yakov was arrested on suspicion of being a German spy. Two captains interrogated him. Nevertheless they behaved toward him in a very friendly way, and even expressed their regret at his bitter struggle for life. Yakov had managed to acquire some vodka, and he got along very well with the officers. Their celebration drew on until late at night.

Suddenly a counter offensive by German tanks began. The Red Army quickly abandoned the area, which was saturated with the fires rising from burning villages. Desperate battles continued all day long. Yakov was at the front lines. It seemed to him that his hopes of remaining alive until the liberation would die together with him in the fire of battle. Fortunately Red Army soldiers appeared again the next day, this time for good.

## Revenge

After Kelm was liberated by the Red Army Yakov and his comrades returned to their home town, which had been completely burned. The surviving youth of Kelm were the organizers of the Red Militia in town. Their chance to take sweet revenge on the Jew murderers had come.

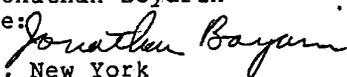
Later the three comrades settled in Shavl. Shmuel Kholozhin became the warden of the Shavl prison. His brother Yitskhok began working in the *Verpstas* factory. Yakov was named chief of the militia in the town of Vaiguva, where he organized the entire militia. In that position Yakov was able to breathe more freely. He had full authority to take revenge on the Lithuanians who had participated in the slaughter of Jews. More than one Lithuanian degenerate paid with his dog's life for the innocent Jewish blood which had been shed.

Yakov and a Russian caught the infamous Jew murderer Stasys Gedrimas at the home of a peasant, playing with a child. Yakov beat him and took him to the headquarters of the militia. The murderer had taken part in the shooting of Jews in Zhagare, Uzhvent and Shavl. But the murderer would not confess. While taking the Lithuanian degenerate from Vaiguva to Shavl, Yakov shot him in the back with his revolver. When the Soviet security bureau found out about this, Yakov was arrested and kept in prison for several days.

After that incident Yakov began working in a division of the Soviet security police, the Border NKVD Yitskhok Kholozhin also began working there. The two comrades helped clear out both Lithuanian Jew- murderers around the village of Shukian, and also Lithuanians who hadn't reported for service in the Red Army. After that the two went to work for the Soviet security organs in Kelm. Yitskhok's brother Shmuel also came to work with them. The three "old friends," who had an intimate knowledge of the entire area, helped the Soviet security organs to clear the entire area of all the Lithuanian bandits and Jew-murderers. The three Jewish men took revenge as far as they could for the death of thousands of Jews in the area. The three youths became the terror of the entire area, and peasants-sought opportunities to get rid of them. Informants in the countryside warned the three youths about this. The three comrades left the area after they had taken partial revenge on the Jew-murderers.

Those who survived from the town of Kelm were Yakov Zak; the brothers Shmuel and Yitskhok Kholozhin and their sisters Shime and Libe; Mrs Basye Broide; Mrs Khave Roz; Frumka Meyashnik; Malke Karabelnik and her mother Tsipe (refugees from Taurage); Rivke Mendelovits and her brother Leyzer; Itke and Bashke Karabelnik (the two sisters remained converted in the monastery of Kruk, in Kedainiai County); and Khonon Levin. In addition to these, there were a small number of survivors who had escaped to the Soviet Union at the beginning of the war.

Translated from Yiddish manuscript  
by Dr. Jonathan Boyarin

Signature: 

New York, New York  
August 7, 1988

## Attestation of Yakov Zak

I, Yakov Zak, carefully related to Engineer Leyb Koniuchowsky in Lodz during the summer of 1946, all the information about the slaughter of the Jews of Kelm, Vaiguta and Lyola, as well as the slaughter of the Jews from the Jewish compounds around Kelm.

I attest to all the facts, dates, and names of persons and geographic locations which are contained in the testimony corrected at the camp at Moncheberg-Kassel, and I certify thereto with my own signature on each page.

Yakov Zak (Signature)

The corrected testimony was recorded by  
Engineer Leyb Koniuchowsky (Signature)  
Kassel, Moncheberg camp.  
November 7-9, 1948

The signature of the  
Moncheberg Camp resident  
Jakob Zak is attested to  
by the Chairman of the camp  
M. Korn (Signature)  
Mancheberg-Kassel, November 10, 1948

Translated from Yiddish manuscript  
by Dr. Jonathan Boyarin  
Signature: *Jonathan Boyarin*  
New York, New York  
August 7, 1988



JAKOV ZAK  
(Kelm)

## THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS OF KELM

The testimony of Khaye Roziene, born in Kelm June 10, 1885. She lived in Kelm her entire life. She had an elementary school education. She was a seamstress by trade. Her father's name was Moyshe Hil, and her mother's name was Hana Vaigovsky.

### Geographic Situation

Kelm is in Raseiniai County, 42 kilometers from Shavl, 14 kilometers from the small town of Vaiguva and nine kilometers from the convent compound of Lyal. At the edge of the town flows the small stream Krazhante. Gravel roads connect Kelm with Vaiguva, Krazhiai and other towns.

### The Population and Their Occupations

Until the outbreak of the war on June 22, 1941, some 2,500 Jews lived in Kelm, along with a smaller number of Lithuanians. The Jews were occupied in trade and artisanry. There were a number of Jewish farmers around Kelm with substantial holdings. The economic situation of the Jews of Kelm was not bad. A certain proportion of the Jewish population drew their livelihood from the local world-famous yeshivas and the advanced rabbinical school. Quite a few received support from relatives overseas.

The Jews in town had large gardens and plots of ground. A substantial number of Jewish families had their own horses, cattle and poultry. Khaye Roziene, who lived at the edge of town, possessed eighty hectares of land, a few dozen cows, horses and poultry.

The attitude of the Lithuanians toward their Jewish neighbors had never been good. More than once Jews were beaten on market days. The medieval blood libel, which charged Jews with killing Christian children and using their blood for matzoh, was well-entrenched in Kelm. Lithuanian students frequently beat elderly Jews as they left the synagogue or the study house.

A poisonous and successful propaganda campaign was carried out by the local anti-Semitic society *Verklas*, which agitated among the Lithuanians, calling on them only to buy from "their own." After the Memel (Klaipeda) region was occupied by the Nazis, they began spreading poisonous anti-Semitic propaganda in the Kelm region as well.

After the arrival of the Red Army in Lithuania in the summer of 1940 the relations between the Lithuanians and the Jews superficially became more correct. But in secret, the Lithuanians enmity toward the Jews became even greater. The largest Jewish enterprises were nationalized, and the largest Jewish compounds became state farms. With great material difficulty, the yeshiva and rabbinical school managed to continue their existence.

### The Outbreak of War

On the morning of Sunday, June 22, 1941, the Jews of Kelm found out about the war between the Soviet Union and Hitler Germany. Refugees from Taurage appeared early in the morning. This caused a panic among the Jews of Kelm. Many Jews from Kelm left their homes that same Sunday, and even more the next day, Monday. On wagons, on bicycles and on foot, refugees from Kelm streamed through all the roads. A small number remained in town. A few families managed to evacuate to the Soviet Union.

The Jews who escaped settled in surrounding Jewish compounds and at the homes of Lithuanian peasants. The German army advanced. The town happened to be at the front line. All the Jewish homes at the center of town were completely burned and destroyed. Only four houses remained, all at the edge of town:

1. The farm of Khaye Roziene
2. The farm of Yisroel Podles
3. The house of Moyshe Benyash
4. The barn of Zundl Lunts

Immediately after the outbreak of the war, armed Lithuanian partisans appeared in the countryside and on the roads. They shot at the retreating Red Army and prevented the Jews of Kelm from escaping. They greeted the German army in the villages and on the roads with German and Lithuanian national flags. Their joy was great.

The peasants began driving the Jews from the countryside back into town, which had been occupied by the Germans on Wednesday, June 25, 1941.

Desperate, full of fear, the Jews began returning to their burned and ruined homes. There was no place to move back into. The town was nothing but a heap of smoking ash. The returning Jews spent the night in Yisroel Podles' farm. The local partisans would detain the returning Jews, rob them and take everything. They did not release any of the men between the ages of fourteen and sixty, but instead herded them into a barn in the compound of Zundl Lunts.

A heavy guard of armed Lithuanians was posted around the barn. The women and children were permitted to go away and settle in surrounding Jewish compounds.

### **The First Victims**

During the battle for the town, the synagogue and the study house began burning. A girl named Mashe Milner rescued a Torah scroll from the burning building and ran together with her uncle Bere Milner. Both of them were shot. Mashe fell with the Torah scroll in her arms.

### **The Civilian Administration in Kelm**

This was constituted at the end of the first week of the war

1. A Lithuanian named Tsesnys became the mayor of Kelm
2. The township chief was a Lithuanian from town named Lopata
3. The chief of the town partisans was the Lithuanian Barkauskas

A role with tragic consequences for the Jews was played by the Lithuanian Rickus.

After the civilian administration was established, the Lithuanians immediately busied themselves with the Jews of Kelm and the surrounding compounds. When they entered the barn camp at the compound of the Jew Zundl Lunts, the Jews had to put on yellow patches.

The women, children and a small number of Jews settled in nearby Jewish compounds:

1. The compound of Avrom Mayerovitsh, in the village of Veidzh, ten kilometers from Kelm;
2. the compound of Berman, in the village of Katlowcizne, seven Kilometers from Kelm;
3. the compound of Kushelevsky, in the village of Paduole, three or four kilometers from Kelm;
4. the compound of Moyshe-Leyb Mendelovitsh, in the village of Biecharne, two kilometers from Kelm;
5. the compound of Moyshe Gelman, in the village of Lukodeme, four kilometers from Kelm.
6. the compound of Shimen Osher, in the village of Kurshun, three kilometers from Kelm;
7. the compound of Yankl Kholozhin, in the village of Lucinawa, seven or eight kilometers from Kelm.

The owners of these compounds were permitted to remain and do their work together with their families. The Jews in the compounds moved into the barns, stalls and storehouses. Everyone tried to work as well as he could. They all worked at various agricultural tasks. The Jews in the compounds did their best to prepare provisions for the winter. There were no guards. The Jews in the compounds lived freely. But they were strictly forbidden to go beyond the limits of the respective compounds' territories.

A woman from Kelm was in one compound with her two small children. She went from one compound to another. The partisans captured her and shot her on the spot. The two children remained alone in the Paduole compound until the first slaughter of Jews.

### **The First Slaughter of Jews**

The men at Zundl Katz' barn and the women and children in the Jewish compounds had no idea of the dreadful plans that were being readied for them. The Jews still hoped that in time the banditry of the Lithuanians would calm down, and they would be able to live and work until after the war. Khaye Roziene and her two grown daughters Hinde and Hene, lived in the Lukodeme compound. The father Mende Roz and his son Khonon were in the barn camp belonging to Zundl Lunts. Khaye Roziene often received permission to visit her husband and son. Khaye's second son Hirshl escaped to Shavl during the first week of the war and was later in the Shavl ghetto. Khaye still hoped some day to be together with her husband and children again. But their dreadful fate determined otherwise.

On Tuesday, the fifth of Av (July 29, 1941), the first slaughter took place. At the Lukodeme compound, where Khaye Roziene lived with her daughters, partisans came on Monday, July 28, 1941 and ordered everyone to prepare to transfer to the Kelm compound. The partisans promised that all the Jews in the compounds would be led to the Kelm compound and a camp would be set up for them.

Every woman and child was frisked separately by the partisans. Their valuables and better overclothes were taken.

At four in the afternoon that same Monday, July 28, 1941, the partisans made the Jews in the Lukodeme compound walk to the Kelm compound. First went the women and children, then a small number of men. Everyone was brought to the Kelm compound owned by the Lithuanian Gruzhesky and driven into a large barn. All the Jews from the surrounding Jewish compounds had been herded into that same barn, the owners of the compounds and their families were still permitted to stay where they were for the time being, to guard and work their farms.

The Jews who were herded together didn't understand what was going to happen to them. Nevertheless many wept and complained that they were being transformed into a plaything in the hands of the murderous Lithuanians.

That same Monday, the fourth day of the month of Av, partisans began selecting two groups from among the Jews in the barn. Some of them were sent to the right, and some were sent to the left. Khaye Roziene was separated from her daughters. One daughter ran over to Khaye and insisted that she see to it that her father and brothers in the barn camp were fed. With tears and weeping, Khaye said goodbye to her two daughters.

The partisans took some of the women and children back to the Jewish compounds on wagons. Khaye Roziene and a group of women and children were taken back to the Lukodeme compound in wagons. Some 1,200 men, women and children remained for the night in the Kelm compound. On Tuesday, while everyone in the Lukodeme compound was working in the field, they overheard shooting next to the Kelm compound. Khaye Roziene realized that they were shooting the Jews who remained in the Kelm compound.

That same evening, a Jew from Kelm named Hershl Shevelovitsh came running to the compound with the terrible news that in the course of the day, the Lithuanian partisans had shot all the Jews who had been taken to the barn at the Kelm compound, along with almost all the men in the Kelm men's camp, at Zundl Lunts' barn. Thirty-six men were left alive in the barn. Hirshl Shevelovitsh was able to move freely, because he helped the Germans buy cattle in the countryside.

On that tragic fifth day of Av, Khaye Roziene lost forever her two daughters who had stayed to spend the night at the Kelm compound, as well as her husband Mendl and her son Khonon who were in the camp compound. The Jews were led out in groups to the gravel pits not far from the compound. Before they shot the Jews, the partisans forced them to strip to their underwear, and then they shot everyone.

Among the Lithuanian partisans who took the Jews from the Lukodeme compound, Khaye remembers the following:

1. Kafeman, a student at the Kelm Lithuanian gymnasium;
2. Feliksas Jakubaitis, a Lithuanian from Kelm;
3. Juosas Jakubauskas, a Lithuanian from Kelm;
4. Marcinkus, a Lithuanian from Kelm;
5. Peniksas, a Lithuanian from Kelm;
6. J Kugelis, a Lithuanian from Kelm;
7. Adomas Jurgutis, a Lithuniana from Kelm.

After the Jews were taken to the Kelm compound, they were heavily guarded by the following partisans:

1. Pipinas, a locksmith from Kelm;
2. Berezhnys, a carpenter from Kelm;
3. Shpukas and dozens of others whose last names Khaye no longer remembers.

## **Lyai**

This is a convent compound not far from Kelm. Five Jewish farming families lived there. After the arrival of the Germans, the men were brought into the men's camp, in Zundl Lunts' barn. The women and children were taken into the village of Blecharne, in the compound belonging to the Jew Khace Rol. They died together with the Jews of Kelm in the course of the first and second slaughters of Jews.

## **Vaiguva**

This is a small town between Shavl and Kelm. Some ten Jewish families lived there. They were engaged in agriculture. The Jews stayed where they were until the fourth day of the Jewish month of Av. The partisans brought some of the Jews into the Kelm compound and shot them. A smaller number were left where they were and shot later.

## **Padubisis**

Twelve Jewish farming families lived in this village. The Jews in this village were shot in the village of Ribuk. Details are lacking.

## **The Second Slaughter of Jews**

After the bloody Fifth of Av, the Jews fell into a situation of desperation, apathy and hopelessness. Those who survived in the Jewish compounds went into mourning, performing the various Jewish rituals and weeping over their near and dear ones, who had been cruelly and irrevocably torn away from them.

Tragic days and nights followed each other in a monotone, without any spark of life. Like robots, the Jews continued working in the compounds, kept an eye on their children and helped out in the fields. A short time later there began to be talk of taking all the Jews to one spot and creating a work camp for them.

On the twenty-eighth day of Av, Friday, August 22, 1941, partisans arrived at the Lukodeme compound and packed all the Jews - the remaining men, all the women and the children - into wagons and took them to the Kelm compound. At the same time all the Jews from the Jewish compound were brought to the Kelm compound on wagons. (The "Kelm compound" was the name the Jews at that time gave to the compound belonging to the landowner Gruzhevsky.) The thirty-six men from Lunts' barn were also brought to the Kelm compound in the evening. All evening and well into the night, all the Jews who had been brought to the Kelm compound were shot in the gravel pits not far from the Kelm compound. This time the owners of the surrounding Jewish compounds and their families were murdered as well. The Lithuanians inherited the compounds, along with their livestock and other inventory.

Khaye does not have sufficient knowledge of more precise details about the atrocities committed by the Lithuanians against the Jews during the execution. Peasants in the villages related that the murderers threw children into the pit while they were still alive. A large number of the unfortunate victims were buried while still only wounded. The peasants also related that one girl had been just lightly wounded. While the mass grave was being covered over, she raised her head from the sand several times. The murderers buried her half alive. The murderers themselves told the peasants about this, boasting about their gruesome acts.

After the second slaughter of Jews, Kelm, which was famous throughout the Jewish world for its yeshivas and its rabbinical scholars, where the religious Jewish spirit was forged day and night, was left Judenrein.

The mystic religious melodies of the yeshiva students, their rabbis and leaders were eternally silenced. The town was ruined down to the foundations; the Jewish community of Kelm was ruined forever. Peasants also related that while the yeshiva students were being taken to be shot, they did not weep. Like stone statues, they moved slowly, with their eyes raised to the sky, murmuring prayers.

## **How Did This Witness Survive?**

Even before the second slaughter of Jews, there was talk in the compound about the possibility that all the Jews in the Jewish compounds would be taken to the Kelm compound. In the afternoon of Friday, August 22, 1941, the elderly Mrs Khaye Roziene was filled with unease. She packed a small suitcase with the bare necessities, and prepared to leave the compound, and go wherever her feet carried her. Her acquaintances noticed this and asked her where she was heading. Khaye didn't want to start a panic and assured them that she was coming right back.

Unnoticed, she left the compound and entered a nearby peasant house, which stood by the road. She planned to wait there until evening, and then go on further. Before Khaye even managed to rest a bit, armed partisans drove into the compound on a truck. A short time later all the women, their children and the few remaining men were taken on wagons in the direction of Kelm.

At the same time, Khaye saw the Jews from the other Jewish compounds being taken in on wagons. Khaye waited until evening in great impatience and fear. In the evening shots could be heard from the gravel pits. It became clear to Khaye that all of the Jews taken from the compounds had been shot.

That evening Khaye felt like a ship without a rudder. She was entirely alone in a strange and cruel world. It was hard for her to decide what to do and where to go. Khaye began to struggle for her life, as if riding on angry, stormy waves in the ocean. Khaye faced a hard and bitter struggle for her own sad and lonely life. Khaye knew that throughout the surrounding region all the peasants she knew were no longer her friends, and that she had to be careful of everyone in order to stay alive.

A few Jews survived the second slaughter. The partisans knew about them, and in order to be sure that there would be no living witnesses to their bestial deeds, they began an intense hunt for the surviving Jews. Quite a few surviving Jews were caught and shot by the partisans at that time. It was hard for Khaye, at her age, to move from one area to another and thus avoid the roundups. Khaye was saved from death more than once by the fact that her appearance was not obviously Jewish.

From peasant to peasant, from one acquaintance to another, Khaye wandered about, seeking a place to rest her tired feet. Not one of the peasants whom she knew best would hide her and save her from death, because they themselves were afraid.

Khaye decided to go to Shavl, where she hoped to find her one son who hadn't been shot. Khaye knew that there were Jews living in a ghetto in Shavl. Peasants had told her.

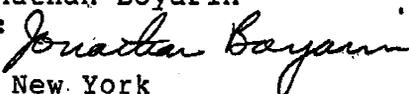
### **In the Shavl Ghetto**

After surviving various threats to her life in the countryside and along the roads, after suffering hunger, thirst and more than a few sleepless nights, Khaye approached Shavl. Five days after Rosh Hashanah 1941, Khaye was brought into the Shavl ghetto by a Jew. It is hard to describe the moment when Khaye met her son Hirshl, who was the only remaining member of her family. At that meeting, Hirshl was the weak one. He could not calm himself for hours, and constantly suppressed a weeping that came from deep inside, so overcome was he at finding his mother alive.

Khaye commenced a hard life in the Shavl ghetto. She had to survive several life-threatening situations during various actions and deportations. The first reason was that she was a "stranger" and the Jewish police didn't know her. The second was that Khaye's innocent age was a great disadvantage at that time. She lived and struggled only for the sake of her Hirshl.

When the Jews in the Shavl ghetto were relocated, Khaye and her son were interned in a camp called Daugel. Khaye suffered through that camp until the liquidation of the Shavl ghetto, when all the Jews from all the camps were brought to the Shavl ghetto, and from there evacuated to Germany. Khaye once again decided not to wait, but rather to escape from the camp immediately. Her son left the camp and went into the forest with a group of young people to join the Red partisans. He gave his elderly mother the address of a peasant in the countryside. The peasant was a good friend of Hirshl's. In the beginning of July 1944, Khaye ran away from the camp by herself. She disguised herself as a Lithuanian peasant woman, and covered about sixty kilometers on foot. Khaye Roziene hid for exactly a month's time at the home of the good peasant Juosas Bartkevitsius, and then she was liberated by the Red Army. A short time later she found out that her son Hirshl was alive. She met him, and Khaye and her son experienced great joy. But Khaye did not have a long time to celebrate with her only surviving son. He was mobilized into the Red Army. Hirshl fought heroically in the ranks of the Red Army for eight months. He exerted himself with all his youthful energy taking revenge on the German murderers. Not far from Berlin, a short time before the end of the bloody war, Hirshl was wounded in battle and died. The elderly Khaye remained alone in Europe. She has two daughters in Israel.

Translated from Yiddish manuscript  
by Dr. Jonathan Boyarin

Signature: 

New York, New York  
August 9, 1988

## Attestation Khaye Roziene

I, Khaye Roziene, personally survived and precisely retold everything contained in this report about the slaughter of the Jews of Kelm. I myself provided all of the dates, facts, and names of persons and geographical locations, and I attest thereto with my signature on each page.

Khaye Roziene (Signature)

The testimony was recorded by  
Engineer Leyb Koniuchowsky (Signature)  
Feldafing near Munich  
July 22, 1948

The signature of the resident of the  
Feldafing camp Chaje Ros is attested to  
by the Chairman of the camp committee

E. Reif (Signature)  
Chairman of the camp committee

Feldafing, July 22, 1948

Translated by  
Dr. Jonathan Boyarin  
Signature:

*Jonathan Boyarin*  
New York, New York  
August 9, 1988



KHAYE ROZ  
(Kelmé)

I, Leyb Koniuchowsky, was in Kelm in 1945, during the summer. I met Mrs. Basye Broide. She had lost her husband, two sons and one daughter. They all died in Kelm. Also, her sister Sheytl Paglinsky died there with two boys. She survived, and lives alone in Kelm. She is the only Jewish woman who lives in Kelm. There are no Jewish men. . . She runs to the mass grave every day, and converses with all the dead Jews of the town. . . and with her dead family. On the grave, pigs and cattle graze. . . She has approached the N.K.V.D., the Soviet secret police, begging them to fence the grave in. . . but no one understands. . .

Leyb Koniuchowsky (Signature)

1946

Translated by  
Dr. Jonathan Boyarin  
Signature:

*Jonathan Boyarin*  
New York, New York  
August 9, 1988

## THE SLAUGHTER OF JEWS IN THE LITHUANIAN TOWN JURBARKAS

The eyewitness testimony of Khane Goldman (nee Magidovits), born in Jurbarkas May 5, 1920. Her father's name was Sholem Magidovitch. Until the war she lived in Jurbarkas. At the outbreak of the war, on June 22, 1941 she was in Jurbarkas.

Jurbarkas is in Raseiniai County. At that time it was located ten kilometers from the German border. It was ten kilometers from Jurbarkas to Smalininken. The distance to Kaunas was about a hundred kilometers. The town lies on the right bank of the river Nieman. On the left bank there is the village of Shiaudyne. Until the outbreak of the war the town contained some 5,000 residents, among them about 2,000 Jews.

The majority of the Jewish population was occupied in trade and artisanry. Some of the Jews owned large boats.

Jurbarkas contained a Hebrew elementary school, a Yiddish elementary school (in which Yiddish was the language of instruction), a national bank, and a private bank owned by a Jew named Bernshteyn (see the eyewitness testimony of Mering-Bernshteyn about Jurbarkas - L.K.), a study house, a synagogue which had been built a century earlier, many smaller synagogues, a Jewish library and other cultural institutions.

A number of Jewish youth studied at the local Lithuanian gymnasium. The majority of the Jewish youth belonged to Zionist movements. A smaller number belonged to the Communist Party, which had been illegal until the Red Army entered Lithuania in the spring of 1940. Until the outbreak of the war, on June 22, 1941, relations between the Jews and the surrounding Lithuanian population were superficially correct.

### **Outbreak of the War; The Civilian Administration; Torment and Oppression of Jews; The "Living Funeral"**

On Sunday, June 22, 1941, at six in the morning, German troops were already marching through the streets of Jurbarkas. The residents didn't even have time to evacuate the town. Khane Goldman, her father and three sisters escaped the town together with the German troops who were engaged in fighting, and hid in a cellar belonging to the Jewish farmer Grinberg, in back of the Jewish cemetery. German troops surrounded Grinberg's cellar, drove the Jews out and separated the men from the women. After searching to see whether there were any Russians there, they sent the Jews back into town. For a few days in a row German troops marched through the town, robbing the Jews as much as their hearts desired. But they didn't stay long in the town, and they marched quickly on, chasing after the retreating Red Army. On Sunday morning a number of young people, former members of the Communist Party, managed to escape town and evacuate into the Soviet Union. Among them was the brother of this witness, Hirshl Magidovits.

As soon as the Germans appeared in town, the local Lithuanians began to act against every class and sector among the Jewish population. Lithuanians appeared in the street wearing green armbands, and gave themselves the title "partisans." The commandant of the town was a German military representative. During the very first days of the war the Lithuanian partisans established a civilian administration in town. They set up the town police, headed by the Lithuanian student Mykas.

His assistant was a man who had been a policeman during President Smetona's rule, by the name of Kilikevicius. The Lithuanian gun club, Shiauliai, who had been active in various underground activities during the Soviet period, immediately reorganized. The head of the gun club was the local Lithuanian Shukaiitis, the former director of the "Pienine" dairy during Smetona's rule. The mayor was a German who had lived in town until the war. The German had been the director of a municipal kitchen during the Soviet period, and he was a devoted Soviet loyalist. His last name was Gefner.

Hundreds of Lithuanians from town and from the surrounding towns and villages volunteered for the partisans and police. Khane remembers the following Lithuanians: two brothers, both gymnasium students, named Vakseliai, the owner of a kiosk, the Lithuanian merchant Tselkis; Budvinskis, who had been a policeman under Smetona, and others.

One week after the war broke out, Lithuanian partisans selected Jewish men and forced them to go the synagogue and study house. They forced the Jewish men to carry out of the synagogue the plank on which corpses are taken to be buried. Then they forced a young man from Jurbarkas, the wigmaker Yitskhok Kopelevitch, to lie down on the plank with a Torah scroll in his arms. Several men bore the plank, on which Yitskhok Kopelevitch lay with the Torah scroll. The rest of the Jewish men followed, guarded by armed Lithuanians. After marching down the main street, the "funeral" was led to the banks of the Nieman. All the participants in this "living funeral" were forced to enter the water.

The partisans forced the Jews to throw the "living corpse" and the Torah scroll deep into the river and drown them. Yitskhok Kopelevitsh swam out of the river. The murderers then forced the Jewish men to "drown" each other. The men had to pretend to "drown" each other - forcing each other's heads under water. Khane's younger brother Velfke, aged thirteen, was present at this execution. He had to "drown" a certain tall, healthy Jew named Tetke Levnzon. Levnzon "escaped" from little Velfke and made his way to the shore. In the evening, when Velfke returned to his home in town, he wept bitterly and told his father and sister about everything.

### **Mockery and Insults Against the Jewish Religion; Bonfires Fueled with Torah Scrolls and Jewish Holy Items**

On that same day the bandits forced all the Jewish men to bring their prayer shawls and holy books from home to the synagogue yard. Groups of bandits went through all the Jewish houses, tore down the mezuzahs with their bayonets, and forced the Jews to carry their prayer shawls and books to the designated spot. More than one Jew was beaten that day.

The Jews were forced to bring all of the Torah scrolls and other holy books out of the synagogue into the yard. The Jews had to unroll the Torah scrolls, and the murderers danced and jumped up and down on them. It was late in the evening, and the murderers let the Jewish men return home. Their moral depression at such religious mockery and insult threw all of the Jews in town, even the non-observant, into despair. The religious Jews shut themselves up in their houses that night, and each one of them wept and bore his complaints to God.

At six a.m. on the day after the "living funeral," the Lithuanian armed murderers took all the Jewish men from town to continue tearing down the walls of the synagogue. Jewish coachmen were forced to transport the lumber from the demolished walls and deliver it to the poorer Lithuanian workers and peasants. The Torah scrolls, holy books and prayer shawls remained heaped together in the synagogue yard.

On the third day after the "living funeral," a Sabbath (the second Sabbath after the outbreak of the war), the murderers forced the Jewish men to take the Torah scrolls, books and prayers shawls to a pasture on the banks of the Nieman, known as the "Zharde." The Jews had to pile everything up into a heap and burn it. There were Lithuanians from town at this "performance." They applauded and enjoyed themselves. At the same time, other Jews were forced to work diligently, tearing down the walls of the synagogue and study house.

While they were tearing down the slaughterhouse next to the synagogue, feathers from the slaughtered poultry were blown around by the wind. That Sabbath evening the partisans took all the women out of the houses and forced them to clean up the feathers, rubble and dirt in the streets. While this work was being done, the Lithuanian degenerates bullied the Jewish women.

The partisans forced Mrs Berzaner to get into a wheel barrow, and a twelve-year-old girl named Shimkhke Portnoy was forced to wheel her to the river (several hundred meters). The Lithuanian bandits murderously beat Mrs Berzaner. The woman spotted a German officer and ran up to him. She threw herself to her knees and begged him to shoot her. The officer declared that he couldn't do that, because authority over the Jews had been placed in the hands of the Lithuanians.

After work that Sabbath, all of the Jewish women were lined up and taken to the Nieman to bathe. The murderers forced the Jewish women to bathe in their clothes. At the same time civilian residents of the town, Lithuanian men and women, gathered together and stood at the bank of the river, armed with buckets of stones, sticks and brooms. They threw stones at the Jewish women in the river, forcing them to submerge themselves in the water with their clothes on.

Germans stood by taking pictures. Khane Goldman was among the women in the river. After this "bath" the murderers let the women go home.

After work each day, the men were forced to "bathe" in the river- with their clothes on. Being permitted to "bathe" was a sort of payment, recompense to the Jewish men for the day of hard labor. The Jews were afraid of nothing so much as being forced to "bathe" in the river.

Over the course of four or five days the synagogue and study house were torn down, and the rubble cleared just as if nothing had ever stood there. The only remnant of the study house was the brick walls.

At 6:00 a.m. each morning every able-bodied man and woman had to come to the compound of the Jew Mote Levyash. The men were sent to do various tasks. Some of the women already knew exactly what their job would be each day. The rest of the women were taken to Mr. Levyash's house. There the women stayed all day under the

supervision of the Jew Fridman, who was responsible for seeing to it that the women didn't leave the house. Whenever there was any sort of work to be done, as many women as were needed were taken away. The rest were locked up in the house until the evening, when all of the able-bodied women and men were allowed to go home.

During Smetona's times, Fridman had been the owner of a guest house called "Versal." He was also a former member of the Shiaulys gun club. It was said that before the war he had served in Smetona's secret police. And clearly, he was well-acquainted with all of the high officials when the Germans arrived in town. The Jews received neither food nor pay in exchange for their labor.

### **The Shooting of 550 Jewish Men**

On the third Thursday after the beginning of the war (July 10 or 11, 1941), the Jewish men came to work as they did every day. They all arrived punctually at the home of the Jew Mote Levyash. After roll call, the men went away to their work sites. Suddenly the Jewish men heard an announcement stating that they could all go home, because there would be no work that day. All of the men went home. Some of the women had gone to work. Some of them remained confined in Mr. Levyash's home as they were every day. At noon, groups of armed Lithuanians appeared in the streets. They went from house to house, driving the Jewish men out into the street and lining them up in rows. Before they left the houses, the bandits announced that all of the men were to go to work, and anyone who possessed a spade or a shovel should bring it along. The men were taken away from town under heavy guard. Several Germans were present as the men were being taken from the houses.

It was impossible to find out that day where the men had been taken. In the evening the women returned from work and from Levyash's house, but they did not find the men. Khane and her two sisters, Zelde and Zise, returned home in the evening, and their father Sholem and brother Velvl were missing. The women did not know exactly where the men had been taken. The weeping of the women could be heard far from their homes, but they did not lose hope. The women did not want to let themselves think that their husbands and fathers had been shot, although they already suspected that was what had happened.

The next day the able-bodied women once again went to work. That day rumors circulated, saying that the men had been taken away to work.

The Lithuanians in town began asserting to the women that their men had been shot at the Jewish cemetery. But the Jewish women did not believe this. Several Lithuanians brought evidence from the cemetery - photographs and the like. One of the Lithuanians brought a photograph of Mrs Vilonsky, which had been in the pocket of her son-in-law Kusl Levin, who had been taken away with the men.

Mrs Dobe Lam went to the Jewish cemetery. Her husband and son-in-law were also among the men taken from town. Mrs Lam related that she had found no evidence whatsoever at the cemetery. People said that the grave had been carefully disguised with grass by the murderers.

Various contradictory rumors began to circulate. Several of the Lithuanians asserted that the men had been taken to work on the Aleksot Bridge in Kaunas. And others still insisted that the men had been shot. The unfortunate mothers and wives hoped that the men were still alive. They couldn't even think about such sadistic murders.

The Lithuanian murderers themselves later began to boast that the Jewish men had been taken to the Jewish cemetery. There they had been forced to dig a pit. Then they were forced to strike each other on the head with shovels until they died. They forced fathers to kill their sons with shovels, and vice versa. But at that time, it was still unknown exactly what had happened at the pits.

That "bloody Thursday" the Lithuanian murderers, along with a few Germans, took a total of over five hundred men out of their homes. In Jurbarkas at the time the total was understood to be exactly 550 Jewish men. Among the Jewish men who were taken away were the popular Jewish doctors from Jurbarkas: Dr. Karlinsky, Dr. Gershovitch (an optometrist from Ponevezh), and Dr. Raykhman. Also, there were the Jewish pharmacist Beregovsky, the town dentist Shimonov and the dentist Kopelov, the lawyer Segal, the town cantor, the slaughterer Artshik Salamovitz, the rabbinical judge, Mr. Levyash (a merchant), the father of this witness and her brother Velvl, the textile merchant Hirsh Purve and his brother-in-law Mendl Furman along with Mendl's sixteen-year-old son Moyshe, Ruven Nayvidl (an iron merchant), Khayim Rudansky and his father-in-law Levenberg (owner of a steam ship), and Karbelnik (owner of boats).

Rumors circulated at the time that the 550 men had been seen dressed in the clothes of Red Army prisoners, doing various jobs around Raseiniai. The morning after the 550 men were taken away, men who had been hiding

reported for work. Later, just like every other morning, the rest of the men and women had to report to roll call at the compound of the murdered Mr Levyash.

### **The Torture of "Rehearsal" and Processions**

One Saturday after work had been completed, the Lithuanian bandits did not let the Jewish men and women go home. Instead they took them all to Mr. Levyash's courtyard. There it was announced to the Jews that the next morning, 8:00 a.m. Sunday, all the men and women who were not working had to appear for roll call.

Immediately after the "action" against the men, Khane's mother Fayge-Mirl and Khane's sister Yehudis, together with Yehudis' husband Hirshl Zelik and her two boys Gershon-Yudele (aged two and a half) and Tsoidekl (aged one and a half) arrived in Jurbarkas from Kaunas. Khane and her mother decided not to report for roll call, which seemed very suspicious to them. No one could imagine why precisely the men and women who were unable to work were needed on a Sunday morning.

Fridman suggested to the policeman Budvinsky that instead of the elderly women, those younger women who would voluntarily appear for roll call should be taken. The policeman agreed.

On Sunday morning, all the young women appeared, along with all the men of every age. In the courtyard, the Lithuanian policemen lined up the men and the women separately. In rows of four, they took the Jews to the bank of the river Nieman (Zharde). While they went through the streets of the town, the murderers forced the Jews to sing. The men began to weep and say the prayer for the dead. The women could not sing along, and the police beat them and forced them to sing a song called "Around the Fire." When they arrived at the meadow, the bandits arranged a "rehearsal." The women had to dance with the men in a circle. The women convinced the Lithuanians to let them dance separately, and to let the men dance separately. The women danced in a circle, and the men danced around them in a second circle. After this successful "rehearsal" the Jews were lined up and herded onto the deep sand at the edge of the Nieman. From there the Jews were driven to Mr Levyash's compound and told that precisely at noon there would be a roll call, at which everyone had to be present. Everyone was allowed to go home.

During the "rehearsal," the Lithuanian bandits told the Jews that they were getting them ready for a parade at noon. Precisely at noon the younger women and all of the men were present for roll call at the courtyard of the camp compound belonging to Mr Levyash. The men and women were lined up in rows of four.

Four men Alter Shtern, Notl Mendelovitch, Velve Portnoy and one other were given a slab made out of boards. First the four men bearing the slab, and then all the men and women were led to the kiosk of the Lithuanian merchant Tselkis, where they were forced to carry out pictures of the Soviet leaders; Stalin, Lenin, Molotov and others. These were distributed among the Jewish women. From the kiosk, the four men bearing the slab carried out a bust of Stalin. All the women and men in line had to hold the pictures out in front of themselves, and march forward behind the slab carrying the bust of Stalin. While the "procession" marched through town, it was surrounded by peasants from the countryside as well as townspeople, who were just getting out of church at that time. In honor of Sunday, the Lithuanian murderers had prepared this show for the churchgoers. The "procession" was driven out onto the meadow. The slab, with four feet attached to it, was set down, and every man or woman had to place the picture he or she had been carrying under the slab. The women were forced to get into a circle around Stalin's bust, and the men in a second circle around the women.

The four men were forced to set fire to the pictures under the slab. When the fire began to grow, the bandits commanded the women and men to begin to dance, and forced them to sing Soviet songs. When the fire settled down, they forced the Jews to throw stones at the bust of Stalin. Then the Jews were forced to kneel and kiss the Lithuanian ground, and swear loyalty to Lithuania and the Lithuanians. After they kneeled down, the Jews once again had to dance and sing.

The Lithuanians who had just gotten out of church stood nearby, dressed in their best clothes. A fire of joy and satisfaction flickered on their faces. There were also several Germans present; they photographed everything and even shook their shoulders. After the "performance" the Jews were once again lined up and taken back through town singing to the Levyashes' compound. Then the Jews were released. They all went away "satisfied," since no one had been beaten and they were all going home alive to their dear ones, to their old mothers whose places the young women had taken. Khane Goldman and her two sisters, Zelde and Zise, were also present the entire time, during the "rehearsal" and then during the "performance."

### Three Hundred Women Deceived and Shot

Around five or six weeks before Rosh Hashanah 1941, on a Tuesday, the Lithuanian police announced to the Women in the work camp (at Levyash's compound), as well as those at work, that when they went home for lunch they should tell all the women who had neither husbands nor small children, that they should report precisely at six in the evening. According to the order all the women whose husbands had been among the 550 men taken away also had to report. Other women as well, widows without small children, had to report.

At six in the evening, about a hundred women had already reported for roll call to the work camp at Mr Levyash's compound. The Lithuanian policeman from town Mikas Levickis gave a speech to the women. He declared that the women shouldn't sell their household possessions, nor should they trade them, "Because you will still have to live." He assured the women that their men would come back. Meanwhile the women would be paid for their husband's work; they would be given food and drink, and so forth. The women didn't know how to thank the murderer for his promises. After roll call he announced the women could return home, but they had to report for roll call at six p.m. the next day.

The next day, Wednesday evening, two hundred women reported for roll call. This time as well the murderers promised the women everything, and advised them not to sell everything they had in their houses: "Because you will still have to live," the murderers assured them. The mood of the Jewish population improved, and everyone believed that no further evil would befall the Jews. Some people began to believe wholeheartedly that the 550 men who had been taken away were living and working somewhere.

On the third day, Thursday, in the middle of the day, the partisans drove peasant wagons up to all the Jewish houses, and according to a list, they took out all of the elderly, weak, sick or blind women. The murderers promised to take all of the sick people to a hospital. On Thursday evening about three hundred women, including the sick and the elderly, appeared for roll call at the work camp. After roll call, the women were not permitted to go home. The men and women who were working finished their day's work and went home, where they found the women missing.

The next day, Friday morning, when the able-bodied men and women got ready for work, they were not permitted to leave their houses. Policemen and armed Lithuanian civilians marched through the streets, making sure that the Jews did not leave their houses to go to work. The murderers declared ironically: "There's shooting, the Russians are coming back, they're not far from the city!" The Jews didn't understand why they weren't permitted to go to work.

At 8:00 the murderers announced that everyone could leave their houses, and that they had to go to work. When everyone arrived at the work camp, the women were already gone. In the courtyard and in the house shoes, clothing, earrings torn off along with bits of ear, and the bloodied canes of the sick, were all scattered around. In the midst of everything, people found hidden money. On the second floor, in a drainpipe, the women found hidden gold and money. One girl, Yokhke Kusilevitsh, found her mother's handkerchief in an outhouse.

Everyone understood then that the roughly three hundred women had been deceived and taken out to their deaths at night. Lithuanians reported, and others corroborated the report, that all the women had been taken by night to the forest of Kalneniu, five kilometers from town in the direction of Smalininken, where everyone had been shot on Friday morning.

With tears in their eyes, the women begged the policeman Budvinskis to tell them honestly where the women had been taken. The murderer calmly and smilingly insisted that all the women had been dressed in the uniforms of Red Army prisoners, and taken to do agricultural work in the countryside. The murderer forced the women to clean up the yard and rooms, removing the dreadful evidence, the things left behind by the women who had been taken away. On Friday evening after work, the Jews found out more exactly that the women had indeed been shot in the forest. In the middle of the night other Jews heard the women being taken past their homes. The women wept and moaned bitterly. The sick and elderly had been taken in wagons belonging to the Jew Grinberg (taken to Russia with his family before the war).

But from time to time there were rumors that the women who had been taken away were doing agricultural work somewhere, and living quite well. For instance, there was a rumor that Mrs Pulovin (aged seventy) had personally sent a letter, explaining exactly how she was doing and where she was working. But no one saw the letter.

After the 300 women were taken away, the able-bodied men and women still had to go to work, just as if nothing had happened.

## **Old and Sick Men Shot Executions During the Slaughter of Women and Children**

A few weeks after the action against the women, before Rosh Hashanah 1941, police and armed partisans began going through the Jewish houses, driving out all the elderly and sick Jewish men, placing them into wagons and taking them to the work camp. One Jew named Hirshl Koblovsky had to help place his neighbor Moyshe Kaplan (over 65 years old) onto a wagon, and take him to the camp at Motl Levyash's compound. When he returned Hirshl told everyone that Moyshe Kaplan had died on the wagon on the way. Hirshl was not permitted into the camp. The next day, when women got ready for work at the camp, they did not see the old and elderly men any longer. Nor were there any traces of the men.

It was said at the time that the elderly and sick Jewish men had been taken away to Raseiniai in wagons. It was impossible to obtain any more details about their slaughter at the time.

On September 6, 1941, at 10:00 on a Saturday morning, the women at the work camp found out that groups of police and partisans were going through the Jewish houses, ordering all the women with small children who had no husbands to bring along small packs and come to the building of the Talmud Torah, the community religious school. The police explained that a ghetto was being set up at the Talmud Torah for the women and children. The women no longer trusted the promises of the Lithuanian murderers, and only a small number of the women and their children went to the Talmud Torah. The rest began to go into hiding. Their fear and panic was great. Until Monday, September 8, the Lithuanian murderers continued taking all the women and children whose names were on a certain list out of their houses, and taking them to the Talmud Torah. The murderers lost patience, and began to arrest women whose children were at work. Thus, for example, they brought to the Talmud Torah Mrs Polak, whose three daughters were at the work camp at the time. Her daughter Miriam and her two sisters ran weeping to the head of the armed partisans, Shukaitis. The bandit asked the girls for a bribe of 25,000 rubles. Miriam wept and explained that she only had 15,000 rubles, the murderers refused to free their mothers.

Then Miriam ran to the German commandant of the town, and told him about the deal Shukaitis wanted to make, and how much of a bribe he was asking for in exchange for their mother. The German commander assured the girls: "Everyone's going to do the same job. You won't be able to help your mother, and your mother won't be able to help you." The three girls wept as they returned to the work camp.

After lunch on Monday, Khane came home with her married sister and her two daughters. Khane's mother lay hiding in the attic. The policeman Kilikevicius and his friend Mockus came into the house. They ordered Khane's mother to go to the Talmud Torah immediately. Khane announced proudly that her mother was out, and that she would volunteer to go in her mother's place. The policemen ordered Khane to get dressed. Khane refused to get dressed; she explained that they could just as easily shoot her without a coat on. Khane began to take her leave of her sister Yehudis, who was holding a small child in her arms. The murderers struck Yehudis in her face with their fists. Yehudis pressed her child to her heart, and burst into tears. The policemen consulted among themselves, and left Khane in the house. Yehudis still had her husband Hirshl Zelik, and therefore was not taken.

About four o'clock on the afternoon of Monday, September 8, Fridman summoned Khane to the work camp. He promised Khane that nothing would happen to her. At six in the evening, a partisan announced roll call. The partisan Valetskas carried out the roll call the same as always. At that moment a taxi drove into the camp. The county chief of Raseiniai got out of the taxi, along with the partisan chief, Shukaitis. There was an order: "Women without husbands on one side, they will be taken to work!" The women began weeping and kissing each other as they said goodbye. Khane took her leave of her sister Zelde (Zelde's husband Hillel Zarkin was still alive). The order had come down in retaliation for the three Polak sisters reporting the attempted bribe to the German commandant.

The women in the camp were lined up in rows of four, and taken to the Talmud Torah building under heavy guard. There they were stopped, while the women and children in the Talmud Torah were taken out. The women were not allowed to bring along their packs. The women were taken in direction of Smalininken in rows of four. On the way, at the first bridge, civilians armed with sticks, poles, whips and the like appeared from under the bridge. The civilian volunteers helped make sure that the Jewish women did not escape. Among the civilian volunteers Khane recognized a number of people from town.

Among the armed Lithuanians there were partisans from the small nearby town of Skirsnemune, six kilometers from Jurbarkas. They had brought some of the Jewish women from Skirsnemune that Monday.

One of the partisans from Skirsnemune knew Khane well from before the war. He advised her to escape, because he told her that this time the women were being taken to do very hard work. Khane didn't want to separate from all the women, and did not run. When they had gone seven kilometers along the highway, they turned onto the Taurage Road. When they had continued for less than a half kilometers, the women were led into a nearby forest.

At the edge of the forest a pit had been dug, to which all the women and children were taken. The partisans ordered the Jews to climb up onto the heaps of excavated dirt and to stand near the pit. These orders were immediately accompanied by blows from whips, poles, pickets and rifle butts. The civilian volunteers helped out with this. All the women began weeping and kissing their small children.

The children shrieked and clung to their mothers. The Lithuanian degenerates constantly beat the women. Then the women were ordered to throw their children into the pit and strip naked. The women kissed their small children and threw them into the pit. Mrs Perl Beder (nee Shtern in Jurbarkas), received a whipping over her head for refusing to throw her child into the pit. She angrily bashed her small child's head against a tree. Khane saw this precisely, because Khane was standing next to Perl.

The children had already been thrown into the pit alive. The children shouted and wept. The mothers and girls were ordered to strip. The women began to strip.

At that moment Khane's Lithuanian acquaintance came again and told her to run away. Somehow the murderer took pity on Khane. "Run away, you'll still have time to die!" he said to her. Khane began to run. She was shot at, but she was not hit. Outside it was dark and rainy. While running, Khane arrived at the border, and she saw a red light.

She ran back. A taxi stood on the highway, and not far from the taxi shooting could be heard. Khane ran back into the forest and sat down on a stump. The weeping and shouts of women and children could be clearly heard, followed by another round of automatic fire, and finally single shots. Khane heard a Lithuanian shout; "There are some more here!"

The weeping and shouting of women was heard again, followed by automatic fire and then single shots.

The murderers could be heard shouting: "How many watches do you have? How many do you have?" and so forth. The murderers got what they wanted.

Khane asserts that there were only two Germans in Jurbarkas' at that time: the commandant, and his sergeant.

While the Jews were being taken out of their houses to the work camp on Saturday, and while the women were being led from the Talmud Torah to the pit, Khane did not see a single German. Khane does not know who gave the order for the shooting.

All night the murderers worked around the murdered women and children. They took off the women's rings, sorted and distributed the valuables among themselves. They had plenty of liquor, and they got quite drunk after their work was over. When day broke, Khane left the forest and began wandering. She went to the home of a peasant and begged him for a drink of water, and a kerchief, so that she could disguise herself when she went to town. The peasant drove her out of his house. Khane left. She noticed the peasant following after her on a bicycle. Behind him ran two partisans with automatics. They caught up with Khane, and ordered her to stand still with her hands up. The murderers consulted about where to shoot her. At that moment there arrived a third partisan, who recognized Khane. He convinced them to leave Khane in his hands, telling them that he would take her away and shoot her in the forest. The first two went away. The peasant whom Khane knew assured her that everyone had been dressed in Russian uniforms and taken to work. "The shooting was only to frighten the women," he reassured Khane. "You're lucky," he calmed Khane, and told her to run through the forest to town. Khane was afraid. The Lithuanian got a peasant-style kerchief from a peasant, disguised her and took her to town "under arrest." When they arrived at the bridge, he released Khane. Of course, the partisan didn't do this for free. Khane promised to give him a gold watch in exchange for saving her life. When they said goodbye at the bridge, he promised to come to Khane's house at twelve noon. Precisely at noon he appeared at Khane's, and he received her father's gold watch from her.

At that time Khane's mother was at the camp, asking Fridman about Khane.

The three Polak sisters died during the slaughter of the women. Their mother escaped from the Talmud Torah along with a small sister and survived. However, their mother also died during the last action.

Khane told everyone about all of her experiences. But even then there were still Jews who did not believe that such slaughter was possible. Many people doubted. Khane no longer went to work. She could not rest after what she had seen. Every second of the day, she relived once again the entire horror of the execution she had witnessed. Khane knew quite well where the men and women had all been taken, and what their "tasks" had been.

Khane lay in bed, her legs sick and bloodied from wandering through the forests and fields, and did not go

anywhere. Jews used to come and ask her whether everything that was related in her name was true. Khane told them everything, but not everyone believed it.

### **The Last Jews Taken Away to the Slaughter**

On Thursday, September 11, 1941, Lithuanian police went through all of the Jewish houses announcing that every remaining Jew; men, women and children, had to report to the work camp that evening (at the compound of the Jew Levyash). But the Jews understood exactly what the murderers intended, and many of them hid. Anyone whom the murderers found in their houses was taken directly to the work camp. At night the Jews were confined in Mr Levyash's house, and a guard was posted.

On Friday, September 12, the police in town and the armed partisans began intensively herding the Jews into the work camp. Khane's entire family was in the compound. Khane warned all the Jews that the last of the Jews were being taken to the slaughter. But the Jews' capacities were atrophied; they did not react to anything. They were all indifferent to everything.

The policeman Valetskus arrived in the compound and immediately spotted Khane. The murderer had seen Khane at the pit on Monday, September 8. "You know quite well where we're taking everybody. Come, I'll hide you!" the murderer proposed to Khane. At first, Khane refused to leave without her mother. Fayge-Mirl ordered Khane to save her life no matter what the cost, even if she had to convert. Her sisters also pleaded with her to go with the murderer and save her life. Her sisters asked her to take revenge for their deaths and the deaths of their children. Khane said goodbye to them and went away. Valetskus hid Khane on the second floor of Levyash's house in a closet where the possessions of the women who had been shot were kept.

While lying in the closet, Khane heard the murderers driving Jewish men and women into the house, beating them with whips and forcing them to surrender their money, gold, silver and other valuables. The murderers beat everyone thoroughly, and after they had gotten all of their valuables, they searched them once again. At four in the afternoon a wagon rode into the courtyard. The few remaining children were placed in the wagon. Through a window in the closet, Khane saw the children sitting in the wagon. Their legs and arms stuck out through the slats. Behind the wagon the men and women were lined up, and everyone was led away in the direction of Smalininken, to the same forest in which the women had been shot on Monday.

On Friday, September 12, 1941, everyone was shot. The clothes of the murdered Jews were brought to Mr Levyash's house. On Friday evening Khane prepared to escape. Valetskus left the door of the closet open, and he himself went off to get drunk. On Friday night the murderers all got drunk, and they had a party that lasted all night.

Khane was thoroughly exhausted after the last few horrible days, and she fell asleep on the clothes of the murdered women. The next morning Khane woke up late, when Valetskus came to see whether Khane had escaped. He ordered her to sweep the living room. At that moment, however, someone arrived, and Khane hid again.

All day long on Saturday Khane watched peasants from the villages and townspeople whom she knew coming and asking to be given some of the things. Several of the peasants and Lithuanians from town received Jewish goods, and went back home contented.

Khane found her mother's kerchief, which had been left behind when the Jews were taken out of the camp, and took it into the closet. On Sunday morning Khane tried to leave. But suddenly she saw a Lithuanian partisan standing in the living room guarding a captured Jewish family, Khayem Katsev, his wife Sheyne, a daughter and a son. The family had been caught hiding in their barn. Khane hurried back into the closet, removed the window and slipped out onto the roof. From the roof Khane jumped down, and then she ran from the courtyard in the direction of Taurage. For two days Khane wandered through the forest. She was able to get food from peasants, but they would not let her spend the night. For exactly six weeks Khane went from peasant to peasant, without finding a place to rest her exhausted feet. Khane found out about the Kaunas ghetto and decided to walk to Kaunas. When she arrived in Kalatove near Kaunas, a peasant assured her that the Jews would soon be evacuated from the Kaunas ghetto. But Khane went to Slobodke and went through the fence of the ghetto at night. This was during the night between October 27 and 28, 1941. There Khane met her sister, Khaye Abramson (whose husband had been taken away).

The next day, October 28, 1941, Khane was at Democracy Square, where the "large action" at the Kaunas ghetto had been carried out. This time, too, Khane survived safely. Khane suffered all the sorrow and pain of the Jews in the Kaunas ghetto. She was "interned" in a prisoner of war camp in the fall of 1943. From that camp she was sent to the Ponevezh camp, where she spent six weeks. Here, too, the work was hard, and the situation in the camp

was no better than in other camps near Kaunas.

When the Germans evacuated the Shavl ghetto, all the Jews from Ponevezh were brought to Shavl. Together with the Jews from the Shavl ghetto, Khane was evacuated to Stutthof, Germany.

Khane also survived the concentration camp Maskin, where she spent eight months. All the Jews from that place were transferred to a camp twenty kilometers from Danzig, called Chinhof. There all the women contracted typhus. Half of the women died. The rest were liberated by the Red Army. Khane was among those who were liberated. This was on March 10, 1945. When she was liberated, Khane had typhus. All of the sick women were taken to the hospital by the Red Army, and there Khane regained her health.

The family Khane lost in Jurbarkas included her father and mother, three sisters, two brothers-in-law, two nephews and a young brother, Velvel. Her sister in the Kaunas ghetto survived, along with a brother who was in the Soviet Union. Fridman did not treat his fellow Jews badly. During the first action against the women, his relatives went voluntarily. Fridman certainly did not know where the women were going to be taken. While wandering through the countryside, Khane found out that during the last action, Fridman too had been murdered in a terrible fashion. The Lithuanian peasants related that Fridman had been shot and wounded, and then immediately hung.

Together with the 550 men from Jurbarkas, the men from Skirsnemune were also shot at the cemetery the same day. The women from Skirsnemune said that their men had been assembled the same day as the men from Jurbarkas. The women from Skirsnemune said this when they were brought from Skirsnemune to Jurbarkas.

The Lithuanian murderers brought some of the women from Skirsnemune to Jurbarkas one day before the women's action, when Khane was driven to the pit together with the women. Khane herself spoke to women from Skirsnemune. Khane does not know how many women from Skirsnemune were shot.

Jewish women, children and men from Skirsnemune were also taken to the last action in Jurbarkas. Khane does not know how many.

Yakov Olcman and his mother also survived the slaughter in Jurbarkas. Yakov. Olcman escaped to the Kaunas ghetto, and from there he joined the Red Partisans (in the Rudnicky Forests). He died as a partisan. Khane Goldman does not know who else survived from Jurbarkas.

*Translated from Yiddish manuscript by Dr Jonathan Boyarin New York August 10, 1988*

### Attestation Khane Goldman (nee Magidovits)

I, Khane Goldman (nee Magidovits), personally experienced and related all of the dates, facts, names of persons and locations, and generally everything that Leyb Koniuchowsky has recorded about the slaughter of the Jews in the Lithuanian towns of Jurbarkas and Skirsnemune. I attest to everything written on precisely 17 pages about the slaughter of Jurbarkas and Skirsnemune Jews with my signature on every page, as well as with my photograph.

Eyewitness Khane Goldman (Signature)

The report was recorded, while lying sick in the Munich hospital, by  
L. Koniuchowsky (Signature)  
Munich, Hospital  
April 27, 1947

The signature of Mrs. Khane Goldman, born May 5, 1920 in Lithuanian (according to identity card BV03729, dated October 15, 1946), is hereby attested to.

Munich, April 30, 1947  
Dr. Pesakhovits (Signature)  
Head doctor

Translated from Yiddish  
by Dr. Jonathan Boyarin  
Signature: *Jonathan Boyarin*  
New York, New York  
August 10, 1988



**KHANE GOLDMAN  
(Jurbarkas)**

## THE SLAUGHTER OF JEWS IN THE SMALL LITHUANIAN TOWN VIDUKLE

The testimony of two eyewitnesses:

1. Hirsh Hirshovits, born November 3, 1928 in Vidukle. His father's name was Khayem-Ber. Until the war he lived in Vidukle. He was a student in the Lithuanian elementary school until the beginning of the war.
2. Peshe Ickovits, born in 1922 in Vidukle. Her father's name was Moyshe. She lived in Vidukle all her life until the war.

The town of Vidukle lies on the highway between Kaunas and Klaipeda (Memel), fifteen kilometers from Raseiniai. Until the war, some 190 Jewish men, women and children lived in town. The Jews of the town were occupied in trade and artisanry. The attitude of the Lithuanian population toward the Jews was good before the war.

### The Outbreak of War Between Germany and the Soviet Union

#### Hirshl relates:

On Tuesday, June 24, 1941, the Germans arrived in Vidukle. A large number of the Jews escaped and hid in the countryside.

The Lithuanians in town immediately changed their position vis-a- vis the local Jews. Many of the local Lithuanians put white armbands on their sleeves, started calling themselves "partisans" and began to oppress the Jews. They all had weapons. The police and the leadership of the town were immediately recruited from their ranks. The German military only marched through town; no Germans remained in town. There were only a few Germans at the railroad station, three kilometers from town.

A few weeks after the war began, Lithuanians and Germans went to all the Jewish houses. They drove the Jews out of their homes and robbed everything they desired. The Lithuanians kept for themselves the best of the things they had stolen. Then they placed the rest of the things in wagons and took them to the police station.

The bakeries in town were owned by Jews. The Jews had to bring the bread they baked to the town co-operative, where only Lithuanians with ration cards were allowed to shop. If there were leftovers, the Jews were allowed to buy them. This situation continued for one month.

#### Peshe relates;

Every day the able-bodied men and women were taken to work at the railroad station, two kilometers from town. Lithuanian police guarded the Jews at work. Among them were the following local Lithuanians: Antanas Rainys, Petras Radavitsius; and Stepas Teretska. The murderers used to beat and torment the Jewish men while they worked. They were forced to dance and sing, and meanwhile they were murderously beaten. Every evening the Jewish men and women returned to town. The Jews were not given any food in exchange for their work. All the Jews without exception were forced to wear a yellow Star of David on their backs.

On Sunday, July 20, 1941, police went to all the Jewish houses registering the names and ages of all the Jews. They announced that early Monday morning all the Jewish men, women and children, including the elderly and sick, had to come to the square next to the municipal building. When everyone arrived for roll call, the elderly men and women, as well as the children, were told to go home. The rest of the men were taken to the train station, and herded into a house which belonged to the Jew Fridman. The same day all the Jews from the nearby town of Namakshtsiai were brought to Fridman's house. The Jewish men were detained at Fridman's house for three days, until Thursday, working at the railroad station. Peshe Ickovits was working at the railroad station then, and she saw how the Jewish men were being tortured:

The men had to run very quickly to and from work. Those who stopped were viciously whipped. Next to Fridman's house there was a dirty swamp. The Lithuanian murderers forced the Jews to strip naked and go into the swamp. Lithuanians from town stood by, enjoying the scene.

Throughout the day, a Wednesday, the Jews dug pits behind the railroad station. Peshe watched the Jewish men calmly digging the pits. They did not know that they were digging their own graves, while they were digging the graves, they were guarded by the same Lithuanians who took them to work. On Thursday morning, the women went to work, just like every other day. Peshe went to work that day as well.

At 10:30 a.m. on Thursday, a car drove up to Fridman's house, and three Germans got out. Peshe saw all the men being driven out of Fridman's house, and policemen forcing them to sit down on the ground. All the men had to take off their boots, shoes and jackets. They were left in their shirts and pants, with bare feet. After that, they were lined up in rows of three and taken past the station. After the men were taken from Fridman's house, all the Jewish

women who worked near the station were taken into the house. A guard was immediately posted next to the house. A short time later, automatic fire was heard coming from the area where the pits had been dug the previous day, Wednesday. All the women in the house understood then that the men who had been taken away had been shot. With tear-filled eyes the women saw through the window that Lithuanian civilians were running to Fridman's courtyard, and quickly snatching up the shoes, boots and jackets of the murdered, men. The murderers watched as their brothers from the countryside "wagged their tails" with joy at inheriting the Jews' clothing.

Peshe remembers only some of the local Lithuanians who took part in the murder of the Jewish men. Among them were Felius Teretska, Stepas Teretska, Norushas, Adamas Radavitsius, Petras Radavitsius, Shidlauskas, Petras Gruzinskas, Bronius Pavilauskas, and Karys.

In town all of the mothers and other women knew that the men had been shot. The women still had to go to work every day.

Before the men were shot, the Lithuanian murderers announced in town that all of the elderly and sickly men were to sleep in the synagogue. The elderly and sick men spent one night in the synagogue.

In the morning they were taken to the railroad station, where they were herded into Fridman's house. The elderly and sick men were shot together with the rest of the men.

After the men were shot, Peshe spent another week in town, and then she went to a peasant friend in the countryside, with whom she stayed until the end of the war.

Before she left town and went to the countryside, people in town began saying that the women and children were to be taken from town. Peshe's mother pleaded with her and her sister Brayne to go to the countryside. Brayne was older, and didn't want to leave their mother alone. Their father Moyshe had been shot together with the rest of the men near the railroad station.

#### **Hirshl relates:**

When all the Jewish men were brought to Fridman's house, the men from the town of Nemakshtsiai, seven kilometers from town and four kilometers from the station, were brought to the Vidukle railroad station. In all, roughly three hundred men were packed into Fridman's house and were kept there for just three days. At work they were tormented in various ways. The Lithuanian murderers forced the Jews to perform various calisthenics, such as ordering them to run and fall down. At night the Jewish men were not allowed to rest. They had to stand next to each other all night. The next day they were again taken to work. They were not given any food, nor were they allowed to bring anything from home. The situation for the men in the house was so bad that they all pleaded for death. Among the men in the house was this witness' father, Khayem-Ber. Their father sent one letter to his wife and children, in which he gave them some idea of the Gehennom at that house.

On Thursday, July 24, 1941 (the 29th of Tammuz), everyone was forced to strip and then shot next to the station. On Thursday, while the men were still being shot, the murderers announced to the women in town that they would bring their men food. When the women arrived at a spot not far from the station, they were not permitted to continue. The women heard shooting, and understood the tragic fate of their fathers and husbands.

#### **Women and Children Shot at the Jewish Cemetery**

Several days after the men were shot it was announced to the women and children that they had to move into three houses in the area of the synagogue. They were permitted to take along whatever they wanted. The women and children lived in the three houses for about a month. The younger women were taken to do various tasks. The women fed themselves. There was no especially heavy guard. Peasants from the countryside brought the women food for sale, and bought various items from the women.

During the first weeks of the war, a group of young people had been taken from the town to Raseiniai. They were accused of Communism. The men died in Raseiniai prison. The women were released, and they came to the three houses near the synagogue yard.

On the evening of Thursday, the 28th of Av (August 21, 1941), a Lithuanian policeman came and announced that the next day, Friday, no one had to go to work, and that no one should go out of the houses. The murderer explained that those without adequate means would be registered, so that there would be a record of those who needed assistance for the winter. The majority of the Jews sat and waited to see what news the morrow would bring.

On Thursday night and Friday morning, the women noticed that Lithuanian murderers were keeping a tight watch around the houses. It was too late to escape. The women and their children were driven out of the three houses and into the synagogue. Armed Lithuanians stood around the houses, preventing anyone from going outside. The panic of the women and children in the synagogue was terrible. Everyone wept and screamed. Everyone was looking for a way to escape. Women opened the ark of the Torah, pleading with the Jewish God for mercy. The Lithuanian bandits only laughed at this.

Osher Ickovits, the tanner, was still living freely in town and working at his trade. That Friday he and his family were also brought into the synagogue. He was the only man among the women and children, who were maddened with terror.

A Lithuanian policeman entered the synagogue, and checked everyone's name off on a list to make sure everyone was present at the synagogue. Meanwhile, he calmly asked who needed assistance for the winter. But the women understood clearly what was happening. Unfortunately it was too late, and there was nothing they could do.

A group of Lithuanians from town walked past the windows of the synagogue to the Jewish cemetery carrying spades, the women understood that graves were being dug for them. A Lithuanian policeman with whom Osher Ickovits was quite friendly came into the synagogue and told him that the situation of the woman and children was quite serious. But the policeman did not try to save Osher. The women saw the peasants returning from the Jewish cemetery with their spades.

Hirsh turned to his mother, pleading with her that they should try to escape, Hirsh's mother Rokhel-Gite refused. Hirsh's sisters Dvoyre-Ite and Tobe-Rivke and his younger brother Moyshe were with them as well. Of course, their mother Rokhel-Gite couldn't leave her other children. It was impossible for them to escape together. Hirsh slipped out through the window. He managed to escape from the synagogue. Hirsh survived countless threats to his life from the Lithuanian murderers who were guarding the synagogue, and eventually he managed to escape town and get into the countryside.

That same Friday, August 22, 1941 (the 29th of Av), all of the women and children were taken away from the synagogue to the Jewish cemetery, where they were all shot.

Dozens of local Lithuanians, and also Lithuanians from nearby villages, took active part in the slaughter of the Jews of Vidukle.

Hirsh remembers the following last names of Lithuanian men who took active part in robbing the Jews in town, and who later actively participated in the slaughter of the men, women and children of the town: Adomas Radavitsius (the warden of the prison under President Smetona), Petras Radavitsius, Feliksas Teretska, Steponas Teretska, Kazlauskas (a son and a father), Grushinskis (a merchant), Anton Kazlauskas, and others whose last names Hirsh does not remember.

Hirsh survived various dangers, until he managed to reach a village three kilometers from town. He went to the home of the peasant Petrartis, a friend of Hirsh's parents. Hirsh stayed with that peasant from Friday until Sunday morning (for two full days). A peasant from town named Domarkas knew where Hirsh was. Domarkas took Hirsh to an uncle in Shavl. Hirsh was in the Shavl ghetto for three years. Then he was at Stutthof, Germany, and finally at Dachau Camp Ten. From Camp Ten, he and other Jews were taken to the Tirol. On the way they were liberated by the American army.

### **Peshe relates;**

Two weeks after she left town, Peshe received a letter from a cousin of hers named Rivke Hirshovitch. Rivke wrote that all the women and children had been shot next to the Jewish cemetery. Rivke had run away from her house several days before the women were shot. Rivke's sister Gite, aged 17, escaped with her. Unfortunately, however, Gite stayed with her mother on the night the women and children were taken to the synagogue.

Immediately after the men were shot, the women and children were taken to three houses next to the synagogue. One night before they were taken to be shot, the women and children were driven into the synagogue. Only one boy, Hirsh Hirshovits, escaped from the synagogue. All the women and children were taken to the Jewish cemetery in automobiles and shot.

After the war Peshe returned to town. She found her cousin Rivke Hirshovitch. The two of them went to the Jewish cemetery where the women had been shot. At the cemetery there is one long pit, in which all the women and children are buried. There is no fence. The peasants walk on the grave. The cemetery is wrecked, the gravestones are scattered. Some of the peasants used gravestones taken from the Jewish cemetery as the foundations of houses.

A peasant woman named Ona Butvinatė, who lived near the cemetery, described the murder of the women and children. She related that the women and children who had been brought to the cemetery were forced to strip stark naked, and then they were herded toward the pit. Most of the children were thrown into the pit alive. The peasant woman lives right next to the cemetery, and clearly heard the screams of the women and small children.

Translated from Yiddish manuscript  
by Dr. Jonathan Boyarin

Signature: *Jonathan Boyarin*  
New York, N.Y.  
August 10, 1988

### Attestation of Peshe Icikovits

I, Peshe Icikovits, personally related everything about the slaughter of the Jews of the Lithuanian town of Vidukle which L. Koniuchowsky has recorded on exactly three pages of a notebook. I precisely provided all of the facts, dates and names of geographic locations, and I attest thereto with my signature on each page.

Peshe Icikovits (Signature)  
The report was recorded by  
Leyb Koniuchowsky (Signature)  
Landsberg a/Lech, Bavaria, January 15, 1947

The signature of Peshe Icikovits is attested to by the director of the Landsberg cultural bureau.

Director of the cultural bureau:  
H. Milshteyn (Signature)  
January 15, 1947

Translated from Yiddish  
by Dr. Jonathan Boyarin

Signature: *Jonathan Boyarin*  
New York, New York  
August 10, 1988

I related to Leyb Koniuchowsky everything that is recorded on four pages stamped with the seal of the Landsberg cultural bureau. I related all of the dates and names of persons and geographical locations, and I attest thereto with my signature on each page.

Hirsh Hirshovits (Signature)

The report was recorded by  
Leyb Koniuchowsky (Signature)  
Landsberg a/Lech, January 11, 1947

The signature of Hirsh Hirshovitsh is attested to by the director of the Landsberg cultural bureau.

H. Milshteyn (Signature)  
January 11, 1947

Translated from Yiddish  
by Dr. Jonathan Boyarin

Signature: *Jonathan Boyarin*  
New York, New York  
August 10, 1988



HIRSH HIRSHOWITZ  
(Vidukle)

## **THE SLAUGHTER OF JEWS IN THE LITHUANIAN TOWN OF KRAZHIAI**

The testimony of Elke Flaks, born April 13, 1923 in the town of Krazhiai. Her father's name was Yosl, and her mother's name was Gutl. In 1939, she left Krazhiai and studied at the Kaunas gymnasium for adults. Elke's mother, three sisters, a brother and all of her close relatives continued living in Krazhiai.

### **The Geographic Setting of the Town; the Economic and Cultural Life of the Jews**

Krazhiai is located sixty kilometers from Shavl, fifty kilometers from Taurage, and eighteen kilometers from Kelm. The town is ten kilometers away from the major highway between Kaunas and Klaipeda (Memel), the Zhemaitis plantations. A small stream called the Krazhanta flows through the town into the Dubise.

Before the war about 1,500 people lived in the town, including eighty Jewish families, about 550 or 600 Jews. The majority of the Jews were retailers, peddlers, and artisans. A small number rented land and were occupied in agriculture. There were a number of bristle makers in town. The majority of the Jews in the town were poor. None of the Jews in town had an adequate livelihood, and nearly all of them got by on the support of relatives overseas.

The town had a Hebrew elementary school; a traditional religious school for young children; a library; two study houses (the old one and the new); and a Jewish national bank. The wooden ark of the Torah in the old study house, which had wonderful wood carvings, drew the interest of artists, who came to see it not only from Lithuania, but from foreign countries as well.

The majority of the Jewish youth belonged to Zionist movements.

The attitude of the Lithuanian population toward the Jews was friendly until 1934. When Hitler's Fascism came to power in Germany, open anti-Semites appeared in town. They were organized in the Lithuanian Verslas organization.

At that time Krazhiai was located fifty kilometers from the German border, and the Jews of the town were unable to evacuate to the Soviet Union when the war broke out, on June 22, 1941.

### **The War Between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union**

The Germans entered the town on Tuesday, June 24, 1941. During the battles the entire town was burned. All the residents of the town escaped to nearby villages, forests and fields. When the battle for the town was over, all the Jews of the town returned. Only one Jewish house had not been burned. This was the home of the Jewish butcher Ben-Tsion Itsikovits, who had managed to escape to the Soviet Union together with his family. All the Jews from the villages and forests assembled in Ben-Tsion's house, courtyard and barn. The Lithuanians in town, large and small, used to come tease and threaten the Jews. "You wanted a Commune - now you've got it!" - they shouted at the Jews.

A few Germans remained in town. All of the power and authority was in the hands of the Lithuanians. The carpenter Kaminskas immediately gave up his trade and became a leader of the bandits. The three brothers Budreikai, who lived a few kilometers from town, also appeared together with several dozen armed bandits, who gave themselves the title of "partisans." During the year of Soviet rule before the war began, they had already been working clandestinely in an illegal Lithuanian Fascist organization. One of the three brothers was a fellow student of Elke Flaks. One of the main leaders of the Lithuanian armed bandits was a former gymnasium student, who had also been a policeman under President Smetona. He was the local Lithuanian Kacivevicius. His father was a fisherman. A teacher from the village of Koshciukas, seven kilometers from Krazhiai, and the Lithuanian textile merchant in Krazhiai became the main authorities in the burned village. These Lithuanian bandits were rapidly joined by the former director of the Krazhiai Lithuanian elementary school, Kasys Matulevicius. He had been arrested and imprisoned in Raseiniai during the Soviet occupation. During the panic and fighting in Raseiniai, he had escaped from prison, and returned to the town of Krazhiai a "hero" and "martyr." The organized Lithuanian bandits in town gave him a grand welcome.

Several days after the arrival of the German army, the bandits began organizing the life of the town. They arrested all of the Lithuanian peasants who had been given land by the Soviets. Among these was a Jewish family named Aron, the father Yitskhok, his wife Hinde, a son named Berl, and two daughters named Rokhel-Malke and Leye. Yitskhok Aron had rented land from large landowners for years. He had worked it himself, and that was how he earned his living. He had been engaged in that work for more than ten years. When the Soviets distributed the large estates among poor peasants, Yitskhok was given land. The Lithuanian bandits released all of the peasants

who were arrested because they were given land. But the Jew Yitskhok and his sixteen-year-old son Berl were hung in the village of Lolai. This was related by the peasants who were later released; they saw it with their own eyes.

### **The Camp at the Shukshtis Compound**

The Jews didn't stay long at the compound of Ben-Tsion Itsikovitsh. Soon they were all taken to the market place. There the Jews were ordered to surrender their watches, rings, money, gold, silver and other valuables. The armed Lithuanians in town promised in return that they would let the Jews live. They threatened that if the Jews refused, they would shoot everybody. They gathered up all of the Jewish gold, silver and valuables in two large heaps, and took everything to the police station. Then the Jews were lined up in a row and taken to a compound belonging to a man named Shukshtis, located across the bridge, at the edge of town. The date was Tuesday, July 8, 1941. The Jews were taken into cattle stalls. It was terribly crowded. There was very little space even to lie down in the dirt to sleep. The Jews from Krazhiai were kept there for several weeks. Meanwhile all the men, women and older children were taken to work, which consisted of clearing away the rubble from the streets. Armed Lithuanian bandits kept watch while this work was being done. They beat and tormented the Jews. The moral suffering of the Jews as they worked was no less than the physical suffering. The Lithuanian bandits mocked the Jews, especially the older ones. They beat and jeered at them. Once the Lithuanian bandits, together with a few Germans, shaved off the beard of the synagogue attendant Shloyme, and forced him to run through town, dancing and singing religious songs. Meanwhile the Lithuanians in town enjoyed themselves immensely. Similar "performances" were held nearly every day.

The living conditions in the barns were terrible. After a hard day **of** heavy labor, the tormented Jews had nowhere to rest. The tumult and weeping of the small children was very loud.

The Jews were fed by a military kitchen which the bandits brought into the compound. The food was very bad, and also insufficient. Peasants whom the Jews knew brought the Jews food for high prices. Lithuanian armed murderers kept guard around the compound. In return for bribes, they permitted Lithuanians whom they knew to trade with the Jews. The Jews took off their shoes and clothes, and exchanged these for food.

In these circumstances a woman named Bashe Leyzerin bore a male child. The murderers would not allow her to have any medical assistance. Nor would they permit the woman to be taken out of the stalls into the town. Bashe's maiden name was Tomor.

The compound was surrounded by the river Krazhanta on three sides. There was a heavy guard. The Jews were not permitted out of the barn without the permission of the Lithuanian bandits, even to take care of their natural functions. Not only were the Jews cut off from all the surrounding towns; they didn't even know exactly what was happening in their own town. It was impossible even to think of escaping.

The Jews didn't know what was in store for them, but everyone complained about the terrible conditions at work and in the stalls. Many of them pleaded for a quick and easy death. But the Jews were not even destined for that.

### **All the Men and Women Shot**

On Tuesday, July 22, 1941, a truck drove up to the compound where the Jews were interned. It was 5:00 a.m. At six o'clock, all the Jews were driven out of the barns and lined up in rows. One of the Lithuanian murderers called off the first and last names of all the men, women and children from a list which had been prepared earlier. He then promised the Jews that everyone was to be taken to the town of Zhagare to work. There the Jews' living conditions would be better.

Elke's mother Gute called happily to Leye Aron: "What difference does it make, as long as we're finished with this place!" Immediately after checking whether everyone was present, the Lithuanian bandits chose the healthiest and strongest men, and placed them in the truck. They gave the Jews spades and shovels and explained that they were being taken to prepare space in Zhagare for the rest of the Jews. The group of men were taken seven kilometers from town in the direction of Kelm, to the Kuprin forest, two kilometers from the Kelm-Raseiniai road. They took the men a few hundred meters away from the road into the forest, and forced them to dig pits. Then the Lithuanian murderers shot the men.

The peasant Bendiktas, who was driving down the road, heard shooting, followed by the terrible screams of men. He came to the town of Krazhiai and immediately told the Jews in the barn about this. Some of the Jews simply refused to believe him. Those who did believe him could do nothing about it.

The truck drove to the barns and then back to the Kuprin forest, where all the men were shot. That same day the Lithuanian bandits began taking the women as well to the Kuprin forest, and all the women were shot. The clothes of the women who had been shot were brought to the county hall, and the cheaper clothes were distributed among the Lithuanian residents of the town, who had suffered in the fire. The murderers distributed the better things amongst themselves. There were no Germans present when the Jews were shot. Everything was carried out by the Lithuanian bandits. Elke Flaks does not know who gave the order. But Lithuanian peasant women whom the Jews knew assured them that the order to slaughter the Jews came from the German authorities in Raseiniai.

The murderers later passed on details about what had happened when the Jews were shot:

1. Ayzik Krom, a Jew from Kruk, around sixty years old, went mad at the pit, and began singing and laughing.
2. Gavriel Bang was a heroic Jew; the murderers shot him twelve times.
3. Mrs Sore Milner had a heart attack at the pit before she was shot.
4. Eta Uriashovits tried to escape from the edge of the pit. She reached the road. The murderers shot her. Peasants who were present saw her lying dead.

## **The Camp for Young Orphans**

The bandits left living in the stalls children up to the age of twelve, along with a few between the ages of twelve and fourteen. There was a terrible panic when the mothers were separated from their children. Many of the mothers fainted. The weeping could be heard far from the barns. Many of the mothers tore the hair out of their heads. The murderers beat everyone, assuring them that the children as well would shortly be brought to the town of Zhagare. Some seventy children remained in the barns. The Lithuanian murderers left the town rabbi, Kremerman, to look after them, along with the well-known town merchant Yisroel Zef, and a few attractive young women from town: Frida Zef, Rivke Zef, Tema Shapiro, Bashe Leyzerin (nee Tomor) and her two-week-old child, Leye Aron, Malke Novik, and Dr Shmit with his wife and small boy.

Elke's former Lithuanian teacher Miss Petreshevitsiute related that the older children were still taken to work cleaning the streets of the town, after their parents were murdered. The teacher had seen many of the children weeping as they remembered their parents. They were dirty and hungry. The teacher comforted them and gave them something to eat.

Mashe Katsikiene, a convert (born in the resort area Titovenai) related that the children who worked at street cleaning used to go to her house. She would comb their hair, wash their clothes and give them soap so they could bathe at the stream.

The unfortunate children evoked sympathy among a small number of the townspeople, who tried to save the children's lives by converting all of them. Three Polish sisters named Krukovska, the priest Bombulis from Krazhiai, and several Polish owners of nearby compounds, went to the Lithuanian murderers to request that all the children be converted and given to peasants in the villages. But the armed bandits didn't want to hear about this. They still kept all of the children in the stalls, and drove the older ones to work. Rabbi Kremerman agitated among the Jewish children to convince them that no one should betray the Jewish religion, and that it would be better to die as martyrs. Among the children there were still a few aged fourteen or fifteen, who understood everything. The town rabbi dissuaded all the children from saving themselves by running to peasants in the countryside. The rabbi declared that anyone who escaped was running away from his people and betraying the Jewish faith.

At that time the Lithuanian Jonas Vladitskas, who had been in love with Elke's cousin Leye Aron since before the war, began coming to the stall. Elke's sister Malkele began to shy away from her cousin Leye, who, Malke said, was "going around with a Lithuanian and betraying the Jewish people." Leye Aron could no longer win the trust of her little cousins, whom she was trying to save. All of the little orphans remained true to the martyr's path of their parents and ancestors.

The children were taken to do various difficult tasks in the city. When they returned, they didn't have anyone to care for them, to wash them and give them something to eat. In a short time the little children became "big grownups," who knew and understood everything. The older ones helped their smaller brothers and children. They replaced the parents.

## **The Orphans and Their Guardians Murdered in a Vicious Manner**

Five small children gave fodder to the cattle in the compound where they were staying. The five children were Yosele Yankelevits (aged nine), Avrom-Hirshle Preis (aged twelve), Velfke Leyzerin (aged twelve), Itsele Yankelevits (aged 12), and Itshele Zef (aged fourteen).

One Tuesday during the first week in September, on the slope of a hill some three hundred meters from the compound, near the Majuvka forest, the five children saw a car drive up, and Germans getting out of it. They all had photographic equipment. They consulted as to where and how to dig pits. After the Germans drove away, Lithuanian armed bandits brought young Lithuanian Communist arrestees to the spot, and forced them to dig pits. The five Jewish children clearly heard the Communist youth saying to each other that the pits were being dug for the Jewish children in the compound. All five children decided to run away and hide in the forest. At noon that Tuesday the children were taken away from the compound, and everyone was shot. Lithuanian police and partisans shot the small children. After the children were shot, the same Germans returned to the pit in the same car and photographed everything. The five small children lay in the forest watching everything. The shrieking and weeping of the small children at the pit was dreadful and heart-rending. The peasant men and women who worked in the compound also saw everything. Several residents of the town also gathered together and watched as the small Jewish children were shot.

1. The peasants in town related that Bashe Leyzerin went to the grave with her five-week-old child. She pressed her infant son close to her chest, and begged the murderer Kaminskas to let her die together with her child. The murderer tore the child out of its mother's arms and threw it deeper into the valley, as if it were a rag. Bashe fainted. Kaminskas immediately shot her. One peasant woman couldn't stand to watch this, and ran to save the child, who lay among the clothes of the murdered children. Kaminskas threatened to shoot the women. He stabbed the child with a long spear, lifted it into the air and threw it into the pit. The following peasant woman from town described to Elke the case of the mother Bashe and her child: Kasperiene; Marcinkiene; Jovarauskiene; and others, who personally saw the children being shot.

2. Tema Shapiro, aged 27, escaped together with children, she managed to escape to the Medshiokalnys forest. One of the Lithuanian bandits, the town baker Dimeika, chased her into the forest. He caught her there, raped her and beat her. He brought her back from the forest to the town prison. She was kept there for an entire week. The peasants relate that they brought her food in the prison, and she didn't take it. She became somewhat mentally unbalanced. She was taken out of prison and shot. None of those who survived was able to ascertain where she was shot, or by whom. Tema Shapiro was very beautiful.

3. When they arrived at the pit, Rabbi Kremerman held his youngest child in his arm. In his other hand he held a book, and he recited something for the children. The murderer permitted the rabbi and the children to say their confession before death, and ordered them to undress.

4. The town doctor, Osher Shmit, his wife Eta and a two-year-old boy named Benye stayed in their house the entire time. The leader of the bandits, the teacher Matulevitsius, stood up for the Jewish doctor, and the entire family was allowed to remain living in their home, which had not been burned. It was said that Osher Shmit had given the bandit a huge bribe. Several days before the children were shot, the Jewish doctor, his wife and child were arrested and taken to prison. The day the children were shot, Dr Shmit, his wife and child were also taken to the pit and shot.

The priest Bombulis, who lived in the same house as the doctor, ran to the grave and begged the murderers to permit the doctor to live. He argued that the doctor would care for them, because he was the only doctor in town. The murderers proposed to the priest that he stand next to the pit and "take the place" of the doctor. When the doctor was taken from prison with his wife and child, all the children, the young girls and the rabbi already lay dead in the grave.

The five boys who fed the cattle in the compound and then hid in the forest saw their little comrades being shot in the distance. They all ran away from the forest into another thick forest. Berries in the forest served as their nourishment. For three or four days they wandered through the forest. One day it began to rain very hard. The children left the forest and went to the home of a peasant, the Russian Zinkus. He pretended to be friendly, and even fed them. The children heard the peasant saying to his wife that the next morning he would take them to the police in town. The peasant tied the children to the bed like dogs. At night, when the peasant was sleeping in a nearby room, the children untied themselves and ran back into the forest.

5. Yitskhok Yankelevitsh had settled in at the home of a peasant as a shepherd. However, the town police were informed about him, and Yitskhok was arrested. The surviving comrades do not know where he died or who betrayed him.

6. Yitskhok Zef, aged fourteen, wandered through the forests on his own for several months. As the surviving children later related, he was extremely nervous, and even somewhat mentally unbalanced. A peasant in the countryside detained him and took him to the town police, and then he was taken to prison. Zef was held in prison

for several days. One day the murderer Kaminskas took him through the town. The peasants begged that he be released. Kaminskas. answered: "I'm taking him to a good spot, and I'll plant trees over him!" The murderer took Yitskhok Zef to the Jewish cemetery and shot him.

7. Frida Zef, aged seventeen, went to her death' in a particularly heroic manner. When she and the children were taken to the pit, she turned to the murderers who were driving the Jews, and to the peasants who stood nearby watching, and she said the following; "Don't think you will annihilate our people! Our people have been and will remain eternal. Our people have survived many murderers like you! We aren't dying - we're going off to a new life!"

The local student Kasperavitsius knew Frida well. He had connections with the murderers. He convinced them to let her run away from the pit. Frida had a chance to run away and survive. But she refused, shouting; "I refuse to continue living among those who murdered my parents!" The murderers tore her clothes off. Fridka shouted: "Murderers, shoot me quickly! I can't look at your degenerate faces anymore!"

The entire scene of the death of this heroic Jewish girl was seen and heard by the peasants and the Lithuanian Communist youth. The latter, who had dug the graves, were forced to watch the Jewish children being annihilated.

a: Malke Novik was with the children for a short time. She escaped from the stalls with a Lithuanian bandit who fell in love with her. She ran away from him, and hid in a village. She married a Lithuanian from one of the villages and converted. She survived in the countryside with her Lithuanian husband. When she escaped from the stalls, Malke was nineteen years old.

b: Taybele Perlman, aged twelve, and her ten-year-old sister Khane-Sorele were brought to the pit with all the children from the barn.

The children began running in all directions. But they were stopped by the murderers. Taybele and her sister Khane-Sorele managed to hide among the potatoes. The murderers looked for them, but could not find them. The peasants, who watched everything, deliberately indicated that the children had run in an entirely different direction.

After the war, Taybele and Khane-Sorele took Elke to the precise spot of the grave, where the children lay. The two children described exactly how they had escaped from the pit together with many other children. The two children showed the bridge over the Krazhanta river across which they had run when they hid among the potatoes.

When they got up from among the potatoes, the two small children hid at the home of Krukovskis. In the evening the two girls left Krukovskis' home and escaped to a village several kilometers from town, to a peasant woman named Joselaitiene. This woman was a close friend of Rive Perlman, the children's mother. The woman took both children in and hid them. For some time the good peasant woman hid both children at her home, and then she found separate places for them with peasants whom she knew in the countryside. The children lay in hiding at first.

Later they lived freely and worked. However, the two girls were constantly looked after by the peasant woman Joselaitiene. The two sisters survived, converted after the war and lived in the country. After the war Elke spoke to both of them when they went to church on Sunday and went to visit Leyeke Aron. Elke was staying at Leye's while she was in town. The two girls told Elke everything, showed her where the children had been shot, and described to her how they had survived. The two sisters knew that they had been born Jewish, but didn't want to have anything more to do with Jews or Judaism. Their Yiddish was weak, and they didn't want to speak the language. Elke tried to speak to them, and convince them that they should rejoin the Jews. The two sisters explained to Elke that there would certainly be another war, and the Jews would be shot again. "So why should we suffer again?" was their response. -The two girls were lost to the Jewish people. The peasants, among whom they survived, had taken care of that. They didn't even like Jews anymore.

c: Before the war Leye Aron had fallen in love with a local Lithuanian named Jonas Vladitska, who was a telephone lineman. Neither her parents nor the Jews in town knew about this. Leye Aron survived the slaughter of the women, and was assigned to care for the children. The murderers let her live meanwhile. Once Jonas Vladitska came to the stall, and proposed that she leave the stall, convert and immediately marry him. Leye didn't hesitate. The guard knew Jonas Vladitska, and let him out with his lover. Leye Aron converted and immediately got married. The Lithuanian had considerable trouble on account of his Jewish wife. For the first year, he kept her hidden in the countryside. Later she began to live openly. Leye has two children. However, she confided to Elke, who visited her after the liberation, that she was unhappy and would happily run away from her Lithuanian husband, who is a drunkard and does not treat her well. In addition, Leye longed for Jewish life. She had converted and gotten married to save her life. Leye Aron precisely related after the war the slaughter of the Krazhiai Jews. Elke is Leye's cousin.

d: Avrom-Hirsh Preis, aged fourteen, wandered around and survived various dangers. Once he went to the home

of the peasant woman Mareinkiene in Krazhiai. The woman told Preis about the death of Yitskhok Zef, and advised him to get away from town and go to the nearby town of Ushventis, 18 or 19 kilometers from Krazhiai. When he arrived at that town, a Lithuanian policeman arrested him and took him to prison. A converted Jew named Elye Ziv lived in that town. Ziv had connections with the police. He managed to get Preis sent from prison to the Shavl ghetto. Avrom-Hirsh Preis survived. He escaped from the Shavl ghetto shortly before it was evacuated, and hid with peasants in the villages. He was liberated by the Red Army.

e. Yosele Yankelevitsh, aged nine, and Velfke Leyzerin, aged eleven, hid with peasants in the countryside the entire time. They didn't stay in one place the whole time; they were with several peasants in various places. The two children were not together. They fed the cattle and worked for the peasants. They were liberated by the Red Army. All three of the surviving boys have left Lithuania, and are on their way to Israel (at that time still Palestine - L.K.)

Leye Aron and her Lithuanian husband remained in town. Taybele and Khane Perlman converted and live in a village.

## The Tragic Reckoning

Elke's father was with her in Kaunas when the war broke out, on June 22, 1941. Elke and her father ran away from Kaunas into the Soviet Union. Both of them served in the Lithuanian division in the Red Army. They returned to Lithuania together with the Red Army, at the end of 1944. After being released from service, Elke spent some two months in her home town of Krazhiai, where, during the German occupation, her following relatives had been annihilated: Elke's mother Gutl; her brother Moyshe (aged 16); and three sisters, Malke (aged 12), Khanele (aged 10), and Dvoyrele (aged 8); her grandmother Rokhl-Leye Flaks and her daughter Slove Lipman; Slove's husband David Lipman, and their three children Brokhele (aged 14), Tsipele (aged 11), and Sore-Gitele (aged one and a half).

In addition to these, a few dozen close relatives of Elke were killed in Krazhiai, such as male and female cousins, uncles, aunts and so forth.

Elke asked precise questions about the slaughter of the Jews in Krazhiai, including her relatives, and got precise information from the surviving Jews and from peasants whom she knew.

Her former Lithuanian neighbors from town, Marcinkiene, Jovarauskiene, Mockiene, and Kaspieriene, told Elke that they often went to see the Jews in the ghetto, and spoke with her mother. Gutl complained to the peasant women that she had no information about her daughter and her husband. Elke Flaks also went to the Jewish cemetery. The gravestones had been overturned, and some of them were stolen. The fence had also been damaged. The Krazhiai cemetery is large and old.

Translated from Yiddish manuscript  
by Dr. Jonathan Boyarin  
Signature: *Jonathan Boyarin*  
New York, N.Y.  
August 11, 1988

## Attestation of Elke Flaks

I, Elke Flaks, born in Krazhiai in 1923, told Leyb Koniuchowsky about the slaughter of the Jews of Krazhiai. I carefully interrogated peasants whom I know, and also my cousin Leye Aron, who lives with her Lithuanian husband in town, concerning everything I relate herein. I attest to everything I related with my signature on every page. I add that the last name of the rabbi of Krazhiai was Kremerman.

Signature of the witness Elke Flaks (Signature)

The report was recorded by  
Leyb Koniuchowsky (Signature)  
Rozenheim, Bavaria, April 4, 1947

The signature of Elke Flaks is attested to by the chairman of the  
Rozenheim Jewish committee. (Signature)  
Khayem Finkel  
April 7, 1947

Translated from Yiddish  
by Dr. Jonathan Boyarin  
Signature: *Jonathan Boyarin*  
New York, New York  
August 11, 1988

## THE SLAUGHTER OF JEWS IN THE LITHUANIAN TOWN OF TITOVENAI

The testimony of Bashe Bloch, born in Titovenai May 5, 1917. She lived there until the year 1933 and went to Shavl, where she stayed until the war broke out, on June 22, 1941.

Titovenai is in Raseiniai county, thirty kilometers from Raseiniai, eighteen kilometers from Kelm and 42 kilometers from Shavl. Not far from town are the highways connecting Raseiniai to Shavl and to Kaunas. About forty Jewish families lived in town, mostly retail merchants and artisans. Jews had begun small industrial enterprises in town. There was already a tannery owned by a Jew, and a pottery factor owned by the Jew Kaplan and his family. There were also a few Jewish farmers. Titovenai was a summer resort, and the local Jews earned their livelihood in the summer. The town contained a synagogue, a study house, a traditional religious school for young children and a small library.

The attitude of the local Lithuanian neighbors to the Jews was good, even after the Red Army arrived in Lithuania in 1940.

All of the information which Basye Bloch possesses concerning Titovenai, she acquired in Shavl and then in the Shavl ghetto.

Mrs Miriam Hak (nee Flayshman in Titovenai) fled Titovenai with her two small children, aged nine and twelve, and went to a brother of hers in Shavl. At the same time, Mrs Kaplan fled Titovenai and went to Shavl. Both of them arrived in Shavl about three weeks before the Shavl ghetto was sealed. Basye found out from the two women:

After the Germans entered the town, the local population was overjoyed. The forester Ruseckis became the municipal chief. A teacher from the village of Gudeliai, six or seven kilometers from Titovenai, became the head of the partisans.

For about three weeks after the Germans arrived, Jews lived peacefully in their houses and kept their shops open. There were no special regulations announced regarding the Jews; they didn't have to wear yellow patches. All authority was in the hands of the Lithuanian partisans. The Germans did not stay in the town. They only marched through.

During the third week after the Germans came to town, policemen and partisans arrested a total of about 20 or 25 Jewish youth, both boys and girls. They were all accused of being Communists during the year of Soviet rule, or of holding Communist positions. Everyone was taken to prison in Raseiniai, and it was impossible to learn anything more about them. Among those arrested there were also a few middle-aged Jews who had held innocuous positions under the Soviets.

Among those arrested was Moyshe, the husband of Miriam Hak. Her twelve-year-old son walked to Raseiniai "to find out about his father." He stood near the prison for an entire day, but did not see his father.

Among those taken to the Raseiniai prison were:

1. Moyshe Hak - a shoemaker who had a small shoe store in town.
2. Bere Hak, Moyshe's brother - a tailor.
3. Ben-Tsion Melamed, who worked in the forests, and his daughter Rivke, aged 23.
4. Perets Bulva - a coachman, and his two daughters Sore, aged 17, and Rivke, aged 19 or 20.
5. Artshik Zhus and his brother Zisl.
6. Heker - a storekeeper.
7. Moyshe Kaplan- a potter, and his two sons.
8. Leyzer Dogon - a potter, and his son.
9. Shmerl Kaplan- a potter, and his son.

Miriam Hak listed all of the arrestees, but Basye does not remember any more of them.

The younger women and girls of Titovenai had to work every day. Partisans guarded them while they worked. Once, when the women were cleaning out the streets and pulling out grass from between the paving stones, the municipal chief went by and said sadly: "It's a shame to kill such nice girls." Shmuel Bender's daughter Taybe went home and told her father, who was very well liked in town and was an excellent scholar. He was the town politician. Shmuel just laughed at what his daughter said.

One time the Lithuanian Antanas Niutautas, a former member of the Shaulys gun club during Smetona's time, came to Miriam Hak's home. He advised Hak's family to lose no time, not to worry about their possessions, and to get away from town to Shavl as quickly as possible by night, so that no one would see and no one would know. Niutautas assured the Jews that preparations were being made to shoot all the Jews in town. He advised them not to start a panic, and to escape to Shavl.

Miriam Hak went to her sister Rokhel Zhus and told her everything. Everyone laughed at Miriam, adding that the Lithuanian probably wanted to inherit their possessions. Everyone whom Miriam told laughed at her, and warned her not to start a panic in town. The same Lithuanian went to his Jewish friend Meyer Heker and warned him as well. Meyer thought that the Lithuanian was simply "eager to get his things."

That same day, at 3:00 a.m., everyone heard the commotion of trucks which drove up and stopped in the middle of town. Shouts were heard in the street: "Let's cut up and shoot the Jews!" In the dark night, there was banging on all the windows of the Jewish houses. The next thing that was heard was the weeping and screaming of women and children.

Miriam recalled the warning and advice of Niutautas. She quickly grabbed her two half-dressed children, and while the partisans were knocking on the front door, Miriam managed to run out of the house through the back. Near Miriam Hak's house stood the study house, on a high foundation. She crawled under the foundation with her two children and hid. From there she heard the screams and weeping of women and children who were beaten and driven out of their houses in their sleep. Miriam stayed under the foundation for a day and half of another night, without food or drink, with two half-naked children. Around two or three a.m. the second night, Miriam and her children fled town to a certain peasant, with whom she had placed some of her possessions at the beginning of the war. The peasant was afraid to keep Miriam. He got a wagon, and sent her to Shavl to be with her brother.

A short time later the people from Titovenai in Shavl found out that the same night the partisans drove the Jews out of their houses, they had driven them into the forest at the edge of town, onto Shapiro's mountain (Shapiro Kalnas), and they shot everyone there in the morning. This was at the beginning of the second week of August 1941.

Miriam and her children went into the Shavl ghetto. They lived through great material difficulties there. She decided on a bold move. She left Shavl and returned to Titovenai. She had left some of her things with Sharap, a teacher in town. When she arrived in town, she went to a female tailor whom she knew named Kalesauskiene. Miriam sent the teacher's wife a letter by way of the tailor, asking her to send back some of her things with the tailor. The teacher's wife sent some things back with the tailor, asking Miriam to leave town as quickly as possible, because she wasn't certain of her husband.

Miriam left town and went to a peasant she knew in a village, with whom she had also left some of her things. The peasant gave her some of the things and also advised her to leave the village as quickly as possible, because as she left the town, peasants had spotted her, and everyone in the village already knew about her.

Miriam followed the advice immediately left the village, and returned to the Shavl ghetto in peace. It was the spring of 1943.

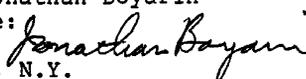
While she was spending a couple of days with the tailor in Titovenai, Miriam went to visit the mass grave of the Jews of Titovenai, on Shapiro's Mountain. When she returned to the Shavl ghetto, Miriam told Basye about everything.

Basye was taken with all the Jews from the Shavl ghetto to Stutthof, Germany. There she again saw Miriam and her two children, whom she had saved from the children's action in the Shavl ghetto. Miriam's two children were taken from her in Stutthof. Basye did not see Miriam again.

The witness Basye lost her children in the children's action in Shavl: her seven-year-old son Elye, and her five-year-old Shmuel, aged five. Among the murderers in town Basye remembers:

1. The teacher from the village of Gudelis. She does not remember his last name.
2. The forester Ruseckis.
3. Antanas Getsas.
4. Sharap, the teacher in town.

Translated from Yiddish manuscript  
by Dr. Jonathan Boyarin

Signature: 

New York, N.Y.  
August 11, 1988

## Attestation of Bashe Bloch

I, Basye Bloch, attest with my signature to all of the information which Leyb Koniuchowsky recorded on three and a half pages about the slaughter of the Jews of Titovenai.

Basye Bloch (Signature)

The testimony was recorded by  
Engineer Leyb Koniuchowsky (Signature)  
Feldafing, Bavaria  
July 26, 1947

The signature of the resident of the  
Feldafing camp, Basye Bloch,  
is attested to by the chairman of the  
camp committee,  
E. Reif (Signature)  
Feldafing, July 26, 1947

Translated from Yiddish  
by Dr. Jonathan Boyarin  
Signature:

*Jonathan Boyarin*  
New York, New York  
August 11, 1988



*BASHE BLOCH  
(Titovenai)*

## THE SLAUGHTER OF JEWS IN THE LITHUANIAN TOWN OF STAKIAI

The testimony of Yitskhok Feinshtein, born October 25, 1912 in Raseiniai. His father's name was Binyomin. He was a miller by trade. He had completed elementary school in Raseiniai. Until 1936 he had lived in the nearby town of Shimkaičiai. From 1936 until the war he lived in Stakiai, where more than thirty Jewish men, women and children lived. The majority of the Jews were occupied in commerce, and a small number were farmers. The town possessed a large mill owned by the Feinshtein brothers (Yitskhok and three others).

The town is located fifteen kilometers from the town of Raudonė, where two Jewish families lived. Stakiai is thirty kilometers from Raseiniai, and ten kilometers from Shimkaičiai. The attitude of the Lithuanian population toward the Jews was quite good.

### **The Outbreak of the War**

The Germans entered the town one day after the war broke out, Monday morning, June 23, 1941. None of the Jews in town managed to escape to the Soviet Union. Local Lithuanians seized all power in town. They immediately announced their loyalty to the Germans, and called themselves "partisans." No Germans remained in town. They all continued to the front.

The Jews continued living in their houses. They were not forced to work, except for individual instances when Jews worked for a few days, repairing the roads or doing various other small tasks. Most of the Jews stayed at home, consuming what they had stored up before the war. Jews were, permitted out into the street from 8:00 a.m. until 8:00 p.m. There were virtually no actions taken against the Jews in particular, the entire month of July.

At the end of July, a libel was invented against a certain Jew. A peasant from town had kept his cow in a field, tied to a rope. The cow got the rope twisted, and strangled itself. Not far away, a cow belonging to the Jew from town Moyshe Vinik, was also grazing. The peasant who owned the cow assured all the peasants in town that the Jew Vinik had deliberately strangled his cow.

A Lithuanian from Jurbarkas came to town drunk, passing himself off as an agronomist. The drunken peasant got the local peasants aroused, insisting that as a "specialist" he was sure that the Jews had strangled the cow. At night the "agronomist" and an armed Lithuanian murderer from town drove all the younger men and women into one house. An armed Lithuanian was posted outside the house, and prevented anyone from going outside. The "agronomist" warned the interned Jews that if they didn't admit which one of them had strangled the cow by the next day, ten Jews would be shot in exchange for the cow. The Jews were confined all night. The next morning, the "agronomist" returned drunk, with a large, thick stick in his hand. The guard went in with him. Once again he demanded that they tell him which Jew had strangled the cow. Of course, no one could respond by admitting his or her guilt, because the Jews didn't know what to say. The "agronomist" drove all the Jews out into the street and lined them up in a row. With his large, thick stick he began beating the unfortunate Jews. No one admitted guilt in the strangulation of the cow. The "agronomist" drove the Jews down the street, and beat them again. Several times he grabbed the armed Lithuanian murderer's rifle and threatened to shoot all the Jews. The local Lithuanians stood nearby glowing with happiness. Some of them gave the "agronomist" liquor to boost his courage. After this, the Jews were allowed to return home. All the Jews had to bring their cows to a certain spot, and the "agronomist" distributed the Jews' cows among the peasants in town. The peasant whose cow had been strangled chose the best of the Jews' cows. Suddenly the Jews were deprived of their cows. The Lithuanian residents of the town, who had lived with the Jews for so many years, were not ashamed to look the unfortunate Jews in the eyes, and joyfully took the Jews' cows.

Several days after the affair with the cows, an order was promulgated, stating that all the Jews had to wear a yellow patch on the left side of their chest. They all continued living in their homes. But the Jews no longer lived calmly in town. Terrible news about the slaughter of Jews arrived from everywhere. Every day the Jews in town waited for death. However, many of them could in no way accept the possibility of such mass murder.

### **All the Jews from Stakiai and Raudonė Shot**

On Thursday, August 8, 1941, when Yitskhok Feinshtein was returning to work at the mill from lunch, he noticed a number of armed Lithuanians who weren't from town. He understood that something bad was going to happen to the Jews of the town. But he didn't think of the worst, and went to work at the mill. At 2:00 p.m. one of the workers in the mill, Jonas Petraitis, came to Yitskhok. He warned Yitskhok that the Jews in town, including Yitskhok, were threatened with possible death. The worker logically explained to Yitskhok that he would do better to leave the mill

and hide at the Stakiai compound until the next morning. He explained to Feinshtein that if nothing happened until the next day, Feinshtein could return to work. But if there were shootings, then Feinshtein would escape them.

Yitskhok went away and hid in some straw in a barn at the Stakiai compound. In the evening Yitskhok's brother Hirshl Feinshtein came running from town. That same day Moyshe Vinik, with his two sisters Sore and Yokhe, escaped from town and hid in a village near Stakiai. Later the two Feinshtein brothers met Moyshe Vinik and his two sisters. They also found out that another Jew from Stakiai, Ayzik Kremer, had also escaped.

On the evening of Thursday, August 8, there was a great commotion in the compound. The two brothers in hiding became very afraid. They thought they were being searched for. It turned out that armed Lithuanians had come to force the peasants to dig graves. The two brothers saw the peasants being taken away with shovels.

On Friday, August 9, 1941, at 5:00 a.m., automatic fire could be heard. The two brothers understood that the Jews in town, including their families, were being shot. The two brothers covered their ears with their hands so they wouldn't hear the shooting.

Jonas Petratis was among the twenty peasants who dug the graves. When he returned he conveyed to the two brothers the tragic news that all the Jews in town had been shot one kilometer from town, on the slope ten meters from the stream Matuva. After digging the pit, Petratis had to leave the spot. He went a short distance, and saw the Jews being forced to undress. Stark naked, they were driven to the pit. Peasants who had dug the pits stood nearby and saw everything. After the Jews from town were shot, the peasants shared the clothes of the people who were murdered. More than forty people from Stakiai and the nearby town of Raudone, where two Jewish families lived, were shot that day.

The following Lithuanians from the town of Stakiai were active in taking the Jews from the houses to the pits, and later during the shooting:

1. J. Rukshnaitis;
2. Viktorius Kordushas;
3. Leonas Dubinskas;
4. Tolushis (whose sister was a teacher)
5. Klimaitis (a musician);

and others whose names Yitskhok does not recall. There were also several from Raudone, among them the Raudone police chief Juosas Pozherackas, and Viktorius Kordushas, who had worked at Feinshtein's mill for a full seven years.

Translated from Yiddish manuscript  
by Dr. Jonathan Boyarin  
Signature: *Jonathan Boyarin*  
New York, N.Y.  
August 15, 1988

## Attestation of Yitskhok Feinshtein

I, Yitskhok Feinshtein, related to L. Koniuchowsky word for word everything recorded on exactly three pages, concerning the slaughter of the Jews of Stakiai and Raudone. I personally related all the dates, facts, and names of persons and geographical locations, and I attest thereto with my signature on each page.

Yitskhok Feinshtein (Signature)

The testimony was recorded by  
L. Koniuchowsky (Signature)  
Landsberg a/Lech

January 22, 1947

The signature of Yitskhok Feinshtein  
is attested to by the chairman of the  
Landsberg cultural bureau,  
H. Milshteyn (Signature)  
Landsberg a/Lech  
January 22, 1947

Translated from Yiddish  
by Dr. Jonathan Boyarin  
Signature: *Jonathan Boyarin*  
New York, New York  
August 15, 1988

# THE TRAGIC DEATH OF JEWISH SURVIVORS FROM SURROUNDING TOWNS AND OF JEWISH ESCAPEES FROM THE KAUNAS GHETTO

## HOW DID THE FEINSHTEIN BROTHERS SURVIVE?

Yitskhok and his brother Hirshl Feinshtein stayed in the Stakiai compound for a week. The location was not safe, because there were too many people in the compound. It was hard to avoid being observed. The next place the two brothers went to was the home of a peasant whom they knew in the Shimkaitsiai area. Neither he nor other peasants whom they knew were willing to let the brothers in even for a rest. They were forced to return to the barn they had left. They were there for four days, and then they went to the home of the peasant Benatas Sendikaitis, just half a kilometer from Stakiai. It was at this peasant's home that the two brothers found out where the Jewish survivor from Stakiai Moyshe Vinik was with his two sisters Sore and Yokhe. All five Jews met together, and hid at the peasant's home for a few months. During that time, some of them left for a while to stay with other peasants, and then returned. Village peasants gave the Jews food; the peasant Sendikaitis himself gave them some food. The Jews lay in a barn among the hay for the entire two months. It was impossible for them to stay at his home any longer, because Lithuanian murderers from town began searching for hidden Jews at the peasant's home.

All five went to the home of the peasant Stravinskiene, in the village of Palsis, five kilometers from Stakiai. She was a widow with two grown sons and a daughter. The peasant woman took four of the Jews. Yokhe Vinik went to work as a servant in another village. The four Jews stayed with the peasant woman for six months. Night and day they were all in a barn, which had only a partial roof. The wonderful peasant woman nourished the Jews very well. She took nothing in return. However, the Jews voluntarily gave her everything they possessed. There were no surprises during that time. Nor did anyone suspect that Jews were hiding there. During those six months, the Jews would leave for several weeks, and then return as if to their own home. Before she said goodbye to the Jews, the good woman would give them food and clean clothes to take along, just as if she were their own mother.

### The Village of Mishku

In the spring of 1942 all four went into the forest, four kilometers from the home of the good peasant woman. The four Jews made a tent out of brush and branches. During the day they all slept. At night the men went far across the countryside in search of the necessities of life. Sore Vinik stayed alone in the forest - on occasion for several days. Sore Vinik was about thirty years old at the time. The Jews washed their clothes and cooked in the forest. The peasants who lived at the edge of the forest knew Feinshtein well, and often came to visit the Jews, conveying the important news from the front and around the world. The names of these peasants were Pranas Sebeckis and Jonas Zaksas, from the village of Pavidaujo. They also brought the Jews food, and informed them about what the peasants nearby and in town were saying about the Jews who had run away. The Jews in the forest did not live through any particular dangers. The Jews were in the forest for about three months. After that they went into a second, larger forest, two or three kilometers from the town of Stakiai.

There the Jews selected a heavily overgrown spot in the middle of the forest. It was a very large forest. It was possible to walk all the way to Taurage through these woods. At the edge of the forest, the Jews had peasant acquaintances - Povilas Gudrunas and his father Pranas, both from the village of Stakiai. In the middle of the forest was a village populated by about ten Lithuanian families. They were all good peasants, who supported Jews who escaped and came to them throughout the entire war. The name of the village is Mishku; it is in Raudonas Township. The ten families in the village took care of the four Jews in the forest the whole time, giving them food, clothing, and sharing with them everything the hidden Jews could use.

The Jews were in the forest near the village until Christmas 1942. There was snow in the forest by then. It was impossible to spend the winter in the forest, because their footprints would have placed the Jews in danger of being discovered. Sore Vinik went to work for a Polish peasant as a servant. Her sister had found the place and taken her out of the forest.

### Jewish Survivors

The Feinshtein brothers and Moyshe Vinik left the forest and went to the village of Stakiai, very close to town, to the home of the peasant Vladas Adamavitsius. The Jews quickly prepared a place for themselves in the attic of the stall. They received bedding from the peasant, and settled in. The Jews were also well fed by the peasant. They were there for two months. The Jews lost patience with lying in the barn, and went to the peasant Antanas Masiulis', in the village of Pamituvio, seven kilometers from Stakiai, in the township of Vilon, Kaunas County. This peasant told them about a Jew named Moyshe Veber, who had been in Borok (Shiline). Moyshe had escaped from the slaughter of the Jews in Borok. A week later the Jews returned to the peasant Masiulis and met Moyshe Veber.

When Moyshe met the three Jews, he burst into tears. During the entire time, the three Jews from Stakiai were the only other survivors he had met. Moyshe Veber joined the three Jews and accompanied them. The three Jews from Stakiai had acquired arms by this time. They had two automatics, a rifle and two revolvers. The four Jews stayed with the peasant Masiulis for three days, and then they went to a peasant whom Veber knew in the area near the Nieman river.

When they arrived at the home of the peasant Antanas Endrijaitis in the village of Shvendrishkiai, the four Jews discovered that the ritual slaughterer from Skirsnemune, a small town twelve kilometers from Jurbarkas, was alive and wandering through the region. His name was Berl Gertner. He had his wife and six-year-old son Ruvele with him.

The four Jews were very happy to find out that the slaughterer and his family were alive. Some time earlier peasants in the countryside had told them that all the Jews from the town of Skirsnemune had been shot, and that not a single one survived. The four Jews spent a single, night with the peasant Endrijaitis. Before they left, the peasant arranged with them that in a week they would come back and meet Berl Gertner.

Moyshe Veber had stayed with this peasant for a few months immediately after the Jews from Borok (Shiline) were shot near Raseiniai in Zhuvilishkiai. Moyshe Veber had been in the monastery camp near Raseiniai. When he escaped from there, he had gone directly to the peasant Endrijaitis.

When they left his home, the four Jews went to the village of Palsio in Shumkaitsiai Township, to the peasant Antanas Bendzhius. This peasant was a forester. They were at his home for several days, and then they went back to Endrijaitis. They found the slaughterer waiting for them in the house. When the slaughterer saw the four Jews, he burst into heavy weeping. The four Jews had known the slaughterer well before the war. He had been tall, heavy and healthy. Now it was hard for the Jews to recognize him. He was very thin and pale, exhausted and hopeless. He wept so bitterly that he could not even open his mouth to speak. The four Jews comforted him and encouraged him to keep struggling for life. Berl Gertner finally told them his secret: he, his wife and son had been hiding at that very peasant's home for two months. Berl begged the four Jews to have mercy on him and find him some place else, because it was too hard for the peasant to keep him any longer. Furthermore, it was winter, and it was hard to stay in the barn with the child any longer.

The four Jews found out that two kilometers away there was a peasant woman from Shumkaitsiai who had recently married a peasant named Antanas Maksaitis. The four Jews took their guns and went to the peasant's home at night. The peasant received them warmly. The peasant woman recognized Bine Feinshtein's two sons and was very friendly to them. The four Jews convinced the couple to take in the slaughterer with his wife and child.. After some resistance, the peasant and his wife agreed, and the slaughterer went to their house. He stayed in a warm spot behind the oven. The slaughterer wept for joy and kissed the four Jews. He and his family stayed at the peasants' home through the winter of 1942 until the spring of 1943.

The four Jews had no steady hiding place, and wandered continuously from peasant to peasant, from village to village. They wandered well-armed through an alien world full of dangers and difficulties. For now their biggest worry was the difficulties they faced getting food and shelter. They also had to struggle against nature, against the cold, and snow of winter, against the mud and rain.

The Jews did have one stable place to return to after their wanderings from village to village. This was the home of the forester Antanas Bendzhius. The Jews used to go to this peasant's home to rest, and he always received them warmly. The Jews also went frequently to the home of the peasant Antanas Maksaitis, bringing produce for the slaughterer and his family. The Jews lived this wandering life until the summer of 1943.

### **Internment of Jews in the Kaunas Ghetto; Their Escape**

The four Jews returned to the Paslauskis Forest. They left the forest to get food from peasants they knew. The slaughterer also came to visit them sometimes in the forest. Nothing of particular note took place during that time. Starting in midsummer, the slaughterer wanted very badly to stay with the four Jews in the forest. He brought his wife and son, and settled in the forest. All the Jews were in the forest until the fall of 1943, full of hope to survive until the happy moment they would be free. That summer Lithuanians in the villages became friendlier to the Jews. They already foresaw clearly how the war would turn out. The great German defeat and the battle of Stalingrad opened everyone's eyes to the approaching end of German militarism.

In the fall the slaughterer, his wife and child once again went to the peasant Antanas Maksaitis. The peasant warmly accepted the slaughterer and his family. The rest of the Jews remained in the forest.

That fall the brothers received a letter from their brother Berl Feinshtein, who was in the Kaunas ghetto. The internment of Jews from Kaunas in concentration camps was beginning at that time. Berl wanted to escape and join his brothers. They sent a peasant to Kaunas, and brought Zelde Kadushin and Berl's wife Miriam. The peasant who brought the women in his wagon was Antanas Lukauskos, from the village of Palsio. The peasant brought the two women to his house. The Feinshtein brothers placed the two women with the forester Antanas Bendzhius. Two days later Berl Feinshtein arrived from the ghetto on a bicycle. He, too, had been brought by the peasant Antanas, Lukauskos.

A week later the family Yeshayohu Krom, with his wife and daughter, arrived from the ghetto by car. With them was Nakhman Krakenovsky, who had been born and lived in Vilon until the war. This group also went to Antanas Bendzhius. Krakenovsky was Moyshe Veber's cousin. All of the surviving Jews from the region stayed with Bendzhius at that time.

The situation in the Kaunas ghetto grew worse from day to day. At that time there were no good lines of communication with the partisans in the Rudnicky Forests. The internment went on at a rapid pace. The Jews of Kaunas clearly saw their fate. Many of them left the ghetto, and went to look for protection in the villages. Many died on the roads. Many of them were betrayed by peasants, after the latter had taken all their possessions.

It was at that time that Jews began escaping from the ghettos in Raseiniai County, where the Feinshtein brothers and the others were hiding.

A Lithuanian engineer from Shants, near Kaunas, helped the Jews escape from the Kaunas ghetto to Raseiniai County. This engineer had an automobile, in which he personally brought Yeshayohu Krom's family. After that, he also brought out Ete Gayman and her mother from Kaunas, Ayzik Bak and Khone Fum (a butcher from Kaunas). All these Jews were brought to the peasant Milushius in the village of Anulinos (see "The Slaughter of the Jews of Raseiniai.") The Feinshtein brothers found out about Jews who were brought, and took everyone to the peasant Jonas Bakshys in the village of Patalupu. From there the Feinshtein brothers brought the two women to the village of Knetziu in Shimkaitsiai Township, to the home of peasant Antanas Birgidos. Khone Fum and Ayzik Bak were taken to the village of Mishku, which the peasants had begun calling "Palestine." They went to the home of the peasant Pranas Danikauskas. This group arrived at the beginning of December 1943. Three weeks later, just before Christmas, the peasant Antanas Lukauskas brought Ayzik Bak's wife Genye from Kaunas. The Feinshtein brothers took her to join her husband.

## **The Heroine Hene Frank**

In the village of Pubkaimis, not far from the town of Raudone and sixteen kilometers from Jurbarkas, a Jewish family named Frank lived before the war. They were a father, a mother, a brother and Hene, the sister. While her family were being taken to be shot, Hene escaped, and she hid with peasant acquaintances in the countryside. At the beginning of 1943 the Feinshteins and their friends met Hene Rank. She had a Lithuanian appearance and a good Lithuanian accent. She lived openly among peasants, but often met with the wandering Jews.

Hene Frank was very friendly with a peasant named Eidikis, who lived one kilometer from the Nieman, not far from the town of Raudone. When the Jews escaping from the Kaunas ghetto began arriving in the Raseiniai area, Hene Frank accepted a very important and self-sacrificing task. She often rode to Kaunas. She was in the Kaunas ghetto a few times, and brought news and greetings for the Jews in the villages from those whom they knew in the ghetto. With the help of the peasant Eidikis, Hene began bringing transports of Jews from the Kaunas ghetto. With the help of Eidikis, Hene brought about forty Jews out of the Kaunas ghetto.

One time Hene and the peasant brought twelve Jews on two wagons. In the middle of the night they drove through the town of Vilki. There they were stopped by a Lithuanian guard. It was strictly forbidden to drive through town after midnight. But Eidikis didn't lose his composure. He produced an old document - a travel pass from Vilna. The Lithuanian murderers freed him on the strength of the document, and he saved himself and his Jewish passengers from certain death. The peasant brought all the Jews to the village of Mishku ("Palestine"), to the peasant Pranas Danikauskas. But the two peasants did not know about each other.

Hene also brought a number of Jews from the Kaunas ghetto by way of the steamboat on the Nieman. Each time she rode to Kaunas by herself, bought tickets on the steamboat, and brought the Jews to the peasant Danikauskas in the village of Mishku. From there the Jews were placed in various locations. All told, Hene brought more than fifty Jews from the Kaunas ghetto. Some more arrived later from the ghetto on their own. In the area around Raseiniai about eighty Jews were gathered.

Some were from the Kaunas ghetto, and some who had survived Raseiniai and nearby towns, such as Stakiai, Borok, Skirsnemune. There were also a man and a woman from Jurbarkas. On Passover 1944 in Mishku, twenty Jews met at the home of Danikauskas. There was challah, meat was brought, and the Jews celebrated for a few days.

### **Ukrainians and Latvians Join the Jews in the Forest**

The peasants always found out from each other how many Jews each was hiding. The peasant's small children knew just what to do, and when to warn the Jews about possible danger. By day the Jews lay in hiding. At night they went out to the nearby villages for food. The Jews had connections amongst themselves.

The brothers Feinshtein, Moyshe Vinik and Moyshe Veber directed everything, got people quartered and made sure they had food. They had considerable problems with the young people from town, who didn't always know how to behave with peasants from the country.

The spring of 1944 came early and warm. All the Jews had good weapons by then. Each one had an automatic, a revolver and several hand grenades. The Jews had bought these weapons from peasants. Hene Frank had also brought weapons from Kaunas. Everything was in order. They had great hopes of remaining alive.

The Red Army quickly approached Lithuania that spring. The Jews soon found out that the Red Army had taken Vilna, followed a few weeks later by Kaunas, Yanov and Babtai. They were approaching the region where the Jews were in hiding. Not far from the spot - no more than three kilometers away - the front held steady.

The German field police issued an order stating that the entire Lithuanian civilian population had to evacuate away from the front. The peasants in the surrounding villages left their homes. All the Jews decided to move into the forest. The Jews lived in the forest for three weeks. During the day they lay in the forest. At night the men left to the forest to get food.

The Jews had taken a good deal of food along with them into the forest. While they were in the forest the Jews met four Ukrainian prisoners of war who had volunteered to serve with the Germans. When the front approached, the four had escaped with their arms, and even in their German uniforms. Later they had changed into civilian clothing. The Jews got along well with the Ukrainians, and waited for the liberation together with them. The four Ukrainian prisoners of war used to go with the Jews at night to get food.

Three weeks after the Ukrainians joined the Jews, a son of Moyshe Koniuchowsky's sister went to a peasant to get some things they had left with him. At the peasant's home, the boy met two Latvians, who explained that they had escaped from the German army (they had been drafted in Latvia). The two Latvians were already in civilian clothing. They had no weapons. The peasant advised the boy to take the two Latvians along so that they could hide together with the Jews. The boy brought the two Latvians to the Jews in the forest. A number of the Jews thought about the possibility of being betrayed by the Latvians. There were two choices. One was to shoot the two Latvians, because the Jews were afraid to let them go back, since they might reveal where the Jews were. They chose the second option instead, taking the two Latvians in and remaining with them. The Jews were with the Ukrainians and Latvians for some three weeks.

### **The Betrayal by the Latvians, and the Death of the Jews**

One evening the four Ukrainians and the two Latvians decided to leave the Jews and try to make it to the front. At daybreak they returned and said that they had been unable to reach the front that time. After waiting a few days, two Ukrainians and the two Latvians once again tried to get to the front. Two Ukrainians stayed in the bunker.

The next day Yitskhok and his brother went to the other Jews. They reported about the departure of the Ukrainians and Latvians and proposed that they immediately abandon their camp, and move into another forest, ten kilometers away. The brothers argued that if the Latvians were captured alive, the lives of all the Jews would be endangered. The Bak brothers from the Kaunas ghetto, and some of the others, laughed at the Feinshtein brothers.

Yitskhok and his brother went back to their bunker. Nothing happened that day. The next day one Ukrainian returned, wounded. He reported that while they were crossing the front, they had been fired at several times, and he had been lightly wounded in the leg. The Ukrainian didn't know exactly whether the rest of his colleagues had been shot, or whether they had been captured. But the Ukrainian advised that everyone abandon the area.

Once again Yitskhok and his brother went and reported everything they had learned from the Ukrainian, and proposed going to another place. Once again the Jews from Kaunas refused to leave the spot. The two brothers brought a doctor named Tuti Aronson to their bunker. The doctor bandaged the wounded leg, and stayed in the forest with the Feinshtein brothers that night.

The next morning all the Jews ate breakfast. It was already 10:30 am. Suddenly they heard a revolver shot. They all became terrified. Most of them ran into the bunker. Five men stayed above: the two Feinshtein brothers, Moyshe Koniuchowsky, Yudi Tarshis and Khone Fum. The five men disguised the bunker well. Ten minutes later shots were heard, and countless bullets flew over the five men's heads. They ran fifty meters away from the bunkers. Constant shooting was heard for about five minutes. The five tried to run out of the forest, but they could not. Everywhere they met armed Germans. In the evening it grew quiet. When it got dark the five Jews returned to their bunker.

At the entrance to the bunker, they saw the wounded Ukrainian lying dead. They found no one in the bunker. In the darkness the five men immediately went to see what had happened at the second bunker, where the largest number of Jews had been located. But they found no one there, either. Clothing, suitcases and various objects lay scattered around the bunkers. The situation became clear to the five surviving Jews. All the Jews in the bunkers had been discovered, and they had been taken in a direction which was impossible to determine. It will eternally remain a secret what happened next to the Jews, where they were taken. But it is certain that everyone was discovered and slaughtered.

Zelde Kadushin and Frida Friedman were in the Feinshtein's bunker when it was discovered. As soon as Frida Friedman left the bunker, she ran away. The Germans shot at her, and hit her in the little finger but she kept running, and survived. Zelde Kadushin ran while the Jews were being taken through the forest. Both of them related that while they lay in the bunker, they heard the voice of the Latvian who had gone away. He told the Germans everything. The Latvian himself ordered everyone to leave the bunker, threatening to throw in a grenade. The Ukrainian came out first, and was shot. The rest were taken out of the forest alive.

A woman and her husband from the other bunker also survived. This was Mr Glastoft and his wife. They later reported that their bunker as well was betrayed by the Latvian. The five Jews left the forest and stayed in the straw in a barn belonging to the peasant Pranas Lakshas in the village of Painistro.

There the five Jews found a Jew from Juifbarkas by the name of Leyb Meigl hiding with his wife. This Jew and his wife had escaped from the slaughter of Jews in Jurbarkas, and stayed in the barn until the Red Army liberated them.

The five Jews were there for three weeks, and then they went to a brother-in-law of the peasant named Stasys Gudaitis, in the town of Skirsnemune. There the Jews hid in the hay of the barn. The five Jews lay there for three weeks, until they were liberated by the Red Army.

Zelde Kadushin escaped from the forest twelve days after the bunker was liquidated. Zelde opened up a hole in a tree stump with a knife. She lay in it and covered the opening with grass. She had nothing to eat. It was dangerous for her to leave the forest. She lay in the stump for three days, and went back into the bunker. The murdered Ukrainian still lay by the bunker. She didn't find anything to eat in the bunker. She wandered there for twelve days, unable to leave the forest. She had nothing to eat or drink. In the morning Zelde would lick the dew.

Twelve days later Zelde left the forest and met a German. He asked her for a pass. Zelde ran away from him. Zelde ran for a few hours, until she arrived in the village of Mishku. There she met a peasant named Sabonaitis. The peasant took her to the village of Barzdziu, where the peasants from the village of Mishku had evacuated. In Barzdziu Zelde found out that Frida Friedman had escaped from the bunker and was at the home of the peasant Petras Minalgos in the same village. Frida lay hidden among the threshed straw in a field. Frida and Zelde then went to the peasant Lukoshius in the village of Pauliu. The two women were with that peasant until the liberation. The Jew Glastoft and his wife also went to the same peasant. The women were liberated on October 7, 1944.

The five Jews in Skirsnemune were liberated October 8, 1944. A total of nine people survived out of all the Jews who had been in the bunkers: the two Feinshtein brothers, Moyshe Koniuchowsky, Yudi Tarshis, Rhone Fum, Frida Friedman, Zelde Kadushin (married to Yitskhok Feinshtein), and Glastoft and his wife. More than fifty Jewish men, women and children died in the bunkers, most of them escapees from the Kaunas ghetto. Moyshe, Sore and Yone Vinik and Moyshe Veber also died. Among those who died was Dr Tuti Aronson, the dental technician Luria, a man named Peysekh Gork with a degree in chemistry, a pharmacist named Ete Gayman with her mother, a lawyer named Shayn, the two Bak brothers and their wives, and others. The slaughterer Berl Gertner and his family died at the same time.



## THE SLAUGHTER OF JEWS IN MAZHEIKIAI COUNTY

### I Vekshniai

Eyewitness testimony of Khonon Reif, born in the town of Tirkshliai, Mazheikiai County, in 1908. He lived in Vekshniai for fourteen years prior to the start of the war. His father's name was Abe-Moyshe.

The town of Vekshniai is located twelve or thirteen kilometers from Mazheikiai and fourteen kilometers from Akmene. Through the town flows the Venta river.

Until the outbreak of the war, some 700 Jews lived in town. The majority of the Jewish population was engaged in trade. There were many artisans. Some of the Jews were engaged in agriculture.

There was a Jewish national bank in Vekshniai until 1940, directed by a man named Rabinovits; a Hebrew and Yiddish library; and a large synagogue. The Jewish young people were organized in Zionist movements. The town possessed a mill, an electric power station and a woollen mill. These were all owned by a Jew named Yosef Lesemas. There were also efficient woollen dyeing mills owned by a Jew named Moyshe Lansky.

The Jews of Vekshniai had managed to develop industry on a modest scale. There were four efficient leather factories owned by the Jews Yisroel Kalvariye, Are-Yanke Rib, Zelig Shuster and Khonon Reif (this witness).

The potteries of Vekshniai were known throughout Lithuania for their high-quality work. The potteries belonged to the Jews Yeshaye Mikhel, Dovid Ginde and Zelig Klaf.

There was a fine Jewish theatre which belonged to a Jew named Moyshe Gordon.

Vekshniai had an all-Jewish volunteer fire company, headed by Mikhe Vaks.

The Jews got along well with their Lithuanian neighbors.

### The Outbreak of War and Persecution of Jews

When the war broke out all the Jews in town tried to flee to the Soviet Union. Only five Jewish families were successful. The others were unable to escape, because during the very first days of the war armed Lithuanian bandits, calling themselves "partisans," began shooting at fleeing Jews. In the bush, the forests and the fields the murderers shot at Jews who tried to save themselves from German fascism. German troops caught up with the Jews, and they all began to return to their homes. On their way back armed Lithuanians robbed the Jews' better clothing and valuables.

The first Jewish victim in Vekshniai was Dovid Levin, a grain dealer. He was shot while trying to escape through the window of his house, when partisans came to arrest him.

On Saturday, June 28, 1941, the partisans drove all the Jewish men out of their homes, and herded them together at the marketplace. There they were assigned to various tasks. The Jews were forced to pull out the grass growing between the cobblestones in the marketplace, clean out the Lithuanians' outhouses, and other similar tasks. While the Jews were doing the work, the Lithuanian bandits mocked and beat them.

When the work was finished, the Jews were forbidden to return to their homes. They had to sleep in the synagogue. The synagogue was guarded by partisans. The women brought food from home for the men. There were no Germans in town at that time. Generally they drove through town without even stopping.

At 3:00 a.m. on Tuesday, (June 31 or July 1), 1941, the bandits let the men out of the synagogue and ordered them to run to their homes. Next to every Jewish house the men found several armed partisans. They ordered all the Jews; men, women and children, the elderly and the sick, to assemble enough food for three days, and get ready to travel to Lublin, Poland. Next all the Jews were herded together at the marketplace. The bandits herded the women and children into the synagogue. The men remained at the marketplace. The last Jew brought to the marketplace was the town rabbi, Kalmen Magid.

The bandits made the men line up in rows. The director of the Lithuanian gymnasium, Miltsius, placed the rabbi in front of all the Jews, cut off his beard with a pair of scissors and cut a crucifix into the hair on his head. Rabbi Kalmen Magid stood with his head bowed, weeping. All the Jews wept with him. The Lithuanian population of the

town and from the surrounding countryside had assembled to watch this show, and they enjoyed it thoroughly. When they were finished with the rabbi, the murderers pulled out the town doctor, Khayim Lipman. He was from Kaunas. His parents and brother were sent to Russia as bourgeois in the spring of 1941. The Lithuanian murderers ordered the doctor to point out the Communists among the Jews. Dr Lipman responded that there were no Communists among the Jews of Vekshniai. The Lithuanian murderers began to entertain the Lithuanian public. They forced the Jews to dance around the rabbi and clap their hands, and to fall down and get back up. If any Jew collapsed, the Lithuanians doused him with cold water and forced him to get back up and dance again. From the marketplace the men were driven into the synagogue yard.

A German SS man wearing short pants stood there. He beat all of the Jewish men with a whip. Many military horses stood in harness in the yard. The Jews were forced to lead the horses around, to crawl under the horses' bellies, climb onto the horses' backs and then jump down, and so forth.

Khonon Reif, this eyewitness, was ordered to polish a saddle.

Finally the Lithuanian murderers forced the rabbi to get onto a horse, and then they forced the assistant rabbi, Rabbi Bloch, to pour a bucket of water on Rabbi Magid's head. On a nearby hill next to the study house stood the entire Lithuanian intelligentsia of the town, dressed in their holiday clothes, along with simple peasants. All of them watched as their Jewish neighbors were tormented, and they enthusiastically clapped as if they were watching a circus.

The German ordered all the Jews to line up, and each one had to pass by him. The German asked the happy Lithuanian "intellectuals" as each Jew passed him by: "Communist?" The Lithuanians answered each time, "Yes, Communist!" At this, the German would strike the Jew with his whip. The Lithuanians would begin to applaud. The show at the marketplace and then at the synagogue yard lasted for more than three hours.

The Jewish men were lined up in rows once again, and the SS man and the Lithuanians took away all of the Jews' knives, watches, gold rings and similar items. Later the German announced to the Lithuanian murderers that they could do whatever their hearts desired with the Jews.

The Lithuanian murderers took the Jews from the synagogue yard into empty stores which had belonged to the former Jewish merchant Shimen Vaks, located near the study house. Khonon Reif was present at the marketplace and at the synagogue yard, and he was driven into the stores together with the rest of the Jewish men.

The men in the stores and the women with children in the synagogue were detained for several weeks. A few of them were taken to do various jobs. The men were rarely able to meet with their wives and children. The synagogue and the stores were always guarded by armed Lithuanians.

During the first days the Jews still had food. Subsequently they suffered greatly from hunger.

On Tuesday evening, July 15, 1941, the better clothing, money and other valuables were taken from the men in the stores and from the women in the synagogue. The murderers threatened to shoot anyone who didn't give them away everything.

The women were stripped stark naked and searched. Meanwhile they were bullied and mocked. The director of the gymnasium was in charge of the looting, along with his assistant Tautsius and a man named Jarashauskas who had been a policeman during the rule of President Smetona.

That same evening, after the men and women were robbed, Lithuanian partisans shot a Jewish shoemaker named Khatse Mandl. They took him out of the stores onto the bridge over the Venta, ordered him to run, and shot him in the back on the bridge. The residents of the town stood calmly by, watching the Jew being shot.

The same evening the Lithuanian murderers distributed half a loaf of bread to every Jew, promising that the next day all the Jews would be taken to a better and more permanent camp.

Dr Lipman set up a Jewish hospital in town, at the home of Dr Rakuzin. Some ten Jews lay sick there. On the evening of Friday, August 1, 1941, all of those in the hospital were placed together with the men in the stores. Among the invalids brought there were the wife of Rabbi Kalmen Magid; the wife of Koenigsberg, the town iron dealer; and Mrs. Tsipe Goldberg. These three women died the very next day, Saturday, August 2, 1941. All three were buried at the Jewish cemetery. Dr Khayim Lipman was deeply distressed, because he already understood that something terrible was being prepared for the Jews.

At 4:00 a.m. on Tuesday, August 5, 1941, the Lithuanian bandits drove the men, women and children out of the

stores and the synagogue. They were heavily guarded. As they left the stores and the synagogue, the murderers confiscated even the little packages the Jews carried in their arms. The men were lined up in rows, followed by the women. The smaller children and the weak were placed in carts.

On the way, a kilometer past the Vekshniai Jewish cemetery, three men were shot, all elderly men, who had stopped while they were walking. The three men were the town slaughterer Feinberg, Mende the Tinsmith and Khatse-Garbl. The three men were shot by the Lithuanian murderers Levis Dargis and Algis Korsakas, both members of the town "intelligentsia."

All of the Jews were taken about nine kilometers away from Vekshniai, in a compound with a mill. It was between Mazheikiai and Tirkshliai, one kilometer from the Mazheikiai cemetery. The mill was owned by the local Germans Broitmozer and Latsch.

There were large barns at the mill compound, and the Jews brought from Vekshniai were placed in them. In the barns the Jews found torn tefilin, prayer shawls, Torah scrolls, and scraps of food and clothing. The Vekshniai Jews later found out that the men from Mazheikiai had been kept in the barns before they were shot. They realized why they had been brought to the barns.

## **II Tirkshliai**

A small town twelve kilometers from Vekshniai and six kilometers from Mazheikiai. Between Tirkshliai and Mazheikiai there is a Jewish cemetery. Khonon Reif was born in this small town, and he lived there for a number of years. Roughly sixty Jews lived in the town until the outbreak of the war. Tirkshliai was a resort. Every summer about a thousand guests from various cities and towns in Lithuania took their vacations there.

During the summer the town's Jews earned their living by providing food for the guests. The town had a study house, a slaughterer, and a butcher named Moyshe Montvid. There was a hardware store owned by the Jew Bentse Zin; two textile stores owned by Gute Vareyes and Yankl Movs; and a tannery owned by Hirsh Heyman.

The town had a Jewish volunteer fire company whose chief was the Jew Shase Lan, a tinsmith by trade. He was the first Jewish martyr in town. The Lithuanian wigmaker in town got along well with all the Jews in town.

As soon as the Germans arrived in town, the Lithuanian wigmaker Alfon Verkutis shot for no reason the Jewish tinsmith and fire chief Shase Lan, who had been liked by the entire Lithuanian population before the war.

Gradually the partisans arrested all the Jewish men in town, shortly after the Germans arrived. No one has been able to determine exactly where they were slaughtered. On Tuesday, August 5, 1941, all the women and children were driven into the barns next to the Mazheikiai cemetery, in the mill compound.

## **III Seda**

This town is located 32 kilometers from Vekshniai, and 23 kilometers from Mazheikiai. Some 700 Jews lived in town. Most were occupied in trade, but a significant number were also engaged in agriculture. In the town itself there was a Jewish compound consisting of several hundred hectares, which was divided among twenty Jewish families during the period of Soviet rule in 1940.

The town possessed a large leather business owned by the Binder brothers, and a large china shop owned by Hirshe Kan. The town contained an elementary school, a study house and a small library.

There was a Jewish pharmacist who had been a member of the gun club (Shauliai) during President Smetona's time. He was called Jonas Messe.

After the Germans arrived in town, Lithuanian bandits began arresting and taking away Jewish men. No one has managed to determine where the men were taken and slaughtered. It happened at the beginning of the month of July 1941. The pharmacist was shot together with the rest of the Jewish men. The women and children from Seda were brought to the barns at Mazheikiai on Tuesday, August 5, 1941.

## **IV Zhidikai**

A small town 29 kilometers from Mazheikiai. Some two hundred Jews lived there. They were occupied in trade and agriculture. There was a study house, an elementary school, and a few shops. There was also a larger textile and shoe store, owned by the Jew Meir Reif (a cousin of Rhone).

The attitude of the Lithuanian population toward the Jews before the war was not bad. Most of the Jews were poor.

As soon as the Germans arrived in town, the Lithuanian partisans began to arrest the Jewish men and take them away. Noone knew where the men were taken. The women and children were brought to the barns near Mazheikiai by the Lithuanian partisans.

#### **V Klikoliai**

A small town near the Latvian border, 28 kilometers from Vekshniai and forty kilometers from Mazheikiai.

Thirty Jews lived there, however, Jews from other places fled to the town during the first days of the war. On Tuesday, August 5, 1941, the men, women and children were all arrested and brought to the barns near Mazheikiai. They all wore yellow patches.

#### **VI Vegerai**

A small town near the Latvian border with a small Lithuanian population, including fifty Jews who were almost all farmers. From this town as well, all the men, women and children were brought to the barns near Mazheikiai. All of them wore yellow Stars of David.

#### **VII Akmene**

A small town 34 kilometers from Mazheikiai and 18 kilometers from Vekshniai, lying on the river Venta. About two hundred Jews lived there. All of the men, women and children were brought to the barns near Mazheikiai on August 5, 1941.

#### **VIII. Mazheikiai**

A county seat, 75 kilometers from Shavl and two kilometers from the Venta River. At the beginning of the war, more than 1,200 Jews lived in Mazheikiai.

Mazheikiai had a Hebrew gymnasium; an elementary school; a community bank directed by Glikman, and a Hebrew-Yiddish library, until 1940. The Jews of Mazheikiai had built their synagogue not long before the war broke out. Most of the Jewish youth belonged to Zionist movements, until the Red Army entered Lithuania in the spring of 1940.

The majority of the Jewish population was engaged in trade and artisanry. There was a large mill, belonging to the Jewish partners Leybovits, Moyshe Kan and Peyres; two large tanneries which belonged to Leybe Kalvarye, Bere Tsindler and his father; a pharmacy owned by the Jew Shvab and his son; large leather businesses owned by the brothers Berkman; large iron works owned by the Jew Bloch and his son; and a pharmaceutical warehouse owned by Lozer Bobey.

#### **The Outbreak of War, June 22, 1941**

On Saturday, June 28, 1941, the Germans were in Mazheikiai. The armed Lithuanian partisans in town drove the Jews out of their homes and assembled them in the study house. For a week all the Jews were kept in the study house. Then the men were separated from their wives and children. The partisans explained that the men were being taken to do an important job in Kretinga. But they weren't actually taken to Kretinga. Instead they were taken to the barns, where the Jews of Vekshniai, including this witness Khonon Reif, found torn tefilin, prayer shawls and scattered items of food. The Lithuanian murderers took all the Jewish men out of the barns to the cemetery and shot them.

The popular Jewish Dr Krongold was permitted to go away from the pit at the cemetery when the men were shot and to return to the study house. The murderers explained that the doctor was needed to tend to the Jewish women and children. Thus fate decided that the popular Jewish doctor would temporarily remain alive as a witness to the slaughter of the Jewish men of Mazheikiai, and describe the incident to Khonon Reif in full detail.

The Jewish women and children of Mazheikiai, along with Dr Krongold, were taken from the study house to the Pashirkshniai compound between Tirkshliai and Seda. They were kept in that compound until August 5, 1941, when they were brought to the barns near Mazheikiai. Khonon Reif does not remember exactly when the Jewish men of Mazheikiai were shot. But he is certain that it was the end of June or the beginning of July, 1941.

## All the Jews Shot at the Mazheikiai Jewish Cemetery

At 7:04 a.m. on the morning of Tuesday, August 5, 1941, the Lithuanian murderers took out of the barn a selected group of Jews from various towns. In all there were 130 of them, young, healthy men. They were all given spades and shovels. Heavily guarded by Lithuanians, armed with machine guns and hand grenades, the Jews were taken to the Mazheikiai Jewish cemetery, exactly a kilometers from the barns.

The following Lithuanian murderers from Vekshniai were present while the Jewish men were digging the pits at the cemetery: Pikevitsius Pranas; Kairys Kostas; Zhutautas; Algis Korsakas; Dargis Levis; Miltsius (the director of the gymnasium); Tautsius Pranas; Jarashauskas; Shpingis; Matsijauskas; Mazheika, and other bandits whose last names Reif no longer remembers. There were fifty men all together. Three Germans accompanied them. When the 130 men were brought to the cemetery, they were all forced to lie on the ground. Dargis Levis and Jarashauskas told them where to dig the pit. Half of the Jews had to dig, and the other half had to rest on the ground. Every half hour the Jews had to change places. Khonon Reif was among the 130 Jews. His two brothers, Leyzer and Yitskhok, were also present. At the last minute he wanted to be with them, and he crept towards them on his belly. The Lithuanian murderers noticed this, and brutally beat him with their rifle butts. The two Jewish doctors from Vekshniai, Lipman and Gelfand, were also present at the digging of the graves.

Near the new pits was a half-filled pit where the men from Mazheikiai had been shot.

At noon the German commandant of Mazheikiai, an S A man, arrived at the cemetery. He took some measurements and indicated how long the second pit the Jews had to dig would be. He was very angry, constantly shouting that the "work" had to be done as fast as possible. Then he left immediately.

The pit wasn't finished yet. Men were brought from Akmene. They immediately began to help digging the new pit. The partisans brought the weaker men back to the barn. Among them were Dr. Lipman; Dr. Gelfand; Ben-Tsion Peysekhovits; Khonon Reif and others. While taking these men back to the barn, the Lithuanian murderers beat them and forced them to sing Soviet songs.

When they arrived at the barns, partisans warned the fifty men who had been brought back that anyone who reported that pits were being dug at the cemetery would immediately be shot. Khonon Reif entered the barn where the men from Vekshniai were staying, and told them everything he knew. Then he went to see his wife and child, kissed them and said goodbye. Before he left his nine-year-old son Berele asked him; "Papa! The partisans said that they would shoot all of us. Is it true?"

Khonon denied this, and trying to hide the tears in his eyes, he left and returned to be with the men from Vekshniai. There he found Dr Krongold, who had been brought from the Pashirshkshniai compound together with the Jewish women and children of Mazheikiai, while Khonon was at the cemetery helping to dig the pits. Next to Dr Krongold sat Dr Khayim Lipman, Dr Gelfand, Rabbi Magid and Rabbi Bloch, all from Vekshniai.

Dr Krongold described the shooting of the Jewish men from Mazheikiai, and how he had been permitted to remain living, Krongold asked Reif exactly how long and wide the new pits were. He also asked whether there was evidence of the blood of the Mazheikiai men near the pit where they were buried, and which had been covered over with dirt.

He described the exact location of the pit. Khonon Reif confirmed for Dr Krongold that the two new pits were in fact being dug next to the pit where the Jewish men from Mazheikiai lay murdered.

Yone Galpern, also from Vekshniai, was worried about his son Pinkhos, who was lame in one leg. He constantly complained that he didn't know how his son would be able to walk all the way to the pit. He ended with a sigh, saying that he wished they had been shot already.

Rabbi Kalmen Magid ordered everyone to recite the Jewish confessional prayer, and did the same himself. Everyone sat hopelessly, recited Psalms and wept. In the second barn the women tore the hair out of their heads, kissed their small children, wept bitterly and wildly, and took leave of one another.

Khonon Reif suggested to Dr Khayim Lipman that they try to escape from the barn and find a way to survive. Lipman told him that there was nowhere to run to, that the same thing was doubtless happening all over Lithuania. He mourned the fact that his family, whom the Soviets had taken away as bourgeois early in the spring of 1941, wouldn't even know where he had died.

At the gate of the barn stood a Lithuanian from Vekshniai, a close acquaintance and client of Khonon Reif's leather goods store from before the war. Reif asked the bandit, whose name was Kerys Antanas, to let him bring a bucket of water from the pump, which was located approximately forty meters from the barn. The bandit accompanied Reif. Next to the pump he sat down calmly. He put his rifle down next to him. Khonon Reif seized the moment when the bandit was looking the other way, and began to escape in the direction of the Jewish cemetery and the grain fields. The bandit immediately began shooting at Reif, but didn't hit him. Khonon made his way into a field of potatoes, and lay there until evening. While he lay in the potato field, Reif heard a huge commotion in the barn, and constant shooting in the direction of the area toward which he had been running. In the evening the commotion was stilled. At 8:00 p.m. the men who had finished digging the pits were brought back from the cemetery to the barns.

When they were brought to the barn, terrible weeping and shouting could be heard. It lasted for quite a while. When it grew dark, Khonon approached the cemetery more closely, and he lay there until the next morning. All of this took place on August 5, 1941.

On Wednesday, August 6, 1941, at 6:00 a.m., the first group of men were taken from the barns to the pits. The shouts of the men could be heard: "Help, save me! My little children!" Immediately afterward shouting and moaning could be heard. Khonon escaped confused and terrified, to a forest five kilometers away in the direction of Vekshniai. Then he began to go closer to Shavl. Reif didn't know what was going on in Shavl at the time.

It took three nights until Reif arrived in Shavl. It was impossible for him to walk during the day. In Shavl the Jews were still living in their own homes, and they had no idea what was happening in the countryside.

Khonon immediately turned to the Council of Elders and told everything to Engineer Abramson and Mendl Leybovits, both members of the Council of Elders. They didn't believe Reif, thinking that he was mentally ill. Later, when the shooting of the Jews of Shavl began, these men began to believe what Reif had told them.

### **In the Shavl Ghetto. How Did Khonon Survive?**

Khonon Reif entered the ghetto together with all the Jews of Shavl. In the city, he and Hirsh Davidov established a fur workshop, following the Germans' orders. Later a brigade of sixty Jews from the ghetto worked in that shop.

After Reif had been in the Shavl ghetto for three weeks, a servant of his who had worked for him two years, came to see him. The servant was a Russian woman named Nina Kukhalskyte. She told Reif that she had gone from Vekshniai to the barns near Mazheikiai, hoping to get his son Berele out. All the men, women and children had already been shot at the Jewish cemetery, in the course of three days - Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, August 6-8, 1941.

Khonon Reif is certain that more than 2,300 Jewish men, women and children were shot during those three days. Khonon Reif escaped from the Shavl ghetto one month before it was sealed. He went to the peasant Kostas Zhutautas, in the village of Baleneliai, seventy kilometers from Shavl, between Telshiai and Seda. He stayed there for six weeks, and meanwhile a good friend of his, Khatskl Fleysher, sent a letter saying that all the children had been taken away from the Shavl ghetto by the Germans and Lithuanians, and that Reif should do whatever he could to save him. Khonon sent a peasant with a wagon, who brought Khatskl and his wife out of the Shavl ghetto. All three spent four weeks in a bunker which Khonon had prepared, and then they had to leave. Peasants had found out about the bunker, and even reported it to the Lithuanian police in the town of Seda, the police searched the peasant's home but didn't find the Jews.

Khatskl Fleysher and his wife left for the countryside around Telshiai, while Reif set off for the village of Navareniai, near Telshiai. Reif lived there for about seven months, together with a Jewish woman named Movshovits from Shavl and her child Avrom, aged 13, whom he had earlier found staying with the peasant. Two days before the Red Army arrived, Lithuanian bandits discovered the woman and child, and shot both of them in that same village. At that moment Reif was in the attic. He lowered himself from the attic with a rope, and escaped back to the peasant Kostas Zhutautas. He was there just one night. The Red Army was just 15 kilometers from the village. The peasant Kostas Zhutautas called the police in Seda, telling them that there was a Jewish bandit at his house.

While Reif lay in the barn, two SS men and two Lithuanians arrived in a car, and found Reif in the barn. They tied his hands, and took him to Seda. He spent the night from Friday evening until Saturday morning there. (That was precisely the time that the Soviets took Telshiai.) In the morning preparations were made to shoot him.

Suddenly the Red Army began shelling the town. The Lithuanian and German murderers escaped, and Reif was left in the jail. All the arrestees broke down the walls of the prison and freed themselves.

Several days after the liberation, Reif went to the peasant Kostas Zhutautas, accompanied by the Red police of Seda and a Soviet Jewish military doctor. They brought the peasant to Seda. Under interrogation the peasant confessed that he hadn't wanted Reif to be left alive, so that he could inherit the things Reif had hidden at his place. Reif had left two suitcases containing his possessions at the peasant's place.

Reif attests that if he hadn't had any money he would not have survived, because not a single peasant would have even fed him or sheltered him a single day. Every month Khonon had to pay a golden Russian ten-ruble coin.

Translated from Yiddish manuscript

by Dr. J. Boyarin

Signature: *Jonathan Boyarin*

New York, NY

November 9, 1988

### Attestation of Khonon Reif



*KHONON REIF  
and wife Liuba  
(Mažeikių)*

I, Khonon Reif, told Leib Koniuchowsky word for word everything recorded on exactly eleven pages regarding the slaughter of the Jews of Mazheikių County. I precisely related all the dates, facts, names of persons and locations, and I attest thereto with my signature on each page.

Khonon Reif (Signature)

The report was written by  
L. Koniuchowsky (Signature)

Bavaria,  
Bad-Reichenhall  
November 12, 1946.

We hereby certify the signature of the camp resident Khonon Reif.

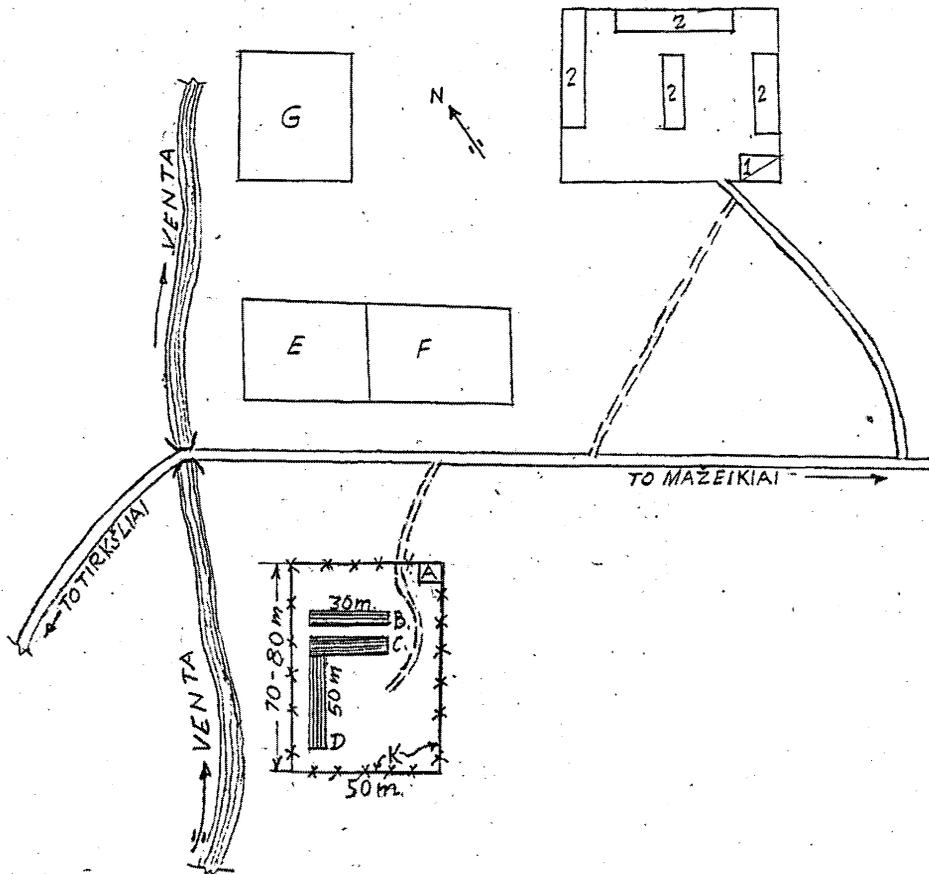
Jewish Central Court  
in Bad-Reichenhall  
Mgr. Ingber (Signature)  
Mgr. Tayshman (?) (Signature)

February 14, 1947.

Translated from Yiddish  
by Dr. Jonathan Boyarin  
Signature:

*Jonathan Boyarin*

New York, NY  
November 9, 1988



No scale

*Leyb Koniuchowsky*  
-1983-

Indications and Explanations of the Sketch

1. The mill.
2. The barns.
- A. A room at the cemetery for preparing the corpse for burial.
- B. The pit where the murdered men of Mazheikiai were buried.
- C & D. Both pits containing murdered Jews from Mazheikiai County, who had been confined in the barns.
- E. The Russian cemetery.
- F. The Lithuanian cemetery.
- G. The German cemetery.
- H. The Jewish cemetery, surrounded by a barbed-wire fence.

The sketch was drawn by L. Koniuchowsky (signature), based on information provided by and attested to by Khonon Reif (signature).

December 9, 1946

Translated from Yiddish  
by Dr. Jonathan Boyarin  
Signature:

*Jonathan Boyarin*

New York, NY  
November 9, 1988

# THE GRUESOME SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS OF KÉDAINIAI, SHETA AND ZHEIME

## 1. The eyewitness testimony of Moyshe Krost,

Moyshe born in Kédainiai on March 18, 1900. Moyshe finished elementary school there. He was a master confectioner by trade. Moyshe lived in Kédainiai until 1925, and then moved to Taurage. His father's name was Mikhal and his mother's name was Khaye-Etl. After he moved to Taurage, Moyshe often came to visit his hometown of Kédainiai, where his mother and his three brothers Berl, Nisn and Dovid all lived with their families.

## Location; The Population and Their Occupations

Kédainiai is a county seat and a stop on the railroad line between Jonava and Rivilishkis. It is on the Kaunas-Panevezhys highway, fifty kilometers north of Kaunas. Through the town flows the Nevezhis River. Not far from Kédainiai flows the small river Smilga, which empties into the Nevezhis at the edge of town.

More than 6,000 people lived in Kédainiai. More than half of them were Jewish. Most of the Jews of Kédainiai were occupied in trade, artisanry, gardening and orchard leasing. Among the larger Jewish enterprises were:

1. A steam sawmill owned by the three brothers Gel.
2. A mill in the church compound of Švyliai, not far from Kedainai, also belonging to the brothers Gel.
3. A lumber mill belonging to the Sisynsky brothers, at the Viliainiai compound.
4. A sawmill owned by the partners Bloch and Frayman, in Jotkishkis, a kilometer and a half from town.
5. A cake factory owned by Hillel Krost.
6. A leather factory owned by Avrom Podlas, formerly owned by Kahan.
7. A brickworks and a tannery owned by the brothers Dovid and Elye Bavilsky.

There were large tanneries in Kédainiai which belonged to Jews. A large number of Jews had their own gardens, and some of their land was leased. They earned a living from their gardens, and they didn't live badly. Quite a few Jews leased orchards. A number were also occupied in artisanry. There were large textile stores in Kédainiai, including the one owned by Yosl Volpert, as well as hardware stores.

Thanks to the fact that Kédainiai is located not far from Kaunas, it possessed a railroad station and good means of transportation, the Jews earned a decent living. Nevertheless a fair number needed the support of their relatives overseas, especially from South Africa. During the last years prior to the war, the economic situation of the Jews of Kédainiai grew worse because of phenomenon which affected not only Kédainiai, but all of Lithuania. There began to be immigration from the countryside to the cities, and along with it came bitter competition from the Lithuanians, who were supported by the government. Thus the *Verslas* Co-operative competed with the Jews in every aspect of economic life. The members employed anti-Semitic slogans and called on the Lithuanians to buy only from "their own." The members of *Verslas* also caused the Jewish artisans considerable trouble. It was never possible for Jews to get government positions in Lithuania.

The Jewish youth in town began to sense that their future was hopeless, and those who could emigrated either to Palestine or to South Africa.

## Cultural and Economic Life; Coexistence with the Lithuanian Population

The Jewish community of Kédainiai was one of the oldest in Lithuania. The evidence for this was the existence of two cemeteries, next to each other on the right side of the Smilga River, containing old gravestones, half-sunken, whose inscriptions were difficult to read.

The old cemetery was filled with graves, and the new one was almost full as well. It was said in Kédainiai that the community had been in existence for over four hundred years. Kédainiai also possessed one of the oldest and most beautiful synagogues in Lithuania. People in Kédainiai believed that the old brick synagogue had been standing for precisely five hundred years. There was no ceiling in the synagogue. The roof was round, and decorated with frescos on the inside. From floor to roof stood a high wooden Torah ark, decorated with wonderful carvings, which was considered a remarkable work of art.

In addition to the old synagogue Kédainiai also had a municipal study house, a large prayer room and two more study houses. On the other side of the Nevezhis there was another synagogue. The rabbi in Kédainiai was named Zilberg, and there was a rabbinical judge named Rabbi Altmuner. Rabbi Lis, who was the spiritual leader of the local yeshiva, was very popular.

Most of the Jews of Kédainiai were religious, except for some of the young people. But even they went to pray on the Sabbath, the holidays and particularly on the High Holy Days.

Kedainai had a Jewish community bank and a Jewish commercial bank, which gave short-term and long-term loans. The two banks played an important role in the economic and social life of the Jews of Kédainiai.

The local Hebrew gymnasium played an important role in the education of the young people in town. In addition to academic subjects, the gymnasium also trained the young people to be committed to the renaissance of the Jewish people, and the Hebrew language and literature.

The wealthier families sent their children to study at the Kaunas University. Some of them also studied overseas. Some of them brought their enthusiasm for the renaissance of the Jewish people to the various countries to which they emigrated.

There were two elementary schools in Kedainai: in one the language of instruction was Hebrew, and in the other it was Yiddish. Among those loyal to the Yiddish elementary school were the few local "Yiddishists" who promoted the principle of "working where we are," along with a few artisans. But they were a minority in Kédainiai. By far the largest number of Jews in Kedainiai, including the youth, were organized in Zionist movements.

An important role in the education of the Jewish youth was played by the library, the majority of whose books were in Hebrew and Yiddish. Kédainiai often received delegates from Palestine, to whom the young people of Kédainiai paid fascinated attention.

The relations between the Jews and their Lithuanian neighbors grew tense during the several years leading up to the war. The Jews sensed an increase in anti-Semitism. The entry of the Red Army into Lithuania in the spring of 1940 changed every aspect of the lifestyle of the Jews of Kédainiai, who had no choice but to swallow the bitter pill and give up the ways of life they had followed for generations.

The larger enterprises, stores and houses were nationalized. The Hebrew gymnasium and elementary school had to give up their customary nationalistic education, and had to adopt a curriculum which didn't suit them.

But there were also young people who looked forward to the new Soviet system, and who saw it as providing them with new opportunities in every area. Some of the Jewish young people received official positions and took active part in political and social life, just like their Lithuanian neighbors. Indeed, this aroused the hostility of the Lithuanians, both toward the Jews and toward the new system. They impatiently awaited their "redeemers," the brown-shirted Nazi Fascists, who would bring them the opportunity to get rid of the Jews who had had the "nerve" to think they had the same rights as Lithuanians.

## **The Outbreak of War**

When the war between Hitler Germany and the Soviet Union broke out on June 22, 1941, the Krost family was in Taurage. Together with hundreds more Jews, they fled the bombed and burning city in panic. On the way Krost lost his wife and children, and therefore he could not escape to the Soviet Union.

With great difficulty, he managed to find his older son Yisroel and his second son Beynish. Moyshe could not find his wife Ite (nee Zalmanovits in Kédainiai) nor his youngest son Avrom, and he went to his hometown of Kédainiai, where he hoped that his wife and youngest son would be staying with his mother and brothers.

Moyshe and his two eldest sons survived a dangerous journey. A few dozen times they were detained by armed Lithuanian bandits who called themselves "partisans," and who appeared as suddenly as mushrooms after rain. They disrupted the retreat of the Red Army, and also shot at the Jews who flooded all the roads in the area.

Thanks to the fact that Moyshe was carrying his army reserve booklet, proving that he had volunteered for the Lithuanian army during the struggle for independence, he was liberated after he was detained. However, the partisans robbed all of the better valuables he still had in his possession.

## **Moyshe and His Children in Kédainiai**

On July 5, 1941 Moyshe, together with his two children and other Jews, arrived in his hometown of Kédainiai. At the station he saw Jews working in gardens which had been nationalized by the Soviets and granted to the Sodyba cooperatives. The Jews were all depressed and hopeless. All of them wore yellow ribbons on their left sleeves.

Partisans guarded them while they worked. The Jews recognized Moyshe, but were afraid to speak to him.

When they came closer to the barracks, Moyshe spotted his two brothers Nisn and Dovid. They were repairing automobiles together with other Jews. Germans from the Wehrmacht were guarding them. The brothers were afraid to speak to Moyshe, and gave him a signal not to go through town.

Making his way through fields and side roads, Moyshe reached the synagogue yard where his brothers and his mother lived. At the synagogue yard Moyshe saw torn religious books and a trampled Torah scroll. A military patrol stood in the yard.

When he reached his house he saw the doors locked and the shutters closed. The Jewish homes stood as if orphaned, wrapped in sorrow.

'Moyshe couldn't recognize his town. The happy Jewish youth were nowhere to be seen. In fact there were no Jews at all to be seen.

He knocked. Those inside were afraid to open the door. Moyshe knocked several times, and announced who he was. The door was opened. When he went inside the house, he saw the catastrophe that had befallen his family, and found out about the tragic situation of the Jews of Kédainiai.

When Moyshe's sisters-in-law saw him, they burst out weeping. Moyshe's mother Khaye-Etl had received inaccurate bad news concerning Moyshe. The old woman hadn't survived the news. She had gotten a heart attack and died. The partisans hadn't granted permission to bury her. The brothers had to appeal to the German commandant. On the third day after her death, she was buried at the Jewish cemetery. There was no funeral. Everyone was afraid to go out into the street.

He found out that the Lithuanians weren't selling the Jews any food. In order to avoid starvation, some Jews were forced to risk their lives, and go outside of the city to get food from the Jewish farmers.

Before the Germans arrived, a large number of the Jews of Kédainiai escaped and hid in the countryside. Some of them hid in cellars in the city. Before the Germans arrived, there was a short battle outside the city between the retreating Red Army and the Germans. After the Germans arrived in Kédainiai, the Jews returned from the villages to their homes, which they found completely looted. Torn bedding and photographs were scattered in the street.

In the evening his brothers returned from work. They complained that while they worked they were beaten and tortured. Their tormenters were Lithuanians from town and from nearby villages. The Germans in particular beat and tormented the Jewish workers. Every morning the men had to report to their assigned workplaces. Those who didn't have any assigned workplaces had to work at the local airport. Some of the men worked for the Germans, some worked in the gardens of the Sodyba co-operative. Others did agricultural labor in the surrounding compounds. The worst job was the work at the airport. A large number of men worked there. They were guarded by Lithuanian partisans. In the worst heat the Jews had to toil from morning till evening. The partisans used to pressure the Jews to work ever faster. They weren't fed. All they had to eat was whatever they took from home. No wonder no one wanted to work at the airport.

After the men left for their regular workplaces, partisans would go from house to house, shouting and screaming, and grab men for work at the airport. That was the reason the Jews closed their doors and shutters. When the partisans found men who were hiding, they murderously beat them and forced them to go to work at the airport. In the evening the men were allowed home. Only then were the doors and shutters opened, and the Jews began to appear on the street.

One evening after work, Pine the porter, a healthy, large-boned Jew, complained to Moyshe that he had been so murderously beaten and tormented that the Jewish doctor Sholom Rifkowitz had been obligated to visit him at home, and ordered him to stay in bed. Then he wondered at the survival of the youngest Gel brother, whom the partisans had beaten even worse than himself. That day the partisans forced the Jewish workers at the airport do somersaults in water and mud. Moyshe heard of several such incidents.

### **The Bedding Action; Murder of Young Jews**

On Tuesday, July 8, 1941, before noon, Germans and partisans grabbed young Jewish boys and girls, brought carts out into the street, and drove past Jewish houses. All of the Jewish women (the men were at work or in hiding) were forced to hand over their better pillows, blankets and linen for the hospital the Germans had set up for their wounded.

On Wednesday morning, July 9, 1941, after the men had already gone to work, Germans and partisans went through the Jewish houses looking for men they could take to work. It so happened that Moyshe's brother Dovid had stayed at home that day. Moyshe and his elder son managed to hide in an outhouse in the courtyard. They took Dovid off to the airport. The same happened to other Jewish men.

In the evening the men returned from the airport bringing Dovid's cap. They explained that Dovid had been murderously beaten and taken to prison. Dovid's wife went to the prison, and brought him his cap and some food. The partisans confiscated these things, but she was unable to see Dovid again.

That same evening partisans began seizing young Jews at home and arresting them. It was said then that they were arresting those who had been Communists, along with those who had occupied, any position whatsoever under the Soviets. In most cases they simply arrested them and then invented various sins connected with Communism. Moyshe remembers that Pine the porter's daughter was arrested that evening, along with Moyshe Zelmanovits' three daughters Bune, Leye and Rokhel (aged 22-26), and his son Ruven, aged 20.

There was a terrible panic in the town. The doors and shutters were tightly shut once again that evening. Everyone hid from their own sorrow and from the tragedy surrounding them.

Later, when he was in the Shavl ghetto, Moyshe found out that all of the young people who were arrested had been taken to prison. From there they were taken to the Borer forest next to the railroad station, where they were all shot.

Moyshe Krost was afraid to remain in Kédainiai any longer. Together with his two sons and one more Jew, he left Kédainiai for Shavl the next morning, Thursday, July 10. Their lives were in danger more than once during the journey.

While he was in the Shavl ghetto Moyshe heard that before the Jews of Kédainiai were shot, they had been confined to a ghetto. He doesn't know how long they were there or what their lives were like. But he heard people in the Shavl ghetto saying that at the pit, a Jew from Kédainiai named Yitskhok Shlapobersky had choked a Lithuanian partisan to death. Moyshe does not know the details of how the Jews were slaughtered.

### **In the Shavl Ghetto**

When he arrived in Shavl, Moyshe found his wife and youngest child. Together with all the Jews of Shavl they had entered the ghetto, and they had suffered along with everyone else.

Moyshe Krost lost his son Avremele during the action against children. Moyshe was interned at the Shavl airport with his family at the time. Moyshe, his wife and two sons were taken to Stutthof, Germany, together with the Jews of Shavl, and from there he and his two sons were taken to a concentration camp near Dachau. His sixteen-year-old son Beynish died of hunger at Camp 11. Moyshe had by then been transported to Camp 4 as a "Mussulman" (a Jew who was barely alive). There he was liberated by the American army, together with his eldest son. His wife was liberated at another location by the Red Army. Later she was united with her husband and son.

## **2 The testimony of Aba Lison**

Aba was born in 1905. His father's name was Leybe. Until 1940 he lived with his parents in Vendzhiogala. From 1940 until the outbreak of the war in the spring of 1941, he lived in Kaunas. As soon as the war broke out, he went to join his parents in Vendzhiogala. Aba Lison spent three days each week in Kédainiai, where he had partners with whom he did business. His partners were Leyzer Reybshteyn and Moyshe Gurvitz. Kédainiai was his second home.

### **The Total Destruction of Men, Women and Children**

On the first day of the war many young people in Kédainiai tried to escape to the Soviet Union. But the very first day of the war the Lithuanian bandits began shooting at the fleeing Jews. Many people died along the roads. The German army caught up with them, and the Jews began to return to their homes. The armed Lithuanian murderers immediately set upon the Jews, passing various regulations and ordinances concerning such things as the wearing of yellow patches, not walking on the sidewalk, not speaking to the Lithuanian population, and so forth.

Every day they began taking groups of Jews off to various tasks in the city, especially to the local airport, where they dismantled bombs left behind by the Red Army. About ten Jews were torn to pieces while doing this work. The Lithuanians stood in the distance watching. A large number of Jews were forced to work at the compounds of Podborok, Pelednoga and Zhergina, a few kilometers from town, all of which had been nationalized under the Soviets.

On July 23, 1941, six German trucks took about 200 Jews off to "work," and they never returned. Those who carried out this action were Lithuanians and a few Germans. Among the local Lithuanians who took active part were three brothers who lived at the horse market: Vacys, Stepan and Juozas Shultsa, and a carpenter named Vlaclovas Leshtsinski, who lived on Jasvojn Street in Kédainiai.

Among the two hundred Jews who were taken away were Yisroel Kahan and his three sons Zalmen, Fayvl and Ortshik; a merchant named Ortshik Karanovsky; Leyzer Reybshteyn, his son Bine, and his brother Yankl, all butchers; two brothers-in-law, a pharmacist named Kagan and a merchant named Pruzhansky, who had married; two sisters named Lina and Gesa Rabinovitz, both dentists; Moyshe Gurvitz, a farmer, along with his wife, a son and two daughters; Yisroel Tober, a baker, along with his wife and daughter; and Mine Shulkiner, a saleswoman.

The relatives who were left behind began running to the leaders of the Lithuanian partisans to find out about the fate of their loved ones. But they couldn't learn anything. For a large sum of money, the relatives hired a Lithuanian to serve as a special messenger to find out about the fate of the 200 Jews. The Lithuanian quickly returned with a precise answer: that very day, July 23, all 200 had been taken from Kédainiai to a forest ten kilometers away, near the village of Tavtsunai, where they were shot. The relatives didn't believe him, but later they realized that this tragedy had indeed occurred.

A short time after this tragedy, the mayor summoned the leading Jews of the town Tsoдек Shlapobersky, Khayim Ronder, the textile merchant Blumberg and others. The mayor announced to the Jews that the Jews had 24 hours to leave their homes and settle along Smilgų Street.

On August 20, 1941 all the Jews of Kédainiai settled on that street. The panic, weeping and suffering of the Jews that day was terrible. In one day the Jews lost everything they had built up with their own hard work over the course of generations. That same day, August 20, 1941, the Lithuanian bandits brought all the Jews from Sheta and Zheime to Smilgų Street. In all there were 1,500 people.

Zheime is twenty kilometers from Kédainiai. Twenty Jewish families, merchants and artisans, lived there. Sheta is thirty kilometers from Kédainiai. About 65 Jewish families lived there. Among the 1,500 Jews brought from Sheta and Zheime to Kédainiai, there were quite a lot of Jews from other towns who had fled during the first days of the war.

The street on which the Jews settled was surrounded by barbed wire. The overcrowding was terrible. As soon as the Jews moved onto that street, the mayor imposed a demand for a large sum of money from the Jews, threatening to annihilate them if they didn't come up with it in time. The sum was assembled. For three days the Jews were in the ghetto. On August 23, Lithuanian police and members of the Shauliai gun club arrived in the ghetto under the direction of a few Germans, and drove all the men over the age of fourteen out of their houses. The men were lined up in rows of four, and taken to barns at the Zhirgunai compound, at the edge of Kédainiai. The barn was heavily guarded by Lithuanian bandits who called themselves "partisans." The Zhirgunai compound had once belonged to the German Todtleben, who had been an army general under the Russian tsars. On the 24th, all of the women and children were driven out of their houses in the ghetto, and they too were brought to the Zhirgunai barns.

That same day, all the women and newborn children were brought from the hospital to the barns. The barns were made of brick. The Jews were not given any food. All they received was black coffee. The Lithuanian bandits came into the barns several times and robbed the Jews' last possessions.

On Thursday, August 28, 1941 some two hundred Lithuanian railroad workers came to the Zhirgunai compound armed with carbines and hand grenades. The murderers selected all the young, healthy men and took them out of the compound in groups of sixty. The Jews had to keep their arms behind their backs, and were forbidden to speak to each other. They were taken group by group from the compound to the left bank of the Smilga River, about one and a half kilometers from the barn. A long, deep pit had already been dug there over the course of five days by Soviet prisoners. Every group of men was shot at the pit. To prevent the Jews in the barn from finding out about the shootings too soon, the murderers placed huge motors close to the pit. The noise of the motors covered the sound of the machine guns and the screaming of the unfortunate men who were being shot. Many of them fell into the grave only wounded. The Kédainiai butcher Hirsh Leb jotkin hung himself in the barn.

The town rabbi was among the first group brought to the pit to be shot. He spoke to the Jewish men before they died, advising them not to try to resist, because doing so could have further angered the murderers and led them to shoot the women and children in the barn, who otherwise might have survived.

Among the second group brought to the pit was the Kédainiai Jew Tsodek Shlapoberski. A German stood near the pit giving orders. Tsodek begged the German not to shoot him. At that the German began beating him. Shlapoberski dragged the German into the pit and began choking him. A Lithuanian bandit jumped into the pit to help the German. Shlapoberski tore out the Lithuanian's throat. The Lithuanian lay dead. Shlapoberski wasn't shot, but cut to pieces with knives. The bandit was buried with great ceremony.

After the incident involving Shlapoberski, the murderers took smaller groups of men to the pit. After they finished shooting all the men, they led the women and children to the pit in groups of forty.

They brought the elderly and sickly women to the pit in automobiles and threw them into the pit alive. Finally the murderers brought out the small children. At the pit, the murderers threw the small children into the air and stabbed them with bayonets.

Lithuanian acquaintances of Aba Lison - Michal Shnorevitsius who lived on Vilnius Street, Petras Gedravitsius who also lived in Kedainai, and Feliksas Shultsas from the village of Pelednava, later told Lison that after dirt had been shovelled into the pit, the dirt moved up and down, and blood flowed from the pit. The murderers drove steam rollers over the pit to make the earth settle.

Aba Lison escaped from the slaughter of Jews in Vendzhiogala and hid in a village called Medekšai, Kédainiai Township, six kilometers from the pit. He clearly heard the shooting, but didn't imagine the gruesome deed the Lithuanian and German murderers had committed. Aba's sister Mine visited him the next day and told him about the slaughter of the Jews in Kédainiai. This was three days before the women and children in Vendzhiogala were taken to Babtai, where they were shot the same day, January 9, 1942.

### **Those Who Survived the Gruesome Slaughter**

Two of the Jews in the Zhirgunai compound were Khayim Ronder from Kédainiai, born in 1903, and Shmuel Smolski, a refugee from Poland who had been born in Posnan. Shmuel had fled Poland during the war between Germany and Poland in 1939, and he had come to Kédainiai. When the men were taken to be shot, both of them managed to find hiding places in the barn. After all of the men, women and children were murdered, the murderers brought the Jews' clothing back to the barn, and set a guard around it. During the night Khayim and Shmuel cut an opening in the roof with a knife and removed their shoes. At midnight they lowered themselves from the roof with a rope. The guard didn't spot them, and didn't hear them running away. They hid in the forest for a while.

Then they heard rumors from peasants that units of Red partisans had been created in the forests around Vilnius. They decided to leave the bloody earth of Lithuania and look for Red partisans in the Vilnius region.

After a long and dangerous journey, the two Jews arrived in the Vilnius region. But they didn't find any partisans, because in the fall of 1941 there still were no organized Red partisan groups. The two returned to Lithuania, and by chance happened to go to the village where Aba Lison was hiding. The name of the village was Puzhaitisai, and the day they arrived there was December 15, 1941. Aba Lison was hiding at the home of a Polish peasant named Feliks Novik. Aba Lison barely recognized Khayim Ronder, who had been a good friend of his before the war. The two Jews were in bad shape; they were frozen, exhausted and malnourished.

The two men gave Abe precise detail about the slaughter of the Kédainiai Jews. He also found out that only three Jews from Kédainiai had survived: Khayim, Shmuel and Ben-Tsion Birger. Aba found himself another hiding place, and the two men from Kédainiai stayed with the peasant Novik. Khayim was half naked. Aba and Khayim went to a forest warden, from whom they took back Khayim's fur coat and the coat of Khayim's brother. From that point on the four Jews stayed in contact until the end of the war. Aba's brother Yosef had also survived the slaughter of the Jews of Vendzhiogala.

### **The Four Jews Become Red Partisans**

Aba, his brother Yosef and the two Jews from Kédainiai left for the forests in the spring of 1942. With difficulty they managed to settle into a well-camouflaged bunker, where they lived until August 1942. They would go out into the countryside at night to get food. Meanwhile they acquired a rifle and two hand grenades. They found out that fifty kilometers further, near Sheta in the Lantsunava forest, there was a group of Red partisans made up of escaped

Soviet prisoners of war. In the fall of 1942 the four Jews met the partisans. Later they established contact with those in the Rudnitski Pushtshe, and began to live as partisans. The four Jews stayed with the Red partisans until the liberation. They survived many dangers during that time. More than once they saw Death before their eyes.

On January 9, 1944 at 4:00 p.m., while sitting in a bunker in the Podborski forest, the two comrades Aba and Khayim were attacked by Lithuanian police armed with machine guns. The bunker was abandoned, half filled with water, and no one lived there. Aba and Khayim only planned to spend the day there and then go further. It was clear to the two comrades that they had been betrayed. They didn't lose their wits, however. They threw a grenade at the Lithuanian police, and used the ensuing panic to run in different directions. At night the two got back together. They ascertained that they had been betrayed by the peasant Girgeravitsius from the village of Podborupe. Three days later Aba and Khaim, accompanied by a Russian, shot the peasant, his wife and his father. The three comrades hung a warning on the peasant's house, stating that any Lithuanian who tried to prevent innocent people from staying alive could expect the same fate. The entire surrounding region was terrified. No one dared to enter the house until the police came. The priest was afraid to bury the three corpses at the Christian cemetery. They were buried outside the cemetery fence. The priest was from Labanova.

Nevertheless, the Jews and their comrades, the Red partisans, began to be hunted. They all went to the region of Ukmerge. But in that area there were raids carried out by Lithuanians and Germans against Red partisans. A group of sixteen men, including the four Jews, went back to the Lantsunava forest in the Sheta-Kedainiai region. In that area all the Jews fought and lived together with the rest of the Red partisans until they were liberated by the Red Army.

### **Interned Jews Escape from the Airport; Rivké Levit, Leader of the Ranks at the Airport**

A camp was created in Kédainiai for Jews brought from the Kaunas ghetto. The Jews worked at the airport. After work, the Jews were allowed to go into the countryside to barter their valuables for food. While wandering through the countryside, the Jews met Red partisans, who showed them a letter from Aba written in Yiddish. The Jews in the camp organized themselves and prepared to escape to join the Red partisans in the forest. Their leader was a young woman named Rivke Levit, who was a supervisor over the Jews at the airport in Kédainiai.

The first group of young people left the camp in March 1944. Six of them were shot while escaping from the camp. Eighteen managed to escape, and reached the Red partisans safely. A hundred young people were supposed to escape the camp that day. But suddenly the guard was reinforced, and no one else managed to escape. Later there was talk of betrayal by a Jewish camp leader.

Rivke Levit's mother was shot the next day as punishment for the "guilt" of her daughter, who had been the major initiator of the escape. Out of the eighteen who escaped, one Jew named Kirke Solski died later during a conflict with Lithuanian police who were carrying out a raid. The rest survived, and were liberated by the Red Army.

### **The Death of Kirke Solski.**

Eight partisans, of whom Solski was the only Jew, went to the homes of peasants in the village of Ritsunai and seized weapons. At night the eight divided into two groups of four, and without asking the farmer's permission, one group went to the barn and the other went to a small bath in a hut in a field. The next day the woman farmer found out about her uninvited guests. She immediately reported them to a teacher in the nearby village of Kulve. The teacher reported this by telephone to the Jonava police, who immediately drove up and surrounded the farm. There was a battle which lasted for an hour and a half. One of the partisans was slightly wounded during the battle, and Kirke Solski was killed. The seven surviving partisans managed to escape the encirclement. When the Lithuanian police drove away from the village, the seven men returned and burned all of the farm buildings. They did not find the woman or any of the members of her family at home. The Jews suspected that Kirke Solski had actually been shot by his seven comrades.

Aba Lison testifies that on August 28, 1941, on the left bank of the Smilga River next to the Jewish cemetery in Kédainiai, some 4,000 Jewish men, women and children from Kédainiai, Sheta and Zheim were shot.

While Aba was wandering through the countryside in August 1941, he met a sixteen-year-old girl named Khayeleva Labinovskaya from Vendzhiogala who had survived. Aba took Khayeleva under his protection, and found her a place to stay at the home of a peasant woman named Kustantova in the village of Serbinai, Kédainiai Township. The peasant woman was poor and lived alone. Aba had to provide food and clothing for both women. He had to bring everything at night. Khayeleva stayed with the peasant woman for thirteen months. Aba couldn't find a permanent

place for her, but peasants were found with whom she stayed sometimes for a few months, sometimes for a few days. Thus she wandered until she was liberated. After the liberation, Khayele married Yosef Lison, Aba's brother.

Translated from Yiddish manuscript  
by Dr. Jonathan Boyarin  
Signature: *Jonathan Boyarin*  
New York, New York  
November 11, 1988

### Attestations of Moyshe Krost and Aba Lison

I, Moyshe Krost, provided this meager information concerning the slaughter of the Jews of Kedainiai, and I attest thereto with my signature on each page.

Moyshe Krost (Signature)

The report was recorded by  
Engineer L. Koniuchowsky (Signature)  
Feldafing bei Starnberg  
May 11, 1948

The signature of the Feldafing camp resident Moyshe Krost is attested to by the chairman of the camp committee.

E. Reif (Signature)  
Feldafing, May 11, 1948

Translated from Yiddish manuscript  
by Dr. Jonathan Boyarin  
Signature: *Jonathan Boyarin*  
New York, New York  
November 11, 1988

I, Aba Lison, related word for word to Leib Koniuchowsky everything written on six pages of a notebook, concerning the slaughter of the Jews of Kedainiai, Sheta and Zheime. I personally and precisely related all of the dates, facts, and names of people and locations, and I attest thereto with my signature on each page.

Aba Lison (Signature)

The report was written by  
L. Koniuchowsky (Signature)

Bad-Reichenhall  
Bavaria  
November 10, 1946

Translated from Yiddish manuscript  
by Dr. Jonathan Boyarin  
Signature: *Jonathan Boyarin*  
New York, New York  
November 11, 1988



ABE LISON  
(Kedainiai)

## THE EXTERMINATION OF JEWS IN THE COUNTY SEAT TAWRIK (TAURAGE), LITHUANIA

A collective eyewitness report by the following Jews from Tawrik:

1. Berl Gurvitz - born December 20, 1902 in Tawrik. Until the outbreak of the war, he lived in Tawrik. His father's name was Moyshe.
2. Eliyohu Baykovitz - born May 3, 1902 in Kovno (Kaunas). He lived in Tawrik from 1924 until 1940. From 1940 until the outbreak of war, he lived in Kovno. His father's name was Leyb, and his mother's name was Perl. Education; he had finished commercial school. By profession, a merchant.
3. Mrs Fruma Baykovitz (nee Gurvitz) - born December 24, 1907 a sister of Berl Gurvitz. Education; high school, graduated the Hebrew gymnasium in Ponevezs (Panevezsys); by profession a bookkeeper.
4. Dvoyre Fish - born November 20, 1900, a sister of Berl Gurvitz. Born in Tawrik, and lived in Tawrik until the outbreak of the war with her husband Shiye Fish, her daughter Ida and son Hershl. Education: three grades in gymnasium.
5. Dvoyre's daughter Ida Fish - born in Tawrik November 23, 1928. Finished three grades in gymnasium.
6. Dina Koropatkin - born in Tawrik March 20, 1920. Lived in Tawrik until the outbreak of the war. Father's name Hirsh Goldblat. Mother's name Fanye.
7. Miriam Kivelevitz nee Zaks - born June 28, 1918 in Tawrik. Lived in Tawrik until the war (June 22, 1941). Father's name; Hirsh Zaks. Mother's name; Feyge (nee Bernshteyn). Education: Six grades of Hebrew gymnasium. By profession, a milliner.
8. Rokhel Maler born in Tawrik December 10, 1908. Lived in Memel (Klaipeda) from 1931 until 1938 and then resettled in Tawrik, where she lived until the outbreak of the war on June 22, 1941. Father's name; Isroel Fogelman. Mother's name; Khaye (nee Arshenovitz), from Daugiai (Alytus) County. By profession, a seamstress.

### The Geographical Setting

The participants in this collective report recount:

Tawrik is a county seat, seven kilometers from the former German border at the town of Lauksargen, not far from Tilsit. Through the town flows the Jura River. The highway connecting Shavl (Shiauliai) and Tawrik passes through Kelme. Roughly one and a half kilometers from the town there is a railroad station, on the line connecting Kovno and Memel.

Before the war and at its outbreak some 3,000 Jews dwelled among a much larger number of Lithuanians.

### The Economic and Cultural Background

The Jewish population was employed in commerce, retail and artisanry. Among the larger and smaller Jewish enterprises were:

1. The shirt factory "Moderne," owned by Moyshe Nadl and Yitskhok Shus.
2. The detergent factory owned by Dovid Yezner and Itshe Segal.
3. A candy factory owned by Yitskhok Shus.
4. A soap factory and a print shop owned by Borukh Pagrimansky.
5. The poultry slaughterhouse owned by the Yezner brothers.
6. The sawmill owned by Yehoshue Kayen and Yakov-Hirsh.
7. The sawmill owned by Baykovitz and Eliyohu Gutkin.
8. The sawmill owned by Ruven Shereshevsky.
9. Hirsh Leyb's mill.
10. The mill owned by the brothers Berelovitz.
11. The substantial lumber merchants Gutkin, Baykovitz, David Epshteyn and Hirsh Taytz.
12. The movie theater owned by Berl Gurvitz and Shiye Fish.

In general, the economic situation of the Jews in Tawrik was good. That may be explained by the fact that Tawrik was a county seat and had good connections with the larger Lithuanian centers of Kovno and Memel. Tawrik also maintained connections with merchants in Germany.

Until 1940 there was a Jewish folks' bank in Tawrik, which counted 350 members. The last director was Ayzik Zelikhov from Alite (Alytus). There were 200 members in the Tawrik Jewish commercial bank. The last director in 1940 was Dr Vareta. There were two free loan societies as well, one named for the popular Tawrik philanthropist Baykovitz, and the other for the towns. Tawrik had a Hebrew gymnasium which had its own large building, built with the help of a Jew from Tawrik in America. His last name was Miller. This Jew was very popular in Tawrik, since even though he was far from his hometown, he remained interested in the life of Tawrik Jews in Lithuania and sent large contributions to them.

The last director of the Hebrew gymnasium, until 1940, was Mariampolsky.

The Jews in Tawrik also built a grade school with the help of Tawrik Jews in America. The director of the school was Benjamin Lazosky.

Tawrik had a modern religious school built with a donation by the philanthropist Leyb Baykovitz. The last director of this school was the teacher Lis. The Jewish library contained some 1,500 books in Yiddish and Hebrew. The founder of the library was Berl Gurvitz.

Tawrik possessed a main study house and synagogue, with a women's balcony; the "Tiferes Bokhurim" study house; the "Beys David" study house; Baykovitz' study house; the Shilele synagogue and the synagogue in the old town. The Tawrik Jews had a slaughterhouse which had been built specially for the purpose, and a modern bath house with a mikveh. The last rabbi of Tawrik was Ha av Hagaon Shpitz.

The Jewish young people were mainly organized around Zionist movements. A large number of the youth actually emigrated to Palestine. A very small number of the Jewish young people were organized around the illegal leftist workers' parties during the administration of President Smetonas. Tawrik had only one Jewish sports club, the "Maccabee."

The attitude of the majority of the Lithuanian population in Tawrik toward the Jews was good. But members of the society called "Verslas" spread virulent antagonism. In a variety of leaflets, they called for a boycott against Jews, called the Jews the most degrading names and invented various slanders against them.

After the arrival of the Red Army in Lithuania (summer 1940), the anti-semites gave up their overt anti-Jewish agitation. They secretly "sharpened their knives" for the Jews, waiting for the war to break out and for the German Army to march into Lithuania.

## **The Outbreak of the War**

On June 21, 1941, about 4:00 on Saturday night, residents of Tawrik were awoken by loud explosions in and around the city. Fires immediately began all over the city. The barracks on Vytauts Street could be seen burning, along with the Lithuanian bank, the chemist's, Shilale Street and Synagogue Street. Not only bombs dropped from overhead fell onto the center of town, Tawrik was also barraged by heavy artillery. In a short time the entire city was engulfed in flames. Mountains of black smoke and fire rose toward heaven, accompanied by a wild din.

The civilian population hurriedly left the city, some half-naked. Everyone ran wherever their feet carried them, bringing along their children. It was clear to everyone: The war between Fascist Germany and the Soviet Union had begun.

Six kilometers from the city, the Red Army had built fortifications at the bank of the Jura River. Early Sunday morning there were hundreds of Red Army trucks in the city. Whoever wanted to could climb into the trucks and be evacuated to the Soviet Union. Many Tawrik Jews did evacuate, and thus survived.

In the terrible confusion many people lost their families, and couldn't think of evacuation. Many Jews did not believe in a quick German advance, and since they didn't want to abandon all their possession, they only rode the trucks out of the city, temporarily hiding in the surrounding villages, fields and forests.

The Soviet soldiers did everything they could to rescue the civilian population of Tawrik. In doing so they demonstrated great commitment and self-sacrifice. Jews from Tawrik ran in all directions from the hellfire which Tawrik had become.

## **Killed in the Bombardment**

Dozens of Jews died on account of the bombardment and fires in the city. It has only been possible to determine the names of a few of the Jews who died in and around the city:

1. Mrs Dvoyre Leshem was paralyzed, and her husband and children could not bring her with them when they escaped.
2. Peshe Goldshmit, the wife of Mane the Badkhn, was sick and could not escape; she was burned to death in her house. Mane Goldshmit was killed by a bomb which exploded in his courtyard.
3. Sender the Teacher was found dead in the street.
4. Taylman, a lumber broker, was found dead in the street.
5. On the way to Skoudvile, on the edge of the city, Borukh Kirshner and his wife were killed by a bomb.
6. Dvoyre Abram was burned to death at home on her sickbed.
7. Sheyne Kahan and her three children were killed in the city by a bomb.

Jews from Tawrik were to be found on all the roads nearby, in all the cities and towns, close to and further away from Tawrik. They were the first refugees in that region, and wherever they went they announced to all the Jews: "It's war!"

The retreating Red Army and the Jews that escaped with them were bombarded by the German flyers, who would fly very low and release a hail of machine-gun fire on the people below. Hundreds lay dead and badly wounded on all the roads. Among them were many Jews from Tawrik, men, women and children.

## **Advance of the German Army. Establishment of Civilian Administration**

At 7:00 a.m. on Sunday, June 22 1941, the German Army entered Tawrik. The Lithuanians met the German army units with bouquets of flowers on all the roads and in the town as well. A Lithuanian living in the town, the driver Pavalkis, immediately became the chief of those who received the Germans.

They immediately hung Lithuanian flags in the town. Dr Proshevitshius greeted the German army units in the name of the residents of Tawrik.

Germans settled into those Jewish homes in the center of the city which remained intact. The Lithuanian residents robbed and demolished all of the empty homes whose Jewish owners were still in the nearby countryside and villages. The Lithuanians carried away the stolen Jewish possessions to the nearby villages, in wagons and even in trucks.

The civilian administration was established by partisans (armed Lithuanians who shot at the retreating Red Army) and by men who had been police officers during President Smetonas' times. The mayor of Tawrik was the Lithuanian Tolushys, who had spent time in prison under the Soviets, and when the war broke out, he escaped from prison. It is said that this Tolushys was mayor for only one day. The next day, Monday, June 23, he was shot by collaborators of the Soviet security service, who were hidden in a bunker in Tawrik.

The next mayor after Tolushys was the Lithuanian Jurgilas. The police chief was Jakutis, who had also been the police chief in President Smetonas' times. The police were recruited from members of the former gun club "Shiauliai" and from men who had been police under Smetonas. But it was the partisans who had the final say in town, those who helped the Germans drive out the Red Army. Their commandant was a student who had been in the tenth class in gymnasium under the Soviets, named Pavalkis, whose father was the driver Pavalkis.

## **Edicts, Robberies, Harassments and Murders.**

The new bosses in Tawrik immediately set about dealing with the Jews. On Sunday, the first day of the war, the Lithuanians reported that the Jew Shulom Dovid and his son Yehoshue had been hiding Russians. The father and the son were both shot immediately, with no investigation or trial. The new bosses immediately passed various edicts against the Jews.

Jews were forbidden to buy from Lithuanians, to go shopping for food at the market, to walk on the sidewalks, to use horses, automobiles or trains. A few days later the rest of the edicts appeared: Jews had to put on two yellow Stars of David, one on their chest and one on their back. When Dr Shapiro's wife put on only one yellow star, she was beaten brutally.

Jews were forbidden to leave the city. Everyone had to come in person to register at the city council. When they registered, the Jews had to have two Lithuanian witnesses along to corroborate their information. After this registration, yellow documents inscribed in German were handed out to the Jews. The Lithuanian inhabitants took money for going along to serve as witnesses, without which it was hard to get them to come.

Right after the arrival of the Germans in town, some of the Jews settled back into their homes. The majority of the Jewish homes in the center of the city were in ruins, and the Jews voluntarily settled in the building owned by the Jewish landlord Yankl Pubzub; in Khayem Gin's house outside the city; in Shnayder's house and at Dr Shapiro's house.

On one occasion gymnasium students attacked the home of the Jewish family Kivelevitz and Pagrimansky. Paula Pagrimansky was a fellow student of the attackers. She escaped from the house through the window. The student partisans demanded that Paula be handed over to them, and constantly threatened to shoot. There was a panic in the house. The students stole everything in the house. Such cases were commonplace, and the Jews were afraid to undress at night; they always slept in their clothes.

During the very first weeks of the war, the Germans drove Jews to Dr Shapiro's garden. There they were forced to dig a grave for a horse which had been shot. A German went to Dr Shapiro and wanted to make him help dig. Dr Shapiro was over seventy years old, and suffered heart trouble. He explained to the German that he couldn't dig a hole because of his advanced age, and also because of his illness.

The German took the doctor out near the dead horse and shot him. The murderer forced the Jews to bury the popular Dr Shapiro in the same grave as the horse.

After the registration, the Jews had to go out on various work assignments every day. All of the men and women had to go to work, as well as young people, and even women who had small children. Miriam Kivelevitz remembers that women used to come to work with their children. Miriam was still in Tawrik then. The work consisted primarily of clearing the streets of the debris from ruined buildings. The women worked washing the floors of the city council buildings.

Partisans kept watch while this work was being done. They bullied the Jews and mocked them.

A peasant woman named Kastautsiene told Mrs Rokhel Maler later, after the war, that she had witnessed a scene in Shereshevsky-Kokh's courtyard where Jews stood in a row, while a partisan combed the rabbi's beard with an iron rake.

Slowly, toward the end of the first week of the war, Jews began returning from the surrounding towns and villages. The new arrivals settled into Jewish houses near the edge of the city. Dvoyre Fish and her daughter Ida recall that Wednesday the 25th of June, 1941, during the first week of the war, partisans arrested on the pretext of Communist activities the following Jews:

1. Shiye and Shloyme Yezner, both merchants.
2. Shakhnovsky, a merchant.
3. Note Goldberg, a merchant.
4. Itshik Shus, a merchant; the owner of the "Moderne" shirt factory,
5. Nadl, a merchant.

It is said that altogether 12 Jews were arrested that day. The arrestees were held for a short time in the town prison, without food or water. All of the 12 Jews who had been arrested were led away by the partisans near the Jura River, not far from the bridge and close to a mill. They were shot there. In the same spot lie Communists who were shot after the "Tawrik Putsch" during President Smetonas' time.

### **The Shooting of All the Men**

At the end of the first week of the war police and partisans surrounded all the Jews' houses and arrested all of the Jewish men from around 12-13 years, up to the very aged. All of the men were immediately taken to prison. Some of the men who were arrested were working at the German military command, They were immediately released from prison.

A certain coachman named Yoysef Den was among those arrested, however, he was freed. He reported that the condition of the men in the prison was terrible. The Jews were kept in a cellar, half full of water. It was impossible to

sit or to lie down. Several barrels stood in the cellar. The men took turns sitting on the barrels. The men received nothing to eat. No one was allowed to visit the arrestees. Packages of food were confiscated by the partisans, and the arrestees never received them. The women later saw their packages being stored at the city council.

The men in the cellar were thoroughly discouraged, and waited for death to come. Though the Germans assured the women several times that all the men would be taken out to work, they were all detained in the prison for several days. Then the men were taken outside of the city, in a valley near the prison. There they were forced to dig graves, and all of them were shot. Near the place where they were shot there is a mill which belonged to a Jew named Yisroel-Itshe. It is a half kilometer from the city, near a brickworks which belonged to a Jew named Alter Gudl.

A rumor spread in town that the men had been taken out to work. Finally the women found out that the arrested men had been shot, because their clothes were brought to the city council and the partisans shared them among themselves. Peasants recognized items of clothing worn by the partisans which had belonged to the Jews who were shot, and told the Jewish women about this. The Jewish women found it difficult to believe in such great cruelty.

It was said at that time that during the second week of the war, roughly 150 men were shot. Among them were the following men:

1. Sholem Kivelevitz and his two sons, Hillel (aged 35) and Yitskhok (aged 18).
2. Soma Taytman, a student.
3. Sandler, a merchant, typesetter and printer.
4. Motl Litman, a storekeeper with two sons, Leybl and Shimen.
5. Yisroel Akslrod.
6. The dentist Most and his son.
7. Dr Yofe.
8. Moyshe Laib.
9. Moyshe Getsov, a merchant and popular Zionist activist.
10. Mekhanik, a merchant.
11. The butcher Itshik Varpol and his sons.
12. Two brothers named Faynberg; Avrom and Shloyme.
13. A butcher named Berman (originally from Memel).
14. Mane Leyzerovitz and his son Gershon.
15. Ortshik Leyzerovitz, a merchant, Mane's brother.
16. Yose Leyzerovitz and his two sons, Yankl and Leyzer.
17. Shimen-Haren Rabinovitz, owner of a knitwear business.
18. Yankl Zaks.
19. Yisroel-Hirsh Shuster, a merchant, with his son Yankl.
20. Azriel Blokh, a merchant.
21. Shmuel-Yank Man, a merchant.
22. Arshinovitz, a merchant.
23. Gril, a tailor from Vorne.
24. Yisroel Kaplan, a merchant.
25. Mote Yezner, a student.
26. Ruven Davidovitz, a glazier.
27. Khayem Raykhlung, a coachman.
28. Henakh Ozer, a driver.
29. Yosl Taitsh, a retail merchant.
30. Rabbi Shpitz.
31. The teacher Nayvidl.
32. Yeshaye Kahan and his brother-in-law Yakov Hirsh.
33. Shpilk and his son.

### **The Shooting of the Last Men and of All the Women and Children**

Shortly after the men were shot, the few men who remained alive, and all of the women and children were herded together into military barracks on Vytauto Street. The barracks were made out of boards, and had no heating stoves. As soon as the Jews were brought in, the electrical current and the water were turned off. There was a barbed wire fence around this ghetto barracks.

Partisans stood watch around it. No food was given to the Jews. Few of them were taken to work. Hunger became

a constant concern. The women used to steal their way out through the fence and risk their lives trading their last possessions for a bit of food.

The partisans sometimes came to the barracks to rob the last possessions which the Jews still had. In the barracks the infamous Jew-killer Jotsis knocked out the gold teeth from the mouth of a woman named Paula Yezner.

The guards around the barracks spread rumors that the 150 men were alive and working. The murderers even took money for taking packages "to deliver to the men."

Dina Koropatkin, a participant in this collective report, was hiding at the home of a peasant in Tawrik at that time. She used to send food to the barracks for Mrs Davidovitz and her daughters and son, and also for Mrs Raykhlin. Dina did not personally visit any of the Jews then.

Miriam Kivelevitz had by then gone to Shavl to be with her husband. Miriam's husband Mote Kivelevitz had received a letter from his mother and sister, brought by a peasant woman. They wrote in the letter that they were receiving a bit of food in exchange for clothing. A second letter was returned by the peasant woman, who reported that it was impossible to get to the women, because they were located in the barracks under heavy guard.

One evening the partisans announced to the women and children that early the next morning, the 13th of August, 1941, the women and their children would be brought to stay with their husbands in a camp.

The women were overjoyed. They all packed carefully and waited for the morrow. At 5:00 a.m. on August 13th, partisans began arriving in trucks. They loaded the women and children in the trucks, and took them five kilometers from the city, near the Shuna River. There, in a small forest, they were all shot.

The peasant woman Jozaitiene lived right next to the barracks at that time. She saw everything exactly as it happened, and related it to Dvoyre Fish after the war.

The peasant woman related that while the Jews were being taken out of the barracks, the Lithuanian inhabitants were forbidden to look out their windows. Yet the peasant woman first saw four truckloads of women being taken away at once. All of them had nothing but underwear on. Some time later trucks came one by one, bearing away women, children and also men, all wearing nothing but underwear. The screams of the children and women could be heard for some distance. Only partisans went with the trucks.

It was later reported that the younger and healthier women were first made to dig the graves. After the graves were dug, they were immediately shot. The rest waited in the barracks until the graves were finished. Before they were driven away from the barracks the women had to hand over their valuables; rings, earrings and so forth. They all had to undress, and were left in just their underwear. The few men who remained alive had to do the same thing. Children as well were forced to undress down to their underwear.

The murderers themselves later boasted as they told of the horrifying executions at the mass graves. Thus it was found out that the rabbi's daughter, on the edge of the grave, had realized that she still had a comb in her hair. She immediately handed it over to the partisans, asking them in return to shoot her first, so that she wouldn't have to see the horror of everyone being shot.

Dr Yofe's daughter was still hiding a gold watch before the shootings began. She gave it to one of the executioners, asking him to shoot her first, so that her eyes would not have to witness her mother, sister and brother being shot.

The Lithuanian murderers raped the more attractive women before they shot them. A 16-year-old girl name Jakhe Yezner was thus raped. A cousin of hers, Hene Yezner, did not undress, and the murderers wanted to rape her before they shot her. She jumped into the grave with her clothes on. The partisans boastfully related all these incidents to their acquaintances.

Several Germans stood near the mass grave and watched while the women and children were being shot.

One Lithuanian woman, Mrs Petrauskiene a worker at the "Modern" factory told Dina: "A pretty girl asked the German standing near the grave to let her live, and promised to work well for them. The German answered: 'We're not shooting anyone! You see who's doing the shooting!'"

The killers distributed amongst themselves the better clothing and possessions of those whom they shot. They distributed the rest to Lithuanian residents of the town who had suffered during the war.

Shortly after the women and children were shot the driver Petras Sergejevas from Tawrik rode to Shavl. The Lithuanian driver reported that he had personally seen a Lithuanian girl dressed in Motl's sister's clothing, and that the women and children had been shot several kilometers from the city, in the Shilaler Forest.

A photograph of Motl Kivelevitz' sister Yokheved and her girlfriend Beyle Litman was found at the gravesite at that time.

### **Shootings of Jews Who Were Discovered Hiding**

After the annihilation of the women and children, there were only a few Jews who survived in hiding.

1. A young woman named Dina Shulom was hidden for a considerable time. A fellow student of hers in the gymnasium recognized and betrayed her. She was captured and shot.
2. The case of a young woman named Khase Mekhanik was similar. She, too, was betrayed by a former fellow gymnasium student.
3. While the women and children were being transported from their houses to the barracks, a woman from Tawrik named Leyzerovitz escaped. A short time after the women and children were annihilated, a peasant woman spotted her and betrayed her. She was seized and shot.
4. The Jew Borukh Shlomovitz was hidden for a long time at the home of a peasant in a village near Tawrik. One morning a female neighbor noticed him. In the afternoon police came to the peasant's home. Borukh was captured and shot on the spot. He was buried in the peasant's farmyard.
5. The tanner Fayve Itsikovitz, along with his wife and children, was allowed to live for several months, since he was an excellent artisan. After his family was shot, he hung himself.

### **Tawrik Jews Who Died in Other Cities and Towns**

Very many Jews from Tawrik lie buried in mass graves in surrounding towns in north eastern Lithuania, near the Latvian border, and in Latvia as well.

Many Jews from Tawrik were annihilated in the Shavl ghetto, in Zhagare, Telsh, Kelm; and in other towns. Jews from Tawrik died in the Kovno ghetto as well.

Five Jews from Tawrik died in the Heidekrug camps:

1. Yakov Fish, owner of a guest-house;
2. Shvartz, a merchant;
3. Yakov Fridgut;
4. Hushe Dorfman;
5. Yankl Levitan.

(See the report about the camps in Heidekrug - LK)

The following died in the town of Kurshan:

1. Mordkhe Klugman, his wife and son;
2. Rom with his wife Ele and a daughter;
3. Two sisters, Khane-Rivke and Golde-Shrage;
4. Miss Faye Kaufman.

### **The Tragic Reckoning**

The participants in this collective testimony shared all the suffering and torture of the Jews of Shavl and Kovno. When the Jews were evacuated from the Kovno and Shavl Ghettos to Germany, they were evacuated as well. They lost part or all of their families in various concentration camps. They were liberated by the Allied troops.

On the Sunday when the war broke out, Berl Gurvitz hurriedly left Tawrik and came to Shavl. He was together with the last Jews from Shavl in concentration camps in Germany. He lost his mother Rokhel in the Shavl ghetto. His wife Khave, his 18-year-old daughter Nekhame, son Efroyim (aged 15), and sister Feyge Rubinshteyn died in camps in Germany. He was the only member of the family left alive.

Rokhel Maler, her husband and two children escaped from Tawrik to Shavl. From Shavl they accompanied the Red Army to Kruk (Kriukai) and thence to Zheymel (Zhemelis). In Zheymel they found out that the Soviets were not permitting people to cross the Latvian border, and so they returned to Krok. The Maler family remained in Kruk for a week.

The partisans in the town ordered all of the Jewish refugees to leave Kruk, and to return to their homes in the various towns. The Maler family rode back to Shavl.

Rokhel Maler lost her 8-year-old daughter Gitele in the "children- action" in ghetto Shavl. Her son Shloymele stayed with his parents as far as Stutthof, Germany. There he was separated from his parents and carried off to the crematorium in Auschwitz. Rokhel was also separated from her husband at that point. She was liberated by the Red Army in Danzig. Rokhel's husband survived in a camp in Dachau.

Dina Koropotkin's family, the Goldblats, left Tawrik the first day of the war, and escaped to Shavl by way of Shkudvil (Skaudvile). Dina's brother Moyshele got lost on the way. After spending five days in Shavl, Dina rode to Tawrik to search for her brother. There were still very few Jews who had returned to Tawrik at that point. Dina stayed in hiding at the edge of the city, at the home of the Lithuanian Antanas Spelveris.

Jews were beginning to be arrested and tortured in the city. The Lithuanian inhabitants began openly saying that all of the Jews would be shot. Dina stayed in Tawrik for six weeks, and then rode back to Shavl. There she found her lost brother Moyshele. While she was in Tawrik Dina attempted to find a place where she could hide her family, but she was unsuccessful.

While the "Kavkaz" ghetto was being fenced in, in Shavl, a peasant women named Anke Antzekte, a native of Kurshan (Kurzhenai) arrived from Tawrik. She told Dina that all of the surviving men, women and children had been taken out of the barracks onto the Shilaler Road, near the village of Shunya, and shot there.

After Dina Koropatkin found out about the annihilation of the women and children in Tawrik from Anke Antzekte, she travelled to Tawrik with a brigade of Jews to pick up vegetables. She then spent five days at the home of a peasant she knew in Tawrik. She found out that everything the peasant woman had told her about the women and children in the barracks was correct. After spending five days in Tawrik, she managed with difficulty to return to Shavl. During the time that Dina had been absent from Shavl, her entire family was taken into the synagogue. From the synagogue they and several hundreds of Shavl Jews were taken away and shot. This was at the time when the Jews of Shavl were supposed to be settled in a third neighborhood, which was called Kalnukas.

(See "The Destruction of the Jews of Shavl," by Hirsh Shuster-- LK)

Dina was evacuated together with everyone in the Shavl ghetto to Germany, and she was liberated by the American army not far from Landsberg. Those in her family who were taken to the synagogue in Shavl, then taken out and shot were her parents; her three sisters Sore, Ete and Bela; and her three brothers Mendel, Yakov and Moyshele.

Miriam Kivelevitz escaped from Tawrik together with her son Dovidl on Sunday, June 22. She had become separated from her husband. She spent a short time hidden in the villages near Botik (Batakiai). After the arrival of the German army, peasants with axes and scythes attempted to murder Russians and Jews. They helped the partisans a great deal. Miriam and her son, together with other Jews from Tawrik, left Botik and returned to Tawrik. After she had been in Tawrik for a while, she managed to correspond with her husband in Shavl.

Miriam and her son Dovidl left Tawrik after the 150 male arrestees had been shot near the prison, and travelled to Shavl.

At the time of the action against children in the Shavl ghetto Miriam Kivelevitz gave her son Dovidl to a peasant named Jonas Malinauskas in the village of Kurpiu, ten kilometers from Shavl. After she was liberated, she returned to find Dovidl alive and well at the peasant's home. Miriam was also reunited with her husband, who survived in a camp near Dachau.

The Fish family; Shiye the father and his wife Dvoyre, their daughter Ida and son Hirshl escaped from Tawrik on Sunday morning during the bombardment. While escaping they passed through Radvilishok (Radvilishkis), Shavl (Shiaulenai), and Sheduve (Sheduva), together with hundreds more Jews from various towns and from Tawrik, and finally they reached Ponevezs. After the German army arrived in Ponevezs all the Jews from Tawrik returned home. Only two families from Tawrik remained in Ponevezs: the Fish family and the Kokh family. Both families stayed in Ponevezs until August 5, 1941. They arrived in Kovno with great difficulty five days before the Kovno ghetto was sealed.

The Fish family entered the Kovno ghetto (near Slobodke) together with the Jewish natives of Kovno, suffered together with them, were interned in the camp at Shantz, a suburb of Kovno, and thence evacuated with the rest of the Jews to Stutthof, Germany. There her husband Shiye and son Hirshl were separated from Dvoyre and her daughter, and taken to a concentration camp near Dachau.

Dvoyre and her daughter were liberated near the town of Torn by the Red Army and returned to Lithuania. Hirshle, aged 12, was taken from Dachau to Auschwitz and exterminated. Shiye died in the Dachau camp on January 28, 1945. (For details about the Fish family, see the testimony about the extermination of the Jews of Ponevezs -- LK)

The Baykovitz family received information about the extermination of the Jews of Tawrik while they were in Kovno and later in the Kovno ghetto. The informant was a peasant named Albinas Sabalauskas with whom they were closely acquainted. The situation in the Kovno ghetto grew continually worse. People were already seeing the beginning of the end of the surviving Jews in the ghetto.

Baykovitz personally knew quite a few Lithuanians. Baykovitz had been a member of the Tawrik city council for six years before 1940. He had been a representative on the tax commission for six years as well. He was a member of the county sick fund, and had a mill called the "Progress." These connections gave Baykovitz the opportunity to be acquainted with many people among the Lithuanian intelligentsia as well as with peasants.

He decided to send his wife and children out of the Kovno ghetto and then to leave himself.

The strategic situation at the front was already clear enough by then. Fascist Germany was marching quickly toward its logical decline and fall. Baykovitz set up contacts beforehand with his Lithuanian acquaintances. Three days before the "Estonian action," his wife Frume and both children went from the ghetto to a certain Captain More inside the city. In the beginning of the war the Lithuanian captain was the aide to the Kovno county police chief. Frume stayed with the captain for a week. The family could stay there no longer.

One child remained with the captain in the city. Frume went back to the ghetto with the second. The captain sent the boy Leybele to a village seventy kilometers from Tawrik, where he worked for a peasant as a shepherd until the liberation.

Frume and her second child stayed in the ghetto five more days. She dressed as a Lithuanian peasant woman, and rode away to the village Kryszkhalnai near Tawrik with an SS truck that happened to be going that way. From there she continued for five kilometers and chanced upon the home of a peasant in a certain village. She spent one night there and then travelled to a peasant of her acquaintance in Tawrik named Sabalauskas. On the way Frume used Veronal to keep her child constantly asleep, because he knew only Yiddish. Sabalauskas had a store, and Germans used to shop there. The Tawrik Lithuanian Shulcas, who was crippled in one arm, found a place for Frume and her child in the village of Kazberine, at the home of the peasant Leonas Vaishvilis. Frume passed as a Russian woman there. At that time the Germans were seizing women and children deep inside Russia and sending them to work for peasants in Lithuania. Frume was there with her child for seven months, without any documents. Of course, none of the neighbors knew that she was Jewish. Frume managed to give her child to a certain policeman, who had been an infamous shooter of Jews in the town of Batik at the beginning of the war. It was said of this murderer that he had cut off the fingers of those whom he shot who wore golden rings. He had become terrified of the revenge of the Red Army when it would return to Lithuania. He wanted to clear his name and assure himself a place in "the world to come" by rescuing a Jewish child. The policeman was originally from the village of Kazberine. His last name is Jonikas.

(By then there were already many Lithuanians who attempted to save Jews-LK)

After the arrival of the Red Army in Lithuania, this murderer escaped to the forest and hid, yet he saved Frume's child and took care of him until the Liberation. As the front came closer, raids on Red partisans in nearby villages began. Frume went to the peasant Sabalauskas in Tawrik again. By then, the Red Army had occupied Vilna. Then Frume had the chance to hide in Kazberine with the peasant Stanislav, a brother of the peasant Leonas Vaisvilis. The peasant built a hiding place for Frume, and she was there for two months until the arrival of the Red Army.

After his wife and children left the Kovno ghetto, Eliyohu Baykovitz stayed in the ghetto for five more weeks. Then he escaped from the ghetto to the Tawrik region, to join the functioning Red partisan units. The Red partisans appreciated Baykovitz' thorough knowledge of the entire surrounding area. His many connections with peasants in the villages made it easier for the partisans to obtain food and to find out everything they needed to know about the Germans. The detail was called "Mestitel" (the Avenger). Baykovitz participated in the group for exactly one year, until the Red Army arrived in Tawrik. During the year Baykovitz met more than once with his wife as well as his children, providing them with everything they needed.

After the Liberation, the Baykovitz parents were reunited with both of their children. From the dozens of peasants with whom he spoke, as well as with the partisans, Eliyohu found out everything about the extermination of the Jews in Tawrik.

## In Tawrik after the War

With the exception of Berl Gurvitz, all of those who contributed to this collective eyewitness report were in Lithuania after the war, and in Tawrik itself for some time.

Rokhel Maler spent three-quarters of a year in Tawrik. There she found her surviving brother, Wolf Fogelman.

The center of the city where the Jews had lived was completely destroyed when the Germans arrived in 1941, and during their retreat.

The following relatives of Rokhel were exterminated in Tawrik: her mother Khaye-Sherl Fogelman; her brother's mother-in-law Khaye Melamed, and her brother-in-law Alter Melamed.

Rokhel visited the Jewish cemetery in Tawrik. She reports that all of the gravestones were overturned and shattered. A Soviet tank battalion and field kitchen were stationed at the cemetery.

Dina Koropatkin visited the barracks from which the women and children had been taken out to be shot. In the first barrack, room number 14, Dina saw the first and last names of the Jewish girls from Tawrik Yokhe Davidovitz and Mekhe-Leye Raykhlin etched on the side of a door. Dina also visited the mass grave of the woman, children and small group of men from Tawrik who were shot together. The mass grave comprises two pits.

Miriam Kivelevitz was in Tawrik for a few days after the Liberation. She visited the mass grave of the men who had been shot. She reports that there is no way to recognize the place. There is one pit; it is not fenced in, and no one pays any attention to it.

Those who provide this information attest that in Tawrik alone some 600 Jewish men, women and children were shot.

Eliyohu Baykovitz reports that some 150 men were arrested and shot. Some 450 women and children, along with a small number of men, were taken out of the barracks and shot, so that the sum of men, women and children is 600. This sum does not include the Jews who were captured while hiding in fields, forests and villages. Hundreds of Jews from Tawrik died in various towns in Lithuania. Some of them were evacuated to the Soviet Union, but few of them survived. The majority fell at the battlefield. Many died from various causes, such as hunger, cold, unhygienic conditions and so forth.

Those who have contributed to this collective testimony remember the following Lithuanian murderers who robbed, tormented, bullied and finally assisted in shooting, or themselves shot the Jews in Tawrik:

1. Jurgilas, the mayor of Tawrik;
2. Jakutis, the police chief (and former chief from before the war);
3. Pavalkis, the commander of the partisans (a student in the tenth grade in gymnasium);
4. Pavalkis, the commander's father, a driver;
5. Jonas Jotzys, a painter by trade, a member of the gun club during President Smetonas' times;
6. Jotzy's brother, an electrician;
7. Jonas Stankus, a student in the Lithuanian commercial gymnasium;
8. Jonas Urbutis, a (medical?) student from Tawrik;
9. Stirbys, a son of the lawyer Pranas Stirbys;
10. Antanas Batzys, a garbage man in Tawrik before the war; from the village of Sartininkay;
11. Juozas Apenavitzius;
12. Jonas Jonikas, from the village Kazberine;
13. Kantauskas, a murderer from Tawrik;
14. Dr Prasevitzius, the Lithuanian doctor in Tawrik;
15. Kinderis, a student in the Tawrik Lithuanian gymnasium;
16. Noreikis, a student in the Tawrik seminary;
17. Kiselis, this murderer shot the Jewish boy Yisroel Akselrod with his own hand.

A large number of students in the Lithuanian gymnasium and teachers' seminary participated in the extermination of the Tawrik Jews. The participants in this collective testimony no longer remember their first or last names.

*Translated from Yiddish by Dr. Jonathan Boyarin January 11, 1987*      *New York*

**Attestations of Berl Gurvitz, Eliyohu Baykovitz, Frume Baykovitz, Dvoyre Fish, Ida Fish, Dina Koropatkin, Miriam Kivelevitz and Rokhel Maler.**

This collective eyewitness report concerning the extermination in Tawrik was read out loud to all of the participants by Leib Koniuchowsky. All of the facts, dates, family names and place names were provided by us and we attest thereto with our signatures on each page.

However, each one of us is responsible as to his or her own personal experiences.

The participants in the collective testimony:

- |                      |            |
|----------------------|------------|
| 1. Berl Gurvit       | Signature. |
| 2. Eliyohu Baykovitz | Signature  |
| 3. Frume Baykovitz   | Signature  |
| 4. Dvoyre Fish       | Signature  |
| 5. Ida Fish          | Signature  |
| 6. Dina Koropatkin   | Signature  |
| 7. Miriam Kivelevitz | Signature  |
| 8. Rokhel Maler      | Signature  |

The collective testimony was recorded by Engineer L Koniuchowsky  
Signature. Feldafing, Bavaria September 18-27, 1947

The signatures of the residents of the Feldafing camp: Berl Gurvitz; Eliyohu Baykovitz; Frume Baykovitz; Dvoyre Fish; Ida Fish; Dina Koropatkin; Miriam Kivelevitz; and Rokhel Maler, are attested to by the chairman of the camp committee

E. Reif Feldafing September 18, 1947 Round stamp of camp council

*Translated from Yiddish by Dr. Jonathan Boyarin Signature January 11, 1987 New York*

## **SUPPLEMENTARY TESTIMONY ABOUT THE EXTERMINATION OF JEWS IN THE LITHUANIAN COUNTY SEAT TAWRIK**

Reported by Tobe Gurvitz, formerly Rozensheyn. Born Shokhat in Tawrik on October 1, 1907. Father's name; Shmuel Shokhat. Lived in Tawrik until the outbreak of the war.

### **Tawrik, a county seat with a population of approximately 20,000**

At that time it was five kilometers from the German border at Lauksargen. One hundred five kilometers away from Shavl. The Jura River passes through the city. Some 3,000 Jews lived in Tawrik. The majority were involved in commerce and artisanry. The attitude of the neighboring Lithuanian population to the Jews was good. Yet even before the war there were demonstrations by the Lithuanian youth against the Jews. Seminary and gymnasium students participated in these demonstrations. However, the attitude of the Lithuanian population grew much worse upon the arrival of the Red Army in Lithuania in the year 1940.

Tawrik contained a Hebrew gymnasium; a Hebrew grade school; a kindergarten; a folks' bank; a commercial bank; five synagogues and study houses; a Hebrew-Yiddish library and other communal institutions. Under the Soviet regime in the year 1940-1941 all of the former Jewish institutions changed their character and lost their Jewish value. Almost all of the young Jewish people studied in the Hebrew gymnasium and belonged to the Zionist movement until the year 1940. Shortly before the war broke out, the women from the Soviet Union began to leave the border city Tawrik and hurriedly evacuated.

The Jewish population, more than once, heard warnings from their Lithuanian neighbors that a war would begin quite soon, and Hitler would soon be coming. The Jews sensed the tension and uncertainty of the Tawrik situation, but did not believe that it would begin so soon.

### **The Outbreak of War**

During the night of Saturday to Sunday, June 22, 1941, after 3:00, the city's inhabitants were awoken by the sound of bombs exploding. Yet no one believed that it was the beginning of the war. However, the large fires in the city revealed the whole tragic truth. The Jews began hurriedly to leave the city. Means of transport were provided by the Soviets, but the press of those leaving the city was so great that they were insufficient. Only a small proportion of the residents of the city escaped with the Soviet trucks.

Tobe Rosensheyn, her husband Yitskhok and three children were among them, reaching as far as Shavl (Shiauliai). Many Jews left the city and settled in surrounding villages, where they went into hiding.

That same morning the Germans arrived in the city, but they were driven out by the Red Army. On Sunday, June 22, 1941, street battles took place in the city. Around 7:00 a.m. that day the Germans conclusively occupied the city.

The Rosenshteyn family continued fleeing past Shavl, intending to evacuate further into the Soviet Union. They arrived at the city of Bouska in Latvia. But the German army caught up to them there, and they were forced to begin the tragic retreat from Latvia to Lithuania. When they arrived at the border between Lithuania and Latvia at the town of Vashkai in the County of Birzsai, they found that several hundred Jews had been herded together into a barn. The Rosenshteyn family was brought there as well.

The returning Jews were detained and taken to the barn by armed Lithuanian partisans, who helped the Germans and fought against the Red Army. There was a heavy guard around the barn, and the Jews could not leave it. They spent the night there. The next morning a partisan came into the barn and announced to the Jews that they would all soon be shot.

He, along with others, repeated the threats very frequently with great pleasure. This was on Thursday, June 26, 1941. During the day on Friday, June 27, 1941, a partisan entered the barn and demanded that all the Jews surrender their gold, money, and other valuables. He warned that they would all be shot if they disobeyed. The Jews surrendered some of their valuables, hoping that they would be left alive and permitted to return to their homes. Yitskohk Rosenshteyn gave 5,000 rubels to one partisan, a teacher from Vashkai, to free his family from the barn. The teacher took the money, and gave the Rosenshteyn family ten minutes to leave the town of Vashkai.

## **Back to Shavl**

Hundreds of Jews, including women and children, made their way by foot in the direction of Linkuva, Shavl County. On the way they had stones thrown at them by peasants in the villages, who mocked and laughed at the exhausted, hungry and thirsty Jews: "Ha, you wanted to run after the Bolsheviks! Good for you. Hitler's going to give it to you now!" the peasants shouted at the Jews.

Near Linkuva all of the Jews were detained by partisans from the town, who threatened to shoot the Jews and shouted: "You cursed Jews, soon we're going to shoot you like dogs!" All the Jews began to weep, begging them not to shoot. The peasants made all the children kneel in a line with their hands held high, and forced them to shout three times: "Heil Hitler!"

There were Jews from Linkuva, Pakruojus and Ligumai, in Shavl County. Once again the Jews handed over some of what they had left, and the partisans released them. The Jews arrived in Linkuva. In Linkuva all the Jews, men, women and children were already locked up in cellars and barns. Through the window of a storage house, an imprisoned woman with a child on her arm shouted to the arriving Jews: "Jews, cutthroats, where have you come to? We're all locked up and starving!" The Lithuanian immediately detained the Jews who had come into Linkuva and led them under heavy guard. At that moment German army units rode through the town. Jewish women and children fell on the Germans, begging to be released and allowed to travel home. One German officer ordered the Lithuanian partisans to let the Jews go immediately. All the Jews went their various ways. The Rosenshteyn family returned to Shavl with other Jews.

That day, young men were arrested in Shavl and taken to prison. Shimen Shokhat, Tobe's brother, was one of those arrested and imprisoned that day. The entire Rosenshteyn family entered the Shavl ghetto together with all the Jews of Shavl.

## **In the Shavl Ghetto**

While in the Shavl ghetto, Tobe received letters from her father. In all these letters there were only hints of the tragic situation of the Jews in Tawrik. However, her father explicitly warned his daughter and her family not to come to Tawrik. Tobe's sister also sent a letter in which she wrote that her husband had been arrested and was probably on the other side of the border (meaning in Germany). She managed to free her father.

The letters were brought from Tawrik to Shavl by a Christian woman from Tawrik named Ana (she was called "Ana the water carrier"). This Ana said that she had to be very careful taking the letters, because it was forbidden for Lithuanians to have any dealings with Jews. Tobe used the peasant woman as a messenger three or four times. The day Tobe entered the Shavl ghetto with her family, she received from her father the last letter, in which he warned her not to come to Tawrik.

Tobe received further information about the extermination of the Tawrik Jews from Jews who had survived, escaped and come to Shavl.

The Rosenshteyn family lived in the ghetto. They were all evacuated to Stutthof, Germany, and all died in the concentration camps. The only one who remained alive was the mother, Tobe Rosenshteyn. She was liberated by the Red Army in the camp at Chinov, near Danzig, on March 10, 1945. After recovering from a grave illness which lasted three months, Tobe returned to Lithuania.

## **In Tawrik After the war**

In Tawrik after being liberated, Tobe learned the following:

The Germans entered Tawrik on Sunday morning, June 22. Armed Lithuanians immediately appeared and began robbing Jewish possessions. The city continued burning in several spots. There still was no local authority in the city. Like vicious dogs who had torn free from the leash, the Lithuanian murderers threw themselves on the Jewish community in Tawrik. The robberies continued the whole time, until the Jews had been completely exterminated.

Lithuanian partisans arrested the popular Jewish dentist Shakhne Most and his 16-year-old son. They were taken out of town, and both were shot. Before they were shot he asked the murderers to shoot him but to let his son live. The incident made a powerful impression on the Tawrik Jews at the time. Dr Most was not only a doctor, but also a respected social activist. The incident took place in the beginning of July 1941.

In mid-July 1941 partisans drove all the young men out of their homes and led them away. Tobe does not know where the men were led, nor the circumstances in which they were annihilated. Lithuanian townspeople attest that all of the young men were shot the same day.

Among the men who were taken away were:

1. Yeshayohu Kahan, a lumber merchant;
2. Yank Hirsh, aged 27, a lumber merchant;
3. Yoysef Lipshitz, a bookkeeper in his thirties;
4. Dr Shakhnovitz;
5. Shimen Rabinovitz;
6. Mordkhe Foglin;
7. the pharmacist Yitskhok Goldshteyn and his brother-in-law Varshavsky, both from Vilkavishkis.

The only people remaining in Tawrik then were old men and women with children. The young women had to go to work every day, clearing the debris from the ruined buildings. Lithuanian partisans kept watch and bullied the women. The women received neither food nor wages for their work. The Lithuanians mocked and laughed at the helpless women as they worked.

At the end of July 1941 all of the older men and women with children were driven into a ghetto on Vytauto Street, in barracks which had been built by Russians before the war. The ghetto was fenced in with barbed wire. Lithuanian partisans kept watch all around. The Jews were in the ghetto for only a few weeks.

### **The Extermination of the Last Jews**

The women were taken from the ghetto to work at various tasks. A Lithuanian peasant woman living in Tawrik, not far from the former ghetto, told Tobe: "On August 13, 1941, Lithuanians came with trucks and took the women. The partisans promised that all of the women were being taken to do good work, so the women were content. They were taken outside of town near Visbut, not far from the prison, where they were shot and thrown into trenches which the Russians had been getting ready to use for sewers.

The possessions of the murdered Jews were brought back to the meat hall in town. There they were distributed to the poorer Lithuanians in town. The county doctor Prashevitzius and others supervised the distribution." Other Lithuanians in the city told the same story.

Tobe found out that before her father had been shot, he had convinced the murderers to allow him to make a final ritual confession together with the other Jews. The Lithuanian murderers later told everyone in Tawrik about this, laughing at Shmuel Shokhat.

Before shooting, the murderers forced the men and women to strip naked. Hene Yezner, a girl in her early twenties, refused to undress. The murderers began to beat her. Hene jumped into the pit alive with her clothes on. Hene was very beautiful and the Lithuanian gangsters wanted to rape her before she was shot. All the Lithuanians in Tawrik knew about this incident.

Tobe spent six weeks in Tawrik. During that time she investigated the extermination of the Jews in Tawrik how her father Shmuel Shokhat, her step-mother Tsherne, sister Leye Lifshitz and her husband Yoysef Lifshitz and daughter Dovoyre Lifshitz had all died. All of Tobe's close friends had died in the town as well.

Tobe does not know who gave the order to shoot the Jews. However, all of those who did the shooting were Lithuanians. Those who led the Jews from the ghetto were Lithuanian partisans. Among the leaders of the Lithuanian murderers Tobe knew the murderer Jotzys and a student in the Lithuanian gymnasium, the murderer Pavalkis.

While in Tawrik, Tobe visited the graves of the women, children and smaller group of men who had been shot. There is nothing there to mark the spot. In the field and on the graves of the men, women and children cows and pigs grazed. No one was interested in fencing and putting in order the mass grave of the Jews of Tawrik.

*Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin New York January 11, 1987*



## **THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS OF ERZHVILIK (ERZVILKAS)**

### **The Collective Eyewitness Testimony of:**

Khayem Goldshteyn, born in Erzhvilik on July 8, 1903. Completed six grades of Lithuanian gymnasium in Erzhvilik. A butcher by trade. Father's name Avrom-Berl and mother Gitl-Rivke, nee Paglinsky. Khayem's wife Menukhe, nee Druker, born November 10, 1910 in Kelm. Completed five classes of Hebrew gymnasium in Kelm. Father's name Avrom-Leyb and mother Leah. Married Khayem in 1934 and settled in the town of Erzhvilik. Khayem and his wife Menukhe were in Erzhvilik at the outbreak of the war, and they survived the mass slaughter of the Jews.

### **The Geographic and Economic Setting**

Erzhvilik is in Tawrik County, 32 kilometers from Tawrik, 20 kilometers from Yurberik (Jurbarkas) and 35 kilometers from Raseyn (Raseiniai). The town lies on the river Shaltona. Gravel roads connect the town with the larger surrounding cities. The surrounding villages are inhabited by Lithuanians.

180 Jews lived in the town, along with a much smaller number of Lithuanians. The Jewish residents of the town were occupied in commerce. Almost all of the Jews had large gardens of their own and parcels of land, horses and cows, and their life was semi-rural. Economically, the life of the Jews in the town was not bad.

Some of the Jewish families received support from relatives overseas. The attitude toward the Jews on the part of the local Lithuanians was very good and even fraternal until the outbreak of the war between Germany and the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941. Nor did the material situation of the Jews of the town deteriorate when the Red Army came into Lithuania in 1940. The town possessed a study house, a Hebrew elementary school and a library.

### **The Outbreak of War**

A few weeks before the outbreak of war on June 22, 1941, Khayem and his family settled in the village of Kulvertishke, two kilometers from the town, on their own small farm.

On the evening of Saturday, June 21, 1941, peasants from villages around Tawrik came to this village. They announced that on the next day, Sunday the 22nd, a war would begin between Germany and the Soviet Union. The Jews in town did not believe them. At 3:30 a.m. on Sunday, Khayem heard artillery fire around Tawrik, which was in flames. German airplanes flew undisturbed over the entire region. It was clear to Khayem that a war had begun.

On Sunday morning Khayem, his wife and both children drove back to their apartment in town. He left his farm in the hands of Lithuanian neighbors in the village.

The Soviet administration of the town assured the population that these were only maneuvers, and ordered everyone to remain calm.

All of the Jews in town prepared themselves to run away, with the goal of evacuating to the Soviet Union. They packed their things onto wagons; their doors were already locked. The Jews left their cows with peasants whom they knew well. At ten in the morning a Soviet general arrived in the town and ordered that no one leave. He threatened to shoot on the spot anyone who disobeyed his command.

Refugees from Tawrik arrived in town at around 11 a.m. They caused a panic in town. Jews from town ran away, most on wagons, some on foot. All of them went in the direction of Raseyn.

After ten kilometers Germans began strafing the roads, and Jews spread into the nearby villages. Eight Jewish men continued running, and they managed to evacuate to the Soviet Union.

In the afternoon of that same Sunday, the first day of the war, German military units appeared in the region. In the evening they entered the town. On the next day, Monday evening, the peasants explained that they didn't want to give shelter to Jews, because an order not to do so had been broadcast over the radio from Kovno.

Throughout the first week and into the second week of the war, nearly all of the Jews returned to town from the villages. The town was not damaged in the war. When they returned to town, the Jews found that their homes had been vandalized and robbed. The Lithuanians had become the Jews' heirs and had become rich overnight. Other Jewish houses, especially the better ones, were immediately occupied by German military, and some by local civilian Lithuanians as well.

Khayem and his family returned to their farm in the village. It was said at that time that Jewish agriculturists in the villages were safer. Later Khayem and his wife went into town to visit their home. They found nothing in their apartment. Everything had been robbed. The windows and doors had been torn out. Even the brick ovens had been demolished and taken by Lithuanian neighbors. Khayem recognized some of his stolen possessions, and took them back from Lithuanian neighbors. Khayem and his family returned to their small farm in the country.

### **The Civil Administration; Decrees; a Ghetto in Bathhouse Street**

When the war was two weeks old, two armed Lithuanians named Juozas Marinas and Bronius Toliushius; both of them workers from the town of Erzhvilik, came to Khayem, and forced him with his wife and several other Jews to come to the police in town and register. Khayem was ordered to sign an agreement that he would carry no weapons, nor hide any Red Army prisoners. Khayem found out that all of the Jews in town had been registered several days after the arrival of the Germans.

On the afternoon the war broke out, armed Lithuanians appeared in the villages and town, calling themselves partisans. They supported the Germans against the Red Army, and began tormenting and robbing the Jews.

The municipal police and the administration were recruited from the ranks of the partisans. The town mayor was the Lithuanian Klimas Skilinskas, a carpenter in the town. The man who became the leader of the partisans was the Lithuanian Vytas Shalkauskas, a son of the pharmacist. The police chief in town was the Lithuanian Stongvilas.

Immediately after the arrival of the Jews in town, after they had hidden in the country, the partisans and police registered everyone and drove them together into seven Jewish houses on Bathhouse Street, the smallest and worst in town. Many of the Jews didn't even have an opportunity to visit the ruins of their homes.

German military personnel forced the Jews to remove the books and the Torah scrolls from the study house, and throw them onto a single pile in the yard. The Jews had to ignite the holy books and constantly poke them deeper into the fire, so that everything would burn better. While the fire burned the Jews were forced to shout: "God of Israel, where are you?" Lithuanians and Germans cut the beards of elderly Jews.

The Jews were ordered by the Lithuanian administration: not to walk on the sidewalk, not to gather in large groups, and to wear a yellow Star of David on their chests. There were other decrees as well. Mikhl Kaplan became the Jewish elder. He was appointed by the partisans. There was no Judenrat and no committee in the ghetto.

The more prominent men of the town, along with the Rabbi, Zev Rapaika, were forced by the partisans to clean out the town's outhouses by hand. The younger men and women were forced to report for work at the marketplace every morning at 7 o'clock. From the marketplace they were taken by partisans to do various jobs: chopping wood in the forest, cleaning the houses and yards, and so forth. The women were made to wash floors and clothes for the Lithuanians and Germans.

Lithuanian policemen and partisans used to stand guard while the work was being done, and they would beat and torment the Jews. The Jews received no payment nor anything to eat in exchange for their work. After work the Jews were taken back to the seven houses, which were surrounded by police and partisans.

Day and night the partisans would come into the seven houses, and rob Jewish possessions. There was no one the Jews could complain to about the Lithuanians. The Lithuanian murderers used to squeeze money from the Jews, using various threats and pretexts.

There was a detail of Germans in town. They did not involve themselves in the internal affairs of the civilian administration, and didn't know about the robberies committed by the Lithuanians.

### **The First Four Jewish Victims**

The first week of the war, partisans arrested four young Jews and put them in prison. The four Jewish boys had held responsible positions in the communist Party and the Communist Youth during the year of Soviet rule. Every day the four were taken out of prison to work at various dirty and difficult jobs. They were only given enough food to keep body and soul together. In addition, they were tormented night and day in various sadistic ways.

Together with the four Jewish Communists, four Lithuanian Communists were arrested as well. On August 31, 1941 all eight Communists were taken two kilometers from town into the Balandine forest, and they were shot.

The four Jewish boys were: Eliezer Goldshteyn and his brother Leyb, Khayem's cousins; Hillel Diskant and Dovid Matis. They were the first four Jewish victims.

On Thursday, August 28 the partisans rounded up all the Jewish men living on farms and took them into the study house. On the same evening, the partisans arrested 31 more men living in the seven houses, and interned these as well in the study house.

On Thursday night the partisans called individual men out of the study house, and took away their watches, money, boots, shoes and better clothes. They were allowed to return, half-naked, into the study house. There was a close watch all around. None of the men was able to go outside, even to take care of his bodily functions. Every half hour the partisans would come into the study house, wake the Jews and force them to do various calisthenics. The harassment of the men continued until the next morning, Friday the 29th of August.

At 3:30 a.m. the men were driven out of the study house half naked, made to stand in rows of four and brought to the courtyard of the city hall. The Jews were guarded by 42 partisans. In the courtyard of the city hall the Jews, together with the town rabbi Rapeyka, said the prayers Jews recite before dying.

In order to frighten the Jews, one of the partisans shot several bursts of bullets from his automatic rifle over the Jews' heads. Hearing the shots, two Germans came to the courtyard to investigate. The partisan Bobleckas, a son of a colonel in President Smetonas' army, explained to the Germans that Jews had shot three Lithuanians, and they had to pay with their lives. The Germans were outraged, and permitted the Jews to be taken away to be shot.

The 42 partisans took the men out of town and brought them across the Shaltona River into a gravel pit owned by the peasant Babilis, across from the town hall. The Germans remained in the yard of the town hall. The 31 men were forced to line up at the edge of the gravel pit. Each Jew clung to the man next to him, and readied themselves to die. At that very moment the two Germans arrived at the gravel pit with the leader of the partisans, Shalkauskas.

The participant in this collective testimony Khayem Goldshteyn asked the German to permit him to say a final word. He explained to the Germans that he was a farmer and hadn't been active in any political party. He accused the Lithuanians who had taken him away from his work during the harvest season. A few other Jews were emboldened, and told the Germans who the Lithuanians were and what they had done during the year of Soviet occupation.

Yeshayohu Libman told the Germans that during the previous night the Lithuanians had robbed the women in the seven houses and the men in the study house, and that they had done it all in the name of the Germans.

After listening to what the Jews had to say, the German personally accompanied the Jews back to the study house, from whence they were freed. Khayem and his father returned to his home in the village. Two days after this incident, the eight Communists were shot.

### **The Annihilation of the Town's Jews**

A week after this incident, an order was issued commanding all Jewish farmers, including women and children, to leave their farms and to settle in one of the seven houses in town. The Jewish farmers had to leave their livestock and other possessions where they were.

The Jews of Erzvilik received dreadful news from peasants whom they knew, concerning the total annihilation of Jews in nearby towns and cities. Several men began hiding out, and sleeping in the villages with friendly peasants.

After the shooting of the eight Communists on August 31, 1941, the police and partisans commanded all the men aged 13 and over to sleep at night in the study house. The women were forbidden to leave the houses in the evening or at night. This order reinforced the suspicion that preparations were being made for the shooting of all the Jews. No man who had an alternative slept in the study house.

At night the partisans locked the study house and guarded it closely. In the morning the men were all released for work. Those incapable of working could go to their families in the seven houses.

The Lithuanians threatened to shoot all the Jews if one of them failed to return to the study house to sleep. The Jewish elder Mikhl Kaplan and several other Jews were quite careful to see that no one failed to come sleep in the study house. Khayem, however, spent many nights at the homes of friendly peasants in the country.

Eighteen kilometers from Erzhvilik is the town of Botik (Batakiai). In that town the partisans created a camp for women and children from the town of Botik, and for women and children who were brought from the town of Skaudvile. The men from both towns were annihilated during the first weeks of the war.

The Jews of Erzhvilik knew about the camp in Botik. Several letters were received from the women in the camp there. The Jews of Erzhvilik even sent food for the women and children in the Botik camp. However, the peasants took these provisions and kept them for themselves.

On the afternoon of Saturday, September 13, Jews began fearfully saying that the Jews of Erzhvilik were to be taken to the camp in Botik. This news apparently had come from the wife of the town police chief, Stongvilas. The Lithuanian woman had Jewish acquaintances, and told them about this. In the evening some of the Jews began running away from town.

The Lithuanian police noticed them, and returned the runaways to the seven houses. A heavy guard made up of policemen surrounded the seven houses in the ghetto. Men who had been hiding out in the villages found out about the plan to take the Jews to the camp in Botik and returned to be with their families in town.

There were various opinions among the Jews. Some believed that the Jews would in fact be taken to the Botik camp, where they would be interned and forced to work. But there were also Jews who no longer believed the Lithuanians' reassurances.

On the morning of Sunday, September 14, the Lithuanian police officially announced to the Jews that they would be taken away to work at the Botik camp. They permitted the Jews to take along whatever they considered necessary. The Jews began to prepare. They packed their things. Whatever they could not carry they distributed among their Lithuanian neighbors, making arrangements to retrieve their things after the war. The Jews baked bread and cakes, and packed food. A few, however, got ready to escape from town and hide in the villages.

During the time the Jews had been interned in the seven houses, they had done everything they could to win the Lithuanian police and partisans over to their side, including giving them frequent "gifts." These were given to the police chief Stongvilas, the mayor of the town and other Lithuanian notables. The collection of money was carried out by the leading Jews of the town, who negotiated with the Lithuanians to annul the various ordinances and decrees.

Rabbi Rapeyka, Hirsh Shereshevsky, Zev Shayevitsh, Shmerl Mazhinter, Yeshayohu Libman and a few others went off to see the town priest, asking him to use his influence on the police and partisans to prevent the Jews from being taken away. The commission achieved nothing by going to the priest.

At six a.m. on Monday, September 15, the partisans and police brought in peasants with horses and wagons from surrounding villages. All of the Jews' belongings were piled onto the wagons, and the Jews were brought to the chief of police under a guard consisting of partisans and police.

All of the adults had to go to the police chief and surrender their money and valuables. All of the Jews were carefully frisked. The same morning the Jews were taken from the town to the camp in Botik.

A truck stood ready near the Botik camp. Groups of Jews were taken off the wagons, carried by truck to the Griblaukiai Forest and shot. All of the women and children in the Botik camp had already been shot there that morning.

All the Jews of Erzhvilik, men, women and children, were shot on that tragic Monday, September 15, 1941.

Two Jewish families from the church compound at Gaure, sixteen kilometers from Erzhvilik, were shot at the same spot. The men from the two families had been shot earlier. Some 1,400 Jewish souls were shot in the Griblaukiai Forest that day.

### **The Dreadful Cruelty During the Mass Shootings**

Khayem and his wife happened to receive reports from peasants as well as from partisans about various tragic episodes that took place in the course of the mass execution: The Jews who were taken to the pit were beaten with clubs and rifle butts so badly that most of the unfortunate Jews wanted to die as soon as possible.

1. While riding on one of the wagons, Khayem's father Avrom-Berl jumped down and began running into some shrubbery. He was caught, and the Lithuanians tormented him using various sadistic techniques. He was brought

to the pit barely showing signs of life.

2. Before she was shot, a girl named Peshke Segal was raped by two partisans, Juozas Ambrozaitis and Bronius Toliushiush. These two Lithuanian villains boasted to their friends about what they had done.

3. Mrs Rokhel Beker, nee Niselevitz, did not want her two small children, aged one and three, to be murdered by the Lithuanians, so she threw them into the pit herself with her last bit of strength.

4. Mrs Tsipe Kulesha, nee Paglinsky, had left her possessions in the care of the policeman Juozas Ambrozaitas, who promised to hide her and let her live. At the pit, the woman cursed the policeman. The murderer struck Tsipe's youngest daughter Rokhel, aged ten, on the head with his rifle butt. The child's brain spilled out next to her mother. Tsipe immediately fainted away. Her other two children were also next to her, and they witnessed the death of their sister. Tsipe and her children were then shot.

5. Everyone had to strip stark naked. A girl named Ite-Bashke Ofnbakh refused to remove her underwear. The partisans tortured her until she died.

6. Unable to bear seeing the torture and beating of the women who refused to remove their clothes, Khayem's mother Gitl-Rivke threw herself into the pit and was buried alive.

7. Moyshe Kaplan, a youth, could not bring himself to believe that Jews were being shot. When he was shot, the bullet wounded him in the throat. He escaped from the pit. The partisans who were standing nearby caught him. They beat him over the head with their rifle butts until he died.

8. The strongest Jew in town, 40-year-old Hirsh Yofe, jumped on the Lithuanians at the pit and struggled with them. The Lithuanians twisted his arms and legs and threw him into the pit alive. His wife Tsivye Yofe and three small children died together with him.

9. The partisans and police snapped the small children on their knees and then threw them half-dead into the pit. The partisans boasted about this to their peasant friends. The partisans bashed the heads of other small children against trees and threw them into the pit. Later they also boasted about this to their peasant friends. For several days blood seeped up out of the pit. It appeared to seethe and boil.

The peasants who had brought the Jews from town carried away the possessions of those who were shot. They brought everything to the compound of the Lithuanian peasant Jonas Zhilaitis in the village of Rumshiai, one kilometer from town. At that peasant's home the peasants divided among themselves, the murdered Jews' possessions.

71 partisans and policemen from the town of Erzvilik, Gaure, Skaudvile and from the entire region participated in the slaughter of the Jews.

Among those who actively participated in shooting the Jews, or who brought them to the pit and guarded them, Khayem and his wife recall the following Lithuanians:

1. Juozas Ambrozaitis, a farmer from the village of Garshvilai.
2. Bronius Toliushiush, a farmer from the village of Tshepaitshai.
3. Pranas Jankauskas, a farmer from the village of Garshvilai.
4. Shakalauskas, a tailor from the village of Balandzhai.
5. Bronius Bruzhas, a farmer and smith from a village six kilometers from town.
6. Aleksa Izidorius, a farmer from the village of Tautshelai.
7. Jankauskai, two brothers from the church compound at Gaure.
8. Bronius Jonikas, a farmer from the church compound at Pashaltonis.
9. Starkus, a farm worker from the compound Budai, four kilometers from town.
10. Latvis, a former church organ player from the village of Girdszai, 14 kilometers from town.
11. Bronius Mockus, a farmer from the village of Purvishkiai, nine kilometers from town.
12. Babilius, a farmer from the village of Padvare.
13. Shpudvilas, a farmer from a village near the church compound Gaure.
14. Izidorius Shickus from the village of Garshvilai.
15. Bronius Beinarys, a medical student from the town.
16. Bronius Banys, a gymnasium student from the village of Karklotis, one kilometer from town.
17. Juozas Marinas, a farmer from the village of Kulvertishkis, two kilometers from town.
18. Jonas Bosas, a watchman in the mill at Erzvilik.

Khayem and his wife remember no more names.

Two Germans were present while the Jews were being slaughtered, and they photographed everything. The same evening after the shootings the Jew-murderers arranged a party at the home of Jonas Zhilaitis. The next day, Tuesday, September 16, there was a second party in the town of Erzvilik.

The town intelligentsia were present, along with all of the police and they sang nationalist songs, got drunk and danced for joy.

During the party the partisan Bronius Jonikas showed everyone a golden watch which he had received from a woman from Tawrik named Sore-Dvoyre, nee Berman, for letting her get away from the pit before being shot. A second partisan, Bronius Mockus, shot her in the forest. The police chief took the watch and kept it for himself. The other murderers took the side of their offended comrade and informed in Tawrik against the chief, saying that he had taken "gifts" from Jews and allowed them to escape from town.

### **Those Who Died After the Mass Slaughter**

More than fifty Jews had escaped from Erzhvilik. A hunt for the hidden Jews was undertaken through the forests, fields and villages.

Khayem and his wife remember the following incidents:

1. Rabbi Rapeyka, his wife and little boy had escaped the town on the morning of September 15 and hidden in different places every day and night. Stongvilas the police chief and several other policemen found him at the home of the peasant Juozas Shaulys in the village of Jerebishkiai, three kilometers from town. After taking the rabbi's gold watch and robbing his family, they shot the three Jews in a small wood near peasant Shaulys' home. This was precisely two months after the major slaughter of the Jews, September 15, 1941.

2. Yankev Kulesha had no place to hide, and came to the father of the Jew-murderer Juozas Ambrozaitis. The peasant gave him food and sent someone to tell his son in town. Bronius Toliushus arrested Yankev. Two hundred meters from the farm he shot Yankev in an open field near a forest by the village of Uzsakmeniai, next to a brook called the Akmena. This happened one week after Rabbi Rapeyka and his family were shot.

3. With the knowledge of the police chief, a 75 year old woman named Khane Zarkin, her daughter Sore-Yente and the six-year-old daughter of Khane's other daughter were hiding at the home of a partisan named Antanas Butkus in the village of Baciey (or Kuzhiai?). The police chief wanted to let Sore-Yente live, and ordered that only her aged mother and the granddaughter be killed. The same Butkus, together with Juozas Ambrozaitis and a third man, permitted Sore-Yente to escape, but they took the old woman and the little girl, Mashele Press, a hundred meters from the farm and shot them. Sore-Yente hid with peasants whom she knew, and she survived.

4. Two sisters named Taybe and Sore Gans deliberately hid in different villages. Sore was caught in the village of Rudkishkiai; Bronius Toliushus tortured her to death and buried her on the spot. A few weeks later her sister Taybe was caught in the village of Libishkiai, 10 kilometers from Erzhvilik. She went into a peasant's home to get warm. A policeman from Erzhvilik was sleeping at the peasant's. He shot Sore. This was before New Year's Day, 1942.

5. Two brothers named Motl and Mayer Vilentsik hid at the home of the peasant Danelius in the village of Openishkiai, four kilometers from Erzhvilik. There was a party at the peasant's house on December 31, 1941. The neighbors noticed that Jews were hiding under the straw in the barn, and they reported this to the police in Erzhvilik. Toliushus, Mockus and a third man tormented the two brothers in various ways and demanded that they reveal the hiding place of the third brother Moyshe. Moyshe was hidden at the home of a peasant named Butkus in another nearby village. One brother could not withstand the torture and revealed the third brother's location. All three brothers were shot.

6. Velve Shayetiz, his wife Khase and daughter Khaye Rishe; Shmerl Mazshinter, his wife Tsipe and son Are-Hirshl; two brothers named Velve and Ruven Shereshevsky were all hidden at the home of the peasant Bendiktas Butkus in the village of Butkaitziai. The peasant kept them for a large fee. During the winter of 1941-42 they were discovered at the peasant's home and taken to Erzhvilik. Shmuel Mazshinter tried to escape on the way, and was shot.

The Jewish arrestees were brought to the Erzhvilik prison. After holding them for some time, they were all shot at the Jewish cemetery. Only one woman, Tsipe Mazshinter, who was lightly wounded in the leg and fainted, took advantage of the evening darkness and the drunkenness of the partisans and escaped from the cemetery in just a shirt. After suffering in various ways while hiding out with peasants, she survived.

7. Yankl Gering hid for quite some time together with Tsipe Mazshinter in the cellar of the home of the mother of the student partisan named Bronius Beinarys in the town of Erzhvilik. Later he wandered around in the villages, until he came to visit a female Christian acquaintance of his in town, with whom he had left money. The peasant woman's son-in-law Balashaitis was a policeman in town. The policeman sent the partisans Toliushus and Mockus. They spotted him leaving the town and strangled him. He was buried at the Jewish cemetery by the town police. This was in the fall of 1942.

8. Gutke Kulesha, aged 21, hid for a long time. He became friendly with a hidden Red Army soldier who had stayed behind. The Red Army soldier shot Gutke in the course of a dispute. This was in the winter of 1943-1944.

9. Brayne Kulesha, a sister of Yankl Kulesha, hid with peasants in villages and survived until the Liberation. After the Red Army marched into Lithuania the Lithuanian partisans and Jew-murderers began to go into hiding. The murderers found Brayne in a village called Potsaitsiai at the home of the peasant Veitsys and dragged her away. It has been impossible to ascertain how she died.

### **How Did Khayem Goldshteyn and His Family Survive?**

On the morning of Saturday, September 13, the town was surrounded by Lithuanian police and partisans.

There was great panic in town on Saturday afternoon. Jews who had contacts with the police received news about the danger facing them, and escaped from town with their families.

Khayem made up with his wife and parents that they would all escape in different directions, and meet up at a certain spot in the country.

He escaped from town Saturday evening and arrived in the village of Karklote, one kilometer from town. He went to the home of Jokubas Jushtsius, a good peasant and a friend of the Jews.

It was not possible to stay at that peasant's home, because the entire region was occupied and surrounded by partisans. Khayem managed to escape this unsafe place and arrived on Sunday morning at the home of the peasant Pakutinskas in the village of Palabaukshtsiai. The peasant's son had gone off to town with a letter from Khayem in which he asked everyone in his family to come join him. The peasant's son returned from town in the evening with a letter from Khayem's aunt, Tsipe Kulesha. In the letter Tsipe wrote that Khayem's wife and two children had already escaped the town, and were on their way to a friendly peasant. Khayem's father decided to go to the Botik camp with all the Jews. Khayem's mother and aunt also decided to spend the war in the Botik camp.

On Monday evening Khayem went to the home of the peasant Antanas Brasas in the same village where he had been hiding, and there he met his wife and two children. Because of the warnings and threats of the partisans against any peasant who might be hiding Jews, the peasant no longer wanted to hide them. The whole family left and went to the poor peasant Antanas Potsius in the village of Palabaukshtsiai. They hid in a tumble-down building for exactly three weeks. Neighbors found out about them, and informed the police in Erzhevilk.

Khayem and his family escaped in time. The day after Khayem and his family left the peasant, the police surrounded the entire farm and searched through all the barns and storage rooms. The police announced to all the peasants that there would be a large reward for anyone who caught or gave information about the whereabouts of Khayem and his family.

For more than a week Khayem's family wandered through the forests without anything to eat or drink, until they reached the home of peasant Jonas Butkus, in the countryside two kilometers from town. The family lay hidden in hay two meters deep in this good peasant's barn. During this time the family found out about the death of the Erzhevilk rabbi's family and about the capture of Mozshinter, Shayevitz and Shereshevsky families, as well as the death of Khayem's uncle Yankl Kulesha.

(See incidents 1, 2 and 6.)

All over the surrounding area Jews in hiding were being sought out. There was a careful inspection of this peasant's farm as well. Policemen and partisans stuck lances into the hay above the heads of Khayem's hidden family. It was unsafe for them to remain at the peasant's home any longer.

### **Khayem's Family Hides in a Forest During the Winter of 1941-2**

One bright moonlit night deep in the cold autumn of 1941, Khayem put his younger child into a sack and held his older child by the hand, and thus they snuck away from the guarded village and arrived at a barn near a forest in a second village. A farm belonging to the barn's owner was eight kilometers away. The family stayed in that barn for some five weeks' time. Every Monday and Thursday the parents fasted. The little bit of bread they got was given to the children.

By now it was just before Christmas 1941. The cold weather that year was tragically severe. The family had nothing to cover themselves with. All they had to protect themselves from the cold was hay and straw. However, the wife of

the barn's owner found out about the hidden Jews and came to the barn with her son. Khayern took his wife, whose leg was badly injured, out of the straw and carried her into the nearby woods. Then he did the same thing with his two children.

The peasant woman and her son would under no circumstances agree to allow the Jews to remain in the broken-down barn.

Some fifty meters from a sandy road, in some bushes, Khayern made up a "shelter" out of branches, just like a bird would make a nest. He camouflaged the spot with pine saplings. From Christmas 1941 until the March 1, 1942 Khayem and his two children remained in the "nest." Of course, they had no bedding. They didn't take their clothes off the entire time. In order to prevent the children from becoming frozen, Khayern and his wife constantly kept them between their legs and warmed them with their own half-frozen bodies. The family did not wash the entire time. Khayem had no chance to shave or to cut his hair. From day to day the forest did its job, hiding these strange creatures, dirty, lousy and infested with bedbugs, and making them resemble orangutans.

The skin peeled off their bodies. The nails of their toes and fingers were bloody and full of pus. Once every few weeks Khayern would leave the "nest" and steal in to see peasants in both nearby and more distant villages. Khayem had to take great care to camouflage and cover his footsteps in the deep snow. The peasants were not eager to give food for nothing. Khayem put on his tallith and tefillin and prayed every morning throughout that tragic time. Nor did he fail to say the afternoon and evening prayers. The family ate no non-kosher food the whole time, living instead on bread and water.

In the beginning of the month of March 1942, Khayem and his family left that location and came to the home of a peasant named Vincas Potsius, also in the village of Usheshuviai-Palabaukshtsiai. The peasant warmly received the half-dead family and fed them. But he was afraid to keep them on his farm, and instead permitted them to remain in a small wood in the middle of his own fields. There the Jews had to be extremely careful not to be noticed by peasants. The good peasant used to bring water to the Jews. One night every couple of weeks Khayem would go far away and beg for potatoes, bread and onions from peasants.

When spring arrived, the family's situation improved. The trees became covered with leaves, which camouflaged their hiding place. They no longer had to be quite so careful. There was nothing but fields of grain around the woods. No roads or paths led to the woods. In the summertime the peasant did everything he could to help the Jews heal their injured bodies. The peasant brought Khayem a razor. However, they didn't receive any clean clothes, and they were constantly lousy. During the summer Khayem made home-made alcohol in the woods for the peasant.

The summer and autumn of 1942 passed without incident. In this forest Khayem and his family gathered their strength to continue fighting for their lives.

### **Khayem and His Family in the Arms of Death**

Their life in the forests affected the health of Khayem and his family. The older boy began to grow ill. An abscess began to grow on his leg, starting in the bone. It was already October by then. The peasant saw that the child was suffering and growing worse from day to day. He agreed to take the sick boy into his home and do what he could to save him.

One Friday evening the entire family came into the peasant's house for the first time, bringing the sick boy. During the night the peasant placed hot compresses on the boy's leg. The abscess broke. The child grew better. Friday night everyone slept in the kitchen.

On Saturday morning the peasant rode off to the forest for firewood. At three in the afternoon Lithuanian police from the town of Batik suddenly appeared in the house. Menukhe immediately fell at their feet and began begging them to forgive her. The police, who had come seeking home-made alcohol at the peasant's home, accidentally found the Jewish family.

An armed policeman stayed and guarded the Jews. The rest went into the barn looking for alcohol. Khayem and his wife understood the danger facing them. Khayem decided he would die together with the Lithuanian policeman who was guarding them. He communicated his intention to his wife, but she talked him out of it. Khayem told his children that when he started running, they should try to hide under the big oven, and he told his wife to run in a different direction. Like an aroused tiger, Khayem threw himself toward the low window, pushed out the frame and ran away. Apparently, the policeman wasn't expecting this, and he lost control. He ran out into the courtyard to his comrades. They immediately caught Menukhe and beat her. One of the murderers shot at Khayem and wounded

him in the head. Khayem could run no longer. The policemen prodded him brutally with their heavy boots. They bloodied him, and then brought him back into the house, from which he had escaped. That same evening the policemen forced the peasant to harness his horses to a wagon. They bound the entire family and took them to Botik.

They gleefully took Khayem and his wife to the police chief in Botik. The police chief did not give the murderous collaborators a very friendly reception. He immediately announced that the Jewish arrestees were human beings for whom he had compassion, and he asked Khayem all about his painful struggle to remain alive. The police chief found out that Khayem had been a school mate of his wife in the Lithuanian gymnasium in Erzvilik. He calmed Khayem and reassured him. Khayem asked to be left alone with the police chief. Khayem bluffed the police chief, "confiding" that an aunt of his in Tawrik had, before being shot, hidden an iron chest containing a treasure" of gold, silver and diamonds.

Khayem offered to give this imaginary "treasure" to the police chief, and to go show him the spot himself. The police chief believed Khayem, and promised to do everything he could to save Khayem and his family. Meanwhile Khayem and his family were imprisoned.

### **Khayem and His Family in Tawrik Prison**

The first night in prison was terrible. Khayem, his wife and children did not sleep. They prepared themselves to die. They hardly believed that they would be allowed to live. Experience had taught them the attitude of the Lithuanian police to Jews who were caught in the villages. There had been no cases in which they had failed to shoot a captured Jew. Khayem and his wife said their final confession before God. Khayem put on his tallith and tefillin and looked through the window as morning came, expecting it to bring a terrible death.

In the morning a wagon drove up. Sixteen policemen led the arrestees out of the prison. The police chief was not present.

That morning peasants from surrounding villages had come to town to confess to the priest and to ask forgiveness for their sins. The peasants found out about the family of Jewish arrestees and surrounded the prison from all sides.

Menukhe did not go on the wagon. She was certain that they were being taken to be shot. She threw herself onto the ground and began to weep and shout loudly and wildly. The two children lay at her on the ground and wept as well. Khayem stood up in the wagon wearing his tallith and tefillin, and with tears in his eyes, in a trembling voice, he begged that he and his family not be shot. He begged the peasants standing nearby to help him. He also threatened that his good friends would take revenge for his life. He passionately shouted and bewailed all the terror, suffering and sorrow of the innocent Jews who had been shot, and the mass graves of the Jews from all the towns and cities in Lithuania. There were peasants who listened attentively to the moral reprimands and the threats of the "Yid!" in his tallith and tefillin, and many of them wiped tears from their eyes.

But there were also some peasants who laughed heartily. Two peasants who had inherited the possessions of the murdered Jews from Botik threw Menukhe and the two children into the wagon. Two policemen went along. The police chief rode in front on his motorcycle. The Jews were brought to Tawrik. A policeman drove the Jewish family back and forth through the streets of Tawrik. Together with them was the peasant who had allowed the family to stay in his woods.

It was a dreadful scene. Blood still trickled from Khayem's wounded head. His face was black and blue from the blows he'd been given, and his wife and children were also pale, starving, exhausted, dirty and in tatters. There was a market in Tawrik that day. Some of the residents of Tawrik accompanied the "demonstration." With their fists clenched they threatened the police, expressing their sympathy for the innocent tortured Jews.

The Jews were placed in a cell in the Tawrik prison. The good peasant was interned as well. In the evening a policeman took Khayem to the SS in Tawrik. The chief of the German SS men was a man from Tilsit named Schwartz. He already knew everything about Khayem and promised him his life in exchange for revealing the precise location of the treasure. Khayem told him about the attitude of the Lithuanians toward him, and asserted that he would rather give the treasure to the Germans.

Early the next morning a Lithuanian policeman brought Khayem and two Lithuanian arrestees to a burned building. There was an SS. man present as well. Khayem didn't know exactly where the "treasure" he had invented was. For eight days in a row the arrestees searched for the "treasure, taking apart the broken, burned walls, but they found nothing. Khayem sensed that his last hopes were disappearing.

## **Khayem Becomes a Domestic for the German SS Men**

Khayem told the head of the SS that after the Jews of his town were shot, he had had nowhere to hide. A peasant had promised to prepare an underground bunker for him, his wife and his children. But because he hadn't had anything with which he could pay the peasant for hiding him, he had told him the location of the hidden "treasure." The peasant had gone to Tawrik. When he returned, he had driven Khayem and his family out. Khayem asserted to the SS man that the peasant was the only one who could have found the "treasure," because no-one else knew about it.

Khayem declared that he was ready to go with the SS chief to demand the return of the treasure. The SS chief believed him, and agreed to go along with Khayem's proposal.

The next morning Khayem was brought from prison to the home of the SS men. The SS chief explained that there were Lithuanians working for them as servants, but they could not communicate with them because of the difference in language. Furthermore, they didn't trust the Lithuanians. The chief proposed that Khayem become their domestic.

Khayem was glad of the idea. He saw it as a chance to win time and to extend the life of his family. Khayem happily thanked the SS chief, promising to be loyal to him and to fulfil his every wish. Every morning Khayem was released from prison and walked freely through the streets of Tawrik to the SS men.

The work consisted of bringing in wood and heating twelve brick ovens, shining 24 pairs of boots each morning so that they were good and shiny, washing the floors in twelve rooms, slaughtering, plucking, roasting and boiling several chickens. Khayem was never allowed to taste the good meals he prepared, and ate in the prison instead.

The SS men threw good pieces of bread into the ovens, and Khayem went hungry for entire days. Sweat would run from his tired body as he did the difficult tasks, which had to be carried out precisely and quickly, and which were often accompanied by blows and curses from the SS men.

The chief, however, was polite to Khayem and did not beat him. He still hoped to find the treasure.

After an entire day's work, Khayem returned by himself to his wife and children in prison, who were kept under close guard as hostages in case Khayem ran away. At lunchtime he came and ate in the prison. Thus it continued for six weeks, from late 1942 until after New Year's 1943.

During this time, Khayem's wife Menukhe knitted sweaters for all of the guards and officials at the prison. She did everything she could to please them and make herself useful.

## **Khayem and His Family Are Freed from Prison**

Shortly before New Year's a prison guard told them that the coming days would be decisive for Khayem and his family. He told them that the SS chief had sent an inquiry to the regional commissar in Riga, asking what to do with the Jewish arrestees. There were two possibilities: either the Jews would be taken to the Shavl (Shiauliai) ghetto, or they would be shot.

Khayem and his wife didn't sleep the whole night, considering what to do. They decided to ask the SS chief, to let them relate a dream Khayem hadn't actually had. The next morning, a Sunday, while Khayem was sweeping the chief's room, he requested that the chief permit him to relate his dream. The chief was amazed. Khayem said that he had seen the chief standing in a room, dressed like a king, and that Khayem and his family were kneeling before him. Just then the door opened and Khayem's murdered mother came in, dressed in black. In a mild voice she assured Khayem that his life was in the hands of the ruler, and that on account of the ruler he would remain alive. Then she disappeared.

The chief was bewildered and frightened. Khayem also lied to the chief that every evening he heard the Lithuanians in the prison corridor saying that they would shoot all the Germans in town together with his family as soon as the Russians approached Tawrik.

The chief became very upset and demanded that Khayem tell him which Lithuanians were saying these things. Khayem answered that when he returned from work it was dark in the prison corridor, and he couldn't see the Lithuanians' faces.

Khayem managed to have his family released to live freely in the city. The chief agreed. Khayem and his family were released from prison, and found quarters with a peasant in the middle of the city. When Khayem came to work the next day, all the SS men greeted him happily. They gave him gifts, including clean clothes, razor blades, whiskey and other good things. Khayem does not know why the S.S. men celebrated with him that day.

Living in the city, Khayem received a ration card like all the other residents of Tawrik. His wife and children recovered from their wounds and gathered a bit of strength for the continued struggle. Friendly peasants from the city and the countryside brought the only Jewish family in Tawrik enough to eat and drink. Khayem also received invitations from village peasants to come running to them and hide in case his and his family's lives were threatened.

Times were changing by then. The "victorious" German armies began to suffer decisive blows. It was clear to everyone that the German army was being crushed by the heavy blows they received from the Red Army. Many anti-Semites and Jew-killers began to tremble in fear of the revenge the Soviets might take on them. More upright Lithuanians began to assure themselves of a "Red heaven" after the war, and tried to ingratiate themselves with the few surviving hidden Jews in the countryside, as well as with Khayem's family.

### **Khayem and His Family Escape from the German SS**

One morning shortly after the great defeat of the German military at Stalingrad, Khayem overheard a conversation between the SS men, who still lay in bed. Khayem heard one of the SS men suggesting, "Tonight we should bring the woman and the two children." Khayem understood quite well whose wife and children they were talking about.

At that moment an SS man ran in to the nearby room where Khayem stood, and kicked him. "What did you hear?" he asked Khayem in agitation. Khayem played dumb, insisting that he hadn't heard a thing. Khayem tried to work just as he did each day and tried with all his power to control his agitation, but one SS man guarded him with a revolver in his outstretched hand.

In the afternoon the same SS man took Khayem to heat the ovens in their garage. Suddenly all the SS men came to the garage, with the SS chief at their head. They ordered him to take the key from the garage into their office. They all drove off in a hurry. Khayem didn't take the key from the garage into the office, but he carefully hung it outside on the door of their office.

Making his way stealthily through back streets, Khayem reached his wife and children. To be sure that the Lithuanian neighbors wouldn't notice anything, Khayem put better clothes on the children in the middle of the day and very carefully they made their way out of town.

The family hid out in various places, including for a short time in the homes of friendly peasants. Then they were helped by a peasant to cross the Sheshuvis River and arrived at the home of the peasant Eitsas Pranas in the village of Stirbaitiai. In a disguised room in the entrance way they lay hidden for over three months, until the spring of 1943. Then they went to the peasant Juozas Gaizhauskas in the village of Milgaudzhiai and hid for another two months, until the beginning of summer. For several months Khayem and his family did not stay with peasants, but hid in various villages, fields and forests. One night each week he would go off to distant villages to get food. During the harvest season Khayem met for the first time other surviving Erzvilik Jews who were in hiding. The surviving Jews from Erzvilik were Akiva Libman and his three sisters Lyuba, Sore and Khave, along with the Erzvilik Jew Aron Kelts.

### **Actions to Save Jews from the Kovno Ghetto**

From them Khayem found out first of all that there was a ghetto in Kovno and that Jews were still living there, and also that among these Jews was his sister-in-law Rokhel Druker and two other young sisters from Erzvilik, who had lived in Kovno since before the war. The Erzvilik Jews decided to take Khayem's sister-in-law and the two sisters out of the ghetto.

Khayem and Sorele Libman were appointed to travel 26 kilometers to the peasant Rakevitsius, a Pole, in the village of Keidshiai, about six kilometers from the town of Vidukle. Khayem's wife Menukhe and the two children remained hidden in a large field of grain.

The peasant Rakevitsius received a dress suit, and in exchange he safely took out from the Kovno ghetto Khayem's sister-in-law Rokhel Druker and the two sisters Sore and Lyuba Ziv, along with a small girl. Rokhel





## **THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS IN THE TOWN OF LAUKUVA**

The eyewitness testimony of Yoysef Aronovitz, born September 19, 1918 in the town of Laukuva. Father's name; Azriel-Meyer. Mother's name; Alte. Lived in Laukuva his entire life, until the outbreak of war on June 22, 1941. Education: Completed six classes of Hebrew gymnasium in Tawrik. Trade: master confectioner.

Laukuva is located in Tawrik County, 50 kilometers from Tawrik and 65 kilometers from Memel. Lake Parsho is located three kilometers outside of town. The highway called "Zhemaitshiu-plantas" goes through the town.

The total population of the town was about 1,200, including some sixty Jewish families before the war. The majority of the Jewish population was occupied in commerce. In villages near the town there lived four or five Jewish families, who were occupied in agriculture. The town had a Hebrew elementary school (until 1941), a library containing 500 Hebrew and Yiddish books, and a study house.

The last rabbi in town was Reb Khayem-Zelik Kaplinsky (a native of the White Russian town of Zhetl), who occupied the position for some 25 years.

The majority of the Jewish youth studied in the gymnasium and the yeshiva in Telshe, in the Hebrew gymnasium in Shavl, and in other large cities in Lithuania.

The attitude toward the Jews on the part of the Lithuanians in town and in the countryside was not bad. There was a small group of anti-Semites; however, they never expressed themselves publicly.

### **The Outbreak of War**

On Sunday, June 22, 1941, the Jews in town immediately became aware of the war. Refugees from Tawrik arrived in the town. The Jews all left the town and settled in surrounding villages. A small group went as far as the Latvian border and had to return, because the Soviets were keeping the border closed.

The Germans arrived in town on the evening of Tuesday, June 24, 1941. The town was occupied without a struggle and without any physical damage.

On Wednesday nearly all of the Jews returned to the town from the villages nearby. All of the Jewish houses had been looted, their doors ripped out and their windows broken. The houses were entirely empty. Even old furniture had disappeared. This was all the work of the town's Lithuanian residents.

Before the war Yoysef's family had had a small factory which produced honey, marmelade and extracts of liqueurs. When they returned from the village they found everything in the cellar broken; the house had been completely looted and vandalized.

### **The Civil Administration; Decrees, Brutality, Looting**

The civil administration of the town was taken over by Lithuanians. They were former members of the Gun Club, policemen during Smetonas' time and partisans. They wore white ribbons on their sleeves and were all armed with rifles. They supported the Germans against the Red Army.

The leader of the partisans was the local Lithuanian Tadas Kelpsha, a former army officer and a bitter anti-Semite. He owned a compound in a village called Divitshio Kaimas, five kilometers from town. This Kelpsha ran the town. His brother had been a general in the artillery under President Smetonas.

Tragic decrees began to be enacted against the Jews. Every morning Jewish men were driven out of their homes to work at various jobs: cleaning streets, grooming German horses, cleaning all the out houses in town and so forth.

On Sunday, June 29, 1941, Yoysef and three other Jews were taken one kilometer out of town to bury four fallen Red Army soldiers. They worked until the evening. The partisan Sugentas from the village of Eitvidaitzio, one kilometer from town, stood guard. His brother Sugentas was a lawyer in Kovno.

When they returned to town, the four Jews noticed trucks in the market place and a group of people running. When he came home, Yoysef lay down to rest after his hard day's work. Suddenly a German SS man and a Lithuanian partisan broke into the house and drove Yoysef out half-naked.

Other partisans were standing outside in the street. They took Yoysef, together with other Jews, to the marketplace, where most of the Jewish men in town had already been herded together. Yoysef was taken out of his house by a Lithuanian with whom he had been friendly in his youth, Alfonsas Rocevitzius, and by Kulikauskas, an employee of the town creamery. He was taken to the marketplace by Jasas, a tailor in town.

After almost all of the Jewish men in town had been herded together into the marketplace, they were lined up in two rows. The German SS men and the Lithuanian partisans under the command of Kelpsha searched every Jew, taking away their money, rings; watches, better shoes and boots, and so forth. They beat each Jew as they searched him.

The German Ober-Sturm-Fuehrer Dr Schau, who had a large compound of his own in Heidekrug, was also at the marketplace.

The partisan commander Kelpsha related the "biographies" of all the Jews to the German. In general Kelpsha informed him that all of the Jews in town were Communists who had helped the Soviets. Yoysef's brother Zelik Aranovitz had been a member of the Communist party under the Soviets. He had run away from town when the war broke out, and the family had no news of him.

Suddenly the men who had been driven together at the marketplace saw Zelik being led under heavy guard. Kelpsha spoke to Dr Schau about Zelik, telling him everything that Zelik had done during the year of Soviet rule. Schau listened attentively, and wrote everything down in a notebook.

All of the 80 Jewish men who had been herded together were driven into two trucks. The Jews were forbidden to look behind them or to the side. They were pressed together into the trucks like herring in a barrel. Each truck had a trailer hitched behind it, in which some twenty SS men with machine guns rode.

The Jews were certain that they were being taken off to be shot. The Jews were taken from Laukuva into the town of Khveidan, where they stood for an hour in the marketplace. They were not let out of the trucks.

Some forty Jewish men were at the marketplace in Khveidan. They were waiting for a truck. Some of them had already been taken away. The men from Laukuva were taken from Khveidan to the town of Shvekshne, by the study house in the marketplace.

### **The First Jewish Victims**

At the marketplace Dr Schau ordered the young Communist to come forth voluntarily. Zelik Aranovitz jumped down from the truck and walked up to Dr Schau. Nearby stood the SS man Jakst, also a native of Heidekrug.

The SS ordered Zelik to take off his good fur coat and give it to the Jews in the truck. "You won't be needing it," Dr Schau informed Zelik with a shout. Zelik removed the fur coat and threw it into Dr Schau's face. Jakst beat Zelik brutally.

Before the transport left Laukuva two sick Jews, Avrom-Gershon and Eliyohu Shapiro were taken out of the houses. Both of them were forced to ride in the transport.

In Shvekshne they too were taken out of the trucks. Dr Schau assured the two sickly men that after they buried the Communist Zelik he would leave them in a sanatorium in Shvekshne.

The SS men drove the three Jews away to the neighborhood of the Jewish cemetery. Nine shots were heard. A while later the SS men returned. From Shvekshne the two trucks full of Jews were brought to the village of Mactubern in Heidekrug County.

After the men had been in the Mactubern camp for three or four weeks, a transport of some thirty or forty men were brought in. Some of them were from Nayshtot, some from Vainutas, and the rest from Koltinan. In the group were five or six men from the town of Laukuva. These five or six men from Laukuva had been hiding with friendly peasants since the beginning of the war. The conditions under which they were in hiding grew worse from day to day and the men had "voluntarily" returned to their families in town.

Every day they had to report to the town police headquarters. They were taken to work from there. While the men from Koltinan were being driven through Laukuva in trucks, these five or six men were taken along to Heidekrug.

Among the men from Laukuva who were brought to Heidekrug Yoysef remembers the following:

1. Tsvi Sharanovitz, a student.
2. Mikhl Shlakhter, a baker.
3. Ben-Tsion Katsev, an agriculturist.

### **The Boundless Suffering of the Women and Children; Their Death**

The five or six men who were brought in told Yoysef that after the 80 men had been taken to Heidekrug, all of the women and children had been ordered to leave their houses and move into the town study house.

The women were allowed to take along anything they wanted. The partisans assured the women that after spending a short time in the study house they would all be taken into a ghetto or a camp. The women and children were driven into the synagogue ten days after the 80 men were taken from Laukuva. Thus, they were taken into the study house on July 10 or 11, 1941.

Around the study house stood a heavy guard made up of partisans, who didn't let anyone out and didn't let anyone in to see them. The situation of the women and children was dreadful. The women and children received nothing to eat, nor was there any way for them to get food themselves. Even to go out and fulfill their bodily functions the women were required to get the permission of the partisans. The women were not taken to work.

The five or six men were not taken to the study house. They were locked into a room in the Lithuanian elementary school. They were taken to work every day. They were there for several days, until they were taken away with the men from Koltinan.

Lithuanian arrestees who were members of the Communist Party and of the Communist Youth were also kept in the elementary school. Among those arrested there were three Jewish girls and one boy. The four Jews were accused of active participation in various work for the Soviets. The three girls were the two sisters Reyzl and Beyle Khayet and an aunt of Tsvi's named Reyze Sharanovitz. The arrested boy was Shloyme Shnayder.

The two sisters and the boy were taken out of the Lithuanian elementary school and shot after the women and children had been taken to the camp in Geruliai.

At the end of the month of August Yoysef Smilansky, a native of Heidekrug who had lived in Laukuva before the war, received a letter from his wife, which was delivered by a German officer. The letter reported that all of the women and children from Laukuva were in a compound called Geruliai near Telshe (Telsiai), and that they were doing agricultural work for individual peasants. The same was written in a second letter as well.

Late in the autumn of 1941 the men in the camp found out that all of the women and children had been shot near Telshe. It was impossible to find out more precise details at that time.

The men still had a few golden rings which they'd managed to keep hidden. They gave them to a Lithuanian boy to take a letter for them. But the Lithuanian brought no reply.

Among the Lithuanian murderers who actively participated in the torture and the looting of the Jewish residents' possessions, and who helped the German SS men drive the Jewish men out of their houses to take them to the marketplace and from there to Heidekrug, Yoysef Aranovitz remembers the following:

1. The partisan commander and owner of a compound; Tadas Kelpsha.
2. The partisan and owner of a compound; Shugentas.
3. The partisan and farmer; Alfonsas Rocefitzius.
4. The employee of the town's creamery; Kilikauskas.
5. The main tailor in town; Kazys Urbonas.

(For details about the fate and the end of the women and children after the men were taken to Heidekrug, see the testimony of Mrs Leye Shapiro.- LK )

*Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin New York March 29, 1987*

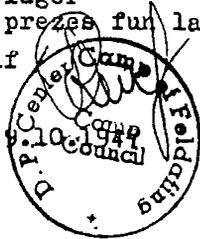
Attestation of Josef Aranovitz

אני, יוסף אראנוביץ, הייתי אחד מן היהודים שחיו בלוקאווה - קטנה  
בליטא. אני מספר את מה שראיתי ושמעתי באותה תקופה.  
אני מאשר את כל מה שכתבתי כאן. יוסף אראנוביץ  
אשר אראנוביץ

Dem eigenthentikn unterschrift  
fun Josef Aronowicz wos wojnt  
in feldafinger lager  
baszleakt der prezes fun lagerkomitet  
/ E. Reif

אני מאשר את כל מה שכתבתי כאן.  
אשר אראנוביץ  
1947-9-9

Feldafing, den



Everything written on exactly five pages about the slaughter of the Jews of the small Lithuanian town of Laukuva - I related myself, and attest thereto with my signature on each page.  
Josef Aranovitz [Signature].

The testimony was recorded by Engineer Leyb Koniuchowsky [Signature]  
Feldafing October 9, 1947

The signature of Josef Aranovitz, who lived in the Feldafing Camp is attested to by the camp chairman of the camp committee  
Signature of the chairman: E Reif [Signature] Feldafing October 9, 1947

Translated by Dr Jonathan Boyarin New York March 27, 1987

## THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS OF LAUKUVA AND SHILALE

The testimony of Mrs Leye Shapiro-Rudnik, born in Utena on November 26, 1911. Completed the Hebrew gymnasium in Vilkomir in the year 1929, and the teachers' seminary in Telshe in the year 1931. Father's name; Tsivian; mother; Khaye. After finishing the teachers' seminary, Leye left Utena and settled in the small Lithuanian town of Shilale, where she was a teacher in the elementary school. There Leye married Eliyohu Shapiro in the year 1934. They lived in Shilale. Leye's parents continued living in Utena.

Two weeks before the war broke out on June 22, 1941, Leye, together with her husband and three and a half year old daughter Esterl went to Laukuva to visit her father-in-law, Aharon Shapiro.

On the first day of the war refugees from Tawrik, Shilale and other towns began appearing in Laukuva. They fled through Laukuva in the direction of Vorne (Varniai). The people from Shilale related that in the distance they saw Tawrik burning. Ten kilometers from Shilale, near the small town of Pajuris, there was a Red Army airstrip. There were many Soviet military engineers, technicians and workers who were preparing fortifications there. When the war broke out, they fled through Laukuva in the direction of Vorne. The Jews from Shilale fled together with them. Some ten Jewish families escaped with the Red Army and arrived safely in the Soviet Union. Some of the young men fell on the front. The others survived, and returned to Lithuania after the war.

The refugees from Shilale in Laukuva related that the Red militia, the Communist Party and other Soviet institutions had left Shilale. The civilian population had escaped to the villages.

### I. Laukuva

Concerning Laukuva, see the testimony of Yoysef Aranovitz, dated October 9, 1947.

The refugees who had arrived in Laukuva caused a panic. All the Jews in town hurriedly abandoned their possessions and spread out to hide with peasants in the surrounding villages. Leye, her husband, her daughter and her father-in-law escaped to a village four kilometers from Laukuva. Friendly peasants received them decently.

On Tuesday, June 24, 1941, the Germans entered the town. The next day, Wednesday, it was announced on the Kovno radio station that all of the Jews had to return to their towns. The peasants in the villages were strictly warned not to hide any Jews. On Friday, June 27 all of the Jews of Laukuva left the villages and returned to their homes.

Several Jewish homes in town were burned. All of the Jewish homes had had their doors ripped out, their shutters and windows broken, and had been thoroughly looted by the local population. The Jews couldn't bring back to town the few things they had brought along by horse and wagon to the villages, because their horses had been taken away.

Lithuanians with white ribbons on their sleeves who called themselves partisans were already lording it over the town. After the German army marched through town, the partisans took over the civilian administration.

Tadas Kelpsha, a former leader of the gun club in President Smetonas' times, became the boss in town. He became the commander of the partisans in town.

Each morning the Jewish men and women were driven out from their houses to various dirty tasks. Lithuanian partisans kept guard while they worked. They physically and morally tormented the helpless Jews.

### All the Jewish Men Are Taken Away to Camps near Heidekrug

On Sunday, June 29, 1941, SS men rode in from Heidekrug. With the help of partisans, they went into all the Jewish homes, looted them and then drove all the men into the street. Several SS men and partisans came to Leye's home demanding gold, silver, and paper securities. They beat the Jew Yoyel Levy, who had nothing to give them. Leye wore a golden chain; she took it off and gave it to the SS so that they would stop beating Yoyel.

The SS and partisans drove all the men out of their homes, including Yoyel Levy, Leye's husband Eliyohu, his father Aharon, and Yoyel's son-in-law Shnayder. All the men who were driven out were taken to the marketplace by the partisans and German SS men. There all the Jewish men in town were herded together.

In the marketplace the men were tormented with various calisthenics. They were forced to run fast and fall down, and then they were lined up in rows. The murderers took whatever they pleased from anyone. They took watches, knives, money, wedding rings and the like.

All of the men were loaded onto two trucks and taken away in the direction of Khveidan. Each truck had a trailer attached, on which the SS men, armed with machine guns, rode comfortably. (Concerning the subsequent fate of the men who were taken away, see the testimony of Yoysef Aranovitz.)

### **Arrests, Robberies, Torture of Women at Work**

The women and children continued to live in their houses. The partisans and the German SS men assured the women that at a certain time they too would be taken to join their husbands. The women were naive, and still believed everything.

A short time after the men were taken away, partisans arrested two sisters, Reyze and Reyzl Khayet, a girl named Reyze Sharanovitz and the youth Shloyme Shnayder. All four arrestees were accused of Communist activity and were interned in a small prison in the Lithuanian elementary school.

Reyze Sharanovitz managed to gain her freedom. At the outbreak of the war, the youth Shloyme had escaped from town, and had hidden at a friendly peasant's home. He could stay there no longer, and returned to town. The partisans immediately spotted him and took him to prison. The partisans also sought a girl named Shviler, a Communist. The girl had changed her name to Kagan. While searching for her through all the Jewish homes, the partisans robbed and beat the Jews.

These three Jewish prisoners were taken out to work every day. Every morning partisans would come to take women off to various jobs, sweeping the streets, doing the laundry and washing the floors in the partisans' homes and offices, and so forth. Every day the partisans went to the Jewish homes taking away more possessions. The women had to surrender their cameras, gold, paper securities, footwear, and Lithuanian national flags. The women had to bring their radios to the partisans' headquarters.

The women and children waited each day to be taken to join their husbands and fathers. They had their things packed, and slept in their clothes at night. They waited and waited, but nothing happened.

### **Women and Their Children Locked Into the Study House**

The women received neither any letters from their husbands, nor any news of them. Approximately three weeks after the 80 men were taken away, the two sisters and the youth Shloyme Shnayder were taken to the study house. They took all of the benches, lecterns, tables, books and Torah scrolls out of the study house. They threw everything into a heap in the courtyard. They swept out and cleaned the study house. Partisans stood by as they worked, hurrying them along. No one understood why everything had been thrown out from the study house into the yard.

The women took the Torah scrolls and some of the books from the yard and took them to the wife of the town slaughterer, who lived near the study house.

Several days after the study house had been cleaned out, at seven in the morning, the partisans surrounded the Jewish women's houses. They forbade anyone to open their doors or shutters. Through a crack, Leye saw women and children being driven into the study house. They had small packages in their hands. In the street could be heard the moans and weeping of woman and children.

Leye herself packed up the things she needed, and along with the rest of the women, she went voluntarily to the study house. Other women and children were taken out of bed by the partisans and they were driven into the study house wearing nothing but their night shirts. They were not permitted even to take along a small package, not even their overclothes. In the course of three or four hours the partisans had driven all the women and children into the study house.

They set a watch around the study house. No one was permitted to go out, nor was anyone allowed in to see the women. The women and children lay on their little packs on the floor. It was very crowded. The shouts and tumult of the children and the women's wails could be heard throughout the town. The partisans threatened to throw in hand grenades. The weeping and shouting didn't stop. They assured the women that they would soon be taken to their husbands and fathers in Lublin. The women believed them, and calmed down somewhat.

One market day peasants came to the study house to see the Jews, just like people go to see animals in a circus or a zoo. The partisans would let the peasants in. Other peasants threw in pieces of bread, as if to animals in a cage. The air inside was suffocating. Apparently the roof was damaged, and it rained in on the women and children stretched out on the floor.

Once all the women and children were taken out into the yard and lined up in rows. One of the partisans smilingly ordered everyone to sing the International. Then he warned the women that they had to surrender their gold, silver, rings, golden earrings, watches and the like. He threatened to shoot on the spot anyone who hid anything. The women surrendered everything they still had. Then they were driven back into the study house. The women and children were kept in the study house for exactly one week.

### **The Women and Children in the Compound at Gerul (Geruliai)**

One morning when it was raining very hard outside two trucks drove up to the yard of the study house. The partisans told the women that they were being taken to their husbands and fathers, and ordered them to leave the study house with their packs. The women and children were loaded into the trucks like herring in a barrel. They were taken to the compound at Gerul, 12 kilometers past Telshe. The women were taken from the study house in two separate groups, on two days. On the way the women and children bitterly wept and screamed.

When they arrived at the compound at Gerul, the Laukuva women and children "settled into" stalls for horses on cots stacked two high. The partisans from Telshe took everything the women had brought along from Laukuva in exchange for letting them into the stalls.

In Gerul the women from Laukuva found women from the Reiner compound and from compounds at Visevyan who had previously been brought in. The women from Laukuva found out from these women that the men in the Reiner and Visevyan compounds had been shot. That was when the women from Laukuva first comprehended the fate of their husbands who had been taken away.

Concerning the life of the women and children in the Gerul compound and their tragic slaughter on Saturday, August 30, 1941, as well as about the further hard life of a few surviving women who were taken from Gerul into a ghetto in Telshe, see the testimony of Malke Gills, Yente Alter-Gershonovitz and Khane Golembo.

When the women and children were taken from Laukuva to the Gerul compound, the Jewish community in town was completely liquidated. The town was Judenrein.

All of the Jews' non-moveable possessions were inherited by Lithuanians from town and from the villages, particularly the partisans and their families.

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After the war Leye Shapiro was in Shilale, Laukuva and Telshe. She found out that a woman from Laukuva, named Khave Kagan, and her 13-year-old daughter Minele had escaped from the Telshe ghetto. Some time later her dead body was found in a sack in a lake. Minele was found in a village, with multiple stab wounds.

The girl from Laukuva, Reyze Sharanovitz had also escaped from the Telshe ghetto. She was caught some time later. Kelpsha got some peasants drunk. They took her to the old Jewish cemetery in Laukuva, raped her there and then gouged out her eyes, knocked out her gold teeth and finally shot her.

*Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin New York March 26, 1987*

## II. Shilale

Tawrik County, a small town 33 kilometers from Tawrik, 40 kilometers from the former German border. Between Shilale and Tawrik there is a first-class gravel road.

Some fifty Jewish families lived in town until the outbreak of the war. The majority of the Jews were engaged in commerce and artisanry, and a few were engaged in agriculture. The economic condition of the Jews in the town was not bad. Many Jews received support from their relatives overseas.

The town possessed a Hebrew elementary school, a folks' bank (until 1940), a Yiddish-Hebrew library with a considerable number of books and a brick study house.

After completing the Hebrew elementary school, some of the town's young people studied in the Hebrew gymnasiums in Tawrik and Kovno. Most of the Jewish youth in town were members of Zionist organizations until 1940. A very small minority were active in the illegal Communist Party

During the regime of President Smetonas the attitude of the Lithuanian population toward the Jews was good until the war broke out.

At some point while Leye and her family were in Laukuva, two young boys from Shilale came to Laukuva. They explained that they had been hiding in the countryside. The peasants didn't want to keep them any longer, and they had gone home to Shilale. On the way they found out that their lives would be endangered in Shilale, and so they went to Laukuva instead. The two boys were the brothers Eliyohu and Yekhezkl Kaplan. They reported that in Shilale the Jewish dentist Misha Bandalin had been arrested, along with a girl named Libe Zelikman and several other Jews. They had been accused by the partisans of belonging to the Communist Party. The women, men and children were still living in their homes.

While Leye was with the other women in the Laukuva study house, the police chief of Shilale came with a letter from Yokheved Bandalin. The letter reported that her husband, Misha Bandalin, was no longer living. She wrote nothing concerning the rest of the men in town. Yokheved advised Leye to come and be together with her in Shilale. She also told Leye that later on, if Leye wanted to, the police chief would agree to take her to her parents in Utena, in exchanged for signing over to him the furniture in her home in Shilale. The police chief actually came from Shilale to ask Leye to sign over her furniture to him.

Leye did so, hoping to retrieve her furniture after the war. The police chief (whose wife's name was Kukshaitaite) told Leye that the women and children were living in their homes and were well. The men had all been shot. When Leye asked why the men had been shot, the police chief responded: "Buvo toks incidentas" - there was some sort of incident. He told her nothing else concerning the men.

Leye later found the following concerning the "incident:" A short time after the Germans arrived in Shilale, partisans drove out all the men from their homes and drove them into the study house. The partisans did everything they could to get rid of the Jews as fast as possible and to inherit their property.

Once the partisans announced to the Jews that the Red Army was returning, and they pretended to begin to flee themselves. The Jews became confused, and began running away from the study house. The partisans opened fire from all sides, shooting into the study house through the windows. There were many dead and wounded.

After this incident, the partisans led out all the men from the study house to the Jewish cemetery and shot everyone. The wounded in the study house and the arrestees in prison, including Misha Bandalin, were shot at the Jewish cemetery the same day. Leye believes that this happened during the third week of the war. (It was on Friday, July 18, 1941. See the testimony of Sender Linkimer concerning the slaughter of Jews in the town of Koltinan [Kaltineniai] -- LK)

The Jewish doctor Moyshe Zaks had married a Lithuanian woman. While the men were being taken to the Jewish cemetery to be shot, the town's mayor, Birzhishka, and other Lithuanians stood up on Moyshe Zak's behalf and also tried to rescue him, because of his Lithuanian wife. Apparently there was a German present at the shooting of the men as well. He shouted, "Alles kommt mit." Dr Zaks was shot that day as well. Among those shot at the Jewish cemetery that day was the town rabbi of Shilale, Rabbi Ziv.

## The Slaughter of Women and Their Children

Leye spent a short time in Shilale after the war. There she met a young Jewish girl who had survived, named Hode Miler. Hade told Leye that some time after the men had been shot, the women and children had been herded together into a ghetto near the edge of town, in a few houses. A few Jewish families were granted the privilege of staying in their homes. Among these families were Hode and her two sisters. Hode's two brothers had been shot along with the rest of the men at the Jewish cemetery.

Hode was the mediator between the partisans and the Jewish women in the ghetto. The partisans exploited Hode, using her to cheat the women out of everything they owned; gold, money, valuables, everything. The partisans assured the women that they would not be evacuated anywhere. The women gave everything away, believing the reassurances of the Lithuanian murderers.

In town the Lithuanian inhabitants constantly insisted to the women that they were going to be shot. On one occasion the rumor was taken quite seriously.

Hode's sister, coincidentally named Rokhl-Leye, could no longer stand her great sorrow over her two murdered brothers. She also sensed that the women and children's days were numbered. She took a bottle of pickling acid and went to the grave of her two murdered brothers. She poisoned herself. She returned to town from the cemetery pale and shattered. Bloody foam was running from her mouth. She was taken to the Lithuanian hospital in Tawrik, where she died.

One morning partisans surrounded all of the homes in the ghetto and wherever else Jews were still living in town. All of the women and children were loaded into trucks and taken seven kilometers from Shilale to a forest called Tubiniai, not far from the village of the same name, where all the women and children were shot.

Together with the women and children from Shilale, all of the women and children from the town of Pajuris, as well as Mrs Dvoyre Glezer and her children from the village of Tubiniai were shot as well on the same day at the same place.

Two Jewish families had lived in Tubiniai until the outbreak of the war. One of them was Yitskhok Glezer's family.

The women and children were forced to strip naked before they were shot. After the shootings the partisans boasted that Mrs Tamara Arenberg, nee Muler, had refused to allow the partisans to take her two children's clothes off, and hugged them both tightly. The partisans shot her and her two children in this position. Tamara was from Ponevezh (Panevezhys). Her husband was the Veterinarian in Shilale. He was from the city of Marijampole. He was in the Soviet Union during the German occupation, and survived.

After shooting the women and children in the Tubiniai forest, the partisans returned with their trucks, singing Lithuanian nationalist songs. While they drove through the villages they threw the peasants things which had belonged to the murdered Jewish women and children.

When the Jewish houses were being surrounded, Hode's second sister was getting dressed. She ran out through the window and tried to escape. A partisan shot her in the yard of her house. Her name was Hene.

Hode managed to escape. She hid with peasants in the villages and survived. She was greatly helped by the peasant Aushra, who had been a coachman for her parents before the war. Hode married the coachman, and lives in Shilale.

Hode told Leye that after the war a Soviet commission had opened up the mass grave of the women. The bodies of the women and children had not yet decomposed. Both the women and children lay naked in the mass graves. Hode was personally present at the opening of the graves. Almost all of Shilale was burned out, especially the center of town where the Jewish homes had been. The study house was not burned, and is still intact today. Only the windows have been broken, and covered over with boards.

Among the Lithuanian partisan murderers who actively participated in slaughtering the town's Jews, or who robbed and tortured Jews, Leye Rudnik remembers the following:

1. The police chief in town, whose wife's maiden name was Kukshyte.
2. The partisan commander, a tall, blond former gymnasium teacher named Sungaila.
3. The mayor, Birzhishka.
4. A blond partisan who was a former teacher in the Lithuanian gymnasium, named Meijeris.
5. The director of the Lithuanian elementary school in Shilale.

6. The son of Shilale's pharmacist, a student named Gaudeshius.

The town's "intellectuals" always stayed in the background, inciting the murderers against the Jews. They constantly went to Tawrik asking for permission to slaughter the Jews of Shilale. After the men were shot the "intellectuals" had a party, at which they greeted each other with the wish: "That's how it should always be!"

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Leye and her daughter Esther were among the 500 women who were selected to be sent to the Telshe ghetto, before the women and children of the Gerul camp were slaughtered on Saturday, August 30, 1941. (Concerning the slaughter of the women and children in the Gerul camp and the slaughter of the Jews in Telshe, see the testimony of Malke Gills, Yente Alter-Girshovitz and Khane Golembo - LK)

Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin New York March 29, 1987

**Attestation of Lea Szapiro-Rudnik**

דער עיגענטליכער אונטערשריפט פון דער לירערין לעא שאפירא-רודניק וועלכע ארבעט אלס לירערין אין דער העברעיזשער פאלקסזול אין דעם לאנדסבערגער לאגער - באזטעטיקט דער פרעזע פון דעם לאגער -

Dem eigenhantigen unterschrift  
fun der lererin Lea Szapiro-Rudnik  
welche arbeits als lererin in der  
hebrejiszer folkszul in dem Lande-  
berger lager- basztetikt der prezes  
fun lager -

Landsberg a/Lech  
1948-I-6

Unterschrift fun prezes: \_\_\_\_\_  
COMMITTEE  
of the Landsberg Jewish Center

Landsberg a/Lech  
6 Januar 1948  
Malnik Jicchok

SECRETARY

I Leye Shapiro, who married Eliyohu Rudnik after the war, personally reported and hereby attest with my own signature to everything written about the slaughter of the Jews of Shilale, Laukuva and Pajuris, as well as about my personal experiences. The witness: Leye Shapiro-Rudnik [Signature].

The testimony was recorded by Engineer Leyb Koniuchowsky [Signature]  
Landsberg a/Lech January 6, 1948

The signature of the teacher Lea Szapiro-Rudnik, who works as a teacher in the Hebrew elementary school in the Landsberg camp is attested to by the camp chairman:  
Signature of the chairman: Malnic Jicchok Landsberg a/Lech January 6, 1948

Translated by Dr Jonathan Boyarin New York March 29, 1987

## **THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS OF PAJURIS**

Eyewitness testimony of Rivke Furman, born in Vilon on December 24, 1913. Education: Completed the Kovno Real-Gymnasium and the "Tarbut" pedagogical institute in the year 1933. Father's name: Leyb Levitan. Mother: Rokhel-Leye Zilbershteyn.

In 1937 Rivke had settled in Tawrik, where she had married Hirshl Furman, a native of a village called Teneniai, where his parents lived and died before the war began.

### **The Village of Teneniai**

Teneniai is located six kilometers from the small town of Pajuris. Two Jewish families lived in this town. They were engaged in agriculture and kept small stores. The two families were:

1. Alter Feyges, his wife Esther and a small child.
2. Zaltsman and his wife Rokhel, with two boys named Totke and Khayeml, and Rokhel's sister Reytse Berman.

Hirshl and Rivke used to spend their holidays and vacations with his parents in the village, and they knew the area well. They would often visit Hirshl's cousin Moyshe Goldin and his brothers and sisters in Pajuris.

### **The Town of Pajuris**

Tawrik county, thirty-odd kilometers from Tawrik, 13-14 kilometers from the town of Shilale, on the right side of the small river Jura.

There were some fifty or sixty Jews in the town, who were occupied in agriculture and commerce. The economic situation of the Jews was very good. The town possessed a study house, a rabbi and a sexton. The children studied in the local heder.

### **The Outbreak of War**

On June 22, 1941 Rivke, her husband Hirshl and her sister Golde fled Tawrik, which had been heavily bombarded and burned. After a dangerous journey they arrived in Shavl. They were in the Shavl ghetto, where they lost their little Yitskhok in the aktsye against children. Rivke, her husband and her sister were evacuated to the Stutthof camp in Germany in the spring of 1944, together with the rest of the surviving Shavl Jews. There Hirshl was separated from his wife. Rivke and her sister were in the Malken camp at Stutthof until the Liberation. They were liberated there by the Red Army. Hirshi died in Camp II near Landsberg.

### **After the Liberation**

Rivke went to Pajuris. There she found out that when the war broke out some of the Jews had fled to the village of Teneniai, where they hoped to be able to survive the war more easily. On the first day of the war, the Germans entered Pajuris and Teneniai.

The local partisans forced the two Jewish families from the village and those who had come from Pajuris to do various tasks. For a while all of the Jews lived in the houses of the two Jewish families. Then they were driven into a barn in a compound which belonged to the Lithuanian farmer Petras Budvitis, known as Dvarininkas.

The barn was actually an old house in ruins, its windows sealed with boards. The peasants from the village related that the partisans had thrown a grenade into these ruins, and that Jews had died.

Alter Feyges and Zaltsman were forced by the partisans to burn all the religious books and Torah scrolls from the study house. Then they were both taken away along the road to Kveidan and shot, five or six kilometers from town.

The partisans kept the rest of the Jews locked in the barn for some time without anything to eat or drink. A partisan kept watch. After they had been in the barn for some time they were taken away to the town of Khveidan, where they were shot at the same time and place as the Jews of Khveidan. Rivke does not know how long the Jews from the village remained alive in Khveidan. Nor does she know the date they were shot. (See the collective testimony concerning the slaughter of the Jews of Khveidan in the forest of Tubinai - LK)



## THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS IN UPYNAS (UPYNAS), BOTIK (BATAKIAI) AND SKAUDVILE

These three small towns in Tawrik county are located to the northeast of Tawrik.

1. Upynas (Upynas) is on the gravel road between Skaudvile and Laukuva.
2. Botik (Batakiai) is not far, on the right side of the highway which leads to Shavl (Shiauliai) from Tawrik.
3. Skaudvile is on the highway between Tawrik and Shavl.

The Eyewitness Testimony of:

Mrs. Peshe Meltsner, nee Kahan, from the town of Shilale, born on March 28, 1906. Finished four grades of Russian gymnasium. Trade: a milliner. Peshe's father's name: Yakov Kahan, Mother: Keyle, nee Khaymovitz, from the town of Shilale. Until 1929 Peshe lived in Shilale. In 1930 Peshe married Mendl Meltsner from Shilale, and settled permanently in Tawrik, where she lived until the day the war between Germany and the Soviet Union broke out, Sunday, June 22, 1941.

### The Outbreak of War

At four a.m. German airplanes bombarded Tawrik. There was a terrible panic in the city. Fires began all over the city. The dead and badly wounded lay in the streets. Most of the residents began to flee the burning city in great panic.

Peshe, her husband Mendl, their two children Keyle (aged 8) and Yankele (aged 6), and Peshe's brother the lawyer Bene Kahan fled Tawrik along the road which lead toward the town of Upynas.

After wandering through the countryside they arrived that same Sunday evening in Upynas, where they found the town almost deserted.

Most of the residents, and especially the Jews, had abandoned their homes and spread out into the surrounding villages to peasants whom they knew.

On Monday, June 23, the Kovno radio broadcast orders and instructions, explaining how the Lithuanians were to deal with the Jews in the villages. The Jews were forced to leave the villages, and on Monday evening most of them returned to their homes in Upynas. In town there were also many refugees from Tawrik and the nearby towns. Krozh (Krazhiai) and Namoksht (Nemakshtziai), as well as a Jewish peasant family from the village of Stulg. Peshe settled in Upynas with her husband, children and brother.

### Civil Administration in Upynas; Looting; Brutality

A few dozen Jewish families lived in Upyna. They were occupied in retail trade and agriculture. Their style of life differed little from that of their Lithuanian neighbors, with whom they lived quite peacefully. The town possessed a small study house. The Jews were strictly religious.

On Monday, June 23 the Germans entered the town. Armed Lithuanians calling themselves "partisans" began to lord it over the town, and immediately turned their attention to the Jews.

The civil administration was set up by the partisans. The mayor was the Lithuanian Jurgis Jurgaitis, a farmer from a nearby village. This Jurgis was a tall, solid man about forty years old, and a bitter anti- Semite.

The commander of the partisans in town was the local Lithuanian Macijauskas, a short man in his thirties.

The Lithuanian German Ewald displayed exceptional cruelty at that time. Several days after the Germans arrived, a German accompanied by a Lithuanian girl forced the town rabbi, Reb Shmuel Sandler, to leave his house. The girl gleefully cut off the rabbi's beard. Then the German shot and wounded the rabbi in his leg. The rabbi lay on the ground. The Lithuanian healer, who was a neighbor of the rabbi, refused to give medical assistance to his Jewish neighbor. Permission was granted to take the rabbi to a doctor in Skaudvile. The rabbi was killed during the slaughter of the Jewish men of Skaudvile.

On the first Wednesday of the war, the same German in the company of Lithuanian partisans burned the town study house and all of the Torah scrolls and religious books. The Lithuanian residents removed the benches from the burning study house and happily dragged them home.

At night the partisans used to shoot near the Jewish homes, keeping the Jews in constant deadly fear. Quite frequently the Jews would hear knocking on their windows and doors. The partisans banged on the windows and threatened to shoot anyone who didn't close his shutters. They did the same thing to anyone who did close his shutters. The unfortunate Jews didn't know what to do in order to please the Lithuanian murderers.

Immediately after the arrival of the Germans the partisans looted the few small Jewish stores. They often broke into Jewish homes in the middle of the night and brazenly looted. The looting by partisans did not end until the men and later the women and children had all been slaughtered.

In the first week of the war the partisans arrested four Jews and took them to prison in Skaudvile. The four were shot together with the Jewish men from Skaudvile. It was not possible to learn details about their death.

The Jews were forced to do various menial tasks in town and along the surrounding roads. It wasn't the work the partisans cared about and their main goal was to torment the Jews and make their lives miserable. Partisans kept watch as the Jews worked. They mocked the Jews and beat them frequently for the slightest "infraction." After work the men were allowed to return to their families. The partisans seized men in their homes to send them to work, and would meanwhile loot the houses.

A German SS man arrived from Skaudvile at the beginning of the second week of the war. He ordered all of the Jewish men aged thirteen and over to sleep in the town's Lithuanian elementary school. The Jewish men worked all day, and at night they had nowhere to rest. Seventy Jewish men were driven into the small elementary school. Some of them were refugees from Tawrik and the surrounding towns.

Peshe's husband Mendl and her brother Bene were among the seventy men in the elementary school. Those men who were not taken to work could go home, but they had to return to sleep in the school. After the men had been in the school for a week, no-one was allowed to return home during the day, even to get something to eat.

One Saturday before the Christian holiday Zolyne, the partisans guarding the Jews at work murderously beat the 70-year-old kosher slaughterer from Krozh, who fainted and collapsed. That same Saturday the partisans took all the men from the elementary school out into the street and forced them to pull out the grass with their hands. Meanwhile they beat and bullied the men.

The partisans allowed food to be brought from home to the men interned in the school. The women could do so every day, and they had a chance to talk to their husbands, fathers, brothers and friends.

### **The Slaughter of the Men**

On Tuesday, July 22, 1941 the women were still permitted to bring food and packages to the men in the school. Several days earlier they had learned that the men were to be taken away "to work" in a different location. That Tuesday Peshe took along her two children when she brought food and a package of clothing to her husband and brother. Peshe conversed with her husband and brother through the window. They reassured her that she still had enough money to live on for a couple of years. Peshe noticed that her brother was hiding something from her. He said goodbye to Peshe and her children and kissed them through the window. Peshe's husband did the same.

At three o'clock of the same day the German commander, an SS man from the town of Skaudvile, drove up in a car together with several SS men.

Partisans went from house to house advising both the Jewish and the Christian population not to go out into the street for a while.

The men were taken through town under a heavy guard of SS men and armed partisans. The women saw them. A dreadful weeping and shrieking accompanied the men out of town.

At that time Peshe and her children were living with Mrs Rikhnan, nee Prisman. When they saw the men being taken away from town, everyone in the house began weeping and shrieking. An SS man shot into the house, and wounded a young woman from Tawrik named Khaye Berkovitz in the side.

The men were taken away in the direction of Skaudvile. Exactly one hour later shots were heard coming from that direction. Most of the women understood that the men who had been taken away had been shot.

A few hours later the women saw Lithuanians returning to town along the Skaudvile road. The Lithuanians were carrying shovels and the belongings of the murdered men. The sorrowing women were again seized by a terrible weeping and wailing as they mourned for their near and dear ones. There were women who still hoped that the men had not been shot.

A Jewish family called Pakhter lived in the village of Luorni. The elderly father and a son were among those interned in the elementary school. Their daughter brought food and other items to the school for them. On the way, not far from Upynas, she saw the men from Upynas stripped to their underwear. Lithuanians and SS men were forcing them to run, fall down and then continue running.

In addition the unfortunates were forced to do various calitshtenics. The SS men and the Lithuanians were "preparing" the unfortunate men for their terrible death.

Peshe spoke to the girl after she arrived in town. The girl was highly agitated, and she appeared almost mad as she related what she had seen being done to the men.

Not one of the seventy men survived. Peshe has no more details about the terrible execution.

### **Women and Children Taken to the Camp Near Batakiai**

On the same day that the men were shot, about ten in the evening, the mayor along with other partisans announced to the women that they were to get ready to be taken to join their husbands the next morning.

With tears in her eyes, Peshe begged the mayor to tell her truthfully whether all of the men had really been shot. The Lithuanian good-for-nothing reassured her: "Only the old ones!"

The women didn't have much time to think over what had happened during the day. Their responsibilities for their children forced them to prepare for the journey ahead of them. They made noodles, baked bread and packed. Everything had to be done in the dark, because Jews were forbidden to illuminate their homes. The partisans enforced this very strictly.

Lithuanians from nearby villages and from town passed through the doorways of the Jewish homes. They came not to comfort the women, but rather to convince them to leave their better things with them "until after the war".

Mrs Rikhman took everything she could find that belonged to her husband, and threw it into the fire in the oven, which she was heating up to bake bread. The women got no sleep that night.

Three elderly, sickly Jewish men had not been in the elementary school. After the men were shot, these three remained in their homes and helped the women mourn for the murdered men. At night they helped in the packing, and they prepared themselves to be taken away together with the women.

At 8 a.m. on Wednesday, July 23, partisans drove up in a wagon and removed the three elderly, sickly men. Among the three was Mrs Rikhman's elderly father, Mr Prisman. With his last bit of strength, he went out of the house. Before going out, he kissed his daughter.

"Forgive me, father!" Mrs Rikhman asked him as he left.

"My child, I'll plead for you in Heaven," the old man replied as he parted with his daughter.

The three elderly and sickly men were taken out of town and shot the same day. Details about the execution are lacking.

One hour before the women and children were taken out of town the partisan commander Macijauskas and his comrades went to all the Jewish houses. Threatening to shoot anyone who didn't obey his command, he took all of the women's money, gold, silver and other valuables. He only permitted them to keep twenty rubles each. After he left other partisans appeared. They took the twenty rubles, and completed the robbery.

Mrs Rikhman's brother, Dr Prisman, got along well with his neighbor, the Lithuanian healer Rimsha. Dr Prisman was away from town at that time. The healer refused medical assistance to a girl name Khaye Berkovitz who had been badly wounded and taken to a camp near Batakiai, together with all the women and children. On the way the partisans stopped the wagons which were carrying the women and children, and checked through their things several times. Each time they stole whatever they pleased.

## **Batakiai**

A small town between Skaudvile and Tawrik, one kilometer from the railroad station. More than ten Jewish families lived there. They were occupied primarily in agriculture and to a slight extent in retail trade as well. There was a small study house in town. The Jewish property owner Shloyme Mendl had a mill.

After the Jewish men of Batakiai were slaughtered, a Lithuanian moved into the mill. A short time later the Lithuanian told Peshe that all the men from Batakiai, together with male refugees from Tawrik and other towns, had been taken out of town and shot in a forest not far from Batakiai. Peshe does not know the details concerning the death of the men of Batakiai.

The camp was located not far from the town of Batakiai, next to the railroad line. The camp consisted of three wooden barracks. Two of them were without windows or doors. Women and children from Upynas, Skaudvile and Batakiai were herded into these two barracks. There were also women and children who were refugees from other nearby towns, cities and villages, including a large number from Tawrik.

The third barrack had been completed; it had windows and doors. In this barrack the partisans set up their headquarters, and they also made primitive arrangements for an ambulance and hospital. Dr Dolnicki, a specialist in internal medicine, had lived with his wife in Skaudvile before the war.

These were among those brought to the camp. The dentist Schmidt, his wife and 13-year-old son, along with his mother-in-law, had also lived in Skaudvile before the war, and were brought to the Batakiai camp. Peshe has no idea how the two Jewish doctors from Skaudvile temporarily managed to escape the slaughter of all the men.

A third man was brought from Skaudvile as well. He was a mentally ill son of the rabbi from Skaudvile. The Skaudvile rabbi and his healthy sons were slaughtered with the rest of the men of Skaudvile.

The women and children received warm food only once during the entire time Peshe was in the Batakiai camp. The rations in camp consisted of half a glass of milk and a piece of dry bread per person per day. The women from Skaudvile were permitted to bring their cows to the camp. They milked the cows under the supervision of the partisans, and distributed the milk among the women and children. Each day the number of cows decreased. The partisans stole the better cows and took them home.

The evacuated Soviet army left bags of dried bread behind in the camp. Each day the partisans distributed one piece per person. They threw the bread down on the ground, as if giving it to dogs. After the women had been in the camp for some time; Lithuanian peasants were allowed to take them to do agricultural work in the countryside and in town. The peasants had to sign an agreement saying that they would bring the Jewish women back to the camp every evening. Most of the women asked to be chosen for work, hoping to get better food for themselves, as well as something to bring back to their children and close friends in the camp.

The camp was surrounded by a high barbed-wire fence and guarded by armed partisans.

## **Stomach Typhus, Dysentary and Measles Among the Children**

The women had neither beds nor straw on which to sleep. They lay on the ground, with nothing for bedding but the old clothes they had brought along. Nor was there ever enough water. The place was extremely filthy. Day and night the barracks were full of the cries and weeping of the small children, and the heartrending moans of their mothers.

After the women had been in the camp about ten days, SS men accompanied by armed partisans arrived in automobiles. All the women and children, including the elderly and the sick, had to crowd together into one barrack. A frightful panic and deadly fear seized the helpless and miserable women and children. There was talk of checking to see who still had money and valuables.

Women threw their rings, earrings and other valuables into the outhouses. They tore their money into shreds.

There were optimistic women who were certain that the children would be taken from their mothers and taken to an institution to be brought up. No-one knew exactly what the refined murderers were planning for the women and children.

Schmidt the dentist said confession and repented for his sins. Weeping women held their children tight, and they too said confession.

Suddenly a high storm wind arose. A black cloud covered the sky. A pouring rain began to fall. It rained buckets.

Dr Dolnicki and his wife took poison in an attempt to commit suicide. Dr Schmidt saved both of them. This happened on a Thursday. After the wind and rain began, the SS men and the armed Lithuanians drove away from the camp.

The two Jewish doctors and their families received permission from the partisans to leave and enter the Kovno ghetto. The hunger, filth and crowded conditions led to epidemics of stomach typhus and dysentery among the women, and to measles among the children. The helpless women could do nothing for themselves. The Lithuanian healer Rimsha visited the camp several times, but he was more interested in looting than in healing the sick.

When the epidemic took on serious proportions, the camp commander gave permission to bring in a Lithuanian female doctor from Skaudvile.

The unfortunate women tried to get an explanation of their condition from the doctor. The Lithuanian doctor replied to all their questions: "You shouldn't have taken our Lithuanian people to Siberia!"

An eight year old girl from Upynas died in the epidemic. The maiden name of the child's mother was Itzikovitz. Her father was a tanner by trade.

An elderly female refugee from Tawrik named Kahan also died in the camp. Her son Bere-Leyb had been killed with the men from Upynas. The woman was buried in the Jewish cemetery at Batakiai with the permission of the camp commandant. Before her corpse was removed from the camp, a twelve year old boy eulogized her in such a way that the women burst into weeping and shed rivers of tears. Two of her daughters and a small group of women accompanied the deceased to her final resting place.

In order to still the terrible hunger and to combat the epidemic, which threatened to spread outside the camp, the partisans permitted local peasants to visit the camp and exchange produce for the women's possessions. Other peasants came to the camp and demanded that the women sign over to them their houses and land in town. The women gladly did so in exchange for the little bit of produce which they needed for themselves and their children. The partisans did not interfere in this.

Around the middle of August Peshe's relatives in Shavl obtained permission for her and her two children to leave the Batakiai camp and settle in the Shavl ghetto. Peshe knows no further details about the Batakiai camp. She only knows that all of the women and children were slaughtered a short time after her arrival in the Shavl ghetto. (Concerning the tragic end of the women and children in the Batakiai camp, see the collective testimony of Khayem Goldshteyn and his wife Menukhe, concerning the slaughter of the Jews of Erzvilik - LK)

Peshe shared all of the suffering and torment of the local Jews in the Shavl ghetto. Peshe lost her two children during the mass execution of children in the Shavl ghetto. But Peshe herself miraculously survived, against her own will.

After the war Peshe was in Upynas, where she visited the mass grave of the seventy murdered men, including her husband and brother.

*Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin*

*New York*

*April 1, 1987*

## **Skaudvile**

Tawrik County, 35 kilometers from the German border. About a thousand Jews lived there when the war broke out.

Peshe and her brother, the lawyer Bene Kahan, went from Upynas to Skaudvile by foot several times to get some news. There was a Judenrat in Skaudvile at that time. The Jews of Skaudvile were all still living at home. The men had to go work at various tasks each morning. They came home to sleep.

The chairman of the Judenrat (whose last name may have been Broyde), whom Peshe and her brother used to see when they came from Upynas, once proposed that Bene remain in Skaudvile and work with the Judenrat. Bene did not accept the proposal. This happened before the men in Upynas were forced to sleep in the school.

Peshe remembers clearly that one time the chairman of the Judenrat in Skaudvile asked Attorney Bene Kahan to find out where the men from the nearby town of Batakiai had been taken. The men from Upynas had not yet been interned in the elementary school then, nor had the men from Skaudvile been taken away.

In Skaudvile the following Lithuanians became infamous for their murder and persecution of the Jews:

1. The leader of the partisans, by the name of Lepoldas.
2. Lepoldas' assistant, Macijauskas.

Apparently this Macijauskas was a relative of the other murderer, also named Macijauskas, the leader of the partisans in Upynas.

Immediately after the Germans arrived, Lepoldas arrested the Skaudvile Jew Naftali Prop on the charge of membership in the Communist Party, and of being an agitator during the year of soviet rule. However, Naftali stammered, and could not possibly have been an agitator. Naftali miraculously managed to survive that time. Later, however, he died with the rest of the men of Skaudvile.

While she was with her children in the Batakiai camp, Peshe spoke to a woman from Skaudvile named Novik, who told her that the partisans had one day ordered all the Jewish men, women and children to come to the marketplace. The German commander, an SS man, had delivered a speech to the assembled Jews, demanding that they keep their peace vis-a-vis the German army and the Lithuanians.

After his speech the partisans ordered the Jewish men to leave their families and to stand in a different place. The women and children, including boys under 12 or 13 years, were permitted to go home. The men were herded into a barn near town.

Peshe knows nothing about the life of the men in the barn. She does remember, however, that Mrs Novik related that one day the partisans drove all the men out of the barn and shot them. Peshe does not remember the date or location of the execution.

A Jew from Skaudvile named Novik, Mrs Novik's brother-in-law, survived near the pit. The survivor related all the details of the terrible execution. Not all the women in Skaudvile believed what Mrs Novik told them. Peshe does not know what later became of the survivor Novik.

The women and children from Skaudvile were brought to the camp near Batakiai. On September 15, 1941 they were shot together with the women and children from the Batakiai camp. The shootings were carried out in the forest of Griblaukiai, not far from the town of Batakai.

(See the testimony of Khayem and Menukhe Goldshteyn, concerning the slaughter of the Jews of Erzhvilik - LK)

*Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin New York April 1, 1987*



## **THE SLAUGHTER OF JEWS IN THE SMALL LITHUANIAN TOWN KOLTINAN (KALTINENAI)**

Related by Sender Linkimer, born in Shkud (Skuodas) on September 7, 1905. Father's name; Mikhl. Mother's name; Gitl, nee Karpul, from Shkud. Lived in Shkud and in Shadeve (Sheduva) until 1936. Lived in Koltinan from 1936 until the outbreak of the war.

Koltinan is in Tawrik County, 30 kilometers from Tawrik, about 40 kilometers from Shavl. A new highway between Kovno and Palangen (Falanga) runs through the town.

Some three hundred families lived in the town. (There were about a hundred Jewish families LK). The majority of the Jewish population was occupied in commerce. A very small percentage were occupied in agriculture.

Among the smaller enterprises the following should be mentioned:

1. A tannery and leather processing plant owned by the Jew Sender Linkimer, the narrator of this testimony.
2. A wool spinning workshop owned by the town kosher slaughterer.

The larger businesses were:

1. A manufacturing concern owned by Yisroel Klas;
2. A manufacturing concern owned by David Aron;
3. A manufacturing concern owned by Khonon Feygus.
4. An iron business owned by Yoshe-Itshe Elkon.

The economic life of the Jews in town was good. All of the Jewish inhabitants had adequate livelihoods. There was an elementary school in Koltinan, a large new synagogue built in 1937, and a small library. Some of the Jewish young people studied in the nearby larger cities, Tawrik and Shavl. The majority of the young people were organized in Zionist movements. A smaller number were members of the Communist party, which was illegal at that time.

The attitude toward the Jews on the part of the Lithuanians living in the town and surrounding countryside was good until the beginning of the war.

### **The Outbreak of War**

On Sunday, June 22, 1941, the Jews of Koltinan found out about the war between Fascist Germany and the Soviet Union. That same morning the fires burning in Tawrik could be clearly seen. Some of the Jews from Tawrik who fled to Koltinan talked about the dreadful bombardment of Tawrik.

On Sunday morning the Jews in town began to flee hurriedly to the countryside, taking along their more valuable and necessary possessions.

On Sunday evening German artillery began shooting at the town, and all the remaining Jews fled the town.

On Monday, June 23, at about 3:00 a.m., there was a battle about two kilometers from town. The town, which is situated in a valley, did not suffer in the fighting. Villages surrounding the town were destroyed in the battle. At 6:00 a.m. on Monday the German army entered the town.

On Monday afternoon, the Jews returned from the countryside to their homes. The houses had been completely looted by Lithuanian residents of the town. Even the furniture was gone. The civilian control of the town fell into the hands of partisans, who worked with the Nazis. They immediately set up the civilian administration. The leader of the partisans was a Lithuanian from town named Prashtsys; the chief in town was a Lithuanian farmer.

Several days after the arrival of the Germans, orders and decrees against the Jews appeared. Jews were forbidden altogether to leave their houses and go into the street or to the marketplace. They were even forbidden to look out through their windows. Jews had to wear two yellow Stars of David. At night, Jews had their windowpanes broken. Every morning at 7:00 all able-bodied men had to report to the square near the town hall. From there the Jews were taken off to various jobs: chopping wood, cleaning outhouses, filling up craters made by bombs. Partisans from town whom the Jews knew, kept watch as they worked, and they did not let the Jews rest. After work, the men went back home by themselves.

The day after the Germans arrived in Koltinan, a Jew named Karebelnik drove another Jew to Krozh (Kraziai). When they were several kilometers out of town, both Jews were shot by partisans. The horse and wagon returned to town empty.

## **Young, Healthy Men Taken to the Heidekrug Camps; Old, Weak and Sick Men Shot**

Some five weeks after the arrival of the Germans in town, on Sunday, July 20, 1941, two armed partisans came to Sender and took him away from his work at the tannery. Sender asked where they were taking him. The partisans ordered him to keep silent. Sender saw his wife Hene with their daughter Gitele, aged 12 at the time, and a younger boy named Lybele, aged 8. Sender wanted to speak to his wife. The partisans did not permit him to.

The partisans brought Sender to the synagogue, where all the Jewish men in town had already been herded together. The synagogue was heavily guarded by partisans, who let no one out and no one in.

On Saturday, July 19, 1941, several trucks carrying SS men came to the synagogue. There was a great panic among the men in the synagogue. One day earlier partisans had shot all of the Jewish men in the town of Shilale. The men in Shilale had been herded into the synagogue by partisans. The partisans had thrown grenades through the windows. Many people died on the spot. The Jews began to get out through the windows. Then all of them were shot. This was on Friday, July 18, 1941.

The Jews in Koltinan found out on Saturday what had happened in Shilale. While the Jewish men were being herded into the synagogue, everyone thought that the murderers were preparing to do the same thing that had been done in Shilale.

The SS men, commanded by the Sturm-Fuehrer Dr Schau, a resident of Heidekrug, entered the synagogue and ordered the men to remain standing. They asked whether everyone in the synagogue was Jewish. Then they forced the men to do various calisthenics, which they accompanied with blows from their sticks and rifle butts. They forced the rabbi to put on his tallith, and beat him until he bled. After two hours of these "gymnastics," all of the men were pale and covered with sweat.

They took the rabbi out of the synagogue. Near the synagogue there was a deep pit caused by a bomb. The rabbi had to enter the pit with the Torah scroll in his arms. The murderers tore his beard and burned his sidelocks with lit candles. While the rabbi was still standing in a pit wrapped in his tallith and holding a Torah scroll in his arms, the SS men ignited the Torah scroll. After torturing him, they shot him with a Browning.

The men who had been driven out of the synagogue saw the rabbi lying dead in the pit. One of the murderers shouted to the men: "There's your rabbi!"

Then the men were lined up in rows of five. The Sturm-Fuehrer, Dr Schau, made the following speech to the men: "Don't be worried. Nothing will happen to you. You're going off to work for eight days." He threatened to shoot anyone who tried to escape.

The elderly and sick were driven back into the synagogue. An SS man or a partisan accompanied each of the young men to their homes, where they were permitted to take their valuables, clothing and food. Sender took his leave of his family.

All of the men were driven back together close to the synagogue. The SS men took the Jews' money, gold, rings and better things.

Jewish women and children were forbidden to leave their homes. Armed partisans were posted around the town. Lithuanian inhabitants of the town and nearby villages stood nearby and watched with cheerful satisfaction as the Jews were driven out of Koltinan.

Roughly two hundred men were packed into the trucks. Three trucks carrying partisans and SS men rode in back, watching to see that none of the Jews escaped. The trucks stopped in a forest about 12 kilometers outside of town. The Sturm-Fuehrer took out a list and read the last names of three young Jewish men who came from a nearby town. All three young men were taken about ten meters away from the road into the forest, and immediately shot for everyone to see. Meanwhile all the Jewish men in the trucks had to sit or kneel; the SS men threatened to shoot anyone who tried to stand up in the trucks.

The three were shot in the Tubiner Forest (Tubinos Mishkas), between Shilale and Koltinan. As they continued, the trucks drove through the towns of Khveidan (Kvedarna), Nay-shtot (Naujamiestis) and Laukuva. No Jews were to be seen in these three towns.

On the same day, Sunday, July 20, the trucks carrying the Jewish men came into the German town of Heidekrug (Shilute), in Memel County. A camp had already been prepared outside the town, in the compound of the Sturm-Fuehrer Dr Schau. The camp consisted of about ten buildings. It was surrounded by a guard consisting of German

SS men and police. Jewish men from various towns around Tawrik had already been herded into the camp.

All of the men who had been rounded up slept on the ground inside the buildings. The next morning, on Monday, July 21, Sturm-Fuehrer Schau drove all the Jews out of the buildings into the courtyard and lined them up in rows. He ordered all of the sick and elderly to get out of line and stand by themselves.

More than three-quarters of the men got out of line. Even healthy men pretended to be sick, because their desire to go home was so great that most of them were easily caught by Dr Schau's fishing rod.

The murderer assured the elderly and sick that he was taking them to a doctor for a health examination. All of them were taken into a forest the same day and shot. The forest is not far from the village of Schaudvitz. (See the collective testimony concerning the camps in Heidekrug - LK)

On that same day, Monday evening, July 21, 1941, the possessions of the men who had been shot were brought in trucks.

The men remaining in the camp were ordered to choose things for themselves. They were in a terrible panic. The men recognized the possessions of their murdered fathers, brothers and friends. It was clear to everyone that the men who were taken away had been shot. There were cases of sons finding not only the possessions of their fathers, but their documents as well. Everyone grew apathetic toward what happened in the camp later on.

After he had been in the camp for four weeks, Sender found out that all of the women and children had been shot in the Tubiner forest in mid- September, 1941. The partisans assured the women that they were being taken away to join their husbands. This was told to Sender Linkimer by peasants from the villages around Koltinan, with whom he was acquainted. (Concerning the further experiences of Sender in the camp near Heidekrug, see the report on the Heidekrug camps- LK)

Sender's wife and two children died in Koltinan. Sender Linkimer was the only Jew in town who survived.

Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin New York April 30, 1987

**Attestation of Sender Linkimer**

דער עיגנהענטיקער אונטערשריפט פון פאלדאפֿינגער לעגער אַוואָקאַטן סענדער לינקימער באַשטעטיקט דער פּרעסע פֿון לעגער־קאָמפּליעט קאָמפּטען / E. Reif /

דער עיגנהענטיקער אונטערשריפט פון פאלדאפֿינגער לעגער אַוואָקאַטן סענדער לינקימער באַשטעטיקט דער פּרעסע פֿון לעגער־קאָמפּליעט קאָמפּטען / E. Reif /

Dem eighentliken underskrift  
fun Feldafingser legerawogger  
Sender Linkimer baestetikt der  
preses fun lagerkomplet kamp  
/ E. Reif /  
Feldafing, d. 4.10.1947 Council



Everything written concerning the slaughter of the Jews of the town of Koltinan was related personally by me, Sender Linkimer, and I attest thereto with my own signature on each page.  
Sender Linkimer Signature

The report was recorded by Engineer L Koniuchowsky Signature  
Feldafing, October 4, 1947

The signature of the resident of the Feldafing camp, Sender Linkimer, is attested to by the chairman of the camp committee. E Reif Signature Feldafing October 4, 1947

Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin New York April 30, 1987

## THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS OF SHVEKSHNE (SVEKSNA)

The collective testimony of:

1. Moyshe Ment, born in Shvekshne on December 15, 1904. Completed elementary school. A horse trader and farmer. Father's name; Khayem; mother; Yehudis.
2. Naftoli Ziv, born in Shvekshne on October 25, 1924. Finished four grades of Lithuanian gymnasium in Shvekshne. A student by occupation. Father's name; Moyshe; mother; Peshe-Rokhel Krom.
3. Meir Shmulovitz, born in Shvekshne on February 26, 1910. Completed elementary school. By trade a butcher. Father's name, Hirshe; mother, Ele Ladon.
4. Yiskhok Markushevitz, born in Shvekshne on June 1, 1914. Completed elementary school. By trade, a butcher. Father's name, Avrom-Eliyohu; mother, Tobe-Leye Glezer.

All of these people had spent their entire lives in Shvekshne. When the war between Hitler's Germany and the Soviet Union broke out on Sunday, June 22, 1941, they were in Shvekshne.

Shvekshne is in Tawrik County, 60 kilometers from Tawrik and 18 kilometers from Nay,-Shtot, 7 kilometers from the border of the Memel region, after that region was taken from Lithuania by Hitler Germany in the year 1939.

A gravel road connects the town with Verzhan (Veivirzheniai) and with Nay-shtot. A highway connects Shvekshne with Heidekrug (Shilute) and Memel.

### The Jewish Population and Their Occupations

In the year 1924 the entire town was burned down. The Jews in town received assistance from their relatives in foreign countries, especially from the United States. With great stubbornness and dedication the Jews managed to rebuild their homes, which they had to make out of brick.

(The government had forbidden the building of any wooden houses in the center of town- LK)

They improved their hometown, putting in sidewalks, gardens and orchards. The town was reborn, young and beautiful. Shvekshne was one of the nicest towns in Tawrik County, and the Jews loved their new town.

The Jews in town used to boast about their beautiful park, where the young people enjoyed spending their free time. After lunch on Sabbath afternoons in the summer, the Jews in town would go walking in with their wives and children. The young people played and enjoyed themselves in the park. Even a number of religious Jews with beards could not resist the temptation to fill their lungs with the pure, fresh air in the park. The park was located on the estate of Count Plater. The count's palace was also on the estate.

One part of town that Jews had avoided for generations was Verzhan Street. It was written in the town chronicle that Jews must not dare to build or to live on Verzhan Street. The chronicle told of an incident that had happened in Shvekshne generations previously: Many years ago, it had been the custom to lead funeral processions to the Jewish cemetery along Verzhan Street.

Once, during a funeral, the Christian residents threw stones at the procession, and many people were wounded. The rabbi at that time placed a ban on the street, and strictly forbade Jews to live there. The Jews who were then living there had to move to other streets. No more funerals went by way of Verzhan Street. And down to the present, Jews did not live on that street, nor did they build there.

Up to the outbreak of the war, about 110-115 Jewish families lived in Shvekshne. Most of them were occupied in retail trade and artisanry. A small proportion was also occupied in agriculture. But most of the Jews in town had their own gardens, cows, and poultry, and lived a semi-rural life.

The mill in town belonged to the brothers Hillel and Mende Yavner. There were also large manufacturing concerns in town, owned by the Jews: Moyshe Ziv, Moyshe-Yoshe Yoselevitz, Shmuel Yoselevitz and a few others. Iron businesses were run by: Mikhl Yoselevitz, Beyle Markus, Khayem Ripkin and others. The Jews carried out intensive trade with Memel, which they supplied with various agricultural products, meat and horses.

After the Memel region was seized from Lithuania, the economic situation of the Jews became much worse. Many Jews lived on money sent by their relatives overseas.

Three kilometers from town was the compound of Kaukishkiai, owned by the Jew Shayevitz.

## **The Cultural Life of the Jews and Their Contacts With Lithuanians**

Shvekshe had a Hebrew elementary school, a heder, a study house and a synagogue. Some of the wealthier young Jews studied in the local Lithuanian gymnasium after completing the Jewish elementary school. A few studied in yeshivas. The vast majority of the Jewish youth were members of Zionist movements, where they spent all their spare time. A very small number were active in the Communist Party, which was illegal during President Smetonas' regime.

The relations with the Lithuanians had never been good in Shvekshe. The Lithuanian youth who studied in the gymnasium were quite anti-Semitic. They didn't only study science in the gymnasium. They also diligently studied various libels against the Jews, whom they regarded as their competitors in every area of life, both socially and economically. The medieval blood libel against the Jews, which claimed that they used Christian blood for matzoh, was quite successful in Shvekshe. Each year before Passover, the Jews fearfully anticipated various anti-Semitic actions.

One year during the 1930's, before Passover, Lithuanians invented the story that a Jew from town named Ruven Srolomitz had killed a Lithuanian child to make matzoh. An agitated crowd of Lithuanians broke into his house, looking for the dead child. They destroyed or looted everything in his house.

The next day the "lost" child was located in the countryside. The Lithuanians then insisted that the Jews had terrified and then rejected the child. The Jews lived in terror all through Passover.

After the Memel region was appropriated by the Third Reich, Jewish businesses' signs were often smeared with slogans at night, and announcements were spread calling for the Christian population to boycott Jewish businesses.

After the Red Army arrived in Lithuania in the summer of 1940, the anti-Semites felt like whipped dogs, and shamelessly began to act in a superficially friendly way toward the Jews. The economic situation of the modest classes improved. Things became worse for the larger merchants. But all of the Jews felt like equal human beings, and were no longer afraid of the various anti-Semites.

The majority of the Jewish youth, together with the Lithuanians, actively participated in the new Soviet economic and socio-political life of the town.

## **The Outbreak of War**

Soviet officers and their families lived on the estate of Count Plater. On Saturday, June 21, 1941 the residents of the town noticed a nervous mood in the Soviet military and civilian institutions. At 4:00 a.m. the next day, Sunday, June 22, 1941, German artillery bombarded the estate. The Jews in town panicked. Jews took whatever they absolutely needed, and left the town by wagon and on foot, going as fast as they could to the surrounding villages.

That same Sunday morning the Germans entered the town. The peasants in the villages immediately began to drive the Jews from their houses and farms. Some of them even threatened to shoot the Jews, shouting: "You've had enough good times! You won't be singing any more Soviet songs now!" By Friday, June 27, all of the Jews had returned to town.

The Jews' horses, cows, poultry and carts were gone when they returned. The houses had been looted by the local Lithuanians. SS men had settled in town. Military details constantly marched through town. The Jews settled in their ransacked houses. Lithuanians from town and from the countryside appeared in the streets wearing white armbands, all of them armed, content and overjoyed. They called themselves partisans and supported the Germans against the Soviet Union. Many Lithuanians who had had government positions under President Smetonas and had been replaced under the Soviets, reappeared in town bearing arms. They created the civilian administration in town.

A Lithuanian named Penkauskas became the mayor of the town. He was a farmer from the village of Jonkakliai, and the former mayor under Smetonas.

The Lithuanian Lomsargis, a townsman who had been in active service under Smetonas, was also very active.

The leaders of the police and partisans were Lomsargis, from the village of Vilkenai, two kilometers from town, and Palauskas, a Lithuanian from town who had been a border policeman under Smetonas. The civil administration regarded "the solution of the Jewish question" as its main task.

## **The First Victims; Harassment and Decrees**

1. A Jew named Moyshe Shapiro was one of the leaders of the town's party committee. During the year of Soviet rule, he often helped to requisition grain for the government from the peasants. On Sunday morning he had fled the town. Peasants in the village of Kurmiai recognized and detained him. As it was later retold, Moyshe defended himself, and fired several shots. One of the attackers was wounded. The peasants caught him, murderously tormented and beat him, finally cutting open his belly and stuffing it with grain. Moyshe was buried at the non-sectarian cemetery.

2. During the first several days after the arrival of the Germans, partisans arrested the young brothers Yekhiel and Leyzer Laden, and the female Communists Zelde Luria, Blume Itsikovitz (Gales), and Aida Ladon.

The three girls were shot by the partisans in the town park on Saturday, June 28, 1941. It was said at the time that another Jewish girl had been shot in the park the same day. Details are not available. The two boys were kept in prison until Friday, June 27. Then they were taken to the study house. From there they were taken the next day, Saturday, along with other men to the camps around the town of Heidekrug.

3. Yisroel Gesl had been the secretary of the Communist party in Shvekshne during the year of Soviet rule. When they war broke out he escaped from town to a village near Shilale, where he was chased by the German army. He returned to Shvekshne. On the way he met Jews who were coming back to town from the villages, and who advised him not to go to town. Lithuanian partisans caught him and immediately shot him at the Jewish cemetery in Khveidan on Thursday, June 26, 1941. He was buried there.

During the first days of the war the Lithuanians ordered all the Jews to deliver to the headquarters their radios, bicycles, gold, silver and all other valuables. The partisans' staff was quartered in the former Communist party hall, at the home of the Jew Shaye Osherevitz. At the same time Jews were forbidden to walk on the sidewalks, and to leave their houses for a certain period each day. The Jews also had to put on yellow stars.

Notices saying "Jewish home" (Zhydu Namas) were required on each Jewish house. Every morning men and women were rounded up in their homes by partisans and driven off to do various tasks, such as digging holes for telephone poles and burying fallen Red Army soldiers. The Jews had to clean out the outhouses in town. The women were forced to wash windows and floors in the Lithuanian and German offices. Before noon the Jews were allowed to go home to eat. Right after noon they had to reassemble and work until night.

Armed partisans stood guard as the Jews worked. They teased the Jews, tormented and beat them. This went on until the end of the week.

## **Jewish Men Are Taken Away to Camps**

On Friday, June 27, 1941, at lunchtime, German SS arrived in Shvekshne in light automobiles. They went to all the Jewish homes together with partisans, and rounded up all the men above the age of twelve or thirteen. Before they took the men, the Lithuanians ordered them to bring along a tin plate and a spoon. The men were rounded up in the yard of the studyhouse and lined up in rows. They drove the men in groups of several men from the yard into a corridor of the study house, where three tables stood. SS men sat at the tables. Others stood nearby with sticks and braided ropes. Each Jew was thoroughly beaten as soon as he came in.

The screams of those being beaten could be heard in the yard, and everyone outside was certain that those in the corridor were being hung.

At the first table the Jews had to hand over their money, at the second their watches, wedding rings and other valuables. The SS men beat the Jews with sticks and ropes at every opportunity. They might be displeased by someone's "unmilitary" approach to the table, someone's failure to walk or stand the way they wanted him to.

They knocked out one of Yitskhak Markelevitz' molars. They bloodied Mayer Shmulovitz. At the third table the Jews had to hand over their documents and answer a series of questions. All of the men were registered.

After being processed at the three tables, everyone was examined by the town's Lithuanian doctor, Biliunas, who stood in the corridor confused and upset. The doctor was a very good man, and understood what the Germans were likely to do to those men whom he would declare unfit for work. The good doctor declared all the men fit for work.

A small corridor led from the large corridor into the women's section of the study house. In the small corridor stood a Lithuanian wigmaker named Ivanauskas, a partisan and a bitter anti-Semite. He had a hair cutter, but he didn't cut, he ripped the men's hair out. He cut the beards of the old Jews.

After the hair cut, the men had to immediately walk upstairs to the women's section. On both sides of the stairs stood SS men holding sticks, who once again brutalized each Jew. The Jews could not walk up or even run up, they had to "fly" up, or else they were beaten with the sticks even more. Of course, the old men were beaten worst of all.

When they reached the women's section, the men had to quickly join a row of men whom the SS murderers forced to do various calisthenics. The Jews had to run, fall down and get up again, over and over again without stopping. Even the old and weak men had to take part in these "sports." For three hours the SS men tortured the Jews with these "sports."

It was hot outside. In the women's section it was stuffy. The Jews were very thirsty. The SS men brought a pot of cold water, splashed their hands in it and teased the Jews, pointing: "Water!" But they did not give the Jews anything to drink.

At six o'clock in the evening the women were told that they could bring food for their husbands. The partisans took the food from the women and gave it to the men. The better food they kept for themselves.

Late at night the men had to lie down to sleep on the bare floor. They were forbidden to speak or to get up. The SS men stood guard. They spoke loudly among themselves so that the Jews would hear. They listed all the various forms of unnatural deaths that the Jews would suffer the next day. In the middle of the night they woke up individual Jews, demanded that they surrender their weapons, and meanwhile struck them.

On Friday evening, June 27, 1941, Jews were forced by German SS to take all of the Torah scrolls and holy books out of the study house and to burn them in the synagogue yard. On the same Friday evening other Jews had to take all the holy books in the rabbi's house and in other Jewish homes to the Jewish cemetery. The Jews were forced to burn them.

The next day, Saturday morning, June 28, 1941, the SS men woke up the rabbi, Yisroel (or Sholem-Yitskhok) Levitan, and took him to the corridor on the first floor. They forced the rabbi to gather the hair from the floor and burn it. The rabbi explained to them that it was his Sabbath, and refused to obey their order. The murderers beat the old rabbi with their Browning and shot once close to his head. Yet the rabbi would not carry out their order.

One of the SS men called the eyewitness Moyshe. ~~Ment~~ <sup>Ment</sup> down from the women's section, and forced him to pick up the hair from the floor. They ignited a piece of paper, and used that to set the hair on fire. Moyshe was forbidden to drop the hair from his hands. Then they beat Moyshe and the rabbi, and took them out to the synagogue yard, to the burned Torah scrolls.

Moyshe was forced to stir the coals, which on Saturday morning were still glowing red. While stirring the ashes, Moyshe pointed out to the rabbi a bit of parchment from a Torah scroll. On the unburnt piece of parchment stood the words: "Remember what Amalek did to you!"

The SS men shot several times for no reason. The Jews in the women's section were certain that Moyshe and the rabbi had been shot. Then the two were driven into the women's section. In the morning of Saturday, June 28, 1941, two trucks with trailers were driven into the study house yard. The younger and healthier men were driven out of the women's section into the trucks by the SS. When they ran downstairs, they had to "fly" down. They had to jump into the trucks without touching the sideboards, or else they were beaten once again. And the truck was high.

Two transports of 30 Jews were taken away to a camp not far from the town of Heidekrug. The rest of the Jews were taken to another camp. Altogether about 120 Jewish men were taken from Shvekshne that Saturday. The old and sick men were not taken from the women's section to the camps.

Together with the leaders of the municipal police and the partisans, whose names have already been recorded, dozens more Lithuanians from town and from the surrounding villages took part in rounding up the Jews in their houses. Among them were:

1. Stankus, a tanner who worked for Jews.
2. Jablonskis, a tanner who worked for Jews.
3. Zhutautas, a farmer who lived in town.
4. Juozas Zhutautas, a farmer who lived in town.

5. Rupshas, a farmer who lived in town.
6. Jonas Rokas, an employee of Jews
7. Justinas Montvidas.
8. Juozas Montvidas.
9. Antanas Shlajis, a fisherman.
10. Petras Kaulakis, a gymnasium student, the son of the pharmacist.
11. Stankus, a gymnasium student.

There were also Lithuanian women who were active partisans:

1. Kungyte, a gymnasium student.
2. Ona Gailute-Andriave, a gymnasium student from town.
3. Bronia Kondratenkaite, a gymnasium student from town.

Dozens of gymnasium students, both male and female, participated. However, the eyewitnesses do not remember their last names.

The men from Shvekshne who were brought to the camps at Heidekrug were given physical examinations and a doctor gave them injections. After they had gone through this entire procedure, some of them were sent to the camp at Piktaten and some to the camp at Silwen. (Concerning the life of the Jews in these camps, see the collective testimony concerning the camps at Heidekrug - LK)

### **The Slaughter of the Rest of the Jews of Shvekshne**

While living in various camps, the men found out from Lithuanians that the women and children, along with the older and weaker men had been herded into a ghetto on the Jewish street (Zhydu gatve) in Shvekshne.

The surviving men from Shvekshne do not know any of the details about their life in the ghetto and about their tragic death. However, it is known that they were killed by Lithuanian partisans between the villages of Raudishkiai and Inkakliai, six kilometers from Shvekshne, on September 20, 1941, Saturday, the 28th of Elul according to the Jewish calendar.

*Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin Signature April 30, 1987*

### **Attestations of Moyshe Ment, Naftoli Ziv, Mayer Shmulovitz and Yitskhok Markushevitz**

The information concerning the slaughter of the Jews of Shvekshne all of the facts, dates, names of persons and geographical locations, which are mentioned in this collective testimony, were related by us personally, and we attest thereto with our signatures on each page.

- |    |                       |           |
|----|-----------------------|-----------|
| 1. | Moyshe Ment           | Signature |
| 2. | Naftoli Ziv           | Signature |
| 3. | Mayer Shmulovitz      | Signature |
| 4. | Yitskhok Markushevitz | Signature |

The signatures of Messrs; Naftoli Sieff and Mosze Ment are attested to by the chairman of the Jewish Committee of Weilheim. Chairman Mosche Moritz Signature July 4, 1948

The signature of the resident of Graefelfing, Icchok Markusiewicz, is attested to by the vice chairman of the Committee in Graefelfing.

Vice Chairman Fiszal Krakowski Signature Graefelfing June 24, 1948.

The collective testimony was recorded by Engineer L Koniuchowsky Graefelfing b. Muenchen November 24, 1948

*Translated by Dr Jonathan Boyarin Signature April 30, 1987*

## THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS OF KHVEIDAN (KVEDARNA)

The collective testimony of the following Jews of Khveidan:

1. Motl Druzin, born in Khveidan on March 20, 1903. Completed Hebrew elementary school. By trade a baker and merchant. Motl's father's name, Bere-Shmuel; mother's Feyge, nee Aron in Khveidan.
2. Gershon Yung, born October 15, 1923 in Khveidan. Completed Hebrew elementary school and six classes of Lithuanian gymnasium. Father's name, Shiye; mother, Miriam Katz.
3. Berl Levit, born May 3, 1917 in Khveidan. Completed Hebrew elementary school. Father's name, David; mother Sheyne.
4. Khayem Nadl, born May 7, 1905 in Khveidan. Completed Hebrew elementary school. By trade a merchant. Father's name, Shmuel; mother Zlate Hirshovitz.
5. Rosa Rakhmil, born in Khveidan on February 13, 1924. Completed Hebrew elementary school in Khveidan and two classes of gymnasium in Telshe. Father's name, Shmuel-Binyomin Rakhmil; mother, Sheyne-Gute Meyerovitz. Studied in the tailoring department of the Kovno ORT School from 1937, and graduated in 1941.

After the outbreak of the war, the first three were taken by German SS men to camps around Heidekrug. They survived all the Hells arranged by the German Fascists in Auschwitz, Warsaw and finally in the Dachau concentration camps. They survived miraculously.

The last two were in Kovno when the war broke out, and in the Kovno ghetto later on. Khayem Nadl escaped from the Kovno ghetto and joined the Red Partisans. After being liberated by the Red Army Khayem spent six months as the head of the Red militia in his hometown of Khveidan.

Rosa Rokhmil spent a good deal of time in her hometown of Khveidan after the Red Army returned to Lithuania.

Khveidan (Kvedarna) is in Tawrik county, 48 kilometers from Tawrik, 16 kilometers from Shilale and 18 kilometers from the town of Laukuva. Kveidan is connected to Riteve (Rietavas), Laukuva, Shilale and Pajuris by gravel roads. The river Jura flows near the town.

### The Occupations, Cultural and Social Life of the Jews

Until the outbreak of the war on June 22, 1941, 75 Jewish families lived in Khveidan, a total of perhaps 290 or 300 Jews. The majority were occupied in retail trade and artisanry, and some worked in agriculture. Almost all of the Jews had gardens or patches of ground, and owned their own cows, poultry and horses. The life of the Jews in town was semi-rural.

Most of the trade was with Memel (Klaipeda). The Jews of Khveidan supplied the city agricultural produce, which they bought from Lithuanian peasants.

After the Memel region was seized from Lithuania by Hitler's Germany, the economic situation of the Jews grew worse. Trade with Memel was stopped. Overall, the economic life of the Jews in Khveidan was not bad. Nevertheless, many of them received assistance from relatives in foreign countries.

Until the Red Army arrived in Lithuania in the summer of 1940, Khveidan possessed a Hebrew elementary school, a Hebrew-Yiddish library, a Tiferes Bokhurim and a study house. In the summer of 1940 the Hebrew elementary school switched to Yiddish as the language of instruction. The vast majority of the Jewish youth belonged to Zionist movements.

A few participated in the illegal activities of the Communist party during President Smetonas' rule.

After completing the Hebrew elementary school, a small number of the Jewish youth studied in the Hebrew gymnasium in Telshe or in the six- grade Lithuanian gymnasium in Khveidan. Some of the boys studied in the yeshivas in Telshe, Ponevezh or Slobodke.

## **Relations with Lithuanian Neighbors**

These were not good. Before Passover each year the Lithuanians demonstrated against the Jews. The libel about Jews killing a Christian child before Passover each year and using its blood to make matzoh was quite widely believed in Khveidan.

During Passover Jews used to wait up until the middle of the night until the Christians left the church. More than once, upon leaving the church late at night, Lithuanians broke the Jews' windowpanes, detained Jewish youngsters and beat them.

One year before Passover Rosa Rokhmil's younger brother burst out crying. Just then a nun was walking past the house. She spread a rumor in town that Jews had captured a Christian child. The town's residents were preparing for a pogrom against the Jews. The nun was arrested, interrogated and released. That year the Jews' Passover was disrupted. When they conducted their seder, they shuttered the windows and barred the doors.

The organization known as "Verslas" carried out vicious anti-Jewish agitation in town. The old priest Latvis openly turned the Lithuanian populace against Jewish merchants and artisans, calling on them only to buy from "their own." The agitation was successful, and a number of Jews had to close their shops. This took place after the annexation of the Memel region by Hitler's Third Reich, from which the anti-Semitic plague spread to all the nearby border towns.

Very often the Jews would wake up to find graffiti on the walls and doors of their houses, saying: "Jews, move to Palestine!"

After the arrival of the Red Army in Lithuania in the summer of 1940, the attitude toward the Jews improved superficially. For obvious reasons, some of the Jewish youth actively participated in economic and political life, on an equal basis with young Lithuanian leftists.

## **The Outbreak of the war**

In the morning of Sunday, June 22, 1941, clashes between the retreating Red Army troops and the Germans began not far from Khveidan. Almost all of the Jews fled their homes in a panic, taking along some of their possessions, as well as their horses and cows. They all fled to the countryside to hide at the homes of friendly peasants. That same day, Sunday, the Germans arrived in town.

The peasants immediately began to drive the Jews out of the villages. The Jews left their horses and cows with the peasants, along with some of their more valuable things, and began to return to town. By Thursday, June 26, all of the Jews had returned to town from the countryside.

When they returned home, the Jews found that everything had been looted or taken over. Lithuanian townspeople had settled in the better Jewish homes and claimed possession of the furniture, bedding, storage rooms, horses and cows which the Jews hadn't managed to bring to the countryside. The Lithuanians didn't even feel obliged to come up with explanations, nor were they ashamed in front of their Jewish neighbors. They felt like long-established homeowners in the Jewish homes which they had "inherited." The Jews were afraid even to protest or to demand anything in return.

Some of the Jewish houses on Shilale street had been burned. The Jews settled together into the few remaining houses.

## **The Civilian Administration**

Immediately upon the arrival of the Germans, Lithuanian townspeople and rural residents put white ribbons on their sleeves and joyfully greeted the Germans. Armed Lithuanians calling themselves partisans appeared in town.

The leaders of the partisans were:

1. Petras Kazulis.
2. Jakas, a farmer from the village of Prapeme.
3. Vladas Mylimas, a brother of the village priest.
4. Jonas Kurshelis, a farmer from the village of Paregauda, three kilometers from town.

The town's civilian administration was made up of these armed partisans. The fate of the town's Jews was in their hands.

## The First Victims; 80 Men Taken to the Heidekrug Camps

On Sunday, the first day of the war, 13 year old Leybe Shvartz and Ruven-Meir, who was mentally ill, were found dead not far from town. They were buried at the Jewish cemetery.

Throughout the first week of the war, partisans rounded up Jewish men in their houses and sent them off to do various tasks, such as working on the damaged bridge over the Jura river, cleaning the automobiles and residences of the German military, and so forth. While they worked they were guarded by armed Lithuanians. After work at night, the men were allowed to go home.

In the afternoon of Sunday, June 29, 1941, armed groups of partisans went to all of the Jewish homes and took away all of the Jewish men over the age of twelve or thirteen. When the men were taken away, they were forbidden to take anything along. The partisans solemnly swore that after working for a certain amount of time, the men would be brought home in the evening. They drove all the men to the marketplace, where German SS men were waiting, led by the infamous Dr Schau from Heidekrug (Shilute) and his adjutants Jakshtas and Dembrovsky.

The SS men greeted the Jews by striking them with their fists, with sticks and with whips. Many of the men were bloodied.

Women began to bring food and other items from home for their husbands. The SS men beat them and drove them away from the marketplace. The cantor's wife, who was pregnant, brought a package of food for her husband. She, too, was beaten.

A Lithuanian partisan from town by the name of Barauskas, along with one of his comrades, cut off half of the beard of the town rabbi, Fayvl Gavron. Lithuanian townspeople stood around the square, happily applauding their "heroic" brother partisans.

Some ten elderly or sick men were rounded up separately and taken away from the marketplace. The SS men drove the rest into two trucks with trailers. While they were herding the men into the trucks, they beat them again with sticks on the head and sides.

That same Sunday evening, the men from Khveidan were brought into the yard of the study house at Shvekshne and forced out of the trucks.

The windows of the study house had been broken. In the yard, the Torah scrolls and holy books were almost completely burned. All of the men from Khveidan had to stand around the fire. There was an order to surrender all of their watches, rings and other valuables. The Jews began to throw everything onto the grass nearby. Lithuanians standing nearby picked everything like berries in a forest. Then everyone was driven into the women's section of the synagogue. Below, in the men's section, there were still men from Shvekshne who had been rounded up. Some of them had already been taken away. In the evening of that same Sunday, June 29, 1941, the men from Khveidan and the remaining men from Shvekshne were driven out of the study house into trucks and taken to Heidekrug. Some of the men were driven into a barn in the yard of the Heidekrug town hall, and some into Dr Schau's compound near Rabnwald.

A few men spent the night in Khveidan, because they hadn't gotten into the trucks. In the morning of Monday the thirtieth, they were taken to Heidekrug on the same trucks. They spent the night at the home of a Jew named Zuse Aron.

A total of 80 men from Khveidan were taken to the camps near Heidekrug. On Monday, June 30 the men were taken to a doctor, where they were given injections in their chests. Many of the men caught a high fever from the injections.

Several days after the injections the men were taken to have a hot bath. As they were leaving the bath, SS men doused them with cold water from a hose. Shiye Yung caught a lung inflammation, and lay sick in bed for several weeks. Eventually he felt better and worked a bit in the camp. However, he was taken away with the first transport and shot. That was on July 19, 1941, a Saturday. (Concerning this transport, see the collective testimony about the camps around Heidekrug - L Koniuchwsky.)

Several Lithuanians from town and from the countryside took part in the roundup of the men at the marketplace. The eyewitnesses remember the first and last names of the following:

1. Ignas Kurshelis from the village of Paregaude, three kilometers from town.
2. Vincas Kurshelis, Ignas's brother, from Paregaude.
3. Petras Koziulis, a farmer in town.

4. Jakas, from the village of Prapeme.
5. Vladas Gedvilis, from the village of Kalnytsiai, three kilometers from town.
6. Barauskas, a farmer in town.
7. Vladas Mylimas, a former leader of the gun club during Smetonas' rule.
8. Kolitsius, a watchmaker in town.

Motl Druzin was taken to the marketplace by the Lithuanian Petras Kaziulis. "Motke, your life is over!" the murderer Petras teased Motl.

### **Victims after the Men Were Taken Away**

While the men were still standing in the marketplace, one partisan arrested a young girl named Leye Nadl and handed her to the SS men. Leye had been active as a young Communist under the Soviets. She was taken to prison. At the same time, a Jew named Khayem Marik was arrested and taken to prison.

After the Red Army returned to Lithuania, Khayem Nadl became the head of the militia in Khveidan. He was able to determine what had become of the two arrestees. For eight days the two had been kept imprisoned. They had been dreadfully tortured by partisans. The two were then taken to Shilale, where Khayem Marik was shot. Leye Nadl was brought back to Khveidan. Peasants reported that she had been so brutally beaten that her entire face was swollen and her eyes were barely visible. Her brother was unable to find out where and in what circumstances she died.

A woman named Tobe-Basye Meres from Khveidan, whose maiden name was Meyerovitz, was shot by the local partisans on Moday, June 30, 1941. It was reported that she was shot when she went to get water. Details are lacking.

On Monday, June 30, 1941, a day after the men were taken to the camps near Heidekrug, partisans from town and villages shot the ten Jewish men whom the German SS men had taken from the marketplace. The ten or eleven men were forced to dig a grave, and then they were shot and buried at the Jewish cemetery.

Those who were shot were:

1. Reb Beynish Yofe, the town slaughterer.
2. Aba Yofe, Beynish's son.
3. Dovid-Ayzik Aron, a merchant.
4. Shabsay Blokh, a merchant.
5. Shmuel-Khayem Ment, a glazier from Riteve, who had fled to Khveidan.
6. Leyzer Aron, a merchant.
7. Meir Katz, a horse trader and farmer.
8. David Yung, a butcher.
9. Moyshe Fleker, merchant.
10. Bere-Leyb Shkolny, a son of the rabbi.

### **The Ghetto in Khveidan**

Shortly after the men were taken from Khveidan, the partisans drove all the women and children into a ghetto on Laukuva Street. They brought the contents of the houses into the study house. Partisans stood guard around the area.

The women were forced to do various tasks in town and at the homes of peasants in the villages. It has not been possible to obtain details about their life in the ghetto. However, a tragic incident concerning three young, attractive girls is known. Three partisans; Gedvilys, Jakas, and a third whose name is not known, took three girls named Rivke Berelovitz, Sore Aron and Mashe Yung out of the ghetto, and took them to an empty house belonging to a Jew named Meir Aron.

These three scoundrels removed the girl's clothing by force and raped them. Then they burned their sexual organs with lit cigarettes. The cries of the three girls could be heard throughout the town. Afterwards the three scoundrels boasted to their Lithuanian friends in town about what they had done.

After the Red Army arrived in Lithuania, Jakas became the head of the Red Army militia in Laukuva. His crimes were discovered, and he was arrested. He was accused of actively participating in the murder of the ten Jews at the Jewish cemetery, and of raping the three Jewish girls.

Around the time of the High Holidays in 1941, the partisans ordered the women and children in the ghetto to prepare to join the men. They were taken away from the ghetto in trucks. After the war peasants reported that the women and children had been shot in the Tubiniai forest, between Laukuva and Shilale. Details about the execution and its exact date are unavailable.

Avrom Bereznik, the pharmacist, was shot along with the women and children.

*Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin Signature May 1, 1987*

### **Additional Testimony of Rosa Rakhmil about the Slaughter of the Jews of Khveidan**

1. A Jewish girl named Sore-Miriam Hamelnan studied tailoring with the Lithuanian Pranas Jutkevitzius before the war. Against her parents' will she often spent time with him, and she married him without her parents' knowledge. Before the war she had a child in Kovno. She gave it to a Lithuanian woman to raise, and she and her husband settled in the countryside. She stayed there until the town's Jews were driven into a ghetto, after the arrival of the Germans. She came to Khveidan to see how her loved ones were doing. Partisans detained her and took her to the ghetto. Her husband Jutkevitzius paid a large sum of money to obtain a marriage certificate, which certified that Sore-Miriam was his wife.

He also managed to get the partisans to agree to release his wife from the ghetto and to have her sister Malkele come work as a servant. However, when he arrived at the ghetto he found that all the Jews had been taken to the Tubiniai forest, where they were shot.

2. An 18-year-old girl named Rivke Blekher was hidden in the countryside for more than a year. For reasons which are not understood, she happened to come into Khveidan. She was immediately arrested by partisans and shot. The tailor Jutkevitsius from the village of Grimdshiai reported the incident.

3. A Jew named Berl Yokhelovitz, a cattle merchant, spent a good deal of time with peasants in the country before the war. After the Jews of Khveidan were slaughtered, he hid in the country with a friendly peasant for a long time. A neighboring peasant betrayed him to the police in Khveidan, who arrested him and took him to town. After keeping him in prison for some time, he was shot. A peasant woman named Pupsiene told Rosa about this incident after the war.

*Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin Signature May 1, 1987*

### **Attestations of Motl Druzin, Gershon Yung, Berl Levit, Khayem Nadl, Roze Rakhmil and Rosa Rachmil.**

I. All of the information about the slaughter of the Jews of Khveidan, all of the facts, names of persons and geographical locations, which are reported in this testimony, were related by us, and we attest thereto with our signatures.

1.	Motl Druzin	Signature
2.	Gershon Yung	Signature
3.	Berl Levit	Signature
4.	Khayem Nadl	Signature
5.	Roze Rakhmil	Signature

The collective testimony was recorded by Engineer L Koniuchowsky      Signature  
Weilheim near Munich, June 22, 1948      Feldafing, June 24.

1. The signatures of Messrs. Berl Levit and Chaim Nadel and of Miss Roza Rachmel are attested to by the chairman of the Jewish committee of Weilheim.

Chairman: Mosche Moritz      Signature July 4, 1948.

II. The signatures of Gerszon Jung and Motl Druzyn are attested to by the Chairman of the Feldafing camp committee.

Feldafing, June 22, 1948      E Reif      Signature

III. I, Rosa Rachmil, found out about the three cases reported in the additional testimony when I was in Khveidan after the war, and I reported about them precisely to Engineer L Koniuchowsky. I attest to each incident with my

signature: Rosa Rachmil      Signature

The additional testimony was recorded by Engineer L. Koniuchowsky  
Signature Weilheim, July 2, 1948.

Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin      Signature      May 1, 1987

די עיגענהענדיגע אונטערשריפט פון די געזעצטע פראזעס פון דעם  
- פראזעס פון דעם פאלדאפינגער לאגער קאמיטעט, פאלדאפינג, 22. 7. 1948.

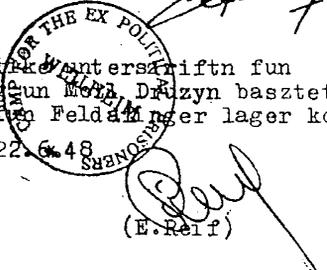
I. Die eigenhändige Unterschrift von den Herren  
Berl Levit, Chaim Nadel und Fräulein Rachmel  
Roza bestätigt der Präses vom Jüdischen  
Komitee, Weilheim.

Präses:  
den 4. Juli 1948.

(Mosche Moritz)

1. אברהם לויט / אברהם לויט / 1.  
2. חיים נאדל / רחמל רוצה / 2.  
3. פראזעס פון דעם פאלדאפינגער לאגער קאמיטעט / 3.  
4. פאלדאפינגער לאגער קאמיטעט / 4.  
5. פאלדאפינגער לאגער קאמיטעט / 5.

II. Di eigenhändige Unterschrift fun  
Gerszon Jungeman Moritz, Druzyn basztetikt  
der prezes fun Feldafing'iger lager komitet,  
Feldafing, 22. 7. 48

  
(E. Reif)

פאלדאפינגער לאגער קאמיטעט פון  
פאלדאפינג, 22. 7. 1948.  
Weilheim, bei München  
22 - VII - 1948.  
Feldafing - VII - 24.

III. פראזעס פון דעם פאלדאפינגער לאגער קאמיטעט, פאלדאפינג, 22. 7. 1948.  
פאלדאפינגער לאגער קאמיטעט פון דעם פאלדאפינגער לאגער קאמיטעט, פאלדאפינג, 22. 7. 1948.  
פאלדאפינגער לאגער קאמיטעט פון דעם פאלדאפינגער לאגער קאמיטעט, פאלדאפינג, 22. 7. 1948.



פאלדאפינגער לאגער קאמיטעט פון  
פאלדאפינג, 22. 7. 1948.  
Weilheim / 066 /  
2 - VII - 1948.

## **THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS OF NAY-SHTOT**

The collective testimony of the surviving Jews from Nay-shtot:

1. Henakh Elert, born in Nay-shtot on September 12, 1922. Completed four classes of Lithuanian gymnasium. By trade, an electrician. Father's name, Mikhl; mother Peshe Itsikovitz. Until the annexation of the Memel region by Hitler's Germany, he lived in Heidekrug (Shilute). Until the outbreak of the war on Sunday, June 22, 1941, he lived in Nay-shtot.
- 2, Azriel Glukh, born in Nay-shtot on November 10, 1924. Completed Hebrew elementary school and two grade of Lithuanian gymnasium in Nay- shtot. Studied locksmithing in the Kovno ORT school for a few years. Father's name, Tuvye Glukh; mother Feyge-Libe Blekher. He was with his parents in Nay-shtot when the war broke out.
- 3, Leyzer Gold, born April 22, 1926 in Nay-shtot. Completed three grades of Lithuanian gymnasium. Father's name, Nakhman' mother Leah Katz. Lived in Nay-shtot until the outbreak of the war on June 22, 1941.

### **The Town's Geographical Setting**

Nay-shtot (Zhemaitiu Naumiestis) is in Tawrik County, 45 kilometers from Tawrik, 10 kilometers from Vainute, two kilometers from the border between Lithuania and the Memel region. The river Shushta flows through the town. Nay-shtot is 14 kilometers from Heidekrug.

### **The Jewish Population; Its Employment and Cultural Situation**

When the war broke out, approximately 100-110 Jewish families were living in the town. Most of them were retail merchants and artisans, and there were a few farmers as well. The town's mill and an electric power station were owned by a Jew named Shloyme Rabin.

The Jews Lapin, Goldberg and Epshteyn owned large manufacturing concerns. There was a good deal of trade with Memel, where Jews sold meat and agricultural products. After Memel was annexed by the Third Reich, trade dropped significantly. In general, however, the economic situation of the Jews was not bad. Many Jews received assistance from their relatives overseas.

Nay-shtot had a library, a Hebrew elementary school (until the summer of 1940), Lipe the Melamed's heder, a synagogue and a prayer room. The Jewish youth studied in the six-grade Lithuanian elementary school in Nay-shtot, and, until the annexation, in the Lithuanian gymnasium in Heidekrug. A small proportion of the youth studied in Hebrew gymnasiums in the larger Lithuanian cities.

Relations with the local Lithuanians were not good. The anti-Semites were very active there. After the Memel region was annexed to East Prussia, there began a brazen, open anti-Jewish agitation in town. During the year of Soviet rule the situation improved. The anti-Semites stopped their open agitation against the Jews.

### **The Outbreak of the War**

In the early morning of Sunday, June 22, 19.41, shots were heard near the border. One hour later, the Germans were in Nay-shtot. 32 German soldiers fell in battles with the Red Army. Rumors that local civilians had shot the Germans were immediately spread in town.

At about 10 or 11 a.m. of the same Sunday, the Germans drove all of the residents of the town, Christians and Jews, into the Evangelical Church. The women were immediately released.

All of the men were kept in the church under heavy watch until the afternoon of Monday, June 23. A German Wehrmacht major came and announced in Russian and German that the civilian population was suspected of shooting at the Germans. They had already made a decision to shoot every tenth man. An investigation proved that Russian officers had dressed in civilian clothes and shot at the Germans. All of the men were released from the church.

## **The Civilian Administration. The First Jewish Victims**

On Monday, June 23, 1941 at twelve noon, a light automobile carrying SS men, arrived in Nay-shtot from Heidekrug. The SS men arrested a Jew named Mende Vinik, his son Pesekh, and Mikhe Elert. The three Jews were interned in the Heidekrug prison.

The military commandant of Nay-shtot at that time was named Hirsch. He assured everyone that three men who had been taken away were in a camp and were working. Later this was ascertained to be true.

From that Monday on, all the Jews had to distinguish themselves by wearing a yellow armband. Mende Vinik's daughter Yehudis, had also been a young Communist during the year of Soviet rule. After the Germans arrived, Lithuanians established the civil administration in town. A policeforce and partisan group were formed. Their first action was to arrest Yehudis Vinik and lock her up in a cellar. She was tormented for several days, and then taken to the edge of town. Next to the outhouse not far from Morozow's house, near the Shvekshne bridge, they shot and buried her. This was during the second week of the war.

At the end of the third week of the war, Germans and Lithuanians arrested five Jewish girls. It is not known where they died and in what circumstances. The five girls were:

1. Rivke Lesin.
2. Gitke Berelovitz.
3. Rokhel Lerman.
4. Mine Glaz.
5. Mariam Shnayd.

## **The Bonfire of Holy Books**

At the end of the second week of the war, Germans and partisans captured some thirty Jewish men and took them to the synagogue. They had already gotten axes and hammers ready. They forced the thirty Jews to break the lecterns and benches and carry them outside. With tears in their eyes, the Jews had to carry the Torah scrolls and holy books out to the courtyard and stand in a circle. Rabbi Paklibak was forced to ignite the bonfire. It is not known who actually lit the fire. The rabbi, however, categorically refused. The men around the fire had to stir it so that it would burn better.

## **Jews at Forced Labor; A Ghetto for Jews**

On Thursday, June 24, 1941, partisans began driving the Jews to do various tasks on the roads and in the marketplace in town. They forced the women to wash the floors in the barracks. Every morning the men had to report to the courtyard of a building near the bridge. From there they were taken to work at various jobs until the evening, when they were allowed to go home. Lithuanian foremen or partisans kept watch while they worked. They teased and bullied the Jews while they worked.

On Friday, July 18, 1941 the Lithuanians ordered all the Jews to move into a few streets in a neighborhood near the edge of town, on the far side of the Shushta River. The Jews were given one day to carry out the order. They were allowed to take everything along. Because of the shortage of space in the designated ghetto, most of the furniture and other items remained in town, and Lithuanians "inherited" it. Before the war only Jews had lived in the neighborhood where the Jews had to settle in, a ghetto. Partisans took everything remaining out of the Jewish houses into the synagogue, and later sold it to Lithuanians at auction. The empty houses were immediately sealed.

## **The Slaughter of the Men of Nay-shtot**

On Saturday, July 19, 1941 at 10 a.m., the partisans ordered all the men over the age of 14 to come to the synagogue yard. At 10 o'clock the Jews began to assemble. The synagogue yard was already being guarded by armed partisans, and no one could leave.

All of the sick and elderly men were taken away from their homes on wagons and brought to the synagogue yard. Children up to the age of 12 or 13 were sent home.

A partisan read a list containing the names of all the Jewish men. If anyone was missing, he was searched for at home.

The infamous Dr Schau was at the synagogue yard, together with his adjutants Jaksht and Dembrowsky. The healthier men were lined up in rows, followed by the wagons bearing the elderly and sick. In this fashion the men were driven through the town. Their wives and children stood by their houses, weeping bitterly. The healthier men were driven to the courtyard of the local barracks outside of town, and herded into a horse barn. Some time later SS men arrived and picked out 40 of the healthier, younger men.

They took the rest of the men out of the barn. The elderly and sick who had been brought on wagons were not taken into the barn at all. The SS men forced the men who were less healthy to climb onto a truck. They asked whoever felt sick to tell them so. 15 of the 40 men still in the barn complained of various illnesses. Only 25 men remained in the barn. Partisans kept watch around the barn.

Several hours later they reassured the Jews they knew, and cheerfully announced that all of the elderly and sick on the wagons, as well as the 15 sick men who had been chosen from the barn, had been shot in a forest not far from the village of Shaudvitz.

Late in the evening the 25 men in the barn were placed into a truck and brought to the marketplace in Nay-shtot. From there SS men and Lithuanians accompanied each man home, so that he could gather some things and a package of food.

That same Saturday night all 25 men were taken to a camp at the Kalvelishkis compound in the town of Heidekrug, where they spent the night.

On Sunday, July 20, 1941 all of the men were taken to a doctor, where they were examined and given injections. Some of the men from Nay-shtot were taken to a camp called Silven, and others were taken to a camp near Mactubern. About ten men from Nay-shtot were brought from other towns, together with the local Jews. Thus there were a total of 35 to 37 men from Nay-shtot in the camps at Heidekrug.

The men from Vainute were brought to the Heidekrug camps in trucks together with the men from Nay-shtot. One truck contained the possessions of the men who had been shot. Several of the survivors recognized things belonging to their fathers, brothers and acquaintances.

Among those who were shot in the Shaudvitz forest on July 19, 1941 were the following men of Nay-shtot:

1. Paklibak, the town rabbi.
2. Shmuel Lesin, the son of a rabbi in another town.
3. Itzik Zakon, an elderly Jew.
4. David Shvartz, a flax merchant.
5. Yerakhmiel Shvartz, David's son.
6. Beynish Shvartz, David's son.
7. Khatzkl Laski, a furrier.
8. Moyshe Burg, owner of a knitting workshop.
9. Shloyme Blumberg, a photographer.
10. Yankl Leybovitz, a butcher.
11. Ruven Yankelevitz.
12. Shloyme Katz, a merchant.
13. Meir Shnayd, a baker.
14. Yeshayohu Mote Davidson, a coachman.
15. Lipman Volpert.
16. Leyzer Volpert, Lipman's son.
17. Khayem Atshik, owner of an iron business.
18. Leyb Lapin, owner of a textile business.
19. Shloyme Katz, a butcher.
20. Avrom Zaks, a merchant.
21. Feyve Rabinson, a merchant.
22. Yankl Abramovitz, a merchant.
23. Itzik Fayt, a watchmaker.
24. Yankl Sher, a coachman.
25. Moyshe Sher, a glazier.
26. Yizkhok Sher, a glazier.
27. Bine Hirshovitz, a coachman.
28. Pysakh Birfas, a baker.
29. Avrom-Yitskhok Birfas, a student.
30. Yitskhok Kopelovitz, a chemist.
31. Shimon Leyzerovitz, a pharmacist.

32. Fayve Yoselovitz, a farmer.
33. Avrom Elert, a retail merchant.
34. Mendl Elert, a student.
35. Mikhke Elert, a laborer.
36. Eliyohu Glat, owner of a restaurant.
37. Moyshe Zusmanovitz.
38. Shloyme Zusmanovitz.
39. Shepe Goldberg, a retail merchant of manufactured goods.
40. Mote Blumberg, the father of Shloyme the photographer.
41. Avrom Blumberg, Shloyme's brother.
42. Sholem Nosl, a wigmaker.

Two men were selected during the medical examinations by the doctor in Heidekrug. They were not taken to any of the camps, but kept in Heidekrug. The location of their deaths is not known. Their names are:

1. Grishe Grosman, a storekeeper.
2. Nisn Fish, a refugee from Tawrik in Nay-shtot.

The men in the camps received little news about the women, children and a few older men who had remained in the ghetto. One man from Nay-shtot wrote a letter, and sent it by way of a Lithuanian whom he knew. Many of the men received letters by way of the same messenger. In the letters that the women wrote, was the expression: "We are also on the way." Details concerning their death are lacking.

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The surviving men of Nay-shtot found out from peasants that all of the women and children, and the few surviving men, had been shot in a forest near the village of Shaudvitz (Shaudvitsiai).

*Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin Signature May 3, 1987*

#### **Attestations of Henekh Elert, Azriel Glukh and Leyzer Gold.**

We personally reported all of the information concerning the slaughter of the Jews of Nay-shtot (Tawrik), all the dates, names of persons and of geographical locations which are contained in this collective testimony, and we attest thereto with our signatures on each page.

- |                 |           |
|-----------------|-----------|
| 1. Henekh Elert | Signature |
| 2. Azriel Glukh |           |
| 3. Leyzer Gold  |           |

The collective testimony was recorded by:

Engineer L. Koniuchowsky	Signature
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Feldafing bei Muenchen  
June 16, 1948

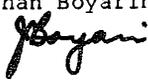
Muenchen XIII  
June 28, 1948

The signature of the Feldafing camp resident Henach Ellert is attested to by the chairman of the camp committee:

E. Reif	Signature
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Feldafing, June 16, 1948

Translated from Yiddish  
by Dr. Jonathan Boyarin  
Signature:  
May 3, 1987



## **THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS OF VAINUTA (VAINUTAS)**

The collective testimony of:

1. Yitskhok Markus, born May 1, 1917 in Vainuta. He lived in Vainuta his entire life, until the outbreak of the war. Completed Hebrew elementary school there. A butcher by- trade. Father's name, Khayem Leyb; mother Gite Darbyan from the town of Drubyan.

2. Yakov-Mendl Nekush, born in Vainuta on June 5, 1924. Completed elementary school there in 1941. Father's name, Leyzer; mother Zelde Mendelson. A butcher by trade. The family had nine children, six boys and three sisters. Yakov Mendl was the fifth child. Zelde died in her last childbirth. Leyzer was left with nine young children, and had a very hard time raising them.

Vainuta is in Tawrik County, 35 kilometers from Tawrik, 10 kilometers from Nay-shtot-Tawrik. The small river Shishe flows through the town. A gravel road connects Vainuta to Nay-shtot and Tawrik. In 1941 the town was located five kilometers from the border between Lithuania and Germany.

### **The Jewish Population and Their Employment**

Exactly 70 Jewish families lived in Vainuta, amidst a much larger number of Lithuanians. The Jewish families all observed the commandment to "be fruitful and multiply," and had many children. The majority of the Jews were occupied in agriculture and owned large plots of land, pastures and gardens. A smaller number were engaged in wholesale and retail trade, and in artisanry. All, including the latter, had small plots of land which helped provide their livelihood.

The life of the Jews in this town was very similar to that of village peasants. All the Jews without exception owned horses and cows. There were Jews who had a large numbers of horses and cattle. For instance, Leyzer Nekush had forty hectares of land which he and his children worked. He also had twelve cows and twenty horses. Leyzer also traded in horses, which were sent to Germany. The Jewish farmers had acquired farm machinery, and worked their land intensively.

The mill, sawmill and electric power plant belonged to a Jew named Avrom Markus and his partner Khayem Aranovitz. Jewish men named Yisroel Javitz and Yosl Leybovitz owned large manufacturing concerns. A small number of the Jews in town were peddlers, who made a poor living. A number of the town's Jews often received support from overseas. In general, however, the economic situation of the Jews was not bad.

### **Relations With Lithuanian Neighbors**

These were not good. Relations grew quite bad and even intensely anti-Semitic every year before Passover. Before Passover the Lithuanians in that region always spoke about the famous blood libel, that Jews slaughter a Christian child and use its blood to make matzoh. When the Lithuanians came from church late at night at Easter time, they would break windowpanes in the Jewish houses. Each year before Passover the town's Jews were afraid of the likelihood of a pogrom. There were a few Jewish peasants in the surrounding villages. They came to town for Passover every year, because they were afraid of staying in the village at Passover.

Before Passover in 1940 a Lithuanian serving girl working for the Khatskelevitz family made up a story that her boss had killed her child.

When the Lithuanians came from church at midnight, the serving girl met them, weeping and shrieking. In front of the entire outraged crowd, she accused the Jews of slaughtering her child for matzoh.

In the middle of the night the wild, agitated mass attacked the Jewish houses, knocking out windowpanes, breaking doors and shutters and beating Jews. A number of them also looted the possessions of several wealthier Jews. The Lithuanian child who had disappeared was found after Passover in the countryside, where his mother had taken him.

After the Red Army arrived in Lithuania, in the summer of 1940, the attitudes of the Lithuanians toward the Jews in town improved superficially. The Jews felt like equal citizens, and took part in economic, political and social life, just like the Lithuanians.

## **Cultural Life in Town**

The town possessed a Yiddish-Hebrew elementary school, a heder, a small Hebrew-Yiddish library and a study house. After completing the elementary school, a small number of the youth studied in the Tawrik Hebrew gymnasium, and several in the yeshiva of Telsh (Telshai), however, the great majority of the young people helped with domestic and farm work in the fields and gardens after finishing school.

The older generation as well as the young people in Vainuta were strictly religious and were organized in several Zionist movements, where they worked actively. A few young people belonged to the Communist party, which was illegal under President Smetonas' rule until the summer of 1940.

## **The Outbreak of the War**

On Sunday, June 22, 1941 at four in the morning, the inhabitants of the town were surprised by the roar of German airplanes. Rifle and machine gun fire could also be heard not far off. A half hour later, the German advance guard entered the town.

A large number of the Jews packed their most necessary possessions into wagongs, drove their horses and cows out to pasture, locked their houses and rode to the homes of friendly peasants in the surrounding villages.

At 8:00 a.m. the same Sunday German military details began to march through the town, hurriedly chasing the retreating Red Army units. The Red militia and activists in the party and youth groups had also left the town at daybreak. Some of them were recognized and shot on the roads by armed Lithuanians, who immediately began to be active in town and in the villages.

On Monday, June 23 the peasants in the villages began to drive the Jews from their farms. The majority of the Jews returned to town the same Monday. The rest also came back to town in the course of the first week of the war. Only a few Jews who had actively taken part in political life during the year of Soviet rule managed to evacuate to the Soviet Union.

When they returned from the villages, the Jews found their homes, barns and storerooms looted. Some of the horses had been taken from the pastures by Germans, and some by local Lithuanians. The cows and poultry were likewise shared by the Germans and the Lithuanians.

Germans settled into the better homes of the Jewish refugees, and Lithuanians settled into the rest. They inherited the furniture and other contents of the houses. The Lithuanians brazenly drove the Jews away from their houses, and would not even let them into the yards. In one day the Lithuanians had become rich. All of the possessions which the Jews had managed to accumulate with hard work over the course of generations fell into the hands of their Lithuanian neighbors.

The Jews who returned from the villages had to settle in the study house or with relatives and friends who had not fled the town. The Jews who came back also moved into the attics, barns and storerooms.

The very first day after the Germans arrived, the Jews began to be harassed and to be subject to decrees. The Jews had to wear a yellow armband, were forbidden to walk on the sidewalk and were only permitted to leave their houses at a certain time each day.

## **The Civilian Administration**

As soon as the Germans arrived in town, armed Lithuanians from town and from the surrounding villages appeared, wearing white armbands. The civil administration was formed by these armed Lithuanians, who supported the Germans.

A man named Antanas Cuzauskas from the village of Krigelishkis, three kilometers from Vainuta, became the head of the town. Until the outbreak of the war he had been in prison in Tawrik for criminal violations. As soon as the Germans entered Tawrik he came to Vainuta. He was also the chief of police and the head of the armed Lithuanians, who called themselves partisans.

Cuzauskas was only the head for a few days. Almost immediately he was replaced by a man named Paulius, who had occupied the same post under President Smetonas. He had been removed from his position by the Soviets. When the Germans arrived, he returned to town. He was from the village of Zhvingiai, ten kilometers from town. Another leader was the farmer Andriushas, from a village three kilometers from town.

The newly created administration began to lord it over Jewish lives and possessions.

### **The Mass Arrests and Regulations**

In the evening of Monday, June 23, 1941, the partisans went to the homes of all the Jewish youth whose names were on a list of those who had been active in political and economic life under the Soviets. They took them to the town prison, where they were tortured and beaten. They were given nothing to eat. After detaining them until the end of the week, they were released.

Several days after the Germans arrived, the Lithuanian administration ordered all the Jews to surrender their radios, money, gold and valuable, as well as hidden weapons to the police. They threatened that they would then search all the houses, and that if they found any of the items which were to be turned over, they would shoot the entire family. The Jews only obeyed the order partially. A number of the Jews hid their valuables, or brought it to the town priest "until after the war." The town priest, Dundulis, gladly agreed to "hide" the Jewish possessions, horses, cows and assorted other valuables "until after the war."

On Sunday, June 24 the partisans ordered that all the male Jews over the age of twelve had to report to the police. When they arrived the men were registered, and the healthier ones were ordered to report for work at the courtyard of the police headquarters every morning at eight.

From there the men were assigned to various tasks burying dead horses, maintaining the roads and the smaller bridges, cleaning the streets, and serving the Germans and Lithuanians in town. The men were taken from the police headquarters to work by partisans, who guarded them while they worked. At midday the men were allowed to go home. At 2:00 p.m. they had to return to the police headquarters, and from there they went back to work.

In the evening the Jews were brought back from all the work sites to the police headquarters and from there they were allowed to go home. The Jews worked like this for precisely four weeks.

### **Harassment and "Performances"**

After the radios and valuables had been taken to the police, a Lithuanian named Petras Linkus, who had worked for Leyzer Nekush years before the war, came to Leyzer's house. He claimed that his former employer had hidden a radio and a revolver. He also reported this to the partisan command. Several partisans took Leyzer out past his house, gave him a revolver and ordered him to shoot himself. Leyzer fell on his knees before them and begged to be let go, because he had not hidden anything. Then they threatened to shoot Leyzer with the revolver. They tortured him in this fashion for three evenings in a row.

In the middle of the third week after the war broke out, while the Jewish men were coming to report for work at the yard of the police headquarters, partisans lined them up in rows and marched them off to an open area near the church. They forced the Jews to stand in a circle around a stage that had been built during the Soviet occupation for meetings and parades. The partisans brought men from their houses as well as the town Rabbi, Reb Yoysef-Yakov Shur, who was over sixty years old, and the kosher slaughterer, Yoysef Shtern. Both of them were brought to the platform with their hands tied behind them. The partisans drove the rabbi onto the stage. At that moment the Nazi flag was raised on a high pole nearby.

The partisans gave the slaughterer a pair of scissors, and forced him to cut off half of the rabbi's beard. s.s. men came to the "performance." They tied the rabbi to a horse with a rope. One of the SS men got onto the horse and began riding around the circle of Jews. The rabbi had to run after the horses. Partisans ran after him and beat the rabbi with whips.

Lithuanian men, women and children stood nearby, and were beside themselves with amusement.

After these tortures the Jews were allowed to go home. The rabbi was quite sick, and had to stay in bed.

### **The First Jewish Victims**

The tailor Hirsh Grinshpan and Leybe Shukhavolsky, the 30-year-old owner of a restaurant, were members of the Communist party. When the war broke out, they fled the town together, and they were chased by the Germans. They returned to town with their families. At the end of the first week of the war, Lithuanian partisans arrested both

of them and took them to prison. That same week Itsik Osherovitz and Moyshe-Mendl were also arrested and taken to prison.

On Sunday, June 29 Yitskhok Markus was walking in the street. Lithuanians threw stones at him. Yitskhok got into an argument with them. The Lithuanians reported to the partisans that he had spoken badly of the Germans and of Hitler. He was arrested, beaten and put in prison.

On Sunday, June 29 all five men were taken to a small forest three kilometers from town, in the direction of the village of Lazdenan. There they were forced to dig a ditch. Itsik Osherevitz and Moyshe Mendl were brought back to prison after digging the ditch. Itsik remained in prison until July 19, 1941, at which time he was taken away and shot at the forest of Shaudvits together with other Jewish men.

Moyshe Mendl managed to get out of prison with the help of the priest, Dundulis.

Hirsh Grinshpan, Yitskhok Markus and Leybe Shukhavolsky were brought to the pit and prepared for shooting. Leybe ran away from the environs of the pit. He was shot at, but not hit. He hid among thick shrubs.

Hirshl and Yitskhok were shot that day. Leybe hid in a potato cellar in a forest for three days and nights. A peasant woman spotted him and reported him to the partisans who arrested him, beat him and let him go home. On July 19, Leybe and other men were taken to a camp near Heidekrug.

Only Lithuanians from town and from the nearby countryside took part in the arrest of the five men and the shooting of the town men. Among them was Antanas Venckus, a shepherd living in town.

In the village of Zhvingiai, ten kilometers from Vainute, lived a family of Jewish farmers. The owner of the farm was named Yitskhok. His son-in-law was caught in Vainuta by partisans and shot near the Jewish cemetery. The son-in-law was a native of the town of Batik (Batakiai).

These murders made a dreadful impression on the Jews in town. There was also a polite form of robbery: partisans and police would go to Jewish houses and "request" that various items be given to them.

### **Everything Sacred Is Destroyed**

At the end of the second or the beginning of the third week of the war the men only worked until midday. When they returned to the police yard in the afternoon, partisans took everyone to the study house. They also brought all the men from their homes to the study house. The men were forced to carry all the benches and lecterns out of the study house.

They had to destroy the holy Ark and pile everything together outside in the yard. Then they were forced to bring the Torah scrolls and all the holy books out of the study house. The Jews also had to bring all the religious books and tefillin that were kept in private houses. The partisans threatened to shoot anyone who was caught keeping religious articles in their homes or hiding them.

Women, grown children and old Jews with beards wept as they brought all the holy books, tefillin and tallioth from their houses and threw them onto one heap.

The German commandant in town directed this "work." The rabbi, Reb Yoysef-Yakov Shur was ordered to light the fire. The rabbi categorically refused, and begged to be shot instead. The tailor Fayvl Markus, who lived near the study house, ignited the fire, weeping bitterly and with his eyes stretched toward Heaven. Tongues of flame covered by thick smoke consumed all the Torah scrolls and books, the tefillin and tallioth. The Jews had to stir the fire from time to time, and see that it burned thoroughly.

Local Lithuanians gathered around the bonfire, celebrating and applauding. In the evening the Jews were allowed to go home.

### **The Slaughter of the Men**

In the afternoon of Saturday, July 19, 1941, all the men who were capable of working had to come to the yard of the police headquarters. From there the men were herded into the study house, and ordered to line up around the walls. Partisans searched everyone's pockets, taking watches, rings and whatever they found worthwhile, on the pretext of searching for weapons.

At three o'clock they were still taking men who did not have to work and who had been at home. The partisans took everyone out of the study house, lined them up in rows of three and drove them through town under heavy guard.

Other partisans forced the women and children to come outside of their homes, or to watch through the window as their husbands, fathers and brothers were taken "to work." Among them were many who were refugees from Tawrik in Vainuta.

A dreadful weeping and shrieking could be heard in all the Jewish homes. The women and children accompanied their near and dear ones on their march to eternity.

One of Yakov-Mendl's brothers shouted to Leyzer: "Dear father, where are they taking you from us?" Tears welled up in the eyes of the men and rolled down their exhausted, desperate faces. When they were far outside of town, they still heard the cries and shouts of their wives and children.

Outside of town the men were ordered to run quickly. The Lithuanians ran after them on all sides and beat them. When they were three kilometers outside of Vainuta on the road leading in the direction of Nay-shtot, not far from the village of Shaudvitz, the men were told to halt in a meadow, where they were lined up in rows of three.

Two light automobiles arrived at the meadow, together with a truck which had a trailer attached. SS men led by Dr Schau from Heidekrug and his adjutants Dembrowsky and Jakshtas came out of the cars.

The doctor read everyone's first and last names from a list. He announced that everyone was being taken to work, and asked who was feeling sick or weak. The vast majority did not understand what was in store for them, and even healthy young people complained that they were sick. Only thirty out of the 120 said that they were healthy.

The other ninety were loaded into the truck and the trailer and taken in the direction of Nay-shtot (Tawrik). The thirty healthy men were taken to Nay-shtot on foot. The Lithuanians returned to Vainuta from the meadow. On the way the SS men beat and tortured the thirty Jews. When they had gone a few kilometers the truck arrived. Shots could be heard in the distance. One SS man asked his comrade: "Are they shooting one by one?" The second one indicated that they weren't supposed to talk about it, and winked to the thirty Jews, who had heard and paid attention. The fate of the ninety became clear to everyone.

The thirty were loaded into the truck, taken to Nay-shtot and locked into a barrack. The truck returned the same Saturday evening. The Jews in the barrack were loaded into the truck, which already contained the possessions of the ninety men who had been shot. The thirty men even recognized the overclothes of their loved ones and friends. Men from Nay-shtot were taken from the barracks on the same truck. When they arrived at the marketplace in Nay-shtot, the men from Nay-shtot were allowed to go home to get food and personal possessions.

That same evening the men of Vainuta and Nay-shtot were taken to Kalvelishkis, the compound of Dr Schau near Heidekrug. In the morning of Monday, July 21 the thirty men were ordered to bring the clothes from the truck to a warehouse at the same barrack.

Among the thirty men were the eyewitness Yakov-Mendl Nekush, his two brothers and friends. When they carried the clothes from the truck, Yakov-Mendl and his brothers recognized their father's clothes. Other men also recognized the belongings of their murdered fathers, brothers and acquaintances. No one doubted any longer that before the thirty men were taken away from the barracks at Nay-shtot, the ninety men who had previously been selected had been shot.

On Monday, July 21, the thirty men from Vainuta were taken to a German doctor in the town of Heidekrug, who gave them injections in their chests. Several men passed out from the injections.

Among the ninety men who were shot, Yakov-Mendl and Yitskhok Markus remember the following:

1. Yosl Leyzerovitz, from Tawrik.
2. Yankl Leyzerovitz, Yosl's son.
3. Fayvl Leyzerovitz, Yosl's nephew.
4. Shrnuel-Yitskhok Kahan, from Tawrik.
5. The rabbi, Rabbi Yoysef Shur.
6. The pharmacist, Yankl Getz.
7. Kirsh, the Jewish doctor in town.
8. Hirshe Rozin, a bookkeeper at the mill.
9. Khayem, a teacher in the elementary school, from Jurbarkas.
10. Avrom Markus, the owner of a mill.

11. Khayem Aranovitz, Avrom's partner in the mill.
12. Yoysef Shtern, the town's kosher slaughterer.
13. Leyzer Nekush, a rich farmer; Yakov-Menal Nekush's father.
14. Yisroel Fogelman, owner of a restaurant.
15. Yakov Meltser, a merchant.
16. Pale Meltsner, a brother of Yakov.
17. Avrom Aranovitz.
18. Zelik Aranovitz.
19. Khayem Aranovitz, the last three were brothers.
20. Yankl Aranovitz, a merchant.
21. Davia Murinik, a butcher, and his brother Yoysef Murinik.
22. Leyzer Murinik, Davia's nephew.
23. Melekh Grinshpan, the tailor's son.
24. Tankhum Aranovitz who had been to Palestine and returned.
25. Yehoshure Kahan, a merchant.
26. Meir Segal, a farmer.
27. Hirshe-Zelik Sokhovolsky, a shoemaker.
28. Yitskhok Osherovitz, a horse dealer and farmer.
29. Velve Kahan, a merchant.
30. Yankl Markus, a farmer.
31. Isser Yoselovitz, a horse dealer.
32. Yitskhok Yoselovitz, Isser's son.
33. Meir Leybovitz, a horse trader.
34. Khayem Oberman, a dealer in manufactured goods.
35. Eliyohu Aranovitz, a glazier; Tankhum's father.
36. Gershon Kulman, a butcher.
37. Moyshe Shlomovitz, a tailor.
38. Two young brothers named Levinson from Tawrik.
39. A father and a son named Balk, from Tawrik.
40. Khayem Margolis from Vainuta.

The eyewitnesses do not remember who else was among the ninety. On that same tragic Saturday, July 19, the sick and weak men were selected in the camps around Heidekrug, taken to the same place as the ninety men from Vainuta and shot. Since the first week of the war, men from the small towns in Tawrik County had been driven into the camps around Heidekrug. All of these men were shot three kilometers from Nay-shtot in the Shaudvitz forest.

That Saturday was the first day of the Jewish month of Av. Those who rounded up the Jewish men in the study house, and took them from there to the meadow three kilometers from town were all Lithuanian partisans and police.

Among the thirty partisans were the following:

1. Antanas Cuzauskas, the leader of the partisans.
2. Kleinas, a farmer in town.
3. Rimkus, a farmer in the vilage of Galne, four kilometers from town.
4. Vituvis, a gymnasium student from the village of Lazdenan.

### **The Ghetto in Vainuta**

After the 120 men were taken from town, the women, the children and the few remaining men were moved into an area near the yard of the study house. They occupied six or seven houses, and also the study house. There were also a few families of refugees from Tawrik in town.

Some 225 people remained in town at the time. It is hard to imagine the crowded conditions in which the unfortunates had to live. The partisans reassured the women that all of the men who had been taken away were living and working in the Memel region. There was no exchange of reliable information between the men and the women in the ghetto. Later on the women began to get letters in various ways. It was even possible for them to send a little bit of money and personal items. They never found out about the murder of the ninety men on Saturday, July 19. The partisans constantly reassured them that the men would soon be brought back to town.

The small ghetto at the synagogue yard was not fenced in. The Lithuanian partisans stood watch. The healthier women were taken to work each day in the priest's fields and on peasants' farms. Smaller groups also worked as servants in the German and Lithuanian offices.

A German named Anton Hofman had worked for Leyzer Nekush for some time before the war. He was from a village near the town of Pagenen in the Memel region. He became a foreman in the camp where Yakov-Mendl worked. On Saturdays the men worked until noon. Every Saturday Anton took letters from the Vainuta men to their families in the ghetto. He also brought letters and a considerable amount of money to the men. Each time he carried out such a mission, he received a gold watch from the women in the ghetto. From the letters which the men received from the ghetto, they found out what was going on there.

The SS men from the Heidekrug camps often drove to Vainuta, took young, pretty girls from the ghetto and raped them. They even took some of the girls into the camp and raped them. For example, an SS man took away Yakov-Mendl's sister Feygele Nekush, aged 15, and brought her to the camp. The SS man had worked for the Nekush family for years before the war. After raping Feygele, the German scoundrel did her a favor by bringing her letter to Yakov-Mendl and his brothers. The SS man worked in a different camp. After raping the girls, they used to bring them back into the ghetto. The Lithuanian partisans and police in town used to do the same thing.

In the letters which the men received from the women, they used to complain about this. They also wrote that conditions were very bad for them, and that they suffered from hunger. The men wrote them comforting letters, saying that they would survive everything and they would see each other again. They did not write anything about the ninety men who had been shot.

On the Saturday before Rosh Hashanah, Anton Hofman took letters from the Vainuta men and went to town to deliver them to the women in the ghetto. He returned the next day, Sunday, bringing all the letters back. He reported that on Saturday all the women, children, elderly and sick had been taken out of town under heavy guard. Before they were taken out of the ghetto, partisans reassured them that they were being taken to their husbands.

All the Jews were taken four or five kilometers from Vainuta along the road leading toward Shilale, near or in the Gerainiu forest and they were all shot. It was not possible at the time to obtain more precise details about the tragic executions of the women and children.

*Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin Signature May 4, 1987*

#### **Attestations of Yitskhok Markus and Yakov-Mendl.**

I, Yitskhok Markus, personally related all the information concerning the slaughter of the Jews of Vainuta, and I attest thereto with my own signature on every page.

Eyewitness Yitskhok Markus Signature

The testimony was recorded by: Engineer L Koniuchowsky  
Weilheim June 14, 1948

The signature of Mr. Isak Markus is attested to by the chairman of the Jewish committee of Weilheim.  
Chairman (Mosche Moritz) Signature July 4, 1948

*Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin Signature May 4, 1987*

I, Yakov-Mendl, personally experienced and have related to the best of my capacity to Engineer Leib Koniuchowsky everything contained in this testimony concerning the slaughter of the Jews of Vainuta, and I attest thereto with my signature on each page.

Eyewitness Yakov-Mendl Nekush Signature

The testimony was recorded by: Engineer L. Koniuchowsky Signature  
Graefelfing bei Muenchen November 11, 1948.

The signature of the Graefelfing residents Jankow Mendel Nekusz is attested to by the vice-chairman of the Jewish Committee of Graefelfing.  
(Vice-chairman Fiszal Krakowski) Signature Graefelfing, June 11, 1948.

*Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin Signature May 4, 1987*

## **THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS OF VERZHAN (VEIVIRZHENAI)**

The testimony of the brothers Shimen and Yoysef Shlomovitz. Both of them were born and lived in the town of Verzhan. Shimen was born on April 18, 1923. He completed the Hebrew elementary school in Verzhan and studied in the commercial school of Memel (Klaipeda) for some time.

Yoysef was born on the 15th of December, 1924. He completed the Hebrew elementary school, studied in the Lithuanian elementary school for two years, then one year in the yeshiva of Riteve (Rietavas), a half year in the yeshiva of Kelm (Kelme), and two years in the Telz (Telshai) yeshiva. Father's name, Leybe Shlomovitz; mother, Blume Gershinovitz. Leybe had three daughters: Golde, aged 15; Taybele, aged 13 and Sheynele, aged 11.

Verzhan is in Kretinga County, 30 kilometers from Kretinga and 28 kilometers from Memel. The river Veivirzhe flows through the town. A gravel road connects the town with Riteve, Gardzh (Gargzdai) and Shvekshe.

### **The Jewish Population; Their Economic and Cultural Life**

Some fifty Jewish families lived in the town, among a large number of Lithuanians. Most of the Jewish population was engaged in trade. There was a smaller number of artisans and a few farmers.

The main source of income for the Jews in town was their trade with Memel. The Jews bought various produce from peasants, including fruits and vegetables, and delivered it to Memel. Leybe Shlomovitz had a center for purchasing flax in town. The flax was delivered to Memel. After Memel was annexed by Hitler's Germany in the year 1939, the trade in flax shifted to Shavl. Trade in general declined on account of the annexation, and the economic situation of the Jews grew worse.

The larger manufacturing concerns in town belonged to the Jewish businessmen Avrom-Shaye Rutznik, Leybe Borukhovitz and Shmukler. A Jew named Mendl Falkovisky had a large iron business. In general the economic situation of the Jews of Verzhan was not bad until Memel was severed from Lithuania.

There were a Hebrew elementary school, a Hebrew-Yiddish library, and a study house in town. After completing elementary school, some of the Jewish youth studied in the Lithuanian gymnasium in the nearby town of Shvekshe. A few studied in yeshivas in the larger cities nearby. The Jews in town were strictly religious and involved in Zionist movements.

### **Relations Between the Local Lithuanians and the Jews in Town**

These were not bad until the Memel region was annexed to East Prussia. Then there appeared anti-Semitic agitation, which drew its inspiration from the other side of the border, from Hitler's Germany.

The "Verslas" organization successfully aroused the population against the Jews and printed leaflets in which they urged the Lithuanians to buy "from their own."

More than once Jewish store windows were broken, and their signs were smeared with pitch. The police never caught or found those guilty.

In the summer of 1939 a Lithuanian in town tried to set fire to the center of town, where Jews lived. Yoysef Shlomovitz spotted him, and let all the Jews know. The Lithuanian himself lived in the home of a Jew. He was arrested, but nothing was done to him.

After the Red Army arrived in Lithuania in the summer of 1940, the Lithuanians began to "get along well" with the Jews. A large number of the Jewish youth took part in the economic, cultural and social life of the town. The chief commissar in town was a Jewish boy from Shvekshe, Yisroel Gesl. He organized all the young people for various projects. The economic worries disappeared.

### **The Outbreak of the War**

On Saturday night, June 21, 1941 the Jews in town sensed a nervous unease among the Red Army and Soviet responsables in town. The Red Army built fortifications all along the border with Hitler Germany. A large number of the Jews in town were occupied at that task. They were the first to sense the tense situation along the border.

At 5 a.m. on Sunday, June 22, 1941, the Germans began to bombard Verzhan with artillery fire. Several artillery shells fell in town and caused a great panic. One shell fell in the home of the Jewish farmer Leybe Kahan. Gitl Khononovitz, a young girl who lived next door, had just gone in to Leybe's house, and she was torn to pieces.

The courtyard belonging to the Jew Yisroel Belogorsky in the village of Trepkalis, about two kilometers from town, was burnt down in the bombardment. The Russians blew up all the bridges over the stream near the town.

At ten in the morning a small battle for the town began. At noon the Germans entered Verzhan. All of the Jews had fled the town to hide in the countryside. Only a few remained in town. On Monday, June 23, the Jews who had fled returned to town, where they found their houses and establishments untouched. Two Lithuanian farmers in town, the brothers Cirtautas, had robbed a Jewish family named Ayznberg. The Jew reported this to the German commandant, who took the two Lithuanians out of their house and shot them. The Jew got his things back.

### **The Civilian Administration Pogrom and Vandalism of Religious Property**

The Lithuanian farmer Petras Cirtautas became the chief of the town on Tuesday, June 24. A Lithuanian veterinarian from a different place became the head of the armed Lithuanian partisans. At the end of the first week of the war a large number of Lithuanians from town and from the countryside joined the police and the partisans. Among them were these men from town:

1. Ushelis, a tailor (?).
2. Ignas Gershminauskas, a stone cutter.
3. Petras Pakalniskis and his brother; both gymnasium students.

The police and partisans began forcing Jewish men to do various jobs each day, both for the Germans and partisans in town, and along the roads.

In the morning of Friday, June 27, 1941 the Jews found the study house ransacked. The Torah scrolls lay unrolled on fences and on the roadsides. On the floor of the study house torn books were strewn around. The windows had been knocked out.

During the day that same Friday the Lithuanian administration ordered that a list of all the Jews in town be presented. They demanded the list in order to be able to distribute ration cards. A girl named Libe Sheftelovitz went from house to house, registering everyone. She gave the list to the chief in town.

### **The Jewish Men Are Taken to a Camp**

On Saturday, June 28 the partisans drove all the men out of their houses. They had to clean the streets until the evening, and then they were allowed home. Before they had a chance to rest, German SS men arrived in town. One of them shot a rocket as a signal. Right away the SS men drove all the Jewish men out of their houses and rounded them up in the marketplace, where two trucks with trailers stood waiting.

The custodian of the synagogue, Ore Ayzikovitz, tried to hide, and was shot on the spot. The children and old men were allowed to go home. The synagogue secretary, Yankev Magid, and Yitskhok-Dovid Shlomovitz were allowed to get off the truck and go home, because of their advanced age. The rabbi, Rabbi Yoysef Graz, who was over 70 years old, was taken away on the truck. The men didn't manage to take along any personal belongings or food from home. Some of the women managed with difficulty to bring packages of food and personal items to their fathers, brothers and husbands in the truck.

At 7:00 p.m. that evening, the men from Verzhan were taken in the trucks to the synagogue courtyard in the town of Shvekshe. Near the study house, the men saw Torah scrolls and religious books burning. The men were ordered to get down from the trucks and stand around the fire.

Partisans from Shvekshe guarded the Jews. Near the walls of the study house the Jews noticed shovels and spades. None of them doubted that they all were about to be shot. The rabbi began leading everyone in viduy, the confession before death.

The SS men ordered the Jews to take their watches and golden rings off, and pile them together in a spot near the fire. They also demanded that the men surrender their money and gold. The head of the SS men, Dr Schau from Heidekrug, was present. His adjutants cut off the rabbi's beard. They tied up the hair and stuck it onto the doctor's taxi. They drove the men into the trucks and drove in the direction of Heidekrug.



## **THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS IN JONISHKIS**

Testimony of Efroyim Veinpres, born in Jonishkis April 24, 1927. There he graduated from the Lithuanian elementary school. He was a butcher by trade. Efroyim lived in Jonishkis his entire life, until the day the Jews of the town were annihilated.

### **Geographic Situation, Population, Occupations and Cultural Life of the Jews**

Jonishkis is located thirteen kilometers northwest of the town of Podbrodz, thirteen kilometers from Dubingiai and 26 kilometers from Malat on Lake Driria. A gravel road connects the town with Malat. Jonishkis was located about two kilometers away from the former Polish-Lithuanian border until the year 1939, and was considered part of Utena County.

After Poland collapsed in the fall of 1939 and after the Vilnius region was assigned to Lithuania, Jonishkis was assigned to Svencionis County. Until the war between Germany and the Soviet Union broke out, more than ninety Jews lived in Jonishkis among a smaller number of Lithuanians.

The Jews were occupied in retail trade and agriculture. Almost all of the Jews in town possessed substantial parcels of land and cattle. Many of them received support from their relatives overseas. The Jews in town did not live badly from an economic standpoint. They always got along well with their Lithuanian neighbors.

The town had a Yiddish elementary school, a few heders, a small Hebrew-Yiddish library and a study house. The Jewish youth in town were oriented toward nationalist Zionism. Some of the young people studied in the gymnasium in Ukmerge and Utena. The older generation were deeply religious.

### **The outbreak of War: The Civilian Administration is set Up**

On Sunday morning, June 22, 1941 the news spread about the outbreak of war between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. The Jews, closely tied to their homes and farms, had no desire to evacuate. Several of the wealthier Jews whose goods had been nationalized under the Soviets calmed the rest, saying that it would be possible to live under the Germans as well, and that no good awaited them in the Soviet Union.

On Monday, June 23, 1941 there was no panic among the Jews in town. They continued their normal daily work.

On Tuesday, June 24, 1941 the Soviet authorities abandoned the town together with the Red Militia. Retreating Red Army units rode through the town. On Wednesday, June 25, 1941 the town and surrounding region began to feel the effects of the activities of armed Lithuanians, who shot the retreating Red soldiers in the back. The same thing happened the next day, Thursday, June 26, 1941.

On Friday, June 27, 1941 a German reconnaissance man drove up on a motorcycle and went to see the priest Mazheika, who later turned out to be the chief of the Lithuanian partisans. Immediately afterward armed Lithuanians appeared in town wearing white armbands. They joyfully greeted the arriving German army units.

The Germans didn't stay in town. They concentrated in the surrounding villages and began clearing out the remaining Red Army soldiers who remained in the nearby forests and put up a resistance.

On Saturday, June 28, 1941 the civilian administration was established in Jonishkis, consisting of armed Lithuanians who arrived from surrounding towns and villages. Lithuanians from town had little to do with the newly-established administration. They kept to themselves throughout the entire period of the German occupation.

The mayor of the town was a Lithuanian who had come from somewhere else. The chief of police in town was a Lithuanian named Zhelenas from a village not far from the town of Zarasai. During Smetona's rule he had also been the chief of police. After the Soviets arrived in the summer of 1940 he escaped from town, and he returned after the Germans entered Jonishkis. The heart and brains of the newly-arrived partisans was the town priest Mazheika. At his home there were regular consultations of the police and other town leaders. All of the anti-Jewish decrees in town, along with the plan for the total slaughter of the Jews, were worked out at the priest's house.

## **The First Victim and the Seven Who Were Shot**

On Saturday, June 28, 1941 the 21-year-old Shimon Strenelsky, a cousin of Efroyim's, was shot by the partisans in the middle of the street near the town hall. During the year of Soviet rule Shimen had been the Secretary of the Communist youth in town. His burial place remains unknown.

On Monday, June 30, 1941 at 10:00 or 11:00 p.m., partisans took seven men out of Jewish houses. Before they took the men out of the houses they promised the men that they would all be able to return immediately after taking care of a certain task. But the men did not return the next day. Women and children ran to the partisans' headquarters, which was located at the Lithuanian elementary school. There they demanded to be told where their husbands and children were. The partisans again promised that all the men were living and working.

A few days later the Jews in town learned that the seven men who had been taken away had been shot that same Monday evening in a the forest of Armenu, at a polygon, about six kilometers from Jonishkis in the direction of Podbrodz. Peasant acquaintances reported to Jews in town about this.

Efroyim Veinpres states that the first Jews taken from Podbrodz were also shot in that forest.

The seven Jews who were shot on Monday evening, June 30, 1941 were:

1. Yehoshue Veinpres, Efroyim's father.
2. Hirsh Berlin, a butcher aged 26 or 27, and his father.
3. Leybe Berlin, a butcher aged 60.
4. Yosl Zaleschansky, an employee, aged about 26.
5. Khatzke Reiz, a butcher, aged 29.
6. Yisroel Reiz, Khatzke's cousin, a coachman aged about 26.
7. Mendl Osherovitz, a storekeeper, aged about 30.

Those who took part in taking the seven Jews out of their homes and later shooting them included:

1. Zajantskauskas, Efroyim's fellow student at the Lithuanian elementary school, a farmer from the Cuprinkiai compound, two kilometers from town.
2. Ratskelevitsiai, two brothers, both farmers, from the village of Zhugedai, six kilometers from town.
3. Jonas Baltaduonis, a farmer, one kilometer from town.
4. Nitsuinas, a farmer who had lived near the town prison for several years. He was the guard at the prison under the Germans. He was short and dark.

Efroyim doesn't remember any others. Partisans from other places took part as well.

## **Decrees against the Jews in Town**

When the war broke out, the Jews in town did not escape, instead they continued with their daily activities. After the Germans arrived a few able-bodied Jews were taken to do various tasks. Immediately there was a strict order for the Jews to bring their radios, bicycles, gold, silver, hardware and other valuables to the partisans' headquarters.

At the same time the Jews were strictly forbidden to have any dealings with Lithuanians or to leave the town for the countryside. The Jews had to mark themselves with two Stars of David, on the back and front of their clothing.

Roughly a week after the Germans arrived, skirmishes with Red soldiers hiding in the forests were still taking place. Several Lithuanians who were collaborating with the Germans were shot by the retreating Red Army soldiers. One partisan was found shot near Lake Orina. The partisans blamed the Jews for this.

## **The Mass Slaughter**

On Tuesday, July 8, 1941, at 10:00 a.m., partisans from the surrounding area rode into town. An order was immediately issued for all the Jews to stay in their houses.

The Jew Moyshe Epshteyn, a father of seven children, was harnessed to a wagon. Then they climbed onto the wagon and ordered him to pull them around in the street. Meanwhile the partisans beat Moyshe with whips and cat-o-nine-tails.

At the same time those partisans who had earlier settled in town surrounded all the Jews houses and drove out all the men, forcing them to take along shovels and spades. All the men were taken away near the church under

heavy guard.

A short time later the leader of the partisans from out of town, Petronis came to the Jews. He indicated to them where to dig two pits, and how long and wide they should be. The deathly terrified Jews were strictly forbidden to speak amongst themselves. They murderously beat with sticks and rifle butts anyone who tried to utter a word. Among the Jews who dug the pits was the eyewitness Efroyim Veinpres. The guards at the pit consisted of drunken partisans who laughed and came up with witticisms at the Jews' expense.

Eventually they grew tired of standing on the Jews' necks, and they began amusing themselves. Efroyim seized a chance to run away from the pits. He managed to run into a nearby woods without being spotted. Efroyim ran all night in the direction of New Sventsionis. The next morning, July 9, 1941 he arrived at the home of his uncle Yisroel Portnoy in New Sventsionis, deadly tired and frightened.

On Friday, July 11, 1941 Efroyim learned from peasants that all the Jews of Jonishkis had been shot. A few weeks later Efroyim personally spoke to a peasant woman from Jonishkis named Tarakovitsiene. She told Efroyim that all the Jews of Jonishkis had been taken out of their homes on Tuesday and shot next to the church. The mass graves of the men, women, children, elderly and sick Jews of Jonishkis, who had been shot on Tuesday, July 8, 1941, are located about 200 meters from the town church, near the priest's woods.

Details about the execution at the pits are not available to Efroyim Veinpres. But he does know that the main leader of the Lithuanians who shot the Jews was a certain Petronis from the small town of Labonas. His father had been a major in the Lithuanian army under Smetonas.

### **Attestation of Efroyim Veinpres**

All of the information, facts, dates, names of persons and of geographical locations which are indicated in this testimony concerning the slaughter of the Jews of Jonishkis was personally related by me, Efroyim Veinpres, and I attest thereto with my signature on each and every page.

Signature: (Efroyim Veinpres)

The testimony was recorded by Engineer L Koniuchowsky Feldafing, bei Starnberg April 24, 1948

The signature of the Feldafing camp resident Efroyim Veinpres is attested to by the chairman of the camp committee

Chairman of camp committee: E Reif Feldafing, April 24, 1948

*Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin New York New York February 7, 1994*

## **THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS IN THE LITHUANIAN TOWN OF ANYKSHTSIAI**

Reported by Golde Aron (now Yed), born in Anykshtsiai on April 25, 1918. Completed four grades of the Real Gymnasium in Ukmerge. A seamstress by trade. Her father's name was Leyzer, from the town of Rimshe. Until the war she lived in Anykshtsiai.

Anykshtsiai is located 35 kilometers from Ukmerge, and the same distance from Utena. The town lies on the Shventoji River. Anykshtsiai is a narrow-gauge railroad stop. Near Anykshtsiai there are large forests and spas, which have been celebrated by Lithuanian poets.

About 500 Jewish families lived in town. There were two elementary schools, one Yiddish and one Hebrew. There was also a "Yavne" elementary school. There were two libraries, one Yiddish and one Hebrew. The town had two large study houses, one old and one new; a Hasidic synagogue; and two more smaller prayer rooms.

The Jews did a little bit of trade. Most of them were artisans. They worked at producing woollen boots and children's shoes in workshops and small factories. Most of the Jewish women in Anykshtsiai were knitters. Anykshtsiai was a town where all the young people worked.

The majority of the young people belonged to leftist movements. During the period of fascist rule in Lithuania Anykshtsiai produced the highest percentage of revolutionaries. Several belonged to the illegal Communist party or other leftist parties.

### **The outbreak of War Between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union**

When the war began the Jews of Anykshtsiai didn't rush to escape from the town, because the town leaders and Communist Party officials assured them that everyone could safely keep going to work. The leading circles threatened severe punishment for anyone who didn't go to work and caused a panic.

The Jews stayed calmly in town until Tuesday afternoon. On Tuesday afternoon those responsible for the Party and other institutions began fleeing the town. But the Jews did not manage to evacuate to the Soviet Union. All of the young people left the town and fled, but very few of them managed to make it to the Soviet Union. The rest were caught by the Germans and forced to return to Anykshtsiai.

The Germans entered Anykshtsiai on Wednesday, June 25, 1941. They didn't stay in town, but continued to harry the retreating Red Army. All power in town fell into the hands of the armed Lithuanians from town and from the countryside. Jews from other towns and cities, mostly from Kaunas, gathered in Anykshtsiai at that time.

As soon as the Lithuanian murderers took power in town, they began openly to rob Jewish possessions. They robbed by day and by night, whenever they felt like doing so. The Jews immediately locked themselves into their houses and avoided meeting up with the Lithuanian murderers in the street. The Jews who had escaped to Anykshtsiai from Kaunas and other towns stayed with the local Jews at first.

Later the Kaunas Jews were confined in the old and new study houses. There was a large square in the middle of the town. In that square the old and the new synagogue and both prayer houses were located next to each other, while the Hasidic synagogue was across the road.

Until Thursday, June 26, 1941 all the Jews in town, along with thousands of Jews from Kaunas and other towns, stayed in Jewish homes.

### **The Terrible Bloody Inquisition; Mass Graves in the Synagogue Yard**

On Thursday morning the Lithuanian murderers drove all the Jews out of their houses. They didn't allow the Jews to take anything along. All the Jews, men, women and children, were placed into the synagogues, study houses and prayer rooms, even pregnant women, women with nursing children and the elderly. The Jews had to lock the doors and hand the keys over to the murderers.

The leader of the Lithuanian murderers was a certain German from town who had evacuated from Klaipeda and settled in Anykshtsiai. He wore a German SS uniform and a leather cap. The Jews referred to this sadist by the nickname, "the leather cap."

The Jews were tormented in the synagogues and prayer rooms in various sadistic ways, and there were shootings day and night. The synagogues and prayer rooms were transformed into inquisition halls or slaughterhouses. The floors and the surrounding yard were spattered with blood from the men who had been beaten to death or shot. The courtyard was transformed into a cemetery. Every day Jewish men who had been shot or beaten to death were brought there. The weeping and screaming of the women and children could be heard far outside of town.

The cursed Lithuanian murderers kept sticks, whips, thick beams, military shovels and knives handy. They used all of these to torture and murder the Jewish men in the synagogues and prayer rooms.

That same Thursday evening the older women, nursing women and women with children up to the age of ten, were allowed to go home. All the rest were kept in the slaughter halls, in the synagogues and prayer rooms for two weeks longer.

Two weeks later all the Jews who had come from other towns and cities (mostly from Kaunas), were released and allowed to return to their homes.

Among the most gruesomely sadistic murders was the shooting of 36 young men in the synagogue yard. They were forced to dig a pit right there, and they were shot there. Golde Yed saw to it after the war that a fence be put up around the mass grave.

After the Jews from other places had left town, all the Jews of Anykshtsiai were freed as well, and everyone was allowed to go home. When they got home they found nothing left in their houses. Everything had been robbed and demolished. But after they returned home, the Lithuanian murderers began to torment the Jews in other ways.

### **The Ghetto; Further Murder and Inquisitions; The Total Slaughter**

At the same time the murderers killed Yitzkhok Vinikov, the wealthiest manufacturer in town, along with his wife. Yitzkhok Vinikov and his wife were shot in their home.

A short time later all the Jews were removed from their houses and moved into a ghetto in the forest, where people used to have summer homes. As the peasants from town relate, a large percentage of the Jews in town were taken away to Utena. The summer homes were about two kilometers from town. There was a fence around the ghetto. The guards were Lithuanians. Golde Yed does not know how the Jews were treated in the ghetto. The Jews were kept in the summer homes in the ghetto for about a month. All at once everyone, women, children and men, were taken away on foot and in automobiles three kilometers from town to the Hare Hills, and there everyone was shot.

One person who ran away from the shootings was Leybele Garber, aged 15. Leybele Garber hid at the home of a peasant for a long time. There he was arrested, and taken to prison in Utena. From Utena prison he was taken to Jonava. Leybele Garber was brought to the Kaunas ghetto together with the 208 surviving Jews in Jonava.

Golde Yed, who was in the Kaunas ghetto at the time, spoke to Leybele Garber about her home town of Anykshtsiai. Leybele Garber told her: When the Jewish men, women and children of Anykshtsiai were taken out of the ghetto, he was in an automobile with his mother, sisters and brothers. On the way he wanted to jump out of the auto. His mother talked him out of it, advising him to trust in God and wait for a miracle. When they arrived at the Hare Hills, Leybele found hundreds of Jewish men, women and children not far from the pits which had been dug. The Jews had been herded together into one spot. They were heavily guarded by Lithuanian murderers armed with rifles, automatics and hand grenades.

Leybele immediately escaped. The murderers immediately began shooting at him. But they didn't hit him, and he managed to escape. After running through the brush and forests near Anykshtsiai, he allowed himself to rest. He heard shooting at the Hare Hills, along with wild screams and shouts of women and children. Leybele Garber told Golde Yed all of these details about the pits when he visited her home in the Kaunas ghetto.

Leybele also reported that before the Jews had been taken away to the ghetto, armed Lithuanians robbed the possessions of the town doctor, Noyekh Ginsburg. Immediately afterward Noyekh's brother Leyzer Ginsburg and his wife, as well as Noyekh's mother, were shot at their home.

Noyekh Ginsburg begged the murderers to let him live, reminding them how competently and devotedly he had cared for all the Lithuanians in town. The murderers tricked him out of his fortune, consisting of gold and other valuables. Then they shot him in his home. Armed Lithuanians from town, including Mishkinys, took part in this crime.

His mother was an illegal midwife. Noyekh Ginsburg's wife was pregnant at that time. The Lithuanian murderers forcefully stripped all her clothing and drove her through the streets of the town. Residents of the town related that while the murderers drove her through the streets they beat and tormented her. After this "show" the murderers killed her in a gruesome fashion.

### **Attestation of Golde Yed**

Everything written on four pages about the slaughter of the Jews in Anykshtsiai was personally related to L Koniuchowsky by me, Golde Yed, born in Anykshtsiai April 25, 1918. Each and every page is signed by me and stamped with the seal of the cultural bureau of the Jewish camp in Landsberg. All of the facts, names of persons as well as of geographic locations were personally related by me, and I attest thereto with my signature.

Golde Yed (Signature)

The report was recorded by L Koniuchowsky Landsberg, December 17, 1946

Certified by the technical director of the Landsberg camp cultural bureau,  
Hirsh Milshteyn (Signature) December 17, 1946

*Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin New York, New York, February 7, 1994*

### **The inquisitions and slaughter of the Jews in the synagogues and study houses in the small town of Anykshtsiai**

1. Eyewitness Zalmen Bregman, born in Kaunas on May 1, 1902. His father's name was Dovid-Yitzkhok, a house painter by trade. Lived in Kaunas until the war.

2. Eyewitness Galya Bregman, born in Vilnius on March 12, 1906. Lived in Kaunas until the war.  
(See also the testimony of Motl Kuritsky - LK)

Immediately after the war began Zalmen Bregman, his wife, his wife's mother, his wife's sister and her child, escaped from Kaunas. Several families rode in a wagon. On the morning of Monday, June 23, 1941 they left Kaunas. Tens of thousands of Jews fled Kaunas at that time, on foot and in wagons. The highway between Kaunas and Ukmerge was jammed.

Immediately after passing the bridge at Jonava Bregman's brother-in-law was wounded. He got caught in the chains of a tank. Zalmen's older son Avrom, aged fourteen, was seriously wounded by a second tank. Another sister-in-law was badly wounded in the leg, also by a tank. None of the wounded received any first aid from the Red Army medics.

The German military quickly advanced. The Red Army didn't even have any time to take care of wounded Red soldiers. One tank after another rolled by, shattering everything that crossed their path.

When they arrived in Ukmerge, they immediately discovered that all the Jews of Ukmerge had fled. This was on Monday evening, June 23. Ukmerge was repeatedly bombarded by German aviation. German airplanes flew over the town in waves, hitting it with machine gun fire and bombs. The Red Army didn't let anyone stay in town. Bregman and his close associates continued further along the road toward Dvinsk. There they rested. When they had got close to Utena, the German aviation once again began heavily bombarding the retreating motorized Red Army units.

The highway was filled with the corpses of civilians and Red soldiers. Ruined heavy artillery, tanks and wagons were strewn on the roads. The highway was blocked. The Red Army forced all the civilians to abandon the highway. The wagons had to leave the highway, and were forced to take the secondary road toward the town of Anykshtsiai.

## **The German Army Takes Anykshtsiai; The Lithuanians Are Enthusiastic**

On arriving in Anykshtsiai on Wednesday, June 25, 1941, they found many of the homes in town empty. All of the young people had fled the town. An old Jewish woman who had stayed behind to guard the house and possessions came out of one of the houses. The old, solitary woman invited Bregman's family into her house. All three wounded were immediately brought to the town doctor, Noyekh Ginsburg. All three received medical assistance from the doctor.

There was no Red militia in town. Control of the town gradually passed into the hands of armed Lithuanians who were friendly toward the Germans.

The Germans entered the town at 4:00 a.m. Crowds of Lithuanians from town greeted the Germans with bread, flowers and wine. Music was played. The population celebrated. The Jews who were in town at the time clearly understood their situation, and immediately locked themselves into their homes. No one dare leave their houses and go into the street. The Jews in town were terribly frightened. They immediately realized that they had as much to fear from the Lithuanians as from the Germans. All the Jews stayed inside looking out at the street, which resounded with the celebrations of the Lithuanians and the noise and confusion caused by the German army units which raced through town, taking along with them bouquets of flowers given to them by the Lithuanian population.

The Lithuanians were left in control of the town. Bregman's family sat there all night. No one took their clothes off or went to sleep. Everyone trembled at the least sound. The Jews understood their situation, and were prepared for anything.

## **A Holiday for the Lithuanian Population; Thousands of Discouraged Jews Interned in the Synagogues and Study Houses**

At 5:00 a.m. Thursday there was banging on the doors and windows of the Jewish houses. Everyone woke up and understood it had begun. There were shouts and orders: "Juden raus!" There were shouts in Lithuanian as well: "Zhydai isheikyte!" The murderers broke into the houses like wild beasts, and beat the Jews with their rifle butts, with whips and sticks, driving them out of their houses. Jews in other streets had already been driven outside earlier.

The early morning sun shined on the helpless Jews, their eyes full of tears. Galya tried to take something out of her suitcase, and the murderers beat her and drove her out of the house. Everyone was placed into long rows, and taken to the synagogues and study rooms under heavy guard. On the way the murderers shot above the Jews' heads and threatened to shoot them. They joked and mocked the terrified Jews. They pointed to the hand grenades they were carrying, and cheerfully explained to the Jews that the grenades would soon blow up the synagogues and prayer rooms. But first they would drive the Jews inside.

Thus the murderers "joked," as they continued to shoot over the heads of the terrified Jews. Children became separated from their parents; husbands didn't know where their wives and children were, and it was impossible to leave the line to look for them. They were forbidden to talk amongst themselves, nor even to weep or scream. The murderers beat, mocked and kicked the Jews for the least infraction.

They arrived at the synagogue yard. The only ones who took part in the torture were Lithuanians armed head to toe, just as if they were going to the front. When they arrived at the yard they beat the Jews with sticks, shovels, whips and their rifle butts, and drove them into the synagogues and prayer rooms. All of the women, children and men rushed through the doors. A second group of murderers stood in a double row near the doors, striking the crowd of Jews on the head with poles, sticks and shovels. The pushing and shouting at the doors was frightful.

There were screams and weeping of women and children, and the weeping and screaming of wounded Jews, their skulls cracked, their arms and ribs broken. Meanwhile the murderers doubled up with laughter. Spades, sticks and poles constantly fell on the human mass, who struggled and pushed to get inside more quickly and thus to rid themselves temporarily of the murderers.

When the Jews had gotten inside, everyone stood pressed close to each other. More than half of them were wounded and bloodied. They bound each other's bleeding wounds. Those whose arms, legs or ribs had been broken stood pale and moaning.

In the opinion of Zalmen Bregman and his wife Galya, more than 5,000 Jews were packed into the synagogues and prayer rooms on that Thursday, June 26, 1941. All day Jews were brought in from nearby towns forests and fields, and all day more Jews entered the synagogues.

## **The Slaughter of the Jews in the New Synagogue; Mass Graves in the Synagogue Yard**

It happened that same Thursday evening. All of the elderly women, nursing women and women with children under the age of ten were released from the synagogues and prayer rooms by the murderers, and allowed to go home. Galya's sister Rivke and her child, and Galya's mother had been released and returned to town.

On Thursday night the Jews had to lie down on the floor. No one was allowed to stand up or sit. Zalmen and his family had a spot near the door of the synagogue. There they arranged themselves and lay down. At 11:30 p.m. there was banging on the windows of the synagogue, and shouts of "Juden raus!" The same thing was shouted in Lithuanian. The murderers drove all the Jews, men and women, out of the new synagogue.

The women and children were separated from the men. The murderers ordered the men to run in a certain direction. Everyone heard the murderers' order: "Begte!" (Run!) As the men began to run, the Lithuanian murderers began shooting as well. The women and children saw everything and began to scream and weep. The weeping, screaming and moaning of wounded and dying Jews was heard. A mixture of screams of terror, weeping and continued shooting resounded through the dark nocturnal stillness, all around the town.

The men who managed to escape to the little streets nearby hid out there, while others returned to the synagogue. On Friday morning the Jews who had escaped were recaptured, and the murderers brutally beat the men again with sticks, poles and short military shovels when they were returned to the synagogue. The men who had been rounded up all needed to have their wounds bandaged.

No-one returned with his entire body intact. On Friday morning a young boy from Kaunas was thrown in with Galya in the synagogue. With both hands he held onto his cracked scalp. Galya bandaged him up. Blood ran through his fingers onto his arms. The boy told her that he had been with the men when they were ordered to run. Some men were left wounded or dead after the shootings. He had run away to a nearby house. The Lithuanian murderer had found him there and beaten him over the head, on the sides and on his limbs with a small military shovel. Galya Bregman bandaged his cracked head, but she had no time to bandage his battered sides or bruises, and there was nothing she could do.

Before daylight on Friday six young, healthy men were taken out of the synagogue. The six men had to gather the corpses, dig graves at the synagogue yard and bury them there.

Galya, her husband and their children were in the old study house at that time. They were lying near the exit door. The Lithuanian murderers brought a boy to the door, and forced him to dig a grave near the door. After the grave was dug two men who had been shot were buried in it. Galya even saw the two corpses being placed into the grave. The two were placed head to toe, so that they would fit in the grave. The two men who had been shot were buried at the threshold of the old synagogue.

That same morning, Friday, June 27, the rest were all buried in one or two mass graves in the synagogue yard.

All day Friday the Lithuanian murderers looked for the men who had managed to escape death. All those who had been seized in the houses in town were brought back to the synagogue half dead. At night the murderers ordered the men to run, and shot at them. When they brought in men whom they had seized, they beat them murderously for "trying to escape."

All day long on Saturday the 28th, dozens of Jewish men were taken on stretchers to the town doctor, Noyekh Ginsburg.

Every day brought new methods of sadistic torture. Every night had its own particular character for the helpless Jews in the slaughter institution the world knew nothing about, the first in Lithuania and perhaps the first in all of Europe.

At night the Lithuanian bandits used to enter the synagogues and study houses and kick their boots into the Jews' sides and bellies. No one dared stand up, because then they would be beaten to death. All of the murderers had sticks, poles and shovels. They used the shovels to crack the skulls of the Jewish men. They broke the arms and legs of living people into pieces.

Some of the Lithuanians used a flashlight to find young, attractive women and girls, and took them away by force for entire nights. The women would return pale, and fall onto the floor half alive and half dead. More than once the Jews were woken up in the middle of the night, counted and forced to do heavy calisthenics. More than one Jew was left bloody or lame from these "exercises."

After this sort of torment the murderers brought kegs of water and the Jews themselves had to pour it out over the floor on which their Jewish brothers lay. But the Jews didn't dare leave their spots, or even sit up. They had to lie in the water and blood on the floor. This was the character of the daily and nightly executions in the small Lithuanian town of Anykshtsiai.

Every day new victims were buried. In a short time the synagogue yard was "decorated" with individual and mass graves.

### **The Brutal Inquisitor with the "Leather Cap"**

The master of death at that time was "the leather cap." He was a German from the Klaipeda region who had come to Anykshtsiai when Klaipeda fell into the hands of the Germans. The German-Lithuanian beat the Jews in such a manner that at least one of them was always killed. He would beat them with a large, heavy beam. The Jews had to lie on the ground. He would lift the heavy beam and drop it. Every time the beam dropped it killed someone or split a forehead, an arm or a leg. The screams of the helpless Jews could be heard through the entire town. Blood flowed on the floor. The murderer and his comrades mercilessly continued their work.

The eyewitness Zalmen Bregman was once in a situation where he could have died in this fashion. The "white cap" wanted to strike

Several days after the "quiet night" there was a directive stating that all of the Jews from Kaunas who wanted to go to Kaunas had to fill out request forms and questionnaires. Most of the people from Kaunas did so.

Bregman, his wife and children all returned to Kaunas. The family lived through all of the suffering and pain of the Jews in the Kaunas ghetto, and later on they survived a concentration camp in Germany.

### **Attestation of Zalmen and Galya Bregman**

Everything written on six pages about the torture and mass shootings in the synagogues and prayer rooms in Anykshtsiai was related word for word to L. Koniuchowsky by us, Zalmen Bregman and his wife. All of the facts, dates and locations were provided by us, and we attest thereto with our signature on each and every page. Every page is also stamped with the seal of the cultural bureau in the Landsberg Jewish camp.

Signatures:                      Zalmen Bregman                      Galya Bregman

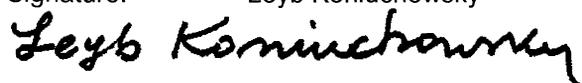
Report written by: L. Koniuchowsky Landsberg, December 17, 1946

Certified by the technical director of the Landsberg camp cultural bureau,  
Hirsh Milshteyn                      (Signature) December 17, 1946

*Translated from Yiddish by Dr Nathan Boyarin, New York, February 10, 1994*

NOTE: Testimony collected by Leyb Koniuchowsky concerning the slaughter of the Jews only in the county of Kaunas has been translated into English by Jonathon Boyarin. I was in the Kaunas ghetto from the beginning to the end. Professional historians have written and perhaps translated materials about the matter of the Kaunas ghetto.

Signature:                      Leyb Koniuchowsky



## THE SLAUGHTER OF JEWS IN THE LITHUANIAN TOWNS OF KRUONIS, PAKUONIS AND DARSHUNISHKIS

Related by Yosef Gar, born in Kaunas in the year 1905. A journalist by profession. Education: graduated from the teachers seminary in Kaunas. Lived in Kaunas until the war broke out on June 22, 1941. Father's name Dovid. For the entire time up until the war, Yosef's mother Esther lived in Kruonis with Yosef's brother Yakov.

Kruonis is located forty kilometers from Kaunas, on the highway between Alytus and Kaunas. It is twenty kilometers from Kaishiadorys. Kruonis belonged to Kaunas county. About a hundred families lived in town, including twenty Jewish families. Most of the Jews in town were occupied as retail merchants, and a few of them were in agriculture.

The town had a synagogue and a small library. Most of the Jewish youth were Zionists. The attitude of the Lithuanian population toward the Jews was relatively good.

Throughout the period of the German occupation, Yosef Gar lived in the Kaunas ghetto, experiencing all the suffering of the Jews in the ghetto together with his wife and child. When the few surviving Jews of Kaunas were evacuated to Germany, Gar and his wife Rokhel jumped out of a fast-moving railroad car, on July 12, 1944. They wandered through the fields and forests for eighteen days. They were liberated on August 1, 1944 by the Red Army near Pilvishkiai.

On their way to Kaunas after the liberation, the following August, Gar and his wife stopped in at the town of Kruonis, where his mother and brother had died. Gar found one surviving Jewish family named Volpe in town, consisting of the mother Khane, her fourteen-year-old daughter Sheyne, Khane's sister and the sister's little boy. 'The Jewish family, as well as peasant friends, told Gar as follows about the slaughter of Jews in the town.

The Germans entered the town on Tuesday or Wednesday, June 25, 1941. The Jewish families lived in their own homes until the first days of July 1941. No excesses were committed. Nor did the Germans take any particular anti-Jewish measures. Indicative of this was the fact that Gar's sister in law Bayle Gar worked for a time as a translator for the Germans.

### **All the Jews in Town Interned in a Barn**

On the seventh or eighth of July 1941 all the Jews, men, women and children, were arrested. They were kept in a barn guarded by Lithuanian partisans. The houses and farms were abandoned. Several days later the women and children were freed. Only the men were kept interned in the barn. On July 13, 1941 Gar and his wife passed by Kruonis on the way to Kaunas. When he entered the town, he met a Jewish woman named Rokhel Lurya (born Rosenberg) from Kruonis, who told Gar that all the men had been arrested. She told him that women and children had been arrested along with the men, but they had been released several days previously.

On the way to his mother's house, he and his wife were arrested by two Lithuanian partisans next to the house. One of them was the leader of the partisan bandits in town, Arlauskas, a son of a peasant outside of town, and the other was Malinauskas, a Lithuanian from town.

They forbade him from staying in town, because his papers stated that he and his wife were permitted to go to Kaunas. Finally Gar managed to convince them to let him spend the night in the barn together with the arrested men. But before opening the gate of the barn to let him in, the partisans changed their minds, and Gar and his wife were taken away to the highway leading to Kaunas.

### **Murders of Jewish Families; The Ghetto in Darshunishkis; Ten Young Women Murdered**

Later on the men were also released from the barn. After the men were released, the Jewish family Perlshteyn from town (the husband Lipe, the wife Khane, daughters Khaye and Rokhel, the sons Alter and Hirshe, all grown men) were murdered one night. The murder was committed by a Lithuanian from town, the farmer Juozas Bileishys, with whom the victims had disputes over land before the war.

At the same time two young Jewish men, brothers named Moyshe and Yakov Rosenberg, were also murdered. After these murders most of the Jews left the town, and settled at the homes of peasant friends near Kruonis. At the end of July or the beginning of August there was a decree stating that all the Jews had to come to town in order

to move to the nearby town of Darshunishkis, where a ghetto was supposed to be prepared for the Jews.

The Jews of Kruonis, Darshunishkis and Pakuonis were herded together into the Darshunishkis ghetto. Since some of the Jews of Kruonis worked plots of land, they would go from Darshunishkis to Kruonis to work in the fields. Some of the rest of the Jewish men were taken to work on the highways and roads around Kruonis.

One day a group of ten Jewish women and girls walked from Darshunishkis to Kruonis to bring food for the men. About one kilometer from Kruonis all the women and girls were shot. The sisters Khane and Khaye Strazh were among the women who were shot.

A young Jewish man named Faynberg from Darshunishkis, who was sick during the time the men were being taken to work, was taken to work together with the women. He was murdered as well. Ite Rosenberg from Kruonis was also among the ten. The rest of the women were from Darshunishkis.

In Darshunishkis the Jews were badly mistreated, with respect to food, at work and so forth.

On August 15, 1941, on the Catholic holiday of Zholynes, when Christians from the surrounding area gathered at the church in Darshunishkis, the Jewish men were taken away from Darshunishkis in trucks. No one said where they were taking the men. The alibi was that they were being taken to work. Among the men taken from Darshunishkis was a Jew from Kruonis named Dovid Tkatsh, who was elderly and had a limp. He asked the partisans why he was being taken to work, even though he was incapable. The partisans answered: "You'll only make coffee for the ones who work" (Khane Volpe relates this).

According to later information, the men were taken somewhere near Kaunas and shot there. It was said that the men were supposed to have been shot in the Kamenduliu forest, not far from the Pazhaisliai monastery. It was also suspected that they were shot at the Seventh Fort near Kaunas.

The only ones left in Darshunishkis were the women, children and elderly. At the beginning of September 1941 the Jews learned that something was going to happen to them in the near future.

On September 3, 1941 all the Jews in the Darshunishkis ghetto were shot at the Jewish cemetery. The sick and the elderly were thrown into the pits alive. (reported by Khane Volpe).

A short time before the executions the partisans severely tortured the Jews to get them to say where they had hidden their gold and other valuables. Thus, for example, the Kruonis Jew Shloyme Akhitovits and his wife were murderously beaten. The woman was brought from Darshunishkis to Kruonis and beaten terribly there so that she would show them where they had buried the gold (told by Khane Volpe).

Gar's sister-in-law, Beyle Gar, escaped from Darshunishkis together with her child. The partisans found out, chased her, caught her, and after beating her murderously, brought her to the execution. She too was tortured in an attempt to get her to show where she had hidden valuables.

Shortly before the execution, the family Volpe from Kruonis found out what was in store for the Jews in Darshunishkis, and a certain peasant kept them in hiding throughout the entire German occupation. The husband Moyshe Volpe stayed with one Christian, while his wife and child, her sister and the sister's boy stayed with another Christian. The women and children survived. Moyshe Volpe was shot by a peasant from a village near Kruonis with whom he had secured valuables, when he went to the man's house to ask for something. The peasant's name is Sadonis.

### **The Death of the Pakuonis Jews in Darshunishkis; The Tragic Accounting**

About ten Jewish families lived there. The Jews of Pakuonis, who had been brought to the Darshunishkis ghetto as well, shared the fate of the Jews of Darshunishkis and Kruonis.

A Jew from Pakuonis named Frenkelshteyn, who had a business selling instruments for dental technicians in Kaunas, was in Pakuonis when the occupation began. The Lithuanian police chief of Pakuonis, with whom Frenkelshteyn had good connections, warned him one day that an action was being prepared against the Jews, and advised him to escape from town. Frenkelshteyn hid for a certain time in the region of Pakuonis, and then he made his way into the Kaunas ghetto, where he died during the liquidation in July 1944.

Frenkelshteyn told Gar in the ghetto that the Jews of Pakuonis had been taken to Darshunishkis, where they were killed together with the Jews of Darshunishkis and Kruonis.

During the military operations in Lithuania in the year 1944, the town of Darshunishkis was completely destroyed in the bombing. The front stopped at the Nieman. The Soviet army, which massed at the river, was heavily attacked by the German army. The town was destroyed during these battles.

Later the local Christians unanimously insisted that it was a punishment from heaven, because innocent Jews had been tortured and killed in Darshunishkis. The town of Kruonis was almost totally undamaged. The town of Pakuonis was also badly damaged during the military operations.

### **Attestation of Yosef Gar**

Everything written about the slaughter of the Jews in the towns of Kruonis, Pakuonis and Darshunishkis (in the Darshunishkis ghetto) was related by me, Yosef Gar, to Leyb Koniuchowsky, and I attest thereto with my signature on each and every page.

Eyewitness Yosef Gar

(Signature)

The report was written while lying in the Munich hospital by L Koniuchowsky  
Munich hospital May 18, 1947

The signature of Mr Yosef Gar is attested to by Engineer Y Shuster (Signature)  
General Secretary of the Union of Lithuanian Jews Munich, May 18, 1947

*Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin, New York, February 27, 1994*

## THE SLAUGHTER OF JEWS IN THE SMALL TOWN OF RUMSHISHKES

Reported by Khane Shuster (born Bobrovsky), born in Rumshishkes on February 10, 1910. Her father's name was Yakov-Elye. She lived in Rumshishkes with her parents until 1932. She is a bookkeeper by profession. She graduated from the Hebrew gymnasium in Kaunas. When the war broke out she was in Kaunas with her husband Avrom Shuster.

Rumshishkes is located on the banks of the Nieman, twenty-one kilometers from Kaunas. The highway between Kaunas and Vilnius leads through the town. The town belonged to Kaunas County.

Between 40 and 45 Jewish families lived in town until the war broke out on June 22, 1941. Nearly all the Jews in town were retail merchants, along with a small number of artisans.

The majority of the young Jews had already left the small, dull town before the war and settled in Kaunas.

Relations between the Lithuanian population and their Jewish neighbors were friendly until the Red Army arrived in Lithuania in 1940.

The Jews met the Lithuanians not only in the market and on the street, but also at social events and concerts which they attended together. The Lithuanian intelligentsia were friendly with the Jewish youth who used to come from Kaunas on vacation.

Much ill feeling was expressed by the Lithuanians toward the Jews in town during the period of Soviet rule in 1940-1941. The head of the Red militia in town was a young Jewish man from Kaunas, who had married a girl from town named Vays. For several years in a row previously the head of Smetona's police had been a Lithuanian from Kaunas. Only the chief had been replaced. The policemen, all locals, couldn't get over the fact that a Jew had taken the place of their chief, and was giving them orders and acting like their boss.

The Lithuanians in town regarded the Russians as occupiers. But the Jewish youth in town felt fortunate. They became equal citizens, and they threw themselves body and soul into economic, social and political activities. This too caused animosity between the Lithuanians and the Jews.

### **Outbreak of War, June 22, 1941; Robberies, Revenge and Shooting of Jews: Power Passes Into the Hands of the Lithuanians**

The Jews in town did not manage to escape to the Soviet Union, because no one believed that the German Fascist army would advance rapidly.

Jews from Kaunas, Shants, Petrashuniai and other locations gathered in the town. They were all caught by the German army on various roads, and on the way back they were left stuck in the town of Rumshishkes.

Mrs Shuster, her husband and their child Yosef were in Kaunas when the war broke out, and they constantly sought news about the fate of their parents in Rumshishkes. Two weeks after the war began a farmer in town named Antanas Bernauskas gave them a letter from their parents. No particular news was contained in the letter. (This peasant lived three kilometers from town in the village of Uzhtakiai.)

1) The peasant then volunteered the information that the Jewish pharmacist Yermiyahu Rubenshteyn had been sent by the Lithuanian bandits to the municipal offices. There they demanded that he hand over all the money he had earned while he was the pharmacist in town. Before the war Rubinshteyn was well known and well liked not only among the Jews, but also among the Lithuanian population in town and in the countryside. The Lithuanian murderers tortured the pharmacist. But he didn't have anything to give them, and he was shot together with his wife Asna and their three children, Yosef (aged 9), Khananye (aged 9, Yosef's twin) and Shloymele (aged 2).

2) The carpenter in town Motl Kagan (aged 40?) and his son (aged 18) were shot at the same time, without investigation or trial. During the period of Soviet rule, the father and his son were active members in the Communist Party and communist Youth.

3) The same peasant also related that the religious Jew, Matz, had also been shot at the same time, with no reason.

The peasant reported that the Jews in town were in a very bad situation. They found themselves in constant fear of dying, and were afraid to go out into the street. All of the power had passed into the hands of the partisans (partisans opposing the Red Army - LK), and they were able to do whatever they wanted to the Jews. The leader of the bandits was a former inspector at the municipal offices under the Soviets.

The peasant Antanas Berkauskas came a second time with another letter from Khane's parents, about four weeks after the war began. This letter didn't contain any special news about the situation of the Jews in town, either. The peasant reported that the situation of the Jews was getting worse day by day, because by now the Jews didn't even have anything to eat.

The Lithuanian armed bandits had forbidden all commerce with Jews. Many Jewish families packed up their better things and sent it to peasants they knew in the villages for safekeeping. He, too, had been given several bags of soft items by Khane's father for safekeeping. The Jews who had cows gave them to peasant acquaintances. Khane's father sent one cow to the peasant Sadauskas in the village of Ushtakas. Khane did not see the peasant again.

### **Sheyne Tsodikov**

Before the war a young woman from Rumshishkes named Sheyne Tsodikov lived in Kaunas. When the war broke out she escaped to her parents in Rumshishkes. Until the middle of August 1941 she was with her parents. Her fiance stayed in Kaunas, and she returned from Rumshishkes to be with him. Khane met him before the Kaunas ghetto was sealed (before August 15, 1941).

Sheyne Tsodikov told Khane at that time: The Jewish pharmacist and his family were shot because they didn't want to hand over gold. At the same time Motl Kagan and his son, and Yakov Matz were also shot. She corroborated everything that the peasant had already told Khane, and added that Mrs Tsile Grinblat was among the first victims in town.

The Lithuanian murderers had taken her husband to Pravinishkis to work. She cursed the murderers and said that a time would come when she would take revenge on them for this. The murderers had shot her at the entrance to her house for this.

Sheyne also related at that time that shortly after the beginning of the war the Lithuanian bandits had gathered all the able-bodied men together and took them to work in peat bogs at Pravinishkis, five kilometers from Rumshishkes. A work camp was set up at Pravinishkis. There all the Jewish men the Lithuanian bandits had encountered trying to escape to the Soviet Union had been herded together. The conditions in the men's camp were terrible. The women from Rumshishkes brought their fathers and sons food. The able-bodied women also had to go to work every day. The women were forced to pull weeds out of the street, wash laundry and so forth.

Sheyne Tsodikov also related that every day peasants from the villages used to come ask the Jews for clothing, tools and the like. There were also days when long rows of peasant acquaintances used to stand at every house, "requesting" that the Jews with whom they were friendly give them something, or "lend" them something for "a certain time." In no case did a Jew ever refuse the request of a peasant acquaintance. The Jews gradually parted with the possessions they had worked hard to assemble.

Everything they handed over was drenched in tears. The Jews still had no idea what was in store for them. The Lithuanians had a very good sense of smell; the sense of a hyena spotting a victim. These Lithuanian friends with whom the Jews had lived for hundreds of years, co-operating in every aspect of life, didn't think for a second of saving the Jews or at least comforting them. They came to inherit the Jews' possessions while the Jews were still alive.

Khavive Yonenson had married Yitzkhok Hofnheym in Shiauliai. When the war broke out she escaped to Rumshishkes with her husband and child. Khavive had a good karakul lamb coat and other valuables. As soon as she came to Rumshishkes, the chief of police (a Lithuanian) came to their house and took the karakul coat "for his wife."

Sheyne Tsodikov told Khane later, when they were both in the Kaunas ghetto, that the Jews in town were terrified. After the men were taken to Pravinishkis, some of the sick men remained in town. Among them was Khane's father Yakov-Elye, her uncle Tsvi Shafer, Yitzkhok Hofnheym (from Shantz), and others. The men stayed in hiding at their homes. Every Jewish family lived on its own. They didn't go to visit each other. There was great sorrow among the small Jewish population.

## **Tragic Situation of the Jews in the Ghetto; The Total Slaughter**

The situation of the Jews in town grew even worse when the Lithuanian bandits drove the Jewish women, children and few remaining men into two homes belonging to two Jewish brothers named Yosef and Tsemakh Katz. The women were crowded together in the houses like herring in a barrel. A guard was posted to make sure that the Jews didn't leave the houses, and that they wouldn't be able to come into contact with the Lithuanian population of the town. Nor were the women allowed to bring food to their husbands in Praviniskis any longer.

The Jews were herded into the ghetto in the second half of the month of August. The Jews were kept in the ghetto consisting of the two houses for a short time, and then they were herded into one house of a Jewish businessman named Yekhezkel-Leyb Langman. The guard around the house was reinforced.

The Jews suffered from hunger at the time. The Jews weren't in this house for a very long time. One Sunday, when the religious Christians had already left church, a truck drove up to the house. The bandits herded women and children into the truck, and took them away in the direction of Kaunas.

One half kilometer from town, beyond the hill located next to the highway, a pit had already been dug, and there the women and children were shot. In this manner all the women, children and the few remaining men were shot that Sunday. The mass grave is located next to Lion Mountain, on the right side of the highway leading from Rumshishkes to Kaunas, after going over the stream a half kilometer from town.

Peasants from town told Khane Shuster about the ghetto and the slaughter of the women, children and a few men after the war, when Khane herself went to the mass grave. A peasant woman from town named Roste Abramavitz as well as other peasant acquaintances told Khane that when the Jews had been taken from town to be shot, one woman began going into labor. The murderers didn't stop, and they took the mother and the newborn child to the pit, where they were shot. The maiden name of the mother was Rokhel Langman.

All the peasants watched the Jews being taken out of town. They relate that one boy named Katz didn't want to get into the truck, and with tears in his eyes he pleaded with his mother, "Mama, I don't want to die, I'm afraid!" The murderers placed him in the truck by force.

When she was in Rumshishkes after the war, Khane could not find out exactly when the women and children had been shot. Everyone assured her that it was on a Sunday. Khane does not know what happened to the men who were taken away to Praviniskis. Khane lost her parents and her uncle Tsvi Shafer in Rumshishkes. They all lie murdered in mass graves half a kilometer from town.

The town was completely burned down in 1944, when the Germans retreated. There is no trace left of the Jewish life that once was. The town died forever, together with the Jews.

On November 17, 1943 Khane, her husband Avrom Shuster and their child Yosef left the Kaunas ghetto. They stayed with various peasants they knew, first in the suburb of Murava (for three months) and then near Aukshtadvaris. They risked death dozens of times, living through hunger, cold, and terror.

On July 12, 1944 they were liberated by the Red Army.

### **Attestation of Khane Shuster**

Everything recorded by Leib Koniuchowsky on five pages concerning the slaughter of the Jews in Rumshishkes was personally related by me, Khane Shuster, and I attest thereto with my signature on each and every page.

Eyewitness:                      Khane Shuster    (Signature)

The report was written while lying in hospital by Leib Koniuchowsky  
Munich Hospital                      May 3, 1947

I attest to the signature of Mrs Khane Shuster. Engineer Shuster  
General Secretary of the Union of Lithuanian Jews in the American Zone in Germany  
May 3, 1947

*Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin New York                      February 27, 1994*

## THE SLAUGHTER OF JEWS IN THE LITHUANIAN TOWNS OF ZAPYSHKIS AND KRUKIAI

Four brothers named Volk are the eyewitnesses.

1. Shakhne, born in 1905, a glazier by trade.
2. Yerakhmiel, born in 1908, a locksmith by trade.
3. Yitzkhok, born in 1914, a butcher by trade.
4. Nosn, born in 1915, a carpenter by trade.

All four brothers were born in the town of Zapyshkis, and graduated elementary school. From 1936 on all four lived in Kaunas. Their parents, one brother and a sister remained in town. Another sister named Khane had moved to Kaunas with her husband earlier.

Their father's name was Yankl (Yakov). Their mother's name was Libe (born Per in Zapyshkis). Their brother's name was Yisroel and their sister was Khaye-Leye. Khane Brener and her husband Yisroel were in Kaunas.

The town of Zapyshkis is located not more than 17 kilometers from Kaunas, on the left bank of the Nieman. Until the war broke out eighteen Jewish families lived there. Most of the Jews in town got used to doing local forest work and manual labor. A small number were retail merchants. There were a few forest merchants and some farmers and artisans. The life of the Jews in town was very similar to the life of the peasants in the countryside. Almost every family had a garden and a cow, and some had horses as well.

In the summer a number of the Jews earned their livings from vacationers who came there to rest. The economic life in town was not bad. The Jews got along well with the Lithuanians in town.

The town had a Hebrew elementary school, a library, a study house and a sports club. Those young people who continued their studies went to the Hebrew gymnasiums in Kaunas.

The majority of the Jewish youth had leftist tendencies. Some of them belonged to Zionist movements. Travel to and from Kaunas in the summertime was frequent and comfortable, by means of steamers which went between Kaunas and Jurbarkas.

### **After the Outbreak of War, June 22, 1941**

When the war broke out Yankl Volk was in a hospital in Kaunas. Together with his four sons and their families, he left Kaunas in a horse and wagon on the second day of the war. In Jonava they learned that the Red Army had forbidden wagons on the highway, so that the roadways wouldn't be congested and the retreat of the Red Army would not be blocked.

After Jonava was taken, Germans and partisans began harassing the few Jews in town. Volk's entire family left Jonava, and arrived in Slobodka, near Kaunas, without incident. On the way partisans shot at Jews, and they killed one man from Jonava. The Volks buried that Jew.

When they arrived in Slobodka the four brothers and their families settled into their looted dwellings. Their father Yankl was taken to his wife and children in Zapyshkis. The four brothers kept in touch with their parents through the peasant Jeronimas from Zapyshkis. More than once they received packages of food. It was entirely calm in town at that time, and their mother wrote to them that they should come to town, because it would be easier for them financially.

The first days after the war broke out, and immediately after the arrival of the German army in town (on Wednesday, June 25), all power fell into the hands of the smith Jonas Podezhis from town, along with his partisans. Later the civilian administration was set up in town.

The new mayor of town was a German from town, a smith with the last name Herman. The chief of police in town was a Lithuanian from Zapyshkis named Jonas Vaidilys, a journalist.

The partisans used to take the Jewish coachmen of Zapyshkis to do forced labor. The brothers Volk met the Zapyshkis coachmen Noyekh Knebl and Motl Zilberman in Kaunas at that time. They carried the mail and delivered Christian arrestees from Zapyshkis to Kaunas. The Volk brothers found out from them about the situation in their town.

Young men and women were taken out of their houses seven kilometers from town, to the village of Azere, every morning. The Jews were forced to march on foot both ways. The work consisted of digging peat. At work they were guarded by partisans, who tormented and bullied the Jews.

Once partisans from town took the town rabbi, Rabbi Yitzkhok Grin, out of his house, cut his beard off and marched him down the street, beating him with a stick. The Jews of Zapyshkis readily found out about the murders and atrocities committed against Jews by partisans in Kaunas. The terrible news from Kaunas caused dreadful panic in town.

Anti-Jewish decrees also began to appear in the town of Zapyshkis. The worst was when Jews were forbidden to leave their homes for 24 hours in a row.

There were no particular cases of robbery or vengeance in town at first.

Once a coachman performing the forced labor told the Volk brothers that their old father had grown mortally ill. Yitzkhok set off for Zapyshkis that same day. When he arrived in his house in Zapyshkis, Yitzkhok found his father poisoned.

Yankl could not stand the terrible news from Kaunas about the Jews there. The inhumanly hard work imposed on the town's youth working in the peat bogs, and the general behavior of Lithuanian acquaintances toward Jews, broke the old man's health and hope, and he poisoned himself by drinking a bottle of essence of vinegar.

Their mother related that Yankl had constantly argued and insisted that the Lithuanian degenerates were getting ready to annihilate all the Jews in Lithuania and inherit their possessions, with the consent and blessing of the Germans.

The police chief forbade the arrangement of a funeral for Yankl. He was taken to the cemetery and buried by one man, Dovid Brener. Yankl's wife came up by the banks of the Nieman to visit her husband's grave at the cemetery.

Yisroel Volk had gone to work at the peat bogs. When he came home to the house in the evening, his father was gone. This was Friday morning, the 23rd day of Tammuz.

### **Forty Jews Tricked and Then Shot**

On Saturday, the 24th of Tammuz, partisans came to Zapyshkis from other locations. All day they partied and got drunk. They were getting ready for some sort of "important work." The priest in town found out about this. He went to see them at the Lithuanian elementary school, and warned them not to spill innocent Jewish blood. The partisan Litenevicius, who informed the priest, also gave a speech to his comrades, begging them not to spill innocent Jewish blood. But the Jews didn't know about this.

That same Saturday evening the partisan Antanas Vaidilis went through the Jewish houses and called out from a list the names of Jews who had to come to the study house for an economic consultation concerning arrangements in town. More than forty Jews were gathered at the study house.

When the Jews arrived at the study house they saw heavily armed partisans nearby. The partisans didn't let them leave. All the Jews were herded into the study house. None of the Jews understood anything yet. Everyone waited impatiently.

Into the study house came several partisans, who ordered the Jews to "Sing Communist songs!" ("Bainuoti Komunistu dainas").

The Jews didn't sing, and they weren't afraid, because they saw all of their partisan companions from town, people with whom they had grown up and been friendly.

There came a command for all the Jews to leave the synagogue and line up in rows of four. The partisans promised the Jews that they were being taken to work at a compound called Reingvildishkis, fourteen kilometers from Kaunas. The Jews were taken in the direction of Kaunas. The more than forty Jews were accompanied by about twenty partisans, armed with automatics. Among the twenty were some from the town of Pavilkiai.

When they were one kilometer away from Zapyshkis, all the Jews were taken off the road to the left, near the Jewish cemetery, where they were ordered to line up. Suddenly there was a command: "Ugnis!" (fire!). A hail of bullets riddled the bodies of the Jews, who fell like grass before the scythe.

Yitzkhok Volk, his brother Yisroel and their mother Libe were all present in the study house and during the shooting. Yitzkhok Volk, hearing the command to shoot, immediately fell to the ground. The dead and wounded fell next to him and on top of him. He heard terrible moans and sighs of his dying and wounded comrades.

After the shooting was finished, Jonas Poderis ordered a guard to be left behind, "because it's possible that someone is still alive," he explained to his comrades. A certain partisan named Bartkus personally "checked" some of those who had been shot. He finished off with a revolver anyone who was still alive. Yitzkhok, however, was covered over with dead bodies, and Bartkus didn't check him. All the partisans then left. This was on Saturday evening, at 10:00 p.m., the 24th day of the month of Tammuz.

Yitzkhok crawled out from among the heap of corpses, and went to his brothers in Kaunas. Yitzkhok's clothes were soaked in blood. His right pants leg had a bullet hole.

Among those shot were:

1. Libe and her son Yisroel Volk (the mother and brother of the four Volk brothers).
2. Esther Zilberman.
3. Motl Zilberman and his sons Ruven, Avrom, Efroyimke, Binyominke and a daughter named Sheynele (aged 9).
4. Volf Zilberman.
5. Menukhe Knebl (born Greiman).
6. Noyakh Knebl, his wife Khane and three sons, Yerakhmiel, Yisroel-Aba and Avrom.
7. Yakov, Yudl, Peysekh and Tevke Gruman, four brothers.
8. Three brothers named Khayem-Leyzer, Fayvl and Yitzkhok Shulman.
9. Motl Galinsky.
10. Yitzkhok Aranovitz and his son Shimke.
11. Nokhke Faynberg.
12. Fayvl Abramovitz and his son Moyshke.
13. Two brothers named Avrom and Moyshe Knebl, both shoemakers in town.
14. Their uncle Ruven Knebl, also a shoemaker.
15. Tevye Faynberg and his son Khayem.
16. The slaughterer and his son.

Among the partisans who shot more than forty Jews that Saturday, Yitzkhok Volk remembers:

1. The smith from Zapyshkis, the leader of the partisans, Jonas Poderis.
2. The farmer from the village of Davoglio, two kilometers from town, Jiskevitsius.
3. Three brothers from the village of Papishkis, three or four kilometers from town, farmers named Visgaitisai.
4. A farmer from the village of Klonishkis, three kilometers from town, named Bartkus.
5. A peasant from the village of Klonishkis, three kilometers from town, named Poderis.
6. A worker and partisan named Brashaitis.

Yitzkhok Volk does not remember any others. The next day, Sunday, all of the murdered Jews were buried in a single mass grave near the Jewish cemetery. Among the murdered were eight or ten minors, still almost children, and four women.

Immediately after the more than forty Jews were shot there was an order for all of the Jews to settle in a single neighborhood, in the study house and in the Jewish elementary school nearby. The peasants immediately inherited the cattle from the helpless Jews.

The Jews were only allowed to take small packages out of their houses. There was a heavy guard around the study house and elementary school. There was a barbed-wire fence around the area. No-one was allowed to leave the area. No-one was taken to work. A week after the Jews were settled in that area, more than 200 Jews were brought in from the town of Krukiai.

## **Krukiai**

Krukiai is located on the left side of the Nieman, ten kilometers from Veliuona, across from the town of Serezhius.

Immediately after the ghetto was set up, 800 rubles were requisitioned from every Jew (per capita). The Jews who had been brought from Krukiai helped to raise this sum. The partisans kept the Jews in the ghetto for exactly one month. They told the Jews in town that the men who had been taken away were working, and that the rest of the Jews in town would be joining them soon.

Around the time of the High Holidays the partisans took all the Jews out of the study house and the elementary school. Everyone; men, women and children was taken on foot to the bank of the Nieman, to Lagankupes near the Kaletova summer resort, and there everyone was shot. The men, women and children who were shot were thrown into a single grave and buried.

Peasants later reported that when the Jews were shot terrible, heartrending screams of women and children could be heard all around. A few Germans were present at the shooting. They did not shoot, but they observed everything.

The murderers distributed amongst themselves the better clothing of the murdered Jews. They sold the rest at auction. The last one thrown into the pit was Avrom Solsky, who was still alive.

Later the Volk brothers were in the Kaunas ghetto, where they worked at the airport. Peasants from Zapyshkis very often were sent there for forced labor, and they would meet with the Volk brothers. They told everything. Among the peasants who reported what had happened, the Volks remember the following peasants from town: Jurgis Litinevicius, Jerashius and others.

In the spring of 1942, when the Nieman flooded the entire area surrounding Zapyshkis, it soaked the mass grave and the corpses floated away. Thus the last trace and memorial to the Jews of Zapyshkis and Krukiiai was washed away.

The Volk brothers add that among the infamous Jew shooters were also:

1. Three brothers, farmers from the village of Papishkis named Visgaitisai.
2. The town baker, the infamous murderer Brashaitis.

Yerakhmiel Volk lost his son Gideon, aged six, during the children's action in Kaunas. Yitzkhok's daughter Khanele, not yet one year old, was placed in the Lithuanian orphanage called Lapshelis. She lived there for three months, and died. Khane Brener (the Volks' sister), her husband and children were slaughtered during the major action in Kaunas.

The four Volk brothers and their wives were evacuated to Stutthof, Germany, together with all the other Jews in the Kaunas ghetto. There they were separated. All four brothers survived the concentration camps and were liberated by the American Army.

The four women survived the local Gehennoms in the region of Stutthof, and then were liberated by the Red Army.

After the war the four Volk brothers did not go to Lithuania. The Volk brothers received letters from Lithuania, telling them that the mass grave of the men had been washed away from the surface of the earth, and that it was impossible to determine the correct place where a memorial should be placed.

The letters were sent by their wives from Lithuania.

#### **Attestations of Shakhne, Yerakhmiel, Yitzkhok and Nosn Volk.**

Everything written on six pages about the slaughter of the Jews of the towns of Zapyshkis and Krukiiai was related by us to Leib Koniuchowsky, and we attest thereto with our signature on each and every page.

- |                    |             |
|--------------------|-------------|
| 1. Shakhne Volk    | (Signature) |
| 2. Yerakhmiel Volk | (Signature) |
| 3. Yitzkhok Volk   | (Signature) |
| 4. Nosn Volk       | (Signature) |

The report was written by Engineer Leib Koniuchowsky  
Feldafing (Bavaria) August 1, 1947

The signatures of the Feldafing camp residents, the four brothers are attested to by the chairman of the camp E Reif Feldafing, August 1, 1947

*Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin New York March 1, 1994*

## **1. THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS OF VILKIJĀ**

Eyewitness testimony of Moshe Karnovsky, born in Vilkiĵa on November 4, 1907. Nearly all his life Moyshe lived in Vilkiĵa. Just before the war broke out on June 22, 1941, Moyshe settled in Shiauliai. When the war broke out he was in Shiauliai. In Vilkiĵa Moyshe graduated the Hebrew elementary school. He was a tailor by trade. Moyshe's father's name was Azriel. His mother was Khane-Zisle Tomer.

### **Geographic situation of the town:**

Vilkiĵa is located on the right bank of the Nieman. It is a one and a half hour trip by steamer and an hour by car to Kaunas. Vilkiĵa is in Kaunas County.

### **The population and their occupations:**

About 250 Jewish families lived in Vilkiĵa, along with an equivalent number of Lithuanian families. The Jews in town were occupied in trade, artisanry and peddling. A significant number of the Jews worked transporting lumber on the Nieman. A few Jews worked as lumber merchants, shipping wood to foreign countries.

Among the larger enterprises in town the following should be mentioned:

1. The saw mill and mill belonging to the Jewish businessman Shimen Fridland.
2. The saw mill and mill belonging to the Jewish businessman Peysekh Yudelevitz (on the other side of the Nieman).
3. Jewish-owned passenger and freight ships on the Nieman.

In general, the economic situation of the Jews of Vilkiĵa was not bad.

### **Cultural life of the Jews of Vilkiĵa:**

The town had a Hebrew elementary school, a Hebrew-Yiddish library with a large number of books, an old synagogue and a study house. Almost all of the young people graduated from elementary school. Some of them studied at gymnasiums in the larger cities. Almost all of them knew Hebrew. Of course, there was no illiteracy among the young people. The youth read quite a bit, and they were interested in the development of the Land of Israel and the political situation in the world. The majority of the Jewish youth were Zionists. A small number took part in the illegal Communist party under Smetonas.

After the Red Army entered Lithuania, the language of instruction in the elementary school became Yiddish. The community bank was liquidated.

Some of the Jewish youth enthusiastically threw themselves into political life, and occupied important positions during the year of Soviet rule (1940-1941). The great majority of the Jewish youth did not participate in political life, and remained loyal to the Zionist idea.

The attitude of the Lithuanian population toward the Jews of Vilkiĵa until the outbreak of war on June 22, 1941 was not bad.

### **The arrival of the Germans:**

Regular German army units appeared in Vilkiĵa on June 26, 1941. Some of the Jews who had escaped from town to hide temporarily in the countryside immediately returned to their homes in town. A few escaped together with the personnel of the Soviet government institutions to the Soviet Union from Kaunas, where they had been working.

The townspeople joyfully greeted the Germans and shot at the retreating Red soldiers from the back. Armed Lithuanians calling themselves partisans immediately appeared in town. The German army units did not remain in town.

The civilian administration in town was immediately formed by former members of the Shiauliai gun club, and by partisans. The chief of police in town was the Lithuanian Mikalonas. The leader of the partisans in town was a

Lithuanian named Gudsas, the former *antstolis* under Smetona. This Gudzas had been the leader and inspiration of the anti-Semites in Vilkija since years earlier. The other leader of the murderous partisans in Vilkija was the medical student from Vilkija, Kestutis Angliskas, who was not from Vilkija. The military commander in town at that time was the German Schvarc, a terrible murderer.

The civilian administration immediately set about its main task, which it enjoyed; liquidating the Jewish community in town. The *antstolis* Gudsas invited the partisans to his home, and proposed that they volunteer and get ready to begin the slaughter of the Jews of Vilkija, Veliuona, Seredzhius, Tsekishke and other smaller communities nearby.

He promised to give the partisans as much liquor as they wanted. He also promised that they would inherit the Jews' goods. Almost all the partisans, police and Lithuanian civilians enthusiastically volunteered to participate in slaughtering the Jews of Vilkija and the surrounding towns. The *antstolis* chose only some of the many volunteers.

Among the ones who were chosen were:

1. J. Oailyde, from town; his father was a tailor in Vilkija.
2. Shtarmekaitis, from town; his father was a potter in Vilkija.
3. Viltzinskis, two brothers. Their father had a lime oven.
4. A Liepos, or Lapenas, as he was called.
5. Tzernichovskis, from town, the son.
6. Naujomshtzikas, two brothers, fisherman by trade. Both from Vilkija.
7. Jotzys, not from Vilkija.

There were dozens others, whose names Moyshe Karnovsky no longer remembers.

### **The first victims.**

The day after the civilian administration was established, Saturday, June 28, the partisans Yashke Dalydes, Liepas and Naujomshtzikas arrested three Jews from Vilkija:

1. Khayem Videlevsky, the son of Itzik-Shloyme's.
2. Yitzkhok Groysman, a son of Ayge Avrom-Itshe's.
3. Khayem-Yudl Zojer, a grandson of Motl Kagan, a miller.

Khayem Videlesky had hidden in the field of a peasant acquaintance. The partisans looked for him at home and didn't find him. Apparently someone was investigating Khayem's hiding place. They arrested him. Yitzkhok and Khayem-Yudl lived not far from Shneyer Vaysfeld. All three Jews were taken away to the Nieman by the murderers. Not far from the houses of the Jews Dovid Yeglin and Katevushniks, three partisans shot the three Jews. Their corpses were thrown into a nearby pit and covered with garbage.

The next day, Sunday, June 29 (?), the representatives of the Jews in town, Shloyme Zaks and Dr. Shpunder, received permission to bury the three Jews at the Jewish cemetery in Vilkija.

At first, after the Germans entered Vilkija, the partisans and police arrested a group of Jews from town, 21 in all. The arrestees had occupied insignificant positions during the year of Soviet rule. But this was enough for the Lithuanians to accuse the Jews of helping the Soviets against the Lithuanians. Without investigation or judgment, the partisans took the group of Jews to the village of Jegminishkis, not far from town, and there everyone was shot. This took place on July 15, 1941.

Peasants later reported that before the shooting the Jews' valuables were taken away and they were forced to strip almost naked. The peasants from the village were forced by the partisans to cover over the dead bodies in the pits.

The following Jews were shot that day:

1. Dovid Sher and his son Motl.
2. Leyb Tamshe, owner of a bakery.
3. Moyshe Savitsky, a quilter.
4. Max Vidutsinsky, a storekeeper.
5. Yosl Katavushnik, a cashier on a river steamer.
6. Avrom-Yitzkhok Shvartz, a grain merchant.
7. Karabelnik, the son of Yankl, a lumber merchant.
8. Motl Punsy, owner of a bakery.
9. Ruven Atkatzik and two other brothers and two sisters, all children of Shimen-Yosl.
10. Heysl Myasnik.
11. Three men from the nearby town of Tzekishke, and three from Seredzhius. Their names are not known.

The group of Jews were shot by partisans in town. A group of twenty men, all from town, took part in the shootings.

### **Requisitions and robberies:**

As soon as the Germans entered town, the German commander, Schwartz, imposed a requisition on the Jews. The Jews had to provide a certain sum of money, gold and other valuables, such as radios, cameras, and electrical appliances, by a specified time. The deathly terrified Jews came up with the requisition on time.

In addition to the requisition, the Jews in town also had to fill various "orders" for the partisans and police. Partisans and police openly robbed Jewish possessions during the initial period after the Germans arrived. They went through Jewish houses, taking everything they found useful.

### **The Jews have to leave their homes:**

Some time after the Germans arrived there was an order for the Jews to leave their homes and settle in a few parts of town.

The women and children up to the age of fourteen had to settle in the house and barns belonging to Shimen Fridland. Girls between the ages of 18 and 22 were herded together into the town hall. From there they were taken to wash laundry, clean the floors and polish the shoes of the partisans and Germans. The partisans raped and murderously beat the girls. Some of the Jews were herded into the town synagogue by the partisans. Some of them, meanwhile, continued living in their houses.

The Jews who had been herded together in the various locations found themselves heavily guarded by partisans. The Jews could only go outside until 5:00 p.m.

Some of the men were taken to do various tasks. Some worked at the sawmill belonging to the Jew Shimen Fridland. At work they were guarded by partisans, who beat and tormented the Jews.

The Jews were neither fed nor paid in exchange for their work. Some of the Jews lived by exchanging their last clothing for food. Some of them managed to bring things along when they left their homes. It was strictly forbidden and mortally dangerous to communicate with Lithuanians. There were Jews who risked their lives going to the better Lithuanians in town to get food. Of course, they didn't get anything for free. The "good" Lithuanian friends asked for clothes and valuables in return for everything.

### **The slaughter of the women and children:**

The partisans announced to the men that they were getting ready to shoot the women and children, and they let it be known that in exchange for a certain sum of money and valuables they would let the women and children live and release them. The men handed over everything they still had left over after the requisition and all the robberies. After they had given everything to the Lithuanians, however, the women and children were taken near the village of Jautzikai, to a pit between the Bruza stream and the Nieman. Two pits had already been dug there. Next to the pits the women and children had to strip totally naked, and then they were shot.

A total of 1,800 women and children from Vilkija, Tzekishke, Seredzhius, Veliuona and other smaller communities were shot that tragic day.

The two mass graves of the women and children are located on the right side of the road, leading from Vilkija to the village of Jautzikai, near the village elementary school in a pit between the Bruza stream and the Nieman. The exact date of the shooting of the women and children is not known to Moyshe Karnovsky. Nor does he know any more details about the slaughter at the pits.

### **The slaughter of the men and girls:**

Concerning the slaughter of the men, Moyshe Karnovsky has little information. According to what peasants told him, groups of men from Vilkija and the nearby towns were taken away and shot at Jese near Kaunas, not far from the Kaunas suburb of Aleksot.

Details about the slaughter of the men are unknown to Moyshe. He does know, however, that after the women and children were shot, the mass slaughter of the men began.

The young girls who were at the town hall were shot together with the men.

Two Jewish doctors, Krestin and Shpunder, lived in Vilkija at that time. Both were shot.

Moyshe does not know how long the young Jewish girls were kept in the town hall, nor the conditions under which they lived there.

Nor does he know how long the men were kept in the synagogue, or the conditions in which they lived there until they were slaughtered.

Not one of the Jews who were in Vilkija after the arrival of the Germans managed to escape and survive.

When the war broke out the Vilkija Jews Leyb Safir and Leyb Abir found themselves in Kaunas, where the lives of the Jews were not secure. Anyone the partisans caught was taken to the Seventh Fort near Kaunas and shot.

The two Jews left Kaunas and walked to their home-town of Vilkija. Not far from town they were both stopped by partisans who robbed both Jews, tormented them and then shot them. The names of the murderers are not known. Nor is it known where the two Jews were shot. Among the Vilkija Jews who were in the ghettos in Kaunas and Shiauliai, and then in the German concentration camps, only a few miraculously managed to survive.

All of the information about the slaughter of the Jews of Vilkija was reported to Moyshe in Munich by a Lithuanian tailor whom he knew well named Bronius Ignatavitsius. Moyshe wrote down all of the information. The Lithuanian tailor Bronius had a clothing workshop in Vilkija until 1944. His father Antanas was a tailor as well. When the Jews of Vilkija were annihilated Bronius was in Vilkija, and he saw everything with his own eyes, as well as hearing reports from Lithuanians from town and from the countryside.

Poor Lithuanians from town, as well as partisans, moved into the better Jewish houses. After the shooting of the Jews was completed, all the Lithuanians in town spent a few weeks digging and constantly looking for hidden Jewish treasure.

Before the Germans retreated from town in the summer of 1944 there was a battle with the Red Army. The center of the town was destroyed. Eighty houses were burned down. The synagogue was left intact, and is now being used as a grain storehouse. No more Jews live in Vilkija.

### **Attestation of Moyshe Karnovsky**

Everything written by Leib Koniuchowsky on six pages about the slaughter of the Jews of Vilkija was personally related by me, Moyshe Karnovsky, and I attest thereto with my signature.

Moyshe Karnovsky (Signature)

The report was written by Engineer L Koniuchowsky      Munich      June 4, 1948

The signature of Mojsze Karnowski is attested to by the general secretary of the Feldafing camp directorship  
Feldafing, April 13, 1948      H Ellert (Signature)

*Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin York York      March 1 1994*

## 2. THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS OF VILKIJIA

Related by Rokhel Gemp (born Karnovsky), born in Vilkija April 5, 1923. Until 1937 she lived in Vilkija, and then in Kaunas. Then she was in the Kaunas ghetto. Her father's name was Berl. Rokhel completed five grades of Hebrew elementary school in Vilkija.

Vilkija lies on the right bank of the Nieman, 35 kilometers from Kaunas. About 2,000 Jewish men, women and children lived in Vilkija. The majority of the Jews were occupied in trade. The town had a Hebrew elementary school, a Hebrew-Yiddish library, two synagogues and one study house. The majority of the Jewish population, especially the young people, were organized in Zionist parties.

Five kilometers from town there was a compound belonging to a Jew named Fridland (Mote-zuse) and his son.

The attitude of the Lithuanians toward the Jews was not bad, superficially.

When the war began Rokhel stopped receiving news from the town of Vilkija, where all of her close friends lived.

A few weeks after the war began, a Jew from Vilkija came to Kaunas and reported that as soon as the Germans entered, the famous murderer, the Lithuanian from town, J Dailyde, a tailor, had stopped two Jewish boys from town named Khayem Videlevsky and Yudl Zojer, on the street. The murderer tormented them and shot them on the spot. This was later reported as well by peasants who came to Kaunas from Vilkija.

This Dailyde became the leader of the Lithuanian murderers in town, and he did whatever his heart desired to the Jews.

After being liberated Rokhel Gempl rode to her home town of Vilkija. The peasants in town told Rokhel that a few weeks after the beginning of the war all the Jews in town had been herded together into the synagogue, where they were kept for three days. Later all the men were taken near the village of Jausikai to a small forest, and there they were all shot. The village is located a few kilometers from town. Exactly where and when the women and children in Vilkija were shot is unknown to Rokhel Gempl.

Rokhl Gempl and her husband were partisans in the Rudnitsky Forests.

### **Attestation of Rokhel Gempl**

Attested to by Rokhel Gempl (Signature)

The report was written by L Koniuchowsky Landsberg am Lech January 24, 1947

The signature of Rokhel Gempl is attested to by the director of the Landsberg Cultural Bureau  
H Milshteyn

*Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin New York March 1, 1994*

## 1. THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS IN THE SMALL LITHUANIAN TOWNS OF VENDZHIOGALA AND BABTAI

Related by Aba Lisen, born in 1905. His father's name was Leybe. Until 1940 he lived in Vendzhiogala together with his parents. From 1940 until the beginning of the war he lived in Kaunas. As soon as the war began he returned to his parents in Vendzhiogala.

About seventy Jewish families lived in Vendzhiogala. The town is located 25 kilometers from Kaidaniai, the same distance from Kaunas, on the unimproved road between Kaidaniai and Kaunas. The town had a Hebrew elementary school, a library, and a study house. The Jews were primarily occupied in trade and artisanry. The Jews got along well with their Lithuanian neighbors.

On the very first day of the war, June 22, 1941, a number of young people tried to evacuate to the Soviet Union. The armed Lithuanian bandits, however, prevented the evacuation, and shot at the Jews. Many Jews were killed by the murderers at that time, while the rest of those who had tried to escape had to return to town. There were refugees from Kaunas, Jonava and other places.

On Wednesday, June 25, 1941, the Germans entered the town. Immediately after the Germans arrived, armed Lithuanians from town began arresting Jews on the pretext of searching for Communists. Thus, for example, they arrested the brothers Garelik-Hirshl, Nokhem and Moyshe; Moyshe Faynman; Yosef Labunovsky, and others. Several days later they were all liberated, after everything the Jews had was taken from them, including their better shoes and overclothes.

The Jews continued living in their homes. During the first days of the war there was an order that all the Jews had to put on yellow patches, were forbidden to walk on the sidewalk, and so forth. The Lithuanian murderers forced the able-bodied men and women to work at hard labor. The Jews worked in town and at agricultural tasks in the countryside and at compounds. A number of them, for example, worked in the Labunova compound, twelve kilometers from town. Jews had to clean out all of the Lithuanian residents' outhouses.

A short time later the Lithuanian murderers from town, together with Lithuanian murderers who came from Kaunas, arrested 68 men. The bandits took the men out of their houses and seized them on the street. Among the men were young people aged thirteen and fourteen. Among the arrestees were Jewish men from Kaunas and Jonava. All of the arrestees were taken to prison by the murderers.

From there the innocent men were taken to the forest near the Jewish cemetery in Vendzhiogala. The murderers forced the Jewish men to dig pits and take off their overclothes and shoes. Before the Jews were shot they had to strip totally naked. The murderers then shot all 68 Jews.

Among the Lithuanians from town who took active part in the shooting then were:

1. Feliksas Kutkevicius.
2. Two brothers Labutis, Staschisnkis.
3. Jurgis, a secretary at the township hall.
4. Bronislavas Jushevicius.

There were other Lithuanians from town whose families Aba does not remember any longer.

Among the Jews who were shot were:

1. Nokhem Garelik.
2. Moyshe Garelik.
3. HirshGarelik.
4. Their mother didn't want to continue living and see the death of her three sons, and voluntary went to be shot together with them. The sister of the three brothers, and Hirshl's wife, also voluntarily accompanied them and died with them.
5. Binyomin Pres.
6. Osher Pres, Binyomin's brother.
7. Binyomin Fridman.
8. Perets Fridman, Binyomin's son.
9. Gershon Fridman, Binyomin's son.
10. Hirsh Feynman.
11. Dovid Feynman, Hirsh's brother.
12. Gershon Feynman, Dovid's son.'
13. Moyshe Feynman, David's son.

14. Yankev-Ber Koren.
15. Another man named Koren, Yankev-Ber's brother.
16. Volf Labunovsky.
17. Yosef Labunovsky, Volf's son, aged 22.
18. Dovid Reybshteyn from Kaunas and others.

After the 68 men were shot, the rest of the Jews in town were herded together into one part of Kaidaniai Street. There was no fence around the area. The Lithuanian murderers robbed everything they wanted to take. The helpless Jews no longer cared about their possessions. They sensed that the final, complete annihilation of the Jews was not far off.

On Saturday, August 16, 1941, when the men from town stood in the study house praying, a girl named Tobe Langman (aged 23) ran up to them and announced that the town was surrounded by armed Lithuanian murderers. The men began running out of the study house in a panic. But armed Lithuanians already stood at the door to the study house, and they didn't let anyone exit. Other bandits went to all the Jewish houses at the same time, taking out all the men above the age of fourteen, and herding them into the study house as well.

Near the study house wagons stood waiting. The Jews were forced to sit on the wagons, and under heavy guard they were taken to the nearby town of Babtai, ten kilometers from Vendzhiogala. In Babtai Lithuanian bandits drove all of the Jewish men into the study house, and surrounded it with a heavy guard.

Babtai is located on the highway between Kaunas and Klaipeda, thirty kilometers from Kaidaniai. Until the war about twenty Jewish families lived in Babtai, earning their livings in trade and artisanry.

On Saturday, August 16, 1941, when all the men were taken away from Vendzhiogala, all the men in Babtai were also herded into the study house.

The men who had been brought from Vendzhiogala were brought into the Babtai study house. For two weeks the men from the two towns were kept interned in the study house. Every day the men were taken to work at the highway. The men didn't get anything to eat. The women from Vendzhiogala and Babtai brought the men food at the study house.

Ten days later the Lithuanian murderers demanded a payment of 500 ruble per Jewish man. The Jews of Vendzhiogala chose three representatives, who went to their town to raise the demanded sum. Among the three representatives were Ch. Labunovsky and Jakov Reibshtein. The Lithuanian murderers told the Jewish men that after the Jews raised the required sum, everyone would be released.

Thirteen Jews escaped from Vendzhiogala and hid. When they learned that after the money was handed over the men would be released, they left their hiding places and reported to the police in Vendzhiogala. From there they were taken to join the rest of the men in the study house in Babtai.

Three days after the money was raised the Lithuanian murderers in Vendzhiogala drove all the Jewish women and children out of their houses, and herded them into the marketplace in town. The women were permitted to bring along small packages of food and clothing. The women were allowed to lock the doors of their houses. In the marketplace the bandits took the women's packages away, and they took everyone away to Babtai.

As soon as the women and children from Vendzhiogala were brought to Babtai, the men were driven out of the synagogue, and under heavy guard they were taken to a forest two kilometers from Babtai, about a half kilometer off to the side from the Babtai-Kaidaniai highway. Pits had already been dug there. The men had to take all their clothes off, and then they were shot. This happened on September 1, 1941, a Sunday.

That same day the Lithuanian degenerates shot all the women and children from Babtai, along with the women and children who had been brought from Vendzhiogala. The women and children were shot by the murderers at the same spot as the men.

The peasant Vitas Garbatsauskas from Babtai later told Aba that the men and the women and children from Vendzhiogala and Babtai had been shot solely by Lithuanian bandits. After the Jews were shot all of the Lithuanian murderers gathered in the town of Babtai and organized a large ball at the town hall; At that occasion fiery speeches of joy and nationalist enthusiasm were held. The murderers swore to find the escaped Jews who were in hiding.

Among the shooters in Babtai were all the murderers who had slaughtered the 68 men, along with others from Vendzhiogala, Babtai and the surrounding towns and villages. When the women and children were herded into the

markeplace in Vendzhiogala, three girls escaped. They were Khayem Labunovsky (now Khayem's sistr-in-law); Ida Labunovsky; and Ade Kaidansky.

Ida and Ada hid for three months. The winter was very cold; they didn't have anywhere to hide, and came to the Kaunas ghetto. The Lithuanian guards at the fence detained the two girls. They took Ade for a Lithuanian. They arrested Ide, and then she was shot. This was at the end of 1941. Ade Kaidansky survived.

Among the Jews of Vendzhiogala who died was the Jewish pharmacist from town Rozental and his wife, and the town rabbi.

Those who survived from Vendzhiogala were Meir Labunovsky, his wife and the children. They escaped the slaughter in Vendzhiogala and went to the Kaunas ghetto. Later they escaped from the Kaunas ghetto (in 1943), and hid with peasants until they were liberated by the Red Army. Osher Kaidansky and his wife also survived in exactly the same manner as Labunovsky.

Abe Lison was herded into the study house in Vendzhiogala together with his father and brother. His younger brother Yosef lay hidden in the attic of a stall near their house. The police chief in Vendzhiogala was well known to Abe from before the war. He let Abe and his brother out of the study house. On the way to their house they were detained by the Lithuanian murderer from town Stashinskis, who wouldn't let them go under any circumstances. They pleaded with the murderer at least to go with them to their house to get clothes. Abe entered his room to look for clothes, and escaped through the window.

The murderer ran out to look for Abe, and meanwhile his brother escaped and hid among the potatoes. Stashinski caught Abe's brother in the potatoes, cut off one of his ears and took him to the study house. Abe hid in the same stall where his younger brother Yosef had already hidden earlier. His older brother and father were taken to Babtai together with all the Jews of Vendzhiogala.

Abe and his younger brother Yosef escaped from the stall at night to a nearby forest, and let their mother and sister know where they were. Their sister used to visit her brothers in the forest, bringing them food and giving them information about their father and brother in the study house. But she could not help her brothers in the forest.

Abe's mother Blume and his sister Mine (aged 21) were taken away to Babtai together with the Jewish women and children of the town, and shot together with all of the Jews. Abe and his brother Yosef quickly found out about the tragic death of their entire family.

The two brothers began a bitter, difficult struggle for their lives. The struggle wasn't only against the Lithuanian cannibals who sought after them, but also against nature. The autumn and winter of the year 1941 was terribly cold. There was no place to settle in at the beginning. Both of them had to lie in the forest or in the open fields for weeks.

As they wandered, a day here and a night there, constantly facing terrible dangers, Abe met two surviving Jews from Kaidaniai. The two survivors from Kaidaniai were Khayem Render and Shmuel Smolsky. All four stayed together in their difficult struggle for life, until the Red Army liberated (for more about this, see the report about the slaughter of the Jews of Kaidaniai).

In a forest near the banks of the Nevezhys River, two kilometers from Babtai, about half a kilometer off to the side of the Babtai- Kaidaniai highway, all the Jewish men, women and children of the two towns of Babtai and Vendzhiogala were shot on September 1, 1941. About four hundred men, women and children were shot in all that day.

### **Attestation of Abe Lison**

Everything written on exactly five pages about the slaughter of the Jews of Babtai and Vendzhiogala were related word for word to Leib Koniuchowsky by me, Abe Lison, born in 1905.

All of the facts, names of persons and geographical locations were personally reported by me, and I attest thereto with my signature on each and every page.

Signature: Abe Lison

The report was written by L Koniuchowsky Bad Reichenhall, Bavaria November 11, 1946

*Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin New York March 1, 1994*

## 2. THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS OF BABTAI

Additional testimony of Mrs Sheyne Nozhikov, born Glik in Babtai on December 28, 1903. Sheyne graduated elementary school in Babtai. She was a business manager by trade. Until the year 1921 Sheyne lived in Babtai, then she married and lived in Kaunas. Her father Rafoel and her mother Khaye, born Kulman, left for America in 1922.

Sheyne was in the Kaunas ghetto with her son Alter and her daughter Khane.

She escaped from Kaunas with her two children, Alter, aged 21 and Khane, aged 13, on December 20, 1943. At that time the Jews began to be transported from the ghetto to concentration camps. Sheyne and her two children hid in villages around Jurbarkas together with Jewish survivors from the town of Erzhvilishkas. (See the testimony about the slaughter of the Jews of Erzhvilishkas - L Koniuchowsky.)

Sheyne and her two children were liberated by the Red Army in that region. After the liberation Sheyne spent some time in her home town of Babtai. She spoke to peasant acquaintances from town, who willingly told her in great detail about the slaughter of the Jews of Babtai.

The town of Babtai is located 24 kilometers north of Kaunas, 12 kilometers from Vendzhiogala, thirty kilometers from Kedainiai. Babtai is in Kaunas County, and lies on the bank of the Nevezhs River.

Until the war broke out about forty Jewish families lived there, along with twice as many Christians. The Jews in town were engaged primarily in trade and peddling, and a few worked in agriculture. Twelve kilometers from Babtai, in the village of Bujonai, there was a mill belonging to the Jew Yisroel Buyaner.

The town had an old syagogue. The Jewish youth studied in Kedainiai or Kaunas, and had leftist tendencies. The attitude of the Lithuanian population toward the Jews until the outbreak of the war on June 22, 1941 was good. After the war broke out a small number of the Jewish youth left the town and tried to evacuate to the Soviet Union. Not one of the Jews in town managed to evacuate. Lithuanian partisans shot at the retreating Red soldiers on all the roads, and also prevented the Jews from fleeing.

On Tuesday, June 24, 1941, the Germans were in Babtai. The Jews in town continued living in their houses. There was no battle for control of the town at that time. Only a few Germans remained in town. The local Lithuanians immediately set up the civilian administration. The mayor of the town was the farmer Antanas Janushewsky, who lived at the edge of town. The chief of police was a farmer named Jan Inc from town. The commander and leader of the partisans in town was a farmer from a settlement a kilometer and a half from town, an anti-Semite and infamous murderer named Chatkevitsius.

After the civilian administration was set up, acts of revenge immediately began to be taken against Jews in town:

1. On Wednesday, June 25, 1941 partisans took two brothers named David and Leyzer Kulman out of their house, along with their brother-in-law Aba Varikansky. They were taken behind the hill, at the bank of the Nevezhs River. There all three innocent Jews were shot. It was said among the Jews at the time that before the war the family had bought a horse from the town priest for a low price. The priest resented this, and he had aroused the partisans against the Jews. The three innocent Jews were shot in the priest's field.

The partisans also looked for a Jew named Srednitsky and his wife Khaye (born Varikansky in Babtai). Both of them managed to escape from town, and they arrived in Kaunas. Sheyne learned from them about the incident involving the priest.

2. On Thursday, June 26, 1941 partisans came to the home of Mrs Sore Adler, and took her children Gitl, aged 18, and Yankl, aged 16, out of the house. Both of them were kept for three days and nights in the town prison, without food or a drop of water. Then both were taken to the garden of the town hall and shot. Both were buried there.

3. On Saturday, June 28, 1941 partisans came to Sore again and took Sore and her small son Moyshe away to the spot where her other two children had been shot, in the garden of the town hall. The mother and child were shot and buried there. Sore's mother Rashe, who was blind and had been bedridden for years, was buried alive in the syagogue yard.

The entire Adler family was shot because their uncle Yudl Adler had been an employee at the prison in Kaunas during the year of Soviet rule. Yudl managed to escape to the Soviet Union.

4. The Russian woman Tarafes, whose husband was a Communist who had managed to escape to the Soviet Union, was shot along with Sore Adler that day.

There were also robberies of Jewish possessions by the partisans in town.

During the second week of the war the police and partisans herded all the Jewish men into the synagogue. A guard was posted. No-one was allowed in to see them. Every day the men were taken two kilometers away from the synagogue to the Bobtsinai compound, on the other side of the river, to do agricultural work. The women were not taken to work. But there were cases of women working at the same compound as the men.

At the end of July 1941 all the Jews from the town of Vendzhiogala were taken to Babtai, and everyone was interned at the synagogue. The women and children from Babtai remained in their houses.

The Jews were kept in the synagogue for several days after the Vendzhiogala Jews were brought. One morning; Sheyne does not know the date; partisans rode into town on trucks, singing Lithuanian nationalist songs.

That day the Jews from the synagogue were taken to the Bor forest, two kilometers from town. There the men were forced to dig a pit, and later they were shot. After the men were shot the women and children were ordered to pack quickly and prepare to ride to the forest, where their men were waiting to go to a ghetto in the town of Jonava.

The woman and children were permitted to take everything along that they needed. That same day, in the same forest, the murderers shot the women and children. The women, children and men lie buried in a single mass grave in the Bor forest, on the left side of the highway on the way from Kaunas to Kedainiai. The mass grave is in the shape of a square, ten meters by ten.

The partisans and peasants in town reported after the shooting of the Jews that after the grave had been dug, Shloyme Levin had shouted out: "Jews, we are lost! Let's take revenge at least!" The Jew Yankl Barovsky threw himself at a partisan, but another partisan shot Yankl.

One of Sheyne's cousins had a daughter named Yentl Burovsky who was expecting a child any day. She and her mother were the first ones shot as soon as the women and children were brought to the pit. Partisans boasted as they told their peasant friends in town about this. The men and later the women and children were taken from town by partisans and police from town and from elsewhere. The Jews were forced to strip naked at the pit before they were shot. The clothing of the murdered Jews fell into the hands of the shooters and the towns people. Townspeople settled in their houses. The families of the shooters got the better houses. The synagogue was turned into a bathhouse.

The following relatives of Sheyne died in Babtai:

1. Three brothers, David, Leyzer and Mikhl Kulman.
2. Ruven, Khayen and Tsherne Kulman, cousins.
3. Shakhne Kulman, an uncle, aged 75.

After the war Sheyne was at the mass grave. She was accompanied by a townsman named Jakubowsky. There was no fence around the mass grave, nor any inscription. Sheyne thinks that more than two hundred Jews from Babtai and Vendzhiogala lie buried in the mass grave.

(See the testimony about the slaughter of the Jews of Vendzhiogala by Abe Lison - L Koniuchowsky.)

### **Attestation of Sheyne Nozhikov**

Everything recorded by L Koniuchowsky on four pages concerning the slaughter of the Jews in the town of Babtai was personally related by me, Sheyne Nozhikov, born Glik. I discovered and checked with peasant acquaintances all the facts, dates, names of persons and geographic locations when I was in Babtai after the war, and I attest thereto with my signature on every page.

Eyewitness Sheyne Nozhikov-Glik

(Signature)

The report was recorded by Engineer L. Koniuchowsky Heidenheim am Brenz, January 26, 1948

The signature of Mrs Szejne Nozsikow Glik, resident of the Heidenheim (Brenz) Camp 1005, is attested to by the chairman of the camp committee.

(Camp chairman) J Bialowicz Heidenheim (Brenz) January 26, 1948

*Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarim New York*

*March 2, 1994*

## 1. THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS IN THE LITHUANIAN TOWN OF JONAVA

Reported by Gershon Reybshteyn, born in Jonava on June 10, 1909. His father's name was Borukh. He lived in Jonava until 1935. From 1935 until the war he lived in Kaunas. During the German occupation he was in the Kaunas ghetto. He survived the Kaufering concentration camp, Dachau camp #11, in Germany. After the liberation he was in Jonava.

### **Spiritual and Economic condition of the Jews**

The town of Jonava is located 35 kilometers from Kaunas, and the same distance from Ukmerge. In the middle of the city flows the river Vilie (Neris). Before the war about 4,000 Jews lived in the town.

When the Germans arrived in Jonava about 3,000 Jews were there.

The town had a Yavne school, a Tarbut school, and a Yiddish "Morgn Shul" (an elementary school), and a Yiddish evening school for adults. Jonava had a yeshiva where a few hundred young men and boys studied, and a Talmud Torah for children of religious parents. The heads of the yeshiva were Rabbi Mendl and Rabbi Zamdman.

Jonava had a well-organized community bank. The director was Efroyim Abramson, and his last successor was Mayshe Ivinsky. Jonava had a large synagogue and eight study houses.

Most of the Jews were specialized artisans. A small number of Jews were engaged in trade. Only a few worked in agriculture also. There were many factories, workshops and craft shops in Jonava belonging to Jewish businessmen. The furniture factory belonged to the partners Yakov-Leyb Landman, Kopl Reznik, Shmuel Tsherneman, Zusl Klotz, Monish Klibansky and others.

The large factory was a sawmill which used to take raw materials and turn them into finished boards and other lumber products for various kinds of furniture. After they received various parts from the factory, the partners would finish the items of furniture in their own workshops.

There was also a match factory which belonged to the partners Dovid Burshteyn and Khayem Levin.

There was also a large mill belonging to the Jew Abe Upnitsky.

A very large number of Jews were smiths, tailors and carpenters. The attitude of the local Lithuanian population was good in public.

Behind the scenes they were sharpening their knives to use them on the Jews of Jonava.

### **Outbreak of War; The First Jewish Victims; The Pogrom**

When the war broke out thousands of Jews left the town. The majority wanted to flee together with the Red Army toward the Soviet Union. Others left the town temporarily and hid in the countryside until the front passed the town. A number of people escaped and arrived safely in Soviet Russia.

The majority, however, didn't manage to do this, and were caught by the German Army, because the Lithuanian population prevented them from escaping.

Near the town of Jonava there were large battles between the motorized units of the Red Army and the German military. Not far from Jonava there were motorized units of the Red Army which had lately been stationed at the polygon eight kilometers from Jonava. The battle in and around the town lasted for more than 24 hours. The entire town was bombarbed and burned. The town was turned into mountains of ash in the great battles. Only a few houses at the edge of the town remained whole.

Jews from Kaunas, and some from other towns, had gathered in Jonava at that time. They didn't manage to flee further. When the huge bombardment began, many Jews from Kaunas and Jonava descended into a cellar on Kaunas Street belonging to the Jew Liber Farber. A bomb fell into the building. About a hundred men, women and children suffocated in the cellar.

On Thursday, June 26 at 4:00p.m., the Germans entered the town of Jonava. The Lithuanian armed townspeople

immediately demonstrated their friendliness toward the Germans, and began looking for hidden Jews.

The first ones murdered by the Lithuanian murderers from town were:

1. Motl Fleishman, from town.
2. Shaul Kaidansky, a teacher from town.
3. Ruven and Ilke Kaidansky, Shaul's sons.
4. Moyshe Shamit.
5. Shabse Rits.
6. Shmuel Rits, Shabse's brother.

More than twenty Jewish men in all were caught that Thursday evening. The Lithuanian murderers stabbed all these innocent Jews with knives in the courtyards and streets of the town.

Motl Fleishman and the teacher Kaidansky and his two sons were taken away to the Jewish cemetery. There the Lithuanian murderers demanded money, gold and valuables from the Jews. The Lithuanian murderers stabbed the innocent Jews with knives at the cemetery.

The Lithuanian murderers carried out this pogrom without the knowledge of the Germans. The following Lithuanian murderers from town took part in the pogrom:

1. Leonas Zacharinas
2. Jonas Shtrashunas.
3. Simonas Bolgatzas.
4. Vacys Mongartas.
5. Juozas Shopis.
6. Grigeliunas (the agronomist from Jonava).
7. Ludvikas Prashtziuknas.
8. Stasys Simonavitzius.

In addition to these, there were dozens of others at the pogrom, whose first and last names Reybshteyn does not remember.

A neighborhood with a few houses intact remained on Kaunas Street in Jonava. Some of the Jews of Jonava settled into these houses. The majority were in the villages or lived in the fields and forests.

Armed Lithuanians seized adolescent Jewish girls during the second week of the war and took them out of town, near the bathhouse. There five young girls were raped.

The five girls were:

1. Eydl Grinblat (aged 15).
2. Rivke Zalmenovits (aged 17).
3. Beylke Beten (aged 17).
4. Gite Kagansky (aged 17).
5. Nekhome Selsky was raped before her mother's eyes.

They were raped by a band of Lithuanian murderers, headed by Antanas Gineika.

### **Chicaneries and Insults of Jews**

Jonas Strashunas was in charge of taking Jews to work until August 12, 1941. When the Jews were taken to work they were guarded by armed Lithuanians. The work was hard. The Jews had to clear the streets, repair the roads and highways, bury the corpses of animals, and so forth.

One time fifty elderly Jews were gathered together, headed by the rabbi of Jonava, Rabbi Dovid Ginsburg. The rabbi was ordered to bring along a red flag. The beadle Berl Shapiro also had to prepare a red flag and bring it along to work. All fifty Jews had to gather at the old marketplace, near the former cinema. There everyone was lined up in rows of four. All of the Jews were forced to do calisthenics. They had to run and fall. Meanwhile they were murderously beaten. The civilian population in town meanwhile stood laughing uproariously. There the elderly Jews had their beards cut off, and some were pulled out by force. The Lithuanian murderers gave an order for all of the Jews to get rid of their beards.

Those unable or unwilling to do so themselves had their beards torn out or cut off by the Lithuanian murderers. The Lithuanian townspeople stood and applauded at the brilliant ideas of their Lithuanian brothers. The murderers stripped the rabbi of his long caftan, put a short shirt on him, and ordered him to climb up to the balcony of the

burned cinema. The rabbi had to stand on the balcony and deliver a speech to the Jews and Lithuanians in Yiddish and Lithuanian. He was forced to give a speech welcoming Stalin.

Then the beaten and tormented Jews had to march out of town. The rabbi and the beadle went in front, carrying the flags. The rest of the Jews followed them. On the way they were forced to sing Russian songs.

When they got outside of town they were stopped. A wagonload of spades were brought, and the fifty Jews were forced to dig a long, deep pit. The murderers forced the Jews to go into the pit, and shot over their heads. Some of the Jews fainted in terror. The murderers ordered the Jews to leave the pit again.

Some of them had to be pulled out of the pit, because they had fainted or been badly beaten. All the Jews were brought back to town then. During the time when the Jews were out of their houses, a second group of murderers robbed all of the possessions of the Jews from their houses.

### **The Jewish Committee; The Requisition**

On August 15, 1941 groups of armed Lithuanians surrounded the small Jewish neighborhood and drove out all of the Jewish men over the age of 14. All of the men were taken to the barracks. At the barracks the men were not given any food. The men were only allowed to bring along small packages in their arms.

Right after that there was an order from the Lithuanian commandant in town Simonas Dolgatzas, stating that all of the men who were located in the villages or in the fields around Jonava had to come to Jonava to report for work. All of the men came from the villages to town. Everyone was immediately herded together into the barracks. The Lithuanian murderers ordered the Jews to appoint a committee of three men. The task of this committee consisted of immediately gathering 120,000 rubles which was requisitioned.

The murderers promised that after the sum was raised they would release the Jews. The Jews did not appoint a committee, so the Lithuanians appointed a committee themselves. The committee consisted of three respected Jews: Rabbi Ginsburg of Jonava, Kagan the pharmacist and Moyshe Zak.

All three Jews went to the Kaunas ghetto on August 18, accompanied by Lithuanian guards. The three Jews complained that they had no way of raising that much money without co-operation from Kaunas. For that reason the three Jews were taken to the Kaunas ghetto. The three respected Jews from Jonava sought advice in Kaunas. The Jews in Kaunas had been confined to the ghetto in Slobodka by then. The Jewish council in the Solobodka ghetto convinced their helpless brothers from Jonava not to give the money to the murderers.

It was decided that the requisition would not be paid. Gershon Reybshteyn spoke to his fellow townspeople in the Kaunas ghetto at that time. The pharmacist Kagan from Jonava told Reykhshteyn about everything that had happened in Jonava, and added that it had been decided that the requisition would not be paid. All three Jews were taken back to the barracks in Jonava.

### **The Total Annihilation of the Men Women and Children**

On August 17, 1941 the Lithuanian bandits chose three young, healthy men and took them out of the barracks.

The three men were:

1. Aron Samuelov (aged 30).
2. Ber Mekhanik (aged 33).
3. Avrom Reybshteyn (Gershon's cousin).

The three men were not brought back to the barracks. For five days the Jews had to dig pits from early in the morning until dark. All night they were interned in the cellar of the police headquarters. None of the Jews knew about the pits being dug.

In the morning of August 21 and 22, 1941 armed groups of Lithuanians under the leadership of Germans took all the men out of the barracks. Wagons were ready to carry the elderly and weak men. All of the men were taken in the direction of the railroad station. On the way the murderers promised the Jewish men and their wives in town that the men were being taken to a ghetto.

The men were taken to a forest called Girelkiai, three kilometers from Jonava and three kilometers from the station. In the forest the Jews found pits already dug. The murderers forced the Jews to strip to their underwear. Groups

were taken to the pit and shot. In Reybshteyn's opinion more than six hundred Jewish men from Jonava were shot at that time. Two men managed to escape from the pits. They ran a couple of kilometers away from the pits. However, they were stopped by other Lithuanian murderers, and shot on the spot.

While taking the Jews to the pits the Lithuanian murderers beat them with whips, sticks and poles. Several Jews were shot or beaten to death on the way. Thus, for example, Gershon's father Borukh Reybshteyn and others were shot on the way. Before the Jews were shot at the pit the rabbi said something to the Jews. Gershon doesn't know what he said there.

Gershon was told about the shooting of the men in great detail by Nokhem Plumberg. Nokhem Plumberg was hidden by a forester. The forester would meet with the Lithuanian murderers, get all the information and pass it on to Nokhem. Nokhem Plumberg later came to the Kaunas ghetto and told Reybshteyn exactly what had happened.

The women had no idea of the tragic shooting of their husband, brothers and fathers in Girelkiiai. The murderers told the women that all of the men had been taken to a ghetto.

The day after the men were shot, all of the women and children were taken to the barracks in wagons and on foot. The women were only allowed to bring along small packages and something to eat. Some of the women found goodbye letters left in the barracks for loved ones in the town. But the women did not know the exact fate of their husbands.

For one night the women and children slept in the barracks. Some of them began to settle in, arranging places for themselves and their children to stay.

On the morning of August 23, 1941, large groups of armed Lithuanians and Germans came to the barracks and took out all the women. The murderers told the women that they were being taken to join the men in a ghetto. When they were brought to the pits a girl named Hene Yudelevits (aged 20) encouraged the women to run wherever they could. She gave a speech in a loud voice. The murderers shot all the women and children at Girelkiiai, near the men who were shot. The girl Hene Yudelevitz was buried alive.

Groups of women, children and a few men were in hiding in various villages at that time. Grigelunas issued an order stating that all the women and men who were hiding with peasants should not be afraid to report at Jonava. He promised to send all the survivors to the Kaunas ghetto. 208 men, women and children reported to Jonava. They were all placed into wagons and taken to the Kaunas ghetto. The 208 Jews were taken on October 22, and on October 28 most of them were taken during the "Big Action" in the Kaunas ghetto.

After the Big Action the Jews who had been taken from Jonava were gradually taken in various transfer actions, and later to internment camps. Only four of the 208 survived, one man named Nokhem Blumberg and three women: Khane Blumberg, Hele Khoshed, and Mrs Maryashe Baron.

## **The Death of the Jews in Hiding**

1. There were Jewish peasants in the countryside before the war. As soon as the war began and the lives of the Jewish peasants became insecure, all of the Jews left their farms and went into hiding. The Lithuanian peasant Kuzenauskas from the village Markutishkiiai, a forester, hid 23 Jews. He hid the Jews in a well-prepared bunker in his compound. The 23 Jews hid with the good Lithuanian peasant until the end of 1943. In the winter of 1943 a neighbor peasant reported him to the German Gestapo. All 23 Jews and the peasant Kuzenauskas were taken to Girelkiiai and there they were all shot. The village of Markutishkiiai is located twelve kilometers from Jonava.

2. The Jewish family Lafer from Jonava, consisting of a woman, her twelve-year-old son Hirshl and a daughter named Khane (aged 15), hid with a peasant in the village of Ragazh, four kilometers from Jonava. They lived there in hiding until the end of 1943. One time Hirshl went to the village for food. Lithuanian peasants found out where the three were hiding, and reported to the Lithuanian police and partisans. A group of armed murderers surrounded the house where the three were hiding, and they shot the mother on the spot. The daughter absolutely refused to identify herself as Jewish.

The Lithuanian murderers raped her and tortured her in various ways. Yet she still refused to identify as Jewish. Then they hung her with her head down in the door of the barn, beat her murderously and poured cold water on her. It was already quite cold outside. She still didn't admit she was Jewish, and the murderers tortured her to death.

At that time Hirshele was in the countryside looking for food. He learned from peasants about the tragic death of his

mother and sister, and escaped to a different place. He knew Lithuanian well, and didn't know much Yiddish, and he pretended to be a Lithuanian. He went to work for a peasant as a shepherd and survived. Now he lives alone in Jonava. He is now the only Jew in town. His aunt also survived, and lives in a village not far from Jonava.

### **After the End of the War**

When Gershon Reybshteyn returned to Lithuania after he was liberated, he went to Jonava to find out about his parents and brothers. The peasant woman Lapinskiene from the town of Jonava told Gershon: "Your father was taken to be shot with all the men. Your father was pale and weak, and couldn't stand it. Peasants from town ran after the Jews, joyfully teasing and mocking them. The peasants joyfully shouted after the helpless Jews that soon they were all going to be shot. Borukh Reybshteyn fell to the ground and couldn't walk any more. The murderer Antanas Ginaike shot Borukh and threw him into a wagon."

Then Gershon Reybshteyn went to the pits where all the Jews of Jonava had been shot. The pits had been exhumed, and they were empty. As Gershon found out, all the dead bodies had been dug up and burned. The work of burning the bodies was done in the spring of 1944.

Gershon was told about it by residents of Jonava. Gershon himself saw the spot where the dead bodies of the murdered Jews of Jonava had been burned.

Dveyre Shabses was among the 208 Jews brought from Jonava to the Kaunas ghetto. She told Gershon Reybshteyn that the murderer Stasys Meldas and twenty other young Lithuanian Gentiles had stoned two Jews, Ben-Tsion Yudelevits and Abe Adelevits. Both Jews were caught in the village of Stasantz. This was after the men from the barracks were shot. The dead bodies of both Jews who had been stoned to death were brought to Girelkiai and buried.

### **Attestation of Gershon Reybshteyn**

Everything written on twenty pages about the slaughter of the Jews in Jonava was personally related to L Koniuchowsky by me, Gershon Reybshteyn, born in Jonava on June 10, 1909. All twenty pages are stamped with the seal of the cultural bureau in Landsberg and signed by me. All of the dates, facts and names of persons and geographical locations are certified by me at the end with my signature:

Gershon Reybshteyn (Signature)

The report was written by L Koniuchowsky  
Landsberg am Lech December 14, 1946

Attested to by the technical director of the cultural bureau in the Landsberg Jewish camp  
Hirsh Milshteyn (Signature)

*Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin New York March 2, 1994*

**NOTE:** Testimony collected by Leyb Koniuchowsky concerning the slaughter of the Jews in Vilnius County only has been translated into English by Jonathan Boyarin. Professional historians have written and perhaps translated materials about the matter of the Vilnius ghetto.

Signature: Leyb Koniuchowsky

*Leyb*

*Koniuchowsky*

## 2 . THE SLAUGHTER OF JEWS IN THE LITHUANIAN TOWN OF JONAVA

Reported by Shloyme Katsas, born in the small town of Taujenai, in Ukmerge county, on May 5, 1892. His father's name was Avrom. For thirty years he lived at the Ishori compound, eighteen kilometers from Kaunas, thirteen kilometers from Jonava. The compound is located next to the Kaunas Jonava highway. Until the war, he lived at the Ishori compound. He graduated from elementary school in Jonava. He was a farmer by trade, and he owned the Ishori compound. The compound comprised 146 hectares.

When the war began Katsas was in the compound for the first days. Katsas had the opportunity to observe the great panic of the Jews, who escaped in the tens of thousands from Kaunas in the direction of Jonava and Ukmerge.

Old and young, women pushing baby carriages or carrying children in their arms, the elderly and the sick, left their homes as soon as the war began and tried to escape together with the retreating Red Army. Quite a few of them died at that time. The German airplanes ceaselessly bombed and strafed the highway. On all the roads and at the sides of the highway lay hundreds of suitcases, bedding and clothing which the Jews discarded, so that they could ease their burdens and escape faster from the approaching danger. About sixty Jews who had escaped from Kaunas, along with Lithuanians waiting for the front to pass by, stayed at Katsas' compound, and were given food and drink.

The front rapidly approached. The village of Ishori became a field of slaughter. The village changed hands three times. At the compound the Germans later stationed artillery, from which they shot at the town of Jonava. The hidden Jews lay in two bunkers. The German army took Jonava on Friday evening, June 27, 1941. After they took Jonava, the German field police settled into Katsas' compound.

As the Jews began returning from Jonava and Ukmerge they were detained and forced to bury the dead, to bury the corpses of horses, and clear the streets and highways. All of the Jews who had been staying with Katsas returned to Kaunas. Only some of the Jews who had been detained for work returned to Kaunas on their own. The rest were handed over to the Lithuanian armed partisans, who were getting organized in the surrounding countryside at that time.

The Jewish detainees were taken to the Seventh Fort at Kaunas by the Lithuanian murderers.

The dentist, Dr Kats from Kaunas, died not far from Jonava while escaping from Kaunas. His wife (born Etkin) arrived in Ukmerge with her daughter, her brother Meir and her sister. On the way back from Ukmerge they all stopped at Katsas' compound, and they stayed until the Kaunas ghetto was established (August 15).

Shloyme's son Yitzkhok by his first Jewish wife, left the compound and went to the Kaunas ghetto, because it became mortally dangerous for him to stay at the compound with his father. The Lithuanian murderers were searching for Jews throughout the entire region, taking them away and torturing them.

The wife of the dentist, Dr Kats, and Yitzkhok received passes from the German field police, who were still at Katsas' compound at that time, permitting them to travel to the Kaunas ghetto. Katsas had a sister named Libe, who lived with her three children in Jonava. Her husband was named Mendl Manishevits, a tailor.

The Jews of Jonava returned from all the surrounding villages. Jonava was completely destroyed and burned. Most of the Jews who gathered there lived on Kestutsio Street, near the edge of town, or on Zhuviu Street. The men were already working at various tasks.

Not far from the compound, four kilometers away in the village of Uzhusuoliai, lived a Jewish family named Karnovsky, consisting of a husband, a wife, two daughters, their husbands and two sons. Karnovsky had a mill and thirteen hectares of land in the vilage. Two kilometers from Uzhusuoliai lived a second Jewish family in the village of Kolnancai II. The family, named Borov, consisted of a husband, a wife, five children and a son-in-law.

On August 14 Karnovsky ran to Katsas to decide what to do. He told Katsas that the Lithuanian agronomist Grigaliunas from Jonava had ridden to Karnovsky's home and recorded an inventory of everything he had. The agronomist had done the same thing at Borov's home. The agronomist had been accompanied by two other armed Lithuanian murderers. At that time the agronomist was the leader of the armed Lithuanian murderers in Jonava. He would ride through the villages, catch Jews and take them to Jonava.

Karnovsky wanted Katsas to advise him what to do next. Karnovsky's son and two sons-in-law, along with Borov's entire family, had been taken away to a small camp in Jonava by the agronomist. The camp had originally held Red Army prisoners. The camp was located in the former Russian barracks.

Katsas advised Karnovsky to travel immediately to the Kaunas ghetto with his entire family, and protect their lives. Karnovsky and his wife went to the Kaunas ghetto. That was the day the Kaunas ghetto was sealed. The daughter-in-law of the Jew Borov went to the ghetto with Karnovsky.

The village of Uzhusuoliai is located not far from the town of Jonava. The village was exclusively populated by Russian peasants. At the beginning of July 1941 an entire German military detachment arrived in the village, together with Lithuanian murderers under the leadership of former Lithuanian officers. They surrounded all of the nearby villages, including Rudman, Paskutishkiai, and Budu, as well as Uzhusuoliai. A couple of hundred Russian peasants were driven out of their homes in these villages.

Everyone who was taken was suspected of belonging to the Communist Party. Everyone was gathered in the elementary school and its courtyard in the village of Uzhusuoliai. The murderers beat everyone with whips and sticks.

The Lithuanian murderer Vilkevicius, from the railroad station at Kalnantsai, pointed out which of the assembled peasants had collaborated or sympathized with the Red Army or the Communist Party.

According to Vilkevicius, 56 peasants were selected at that time, along with the Polish nobleman Lukovsky. The nobleman owned the Kalnantsai I estate. He had a store called Ratas in Kaunas, on the corner of Laysves and Presidento Streets. He was also the director of the Lithuanian Credit Bank.

A Lithuanian worker betrayed the nobleman, claiming that he had given bread and milk to Red Army soldiers who had escaped into the forest.

Pits had been dug next to the above-mentioned villages, and each of the peasants was supposed to be shot next to his own village. The chief of the German field police, however, ordered that everyone be shot at a cemetery in Uzhusuoliai. All 56 were shot there. Among the Lithuanian murderers who took active part were Lopata, who lived not far from the Kalnantsai station; two brothers named Malinovsky from Kalnantsai; and the Lithuanian Malinovsky from the village of Daiklunu, all under the leadership of the famous murderer, the Lithuanian Vilkevicius.

In addition to these, there were also Lithuanians from Kaunas under the leadership of former Lithuanian officers. A short time later the agronomist from Jonava Grigaliunas came to Uzhusuoliai and took away the two Jewish families, Borov and Karnovsky.

In the morning of August 21 and 22, 1941 armed groups of Lithuanians under the leadership of Germans took all the men out of the barracks. Wagons were ready to carry the elderly and weak men. All of the men were taken in the direction of the railroad station. On the way the murderers promised the Jewish men and their wives in town that the men were being taken to a ghetto.

The men were taken to a forest called Girelkiai, three kilometers from Jonava and three kilometers from the station. In the forest the Jews found pits already dug. The murderers forced the Jews to strip to their underwear. Groups were taken to the pit and shot.

The shooters covered over the pit. The two murderers reported that before the shooting the men had to strip naked. The clothing was taken to Jonava in a truck. Katsas was so terrified that he doesn't remember any of the other Lithuanian murderers who were singing. Katsas' sister Libe Manishevits, her husband and four children were shot that day as well.

The Jews were shot in the forest of Giralke, exactly a kilometer from where Burshteyn's mill used to be, near the highway leading to Ukmerge, near the fork where an unpaved road leads to the Konceptija compound. The pit is about a hundred meters from the Ukmerge highway, and about fifty meters from the road to Konceptija. Katsas does not remember the exact date when the Jewish men, women and children were shot.

After the Jews of Jonava were shot, Jews who were still hiding in the fields and forest, or a few at the homes of peasants, began to be arrested. There was an announcement that all Jews who were in hiding should report to Jonava. There was a promise that they would be taken away from Jonava to the Kaunas ghetto. A few hundred

Jews gathered in Jonava at that time. They were placed in the former Russian camp. The Jews of Jonava who had already been shot had earlier been in that camp.

Katsas could no longer remain at his compound, because he was very afraid that one day he too would be arrested and shot, even though the Lithuanian population only considered him as a half-Jew; he had a Lithuanian wife, and his children had been raised in the spirit of Lithuanian nationalism. He went to Jonava with his family. Katsas and his wife went to the Kaunas ghetto together with the Jews of Jonava.

His two daughters continued living in the city of Kaunas.

### **Attestation of Shloyme Katsas**

Everything recorded on four pages about the slaughter of the Jews of Jonava was reported word for word to L Koniuchowsky by me, Shloyme Katsas, and I attest thereto with my signature on each and every page.

Signature:                    Shloyme Katsas

The report was written by L. Koniuchowsky  
Landsberg am Lech                    January 26, 1947

The signature of Shloyme Katsas is attested to by the director of the  
Landsberg cultural bureau.

H Milshteyn    Landsberg am Lech    January 26, 1947

*Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin New York                    March 2, 1994*

## THE SLAUGHTER OF JEWS IN THE FOLLOWING LITHUANIAN TOWNS IN THE VILNIUS REGION

- I. Pabershe.
- II. Maishiogala.
- III. Rieshe.
- IV. Suderwe.
- V. Dukshatas.
- VI. Jerusalimka.

Eyewitness testimony of Khyene Katsev, born Izrailsky in the town of Pabershe on April 5, 1920. She lived in Pabershe her entire life, until the war broke out on June 22, 1941. She graduated elementary school in the year 1935. A seamstress by trade. Her father's name was Yosef Izrailsky. Her mother's name was Bashe, born Oguz in Pabershe.

All six towns listed above belonged to Vilnius county, Poland in 1939. After Poland fell that year, the six towns were assigned to the Vilnius region of Lithuania, together with the entire area around Vilnius.

### **I. Pabershe**

Pabershe is located 28 kilometers to the north of Vilnius. A highway leading from Vilnius to Giedraitziai goes through the town. Until war broke out between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, about seventy families lived in town, along with a smaller number of Poles.

The mill in town belonged to a Jew named Moyshe Gendler. The majority of the Jewish population were employed in trade and artisanry. A small number were engaged in agriculture.

The town had a small Hebrew-Yiddish library, a study house, and a free loan society. The Jewish youth mostly studied at the Hebrew and Yiddish gymnasiums in Vilnius. Most of the Jewish youth belonged to Zionist organizations until the Red Army entered Lithuania in the summer of 1940.

The villages around the town were occupied by Poles. After the town was assigned to Lithuania, Lithuanian officials from deep inside Lithuania arrived in town.

The attitude of the townspeople and local country people toward the Jews in town was not bad. The arrival of the Red Army in town and the announcement that the Jews were citizens with equal rights aroused considerable hostility on the part of Christian neighbors in town and in the country. The majority of the Poles concurred with the anti-Jewish sentiments of the new Lithuanian rulers in town. This hostility toward the Jews was closely tied to their refusal to tolerate the Soviets and the new system. Both Poles and Lithuanians were overjoyed when war broke out between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941.

### **War Breaks Out; The Civilian Administration**

On the morning of Tuesday, June 24 the townspeople realized that the Germans were already close to town. Almost all the Jews left their homes and rushed to stay with peasants in the countryside. The Germans arrived in town at 4:00 on Tuesday afternoon. There was no battle for control of the town. The town was left entirely intact.

On the evening of Tuesday, June 24 the Jews began to return from the countryside to their homes. When the Jews returned they found their houses and all of their possessions in proper order. There had been no robberies.

The civilian administration in town was assembled by Lithuanians from town, along with the recent arrivals from the Lithuanian interior. Some of the Poles from town joined with them.

The first mayor in town was the Pole Rimsenewitz. The chief of police in town was a Lithuanian who hadn't been in town before the war. Four or five of the police were those who had been in the Red militia during the year of Soviet rule. They were all Lithuanians who had come from Lithuania during the Soviet period. The boss of the Jewish mill after it was nationalized under the Soviets, was a Lithuanian from the Lithuanian interior. After the Germans arrived in town he became the partisan commander. Khyene does not remember his last name.

During the second week of the war partisans in the village of Kazhmirove caught a Jewish boy named Khayem Nementshinsky. He had been involved in politics under the Soviets, and thus he was afraid to come to town. A

partisan acquaintance of Khayem's shot him on the spot. The murderer buried Khayem there in the country, near a stream. All three partisans were Poles from Pabershe. Their first and last names are: Henrik Jancsek; Kazhuk Balenda; and Juzef Sumbar. Before the war these three had been friendly with the Jewish youth of the town. Juzef Sumbar had been a member of the militia under the Soviets. Henrik Jancsek had been a member of the Communist youth.

The Polish photographer from town Kadelsky and the farmer Drozd from a settlement near the Gerviat compound had been arrested and imprisoned under the Soviets. The photographer had been caught with pictures of the Polish leaders, and the peasant Drozd had been caught hiding a rifle. Young people from town took part in the inspections. After the war broke out the two men escaped from prison in Vilnius and came to Pabershe. They both sought opportunities to take revenge against Jews. They went to the Gestapo in Vilnius and libelled the Jews from town, saying they were all Communists.

### **Robberies and Arrests: 36 Jewish Men Shot**

On the morning of Friday, July 11 several automobiles carrying high-ranking Gestapo officials and a truck carrying Gestapo men arrived from Vilnius. They all pulled in at the marketplace near the restaurant belonging to the Pole Rauba. There they got drunk. From there they spread out in groups to the Jewish houses. The first Jew they encountered in the street was Khyene's cousin Yankl Oguz, a cattle dealer. The Gestapo men murderously beat him and arrested him. At the same time they arrested a Jew named Lipe Pastor, owner of a restaurant. They murderously beat him as well. They forced both Jews to accompany them and show them where Jews lived. Together with the police and partisans in town, they went to all the Jewish houses, taking money, gold, silver, gold rings and earrings, watches and other valuables. In each Jewish house they carried out a thorough investigation, taking everything they wanted. They took all the Jewish men above the age of fourteen or fifteen out of their houses.

They took all the men to the church in town. There the Jewish men had to stand with their hands up and their faces to the wall. At the same time the police and partisans took shovels out of the Jewish houses, and they took these to the church as well.

The photographer Kadelsky from town was an active participant in everything. He showed them where Jews lived, helped them rob and helped gather the necessary number of shovels. He spent a long time helping a Gestapo officer to rob and search for Jewish men in hiding. Next to the church the Gestapo men, helped by police and partisans, gathered 38 Jewish men.

The youngster Henokh Tsikhok, aged thirteen, was allowed to go back home. All of the other 37 were forced to climb into a truck. The necessary number of shovels were also placed in the truck. The Jewish men were taken out of town in the direction of Giedraitziai, on the highway.

Before the men were taken out of town, the Gestapo told them they were all being taken away to work in Lithuania. They were taken off to a small woods near the Trokiai compound, located two or three kilometers from town. In the forest the Jews were forced to dig a pit. Then they were all shot. The mass grave is located less than a kilometer from the Trokiai compound. 36 men lie murdered in the mass grave. The 37<sup>th</sup> was released from the area of the pit. The Jew who was released was Khayem Yofe. When Khayem came from the area of the pit to town he related that several young people had wanted to jump out of the truck and run away.

Rabbi Khayem Kaplan from town convinced them all not to do this, and recited the final confession before death with everyone. He also related that he had been released from the forest near the pit. At that time it was impossible to learn any details from him. He was very depressed and apathetic. He reported that a peasant acquaintance whom he had hidden from the Soviets had saved him.

However, everyone in town had always had a low opinion of this Khayem. The relatives of those who had been murdered suspected him of having betrayed several Jews. A short time after the 36 men were shot, his son Aba, at that time aged 21, was appointed foreman of the Jewish workers by the partisans in town.

When the Gestapo rode into the town, a large number of men hid in the attics of their barns. Others escaped from town to villages, fields and forests. Khyene's older brother David Izrailsky ran to hide in grain fields at the edge of town. Two Jews named Peretz Lap and Shmuel Vilkinsky came to hide at the same place. They convinced David that the spot wasn't a good one, and all three left the grain field, trying to hide in the forest. They were attacked by three Poles from town who didn't have any weapons in their hands except for knives. Peretz Lap and Shmuel Vilkinsky ran away. David was left among the murderers, who threatened him with their long knives.

David ran away. At that moment an automobile carrying Gestapo men was already returning to town after the shooting of the 36 men. They arrested David. David told them that he had been working in his own field when three Poles tried to kill him. The Gestapo men took his golden fountain pen and his watch. They took him along to town in their taxi, and brought him to the church. There David had to stand with his hands up against the wall for an hour and a half. Then he was allowed to go home.

The three Poles caught up with Peretz Lap and stoned him to death. They dug a pit and wanted to bury him in it, but the grave was too short. They chopped his head off with their spade, and covered the grave over. After this murderous act they came to town and boasted to everybody. Khyene herself heard the three murderers boasting to everybody. All three murderers were Poles from town.

The three were:

- 1) The locksmith Ciranowsky;
- 2) The mason Marcinkewitz;
- 3) The worker Schniak, a partisan.

The first two were neither members of the town police nor of the Lithuanian partisan group, but they always helped in the slaughter of the town's Jews and the robbery of the Jews' possessions.

Among the 36 Jewish men who were shot on Friday, July 11, 1941 near the Trokiai compound, Khyene remembers the following:

1. Aron Izrailsky, aged 17, a student, Khyene's brother.
2. Avrom Bampi, aged forty, a merchant.
3. Moyshe Gordon, a tailor.
4. Meyer Kagan, a merchant, an elderly man, and his three sons:
5. Rafael, a merchant;
6. Yankl, a merchant;
7. Binyomin, a merchant.
8. Shmuel Valtstok, a merchant.
9. Yankl Oguz, a cattle dealer.
10. Leybe Oguz, a merchant.
11. Yankl Oguz, a cousin of Yankl Oguz the cattle dealer.
12. Pine Shpitalnik.
13. Heyshl Volovitz, a merchant.
14. Iser Viker, a scribe, and his son:
15. Leybe Viker, also a scribe.
16. Lipe Pastor, owner of a restaurant.
17. Zalmen Vilkinsky, a farmer, aged 17, and his uncle
18. Leybe Vilkinsky, a yeshiva student.
19. Berl Retzky, a farmer, and his brother:
20. Moyshe Retzky, a student.
21. Shmuel Kagan, a merchant.
22. Moyshe Vaynshteyn, a farmer and merchant, and his brother:
23. Osher Vaynshteyn, a farmer and merchant.
24. Shmuel Vaynshteyn, a student, a nephew of Moyshe and Osher Vaynshteyn.
25. The town rabbi, Rabbi Khayem Kaplan.
26. Shimon Kagan, a wigmaker.
27. Yeshayohu Nementshinsky, a tailor.

Khyene does not remember the first or last names of the rest of the murdered men. Among the men who were shot were yeshiva students and refugees from Poland.

On Friday, July 11 Lithuanian police and partisans took away the Jews' horses and cows, and distributed them to peasants living in town and in the countryside.

### **The Ghetto: Decrees and Insults of Jews; Various Hard Tasks**

Five or six days later, on July 17 or 18, 1941, police went to all the Jewish houses announcing that everyone had to settle into one neighborhood, in small old houses near the study house. The Christian residents moved into the good Jewish houses, and the Jews moved into the old, dirty houses. The Jews also moved into the women's section of the synagogue, and into the free loan society building. All the Jews had to move before 6:00 p.m. that same day.

There was no fence around the neighborhood, nor was there a guard posted. At that time as well the familiar anti-Jewish decrees were enforced in town, about wearing two yellow Stars of David, forbidding Jews to walk on the sidewalks, and so forth. A curfew was introduced for Jews. Jews were not allowed to leave their homes between 6:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m. They weren't even allowed to go from one house to the other. During the day the Jews were allowed to leave the neighborhood.

Some of the Jews even went to the country to buy food.

Immediately after the Germans arrived in town police and partisans took Jews to do various tasks. Every morning all of the able-bodied men and women had to gather near the town police headquarters for roll call. From there they were taken to do various tasks. The Jews worked at fixing up the graves of fallen German soldiers from the First World War, and repairing the roads and highways around the town. Some of the young people did agricultural work at various compounds. While the Jews worked they were guarded by police and partisans, who bullied the Jews, beat them and mocked them. After a hard day's work, the Jews went home.

The Jews were not paid for their work, nor were they fed. The Jews exchanged their possessions with peasants for a bit of food.

After they had been in the neighborhood for a certain amount of time, the Jews were forbidden from buying food at the market place. They were strictly forbidden to leave town and buy food in the country.

Tragic reports about the total annihilation of Jews began coming from nearby Lithuanian towns. Several Jewish survivors from surrounding towns appeared and corroborated the reports. Most of the Jews in town considered the reports to be impossible and exaggerated. The Jews torn away from all the nearby Jewish communities were consumed with sorrow and despair.

### **All the Jews Taken to the Wilianowa Compound; The Total Slaughter**

On Friday, September 19, 1941 policemen went to the Jewish houses, and warned everyone that the next day, Saturday, they would have to report to the square near the police station. All the Jews, men, women and children, had to report to the square. Some of the young people left the town that Friday evening, and ran away to hide at the homes of peasant friends in the nearby forests and villages.

They took along their better possessions and hid them. The Jews did not guess the intentions of the Lithuanian police and partisans in town.

On Saturday morning almost all of the Jews came to the square near the police station. Only the elderly, the sick and small children remained at home. From eight in the morning Jews waited for further news in great terror and impatience.

At 9:00 a.m. two trucks carrying Lithuanian partisans arrived in town. They were all dressed in their pre-war uniforms. They were all well-armed. When they saw the Jews standing in the square, they began laughing uproariously and rubbing their hands with joy. Some of those remaining in the trucks skipped with glee. The two trucks stopped across from the Jews. The Jews' mood changed to despair. Some of them said that these murderers were going to shoot all the Jews. Some of them said that they were on their way to the front. Some of the Jews gradually moved away from the square, hiding behind the nearby houses, where they waited with their hearts pounding for the desperate situation to evolve further.

Aba Yofe, the foreman of the Jewish workers, had apparently overheard a conversation between the leaders of the newly-arrived partisans. Aba understood a bit of Lithuanian. He came to the Jews and desperately complained that he didn't understand what was happening.

When he came a second time he shouted out loud: "Jews, it's bad! Everybody who can save himself should do so!" The Jews began running away from the square in every direction. Many of them ran out of town into the surrounding forests. Others ran to their houses, grabbed their small children and then ran out of town toward the surrounding forests and villages. Some of them ran from the square toward their homes and hid there. These were the older and weaker Jews.

The partisans immediately surrounded the town. They forced Aba to go to the houses with them and summon the Jews back to the square. The partisans promised the Jews that everyone was being taken away to work, and no one should be afraid. They permitted everyone to bring along their things and gather at the town community center.

The Jews in town calmed down a bit, and began packing their better possessions to bring them along. Some of the Jews immediately ran off to join their relatives in nearby forests and villages, and told them to come back to town "because everyone is being taken to work," as they told their relatives.

The majority of the Jews who had run away returned to town, packed their valuable possessions and went to the community center. More than a hundred Jews ran away from town that morning. Most of them believed the partisans' assurances, and returned to town. The Jews were allowed to take whatever they wanted out of their houses and bring it to the community center. At noon on Saturday almost all the Jews had arrived at the community center.

After the Jews went to the community center, police sealed the Jewish houses. As soon as the Jews had entered the community center, a heavy guard was posted. No one was allowed out. The Jews were allowed to load their possessions onto wagons which had been brought for the purpose. The sick and elderly Jews and the small children were placed in wagons. The rest of the Jews had to line up in a column in rows. All the Jews were taken out onto the highway in the direction of Vilnius under heavy guard. When they had gone fifteen kilometers the Jews were taken off the highway to the left, and brought to the Wilianowa compound, a few kilometers from the highway.

On Saturday evening, September 20, 1941 all of the Jews of Pabershe were brought to the Wilianowa compound. Peasants who took the older Jews in their wagons later related that on the way from town to the compound partisans brutally beat the Jews.

## **II. Maishiogala**

Maishiogala is a small town 28 kilometers from Vilnius. The highway between Vilnius and Ukmerge goes through the town. About seventy Jewish families lived in town. They worked in trade, artisanry and also did a bit of agriculture. The town had a study house. Until 1936 the town belonged to Poland. Then the town was assigned to Lithuania, along with the Vilnius region.

On Sunday, September 21, 1941, partisans brought all of the Jews of Maishiogala to the Wilianowa compound.

## **III. Rieshe**

Rieshe is a small town north of Vilnius, halfway between Pabershe and Vilnius. Until the war broke out on June 22, 1941, about ten Jewish families lived there, and worked at trade, artisanry and agriculture.

On Saturday, September 20, 1941, the Jews from these places were brought to the Wilianowa compound.

## **IV. Suderwe**

A church compound ten kilometers from the town of Rieshe. Several Jewish families lived there, working at trade and agriculture. There was no study house there. On Saturday, September 20 the Jews were taken to the Wilianowa compound.

## **V. Duktas**

A small town not far from Maishiogala. Several Jewish families lived there, working at trade and agriculture. These several Jewish families were also taken to the Wilianowa compound on Saturday, September 20, 1941.

## **VI. Jerusalemka**

Part of this place belonged to the city of Vilnius, and the smaller part, containing the summer houses across the river, belonged to Rieshe township. It is a small town seven kilometers from Vilnius, on the highway between Vilnius and Pabershe. Until the war about ten Jewish families lived there. They worked at trade, artisanry and agriculture. The town had a study house.

On Saturday, September 20, 1941 partisans drove the Jews out of their houses. A small number of the Jews were taken to Wilianowa, and the rest to the Vilnius ghetto. The Jews from the section belonging to Rieshe township were taken to Wilianowa.

The Wilianowa compound is located five kilometers from the town of Rieshe. Until 1939 the compound belonged to a Polish nobleman named Slizhen. After the Red Army entered Lithuania in the summer of 1940, the compound had been nationalized.

The compound contained agricultural buildings, and a beautiful house belonging to the former nobleman. All the Jews who had been brought from the six towns were herded into the barns by the partisans.

A heavy guard was posted around the barns. The Jews were not allowed to leave the barns. They were given nothing to eat or drink. The Jews clearly understood what was going to happen in the near future. The panic of the women and children is hard to convey.

On the first day of Rosh Hashanah 1941, Monday, September 22, the partisans drove a group of Jews into a small forest half a kilometer from the Wilianowa compound. There the Jews were shot. The same thing happened on the second day of Rosh Hashanah, and on Wednesday, the day after Rosh Hashanah.

In the course of three days all the Jews who had been assembled were shot at one mass grave. Peasants later reported that for some distance the screams of men, women and children could be heard. After the grave was covered with dirt, blood seethed from inside. The surface of the grave slowly heaved up and down. When the mass grave was covered over, many people were buried alive who had been only slightly or badly wounded.

While the Jews were being shot, liquor and beer were available near the pit. The shooters kept drinking and celebrating. In Khyene's opinion more than seven hundred Jews were shot at that spot (820?) (750-800-L.K.).

### **Hidden Jews Caught and Shot After the Total Annihilation**

On Friday, September 19 in the evening, as well as the next day, Saturday the 20th, a large number of Jews escaped from town. Some of them returned to town on Saturday, and went to the community center with their relatives. The rest hid in the forests and with peasants in the countryside. The majority, however, were later caught by the Lithuanian and Polish police, and the Lithuanian partisans.

Khyene remembers the following cases:

1. Gershon Zaks and his wife Feyge and two small children hid in the village of Schapeci, two kilometers from the town of Pabershe. On the second day of Rosh Hashanah 1941 the peasant woman with whom they were hiding reported them to the town police. They were kept in the town prison for a few days. From there they were taken to the Vilnius prison. All four were killed.
2. A girl named Dvoyre Viker hid at the home of a peasant in a village near a forest. Lithuanian police caught her at the home of the peasant Karpowits and brought her to the town prison. From there she was taken to prison in Vilnius. Dvoyre Viker was killed.
3. Mrs Sore-Etl Retsky and her daughter Esther hid at the home of the peasant Baczul in the village of Rawnopoli, two kilometers from Pabershe. Mrs Retsky had hidden her valuables at this peasant's home. After the Jews were shot near the Wilianowa compound, the peasant kept the two women for a week and then handed them over to the police in town. The mother and daughter were taken to prison in town, and from there to Vilnius prison. Both were killed.
4. Mrs Etl Lap and her three sons Dovid, Yosl and a third little boy hid in the village of Sawky, four kilometers from town, at the home of a peasant. Mrs Khaye Tapuakh and her daughters Leye, aged 18 and Rokhel, aged 16, were also hiding with that peasant. Exactly two weeks after the Jews were taken out of town, a neighbor betrayed them. All seven Jews were arrested by the police and taken to prison in town. From there they were taken to Vilnius prison, where they evidently all died. The neighbor who betrayed them was Juzef Wirbil.
5. Dovid Izrailsky, Khyene's brother, escaped from town on Friday evening, September 19, 1941. He hid at the home of a peasant named Woitkewitz, in a settlement near the village of Borskuni, seven kilometers from the town of Pabershe. Dovid was at the home of the peasant for a week. The peasant gave Dovid food and drink, and then went to the police in town and betrayed Dovid. Policemen arrested Dovid at the peasant's home. They beat him and tortured him. They demanded that he tell them where his three sisters were hiding.

For a long time Dovid was kept in prison in town, tortured and interrogated. Then they sent him to the Vilnius Gestapo headquarters, where he was kept interned for a week. From there he was taken to Ponari, near Vilnius. Dovid was arrested by police at the peasant's home in the countryside on December 6, 1941.

6. Shimen Vaynshteyn hid until late fall 1941 at the home of a peasant in the Koniuch compound. He was betrayed. Police arrested him and brought him to prison in Pabershe. From there he was taken to prison in Vilnius. Shimen Vaynshteyn died. Khyene does not know any details.

7. A cousin of Shimen's named Leyzer Vaynshteyn hid at the home of a peasant in the village of Burkuli, six or seven kilometers from town, until late in the fall of 1941. Leyzer had hidden his possessions at the home of another peasant. Once when he went to the other peasant to pick up some of his things, the peasant betrayed Leyzer to the police. Leyzer was arrested and taken to prison in town. From there he was taken to Vilnius prison. Later Leyzer was in the Vilnius ghetto and in a camp in Germany, where he died.

8. Yisroel Oguz, his wife Mashe and their two small children hid in a village at the home of the peasant Matlak. Yisroel had hidden his things at the home of another peasant named Schimkewitz. Yisroel went to him to ask for some of his things. Schimkewitz asked where he and his family were hiding, and promised to bring him some of the things. Schimkewitz decided instead to inherit Yisroel's goods, and told the police in Pabershe about the Jews who were in hiding. The Oguz family were arrested. They spent a short time in the town prison. From there they were taken to Vilnius. They were all killed. The good peasant Matlak lived in a village five kilometers from Pabershe.

9. Gedalye Shmukler, his wife Miriam and their two small children Bashe and Leybele hid in a village five kilometers from town at the home of a peasant. Another peasant betrayed the family. They were all arrested. They were killed in the Vilnius prison. This was in the winter of 1941.

10. The peasant Woitkewitz, who had betrayed Khyene's brother Dovid Izrailsky, was visited by the Pabershe Jews Zusl Shapiro and his two sons Shmuel-Khayem and Moyshe, who wanted food. The peasant warmly received the father and his two sons, and gave them food and drink. He suggested that they wait until fresh bread would finish baking, so he could give it to them to take along. He himself went to town and reported the Jews to the police. Before he left he let the Jews into a barn. Police surrounded the barn. Zusl and Shmuel-Khayem managed to escape. Moyshe was caught, tied up and brought first to Pabershe prison and then to the Gestapo in Vilnius. From the Gestapo he was taken to Vilnius ghetto. Later he fled the ghetto and went into hiding in the countryside again, and he survived. He was killed by Polish nationalists after the war.

11. Zusl Shapiro and his daughter Bashe, a girl in her twenties, later hid in a small bath house near the village of Olani, twelve kilometers from the town of Pabershe. No-one knew about their presence. In the evening the father and daughter went to the village to get food from the peasants. A forester spied on them, and detained both of them. He tied them up and brought them to the police in Pabershe. From there they were both taken to Vilnius prison. Details about their death in Vilnius are unavailable to Khyene. The father and daughter were arrested by the forester three weeks before the arrival of the Red Army in the region.

The Pabershe Jew Shmuel Shapiro, aged 35 or 36, escaped from the mass grave. Khyene spoke with him after the Liberation. Shmuel told Khyene that a group of Jews from the Wilianowa compound had been forced to dig the mass grave in the forest. He had been one of them. After the mass grave was dug, all the Jews who had worked on it were shot. A number of Jews ran away from the pit at that time. Automatic rifle fire was aimed at the escaping Jews from all sides. Everyone was shot trying to escape. Shmuel Shapiro was the only one who managed to escape from the pit and hide in a forest.

Shmuel Shapiro was murdered by Polish right-wing nationalists after the war.

### **How Did the Eyewitness Khyene and Her Sister survive?**

Among those who escaped from the square in Pabershe on Saturday, September 20, 1941, were Khyene and her sister Reyzl. They went to their own house, quickly gathered together as much as they could and escaped to a peasant in a village two kilometers from town.

Khyene, her mother Bashl and sister Reyzl immediately returned to town to take something out of the house and bring it to the village. In town people began to be reassured, thinking they were being taken to work. Their mother decided to stay in the house, but she sent her two daughters to escape, Bashl asked her two daughters: "I've already lived more than half a life. But you should run and survive! God will show you a way, and good people will help you!"

Khyene and Reyzl said goodbye to their mother, and left the town. Partisans arrested the two sisters outside of town, and brought them back into town. Then the two sisters escaped from town in another direction. Khyene's brother Dovid escaped from town on Friday, September 19. On Saturday morning Freydl left town to see Dovid, in order to warn him not to come to town.

The two sister Khyene and Reyzl escaped from town into a forest where they met their sister Freydl and their brother Dovid.

Khyene's father Yosl and his little son Moyshe, aged seven, ran away from town in another direction on Saturday. The father and other Jews allowed themselves to be convinced by peasants that the Jews were being taken to work. The father and Moyshe returned to town and went to the community center.

After her two daughters escaped, Bashe took the two small children Khayele and Elinke from a village and took them to town. Then they too went to the community center.

Khyene's father Yosl, her mother Bashe, her brothers Moyshe and Elinke (aged 2) and her sister Khayele were all annihilated near the Wilianowa compound.

Khyene's brother Aron Izrailsky was one of the 36 Jews who were shot on July 11, 1941. Khyene's other brother Dovid Izrailsky was betrayed by a peasant two months after he ran away from town, and was killed (see Case 5 above).

Surviving Pabershe Jews after the slaughter near the Wilianowa compound later died in the ghettos and countryside in White Russia.

The three sisters Freydl, Reyzl and Khyene began a difficult, bitter and desperate struggle to survive. They were facing not only the Lithuanian and Polish partisans, police and the Germans. They also had to fight desperately against the terribly cold winter of 1941. A day here and a night there, they wandered through fields, forests and villages, through an alien world which was murderously prejudiced against the Jewish survivors. Khyene was a seamstress, and she managed to obtain a position with a peasant named Matijas in the village of Borskuni, seven kilometers from Pabershe. At the peasant's home she sewed and earned money. She was there for six months, and then she went to another peasant named Kazimir Arszewsky, in the same village. She was there for six weeks. In the fall of 1942 Khyene no longer had anyone to work for, and she went to the Vilnius ghetto, where she stayed for ten months, until the fall of 1943.

At that time Jews began to be taken out of the Vilnius ghetto to various camps. Jews were taken from the Vilnius ghetto to Estonia, Latvia and so forth, Khyene escaped from the ghetto in the fall of 1943, three weeks before the Vilnius ghetto was liquidated. Khyene returned to the area near the town of Maishiogala.

Khyene hid in the village of Borskuni at the homes of the peasants Stanislaw Gladkowsky, Juzef Matijas, Juzef Matilanec and several other peasants from the fall of 1943 until the liberation on June 25, 1944.

While she was with the peasants Khyene did everything she could to be useful to her rescuers. She sewed for them, helped with the housework and the like. Khyene didn't have any money, and she paid the peasants with her diligent, useful work.

Reyzl was fortunate. A peasant from a village near the town of Shirvintas in Lithuania came to visit another peasant in a village. The peasant had six daughters. One of them worked for the Gestapo. The peasant took Reyzl to his village. There she managed to obtain Aryan papers, and she lived openly. But neighbors figured out that she was Jewish. Reyzl left for a village near Ukmerge, and went to work as a maid for Lithuanians who had helped slaughter the Jews of Ukmerge.

There she pretended to be a Polish woman. None of the peasants in the village figured out that she was Jewish. Reyzl heard terrible stories from her masters about the slaughter of the Jews of Ukmerge. The peasants spoke about it with great satisfaction. They all justified the slaughter of the Jews of Lithuania. When Reyzl listened to these stories her heart pounded in her chest. Tears burst from her eyes. But she had to control herself and avoid revealing her identity. With all her strength she tried to please and satisfy her masters, whose hands were drenched in Jewish blood. She was liberated in a village near Ukmerge.

Frida hid the whole time with the same peasants as her sister Khyene. The peasants knew that they were sisters. The two sisters were always separated, and they met very seldom.

The town of Pabershe was totally burned down by the Germans before the Red Army arrived in the summer of 1944. All of the Jewish survivors gathered in town. They visited and paid their respects to the 36 Jews who had been shot, and also went to the mass grave near the Wilianowa compound. Khyene also visited both mass graves.

The Jewish survivors had no place to go in town. They were all exhausted, hungry, barefoot and naked. They had no place to stay. For some time they all slept in a barn belonging to the peasant Franciszek Balkowsky. The Jews began demanding their belonging and their cattle, which their relatives and families had given to peasants after the Germans arrived in the year 1941. Those whose houses were still intact demanded them back from the townspeople who had considered themselves the heirs of the murdered Jews for several years by then.

The peasants in town apparently turned to the right-wing nationalist Poles in the forests for help against the "nervy" Jews.

One Friday evening after the High Holy Days of 1944 nationalist Poles in the village of Pamuszi caught the Jew Moyshe Shapior, tied his hands and feet and threw him into a river.

The next day, Saturday night, nationalist Poles took Mrs Miriam Shapiro from a peasant's house and forced her to show them where the surviving Jews from the town were sleeping.

The Polish nationalists took the Jews Yisroel Nementshinsky, Yudl Orzhekhovsky, Shepsl Vilkinsky and Moyshe Shapiro's uncle Shmuel Shapiro from the homes of peasants.

The Polish nationalists shot Miriam Shapiro and the four Jews in town near the houses where they had slept.

Khyene was in town as well at the time, sewing for a peasant woman. There were other Jews in town at the time. The Polish nationalists looked for them as well, but didn't find them.

Because of the shortage of space in the burned town of Pabershe, the Red militia had settled into the nearby compound of Glinczyszky, and they didn't know about the murderous attack by the Polish nationalists against the few Jewish survivors. A total of ten or twelve Jews survived from the entire town.

### **Attestation of Khyene Katzev**

Everything written about the slaughter of Jews in Pabershe, Maishogola, Rieshe, Suderve, Dukshatas and Jeruzalimka, all of the facts, dates, names of persons and of geographical locations, were personally experienced and related to L Koniuchowsky by me, Khyene Katsev, born Izrailsky. After reading over the report, I attest to everything with my signature on each and every page.

Eyewitness Khyene Katsev-Izrailsky (Signature)

The report was written by Engineer L Koniuchowsky  
Heidenheim a/Brenz January 26, 1948

The signature of Mrs Khyene Katsev (Izrailsky), resident of the Heidenheim (Brenz) camp, is attested to by the chairman of the camp committee.

Chairman of the camp: J. Bialowicz (Signature) Heidenheim, January 26, 1948.

*Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin New York May 18, 1994*

## THE SLAUGHTER OF JEWS IN RIESHE

Reported by Khyene Fridberg, born in Greater Rieshe on October 5, 1917. Her maiden name was Mindes. She graduated elementary school. She is a bookkeeper by trade. Her father's name was Avrom, and her mother Khayesore.

- I. Greater Rieshe is located fourteen kilometers from Vilnius on the highway between Vilnius and Pabershe in Vilnius county. It is a small town. Two Jewish families lived there, working in agriculture and trade.
- II. Little Rieshe, three kilometers from Greater Rieshe, on the highway between Vilnius and Maishogala. One Jewish family lived there, consisting of Yankl Burshteyn, his wife Matle and four little children. The family worked in agriculture.
- III. Fabritshne-Rieshe, about six or seven kilometers away on the road to Green Lake near Vilnius. Three Jewish families lived there. There was a large paper factory, where some of the local Jews worked as well. The Jews also worked in agriculture.

The Germans entered Greater Rieshe on Wednesday, June 25, 1943.

Immediately after the Germans arrived, the new mayor of the town was appointed—the Pole Petr Szwarczewitz, a farmer who had been mayor from 1939-1941.

The Jews in these three localities remained in their own houses after the Germans arrived, and continued at their work. There were no particular persecutions against the Jews in the three places, and in general they were only slightly aware of the situation of the Jews in the surrounding towns.

On Saturday, September 20 the Lithuanian partisans brought the Jews from the three places to the Wilianowa compound, where they brought the Jews from the surrounding towns the same day. The Jews from the three places were shot with all the Jews at that compound on September 23 and 24, 1941.

On Saturday, September 20 the Jew Berl Likhtzon, a merchant aged 40, escaped from Greater Rieshe. He hid in the countryside for a short time. He was caught in the village of Zhveralishki and taken to Vilnius prison, where he died.

He hid with the Kruks brothers in the village of Zhveralishki. Peasants later said that the two brothers had argued, and one of them had betrayed the other.

In the compound of Bukishki, six kilometers from Greater Rieshe, there were no Jews before the war. There was a police station there, however. The chief of the police station, Zashtzerinsky, a Lithuanian from deep inside Lithuania, was a terrible anti-Semite. He killed many Jews in the villages and forests. He shot them himself immediately.

Thus, for example, he caught a Jew from Vilnius named Leyzer Volk in the village of Klinuwka, two kilometers from Little Rieshe, at the home of the peasant Juzef Subotkowsky. The peasant betrayed Leyzer, along with a Jew from the White Russian town of Oshmene. Zashtzerinsky shot both Jews on the spot.

In the same village of Klinuwka, in a nearby forest, two bunkers had been set up and occupied by Jews from Vilnius who had escaped from the ghetto in September 1943. A Russian peasant found out about the bunkers, and told the murderer Zashtzerinsky about them. The latter came to the forest with four more well-armed Lithuanians, and they surrounded the bunkers. The Jews didn't know that they had been betrayed, and stayed in the bunkers. Zashtzerinsky threw hand grenades into the bunkers. Eleven Jews were killed. Three were captured alive and taken to the Gestapo in Vilnius.

The eleven Jews who died on November 9, 1943 were:

- 1-2. David Leybinsky and his wife Gite.
- 3-4. Khasye Verblin and a child named Khanele.
5. Ita Miransky.
6. Hirsh Vaynerman.
7. Binyomin Itzkovitz.
- 8-10. Leybe Geler and his sisters Rokhel and Esther.
11. Mishke (Moyshe) Zak.

Ita Leybishky and her little brother Avromele, and Abrashe Shavidantz were taken to the Vilnius Gestapo by the murderers.

The murderer Zashtzerinsky also killed a Vilnius Jew named Ring. At the dairy center in the Bukishky compound worked a Lithuanian partisan named Karecky. In a village called Owizhene he arrested a Jew named Hirsh Leybisky, who had escaped from the Vilnius ghetto in the fall of 1943. It is not known where the Lithuanian murderer killed the Jew.

Khyene and her first husband Ruven Vaynerman were at the Rieshe peat camp until July 11, 1943. Together with other Jews they were brought to the Vilnius ghetto, from which they shortly escaped to a village called Prushishki. Ruven went to Jeruzalimka to make arrangements with a Lithuanian to get Aryan papers for him and his wife. When he returned to town from the village a Lithuanian policeman arrested him and shot him on the spot.

Khyene survived at the home of a peasant woman named Lewkowska in the village of Prushisky, four kilometers from Greater Rieshe.

### **About the Small Town of Jeruzalimka**

A small town near Vilnius. Most of it was considered a suburb of Vilnius. The smaller part, on the other side of the river, belonged to Rieshe township.

On Saturday, September 20, 1941 Lithuanian partisans took all the Jews from that part of Lithuania belonging to Rieshe township, and took them to the Wilianowa compound, where they were killed.

The Jews from the part of Jeruzalimka belonging to Vilnius were taken to the Vilnius ghetto a few weeks earlier.

### **Attestation of Khyene Fridberg**

Everything reported by me about the slaughter of the Jews of Rieshe and Jeruzalimka was personally experienced by me. All of the facts, dates, names of persons and locations were personally provided by me, and I attest thereto with my signature on each and every page.

Signature: Khyene Fridberg

The report was written by Engineer L Koniuchowsky Feldafing, March 20, 1948

The signature of the Feldafing resident Khyene Fridberg-Mindes is attested to by the chairman of the camp committee E Reif Feldafing, March 20, 1948

*Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin                      New York                      May 18, 1994*

## 1. THE SLAUGHTER OF JEWS IN MAISHIOGALA

Eyewitness testimony of Moyshe Fridberg, born in Maishiogala on February 4, 1907. He graduated from a Yiddish elementary school in town. He is a merchant by trade. He lived in Maishiogala his whole life. His father's name was Berl and his mother was Khaye, born Shakhnovitz.

Maishiogala is located on the highway between Vilnius and Ukmerge, 28 kilometers from Vilnius and 21 kilometers from Shirvintas, 15 kilometers from Pabershe, on the former border between Poland and Lithuania, on the Polish side. Through the town flows the Dukstė River.

Until the war broke out on June 22, 1941 about a thousand residents lived in the town. There were three hundred Jews in about seventy families. The town and the surrounding area were occupied exclusively by Poles.

The Jews in town were occupied in trade and artisanry. There were also a few farmers and forest merchants. The economic situation of the Jews was not bad. After the Red Army arrived, and after Maishiogala was assigned to Lithuania in 1939, the economic situation of the Jews improved, thanks to the connections with the Lithuanian heartland.

The town had an elementary school until 1930; a Yiddish-Hebrew library; a town drama club; a large study house; a Hasidic prayer room; and a free loan society.

The attitude of the population toward the local Jews before 1936 was not bad. In 1938 anti-Jewish acts and boycotts began. The Polish Fascist National Democrats successfully aroused the local population against the Jews. After Lithuania was occupied in the summer of 1940, the anti-semitic demonstrations stopped. The Polish population forgot about the Jews in their hatred of the Lithuanians and especially of the Soviets.

### **The outbreak of War. Synagogue and Torah Scrolls Vandalized The Lithuanian Administration. Decrees and Arrests of Jews**

After the war broke out between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, the townspeople evacuated to the nearby towns in fear of the possibility of aerial attacks by the German air force. A few young people escaped to the Soviet Union. A few of them fell at the front, fighting against the Germans. Several survived.

On Thursday night, June 26, German army units entered the town. They arrived from Vilnius and Shirvintas. That same Friday four German officers vandalized the study house, took the Torah scrolls out of the Ark and threw them on the floor and trod on them with their dirty boots. They did the same thing to the religious books. They were ready to burn the study house down. The peasants living nearby asked them not to do that, because they were afraid the fire would spread. Moyshe Fridberg and Dovid Rudnik straightened up the vandalized study house.

The German military units didn't stay in town, but instead quickly raced toward the front.

All of the power in town fell into the hands of the Lithuanians who had set up the civilian administration. The mayor in town was a Lithuanian named Astikas, who had previously been mayor in 1939-1940. During the year of Soviet rule he had lost his post. He returned to town from deep in Lithuania together with the Germans. He was mayor for the first two weeks. Then a Pole from town named Franciszek Romejka, a farmer, became mayor.

The chief of police was a Lithuanian from the Lithuanian interior. The commander of the partisans was a Lithuanian from the interior, a former teacher in the nearby village of Rozwi, four kilometers from town. His last name was Shalkauskas. He occupied the position until after the Jews were liquidated.

After the civilian administration was set up, the Lithuanians issued all of the usual anti-Jewish decrees, and forced the Jews to do heavy, dirty work on the highway and in town. Almost every night they woke the Jews up, tormented them, threatened to shoot them and annoy them in other ways.

Ele Bulansky was the first Jew in town to be arrested and sent by the Lithuanians to Vilnius prison, where he was later killed. At that time Ele was just 17 years old. The second arrestee was Yoysef Grudzensky, aged 16. He too was sent to prison in Vilnius, where he later died. At that time 36 men were shot in the nearby town of Pabershe.

Moyshe Fridberg sent a messenger to find out about the incident. It may be that the Christian messenger told someone about this. Moyshe was arrested on a charge of having looked for ways to establish an organization to

fight against the Germans. He was released from the hands of the Lithuanians in exchange for a large sum of money.

On Sunday, July 20, 1941 the Lithuanian police and partisans arrested 17 Jewish men and placed them in the town prison near the town hall. The relatives of the arrestees raised a large sum of money, and gave it to the Lithuanians, who promised to liberate the arrestees. However, they summoned Gestapo from Vilnius. All of the arrestees were taken to the Vilnius prison, where they were later killed at Ponar near Vilnius.

The seventeen who were arrested and then taken to the Vilnius prison and killed at Ponar were the following:

- 1-2. Fayve Rozntal, aged forty, a storekeeper, and his son Zalmen, a student.
- 3-4. Yakov Katz, aged 45, a storekeeper, and his son Shmuel.
- 5-7. Hirshl Shadevitz, aged 45, a merchant, and his son Yitzkhok and another son.
8. Fayvl Dumsky, aged 40, a lumber merchant.
9. Elye Khakim, a smith.
10. Khaykl Milkhiker, aged 55, a butcher.
11. Shmuel Rozansky, aged over 40, a farmer.
12. Avrom Mushnitsky, aged 33, a wigmaker.
13. Yankl, nicknamed "Kastrul."
14. Yoysef Bernshteyn, aged about 50, a grain dealer.
15. Dovid Bayrak, aged about 50, a farmer.
16. Dovid Arariovitz; aged about 50.

All of these Jews were accused of having pro-Soviet sympathies.

Some of them were arrested because their children had fled to the Soviet Union, and the rest "because they were rich Jews," as the commander Shalkauskas of the Lithuanian partisans explained.

After this incident the murderers arrested the Jew Yoysef Milkhiker, a farmer, and a few other Jews. They too were taken to prison in Vilnius, and from there to Ponar.

### **The Ghetto in "Yurdzhik." Bad Living Conditions: Requisitions and Rapes**

On July 31 police in town announced that all of the Jews in town had to move that very day to a ghetto in a little street near the edge of town. The neighborhood was called "Yurdzhik." The little houses where the Jews had to live were old and made of wood. The streets were dirty. The Lithuanian police and partisans immediately moved into the better Jewish houses with their families. Poles who had left the houses in "Yurdzhik" moved into the poorer Jewish houses.

There was no fence or guard around the ghetto. From 5:00 p.m. until 7:00 a.m. the Jews were forbidden to go out onto the street from their homes.

Every day all of the able-bodied men and women were taken to do various tasks. At night the partisans and police took the Jews out of their houses, herding them along, mustering them as if they were soldiers, and tormenting them in various ways. The Jewish men didn't sleep at home anymore, but hid in the attics at night instead.

The two sisters Rive and Sheynele Levin were taken out of their houses by the degenerates for several nights in a row and brought to the town garden, where they were raped. The two sisters had belonged to the Communist youth under the Soviets.

The Jews spent exactly six weeks in the small ghetto. The representative of the Jews in the ghetto was the Jewish lumber merchant from town, Leyzer Kul. During that period several requisitions were demanded of the Jews. The Lithuanian murderers threatened to shoot all the Jews if the sum wasn't raised on time.

The Jews working on the highway were supervised by a Lithuanian technician named Skinduzis from the Lithuanian interior. One time he confided to the Jews that there was a plan to take everyone out of the town. He assured them that he could keep the Jews working in town longer, but he asked for money to do this.

Moyshe Fridberg and Mikhl Tunkl raised 4,000 rubles. They gave half of the money to the technician, asking him to bring them a document stating that he could keep Jews for work, after which they would give him the rest of the money.

## **From the Ghetto to the Study House; Jews Brought to Wilianowa and Totally Annihilated**

Three days later all the Jews were taken from "Yurdzhik" into the study house. This was Saturday morning, September 20, 1941, before Rosh Hashanah.

At 7:00 a.m. that Saturday the Jews noticed that armed Lithuanian partisans had surrounded the entire neighborhood of the ghetto. Groups went from house to house, demanding that the Jews hand over their money, gold, silver and valuables. They allowed the Jews to bring along small packages in their hands.

The Jews had to come from the houses to the study house on their own. It appeared that there was no coercion. But some of the Jews suspected that they were going to be slaughtered.

One woman named Libe Katz, aged about fifty, and a man named Dovid Lip tried to escape from town. They hid temporarily in town with peasant friends. Neighbors betrayed them, however. Lithuanian artisans arrested them, and after beating them mercilessly, took them to the study house.

One hour later all the Jews had arrived at the study house from the ghetto. The partisans immediately registered everyone there, and once again demanded that they hand over their gold, silver, money and valuables. Until Sunday morning, the eve of Rosh Hashanah, the Jews were kept there heavily guarded by partisans and police. Then all the Jewish men, women and children were taken to the Wilianowa compound. On the way the Jews were murderously beaten in various ways. Zelda Dunskey, aged forty, Ben Tsiyon Mekler, aged forty, and a few others fainted on the way. The partisans murderously beat them and placed them in wagons. The weak, elderly and sick were taken from the study house in wagons. The rest walked.

Peasants later reported that the Lithuanian murderers had beaten the Jews with sticks studded with nails as they walked.

At the Wilianowa compound the Jews were kept in barns until Monday morning, September 22, 1941.

Jews from the surrounding towns of Jeruzalimka, Pabershe, Rieshe and Suderwe had already been brought to the compound.

The Jewish family of Yoysef Anolik, his three daughters and a nephew with two small children were brought from Dukshtas to the Maishiogala study house, and then to the Wilianowa compound together with the rest of the Jews.

The Jews who had been herded together were kept in barns without food or drink.

On Monday morning, the first day of Rosh Hashanah, the partisans called for young men to volunteer for work. Sixty young, healthy men volunteered. The men were immediately taken from the barn and surrounded by a heavy guard. The Jews were immediately warned that anyone who tried to escape would instantly be shot on the spot.

The sixty Jews were taken to a nearby forest and forced to dig a pit. Half of them had to dig, and the other thirty had to sit without talking. Every half hour they changed places.

A few Jews tried to run away from the spot, and were shot. But there was a commotion, and other men began running. Some of them were shot. A few managed to escape from the pit. Among those who escaped while the pits were being dug were Dovid Rudnik, Iser Milkhiker, Elyezer Pager and Hirsh Rozansky, all four of whom were from Maishiogala, and one man from Pabershe, Shmuel Shapiro.

The men who dug the pits on Monday were locked into a cellar in the compound in the evening. On Tuesday, the second day of Rosh Hashanah, they were forced to finish digging the pit, and immediately afterward the Jews were shot.

The partisans took the Jews out in groups and shot them near the pits. The murderers didn't manage to shoot all the Jews on Tuesday, so they finished up their "job" the next day, Wednesday after Rosh Hashanah, September 24. The Jew Hirsh Rozhansky, who had escaped while digging the pit on Tuesday, related all this. Later this was also described by peasants living nearby and by partisans who had done the shooting.

The Polish population of the town of Maishiogala did not participate in the slaughter of the Jews in town. As soon as the Germans arrived in town they were overjoyed. They were pleased at all the anti-Jewish decrees, and they hoped to inherit the Jews' possessions. The Lithuanian police and partisans regarded the Jews as their own

property, and began robbing the Jews' possessions and keeping them for themselves as soon as the Germans arrive.

On account of this the Poles came to dislike their foreign masters, the Lithuanians, and helped the Jews as much as they could. Dozens of Lithuanians from surrounding villages and from the Lithuanian interior took part in the slaughter of the Jews. They were recruited from all classes and walks of life. Moyshe only remembers the following individuals:

1. The director and teacher in the Maishiogala elementary school, Zhvazglis, who came from a town near Gedraitsiai.
2. A policeman under Smetonas in 1939-1940 named Juozas Lapko. After the Red Army arrived in Lithuania he had been fired from his job, and he returned after the Germans entered the town. He was from outside Ukmerge.
3. The director of the dairy center in town between 1939-1940. His last name was Kalnenas.
4. A postal worker in town between 1939 and 1941 named Girenas.
5. A Lithuanian from the interior named Bronuk, overseer on the road.
6. The secretary of the town administration.
7. A certain peasant who had betrayed the Jew Aranovitz. His name was Wladislaw Koshinsky.
8. A black policeman, whose lover was the Polish wife of a Polish policeman.
- 8a. A Lithuanian from the interior named Shreitas, a forest keeper.
9. The first mayor of town, whose last name was Astikas.
10. The second mayor of the town, a Pole named Franciszek Romejka.
11. The commander of the partisans, a teacher in the nearby village of Korai named Shalkauskas.
12. The town carpenter, Jalinskis.
13. The teacher from the elementary school in Maishiogala, Tsesko, from the Lithuanian interior.

Moyshe does not remember any others, because the majority of the murderers had come from the Lithuanian interior.

Moyshe Fridberg had gone to work that Saturday, September 20 at the highway, just like very other day, with his friend Yoysef Lipe-Les. When they left the ghetto they noticed that the entire town was being surrounded by armed partisans. Moyshe ran back to his house and noticed partisans with rifles near his home. The two friends told the rest of the Jewish workers about this. Four of them didn't go to work. Four did go to work. Moyshe and his brother Gershon went back to town to see what was happening. When they saw all the houses surrounded and the Jews being driven out, both of them left town and went to a peasant friend.

The four who were at work were taken to town in a truck. The four who had left work came to the Joda compound, where four Jews were working. They didn't find anyone at the compound. All four hid with a peasant acquaintance until the morning of Sunday, September 21. When they found out that all the Jews had been taken from town to the Wilianowa compound, they "voluntarily" went to that compound to be with their relatives, where they later died together with the rest of the Jews at that compound.

Moyshe and his brother hid with the peasant Pratkewitz at a settlement near the town. When they found out that the Jews had been taken to the Wilianowa compound, they also decided to join their relatives.

The good Pole saw how naive the confused Jews were, and convinced them, "You'll manage yet to hand yourselves over to them. Meanwhile run away and come back to me after a few days, and then we'll decide what to do!" For five days the brothers wandered through the forests, visiting a few peasant friends, until they returned to Pratkewitz. At the home of the peasant they learned that Dovid Rudnik had escaped while digging the pit at the compound, and that the Jews at the compound were still alive.

The two brothers began thinking of ways to send food to their relatives (that's how naive the Jews were at the time). On the Saturday between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur the brothers learned from the peasant Ramald in the village of Gadishki that all the Jews in the compound had been shot.

Moyshe Fridberg's wife Sore Oguz, their little son Leyzerl, aged five; his siter Beyle, her husband Nokhem Gurvitz and their three children; Gershon's wife Ele Anolik (Moyshe's sister-in-law) and their two children Khaye-Rivke and Estherl (aged eight and twelve), and other close relatives all died at the Wilianowa compound.

After the Jews in the compound were shot, the partisans issued a strict order stating that anyone who hid Jews would be shot along with their entire family.

## Those Who Died After the Total Slaughter of the Jews

The following Jews remained after the mass slaughter in the Wilianowa compound, and died later:

1. Iser Milkhiker had escaped while digging the pit. He wandered through the countryside for some time and didn't have any place to go. He went to White Russia, where he died.

2. Shmuel Aranovitz worked in the Korwe compound. When the Jews were taken out of town he stayed behind. After wandering through the countryside for some time, he came to a work camp at Rieshe where peat was dug. On July 10, 1943 he escaped from the camp, and went to a Polish friend of his in Maishiogala to take some of the possessions he had hidden. The Pole asked him to wait for a while, and meanwhile summoned the Lithuanian police, who arrested him, beat him murderously and shot him at the Jewish cemetery in town. The name of the Polish townsman is Wladiwlaw Koshinsky.

3. Avrom Bernshteyn escaped from Maishiogala on September 20. After wandering for some time he arrived at the peat camp at Rieshe (for more on this camp, see below). On July 10 he escaped from the camp. During a raid on Red partisans and Jews he was captured not far from the village of Bolkuni, where he was shot and buried on the spot (before Passover 1943).

4. A Jew from Vilnius named Yitzkhok Taytz escaped from the peat camp near Rieshe, along with his wife and child. They hid for some time in the village of Kontzistawa, ten kilometers from Maishiogala. They hid in a haystack. The peasant Matulanec, a good friend of Yitzkhok's, betrayed him. Lithuanian police arrested him with his wife and child, and sent them to the Gestapo in Vilnius. There he and his family died.

Moyshe and his brother Gershon wandered through the villages, fields and forests for some time. They learned that there was a labor camp in Rieshe occupied by Jews from Viinius. They got in touch with the camp. The director of the work camp let the brothers come into the camp for a certain sum of money, and gave both of them papers.

### The Peat Camp in Rieshe

A total of more than four hundred Jewish men and women from Vilnius had been brought to the camp. The Jews lived at the private homes of peasants, whom they had to pay for their room and board. The foreman of the Jews in camp was a Vilnius Jew named Alexander Pishuk. Before the war he had owned his own peat works in the small town of Kene near Vilnius. In 1941, when the Jews from that town were shot, the Vilnius Jews working in the Kene peat bogs were also shot. Alexander was among them. Before the Jews were shot, he was taken to the Rieshe peat camp together with his wife and a brother-in-law.

At the Rieshe peat camp he and his family lived very well. He behaved very badly toward the Jewish workers at the peat bogs. He always demanded that the Jews work faster. He often extorted money from them, saying it was for the director. He threatened to send to Ponar anyone who didn't give him the demanded sum. Anyone who displeased him was constantly assigned to the hardest work. He always spoke and cursed in Polish, in the presence of Polish workers.

On one occasion Jewish workers had to be sent to the peat camp in Kene. He sent anyone he was angry with at that point. No one survived from the Kene peat camp.

The Polish director wasn't bad. He did take money, but he always did favors for the Jewish workers at his camp at Rieshe.

There was no guard posted around the peat camp at Rieshe. Nor was there a fence. The Jews went to the homes of peasants in the villages after work and traded with them, trading goods for food which they brought to the Vilnius ghetto. Every week a group of Jews was permitted to go to the Vilnius ghetto. The work was very hard, but the average Jew did not live badly there, compared to the conditions in the Vilnius ghetto.

Before Passover 1943 all the Jews had to return to the Vilnius ghetto, because the Jews were forbidden to live at the homes of peasants. Ten days later the Jews were brought back to Rieshe. There the Jews found that barracks had been built and surrounded by barbed wire, and a guard consisting of Lithuanian partisans had been posted nearby. In exchange for liquor and money, the partisans would let the Jews out of the camp to trade with peasants. However, the living conditions grew much worse. The Jews had to sleep on hard pallets. The crowding and filth was terrible. It was always noisy. The Jews' food was cooked in a communal kitchen. But there was very little food, and the Jews had to get food from peasants in the villages.

From the summer of 1941 until the middle of the summer of 1943 the peat camps around Vilnius were in operation. After the Jews were settled into the fenced-in barracks in Rieshe, the Jews were constantly in danger of being surrounded without any chance to escape. Their fear turned out to be justified.

On Friday, July 9, 1943, the Polish director of the peat bogs in Rieshe, whose last name was Matuszewitz, announced that all the Jews at the Bezdani peat camp, not far from Vilnius, had been burned alive by Lithuanian partisans and Germans.

It happened like this: The Jews had been herded into the square and a roll call was carried out. The infamous Gestapo murderer Keitel, who later liquidated the ghettos of Vilnius and Kaunas, came from Vilnius. During the roll call at the Bezdani camp Keitel thanked the Jews for their diligent work. When he finished his speech he gave a signal, and from the nearby forest concealed Lithuanian partisans poured forward, herded the Jews into the barracks and threw incendiary bombs inside. All the Jews were burned. All the Jews at the Kene camp were also shot at the same time.

When they received this disastrous news, some of the Jews at the Rieshe peat camp ran away. The rest were taken to the Vilnius ghetto on July 11, 1943, and they later died there.

Moyshe Fridberg, his brother Gershon and Leyb Bernshteyn from Maishiogala, the two brothers Gedalye and Zalmen Pastor, and a Mrs Gordon, all from the town of Pabershe, escaped from the camp on the evening of July 9, 1943.

The Jews who escaped from the camp conducted a difficult and bitter struggle to survive. A day here, a night there, they wandered through forests, fields and villages, constantly at risk of being arrested by Lithuanian partisans or Germans.

The two brothers, along with Leyb Bernshteyn, hid for eleven weeks at the home of a peasant named Stanislaw Radsewitz in the village of Bolkuni. From there they went to a Polish acquaintance named Alfons Jaruszewitz, where the two brothers and Bernshteyn stayed for five months, with only brief interruptions, until the liberation on July 10, 1944. That day Red Army units appeared in the village.

After the liberation Mrs Sonya Anolik from Dukshtas converted to Christianity, and also converted her little nephew, Hirsh Antilevitz's little boy Yitzkhoki, a grandson of the cantor from Miashiogala.

The survivors among the Jews of Maishiogala were: Moyshe Fridberg and his brother Gershon; Dovid Rudnik; Leyb Bernshteyn and his cousin Rivke, who hid with a peasant, converted and married the peasant; Bayrak; Leyb Milkhiker; Shmerl Rozansky; Binyomin Milkhiker (who had lived in Poland for several years previously); Eliezer Pager and his sister Yente; Hirsh Rozansky (Shmerl's brother); and Borukh Rozansky.

### **Attestation of Moyshe Fridberg**

I, Moyshe Fridberg, personally reported about the slaughter of the Jews of Maishiogala and about the peat camp in Rieshe, and I attest thereto with my signature.

Signature:                    Moyshe Fridberg.

The testimony was recorded by: Engineer L Koniuchowsky.

Feldafing                    March 28, 1948

The signature of the Feldafing resident Moyshe Fridberg is attested to  
by the chairman of the camp committee

E Reif                    Feldafing                    March 20, 1948

*Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin    NewYork    May 18, 1994*

## 2. ADDITIONAL TESTIMONY ABOUT THE SLAUGHTER OF JEWS IN MAISHIOGALA

By Dovid Rudnik, born in the White Russian town of Mednik on October 1, 1906. He graduated from elementary school. He was a butcher by trade. His father's name was Khatzkel, and his mother was Zelda, born Potashnik.

Dovid was married in Maishiogala and settled there permanently in 1931. When the war broke out he lived in town.

After reading the testimony of Moyshe Fridberg concerning the slaughter of the Jews of Maishiogala, I find that all the information, facts, dates, names of persons and locations are precisely and carefully indicated. Nevertheless I find it necessary to add several facts and details which are not provided in Moyshe Fridberg's testimony.

1. When the Jews were driven out of the study house into the Wilianowa compound, the younger and healthier men and women were taken away in rows of four. The elderly, sick and small children were taken in peasant wagons. On the way the Jews were murderously beaten. Police and partisans banged nails into sticks, and used these to tear the flesh of any Jew who became weak and halted.

Mine Anolik, about 65 years old, became weak on the way. She was murderously beaten and placed in a wagon. The cantor from Maishiogala Antilevitz was also beaten by the Lithuanians and placed into the wagon half unconscious.

The Jews of Suderve were brought to the Maishiogala study house by Lithuanian police. From the study house they were taken to the Wilianowa compound together with the Jews of Maishiogala. The boy from Suderve Shmuel Milkhiker had a Torah scroll in his possession. The Lithuanians murderously beat him and forced him to throw the Torah scroll away.

2. The single Jewish family living in the village of Jownun, fourteen kilometers from Maishiogala was brought to the Maishiogala study house, and brought to the Wilianowa compound together with the Jews of Maishiogala and of Suderve, where they were killed.

3. Together with all the Jews at the Maishiogala study house, David Rudnik was brought to the Wilianowa compound. As soon as the Jews were brought to the compound the Lithuanian police called two or three Jews into a room at a time, and took from them everything they found worthwhile. The Jews who had been brought to the compound were herded into a barn. The rabbi of Maishiogala said prayers with all the Jews one evening. The Jews didn't understand that they were being taken to be killed. The Lithuanian police and partisans told everyone that the compound would be a camp, and Jews would live and work there.

4. On Monday morning, the first day of Rosh Hashanah 1941, two policemen entered the barn and called for Jews to volunteer for work digging potatoes in the field. David Rudnik was the first to volunteer. About twenty men in that barn volunteered "for work."

The Jews brought from the town of Pabershe and from other towns were kept in another barn. About forty Jewish men in that barn volunteered for work. The sixty men were lined up in rows of four and taken to a nearby forest. The sixty Jews were guarded by eight armed policemen as they marched. When they reached the edge of the forest, about forty armed policemen and partisans poured out of the bushes and surrounded the Jews.

The sixty Jews were herded deeper into the forest, where they found a truck piled with shovels standing at a parade ground. When they saw the shovels, the three Jews from Pabershe began running away. One of them was shot immediately. The other two were killed with rifle butts.

Two officers among the Lithuanian partisans ordered the Jews to dig a pit 100 meters long by 12 meters wide. The officers forbade the Jews from talking amongst themselves, and told them that the pit was needed for military purposes.

Thirty Jews dug while the other thirty had to lie on their bellies without talking among themselves. At 3:00 p.m. the Lithuanians brought forty more men from the barns.

One Jew from Rieshe seized an opportunity and began running. The partisans shot at him without hitting him. David Rudnik was among the group who were digging then. "Run, as many as you can!" David shouted, and began running. Fifteen men dropped their shovels and began running in various directions. Rifle fire rang out at the escaping Jews. Dead and wounded fell. There were moans of the wounded and dying. The Jew Berke Portnoy from Maishiogala and the cantor's son Hirsh Antilevitz were captured alive by the partisans and killed with rifle butts. Those who succeeded in getting away were Dovid Rudnik, Iser Milkhike, Lozer Pager and two Jews from

Pabershe, five in all.

That Monday the Jews didn't finish digging. In the evening they were locked into a cellar at the Wilianowa compound. The next day, Sunday, the Jews finished digging the pit. On Tuesday evening the diggers spent the night in the cellar again. On Wednesday a box of whiskey was brought to the compound in a wagon. The partisans and police got good and drunk. Young, attractive girls were taken out from the two barns and raped.

An automobile arrived that same day with two high-ranking SS men. First the men from the cellar, then the men from the barns were taken out in groups and brought to the forest near the pit, where they were forced to strip to their underwear, and everyone was shot. After the men were slaughtered they did the same thing to the women and children. Hirsh Rozansky from Maishiogala managed to escape from the pit. He later told Rudnik about the executions at the pit.

The two SS men stood not far from the pit and filmed everything. The clothing of the murdered Jews was loaded on wagons and brought to the town hall in Rieshe, where it was sold at auction to peasants.

The partisans later boasted to peasant friends about the terrible executions at the pit. Most of the Jews fell into the pit wounded and were buried alive. The small children had their heads bashed against trees before they were thrown into the pit. Peasants who covered over the pit reported that the sand over the pit heaved up and down for a long time.

Dovid Rudnik survived a bitter struggle for his life. He was in the Rieshe peat camp together with Moyshe Fridberg, escaped from the camp and hid with peasant friends in the countryside. In the month of July 1944 Dovid Rudnik was liberated by the Red Army.

#### **Attestation of Dovid Rudnik**

Everything included in this supplementary testimony was reported by me, Dovid Rudnik, after reading over the testimony of Moyshe Fridberg, and I attest thereto with my signature on each and every page.

Signature: Dovid Rudnik.

The testimony was recorded by Engineer L Koniuchowsky  
Eschwege b Kassel, November 14, 1948.

The signature of the Eschwege camp resident Dovid Rudnik is attested to by the chairman of the camp committee,  
R Cederbaum (Signature) Eschwege b Kassel November 14, 1948

*Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin New York May 18, 1994*

## **THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS IN THE TOWN OF VALKININKAI**

Eyewitness testimony of Leyzer Goldman, born in Valkininkai on August 15, 1895. He lived his entire life there. When the war broke out he was in Valkininkai. His father's name was Moyshe. His mother was Esther-Malke. He was a smith by trade.

Valkininkai is located on the Merkys river, fifty kilometers from Vilnius and 25 kilometers from Veranai.

In Valkininkai lived about 600 or 700 Jews. Not far from Valkininkai, three kilometers away, there is a Jewish village called Selo. About 120 Jews lived in Selo. Nine kilometers from Valkininkai there was a village called Leipunis. When the war broke about some sixty Jews lived there. About 900 Jews altogether lived in Valkininkai, Selo and Leipunis.

The Jews of Valkininkai were occupied in trade, artisanry and peddling. In the villages of Selo and Leipunis the Jews worked in agriculture and orchard-keeping. In Selo there was a spa for Jewish psychiatric patients. An average of about 150 patients lived in Selo. In the village of Leipunis as well there was a sanatorium for about forty Jewish patients.

Before the war in 1939 Valkininkai belonged to Vilnius county in Poland. When the Vilnius region was transferred to Lithuania that year, Valkininkai became part of Vilnius county in Lithuania.

The economic situation of the Jews in town under the Poles was not bad. After Valkininkai was assigned to Lithuania the situation improved.

Valkininkai had an elementary school, a library, a synagogue and a study house. The synagogue was old and famous for its woodcarving and various decorations. The synagogue was three storeys tall. The hanging in front of the Ark had been a gift from Napoleon Bonaparte in his time. Tourists from all over Poland and overseas came to see the synagogue and its woodcarvings and ancient art.

Most of the young Jews belonged to Zionist organizations.

The villages around Valkininkai were exclusively occupied by Lithuanians.

### **The Lithuanian Administration: Torture and Regulations Against Jews**

On Monday, June 23, 1941, one day after the outbreak of the war, the Germans had already arrived in Valkininkai. The Jews had all escaped from town into the forests. After the Germans arrived, the Jews returned to town and settled into their homes.

On Wednesday, June 25, 1941 Soviet airplanes dropped bombs onto Valininkai. The majority of the town was burned. The synagogue and study house were burned then as well. The Jews settled in with friends. A small number of Jewish houses remained intact. The Jews of Valkininkai settled into the remaining houses. The crowding was terrible.

The civilian administration was taken over by Lithuanians from the area and others from the Lithuanian interior. Every day the Jews were taken to do various tasks. At work they tormented and beat the Jews. The Lithuanian bandits did whatever they wanted to the Jews. They constantly robbed the Jews of their possessions.

A group of thirty or forty men were taken away to do peat work in a village called Matushe, fifteen kilometers from Valkininkai. Every Saturday evening the Jews came to the town of Valkininkai.

A large number of Jews worked at highway projects. Some of the Jews worked at the paper factory belonging to the Jewish businessmen Binyomovitz and Shemshkin. After the Germans came all the Jewish workers were fired.

The Jews had to wear a ribbon on their sleeve and a Star of David. The word "Jude" was inscribed in German on the Star of David.

## **The Ghetto Is Set Up; Jews Arrested and Shot**

A committee was set up to regulate internal Jewish affairs, in line with a demand of the Lithuanian administration. The chairman of the committee was Khayem Berger. The members were Khayem Kohn and Hirsh Polyatzik. Its task was to intercede between the Jews and the Lithuanian administration, and to make sure that Jews arrived for work on time.

There were no Germans in town. Only a few frequently came. The Lithuanian administration demanded that the committee provide various things, such as furniture, bedding and the like. The committee had to provide these things by the specified time.

One month after the Germans arrived all the Jews had to bring their cattle to the town administration. They also had to surrender bicycles and radios. The same thing happened in the two Jewish villages. The Jewish farmers were left without cows or horses.

Not far from Selo, five kilometers from Valkininkai, the village of Pitzkarni was burned during the German advance. All of the peasants moved in with Jewish peasants in Selo. They brought certificates from the town administration allowing them to take the cows of the Jewish farmers in Selo. The newly-arrived Lithuanian peasants inherited everything from the Jewish farmers of Selo while they were still alive.

There were various acts of revenge carried out in Selo by Lithuanians against the town's Jews. The Jew Khayem Gersh had been a political activist during the time of Soviet rule. One month after the Germans arrived he was ordered to go to the police. Together with another Lithuanian Communist, he was taken a couple of kilometers from Valkininkai and one kilometer from Selo. There they were forced to dig a pit, and they were shot. Later Jews received permission to bury Khayem at the Jewish cemetery in Valkininkai.

A few weeks after this incident the police ordered the Jewish Engineer Levin, Ben-Tsiyon Vilin, Khayem Goldman and Avrom Taytz to report to them. As soon as the four Jews came to the police station they were arrested and taken to the Lukishky prison in Vilnius, where they were killed.

Engineer Levin and Ben-Tsiyon Vilin worked at the paper factory until the war broke out. Khayem Goldman was a lumber merchant. Avrom Taytz was a teacher. It was unclear why the four Jews were arrested at that time. A few days later they arrested the Jew Yosl Barg and took him to the railroad station at Varenai, where he was shot without an investigation or a trial.

## **All the Jews Taken to Eishishkes and Shot**

Rumors began to circulate saying that all the Jews of Valkininkai would be taken to a ghetto in Eishishkes. There were Jewish survivors from the slaughters in Alytus and Daugiai by that time. The refugees reported everything. Most of the Jews of Valkininkai, however, didn't want to believe it. A certain Jew named Barg, a quiltmaker by trade, came from Alytus. A husband and wife came. Leyzer does not remember their last name. The Jews of Valkininkai were strictly forbidden to leave the town.

They were allowed to go to the market to shop at first. Then this was strictly forbidden. The Jews in town began to suffer from hunger.

On Saturday, September 20, past midday, it was announced at the peat bogs that the work was over. All the Jews had to leave the village and come to Valkininkai. This didn't disturb the Jews of Valkininkai, because there was still enough work. On Saturday evening all the men who had been digging peat returned to Valkininkai.

On Sunday, September 21 at 5:30a.m., the partisans woke up the chairman of the ghetto committee and told him that all the Jewish men had to gather at the market square by 7:00. At 7:00 all the men were at the square. All the men above the age of twelve or thirteen had to come to the square. They were allowed to bring along small packages in their arms.

The men were driven from the market place into one house (Pilsudski's house). As soon as the men were brought the house was surrounded by a guard consisting of partisans who promised the Jews that everyone was being taken to work in Eishishkes, where they would live in a ghetto.

Leyzer Goldman was among the men in Pilsudski's house. The men didn't know exactly what was facing them. Some of them believed the partisans. Others began to understand that everyone was going to be shot. They were all desperate, but it was impossible for them to save themselves.

At noon that same day the men were taken out of the house and taken in a column in the direction of Eishishkes. There were a total of about 300 men from Valkininkai, Selo and Leipunis. The guard consisted of about forty armed partisans.

When they had gone ten kilometers from Valkininkai into the Gireikis forest, the partisans permitted the Jews to halt and eat. The men began talking about escaping, but the majority would not agree. Leyzer Goldman became convinced that everyone was being taken to be shot. He proposed to his close friends that they escape, but no one wanted to.

Leyzer decided to escape. Leyzer stole away from everyone and ran away. On the way he was stopped by Lithuanian partisans. He gave them a gold watch and bought his release from them. Leyzer made it to the White Russian town of Woronowa.

The Jewish homeowner Avrom Teykman escaped from the slaughter in Eishishkes, and he too fled to Woronowa. He told Leyzer: After resting in the forests, the Jews marched on. The partisans didn't notice that one person had escaped. On the way an elderly Jew about sixty named Shloyme Braz became weak, and couldn't walk any further. The partisans immediately shot him and buried him there. This took place seven kilometers from Eishishkes.

As the men were being driven from Selo to Valkininkai, the partisans shot the Jew Shmuel Bortz. 'He couldn't keep up with the rest of the men, who were being rushed toward Valkininkai.

When the men were brought to Eishishkes they were all herded into a barn and heavily guarded. At the barn they took everything from the men. Some of the men had put their best clothes on. Some of them had put on two suits. The partisans took everything from the Jews.

On Monday, September 22, the first day of Rosh Hashanah 1941, partisans brought wagons from town and from the countryside. The Jews were allowed to bring everything from their houses.

The wagons were loaded with bedding, clothing and dishes, along with the women, the children, the old and the sick. They left Valkininkai and rode in the direction of Eishishkes. The partisans surrounded the town and shot repeatedly into the air.

The women and children constantly wept, and said goodbye to their homes with heartrending cries. All the women, children, the elderly and the sick were brought to Eishishkes.

Concerning the further fate of the Jews of Valkininkai in Eishishkes, see the report of Leyb Kaganovitz about the slaughter of the Jews in Eishishkes.

Leyzer Goldman wandered for a long time in White Russia. He lived through the slaughter of the Jews in the following White Russian towns: the Ivia ghetto, the Novograd ghetto, the Lida ghetto and the Woronowa ghetto. He saw Death before his eyes dozens of times. After the Jews of White Russia were slaughtered, Leyzer came to the Vilnius ghetto. From the Vilnius ghetto he escaped to a partisan group in the Rudnitsky forest. In the forest Leyzer was a partisan in the "Revenge" group. This was an exclusively Jewish company led by Aba Kovner and the Jewish commissar Didzhulis.

### **Attestation of Leyzer Goldman**

All of the information, facts, dates, names of persons and locations were personally related by me, Leyzer Goldman, to L Koniuchowsky. From the first day of the war until the Jews of Valkininkai, Selo and Leipunis were taken to Eishishkes, I was in Valkininkai.

After writing the report L Koniuchowsky read everything back to me, and I attest thereto with my signature on each and every page.

Eyewitness: Leyzer Goldman (Signature)

The report was written by Engineer L Koniuchowsky Bad-Reichenhall      December 21, 1947

The signature of Leyzer Goldman, resident of the Jewish DP Camp in Bad-Reichenhall, is attested to by the General Secretary of the camp committee

Ross                      (Signature)                      Bad-Reichenhall,                      December 21, 1947

*Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin                      New York                      May 18, 1994*

## 1. THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS IN THE TOWN OF NEMENTZINE

Eyewitness testimony of Sore Eynbinder, born in Nementzine on November 15, 1910. All her life until the war broke out on June 22, 1941 she lived in Nementzine. In Nementzine Sore graduated from the Polish elementary school. She had no trade. Her father's name was Sholem-Gedalye Daytsh, and her mother's name was Golda, born Khakim in Nementzine.

Nementzine is located eighteen kilometers north of Vilnius, on the right bank of the Vilia (Neris) River. Through the middle of the town passes the Vilnius-Shventisionys highway. After the collapse of Poland in 1939 the town was occupied by the Red Army. That same year Nementzine was transferred to Lithuania, along with the entire Vilnius region. Until the war between Nazi Germany and Poland broke out in the year 1939, about a hundred ten Jewish families lived in town, among a larger number of non-Jewish families.

By far the majority of the Jews in town were occupied in trade. A small number worked in artisanry. The electric power plant in town and the water mill belonged to the Jewish businessman Avrom-Dovid Kavarsky. The economic life of the Jews in town until the war broke out in 1939 was not bad. Nementzine was a summer resort.

Until the year 1939. The town had a Hebrew elementary school, a Yiddish-Hebrew library, a Jewish community bank, and a free loan society. The town had two study houses. The new study house was completed under the Lithuanians in the year 1940.

After Nementzine was assigned to Lithuania the economic life of the town did not change. Nor were there any significant changes in cultural life. After the Red Army entered Lithuania the economic life of the Jews in town worsened, especially after the larger businesses were nationalized.

After Poland collapsed in the year 1939, the Mezritsh yeshiva settled into Nementzine, including the counselors and the rabbis. There were over a hundred people, or 110 including women and children. The studies at the yeshiva were continued until the war broke out on June 22, 1941. The head of the yeshiva was Rabbi Panitz. The householders of Nementzine materially supported the yeshiva.

The villages around Nementzine were primarily occupied by Poles.

The same was true in town. The attitude of the Polish population toward the Jews in town until 1939 was anti-Semitic. After the collapse of Poland in 1939, until the outbreak of war in 1941, the relations improved. The Poles forgot about the Jews in their great hatred toward the Lithuanians and the Russians.

The attitude of the Lithuanian rulers toward the Jews in town after Nementzine was assigned to Lithuania was extremely anti-Semitic, even worse than before Polish rule.

After Lithuania was occupied by the Red Army (in 1940), both the Lithuanians and the Poles stopped their anti-Semitic demonstrations in public. The Jews felt like equal citizens. This rise in status, however, called forth concealed fury on the part of the non-Jewish population, who waited impatiently to get rid of the Soviets and settle accounts with the Jews.

### **The Town Is Bombed Monday; Jews Temporarily Evacuate**

When the war broke out very few Jews thought seriously about the terrible danger that was approaching for each and every Jew. There were a few Jews who were happy when war broke out between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. These were the Jews whose businesses had been nationalized during the year of Soviet rule, and who hoped to get everything back after the Germans arrived. Very few Jews evacuated together with the retreating Red Army. Most of those who did were Jews who had held positions under the Soviets, or who had been involved in politics. About twenty Jews from town evacuated to the Soviet Union.

At 8:00 Monday, June 23, 1941 Nementzine was bombarded by the German air force. The murderers strafed the civilian population from their airplanes with machine guns. There were dead and wounded. Among them were the Jewish women Rokhel Plotkin and Rokhel Uzhvalk. Both were buried that same day at the Jewish cemetery. Feyge Bratenishky was wounded. She was taken to the Jewish hospital in Vilnius, where she died several days later. The German air pirates dropped a few bombs in the center of town, but these did not explode. After the bombardment the Jews in town left their houses in great panic, and fled to stay with peasant friends in the surrounding villages. There the Jews decided to wait until the front passed by.

The non-Jewish residents of the town didn't evacuate the town, and began robbing the government storehouses and the private possessions of the Jews. A certain peasant named Karashevitsius was shot by a Red soldier while robbing a government co-operative. The Red militia in town and the political organization evacuated the town on Monday, June 23. When they evacuated the Soviet commanders suggested that the Jews go along with them deeper into the Soviet Union. Only a few accepted the offer.

On Wednesday, June 25, 1941 the German military units had already reached the surrounding villages, where the Jews were. Immediately agitators appeared to rouse the peasants in the countryside against the Jews. They even threatened any peasants who continued to protect Jews. The Jews were forced to return to their homes in town.

On Tuesday evening, June 24, 1941 the German military units entered the town. There was no battle for the town. The town remained intact. Some of the Jewish houses were robbed and their doors torn off the hinges. The townspeople had run the show while the Jews were in the countryside waiting for the front to pass them by. The Jews who returned from the countryside settled back into their homes.

### **The Lithuanian Administration: Decrees. Arrests and Murder of Jews**

Several days after the German army arrived in town the civilian administration was established. The new mayor in town was the Lithuanian townsman who owned several houses, Bronius Tserkauskas. The police chief in town was a Lithuanian, a former secretary of the Red militia under the Soviets. The police force consisted of some of the former "Red militiamen" during the year of Soviet rule who had evidently worked in the secret Lithuanian-Fascist organization. The rest had been employees in Girininkija.

Under the Soviets a Lithuanian military unit of the Red Army had been stationed at the edge of town. When the war broke out they did not evacuate, hiding instead in the surrounding forests. They helped the Germans, shooting the Red soldiers in the back. Some of the Lithuanian "Red soldiers" also became policemen in town.

Anti-Jewish decrees began to be passed in town. A curfew was imposed on the Jews. From 6:00 p.m. until 8:00 the next morning Jews were forbidden to leave their houses. It became difficult for Jews to stand in line for food at the stores. The population would push Jews out of line. Jews had to wear a special insignia—a letter "J" (for Jude), cut from yellow cloth. Later the insignia was changed to two yellow Stars of David, on the front and back. Jews were forbidden to walk on the sidewalk. The Jews in town themselves avoided walking in the street, preferring to walk through the town gardens.

The population of the town was very satisfied with the decrees against their Jewish neighbors.

During the day on Friday, June 27, 1941, Germans arrested the following Jews in their houses: Shloyme Pruzhan, aged forty, a merchant; Arluk, a wigmaker, aged 26; Avrom Nementzinsky, owner of a beer hall, aged 32; Khasye Leybman, aged 30; Reyzl Zhur, aged about 30; Alte Fin. These six were all from town. In addition two Jewish men from Vilnius were arrested the same day. These eight Jews were immediately taken to the town prison. It was said in town at the time that the Pole Alfons Jarmulowsky from town had accused the Jews of being Communists. All of the ones from town were kept for a few days and then freed. The two from Vilnius were kept in prison.

About two weeks later, on July 14, 1941, all of the Jews who had been freed from prison were re-arrested and taken to the police compound in town. From there they were taken to the Antokoli prison in Vilnius. Exactly one week later the three women were released from prison, and they returned to Nementzine. It was impossible to determine the fate of the three men who had been taken away. The three women who returned talked about the incident.

Alte Fin went to see the town rabbi to ask for a certificate stating that she was not a communist.  
(The Jews in town were still that naive - LK)

The Jew Leyb Juker, a retail merchant and a pauper, had nothing to eat after the Germans arrived. Every day he would come to the area of the Jewish cemetery, where a German military kitchen stood. The Germans fed him several times. Once, after he ate, a German shot him. He was buried at the Jewish cemetery. This happened at the end of the first week of the war, on June 26, 1941.

Lithuanian police and partisans took the town rabbi, Rabbi Gedalye Snapir, the head of the yeshiva, Rabbi Panitz, and several other rabbis and yeshiva students out of their houses. Everyone was taken to the compound of the Jewish businessman Fayve Nirke. There the partisans and police had their mess hall. The bandits shaved the beards of the rabbis and yeshiva students. Some of them simply had their facial hair torn out. Germans stood by meanwhile, photographing everything.

Every morning Lithuanian police would knock on the Jewish homes and drive all of the able-bodied men and women into the square in front of the police station. From there groups of Jews were taken to do various tasks. Jews worked at the highway, repairing the damaged sections; paving the streets; chopping wood and bringing water for the police, partisans and Germans.

A group of men and women worked at the station in Bezdán. When they worked they were guarded by Lithuanian police, partisans and civilian townspeople, who supervised the Jews' work as if they were experienced foremen. At work the Jews were bullied, mocked and often beaten by the supervisors with sticks and boards.

A certain rabbi from the yeshiva was placed by SS men on the mud guard of a truck, which was driven quickly through the streets.

The townspeople were overjoyed watching this. The rabbi held on, trying not to fall off. He held his head low. After the rabbi was tormented and mocked in this fashion, they let him go.

The Jews did not receive any pay for their work. They had to obtain their own food. The Jews exchanged all their possessions for a little food.

### **Reports of Slaughter of Jews in Nearby Towns**

At the end of the month of July terrible news began coming to Nementzine about mass slaughters of Jews in the towns of Jonishkis and Inturkiai. The Jews in town did not believe these reports. In the month of August and at the beginning of September the rumors increased. The Jews of Nementzine hired peasants to go find out details about the terrible news. When the peasants returned they corroborated the awful information.

A Jew who had coincidentally survived the slaughter of Jews in the town of Inturkiai fled to Nementzine. He told everything in precise detail, but the Jews didn't entirely believe him either. Later Jewish survivors came from Moletai, and they too corroborated the terrible news. The Jews of Nementzine didn't know what to do. The majority found reasons why the Jews had been shot in the Lithuanian towns. Thus, for example, the Jews of Nementzine believed that the Jews of Moletai had been shot because most of the young people had leftist sympathies. They found similar explanations for other towns as well.

But the Jews of Nementzine didn't live calmly any more. Everyone thought about his fate and that of his dear ones. A large number of the Jews began looking for work, and tried to be productive and useful for the Germans and their Lithuanian and Polish followers.

When agricultural work was begun, many Jews tried to go work for peasants in the countryside. Wealthy peasants would get permission from the town administration to take a number of Jewish workers to their farms. Of course, every Jew from town tried to go work in the country, because the working conditions were more humane, and there were more opportunities to be fed well and to obtain food for close friends and family in town.

When Jewish workers were sent, the administration would record the first and last names and address of the peasant, so that it would be possible to bring the Jews back at a moment's notice.

The rumors about total slaughter of the Jews in all the Lithuanian towns increased.

Sore's husband had joined the Polish military, and she hadn't heard from him. Sore sensed that she and her child were in grave danger, just like all the Jews in town. Later she received news that he had been captured by the Germans. Sore's brother had been working the whole time with a group of Jewish men in a mill three kilometers from town. Every day after work Nokhem-Ber and the other ten Jews came to town to sleep. Sore's other brother Avrom worked in a compound three kilometers from town. Other Jews were working there. Every evening the Jews returned from the compound to spend the night in town.

Every Jew tried to work as far from town as possible. The terrible news from the entire area tormented the town's Jews. The panic among the Jews continued to rise. Locked up in their own four walls, the town's Jews mourned over their suffering and pain, and over the terrible news from everywhere around them.

At that time the constant robberies of Jewish possessions increased, not only on the part of the Germans, Lithuanian police and partisans. The civilian townspeople also went to Jewish houses asking for objects, clothing, and money for a drink, constantly threatening the Jews that they would bring Germans and policemen if their demands weren't met. Terrified and full of apathy toward everything around them, toward their tragic life, the Jews handed over everything the local Christians demanded from them or "nicely" asked them for.

A band of thieves consisting of local residents was formed in town. They used various threats to extort from the Jews everything they wanted. One Jewish thief, an underworld figure, must be mentioned here, because he took part in many robberies together with the Christian bandits. The name of the Jew is Yisroel Trakinsky.

Sore knew that her husband Meir was alive and was a prisoner of the Germans. All the responsibility for little Golde, their five-year-old daughter, lay on her shoulders. Sore's two brothers Nokhem-Ber and Avrom, along with her father Sholem-Gedalye, convinced her to go to the country with her daughter. They decided that if a ghetto was set up in town, Sore and her daughter would come back. But if the Jews were taken to be shot, it would be easier for the brothers and father to run away and try to survive. Sore went to the village of Kukutishkis, three kilometers from town, to a Polish peasant she knew named Jan Dubicky. A few days later Sore's father came as well. Before Sore left town she sent her daughter Golde to the village of Pawlukanz, twelve kilometers from town, to the peasant Micke Tigurewitz.

Sholem-Gedalye and his daughter Sore were in the village for exactly one week, from September 11 until September 18. On Thursday, September 18 Dubicky was in town. The townsman Rutkowsky, an anti-Semite who had been the Seniunas of Nementzine before the Germans arrived, warned Dubicky not to keep the Jew Sholem-Gedalye at his house. When Dubicky returned from town he told Sholem-Gedalye about this.

That very day Sholem-Gedalye returned to town. He resolved several days in a row to show himself to Rutkowsky and convince him that he was in town. This was a few days before Rosh Hashanah, 1941. Sholem-Gedalye decided to stay among the Jews in town for Rosh Hashanah.

## **The Ghetto**

During the first weeks of the war the Jews in town chose several community activists to form a committee. The committee's responsibility was to serve as an intermediary between the Jews in town and the Lithuanian administration. The committee included the well-known Jews Mikhl Kensky, a merchant; Mendl Fayn, a lumber merchant; and Avrom-Dovid Kovarsky. The committee tried to distribute the burden of work on all of the able-bodied Jews. They had to see to it that the workers appeared for their jobs on time, along with other responsibilities. The committee did not do much good for the hopeless Jews in town.

On Friday, September 19 the committee went to see the mayor, Bronius Tserkauskas to find out about the further fate of the Jews in town. They told him all of the tragic news about the slaughter of the Jews in the nearby Lithuanian towns.

Tserkauskas assured the committee that the Jews of Nementzine did not face any danger. The members of the committee informed all the Jews in town about this conversation.

Everyone began to prepare for Rosh Hashanah. After the "good news" Sholem-Gedalye decided to stay in town for Rosh Hashanah. That same Friday evening Lithuanian police went to all the Jewish houses with a German and demanded fountain pens. They carefully looked at all the Jews, and they went away without saying anything. Sore decided to return to town that same Friday. She didn't want to stay in the country by herself any longer. The woman she was staying with was in town one day after that and she saw and spoke to the town's Jews. The peasant woman convinced Sore that no one was as afraid as she was. Sore understood that the peasant woman didn't want to keep her any longer. Sore convinced the peasant Dubicky to go to her brother Nokhem-Ber and announce to him that she was returning to town. The peasant returned and announced that her brother was refusing to take responsibility for Sore's life if she returned to Nementzine.

Nokhem-Ber came to his house after work that Friday. The second brother, Avrom, also came back to town from the compound. Suddenly he heard machine-gun fire at the edge of town, near the Vilia River. Avrom sensed the whole time that nothing good was in store for the town's Jews. When he heard shooting, he decided that same evening to sleep at the compound.

That Friday evening German military units gathered at the bank of the river and shot until late in the evening. Until that Friday nothing like this had happened in town. The Jews stayed in their houses in terror, thinking about the shooting at the edge of town.

## **Jews Herded Into the Study House. and Forced to Surrender Valuables**

On Saturday morning, September 20, 1941, police from town along with others who arrived from different towns began knocking on the doors and windows of the Jewish houses, announcing that everyone had to prepare to

move into the Vilnius ghetto. They permitted the Jews to pack up everything they found necessary, and gather at the study house with their packages. At 7:00 a.m. all the Jews were in the study house. When they left the houses screams and weeping of women and children could be heard. The police allowed people to go into the study house, but it was impossible to go back out. After they arrived at the study house, a heavy guard was posted outside. The Jews began to understand that they had been caught in the trap, but it was too late.

A German accompanied by several Lithuanian policemen entered the study house. The German told the Jews that everyone was being taken to the Vilnius ghetto, where they would have a communal kitchen.

He demanded that everyone hand over their money, gold, silver, watches, rings and other valuables. The German said that the assembled valuables would be used solely to finance the communal kitchen in the Vilnius ghetto. He threatened to shoot anyone who didn't hand over the valuables. The depressed and outraged Jews handed over their money, gold, silver and so forth or destroyed it and hid it. Some of the Jews tore up their paper money. The Jews had to place all their money and valuables on a small table the German brought into the study house.

It was clear to the Jews by then that the situation was very serious. The panic in the study house was great. Mothers kissed and wept over their children, whom they couldn't save. It was impossible to leave the study house and try to escape, because a heavy guard consisting of Lithuanian police and partisans was posted all around.

In the middle of the night on Friday, police and partisans brought in peasants from the nearby villages around the town as well as residents of the town itself. Every peasant had to bring a shovel. All of the peasants and townspeople who were taken out of their homes were led out along the highway leading to Vilnius. There the peasants dug a long pit. The Jews, of course, didn't know anything about this.

At 11:00 a.m. on Saturday, September 20, one day before Rosh Hashanah, Lithuanian police, partisans and a few Germans began driving all the Jews out of the study house. The murderers continued to promise the Jews that they were being taken to the Vilnius ghetto, and they permitted the Jews to bring packages of food along.

When they left the synagogue the Germans and Lithuanians searched every Jew for money, gold, silver and other valuables. They murderously beat more than one Jew while they did this. Thus, for example, they beat the Jew Yeshayohu Perevoskin, who was considered to be the strongest Jew in Nementzine. They beat him so badly that he couldn't stand up. Then they beat almost all of the younger, healthier men. After the torture as the Jews left the study house, all the Jews, men, women and children, were lined up in rows and taken out of town under heavy guard along the highway leading to Vilnius. The elderly, the sick and small children were taken in a few wagons.

When they had gone three kilometers from town, the Jews were ordered to turn right off the highway into the forest. The order made it clear to the Jews that they were being taken to be shot. There was a terrible panic. Screaming and weeping of women and children was heard.

The Jews began throwing their packages away. Many of them began running into the forest in various directions. The Lithuanian police and partisans began shooting after the Jewish escapees. The moans of the dying and wounded could be heard. About 50 men and women, however, managed to escape and hide in the forest.

The rest of the Jews were taken into a valley, closer to the pit. There they were all ordered to lie down on their bellies without moving or speaking to one another. Anyone who didn't obey the command was threatened with being shot on the spot.

Outraged and furious, the Germans and Lithuanians gathered the Jews in groups of ten and took them to the pit, located not far away. At the pit they shot every group with automatic rifles. The Jews in the valley heard the screams and weeping of those taken away to the pit, and waited to be taken from the valley to the pit by the murderers and shot.

They began shooting at fifteen minutes past 1:00, and they finished around 3:00. Peasants who had been brought from nearby villages covered over the pit containing the murdered Jews.

When the Lithuanian partisans and police returned to the town they celebrated and got drunk all Saturday afternoon.

The packages belonging to the murdered Jews were brought back to town in wagons and taken to the town community center. All of the clothing and furniture was taken away from all the Jewish houses, and this too was taken to the community center. The better clothing and furniture was distributed by the murderers amongst themselves. They sold the rest at auction. The leaders of the police and partisans settled into the better Jewish houses. Peasants from the villages and Lithuanians from the interior settled into some of the Jewish houses. The

old Jewish houses were torn up by townspeople for lumber. Some of the peasants took the better boards home to the country. The old study house was bought by a peasant named Sinkiewicz from the village of Raguni.

As soon as the Jews left their houses on Saturday morning and went to the study house, all of the Jewish houses had been sealed. The townspeople broke open the doors and windows and stole the better items when the Jews were still in the study house.

On Saturday, September 20, two days before Rosh Hashanah 1941, three or four kilometers from Nementzine along the highway toward Vilnius, a few hundred meters on the right side of the highway in the forest in a small, empty area called Kobilka, about six hundred Jews were shot, men, women and children. Everyone was buried that day in a single mass grave.

Among the murdered Jews were the yeshiva students and the heads of the yeshiva and the rabbis, all of whom had come from Mezritsh to Nementzine in 1939. The rovn rabbi, Rabbi Gedalye Snapir, had fled Nementzine for Radun, where he was killed. His wife Khane died together with everyone from Nementzine in Kobilka. The dental technician Moyshe Feldshteyn and his wife, the dentist Esther, were killed at Kobilka. The Jewish pharmacist Shmuel Bernshteyn and his daughter Taybe, aged 17, also died there.

### **Survivors from the Pit Relate**

On Saturday morning, when the police knocked on Sholem-Gedalye's door, Sore's brother Nokhem-Ber was also at home. He asked the police to let him pack some things. The police allowed him to do this. The father and son fled the house through the back door. Nokhem-Ber escaped from town. Sholem-Gedalye lost hope of escaping, and went to join the rest of the Jews at the study house.

The pharmacist's wife, Mrs Esther Bernshteyn, escaped from the pit and became separated from her husband and daughter. She hid in the countryside and survived. After the war she told Sore that when the Jews were taken from town Sholem-Gedalye had been very cold. He was utterly hopeless and apathetic. He didn't have the strength to walk. The police and partisans constantly hurried him and beat him with their rifle butts. They did the same to other elderly, weak Jews.

The Jews who had survived the slaughter at the pit reported that the old, weak woman Mrs Keyle-Yente Andeman couldn't walk any longer. The policeman let her sit on the wagon. But she refused to ride on the Sabbath. She was beaten.

Rokhel Kheyn, born Margolis, had given birth two weeks earlier. She rode to her death in a wagon, together with her new-born child.

When the young girl Miriam Kremer saw the pit in the distance she fainted. Her parents brought her to, and carried her to the pit in their arms.

While the Jews were being brought along the highway Mrs Miriam Tzornobrotzky pushed her seven-year-old daughter into the grain field. The police didn't notice this. Miriam, her husband Hirshl and a young daughter named Khayele died in Kobilka. Dvoyrele returned alone to the town of Nementzine. Peasant friends took pity on her and took her to the White Russian town of Bistrewitz, where she died with the Jews of that town.

After the Jews were taken out of the study house into the courtyard, the Jew Khone Pruzhan managed to hide in a woodshed. Khayem-Ele Perevoskin hid in the room where corpses were kept overnight at the synagogue courtyard. He went into a coffin and covered himself over. After the Jews were taken away from the courtyard the police looked for Jews hiding in the corpse room. They didn't look in the coffin. Blume Taub, born Glub, and her two and a half year old son Yankele, managed to escape from the courtyard to the Vilia River.

All of the Jewish survivors from the synagogue yard hid throughout the war with peasants in the countryside. They all survived.

A cousin of Sore's, named Aron Khakim, aged 17, and Daniel Nementzinsky, a glazier, were killed trying to escape from town before the Jews went into the study house. Aron Khakim was shot near the Neris River, on the priest's pasture, not far from town. He lay unburied for so long that birds picked out his eyes and tore the flesh off his face. The gravedigger from the Polish cemetery buried Aron in the pasture.

Aron's father Dovid and his sister Khaye-Sore escaped from next to the pit, and after wandering through fields, forests and villages, they survived until the liberation and were still alive after the war.

Several months before the Jews were slaughtered some of the Jewish men and women in town began working at noblemen's estates near the town. The members of the family were able to visit their families in town every evening after work. The unmarried ones generally slept at the compound, and seldom returned to visit their loved ones in town.

On Friday evening, September 19, Jews came to town as usual. On Saturday morning, September 20, they were not permitted to go to work, and together with all the Jews in town they went to the study house.

Some of the Jews learned in the countryside on Saturday morning what was happening in town, and escaped from the compounds to hide in the surrounding villages.

The police in town knew exactly which noblemen had Jews working for them, because before Jews were allowed out of town to work, the noblemen had to state exactly their address. On Saturday morning partisans and police went to the compounds to take the Jewish workers, but they didn't find any of the Jews there. Thus, for example, the police at the Partzewe compound wanted to pick up a group of Jews, but they had all run away already.

At the Red Compound, five kilometers from town, there was a beer brewery belonging to the Jew Nidzon and his partner, the Polish lawyer Partzewsky. A Jewish supervisor named Zibel worked at the brewery. On the morning of Saturday, the 20th police came to the compound and arrested the Jewish foreman Zibel, his wife, their two children and two Jewish boys named Mane Bayrak and Beynish Leyfer. The two boys worked at the Skale compound, one kilometer from the Red Compound. The murderers placed the Jewish foreman and his family into a wagon. They tied the two boys up to the harness next to the horse. The boys had to hold on to the horse, which the partisans constantly whipped to make it run faster. The Jews were brought to join the rest of the town's Jews. All six Jews were shot together with everyone from Nementzine.

### **The Hunt for Survivors; Survivors Arrested and Shot**

After the Jews of Nementzine were shot, and after their goods had been distributed the police, partisans and Germans began a steady hunt for Jews who had escaped and were hiding in the forests and fields, or with peasants in the villages. Sore Eynbinder remembers the following cases:

1. On Sunday, the day after the slaughter of the Jews of Nementzine, the Jew Lipe Rudashevsky continued hiding in a storeroom at his own home, along with his two sons Leybe, aged 18 and Avrom, aged 14, and a nephew named Leybe Rudashevsky, aged 15. The hidden Jews didn't have any idea what had happened in town. Avrom left the storeroom and was spotted by a policeman, who arrested the young boy and beat him. Avrom apparently told the policeman where the other Jews were hiding. All of the hidden Jews were arrested.

That same Sunday the police caught Mrs Khane Gdud and her son Motele. The mother and children lay hidden in the forest, not far from the mass grave. All of the six Jews who were caught were shot on Tuesday morning, the second day of Rosh Hashanah, near the mass grave at Kobila. They were buried there as well.

2. On the second Friday after the slaughter, September 2, 1941, Pinkhes Glukh and his wife Dvoyre and son Yankl, aged one year, along with Dvoyre's father Zaltzberg, were caught in the swamps near the village of Milani. Before the Jews were taken out of their houses into the study house, all of these people had fled the town and hidden. All of the Jews who were caught were taken to prison in Vilnius, where they all died. Details about their death are unavailable. The surviving Jews said at the time that a peasant had betrayed them. At the same time the young man Yankele Beknshteyn was caught together with Pinkhes Glukh. He too died in the Vilnius prison.

3. Yankele's brother Moyshe Beknshteyn, aged 22, and Binyomin Zlatkovits, escaped from town when the Jews were being taken to the study house. They also hid in the swamps. Police caught them. The two Jews put up an active resistance, and did not allow themselves to be taken alive. Peasants from nearby villages helped to murder the two heroic Jews. The father, Pinkhos Beknshteyn and his daughter Khasye lay in the mud, not far away, and saw everything. The father and daughter survived. After the war they buried the two murdered boys at the Jewish cemetery in Nementzine. Moyshe and Binyomin were killed during the second week after the Jews of Nementzine were slaughtered.

4. In the fall of 1941, in a village, police and partisans caught Mrs Blume Taub and her son Yankele, along with the baker Aron Leybman, at the home of a peasant. Aron tried to escape through the window, and was shot on the spot.

A Jew named Avrom Kravtshuk, a tailor, was caught in the same village that same day, along with his daughter Esther. Blume and her son and Avrom and his daughter were taken to prison in Vilnius. From the prison they were taken to the Vilnius ghetto. Avrom Kravtshuk died in the Vilnius ghetto. Esther Kravtshuk and Blume and her little boy escaped from the Vilnius ghetto and hid with peasants in the countryside. All three survived.

5. Miriam Rudashevsky, born Nementzinsky, gave her two children Khaye-Sore, aged eighteen or nineteen and Yankl-Moyshe, aged six, to a peasant in the village of Gritzuni, thirteen or fourteen kilometers from town. On Friday evening, September 19, when the Germans began shooting at the edge of town, Miriam escaped from town and hid with the peasant Franziszek Rusecky in the village of Gritzuni, across from the peasant where her children were hiding.

In a village called Paschnanagali at the home of the peasant Juzef Woitkewitz Miriam hid her valuables, immediately after the Germans arrived in town. At the beginning of winter in 1942 Miriam and her host Rusecky went to take some of the valuables. The peasant (Woitkewitz) asked them to come back another time. On February 2 two Germans came from Nementzine to Rusecky's house to take Miriam.

They found her on the oven in Rusecky's house. A peasant brought Miriam and the Germans to the police in Nementzine. From there she was taken to Vilnius. She was not heard of again. It was said at the time that the peasant with whom she had hidden her valuables had betrayed, so that he could inherit her goods.

When Miriam was taken from Rusecky's house the two children were hiding at the neighbor's. Both of them survived.

6. In the winter of 1941-42 police from Pabershe caught the Jew from Nementzine Yisroel Trakinsky at the home of a peasant. He was taken to Pabershe. There are no details about his subsequent fate.

7. Avrom Bayrak and his two children, twins named Beyle and Yankl, escaped from the pit when the Jews of Nementzine were slaughtered. In a forest six kilometers from the town of Nementzine police and partisans caught them and took them to Nementzine. From there the father and children were taken to prison in Vilnius, and later released and brought to the Vilnius ghetto. All three died. Avrom Bayrak's wife and their son Mane, who had been brought from the countryside bound in the harness of a wagon, were killed together with all the Jews of Nementzine. Avrom and his two children were caught in the spring of 1942 in the forest near the village of Prudalishki.

8. Berl Zhur escaped from town. He was caught at the home of a peasant in a village and brought to Nementzine. From Nementzine he was taken to the Vilnius ghetto. Berl survived.

9. In the fall of 1943 Lithuanian police in the village of Podkschizhkys caught a husband and wife at the home of a peasant woman named Marcinkewitzowa. The woman was from Nementzine. Her name was Rokhel Andeman. The husband was from the town of Koltinan. They were hiding in a barn. When the police came to look for them, they started running away. Both were shot in the field while running. They were buried there.

A daughter of theirs named Taybele was arrested. The police brought Taybele and the peasant woman to town. The peasant woman insisted that she had found the girl abandoned, and that she wasn't a Jewish child. The peasant woman got the girl back. After the war Taybele continued living with the peasant woman.

10. On Saturday morning, September 20, 1941, before the Jews of Nementzine were herded into the study house, the Jew Khatzkl Nementzinsky ran away from town together with his wife and their daughter. One child named Leyzerl, a year old, was left behind when they ran away, and he died with all the Jews of Nementzine.

In the fall of 1943 Khatkl and his wife and child were hiding in a potato pit in the middle of a field in the village of Snegi (17 or 18 kilometers from town). Right-wing Poles came to the village, and passed near the pit. Khatzkl was very afraid, and began running across the field. The Poles shot him in the field and buried him there. Khatzkl's wife and child stayed in the potato pit without being spotted. Later both were killed by right-wing Poles together with a group of Jews in the village of Bilduni, not far from the former Lithuanian-Polish border.

11. The Jew Avrom Glukh from Nementzine hid in a village not far from the spot where his sister Blume Taub's son was hiding with a peasant in a village. One time Avrom came to see how his nephew was doing. Avrom spent the night at the peasant's barn. This was at a settlement in the village of Wigelini, eight kilometers from Nementzine.

Some time earlier the same peasant had hidden Khatzkl and his wife and child for about nine months. Peasant neighbors found out about this, and apparently betrayed the peasant. Khatzkl was forced to leave the place with his family. Blume Taub kept her son there.

The very evening that Avrom Glub slept in the barn, police came to the peasant to look for Jews. Avrom hid in straw in the barn. The police came to the barn and didn't find Avrom. After they left Avrom began to move in the barn, apparently too soon.. The police hadn't left the barn yet, and they spotted the place where Avrom lay hiding. Avrom started running away from the barn. The police shot at him, and he was buried in the field. His sister Blume Taub exhumed her murdered brother after the war and buried him at the Jewish cemetery in Nementzine. Blume's son survived.

12. The young Yisroel Yanishky, aged 18, escaped from Nementzine before the Jews were herded into the study house on Saturday, September 20, 1941. He hid with peasants in the countryside until the end of 1943. Right-wing Polish nationalists found him at the home of the peasant, and shot him and buried him there.

13. In the village of Gritzuni, at the home of the peasant Zhukowsky, two Jews; one from the town of Dubnow, the other a tinsmith from Shventsionys, were in hiding. In the winter of 1943 right-wing Poles caught the two Jews, took them to another village nearby and shot both of them there. The right-wing Poles forced a peasant to take the corpses of the two Jews to the police in Nementzine. The two Jews were buried at the Jewish cemetery. It was said at the time that a neighbor of the peasant Zhukowsky had betrayed the two Jews to the Poles.

14. Two brothers named Kutiel and Elye Kensky escaped from Nementzine while the Jews were being taken to the study house. The two hid for a long time with a peasant friend in a village. Of course, they paid the peasant well for everything. Neighbors began to speak about the two hidden Jews. The two brothers were forced to leave the spot and settled at a neighbor's house. A woman named Esther Gordon came to join the two brothers in hiding. The first peasant bitterly resented his neighbor's hiding the two brothers and Esther, and receiving a lot of money in exchange. He betrayed his neighbor to the town police (the neighbor Ragowsky was the traitor).

On December 31, 1943 Lithuanian police headed by the infamous murderer Raila came to the peasant in the village of Raguni, five kilometers from town, and arrested all three Jews. All three were taken in the direction of Nementzine in a peasant wagon.

The peasant who drove the Jews later reported that the two brothers offered Raila a large sum of money if he would let them live. The murderer took the money and told the Jews to run into the forest. As they "escaped" all three Jews were shot, and they were buried in the forest near the village of Gaji.

After the war the older brother Yankl Kensky exhumed them and buried them at the cemetery in Nementzine.

15. Khatzkl Nementzinsky's wife Rokhel and her child Khayele left the potato pit after Khatzkl was shot and hid in another village. Not far from the village, in the Schuzani forest, a large group of Jews from Nementzine were hiding. Among them were the two brothers Hirshl and Berl Leyfer, and their sister Rivke. Their other sister Dvoyre hid the whole time with a peasant named Bilewitz in a village five kilometers from the town of Nementzine near the village of Pokrowli. In the winter of 1944 Dvoyre came to the forest to visit her brothers and sister. Accompanied by a boy named Peysekh Levinson, aged 11 or 12, Dvoyrele went to the village to get food. She and the boy were arrested by a group of nationalist Poles. At the same time these same nationalist Poles caught Rokhel Nementzinsky and her daughter Khayele in a village. The two women and the children were shot by the Poles in a forest near the village of Bilduni. This was in the winter of 1944.

16. Mendl Fayn escaped from the pit at Kobilka on Saturday, September 20, 1941. For a long time he hid with peasants in White Russia. He was wounded when he escaped from the pit. In the spring Mendl Fayn and his niece Khaye Purzhan lay hiding in a forest near a peasant farm. The peasant brought them food in the forest. There Mendl and his niece prepared a bunker where they could hide in case of a roundup. Mendl had hidden his better possessions with the peasant. The peasant kept them for a short time. The peasant decided to inherit Mendl's goods. When Mendl and his niece Khaye lay in the pit, the peasant threw in a hand grenade. They both died in the spring of 1943. The peasant covered the bunker containing the two corpses with dirt.

17. Near the village of Posadniki, in a bunker in the forest, ten or twelve men and women from the town of Pabershe lay in hiding. This was in the winter of 1943. The hidden Jews used to leave the forest at night for the surrounding villages to try to get food from peasants. The peasants wanted to get rid of the Jewish "beggars," and told the Vilnius Gestapo about them. Gestapo men wearing Red Army uniforms came to the area. They surrounded the bunker containing the hidden Jews and threw in hand grenades. All of the Jews in the bunker were killed. They were buried in the bunker.

18. The Jew from Nementzine Moyshe Andeman and his son Mikhl survived near the pit at Kobilka. In the winter of 1944 they hid in a village ten kilometers from town at the home of a peasant. They were attacked by Polish nationalists. Mikhl managed to escape. His father Moyshe was shot running away. Mikhl later hid and survived.

In the town of Dubinkiai Mikhl had relatives, and he went there to see how they had been killed. On the way he was shot by right-wing Poles. The Red Army had already been informed about the bandits in the forest. Mikhl was shot after the liberation, the day before Yom Kippur 1944.

19. The Nementzine Jews Shmuel Bratinishky and Fayve Nementzinsky escaped from town on Saturday morning, September 20, before the Jews were herded into the study house. Together with the Jew Shloyme Levinson, they hid until the spring of 1943. In the spring of 1943 all three hid in a pit not far from Nementzine. Lithuanian police found out about them and shot all three on the spot.

Most of the surviving Jews of Nementzine, Pabershe and Gedraitziai hid in the region of the Susan forest. There two sisters from the town of Gedraitziai survived. Their names were Frume and Taybele Vaynshteyn. Their aunt Bashe Katz was with them as well. A number of the surviving Jews from Nementzine went to White Russia. Many of them died in the ghettos and countryside there. Sore doesn't know any details about their death.

### **Sore and Her Brothers Struggle for Life**

When the Jews of Nementzine were shot at Kobilka, Sore hid in the village of Kukitiszki at the home of the peasant Dubicky. Sore heard about the shooting of the Jews at Kobilka. The village of Kukitiszki is located about three kilometers from Kobilka. Sore also saw peasants from the village bringing home the packages the Jews had discarded when they ran away from the pit. The peasants carrying the Jews' packages were happy with what they had inherited. Sore's brother Nokhem-Ber escaped from town on Saturday morning while the Jews were being taken to the study house. He came to his other brother Avrom at the compound to warn him not to go to town. Avrom had left the compound by then.

Nokhem-Ber left to hide in a nearby forest. All day he lay in the forest. On Saturday evening he came to his sister Sore, to the home of the peasant Dubicky. In the woodland belonging to the peasant there was an old bunker from the previous war. Nokhem-Ber hid there. That same night the other brother Avrom and another young man, a student named Velvl Gdud, joined him. On Monday, September 22 Sore came down from the peasant's attic and moved into the bunker with her brothers. The peasant Jan Dubitzky brought food to the four Jews in the bunker.

When they had been there for a week a neighboring peasant noticed the four Jews in the bunker. He went to them and advised them to place a fallen tree over the entrance. But the Jews didn't want to stay there any longer. They peasant tried to reassure them, and convinced them to stay in the bunker. The Jews pretended to decide to go to White Russia. They asked the peasant to show them the way. Sore went back to Dubicky's attic by herself. The three boys and the peasant went five kilometers in the direction of White Russia. The peasant went away.

The Jews immediately returned to the peasant Dubicky and hid in his attic together with their sister. They were there for four weeks. They couldn't stay there any longer, because a partisan who had shed a good deal of Jewish blood lived nearby.

Velvl Gdud went to join his father, who was hiding with a peasant in another village. Sore and her two brothers went closer to the town of Nementzine. At the edge of town lived a peasant friend of theirs named Filipowitz and his family. The good Pole took all three Jews in and set up a hiding place for them inside the double wall of a cattle stall. The crowding in the hiding place was terrible. The awful cold weather of the winter of 1941 began. It was always dark there. The Jews felt as though they had been buried alive. The peasant brought them food on time, but not much. There were days when the three Jews suffered considerable hunger.

Before leaving town Sore sent her little daughter Goldele with Filipowitz to a peasant named Michal Figurewitz in the village of Pawlukanz. Golde was there until November 1. The peasant Figurewitz couldn't keep her because peasants found out whose child she was, and envied the money and objects he received for hiding Golde, and told a policeman about her. Figurewitz brought Golde to the peasant Filipowitz. From there he took her to a peasant in a village near Shventsionys. The peasant Filipowitz received money and goods to bring to the other peasant. Evidently Filipowitz didn't hand over everything that was supposed to pay for Golde's upkeep, and the peasant only kept Golde for three days. Of course he didn't return what he had been given. The last name of the peasant was Kwiatkowsky, from the village of Jencsuizsky, five kilometers from Shventsionys.

Sore took in a Polish girl whom she paid to take care of Goldele, whose hair was dyed blond. Golde stayed there until December 14, 1941. Neighbors began to be interested in Golde. It was impossible to keep her openly at Filipovitz's. It was also impossible to bring her inside the hiding place in the double wall because it was so cold.

Sore sent her child with Filipovitz to the White Russian town of Postav, where Meir Eynbinder's parents, Golde's grandfather Yeshua and grandmother Dvoyre, lived. There had been no slaughters of Jews in White Russia yet.

On November 21, 1942 the Jews in the Postav ghetto were slaughtered. Yeshua Eynbinder and his wife Dvoyre, along with Goldele, died that day. Goldele was exactly five years old at the time.

Sore's husband Meir had been called up to the Polish army when the war broke out between Poland and Germany, and he fell prisoner to the Germans. While at the home of the peasant Filipovitz Sore received letters addressed to the family of the peasant Filipovitz. The correspondence with her husband continued until shortly before the liberation. This correspondence with a Jewish prisoner of war in Germany was extraordinary, and even legendary at the time.

The peasant Filipovitz received a substantial sum of money from his hidden Jews for food. He obtained enough food for a long time, and didn't want to keep the Jews any longer. The helpless Jews couldn't even ask for a portion of the money they had handed over, because they were in his hands. Before they left him the peasant extorted the last hundred rubles the Jews had.

From there all three went to the peasant Michal Figurewitz in the village of Pawlukanz, where Sore's daughter Goldele had been just after they fled Nementzine. The peasant was truly a good person, and he warmly received the three desperate Jews.

From December 25, 1941 until April 19, 1942 all three Jews lay hiding in his house behind the oven. Until August 1 they hid in a potato pit in the field, and then in the attic of a barn. The three Jews stayed with the peasant for a total of nine months.

As soon as the Germans entered Nementzine, the Daytsh family had given their better things to the shoemaker and glazier in town Alekander Semaszko, a very religious man, for safekeeping. Throughout the time Sore and her brothers were in hiding, he sent them money and objects punctually. The three Jews generously rewarded the peasant Figurewitz for his goodness and the risk he had taken in hiding them.

Concerning Sore's and her brothers' subsequent bitter struggle for life, see the testimony of Sore's brother Avrom Daytsh.

### **Attestation of Sore Eynbinder**

Everything written about the slaughter of the Jews of Nementzine, all the facts, dates, names of persons and geographic locations, were experienced and related to Leyb Koniuchowsky by me, Sore Eynbinder, born Daytsh. After reading over the report, I attest to everything with my signature on each and every page.

Eyewitness:                      Sore Eynbinder                      (Signature)

The report was written by Engineer L Koniuchowsky  
Heidenheim a/ Brenz                      January 25, 1948

The signature of Mrs Sore Eynbinder (Deutsch), resident of the Heidenheim Camp 100, is  
attested to by the chairman of the camp committee  
Camp Chairman J Bialowicz                      (Signature) Heidenheim                      January 25, 1948

*Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin      New York      May19, 1994*

## 2. THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS IN THE TOWN OF NEMENTZINE

Eyewitness testimony of Yekusiel Gordon, born in the town of Nementzine on May 15, 1900. He lived his entire life in Nementzine, and he was there when war broke out between Nazi Germany the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941. He graduated from Hebrew elementary school in Nementzine in 1914. He was a merchant by trade. His father's name was Dovid-Elye. His mother was Sheyne, born Nemedzhansky.

Yekusiel escaped from his house when the Jews were ordered to go to the study house on Saturday, September 20, 1941. He also suggested that his brother-in-law and sister not go to the study house. They refused, however, because they believed that the Jews were being taken to a ghetto. Yekusiel hid in a cellar. Everyone in the house had already gone to the study house yard. His sister Bashe sent a boy named Khayeml Leybman from there to summon her brother to the study house. Yekusiel refused to go.

A while later his sister personally came to the house and convinced her brother that it would be better not to be separated from all the Jews, and to go to a ghetto. Yekusiel did what his sister wanted this time, took along a package and went to the study house yard. Partisans stood around the town and inside the town as well with weapons in their hands, making sure no one escaped. Yekusiel sensed that he had fallen into a trap. Yekusiel's sister helped him escape the study house yard.

Yekusiel met armed partisans wherever he went. He managed to make his way to the municipal community center, which had not been finished. There Yekusiel climbed into the attic. When the Jews were taken from town in the direction of the Vilnius highway, Yekusiel saw everything. The Jews were herded in a single column under a heavy guard of Lithuanian partisans and police. There were several Germans present, along with two Poles in civilian clothes. One of them was Kondratowitz from the town of Nementzine, and the other Walentinowitz from the village of Wolikiszki. The two Poles were armed.

A half hour after the Jews were taken out of town, Yekusiel heard rifle and machine-gun shots from the direction of the Vilnius highway. While lying in the attic Yekusiel heard Poles from town happily saying that "the filth had been cleaned out of town."

At night Yekusiel left the attic and went to the village of Kelnobridzi, ten kilometers from town, where he found the peasant Kazimerz Wrublewsky, where Yekusiel's family had hidden their valuables right after the Germans arrived in town. The peasant received Yekusiel warmly, and kept him in his barn for seven weeks. Outside it began to grow very cold, and Yekusiel had to leave. He arrived at the village of Rakshani, 16 kilometers from Nementzine, where he knocked on the door of a peasant woman named Poznokowa. The peasant woman knew Yekusiel., but she didn't let him in. Yekusiel stayed for several days at the home of the peasant Stanislaw Zindul in the same village.

From there Yekusiel went to the peasant Andrusancowa, a widow with three daughters and a son-in-law who was a tailor. The peasant woman warmly received Yekusiel. Yekusiel gave her a lady's coat and a pair of pyjamas. The peasant woman kept Yekusiel for one month in exchange. A day before New Year's the peasant woman told Yekusiel that she had kept him in exchange for the things he'd given her, and she couldn't keep him any longer. She knew that Yekusiel had more goods at the home of a friend. Yekusiel left for one night to his peasant friend and brought back a fur, a lady's coat and six packages of chrome. He arranged for her to keep him for two months in exchange. Yekusiel hid behind the oven in the other half of the room where the tailor lived and worked.

After a week the tailor came with a bootlegger and made homemade liquor. After they made the liquor the tailor and the bootlegger drank two liters of liquor. Both of them became very drunk.

The peasant woman had taken in someone else's cow to keep over the winter. She didn't take her son-in-law's cow. The whole time the daughter and her husband, the tailor, had been very angry at her mother. When the tailor got drunk, he grabbed his scissors and decided to murder his mother-in-law and her children. There was a terrible commotion in the house. His wife tried to calm her husband, but he beat her badly. The mother and the daughter left the house barefoot. The drunken bootlegger tried to take the peasant woman's side. The tailor hurt him as well. There was a commotion in the house. From the nearby houses neighbors ran up. Yekusiel sensed that the situation was growing very dangerous for him, and he left the oven. Yekusiel begged the tailor with tears in his eyes to stop making such a commotion, and save his life. But the tailor didn't want to hear it, and he kept looking for his mother-in-law and her daughters. Peasants meanwhile spotted Yekusiel. The bootlegger saw Yekusiel as well.

It was impossible to stay there any longer. The tailor fell asleep. A peasant who came from another village placed him in a sled and took the tailor away to work for him.

After the night had passed the peasant woman told Yekusiel that it was impossible for him to stay there any longer, because neighbors had seen him. Yekusiel asked her to figure what he owed her for one week, and to give him back his things. The peasant woman wouldn't hear of it. She explained to Yekusiel that she hadn't gotten much from him the first month, and that other Jews who were in hiding had given their peasants kilos of gold. With great difficulty Yekusiel got the fur back.

Yekusiel didn't find a place to stay with peasants again for some time. A day here, a night there, he wandered through the fields, forests and villages.

At the beginning of spring 1943 he found a place at the home of Maginsky in the village of Ligaluvke. He was kept there for several months in exchange for his work. Then he wandered again.

In the fall of 1943 Yekusiel met other Jewish survivors from Nementzine. Together they set up a bunker in the Susani forest. There were fourteen men and women in the bunker. They bought food from peasants with money. The bunker was well-disguised. The Jews stayed in the bunker until February 1944.

In that region there were Red partisans who knew about the bunker. Once there was a big search throughout the forest, and fourteen men came to hide in the bunker. They ate up everything the Jews had. The Red partisans stayed there for a week, and then went away. It was no longer possible for the Jews to stay there. All fourteen Jews dug a new, large bunker in a different part of the same forest. There they all settled in. The bunker was eighteen meters long by four meters wide. The ground there was wet. Every day they had to empty out 300 buckets of water from the bunker.

The Jews got food from nearby peasants. The bunker was well-disguised, and nobody knew where it was, except for a few peasants who brought the Jews food in exchange for money. Other Jews from Nementzine, along with one from Dubingiai and one from Pabershe, came to the bunker as well. There were a total of 24 Jews there, men, women and three children. All the Jews hid in the bunker until the liberation in the spring of 1944.

After reading over the testimony of Sore Eynbinder-Daytsh concerning the slaughter of the Jews of Nementzine, Yekusiel Gordon finds it necessary to state that everything was accurately reported by Sore, and he corroborates everything.

Yekusiel finds, however, that it is important to add details which were not provided by Sore Eynbinder.

These facts are:

1. The first day of the war, when the Jews were hiding in the countryside, Lithuanian partisans spread leaflets with a sharply anti-Semitic message. In these leaflets the partisans warned the peasants not to protect Jews, not to hide their goods and so forth. They threatened to shoot peasants who didn't carry out their orders.
2. Yekusiel Gordon does not know about the case of the Jew Yisroel Trakinsky, who was said to have stolen goods from Jewish houses together with a band of Poles.
3. When the Jews were being taken from the study house, Yekusiel lay in hiding in the community center attic. None of the goods belonging to the Jews who were murdered were brought to the community center on Saturday, September 20. Yekusiel thinks this might have happened a few days later.
4. Concerning Cases 2 and 3 in Sore Eynbinder's testimony, it must be added that all of the Jews were caught in a single place that same day. Moyshe Beknshteyn and Binyomin Zlatkovitz died while resisting. The rest of those who were caught were taken to Vilnius.
5. Case 4 in Sore Eynbinder's testimony happened in the village of Balinci, 12 kilometers from Nementzine, at the home of the peasant Wansowitz.
6. Yisroel Trakinsky (Case 6 in Sore Eynbinder's testimony) was arrested in the village of Bazani, twelve kilometers from Nementzine, at the home of the peasant Wezbicky, in April 1942.
7. Berl Zhur was caught in the village of Uninizsky at the home of the peasant Marcinkewitz. In that case there was no betrayal.
8. Case 10 in Sore Eynbinder's testimony is imprecise. The facts transpired as follows: Mrs Rokhl Nementzinsky and her daughter Khayeled hid at the home of the peasant Franciszsek Ajewsky. The husband Khatzkl Nementzinsky had no place to stay, and went to a Polish friend of his named Karl Juchnewitz, in a settlement near



### **3. THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS IN THE TOWN OF NEMENTZINE: ADDITIONAL TESTIMONY**

Reported by Avrom Daytz, born July 21, 1914 in Nementzine. He graduated from the elementary school in the town of Nementzine.

After reading over the testimony of Sore Eynbinder-Daytsh and of Yekusiel Gordon, Avrom Daytz finds that both reports are precise and reflect accurately the entire tragedy concerning the death of the Jews of Nementzine.

Avrom finds it necessary to add several facts, which are absent in both testimonies.

The facts are as follows:

1. The Jew Leyb Juker was shot near the Jewish cemetery on June 26, 1941.
2. The order to put on two yellow stars was given on July 8, 1941.
3. On Friday, July 11, 1941 Germans rode in from the nearby town of Pabershe. With the help of Lithuanians from Nementzine, they forced the secretary of the Jewish community, Khayem Barov, to open the study house. Yeshiva students were brought in and forced to take out all of the Torah scrolls and holy books, place them in a heap and burn them. The murderers forced the yeshiva boys to dance around the pyre.
4. The eight Jews who were arrested on Friday, June 27, 1941 were kept in the town prison for several days. The townspeople were freed, and two refugees from Poland were taken to Vilnius. On July 14 all of the Jews who had been released were rearrested and taken to prison in Vilnius.
5. Avrom Daytz confirms that Yisroel Trakinsky joined a band of robbers and helped to rob the possessions of the Jews.
6. At the end of the month of August police and partisans went through all the Jewish homes, recording all the furniture and other items. The Jews were warned not to sell anything that had been registered, and that they would be held accountable.
7. When the Jews were taken from the study house into the courtyard on September 20, 1941 they had to leave in family groups. At the door every family was checked, and after they were searched and their last possessions were taken, they were soundly beaten and released into the yard. If anyone in the family was missing, the partisans demanded that they be told where the hidden one was, meanwhile murderously beating the entire family.

Avrom's father was murderously beaten as well for refusing to say where his two sons and his daughter were. Avrom was told about this by Jews who escaped from Kobilka.

8. On September 20, 1941, before the Jews were herded into the study house, Mrs Bratinishky hid a small child of hers with a peasant friend of hers named Shtseglikowa, while she herself hid in another place. The peasant woman took the little child's clothes off, dressed him in rags and personally took him to the rest of the interned Jews at the study house.

The next day, Sunday, after the Jews were shot, the mother came to the peasant woman to get her child. Police caught her in town and took her to the prison, where Lipe Rudashevsky and his two sons, his nephew, and Mrs Khane Gdud and her son Motele were already interned.

On the second day of Rosh Hashanah, Tuesday, September 23, 1941, the group of Jews were taken from prison and shot at Kobilka at 7:00 a.m.

9. Case 4 in Sore Eynbinder's testimony happened as follows: Avrom Kravtshuk and Khyene Gordon from Nementzine escaped after the Vilnius ghetto was liquidated and hid in a village five kilometers from town in a peasant's bath house. The partisan Walentnavitsius shot both of them there. The same partisan murdered with a stone a boy named Moyshe Beknshteyn in the swamps near the village of Milani (Cases 2 and in Sore's testimony).

10. When the town's Jews were herded into the study house, Mrs Dvoyre Nudson hid among the potatoes in the garden near her house. The Polish neighbor Petz Schulc told the partisans about her, and she was arrested.

11. Miss Burshteyn, Fayve the Gravestone Cutter's grandchild, hid at the home of a peasant in a village ten kilometers from Nementzine. A neighbor begrudged the peasant for hiding a Jew, and betrayed him to the police, who arrested her and took her to Vilnius, where she died.

12. After the Jews were taken to the study house all of the houses were sealed. On Thursday, September 25, the fifth day after the Jews were shot, the furniture and clothing was assembled at the community center in town. Of course, Yekusiel Gordon, who escaped from there at night on Saturday, June 20, could not have seen this. Avrom's sister Sore correctly reported about the bringing of the items into the community center, and Y Gordon appropriately noted that the items had apparently been assembled several days after he escaped from the community center (see Case 3 of the testimony).

Avrom Daytz remembers the following murderers who tortured, robbed and took active part in the slaughter of the Jews of Nementzine:

1. Raila, a policeman from the Lithuanian interior under Smetonas.
2. Stanislaw Rutkowsky, a carpenter from the town of Nementzine.
3. Woitkewitz, a carpenter from the village of Milani.
4. Marian Zhelazowsky, a former Polish officer.
5. Sokolowsky, formerly employed as a forest watchman before the war..
6. Balukewitz, a construction worker in town.
7. Jaszvurewitz, a dog catcher.

Avrom does not remember the first or last names of the Lithuanian murderers, because more than forty of them were from the surrounding Lithuanian villages, or from the Lithuanian interior. The newly-arrived Lithuanians ran the civilian administration throughout the German occupation, and took active part in the slaughter of the town's Jews.

The Poles deeply detested the new Lithuanian bosses, and in many cases they helped the Jews out against the Lithuanians and Germans. The Poles took more active part in helping to annihilate the remaining Jews who were in hiding when the Polish Fascists began to rage through the countryside. The murderers finished slaughtering the few hidden Jews.

It was very hard to hide from them because the Polish peasants considered the Polish Fascists to be their flesh and blood, and they didn't only support them, but also gave them information about the Red Partisans and the Jews. (A former Polish officer named Szydłowski was the leader of the Polish Fascists in the Susani region.)

From December 25, 1941 until April 19, 1942 Avrom and his brother Nokhem-Ber and sister Sore Eynbinder were at the home of the peasant Michal Figurewitz in the village of Pawlukanz. (See the end of Sore Eynbinder's testimony.) From there all three went away, and hid for ten days in the swamps.

After surviving a bitter struggle against hunger, cold, filth and terror, they managed to obtain a hiding place at the home of the peasant Jan Mikulewitz at a settlement near the village of Gritzuzi, where they stayed for four months in the attic of a barn.

They were there until January 8, 1943. Neighbors nearby found out about the hidden Jews, and they had to leave the spot. They went to another peasant named Francischek Gursky, in the same village. They were at that peasant's place for a couple of weeks until neighbors found out, and all three Jews had to leave that spot as well. They returned to the peasant Figurewitz, where they stayed until the spring of 1943.

For one month they were with the peasant Eduard Lukowsky. Through the area wandered Red Army soldiers who had escaped imprisonment, but hadn't yet gotten in contact with the Red Partisans. The Lithuanian partisans found out about them and began carrying out roundups in the region. The Jews had to leave the area, and they went to a peasant friend of theirs in the village of Gritzuni, and then in the village of Pawlukane. For three months, until a few weeks before the liberation, the three Jews were with the peasant Romanowsky in the village of Gritzuni. They lay hidden at the peasant's house behind the oven. During the raids, or when they were threatened with a danger of being caught, they hid in a bunker that had been prepared in the peasant's pig stall. Despite all the precautions the brothers and their sister took, they were spotted by close neighbors and had to leave the spot.

For the last period, a little less than a month, the three Jews were with a very good, poor Polish peasant named Jan Mikulewitz. Avrom, his brother Nokhem-Ber and their sister Sore stayed with the peasant until the liberation on July 7, 1944.

Throughout the time, at every peasant home, the two brothers and Sore tried not to cause their rescuers too much trouble in exchange for saving them. They suffered a good deal of hunger, and a good deal of cold and deadly

terror. They paid all of the peasants generously with objects, money, gold coins and valuables which the wonderfully good Polish townsman, the shoemaker and glazier Aleksander semaszko, used to provide them with after getting a note from them. Peasants gradually realized that the peasant Semaszko had a Jewish "treasure." Semaszko used to come to visit them, and affectionally talk to the hidden Jews, whom he encouraged and comforted, helping them to be strong and hold out until the liberation. With fiery eyes full of joy Semaszko would talk about the happy moment when the hidden Jews would be released, and when they would be equal to everyone. Semaszko didn't live to see that happy moment.

Shortly before the liberation the organist from the village of Susani moved in to Semaszko's house. The organist apparently had found out that Semaszko was hiding Jewish wealth. In the month of April 1944, the good Pole was found dead in his house. Neighbors stated that he had been found poisoned, and the suspicion fell on the organist, who had moved into Semaszko's house. The organist inherited the goods of the hidden Jews.

### **Attestation of Avrom Daytz**

After reading the testimony of my sister Sore Eynbinder and Yekusiel Gordon, I attest that everything they state about the slaughter of the Jews of Nementzine agrees with the tragic reality. All of the facts, dates, names of persons and locations which I provide in my testimony, I attest to with my signature on each and every page.

Eyewitness:            Avrom Daytz            (Signature)

The report was written by Engineer L Koniuchowsky  
Leipheim aj Donau        February 10, 1948

The signature of Avrom Daytz, resident of the Leipheim camp, is attested to by the chairman of the camp committee.    Camp Chairman Wachshendler    (Signature)  
Leipheim a/Donau        February 10, 1948

*Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin    New York    May 20, 1994*

## 1. THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS OF SHVENTZIONYS

The collective testimonies of:

1. Binyomin Taraseysky was born in Shventzionys on March 2, 1903. He spent his entire youth in Shventzionys. From 1930 he had lived in the Polish town of Bedzin. When the war broke out between Nazi Germany and Poland, he returned to live with his family in Shventzionys. His father's name was Nokhem, and his mother was Sore, born Zhagevitsh. He is a university graduate. He is a medical doctor by profession. He survived the slaughter of the Jews of Shventzionys.

2. Yankl Levin was born in the White Russian town of Lentupis on January 18, 1912. He lived in Shventzionys for his entire life, and survived the slaughter of the Jews there. He graduated from the local elementary school. He was a painter by trade. His father's name was Khonon, and his mother was Libe, born Kharmatz.

### The Geographical Setting of Shventzionys

Shventzionys, a county seat, is located on the highway between Vilnius and Dvinsk, 84 kilometers from Vilnius, thirteen kilometers from Shventzioneliai and between 30 and 32 kilometers from Padbrade. Highways to Shventzioneliai, Padbrade and Maligan pass through Shventzionys. Gravel roads connect Shventzionys to the surrounding smaller towns. A narrow-gauge railroad connects Shventzionys to Lentupis and Shventzioneliai. A few kilometers from Shventzionys are lakes Berezowka and Kochanowka.

### The Political Situation

Until the collapse of Poland in 1939, the entire region belonged to Poland. On September 17, 1939 Shventzionys and the surrounding area were occupied by the Red Army.

Shventzionys was assigned to the White Russian Soviet Republic, while Shventzioneliai was assigned to the Lithuanian Republic, ruled by Antanas Smetonas.

In the summer of 1940 all of the Baltic republics were occupied by the Red Army and incorporated into the Soviet Union as Soviet republics. Vilnius and the entire surrounding area, along with the region of Shventzionys, were assigned to the Lithuanian Soviet Republic.

### The Population and Their Occupations

Until the war broke out on June 22, 1941 about 6,000 people lived in town, including some 2,000 Jews. The great majority of the Christian population was Polish, along with a few Old Believers and Lithuanians.

The surrounding villages were occupied by Lithuanians, who had been anticipating for years the day when they would be reunited with the Lithuanian motherland. During the years of Polish rule they had struggled intensely for their national rights, their traditions and their culture. They maintained a Lithuanian gymnasium in Shventzionys, which served as the focal point of their political struggle for liberation from Polish rule, and their general political and social life. During the 1930s the gymnasium was closed by the Poles. The struggle to be united with Lithuania was carried on even more intensely underground. During this period the Lithuanians were friendly toward the Jews in the surrounding towns and in Shventzionys.

The majority of the Jews in town were occupied in trade and artisanry. Some of them were farmers. The Jews had capably and diligently worked over the years to develop small industry. Among the more important enterprises there were:

1. A village mill belonging to the Jewish brothers Julian and Efroyim Shpiz.
2. A factory where medicinal herbs were prepared, belonging to the firm of Taravsky and Sons.
3. Another factory where medicinal herbs were prepared, belonging to Ruven Abramovitsh. These herbs were sold throughout Poland. A substantial amount was exported as well.
4. A factory where old clothes were recycled into wool for woollen boots.
5. A woollen boot factory belonging to the Jew Binyomin Shapiro.
6. A woollen boot factory belonging to the Jew Berl Shapiro, Binyomin's son.
7. A woollen boot factory belonging to the Jewish brothers Shoyel and Khayim Vilkomirsky.

8. A woollen boot factory belonging to the Jew Leyzer Zeydl.
9. A woollen boot factory belonging to the Jew Yankl Svirsky.
10. A woollen boot factory belonging to the Jew Motl Kurlyantshik.
11. A woollen boot factory belonging to the Jew Aron Ginzburg.
12. A woollen boot factory belonging to the Jew Zalmen Gilinsky.
13. A woollen boot factory belonging to the Jew Avrom Taytz.
14. A woollen boot factory belonging to the Jew Leyzer Taytz.

A large number of Jewish and Christian workers were employed in the manufacture of woollen boots in Shventzionys. The finished boots were sold throughout Poland.

Shventzionys had large manufacturing concerns belonging to the Jews Motl Kagan, Avrom Tshasnik, Khesye Gurvitsh and others.

There were substantial iron businesses belonging to the Jews Shokhar, Lupinsky, and Eydlman, along with other, smaller businesses.

The movie theater in Shventzionys belonged to a Jew named Boris Brumberg, who was the vice mayor of Shventzionys until Poland collapsed in 1939.

The two pharmacies were owned by Jews, one by Nokhum Taraseysky and one by Yisroel Levin. Shventzionys had two print shops, belonging to the Jews Yisroel Levin and Ele-Leyb Porus.

The economic life of the Jews in town was not bad. However, there were a number of paupers and their families, who had to struggle hard to get by. A large number of the young Jews lacked opportunities, and were uneasy about the future. A number of them placed their hopes in the possibility of emigrating to join relatives overseas, and a large number tried to make their way to the Land of Israel.

### **The Cultural Life of the Jews:**

Shventzioys had two elementary schools, one Hebrew and one Yiddish. The cultural and social life of the Jews was centered around these two elementary schools. The two elementary schools served as bases for the political struggle between the Yiddishist Diasporist movement and the Zionists. The Bundists, Progressives, Yiddishists and other Diasporist propagandists grouped themselves around the Yiddish elementary school. All of the Zionist parties, representing various tendencies, gathered around the Hebrew elementary school.

There were two libraries in Shventzionys: the municipal Jewish library and the library run by the Yiddish Culture League (later known as the Bildungs-Gezelshaft). Each of the two main political tendencies had its own dramatic group, which were similarly connected to the Yiddish or Hebrew elementary schools. After graduating elementary school, the majority of the young people learned a trade. Those who continued their studies went to the Polish gymnasium in Shventzionys, which existed until the autumn of 1939. Some of the Jewish youth studied in gymnasiums in Vilnius or in the technical school in Vilnius known as the Technium.

The Jews of Shventzionys had their own theater building, called Bet-Am.

Until the fall of 1939 there was a community bank in Shventzionys, along with two free loan societies. There were two Mitnagdic study houses in Shventzionys, along with an artisans' synagogue and two Hasidic prayer rooms. There was also a yeshiva, run by Ushpal's son-in-law.

Thanks to the constant political competition among the parties, the numerous lectures and educational evenings, the Jewish youth of Shventzionys were well-informed about political and social affairs. For some time there were two Jewish orchestras in Shventzionys. The Cultural League sponsored a good string orchestra.

In their free time, or on summer evenings and Saturdays after lunch, the Jewish youth would go outside of town to Lake Berezowka or Kochanowka. They would swim in the lakes as well.

### **After the War between Poland and Nazi Germany**

Shventzionys was assigned to White Russia in the fall of 1939. The economic situation of the Jews in town generally worsened. The political debates among the parties fell off. The Shventzionys Jews sensed that a

dramatic and insecure time was approaching.

The Poles gradually lost their hegemony over the local minorities. Their attitude toward the Jews improved.

After the Red Army entered Lithuania and the entire surrounding region was assigned to Lithuania, the economic situation of the less well-off portion of the Jewish population significantly improved. A large number of young Jews got the opportunity to participate in the new political and economic life of the Soviet system. Their material worries disappeared. The Jews felt that they were citizens, the equals of the Poles, Lithuanians and White Russians.

The non-Jewish population jealously watched their Jewish neighbors, who behaved like free citizens. They didn't openly display their hostility toward the Jews. They discreetly nurtured their hatred of the Jews and Soviets, and carried on underground work. The new rulers of the region, the Lithuanians, harbored in their hearts a particular hatred of the Soviets and the Jewish citizens. Their hatred of the Soviets and the Jews gave them something in common with their former persecutors, the Poles.

For the wealthier portion of the Jewish population, the economic conditions grew worse. All of the major businesses and factories were nationalized. The Jews were no longer the bosses, and they became employees of Soviet institutions or in the businesses they had previously owned. They gradually got used to the new situation, and made their peace with the Soviet system. They considered the granting of equal rights to be a fair recompense for the material losses they suffered in the process of nationalization.

Naturally, the competition among the parties atrophied. Neither the Zionist nor the Yiddishist groups were able to achieve their goals. Another political force which would tolerate no competition held sway, both among the Christians and among the Jews. More than a few young Jews threw themselves into the new setup body and soul, and accepted positions in the party, the Soviet security services and other agencies.

Shortly before the outbreak of the war between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, the Soviet security forces transferred thousands of former bourgeois, wealthy peasants from town and from the countryside, and former political dissidents deeper into the Soviet Union.

Not one of the Jewish youth participated in drawing up the list of those to be transferred, nor did any of them directly participate in removing the "undesirable elements." The Poles and Lithuanians angrily accused the Jews of helping to exile their relatives and friends deep into the Soviet Union.

As a result of these transfers, the hostility of the Lithuanian and Polish population in town and in the countryside vis-a-vis both the Jews and the Soviets worsened. They impatiently waited for the day when they would be rid of the Soviets, and have their chance to settle the score with the Jews. They quickly lived to see the day they had been waiting for.

### **After the Outbreak of War between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union: Shventzionys without authority:**

On the morning of Sunday, June 22, 1941 the Jews found out about the outbreak of the war between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. The Soviet authorities appealed to the population to stay calm and not to panic. The first day of the war passed without any particular news. The Christian population secretly welcomed the war. The Jews greeted the war with terror and uncertainty.

On Monday, June 23 Jewish refugees arrived in Shventzionys on foot, on wagons and on bicycles, from deep inside Lithuania. Their arrival in Shventzionys caused panic in town. Soviet officials from the center of Lithuania also evacuated further into the Soviet Union. The officials of the Soviet institutions in Shventzionys gradually began to evacuate. Most of them were young people who had taken active part in economic and political life during the year of Soviet rule. They were afraid they would be the target of vengeance taken by the Christian population.

The average Jew didn't think about evacuating that day, but waited in terror for events to develop further.

On Tuesday and Wednesday, June 24 and 25, some of the Jews fled Shventzionys, aiming to get further into the Soviet Union. Lithuanian military units of the Red Army were forcibly evacuated by the Soviet army. When they reached the forests around Lentupis, many of them escaped, returning to Lithuania through Shventzionys.

The escaping Lithuanians shot at the retreating Red Army units and at the Jews who were evacuating. A few Jews from Shventzionys were shot by them. Among those shot was the wigmaker Hirsh Gordon. He was buried at the Jewish cemetery in Shventzionys. A number of Jews from central Lithuania were shot by the Lithuanian bandits.

The armed Lithuanian bandits, who later began calling themselves partisans, shot from their hiding places at the retreating Red Army soldiers and at the Jews as they fled. Almost all of the Jews were thus forced to return to Shventzionys.

Starting on Thursday, June 26 there was no longer any secure governmental authority in Shventzionys. Chaos ruled in the town. Like hyenas, peasants from the countryside sensed an opportunity, and they came to town in groups with sacks under their arms, ready to rob the possessions of the Jews.

During the year of Soviet rule there was a Lithuanian judge in Shventzionys. He was assisted by another Lithuanian and by a Jewish girl, who used a loudspeaker to call on the population to maintain calm and order. The judge riding around on his horse with a rifle on his shoulder, warned everyone not to commit robberies and to maintain calm. He often asserted that the Red Army would return to town in a few days. A high-ranking Soviet official came and said the same thing, threatening to shoot those who committed robberies or caused panic.

The arrival of the Germans on Tuesday evening, July 1, 1941, groups of German reconnaissance men, appeared in Shventzionys. When they came to town they were joined by organized partisans, led by their chief Shvagzlis, the former director of the maistas in Shventzionys under the Soviets. Among the partisans was a female teacher at the Lithuanian school. She was a singer and actress who limped.

There was no battle for control of the town. On Wednesday, July 2 regular German military units began marching through the streets of Shventzionys. Responsibility for maintaining security inside the town immediately fell to the armed Lithuanian partisans, who prohibited the civilians from going outside, so as not to disrupt the advance of the German army.

That Tuesday the Germans arrested a Soviet officer. He managed to grab a German's revolver, and shot him. In retaliation for this the Germans immediately shot three Red prisoners. This murderous incident cast a pall of fear over the Jewish population, who began hiding in their homes. The Christian population joyfully welcomed the Germans.

### **The First Anti-Jewish Decrees**

Total power over civilian life in town lay in the hands of the Lithuanian partisans, who immediately began bullying the helpless Jews. On Thursday, July 3, announcements were posted on the walls, printed in Russian, Polish and German. These announcements stated that the Jews were forbidden to leave town, to ride bicycles or drive automobiles, to use Christian wagons, and the like.

If any German was found shot, the punishment was to be the shooting of a hundred men selected from among the civilian population. The announcements were signed by German military personnel.

That same week the partisans ordered all of the Jews to bring their bicycles, radios, photo cameras and other valuables to the partisan staff. They threatened to shoot anyone who didn't carry out the order precisely. Jews had to wear yellow patches. The partisans appointed the rabbi of Shventzionys as the chief of the Jews in town. He had to wear a special armband. The rabbi was too weak to carry out all of the Lithuanians' commands, and asked a Jew named Moyshe Gordon to help him. Moyshe knew Polish well and also had a little knowledge of Lithuanian.

Immediately after the Germans arrived the partisans began taking Jews to do various tasks, such as repairing the damaged roads, serving the Germans and partisans, and the like. The Jews had to clean out all of the toilets belonging to the Christians in town. Moyshe Gordon had to supply the number of Jews the partisans required each day. While the Jews worked they were tortured and beaten. They were guarded by armed partisans.

Immediately after the Germans arrived, partisans and Germans began robbing Jewish possessions. They would make various "requisitions," which the unfortunate Jews had to fulfill. They took from the Jews everything that caught their fancy.

### **The first Jewish victims**

Yankl Levin attests that at the end of the second week of the war the rumor spread among the Christian population that during the time Lithuanian deserters from the Red Army had been escaping through the town, Jews had seized one of them and handed him over to the Lithuanian judge. The partisans began arresting Jews, most of them young people, who had occupied any position whatsoever under the Soviets, and took them to prison. Dozens of

innocent Jews were arrested at that time. The participants in this collective testimony assert that every day the partisans took Jews out of the prison and shot them near the Tzerkliskis compound.

The eyewitnesses do not remember exactly which of the Jews in town were shot at that time. (For more about this see the testimony of Avrom Taytz--L.K.) While a group of Jews were being taken to work, the partisans would beat them and rush them along. A youngster named Alter Grazul lost control of himself, and evidently cursed and rebuked one of the partisans for his cruel handling. The partisans took Alter outside of town to a field near the Tzerkliskis compound, and shot and buried him there.

The partisans exploited their control over the lives of the Jews, like maddened wild animals. None of the Jews felt his life was secure any longer. Quite a few of them went into hiding. None of the men wanted to be noticed by the partisans, and they would hide to avoid work. Moyshe Gordon had a great deal of trouble providing the number of Jewish workers the partisans demanded.

Some of the Jews obtained permanent positions with the Germans, and obtained special protection certificates for themselves and their families. These certificates temporarily guaranteed their lives, and prevented them from being arrested by the Lithuanian partisans.

Apparently the military commander of the city found out about the repeated murders of Jews, and he forbade the partisans from arresting or shooting Jews without his permission.

At the beginning of the third week of the war two armed partisans came to Dr Tarasevsky at his house and took him to the partisan headquarters, on the second floor of the town pharmacy. One elderly partisan, apparently someone of high rank, accused the doctor of having handed over wounded partisans to the Red Army during the first days of the war. Dr Tarasevsky understood what the partisans intended, and asked them to speak to the new director of the hospital, the Lithuanian Dr Rimas. They called the hospital, but didn't reach Dr Rimas.

Dr Tarasevsky understood that his life was in danger, and he reminded the chief of the partisans that his own brother had been sent to Siberia, and that he wasn't a Communist. His explanations didn't help. Two armed partisans took him to prison.

At the gate of the prison a German stood watch. The guard demanded that the partisans show him a note signed by the commander. Without that, no prisoners would be accepted. The partisans took Dr Tarasevsky inside the prison yard. One of them went to the headquarters to see about getting an arrest warrant from the German commander. The doctor remained under arrest at the prison yard.

Dr Tarasevsky's wife Liba ran to the doctor's sister Rokhl. The two women went to see the commandant to ask him to release Dr Tarasevsky. When they got to the commandant, the partisan chief was already there. In the women's presence, the commandant ordered that the matter be investigated immediately. He strictly ordered that if the doctor was found innocent, he should be released.

Dr Tarasevsky was kept at the prison compound for a few hours, and then he was taken to the headquarters of the police force which was beginning to be organized by then. The same partisan chief who had been at the commandant's office came to the police headquarters some time later and released Dr Tarasevsky. The false accusation failed. Dr Tarasevsky continued working at the town hospital.

The head doctor at the town hospital during the year of Soviet rule was the Jew from Shventzionys, Dr Kovarsky, who was well-known and popular among the people. Dr Kovarsky was a good person, and a Bundist by persuasion. His older son was a Communist, and had served time in prison under the Poles for his Communist activities. After the Soviets arrived he became the doctor for the Soviet security forces, the NKVD. Owing to his personal contacts with the Soviet leaders in Shventzionys, he was appointed chief doctor of the hospital.

Dr Tarasevsky and a Jewish doctor from Vilnius, Dr Fine, also worked at the hospital during the year of Soviet rule. Naturally all three Jewish doctors got along well, and concentrated on their responsibilities.

At the same hospital worked a Polish doctor named Domyslawsky, a surgeon from Bialystok. At every opportunity he would emphasize his sympathy for the Soviet Union. He was the editor of the newsletter posted on the walls of the hospital and the secretary of the union of Shventzionys health care workers.

When he was alone with Dr Tarasevsky, he always liked to repeat *nash oslabodili* (they've weakened us), instead of *nash osvobodili* (they've liberated us), as he used to say at every opportunity in public, in order to underscore his "joy" and "devotion" to the new life. In the month of April 1941 Soviet officials from Shventzionys organized a delegation to Moscow. The chief doctor Kovarsky was appointed as representative of the health workers. Shortly

before May 1 they returned from Moscow. It must be added that Dr Kovarsky was truly impressed by what he had seen in Moscow. Shventzionys got ready to celebrate May Day. A stage was set up in the middle of town, and speakers got ready. Dr Kovarsky, as the most educated man in town and someone who really knew how to give a speech in public, was among the speakers on the list. With such a prominent position in town, it would not have been easy for him to refuse to speak when the request came from leading Soviet circles.

During the May 1 celebrations Dr Kovarsky spoke in public about what he had seen in Moscow, and the strong impressions he had brought back with him.

Several days later the Polish Dr Demyslawsky showed his Jewish colleague Dr Fine a photograph of Dr Kovarsky standing on the stage at the May Day celebration, addressing the crowd which had assembled there. The Pole emphasized that the photography might come in handy someday, if the Soviets had to leave Shventzionys. Dr Fine told his colleague Dr Kovarsky about this, and he consulted with Dr Taraseysky about reporting this to Comrade Reyf.

Reyf had come to Shventzionys from the Soviet Union, and he was the director of the health care institutions. Taraseysky advised Kovarsky not to say anything about the matter. On Sunday, the first day of the war, Dr Kovarsky prepared to evacuate to the Soviet Union together with Reyf. Comrade Reyf packed his things and left, leaving the Jewish doctors behind to face their fate.

Dr Taraseysky decided not to flee, but to stay with his wife and child. The rest of the Jewish doctors escaped Shventzionys on foot. Dr Kovarsky had injured his foot some time earlier, and he limped. He made his way to a White Russian town on foot, and then the Germans caught up with him.

On Saturday, just before the war broke out, the Soviet security forces removed the second transport of "undesirables" deeper into the Soviet Union.

On Monday, one day after the war broke out, there was a rumor in Shventzionys that Dr Kovarsky had escaped because he was a Communist and he had signed the lists of those to be exiled to Siberia. It wasn't hard to guess that the Polish Dr Demyslawsky had deliberately planted this rumor. There was no end to the fury aimed at Dr Kovarsky by the townspeople. Even the guard and the cook at the hospital spoke angrily about Dr Kovarsky.

When Shventzionys was left without 'anyone in charge', Dr Demyslawsky publicly burned all of the photographs of the Soviet leaders at the hospital. There was a rumor in town that a bounty of 5,000 rubles had been offered to anyone who caught Dr Kovarsky.

After the Germans arrived, the Jews immediately began to be taken to do various tasks. The partisans forced Dr Kovarsky's wife to do the filthiest tasks.

On the way back from Shventzionys to rejoin his wife and children, Dr Kovarsky was detained by a Lithuanian from Shventzionys, who handed Dr Kovarsky over to the partisans. Dr Kovarsky was brought to Shventzionys on foot and herded through the streets. The Christian population followed after him, and angrily spat at him. The partisans took Dr Kovarsky to the field police headquarters, where he was forced to wash automobiles. Meanwhile the partisans beat and tormented him. From there he was taken to prison.

The German major, a good man, was staying at Mrs Kovarsky's home. He became involved in the issue of Dr Kovarsky's arrest. At Mrs Kovarsky's request the major went to the field police headquarters to ask that the doctor be released. When he returned, the major reported that he had been shown a photograph of Dr Kovarsky speaking at a podium in front of a huge crowd on May Day. Dr Kovarsky was taken from prison to the Tzerklishkis compound and shot. This took place at the end of the second week of the war.

The Pole from Shventzionys Bukowsky was employed cleaning out waste from the municipal toilets before the war. Shortly after the Germans arrived in Shventzionys, he got into an argument with the Jewish carpenter Yisroel Movshovitz, who slapped him. Bukowsky reported to the partisans that Movshovitz had been a Communist during the period of Soviet rule. Without any investigation the partisans shot Yisroel Movshovitz. It is not known where he was shot.

Three days after the arrival of the Germans in Shventzionys a group of Hitler youth seized about fifteen elderly Jews at their homes and took them to the Kuna River, where they had to wash a car. Then they forced the Jews to enter the river wearing their clothes, and to dunk themselves under water. One of the German sadists stood on a footbridge with a whip, striking the Jews in the river. They forced one of the Jews to fill a bucket with water and pour it over all the Jews.

## The Slaughter of Ninety Six Jewish Men

In the course of time permanent work details were established in Shventzionys. Some of the Jews went to the same jobs every day. The participant in this collective testimony Yankl Levin was a supervisor over fifteen painters during this period, working for the Germans at various assignments. In order to avoid being seized by the partisans in the course of various roundups, all of the painters got special certificates from their German employers, which served to protect them.

One Tuesday the Jews of Shventzionys found out that in the nearby town of Shventzioneliai the partisans had taken away and shot fifty Jewish men. When the Jews of Shventzionys found out about this incident, they fell into mass mourning.

The next day, Wednesday evening, the partisans drew up lists of Jewish men whom they found at home, along with a number they encountered in the street. Yankl Levin found out after that evening that three men in his work brigade were on the partisans' lists.

At 4:00 am. on Thursday morning of that same week the partisans burst into the Jewish houses like wild animals and drove out the men whose names were on the list they'd drawn up the day before. When the Lithuanian murderers took the men out of their houses they promised them that they were being taken away to work. They permitted the men to bring along money, watches, valuables and packages of food and clothing. All of the men who had been seized were taken to Vilnius Street, to the police compound.

When the painters came to work Yankl Levin announced to the Germans that they wouldn't be able to complete the tasks assigned to them, because the Lithuanians had taken some of the men to do another job. A German took Yankl along with him to the police headquarters. In the yard Yankl saw all the men who had been seized standing in two rows. He took his painters, and left with them to go to work.

In the evening it was reported in Shventzionys that all of the men who had been seized had been taken from the police station in trucks, in the direction of Shventzioneliai.

Dr Szabad from Vilnius, Attorney Gurvitz and others used to gather at the home of Dr Kopelovitz. Dr Kopelovitz's wife Rokhl (the sister of Dr Tarasevsky) had an opportunity to become acquainted with the commandant of the field police, a very decent German from Vienna. He often came to visit Dr Kopelovitz and his wife. More than once he told them that he was absolutely opposed to the Nazis, and he would openly express his regret that Dr Kopelovitz, his family and their friends hadn't fled deeper into the Soviet Union. He didn't predict good news for the Jews under German occupation.

The day after the ninety six men were taken away he came to Dr Kopelovitz's house and told them in terror that the previous evening he had seen the list of men to be taken away. He told them that he had nervously looked over the list several times, looking for the last names of his friends, and fortunately hadn't seen them. Before the lists were drawn up by the partisans two high-ranking SS officers had come from Vilnius. Apparently the commandant of the field police had seen the list when they had it in their hands.

Among the ninety-six men who were taken away, the eyewitnesses remember the following names of their friends and acquaintances:

1. Hirsh Gilinsky, the former president of the Jewish community of Shventzionys under Polish rule.
2. Attorney Leyb Gurvitsh, a lawyer in Shventzionys.
3. Naum Gordon, an engineer.
4. Avrom-Yitzkhok Gordon, a medical student.
5. Bere-Leyb Grinfeld, a wigmaker.
6. Meir Shaprio, owner of a brick works.
7. Fayve Kovarsky and his brother, both grain dealers.
8. Ruven Kovarsky and his son; the father was a wigmaker.
9. Yerakhmiel Gordon, a painter.

The relatives of those who had been taken away gathered at the doorways of the Lithuanian and German headquarters, trying to learn about the fate of those who had been taken away. The partisans constantly reassured them that the men who had been taken away were living and working somewhere.

Peasants from the countryside who happened to be in town at the time even brought "greetings" from those who had been taken away, and took packages from the unfortunate Jews, containing food, clothing and money to be brought to the men. Of course, no one ever got a letter in reply. The majority of the Jews believed the reassurances

of the partisans and peasants, who said that the ninety-six who had been taken were still alive and working. Those who were in doubt couldn't learn more about the fate of their loved ones.

The eyewitnesses report that they didn't know a thing about the fate of the ninety-six men who had been taken, nor do they know exactly when or where they were killed. (Concerning the slaughter of the ninety-six men, see the testimony of Avrom Taytz - L Koniuchowsky.)

### **The Civil and Military Administration in Shventzionys**

Until the ninety-six men were taken away the county seat was Shventzioneliai, and the chief civil administration was located there.

Shortly after the men were taken away, the chief of police for Shventzionys County, Antanas Kenstavitzius, from Mazheikiai, came to Shventzionys from Shventzioneliai in a wagon. He was joined by a representative of the Jews of Shventzioneliai. They stopped at the edge of town, at the home of the Jew Shokhar. Kenstavitzius explained who he was, and hinted at the power he controlled over the lives of the Jews in Shventzionys. He also announced that he was moving permanently to Shventzionys. It became clear to the representatives of the Jews of Shventzionys that the police chief for Shventzionys County was looking for "presents."

The new chief of police in Shventzionys was Kenstavitzius's assistant in Shventzioneliai, Skarbutenis. The new mayor of Shventzionys was the Lithuanian Gaizhutis.

The field headquarters moved out of Shventzionys closer to the front. The commander didn't forget his Jewish friends, Dr Kopelovitz and his wife. He came to say goodbye to them. He gave them a sealed envelope with nothing on it, and asked them not to open the envelope. If their lives were threatened, they should appeal to him.

Ten men working for the security police settled in Shventzionys, under the direction of Teclau and a German labor official. Two county agricultural directors, both SS men, also came. These two were Beck and his representative Grul. Postal services came under the control of six Germans headed by the SS man Metz, who simultaneously became the military commandant of Shventzionys.

On one occasion the new mayor Gaizhutis sent Levin to the home of the director of the gymnasium on Vidz Street. There a young German was waiting, and he ordered seven rooms to be painted in the course of three hours. Eight painters carried out the order. One panel was left to finish. The next day two painters went and finished the job. Jewish women washed the floors. After the work was finished the two painters were summoned by Metz. Metz's representative announced that while the work was being done a pair of suspenders, a package of tobacco and a pair of shoes disappeared, and he made the two painters responsible for the losses.

He threatened to shoot ten Jews if the items weren't returned. He beat the two painters. Moyshe Gordon came and managed with the help of bribes to have the decree revoked.

### **The Mass Slaughter of Jews at the Military camp near Shventzioneliai**

After the civil and military administrations were set up in Shventzionys, there were more places for people to work. The Jews did everything they could to please their new German and Lithuanian masters, who had power over their lives. They worked diligently, hoping they would be able to please the Lithuanian and German sadists and thus gradually buy time until the situation improved. A large number of Jews worked at the production center which had been set up in Shventzionys under the Soviets. That large factory produced soap, as well as weaving rope. There was a tannery, a carpenter's shop, and the like. Groups of Jews worked in every department.

Levin's brigade of painters worked for Metz at the post office, as well as for the mayor. A group of shoemakers sewed new shoes as well as patching old ones for the German police.

A group of printers worked at a print shop run by the magistrate. At their workplaces the Jews became acquainted with the Lithuanian and German authorities in Shventzionys, and thereby gained access to them.

Moyshe Gordon had contacts with the Lithuanian police chief for the entire county, named Kenstavitzius. The tailor Yankl Veksler had good access to Metz. Berl Kharmatz worked as a shoemaker at the police station.

These three Jews kept the Jews of Shventzionis informed about all the news at the front; in the world of politics; and, most important, about the various decrees that lay in store for the Jews of Shventzionys. With the help of

these three Jews it was often possible to have decrees revoked. Of course, this all came at the price of "gifts" that had to be arranged for those who had final say over the lives of the Jews.

In addition to these three there were others who went to intervene on behalf of the Jews. Quite a few women were also involved in such interventions.

On one occasion there was a decision to gather the Jews in a ghetto. The Jews bribed the German doctor, who cancelled the decision on the grounds that the designated neighborhood was too small, thus posing the risk of epidemic not only for the Jews, but also for the Aryan population of the town.

### **Terrible News of Total Slaughter of Jews in Lithuanian Towns**

Unconfirmed reports began to arrive concerning the total slaughter of Jews - men, women and children, in the surrounding Lithuanian towns. The Jews of Shventzionys received reports about the slaughter of the Jews in Nementzine. Poles constantly brought reports, one more horrible than the last.

The majority of the Jews of Shventzionys didn't believe these reports, suspecting that the peasants wanted to frighten the Jews into handing over their valuables for "safekeeping."

Several Jews who had survived the slaughter in the surrounding towns also appeared. They corroborated the terrible rumors, and even provided details about the slaughter at the pits.

The Jews of Shventzionys felt like they were rocking on stormy waves in a burning ship. Terrible panic reigned. Everyone began to feel that their own life and the lives of their loved ones were in danger.

The communal officials and representatives began to offer "gifts" for those who had power over the lives of the Jews - the Germans and the Lithuanians. But they didn't manage to find out what was about to happen to the Jews.

On the second day of Rosh Hashana, during the reading of the Torah portion for the day, Moyshe Gordon announced that he had managed to learn about a decree that was shortly to affect the Jews. He announced that all of the Jews of Shventzionys were about to be taken away to work. He added that people would be allowed to bring along the things they needed most. That same week people learned that it had proved impossible to get the order revoked. From that day on the panic increased.

The confused Jews began packing the things they couldn't do without. Some of the Jews escaped from Shventzionys that week to nearby White Russian towns, where things were relatively calm at that time.

A few days before the Sabbath between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur the Jews learned that lists of "useful Jews" were being prepared at all of the workplaces, and that these Jews would not be taken away. The lists were drawn up by the German and Lithuanian employers in great secrecy. Yet the Jews managed to learn that this was being done.

On Friday, September 26 the Jews knew who was on the list of the "useful Jews."

That Friday evening a number of Jews escaped from Shventzionys to White Russian towns, especially Svir.

That same Friday night there were a number of robberies at Jewish homes, committed by peasants from town and from the country. The town pharmacist, a Pole named Schimansky, took goods from several Jews that Friday evening "to keep until after the war." He inherited all of these things.

That same Friday Dr Taraseysky, Khaye-Etl Gordon, Lize Shteyn, Moyshe Gordon and a few other Jews visited the senior priest in town, and asked him to do something to help the Jews. The priest began to weep, insisting that he could do nothing to help. He advised everyone to rely on Almighty God.

After they left the priest, the delegation went to see the Lithuanian Dr Rimas at the municipal hospital. Rimas promised to try to do something to help the Jews. That Friday evening Dr Taraseysky handed over his diploma to Dr Rimas "until after the war." That last Friday night in Shventzionys was a terrible night, full of pain and sorrow. Some of them packed the things they needed most, some of them baked food to bring along on the road. And in the middle of the night loud cries and weeping could be heard. This was the result of impatient peasants, who couldn't wait until the Jews left, to rob their houses.

## The Terrible Slaughter of All the Jews in Shventzionys County

On the morning of the Sabbath of Repentance a beautiful, sunny day appeared. Plenty of bright rays of sunshine poured through the windows of the Jewish houses, on the packs which had been assembled, on the bedding strewn on the beds. The tired, frightened faces of the Jews, with their moist eyes quickly glancing all around, shone in the bright sunshine and clearly reflected their tragic situation.

From every side of town, from every street, the screams of women and children could be heard. Drunken Lithuanian police and partisans began taking the Jews out of their houses, meanwhile murderously beating them with whips, sticks and their rifle butts. The Lithuanian two-footed animals gritted their teeth and loudly ordered the Jews to come out faster and leave their houses. They only allowed the Jews to bring along packages they could carry on their backs or in their arms. After the Jews were taken out, Lithuanians would seal the homes.

From every street and lane groups of partisans herded the Jews toward the edge of town, onto the priest's pasture.

The civilian population began visiting the Jews they knew, offering to hide their valuables" until after the war." Some of them were even bolder, and simply demanded that the Jews they knew give them money, gold and valuables, which they promised to return "after the war."

There were even some who stood waiting for the police to drive the Jews out of their houses, so they could immediately move into the homes of the Jews and inherit their possessions. The Jews moved toward the pasture with their heads bowed, their eyes full of tears, sighing and breathing heavily. Women with children in their arms wept bitterly, together with their innocent babes. The Christian population joyfully accompanied them for their final walk, toward the priest's pasture.

The entire town was guarded by groups of police and partisans, who saw to it that not a single Jew escaped. The process of assembling the Jews at the pasture continued until about 2:00 p.m.

Dr Taraseysky lived at the edge of town, near the priest's pasture. He and his family were among the last to be brought to the pasture. A group of drunken partisans and police angrily burst into the doctor's house, and demanded that he hand over money, gold and valuables. They robbed whatever they found worth carrying. They beat everyone in the doctor's house with whips and sticks, and took them to the pasture.

Moyshe Gurvitz's wife decided it would be better to die at home. She was found hanging near the door of her house. Her husband, a coachman, had already died.

When the Jews were taken out of their houses the Lithuanian cannibals took no pity on little children, the sick or the elderly. They threw the helpless Jews into the wagons like worthless rags, and took them to the pasture.

Mrs Rokhl Abramovitz, born Kovner, had given birth to a child a few days before the Jews were taken away, and she lay in bed very weak and ill. She was carried out of her house in the bloody sheet and thrown into a wagon, together with her newborn child.

The Christian population of the town gathered near the priest's pasture, happily watching the doom of their erstwhile Jewish neighbors.

There was terrible panic at the pasture. Mothers looked for their lost children, and wept bitterly. The sighs and moans of the elderly, the weak and the sick could be heard as they were carried on wagons, along with the cries of little children in their mothers' arms.

The pasture was guarded by Lithuanian police and partisans, who constantly beat the Jews with whips and sticks. German police came to the pasture several times, and went away again. Skarbutenas came quite frequently and beat the Jews at the pasture.

At 5:00 p.m. the partisans and police lined the men up in rows and columns, with the women and children behind them. They began marching the Jews toward the military compound near Shventzioneliai. Behind the women in wagons followed the elderly, the sick, women with little children and several pregnant women. A kilometer-long column of helpless Jews made its way forward. The Jews were guarded on every side by armed police and partisans. There were no Germans to be seen.

The weary steps of the Jews were accompanied by the moaning and weeping of women and children. The Lithuanian degenerates beat the Jews with whips and sticks, hurrying them along. The Jews proceeded for about fifteen kilometers on foot. Late at night they approached the military compound. That night the dark sky was

illuminated by huge bonfires laid out in the compound. Constant shooting could be heard in the distance. The Jews were certain that everyone was being shot at the compound and thrown into the fire.

When they reached the compound the exhausted Jews were met by local police and partisans, who threw themselves at the Jews and beat everyone murderously. All of the Jews who had been brought were thrown into old barracks lacking doors and windows. The barracks were terribly crowded, and it was pitch dark. There was a great deal of confusion. The weeping of women and children cried out to Heaven.

If anyone became lost in the barrack, it was impossible to find him. Now and then the partisans would burst into the barrack and beat the helpless Jews in the darkness.

On that Sabbath of Repentance 1941 all of the Jews in the towns and smaller settlements of Shventzionys County were herded together at the military compound near Shventzioneliai.

The Jews from the surrounding towns were herded into separate barracks. The police and partisans who had brought the Jews from the surrounding towns stayed at the compound to help guard the Jews.

On Sunday, September 28 the Jews began to look around their new surroundings. Groups would assemble near their barracks, consulting with each other about their situation and trying to guess what was in store for them. Partisans drove the groups along, beating the Jews with sticks, boards and whips. The commander of the police and partisans was the county police chief, Antanas Kenstavitzius. His assistant was Skarbutenis. The worst sadist and torturer of the Jews at the compound was the Lithuanian Urbanas, a sergeant in the police force. Urbanas was always at the compound, and at every opportunity he would beat the Jews with a heavy, thick pole. Kenstavitzius and his assistant would come to check everything and then go away again.

The Jews weren't even allowed to leave the barracks to fulfill their bodily functions, and they had to relieve themselves either inside or next to the barracks. Gradually the unfortunate Jews lost their instinctive sense of shame, and men and women would relieve themselves next to each other.

Not far from the compound flows the little river Zhejmiana. The Jews suffered from thirst, but for the first day they were forbidden from going to the river to drink.

One woman named Sakhar went to the stream with a teapot to get water. She asked a partisan for permission. The Lithuanian degenerate shot her. On Sunday evening the Lithuanians distributed "water" to the Jews. It had grown dark in the barracks. Instead of water the murderers gave the Jews flasks of urine, and bread with needles. The Jews were very strictly forbidden to leave the barracks at night, and they were forced to relieve themselves inside the barracks.

The nights were already cold by then. The Jews lay sprawled on the bare floor of the barracks. Between the barracks a bonfire burned every night, and the partisans and police would stand nearby, warming themselves and singing. Frequently they would go over to the barracks to have some "fun" with the Jews, throwing stones through the empty window frames and doorways, spitting and beating the Jews with whips and sticks.

In the middle of the night they would shine flashlights at the Jews, choose attractive women and taken them out of the barracks into the nearby forest. They would rape the women. Afterward they would shoot them and throw them into pits which Jewish men were forced to dig during the day. When they removed their victims from the barracks, weeping and screaming could be heard. Some time later shots were heard in the forests nearby.

More than one mother of these raped daughters went out of her mind, and was shot near the barracks. There were several births at the compound. Among the new mothers was Mrs Merl Yekhiltzik. When she gave birth her screams could be heard in all of the barracks. She gave birth to a child. She was shot with all the other Jews at the barracks, along with her newborn child.

The elderly Mrs Ginzburg was shot one night. She had left the barracks to relieve herself.

Dr Taraseysky does not remember precisely any more of the terrible incidents at the compound. He insists that the hellish suffering of the Jews was so terrible that it cannot be described in words altogether, nor communicated in natural language.

The bit of food the Jews had brought along from their homes was all gone. They received no food. The Jews began to suffer hunger. There was nothing to satisfy the hunger of the little children.

The "useful" Jews who had the good fortune to stay in town did not rest until they convinced the Lithuanians and Germans to let them send bread and potatoes to their loved ones in the barracks. The initiative was taken by Peysekh Goldberg, Meyer Shukhman and others. Moyshe Gordon was not on the list of the "useful" Jews. When the Jews were taken to the compound, he hid and escaped to Svir.

The participant in this collective testimony Yankl Levin was one of those who made several trips to the compound bringing bread and potatoes, and he had the chance to see the suffering of the Jews with his own eyes. Yankl's friend Peysekh Goldberg used to ride with him; some of Goldberg's relatives had been taken away to the compound.

The "useful" Jews who had been left in town didn't only help their helpless brothers at the compound by bringing bread and potatoes. The "useful" ones also constantly tried to get their relatives and close friends released from the compound and brought back to the Shventzionys ghetto, which was set up immediately after the Jews were taken away.

In exchange for large bribes the commandant Metz, the police chief Teclaw and the Lithuanian county executive would give the "useful" Jews special permits, allowing them to remove from the compound other "useful" Jews on the pretext that they were needed for special tasks. They were paid for these passes with various valuable items.

When they received these passes, the Jews would go to the compound. Kenstavitzius was always present when a Jew was released. Those who were released from the compound were brought to the Shventzionys ghetto under armed police guard.

The county police chief understood well that the Jews were paying for these passes. Kenstavitzius decided that he too would exploit this "golden opportunity" for his own interests. He would eagerly receive and negotiate with Jews in town who approached him about releasing their loved ones from the compound. He didn't have to sign any passes, because he was actually in charge of the Jews in the compound. In exchange for large sums of money and valuables he would write down the names of those to be released from the compound. Along with those released by Metz, Teclaw and the county executive, he would also release "his" Jews, the ones whose relatives had dealt with him directly.

The German and Lithuanian masters of Jewish lives in Shventzionys thus traded shamefully in Jewish lives. The German and Lithuanian degenerates exploited the gruesome tragedy of the Jews as an easy, safe and quick way to become rich.

The Jews at the compound noticed that a number of people were being released, and they began trying to reach Kenstavitzius to try to deal with him. The wealthier and bolder ones managed to contact him, pay him a great deal of money and valuables and thus get themselves released. Together with those released through the special passes, Kenstavitzius would release "his" Jews from the compound.

Thus he had a personal interest in seeing to it that some Jews were released with passes each day, so that he could send his own "clients" as well.

But not everyone had the good fortune to make a deal with the German and Lithuanian powers in town. It was even harder to reach Kenstavitzius.

The Lithuanians had their office in a small room in one of the barracks. When Kenstavitzius would come, Jews would besiege his office. Partisans and police would drive the Jews away from the office with boards, sticks and whips. Only a few people had the luck to reach Kenstavitzius and negotiate their release with him. But not all of the "lucky" ones were released. If the amount offered him wasn't large enough, or the "gift" wasn't extremely valuable, he wouldn't even answer. When the Jews were released from the compound they would be taken into the office and thoroughly searched. Everything the Jews possessed was taken away from them, and they were released almost naked, wearing only their overclothes which had been thoroughly searched. Not one of those released from the compound managed to hide something and bring it along.

While the Jews were being examined they would be murderously beaten by the Lithuanians. When the "lucky" ones were released they would bring along small children and young people who did not belong to their own families.

The eyewitness Yankl Levin spoke to the mayor Gaizhutis about releasing from the compound his uncle Shloyme Kuritsky (a carpenter) and his family; his other uncle Khatzkl Sorsky (a tailor) and his family; and the well-known family of Elyokum Sheytl. Of course, the mayor wasn't willing to do this for nothing. He hoped to profit personally

from the artisans. He spoke to his friend Kenstavitzius. Yankl's uncle, his wife Bashe, their four children and the family of Elyokum Sheytl were released from the compound.

Several days later both families were brought back to the compound, together with other "illegal useful" Jews.

On the Sabbath of Repentance, while the Jews were being taken from their houses to the priest's pasture, Dr Kopelovitz and his wife and child hid. They decided that their lives were in danger, and that it was time to use the sealed envelope which their friend the commandant had given them before he left Shventzionys. Rokhl Kopelovitz took the envelope to Commandant Metz, who was just then in consultation with the rest of the Lithuanian and German bosses in Shventzionys. When he opened the envelope he read it through and showed it to Teclaw. Metz permitted the Kopelovitz family to stay in their house.

After the Jews were taken to the compound Rokhl began trying to convince Metz to release her brother, Dr Binyomin Tarasevsky, his wife Liza and their daughter Nina, his mother-in-law Sore Perakh, his step-mother Rivke Tarasevsky and her daughter Sore Brezgin. Rokhl managed to do this with great difficulty.

A Jew name Peretz Yokhay worked at the tannery at the production center. He was friendly with a tanner named Kubusch, a Tatar. No one working at the factory was on the list of the "useful" Jews. The Tatar appealed to Metz to release Peretz Yokhay, claiming that he was a specialist at the tannery and that without him the work would suffer.

The command to release both the Tarasevsky family and the family of Peretz Yokhay was written on a single sheet. Rokhl and the Tatar came to the compound and showed the order to Kenstavitzius, who refused to release the two families. The Tatar became angry, and demanded to know who had more authority, Kenstavitzius or the German Metz. Kenstavitzius struck the Tatar twice in the face for his "nervy" question.

The next day Commandant Metz came to the compound, accompanied by Teclaw. They took a Jewish girl as a translator, and entered Kenstavitzius's office. "Tell this Lithuanian dog, that if he refuses to honor my passes again, he'll be shot like a dog!" Metz ordered the girl to translate into Lithuanian for Kenstavitzius. Shortly after they went away, Kenstavitzius released the two families. However, he didn't let Dr Tarasevsky leave with his family, but left him at the compound instead.

The conflict between Metz and Kenstavitzius had tragic results for the Jews. No more release passes were issued. Nor did Kenstavitzius release any-one from the compound. Dr Tarasevsky lost hope of being reunited with his wife and child, who had been released.

On October 5 or 6, at 2:00 p.m., two high-ranking Gestapo personnel from Vilnius arrived at the compound. All of the Jews were driven out of the barracks. One of the Germans stood up on a barrel and announced in a commanding voice: "Jews! Jews! Within two hours I order you to raise the specified sum of money and hand over all of your gold and silver and other valuables. After this time has elapsed thorough searches will be conducted. Anyone who is found still in possession of valuables will be shot with his entire family!" After the order was issued, the two Germans drove off.

A committee was immediately set up to raise the specified sum. The mortally frightened Jews handed everything over. A heap of money, gold watches and rings, and other valuables began to grow higher. In the evening the two Germans arrived, packed everything up into two large suitcases and drove off.

At that point Dr Tarasevsky was still with his family at the compound. Yankl Levin and Peysekh Goldberg brought a wagonload of bread and potatoes to the compound that day. When they saw the Germans coming, the two men hid, and they heard the order for the requisition to be assembled.

Dr Tarasevsky's sister Rokhl didn't rest until she managed to convince Metz to release her brother from the compound. During the night of Tuesday, October 7 Metz called the police in Shventzioneliai and ordered them to pass on to the compound the command to release Dr Tarasevsky, along with the tailor Zakharye Nyovkin, his wife, two daughters and a son. Together with them, on Wednesday morning a boy named Khayem-Leyb, Elyokim Sheytl's son-in-law and a Miss Labunovsky were also released. Miss Labunovsky still possessed valuables, and she gave them to Khayem-Leyb, who bribed the Lithuanian police at the compound.

Those released from the compound were taken to prison in Shventzioneliai early Wednesday morning. The next day, Thursday, October 9 in the morning, a policeman released them from prison and took them to Shventzionys on foot. On the way they encountered a large group of Jews, men, women and children, returning to the compound.

Dr Tarasevsky relates that while in prison in Shventzioneliai he heard shots coming from the direction of the compound all day Wednesday. Several days later the Jews in Shventzionys found out from peasants that on that Wednesday all the Jews at the compound had been shot. The peasants told him that a few days earlier police and partisans had gathered together peasants with shovels and spades, and forced them to dig a deep, long pit, not far from the compound.

The Jews who had been released from the Shventzioneliai prison were taken to the newly-established ghetto in Shventzionys.

Concerning the "unofficial useful Jews," the participants in this collective testimony are able to attest: After the conflict between Metz and Kenstavitzius, there was apparently some threat that higher circles would learn about those who had been released for money. In order to be safe, the German and Lithuanian authorities agreed that the "unofficial useful Jews" should be sent back to the compound. This was the easiest way for both of them to hold onto the fortunes they had amassed through accepting bribes from the "unofficial useful Jews," and to get rid of the risk of unpleasantness from higher up.

The "unofficial useful Jews" had gone to work at various locations after they were released from the compound. Everyone tried to get a form stating that he was working. Everyone believed that they were on the list of "useful" Jews.

Meyer Shukhman, who had become the representative of the Jews by then, announced on Wednesday that every head of family had to report to the synagogue yard in the ghetto, as ordered by the Germans. Metz, Teclaw, and Kenstavitzius came to the synagogue yard, along with Lithuanian police who surrounded the ghetto. The German and Lithuanian authorities began separating out the "useful" and the "unofficial useful" Jews. Names were called out from the old list, and those on the list were ordered to stand on the right. The "unofficial useful" Jews who had been released from the compound stayed where they were. Their first and last names were not called out.

The "unofficial useful Jews" were taken to prison by police and partisans. From there policemen took everyone to the ghetto, where each man had to show them where his family lived. The "unofficial useful Jews" and their families were immediately taken to prison. The next day, Thursday, October 9, all of the Jews were taken from prison in wagons back to the compound, where they were shot that same day.

On the Saturday before Yom Kippur, September 27, 1941, Lithuanian police and partisans herded together all of the Jews; men, women and children; from the following Lithuanian towns in Shventzionys County:

1. Ignalina.
2. Tveritzius.
3. Tzeikiniai.
4. Malagenai.
5. Aduťishkis.
6. Kaltinenai.
7. Shventzioneliai.
8. Daugilishkis.
9. Stajatzishkis.
10. Padbrade.
11. Shventzionys.

The Jews from all of these towns, and from smaller settlements in Shventzionys County were herded into the compound at Shventzioneliai.

On Wednesday, October 8, 1941, the first of the intermediate days of Sukkot, all of the Jews - men, women and children, the elderly and the sick, were shot. Details about the terrible mass executions at the pit are unavailable to the participants in this collective testimony.

On Thursday, October 9, 1941, the second of the intermediate days of Sukkot, the "unofficial useful Jews" were shot. The number of Jews taken away that day was estimated to be precisely one hundred men, women and children. These one hundred Jews were shot at the same spot, and thrown into the same mass grave where all the Jews from the compound had been shot the day before.

A total of 6,800 Jews; men, women and children, were shot on those two tragic days. There is no evidence for this precise number.

The mass grave is located half a kilometer past the Zhemenai River, to the left in a forest near a hill after you pass the bridge. The mass grave is in the shape of the letter "L."

## The Establishment of the Ghetto in Shventzionys

On Tuesday, September 28, the day after the Jews were taken to the compound, there was a command for all the remaining "useful" Jews to leave their homes and settle into one neighborhood, at the synagogue compound.

The Jews were permitted to quickly move, bringing along all of their things. On Sunday and Monday the Jews carried their meager possessions to the new neighborhood. At the same time the police and partisans opened the sealed Jewish houses belonging to those who had been taken to the compound, and brought the furniture, bedding and clothes to the synagogue yard. Some of the houses had already been robbed by townspeople and by peasants who had come from the surrounding countryside. The police and partisans kept the better things for themselves while they were transporting them.

Lithuanians from town or new arrivals from Lithuania settled into the empty homes. The Lithuanian police and their families settled into the better houses.

A policeman stood guard over the items that had been brought into the synagogues. Several days later peasants came from the countryside, and along with townspeople they bought up the various items at an auction.

The Jewish spokesman Moyshe Gordon was not on the list of the "useful" Jews and escaped to the White Russian town of Svir before the Jews were taken to the military compound.

A man from Shventzionys named Meyer Shukhman began to take his place. He knew Lithuanian and was acquainted with Kenstavitzius. He began dealing with the Lithuanian and German authorities in the name of the remaining Jews. Apparently the German commandant Metz had appointed him as the representative of the surviving Jews. In any case the Jews themselves certainly hadn't chosen him, and they did not authorize him to speak in their name. The Jews understood that he had assumed his new responsibilities in order to have some occupation through which he could qualify as one of the "useful" ones. However, Shukhman did the best he could to restore the ruined lives of the Jews. He was assisted by Jews who had access to Germans and Lithuanians among the authorities in town. Among them were:

1. Yankl Veksler, a tailor who worked for and had access to the commandant Metz.
2. Berl Kharmatz, a shoemaker who worked for and had access to Teclaw.
3. Dr Kopelovitz, who was the ghetto doctor.
4. Aron Kagan, the former bookkeeper at Taraseysky's medicinal herb factory.

From the beginning these four had served as advisers to Shukhman. Later on, as things were gradually arranged in the ghetto, these men constituted a formal committee, headed by Meyer Shukhman. The members of the committee would gather in the evening. They would listen to the news that Jews brought them from town, and decided who had to be bribed, and which of the German and Lithuanian authorities had to be given a "present." The committee tried at first to have the boundaries of the ghetto enlarged, but they did not succeed.

Shukhman's main task consisted in providing the necessary number of Jews to do various tasks in town. He had to obtain all of the "requisitions" and "presents" for the Lithuanians and Germans in order to please them and have continued access to them.

The head of the criminal police, the Lithuanian Matzulevitzius, a terrible sadist and murderer, often came to the ghetto. Every time he appeared in the ghetto the Jews would fall into a deadly panic and try to hide. Every time he found something in the ghetto to complain about, and he would threaten to shoot Jews. This was an easy way for him to obtain anything he found useful. Shukhman would bribe him or promise to give him a fine "gift" later on, and the Lithuanian degenerate would calm down for some time.

He sucked at the Jews of the ghetto like a leech, exploiting them endlessly by terrorizing them in various ways, threatening them until they came up with more and more money and valuables. But he offered the Jews nothing in return.

After the one hundred "unofficial useful Jews" were taken back to the compound, Kenstavitzius ordered that everyone in the ghetto be registered. The Jews who were hiding in the countryside began to return. A total of 240 Jews were registered at that time. The "useful" ones continued working at their regular jobs. Those who had come out of hiding tried everything they could to obtain jobs. The few surviving Jews could not count on living from day to day, and a number of Jews bribed officials to hire them. A good deal of this was done by the committee headed by Meyer Shukhman;

## **Worksites**

The regular worksites at that time included the following:

1. Fifty men and women did agricultural work at the Tzerkliskis compound at that time.
2. Twenty women worked at a garden belonging to "Lietukis," under the supervision of the Pole Ginko.
3. About fifteen or twenty men worked at the lumber mill at the [promkombinat].
4. A large number of Jews worked at the production center, making soap, weaving rope, at the carpenters' shop, making shoes, sewing, and so forth.
5. When the Soviets retreated, they had left weapons at a camp near Shventzionys. A group of men worked there, repairing and renovating everything.
6. The painters' brigade headed by the eyewitness Yankl Levin earned a good deal of respect for the ghetto. They worked doing various renovations, making signs for the Lithuanians and Germans who had power over the Jews, and thus the Jews in the brigade had contacts with the bosses.

A number of artisans set up workshops in the ghetto and did various tasks for the Jews in the ghetto, as well as for the townspeople, especially employees of the civil administration.

Like a drowning man who grabs onto a wisp of straw, all of the Jews seized onto whatever work they could find, which seemed to them to be the only way they could hold onto their own lives and the lives of their families.

All of the workers at the various sites were registered on lists. The lists were signed by the employers every day, and the employers attested that all of the Jews on the list had worked that day. The lists were kept in the archives of the ghetto committee. In addition to these permanent workplaces, there was often temporary work in town, such as cleaning the streets, washing the floors in the Lithuanian and German administrative offices, or clearing the snow from the streets and the surrounding roads in the winter.

In these cases it was very difficult for the committee to gather the necessary number of workers. The families of the artisans who worked for the Lithuanian and German authorities, or those who had regular positions, considered themselves privileged. They didn't want to follow the orders of the committee, and refused to go themselves or send their wives to do these temporary jobs. For the sake of historical accuracy it must be mentioned that during that tragic time some of the families were too egotistical, too self-centered, which carried a taint of corruption and moral collapse. These families felt no responsibility for the fate of the community. This negative attitude on the part of some of the Jews of Shventzionys always made the work of the committee, and later on of the Jewish Council, much harder.

## **Nutrition in the ghetto**

At first the ghetto neighborhood was not surrounded. The Jews managed with difficulty to come into contact with the Christian population, with whom they would trade clothes for food. Those who worked in the city had an easier time moving away from their workplaces to get food. The Jews didn't suffer hunger. The "useful" Jews brought along a good deal of food when they returned to the ghetto.

On one occasion a couple of Germans came from the Vilnius region commissariat, and ordered that the ghetto be fenced in. The Jews themselves surrounded the ghetto neighborhood with two rows of barbed wire. A gate was built at one spot. On the outside of the ghetto Lithuanian police stood guard. It became more difficult for Christians to enter the ghetto. Contacts with the Christian population was controlled. Nevertheless workers from the ghetto could come into contact with the surrounding area, and they moved freely around the town.

## **The newly-established Jewish Council**

The Jews in the crowded ghetto neighborhood survived the winter of 1941-42 uncertain whether they would live to see the next day, mourning for their relatives and friends who had been murdered at the compound, cut off from the surrounding world. Shventzionys Jews began returning from the White Russian towns they had fled to, and settled into the ghetto. During the winter the number of Jews in the ghetto reached four hundred. No additional residences were added to the ghetto. The crowding was terrible.

The former spokesman for the Jews, Moyshe Gordon, returned to Shventzionys from Svir during the winter. His arrival in the ghetto was a joyful moment for the ghetto population.

The participants in this collective testimony do not know why Shukhman was arrested and taken to prison. This

happened at the end of the spring of 1942. It was said that the German commandant Metz had whipped Shukhman and interrogated him, because he had been guilty of some crime against the Germans or Lithuanians.

The head of the criminal police in Shventzionys began coming to the ghetto even more frequently to terrorize the Jews. In connection with the investigation of Shukhman, he summoned a number of Jews. Among them were Dr Taraseysky, Khayem-Hirsh Levin and Moyshe Gordon.

Matzulevitzius angrily shouted at the Jews. He claimed that chaos reigned in the ghetto and threatened that he would personally see to it that there was order in the ghetto. He ordered the establishment of a new Jewish Council and appointed its members.

Moyshe Gordon was appointed chairman of the new Jewish council. Dr Taraseysky and Yankl's brother Khayem-Hersh Levin were the other members. Moyshe Gordon, a butcher, was a down-to-earth person. He knew Lithuanian and was quite capable of fulfilling his responsibilities. He knew how to talk, and how to get along with the German and Lithuanian rulers of the ghetto.

The Jewish Council began to arrange life in the ghetto. A Jewish police force with six or eight members, headed by Khayem-Hersh Levin, was set up. They would guard the ghetto at night from the danger of robbers coming from outside. They kept order in the ghetto. They announced to the Jews who was needed when for temporary jobs. They made sure the ghetto was kept clean, and so forth. The Jewish police didn't have special uniforms.

Two secretaries were appointed. One of them worked for the Jewish Council. The second supervised all matters pertaining to work.

The newly established Jewish Council did everything it could to maintain the existing work assignments, and to find new ones. The Jewish Council was constantly aware of the terror of being liquidated. Giving "presents" and fulfilling various "requisitions" ordered by the German and Lithuanian bosses was the only "strategy" the Jewish Council knew.

Moyshe Gordon concentrated on handling the ghetto's external affairs. He was assisted by Jewish artisans who worked for the Lithuanian and German authorities, who used their contacts to help the Jews in the ghetto. Unfortunately it must be said that a number of artisans used the "gifts" and "requisitions" which they gave to their employers as opportunities to win more sympathy for themselves as individuals. In general, however, the artisans did a great deal to maintain contacts between the Jewish Council and the Lithuanian and German powers.

In the spring of 1942 the slaughter of the Jews in the White Russian towns began. Jewish refugees began to appear in Shventzionys, and they spoke about the slaughter of dozens of communities in White Russia. The Jews of Shventzionys once again felt that their daily lives were insecure. Constant nervousness and fear of death infected everyone in the ghetto.

### **About the Slaughter of the Jews in Lentupis**

Red partisans had appeared in that area. They frightened the Germans and their collaborators. The bold actions of the Red partisans often had a quality of legendary heroism. A large group of Red partisans burst into the town of Lentupis one night, and took control for a few hours. A few of their horses were tied up next to the ghetto in Lentupis after they left. The slaughter of the Jews in the ghetto took place the next day.

Four Jews miraculously managed to survive, and escaped to the Shventzionys ghetto. This happened at the end of the month of December 1942.

A representative of the regional commissar came from Vilnius and ordered the Jewish council to integrate forty Jews from Lentupis into the Shventzionys ghetto. However, the Jewish council could not get the ghetto neighborhood enlarged. The forty Jews from Lentupis were brought to Shventzionys at the beginning of September 1942, exactly four months before their ghetto was liquidated.

### **The Murderers Willy and Simon**

These were two Germans who often came to the Shventzionys ghetto. They both lived in Vilnius and worked at the regional commissariat. Their visits to Shventzionys always ended with new problems or decrees against the Jews. They visited the work sites and asked how the Jews were working, and whether they were producing enough.

One of their visits to Shventzionys cost the life of a Jewish lawyer named Shakhnovitz, a man from a Lithuanian town who had been caught by the Germans while trying to flee at the beginning of the war. He had settled in Shventzionys. For a short time Attorney Shakhnovitz worked for the police as a translator into Lithuanian and German. In the summer of 1942 he took the same position as an employee at the town administration, and he worked in one of the front rooms.

Attorney Shakhnovitz had an impressive appearance. He dressed beautifully and kept himself very clean, and wore a yellow patch on his chest and on his back. He slept in the ghetto. One morning Shakhnovitz was noticed by the two comrades Willy and Simon. They became interested in him, and had a conversation about him with the mayor. In the afternoon two policemen took him from his job and led him away from town, in the direction of Shventzioneliai. They shot him near the village of Margumishky.

One time the regional commissar Wolf personally visited the ghetto. He went into the Jewish homes. In one house he found a large piece of bread, and he punished the Jew for this with blows from his own strong fists.

### **The Assassination of Beck**

Three young men worked for Beck, the county agricultural supervisor. Khayem-Yitzkhok Sheytl was an assistant chauffeur. David Ginzburg was an electrician, and a fifteen year old named Gurvitz worked as a servant and shined shoes. These three youngsters had it relatively good, and they were satisfied that they worked for such an important man as Beck and were considered "useful."

At that time, the summer of 1942, a supply commissar with the rank of First Lieutenant came to Shventzionys at the head of a group, evidently all of them SA men. They settled in for a substantial period.

One time Beck, his spokesman Grul and the newly-arrived First Lieutenant rode in the direction of Svir to requisition horses from peasants. Together with them rode their translator, the Polish Miss Rakovska.

At a village four kilometers from Lentupis the car was attacked by Red partisans. Beck, his spokesman Grul and the First Lieutenant were shot, and burned together with the car. The Red partisans allowed Miss Grul to return to Shventzionys.

A special commando patrol immediately came from Vilnius, armed from head to toe. Together with Lithuanian police from Shventzionys, that day they shot all the men in the surrounding villages within a radius of eight kilometers of the site of the attack. They shot any man they found out in the fields working or at their homes.

They also shot almost all of the men in the town of Lentupis that day.

In the town of Shventzionys, both the Polish intelligentsia and the Polish criminal class were all arrested. All of the arrestees were imprisoned. That same day the three young Jews who worked for Beck were arrested, and they were taken to prison as well.

The day after the arrests Lithuanian police and partisans took all of the Polish arrestees and the three Jewish youth out of the prison, took them to the Jewish cemetery and shot them. A total of forty men were shot at the Jewish cemetery, including three Jews. Among the Poles who were shot was the former mayor under the Polish regime Walulewitz, Dr Miklashewitz, the town pharmacist Nedzwecky and a Polish professor at the teachers' seminary.

At the same time thirty Poles, most prominent among them two priests, were arrested in Shventzioneliai. Next to the highway leading to Shventzionys, one kilometer out of Shventzioneliai, the thirty Poles were shot. The goodness of Dr Miklashewitz, who had done a good deal to help the Jews, must be mentioned here.

At this point it must be emphasized that not one of the Poles who were taken away and shot put up the slightest resistance. Among them were a number of people who had themselves inherited Jewish possessions. After this incident the Poles stopped mocking the surviving Jews of Shventzionys, claiming that they had gone like sheep to the slaughter without putting up any resistance. They began to understand better the tragedy the Jews had suffered.

### **Gershon Bak and Ruven Madzolsky**

These two young men had managed to obtain a revolver. They wanted to try it out in a ruined building. Ruven wasn't careful enough, and he shot and wounded his friend Gershon. The shot was heard in the ghetto. A short

time later everyone in the ghetto knew about this tragic incident. Everyone was terrified. The Jews were afraid that the ghetto might be liquidated because of this incident. There was a special meeting of the Jewish council. Present at the meeting were several people who had advice or proposals about how to deal with the situation.

The father of the wounded boy, the glazier Itzik Bak, was present at the meeting. After lengthy consultations, everyone present decided that they would appeal to the head of the criminal police, Matzulevitzius, asking him to forget about the incident. The father of the wounded boy was well-off, and the Jewish Council didn't find it necessary to raise money throughout the ghetto to bribe Matzulevitzius.

The decision to appeal to Matzulevitzius was taken because all of the participants and the meeting were sure that sooner or later Matzulevitzius would find out about this disastrous incident, and it would be better to approach him beforehand and try to bribe him.

At first Matzulevitzius threatened to shoot a hundred Jews. The spokesmen for the Jews, including the wounded boy's father, fell at his feet weeping, and pleading for mercy for their innocent congregation. Mr Bak also promised a beautiful "gift." However, Matzulevitzius insisted that the families of the young men would certainly be shot. There was no way to get him to forget about the incident.

That same day he arrested Ruven Madzolsky. Gershon Bak was taken to the municipal hospital. The next day Matzulevitzius arrested a young girl named Sore Levin. The participants in this collective testimony do not know the exact reasons for the arrest. Mr Bak and Dr Taraseysky went to Matzulevitzius to ask him to release Sore Levin. Matzulevitzius was very angry and warned them that if they didn't stop pleading on the girl's behalf he would shoot both of them.

Several days later, in the morning, Matzulevitzius took all three young people to the Jewish cemetery and shot them. The invalid Gershon Bak was taken from the hospital. The other two were taken from prison.

### **The Unsuccessful Provocation**

All of the permits provided by Kenstavitzius to the Jewish workers, allowing them to go into town to work without being guarded, had expired. The man who took his place when he wasn't around evidently didn't get along with him, and must have envied the way his boss was getting rich from the Jews. During the fall, when Kenstavitzius went away on vacation, he annulled all of the Jews' passes, and refused to honor them any longer. He demanded that the passes allowing Jews to go to work had to be certified by the police and by the German labor bureau.

One morning the policeman at the ghetto gate refused to let the Jews leave the ghetto to work in town. Dr Taraseysky and Moyshe Gordon were awoken. The two men went to see the director of the German labor bureau, and told him everything. The director of the German labor bureau and the two Jewish representatives went to the police'. The Jews stayed outside and waited. "They say it's your fault!" the director of the labor bureau said with a smile when he came back out.

The three men went to the ghetto and began letting Jews go to work. At that moment Kenstavitzius's replacement and another man came to the ghetto. He carried a long whip in his hand. He asked who the representatives of the Jews were. Moyshe Gordon and Dr. Taraseysky responded to him. Fires began burning in his eyes, and they became bloody with murderous rage. He shouted as he accused the two Jews of trying to sabotage the labor system, and he ordered them to stand next to a wall near the gate to the ghetto. The Lithuanian murderer was ready to shoot them with his revolver. The director of the labor bureau struck the revolver from his hand, and suggested that the workers should be released, and then they should go to the office of the Jewish Council near the gate.

After the workers were allowed out into town, the enraged Lithuanian arrested Moyshe Gordon and Dr Taraseysky. He took both of them to the prison near the ghetto. The murderer ordered Moyshe Gordon to get down on all fours on the floor. One man held his head, and another man whipped Moyshe Gordon. Moyshe Gordon screamed terribly as he was whipped. Dr Taraseysky watched everything, and after they finished beating and whipping Gordon, it was his turn to lie down. After they were whipped, the prison guards locked both of them into a cell.

An appeal was made to Teclaw concerning the arrest of the Jewish spokesmen. Several hours later a policeman came and announced that both men had been sentenced to 25 lashes. Both men suffered painful torture once again. After they were whipped, the policeman ordered the two men to run quickly to the ghetto. Dr Taraseysky states that for several days he could neither stand nor sit. His entire body was bloodied and his internal organs were swollen.

When Kenstavitzius returned from vacation, Moyshe Gordon received his permission to release Dr Tarasevsky from the Jewish Council. Dr Tarasevsky went to work at the Tzerkliskis compound as a simple worker. He worked there until late in the fall of 1942.

### **The camps around Shventzionys**

In the summer of 1942 Jews from Vilnius came to the Shventzionys ghetto. They reported that there was a ghetto in Vilnius. They provided information about life in the Vilnius ghetto and about the surrounding work camps, where Jews were living and working. The news from Vilnius sounded as remote to the Jews in Shventzionys as the legends about the "little red Jews" who live across the river Sambatyon. When they found out that there were still Jews living in Vilnius, the Shventzionys Jews were absolutely delighted, and they became more hopeful that they would live to see better times.

The Vilnius Jews who provided this good news also spoke about the labor camps in Shventzioneliai. A large group of Jews from Vilnius worked at that camp, under the supervision of the Todt organization. The Jews of the camp worked at the railroad station and on the railroad.

The head of the Jews in the camp was a Vilnius Jew named Yudi Shapiro. He often came to Shventzionys, where there was a girl he was friendly with. The central camp was the one at Shventzioneliai. Other camps surrounding Vilnius and Shventzioneliai were attached to the central camp. All of the work camps were staffed by Jews who had been brought from the Vilnius ghetto, and at the beginning they had no contact whatsoever with the Shventzionys ghetto.

Yudi Shapiro often demanded that the Shventzionys ghetto provide material help in the form of money and food. Then, with the help of the Todt Organization, he began to demand workers. A few small groups of young people were sent out to work. However, it was easy for them to buy their way out of the work and return to the ghetto. The Todt organization would take money to release them, and then come to the ghetto to seek new workers. They even obtained the help of the German labor bureau in obtaining workers from the Shventzionys ghetto.

Not one of the residents was willing to go voluntarily, yet the Jewish Council had to provide the specified number of workers, and thus they were under extreme pressure from all sides. The Jews of Shventzionys suffered in every way at the hands of the Todt Organization in the work camps around Shventzionys, until the liquidation of the ghetto.

### **The Liquidation of the Vidz Ghetto**

There was a ghetto in the White Russian town of Vidz until the fall of 1942. Throughout the entire summer the ghetto served as a refuge for Jewish survivors from surrounding towns who had managed to escape the slaughters. There were also a number of refugees from towns near Shventzionys. A large number of strong young Jews were sent to work camps. A number of young people escaped to the surrounding forests to join the Red partisans. Most of the people left in the ghetto were elderly folk and women with children.

In the fall of 1942 Simon and Willy visited the Shventzionys ghetto and ordered the Jewish council to get ready to integrate 2,000 Jews from the Vidz ghetto. For an entire week Jews rode to the Shventzionys ghetto in wagons. They brought their last few possessions along in wagons. For the most part they were depressed, hungry, deathly terrified old people, the sick, and women with children, along with a smaller number of able-bodied men and women.

This unexpected influx of such a large number of Jews placed the Jewish Council in an extremely difficult situation. This time as well, it was impossible to have the boundaries of the ghetto neighborhood increased—a space that was originally designed to house one hundred people. The Jewish Council held one helpless, tragic meeting after another. They decided to move the newly-arrived Jews into the empty synagogues, and to begin fixing up all of the barns and sheds.

Yankl Levin and his brigade of painters were invited to do the renovations in these extraordinary circumstances, without having access to any building materials. The brigade simply accomplished miracles. Out of nothing they managed to create new dwellings. They took out the extra windows from all of the existing dwellings and placed them in the stalls and sheds. They took materials from old, wrecked sheds and used them to repair the old, two-storey brick building where Gershon Bak had been shot while trying out a revolver.

The Jews crowded together into the little ghetto like herring in a barrel. The Jewish Council had an extremely difficult time trying to control the selfishness of a large number of families which didn't want to crowd themselves in any further by taking into their homes the newly arrived Jews from the Vidz ghetto. By then it was autumn. At night it was cold. The brigade used old pieces of tin to make little stoves and placed them into the crowded dwellings.

It must be emphasized that the accomplishments of the brigade of painters in that tragic situation must be considered as a wonder. Of course, it took a great deal of stubbornness and a strong, self-sacrificing will to help their unfortunate brothers. Meanwhile the brigade couldn't neglect their work in town, in order not to lose the jobs they'd obtained and to avoid causing the Lithuanian and German bosses to be dissatisfied.

From the time the Jews arrived from Vidz, life in the Shventzionys ghetto was hard, dirty, crowded and hungry. It was clear to everyone that the ghetto was no longer viable, and that it was destined for death. It was autumn in God's world by then. The gloomy sky spread out over the dying, withered fields and pastures. Yet nowhere in the entire area did the autumn reign as powerfully that year than in the ghetto, where the desperate, terrified Jews suffered and wasted away. Moaning and sighing, the weeping of tormented women with small children accompanied the stormy whistling of the autumn winds, which tore through the cracks in the walls and windows of the helpless Jews' dwellings.

Everyone in the Shventzionys ghetto was filled with a mood of autumnal decline. The new arrivals told the previous residents terrible details about the destruction of the Jewish communities in White Russian towns. News came from the work camps in Shventzioneliai about the liquidation of the labor camps. Bad rumors came concerning the situation in the Vilnius ghetto. Autumn!

The unfortunate Jews saw decline and destruction before them. An indescribable sorrow and unease clearly lay over everyone's face. By this time quite a few Jews were leaving their clothes on when they went to sleep at night. At that time a German Sonderkommando rode through Shventzionys.

The Jews who worked as specialists for German and Lithuanian authorities and who therefore had the opportunity to learn something about the fate of the Jews, were often called to meetings by the Jewish council. At one such meeting which lasted until late at night, the decision was taken to get into contact with the Vilnius ghetto and ask them to learn what they could about the coming fate of the Shventzionys ghetto.

### **The Mortally Dangerous Trip**

It was hard for those who gathered that night at the Jewish council to agree on such a measure. It was even more difficult to find appropriate people who were willing to risk their lives and ride the train to Vilnius. At that time it was impossible for Moyshe Gordon to leave the ghetto. Some people openly acknowledged that they didn't have the courage to take such a bold measure. The specialists couldn't miss work. The Jewish Council was afraid to take too much time if it was possible to get help. They decided to wake up Dr Tarasevsky and Yankl Levin during the night and ask them to carry out the meeting's decision.

Dr Tarasevsky's wife opposed letting her husband travel and thus put his life in danger, especially since it wouldn't be possible to obtain permission for him to travel. They begged her, explaining that it was a matter of life and death for an entire community of Jews. "If it's necessary to go, then go!" she finally said, agreeing to place the precious life of her husband in danger.

That same night Yankl Levin and Dr Tarasevsky left the ghetto. Of course, everything had to be done in great secrecy. The two of them made their way to the station, hid in a small-gauge railroad car and arrived at the station in Shventzioneliai (about twelve kilometers from Shventzionys) without incident.

Encouraged by the success of the first stage, the two men went to the work camp. They woke up the chief of the Jews, Yudel Shapiro, and told him about the plan. With his assistance they tried to get one of the Todt Organization personnel to accompany them to Vilnius. Not one of the Todt Organization personnel would agree to come for any price. Yankl Levin and Dr Tarasevsky decided to continue their risky journey. They crossed the railroad tracks and waited for a train at the station. They were afraid to be seen. They removed their yellow patches and waited for a train.

They arrived at the railroad station in Vilnius on a military train. During the entire journey they were in the same car with soldiers. Both of them have recognizably Jewish appearances. Their lives were in danger for hours.

A Jew found outside of the ghetto could be arrested by anyone and murdered. For the "nerve" of riding on a train, and especially a military train, a mere sentence of death would have been too easy on a Jew at that time. In such a

case the Gestapo would have gradually tortured the Jew to death. Fortunately the two men survived every danger without incident.

Jews from the Vilnius ghetto were working on the railroad lines near the Vilnius railroad station. The two men from Shventzionys went to them and told them who they were. The two men were hidden until the evening. After work in the evening Dr Tarasevsky and Yankl Levin went to the Vilnius ghetto with the workers.

Jewish ghetto police took the two guests to the labor bureau. The two Jews from Shventzionys were astonished at everything their eyes beheld. For about a year and a half they hadn't seen the familiar, dear city of Vilnius and its Jews. They knew that tens of thousands of Jews had been shot at Ponari and they didn't expect to find a well-organized, functioning Jewish life. Everything they saw encouraged them to think they might survive to see better times. The administration of the ghetto constituted a well-organized, thoroughly Jewish "state" with Jewish "ministers" and uniformed Jewish ghetto police. They saw a telephone at the Jewish labor bureau. The two Shventzionys men looked at each other in astonishment, and a hopeful smile crossed both men's faces. They were taken to see the chairman of the Jewish council, Gens.

The chairman received the two men very warmly, and listened with concern to their account of their experiences and to their request. With frightened eyes he looked at the two men from Shventzionys as they told him about their dangerous journey.

"Don't despair! Don't lose courage! Keep your heads high, Jews! As long as we're alive we are human beings and Jews!" Gens comforted the two men from Shventzionys like an officer giving military commands. He promised them that the next day he would speak to his advisers and do everything possible for them. Gens was tall and slim. His facial expression conveyed a strong and determined will. All of his movements showed military bearing. He wore the same cap as the ghetto police, decorated with a silver band.

That evening the local performers' guild gave a performance. Gens suggested that they go to the performance. The two Jews from Shventzionys were astounded at this bizarre suggestion. They were ashamed even to think about sitting in a theater after so many Jews had been slaughtered at the compound, and at a time when so many more Jews in the ghetto were in danger of being annihilated.

As if he read their thoughts, Gens understood. "Don't despair, Jews!" he ordered them once again.

The two Jews from Shventzionys decided they would rather rest after their journey. Jewish ghetto police took them to the place where they spent the night.

The next day Gens received them, assuring them that the Shventzionys ghetto was in no danger. He announced to them that the Shventzionys ghetto was going to become a department of the Vilnius ghetto and that he, Gens, was going to be in charge.

The Jewish Council in Shventzionys was extremely nervous about the situation of their messengers, about whom they had received no news.

Gens reached the Lithuanian police in Shventzionys through the labor bureau in the ghetto, and asked them to bring Moyshe Gordon to the telephone. Gens assured him that his messengers were well and promised that he would soon visit the Shventzionys ghetto in person.

For exactly one week the men from Shventzionys stayed in the Vilnius ghetto, and they had the opportunity to learn more about the lives of the Jews there. During that week Gens managed to obtain an automobile for a large sum of money, and he prepared to visit Shventzionys in person. One morning the Jews from Shventzionys, together with Gens and his assistants got into the automobile belonging to the Luftwaffe and arrived in Shventzionys.

Gens wore a long leather coat and a uniform, and his entourage were also well-dressed in uniforms. The population of the town respectfully watched the newly-arrived Jews, and said to each other that "Jewish ministers" had come to the Shventzionys ghetto. At the entrance to the ghetto gate the Lithuanian policeman stood at attention when Gens and his helpers approached, and he gave them a proper military salute. At the study house Gens gave an encouraging speech to the downcast Jews, promising to do everything in his power to help them. The Jews took comfort from this and felt more hopeful.

Gens went to see the mayor in the company of Moyshe Gordon to ask that the boundaries of the ghetto be increased. He also had a conversation with the head of the German gendarmes. That same evening there was a crowded meeting at the Jewish Council. All of the members of the Jewish Council were invited, along with all of the advisers who had contacts with the Lithuanian and German authorities.

Gens and his entourage showed them how to rearrange the way the ghetto was governed. He proposed the establishment of a new Jewish Council, consisting of the following people: Moysh Gordon, Dr Taraseysky and Motl Gilinsky. Moyshe Gordon continued as the chairman of the Jewish council. Gens left behind one of his assistants to help in the reorganization of the ghetto administration. That same day Gens and his entourage returned to Vilnius. Several days later the Shvencionys Jewish Council received a document stating that the Shvencionys ghetto was to be considered a division of the Vilnius ghetto. The document had been sent from the office of the regional commissar. The document confirmed the appointment of the three candidates Gens had proposed as members of the Jewish Council.

### **The Newly-Established Ghetto Administration**

The new administration was modelled on the example of the Vilnius ghetto. Gens's representative at the Shvencionys ghetto helped to set up the administration.

The following bureaus were set up:

1. The labor bureau under the direction of an art student named Sure (Alexander) Katznbogyn.
2. The supply bureau and social assistance office directed by Motl Gilinsky.
3. The sanitation bureau, responsible for keeping the ghetto 'clean, under the direction of Ferber.
4. The police, who were directed by Khayem-Hersh Levin and his spokesman Zerakh Gordon, a brother of Chairman Moyshe Gordon.
5. The finance bureau, headed by the bookkeeper Shokhar.

Motl Gilinsky had been a teacher at the Medem Sanitorium in a town in Poland before the war. The pharmacist Ferber was a converted Jew, and he had a Polish wife on the Aryan side.

The labor bureau in the ghetto maintained contacts with the German labor bureau in Shvencionys and fulfilled the demands for Jewish labor forces.

The supply bureau received food from town for the residents of the ghetto. The bureau had a small store in the ghetto where food was distributed to the ghetto population. Thanks to Moyshe Gordon this bureau saw to it that there was food in the ghetto. Along with the food that came in from town he would smuggle in flour and other items of food which had been purchased outside the ghetto. In order to bring these items into the ghetto and bring garbage out of the ghetto, Moyshe Gordon received permission from the mayor to possess a horse and wagon in the ghetto.

The supply bureau was also responsible for social support of the hungry and needy Jews, especially the Jews from the Vidz ghetto. The sanitary department kept strict watch over the cleanliness of the dwellings and streets of the ghetto. This department was extremely busy when there was an epidemic in the ghetto. The epidemic broke out late in the fall of 1942.

### **The Epidemic in the Ghetto**

As a result of all of the dirt, the crowding, the hunger and the cold, an epidemic of spotted typhus broke out late in the autumn. On the very first day of the epidemic about a hundred people fell ill. There was a serious danger that the ghetto would be effectively liquidated as a result of the epidemic. The new Jewish Council and its recently established administration felt shattered and helpless in the face of this danger.

That same day Gens's representative in the ghetto returned to Vilnius. Several days later two Jewish doctors came from the Vilnius ghetto, along with two nurses and a new man representing Gens. The doctors who had come from Vilnius held a meeting together with the members of the Jewish Council and the doctors in the ghetto. It was a tragic, helpless meeting. A series of decisions were taken regarding the fight against the epidemic and all of the dangers the epidemic presented for the residents of the ghetto.

They decided:

1. To take every step to prevent the Germans and Lithuanians, as well as the Christian population of the town, from finding out about the epidemic, in order to prevent the ghetto from being totally liquidated.
2. To quickly establish an infirmary for those who had been infected and to set up a bath house.
3. To strengthen the sanitary supervision of the dwellings, and to visit every house each day to determine whether anyone else had been infected.
4. To avoid all but the most urgently necessary contacts with the Aryan side.

The epidemic broke out in several places in White Russia that fall. The Germans destroyed entire villages on account of the epidemic. The doctors from Vilnius departed immediately. Yankl Levin and his brigade of painters were immediately summoned to help build the infirmary and the bath house. The members of the brigade clearly understood what a difficult and responsible job they had been assigned. In a short time they had fixed up the women's section of the study house, hammered together beds for the sick out of old boards, and thus managed to set up a primitive infirmary. The sick were taken out of every house and brought to the "infirmary."

Bedding, sheets and mattresses were collected from the residents of the ghetto. All of the nurses and nurses' aides were mobilized for this task. The Jewish doctors had brought along medicine from Vilnius. The number of sick people grew from day to day, and the crowding at the "hospital" was terrible.

A large house consisting of five rooms and a kitchen was emptied out. Yankl and his brigade of painters fixed up this house as well, and got it ready to serve as an infirmary. But this house, too, quickly filled with those suffering from spotted typhus. Sick people began to arrive from the work camp at Shventzioneliai. An isolation ward was set up for those suspected to have been infected with spotted typhus.

The sanitary department went from house to house every morning, and Dr Kopelovitz examined all of those who had fallen ill. Those who were sick with spotted typhus immediately had to go to the infirmary. A great deal of difficulty was caused by those families which hid their ill members because of their fear that the Germans would find out, and burn both the sick people and the houses they lived in.

Next to the study house there had always stood an old brick shed which was used as a toilet. Yankl and his brigade renovated it to serve as a country-style bath house. At the same time the brigade began preparing a bath where people could be disinfected.

It is simply difficult to imagine the commitment and courage of the men who made up the brigade. They had no building materials. The bath house had to be built from nothing. It must be mentioned at this point that a large number of Jews didn't even want to help, explaining that they worked all day long, and they didn't neglect to mention the names of the Lithuanian and German authorities they worked for, thus emphasizing how important they were.

Yankl had a good deal of success with that sort of person. When he went to summon them to help work, they were ashamed to refuse, because he and his brigade also had to work in town all day long.

There were four Jews from Lentupis in the Shventzionys ghetto who never went to work in town. When Yankl summoned them to help work building the bath house, they would go, saying "When Yankl calls, you have to go and help."

Near a small stream in the ghetto stood an old smithy covered over with garbage and dirt. The smithy was cleaned out. Floors were constructed out of old boards torn from the sidewalks of the ghetto. A disinfection station was set up, with places to take one's clothes off and wash. Yankl managed to bring a 200-liter boiler from town. The primitive stone oven was inside the disinfector. After the stones were heated water would be poured through a small window and the window would immediately be closed.

The disinfector was heated to exactly 120 degrees centigrade. People would hang their clothes inside the disinfector. After they washed, they would remove their clothes from the disinfector. Not only clothing but bedding as well was deloused at the disinfector. It was very difficult to obtain wood for the bath houses and for the infirmaries. All the old sheds, barns and stalls were devoted to this purpose. The epidemic was centered in the study houses where the people from Vidz lived.

The head of the "infirmaries" was Dr Tarasevsky, who devoted himself body and soul to the work. He didn't have much time to devote to affairs of the Jewish council. He went to the Vilnius ghetto several times to obtain assistance.

Later on a third "infirmary" was established, and the sick were brought there for the end of their convalescence. The quota of workers in town had to be maintained in order to prevent the epidemic from being discovered outside the ghetto. The Jewish Council had a great deal of difficulty assembling the necessary number of workers, on account of the selfish attitude of some of the ghetto population.

There was a constant danger that the epidemic would be discovered in town. On one occasion a Jewish woman left the ghetto and asked Christians to sell her milk for her child, who had come down with spotted typhus.

A Jewish girl from the interior of Lithuania worked for Matzulevitzius, the head of the criminal police. She became ill. Matzulevitzius was getting ready to come visit her. In order to prevent the murderer from finding out about the epidemic, she had to be left alone at the infirmary. All of the rest had to be removed temporarily to a different spot. All of the medical personnel, supervised by Dr Tarasevsky, hurriedly carried the sick away on their backs.

One day the director of the sanitation department, the pharmacist Ferber, grew ill. He was placed in an isolation room. His wife sat up with him entire days and nights. She was pregnant. On one occasion she asked to be allowed to bring a priest, because Ferber was losing strength. In addition to spotted typhus he had a lung infection. The Jews calmed her down, but didn't allow her to bring a priest into the ghetto. With great effort it proved possible to cure him.

Almost all of the medical personnel came down with the terrible disease. Finally Dr Tarasevsky and a nurse from Vilnius became ill. Dr Kopelovitz had sole responsibility for all of the sick people at that time.

An indescribable epic was played out in the Shventzionys ghetto during that period. Unnatural levels of energy and superhuman physical strength and endurance, along with a willingness to sacrifice themselves were necessary qualities for the medical personnel in their working conditions at the primitive "infirmaries," in order to overcome the epidemic in the conditions of the Shventzionys ghetto.

The Vilnius ghetto sent a great deal of money, help and medicine. Without that assistance the epidemic would certainly have annihilated the ghetto that fall and winter. For exactly four months' time the epidemic continued. During that time there were a few dozen deaths. The victims were buried at the Jewish cemetery in Shventzionys.

The Jewish Council had problems stemming from the labor camp at Shventzioneliai. Officials often came to demand workers for the camp. It was difficult to supply the necessary number, especially during the epidemic. On a few occasions the Jewish Council managed to negotiate a lower quota.

That winter a few hundred Jews were taken away to work in camps near the Lithuanian town of Vievis and also near Zhagare. Entire families were taken to the work camps. (Later they were brought to the Kaunas ghetto, and then to a camp near Panevezhys - LK)

After the epidemic was stamped out the situation in the ghetto became calmer, safer and more normal. Every day groups of Jews went to their regular worksites, which were almost the same as during the summer. There were frequent temporary assignments. These temporary jobs consisted of clearing the snow from the streets in town and from the railroad line, washing the floors in the buildings belonging to the German and Lithuanian administration, and similar tasks.

Moyshe Gordon was in charge of the external affairs of the ghetto, and he tried to carry out the "requests" of the Lithuanian and German authorities.

The Jews in the Shventzionys ghetto weren't fated to have a long time to gather their strength after the epidemic. The approaching spring, for which the Jews had longed throughout the winter, brought uncertainty, terror and eventually the final liquidation of the ghetto.

### **The Liquidation of the Shventzionys Ghetto**

One of Gens's commissars had remained in the Shventzionys ghetto. He helped to supervise affairs in the ghetto. Once, at the end of March, he came with news from Vilnius about the decision of the regional commissar to liquidate the ghetto. A delegation was chosen to go to the Vilnius ghetto to look into this matter. Tarasevsky was one of the ones who went. Gens assured them that no-one's life was in danger, and that it was simply a matter of transferring the Jews to one of the larger ghettos, either Kaunas or Vilnius. Gens even promised them that all of the necessary preparations had already been made for the Shventzionys Jews to move into the Kaunas ghetto.

Dr Tarasevsky explicitly asked Gens whether he was certain that the Jews would be transferred to Kaunas. Gens once again assured them that no-one was in danger, and that everyone would certainly arrive in Kaunas.

The Jews in the Shventzionys ghetto felt in their bones that a great disaster was approaching. They began to draw up lists to see who should go to Vilnius and who should go to Kaunas. The Jews couldn't decide at first. Some of the families were given the chance to depart to join their relatives at the labor camps around Vilnius and Shventzionys.

Several days before the ghetto was liquidated Gens came from Vilnius, along with his spokesman Dessler, accompanied by Jewish police from the Vilnius ghetto, including Dreisen.

Gens gave a speech at the synagogue to the helpless, terrified Jews, promising that no-one's life was in danger. The majority of the Jews didn't believe him, and they couldn't decide where to go. Gens's commissar then obtained an order from Vilnius to prepare two transports of Jews, and to carry out the transfer in two stages. Those who had been assigned to the Vilnius ghetto had to go.

Members of the Jewish Council went from house to house, asking Jews to go. There was a shortage of people for the first transport. Dr Kopelovitz and his family were part of the first transport to Vilnius.

On April 3, 1943 Gens and Dessler came from Vilnius, accompanied by Jewish ghetto police. Gens ordered all the Jews in the ghetto to pack up and prepare for the trip. Once again he reassured and calmed the desperate Jews, saying that they were in no danger.

### **The Underground Movement in the Shventzionys Ghetto**

As early as the summer of 1942 some of the young people learned about the organized Red partisans in the forests of White Russia and began to organize themselves. The young people working at the abandoned Soviet armaments camp gradually stole and gathered weapons. That summer they even received a letter from the Red partisans, written in Russian. The letter proposed that the young people join the partisans, and the route to follow to reach them was indicated.

The chief organizers of the resistance movement were the young men Yitzkhok Porush, Berke Yokhay and Yeshayohu Gertman.

It cannot be claimed that the organization was very secretive or that conspiratorial discipline was sufficiently maintained. The Jews in the ghetto knew everything that went on inside the organization. The organization communicated through Motl Gilinsky its request for money to buy weapons. The Jewish Council passed on through Motl Gilinsky a large sum of money (40,000 rubles).

Before the ghetto was liquidated they got ready to leave for the forest. There was a meeting, and the Jewish Council decided to have Gilinsky arrange that they wouldn't leave more than one day before the ghetto was liquidated, so that the rest of the ghetto residents wouldn't be endangered in case they were caught with weapons on the way.

Four Jews from Lentupis always walked around the ghetto with weapons in their pockets. One of them had been staying in his clothes at the police station, in order to avoid finding himself in an unforeseen situation. These four Lentupis Jews were a law unto themselves. They didn't go to work. They didn't want to communicate with the organized Jewish resistance movement. Before the ghetto was liquidated they announced that they would let the transport leave, and would go into the forest. They did precisely that. One of these four Lentupis Jews was named Moyshe Gilinsky.

About fifteen or sixteen members of the resistance movement left the ghetto on the night of April 3. Smaller, unorganized groups left the ghetto that same nights. Ordinary Jews just furrowed their brows, lacking any options for themselves and their families. One woman from Shventzionys named Khaye Bushkanetz had a friend among the policemen from Vilnius. She asked him to advise her where to go. Her policeman friend advised her not to go at all, but to escape from the ghetto. She escaped from the ghetto with her mother and brother. They hid in the countryside, and both of them survived.

### **The Slaughter at Ponari**

On the morning of April 4, 1943 wagons came to the ghetto. They had been rented from the countryside by the community organization. The Jews packed their last few possessions and rode to the station at Shventzioneliai on the wagons. When they left the ghetto Lithuanian police kept a close guard to make sure that none of the Jews could cross over and "hide" their things with the Christian population.

The Jews rode from town to the railroad station without anyone guarding them. They got the impression that they really weren't in any danger. They stayed at the station with their things for half a day, waiting for railroad cars. When they got into the railroad cars they were shown which cars were designated for those who had special passes showing that they were going to Vilnius.

After they got onto the train Dessler himself closed the doors of the railroad cars from outside. When they reached the station in Vilnius, several cars full of Jews assigned to the Vilnius ghetto were detached from the train. When they left the railroad cars Gens was present. He hurried them along, ordering the people to be taken to the ghetto. The rest of the Jews were immediately taken away in the sealed railroad cars. That same day everyone was shot at Ponari, a station between Vilnius and Kaunas, not far from Vilnius. The vast majority of the Jews in the Shvencionys ghetto tragically died in this fashion after having been so viciously deceived. A smaller number were brought to the Vilnius ghetto.

A few days later the packages of goods belonging to the Jews who had been shot were brought into the warehouse at the ghetto. The Jews had written their first and last names on the packs before they were evacuated.

### **The Tragic Reckoning**

The group of organized young people who had left the Shvencionys ghetto for the forest a day before the ghetto was liquidated didn't forget about their brothers and sisters in the Vilnius ghetto. They came to the Vilnius ghetto several times and freed small groups of Vilnius and Shvencionys Jews, bringing them into the forest. Khayem-Hirsh Levin, the head of the Shvencionys ghetto police, was thoroughly prepared to leave with one such group. Unfortunately he left the ghetto too late; the group had left just a short time sooner, since it was impossible for them to wait for him. Khayem-Hirsh decided to return to the ghetto and wait for another group to go.

The Jewish police at the ghetto gate arrested him. He asked them to release him, declaring that he was armed. They put him in prison. The agitated Khayem-Hersh shot one of them through the window. There was a panic in the ghetto: Jews were shooting at Jews. Gens himself came running. Everyone was afraid to approach the cell window, out of which Khayem-Hersh was shooting. Gens personally made his way to the window and shot Khayem-Hersh.

The body of Khayem-Hersh was brought to the Jewish council compound. Announcements were immediately posted, stating that an unknown person had entered the ghetto and shot a Jewish policeman, and that in the ensuing conflict the person had been shot. The announcement was written with the intention of averting the terrible danger the ghetto would be in if the Germans had learned the truth.

Khayem-Hersh's father was arrested in connection with this tragic incident. His brother Yankl and Yankl's wife escaped and hid outside the ghetto. They didn't want to abandon their child, so they returned to the ghetto. Yankl voluntarily handed himself over to the Jewish police at the gate of the ghetto. After a long investigation at police headquarters and before the ghetto magistrate, Yankl was released. The tragic case of Khayem-Hersh Levin took place at the beginning of the fall in 1943.

In the fall of 1943 thousands of Jews from the Vilnius ghetto were seized and sent to work camps in Estonia. Most of them died in various painful ways. Among those sent to Estonia were a number of Jews who had been brought to the Vilnius ghetto from the Shvencionys ghetto.

Dr Kopelovitz, Dr Tarasevsky, Motl Gilinsky and Yankl Levin were also among those sent to Estonia. The men's families were taken from the Vilnius ghetto a day later. The administration of the labor camps in Estonia refused to accept the women and children, and they were taken to Auschwitz, where they died.

Dr Kopelovitz, Motl Gilinsky and the chairman of the Jewish Council in the Shvencionys ghetto Moyshe Gordon died in the camps in Estonia.

Shure Katznbogyn left the Vilnius ghetto to join the partisans and survived.

Dr Tarasevsky and Yankl Levin were in a labor camp called Ereda, a branch of the Goldfields camp. When the Red Army approached Estonia, the German cannibals evacuated the Jews from the camp and from the extermination camp near Stutthof. Yankl Levin suffered in the concentration camp until February 10, 1945, and then he was liberated by the Red Army.

Dr Tarasevsky was transferred from Stutthof together with other Jews to the extermination camp at Buchenwald. When the Americans approached the spot, Christians and some of the Jews, including Dr Tarasevsky, were evacuated, and they marched on foot for three weeks in the direction of Matthausen. While they were marching the Americans arrived, and the group of Christians along with the few Jews were liberated. This happened on May 4, 1945, in the Sudetenland.

After the liberation Yankl Levin visited his home town of Shventzionys. All that was left of the town were ruins and a heap of ash. Before the Germans retreated from the town they had burned the entire town center. Only the outskirts of town were left, like a reminder of the destruction. At the military compound in Shventzionel'iai, surrounded by a picket fence, lies the huge mass grave, as a heartrending, tragic, solitary monument for the murdered, innocent Jews of all of Shventzionys County.

### **Attestation of Dr Binyomin Taraseysky and Yankl Levin**

Everything stated in this collective testimony was personally experienced by us and related to Engineer L Koniuchowsky. When the testimony was read to us we made certain notes, which are underlined or added in red ink. After having the collective testimony read to us, we attest to everything with our signatures on each and every page.

Participants in the collective testimony:

1. Dr Binyomin Taraseysky (Signature)
2. Yankl Levin (Signature)

The testimony was recorded by Engineer L Koniuchowsky  
Saulgau, (Wurstin) August 21, 1948

The signature of the Saulgau residents Dr Binyomin Taraseysky and Yankl Levin  
is certified by the chairman of the Jewish community organization

Committee chairman: Salomon Berkowicz (Signature) Saulgau, August 24, 1948

*Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin New York November 7, 1994*

## 2. THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS OF SHVENTZIONYS

The testimony of Avrom Taytz, born in Shventzionys on February 6, 1908. He graduated from the Hebrew elementary school in Shventzionys. Avrom was the owner of a woollen boot factory and a dealer in uncured animal skins before war broke out between Germany and Poland in 1939. His father's name was Yoysef. His mother was Khaye, born Svirsky in the small town of Adutishkis.

Shventzionys is located 84 kilometers northeast of Vilnius. The highway between Vilnius and Dvinsk passes through the town. About four kilometers from town are lakes Berezowka, Kachanowka and others. About twelve kilometers from town passes the railroad line linking Warsaw and Leningrad. The station is located in Shventzioneliai, twelve kilometers from Shventzionys. There was a narrow-gauge rail line linking Shventzionys and Shventzioneliai.

Until the war broke out on June 22, 1941, about 3,000 Jews lived in Shventzionys, along with a roughly equal number of Poles and a small number of Old Believers. The majority of the population in the countryside surrounding Shventzionys is Lithuanian. On the eastern side, especially closer to the White Russian-Lithuanian border, the villages are occupied by White Russians and a few Poles.

After Poland collapsed in 1939, and after the Vilnius region was assigned to Lithuania, Shventzionys was assigned to White Russia. Later, in the summer of 1940, when the Red Army entered Lithuania, Shventzionys was reassigned to Lithuania.

### The Economic and cultural Conditions

The Jews in town were occupied in trade and artisanry, and there were a few farmers. Among the larger Jewish enterprises the following must be mentioned:

1. A woollen boot factory belonging to the Jewish businessmen Avrom Taytz and his brother.
2. A woollen boot factory belonging to the brothers Shmuel and Yisroel Volotzky.
3. A woollen boot factory belonging to the brothers Khayem, Shoyel and Yakov Vilkomirsky.
4. A woollen boot factory belonging to the Jewish businessman Motl Kurlyantshik.
5. A woollen boot factory belonging to the Jewish businessman Aron Ginzburg.
6. A woollen boot factory belonging to the Jewish businessman Vulf Ginzburg.
7. A woollen boot factory belonging to the Jewish businessman Binyomin Shapiro.
8. A woollen boot factory belonging to the Jewish businessman Berl Shapiro.
9. A woollen boot factory belonging to the Jewish businessman Motl Zar.
10. A woollen boot factory belonging to the Jewish businessman Yakov Svirsky.
11. A woollen boot factory belonging to the Jewish businessman Zalmen Gilinsky.
12. A woollen boot factory belonging to the Jewish businessman Leyzer Zeydl.
13. A woollen boot factory belonging to the Jewish businessman Leyzer Taytz.

Two small factories had been set up for the production of various medicinal herbs.

1. A medicine factory belonging to the pharmacist Volodya Taraseysky and his brother Dr Nome Taraseysky.
2. A medicine factory belonging to Ruven Abramovitz.

Among the larger businesses there was the sawmill belonging to Meyer Shukhman.

The town had substantial dry goods and iron goods stores belonging to Jews. The economic situation of the Jews in town under Polish rule was not bad. The cultural and intellectual life of the Jews in town was at an appropriately high level. The town had a Yiddish-Hebrew library, Hebrew and Yiddish elementary schools, a Yiddish gymnasium until 1933, a community bank, a Yiddish theater hall called Beys Am, two study houses, a tailors' chapel, two Hasidic prayer rooms and so forth.

The majority of the young Jews belonged to the nationalist Zionist movement. The Jewish students studied at Vilnius University and elsewhere, including foreign institutions.

The attitude of the Polish townspeople toward the Jews until Poland collapsed in 1939 was not bad. In 1940 Lithuanians from surrounding villages and from the interior of Lithuania came to town and took over the civil administration of the town. There were no open anti-Jewish acts.

After the Red Army entered Lithuania in the summer of 1940, both the Poles and the Lithuanians carried out secret anti-Soviet activities, and they also increasingly agitated against the Jews, who had begun to feel and behave like

citizens with equal rights. A few weeks before the war broke out on June 22, 1941 the Soviet officials in Lithuania exiled a large number of well to do Lithuanians and Poles into the Russian interior.

A small number of Jewish youth, all of whom worked for the Soviet security organs, participated in these deportations. The secret Fascist organizations successfully exploited the participation of these few Jews in the deportations as part of their propaganda promoting pogroms against the Jews and Soviets.

### **The outbreak of the Second World War**

After the war between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union broke out on June 22, 1941, the Jews of Shventzionys didn't even think of preparing to flee. The majority of them didn't imagine that the German army would advance quickly, and they didn't foresee the terrible disaster that lay in store for them.

On Monday, June 23, 1941 Jewish refugees from Lithuania appeared in Shventzionys, along with a large number of Soviet officials, who were retreating to the Soviet Union as rapidly as possible. A few hundred Jews from Shventzionys, most of them young people, fled to the Soviet Union that day. Most of them were employed by the Soviet institutions, and some of them belonged to the Communist Youth or the Communist Party. Ordinary Jews didn't think of fleeing. Almost all the Jews stayed in their homes in Shventzionys, fearfully waiting for further developments in the situation, which was rapidly changing.

About twenty kilometers from Shventzionys at the compound where military exercises had been held before the war, armed Lithuanians from surrounding villages began to gather, along with Lithuanian deserters from the Red army. They began shooting the retreating Red Army soldiers in the back, and they didn't hesitate to shoot Jews who were fleeing.

In this manner the bandits who were called "partisans" later on, shot the Jewish wigmaker from Shventzionys Hirsh Gordon on the road, along with a few other Jews. Some of the Jews had to return to their home towns because of this.

Starting on Thursday, June 26, 1941 there was no longer any government in Shventzionys to supervise the affairs of the town. Peasants in the countryside sensed their opportunity, and came to town en masse with sacks under their arms, ready to begin robbing the Jews' goods.

Twelve kilometers from Shventzionys at the Lentupis compound there was an alcohol distillery. The peasants robbed everything that was there and got good and drunk. For reasons that are unclear, a fire broke out there. About three hundred drunken peasants burned to death that day.

On Tuesday evening, July 1, 1941 reconnaissance units from the German army appeared in Shventzionys. 64 well-armed Lithuanian partisans under the command of their leader Shvagzlis, the former director of the maistas in Shventzionys before the war, accompanied the Germans. Among the 64 was a Lithuanian woman with a limp, a teacher at the town school before the war broke out. She was a singer and actress.

There was no battle for control of the town, and it was not damaged. The next day, Wednesday, July 2, German military units began marching through Shventzionys. The Lithuanian partisans immediately took over control of the town. They didn't allow the residents to go out into the street, in order to avoid impeding the progress of the German army. That same day Germans captured a Soviet lieutenant in Shventzionys. The lieutenant seized one German's revolver and shot him.

As revenge for this the Germans shot three innocent Red Army prisoners. This vicious deed terrified the Jewish townspeople. They realized with whom they were dealing. The eyewitness Avrom Taytz and two other Jews buried the three Red Army soldiers. The Soviet lieutenant escaped from town.

### **Anti-Jewish Decrees**

On Thursday, July 3, 1941 announcements appeared in the streets and on the walls of houses, printed in German, Russian and Polish. They stated that Jews were forbidden to leave the town, that they weren't allowed to go into the countryside, weren't allowed to ride bicycles or use peasant wagons as a means of transportation. They added that if a single German was shot, one hundred of the civilian population might be threatened in retaliation. These announcements were posted by German command.

On the fourth day after the Germans arrived in town there was an order for all of the Jews to bring their bicycles, radios and other valuables to the Lithuanian partisan headquarters and hand them over. The town rabbi was ordered to provide the partisan headquarters with a list of all of the Jewish men between the ages of sixteen and sixty. At that time a Jewish committee was established at the request of the partisans. The committee's task was to serve as intermediaries between the German and Lithuanian authorities and the Jewish townspeople. The members of the committee were: Moyshe Gordon, Meyer Shukhman, Dr Taraseysky and others. Moyshe Gordon had to assemble Jewish workers and send them to the partisans every day.

On Thursday, July 3, 1941 a Polish shoemaker named Jan Droza went to see the partisan leader Shvagelis and asked to be allowed to move back into his house, which had been nationalized by the Soviets. The commandant promised to satisfy his request. However, he explained to him that first he would have to make an "arrangement" with the Jews in town. The shoemaker was a good friend of Avrom, and communicated his conversation with the Lithuanian commandant through a Jew named Boris Brumberg. Boris Brumberg had been the vice mayor of Shventzionys for eight years under the Poles, and at the same time he had been the director of the community bank in town. Boris immediately told Avrom about this, and the very same day Avrom fled the town to hide at the home of a Polish friend of his named Eduard Romaslowsky, a former member of the town council under the Poles.

That same Thursday, July 3 Lithuanian partisans arrested eleven Jews and accused them of having Soviet sympathies. They took them away to the Tzerkliskis compound, one kilometer from town. Next to a stall near the compound the partisans forced the Jews to dig a pit, and then they shot all eleven Jews.

Among the eleven who were shot Avrom remembers the following names:

1. Meyer Lisky, a smith with two sons.
2. Ruven Drutz, a coachman.
3. Khatzkl Kurlantshik, a merchant.
4. Noyekh Kotler, a [kishkenik].
5. A son-in-law of Volak, a gardener.

A deadly panic seized all of the Jews in town after this tragic incident.

The next day, Friday, July 4 partisans once again arrested sixteen Jews. They too were shot the same day at the same spot, near the Tzerkliskis compound, without a trial or a verdict. Most of those who were shot had been employees of the [potrebsoyuz] under the Soviets. Among the sixteen who were shot Avrom remembers the following Jews from Shventzionys:

1. Motl Matzkin, a bookkeeper at the [potrebsoyuz].
2. Borukh Levin, a [kishkenik].
3. Dovid Rokhin, a shoemaker.
4. Yankl Svirsky, a flax merchant.
5. Avrom Volfson, a coachman.
6. Leyzer Kovarsky, a merchant.

There were also young Jews from the surrounding towns whose names Avrom does not know.

On Saturday, July 5, 1941 Lithuanian partisans arrested a third group of exactly 20 Jews. Among the group was the tailor from town Yankl Veksler, who by then was working as a skilled artisan for the Germans and Lithuanians. The teacher with the limp who was working in the partisan headquarters at that point spotted Yankl and took him out of the group. All the rest of the men were taken away that Saturday near the Tzerkliskis compound and shot there. This group also contained a number of refugees from surrounding towns.

That same Saturday, after the group were shot, the partisans once again arrested a group of 20 Jewish men, along with one woman named Khasye Gurvitz. All of the arrestees were taken to the town prison and held there, ready to be shot on Monday.

The military commandant of the town was a Czech. He was also the postmaster. On Saturday evening he met a Jew named Yisroel-Elye Movshovitz in the street. Movshovitz knew German. The German commandant communicated to the partisans through the Jew that from that day on no one was to be shot without his prior knowledge and approval. He angrily explained to the Lithuanian commandant that he was the boss in town. That same day he went to the prison and personally interrogated the Jewish arrestees. After he questioned them he released all the Jews from prison. After this incident the Lithuanian cannibals calmed down for a while.

Immediately after the Germans arrived in town partisans began forcing the Jews to do various filthy and unnecessary jobs. In certain cases the partisans forced the Jew to clean out toilets with their hands. They also repaired the damaged roads, cleaned the streets, and served the Germans and the Lithuanian partisans.

Some of the Jews got steady jobs from the Germans, and received special passes temporarily protecting them from being taken away or abused by the partisans. During the first days the partisans themselves went and took the Jews from their homes to work. After the committee was set up, this was done by Moyshe Gordon, who was responsible to the partisans to see to it that the number of Jews they demanded for work appeared at the specified time. While the Jews worked they were guarded by the partisans, who bullied the Jews, beat and tortured them. After work the Jews could go home.

Avrom, his brother Betzalel and three other Jews got jobs doing agricultural work for a peasant whom they knew, not far from town. They didn't have to work too hard there, and they had the chance to get better food. Most importantly, they were further away from the nightmare and desperation which reigned among the Jews after the three groups of men had been shot.

While a group of Jews were being taken to work, a partisan hurried them along and beat them. A boy named Alter Grazul couldn't control himself any longer, and he shouted: "Today you're leading us, but a day will come when we'll be leading you!" The partisans immediately took the Jew out of town, to a field near the Tzerkliskis compound, and shot him there.

The robberies of Jewish possessions in town began immediately after the Germans arrived. In the beginning the robberies were carried out by Germans, accompanied by partisans. Later the partisans themselves robbed as much as their hearts desired.

In addition to these robberies the Jews had to provide various "requisitions" for the partisan commander. The murderer would announce to the committee what he needed, and he would order that it be provided within the allotted time.

The committee did everything they could to ease the desperate situation of the Jews. They provided "gifts" to the German and Lithuanian commandant, bribed other anti-Semites and tried to win them over. But the committee had little success. The Germans and Lithuanians accepted the "gifts," but they did not ameliorate the situation of the Jews.

### **Information About the Slaughter of All the Jews in Lithuania**

The Jews of Shventzionys began receiving reliable information that all of the Jews in Lithuania had been slaughtered. Individual Jewish survivors from entire Jewish communities that had been annihilated began to arrive. The committee increased the bribes it gave to the commander, and tried to find out from him what was in store for their community. The commandant constantly reassured them, saying that the lives of the town's Jews were safe.

People began saying that the Jews were to be herded into a ghetto near the edge of town. The committee bribed a German doctor, who announced that within the planned ghetto neighborhood it would be very easy for an epidemic to break out, and that such an epidemic would be harmful to the Aryan population as well.

The committee managed to have the order to establish a ghetto in Shventzionys revoked, with the help of the German doctor whom they had bribed.

One Tuesday in August the Jews in Shventzionys learned that the partisans in Shventzioneliai had shot fifty Jewish men.

The next day, Wednesday evening, the partisans in town registered Jewish men. They wrote down the name of every Jew who was found in his house or whom they met on the street. The Jews of Shventzionys sensed that a mortal danger lay in wait for them. Some of the more cautious men hid in town, or escaped to the countryside to stay with peasant acquaintances until the roundup was over.

Early Thursday morning that same week, at about 4:00 a.m., the partisans roused about a hundred Jewish men from their beds and took them to the partisan headquarters. There they took the men's watches, rings, valuables, money and documents. They took the men in the direction of Shventzioneliai in trucks. All of the men were shot that Thursday in a forest four kilometers outside of Shventzioneliai in the direction of the Bozenowka compound. The total number of men shot that day was 96.

Among those shot were:

1. The former chairman of the Jewish community of Shventzionys under the Polish regime, the popular Jew Hirsh Gilinsky;

2. Attorney Leyb Gurvitz;
3. Engineer Gordon;
4. Medical student Avrom-Yitzkhok Gordon, and others.

Avrom, his brother Betzalel and three other Jews were still working for a peasant not far out of town. Two of the five Jews were among the 96 men shot that day.

A peasant who had worked for Avrom before the war immediately told him about the incident. But Avrom didn't want to cause a panic in town, and he didn't tell anyone what had happened.

The partisans told the Jewish townspeople that the 96 Jews who had been taken away were living and working somewhere. There were peasants who even brought "greetings" from the men to their loved ones in Shventzionys. They asked for packages of clothing and food to take to the men. A number of Jews gave the peasants the things they had been asked for, believing that their men were alive and working.

Wives and mothers of the men who had been taken away gathered together to draw up lists of healthy Jewish men in town, preparing to go to the German commandant and ask to have their weak husbands and sons exchanged for the healthy men whose names appeared on their lists.

Avrom understood that he couldn't keep his secret any longer, because the unfortunate mothers and wives were endangering the lives of the men on their list, and told the town the tragic truth about the fate of the 96 men. The innocent betrayal by the unfortunate wives and mothers was avoided.

News came from the nearby towns of Nementzine, Padbarde and others about the slaughter of the local Jews. No one in town was in doubt any longer about what had happened to the 96 men.

At that time, roughly in the middle of the month of September 1941, partisans went through the Jewish houses and workshops and to doctors, writing a list of everyone they considered useful. Then they removed the machinery at the Jewish woollen boot factories. The Jewish doctors had to write on each container of medicine what kind of medicine it was, and everything was taken away. They took the medical equipment away as well.

## **The Total Slaughter**

On Thursday, September 25, 1941 the assistant to the Vilnius region commissar came to Shventzionys, accompanied by several other Gestapo men.

A group of women in town threw themselves at the feet of the Gestapo, begging that the rest of the surviving Jews not be shot. The murderers didn't pay any attention to the unfortunate women.

That same day there was a meeting in town between the newly-arrived Gestapo personnel and the local Lithuanian partisan leaders.

The Jews in town knew that the fate of all the Jews was being decided at this meeting. The military commander of the town, Metz, was also present at the meeting.

The tailor Yankl Veksler worked for the commandant, and he had gotten quite friendly with him. The commandant told Yankl the purpose of the meeting and told him to come see him to find out what had been decided. The Jews in town learned from Yankl and also from peasants that at the meeting a decision had been made to remove all the Jews; men, women and children, and leave behind just precisely thirty professional specialists, as "useful" Jews.

There was terrible panic in town. Several hundred Jews escaped from town to hide in the surrounding forests and with peasant acquaintances in the villages. On Friday, September 26 it began to be openly said in town that all of the Jews would be taken from Shventzionys to a ghetto in Shventzioneliai. Some of the Jews believed these rumors.

On the Sabbath between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, September 27, the partisans announced to the Jews in town that everyone had to bring from their houses whatever they needed and gather at the pasture belonging to the Greek orthodox priest in town. The partisans said that from there the Jews would be taken to the ghetto in Shventzioneliai, which was located at the summer barracks at the military compound. Before the Jews left their houses their furniture and domestic animals were taken away.

Peasant friends from town and from the countryside, neighbors with whom the Jews had lived their entire lives, rushed forward to show the Jews how well meaning they were and to offer their "assistance" to the desperate Jews, proposing that the Jews leave their valuables with them "until after the war." The Jews realized that their "friends" had come to inherit their goods, and bitterly handed over their valuables "until after the war."

All the Jews in town arrived at the priest's pasture, except for a small number who escaped. As the Jews were being marched to the pasture, groups of partisans went through the streets, seeing to it that no-one escaped from town. Guards were also posted at the edge of town. The screams and weeping of women and children as they left their houses should have been enough to make the entire murderous world tremble.

The Jews were taken from the pasture to the compound near Shventzioneliai in wagons that had been brought in from town and from the nearby countryside. The tragic convoy was heavily guarded by Lithuanian partisans on the way.

That tragic Sabbath the partisans gathered at the compound near Shventzioneliai, the Jews from all of the surrounding towns. The Jews from the towns of Ignalina, Tveritzius, Tzeikiniai, Malagenai, Adutishkis, Kaltinenai, Shventzioneliai and the smaller communities of Daugilishkis and Stajatzishkis were also brought. All of the Jews from the larger town of Padbrade were also brought to the compound that day.

When the Jews were taken from Shventzionys the partisans left a number of "useful Jews" in town, according to the list that had been drawn up. They also released a number of "useful Jews" from the compound, and brought them back to Shventzionys. A number of people who didn't qualify as "useful" Jews, managed to join this latter group by bribing the partisans. A total of about 150 "useful" Jews and their families remained in Shventzionys.

At the compound the partisans began "preparing" the Jews for their deaths. The helpless Jews suffered hunger, cold, terror and blows. Tormented and exhausted, they were thrown into the terrible arms of apathy and hopelessness. The partisans walked among their victims in groups, constantly robbing and beating the Jews. They would take away the better-clothed Jews to the nearby forest, take their clothes off them and shoot them. The cannibals would explain as they did this, that the Jews had been shot while trying to escape.

One woman named Abramovitz, born Kovner, gave birth to a child at the compound. The partisans threw the newborn into a pit, as if it were an old, used-up rag. The mother went mad, and suffered a heart attack. She died next to the corpse of her newborn child. The Jew Hirsh Vilkomirsky also lost his mind as a result of the torments. On Wednesday, October 2, 1941, the first of the intermediate days of Sukkot, the partisans took all the Jews out of the compound and shot everyone. All of the Jews of Shventzionys county were shot and buried in a single mass grave, eight meters wide by 160 meters long. The mass grave is located one half kilometer past the bridge over the Zhemena River, to the left, in a forest on a hill. The eyewitness Avrom Taytz attests that 6,800 Jews; men, women and children, lie murdered there.

Details about what happened when the executions were carried out in the forest are unknown to Avrom.

"Useful Jews" from town had to move into a ghetto in the synagogue yard. A number of Jews who had been in hiding came to live in the ghetto.

On Tuesday, the day before Yom Kippur, the Jews entered the ghetto. The next day, Wednesday, the partisans took all the Jews out into the synagogue yard. They separated out the "useful Jews" and their families according to a list and sent them back to their houses. They took the rest to the compound, where they died together with all the Jews.

In exchange for large sums of money, and through contacts with partisans, some of the Jews managed to get out of the compound and to be returned to the ghetto at the synagogue compound in Shventzionys. Some time later Jews were brought from White Russia. About 2,000 Jews were gathered in the ghetto altogether.

### **The Transports to the Vilnius and Kaunas Ghettos**

The Jews were kept in the ghetto until April 4, 1943. Some time earlier, the Jewish council in the ghetto was informed that all the Jews had to move into the ghettos in Kaunas or Vilnius. Some people wrote down that they wanted to go to Vilnius, and some to Kaunas. Four railroad cars full of Jews rode to Vilnius, and the Jews were taken to the Vilnius ghetto. The rest were supposed to be taken to the Kaunas ghetto. When they arrived at Ponari, all the Jews were taken out of the railroad cars and shot on the spot. A large number of the Jews who had been taken to the Vilnius ghetto were eventually brought to Ponari as well.

Some of them were taken to Estonia, where they died. Only a small number of the Jews in the Shventzionys ghetto survived. Among those who survived in Estonia was Dr Taraseysky, the chairman of the Jewish council in the Shventzionys ghetto.

Before the Jews were taken away from the Shventzionys ghetto to the military compound, Avrom's brother Betzalel, his wife Sonya (born Shapiro in the town of Glubok) and their three year old daughter Matele left the town. All three of them died in the ghetto in Glubok. Avrom's sister Peshe also went to Glubok, where she died.

A Jew named Shmuel Bushkanetz escaped from the Shventzionys ghetto on April 4, 1943 and hid at the home of a peasant in the village of Nowosolsky. One of the neighbors wanted to earn a bounty and reported the Jew. Lithuanian police seized him at the home of the peasant and shot him on the spot. His corpse was consumed by birds and wild animals. There was no-one to bury him. After the liberation he received a Jewish burial.

Yitzkhok Ogulnik's daughter escaped from the ghetto before the Jews were taken away. She hid for a short time. One of her Christian acquaintances took her from Shventzionys to her relatives in the town of Kozan. As they passed through the town of Tveritzius, Lithuanians spotted them and reported them to the police. She was shot and buried in a garden near town.

The eyewitness Avrom escaped from Shventzionys on September 26, before the Jews were taken to the compound. He went to the home of the peasant Dominik Romaslowky, at a settlement near town. He stayed there for ten weeks. From there he went to the peasant Zlotnikow in the village of Mili, four kilometers from town, where he stayed for two and a half years. Then he returned to the peasant Romaslowky, where he stayed for four weeks until the liberation arrived on July 7, 1945.

Avrom paid the peasants generously for hiding him, with money, gold, clothing and other valuable items. Avrom suffered a good deal of terror, hunger and cold while staying with the peasants, until he lived to see the liberation.

Avrom doesn't remember the first and last names of the Lithuanian partisans who helped to slaughter the Jews of Shventzionys. Most of them were Lithuanians from the surrounding villages, along with some who came from the interior of Lithuania. He does remember two murderers who had worked for him before the war.

They were:

1. Wanke Wanagitzkis, and
2. Three brothers, workers from town, whose last name was Tratzewskis.

### **Attestation of Avrom Taytz.**

Everything recorded about the slaughter of the Jews of Shventzionys was personally experienced by me, Avrom Taytz. Other facts were related to me by peasants whom I knew, with whom I hid. After reading through the testimony and after correcting a few inaccuracies with a red pen, I attest to everything with my signature on each and every page.

The eyewitness                      Avrom Taytz                      (signature)

The testimony was recorded by Engineer Leyb Koniuchowsky  
Ulm, Sedan camp    February 8, 1948

The signature of Avrom Taytz, resident of Sedan Camp in Ulm, is certified by the chairman of the camp committee.  
Chairman Delatycki                      (signature)                      Ulmf Sedan,                      February 8, 1948

*Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin                      New York                      November 7, 1994*

### 3. THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS OF SHVENTZIONYS

The testimony of Fruma Hochmann, born December 30, 1925 in Shventzionys. Fruma completed seven grades of middle school there. Fruma lived in the town her whole life. Her father's name was Peretz, and her mother was Rivke, born Bilkovitz.

After reading over the testimony of Avrom Taytz about the slaughter of the Jews of Shventzionys, Fruma corroborates everything written there, except for a few imprecise points. Fruma does find it necessary to add a number of facts which are not mentioned in the other eyewitness report:

#### I. Imprecisions:

1. The number of Jews in Shventzionys was not 3,000, but exactly 2,500.
2. The alcohol factory where three hundred Christians burned to death was located at Buszewskis compound.
3. When the Jews were taken to the military compound about forty or fifty families were left behind, not thirty Jewish professional specialists, as reported in the testimony of Avrom Taytz.
4. The episode concerning Mrs Rokhl Abromovitz-Kovner is not reported accurately. Rokhl gave birth, not at the compound, but a few days before the Jews were taken from Shventzionys to the compound.
5. Fruma does not know about the group of Jews who were brought to the compound from Shventzionys on Yom Kippur, Wednesday. Another group of Jews were taken to the compound after all the Jews at the compound were shot. The second group consisted of Jews who had bribed their way out of the compound, along with a few who had never been at the compound and were staying in the city "illegally." For more details about this, see below

#### II. Facts Which Were Ignored

1. Three days after the Germans arrived in town, Fruma and a group of Jews were working at the garden of the Lietukis, which was located near the Greek Orthodox priest's pasture. The work was supervised by a Pole named Ginko. A group of Hitler youth seized about fifty elderly Jews in their houses and brought them to the Kuna stream to wash a car. After the job was done the Jews were herded into the river and forced to sit down and get back up repeatedly. One of the bandits stood on a footbridge and struck the Jews in their faces with a whip. They forced one of the Jews to fetch water in a bucket and pour it over all the Jews in the stream. Then the bandits came to the garden and poured water on the men and women there, mocking the Jews as they did so.
2. One time as they were returning from work Fruma saw six Germans sitting in a cart, forcing Jews to pull them around the streets. While this was going on they made two of the Jews go away, to make it harder for the rest.
3. One month after the arrival of the Germans, Fruma and a group of Jews were working in a weapons warehouse. On one occasion the Jews noticed partisans leading the popular Jewish Dr Binyomin Kovarsky through the streets. The doctor was unshaven, pale, terrified, dressed in a light summer jacket and filthy. Fruma and a few other Jews followed to see that was going to happen to the doctor. All of the townspeople joyfully went along and laughed as he was taken out of town. When he was brought close to a body of water he was forced to duck under water several times. He was pierced with needles and forced to dance on glass barefoot. Dr Kovarsky tried to jump into the water and drown himself. They didn't let him have such an easy death. Instead they continued torturing him in various ways, and then they shot him. Dr Kovarsky was a Communist. He had given a propaganda speech on May Day at the podium which had been set up in the market place. Fruma's father Peretz and her brother Shloyme came back from work in the evening and wept, but they absolutely refused to describe what they had seen when Dr Kovarsky was tortured.
4. When the Jews were taken to the compound on the Saturday between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, Mrs Hodl Gurvitz (her husband's name was Moyshe) hung herself. Hodl understood what the German and Lithuanian murderers were preparing to do to the Jews at the compound, and decided she would rather die in her own home.

## At the Compound near Shventzionel'iai

On Friday, September 26 the Jews in Shventzionys knew very well that all the Jews were being taken to the compound. There had been a decision to leave behind the specialists, the so-called "useful" Jews. The commandant in town and the leader of the partisans determined who the "useful" Jews were, and wrote their first and last names and the names of their families down on a list.

There were only two furriers in Shventzionys; Fruma's father Peretz and his partner Khatzkl Shnayderovitz, who were employed in a workshop. Peretz and his partner were certain that they were on the list of the "useful" Jews. But the list actually didn't consist of Jews with useful professions, but rather of Jews who were able to bribe their way onto the list of "useful" Jews with money, gold or valuables.

On the morning of the Sabbath between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur the Jews were told that everyone had to pack up everything they considered necessary and make their way to the priest's pasture along with their families and their possessions. Partisans went to every house and announced who was permitted to stay according to the list of the "useful" Jews.

Peretz and his partner were not on the list. Neither their pleas nor their arguments that they were the only furriers in town did any good. The entire town was guarded by armed partisans. They went through the streets in groups, seeing to it that no-one escaped. Some of them went into the houses and drove the Jews out. Civilian peasants noticed the Jews' misfortune and went to suggest that they hand over their goods for safekeeping "until after the war." There were heartbreaking scenes when the Jews were driven out of their houses. Women parted with their husbands and children. Mothers with babies in their arms ran back and forth, not knowing what to do. The weeping and shouting echoed throughout the town, along with the murderous commands of the Lithuanians.

Almost all the Jews of Shventzionys had assembled at the priest's pasture, except for a small number who had escaped from town. The confusion there was terrible. The entire human mass was desperate. Everyone clung to his own family, his close friends and neighbors. There could be heard the cries of mothers and children who had gotten separated in the confusion. There were the moans of the sick and the old, and the screams of little children with their mothers. The helpless mass was guarded by partisans who demanded that they keep calm, and beat anyone they chose to.

Fruma, her parents and her two brothers were part of that human mass. The partisans separated all of the men from the women and children and lined them up in columns. They placed the women and the older children behind them, and finally came the old, the sick, the weak and women with small children, riding in wagons.

Mrs Rokhl Abramovitz-Kovner had given birth several days earlier. She was thrown into a wagon near her house, wrapped in the bloody sheet, together with her newborn child. Fruma's cousin Rokhl Bilkovitz helped place the mother into the wagon. The commandant of the partisans spotted a gold ring on Fruma's cousin's hand and immediately took it.

The men were led away half a kilometer in front. The women followed, and finally came the wagons. On the way the partisans constantly bullied and shouted at the Jews. They beat many of the women.

They approached the compound in the middle of the night. The night was very dark. In the distance the sky over the compound was red. As they got closer, the Jews saw a huge bonfire. Everyone's heart pounded. Near the bonfire constant shooting could be heard. The Jews thought that Jews were being thrown into the fire alive, or that they were being shot.

The dark night prevented the heavens from being able to see the women wringing their hands, their eyes filled with tears and their faces twisted in grimaces of pain. Moans tore out from the most profound depths of the Jews' hearts. Fruma was separated from her loved ones. Her father and her two brothers Shloymele and Avreyemele were in front. Her mother rode behind.

In that moment, when Fruma was terrified that she would be burned, she comforted herself with the thought that she was alone, so at least she wouldn't have to witness her mother, father, brothers and other relatives being burned as well.

When she entered the compound Fruma saw a huge, burning bonfire, near which stood partisans carrying rifles. When she saw the group of women being brought, they were happy and they lined up next to a barrack, into which the women were brought. When the women reached the barrack, the partisans beat everyone badly. With their last ounce of strength the women ran into the barrack as fast as possible, in order to avoid the blows.

The barrack was made of boards. It wasn't finished. It lacked a door and windows. More than a thousand Jews were herded into the barrack. It was impossible to sit down and rest after the march. It wasn't even possible to stand up, because it was so crowded.

Only Jews from Shventzionys were brought into that barrack. Jews from all of the towns surrounding Shventzionys were already in the other barracks. Some of the men tried to stand near the door, in hopes that as the women arrived they would be able to meet their mothers and wives. But the partisans beat the Jews and forced them to move further and further into the barrack. They repeatedly beat those who were standing close to the door.

The children impatiently waited for their mothers to come in the wagons. One hour later the wagons appeared. Fruma met her mother, and both of them went to look for her father and brothers.

Screams could be heard everywhere in the barrack. Children were screaming, "Mama! Papa!" In the darkness replies could be heard: "Where are you?" "Here I am!" With great difficulty Fruma managed to find her father and brothers in the same barrack.

In several places in the barrack women lit candles and began to arrange places for their children as best they could. People pushed each other. The curses of women who had lost control of themselves in their despair could be heard. Children wept without stop. Partisans patrolled the barracks. Like wild animals they beat the Jews who stood near the door. They beat the innocent Jews near the door as punishment for the weeping of the innocent children in the barrack and for the screaming of the nervous women.

Outside next to the barrack the bonfire kept burning and crackling. The partisans stood around joking and laughing. They looked like wild cannibals roasting their victims in the fire.

The Jews survived the first tragic night in the compound, leaning on each other, on their packs and against the walls.

On the morning of Sunday, September 28 the partisans ordered the men to say goodbye to the women and children and get ready to leave the barrack. People began to weep and scream as they parted from each other. The men were taken away. At night there was constant shooting. The women in the barrack thought that their husbands were being shot.

On Monday morning they learned that the men were in a barrack across from their own.

From evening until 6:00 a.m. the Jews were forbidden to leave the barrack even to fulfill their bodily functions. They didn't receive any water or food. Screams could be heard, and the voices of people begging for a drink and a bit of bread. On Sunday night the partisans distributed bottles of "water" and pieces of bread. Weeping and screaming could be heard in the barrack. The partisans had deceived the Jews; instead of water they had given the women urine to drink. Needles were hidden in the bread.

On Monday, September 29 several women bribed the partisans to let them fetch some water from the nearby Zhemane River and heat it up in the fire. Although the stream wasn't far from the compound, the partisans didn't let anyone go to fetch water. Water slowly dripped from a faucet in the compound.

The women stood in line for hours, pushing and arguing with each other. The partisans exploited the opportunity to beat everyone and drive them away.

1. One woman named Sokhar lost all hope of getting a bit of water from the faucet. She took a tea kettle and went to ask the partisans for permission to get some water for her child from the stream. One partisan shot her in the compound as punishment for her "nervy" request. She left behind her oldest daughter Sore-Leye, aged 15, and three smaller children, who bitterly wept day and night for their mother.

2. A pregnant woman named Rokhl Abramovitz-Kovner lay on a board sick and pale. Fruma spoke to her. Rokhl constantly complained that she was feeling very weak, and that she was about to die. She asked for a bit of warm water. With great difficulty Fruma managed to obtain it for her. Rokhl died on Tuesday, October 7, one day before the Jews at the compound were annihilated.

3. One woman named Merele Yekhiltshik gave birth to a child near the door of the barrack. Her screams could be heard throughout the entire area. The partisans beat all the women near the door in retaliation. Merele gave birth to a child. She was shot along with her newborn child and all the other Jews at the compound. Her husband's name was Leyzer.

The Jews were forbidden to stay in the barracks during the day. All day the Jews were taken to do various jobs. They carried boards from one place to another and dug pits in the forest. The women had to clean the compound, sweep up and do various jobs.

4. For several nights in a row the partisans shined flashlights at the women in the barrack through the windows, removed young, attractive girls and took them away. Some time later shots were heard in the nearby forests. The degenerates raped the girls they had chosen, then shot them and threw them into the pits the men had dug. Several of the mothers of the young girls who had been shot lost their minds. The partisans took them out of the barrack and shot them in the yard.

The bits of food the Jews had brought along with them were used up. Terrible hunger began to reign in the compound. Partisans took advantage of the opportunity to bargain with the unfortunate, starving Jews. They would charge 100 rubles, a great deal of money at the time, for a small loaf of bread.

A small number of young people were taken to Shventzioneliai to dig potatoes. Everyone competed to be chosen for the job. The Jews hoped they would be able to bring a few potatoes back for their relatives. It was quite cold at night by then. This was the terribly cold autumn of 1941. The Jews clung to each other for warmth as they slept. It was mortally dangerous to leave the barrack and warm oneself near the bonfires which were kept burning all the time. Mothers kept their children close to warm them with their bodies. There was no question of really getting enough sleep. Outside by the fire the partisans would sing, scream and laugh, or come in the middle of the night to wake up and remove women they wanted to rape and then shoot.

In order to ease the situation of the Jews trapped in this valley of tears, a committee was set up. A Jew named Shmuel Marashkin was its chairman. They obtained permission for the Jews to have a bit of food brought from town. The representatives of the "useful" Jews in Shventzionys tried to get permission to send food as well. Some food actually was brought from town.

A space was set off in a corner of the barrack occupied by the Shventzionys Jews, to be used as an office. The partisan leaders used to go there for meetings. They didn't live at the compound, however. They came to check everything over and then rode away.

The chiefs of the police and partisans, and therefore those who really had control over the lives of the Jews, were two Lithuanians. A man from Mazheikiai named Antanas Kenstavitzius was the chief. His assistant's name was Skarbutenis.

On more than once occasion they rode in with their wives, all well-dressed, well-fed and satisfied. The men took their wives to see the Jews living in the barracks. They would stand and laugh with their mouths wide open as they looked into the barracks. After the visit they would climb back into their carriages and ride off as their laughter resounded. Throughout the whole time there was not a single German at the compound. They were confident that their friends the Lithuanians would arrange everything just right.

On one occasion the two murderers announced to the Jewish committee that the Jews had to raise a specified sum of money as a "contribution." If the order wasn't carried out precisely, they threatened to shoot all the Jews. With difficulty the specified sum was raised from all the Jews, and the committee handed it over to the murderer Skarbutenis and his comrades.

### **Yom Kippur at the Shventzioneliai compound**

Fruma doesn't recall how the Jews observed the Kol Nidrei service on the night of Yom Kippur. She does remember the day of Yom Kippur, however. Early in the morning elderly Jews who weren't considered "able-bodied" gathered from all the barracks. They put on their prayer shawls and the white smocks worn on Yom Kippur, and they prayed. Jews with beards "girded their loins" and carried out the thousand year old strategy that day. It was the only way left by which they could try to rescue themselves from the murderers' hands. They all concentrated on the prayers with the utmost seriousness, with all of the passion in their suffering hearts. They all tried to make the most of their last chance to act in this world.

The Jews didn't plead with God to be "sealed for a good year" this time. They didn't stand before God this year like sinners asking for forgiveness, but rather as accusers with demands to make of God. From their hearts burst forth a pained shout against the murderers, a protest against God, who had so awfully forgotten and abandoned the "chosen people" at the most dangerous moment in their history.

Hundreds of eyes stared heavenward, pleading and protesting at the same time. Tears flowed from everyone's eyes. People wrung their hands. Everyone and everything in the barrack raged, and the Jews experienced something terrible.

The slaughterer Moyshe-Mendl Berlin led the services, and his task was a difficult one this time. His trembling voice had a different sound this Yom Kippur. It wasn't the usual Yom Kippur melody that burst forth from his wounded heart. The slaughterer from Shventzionys had the task that year of changing God's mind, something that had not been accomplished in generations. But he sensed that he had to convince God, because an entire congregation was just a few steps away from death. And he, an innocent condemned to death along with all the other Jews, prayed with more passion and more tears than he ever had before in his life.

Meanwhile the younger men had to work in the yard, carrying boards to no purpose, back and forth. The bonfires kept cracking. Thick columns of smoke circled one after the other heavenward toward the same heaven the Jews in the barrack were staring at. Meanwhile the partisans stood happily around the fire joking and laughing at the Jews and their prayers. Some of them stood near the windows of the barracks, watching the Jews praying and pleading.

The women also prayed. In various melodies they wept and told God about their troubles, mourned for their raped and murdered daughters and their innocent, murdered fathers, husbands and sons.

Almost everyone fasted that Yom Kippur. Fruma asked her sick mother not to fast, but her mother wouldn't listen to her.

Men came to help their wives pray and plead with God. The partisans did what they wanted to. They would interfere and laugh. The Jews fasted and prayed all day, protesting and complaining, it was the last Yom Kippur of their lives.

On Monday, the second day after the Jews were brought to the compound, the wealthier Jews began to negotiate with the partisan leader to mark them down as "useful" Jews and liberate them from the compound. The murderers obtained gold, diamonds and other valuables from the Jews. They would summon the Jews into the office. There they accepted the bribes. When a group of such Jews had been assembled, partisans would take them back to Shventzionys.

Peretz did everything he could to get himself released from the compound. More than once he spoke to the commandant, reminding him that he and his partner were the only furriers in Shventzionys. He also promised to hand over everything he possessed. However, Peretz and his partner had very few valuables. Some of the Jews offered the commandant a good deal more.

With the help of friends, Peretz sent his younger son Avreymele back to Shventzionys. Fruma could have gone as well, but she didn't want to leave her mother. Peretz's partner also managed to send his children back in this fashion.

Fruma's uncle Moyshe Bilkovitz in Shventzionys managed to arrange to have his relatives released from the compound and sent back to Shventzionys as "useful" Jews. Partisans removed from the compound Peretz, his wife, and other children, along with Peretz's partner, his wife and two other girls from Shventzionys.

When they returned to the city they found their houses boarded up. Inside, however, everything had been robbed. Only the walls and the cheaper furniture was left behind. Fruma, along with her family and the rest, returned from the compound on October 5, the day before Sukkot.

Peretz and his partner Khatzkl Shnayderovitz immediately went to work at their workshop. At that time the chairman of the newly-created Jewish Council was the Jew Shukhman.

## **Back to the Compound**

On Wednesday, October 8 Shukhman announced to the Jews that the Germans had ordered every family to send one person to the synagogue yard. Khatzkl was very afraid of going because he was considered to have come from the compound "illegally." Peretz was certain that his name had been included on the list of the "useful" Jews, and he reported to the synagogue yard.

Germans had come with the old list, and they separated out the "legal useful" Jews. The "illegal useful" Jews were taken to the police station, and then returned to the synagogue yard. Everyone had to go home and show his family

to a Lithuanian policeman. But none of the Jews knew that preparations were being made to bring them back to the compound. Fruma's brother Shloyme ran to the police station to find out about his father, and he did not return. Fruma ran out of the house to look for him. On the way she was detained by partisans several times because her yellow patches were not in order. By fortunate coincidence, she managed to get away each time.

When she reached the police station she found her brother under arrest, along with two other Jews. She waited for a chance to speak to him. Shloyme signalled to her that she should escape and hide as quickly as possible. When Fruma ran to her house she saw a number of strangers in the house, and policemen surrounding it. Fruma ran to her aunt's house, where she found her younger brother Avreymele. The two young people watched their parents being driven out of their house back to the compound. Avreymele ran out to join them, but turned around and went back to his aunt.

About one hundred "illegal useful" Jews were seized that day and taken to the police station, where they were kept overnight.

On Thursday morning, October 9, 1941, the one hundred Jews were taken to the compound. That same day everyone was shot at the same spot where all the Jews at the compound had been shot a day earlier.

On Thursday morning Fruma went to see the director of the workshop to ask him to help save her family. But the director stated that there was nothing he would do. Peretz's partner Khatzkl was afraid to get involved altogether.

Lithuanian civilians in town said that day that all of the Jews who had been taken away had already been shot. A partisan who had guard duty at the compound told Fruma the same thing. He told Fruma that it was "already too late."

### **In The Shventzionys Ghetto**

After the Jews were taken to the compound the rest of the "useful" Jews began to settle into the newly established ghetto in the synagogue yard and in the surrounding houses. The Jews felt thoroughly free for some time longer. Townspeople and peasants from the countryside brought food and traded it to the Jews for items the Jews still had hidden or inherited from their relatives who had been killed at the compound.

Then there was an order for the ghetto to be surrounded by barbed wire, in order to prevent the Jews from having any opportunity to come into contact with the Aryan world. Near the fence on the inside of the ghetto Jewish police stood guard, preventing anyone from going up to the fence. Later on Lithuanian town police were also assigned to stand guard outside the fence.

Life in the ghetto gradually began settling into a routine. The Jewish police, under the command of Khayem-Hersh Levin, kept order in the ghetto.

At that time the chairman of the Jewish Council was the Jew Shukhman. The Jewish Council's main task consisted of providing a certain number of workers at the specified place and time. After receiving a requisition for a certain number of workers, the Jewish Council would send the police out with announcements telling the residents of the ghetto to report to work at the specified place. At that time there weren't any permanent worksites at the ghetto or in town.

Fruma and her younger brother Avreymele moved into their aunt's house. Khatzkl Shnayderovitz registered both of them as part of his family. Fruma was working on cleaning projects in town at that time. Throughout the winter of 1941-1942 Fruma worked clearing snow from the streets of the town. In the summer she worked cleaning the bridge, and at other tasks. In the fall of 1942 Fruma and a group of men and women began doing agricultural work at the Shvinta compound. They had to work from early in the morning until late at night. They all slept on the naked earth. The peasants living nearby behaved badly toward the group of Jews, mocking their appearance and their work. Red partisans appeared in the region at that time. The peasants were afraid that the partisans would communicate with the Jews, and the Jews were dismissed from their jobs. Fruma and her girlfriend Rivke Gilinsky went to work for the new police chief in Shventzionys, Antanas Kenstavitzius. The new chief had earlier been the leader of the police at the Shventzioneliai compound. He had been responsible for guarding the Jews, and then for slaughtering them.

In comparison to the work that other Jews were doing, the girls' jobs were not difficult. Both of them did domestic work. They both received special documents stating that they could not be forced to do any other jobs. Fruma reminded Kenstavitzius several times that she had seen him and his wife at the compound, and she mourned for her parents and her brother. The police chief didn't want to talk about that. Fruma worked for him until the ghetto

was liquidated.

Fruma remembers the following incidents which took place in Shventzionys at that time:

1. Two boys named Gershon Bak and Ruven Myadzolsky tried out a gun in a brick building outside the ghetto. The gun went off and Gershon was wounded. Ruven was immediately arrested and taken to prison. Gershon was taken to the hospital.

At the same time a girl named Sore Levin was arrested and taken to prison at a different location. Fruma does not know why she was arrested.

One day the two young men were taken out of the prison and the hospital along with the girl, and shot at the Jewish cemetery in Shventzionys. This took place early in 1943.

2. Shloyme-Yitzkhok Shaytl and Yakov Gurvitz worked for the German commandant Beck and his assistant Grul. Yakov worked there as a heating-system specialist, and Shloyme-Yitzkhok was a chauffeur. The two commandants and a first lieutenant rode to the town of Lentupis in the car. Their translator Rakowska rode along with them. Red partisans apparently stopped the car and murdered the three Germans. They didn't do anything to Miss Rakowska, and she returned to Shventzionys. The attack was carried out near the village of Kaznadelischki, six kilometers from town.

Immediately after this incident Germans came from Vilnius and arrested Miss Rakowska, a Polish woman, along with the two young men Shloyme-Yitzkhok and Yakov. They also arrested some of the Polish intelligentsia. They shot all of the Polish arrestees along with the two Jews at the Jewish cemetery. The incident threw the Jews in the ghetto into a dreadful panic. Everyone thought that it would end with the slaughter of the few Jews remaining in Shventzionys.

There was no cultural life in the ghetto. The children didn't study. There were never any political, scholarly or cultural discussions. Everyone was concerned with their own personal problems, trying to survive the grim everyday reality. Gradually there began to be steady jobs, where the able-bodied Jews were employed doing various tasks in town or in the ghetto.

In the fall of 1942 Jews from the Vidz ghetto and Jews from the town of Dubina were brought to the Shventzionys ghetto.

Jews from Lithuania and from slaughtered Jewish communities in White Russia had gathered at Vidz. At that time Vidz was assigned to Lithuania, although earlier it had belonged to White Russia. Many Jews escaped from Vidz in fear of the Lithuanians. Dozens of them died while escaping. Those who remained in the ghetto were brought to the Shventzionys ghetto.

The newly arrived Jews were placed within the already-existing Shventzionys ghetto. No more houses were added to the ghetto. The Jews who had been brought in were placed in the synagogues. Exhausted from their lives in the Vidz ghetto, they had to do the best they could in the synagogues. A large number of Jews had been brought in, and the Shventzionys Jews could offer them little material help.

### **The Work Camps at the Shventzionys Ghetto**

In addition to the camps in Padbarde and later in Dukhstas, there was also a Shventzioneliai work camp attached to the Shventzionys ghetto. A large number of able-bodied men and women who had come from the White Russian towns and from Vidz were transferred to this work camp. The living conditions at the labor camp were difficult. The working conditions were worse. Their situation was eased by the fact that every Sunday they were allowed to visit the Shventzionys ghetto, visit their families, wash up and get their things in order.

The Jewish camp director Yudi Shapiro, who had been sent there from the Vilnius ghetto, caused the Jews in the camp a good deal of unnecessary suffering and difficulty. The Jews kept working at that camp until a few days before the liquidation of the Shventzionys ghetto.

### **The Liquidation of the Shventzionys Ghetto**

Some time before the ghetto was liquidated the Germans announced through the Jewish Council that all of the

Jews could move to join their relatives at the labor camps in the Vilnius ghetto. Some of the Jews left the ghetto at that time and actually did join their relatives in the labor camps and in the Vilnius ghetto.

At that time the chairman of the Jewish council was Moyshe Gordon. At the Germans' command he announced to the Jews that the ghetto was going to be liquidated, and all of the Jews had to go to the Vilnius and Kaunas ghettos. But only those with certain privileges were permitted to sign up to go to the Vilnius ghetto.

All the rest had to register to go to the Kaunas ghetto. Jewish police from the Vilnius ghetto under their chief, Dreisen, came to help carry out the Germans' command. A few weeks later Gens, the commandant of the Vilnius ghetto, came as well. He gathered all the Jews in the synagogue and gave a speech explaining the situation. He assured the hopeless Jews that they were not going to be annihilated. He assured them that everyone was being taken to the Kaunas ghetto, where they would be able to live better than they did in Shvencionys.

He spoke ironically about the young people who were just then getting ready to escape to join the partisans, promising them that "It's too early to go visiting, and if you want to, you can do that once you get to Kaunas." According to his explanation, the Jewish Council had to stay and work until the end.

They hadn't been able to go to Vilnius earlier, when everyone else was allowed to. Gens told everyone that the Jews in the Kaunas ghetto had made the necessary preparations to receive the Shvencionys Jews, and that he would personally accompany the transport to Kaunas.

Some of the young people didn't believe Gens' promises, and escaped to join the partisans. Another group didn't manage to escape from the ghetto. There was a terrible panic in the ghetto. All of the Jews tried to ride to Vilnius with the Jewish council. But not everyone had the good fortune to go along to Vilnius. All of the authority in town lay in the hands of Moyshe Gordon and the police from Vilnius, under their chief. The Jewish Council distributed special passes to those who were to be taken to the Vilnius ghetto. All the rest had to go to Kaunas. Fruma and her brother were included among those sent to the Vilnius ghetto, thanks to the efforts of their uncle.

On the morning of April 4, 1943 everybody finished packing. Every family was given a wagon, into which they packed their bags.

The Jews rode from town to the railroad station without anyone guarding them. They got the impression that they really weren't in any danger. They stayed at the station with their things for half a day, waiting for railroad cars. When they got into the railroad cars they were shown which cars were designated for those who had special passes showing that they were going to Vilnius.

All the Jews rode to Vilnius in freight cars. Those who were assigned to get off in Vilnius were in the last two cars, together with the Shvencionys Jewish Council and the Jewish police from Vilnius. At the station everyone waited for a while, because they didn't receive an order to get out in Vilnius. The train was already beginning to move.. Suddenly Gens came running and managed to have the train stopped, and the last two cars detached.

Everyone else was taken further. The transport stopped at Ponari. That same day all the Jews in the transport were shot at Ponari. The Jews in the two cars which had been detached were brought to the Vilnius ghetto.

Those with relatives in the ghetto went to their relatives. The rest were taken to a camp in the ghetto. After she had been there for a short time, Fruma, her brother and her aunt's family went to join their aunt's sister, where they were given a corner to sleep in.

Fruma immediately went to work at a warehouse belonging to the Lietukis, shoveling grain. The brigade was fed lunch at the worksite. During that period some people began preparing places to hide. Fruma's brother did that work, and he earned a fair amount of money. Then he went to work as a central heating specialist at the ghetto bath house.

Fruma and her brother survived more than one roundup in the ghetto. When Jews were sent to Estonia, Fruma spent four days and nights hiding in a closet in the corridor of the ghetto police. Of course, the police didn't know about this.

One day before the liquidation of the Vilnius ghetto Avreymele was seized as part of a group of Jews who were taken to Estonia.

Fruma hid until the end. She was taken [af Bose?] together with the last Jews working at the ghetto police station. There Germans separated those who weren't able-bodied off to the left, and the younger, more able-bodied to the right. The younger people were taken to Kaiserwald near Riga. All of the women had their heads shaved.

Fruma and a group of women then worked at a weaving factory and lived at the Strasdenhof concentration camp. Fruma and a group of women worked at that factory for nine months. When the Red army approached, the camp's residents were evacuated to Stutthof near Danzig. From there Fruma and a group of five other women went to work for a German peasant in the countryside for three months. When she returned to Stutthof a group of women, including Fruma, were taken to dig trenches near Elbing. Under terrible conditions in bitter cold, naked and barefoot, the women dug trenches for three months, and then returned to Stutthof, where the only people left were invalids. The Red army was quickly approaching, and all the women quickly began to be evacuated.

For one month, in cold weather, tormented, hungry and infested with lice, a group of 1,200 women were constantly marched onward. On the way they were given almost nothing to eat. It was winter, and they slept in barns. Those who stopped on the way were immediately shot. The hungry women ate everything they came across on the way rotten potatoes, frozen beets and the like. After suffering on the road for a month, the women were herded into a large barn in a forest, far from a village. There as well they received almost nothing to eat. The filth, lice, cold and hunger caused an outbreak of typhus. Every day thirty or forty women died. They stayed there for six weeks. Out of the original 1,200, only a couple of hundred women survived. On March 10, 1945 the survivors were liberated by the Red army.

Fruma's brother Avreymele died in Estonia, in Kloga.

### **Attestation of Fruma Hochmann**

All of the facts, dates, names of persons and geographical locations concerning the slaughter of the Jews of Shventzionys were personally reported by me, and I attest thereto with my signature on each and every page.

Eyewitness            Fruma Hochmann            (Signature)

The testimony was recorded by Engineer L Koniuchowsky  
Leipheim am Donau            February 26, 1948

The signature of Fruma Hochmann, resident of the Leipheim camp, is certified by the chairman of the camp committee. Wachshendler    Camp Chairman Leipheim            February 26, 1948

*Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin    New York    November 10, 1994*

## THE SHVENTZIONYS GHETTO

The collective testimonies of:

1. Shimen Bushkanetz, born in Shventzionys on November 21, 1908. Education: six grades of Jewish gymnasium in Shventzionys. Trade: a chauffeur and merchant. Father's name: Shmuel; mother: Leye-Sore, born Markin. Until the war between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union broke out on June 22, 1941, and later on when the Jews were slaughtered, Shimen was in Shventzionys.

2. Khaye Ginzberg, born Bushkanetz in Shventzionys. Khaye was Shimen's sister. She was born in Shventzionys on June 10, 1918. Until the war broke out on June 22, 1941, and later when the Jews were slaughtered, she was in Shventzionys.

### **Shimen and his sister Khaye relate the following facts and episodes about the Shventzionys ghetto:**

I. A short time after the arrival of the Germans in Shventzionys, the rabbi at the time, Rabbi Ushpol, was summoned to the Lithuanian partisan headquarters and authorized to requisition Jewish workers each morning. The rabbi asked the Jewish merchant Moyshe Gordon, who knew Lithuanian, to help him carry out the Lithuanians' order. Gordon gradually became the intermediary between the Jewish townspeople and the Lithuanian and German bosses in town. Gordon was in charge of bribing or giving "presents" to the Germans and Lithuanians. Mrs Liube Gurvitz, whose married name was Gershunovitz (her husband was Mishe Gershunovitz), helped him to assemble the "presents."

On Thursday, September 25, 1941 Gordon sent his parents, his wife and four children to the White Russian town of Svir. His parents were captured and taken to Shventzionys. By Friday Moyshe Gordon was gone from Shventzionys. He, too, escaped to Svir. At that time all of the Jews of Shventzionys knew that the Jews in the nearby surrounding towns had been slaughtered. The eyewitnesses attest that Moyshe Gordon knew that the Jews in the town were in deadly danger. He told his closest friends about this. Most of the Jews in town did not know what Gordon was thinking about the situation of the Jews, and went to the military compound at Shventzioneliai, where they were slaughtered on October 8, 1941.

II. In the autumn of 1942 two young men named Ruven Myadzolsky and Gershon Bak tried out a pistol in an old brick building near the ghetto. Ruven shot Gershon in the mouth. A few Jews in the ghetto faintly heard a shot. But no-one knew what the shot meant. Gershon was brought to his parents' house. Two doctors in the ghetto were summoned. The two doctors were Dr Binyomin Tarasevsky and a young Jewish doctor from Vilnius, the oculist Dr Shabad. Gordon and Shimen Bushkanetz were present at the bedside. Shimen was living together with the Bak family in a single room at that time.

After the examination it was determined that the bullet had entered the throat through the mouth, and that the wounded youth's life was not in danger. The doctors were urged to remove the bullet and keep silent about the incident. Dr Tarasevsky refused to operate. Shimen Bushkanetz personally heard Dr Tarasevsky proposing that the incident be reported to the head of the criminal police, the Lithuanian Matzulevitzius. Bushkanetz proposed instead that the matter be kept quiet, because there was no-one to be afraid of and no-one in the ghetto knew what had happened.

Tarasevsky responded: "I'm afraid of you!" That meant that Tarasevsky was afraid that any Jew might happen to report the incident to the Lithuanians or Germans. Shimen adds that Dr Tarasevsky had a good reason for being afraid that he might be reported by Jews. First and foremost, however, he was afraid of his sister Rokhl Kopelovitz, who was even more "friendly" with the German commandant Metz and with the Lithuanian Matzulevitzius. The Jews of Shventzionys were afraid of Rokhl Kopelovitz, and they were careful around her. She played a destructive, treacherous role in the ghetto. Rokhl's husband Kopelovitz, a doctor, suffered a great deal on account of his treacherous wife, who was flirting with the German commandant against her husband's will, and often in his presence.

The eyewitnesses do not know exactly how the incident was dealt with by the committee. They do know however that Dr Tarasevsky and Moyshe Gordon, both members of the committee, brought along the father of the wounded Yitzkhok Bak and went to report the incident to the Lithuanian Matzulevitzius, who was the head of the criminal police in Shventzionys at the time. Shimen and his sister do not know what was decided at the time. They do not know about the conversations with the Lithuanian Matzulevitzius, nor about the negotiations.

At that time a Jewish girl named Sorele Levin, aged seventeen or eighteen, was living in the ghetto. She was from Shventzionys, and after her parents, brothers and sisters had been shot at the military compound, she was left

alone in the ghetto. When the Jews were taken to the compound to be slaughtered, a young Polish gymnasium student from Shventzionys had rescued her from town and hidden her with friends in the countryside. She often came to the ghetto and returned to be with her Polish boyfriend. She never went to work. She didn't obey the orders or directives of the Jewish Council.

A few days before the incident involving the pistol in the old building, Sorele received a directive from the Jewish Council to report to them and go to work. She didn't go herself, but that day she sent her cousin, a young woman of the same age, in her place.

Dr Tarasevsky demanded that Sorele herself come to work, and he sent the cousin back home. Sorele didn't go to work that day. The Jewish Council told the Lithuanian police in Shventzionys about Sorele's stubborn refusal to go to work. That same day an armed Lithuanian partisan went to Sorele and took her into town.

Several hours later Sorele returned to the ghetto and went straight to the Jewish Council, where she encountered Dr Tarasevsky. She struck him in the face and cursed him. Khaye Ginzberg went to Sorele's home that same day. Sorele took off her clothes and told Khaye what had been done to her in town. She showed Khaye the bloody bruises all over her body. Sorele said that she had been arrested by the Lithuanian partisan for refusing to go to work. The partisan had tried to rape her, and when she resisted, she was beaten with sticks and whipped. She lay sick in bed for several days.

Dr Tarasevsky's sister made a big scene in the ghetto, threatening out loud to get even with the [postashke] Sorele for having had the nerve to slap her brother, Dr. Tarasevsky. Just then Rokhl was working as a supervisor for the Lithuanian Matzulevitzius, and as the eyewitnesses attest, Rokhl also flirted with the Lithuanian. She had a word with him. Rokhl did everything she could to take revenge on Sorele. The wounded Gershon Bak was taken to the hospital in Shventzionys. Ruven Maydzolsky was arrested by Matzulevitzius. Ruven was imprisoned.

After spending several days in bed, Sorele was arrested by Lithuanian police and taken to prison.

Sorele was kept under arrest for a few days. Early one morning Gershon Bak was taken in a cart from the hospital to the prison, and Ruven Myadzolsky and Sorele Levin were taken out of the prison. The three young Jews were taken to the Jewish cemetery and shot. Christians later stated that Sorele had escaped from the wagons several times, begging to be saved. The tragedy of these three young people took place before the attack of the Red partisans against the SS man Beck and his comrades. (See the testimony of Moyshe Gilinsky about Lentupis.) The eyewitnesses add that Dr Tarasevsky devoted himself body and soul to the Jewish community during the period of the terrible epidemic of spotted typhus in the ghetto, the winter of 1942-1943.

III. At the end of the winter of 1942-1943 there was a decision to liquidate the Shventzionys ghetto. A spokesman for Gens, the chairman of the Jewish Council in Vilnius, was sent to the Shventzionys ghetto. The representative from the Vilnius ghetto was the Jewish policeman Frid. The lists stating which of the Jews in the Shventzionys ghetto were to go to the Vilnius ghetto and which were to go to Kaunas, were drawn up by the Jewish Council in Shventzionys. The members of the Jewish Council at that time were: Moyshe Gordon, Dr Tarasevsky, Motl Gilinsky, Shure Katzenellenbogen, Khayem-Hirsh Levin and others. The master artisans who worked for the German and Lithuanian authorities were often invited to the Jewish Council to give their advice. Among these advisers were: Yankl Levin, Berl Kharmatz, Yankl Veksler and others. The ultimate authority in the ghetto was the Jewish policeman Frid, from the Vilnius ghetto, Gens's representative.

Khaye and her brother Shimen, along with their mother Sore-Leye were on the list to go to Vilnius. Apparently Yankl Levin, who was Shimen's brother-in-law, had arranged this with the Jewish council.

Several days before the transports left Shventzionys, Khaye and her brother learned that the entire Bushkanetz family had been removed from the list of those to go to Vilnius and reassigned to go to Kaunas. Once Khaye asked Dr Tarasevsky why they had been removed from the list, to go to Vilnius. Dr Tarasevsky answered, "As far as I'm concerned, you didn't earn the right to go to Vilnius!"

The Shventzionys Jews didn't know what fate awaited them on the way to Kaunas, but when they saw that all the members of the Jewish Council and their families and relatives were on the list to go to Vilnius, everyone understood that the situation in Vilnius would be better.

Early in the morning on April 4, 1943 Gens, Dessler, Dreyzen, Auerbach and others arrived from Vilnius. They came together with Gestapo personnel to help liquidate the Shventzionys ghetto. The ghetto was liquidated by noon. The Jews were carried away along with their few remaining possessions to the railroad station in Shventzioneliai, in carts that had been brought in from the countryside.

Shimen and Khaye left their packages in Shventzionelai and returned to the ghetto to take their mother and the few remaining items. Shimen and other Jews with packages were supposed to ride to Shventzionelai on the narrow-gauge railroad.

In the ghetto Khaye encountered the Jewish policeman from Vilnius, Auerbach, whom she had known before the war. Khaye stood in front of Auerbach and made him swear to tell her the truth about the fate of the Shventzionys Jews. Auerbach and Khaye went to the house where Khaye's mother waited. Auerbach nervously explained: "The Jews who are supposed to go to Kaunas will be shot at Ponari. Those who go to the Vilnius ghetto will remain alive for now!"

Khaye immediately placed her mother in hiding with a Pole from Shventzionys and ran to the station to tell her brother Shimen the awful news. The narrow-gauge railroad train was already starting to move slowly away. Khaye spotted her brother and in great agitation, waving both arms, she shouted to him that he had to get off.

Shimen and his sister returned to the ghetto. They and their mother managed to make their way out of Shventzionys to a nearby village. All three hid with peasants in the countryside for several months, until they managed to join Red partisans. All three hid with the Red partisans in the Naritsh forests, until they were liberated by the Red Army at the beginning of summer in 1944 (July 4).

The train carrying Shventzionys Jews toward Kaunas stopped at Ponari, and there the Jews were shot.

Solem Motzkin and a few others managed to escape from Ponari. A few of them entered the Vilnius ghetto and reported the tragic episode.

### **Testimonies of Shimen Bushkanetz and Khaye Ginzberg**

All of the facts related in this collective testimony were carefully and with the utmost responsibility related by us to Engineer Leyb Koniuchowsky, and we attest to everything with our signatures on each and every page.

Signatures:           1.       Shimen Bushkanetz               (Signature)  
                          2.       Khaye Ginzberg                       (Signature)

The eyewitness testimony was recorded by Engineer L Koniuchowsky  
Bensheim (Kiss.)                       October 9, 1948

The signature of the Bensheim camp residents Shimen Bushkanetz and Khaye Ginzberg-Bushkanetz is attested to by the chairman of the camp committee

Chairman Mikhal Bergman       (Signature)       Bensheim,                       October 10, 1948

*Translated from Yiddish by Jonathan Boyarin   New York       November 7, 1994*

## **1. THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS OF SHVENTZIONELIAI**

The testimony of Fayve Khayet, born in Shventzioneliai on May 5, 1915. He graduated from a Yiddish elementary school there. He is a shoemaker by trade. He lived in Shventzioneliai his entire life, until the slaughter of the Jews.

### **Geographical Setting of the Town**

Shventzioneliai is located twelve kilometers from Shventzionys. Near the edge of town flows the Zhemiane river. Shventzioneliai has a railroad station on the line from Vilnius to Dvinsk. There is a highway between Shventzionys and Shventzioneliai. Until Poland collapsed in the fall of 1939 Shventzioneliai was part of Poland. When Vilnius and the surrounding region was assigned to Lithuania that same year, Shventzioneliai was also assigned to Lithuania.

### **The Population and Their Occupations**

About 5,000 residents lived in town. Among them were roughly 1,500 Jews. The majority of the Christian residents were Poles, along with a smaller number of Lithuanians. The surrounding villages were populated entirely by Lithuanians.

The Jews in town were engaged primarily in trade. A smaller number were artisans, and there were a few farmers.

The town had the following larger Jewish enterprises:

1. A mill belonging to the Jew Yisroel Portnoy.
2. A mill and a sawmill belonging to Borukh Siro and his father.
3. A lemonade factory belonging to Khone Rutshteyn.
4. A woollen boot factory belonging to three partners, Moyshe Gurvitz, Moyshe Elpern and Khone Rutshteyn. About thirty people were employed at that factory.

The town had substantial dry goods and hardware stores belonging to Jews. The economic situation of the town was not good on average. A large number of the Jews got by on money sent by relatives from overseas. The community bank and free loan society played an important role in the economic life of the Jews.

### **The Cultural Life of the Jews**

The town had a Hebrew elementary school and a Yiddish elementary school, a library, an amateur drama group, an old study house, a new study house and a Hasidic prayer room.

The Folkists, Bundists and leftists among the Jews gathered around the Yiddish elementary school. The Zionist-nationalist movement, to which a smaller portion of the Jewish youth belonged, was centered around the Hebrew elementary school. The majority of the Jewish youth belonged to the leftist, Bundist or Folkist movements, or to the illegal Communist Party.

Shortly before the outbreak of war between Nazi Germany and Poland in 1939, the proportions changed. All of the leftist movements began to be persecuted, and especially the Jewish ones. Large sectors of the Jewish small town youth joined the Zionist movements at that point.

The attitude of the Christian population toward the Jewish towns people was not bad. The Jews got along especially well with the Lithuanian population in town and in the surrounding villages. This can be explained by the fact that until the collapse of Poland the Lithuanians in the Vilnius region were persecuted.

After the Red Army arrived in Lithuania in the summer of 1940 the economic situation improved for the majority of the Jews. The attitude of the local population toward the Jews was not bad. But their tolerance was forced. In private, neither the Lithuanians nor the Poles could stand the fact that the Jews now enjoyed equal rights, and even had the right to occupy positions in the government, something that had been impossible neither under the Lithuanians nor under the Poles.

## The War Breaks Out

The people of Shventzionel'iai did not anticipate the outbreak of war between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. The town fell into a panic. The Jews kept going to work all the same.

The next day, Monday, June 23, 1941, one day after the war broke out, German airplanes bombed the railroad station and ruined wagonloads of merchandise. The bridge on the narrow-gauge railroad one and a half kilometers from town was destroyed. A train headed for Shventzionel'iai from Vilnius was strafed. A Jew from Shventzionys named Sholem Ligumsky was killed in the bombing while travelling from Vilnius. That same day he was buried at the Jewish cemetery in Shventzionys.

The same day the families of the Soviet officials and officers hurriedly prepared to evacuate. At night they escaped from town together with the Soviet authorities, and along with them went some of the young Jews who had occupied significant positions in the Party and other organizations.

Before dawn on Tuesday, June 24 the rest of the civilian authorities and the Red militia escaped from town. They were joined by a minority of the Jewish youth.

Lithuanian Red Army units had been stationed in Shventzionel'iai before the war. These were units of Smetona's army, which had been incorporated into the Red army after the Soviets entered Lithuania in the summer of 1940. A small number of these soldiers were forced to evacuate. The majority, however, escaped with their weapons and began hiding in the surrounding villages. After the major Red Army units had retreated, the Lithuanian groups became very active, and they began shooting the last retreating Red Army units in the back. Along the roads they displayed their artillery, machine guns and automobiles full of food and ammunition. They all wore white ribbons on their sleeves, and they waited for the Nazi military units to arrive. It is interesting that all of the Lithuanian army units immediately dressed up in their Smetona's period uniforms and the Lithuanian national symbol.

They fortified their position at Shventzionel'iai and along all the roads. A number of Jews were killed by them. Some of the victims were buried at the Jewish cemetery. Most of these people were Jews from the Lithuanian interior who had tried to flee.

The Lithuanian army units were joined by hundreds of armed Lithuanians from town and from the surrounding villages. They called themselves partisans. They settled into town on June 24, the third day after the war broke out. The Red army units hadn't yet managed to retreat from that area.

In town the Lithuanians began to take control of the lives and possessions of the Jews. The vast majority of the Jews did not escape town to hide in the countryside.

That Tuesday the Lithuanian murderers arrested the Jewish doctor Shloyme Kopelovitz and took him to the yard of their headquarters in town. He was shot in the yard without a trial or verdict, and he was buried there as well. The doctor had been the director of the hospital during the year of Soviet rule.

That same Tuesday morning other Jews came to their workplaces. The partisans drove them away and arrested all of the Jewish employees; bookkeepers, salespeople, department directors and so forth. All of the arrestees were taken to the headquarters. Some of them were immediately robbed and released. The majority of the arrestees were thrown into the cellar of the headquarters, which was used as a prison.

For several nights in a row the partisans took groups of Jews out of the cellar and took them to the forest, in the direction of Padbrade near the Russian cemetery, and shot them there.

Among the Jews who were shot Fayve remembers the following:

1. Hirshl Levinshteyn, the former chief bookkeeper of all of the co-operatives under the Soviets;
2. Ruven Zilber, who had been a musician in the Jewish orchestra under the Soviets. He was aged about 38.
3. Moyshe Zak, a butcher in town.
4. Ben-Tsion Kopl, a fisherman aged 33. He had worked as a fisherman under the Soviets as well.
5. Yisroel Gurvitz, who had been the director of a food warehouse under the Soviets.
6. Yisroel's daughter Blume Gurvitz, who had been a saleswoman in a store under the Soviets, aged 29.
7. Gershon Gurvitz, a merchant.
8. A young man named Meyer Shef, a Communist.

Fayve Khayat doesn't remember anyone else. Refugees who had been arrested by Lithuanian partisans on the roads also died that night.

That same week partisans shot a Jewish girl named Malke Guterman in the village of Great Mizhani, eight kilometers from Shventzioneliai. Malke hid there. She was a member of the Communist Youth, and she was spotted. Her corpse lay in the open field for several days. Birds pecked at her body. Peasants told the synagogue secretary in Shventzioneliai about her. But all of the Jews were afraid to leave town. Peasants buried her at a spot in the same village. Malke's parents Dale and Bashe Guterman returned from the countryside to town after this incident. They later died at the compound.

The Volfson family fled from Shventzioneliai and hid in the village of Pakumshe, one kilometer from town, at the home of the peasant Rakowsky. After the Lithuanian army units entered town, it became difficult to hide in the country as well. The entire family rode back into town. They left their things in the peasant's barn. Their son Motl stayed behind. Rakowsky betrayed Motl to the partisans, who shot him. The peasant betrayed Motl so that he could inherit the goods in the barn. At that time Motl was 19 years old. He was a fisherman by trade.

All these murders of Jews were carried out by armed Lithuanians, including deserters from the Red Army and other armed peasants from the countryside who called themselves partisans. It is worth mentioning that the Germans had not yet arrived in that region. The Red Army units had already fled. The leader of the partisans at that time was an elderly former officer in Smetona's army by the last name of Kurpis, from the village of Buivid, four kilometers from Shventzioneliai and six kilometers from Kaltinenai.

After the Lithuanian military was incorporated into the Red Army, Kurpis had been an officer in the Red Army for some time, and eventually he was released from service.

When the Germans arrived in Shventzioneliai on the morning of Tuesday, July 1, 1941, the Christians in town greeted them in a joyful and festive mood. Music was played. The partisans greeted the Germans with flowers and Lithuanian nationalist flags. Partisans rode in trucks in front to show the Germans where to go, and behind them came motorized German army units. They all set off in the direction of the military compound. No military units remained behind in town. The partisans continued running the town.

They began forcing the Jews to do various jobs. Exactly two weeks later SS men, Germans with special uniforms, came to town. They took the rabbi to the synagogue. They tore up all of the Torah scrolls and stepped on them. They did the same thing to the holy books. They ordered the rabbi to leave his home and move into a room in the synagogue. They appointed him the chief of the Jews, and ordered him to provide the specified number of Jewish workers next to the study house each morning. The rabbi couldn't carry out these duties himself, and asked a few other men to help him out. Thus a Jewish council came into existence in the town.

### **The Jewish Council: Anti-Jewish Decrees**

The Jewish Council consisted of the following members: Berl Guterman, Yeshayohu Katz and Osher Butshunsky, all three merchants. The newly-established Jewish Council's main task consisted in promptly providing the necessary number of Jewish workers. They would also explain to the Jews in town about all of the orders and decrees. They tried to have anti-Jewish decrees revoked. The Jewish Council became the intermediary between the Germans and partisans on one hand, and the Jews in town on the other.

The Jewish council was very involved in bribing the leaders of the partisans and the German officers, and often collected "presents" for them. In this manner the Jewish Council hoped they would be able to ameliorate the rage of the murderous partisans and Germans. The Jewish council had little success, however. Almost all of the anti-Jewish decrees were carried out, and the "presents" did nothing to help. Jews were forbidden to communicate with Christians. They had to put on special insignia, which were changed several times. Finally the Jews had to put on two yellow stars, one on their chest and one on their back. Starting at a certain time in the evening until early the next morning Jews were not allowed to leave their houses. There were other decrees which lowered the standing of the Jews in the eyes of the surrounding population.

Every morning Jews had to go to work. Partisans went to Jewish houses looking to see who had stayed home from work. When they found someone at home they would beat him. The partisans profited from their visits to see if workers were at home. They would fill their pockets with everything they found worth taking. The Jews became paupers. During the first days before the Germans arrived, partisans carried off the Jews' possessions to their own homes in the countryside on wagons.

When the Jews worked they were guarded by partisans, who used to torment, beat and mock the Jews. The Jews worked on the roads, carrying water and chopping wood for the partisans and Germans, and cleaning out toilets. All of the tasks the Jews had to perform had the goal of morally degrading and besmirching them.

## The Slaughter of Fifty Jewish Men

On Tuesday, July 22, 1941 at 4:00p.m., partisans knocked on the doors of Jewish homes and began taking men out into the streets. The panic of the Jews cannot be conveyed in words. Before they drove the Jews out of their homes, the partisans ordered them to bring enough food for three days, as well as a towel and soap. They assured the frightened Jews that the men were being taken to work on a telephone line. Some of the men were driven out of their houses by the partisans, barefoot and wearing only underwear.

All of the men who had been seized were taken to the yard of the partisan headquarters. There they encountered German SS men, who summoned each man separately into the headquarters and ordered them to sign lists which had been prepared. Meanwhile they ordered everyone to tell them his trade, when he was born, and his first and last name.

After they signed, all of the men were taken to the cellar of the headquarters, which served then as the prison. There were a total of 48 to 50 men in the cellar. Among the men in the cellar was Yankl-Velvl Shvartz, the former head book keeper of the Jewish community bank before the war. Yankl-Velvl declared in desperation that the papers the men had signed had nothing to do with being taken to work, and that he thought all of the arrestees were going to be shot. His speech made a terrible impression on the rest of the men. All of them slumped in hopelessness, waiting impatiently for any news about their future.

Near the window the popular Jewish miller, Yisroel Portnoy, leaned against the wall hopelessly. He said that he had hidden goods with his neighbor Alexksandras Matzukos, and that the neighbor had sent the partisans to arrest him so that he could inherit Yisroel's goods.

The Jews were kept in the cellar for a few hours. The door opened, and partisans gathered a group of fifteen or sixteen men, whom they took out into the yard, where a truck already stood waiting. All of the men who had been taken out were ordered to get into the truck, and they were taken away. However, no-one in the cellar knew for sure where the men had been taken. A half hour later the same truck and the same driver returned. Another group of sixteen men were taken out and driven away in the truck.

Yisroel Portnoy was among the second group. Exactly a half hour later the same truck returned once again. The partisans took the rest of the men out of the cellar. The eyewitness Fayvl Khayat was among the last group. All of the men had to sit very low in the truck, so that no-one would see them. The partisans sat on the running boards, carrying automatic rifles. When they drove past Fayvl's house, his mother spotted him and began to run after the truck weeping wildly. A partisan who was passing by struck her and pushed her back into the house.

The truck went to a spot about 150 meters from Mayak toward the military compound, and stopped at a road in a sparse forest. The partisans climbed down from the truck and ordered the Jews to get down and line up next to each other. On a nearby hill the Jews saw piles of earth that had been freshly dug. Near the excavated earth Fayvl clearly saw the dead body of Yisroel Portnoy. Next to him lay Yisroel's cap. Everyone clearly understood by now what they had been brought there for. With their hearts pounding and terrified eyes the Jews looked at the hill.

The third man in line was the Hasidic slaughterer in town. Fayve had taken his shoes off in the truck and left them behind. Barefoot, he was the last one to climb down from the truck, and he got into the line which was guarded by armed partisans on all sides.

Suddenly the Hasidic slaughterer shouted, "Shema Yisroel!" and began running. Partisans began to shoot and chase after him. There was a panic. Shloyme Volfson, who had one crippled arm, began running in another direction. The partisans opened fire at him as well. Both men were shot while running. Fayve took advantage of the panic to begin running in a third direction, toward a denser forest nearby. The partisans shot at him, but fortunately missed. Fayve kept running unusually fast through thick brush and deep mud puddles. His heart beat extraordinarily loudly. He didn't even allow himself to look back. Nor did he listen to his comrades being shot. Fayve was afraid to cross over the bridge, so he went through the stream in his clothes. Utterly exhausted, he ran into the yard of his home. He was afraid to go into the house because he was afraid strangers would be there. He hid in the garbage can and waited. His father came out into the yard. Fayve called to him and told him everything. When he went into his house, his mother fell on him weeping. Fayve told everyone in his household what had happened. Other people knew very little about the incident, however.

A difficult life began for Fayve. He constantly had to hide, because otherwise he would have placed his life in danger. The partisans would have rearrested him and shot him, so that there would be no living witness to what they had done to the men they had taken away.

Among the men who were shot that tragic Tuesday, July 22, 1941, Fayve remembers the following names:

1. Shloyme Gubesky, a farmer, aged about 56.
2. Avrom Klyatzko, a coachman, aged about 60.
3. His son Yankl Klyatzko, aged about 25.
4. Yankl-Velvl Shvartz, a bookkeeper, aged about 45.
5. Nokhem Troytse, a butcher, aged about 45.
6. Yankl Zlotkin, a smith, aged about 65.
7. Yankl's son Shloyme Zlatkin, a smith, aged about 26.
8. Ruven Rudnitsky, a porter, aged 18.
9. Ruven Nokhemson, a storekeeper, aged about 36.
10. Hirsh Broide, a baker, about 18.
11. Shmuel Gavende, a student, about 18.
12. Moyshe Volfson, a merchant.
13. Motl Gurvitz, a leather merchant, about 40.
14. Motl Bank, a merchant, about 40.
15. Yisroel Portnoy, a miller, about 53.
16. Shloyme Volfson, Moyshe Volfson's brother.
17. Yitzkhok Milner, a teacher in the Yiddish elementary school, about 40.
18. Elye Katz, a lumber merchant, about 38.
19. Mendl Tzinman, a tailor, crippled in one leg.
20. Shepsl Shmulevitz, a merchant, about 40.
21. Mairim Flaysher, a wigmaker, 18 or 19 years old.
22. Note Kimkhi, the rabbi's son, a student aged about 22 or 23.
23. The Hasidic slaughterer.

All of those listed were from Shvencionelias. Among those shot were a number of refugees from Poland who had settled in Shvencionelias after Poland collapsed in the fall of 1939. When the men were taken out of their houses to prison, and later when they were taken to the pit in the truck, everything was done exclusively by Lithuanian partisans, under the command of Lithuanian officers. A total of twelve men participated. None of them were from town. Fayve remembers only a few of them from the village of Mazhinelias, a kilometer and a half from town:

1. Nalevaikas, a farmer.
2. Goiga, a farmer.
3. Garla, a farmer.

The rest were strangers from more distant villages.

### **The Civil Administration in Town**

After the group of men were shot the partisans had to hand over their weapons. They all went to work at various spots. The civil administration in town was recruited from their ranks several weeks after the men were shot. The new mayor was a Lithuanian student named Vincenta Blazhys from a village called Kaukishkis, four kilometers from the town of Linkunys. His assistant was the Lithuanian Cicenas from a village near the town of Daugilishkis. This Cicenas had been in charge of the partisans as well before the civil administration was set up.

Some time later Blazhys became the mayor of Shvencionys. Cicenas became the mayor of Shvencionelias. The new police chief was a Lithuanian, a former elderly policeman in town under Smetonas in the years 1939-1940, a man from the Lithuanian interior. The Jewish council did everything they could to please the newly-established civil administration, and tried the old method of bribing and giving "presents" not only to the administration and the Germans, but also Christian civilians who could have harmed the helpless and defenceless Jews. Those who had control over the lives of the Jews did everything they could to get rich at the Jews' expense. They promised everything to the representatives of the Jews, but they never kept their word after they received their "gifts."

### **The Ghetto**

The ghetto was established about the middle of the month of August 1941. There was a command for all the Jews to leave their houses within a short specified period of time, and move into a single neighborhood on Kaltinenai Street. There was no fence around the ghetto neighborhood, nor was it guarded. The Jews were not allowed to leave the neighborhood. The Jews were not allowed to go to the market to shop, either. There were "good" Christians who shopped at the market for Jews. But the Jews had to pay a great deal more. Buying some food for the Jews became a side income for many Christians, a way of getting rich quick. But the Jews had no alternative, and they traded their better possessions for food.

The Jews had to report near the study house for work every morning. From there they were taken to do various tasks at the railroad station, repairing the roads, and so forth. It was not possible to do any cultural or social work in the ghetto. The Jews fell into an apathetic mood which gradually sank into desperation, however, religious practice continued to be observed even in the ghetto.

The Jews in the ghetto did not receive any news from surrounding towns. They had no idea about the total slaughter of the Jews in all of the smaller towns in Lithuania. The ghetto residents did not believe various rumors passed on to them by peasants about the slaughter of Jews.

### **The Liquidation of the Shventzionel'iai Ghetto**

On Friday, September 26, 1941, the day before the Sabbath between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, the partisans in town received weapons and surrounded the ghetto neighborhood. All of the roads around the town were guarded. There was a panic in the ghetto. The weeping of women and children could be heard throughout the town. In the evening some of the Jews tried to escape from town. However, they were seized by partisans, who murderously beat the Jews they had arrested, stole their better clothing and brought them back into the ghetto.

All night the Jews were awake. Pious Jews said Psalms and their final confession before dying, and got ready for death. On the morning of the Sabbath between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, at 5:00 a.m. groups of partisans drove the Jews out of their houses and stated that everyone was being taken to work. They permitted the Jews to bring along packages in their arms.

All of the Jews, men, women, the elderly and the sick were herded to a single spot in the street in the ghetto. From there the partisans marched all the Jews on foot across the river to the military compound. The elderly, weak, sick and the children were taken in wagons which had been brought in. All of the Jews were taken to the compound, about a kilometer and a half from Shventzionel'iai. That same day all the Jews from the surrounding towns in Shventzionys county were also brought to the compound.

At the compound the Jews were herded into barracks. The barracks and the compound were surrounded by a heavy guard consisting of well-armed partisans.

Fayve Khayat hid before the Jews were taken from Shventzionel'iai. Unable to stand being in his hiding place any longer, and seeing that the Jews in the compound weren't being shot, Fayve went to join his family at the compound. (Concerning the life of the Jews who had been herded together in the compound, see the testimony of Fruma Hochmann and Dr Tarasevsky - LK)

Fayve didn't stay at the compound long. Some of the Jews who had special trades were able to get themselves released from the compound in exchange for large sums of money. When one such group was taken from the compound to Shventzionys, Fayve joined them and managed to get back out of the compound. This happened on the evening of Tuesday, October 7, the second day of Sukkot 1941.

On the morning of Wednesday, October 8, the first day of Hol Hameed Sukkot 1941, all of the professional specialists who had been brought from the compound, as well as the specialists who had been left behind in Shventzionys, had to gather at the market place. It was said that all of the specialists who had been left behind as well as those who had been brought from the compound were to be signed up and given special passes. The naive Jews believed this, and went to the market place. 150 Jews were arrested and taken back to the compound, where they were shot.

On Wednesday, October 8 and Thursday, October 9, the first and second days of Hol Hameed Sukkot, all the Jews at the compound were shot.

When all the Jews in Shventzionys were ordered to report at the market place on Wednesday morning, Fayve Khayat did not go. Instead he hid in an attic. In this manner he continued living in Shventzionys.

### **In the Shventzionys Ghetto**

The surviving Jews in Shventzionys and the specialists who had been brought from the compound on Wednesday were settled into a single neighborhood at the synagogue yard. The Jews themselves had to construct a fence around the neighborhood. A Lithuanian policeman was posted at the gate. A Jewish ghetto police force was also established.

A Jewish Council was organized, headed by Meyer Shukhman, a lumber merchant from Shventzionys. Later Dr Binyomin Tarasevsky became the chairman of the Jewish Council. During the course of the winter of 1941-1942 and especially in the spring of 1942 many Jewish survivors of the slaughters in the White Russian towns came to the ghetto, and it became full of Jews from outside. Jews were brought from Vidz into the Shventzionys ghetto, but the ghetto neighborhood was not enlarged.

Fayvl Khayat began to work for a shoemaker named Berla Kharmatz, who worked for Germans. He was given a pass and registered.

### **The Resistance Movement in the Shventzionys Ghetto**

Some of the young people who no longer believed the promises of the Germans and their collaborators the Lithuanians, did not allow themselves to fall into the lethargic, sleepy mood of the ghetto. They began to organize and prepare to go off into the forest to join the Red partisans whose activities already began to be felt in the region. Gradually the young people began to organize in secret, and they managed to obtain weapons. They didn't have any connections with the Red partisans active in the region, however. (For more about the life of the Jews in the Shventzionys ghetto, see the testimonies of Fruma Hochmann, Avrom Taytz and Dr Tarasevsky - LK)

### **The Liquidation of the Shventzionys Ghetto**

At the end of the month of March 1943 there was an order stating that all the Jews who had family members in the work camps could leave the ghetto and move to join their relatives in the ghetto. Some of the Jews signed up to do this and moved. At that time preparations began for the overall liquidation of the ghetto. The partisans and Germans promised that all the Jews would be taken to the Vilnius and Kaunas ghettos. Jewish policeman came from Vilnius to help liquidate the Shventzionys ghetto and move the Jews to Vilnius and Kaunas. But it immediately became clear that while it was easy to sign up to go to Kaunas, only those with privileges, including the local Jewish Council and the Jewish police, were able to sign up to go to Vilnius. This caused a panic. Everyone in the ghetto wanted to register to go to Vilnius. Everyone wanted to be closer to the Jewish Council.

Unfortunately only a few Jews were able to do so. The vast majority had to sign up to go to the Kaunas ghetto. The organized group of youth decided not to go to either ghetto, and prepared themselves to leave for the forest with the few weapons they had acquired. Several days before the Jews were taken from the ghetto a group of 23 young men and one woman left the ghetto and went to the forests surrounding the town of Lentupis. They had six rifles, eight or nine revolvers and five grenades. They had gradually stolen the weapons from Germans they worked for.

There was a late spring that year. The snow was deep and it was cold in the forests around Lentupis. About eight or nine young people couldn't take the difficult living conditions in the forest, and returned to the Shventzionys ghetto, which hadn't yet been evacuated. The chief of the police who had come from Vilnius apparently wanted to have these people in Vilnius, and he registered all of them for the Vilnius ghetto. The 15 or 16 young people who stayed in the Lentupis forest, among them Fayve Khayat, constructed "a roof over their heads" from boughs of trees, and posted a guard. They obtained food from peasants in the villages at night, with the help of their weapons. The group of young people who went to the Vilnius ghetto stayed there for a short time.

When they realized the danger facing the Jews in the ghetto they returned to join their comrades in the Lentupis forest. Seven weeks later the Jews made contact with Red partisans (in May 1943).

### **The Partisan Life**

Red partisans had already begun operating some time earlier in that region. The young people in the Lentupis forest, however, found it very difficult to contact them. Meanwhile the group was enlarged by the arrival of three women, including both of Fayve Khayat's sisters. The two sisters had left the Shventzioniai ghetto to work for peasants. They didn't return to the ghetto, and they went into hiding. Fayve brought both of his sisters to the Lentupis forest. One of them returned to the Vilnius ghetto. Rokhl Kramnik, a girl from Shventzionys whom Fayve had married in the ghetto, also came to the forest.

All of the Lithuanian citizens (most of them Jews) were taken out of all the partisan brigades and formed into a Lithuanian national Red partisan brigade, divided up into companies. Fayvl and his wife Rokhl and sister were assigned to the "Vilnius" company. The commander of the company was a Lithuanian named Apivalas, a parachutist. The company settled into the Antonov forests, between Adutishkis and Pastova.



## 2. ADDITIONAL TESTIMONY ABOUT THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS OF SHVENTZIONELIAI

By Fayve Khayet and his wife Rokhl (see their testimony about the slaughter of the Jews of Shventzionys).

I. Fayve's cousin Mirele Rein was brought to the compound near Shventzionys, together with all of the Jews of Tzeikiniai. On Wednesday, October 8, when groups of Jews began to be taken to be shot, a Lithuanian policeman recognized her. Mirele was very pretty. She didn't look Jewish and she spoke Lithuanian perfectly. The policeman hid her in a pit and covered her over with branches. All day Mirele watched as groups of men, and then groups of women and children, were taken out of the compound to be shot in the nearby forest.

When it grew dark the policeman accompanied her out of the compound. Mirele made her way to the Vidz ghetto on foot. She was brought to the Shventzionys ghetto with the Jews of Vidz. She stayed at Fayvi Khayet's house in the ghetto for exactly two weeks. She related everything at that time.

Mirele left the ghetto and sought means to obtain Aryan papers. She went to see the wife of a Lithuanian policeman who had promised to obtain the papers for her. Instead the woman reported the matter to the Lithuanian Purnas, the head of the security police in Shventzionys. At that time Mirele was fifteen or sixteen years old. She had been a member of the communist youth in Tzeikiniai under the Soviets.

Purnas summoned Moyshe Gordon, the chairman of the Jewish Council. Dr Tarasevsky went with him. Purnas demanded that they hand Mirele over. Moyshe Gordon told Fayve Khayet about this. Mirele left the ghetto and escaped to the Pastoviai ghetto, where she died when the Jews of Pastoviai were slaughtered.

While staying at Fayve's, Mirele related that when the children at the compound were slaughtered, the terrible weeping and screaming made it sound like a slaughterhouse.

After the liberation two coachmen, one name Shmitas and the other a Pole named Schuschlicky, told Fayve that they had been forced to bring in their wagons the elderly, the sick and those who were unable to walk. When the wagons approached the pit, the partisans would tip the wagons over and throw the Jews in while they were still alive.

II. It was also said that a Jewish retailer of dry goods, quite an old man, had refused to leave the barracks for the pit. Partisans shot him in the barrack.

III. A Jew named Yudl Volyak, miraculously managed to escape from the pits by the compound. He stayed in White Russian towns for some time, and then he was brought to the ghetto in Shventzionys. Fayve spoke with him several times.

Yudl reported that he had been taken from the barracks to the forest. When he saw the pit, he began running into the forest. He was shot at, but no one hit him. Yudl was very depressed, and even slightly insane. He was physically strong. Whenever he saw a Lithuanian policeman in the ghetto, he would throw himself at the man and beat him. One time he struck a policeman on the head with a shovel. The policeman was taken to the hospital.

The police chief of Shventzionys Kenstavitzius demanded that the Jewish council hand Yudl over. The Jewish police came to arrest Yudl. He resisted, with a shovel in his hands. Lithuanian police came to the ghetto to help arrest Yudl. They saw that he wasn't in his right mind, and they put off the arrest until another occasion. Yudl was so exhausted that he fell into a deep sleep on the table in Khavesvirsky's house. The Lithuanian police, who hadn't yet left the ghetto, approached him while he was asleep and tied his hands behind his back. They took him to the Jewish cemetery on a sled and shot him while he lay on the sled.

The Jewish Council appointed the tinsmith Shloyme Katshizne, the tinsmith Avrom Poshimensky and Motl Faygl to bury Yudl at the Jewish cemetery. This was in the winter of 1941-1942.

IV. A refugee from the Lithuanian interior, the Jewish lawyer Shakhnovitz, lived in Shventzionys. He worked translating between Lithuanian and German for the town administration. On one occasion two Germans from the regional commissariat came to the Shventzionys town administration and spoke with Shakhnovitz.

The two Germans ordered that he be shot. The Lithuanian policeman Mudinys took the lawyer away to the Vayshkune forest, near the narrow-gauge rail line between Shventzionys and Shventzioneliai. The lawyer was shot there. Mudinys took the lawyer's boots to the Polish shoemaker Jan Drozd in town. The shoemaker removed exactly ten thousand rubles which had been sewn into the boots, and gave them to the policeman.

## **Lithuanian Police and Partisans Who Actively Participated in Killing Jews**

1. Urbonas, a locksmith and chauffeur, who had lived in Shventzioneliai for a year and a half before the war.
2. Milashius, a painter employed by the railroad. He worked as a secretary at the partisan headquarters under the Germans.
3. Three brothers named Rugsienas. One a shoemaker from Shventzioneliai. The other two were in the army.
4. Shimkunas, who had a restaurant at Matziukas' on Kaltinenai Street in Shventzioneliai.
5. Dilys, from Shventzioneliai, a student. During the year of Soviet rule he had been employed by the government band. His father had a food store in town. This Dilys was a leader of the partisans in town under the Germans.
6. Nalevaikas, a farmer from the village of Mazhineliai, a kilometer and a half from Shventzioneliai.
7. Goiga, from Mazhineliai.
8. Garla, from Mazhineliai.
9. Borauskas, from Mazhineliai.
10. Goiga, a railroad worker from the town of Veina, two kilometers from Shventzioneliai.
11. Juozas Treinys, a farmer from the village of Kumpotzius, three kilometers from Shventzioneliai.
12. Sidabris, a farmer from the village of Seniushkis, three kilometers from town.
13. Teunelis, a farmer from the village of Padimeni, four kilometers from town.
14. Balaweckis, a farmer from the village of Padimeni, crippled in one arm.
15. Vaitziulis, from the town of Kedainai, eventually worked as the spokesman for the police chief of Shventzioneliai.
16. Mudinas, a farmer from the town of Ignalina.
17. Gimzhiunas, a farmer from Ignalina.
18. Baranenos, from the village of Shakelishkis, one kilometer from the town of Kaltinenai.
19. Kupris from the village of Datinani, four kilometers from Shventzioneliai.
20. Kurpis, a former officer in Smetona's army. Under the Germans he became the leader of the partisans in Shventzioneliai. He was from the village of Buivid.
21. Jakshys, two brothers. One of them had been a shoemaker before the war, and the other was a leather dealer. Both of them were from Shventzioneliai.

Fayve Khayet and his wife Rokhl do not remember any more names.

### **Attestation of Fayve Khayet and his wife Rokhl Khayet-Kramnik.**

All of the facts, dates, names of persons and of geographical locations which are indicated in this additional testimony about the slaughter of the Jews of Shventzioneliai were personally added by us to our testimony of April 27, 1948, and we attest thereto with our signatures on each and every page.

Signatures:                   1. Fayve Khayet.  
                                      2. Rokhl Khayet-Kramnik.

The additional testimony was recorded by Engineer L Koniuchowsky  
Feldafing near Starnberg           April 30, 1948.

The signature of the Feldafing camp resident Fayve Khayet and his wife Rokhl Kramnik is attested to by the  
chairman of the camp committee.   E. Reif                   Feldafing           April 30, 1948

*Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin   New York   January 18, 1995*

## **THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS OF IGNALINA**

The testimony of Tevye Solomyak, born February 1, 1900 in Ignalina. For his entire life until the war broke out on June 22, 1941, and later during the time of the German occupation until the Jewish community was liquidated, he lived in the town of Ignalina. He graduated elementary school there. He was a merchant by trade. His father's name was Yakov, and his mother was Khava, born Rin in a village called Paringi.

Ignalina is located 25 kilometers north of Shventzionys and 28 kilometers south of the town of Dokshtas in Shventzionys County. A railroad line linking Vilnius and Dvinsk goes through the town. The station is located in town. About half a kilometer from town are lakes Baltis and Shekstis. The town and the surrounding villages were occupied by Lithuanians.

### **Cultural and Economic Life of the Jews**

Until the war broke out 800 Jews lived in Ignalina. Most of them were retail merchants, lumber merchants, grain dealers and artisans. Most of the Jews in town were poor.

Until 1940 there was an elementary school in town with instruction in Yiddish, as well as a Hebrew elementary school, a Yiddish-Hebrew library, a drama club, three study houses and a synagogue.

Most of the young people belonged to Zionist movements, and a smaller number were Bundists.

The attitude of the surrounding Lithuanian population toward the Jews was good, and even friendly. This can be explained by the fact that the Lithuanians in that region were a minority in Poland until the Polish state collapsed in the year 1939. In that same year the region was assigned to Lithuania by the Soviets.

In the summer of 1940, when the Red army marched into the Baltic states, the attitude of the Lithuanians worsened in part. However, this could not be detected in public. Nevertheless they impatiently waited for the moment when they could get rid of the Soviets and settle accounts with the Jews, who had become equal citizens when the Soviets arrived. They were very happy when they heard the news that war had broken out between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union.

### **The War Breaks Out; The Civil Administration**

On Monday, June 23, 1941 the Soviet government employees, Party officials and Red militia fled town.

Tuesday morning the Jews quickly packed and fled in wagons and on foot to the surrounding villages to hide until the front passed on. The Jews were afraid they might suffer if the railroad station in town was bombed. Very few of the town's youth fled together with the Soviet officials. These were people who took active part in the Communist Party and youth, or who had worked at responsible positions. Most of the Jews in town had no reason to be afraid, and they didn't even think about leaving their homes and evacuating to the Soviet Union. Not one of them foresaw what lay in store for them at the hands of the Germans.

From Monday evening, June 23, until the arrival of the Germans, there was no civil authority in town. At the end of the week scattered units of the Soviet army marched through town in the direction of White Russia.

On the evening of Tuesday, July 1, there was a small conflict between Germans and Red Army soldiers in town. On Wednesday, July 2, 1941 in the morning, the German army entered the town. Almost all of the Jews had returned from the countryside, because peasants in the villages hadn't taken the Jews in before the Germans appeared in the region. The Jews had to leave the countryside and return to town even before the Germans marched in.

Between Monday, June 23 and the time the Germans arrived in town, the town was ruled by armed Lithuanians who called themselves partisans. On Thursday, June 26, six days before the German army arrived, the partisans arrested ten Red soldiers who had no weapons. A Jewish girl was with them. The murderers shot all ten Red soldiers. They brought the girl back to town. No one saw her again.

Immediately after the Germans arrived in town all of the able bodied men began to have to go to work at various tasks, repairing the damaged roads, serving the Germans and partisans, and so forth. One group of Jews had to

clear fallen trees off the roads. The Germans forced the Jews to drag trees which still had their branches on, and to run back and forth. Any Jew who didn't do what they told him to was murderously beaten and tortured. Tevye is a tall, healthy man. The Germans made a point of beating the stronger and healthier men. The Germans did not stay in town, however. After they had been there for a short time they continued toward the front.

The Lithuanians immediately set up the civilian administration in town, and began openly lording it over the lives and possessions of the Jews.

The new mayor was a Lithuanian named Zhidor, a farmer from the village of Rashketoni, ten kilometers from town. The new Seniunas in town was the Lithuanian Viktoris Tzeponis. His three sons were terrible murderers and robbers. All three were partisans. The chief of police in town was a Lithuanian from the interior of Lithuania named Zhilenas. The commander of the partisans in town was Albert.

After the civil administration was set up in town the Lithuanians began issuing their infamous anti-Jewish decrees. They threatened to take revenge for any German or Lithuanian found dead by shooting one hundred Jews. The Jews felt helpless, disappointed, deceived and mocked by their Lithuanian neighbors, amongst whom they had lived for generations.

A few weeks after the civilian administration was set up, the Lithuanians set up a Jewish committee and personally appointed its members. The committee's task was to serve as an intermediary between the Jews on one hand, and the police and partisans on the other. The members of the committee were: David Soloveytsik, a forest broker; Ele Gilinsky, a merchant; Gershon Kideshman, a merchant; Ruven Kagan and others. The committee had to recruit the specified number of workers on time, and see that they reported to their worksites.

### **100 Innocent Jewish Men Arrested; 26 Shot**

On the evening of Friday, July 11, 1941 at about 6:00 p.m., police and partisans attacked the Jewish houses and drove out all of the men who had occupied any kind of position during the year of Soviet rule, or whom they simply suspected of being Communist sympathizers. Then they began seizing men in the street. Tevye was in the street with a child of his at that time. The partisans drove the child away and arrested Tevye. That evening they arrested a total of one hundred men and drove them into a cellar at the partisan headquarters. Everyone who was arrested was taken away separately and released that same evening. Twenty-six men were detained and locked up in the cellar.

The next day, Saturday, July 12, the men were taken to work and met the rest of the workers from town. At midnight on Saturday all 26 men were taken to a small forest a half kilometer from town on the road to Dakshtas, near the railroad line. There they were shot together with fourteen Red Army prisoners.

Among the 26 who were shot Tevye remembers:

1. Zalmen Katz, the former chairman of the Yiddish elementary school, owner of a hardware store, and his sixteen-year-old son.
2. Khayem Perlmutter, a baker, and his son, aged fourteen or fifteen.
3. Naum Zaydman, a watchmaker.
4. Yisroel Gilinsky, a worker, aged 25 or 26.
5. Borukh Saroke, a wigmaker.
6. Fishl Oron, a retail merchant. His son, a Communist, had escaped to the Soviet Union. The father was shot in retaliation.
7. Khone-Yitzkhok Suntup, a furrier. He had been released from the cellar on Friday. The partisans had taken a watch from him, and he went to them to get it back. He was arrested and thrown into the cellar.
8. Shapiro.
9. Yankl Levin, a smith.
10. Mikhl Shnayderovitz, a Communist, aged 15.

Among the 26 who were shot were refugees from Poland, who had arrived in town in the year 1939.

Among the partisans and police who arrested the hundred men and then shot the twenty-six, Tevye remembers the following:

1. Boisys, a farmer from town.
2. Grinevitzius, a worker from town.
3. Panava, two men from town, one a guard at the town administration.
4. Viktoris Tzeponis, the Seniunas (mayor) in town, and his three murderous sons.
5. Geidshiunas, a worker in town.

6. Voickus, two brothers from the village of Stirgilishkis, a kilometer from town.
7. Voickus, from the village of Stirgilishkis, a kilometer from town.
8. Zhilen, from the village of Vishniunai, seven kilometers from town.
9. Blashys, from the village of Vishniunai, seven kilometers from town.
10. Zidor, the virshaitis in town during the occupation.
11. Bilkis, two brothers from the village of Polushi, three kilometers from town.
12. Albert, a farmer from the village of Mirani, four kilometers from town.
13. Paukshtis, from town.
14. Burtimas and his brother, both from town.
15. Matzulis, from the village of Girmini, two kilometers from town.
16. A Lithuanian nicknamed "Velnias," from the village of Mirani, four kilometers from town.

For a long time the unfortunate families of the twenty-six men who had been shot did not know about the tragic fate of their beloved sons and fathers. The police and partisans solemnly swore that they had been taken to work. There were "good friends" among the population in town and in the countryside, who insisted that they had personally seen the 26 men working, and asked to be given clothing, food and money to bring to them. The families of the 26 men allowed themselves to be fooled, and sent packages and money for their arrested sons and fathers. About six weeks later the Jews in town learned the tragic truth.

About ten days after the arrest and shooting of the 26 men, the Lithuanians arrested a Jew named Hirsh-Leyb Gilinsky. His brother had escaped to the Soviet Union, and Leyb had hidden at the home of a Jew named Yisroel-Noyekh Aron at a settlement in the village of Paringe, half a kilometer from town. A group of partisans arrested him there, and shot him near the railroad station that same day.

At the same time the partisans Voickus and Tzepanis shot the Jew Joseph Gaydiger outside of town, near the Jewish cemetery. The two murderers demanded money from Joseph. He refused to give them anything. Joseph had come from Lodz in 1939 and stayed in town.

After these two above-mentioned Jews were shot, the situation of the Jews in town began to stabilize. Every day the able bodied Jews went to work, including some of the women. The Jewish council was responsible for seeing to it that the workers went to their tasks, and the Council tried to carry out precisely all the demands of the police and partisans.

The Committee also used other ways and means to try to please those who had control over Jewish lives, and constantly gave them "presents."

A female Lithuanian teacher by the name of Paukstyle lived in town. She did everything she could to propagandize against the Jews, and demanded that a ghetto be established. The Committee managed with the help of "gifts," however, to have the establishment of the ghetto delayed until a certain time.

### **The Ghetto; News about the Total Slaughter in Nearby Towns**

News began to arrive about the total slaughter of Jews in nearby Lithuanian towns. There even began to appear in town solitary refugees, who had escaped from being shot and told everything that had happened. The Jews in town tried to comfort themselves by saying that such a thing wouldn't happen to them, because in any case they had no way to escape the terrible situation. The Committee increased their bribes to anyone they could after they found out about the slaughter of the Jews in the surrounding areas. But this did not help.

Early Friday morning, September 5, police surrounded all the Jewish houses and ordered the Jews to move into a ghetto. They went in groups to rob the Jews of their more valuable possessions. The Jews were not allowed to bring along furniture. When they robbed the Jews they also beat them. They murderously beat the town rabbi, Rabbi Moyshe-Aron Khayat, and they also stole his gold watch. He lay in bed in the ghetto after the beatings.

In the neighborhood of Gawikeny Street where the town's Jews had to resettle there were already some Jews. There was an inspection of the homes of the Jews in the neighborhood, and all of their better things were taken. Later all the Jews in town were herded together.

That same Friday the Jew Yisroel-Noyekh Aron hung himself in a settlement outside of town. He was a wealthy Jew whose property had been nationalized by the Soviets before the war, following which he had moved onto the settlement.

The ghetto was set up on Gawikeny Street. There was no fence around it. Nor was a guard posted. One hour a day the Jews were permitted to leave the neighborhood. A few days after they settled into the ghetto everyone had their cattle taken. The cattle were distributed to peasants. Every morning the able-bodied men, along with some of the women, gathered in one spot in the ghetto. Members of the committee would take them from that spot to their assigned workplaces. Most of the work at that time consisted of building a new railroad line. The Jews did not receive food or even a little bit of pay for their hard work. Like black pieces of tar, monotonous, filled with sorrow and offering very little hope of survival, the days stretched out and became weeks. But the Jews didn't even have the fortune to continue living under the inhumane conditions in the ghetto for many weeks longer.

The news about the slaughter of the Jews in the towns of Dukstas, Ligmainai, Utenas, and other places began to arrive in all of their horror, with all of their awful details. Lithuanians from the countryside and from town began to come more and more frequently to suggest that the Jews in the ghetto "hand over" their more valuable possessions for safekeeping "until after the war." A Russian woman threw a letter on the porch of Moyshe Gurvitz's house, describing the slaughter of the Jews of Utenas. The mood of panic in town constantly increased.

On Saturday, September 20 a Lithuanian partisan officer came from Shventzionys to Ignalina. He went to the Jewish wigmaker Yeshayohu Dubinsky, who had permission to work at his wigmaker's shop in town, for a shave. The officer confided to the Jewish council that he already had many murders of Jews on his conscience, that this troubled him and so he wanted to do the Jews of Ignalina a big favor. He confided some information in the Jewish council. Some time later, after the Ignalina ghetto was liquidated, Dubinsky met Tevye and told him that the officer had told the Committee something. The members of the Committee kept the information to themselves for the time being, however, in order to avoid causing panic among the Jews, they told Dubinsky that the officer had advised the Jews to work as hard as possible and to be productive.

Several days after this incident the police ordered the committee to produce a list of how much money was owned by every Jew in the ghetto.

On Friday, September 26, the day before the Sabbath between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, the Jews saw rifles being brought to the police headquarters and distributed to the partisans in town, who lately had very little to do with the situation in the ghetto. Optimists explained this by saying that the partisans were getting ready to go to the front. That same evening police demanded that the committee hand over to them the list showing how much money each Jew had. A total of 21,000 rubles was handed over to the police at that time. At that point the Jews Shmuel Gawenda and Avrom Gurvitz, the specialists in offering bribes to the police and partisans, tried to find out what the situation of the Jews in the ghetto was, and why peasants had been ordered to come in with their wagons on the following Sabbath morning. They were reassured with the statement that the carts had been ordered to carry stones.

That same Friday evening the Jews noticed armed partisans walking around the ghetto. The Jews clearly understood what was going to happen to them either in the next few hours or the next day. During the day on Friday many people fled. Almost everyone tried to escape on Friday night.

Groups of partisans went to the Jewish houses, robbing, beating and forcing the Jews to take their clothes off and lie in bed, so that they wouldn't be able to flee.

A number of Jews actually did escape that Friday, both during the day and at night. The Jews in the houses, however, didn't go to sleep. They did everything they could to get out of the ghetto and escape. But armed partisans were patrolling outside, making sure that the Jews wouldn't go to sleep. The Jews didn't sleep. Tears poured from everyone's eyes. With piercing, tearful looks wives and husbands took their leave of each other. The innocent, sleeping children were drenched in their parents' tears. In deathly fear, uneasy and desperate, everyone waited for the day.

### **Jews from Ignalina and Surrounding Towns Taken to the Compound**

Early in the morning that Saturday, the partisans began taking all the Jews out of their houses. The dark early morning resounded with the shrieking and weeping of women and children, as they said goodbye to their homes, where they had been born and grown up. The partisans beat the Jews with murderous, bestial cruelty, and hurried them along to leave their houses. All the Jew were packed into the waiting wagons with some of their possessions, and they were taken away to the military compound a kilometers from Shventzioneliai under heavy guard. On the way the partisans continued selecting some of the better things and taking them for themselves. They also beat the Jews on the way. Later it was said that the rabbi of Ignalina, Moyshe-Aron Khayat, had left his house still sick because of the blows he had suffered when his gold watch was taken away before he had moved into the ghetto, and that he died en route.

All the Jews from the following towns were taken to the compound that day:

1. Ignalina.
2. Daugelishkis.
3. Old Daugelishkis.
4. Malagenai.
5. Tveritziai.
6. Tzeikiniai.
7. Padbrade.
8. Kaltinenai.
9. Shventzionys.
10. Shventzioneliai.
11. Stajatzishkis.
12. Adutishkis.

### **Those Who Died After the General Slaughter**

Concerning the further fate of the Jews who had been herded into the compound, and about the terrible slaughter of all of the men, women and children, see the testimony about the slaughter of the Jews of Shventzionys.

On the night of Friday, September 26, as well as during the day, more than eighty Jews escaped from Ignalina. Most of them safely arrived at various White Russian towns, where there hadn't been any slaughter of Jews at that time. In addition a number of Jews escaped from the compound.

Tevye remembers the following cases:

1. When the Jews reached the gate of the compound it was already dark. Mrs Dvoyre Kuritzky took advantage of an opportunity to run away. She hid in White Russia and survived. After the war she married the eyewitness Tevye Solomyak.

2. Leyzer Levitan and four other Jews escaped from Ignalina on Friday. They wanted to make their way to White Russia. In the town of Maleganai they were arrested by partisans, and they were taken to the compound together with the Jews of Maleganai. At night partisans murderously beat all five Jews. Leyze Levitan decided that he had nothing left to lose, and he escaped through a window of the barrack. Partisans shot at him, but didn't hit him. Leyzer safely arrived in White Russia.

3. Leyzer and his brother Shloyme Kuritzky were arrested by partisans near the town of New Daugelishkis, on the Vidz Road. Shloyme escaped and arrived at Vidz. At the same time Moyshe Gurvitz from Shventzioneliai, his wife Esther and their two daughters were caught. This family, along with Leyzer Kuritzky, were not taken to the compound, but instead were brought to Daugelishkis, where they were kept for several days before being shot in the orchard near the city council.

Shloyme Kuritzky was in Vidz for some time, and later in a camp in Padbrade and Dukshatas, and finally in the Shventzionys ghetto. When some of the Jews were taken from the Shventzionys ghetto to the Kaunas ghetto, the entire group was taken off the train at Ponari near Vilnius, and there everyone was shot. Among those who died then was Shloyme Kuritzky.

4. Yisroel-Yitzkhok Leybshteyn escaped in the direction of Vidz. Three kilometers from Daugelishkis in the village of Michalow he was murdered with an axe. His two sons Yoysef and Yerakhmiel escaped separately and arrived in Vidz. There they told about the tragic death of their father. Yoysef and his brother stayed together in Vidz for a few months, and then went in the direction of Shventzionys. One kilometer from Tveritzius he was captured and killed by partisans who stuffed a beam into his mouth. His brother Yerakhmiel left Vidz for Pastoviai, where he died when the Jews in the ghetto there were slaughtered. This happened on November 21, 1942.

5. Mrs Beyle Zaydman and her child were seized on the way to Maleganai in the village of Bitzuni. At that same time and place Mrs Rokhl Permuter, her child, her sister and her mother were also caught. This group was taken to the militia in Ignalina, and from there to the mass grave of the 26 murdered men, where they were shot. This took place on Monday, September 29, 1941. The husbands of Beyle Zaydman and Rokhl Perlmutter had been among the group of 26 who were shot.

6. Hirsh-Aron Brumberg and his child escaped from Ignalina on Friday evening, to a peasant in the countryside. Brumberg's wife was supposed to join them there. He couldn't stand to wait for her, so he went to town with his

child to find out what had happened to her. Partisans seized him and shot him and the child near the railroad line. This happened on Friday, September 26.

7. Mrs Mirl Ring and her fourteen-year-old son escaped on Friday evening and lay hiding in bushes half a kilometer from town. Mirl saw all the Jews in town being taken away. Saturday evening she went to the village of Petrowa, two kilometers from town, to a peasant named Mudin. She hid in a barn without telling the peasant. The next morning, Sunday, the peasant spotted her and ordered her to leave in the evening.

She walked all night with her son, until they arrived at Vidz. When they had been there for a week they went to Pastoviai, where she had sent her sixteen or seventeen year old daughter from Ignalina a week earlier. But she couldn't stay there either, because all of the refugees had to register. There were incidents where refugees in Pastoviai were betrayed, and some of them had been shot. Mirl and her son and daughter left Pastoviai and arrived at Kazan. In the winter of 1941-1942 almost all of the Jews in Kazan were taken to the Gluboki ghetto. Only a few "useful" Jews were left in Kazan and quartered in a few houses in the ghetto. Mirl left the Kazan ghetto for the Pastoviai ghetto, where she and her two children died together with the Jews of Pastoviai on November 21, 1942.

8. Leybe-Khayem Halpern, his wife Perl and their three children were not in the Ignalina ghetto. The entire family lived a kilometer outside of town, at a settlement called Wasiwky, where he leased the fields. On Friday evening a peasant woman told them that the next day all the Jews of Ignalina were going to be shot at the compound near Shventzioneliai. The family was brought to the White Russian town of Vidz in a cart, and then to Opshe. They were there until the ghetto was liquidated in 1942. All the Jews of that town were taken to the ghetto in the town of Braslaw.

Leybe-Khayem Halpern, his wife and their child Matele left the ghetto and went to stay with peasant friends near Ignalina. Leybe-Khayem stayed with one peasant, while his wife and child stayed with another peasant. The peasant did not want to keep mother and child any longer, however, and they went to Vidz. This was in the summer of 1942. The mother was taken to the Shventzionys ghetto with the rest of the Jews in Vidz in the fall of 1942.

When the Jews in the Shventzionys ghetto were taken to the Kaunas ghetto, Perl and her child went along, and they died at Ponari near Vilnius.

Leybe-Khayem hid for some time at the home of a peasant named Michael Kapustin in the village of Bitzuni, as well as with other peasants whom he knew. Eventually he went to stay with a peasant woman named Albina and her husband Kasys Baizhys at his own former settlement. He had hidden his entire fortune with them. The peasants received Leybe-Khayem warmly, as if welcoming their boss. However, Albina's son was a partisan, and more than once he warned his mother not to keep the Jews at her home. Khayem left the place several times, but without having any place else to go he returned to stay with the peasant woman. In the spring of 1943 Leybe-Khayem was found hanging. The peasant woman later insisted that she had warned Leybe-Khayem to go away several times. He would declare that if he had to leave her he would hang himself, and eventually he carried out his "threat." But neighbors insisted that Leybe-Khayem had been hung by the peasant Kasys Bausys and his son, so that they could inherit all his possessions.

Leybe-Khayem's children, Khone, aged 20 and Tito, aged 16, died in the Braslaw ghetto.

9. Mrs Dina Levin and her two children escaped from Ignalina on Friday evening, September 26, and hid for a week in the village of Bitzuni at the home of the peasant Michal Kapustin. She couldn't stay. Partisans caught her and took her to the town of Daugelishkis, where they shot her. This happened roughly a week after the Jews of Ignalina were taken to the compound. Tevye's friend Leyzer Levitan was also staying with the peasant Kapustin. Later he met Tevye and told him about this incident.

10. Lova Beksteyn, his wife Hene and their child, aged five, escaped from Ignalina on Friday. They made it to the town of Svir in a wagon, and they stayed there for some time until they moved on to Lentupis. The wife and child died in Lentupis. Lava was taken to a work camp near Vilnius, and survived.

11. On the evening of that tragic Friday, Moyshe Gilinsky, his daughter, son-in-law and one-year-old grandson, along with Moyshe's wife Gitl, aged 70, all came to Tevye's house. They all agreed to escape from town, and actually left their house. However, there was a great commotion in town, and groups of partisans were patrolling back and forth. They couldn't go into their house, and they went to Tevye's. Gitl didn't let herself be stopped by the commotion in the street, and she escaped. In the countryside she successfully pretended to be a peasant woman, and she safely reached the town of Vidz. She was brought to Shventzionys together with the Jews in the Vidz ghetto. There Gitl had an extremely difficult time, living in strained circumstances and begging for food. Tevye spoke to her more than once. Her only desire was to survive and write a letter about all of her suffering to Yeshayohu, who had emigrated to Columbia. She was taken toward the Kaunas ghetto with the Shventzionys

Jews. On the way, however, the transport was stopped at Ponari, where all the Jews were slaughtered. Moyshe Gilinsky and his daughter, son-in-law and grandson couldn't escape from Ignalina, and they were taken to the compound, where they died.

12. Avrom Yisroelewitz and his wife Menukhe escaped from Ignalina on Friday to stay with peasants in a village near the town of Tzeikiniai, where they stayed until the summer of 1942. It was hard for the peasant to support both of them, and Menukhe went to join a sister in Vidz. Before the Jews of Vidz were taken to the Shventzionys ghetto, Menukhe escaped to rejoin her husband, where they lived in terror and need until the winter of 1943. The peasant was extremely poor and didn't have anything to feed them. But the Jews didn't want to leave the place, and they suffered from hunger. For 18 days and nights they went without any food or water. Avrom couldn't stand it, and died of starvation. Menukhe buried her husband and went to hide with peasants near Tzeikiniai until the liberation. After the liberation she exhumed Avrom's body and buried him at the Jewish cemetery in Ignalina.

13. On Friday the peasant from town Jelinevsky went to the Jewish wigmaker for a shave. The peasant entrusted to the boy Yeshayohu Dubinsky the secret that police and partisans had ordered peasants from town and from the countryside to bring wagons the next day, Saturday, in order to take the Jews away. The wigmaker Dubinsky immediately told the Jews in the ghetto about this, and he himself escaped from town that Friday during the day. He went to the White Russian town of Jod. The Jews of Jod were slaughtered before New Year's Day 1942. Dubinsky managed to escape from there on time. He went to Vidz and from there to Pastoviai, where he stayed until the spring of 1942. Then he went back to Vidz. When Jews were sent from Vidz to the Padbrade camp, Dubinsky was one of the six from Ignalina. Then the camp was transferred from Padbrade to Dokshtas. Before the Shventzionys ghetto was liquidated, the inhabitants of the camp were brought to the Shventzionys ghetto.

Together with other Jews from the ghetto, Dubinsky was brought to the Vilnius ghetto. When he had been in the Vilnius ghetto for some time, he was brought to a camp near Panevezhys with a group of Jews. He escaped from there together with another young man from the Lithuanian interior. Both of them dressed as peasants and made it to Ignalina by train. A half kilometer from town in a settlement called Zalesi they went to the home of a peasant to ask for food. The peasant told both of them to hide in the barn until he could get them some food, and meanwhile he went to town to tell the police about them. The police surrounded the barn, caught the two young men and shot them. Both of them were buried at a spot near the barn. After the liberation the surviving Jews Tevye, Zelik Gilinsky, Shmuel Gilinsky, Leyzer Levitan and the brothers [???] and Dovid Ritvol dug up the grave and brought the two bodies for burial at the Jewish cemetery in Ignalina.

14. After a conversation between members of the Jewish Committee and the Lithuanian officer, they apparently didn't tell the Jews in the ghetto the truth. They said that the officer had advised them to work well and diligently, and try to be as productive as possible. That same Friday during the day, when rifles were brought to the police headquarters in town and distributed to the partisans, all the members of the Jewish Council sent their families to White Russia. They themselves stayed until morning, and they provided the list and the demanded sum of money to the police.

During the day on Friday, September 26 the following families of Jewish Council members left town:

1. Gershon Kideshman's wife Esther-Kril and their young son Leybele, aged 7.
2. Dovid Soloveytzik's wife Ele and their young son Shmuelke, aged seven or eight.

At noon on Friday the other members of the Jewish Council escaped from the ghetto, along with their families: Elye Gilinsky, his wife Rokhl and their one and a half year-old child; Elye's parents Dovid and his mother Khaye, and Elye's sister Bashe, along with her five or six year-old child, and another sister named Gute; Gershon Kideshman; Dovid Soloveytzik, his brother Fayve and a six year-old child.

All the families of the Jewish Council members were in Vidz for some time; and then they moved to Kazan. There they met Tevye, who openly accused them of betraying the Jews of Ignalina in the ghetto on Friday, September 26. Tevye charged that they had learned from the officer that in a short time the Jews were going to be taken to the compound, but they had kept silent about the information and not shared it with the Jews of Ignalina, who would have known what to do, and many of whom would certainly have escaped before being taken away.

Dovid Solovetzik said in response that the officer hadn't told them about the fate of the Jews of Ignalina, and he insisted again that he had advised them to work more productively. As evidence that the Jewish Council had not had any more information, he mentioned his two brothers and their families and his sister, who had stayed behind in Ignalina and had been taken to the compound, where they died.

The elderly Dovid Gilinsky told Tevye, however, that the officer had given them incorrect information, telling them that in ten days the Ignalina Jews were going to be taken away, whereas in fact they were taken away seven days later, so that they hadn't had time to get those close to them out of town in time. Tevye thinks that the members of

the Committee and their families managed to escape from town so easily because the partisans had simply released them after they had so faithfully carried out all the rulings and regulations, and also because before they escaped they had provided the list and the large sum of money.

Around the time of Purim 1942, when the ghetto in Kazan was established, all the members of the Ignalina Jewish Council and their families arrived in Pastoviai. They stayed there until the Pastoviai ghetto Jews were slaughtered on November 21, 1942, when they died together with all of the Jews of Pastoviai. Elye Gilinsky ran away from the pit.

15. Avrom Gilinsky, his son-in-law Yoysef Gawenda, Yoysef's wife Alte and their child all escaped from Ignalina on Friday. Avrom's brothers Yisroel with his wife Hinde and their two children; Shmuel, his wife and child; Meir, his wife and three children; and a fourth brother, who was not married, also went. They all arrived safely at Vidz, where they stayed for a short time and then went to the White Russian town of Mjor. When the Jews of Mjor were slaughtered at the beginning of 1943 they all died. Only Meyer managed to survive, and he escaped from Mjor in the direction of Ignalina. He too was killed on the way. Shmuel Gilinsky survived.

16. Yerakhmiel Korb understood very well the situation of all the Jews where Hitler's military were in control, and he didn't believe any of the promises made by their Lithuanian followers. When the Jews were herded into the ghetto in Ignalina, he predicted everything, and didn't go into the ghetto. Yerakhmiel hid the whole time in the village of Bitzuni at the home of the peasant Pitkewitz. From there he kept sending information about the situation at the front, and also about the slaughter of the Jews in the surrounding Lithuanian towns. Yerakhmiel advised all the Jews in the ghetto, especially his children and his wife, to escape from the ghetto as soon as possible. His two sons Moyshe and Leybl escaped from the ghetto on Friday, September 26, and managed to join their father.

Yerakhmiel's wife Mirl, her daughter Shprintze and a son were taken to the compound with the rest of the Jews of Ignalina. Before they were taken from town Mirl jumped out of the wagon and hid in a bath house at the edge of town until nightfall. At night she went to join her husband as well. Shprintze and her brother were taken to the compound at Shvencioneliai, where they died. Yerakhmiel, his wife and their two sons couldn't stay at the home of the peasant Pitkewitz for long, and they went separately in the direction of Vidz. Mirl and both sons arrived safely. Yerakhmiel was arrested by partisans several times. He gave them everything he had. They took off almost all his clothes and let him go. Sick and exhausted, he arrived in Vidz. Together with his wife and two sons, he stayed there for a short time, and then they went to Opshe. Yerakhmiel grew sick as a result of all his terrible sufferings, from terror and from cold. He was taken to the Breslaw hospital, where his leg was amputated. When he was released from the hospital, crippled, Yerakhmiel was afraid to go to his wife and children in the town of Opshe, because as a cripple he was in constant danger of being shot. Instead he went to a peasant friend of his named Adamavitzius in a compound ten kilometers from Opshe, where he stayed for several weeks. From there the peasant took him to a compound in the village of Bitzuni, where he stayed for several weeks until the peasant took him to the Shvencionys ghetto. There he found his wife Mirl and his son Leybe. Yerakhmiel stayed in the Shvencionys ghetto for several months, and managed to receive permission to travel to Ignalina, where he worked as a glazier for the Lithuanian residents. The peasants exploited him as much as they could. When they didn't need him any longer, they decided that Yerakhmiel must not remain alive as a living witness to everything that had been done to the town's Jews. The peasants were certain that Yerakhmiel was the only survivor, and they decided to kill him. But Yerakhmiel had some good friends among the townspeople, who warned him about the mortal danger he was in.

Yerakhmiel managed to escape from town to a peasant farm in the village of Paschwagina. The Jew Siderovitz had lived at the farm before the war. Police had taken the Jew from his farm and brought him to the Ignalina ghetto. He was killed at the compound near Shvencioneliai together with all of the Jews.

Siderovitz's lady friend received Yerakhmiel warmly and hid him. Yerakhmiel's wife Mirl also came from the Shvencionys ghetto to the peasant woman. They stayed with the peasant woman for half a year. Apparently neighboring peasants found out about them, and Yerakhmiel went away himself to stay with a peasant about five kilometers away.

Yerakhmiel walked on his one leg all night. He experienced fear, hunger and physical difficulty. Yerakhmiel hid at the new place until the liberation, and survived. At the beginning of 1944 the village mayor reported Siderovitz's lady friend for hiding a Jewish woman. A large number of police surrounded the farm and found Mirl at the house. They arrested her and took her to prison in Shvencionys, where she was shot. This was at the beginning of 1944.

Moyshe Korb did not leave Opshe for the Shvencionys ghetto with his brother Leybl. He left Opshe by himself for Vidz, where he stayed for a few months. From there he was one of a group of a hundred Jews who were sent to work at a saw mill in the town of Padbarde. This was before Yom Kippur 1942. They worked there for five weeks, and then they were taken to the town of Dokshtas, where they stayed for five months. On March 28, 1943 the

group of Jews were taken to the Shventzionys ghetto. On April 3, 1943 Moyshe and his brother Leybe, along with Tevye and his friend Leyzer Levitan escaped from the Shventzionys ghetto, because preparations were already being made to take the Jews from the Shventzionys ghetto to ghettos in Vilnius and Kaunas.

All four Jews made it to the home of the peasant Kapustin in the village of Bitzuni, where they rested for one day. When they left that peasant's home, the two brothers went in separate directions. They wandered through forests, fields and villages, suffered every kind of trouble and difficulty, went through the seven circles of hell, but nevertheless made it to the liberation and survived.

17. Hirsh-Aron's brother Moyshe-Yitzkhok Brumberg (see Case 6) and his wife Sonya and their four children, Tevye (aged 20), Gite (aged 18), Berl (aged 10) and one more, stayed in Ignalina until the ghetto was set up. Before the Jews in town were herded into a ghetto Sonia and her four children went to Shventzionys to her father. Moyshe-Yitzkhok entered the ghetto.

At the compound near Shventzioneliai their father met his wife and four children. He managed to bribe the partisans, who declared him and his family to be "useful" Jews and brought them back to the newly-established ghetto. He was there with his family until April 4, 1943, when all the Jews in the Shventzionys ghetto were taken away toward the Vilnius and Kaunas ghettos. Moyshe-Yitzkhok was in one of the two cars containing the members of the Shventzionys Jewish Committee, which were removed from the train at Vilnius. The rest of the Jews were taken away and shot at Ponari. The Jews in the two cars which had stopped at Vilnius were taken to the Vilnius ghetto.

Gite was taken to a concentration camp in Latvia together with other Jews from the Vilnius ghetto. From there they were taken to a concentration camp in Germany, where she survived until the liberation. Tevye stayed in the Vilnius ghetto until shortly before the ghetto was liquidated, and he managed to join the Red partisans, until he was liberated. After the Red Army arrived he was mobilized, fought at the front and survived.

Sonya and the other two children died when the Vilnius ghetto was liquidated. Details about their deaths are unavailable. Moyshe-Yitzkhok escaped before the liquidation of the Vilnius ghetto and made it to the town of Padbarde. There he was caught and shot a couple of kilometers from town, three months before the liberation.

18. Avrom Faygl, his wife Grune and their two boys escaped to Pastoviai two days before the Jews of Ignalina were herded into a ghetto. They were there until the Pastoviai ghetto was liquidated on November 21, 1943.

19. Elye Gilinsky escaped from the slaughter of Jews in Pastoviai and arrived, wounded, at the Shventzionys ghetto. Tevye Solomyak (the eyewitness) spoke with him there. Gilinsky said at that time that the Jews of Pastoviai had been brought to the pit. Germans had been standing near the pit, and they shot every Jew in the back of the head as the Jews were brought up. Gilinsky saw that he had nothing left to lose, and he started running. He was shot and wounded. Yet he managed to escape even with his wound. Throughout terrible, disastrous days and nights he wandered through forests and fields and at the homes of peasants who gave him old, torn clothing to wear, until he was able to rest up a bit and make his way to the Shventzionys ghetto. There he healed his wounds. Tevye suggested more than once that they leave the ghetto together and stay in the forests or with peasants in the villages. Elye Gilinsky was lonely in the Shventzionys ghetto, and he became close to a woman whom he didn't want to leave. He still hoped to survive and start a new family. But fate determined otherwise. When the Shventzionys ghetto was liquidated, Elye was taken toward the Kaunas ghetto, and he was shot at Ponari near Vilnius. (See Case 14 of this testimony-L.K.)

20. Some time before the war broke out on June 22, 1941, Jews from Ignalina settled in Shventzionys. When a hundred men in Shventzionys were seized and 96 of them were shot, five Ignalina Jews were included among those shot. The five men from Ignalina were:

1. Moyshe Soloveytzik, aged 25.
2. Mendl Reyn, aged 30, a merchant.
3. Khayem Gilinsky, a former Communist.
4. Ritvo, a tailor.
5. Khone Shutan, aged 35, a coachman.

Concerning the shooting of the 96 men, see page seven of the Yiddish original of the testimony of Avrom Taytz.

21. In the fall of 1943 a group of Jews were taken from the Vilnius ghetto to Estonia by train. Several people escaped from this transport near the train station in the town of Ignalina. Apparently they jumped out of the moving train, because one of them broke his leg and was brought by his comrades to the village of Budri, not far from Ignalina, to the home of the peasant Apetni. The wounded man was Dr Levin from Vilnius. The police in Ignalina found out about this and arrested him. Peasants later reported that the police had not wanted to kill him. They had

already caused too much Jewish blood to flow, and the situation at the front had shaken the Lithuanians out of their fantasy a bit. They understood well that the Germans had lost the war and they began to reconsider their bloody deeds and to think about how they would have to answer for the Jewish blood they had spilled. The guard at the Ignalina town administration, the infamous Lithuanian murderer Panawa, accepted a liter of liqueur in exchange for shooting the doctor. Panawa took the wounded Dr Levin out into the yard near the militia station and shot him. He carried the corpse to the Jewish cemetery and buried it with a bit of earth. After the liberation Tevye went to the cemetery. There he found Dr Levin's corpse lying on the ground, and he buried it properly at the same cemetery in Ignalina. After the liberation the Soviet security forces sentenced the murderer Panawa to twenty years hard labor in far-off, cold Siberia.

### **Tevye Solomyak Escapes from Ignalina**

That tragic Friday evening, September 26, all of the relatives gathered together at the home of Tevye's uncle. Tevye and his wife Hene were there, along with their two children Yankele, aged five, and Khavele, just fifteen months; Tevye's mother-in-law Khane Katz and her daughters Sore, Dobe and her daughter, a widow; Leye Liberman and her three sons Leyzerl (aged 11), Leybele (aged 8) and Nokhemele (aged 3); Tevye's uncle Artzik Katz and his wife Shifre; Tevye's two cousins Leyzer and Betzalel Levitan and his wife Leye, their two children and Betzalel's father and mother; and Tevye's grandmother, a woman of about 90 years.

The night was pitch dark, throughout the entire town. A terrible sorrow and mysterious stillness reigned throughout all the Jewish houses and courtyards. Only the heavy, confident steps of armed partisans could be heard pounding, as they disturbed the cemetery like stillness and sorrow of the sleepy ghetto.

At 8:00 p.m. the door of Tevye's house opened up, and everyone got ready to run out into the dark street and escape from town. At that moment heart-rending screams shattered the nocturnal stillness of the ghetto, the screams of women and children at the rabbi's house. The family and close friends of Rabbi Moyshe-Aron Khayet were the first ones to shout in protest at the distant, black sky against the Lithuanian cannibals, who were going to the Jewish houses in groups, forcing the Jews at gunpoint to hand over the best possessions they still had. They beat everyone and demanded money, gold and valuables. After robbing the Jews, they ordered everyone to take their clothes off and lie down to sleep.

The weeping and screams coming from the rabbi's house were like a kind of signal. Immediately after, there began to be heard the screams and weeping of women and children, coming out through the windows and doorways of all of the Jewish houses. At 10:00 p.m. a group of partisans came into Tevye's house, where they found everyone sitting in their clothes, ready to escape. They warned the Jews not to try to escape, and they angrily promised to shoot everyone who ventured outside.

As a sign that they meant business, they murderously beat Betzalel Levitan, and ordered everyone to undress and lie down to sleep. Before they went away they promised that they would come again to make sure everyone was asleep. Of course, the Jews didn't undress, and they didn't go to sleep. At midnight the partisans began pounding on the closed doors and windows. No one dared to open up. Everyone in Tevye's house understood clearly what they would face if the partisans found them still wearing their clothes. The partisans pounded louder on the doors in their mad rage, demanding to be let in. The women in the house began to weep, and so did the sleepy children. There was a terrible panic in the house. The women still believed that only the men were going to be taken away.

The partisans broke the windows and pushed in their rifle barrels. With tears in her eyes, Tevye's wife Rene became convinced that he had to escape. Tevye slipped through the front door of the house at the very moment when the partisans wanted to come in through the back door. The cool, leaden darkness of the street enveloped Tevye in its arms. Wherever Tevye ran he encountered groups of partisans. With unnatural strength his tall, healthy body began to cut through the surrounding darkness.

He ran out of town with all his strength. On every side shooting could be heard. Like bits of lightning, bright bullets whistled through the darkness in the same direction where Tevye was running. But they missed him. One kilometer outside of town Tevye stopped. Tevye covered his face and his eyes and began to consider his situation, and to think about what he had experienced during the last hour. He saw himself standing in a strange place, in a foreign, murderous world. For the first time in his life he understood that nothing around him was his. His world, his life, his past and future had been left behind in the town, in his house. His wife's weeping eyes, the gaze of his children, his relatives and friends, who had been left behind in the hands of the murderers, would not let him rest. They pulled him back like magnets, back to his own, back to the only friendly little world he had left. His mouth was dry. He was tormented by a terrible thought, which teased and mocked him: "You ran away by yourself, leaving your wife and two children in the murderous hands of the Lithuanians! Tevye, think it over! Tevye, what have you done?"

This thought bent Tevye's powerful body lower and lower toward the ground. Moans began to burst forth out of his strong chest, as if from a wounded lion. His eyes became moist. He decided to go back to his past and his future, back to his wife and children. At that moment he forgot about the danger to his own life. When he got closer to town he heard the screaming and weeping of women and children. Tevye stopped. He sensed that his dear ones had been caught in a deadly flood. He found himself on the bank, and his eyes watched as they were pulled further and further away from him in the stream, and he could do nothing to rescue them. His healthy instinct to keep living helped him out. He understood well that if he went to town now, he would not be able to reach his loved ones. A certain death would block the way. The thought that perhaps nothing would happen to them played in his mind and comforted him. With pain in his heart, with his eyes full of tears, Tevye decided to try to save his own life for the time being, and then to try to save his wife and children.

With determined steps Tevye began walking further and further away from his home town. During the night he reached the home of a peasant friend named Pitkewitz in the village of Vilanci. The peasant comforted Tevye, telling him that he had done the right thing to escape. The peasant took Tevye into his barn, and told him to rest in the straw. But Tevye could not be calm, since he wanted to know what had happened to his wife and children. He sent the peasant's son to find out. When the boy came back he reported that all of the Jews had been taken away from Ignalina.

At noon the peasant came into the barn and asked Tevye to go away. He said that his maid had certainly noticed Tevye coming, and had evidently told the partisans. The peasant told him that his maid's brothers were among the partisans. In the middle of the day Tevye had to leave the barn. This was how he first encountered the alien world in which he had to try to save himself. All day Tevye walked through forests and fields, trying to avoid being spotted by anyone.

At night he walked on the road. On the morning of Sunday, September 28 he reached the Jewish village of Stajatzishkis. He had relatives living there. When he knocked on the door, no one answered. In the distance Tevye saw someone approaching him. Tevye ran away from the village and waited until early morning. Outside it began to grow light. Tevye returned to his relatives in the village. He found the door locked. He looked through the window and saw that everything in the house had been turned upside down helter-skelter, as if after a fire. A Christian woman told him that all of the Jews had been taken out of town on Saturday, in the direction of Shventzionelai.

Tired, hungry and desperate, Tevye continued on, looking for someone he could cling to. He went in the direction of the White Russian town of Kamai, where other relatives of his lived. In the evening he reached the town. He did not find any Jews left there either. A Christian woman told him that his cousin Yankl Gurvitz had been falsely accused of hiding weapons, shortly after the arrival of the Germans. He had been shot. His family had been forced to leave town and settle at an estate two kilometers from town. Tevye sensed that he was searching for help at grave sites, at the cemeteries of Jewish communities and towns, where just a short time before hundreds of Jews had lived and worked.

When he reached the estate Tevye found the Jews there in deathly fear. Some of them were hiding at the estate. No-one knew what awaited them in the near future. Tevye found two of his cousins from Stajatzishkis at the estate. Before the war the estate had belonged to a cousin of Tevye's named Yankl Gurvits, who had already been shot in town. Tevye was afraid that the Christian workers at the estate would spot him, and he hid in a bath house until the night of Yom Kippur.

Both of his cousins, the Kagan brothers, went away to Pastoviai during that night. But he could't stay there any longer, because there was an order for all the refugees to register. When he had been in Pastoviai for four or five days, Tevye rented a peasant's wagon and rode to Kazan. A group of women were supposed to ride with him. But Tevye was afraid that there would be too much of a commotion, and instead he hired a wagon just for himself. The women were arrested on the way and brought back to Pastoviai. There they were later shot.

There was a total of fifteen people in the group, including one woman from the town of Ignalina. Tevye disguised himself as a peasant from the country, and safely arrived at the home of the Jew Berl Kagan in Kazan.

### **Tevye in the White Russian Town of Kazan**

During that tragic period, Kazan was unusual in its warmhearted hospitality. Until the war broke out about 250 Jews had lived in town. They provided a precisely equal number of Jews with food and drink. All of the refugees were given places to live. The town administration was made up of White Russians. There was no ghetto in Kazan at that time.

A Jewish Committee was responsible for ordering the life of the Jews in town. There Tevye met his cousin Leyzer Levitan, who had escaped from the compoud in Shventzionel'iai.

Tevye and his cousin Leyzer registered themselves in the town, and received a place to stay at the home of the town slaughterer. The Jews in town hoped that there wouldn't be any mass slaughters of Jews in their home country of White Russia as there had been in Lithuania, and they placed a great deal of hope in their White Russian neighbors. All of the refugees and all of the Jews from town had to go off each morning to do various tasks. Tevye and Leyzer worked in a forest, preparing firewood for the Germans. Tevye experienced a great deal of cold, terror and hunger in Kazan in the winter of 1941-1942.

In the middle of the winter Leyzer left Kazan and went to join his sister in Pastoviai. Tevye stayed until the Jews of Kazan were moved into a ghetto in the town of Gluboki. At the same time a ghetto consisting of two houses was set up for the "useful" Jews in Kazan. This was around the time of Purim 1942.

Before the Jews of Kazan were taken to Gluboki, Tevye escaped to Pastoviai. With a great deal of difficulty he managed to find a place to sleep there and a source of food. Every day he had to work hard at a saw mill. Tevye stayed at that town for exactly three months, until after Shavuot 1942.

During that time the slaughter of Jews in White Russia began. Terrible news about the total slaughter of Jews began to come from the surrounding towns of Breslaw, Sarkovt'izne, Danilevitz and Gluboki. There was great panic in Pastoviai. Tevye and Leyzer escaped from Pastoviai. They aimed to reach a local German peasant friend named Pawl in a nearby village. During the day both of them hid in grain fields or in the woods. At night they marched. On the way they had to cross a bridge over the Disna River, where there was a guard. They decided not to go over the bridge. Instead both of them swam across the river at night. They reached the peasant's home and hid in his bath house. The peasant provided them with food, which he would place near the bath house. The two comrades wandered through forests, fields and villages, but they would return to the bath house to eat. It was terribly hot lying in the grain fields all day. In the forest they were tormented by mosquitos. The peasant showed them an unoccupied settlement in a nearby village. The two men moved in there, and at that moment they felt lucky that they had a roof over their heads, and they no longer had to suffer from the mosquitos and the heat. In the evening they would come to the bath house to get food, which the good peasant would provide for them.

On one occasion the owner of the unoccupied settlement visited the place and found the two men. He actually reassured them and suggested that they stay there. However, Tevye and his comrade were afraid that the peasant might report them, and tensely waited until nightfall, when they left the spot. During that period escaped Red Army soldiers appeared in the region. They hadn't yet become organized, and they would beg peasants for food. Thus the spot was altogether unsafe, and the two men went to the White Russian town of Vidz.

### **In the Vidz Ghetto**

The town is located 35 kilometers from Ignalina, 28 kilometers from Dukstas and 50 kilometers from Shventzionys, on the unimproved road between Vilnius and Breslaw. Until Poland collapsed in 1939, the town belonged to Poland. Some 2,000 Jews lived in Vidz. They were engaged in trade and artisanry. In 1939 the town was assigned to White Russia.

When war broke out between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, only a small number of the young people in town fled to the Soviet Union. After the Germans arrived in town the civilian administration was run by White Russians, who had a hostile attitude toward the Jews. Very shortly after the Germans arrived in town they arrested and shot about 100 Jews, most of them suspected of being supporters of the Soviet Union, along with people who had occupied any sort of post under the Soviets.

All of the Jews who managed to survive the slaughter of the Jews in the nearby Lithuanian towns first went to the town of Vidz, which they thought of as the first stop on their way deeper into White Russia. Very few of the refugees stayed in the town, because all of the survivors were afraid to stay lest Lithuanians from nearby towns encounter them and recognize them. Fear of the Lithuanian police and partisans drove the Jews further on into White Russia. In addition all of the refugees had to register, which actually did give them the opportunity to stay in the town. The Germans did this so that the Jews wouldn't be forced to go and hide in the woods.

Around the time of Passover 1942 a ghetto was set up. Internal affairs were the responsibility of the Jewish Council and the Jewish police. Just like in other White Russian towns, the local Jews believed and hoped that what had happened to the Jews in Lithuania had only been possible because of the murderous attitude of the Lithuanians. They hoped that the White Russians wouldn't do the same thing.

Yet the goal of the German Fascists was clear to them, as far as the Jewish question was concerned. Nevertheless they placed too much faith in the help they expected from their neighbors.

The Jews who came from Lithuania were warmly received by the Vidz Jews, who helped them to settle in and fed them. But the mass of refugees were the most vulnerable, the first to be sent away to various labor camps and the first to be assigned to the hardest jobs.

The Vidz Jewish Council was a division of the Gluboki Jewish Council, which distributed amongst all of the surrounding White Russian Jewish communities shares of responsibility for producing the requisitions specified by the Germans. When the requisitions were assembled the Vidz Jewish Council would send them to the Gluboki Jewish council, which handed over the assembled money, gold, silver and other valuables to the Germans. The Vidz Jewish Council was responsible for providing the specified number of workers at the proper time.

On two occasions Tevye and Leyzer were forced to escape from the Vidz ghetto. Once Germans came into the ghetto and demanded that all of the Jews gather in an open square. Tevye and Leyzer escaped from the ghetto and hid in the country side for ten days. When they learned that things were quiet in the ghetto, they returned. A second time the Jewish council was supposed to provide workers to be sent to a labor camp near Vilnius. The first to be chosen, of course, were refugees. Leyzer and Tevye again escaped from the ghetto into the country, and waited until the group of workers were sent away from the ghetto.

On a third occasion the Jewish Council was supposed to supply fifteen men for a labor camp in the town of Padbarde. Other towns also had to send a certain number of workers. Six refugees from Ignalina hid in an attic. The Jewish Council refused to give them food. The Jewish police found all of them hiding in an attic and brought them to the ghetto police. There they were given old, patched shoes and a piece of bread, and fifteen men were sent to Padbarde that day. When he arrived in the camp Tevye found Jews there who had been brought from all of the surrounding White Russian towns. A total of one hundred Jews had been brought there, along with a few women. The hundred Jews were brought in from Lentupis, Michalishkis, Shventzionys, Podbarde, Pastoviai, Ignalina and other towns. Among the Jews in the camp were two brothers, survivors from Utenas, and a man named Shmuel Palatz, a survivor from Ukmerge.

### **The Labor Camp in Padbarde**

The day before Yom Kippur 1942 the Jews from the surrounding towns were brought to the town of Padbarde. Bunks had been arranged for them at the edge of town in a former elementary school, and they were given lockers. The camp was not guarded. The Jews were forbidden to leave the camp without permission; if they did, they placed their lives in danger.

Every morning the Jews had to go to work at a large sawmill. The director of the saw mill was a German from Dusseldorf. His last name was Sole. The work supervisor at the saw mill was a Lithuanian from the interior. His last name was Gilutis. This Gilutis was a bitter anti-Semite and a terrible murderer. He would greet every newly arrived group of Jews with blows from sticks and with kicks. At work he never allowed the Jews to rest. The Jews were deathly afraid of him. Groups of Jews were supervised by Jewish foremen, who had to see to it that the work was done well.

There were no set working hours. The Jews worked from dark until dark. Sometimes they worked all day and all night through. There was a kitchen at the saw mill for the Jews. But there was always very little food. The food that was supposed to go to the Jews mostly went to Sole for his own purposes. The Jews had thin soups with various kinds of grass, without any salt or fat. The Jews were thus often forced to leave the worksite to look through garbage cans, looking for leftover food or a piece of bread. Some of them went into town to beg. It cannot be said that the townspeople had any pity on them. The majority drove the Jews out of their houses without giving them a piece of bread.

The Jews had no place to wash themselves properly. Their beds were hard and dirty. They were all half-naked and barefoot.

The young Jewish survivor Shmuel Palatz was once beaten so brutally by Sole that his face could no longer be recognized, and the murderer's hand was swollen from the force of the blows. All the Jews had to witness this torture. This happened because a Polish worker had reported to Sole that Shmuel supposedly had said that he wasn't even afraid of Sole. Another Jew was once whipped as well.

Hunger tormented the exhausted Jews. Nothing could stop them from going to the countryside to try to get something to eat. Anyone who was caught going to the country was whipped.

The hundred Jews were kept at that camp for five weeks, and then they were sent to the town of Dukshatas, where the same Sole set up a new sawmill.

### **The Labor Camp in Dukshatas**

The camp was set up at the Hotel Swie in town. When the Jews were brought there, they simply had nowhere to go. The doors and windows were broken. Before the war the hotel had belonged to Jews. After the Jews of Dukshatas were taken away and shot, peasants from the village and from town had vandalized everything. The Jews themselves had to construct bunks for sleeping. The Jews covered themselves with their coats and with various rags. It was always cold. Here as well, there was no limit to the amount of work the Jews had to do. Every day they worked from twelve to eighteen hours, sometimes in two shifts. There was even one occasion when they had to work for two days and two nights in succession. The Jews worked in two sawmills.

The six Jews from Ignalina spent almost the entire time working in the saw mill where the working conditions were worst. As far as food went, things were a bit better. Peasants who used to work bringing the logs from the forest used to throw pieces of bread and some food to the Jews. It was deadly dangerous to sneak out to the countryside. From 8:00 p.m. until 6:00 a.m. the Jews were forbidden to leave the camp, except for when they had to work the night shift. The Jews managed to receive permission to go to the Shventzionys ghetto once a week to get some supplies. One Jew from Breslaw left the camp before 6:00 a.m. once to try to get something to eat from townspeople.

German police caught him and took him to a large room. They herded all of the Jews into the room. They set a huge wolf hound on the Jew from Breslaw, and the dog tore pieces of the man's flesh. At the same time the police brutally beat the helpless Jew.

Some time later the Jew Matis Kovarsky and his entire family were brought from the Shventzionys ghetto. He was assigned to be the director of the saw mill. More than once this kapo beat his own brothers if he thought they were working badly. He would respond that he had to answer to Sole. Matis himself didn't need to go to the countryside. He got along well with Sole, and Sole knew that he would illegally sell boards and lumber from the saw mill. In return he would get ham, butter and eggs from peasants. He gave some of this to Sole.

The behavior of this Jewish degenerate toward the depressed, overworked Jews was so inhumane that the Jews developed a plan to murder him and escape into the forest. Tevye and the rest of the Jews of Ignalina did not suffer from hunger for long at that camp. Peasant friends used to bring Tevye and his friends from Ignalina so much food that there was enough to satisfy the hunger of the other Jews as well.

Once, six young men escaped from the Shventzionys ghetto, aiming to make contact with the Red partisans in the nearby White Russian forests. On the way they slept at the Dukshatas camp. In the morning they went away in the direction of Vidz. A few kilometers from Rimshan the German police arrested them and brought them to the police in Dukshatas. From there all six managed to escape. Three of them were caught and shot.

One of them went to a peasant's house to hide. Police found out about this, surrounding the peasant's house and captured him there. At the last moment he pulled a knife out of his pocket and killed himself. This young man was a survivor from the town of Turmont. His name was Motke  
(see the testimony about the slaughter of the Jews of Turmont - LK).

The other two young men were not caught. This incident had a very bad effect on the lives of the Jews in the camp. When the six Jewish arrestees were being taken out of town in two carts, the Jews in the camp saw them. One Jew from Breslaw exchanged a few words with the arrestees from Breslaw who were in the cart. Police came to the camp, demanding that the Jew who had spoken to the arrestees report himself to them. No one reported himself. The Germans took several Jews out of the line and threatened to shoot them if the "guilty party" didn't reveal himself. Then the Breslaw Jew came forward. They interrogated him, beat him and released him. They warned the rest of the Jews not to leave the camp without permission.

A Jewish family from Trisvit, consisting of a husband, a wife and a child, were hiding in a village between Dukshatas and Trisvit. The family's last name was Ring. The wife's name was Mashe. The husband went to beg for food from peasants in the villages. He was caught, brought to the Jewish cemetery in Dukshatas and shot. Mashe Ring and her child hid with peasants and survived.

The following incident caused a considerable amount of embarrassment and anxiety for everyone in the camp: A Jew from Dvinsk named Schiff and his daughter were in the camp. They had hidden in a White Russian town when

the residents were taken to the Padbarde camp. All of the Jews knew that she was sleeping with Sole. The father was ashamed of this, and he used to complain, but there was nothing he could do about it. Once a peasant woman saw the girl sleeping in Sole's room and reported her. Gestapo came from Kaunas to investigate the matter, and they arrested the girl. However, she managed to escape and made her way to the Dvinsk ghetto. A peasant from Dukstas spotted her in the Dvinsk ghetto and told the Gestapo, who arrested her and shot her.

When the Dukstas labor camp was liquidated the Jew Schiff and the young man Shmuel Palatz from Ukmerge escaped to the Dvinsk ghetto. Schiff died there.

The Dukstas labor camp was liquidated, and all the Jews were taken to the Shventzionys ghetto on March 28, 1943. The Jews suffered in that camp for exactly five months.

### **The Liquidation of the Shventzionys Ghetto**

When the men were taken out of the Dukstas camp to the Shventzionys ghetto, the Ignalina Jew Shmuel Gilinsky also escaped. All of the rest were brought to the Shventzionys ghetto under guard. The new arrivals found terrible panic in the ghetto. No-one knew what to do or where to go. People were signing up to go to Vilnius or to Kaunas. But the rest of the Jews immediately noticed that it was somehow hard to sign up to go to Vilnius. Most people were signed up to go to the Kaunas ghetto.

The Jews of Ignalina didn't guess exactly what was being prepared for the Jews, but they had enough experience not to believe any promises made by the Germans and Lithuanians. They were more careful in the ghetto by then. Five Ignalina Jews came from the Dukstas camp. Tevye, Leyzer Levitan, Yeshayohu Dubinsky, Moyshe Korb and Shloyme Kuritzky decided to escape from the ghetto, and proposed to their friends that they do the same thing. None of their friends could decide. Four Ignalina Jews escaped from the ghetto at midnight on April 3, 1943. Before dawn they arrived at the village of Bitzuni, at the home of the peasant Michal Kapustis. When they had been there for a day, the peasant decided he didn't want to keep them any longer. They tried their luck with other peasants. No-one accepted them. The two Korb brothers left to try their luck on their own.

Tevye and Leyzer had no money or valuables, and they decided to take a dangerous, bold step. Tevye had left valuables at the home of a peasant named Michal Korbowsky in Ignalina. The two comrades went to the peasant's home in town at night and took a large package of valuables. They returned to the village of Bitzuni, avoiding the town of Ignalina, and went to a peasant friend of Tevye's named Kazys Mudin in the village of Petrowa, between Dukstas and Ignalina. The peasant had often come to the Dukstas camp and spoken with Leyzer. He always advised him to guard his life and be careful. He even told Leyzer that if he was in danger, he should come to the peasant's house to hide until the end of the war.

When Tevye and his friend arrived, the peasant wouldn't even let him into his house. Leyzer had hidden some of his goods with the peasant as well. Since the two men found no place to rest their weary bodies, they decided to return to Shventzioneliai, where they believed they would still be able to find the transport of Jews headed for the Kaunas ghetto. As they walked along during the day on April 4 in the direction of Shventzioneliai, they met a peasant in the forest of Rashkitanu. The peasant was interested in the two Jews, who told him about their plan to catch up with the transport. The peasant urgently dissuaded them from doing this, and advised them to hide instead. He gave them liquor and told them to go into the forest until night time.

The two comrades barely made it until nightfall, and then went to the peasant's home in the village of Rakutzi, seven kilometers from Ignalina. The peasant who had promised to help them during the day wouldn't even open the door to them. The two men were in a hopeless situation. They had no place to go, and they had already missed the transport. The two men went to a bath house at a settlement belonging to the peasant Tzekutis. They planned to spend the day there and then continue in the direction of Dukstas. In the middle of the day the peasant came to the bath house, and when he found the two Jews there, he raised the alarm. Tevye calmed him down, told him who he was and asked him to tell the peasant in the house about him. The daughter of the family knew Tevye. She brought food to the bath house and was "happy" to see the Jews. But after they had stayed for three days, they had to leave at night, and they continued in the direction of Dukstas. In the village of Belowecky they went to a peasant who lived not far from the railroad tracks, and with whom Tevye had hidden various items of haberdashery. The peasant received them decently, but he was afraid to keep the two Jews in his barn, because Red partisans often attacked the railroad tracks, so there were frequent roundups in that area.

The Jews stayed with him for six days and then went to the village of Pashwagine, to see the woman who ran the Jewish settlement belonging to the Jew Siderevitz. There they met Yerakhmiel Korb and his wife Mirl. They couldn't stay there, of course, because the peasant women couldn't support four Jews. They went to a Polish peasant in the same village. The Jews promised to give him everything they owned in exchange for his keeping them for a

specified period. The peasant was satisfied with the deal, and agreed to keep them for a certain time. In the middle of the day, however, he demanded that they leave him. The two comrades continued wandering around for some time, having no place to go and hide from death.

When they arrived at the home of the peasant Shtoma in the village of Malwinowa, not far from Dukshatas, he received them very warmly. The good peasant simply wept when he saw the terrible condition the two Jews were in, and he took them to his barn. The Polish peasant did everything he could for the two comrades. He arranged a bath where they could wash, bought them salve in town to heal the scratches on their bodies, and fed them well. They stayed with this good peasant for exactly two weeks. The peasant had a large family, consisting of ten people, and lacked the material resources to support two more people. In addition he was afraid to risk the lives of ten innocent people in his family.

Before he let the Jews go away, he directed them to go to the village of Michalowa, eight kilometers from Dukshatas, to the home of a peasant named Jeronim Taraschewitz, who lived at a crossroads.

### **"One of a Very Few"**

At 10:00 p.m. the two comrades fearfully knocked at a peasant's door. He directed them to the owner, who immediately told them to go into a barn. Before daybreak he himself came to see the Jews. They did not know each other. Tevye reminded him who he was. The peasant hesitated, unable to decide whether to accept them. He explained that the peasants brought milk to his house to be handed over to the authorities, and he always had guests. In addition there were roundups of Red partisans in that region, because there was a railroad line nearby.

The two friends explained to the peasant that they had been sent to him. The peasant absolutely demanded to know who had sent them. The Jews wouldn't tell him. Suddenly the peasant began to weep and kiss the two Jews. After this unexpected response, they told the peasant everything, including who had sent them and that he had kept them for two weeks. "Well, if he supported you for two weeks, I'll keep you for two weeks as well," the peasant responded decisively. But he explained as well that he was about to take his son and his sister to a commission in town. If they weren't drafted into the military, he would keep the two Jews. The peasant paid to have his son and sister released from duty, and arranged a place for the two friends to stay, first in the barn and then in the attic of a stall. The peasant took care of the two Jews as if they were his own children. Two good weeks passed, and the Jews were getting ready to go. The peasant sent his daughter with a message that he was going to keep them for one more week. After the third week the two Jews themselves began begging the peasant to keep them, urgently insisting that he didn't have to give them so much food. The peasant once again agreed to keep them on. He didn't say how long he would keep them.

On one occasion he went to the Jews in the attic and told them with satisfaction that he had listened to the Polish radio news from London. The speaker had asked all decent people to do everything they could to rescue those persecuted by the Nazi regime. "What God decides is what will be, either all of us will live or all of us will die," the peasant declared to the two Jews, and he kissed them.

During the fifth week the peasant brought boards to the attic of the stall and built a false ceiling, which could serve as a hiding place for the Jews in case there was a raid. When the work was finished and straw was spread over it, he called his wife and daughter in and just like an innocent little boy, happily ordered them to find the two Jews. No matter how hard they looked, they couldn't find the Jews. Then he told the two friends to come out of the hiding place, and he kissed them again as he promised to hide them until the liberation.

Not only the peasant, but his wife and daughter as well, were extremely generous toward the helpless Jews. The peasant woman gave them milk to drink instead of water, and gave them as much food as possible, as if they were children. "You won't have the strength to get down out of the attic," she would complain to the two Jews, who were careful not to increase the burden on their rescuers any more than necessary, and who therefore deliberately ate little.

Once the daughter Trotzka was bringing them food, and Germans encountered her. She was so afraid that she went out of her mind and she had to be sent to the hospital in Vilnius.

When the two Jews had been there for half a year, the owner's sister was taken to Germany. He didn't buy her way out of it, so that no one would come inspect his house. He temporarily abandoned his sister for the sake of the Jews. That was the kind of man this good Polish peasant was, once he had decided to rescue the two Jews at any price.

It was very dangerous. If the Jews had been found at his home, the peasant would have risked death. There were dangers on every side. His farm was close to the railroad line. Red partisans often blew up parts of the line. There were roundups throughout the surrounding area. More than once Germans and Lithuanian partisans came to his house.

At first he would prepare a bath for the two friends every two weeks. Later this became too dangerous, and he kept them for nine months without letting them down from the attic. He often went up into the attic himself, bringing the growing youths liquor, comforting and encouraging them. He brought them various newspapers and news from the front.

On June 7, 1944 the peasant came up to the attic and told them that the Bolsheviks were advancing, and had already reached Gluboki. He was worried that the front might stop near the farm, in which case his family would have to leave and the two Jews would be left alone. At midday that same day, July 7, 1944, Soviet reconnaissance troops appeared in the village. A short time later they were in the peasant's yard. Among these advance troops was a Jewish Red Army officer. The peasant brought the two Jews out to the Jewish officer. The peasant, the Jews and the Red officers were overjoyed, and they arranged a big party at the peasant's house. Dozens of Red Army officers examined the hiding place the good peasant had arranged to keep the Jews safe from the German and Lithuanian cannibals. The officers saw this as a good example of what the Red Army was fighting for, and thanking the peasant for his generosity and the risk he had taken, they called him "the unknown hero of the Soviet Union."

For some time afterward the good peasant Jeronim Taraschewitz had to hide inside the false ceiling himself, because Lithuanian partisans found out about him and wanted to kill him for having the "nerve" to hide Jews from their demonic, murderous hands.

After the Red Army arrived in Lithuania the former partisans and police began hiding in the forests, terrorizing the surrounding population. More than once they came to Taraschewitz and robbed him. They took a horse and a cow from him, and tried to kill the peasant. Once he barely survived by hiding under the garbage in the stall. About three months after the liberation the good peasant made a party for his peasant neighbors, and also invited representatives of the Soviet security forces. During the party he kissed the two Jewish survivors, calling them his own youngsters. Until the last day the peasant has maintained a correspondence with the two Jews, and their friendship will last forever.

Tevye at the end remembers a number of facts, and asks that they be added to the testimony.

1. Immediately after the arrival of the Germans in Ignalina, a German went to have one of his teeth examined by the Jewish dentist. After the examination the German asked how much he had to pay. The doctor took two marks for the treatment. For this display of "Jewish nerve" the German drove the dentist out of his house, made him wear a board with an inscription on his chest, and herded him through the streets of the town all day, beating him cruelly.
2. The intellectual leader of the partisan organization in town was an agronomist named Maldzhius, from the village of Krikjani, fifteen kilometers from Ignalina. His assistant was the teacher Paukshtis from the elementary school in town. Tevye emphasizes that the Lithuanian intelligentsia took active part in slaughtering the Jews of Ignalina, and they always tried to stay in the background, without being noticed.
3. Tevye clearly remembers that the townspeople used to sign up on lists whenever there was a new decree concerning the Jews. They did this when the Jews were herded into the ghetto, and again when they were taken away to the military compound near Shventzioneliai. In this manner every Lithuanian resident hoped to inherit the goods of the Jews.

### **Attestation of Tevye Solomyak**

Everything written by Leyb Koniuchowsky about the slaughter of the Jews of Ignalina, about the Vidz ghetto, about the labor camps in Padbarde and Dukshatas, and finally about the liquidation of the Shventzionys ghetto, was personally experienced by me, Tevye Solomyak. All of the facts, dates, names of persons and geographic locations were personally supplied by me, and I attest thereto with my signature on each and every page.

Eyewitness      Tevye Solomyak      (Signature)

The testimony was recorded by Engineer L Koniuchowsky  
Leipheim am Donau      February 16, 1948

The signature of Tevye Solomyak, resident of the Leipheim Camp, is attested to by the chairman of the camp committee.      Wachshendler      Leipheim      February 16, 1948

*Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin      New York      November 16, 1994*

## **THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS OF DAUGELISHKIS**

The testimony of Dvoyre Kuritzky, born April 6, 1911 in New Daugelishkis. From 1934 until 1939 she lived in Tel-Aviv, in the Land of Israel. That year Dvoyre came home for a visit, and she could not return because of the outbreak of the war between Nazi Germany and Poland. She continued to live in town the entire time. Dvoyre graduated from the Yiddish elementary school in New Daugelishkis. Her father's name was Leybe, and her mother's name was Reyzl, born Svirsky.

### **Geographic, Economic and Cultural Situation**

Daugelishkis is located 25 kilometers north of Shventzionys, on the highway between Dvinsk and Shventzionys, eighteen kilometers from the Lithuanian town of Dukstas and ten kilometers from Ignalina. The town is divided into two parts: New Daugelishkis and, three kilometers away, Old Daugelishkis. When the war broke out on June 22, 1941 about 280 Jews lived in New Daugelishkis, and about fifty Jews lived in Old Daugelishkis.

The Jews of Old Daugelishkis were employed in agriculture. The majority of the Jews in New Daugelishkis worked in trade and artisanry. The economic situation in the town was not bad.

Before Poland collapsed in 1939, the town belonged to Poland. After the collapse the town was assigned to Lithuania. The surrounding villagers, as well as the townspeople, were all Lithuanians. The attitude of the Lithuanians in town toward the Jews before the war broke out in 1941 was not bad.

New Daugelishkis had a community bank, an elementary school with instruction in Yiddish, a Hebrew-Yiddish library, one study house in New Daugelishkis and another in Old Daugelishkis.

### **The War Breaks Out, Ten Innocent Jews Killed**

The majority of the young Jews belonged to Zionist movements. After the war broke out on June 22, 1941, only eight young people in town escaped together with the Soviet officials. These were young people who had been involved in politics under the Soviets, or who had occupied responsible positions. The great majority of the Jews did not even leave town for the countryside. The Germans entered the town on Wednesday, July 2, 1941. Beginning several days before the Germans arrived, armed Lithuanian bandits who called themselves partisans began running the town.

That same Wednesday, July 2, Germans ordered all the Jews, including the elderly and the sick, to gather at the square near the town hall. There all the Jews were lined up in rows and counted. There were a total of about 270 Jews in town at that time. They allowed the elderly and the sick to go home. The rest of the able-bodied men and women were immediately sent to do various tasks. After work everyone was allowed to go home. From that day on all of the able-bodied men and women had to report to the square near the town hall every morning. From there they were sent to do various tasks, such as pulling out the grass growing between the cobblestones in the town streets, washing the floors in the buildings used by, the Germans and partisans, and chopping wood. A group of men worked repairing the cemetery where German soldiers who had died during the First World War were buried.

The Germans spent a short amount of time in the town, and then proceeded further toward the front. All of the power in town fell into the hands of the partisans and police, who began their work of annihilating the Jews in town. The new mayor in town was the farmer Shtzeponis from the village of Micnalowa, three kilometers from town.

The chief of the partisans was Laurentzukas from the village of Laurentzukas, three kilometers from town. The intellectual leader of the partisans was the student technician Blaskauskas. The new police chief was a Lithuanian who had come from the town of Utenas named Griblauskas. Immediately after the civilian administration of the town was set up, the Lithuanians issued all of the familiar anti-Jewish decrees. Partisans and Germans went to all the Jewish houses, robbing them of whatever they chose to take. The partisan Druteikas, a farmer from the village of Dibarishkis, one kilometer from town, displayed exceptional brutality in the course of these robberies. The murderer broke the finger of a woman named Hese Kuritzky in the process of stealing her gold ring. That day he beat many Jews while he was robbing them. On the evening of Monday, July 14 partisans and police in town arrested ten men whose names were on a list of people whose children had escaped to the Soviet Union or who were suspected of having Communist sympathies. That same evening the ten Jews were driven through the town, carrying spades and under heavy guard, in the direction of Ignalina. Three kilometers from town they were forced to dig a pit, and there they were shot.

The next day, July 15, the partisan Druteikas personally told Dvoyre's brother Moyshe that the ten men who had been taken out had been shot. That same day a peasant came from the village of Maksimanei and said that the ten Jews had been shot, and that the feet of the corpses were sticking out of the grave. Malke Abelevitz, Yokhl Lifshifz and several other women whose husbands were among the ten murdered men went to the mass grave and personally saw everything. They tried to exhume the corpses and bury them at the Jewish cemetery. The police did not permit this.

The ten Jews who were murdered were:

1. Fayve, a smith, aged 48.
2. Yosl Abelevitz, Fayve's brother-in-law, along with Yosl's son Yankl and Yosl's brother-in-law Leybe.
3. Zalmen Tzinman, a tailor.
4. Alter Berman, a tailor.
5. Shoyel Ushpol, a merchant.
6. Moyshe Fridman, a merchant from Kaltinenai.
7. Yankl Tzinman, a tailor.

The ten Jews were arrested and then taken to be shot by several dozen partisans and police. Dvoyre only remembers a few of the murderers:

1. The chief of police in town.
2. Druleika.
3. Cicenas, from the village of Duborishkis, near town.
4. Milashius.
5. Laurentziukas, the chief of the partisans in town.
6. Bartoshki, a Russian from the village of Porigi, five kilometers from town.
7. Ponawa, two brothers from the village of Maksimantzi.
8. The student technician Blaskauskas from the village of Azani, five kilometers from town.

Exactly one week later partisans shot the teacher Avrom Soloveytzik from Shventzionys. Along with several other Jews he had been working at the German cemetery. Day in, day out they beat him murderously. One time they took him away from work, lead him out of town into an orchard, shot him there and threw him into a pit. His wife and father-in-law buried him at the Jewish cemetery in Ignalina.

When the war broke out he had been afraid to stay in Shventzionys because he was a member of the Communist Youth, and he and his wife had fled to stay with his father-in-law in New Daugelishkis.

### **Establishment of the Ghetto Jewish Council; Robberies and Murders**

As soon as the civilian administration was established in town, they appointed the Jew Yudl Aron as the chief of the Jews. Yudl served as intermediary between the Jews on one hand, and the police and partisans on the other. They used him as their vehicle to extort various "requisitions" which they would demand. He was responsible to see to it that the specified number of workers appeared at the specified time.

On Monday, September 8, 1941 at 5:00 a.m., Yudl went to the Jewish houses announcing that all of the Jews had two hours to get ready and to move into a ghetto in the poorest neighborhood at the edge of town. They were permitted to bring everything along except for their better furniture. They were forbidden to use horses to help carry their possessions. The partisan comander gave Yudl a list indicating which house every family was supposed to settle into.

It was a market day in town. The peasants watched curiously and happily as the Jews dragged their few possessions along. Those who didn't manage to move everything in the course of two hours had to leave everything behind in their houses. On the evening of that same day, the Jewish residents of Old Daugelishkis arrived, riding their own horses and wagons and bringing their cattle and poultry.

The next day, Saturday, September 9, the police announced through Yudl that all the Jews had to bring their horses and cattle to the municipal building. They only permitted four cows to be left behind in the ghetto. The Jews were forbidden to leave the ghetto area. There was no fence around the ghetto, nor was it guarded.

After they had been in the ghetto for a week, partisans and police took away every kind of machine the Jews had. At the same time they ordered the Jews to hand over their money, gold, silver and other valuables. Yudl gathered everything together, made a list of who had given what, and brought everything to the police. The next day they surrounded the ghetto, searched all of the Jewish houses and checked to see whether everyone had surrendered all of their valuables. As they made the searches, they took everything they found useful.

The partisans also committed robberies on their own. Each one of them issued orders and robbed Jews. Thus they announced that Jews were not allowed to sleep on bedding, and they took everyone's bedding.

Every morning the Jews in the ghetto had to gather near the police station, and from there they were taken to do various tasks. Wealthier peasants also had permission to take Jews to work in the country every morning. When they returned from the countryside in the evening, the Jews had to report to the police. At work they were guarded by partisans who tormented and beat the Jews. One time they harnessed a boy from Old Daugelishkis named Alter Kril to a wagon. Alter had to drag the wagon through the street, and the partisans struck him with whips like a horse. All day they tormented him this way. The peasants in town stood on the sides of the streets, enjoying the "interesting performance." Alter was brought to the ghetto in the evening, barely alive. He lay sick in bed all week.

### **Terrible News About the Slaughter in Lithuanian Towns**

Peasants in the villages and neighbors from town began telling the Jews terrible details about the slaughter of all the Jews in the Lithuanian towns, and began suggesting to the Jews that they "entrust" to the peasants their better possessions "until after the war." The Jews sensed that a terrible storm was coming their way.

On Friday, September 25 all of the workers were detained until late in the evening. Early in the morning on the Saturday between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur the Jews noticed the ghetto had been surrounded by heavily armed partisans. About ten minutes later Yudi came to Dvoyre's house weeping. He announced in the name of the partisans that all of the Jews had to prepare to move into the Gluboki ghetto. They were only allowed to bring along a small pack of food, enough to last three days. He also expressed the opinion that all of the Jews were going to be shot.

In ten minutes the Jews had to leave their homes and go outside into the streets by their houses. They were taken to the square near the police station in groups, and there everyone was forced to sit down. They threatened to shoot on the spot anyone who stood up. After they drove the Jews out of their houses, they nailed the doors and windows closed. In the square they grouped everyone according to family, thoroughly searched everyone and took away the last goods the Jews had managed to bring along.

They forced the Jews to go in the direction of Shvencioneliai, under a heavy guard of partisans who were on foot and riding horses. The elderly, weak and sick, along with the children, were taken in wagons. The Jews were taken to the Shvencioneliai compound late in the evening on the Sabbath between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, 1941. (Concerning the further fate of the Jews of Daugelishkis, see the report of Dr Tarasevsky about the slaughter of the Jews. of Shvencionys - LK)

As the Jews were being driven from Daugelishkis, the partisans beat them murderously. A Jew named Aba-Zelik Aron was murderously beaten by a partisan for being unable to stand everything. Aba-Zelik was sixty years old at the time. Dvoyre managed to get a ride in a wagon.

Two Jews from New Daugelishkis named Moyshe Gordon and Avrom Ushpol went from the ghetto to work for Germans in the village of Schlesirischkis. They returned from work to town on Saturday, September 26. On the way they met peasant acquaintances who told them that all the Jews had been taken out of the ghetto. They both stayed outside of town and hid in a forest. Partisans arrested the two men, brought them to Daugelishkis and locked them in a cellar.

A peasant friend of theirs named Shtzepanis found out they had been arrested, and received permission from his partisan friends to bring them food. The peasant warned the two Jews of the mortal danger awaiting them, and told them to get ready to leave the cellar the next day. The next day the peasant got the partisan commander drunk, along with several of his comrades, all of whom had stayed in town. The rest of the partisans had taken the Jews to the military compound.

Shtzepanis and another peasant broke the cellar open and told the Jews to escape. The two Jews were afraid to leave the cellar. "When do you want to die? Today or tomorrow?" the peasant told the Jews, and this convinced them to leave the cellar. The peasant told them not to come hide at his house, because the partisans would accuse him of saving the Jews and would come to search his place.

But the Jews had no-one to hide them, and they went to his home nevertheless. The peasant told them whose home to go to. The two men went to the home of a peasant named Raginis, where they stayed for four weeks until they went to Vidz.

When the Vidz ghetto was set up, Avrom Ushfol went to a brother of his in Pastoviai, where he died with all of the Jews of Pastoviai on November 21, 1942.

Moyshe-Isser Gordon entered the Vidz ghetto and stayed there until the liquidation. He went to the Shventzionys ghetto together with the rest of the Jews in the Vidz ghetto. He rode in the train with the Jews going to the Kaunas ghetto. They stopped near Ponari, where everyone was driven out of the railroad cars and shot. Moyshe-Isser Gordon was among those who died there.

Dvoyre's husband Tevye Solomyak spoke to Gordon before the Shventzionys ghetto was liquidated, and suggested that they escape together. Gordon was very attached to a girl, and got involved in a love affair with her. So he didn't leave the ghetto, and he died together with his beloved. Tevye also says that despair reigned in the Shventzionys ghetto, and along with it came loose morals and drunkenness; people descended to the lowest level. Tevye said goodbye to Gordon, who said: "I know that if you leave the ghetto, you have a 90% chance to live. My chances of surviving here are small." Nevertheless he did not leave the ghetto.

### **Dvoyre Manages to Escape. Her Heroic Struggle for Survival**

When the Jews of Daugelishkis were brought close to the military compound, shots were heard and a huge bonfire was seen. The Jews were certain that everyone who had been brought there was being thrown into the fire and shot. Peasants who had brought the Jews from the surrounding villages rode past them. They reported that the Jews who had already been brought there had been settled in barracks. Dvoyre was certain, however, that everyone was being shot, and since she had nothing to lose, she made her way down from the wagon and began running away. At that very moment Mrs Rokhl-Beyle Geytzen and her daughter Rosa ran away from the cart. The partisans chased after them and returned the mother and daughter to the cart, with their rifles drawn and cocked. Dvoyre managed to run away, through valleys and pits and over hills. She found herself filled with superhuman strength. She kept running forward, not knowing where she was headed. The dark night protected her from harm. The flames of the bonfire could be seen for quite some distance, and constant shooting could be heard. Dvoyre ran for about ten kilometers, but she was still afraid she might be captured right away. She went into a forest, made her way into a patch of dense, swampy brush and prepared a hiding place for herself. Depressed and hopeless, she stayed in the dense forest all night. She lay there exhausted all day Sunday. Finally hunger made her alert. She felt in her pockets, but didn't find a single crust of bread.

She gathered various berries that were ripe in the fall and thus managed to calm her hunger and thirst a little bit. Dvoyre was afraid to leave the forest. She would see peasant men and women walking along happy and satisfied, and she was afraid to approach them. Dvoyre began living like Tarzan, with one difference: Tarzan had to watch out for wild animals, and fight against them. Dvoyre had to hide from people, those who were of the same species as herself.

She also had a much harder time finding food than Tarzan or Robinson Crusoe. When she had been in the forests for a few weeks, she began eating various grasses and frozen mushrooms. In the forest she had to struggle mightily against the early cold weather, which were exceptionally stubborn and stormy that fall. As she lay among the bushes, Dvoyre very often heard peasants speaking about the Jews who had been slaughtered at the compound. They would mention the names of Jews who had been found with treasure on their corpses after they were shot, and which of the peasants had gotten rich that way.

She also saw them carrying packages of Jews' possessions that had been bought at auction. When she heard all these conversations, Dvoyre was even more afraid of showing herself to people.

One evening Dvoyre couldn't control herself, and she stopped a peasant and his wife. She doesn't know how long she wept before them, pleading with them to give her a piece of bread and show her first how to leave the forest, and then to continue to Daugelishkis. The peasant and his wife took great pity on Dvoyre, who no longer resembled a human being. They promised that at night they would take her to their farm. They went away.

An eternity passed before Dvoyre saw the peasant woman coming, bringing bread and a bottle of milk. Dvoyre looked at the bread, something she hadn't seen for several weeks, as if it were a priceless treasure. At first she decided to keep it for several days. She broke off little pieces and carefully placed them in her mouth. The peasant woman looked on and wiped her eyes. After she went away Dvoyre ate all of the bread and drank all of the milk. A few hours later the peasant came, bringing her a coat to put on. During the night he brought Dvoyre to his house and had her lie down on the oven. Dvoyre grew sick from eating the bread and milk. Her intestines had atrophied, and didn't work properly. She fainted on the oven. As a result, the peasant didn't want to keep her any longer. At 4:00 a.m. he took her out onto the road. But Dvoyre wandered back into the forest, where she stayed for three days. On the third day Dvoyre met a peasant woman coming from Shventzionys. She was carrying a package of

Jewish clothes that she had bought at auction. The peasant woman took Dvoyre along with her and brought her to a bath house near the forest. Her farm was not far from the spot. At the bath house the woman put Dvoyre into a barrel and covered her over. She told Dvoyre to be very careful, so that her husband didn't find out, because he was terribly cruel and a drunkard.

At night the son came to Dvoyre and brought her a warm coat. Some time later the mother and the daughter came into the bath house. They were very sympathetic toward Dvoyre and pulled her shoes off her swollen feet. They gave her clothes so she could change, and they fed her. The next morning the peasant woman brought a bucket of hot coals into the bath house. Dvoyre warmed herself, and didn't know how to thank the good peasant woman. As she lay in the bath house, Dvoyre constantly relived all of the horrors she had lived through in the course of the past weeks.

Near the bath house was a lake in the forest. The splashing of the water and the rustle of the leaves in the trees were the sounds that comforted Dvoyre. Dvoyre had something to entertain and comfort her. The lake and the forest became her friends, but not for long. After the peasant woman had kept her in the bath house for eight days, she announced that she was afraid of her husband, and asked Dvoyre to go away.

During the eight days in the bath house Dvoyre regained some of her strength. Her intestines, which had become atrophied during the six weeks she had stayed in the forest eating nothing but grasses and berries, began to function again. Yet her feet were still swollen.

The peasant woman gave her warmer clothes to wear, and food to bring along. At 2:00 a.m. the peasant woman took Dvoyre's arm and walked with her twenty-odd kilometers toward Daugelishkis. Dvoyre walked with a stick in one hand, and the other hand holding on to the good peasant woman. In the morning the peasant woman brought her onto a road, said goodbye and wept. Dvoyre knew the roads in that area very well. She avoided people, lying in fields and forests during the day. At night she went onto the road. At 2:00 a.m. she passed her home town.

The Jewish houses stood in a cloak of mourning, as if they had been orphaned. It seemed to Dvoyre that she was walking through a huge Jewish cemetery. In one house partisans were getting drunk, partying and dancing with Lithuanian girls from town. When she passed through the town she arrived at the village of Wasuli, one kilometer from town, where she went to the home of the peasant Matzulis, with whom Dvoyre had hidden some of her better things. Dvoyre knocked on the door. The peasant was quite familiar with Dvoyre's voice, but he didn't open the door. He had considered her dead for a long time, and considered himself the inheritor of her possessions. After she had knocked on the door for a long time, the criminal peasant opened the door and threw a bit of bread and cheese out at her. When she left the peasant's house, Dvoyre found a partisan on the way. She threw herself down by the side of the road and covered herself over with snow. The partisan passed by without seeing her.

She lay in the Christian cemetery in Daugelishkis until morning, and then she went to a village near the town, to the home of the peasant Mikodem. She had given some goods to this man for safekeeping as well. Dvoyre stayed at a bath house without the peasant's knowledge for three days without eating or drinking. Outside it was extremely cold by then. One night she went into the peasant's house. The children were afraid when they saw Dvoyre, and raised a commotion. The peasant took Dvoyre into another room and gave her food. He didn't allow her to stay in the bath house. He promised to show her where to go. Letting Dvoyre go out of the house first, the peasant shut the door behind her and went back into the house. The peasant was unhappy that the owner of the things that had been left with him was still alive, and that she was trying to stay alive even longer. Dvoyre continued wandering for three more days without finding any rest for her swollen legs.

When Dvoyre went to the home of the peasant Shtzeponis in the village of Maligalishki, two kilometers from town, he received her warmly, drew a bath for her, and gave her food and drink. Dvoyre stayed in the hay in the good peasant's barn for two weeks, through terribly cold weather. The peasant did everything he could to make Dvoyre stronger and healthier. Dvoyre had left some of her things with this peasant as well. The two Jewish survivors from New Daugelishkis, Moyshe-Isser Gordon and Avrom Ushfal hid at the home of the same peasant Shtzeponis in the village of Maligalishki.

Dvoyre learned from this peasant that Jews were still living freely in Vidz, and no-one was bothering them. After she had been at the peasant's home for two weeks, he took her to the town of Vidz. When she had been in Vidz for three weeks, there was an order for all of the refugees to register at the German gendarmerie. Of course the refugees avoided doing this, and a large number of them left the town. Dvoyre did not register, either. She spent the day among Jews, and at night she went to the home of a Polish tailor named Skurka.

Dvoyre paid him for this with two pieces of cloth that could be made into clothes. Some time later people began to say that Vidz and several other White Russian towns would be assigned to Lithuania. This was very bad news for the refugees from Lithuanian towns. They hadn't forgotten the Lithuanians, and they feared them like the worst wild

beasts. Some of the refugees snuck out of town and went further into White Russia, to Kazan, Pastoviai and other locations. A certain Polish peasant had a reputation at the time for being a very reliable person who managed to transport people from Vidz into White Russia.

This was the peasant Kazimezh Cintzik from the village of Sarkishki. Dvoyre met the good peasant, and with tears in her eyes she begged him to save her and bring her to his home in the country. The peasant promised to talk it over with his wife, and to bring her an answer the next day. Dvoyre promised to give him everything that belonged to her and that she had hidden in the countryside. She promised to reward him separately after the war. The next morning the peasant came and gave her the good news that he had convinced his wife, and the same day he brought Dvoyre to his farm.

The peasant and his wife Ruzhe received Dvoyre very warmly, fed her and gave her something to drink. They kept her on the oven in their house. After two weeks Dvoyre wrote letters to all of the peasants in the countryside with whom she had hidden some of her things, saying that she was in the Gluboki ghetto, and asking them to send back her possessions with the peasant. In the letter she wrote to the murderous peasants who hadn't allowed her into their houses, she threatened that if they didn't return her things she would report them to the Germans.

The letters were effective. The good peasant Tzincik took back Dvoyre's possessions from everyone, and he was very happy that he had the chance to save Dvoyre from death, and also that he would have enough for himself and his wife.

When she had been at the peasant's home for a month, two Jews named Yitzkhok Katzerginsky and Shakhe Klumel came to the peasant. Neither of them wanted to go into the ghetto, and instead they had escaped from town. The peasant was friendly with them, and he took both of them in. He arranged a hiding place for the three Jews in an attic disguised by a false wall. During the summer the Jews stayed in the hiding place in the attic. For the winter he made the Jews a small hiding place inside his house, next to the oven. The peasant did everything he could to make the situation tolerable for the Jews.

His wife Ruzhe, a Polish woman, was very bad to the Jews, however. She was a very mean woman and she hated Jews. She begrudged them the food they received. She especially bullied and hated Dvoyre, whom she would wake in the middle of the night and force to do various tasks.

Dvoyre helped with knitting, sewing, peeling potatoes and the like. More than once she actually beat Dvoyre and ordered her to leave her house. Kashimezh suffered a great deal on account of this, and he was afraid to start a commotion. When his wife wasn't around he gave Dvoyre extra food and comforted her. He even told the Jews that he wanted to leave his wife. Yet he was afraid she might report him. After the Red Army advanced in the spring of 1944, Ruzhe herself calmed down a bit and stopped persecuting Dvoyre.

The three Jews were liberated by the Red Army in the month of July 1944. After the liberation Dvoyre handed over to the peasant Kazimezh Tzincik the deeds to two houses in New Daugelishkis. The peasant couldn't forgive Ruzhe for bullying the Jews, and after the liberation he separated from her.

The following relatives of Dvoyre died at the compound in Shventzionel'iai: Her brother Moyshe, who lived in New Daugelishkis; her brother Avrom, his wife Rokhel, their child Leybele, aged eight, along with Avrom's sister Feyge, her husband Shmuel Gawenda and their four children: their daughter Reyzl, aged 20; their son Dovid; a girl named Khanele, aged 14; and Dvoyrele, aged 12, all living in Ignalina. From Adutishkis: Dvoyre's brother Yitzkhok-Motl and his wife Basye and three young daughters, Reyzele, Gitele and Libele.

### **Attestation of Dvoyre Kuritzky-Solomyak**

Everything recorded by Leyb Koniuchowsky about the slaughter of the Jews of Daugelishkis was personally experienced by me. All of the dates, facts, names of persons and of geographical locations were personally provided by me. After reading over this testimony, and after correcting some imprecise points, I attest to everything with my signature on each and every page.

Eyewitness: Dvoyre Kuritzky-Solomyak

(Signature)

The testimony was recorded by Engineer L Koniuchowsky  
Leipheim am Donau February 22, 1948

The signature of Dvojre Kuricky-Solomyak, resident of the Leipheim camp, is attested to by the chairman of the Camp Committee. Wachshendler (Signature) Leipheim, February 22, 1948

*Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin New York November 24, 1994*

## THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS OF PADBRADÉ

### The collective testimony of:

1. Yisroel Bavarsky, born December 23, 1906 in the town of Padbradé. He completed four grades of Polish gymnasium in Vilnius. By profession he was a lumber merchant. Yisroel's father's name was Hirsh-Leyb and his mother was Esther, born Frumer. When the war broke out on June 22, 1941, and later when the Jews were taken out to the military compound near Shventzionel'iai, Yisroel lived in Padbradé.
2. Feygl Bavarsky, born November 10, 1924 in Padbradé. She completed two grades of Polish gymnasium. Feygl's father was named Berl Bavarsky and her mother was Peshl, born Volyak. Until the Jews were taken to the compound near Shventzionel'iai, Feygl lived in Padbradé.

### Economic, Cultural and Geographic Situation of the Town

The town of Padbradé is located 48 kilometers northeast of Vilnius and 28 kilometers northwest of Shventzionel'iai. The streams Zhejmiana and Dubinka divide the town into two parts. Padbradé has a railroad station on the line between Vilnius and Shventzionel'iai.

The town is surrounded by pine forests, thanks to which Padbradé became a summer resort. The villages around the town were occupied by Poles, a few White Russians and, closer to Shventzionel'iai, Lithuanians.

Until the outbreak of war between the Soviet Union and Germany on June 22, 1941, just about a thousand Jews lived in Padbradé, along with a larger number of Poles. The vast majority of the Jews were occupied in trade, and a few were engaged in artisanry. Almost all the Jews in town had their own homes and large gardens, and some of them had small fields. The Jews had their own horses, cows, goats and poultry. There were no major Jewish owned enterprises in town. The only pharmacy in town belonged to a Jew named Moyshe Khavkin. The Jewish doctor in town, Moyshe Reyztievsky, was well-known and popular, not only among the townspeople, but among the country people as well.

Among the major Jewish lumber merchants the following must be mentioned: Nosn Shapiro, Dovid Suzhan, the two brothers Shmuel and Yisroel Bavarsky and Borukh Blushinsky.

Among the dry goods dealers: the rabbi's wife, Etl Abramovitz; Elke Mirsky; Rivke Skurkovitz; and Yehoshue-Nokhm Felér. Hardware dealers: Aron Gordon, Meir Blitz. Shoe stores: Yisroel Bratinishky, Elye-Meir Mahofis. A beer and lemonade factory belonging to the brothers Khayem and HirshVilyan.

A small number of Jews received support from their relatives overseas. In general, the economic situation of the Jews in town was not bad on average. After the Soviets arrived in town in the summer of 1940, the economic situation did not worsen.

As far as the cultural and social life of the Jews went, there was a Hebrew elementary school with six grades; a Yiddish, Hebrew and Polish library containing around 4,000 volumes, and housed in its own building; a free loan society; an old study house and a new, brick study house. After graduating from elementary school some of the Jewish youth would continue their studies at a gymnasium in Vilnius or at the Vilnius technical school.

The vast majority of the Jewish youth belonged to Zionist movements. A smaller number took active part in the illegal Communist Party during the period of Polish rule, and under Smetonas. A few young people belonged to the Bund.

The Jews got along well with the Polish population in town throughout the pre-war period. After Padbradé was assigned to Lithuania in the fall of 1939, Lithuanians from the interior came to Padbradé and established the civil administration.

The Poles bitterly hated the new Lithuanian bosses. When the Red Army came to Lithuania in the summer of 1940, the Poles' hatred of the Lithuanians was transformed into hatred of the Soviets and the Jews.

Some of the young Jews threw themselves body and soul into the new Soviet life, which gave them a range of opportunities for the future. The Jews sensed that they were equal to other citizens. Meanwhile the Poles were just like the Lithuanians in their hatred of the Soviet Union.

## **The War Breaks Out**

The Jews in town found out about the outbreak of the war between the Soviet Union and Germany on Sunday, June 22, 1941. That day the Jews stayed relatively calm, because they didn't believe that the Germans would advance quickly.

On Monday the German airplanes bombed Vilnius. That day before noon the Soviet authorities began to evacuate. About twenty young Jews fled that day into the Soviet Union. That Monday afternoon a large number of Jews locked their doors and closed their shutters. They packed their movable goods onto wagons, bringing along their cattle and poultry, and went to the homes of peasant friends in the countryside, in order to avoid suffering from the anticipated German air raids.

On the morning of Tuesday, June 24 a reconnaissance group of Germans riding motorcycles appeared in town and immediately went away again. At the beginning of the second week of the war German military units marched through town. A small number of them remained in town. The rest hurried forward to the east. The Christians in town and in the countryside joyfully welcomed the Germans. Lithuanian Red Army units had settled into the barracks at the edge of town. As soon as the war broke out, many of them deserted and began hiding, together with their weapons. When the Red Army hurriedly evacuated, the deserters shot at them on the roads and in the forests.

Armed civilian Christians also appeared, and they joined forces with the Lithuanian deserters from the Red Army.

In a number of villages peasants pelted the hidden Jews with stones. The more decent peasants became afraid to keep Jews at their homes any longer.

Between Thursday, June 26 and Saturday, June 28 almost all of the Jews returned from the countryside to their homes in town, and found everything in order. Nor were the Jews detained by anyone on their way from the countryside to town. However, there were a number of Jewish victims:

1. The brothers Dovid and Leyzer Mirsky were found murdered in a forest near the village of Padubinky.
2. Shmuel Yevevovsky, aged 40, committed suicide. He hung himself in the village of Nowosiolky. Shmuel clearly foresaw the tragic fate of the Jews, and since he was unwilling to suffer all of the horror, he ended his own life.

Until the beginning of the second week the Jews remained confined to their houses, afraid to go out into the streets. The streets were full of armed Lithuanians who called themselves partisans and wore white armbands.

The Polish townspeople pushed the Jews out of bread lines at the Christian owned shops in town.

## **Robberies; The Civil Administration; Eight Jewish Men Murdered**

Immediately after the Germans arrived in town the civil administration was set up by Lithuanians who had occupied responsible positions during the year of Soviet rule, and by former Red militia men who hadn't evacuated and who had joined the partisans instead. The men who had deserted the Lithuanian units of the Red Army also participated in setting up the civil administration.

1. The new mayor in town was the Lithuanian who had been the secretary of the investigative committee in town during the year of Soviet rule.
2. The new police chief was a Lithuanian.
3. The main partisan leader was [?????]
4. The chief of the secret police in town was the Lithuanian Kondratavitzius.

During the day on Saturday, June 28, 1941 a group of Lithuanian partisans led by an officer arrived in town. They were all well-armed, and they began seizing Jewish men in their houses. The men hid wherever they could. The mood in town that Saturday was utterly depressed. Feygele, the eyewitness, miraculously managed to rescue her father from the murderous partisans, with whom she was able to converse in fluent Lithuanian.

That day the partisans took eight Jewish men out of town. None of them were seen again. A few days later peasants reported that the eight Jews had been shot that same Saturday evening near the barracks, and they had been buried in a single pit. A few days later announcements concerning the death of the eight Jews were hung in the streets of the town. In these announcements the eight Jews who had been shot were designated as Communists and friends of the Soviet Union. The eight Jews who were shot were: the young rabbi, a refugee; Idl Kulbak; Yitzkhok Gilinsky; Avrom and Yoysef Liberman; Kopl Shklarovitz; Khayem Shanevsky and Khone Shnyderovitz.

Immediately after the Germans arrived in town and the civil administration was set up, announcements in Lithuanian and in German appeared in town. These announcements ordered the Jews to put on two yellow Stars of David, one on the left side of their chest and the other on their back. Jews were forbidden to have any dealings with Christians, to walk on the sidewalk, to leave town, and so forth.

Every morning all of the able-bodied men, women and children had to come to the police station at Keysun Street to report for work. From there the Jews were sent off in groups to do various jobs along the roads, cleaning the streets in town, pulling out weeds from between the paving stones. Some of the men worked on the railroad tracks and chopped wood for the Lithuanian and German big shots in town. The women washed the windows and floors of their offices.

The Jews were not paid anything for the work they did. They weren't even fed. On the contrary: the Germans and Lithuanians robbed everything they could from the Jews. They took the Jews' horses, bicycles, radios, and everything they found worthwhile. Of course, there was no one to complain to. The Jews no longer had any rights.

### **The Jewish Council**

According to a directive of the Germans and Lithuanians, a Jewish Council was established in town. The Jews of the town selected the following individuals to serve on the Council: Dr Reyzhevsky; Ben-Tzion Vilian; Borukh Blushinsky; Elye Likht; Yisroel Bratinisky; and Dovid Suzan. The chairman of the Jewish Council, Ben-Tzion Vilian, was responsible for carrying out the orders of the Germans and Lithuanians. There was no specially-designated place for the Jewish Council to meet.

The members of the Jewish Council often met at private houses. The main task of the Jewish Council consisted of offering bribes and trying to intervene so that various decrees aimed at the Jewish townspeople would either be revoked or made less severe. The Jewish council did not manage to accomplish much on the Jews' behalf.

The Lithuanian and German authorities threatened the Jewish Council in various ways, forcing them to fulfill various "requisitions" and to offer them "gifts." The Jewish council often assembled money from the Jews in town, in order to be able to "satisfy" the desires of the Lithuanians and Germans, who often promised to protect the Jews of Padbrade from any danger.

### **Sixty more Jewish Men, Women and Children Murdered**

One morning the Jews of Padbrade found out about a very tragic incident. Some of the Jews had been taken away from town at night, along with their wives and children. Their houses were locked. That same evening all the Jews in town knew that sixty Jews had been taken away by Lithuanian partisans, headed by the painter from town, the Lithuanian Shablinskis. The sixty Jewish men, women and children were taken out of town that same day, and all of them were shot in a forest near the town's water mill.

The town rabbi's son Velvl Abramovitz was a survivor of that group. He related that when the sixty Jews had been taken from their houses in the middle of the night, the partisans told them that they were being taken to work, and allowed them to bring along packages they could carry in their arms. Everyone was taken to the police station, and from there to the pit.

When the Jews saw the pit, they understood their fate. Yitzkhok Zilber, his wife and their lovely one-year-old daughter were among the sixty. Yitzkhok begged a partisan whom he knew to shoot him and his wife, but to let his beautiful little daughter live. The Lithuanian answered Yitzkhok by hitting him on the head with the butt of his rifle. Yitzkhok fell. The men were outraged, and they threw themselves at the Lithuanians. Velvl Abramovitz took advantage of the confusion and began to run. Other Jews did the same thing. The partisans opened fire at the Jews as they fled. Velvl safely reached town. The rest were shot.

Among the sixty Jews who were shot were:

1. The rabbi's wife, Etl Abramovitz, and her two sons Avrom and Leybe (Velvl's brothers).
2. Kopl Shklarovitz, his wife Khaye and his daughters Basya, Yakhe and Mere (young people!).
3. Abrasha Shklarovitz, his wife Helena, his son Yashke and daughter Gitl (young people!).
4. Shloyme Tod, his wife, his daughter Nekhame and two sons, Hilke and Khayemke (young people!).
5. Leybe-Nokhum Glaz, his wife Esther, daughters Rokhl and Dina and a boy named Dovidl.
6. Yisroel-Borukh Bavarsky, aged 73, his niece Raichl Levin and her husband Yosl, along with their two small children Khonke and Khaye- Sorele.

7. Khonon Levit, his wife Leye and a young nephew named Ruvele Lubotzki.
8. The family of Shmuel Potashnik, including his wife and their small children.

### **The Ghetto in Padbrade**

At the beginning of September 1941 it was announced to the Jewish Council that all the Jews had to settle in a single neighborhood and set up a ghetto in Bajoreliu, Arnioniu and Malunu Streets. A small number of Christians lived in these three streets, and they had to move out of the neighborhood and move into Jewish houses outside the neighborhood. In the course of a few days the Jews managed to move the things they most needed. There wasn't much room in the area designated as the ghetto, and the Jews left behind most of their furniture and other valuable possessions that were hard to move.

The new Polish townspeople who moved into the Jews' houses inherited everything. There was no fence around the ghetto area, nor was it guarded. The Jews had to leave the ghetto to work, just as they had gone from town. They also returned from work to the ghetto on their own, without being guarded.

There were no Jewish "police" as in other ghettos. The Jewish Council continued its activities in the open ghetto, just as it had in town. The Jews in the ghetto lived in crowded conditions. There was a constant shortage of food. The Jews used to exchange their possessions with Christians in town for groceries. Peasants from the surrounding villages also used to come, knowing they could get valuable things in exchange for just a little food.

In the ghetto area there was an empty store belonging to the Jew Yank Engeltzin. A bread distribution station was set up in the store. Lithuanians used to bring a ration of 150 grams of bread per Jew from a nearby bakery. The eyewitness Feyge Bavarsky and her girlfriend Hene Lap would distribute the bread to the Jews in the ghetto. Feygl asserts that there were between 800 and 830 Jews in the ghetto at that time.

The Jews in the Padbrade ghetto began hearing reports about the terrible slaughter of Jews in the nearby towns of Jonishkis, Inturkiai and others. Survivors from these towns who had fled the slaughter near the pits began to arrive, and they told everything. The Jews from Padbrade reassured themselves, saying that it wouldn't happen to them because they were in former Polish territory, and furthermore they had a German commandant who wouldn't let the Lithuanians slaughter the Jews.

On Rosh Hashana 1941 the Jews of Padbrade learned that on September 20 the Jews of Nementzine had been shot. The Jewish Council paid a Christian to go to Nementzine and find out the truth. When he returned from Nementzine, the Christian corroborated the tragic reports.

On several occasions the Jewish council appealed to the Lithuanians and Germans who held the power over the Jews' lives, begging them to clarify the Jews' situation. The Jewish Council was told that what had been done elsewhere would not take place in Padbrade. But after the news about the slaughter of the Jews in Nementzine, the majority of the Jews in the ghetto didn't believe the promises of the Germans and Lithuanians.

The family of Borukh Blushinsky and his wife, daughter and father; and the family of Alter Zilber, his wife, son and daughter, fled town at that time. The brothers Shmuel and Yisroel Bavarsky left town and went to peasants in the countryside to find places for their families to stay. But they were too late. Their family was taken away to the compound at Shventzioneliai.

On September 23, 1941 the Jewish Council was ordered to tell the Jews in the ghetto about a requisition. The Jews themselves had to personally bring to the police all of their gold and silver items, as well as money and valuables. A high-ranking Lithuanian official came from Vilnius to supervise the requisition. The helpless Jews handed over almost everything they had, hoping that they would be able to buy a few more days of life.

### **The Liquidation of the Ghetto and the Slaughter of the Jews**

On Friday, September 26, 1941, the day before the Sabbath between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, the Jews in the ghetto learned from reliable sources that everyone was going to be taken away to the concentration camp near Shventzioneliai. The panic was terrible, because no one believed the Lithuanians, especially after the terrible news about the slaughter of the Jews of Nementzine had been confirmed.

By midday that same Friday the majority of the Jews had left the ghetto. They went out of town to the homes of peasant friends in the countryside, or they hid in the nearby fields and forests until the situation became clearer.

The Lithuanian police and partisans noticed that the ghetto was emptying out and the Jews were running away. In the afternoon they began watching all the Jews who were leaving town. They detained a number of Jews on the roads, and returned them to town. Some of the Jews who were stopped bribed the Lithuanians and managed to avoid being brought back to town. Deprived of the possibility of escaping the town, the Jews began hiding in the town itself, either at the homes of peasants or in hiding places that had been prepared in the ghetto.

Shortly before candle-lighting time that Friday evening, police and organized groups of forest keepers appeared in the ghetto neighborhood, armed with rifles and automatic pistols. Some of them surrounded the ghetto, so that the Jews wouldn't be able to escape. They spread out in groups, entering the Jewish houses and brutally driving the Jews outside. The Lithuanians allowed the Jews to take along everything they wanted. Most of the Jews in the ghetto brought along almost nothing because they understood where they were going. When they said goodbye to each other, the women and children wept bitterly and kissed each other. Their eyes filled with tears, they took a last look at their homes. After the Jews were driven out of their homes, the partisans themselves locked the doors and closed the shutters.

The Jews were herded into the old study house. A heavy guard of well-armed police was posted around them. The Jews sensed that they were caught in a trap, without any hope of surviving.

The partisans began hunting for hidden Jews in the ghetto and in town. A number of Jews were seized in various hiding places and brought to the study house that same Friday evening. Some of them were caught the next day, Saturday. The Jews lived through a terrible Friday night in the study house.

The more pious Jews opened the Holy Ark, and wept as they begged God to help them. Everyone wept, kissed each other took their leave of each other. Mothers pressed their children to their breasts, soaking them in rivers of tears and kissing them. Some of the women and men tore their hair out of their head and struck themselves with their fists. The wailing of the women and children could be heard throughout the entire town.

Early in the morning on Saturday, September 27, 1941, Christians from town drove into the yard near the study house with their horses and wagons. The Jews were driven out of the study house into the wagons. An armed Lithuanian sat in every wagon. The caravan full of sorrowing Jews left town. With heart rending screams and bitter weeping the Jews took eternal leave of their home town.

The Jews destroyed their valuables while they rode the wagons. They broke their watches, tore up money and documents, in order to prevent them from falling into the hands of the Lithuanians. As they rode along Kaltinenai Street toward Shventzioneliai, the Jews in the wagons saw all of the Jewish houses locked, and white notices attached to the walls. The Jews of Shventzioneliai had already been taken to the military compound.

The Jews of Padbrade were taken to the compound in 42 wagons. A total of about 120 Jews went, out of the eight hundred who had been in the ghetto. The vast majority of the Jews escaped the ghetto before this, mostly on Friday morning.

All of the Jews in the towns in Shventzionys County were taken to the Baranowka compound near Shventzioneliai that Saturday.

Every wagon bringing Padbrade Jews to the compound would drive up to a barrack and leave the Jews there. Then they would ride over to the side, where the names of the owners of the horses and wagons would be recorded on a list by the partisans. When the peasants returned to Padbrade, they were paid with items that had been gathered from the Jewish houses.

Concerning the further fate of the Jews of Padbrade at Baranowka, read the testimony of Frume Hochman from Shventzionys, and the collective testimony of the Shventzionys Jews Dr. Binyomin Taraseysky and Yankl Levin.

### **Those Who Died After the Jews Were Taken from Town**

The hidden Jews who were found after the Jews were taken from town were imprisoned at the police station by the Lithuanians. From there the people who had been seized were taken out of town to the hill near the mill, where they were shot. The participants in the collective testimony remember the following cases:

1. On Monday, September 29, two days after the Jews were taken to the compound, the Lithuanians found 22 Jewish men, women and children hiding in the attic of the study house. The Lithuanians shot the 22 Jews on the hill near the water mill outside of town.

Among the 22 were:

- a. Leyzer Ringer, his wife Beyle, their three daughters Basya, Klara and Khaye, and a grandchild from Kaunas.
- b. The caretaker at the study house Rosen, his wife Nekhome and two daughters, Hadasa and Tzivye. Hadasa was nine or ten years old at the time. When she saw that her parents had been shot, Hadasa ran away from the pit back toward Padbrade, where there was a market that day. No one spotted her. Little Hadasa walked to the nearby White Russian town of Kemilishkis and went into the ghetto there. When the Jews of the Kelimishkis ghetto were shot, Hadasa escaped from death again. She hid with peasants, where she worked as a shepherdess and survived until the liberation.
- c. Yerukham Bigson and his wife Gitl were also among the 22 who were shot.

2. That same Monday Lithuanians seized another group of Jews who lay in hiding in a cellar in Kemilishkis Street, near the German cemetery. The group of Jews lay in prison for a day and a night. On Tuesday, September 30 the Lithuanians drove all the Jews out of the prison and shot them all on the hill near the water mill. The group included:

- a. The family of Avrom Taytz, his wife Reyzl, his son Leybe and their little daughter Feyge-Merele, along with his nephew Leyb Yevevovitz, aged 16 (his father Shmuel had hung himself!).
- b. On Sunday, September 30, a woman named Sore Bavarsky who was in her eighties was captured hiding in some grain in a barn.

3. That same day Sore's daughter-in-law Leye and her two small children Rashele (aged eight) and Khayeml (aged 15) Bavarsky were caught hiding in some brush in a swamp. A peasant who took the family away to be shot later said that the Lithuanians had bound Leye to the wagon hand and foot.

The Lithuanians dumped the elderly Sore directly into the pit, and buried her alive. The family was shot by Lithuanian police and partisans.

4. Nosn Kharmatz, his wife Bunye, daughter Sonya and one-year-old child and Nosn's sons Yoysef and Gershon were captured, and they were taken to a pit on the hill near the water mill. Near the pit Yosl struck a partisan in the face with a hard object and began to escape. The partisans opened fire at him with their rifles, but didn't hit him. Yoysef managed to escape. Some time later he went to the Vilnius Ghetto, where he died. The rest of Yoysef's family were shot after he escaped from the pit.

5. Basya Bavarsky and Hirshl Vilian were seized in a cellar in the ghetto on Tuesday, September 30. That same day they were shot on the hill near the water mill.

6. An old woman named Ite Kruk, aged about 50, hid together with a small boy named Daniel Mirsky (aged eleven or twelve). They were both shot on the hill near the water mill.

### **Those Who Died in the Countryside**

After the Jews were taken to the military compound, the Jewish doctor from town and his daughter-in-law, wife and daughter hid at the home of the Lithuanian Kondratavitzius, who was the chief of the secret police in Padbrade. The doctor's daughter-in-law gave birth to a child, whom the doctor killed. Kondratavitzius couldn't hide the family any longer. The doctor and his wife obtained documents permitting them to settle in the village of Barani and allowing him to practice medicine there.

1. Jews hiding in the area often visited the doctor, and consulted with him about everything. In the month of November 1941, German SS men captured the Jews in that village and shot and buried them on the spot.

The group included:

- a. Dr Reyzhevsky, his wife, daughter and daughter-in-law.
- b. Berl and his brother Ben-Tzion Engeltzin. Ben-Tzion was a law student.
- c. Yoyne Levin, a butcher from the town of Padbrade.
- d. The brothers Yisroel and Yoysef Zak.
- e. Avrom from Barani and his wife and daughter.

There was a well-founded suspicion that the Jews in the village of Barani were reported by a Pole named Schukewitz, a miller from the nearby village of Bujki.

2. Two kilometers from Padbrade at a settlement called Migelki at the home of the peasant Jusefowitz, ten Jews hid in a bunker that had been set up under the house. In the month of May 1943 two Lithuanian police came to the peasant's home and demanded that he hand over the hidden Jews. The good peasant denied that he was hiding Jews. One of the policeman began writing a report, while the second went out into the yard and shot at birds

several times. A child in the bunker grew frightened hearing the shots, and began crying. The bunker was discovered. The hidden Jews were taken away together with the good peasant to the police station at Padbrade and from there to Vilnius, where all of them died. The good peasant was murderously beaten by the police, and died in Vilnius together with the Jews.

The ten Jews were:

- a. Khaye-Rivke Menitz (born Vilian) with her three-year-old child.
- b. Feygl Bavarsky and her two children Avreymele (aged 8) and Hirshele (aged 6).
- c. Shmuel Shmit, his wife Tzivye and a child who was exactly three years old.
- d. Malke Potashnik, a five-year-old child.

At that time it was suspected that the Pole Bidulsky from the village of Padbrade had reported the ten Jews to the police, in order to get a reward.

3. A Jewish engineer was hiding at a compound three kilometers from the railroad station called Geliadniai. A young man from Padbrade named Moyshe Zilber (his father's name was Alter) was hiding with him. In the month of July 1943 the Gestapo caught them at the compound and shot them on the spot.

4. In the area between the villages of Suzani and Purwinishki there were some thirty Padbrade Jews hiding. In the summer of 1944, shortly before the liberation, they were killed by White Poles in various ways.

Shortly before the Padbrade Jews were taken to the military compound, about 800 Jews were still living in the ghetto. 120 Jews were taken to the compound, and the rest escaped from town. A small number hid in the ghetto and in the town proper, at peasant's homes or in gardens. The majority were caught and shot on the hill near the water mill.

A second group escaped to the surrounding villages, and a number of them died there in various ways. The vast majority of the Jewish escapees died in the ghettos in White Russian towns, especially in Kemilishkis, nineteen kilometers from Padbrade.

When the Jews in White Russia were slaughtered, the refugees from Padbrade also died together with the local Jews in the ghettos.

A total of about thirty Jews, among those who had escaped from town, before everyone else was taken to the compound at Shventzionel'ai, survived and were liberated by the Red Army. Among the survivors were the participants in this collective testimony, Yisroel Bavarsky and his cousin Feygl Bavarsky.

Feygl's mother was killed at the compound at Shventzionel'ai. Her father managed to hide in a closet until the following Friday, September 26, in the evening. He went to Kemilishkis then. Feygl and her mother were already at the compound. A Lithuanian peasant took pity on her and helped her to return from the compound in a peasant-style wagon. The sixteen-year-old Feygl began a heroic struggle for her life. She stayed with various peasants in the countryside, each of whom would keep her for a short time and then drive her out of their homes. She found out where her father was and joined him in the Kemilishkis ghetto.

Before the Kemilishkis Jews were slaughtered she and her father moved to the Bistrisk ghetto. Later her father worked at the Jonishkis camp near Shauliai. From there he was taken "to work" with a group of Jews at the Ninth Fort near Kaunas, where he died. Later on Feygl was in a camp near Panevezhys and then in a concentration camp in Germany, where she was liberated.

### **Attestations of Yisroel and Feygl Bavarsky**

All of the information about the slaughter of the Jews of Padbrade, including all of the dates, names of persons and geographic locations, which are indicated in this collective testimony, were carefully and personally reported by us, and we attest thereto with our signature on each an every page.

1. Yisroel Bavarsky (Signature)      2. Feygl Bavarsky (Signature)

The signature of the Goldcup Camp residents at Fuerstenhagen near Kassel is attested to by the chairman of the camp committee      W Wilf (Signature)      Goldcup Camp      November 26, 1948

The testimony was recorded by Engineer L Koniuchowsky Fuerstenhagen bei Kassel  
"Goldkop" Camp      November 25, 1948

*Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin*

*New York*

*November 25, 1994*

## **THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS OF ADUTISHKIS**

The eye witness is Mikhoel Potashnik, born December 10, 1910 in Adutishkis. He graduated in the Yiddish elementary school there. By profession he was a flax dealer and farmer. Until the day the Jewish community of Adutishkis was liquidated, Potashnik lived in the town his entire life. His father's name was Ruven and his mother was Fradl Svirsky, from the town of Svir.

### **Geographical Setting, Population and Economic Life of the Town**

Adutishkis is located thirty kilometers east of Shventzionys, on the little river Kamaike. The highways between Shventzionys and Pastoviai, and between Kobilnik and Vidz pass through the town. The town has a railroad station on the line between Pastoviai and Lentupis.

Until 1939 the town was in Shventzionys County, Poland. After Poland collapsed and the Red Army marched in during the fall of 1939, Old Shventzionys and the surrounding region, including Adutishkis, were assigned to the White Russian Soviet Republic.

After the Red Army entered Lithuania in the summer of 1940, Shventzionys and the entire surrounding region, including Adutishkis, was assigned to the newly-established Lithuanian Soviet Republic, on the border with the White Russian Soviet Republic.

2,000 people lived in Adutishkis. Among them were about a thousand Jews. The majority of the Christian population were Lithuanians, and the rest were Poles, White Russians, Old Believers and Tatars.

The villages to the northwest of the town were occupied by Lithuanians; to the east and south were Poles, along with White Russians and a few Tatars.

The Jew in Adutishkis worked in trade, artisanry and a little bit of agriculture. Adutishkis was a commercial center for Vilnius county. There Jews would buy their agricultural products from the peasants living in the surrounding countryside. There was a brisk trade in flax and seeds there. Thousands of tons would be bought up there, and sent further into Poland or even overseas. A significant amount of flax was treated on the spot, and transformed into semi-raw material. Hundreds of people, including laborers and clerks from town and from the countryside, worked at the tasks of purchasing the flax and seeds, loading it into the wagons and treating it. Among the specialists at treating the flax were a number of Jews. Adutishkis was such a significant commercial center that it was nicknamed "Little Danzig."

There were a number of Jewish retail merchants and peddlers. A large number of Jews from town had large plots of ground which they worked themselves. Almost all of them had their own cows, poultry and horses.

In addition to the more prominent Jewish flax dealers Adutishkis had a number of large Jewish businesses:

1. A sawmill, oil and varnish factory belonging to the Fridlender family.
2. A lemonade factory belonging to Gershon Bronshteyn.

Up to a thousand workers a day were employed at the larger flax-processing plants. These plants also belonged to Jews from Adutishkis. Among the prominent dry goods dealers, Zalmen Abel's store must be mentioned.

The economic situation of the Jews of Adutishkis was good on average, until the war broke out between Germany and Poland in 1939. Adutishkis was cut off from the external flax markets in Poland and especially overseas, owing to the war.

### **Cultural, Social and Political Life of the Jews**

Adutishkis had four study houses and about sixty Torah scrolls with silver finials. The Holy Arks were adorned with beautiful covers. There were many holy books in the study houses. The town had a slaughterer, Reb Moyshe Levin, and a rabbi named Elkhonon Mashitz, originally from Slonim.

Two cemeteries testified to the age of the Jewish community. One of them was very old. The gravestones at the old cemetery had sunken into the ground, and it was hard to read the inscriptions. The second cemetery was also filled with old and new graves. It was said that the Jewish community in Adutishkis had existed since the thirteenth or fourteenth century.

Adutishkis had two elementary schools. In one of them the language of instruction was Yiddish, and in the other it was Hebrew. The Jewish political parties in town were grouped around these two schools. The Bund, the Yiddishists and other "Diasporist" Jewish parties were grouped around the Yiddish elementary school. They also had their own library, with a large number of books. There were two dramatics groups as well: a Yiddish drama group attached to the Yiddish elementary school, and a drama group attached to the Hebrew elementary school. In the same manner the Zionist movement had their own library and a drama group, based at the Hebrew elementary school.

The movements based in the two elementary schools competed with each other, trying to win over as many children and young people as possible. The competition between the two groups also led to the building of two separate buildings for the two schools, each boasting all of the comforts available through the latest technology. The two buildings were completed in 1938. The Polish authorities didn't permit classes to be held in the old buildings any longer. The Polish authorities hoped that they would be able to close the Jewish elementary schools altogether and take some of the children into the Polish schools. Thus they imposed very difficult conditions on those who wanted to maintain the two elementary schools. The conditions were that there had to be new, modern buildings with all of the features necessary and appropriate for a school. Since both Jewish groups wanted to continue in existence and to continue competing, they built two separate buildings.

Adutishkis had a ten-piece Jewish wind orchestra. Any Jewish child who wanted to could study an instrument there. There was also a Jewish fire brigade with sixty members, modern fire-fighting equipment and their own headquarters. All of this was done with money raised exclusively from Jews.

There was no Christian fire brigade in town. The Adutishkis fire brigade did quite respectably at regional fire-fighting contests. Adutishkis also had a Jewish community bank and a free-loan society. Here as well there was a political struggle between the two Jewish groups based in the elementary schools.

Owing to the struggles between the two groups, which no longer served any practical purpose for the town's Jews but had taken on the character of a sporting contest, almost all of the youth in town belonged to one of these movements, and they remained stubbornly involved in politics. The young Jews in town were cultured and self-aware.

Thanks to the favorable economic situation many young people studied in gymnasiums in Vilnius and Shventzionys. Quite a few studied at the Polish universities.

### **The Village of Stajatzishkis**

Four kilometers from Adutishkis was the village of Stajatzishkis, which was called "Palestine" because its population was entirely Jewish. About forty Jewish peasant families lived in the village. They owned large farms and worked them in exemplary fashion. The village also had a steam mill belonging to three Jewish partners. The Jewish village belonged to the Jewish community of Adutishkis. (For more details about this Jewish village see the testimony of Zalmen Yofe and his wife Reyzi - LK)

The relations between the townspeople and the Jews were good. This can be explained by the fact that there were large minority populations both in the town of Adutishkis and in the surrounding villages, all of whom were oppressed by the Poles. All of the minorities disliked the Poles, and their hostility toward the Poles led them to leave the Jews alone. Even the Lithuanians were friendly with the Jews in Adutishkis.

When war broke out between Poland and Germany in September 1939, a large number of the Jewish youth were called up to the army. The social life in town was paralyzed. On October 18, 1939 the Red Army entered Adutishkis. Life began to pulse with an entirely different rhythm both economically and politically than what had been expected over the previous years by the two Jewish political tendencies.

Life changed in every respect; now everything was done Soviet-style. Both groups were banned, and they disappeared entirely from Jewish life.

During the period of Soviet rule the larger Jewish enterprises and shops were nationalized. The larger houses were nationalized as well.

## The Outbreak of War Between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union

The Jews of Adutishkis learned from a speech delivered by Molotov on the morning of June 22, 1941 that war had broken out between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. The news hit the Jews like a bolt of lightning out of a clear blue sky. Everyone sensed that terrible times were approaching for the Jews. Everyone was confused.

On Monday, June 23, 1941 refugees from Lithuanian towns appeared in Adutishkis. The Jews of Adutishkis hadn't begun to think about evacuating. Jews in town learned that the peasants in the countryside were shooting at the roads Red Army units were using for their retreat.

On Tuesday; June 24, 1941 Red soldiers and a few Lithuanian Red Army units retreated through the town. Before the war they had been posted at the military compound near Shventzioneliai. Some of the Jews from town tried to evacuate together with the Red Army, on foot and in wagons. The trains had stopped running, because the tracks had been bombed in several places by the German air force.

That day about 300 Jews escaped from town, most of them young people, along with some women and children.

On Wednesday, June 25, 1941, a few Red Army stragglers passed through town, along with Jewish refugees from Lithuanian towns.

On the morning of Thursday, June 26, 1941 the Soviet authorities fled the town. Groups of armed Lithuanians who called themselves partisans immediately appeared. They shot at the last few stragglers of the retreating Red Army and took their weapons. One Lithuanian, a partisan named Vagela, was shot that day in a conflict with the Red Army.

Peasants from town and from the surrounding villages sensed that there was no authority in town that day, and they began robbing the former Soviet warehouses.

On Friday, June 27, 1941, the majority of the Jews in town left their homes and escaped to hide in the surrounding countryside until the front passed by. There were more and more robberies in town. The peasants looted all of the Soviet warehouses. Some of them came with horses and sacks they had prepared.

Gasoline and benzine had been left at the station. The peasants stole this as well.

When they finished looting the warehouses, the peasants began robbing the possessions of the Jews who had escaped to hide in the countryside. Hundreds of peasants came with empty wagons to loot the town that day. They left their horses in the yard near the church, and set off for the Jewish houses with large sacks. Wagonloads of stolen clothing, furniture and merchandise were carried off to the peasants' homes in the countryside. At night they would go to loot the homes of Jews who had not even left town. Most of the peasants who did the looting were Lithuanians from the surrounding Lithuanian villages.

The Polish priest reproached the peasants, trying to prevent them from stealing the Jews' possessions. However, he was unsuccessful. The crowd was out of control; not only did they loot the Jewish homes, but they vandalized them as well. The Jews who lay hiding in the countryside saw peasant friends with their carts loaded up with Jewish goods. The peasants didn't want to keep the Jews any longer. Lacking alternatives, many Jews returned to their looted houses.

While these robberies were taking place in Adutishkis, mass murders of the local Jews in the town of Vidz, thirty kilometers from Adutishkis, were committed by local hooligans. In the course of a couple of days a few hundred Jews were murdered there. Their possessions were looted.

A large number of Jews escaped from Vidz at that time, abandoning their possessions. Some of the refugees came to Adutishkis to seek protection. There they were seized by Lithuanian partisans and locked into the town prison. Ten Vidz Jews were taken out of town by the partisans and shot.

The more attractive women among those who had fled Vidz were raped by the partisans. They raped two sisters and then shot them. One of them was badly wounded, and survived. She reported everything later.

The Jews in Vidz were murdered with knives, pieces of iron, and boards, and some of them were shot. The ten Jews who were shot outside of town were buried at the Jewish cemetery in Adutishkis.

At the same time the partisans arrested the following Adutishkis Jews:

1. Gershon Kharmatz, aged 18.

2. Khayem Gordon, aged 25.
3. The dental technician Avrom Yokhlman, aged 25.

All three were accused of being Communist sympathizers. Gershon was ransomed for a large sum of money. While Yokhlman was being led away, he struck a partisan in the head and ran away. He survived. Khayem Gordon was shot. All this took place before the Germans arrived in the area.

### **Study Houses and Torah scrolls Destroyed; The Jewish council**

On Wednesday, July 2, 1941 the Germans marched into Aduishkis. They didn't stay in town, however, and instead hurried on eastward. They kept marching through the town for three days.

As soon as they arrived in town they vandalized the study houses. They tore the Torah scrolls and stepped on them. Jews risked their lives to save some of the Torah scrolls from destruction. The partisans and peasants continued looting.

On Saturday, July 5, 1941 a German military commander came to Aduishkis. The looting in town ceased. Jews returned to their ruined homes from the surrounding villages and roads. The commandant released the Jews from Vidz who had been arrested.

At the end of the first week of the war armed Lithuanians from town and from the surrounding countryside had appeared with white armbands. They were joined by ten uniformed partisans from the Lithuanian interior. The civil administration in Aduishkis was recruited from the ranks of these murderers.

1. The new mayor in town was Pawl Rakowsky, a Lithuanian farmer from the village of Jakele, four kilometers from Aduishkis. His assistant was a farmer from town named Petr Rakowsky. The members of the town council were:
1. Pawl Pashunas, a Lithuanian farmer from town.
  2. Pawl Rimsha, a Lithuanian farmer from town.
  3. Julius Shidlowsky, a Lithuanian farmer from town.

The new chief of police was a Lithuanian who had come from the interior. The commander and leader of the partisans in town was Pijus Rakowsky, one of the sons of Petr, the mayor's assistant.

The surrounding Lithuanian villages were full of partisans who had been recruited among the local youth. The Lithuanians who had lived together with the Jews for generations, and had sometimes even been friendly with them, forgot about everything. They did everything they possibly could to make the lives of the Jews miserable. They began issuing orders and decrees against the Jews. The Germans, who were the real bosses, were satisfied with their Lithuanian collaborators. They had nothing else to add when it came to oppressing the Jews.

During the second week of the war, on the evening of July 6, the police in town announced that all of the Jews had to report to the market place very early the next morning, July 7. No-one was allowed to stay at home, not even the elderly and the sick. Everyone had to come to the market place. The houses had to be left open.

On Monday morning all the Jews in town came to the square. The peasants living nearby immediately found out and came ready to loot, carrying sacks under their arms. They thought the Jews were being taken out of town.

In the square, however, various ordinances were read to the Jews. All the Jews above the age of eight had to wear a special insignia; a yellow patch on their chests with a Star of David and a "J" (for Jude) in the middle. A board marked with a yellow Star of David of a specified size had to be hung on every house where a Jew lived. Every Jew between the ages of ten and sixty, including men and women, had to report for work at the market place each morning, and work for twelve hours.

The Jews were strictly ordered to hand over their bicycles, radios and weapons. Anyone who didn't carry out these orders was threatened with death. After all of these rules and regulations were read out, the Jews were allowed to go back home.

The Lithuanian administration began throwing Jews out of their residences and settling their own families, or other Lithuanians from town or from the countryside in place of the Jews.

Notices of anti-Jewish ordinances began appearing on the walls of the houses and streets. Jews were forbidden to go outside of town, to do business or speak with Christians, to go out into the street during the curfew, and so forth.

Every day each Jew was allowed to buy three hundred grams of bread at designated stores. Every Thursday, the market day, the Jews were permitted to go to the market for one hour in the afternoon to shop. A policeman would whistle to give the signal that any Jew who wanted to could go to the market for an hour. When the Jews heard a second whistle, they had to leave the market place. Anyone who didn't leave the market place quickly enough was beaten. Jews had to pay fixed prices for the goods they bought. The peasants didn't want to sell at the established price, however. Every morning the Jews gathered at the market place. From there partisans took them to do various jobs.

While the Jews worked they were tormented both physically and morally. At that time there were Jews who began "doing something" about their community's terrible situation. These representatives were two citizens named Zalmen Abel and Ber Fisher. They began bribing the leaders of the partisans and the police, along with the mayor. In addition they made contacts with the Germans. The Jews liberally bribed all these people, and kept giving them "gifts" and even to ordinary peasants who threatened to report "Communists." On the other hand the Jews tried to work hard and convince the Germans that the Jews were useful. Jews thought at the time that this would save them.

One month after the Germans arrived in town a new German division settled in Adutishkis. In order to frighten the local Jews, they shot a Jew named Yisroel Lapide, a baker, on the pretext that he had run to hide something. The newly-arrived Germans once again began looting each and every Jewish home. They took everything they found worthwhile.

### **The Ghetto in Adutishkis**

In the middle of the month of August 1941 the Lithuanian police announced that in the course of four hours all the Jews had to leave their homes and settle into a single neighborhood on Vidz Street. The Jews quickly began packing their few possessions. Before they went into the ghetto the police, partisans and peasants checked the packages the Jews were bringing along. They explained that they had to make certain the Jews weren't bringing any weapons into the ghetto. The degenerates didn't leave the Jews much after these "examinations." They confiscated the better things. The partisans and police cut the four hours which were originally allotted down to just two hours. The Jews didn't manage to move much of their things during those two hours. The majority of the possessions they had assembled in the course of generations was abandoned to their Christian neighbors.

In that neighborhood the Jews packed themselves into all of the attics and stalls. The crowding was terrible. The weeping and screaming of women and children echoed throughout the little ghetto quarter. Before entering the ghetto and then while they were in the ghetto, the Jews had their machines, cattle, bedding and better furniture taken away.

In such a chaotic situation there obviously could not be any kind of cultural, political or social life. The Jews in the ghetto were trapped. They were isolated from the surrounding world. They heard rumors about the slaughter of Jews in Lithuania. No-one believed the full extent of the slaughter they heard about.

All of the decrees against the Jews in the nearby village of Stajatzishkis were issued by the Lithuanian administration in Adutishkis.

While they were in the ghetto the Jews still had to go to do various jobs. They were allowed to leave the ghetto and walk in the streets. But all of the Jews were afraid to do this, and they stayed in the houses. On the Sabbath the Jews would gather in a house to pray.

Very often the Germans wanted to enjoy themselves, so they would force the Jews to run three kilometers out of town with bags of sand on their backs. The degenerates would run after them with whips and beat the Jews. Sometimes they would force the Jews quickly to fetch full buckets of water from a well outside of town. If someone brought a bucket that wasn't full, he would be whipped.

Some time before Rosh Hashana rumors began spreading to the effect that the Jews of Adutishkis were going to be deported. There was no precise information about this.

The representatives and communal officials gathered gold, silver and valuables from the Jews and took it to the higher-ups in Shventzionys who had control over the lives of the Jews of Adutishkis. The representatives pleaded to have their town spared. The Lithuanian degenerates took the "gifts" that had been brought to them, and promised to leave Adutishkis alone.

## The Liquidation of the Adutishkis Ghetto

On Friday, September 26, 1941 Jews from town rode to Shventzionys to hear the news and bribe the Lithuanian authorities there. When they returned they reported that the situation was very unsettled in Shvetnzionys, and the Jews were getting ready for something bad to happen.

That same Friday the Jews in Adutishkis noticed that the police and partisans were beginning to assemble in groups. They quickly mobilized the Lithuanian youth in town. During the day on Friday a delegation consisting of Moyshe Lev the slaughterer, Elye Valotzky and the eyewitness Mikhoel Potashnik went to the Polish priest in town to ask him to find out what was going to happen to the Jews.

The priest was a good man. He went to the offices of the police and partisans. When he returned he calmed the Jews, telling them that nothing was going to happen to them. The delegation told the Jews in the ghetto about this answer.

Not long afterward police, partisans and organized civilians in town surrounded the ghetto neighborhood. Those who lived at the edge of the ghetto quickly had to move further toward the center. The ghetto neighborhood shrunk considerably. The panic constantly grew. But no-one could predict how it would end. Still, the Jews weren't expecting to die.

That same Friday evening before candle-lighting time, the Jews in the town of Stajatzishkis were herded into the ghetto on foot. Small children, the elderly and the sick were brought in a few wagons. The Jews who had been brought were herded into the reduced ghetto area. The partisans and police strictly forbade the Jews to try to leave the neighborhood and threatened to shoot without warning anyone who dared to do so.

That Sabbath, September 27, 1941, at 10:00 a.m., all of the Jews were driven out of the ghetto into the market place. They were allowed to bring along small packages in their arms. Those who didn't leave their houses quickly enough were brutally beaten by the murderers. They left five families of "useful Jews" behind in town. Among the five families were the two families of the Jews' spokesmen.

These families were those of:

1. Ber Fisher, his wife and children, and a sister of his.
2. Zalmen Abel, his wife and a child, Zalmen's father, mother and sister.
3. David Shapiro, a tailor, his wife and a child, and David's nephew with his wife and child.
4. Binyomin Gitler, a tailor, and his two sisters.
5. Moyshe Shapiro, a quiltmaker, his wife, his son, and his sister-in-law and her daughter.

At 11:00 a.m. that same Saturday the Jews assembled at the market place were taken away in columns in the direction of Shventzionys. The sick, elderly and weak ones were taken on wagons. They were herded along by police, partisans and civilian Lithuanians from town and from the surrounding countryside. With a heart-rending cry the Jews took their eternal leave of their old, beloved home town and their houses.

On the way to the military compound near Shventzioneliai the Jews Shloyme Don, aged 28 and Shimen Reykhl, aged 70, were both shot. Other Jews were shot as well, but Mikhoel does not know who. When they crossed the bridge over the stream to the compound near Shventzioneliai, it was dark already. Eight young people escaped from the column, crossed the river in their clothes and reached White Russian towns. Two brothers named Nokhum and Avrom-Bune Gordon experienced a bitter struggle for life in the ghettos of White Russia and survived. The other six died in the ghettos of White Russia.

A few old and sick people stayed in their houses in the ghetto, and didn't go to the square. They were shot by partisans in their houses. Among them Mikhoel Potashnik remembers Mrs Ise Sheytl, aged seventy or seventy-five, and Taybele Kurlantzik, aged 70.

1. On Friday, September 26 the Jew Yitzkhok-Yakov Zeyger went to the mayor to find out what was happening to the Jews. Partisans arrested him and shot him on the spot.
2. The quilter Moyshe Shapiro, who was left behind as a "useful" Jew, moved into a different house on Saturday, September 27, after the Jews were taken from town. The police chief ordered him to do something in Lithuanian. Moyshe didn't know any Lithuanian, and he didn't understand the order. The police chief shot Moyshe. Peasants immediately pulled his boots off.
3. Five women were hidden in the Polish priest's barn. On Saturday morning before the Jews were taken away, they left the barn and tried to return to Pastovia. The assistant mayor's son, the commandant of the partisans in town, spotted them and shot them next to the priest's barn, where he also buried them.

The five women were Reyzl Bornshteyn, her daughter Feygele and a niece; Reyzl's sister, Mrs Rudnitzky, and her daughter. The murderer who shot the women with his own hands was Pijus Rakowsky, a Lithuanian from town.

That Saturday morning the Polish priest in town went to the Lithuanians to beg them to let him take care of twenty children. The murderers refused.

All of the Jews in the towns of Shvencionys County were assembled at the military compound that Saturday. They were kept there for twelve days, under terrible conditions. On Wednesday, October 8, 1941, the shootings began. In the course of three days about 8,000 Jews were shot. Their corpses were thrown into a long mass grave, in a sandy forest about three kilometers from Shvencioneliai. The mass grave was 170 meters long and 10 meters wide.

When the five surviving families of "useful Jews" learned about the slaughter of the Jews in the compound near Shvencioneliai, they all escaped from Aduishkis to White Russian towns. These five families all died in White Russia in the course of various actions and liquidations. Details about their deaths are not known to Mikhoel.

### **How Did Mikhoel Potashnik Survive?**

On Friday evening, September 26, 1941 the panic and crowding in the ghetto became unbearable. Moyshe Potashnik proposed to the young people that they organize themselves and make their way outside of town. He suggested that they burn down the entire neighborhood, and while the fire was burning all of the Jews should run wherever they could. No-one thought his proposal was realistic. Then Mikhoel himself crept on his belly for two kilometers, sneaking past the guards. He crossed the river and arrived at the home of a Polish peasant named Grachowsky, a kilometer and a half from town.

There Mikhoel learned that Elye Volotzky and the owner of the mill, Moyshe Shmukler, together with his wife, born Fridlender, had left the spot just an hour earlier. The peasant told him all three had gone in the direction of Svir. Mikhoel immediately left Grachowsky's house and went in the direction of Svir. On the way he happened to enter a barn to rest, without the peasant's knowledge. To his great astonishment he met the three Jews there. Mikhoel learned from them that on Friday before candle-lighting time Elye Volotzky had gone to see the Polish priest. The priest didn't let him return to the ghetto. Several days earlier Elye had sent his wife Nekhe and their son to an uncle of his at a settlement near the White Russian town of Svir.

Elye left the priest and went to the Polish peasant Grachowsky, where he found Moyshe Shmukler with his wife Sheyne. They didn't want to stay at that peasant's house any longer, and they went to Elye's uncle at the settlement. On the way they went into the barn to rest, with the peasant's permission.

When the peasant learned that another Jew had entered the barn he asked everyone to leave. All four arrived at the White Russian town of Kamay, where they found a few other Jewish families. The rest of the Jews had already been taken to Pastoviai. In Kamay they learned about various back roads to Svir, so that no one would spot them on the way. With difficulty they arrived at the home of the Jewish landowner Mendl Karashin at the Dombrovsky compound, four kilometers from Svir, where Elye's uncle lived. There they found Elye's wife and child. Mendl Karashin made documents for the refugees stating that they had been born in Svir and that they were farmers. The Jews lived reasonably well at the farmer until three days before Purim 1942, when Mendl Karashin's farm was confiscated and all of the Jews were herded into the crowded Svir ghetto.

### **Mikhoel in the Svir Ghetto**

The ghetto was in a specified neighborhood. There was no fence around it, nor was it guarded. All of the able-bodied men and women went to work. There was a Jewish Council in Svir as well. There were about 400 refugees in the Svir ghetto from towns around Vilnius. The poet Shmuel Katsherginsky was among them.

Mikhoel worked with a group of Jews at the Alshewa compound, twelve kilometers from Svir, in the direction of Lentupis. The group of Jews worked and slept there. The group consisted of twenty men, who worked in a mill belonging to the former Polish count Chaminsky. The supervisor at the mill was a German. The Jews worked near the mill building a bridge. Shmuel Katsherginsky worked there as well.

On April 1, 1942 the town of Svir and the surrounding region were assigned to Lithuania. The Germans recognized this area as a Lithuanian region. The refugees in Svir knew what a "Lithuanian" meant, and they all escaped from Svir to the nearby White Russian town of Kobilnik, where a large number of the Jews were murdered.

On April 1, 1942 a Lithuanian administration arrived in Svir. The refugees were unable to register at Kabilnik. Mikhoel hid at the home of the Jew Leyb Svirsky until June 21, 1942. At that time a Jewish specialist in soapmaking was needed at the nearby town of Myadl. Mikhoel decided to become legal, and presented himself as an accomplished specialist in soapmaking.

### **Mikhoel Potashnik in Myadl**

In this White Russian town as well, some of the Jews had been murdered during the first days after the arrival of the Germans. About two hundred Jews were still living in the town, working at various assignments. Mikhoel went to work making soap there, although at first he had absolutely no idea how to go about it.

News began to come from all of the nearby White Russian towns about the total slaughter of the Jews. The Jews of Myadl didn't believe that they, the "useful" Jews, would be killed as well. But Mikhoel Potashnik knew from his own tragic experiences that unfortunately, all of the information was correct. He began trying to convince the Jews to escape into the forests, where Red partisans were already beginning to organize. At first the young people from the town didn't respond appropriately to Mikhoel's urgings. But when the constant extortion and "requisitions" had completely impoverished the Jews and they no longer had the means to ransom their lives from all of the murderers, Mikhoel Potashnik's suggestions began to have a powerful influence.

One hundred and twenty of the two hundred Jews came together to organize. On the night of the Sabbath between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur 1942, these 120 Jews, including women and children, escaped from Myadl into the surrounding forests, and hid in "the swamps." In time they built underground bunkers. About two-thirds of all the Jews who fled Myadl survived until the liberation.

The next day the remaining Jews were herded into a single neighborhood which was surrounded with barbed wire. About six weeks later a division of Red partisans attacked the town. They attacked the German garrison and "liberated" the Jews from the ghetto. Some of those who were "liberated" lived to see the true liberation.

### **Mikhoel among the Red Partisans**

As soon as he reached the forest Mikhoel began trying to make contact with Red partisans. He managed to do this. Along with two other Jewish comrades, he joined the Red partisan company called "The Avenger." (See the testimony of Zalmen Yofe about the slaughter of the Jews of Stajatzishkis - LK).

However, they were not permitted to join the company without weapons. They were given two alternatives: either to find weapons there, or to join a group of Jewish families who were getting ready to move to the other side of the front. The partisans showed the two young men where the Jewish families were gathering. Mikhoel and fifteen other young people found the group. Just then everything was ready for the Jews to move eastward, and then to cross over to the other side of the front. Among those marching eastward were entire Jewish families, including women and small children, who had managed to escape from various slaughters in White Russian towns. This strange group was led by two Russian commanders. The group moved from one partisan company to another. They always moved at night. They spent the day in the forests. They suffered endlessly from hunger. They usually managed to survive on potatoes which the Red partisans gave them.

The entire journey was filled with various dangers. They had to pass a number of points which were guarded by Germans and by their Ukrainian and White Russian collaborators. They survived more than one attack. Every time there were casualties. The most dangerous times were when they had to cross over railroad lines, which were always well-guarded.

Mikhoel and other Jews crossed over the Berezina River at night on a raft. They crossed the Western Dvina River on a boat. The dangerous journey took exactly three months. Many people died on the way. The majority, however, including Mikhoel Potashnik, reached the front, just where the rear lines of the Germany army were, in the month of December 1942.

### **The Other Side of the Line of Fire**

For some time the Red partisans stayed close to the front, investigating every possibility of crossing to the other side. They chose a path through the swampy areas in a forest between Veliki Luki and the city of Veliz. One night a large group of Jews led by experienced Red partisans began the dangerous march through the front. The swamps were partially frozen by then, and the group managed to make it past both lines of fire. Of course, there were losses even at the last moment as they passed the front.

One night in December 1942 Potashnik, along with a smaller number of Jews, reached the other, safe side of the front. The epic journey was over. On the other side of the front the newly-arrived Jews were taken to the partisan headquarters. There everyone was interrogated and assigned to various tasks. Some of them were assigned to partisan units. Some were recruited into the Red Army. Mikhoel Potashnik and other Jews were mobilized into the Red Army and sent to the front.

When they had been at the front for some time, Potashnik and other Jews were formed into a production group who were sent to the Kuznetsk basin in Siberia to work in the coal mines. Potashnik and the others were taken away from the front because of a directive that was issued at that time, stating that anyone who had not been a Soviet citizen before 1939 had to be removed from the Red Army.

Mikhoel Potashnik had a difficult life in the coal mines. He was exhausted by all of his horrible experiences, which hadn't left him any time for rest. The difficult living conditions in the coal mines, the shortage of food and being so far away from the pulsing, real world all contributed to a permanent deterioration of Mikhoel's health. Mikhoel Potashnik worked in the coal mines until after Rosh Hashana 1945.

Mikhoel deeply longed for his home, for his birthplace, where he hoped to find someone from his family or one of his friends who had escaped from town the day before Rosh Hashana, Friday, September 26, 1941, before the Jews were taken to the compound. He couldn't wait to be released from work and allowed to travel legally.

On Rosh Hashana 1945 he left work without permission. After long travels, he arrived in his home town of Adutishkis. Mikhoel was totally drained physically and psychologically from everything he had lived through, from the hard work in the coal mines and from his long journey.

### **Back in Adutishkis**

Mikhoel didn't find a single one of his friends in town. He didn't even find any Jews he didn't know. On the night of Friday, September 26, 1941 about eighty Jews had fled from town, including Mikhoel's two brothers, Zundl and Shmuel. He learned that Zundl had run away during an action in Kobilnik. He had been seized and shot in Pastoviai after Sukkot 1941. His other brother Shmuel fell while fighting as a partisan. His third brother Yisroel had been a German prisoner of war after the collapse of Poland. He was released and sent to Lublin, where he died.

Mikhoel's father and mother, his sister Miriam with her husband Moyshe Svirsky and their child Shimen, and his two sisters Khave and Brayne, all died at the compound near Shvencioneliai.

1. A few weeks before the Jews were taken from town there was a successful effort to have a Jewish woman from Adutishkis placed in the hospital. Her husband's name was Henekh Fisher. A few weeks after the Jews were taken from town the Lithuanian murderers found out about her and shot her.
2. Elye Valotzky hid in one place, his wife and child in another. At the beginning of 1944 a peasant reported him to the Lithuanians, who arrested and shot him. Mikhoel was unable to learn details about this tragic case. Peasants told him that Elye had been betrayed by the peasant who sheltered him, to whom he had entrusted some of his goods.

Among the Jewish survivors who came to Adutishkis after the liberation were the two brothers Leybe and Velve Katsherginshky. They went to peasants they knew in a village.

In a forest near the village of Mishkinys the two brothers were found murdered. It was said that this had been done by Lithuanians who had loyally served the Germans and then begun hiding in the forests after the arrival of the Red Army.

Thus, out of all eighty Jews who escaped from town that tragic Friday, September 26, 1941, only six survived:

1. Mrs. Nekhe Valotzky.
2. Her little son.
3. Mikhoel Potashnik.
4. Gershon Bornshteyn.
5. Tankhum Gordon and his brother.
6. Avrom-Bune Gordon.

Mikhoel learned at the time that among those who took active part in slaughtering the Jews of Adutishkis, in addition to those listed earlier, were:

1. Tsecak, a Lithuanian farmer from town.
2. Two Lithuanian brothers from town. Their father's name was Antverd, from the village of Lechowici, two kilometers from Adutishkis.

All of the Lithuanian youth took active part in the slaughter of the Jews.

The town of Adutishkis was totally destroyed. Before the German vandals retreated, they burned it to the foundations. There are no more Jews there. No longer is there the town which pulsed with joy and life. The two old cemeteries remain, with ancient stones from hundreds of years ago, like a monument for the destroyed Jewish life, for the old, established Jewish community.

### **Testament of Mikhoel Potashnik**

All of the facts, dates, names of persons and geographic locations contained in this report of the slaughter of the Jews of Adutishkis and later about my life in the ghettos of White Russian towns and my short time with the partisans, finally about the march toward the east and crossing the front lines, were personally related by me, Mikhoel Potashnik, and I attest thereto with my signature on each and every page.

Eyewitness Mikhoel Potashnik

(Signature)

The testimony was collected by Engineer L Koniuchowsky  
Feldafing near Starnberg April 28, 1948

The signature of the Feldafing camp resident Michoel Potashnik is attested to by the chairman of the camp committee. E. Reif (Signature)

*Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin*

*New York*

*November 26, 1994*

## THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS OF STAJATZISHKIS

Eyewitness testimony of Zalmen Yofe, born in Vilnius on May 10, 1907. Graduated elementary school in Vilnius. A tinsmith by trade. Zalmen lived in Vilnius until 1938, when he settled in the town of Adutishkis. He lived there until the war broke out on June 22, 1941. His father's name was Mordkhe and his mother was Hinde, born Shpitzberg.

Present during the reporting of the testimony was also Zalmen's wife Reyzl, born June 11, 1912 in Stajatzishkis. Reyzl studied in a cheder in Stajatzishkis. She was a seamstress by trade. Her father's name was Sholem Gantovnik, and her mother was Khyene-Leye, born Khodosh. Reyzl lived in Stajatzishkis until 1924, when she moved to Vilnius. In 1931 she married Zalmen.

### Geographic, Economic and Cultural Setting of the Town

The village of Stajatzishkis is located in Shventzionys County between Adutishkis and Shventzionys, four kilometers from Shventzionys. About 45 Jewish families lived in the village, along with ten Polish, White Russian and Lithuanian families. It was thus a Jewish village. Jews had been working there for decades. The farms were handed over from generation to generation.

Almost all of the Jews in the village had substantial plots of ground which they farmed efficiently, along with horses, cattle and various other goods. Naturally, the Jews of this village worked their land themselves, making it fruitful with their own sweat and blood. There were a shoemaker, a tailor and a store to serve the needs of the Jews in the village. The Jews in this village were peasants in the full sense of the word. Their psychological makeup and habits of thinking were those of peasants.

When it came to competence and diligence the Jews lacked nothing in comparison to their non-Jewish neighbors, who called the Jewish village "little Palestine." The Jewish peasant got along well with their Christian neighbors until the outbreak of the war.

"Palestine" had a cheder and a lovely study house. The Jewish peasants were not ignorant; they knew how to study. Many of them were quite capable of getting through a page of the Talmud. Almost all of the Jewish peasants were strictly religious. They did not have a rabbi. The rabbi of Adutishkis served "Little Palestine" as well. There was a kosher slaughterer in the village. The peasants sent their children to study in the gymnasiums in Vilnius and Shventzionys. On the Sabbath the young people from the village would gather at each other's homes. In the summer they would leave the village and spend time on their own fields and pastures. The young people were not interested in politics at all, and in every respect they were isolated from the busy world around them. The young people married amongst themselves, so that almost everyone was related to each other.

### The War Breaks out

The Jewish peasants were taken by surprise on June 22, 1941. None of them thought about abandoning their farms and evacuating to the Soviet Union. The Soviet village evacuated on Wednesday, June 25. There was no government left in town.

A day earlier Zalemn Yofe and his wife had come from Adutishkis and moved in with their parents. On Wednesday, July 2, 1941 Germans appeared in the village. A civil administration was immediately set up. The new mayor of town was the Polish farmer Jozuk Sinkewitz. At that time a town council was set up in the nearby town of Adutishkis, headed by the mayor, Pawl Rakauskas. There were no partisans or police in "Little Palestine."

All of the orders and directives against Jews came from Adutishkis, and the mayor of Stajatzishkis would communicate them to the Christian and Jewish peasants. The arrival of the German army in the region caused little change in the lifeways of the Jewish peasants, who continued to live at their farms and work their land. At first there were incidents of robberies of Jewish possessions. During the third week of the war all of the Jewish peasants were ordered to put on insignia which were changed several times, until they finally settled on the yellow Star of David on their chest and back. But the Jews in town didn't observe the order. They only wore the patches when the Germans appeared in the village. During the sixth week after the war broke out a hundred SS men came to the village. They all wore the Death's Head insignia.

The Jews had to "clean out" the study house, carrying out the Torah scrolls and books. The Germans settled into the study house. They were in "Little Palestine" for eight days. During this period the Jews were obligated to provide them with eggs, butter, ham and other foods.

The chief of the Jews was Yisroel Gantovnik. He would collect from the Jews various taxes or food for the Germans and for the Lithuanian partisans who often came to "Little Palestine."

Some of the Jewish peasants had to go to work repairing the roads, while others had to do forced work with horses and wagons in Adutishkis. The mayor Sinkewitz handed out the labor assignments. Although "Little Palestine" was far from the great, bloody world and there was no opportunity to be in contact with the larger Jewish centers, the Jews learned about the total slaughter of Jews in various regions of Lithuania. Jewish refugees began appearing in "Little Palestine," people who had miraculously survived the slaughter of their towns. Some fled further, and others stayed in the village. The Jewish peasants heard various incredible details from them. There were even two Jewish refugees from the town of Preniai in the village, people who had escaped when the Jews were shot there. Not all of the Jewish peasants believed what they were told, thinking that the stories were certainly somewhat exaggerated.

### **The Liquidation of the Jewish Village**

On Friday, September 19, 1941 two policemen drove in from Adutishkis. Accompanied by Mayor Sinkewitz, they went to the Jewish peasants and made a list of all the horses, cows, better furniture and valuables. They strictly forbade the Jews to hide the items which had been listed, and also forbade them to remove or sell anything. They threatened to shoot the entire family of anyone who failed to carry out their order.

The Christian peasants began to say that preparations were being made for the slaughter of all the Jewish peasants. The Jews didn't believe them, suspecting that they wanted to trick the Jews out of everything they owned.

The next Friday, September 26, 1941, at 4:00p.m., four Lithuanian partisans came to town, dressed in civilian clothes but armed. They went to see the chief of the Jews, Yisroel Gantovnik. They stayed there for some time. Yisroel Gantovnik went through the town, telling the Jews to bring along enough food for three days, along with soap and a washcloth. Yisroel went to every house separately to pass on the instructions. The Jewish peasants furrowed their brows, trying to figure out what this meant. Yisroel Gantovnik explained to them that the partisans had come to take the furniture and other objects on the list. Apparently that is what they had told him.

Meanwhile one of the partisans went away to a nearby village to organize other partisans. On the way to the village he saw the Jewish peasant Itshe-Dovid Rudnitzky running with a pack of goods, and he shot the Jew on the spot. Rudnitzky was running with the things toward his own field. He was the first Jewish victim in "Little Palestine."

The partisan returned from the other village with more partisans. In a short period of time the Jews had to prepare to go out into the street near the crossroads, near Ele Gdud's house. They had to leave their houses unlocked, and the stalls open as well. Yisroel gave all of these instructions when he went to all the Jewish houses.

The mayor Sinkewitz himself went through the village shouting in Yiddish: "Zlatke, get out of the house! I've been patient with you long enough! Now I want to live in your house a while!"

Almost all of the Jewish peasants and their wives and children gathered at the assigned spot. The older Jews refused to leave the house, deciding that they would rather die in their own beds. A Jew named Nokhum Volik, aged over seventy, lay sick in bed. When they came to take him from the house, he slit his wrists. The Lithuanian murderers shot him in his bed.

The mayor delivered a speech to the Jews who had gathered at the crossroads, telling them that they were being taken to Adutishkis, and from there to work at the military compound near Shventzionel'ai. From the crossroads all of the Jews were taken away on foot to Adutishkis that Friday, where they were herded into the crowded ghetto area. All of the goods the Jews had assembled with the hard work and sweat of generations fell into the hands of their Christian neighbors. Immediately after the Jews were driven out of their houses the partisans locked the doors and left a guard behind. Peasants from the village and other locations hurried to "Little Palestine" that evening, broke open the doors and windows and robbed the abandoned Jewish farms. Everyone stole whatever he could get his hands on. They took away furniture, clothing, the livestock and other farm inventory, and so forth.

Shmuel the smith hid in his own home, and didn't go to the assembly point. A woman named Hode Abel hid in another house. The mayor Sankewitz found both of them after the Jews were taken from the village. He locked both Jews into Khaykl Volak's cellar. He kept them there for two days without anything to eat or drink. Then he shot them himself. Zalmen was told about this by White Russian peasants in the same village of "Little Palestine."

On Saturday, September 27, 1941 the Jews of Stajatzishkis and the Jews of Adutishkis were taken to the compound near Shventzionel'ai.

On Wednesday, October 8 and Thursday, October 9, 1941 all of the Jews who had been assembled at the compound were shot not far from the compound.

All of the Jews from the nearby towns in Shventzionys County were shot there on those days.

### **How did Zalmen Yofe and his Wife survive?**

When they saw four partisans going to see the chief of the Jews, Yisroel Gantovnik, Zalmen escaped from his house to a nearby woods next to his own fields. Throughout the entire time he stayed in the village Zalmen had been extremely careful, hiding every time Lithuanians or Germans appeared in the village, just as if he had been a refugee. In general Zalmen obeyed the principle that all of the directives issued to the Jews by the Germans and Lithuanians were meant to enslave them, insult them, rob them of their possessions and finally slaughter them. Thus it made sense not to obey the orders, nor to believe their promises.

Zalmen became friendly with the Jewish survivors from Preniai. He believed everything the two Jews told about the slaughter of the Jews there. While he lay in hiding in his own fields, he saw Yisroel's father-in-law running away from the village. In his arms he carried a bit of food, a small package and something that had been partially baked. Zalmen asked him what was happening. Yisroel Gantovnik's father-in-law answered that the situation was no good, and that preparations were being made for all the Jews to be taken out of the village.

Zalmen saw his wife Reyzl coming to get water. He asked her what was happening in town. She told her husband that Yisroel Gantovnik had spoken to her and reassured her that the partisans had come to take the furniture which was on the list. Zalmen didn't let her go back to the village. They both hid and observed everything that happened in the village. Neither Zalmen nor his wife had any food with them. They went to see the mayor's wife to get food. Sinkewitz wasn't in the house. The peasant woman gave Zalmen and his wife food, and advised them to escape from the village.

Zalmen and his wife hid in some woods next to the mayor's fields. They saw Sinkewitz riding toward his house on a horse. A son of his pointed to the woods where Zalmen and his wife were hiding. Sinkewitz shot in that direction several times, and began riding toward the woods. Zalmen and his wife made their way to another little woods and hid there. A short time later Zalmen's two brothers-in-law, the brothers Moyshe-Zelik and Yisroel-Yitzkhok Gantovnik and his sister-in-law Mirl, came to those woods as well. Then they were joined in the woods by the youngest brother-in-law Yosele, aged 13. Yosele had been at the crossroads with his father. He reported that Yisroel Gantovsky had gone to the crossroads with all the Jews, but without his family. He disappeared from there. His father had sent him to find out what his son-in-law Zalmen's children, who had run away, were planning to do. They explained to Yosele that they wanted to escape to Kazan. They refused to return to the village, and they also asked Yosele to stay with them. But Yosele wanted to be with his father, and he went back to the village.

Yisroel-Yitzkhok and his sister decided to go with all of the Jews. When they reached the village they looked at their houses from the distance and saw it locked, while a Lithuanian armed with a rifle stood guard. The two Jews ran back into the forest.

Zalmen and his wife, along with both brothers-in-law and his sister-in-law went to Kazan to be with his wife's cousin Yudl Khodosh. They settled in there. Yudl was able to spend a certain amount of money and arrange documents for his newly-arrived relatives. He also got them registered with the police. Yisroel Gantovnik, his brother Avrom, his sister Etl and his in-laws also came to Kazan from "Little Palestine." In Kazan Yisroel Gantovnik met his wife Rokhl and their little daughter Rivke, whom he had sent away from the village on that tragic Friday.

The surviving Stajatzishkis Jews in Kazan accused Yisroel Gantovnik, claiming that the partisans had told him everything, that he had known what was going on but hadn't informed or warned anyone. Obviously he had understood in time that he had to send his entire family from the village. He personally was accused of having gone to the assembly point with the Jews in order to still the panic and calm the Jews down. When all the Jewish peasants had been brought from the village to the assembly point, he had left.

The Jewish survivors even said that when the partisans had gone to his house, he had negotiated with them to give him and his family an opportunity to run away from town. On account of these accusations Yisroel Gantovsky's entire family had to leave Kazan, and they went away to Opsche instead.

Zalmen Yofe, his wife, his brothers-in-law and his sister-in-law stayed in Kazan until the Jews were taken away to the Gluboki ghetto in the winter of 1941-1942.

## **Zalmen and His Wife in the Pastoviai Ghetto**

Before the Jews of Kazan were taken to the Gluboki ghetto Zalmen and his wife escaped to the White Russian town of Pastoviai. A few days later his brothers-in-law and his sister-in-law also arrived there.

Many Jews who didn't want to go to the Gluboki ghetto gathered at Pastoviai. The German police ordered all of the refugees to register. They were helped a great deal in this by the Jewish ghetto police. The Jewish police would seize groups of refugees and force them to register. When they did this they told the refugees that nothing bad would happen to them. The refugees were registered at the police station and sent to the ghettos in Gluboki or Vidz.

Zalmen, his wife and his relatives hid from the Jewish police for some time with Jewish friends in the ghetto, until they were eventually summoned. Zalmen went to work in a tinsmith workshop for the German police in Pastoviai. He was the only smith in the ghetto. He had a special pass allowing him to enter the city, and he had the chance to obtain groceries for himself, his wife and his relatives. The Germans found him useful, and he obtained special privileges from them. Yet Zalmen did not allow himself to be lulled into a lethargic sense of security. He did everything he could to make contact with the Red partisans operating in the surrounding region. Zalmen and his comrades at the tin smithing workshop were successful in this attempt. At first the Red partisans gave the Jews the task of providing them with flints for lighters, and with glycerine for a hectograph. The Jews carried out the task and earned the trust of the Red partisans, who promised to get them out of the ghetto into the forest. Zalmen and his friends began to get ready. They managed to steal a rifle and pistol from the German police station. They stole two rifles at another location. They brought the stolen weapons into the ghetto in a tin tube. The entrance to the ghetto was only guarded by Jewish police, who didn't search those coming in from town.

There was an underground resistance movement in the Pastoviai ghetto, divided into small units. They had rifles, machine guns and hand grenades. Their goal was self-defense. It was very difficult to leave the ghetto because the Jewish Council would not agree to this. Their reason was that if a small group of armed youth left, all of the Jews who were unable to leave the ghetto for the forest might be shot.

The Red partisans brought several young people who had been working at the tin shop to join them in the forest. Among the first ones to leave were a young man from Dolhinova named Zalmen Fridman, and Avrom- Itze Fridman from Pastoviai. One month later they came with a Russian to take Zalmen, his wife and ten other Jews, all armed, out of the ghetto. This happened in the month of September 1942.

The German police asked about the master tinsmith several times. In order to erase the traces of Zalmen's escape, the Jewish Council announced that the tinsmith Zalmen Yofe had suddenly died of a heart attack. They received permission from the police to "bury" Zalmen at the Jewish cemetery. The Jewish council faked several such "funerals" during this period. Zalmen's brothers-in-law Moyshe-Zelik and Yisroel- Yitzkhok, along with his sister Mirl, later died in Pastoviai, when all the Jews in the ghetto were slaughtered.

## **Zalmen and his Wife with the Partisans in the Zazerge Forest**

In the forest they found a group of thirty people, including Jews and a few Russians. The group belonged to the "Avengers" company, which was still in the process of being organized. The group was not carrying out any special military assignments. During that time the Jew Yakov Segaltzik and a group of comrades took a few dozen Jews, including children, out of the Myadl ghetto. Entire Jewish families gathered in the forest. Preparations were being made to take them further to the east and bring them across the front. The Red partisans had already taken several groups across the front, deeper into the Soviet Union.

The newly-arrived Jews stayed in the forest for three weeks. From there the Red partisans took them further into White Russia.

The Red partisans' constant attacks against Germans and their forays to get food from peasants gave away their locations. The partisans received reliable information that tens of thousands of Germans, Lithuanians and Poles were preparing a huge blockade in all the surrounding forest. They were ordered to divide up into small groups and head eastward. The partisans separated from the Jews and went away. They left the Jews a few weapons.

Zalmen, his wife and other Jews left the forest and went to a forest in White Russia. As they were going to get food in the countryside they met some Jewish Red partisans, who told them that there was an all-Jewish company. Among the Jewish Red partisans was a Jew from Pastoviai named Zalmen Rokhman, a friend of Zalmen Yofe. The next day he came and brought Zalmen Yofe and his wife into his company. He didn't accept the rest of the Jews

because they were parents with children. Zalmen and his wife joined the Jewish company at the end of the spring of 1943.

### **The Jewish Partisan Company: "Revenge"**

When he joined the company Zalmen found a total of fifteen Jewish men and women who had escaped from White Russian towns. The company belonged to the brigade named after K Voroshilov. The leaders of the company were Boris Grayneman, an escapee from Old Vilejki, and a Jewish parachutist who went by the pseudonym Bitenas, who was from the Lithuanian town of Jonava. Bitenas planned to establish a larger Jewish company. He obtained a few weapons and went to work. Every day Jews used to come to the Jewish company, some with weapons and some without. Some Jews came armed from the non-Jewish company.

Groups of Jewish Red partisans began carrying out various missions, obtaining their own food and scarce weapons.

A group of three men went to Vilnius and returned with thirty Jews and weapons. Among the thirty Jews was Yoysef Glazman, from Alytus, who led the resistance movement in the Vilnius ghetto. (He was one of the founders and leaders of the resistance movement in the Vilnius ghetto - LK)

The commander appointed Glazman chief of staff of the Jewish company. On another occasion a group of ninety Jews were brought from the Vilnius ghetto. The Jewish company became a large group. By this time it included more than three hundred men and women. They all settled into well-made bunkers, and they did not live badly. The women worked in the kitchens, washed clothes and repaired the men's clothing. Some of the women did watch duty in the forest itself.

The fighters in the Jewish company several times attacked German positions. They attacked Kobilnik, the towns of Myadl, Kamay and other positions. These attacks were successful, and the Jewish company obtained more weapons and food.

Several times fighters from this company went into the Gluboki ghetto to bring Jews out. The Jews of Gluboki kept delaying until the total slaughter came. A few people were successfully brought out of the Gluboki ghetto, and they joined the Jewish company. At the same time the last group of Jews were brought from the Vilnius ghetto.

### **The Great Blockade**

In the autumn of 1943 the Red partisans learned about a huge blockade which the Germans were preparing. The blockade hadn't yet begun. The "Revenge" company of Jews received a visit from Commander Markov of the K Voroshilov brigade. Markov sent Bitenas away to carry out a mission for him in the Lithuanian interior. Actually Bitenas had been sent from Moscow to accomplish this mission.

Markov transferred most of the personnel and weapons in the "Revenge" company to the small "Komsomolsk" company, along with White Russians. The commander of the company was a Russian named Valotzky. The commander of the platoon was a Ukrainian. The newly-arrived Jews immediately recognized the Ukrainian. He was an infamous Jew-murderer from Pastoviai. The matter was investigated, and the accusation was completely corroborated. The Ukrainian was sentenced to death and shot. A Jew named Shurke from Shventzionys became the new platoon commander.

The Komsomolsk company began to obtain horses and got ready to become a cavalry company. Just at that time the huge blockage began. The few Jews remaining in the Revenge company divided into smaller groups of five or ten each, and began looking for ways to get out of the blockade. The sick and wounded, supervised by two Russian doctors and a certain number of fighters who were specially assigned, moved to an island in the great swamps.

It was estimated at the time that a total of about 80,000 Germans, Lithuanians, Estonians, Latvians and others participated in the blockade. They were well-armed and they used tanks and airplanes. During the blockade Zalmen Yofe was with the invalids on the island.

Yofe, his wife and several other Jews left the island during the blockade and tried to make their way out with the help of their weapons. One evening, however, they encountered Germans. They couldn't escape in another direction, because there were Germans everywhere.

Zalmen Yofe, his wife and the rest successfully carried out a maneuver. They approached the Germans from the side and hid in deep swamps up to their necks. They covered themselves with branches. The Germans didn't notice them because it was already dark in the forest. The Germans passed by the several men without noticing them. The hidden Jews kept their weapons ready to fire. Some of them could barely keep themselves from firing when they saw the Germans so close. Zalmen barely managed to restrain them. The Germans went further away. The Jews spent the night in that swamp, and went away to look for something to eat on the island. They found no one there. The sick people had escaped from the island. All of the bunkers in the entire forest had been vandalized and destroyed.

For eight days the Jews who were with Yofe lay hiding in the forest. They met partisans and together they all went to the bunkers, which they found burned out. The Germans burned the surrounding villages for about two weeks.

The terrible blockade lasted for eight days. 104 Jews lost their lives. Most of them were people who had been brought from the Vilnius ghetto. Among those who died were Yoysef Glazman and a group of seventeen Jewish men.

### **The Death of Yoysef Glazman and his Group**

Shortly before he left for Lithuania, Bitenas sent a group of eighteen Jews, including Yoysef Glazman at their head, on a mission. The group went far away from their base, armed with automatics and pistols. The Jewish dry goods merchant Peysekh Goldberg and his daughter Julke, both from Shventzionys, were wandering in that neighborhood. They met Yoysef Glazman and his group. The group spent the night in the forest. Everyone went to sleep. A group of Germans found them while they were sleeping. Julke managed to sneak into some brush. The Germans didn't spot her.

They took her father and the other eighteen Jews prisoner and took them in an unknown direction. It is not known where the eighteen Jews were shot. Julke saw everything with her own eyes and later reported it. After wandering through the forest for some time Julke entered a newly-established Jewish production group in the Voroshilov brigade. Julke and her father had escaped from the Vilnius ghetto.

### **The Jewish Production Unit**

After the blockade the Jews began to return toward their base. They entered the Zazerje forest. They were joined by Grayneman, who organized a Jewish production group consisting of thirty men. They also had a few weapons. The group went to another forest, built bunkers, got more weapons and assembled more Jews around them. Eventually there were sixty people in the group. [Shmuel] Katsherginsky and [Avrom] Sutzkever were in the group as well.

After the production group was organized, Grayneman was transferred to another location. He was replaced by a Russian commander. The head of staff was a Vilnius Jew named Khatzkl Eyfe.

The popular Yiddish poet from the "Young Vilna" group, Sutzkever, was taken away to Moscow in an airplane. His colleague Katsherginsky remained with the partisans until the liberation.

The production unit arranged their own tannery, shoemaker shop, tailor workshop, bakery and sausage factory in the forest. They also had a workshop where they repaired weapons, and Zalmen Yofe worked there. The production unit did not only serve its own brigade. Bread was brought to them to be baked for other companies, and they kept a certain percentage for themselves. The other units also worked for other brigades.

The production unit lived and worked in the Zazerje forest in this manner until the great offensive of the Red Army near Vitebsk in the spring of 1944. At that time there was an order for every partisan to blow up five meters of railroad tracks, all at the same time. The assignment was carried out. It was said at the time that eighty kilometers of track had been destroyed.

On June 5, 1944 in the village of Zazerje, the production unit met up with the advancing Red Army. Zalmen Yofe and his wife were rescued along with hundreds other Jews in the surrounding forests and villages.



## Supplementary Testimony by Zalmen Yofe and his Wife

After having the testimony of Avrom Gantovnik and his sister Etl, recorded on November 10, 1946, read to us, we find ourselves duty bound to make the following observations and corrections:

1. The village of Stajatzishkis was occupied not by 66 Jewish families, but by exactly forty.
2. There was no elementary school in the village of Stajatzishkis, only a cheder with one religious teacher.
3. There weren't two study houses in the village of Stajatzishkis, but only one.
4. Pavel Rakowsky was the mayor of Adutishkis, not in the village of Stajatzishkis.
5. When the furniture and clothes were listed on September 19, 1941 no one was registered.
6. The Jewish peasants in the village did receive news about the slaughter of the Jews in Lithuanian towns. The news was brought by refugees and two boys who survived in Prienai.
7. On Friday, September 26, 1941, when all the Jews in the village were ordered to assemble near the crossroads, partisans did not drive any Jews out of their houses. Only Avrom's brother Yisroel Gantovnik went around announcing to the Jews that they should bring enough food for three days, soap and a washcloth. At the same time, however, he sent his entire family out of town, as recorded in our testimony.
8. Gantovsky's entire family hid with peasants, where they survived. None of them joined the partisans. The parents died in White Russia.
9. The Jews in Stajatzishkis were brought to Adutishkis on foot and allowed to enter the ghetto there, but did not go into cellars, as Avrom and Etl indicate.
10. Only the Jews of Stajatzishkis were brought to Adutishkis, because the village is located just four kilometers from Adutishkis. The Jews in all of the other towns certainly were not taken through Adutishkis, as Avrom and his sister assert.

All of the corrections and clarifications regarding the testimony of Avrom Gantovnik and his sister Etl were supplied by us to Engineer L Koniuchowsky after Gantovsky's statements about the slaughter of the Jews of Stajatzishkis were read to us, and we attest thereto with our signature.

Signatures:                    1.     Zalmen Yofe.   2. Reyzl Yofe-Gantovnik.

The testimony was recorded by Engineer L Koniuchowsky                    April 25, 1948

The signature of the Feldafing camp residents Zalmen Yofe and Mrs. Reyzl Yofe are attested to by the chairman of the camp committee. E Reif     (Signature)     Feldafing                    April 25, 1948

*Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin     New York     November 27, 1994*

## THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS OF LENTUPIS

Eyewitness testimony of Moyshe Gilinsky, born in Lentupis on May 13, 1912. Until the war broke out and at the time the war broke out on June 22, 1941, he lived in Lentupis. His father's name was Dovid-Shloyme Gilinsky. His mother was Khane, born Gordon. He completed three grades of elementary school. He was a retail merchant by trade.

### Geographic, Cultural and Political Life of the Jews

Lentupis is located southeast of Shventzionys. It is twelve kilometers from Shventzionys and ninety kilometers from Vilnius. Through the town runs a wide-gauge railroad line linking Vilnius and Pastoviai, as well as a narrow-gauge railroad to Shventzionys. Gravel roads connect the town with the surrounding area. Until Poland collapsed in 1939 the town belonged to the Shventzionys region. After Poland collapsed the town was assigned to the White Russian Soviet Republic. In March 1942 the town was assigned to Lithuania.

More than 3,000 people lived in the town, including about three hundred Jews. Most of the Jews in town were occupied in trade, along with a small number of artisans. The Christian population consisted of White Russians and a few Poles. The villages around the town were occupied by White Russians and a few Poles.

Among the more substantial businesses in town were a distillery and sawmill belonging to the Polish nobleman Bischewsky.

The town had prominent Jewish lumber merchants. Until the war broke out on June 22, 1941, the attitude of the Christian population toward the Jews was good. The Jews did not live badly. Lentupis had an elementary school with instruction in Yiddish, a Yiddish-Hebrew library, a free loan society, and a study house. The majority of the Jewish youth belonged to Zionist movements.

### The War Breaks out June 22, 1941

After the war broke out a few dozen Jews evacuated to the Soviet Union with the Red Army. Most of them were young people who had occupied positions in the Soviet institutions. Several Jewish families escaped. They were caught by the Germans, however. Some of them returned. Some of them remained as refugees in various White Russian towns.

About ten days after the war broke out, Germans entered the town without a battle. The townspeople joyfully welcomed the German army. Immediately after the Germans arrived the civil administration was established.

1. The new mayor was a Pole from town name ??.
2. The voiv in town was the same mayor, ??.
3. The chief of police was the Pole ??.

The police were recruited among the townspeople and the residents of the surrounding villages. Most of them were Poles. Christians accompanied by Germans began robbing Jewish homes. The able-bodied Jewish men and women immediately began to be taken to do various jobs at the distillery and the saw mill; cleaning the streets and toilets, and the civil and military offices. While the Jews worked they were guarded by Germans and police, who beat the Jews brutally. The Jews kept living in their own homes.

At the end of the first month of the war various anti-Jewish directives were issued. According to German regulations, Jews were forbidden to walk on the sidewalk, to talk or do business with Christians, to leave the town, and so forth. Jews were also forbidden to appear in the streets, except for those who were under guard and on their way to work. Jews had to put on two stars of David.

Every morning at 7:00 a.m. the Jewish workers had to go to the yard of the police headquarters in town, and from there they were taken to do various tasks under guard.

The Jews Yudl Mauker and his brother Moyshe had occupied minor posts under the Soviets. Police arrested both of them and accused them of being Communists. The two Jews were taken to prison in Old Vilejki. They were tormented in the prison for a week, and then they were shot. This happened around the time of the High Holidays in 1941. They were the first Jewish victims in Lentupis.

## The Ghetto in Lentupis

Until the end of 1941 the Lentupis Jews lived at home. Nothing particularly dramatic happened. Around the time of the High Holidays Jewish survivors of the slaughters in Lithuanian towns, including Shventzionys, began to arrive. The Jews of Lentupis learned from these refugees about the slaughter of the Jews.

The murders of the Jews at the compound near Shventzioneliai on October 8 and 9 made a terrible impression on the Jews of Lentupis. Not all the Jews believed that these terrible reports were accurate. Later Jews who had been at the pits and survived arrived in Lentupis and corroborated everything.

Shortly before New Year's 1942 a German came from Pastoviai and ordered the mayor to take the Jews to the Pastoviai ghetto.

The town had a committee of the following Jews: Khayem Katzkovitz; Max Rakovsky and Bashe Rudnitzky. The committee served as a "requisition bureau" for the Germans and the police in town. The committee gathered money from the town Jews and gave "gifts" to the Germans and police.

When the committee received an order to announce to the Jews that they had to get ready to go to Pastoviai, they promised the German who gave them the order a fine "gift" and asked him to allow them to enter a ghetto in Lentupis itself, because it was terribly cold at that time.

Members of the committee announced to the Jews that in order to be allowed to remain in Lentupis every family would have to bring a fur coat and valuables to the police. Moyshe Gilinsky brought five gold rubles. The German from Pastoviai sat in a separate room with Soroka, the secretary of the police. On the table stood two plates. Moyshe placed the five rubles in one of the plates. The secretary wrote his first and last names down on a list. The German drove away.

One week later the Jews had to move to a ghetto consisting of a few dozen old, half-ruined houses near the edge of town. The Christians took over the Jews' houses and left their old huts to the Jews. The Jews had 24 hours to move. The Jews were allowed to bring everything they wanted with them into the ghetto. Machines, radios, and bicycles had been taken from the Jews immediately after the Germans arrived. Several days before the Jews went into the ghetto all the Jews had taken their cattle and horses to the Lentupis compound.

The day the Lentupis Jews moved into the ghetto, Germans and police came from Pastoviai and arrested the mayor of the town, his secretary and the town rabbi, along with the rabbi's wife and their ten-year-old child. It was said at the time that the rabbi and the mayor had been arrested for listening to the radio at the mayor's house. The rabbi and the mayor lived in two attached dwellings under one roof. That same evening everyone was taken to Pastoviai. The committee assembled a "gift" for the Germans in Pastoviai and went to Pastoviai. The rabbi and his wife and child had already been shot.

The rabbi and the mayor were reported by local police and peasants, who were angry that the Jews had been allowed to continue living in Lentupis, instead of them being sent to Pastoviai. For a few weeks the mayor and the secretary were under arrest in the Pastoviai prison, and then they were released. The mayor did not return to his position.

The small ghetto neighborhood was not surrounded. There were no ghetto police. The previous committee remained in place, but now it was called the Jewish Council. The functions of the Jewish Council also remained the same as they had been under the previous committee. The Jewish Council served as the intermediary between the ghetto Jews on one hand, and the Germans and police on the other hand. The Jewish Council in the ghetto also had to fulfill "requisitions" and offer "gifts."

The able-bodied men and women had regular labor assignments to which they reported every morning. The Jews worked in the distillery, in a pitch-refining plant and at the Romanishky estate. The Jews were not fed or paid for their work. They exchanged their possessions with the Christian population for groceries. There was no guard posted around the ghetto neighborhood.

During the winter of 1941-1942 life in the ghetto was monotonous, without any particular news or surprises. At the beginning of the spring of 1942 the Jews of Lentupis learned that Lentupis and the surrounding villages had been assigned to Lithuania. The news caused distressed confusion in the minds of the Jews, who by then had heard enough about the Lithuanians' cruelties. Refugees from slaughtered Lithuanian communities left Lentupis in panic and escaped to nearby White Russian towns, mostly to Pastoviai. Some of the Jews of Lentupis left the town as well and settled in White Russia. A number of refugees were arrested by police and Germans while escaping from town, and were shot.

In the spring of 1942 Lithuanians from the interior arrived in town and set up a Lithuanian civil administration. After the Lithuanians arrived the Jews continued living just as they had before.

### **The Attack on Beck**

On May 19, 1942 peasants had to assemble horses for the German army. Beck and two Germans, along with a Polish translator, left Shventzionys for Svir. Three kilometers from the town of Lentupis they were detained by a group of Red partisans led by Markov. The Germans were shot and the automobile was burned. Their secretary-translator Rakowska was released by the Red partisans.

That very morning Moyshe Gilinsky went to town from the Romanishky estate. Four men and twenty women were working at that government owned estate. The four men were Moyshe, his brother Leyzer-Itze, Yosl Rudnitzky and Yisroel Rimer. The men generally slept at the estate.

The women went to the ghetto after work. The estate is three kilometers from the ghetto. On May 19, Moyshe came to town. The twenty women and three men were working at the estate.

The attack took place near the village of Maznadejshkis. At 8:00 a.m. terrified reports were heard in Lentupis about the deaths of three Germans. At 11:00 a.m. Germans and Lithuanian police attacked all of the villages in a radius of five kilometers of the site of the attack. They took prisoner all the men they found, and brought them to the yard of the police in Lentupis. They shot dozens of men and hung them in the villages.

Germans and Lithuanians took the men who had been seized in the countryside away from the police compound. At 9:00 they shot all the peasants in a field near a forest a half kilometer from town.

Among those who were shot were two Jews whom the Germans found working at the Romanishky estate. These two Jews were Leyzer-Itze Gilinsky (Moyshe's brother) and Yisroel Rimer.

That same morning Leyzer-Itze told his brother Moyshe that he had had a bad dream the previous night. He had dreamed that a dead friend had removed his gold ring.

The next day, May 20, the Germans herded a second group of peasants from nearby villages into a courtyard near the police station. This group was taken away in trucks along the road to Shventzionys. They stopped at a field not far from town. There they were all shot. That same day three White Russian policemen were also arrested, and they were shot on trees in the middle of town. Several White Russians and Poles from town were taken away along with the peasants and shot.

During those two days a total of 450 men were shot near Lentupis. During the night of May 19, the Jews in the ghetto could not sleep.

At 1:00 a.m. the chief of the Lithuanian police arrived with his assistant and told the terrified Jews that nothing would happen to them. He said that he had argued strenuously on behalf of the Jews, and he had averted the annihilation of everyone in the ghetto. At night the Jews gathered valuables and gave them as a "present" to the two Lithuanian policemen. The Jews did not go to work during those two days.

The two murdered Jews were buried separately. After the war Moyshe Gilinsky and a few other survivors exhumed the corpses of his brother and Yisroel Rimer. The two Jews were buried in the mass grave of the slaughtered Lentupis Jews.

At the beginning of September 1942 two Germans came from Vilnius in a passenger automobile. They entered the ghetto together with police. All of the Jews had returned from work. It was already evening. The two Germans lined up all the Jews outside in the ghetto and assembled all of the old, the sick, women and children and Jews who weren't working anywhere or were occupied at non-essential jobs in town and in the ghetto.

The Christian employers of the Jews came to the ghetto. They gave the Germans lists of the Jewish workers whom they absolutely needed. The Germans refused to recognize the importance of some of the names on the lists, and they assigned these Jews to the non-"useful" category. About five dozen Jews, men, women and children, some of them old and sick, were taken to the Shventzionys ghetto that same evening. (Concerning this, see the slaughter of the Jews of Shventzionys - LK)

Throughout the summer some of the young, able-bodied Jews were taken out of the ghetto to various camps around Shventzionys. A hundred Jews remained behind in the Lentupis ghetto after the non-"useful" Jews were taken to Shventzionys. The Jews who remained in Lentupis had to leave the ghetto neighborhood, and they moved into three houses in the center of town. The ghetto neighborhood was needed by peasants, because they had their sheds and barns there, where they stored the grain and potatoes from their fields.

### **The Total Destruction of the Ghetto**

On December 19, 1942, at 1:00 Friday night, Red partisans attacked the town of Lentupis. Shooting began in the streets. The Jews lay in their houses in terror, not knowing what to do. The Red partisans burned the post office and robbed the offices of the civil administration. They were in town for about an hour and a half.

On the morning of Saturday, December 23 the Jews noticed that their three houses had been surrounded by armed Lithuanian police. About ten young people managed to escape from the ghetto. The rest couldn't decide, because of the women and children and other family members.

At 8:00 a.m. several German and Lithuanian police came from Shventzionys. About ten Jews were wounded and shot in their houses. The rest of the Jews, men, women and children, were driven out of their houses in nothing but the clothes they were wearing. They were taken away in wagons under heavy guard in the direction of Mikhalishkis. Not far from the gravel road, half a kilometer from Lentupis, near a forest, not far from the Christian cemetery, all the Jews were shot at 3:00 p.m. that Saturday evening.

Peasants from town threw the murdered Jews in a single mass grave and covered it with dirt.

Moyshe Gilinsky was together with his mother and two married brothers. His mother begged Moyshe to save himself by running away. When they began shooting Jews in the houses Moyshe went up to the attic. There he found Avrom Reyn, Hirsh Kharmatz and two girls named Esther Katzkovitz and a refugee from the town of Kobilnik. While lying in the attic these Jews saw all the Jews being taken from town. This happened at 2:00 p.m. A short time later they heard machine gun fire coming from near the Christian cemetery. The hidden Jews no longer had any doubts that those taken away had been shot.

At 8:00 p.m. that same Saturday the Jews tried to get down from the attic on a rope, because policemen had taken the ladder when they went to search for Jews in the houses after everyone was taken away. Moyshe was the first one to get down by the rope, and he began to run. He was shot at. On Monday, December 22 Moyshe arrived at the Shventzionys ghetto. Several days later the rest of the Jews who had been hiding in the attic arrived there as well.

## **THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS OF TZEIKINIAI**

The collective eyewitness testimonies of:

1. Zelik Gilinsky, born in Adutishkis October 17, 1905. He graduated elementary school. By trade he was a merchant and goldsmith. In 1909 Zelik's family settled in Tzeikiniai. Until 1933 Zelik stayed in Tzeikiniai, and then he moved to the nearby town of Ignalina. Very often, however, Zelik came to his home town of Tzeikiniai, to join his mother and brother. His mother's name was Libe-Khaye Reyn, and his father's name was Nosn-Dovid.

2. Khasye Gilinsky, born Feygl in the town of Tzeikiniai on March 17, 1903. She graduated at elementary school. Her father's name was Khloime (Lapidus) Feygl. Her mother's name was Khave, born Birman in Pastoviai. In 1933 she married Zelik and settled in Ignalina.

On Friday, June 19, 1941 the eyewitnesses went to visit at the town of Tzeikiniai, where they stayed until the Jews were taken away to the military compound near Shventzionys.

### **Geographic and Economic situation of the Town**

Tzeikiniai is located on a gravel road twelve kilometers from Maligan, fourteen kilometers from Ignalina and 21 kilometers from Shventzioneliai. When the war broke out on June 22, 1941 47 Jews lived in Tzeikiniai, among a larger number of Christians, almost all of whom were Lithuanians. 90% of the population of the nearby villages was Lithuanian.

The Jews in town were occupied in trade and artisanry. The mill belonged to a Jew named Yoyn Gordon. Every Jewish family had their own house and garden, horses and cattle, and they lived a semi-rural life. The town had an old wooden study house.

In the nearby village of Nevaishan lived the Jewish family of Avrom Tzeikinshky, his wife, their three children and his mother. The family had their own farm, which they worked themselves. In the village of Petshul lived Shmuel-Yankev Tzekinshky with his wife, three children and a brother. This family were farmers as well.

The attitude of the Christian population toward the Jews in town, and in the villages, was not bad until the outbreak of the war.

### **The War Breaks Out**

On Sunday, June 22, 1941 the Jews in town learned about the outbreak of war between the Soviet Union and Germany. None of the Jews in town fled. Only one person, Leybe Reyn, evacuated to the Soviet Union.

On Monday, June 23 retreating Red Army soldiers marched through town. Lithunians in town and in nearby villages organied and armed themselves. They killed many Red Army soldiers.

At the beginning of the second week of the war German military units marched through town. They were very warmly received by the civilian Christian population. Several days before the Germans arrived armed Lithuanians were already running the town. They called themselves partisans. After the Germans arrived in that region, they only stayed for six days, and then they advanced further. The armed Lithuanians maintained control over the lives of the Jews.

### **The Civil Administration; Anti-Jewish Decrees; First Jewish Victims**

The new mayor was the Lithuanian Antanas Maskalunas, a farmer from town. The chief of police in town was the Lithuanian Tzyzas, from a village near Utenas. He had come to town after the Germans arrived. This Tzyzas had been a policeman in the town of Utenas under President Smetonas.

The chief of the armed partisans was the Lithuanian Jakshiboga, a farmer from the village of Dojni, four kilometers from the town of Tzeikiniai. Under the Soviets he had been the director of the co-operative in Tzeikiniai. He was replaced as leader of the partisans by the Lithuanian Tzitzenas from the village of Pavarsme, seven or eight kilometers from town.

The Lithuanians forced the Jews to do various jobs in town and on the roads around town. While the Jews worked

they were guarded by armed partisans who tormented the Jews in various ways. After work the Jews were allowed to go home.

The partisans issued various regulations and decrees. During the second week of the war the Jews were forced to wear two yellow Stars of David on their chests and on their backs. They were forbidden to leave town, and they were forbidden to have any dealings with Christians.

On Friday, July 4, 1941 armed partisans went to all the Jewish houses looking for men they could seize for work. Zelik Gilinsky was very afraid, so he jumped out of the window and hid in the garden near their house. The partisan Tzitzenas spotted him and cocked his rifle, ready to shoot Zelik. Zelik's wife Khasye managed to pull the rifle out of his hands, and at the last minute saved her husband from certain death. Tzitzenas was extremely drunk, and he brutally beat Zelik and his wife with his rifle butt.

Zelik's mother became seriously ill after this terrible fright. She lay in bed a few weeks, and then died. With some difficulty, the family managed to obtain permission to bury her at the Jewish cemetery in Ignalina.

On Sunday, July 6, 1941 partisans arrived in town from elsewhere. The Jew Shmuel Gordon was seized in the street and forced to drag an old motorcycle. Shmuel did not have the physical strength to carry out the order. The partisans took Shmuel out on the road to the village of Tzizishkis, not far from town. He was shot near the edge of the road, in some nearby bushes. He was the first Jewish victim. That same week partisans arrested two Jewish girls, Mary and Gitl Reyn, who were sisters. They were murderously beaten by the partisans. They were released after being held in prison for several days.

## **The Mass Slaughter**

The Jews worked at various jobs for exactly six weeks. Their main worksite was in the village of Rapiškis, eight kilometers from town. Six men worked there. Every day the six Jews were taken there and back on foot. A radio station was being built in that village. The Jews sawed and chopped wood, and served the Germans there.

The Jews received various bits of information about the slaughter of the Jews in the surrounding villages, but the Jews of Tzeikiniai had no place to go to try and save themselves, since the local population was quite hostile to Jews.

Every day these few Jews suffered various frights. The Lithuanians frequently went to the Jewish houses to rob them, taking everything they found worthwhile.

People began to say that all of the Jews in town would be taken to a ghetto in Shventzioneliai. The peasants in town spoke about this. The Jews got ready to move to the ghetto. During the day on Friday, September 26, 1941, police brought the two Jewish families from the villages of Nevoysan and Petshul to town. The mill owner Yosl Gordon, his brother Azriel, his mother and a cousin of theirs who lived at the edge of town were also brought to town that Friday and settled in the center of town.

It was said at the time that a ghetto was being set up in the town itself. But Zelik didn't take it calmly. Instead he proposed that the younger people should escape and try to survive wherever they could. He suggested that they should burn the town down at night, and anyone who could should escape. The Jews paid little attention to his proposals, and they accused him of causing a panic.

On Friday evening partisans surrounded the Jewish houses, making sure that no-one escaped from town. On the Sabbath between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, September 27, 1941, at 7:00a.m., the police chief Tzyzas went to the Jewish houses and announced that no-one should take their cattle into the fields. He explained this by saying that the Jews' livestock needed to be registered. At the same time the Jews noticed that their houses were being guarded by partisans. By this time it was difficult to try to escape. Nevertheless four Jews managed to get out of town.

That same Saturday partisans brought the Jews from the nearby town of Maleganai in wagons. The wagons carrying the Jews stopped in front of the Jewish houses in Tzeikiniai.

The partisans brought in peasants with wagons, and the Jews of Tzeikiniai were placed into them. Older, religious Jews didn't want to desecrate the Sabbath, and they asked the partisans to let them walk. The religious Jews were murderously beaten. Women were also brutally beaten. Khasye's mother Khaye, aged eighty, and Khasye's sister Sime-Taybe were severely beaten that day because they didn't want to tell anyone where Zelik and his wife had escaped to.

During the day that Saturday, the Jews were taken away from Tzeikiniai. The Jews from Maleganai were taken away along with those from Tzeikiniai. On Saturday night the Jews were taken to the military compound near Shventzioneliai.

Concerning the further experiences of the Jews of Tzeikiniai, consult the testimony of Frume Hokhman and the collective testimonies of Dr Binyomin Tarasevsky and Yankl Levin.

### **How Did the Eyewitnesses Survive?**

On Friday night at 12:00 Zelik and his wife left their house. The other members of Zelik's family didn't want to leave the town.

That Friday evening it was pitch dark, and Zelik and his wife managed to make their way out of town along back streets without being noticed. They went five kilometers out of town to a settlement where the peasant Stempkowsky lived. He was a Polish friend of Zelik's from before the war. Zelik's family had hidden two wagonloads of goods at the home of this peasant.

That same night Khasye went back to town to rescue her sister Sime-Taybe and their mother, as well as her brother-in-law Avrom, his wife Dvoyre and a cousin named Brayne Gavende. The family had been joined by two young sisters named Etl and Rokhele from Shventzioneliai. Their father Khayem-Ele had been among the 45 shot. No-one in the family agreed to leave town that night, and they put it off until the next day. Everyone stayed awake all night. Everyone was planning what to do.

The next morning everyone understood that it was too late. No-one doubted any longer that the situation was very grave, especially since the chief of police had made the announcement that they were not to take the cattle out to pasture.

Zelik's brother Avrom and his wife managed to escape that Saturday morning, and during the night they arrived in Lentupis. Lithuanian partisans from Tzeikiniai recognized Avrom. First they took him to prison in Shventzionys, and from there to the military compound. They left Avrom's wife in Lentupis, because she had been born there. Later she died with the rest of the Jews of Lentupis.

1. Zelik's cousin Brayne Gavende also escaped from Tzeikiniai on Saturday morning. She stayed in the Vidz ghetto at first. When the Jews were taken from Vidz to the Shventzionys ghetto, she escaped and hid in the countryside. Thirteen months after the Jews were killed at the compound near Shventzioneliai, Brayne met Zelik and his wife. She survived until the liberation.

2. Yerakhmiel Tzeikinsky escaped from the middle of the road when the Jews of Tzeikiniai were being taken to the compound. He hid with peasants in the villages until 1943, stayed in ghettos in White Russian towns and then joined Red partisans in the forest, where he distinguished himself. He was killed by his Christian comrades in the partisans.

3. On Saturday morning Khasye unwillingly left the house, and went to a Polish friend named Obolewitz, with whom she stayed until the middle of the night. In the middle of the night the peasant woman accompanied Khasye through the forest. That same night Khasye joined her husband, who lay hiding at the home of the peasant Stempkowsky. All day Saturday Zelik lay in the barn, watching Jews from various towns being taken to the compound. They all sat in wagons guarded by Lithuanians. On Friday night, September 26, Khasye's sister Menukhe Srolevitz, her husband Avrom Yankev and their other sister Mikhle Ritve with her husband Dovid and their young daughter, all happened to meet up with Zelik.

The two families had escaped from Ignalina on Friday night. The two families left on foot for the Vidz ghetto that night. Later they were in the ghettos in White Russian towns, and then they went back to Vidz. When the Jews were taken from the Vidz ghetto to Shventzionys, both families fled into the countryside, and later met Zelik and his wife.

4. Menukhe Srolevitz and her husband met Zelik and his wife, hid together, and survived.

5. Their other sister Mikhle Ritve and her husband and child hid with another peasant, and survived there. After the war they were all reunited. Zelik couldn't leave the peasant Stempkowsky, because he was waiting for his wife. Khasye reached the peasant's house Saturday night, but didn't find her sisters, because they had already left for Vidz.

6. Zelik and his wife hid at the home of the peasant Stempkowsky for six weeks. They hid in a pig sty. They suffered considerable hunger, cold and terror there. The peasant didn't want to hide the two Jews any longer, precisely because Zelik's things were hidden at his place.

Zelik and his wife left that place without much hope. It was late autumn already. Peasants were afraid to take in Jews. Some of them even helped the police to find hidden Jews. Terrible days and nights turned into tortuous, tragic weeks for the two Jews. Zelik and his wife hid a night here, and a day there.

On November 7, 1941 they arrived at the home of a Polish peasant named Voitkewitz, where they stayed for one week. On November 15, 1941 they reached the home of the peasant Jonas Tzitzenas in the village of Shielikishkis, three kilometers from the town of Tzeikiniai. They had hidden goods with this peasant. They stayed at that peasant's home for five weeks, lying in the barns and warehouses, and even outside in the yard, in the bitter cold. Here, too, they could not stay any longer. The peasant told them to keep moving.

On December 18, 1941, a cold, dark, night, the two arrived at the home of the Lithuanian Karol Kartzonka in a settlement near the village of Lapunishkis. This peasant lived with his wife in a small, old house. It was always cold in the house. Hunger constantly reigned there. But the peasant woman was very kindly, and she sympathized with the Jews. The Jews lay hidden in various burrows, and they suffered cold, filth and hunger.

Zelik often went away to distant villages at night, begging for food from the peasants. More than once the peasant lost patience, and demanded that the Jews leave his house. More than once police and partisans came to the village, and they would visit the peasant at whose home the two Jews were hiding. More than once they were on the verge of falling into the hands of the Lithuanians.

On Passover of 1942 Zelik and his wife learned that Menukhe Srolevitz and her husband Avrom-Yankl, along with their niece Mashele from Vidz, were hiding in a nearby village. Zelik often saw them, helping them to get food, and on several occasions he also helped them find new peasants to stay with.

Avrom-Yankl had a weak heart and asthma. All of the terror, hunger, cold and filth he had suffered ruined his already-delicate health. On April 27, 1944; a Friday, Avrom-Yankl died in a barn belonging to the peasant Petras Garla. Zelik and his wife had come to visit him, and they were present during his tragic death throes. The Jews dug a grave in the field and buried him that same night. Of course, they did everything very carefully, so that no-one would find out.

Menukhe went away and settled with the same peasant Zelik was staying with. Zelik, his wife and his sister-in-law Menukhe stayed with the good peasant Karol Karatzonka until the Red Army arrived in the area. This happened on July 7, 1944.

Zelik's niece couldn't stand the terrible conditions in hiding, and returned to the Vidz ghetto. Mashele, her mother Sore-Bashe, her younger sister Khanele and a young brother named Gershon were taken to the Shventzionys ghetto. They were taken from the ghetto and slaughtered along with hundreds of others at Ponari near Vilnius.

### **Partial List of Those Who Slaughtered the Tzeikiniai Jews**

1. Tzitzenas, from the village of Pavarsme, the leader of the partisans.
2. Jakshiboga, from the village of Dojni, the former leader of the partisans.
3. Tzyzas, from a village near Utenas, the police chief.
4. Vytautas Rimshelis, from Neveysiai, four kilometers from Tzeikiniai.
5. Rakshtelis, from Neveysiai, four kilometers from Tzeikiniai.
6. Vytautas Shaudinas, from Neveysiai.
7. Shimkunas, from Shavul, three kilometers from Tzeikiniai.
8. Feliksas Gasys, from Shavul.
9. Bulkai (two brothers), from Strakshishkis, four kilometers from town.
10. Their cousin Bulkis, also from Strakshishkis.
11. Kujelis, from the village of Krikeniai, ten kilometers from town.
12. Jronimas Shimunas, from town.
13. Juze Shimkunaite, from town.
14. Luneckis, from the village of Rizunai, eight kilometers from town.
15. Burka, from the village of Shavul.
16. Blada Juchnevitzius, from the village of Jodishkis, four kilometers from town.
17. Bronius Juchnevitzius, from Jodishkis.

18. Adolfas Matulauskas, from the village of Mikhalove, five kilometers from town.
19. Two brothers named Panavai from Mikhalova.
20. Kazys Gudelaitis, from the village of Stanunaj, six kilometers from town.
21. Kliukas, from the village of Garniai, five kilometers from town.
22. Pundish from the village of Garniai.
23. Vlada Kliukas, from the village of Shilejkishkis, two kilometers from town.
24. Antanas Klukas, from Shilejkishkis.
25. Zigmās Kliukas, from Shilejkishkis.
26. Jousas Rimshelis, from Neveyshay.

All of these people helped to torment and rob the Jews in Tzeikiniai, and later took the Jews to the compound, where many of the murderers took active part in the executions at the pits.

### **Attestations of Zelik Gilinsky and Khasye Gilinsky**

All of the information about the slaughter of the Jews of Tzeikiniai, including all of the facts, dates, names of persons and geographical locations, indicated in these collective testimonies, were carefully reported by us, and we attest thereto with our signature.

Signatures:                      1. Zelik Gilinsky                      2. Khasye Gilinsky.

The collective testimony was recorded by Engineer L Koniuchowsky  
Bad-Reichenhall                      December 4, 1948

The signature of the residents of the Tikwa camp at Bad-Reichenhall, Zelik Gilinsky and Khasye Gilinsky are attested to by the chairman of the camp committee:

Oskar Urbach                      (Signature)                      Bad-Reichenhall, Tikwa Camp                      December 5, 1948

*Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin    New York                      November 28, 1994*

## THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS OF TZVERETZIUS

The testimony of Shmuel Reykhl, born in Tveretzius on March 28, 1894. He lived in Tveretzius for his entire life until the outbreak of war between Germany and the Soviet Union. He had an elementary school education. He was a merchant by trade. His father's name was Avrom-Tzvi, and his mother was Reyze-Gitl Zorokhovitz.

Tveretzius is a small town in Shventzionys County, on the stream that formed the boundary between Lithuania and White Russia in 1941. The river was called the Disenke. The town is located twelve kilometers from the White Russian town of Vidz. It is twenty kilometers from Adutishkis, and fourteen kilometers from Kazan.

When the war broke out there were two Jewish families in town: the family of Khone Epshteyn and that of Shmuel Reykhl. Both families were traders.

After the Germans arrived in town a Lithuanian police force was established. The Jews continued living in their homes. They had to wear two yellow patches. The Lithuanian police often forced the men of both families to do various kinds of manual labor. They were not allowed to leave town. In general the two families lived relatively much more normally than Jew in the larger towns did. They were isolated and cut off from the Jews in the surrounding towns.

Some time later terrible news began to reach the two Jewish families concerning the slaughter of the Jews in surrounding Lithuanian towns. The town's mayor assured the two Jewish families that he would protect them from any trouble. The two Jewish families lived in deadly terror among a hundred Lithuanian families.

On Friday, September 26 Shmuel went to see the mayor Bilinys to find out what the situation of the two families was. Shmuel brought him a "gift" and asked him to tell Shmuel what was in store for the Jews. Bilinys told Shmuel that the two families could continue living in town for another month. Shmuel noticed something doubtful in his response, however.

That night, Friday, September 26, at 1:00 a.m., police knocked on the door. Shmuel's mother saw the armed Lithuanians outside and shouted out: "Children, get up! It's not good! Death has come for us!" Outside the moon shone brightly. Shmuel jumped out through the window into the yard and began to run. A group of policeman chased after him and shot at him. Shmuel went into the forest near town.

A Jewish family named Reykhl from a village called Petzurke, two kilometers from Tveretzius, was brought to Tveretzius that night. The seven or eight members of this family had lived at their own mill in the village for generations, until that Friday night.

That Saturday, along with the two Jewish families from Tveretzius, they were brought to Maleganai. They were taken to the town of Tzeikiniai along with the Jews of Maleganai. The Jews of Tzeikiniai had already been forced out of their houses and placed on wagons, and they were being guarded as they waited for the transport from Maleganai.

A large group of armed police and partisans took the Jews of Tzeikiniai, Maleganai and Tveretzius to the compound near Shventzionys. (Concerning their later fate, see the collective testimonies of Dr Taraseysky and Yankl Levin.)

Shmuel's brother Binyomin escaped from the wagon on the way to the town of Maleganai. The two surviving brothers struggled bitterly to survive. Twenty months later they met each other. Both of them hid together with peasant friends in the countryside.

More than once they risked falling into the hands of Lithuanian police and partisans. They miraculously escaped and survived. One of the many peasants who helped Shmuel and his brother and supported them for the last thirteen months was a very good Lithuanian peasant, a wealthy man with a family of eighteen and workers who weren't members of the family. The peasant was named Jonas Matkevitzius and he lived in the town of Pakalnishkis, four kilometers from the town of Tveretzius. Shmuel and his brother had known him well before the war, and they used to do business with him.

Only he and his wife knew about the two hidden Jews. They hid in the attic of a horse barn. The two brothers were liberated on June 6, 1944 by the Red Army.

## **Testimony of Shmuel Yisroel Reykhl**

Everything recorded in this testimony about the slaughter of the two Jewish families from Tveretzius and about the Jewish family from the village of Petzurke was personally related by me, Shmuel Yisroel Reykhl, and I attest thereto with my signature on each and every page.

Signature: Shmuel Yisroel Reykhl

The testimony was recorded by Engineer L Koniuchowsky  
Saulgau (Wurttemberg) August 25, 1948

The signature of the Saulgau camp resident Smuel Yisroel Reykhl is attested to by the chairman of the Jewish community

Community chairman Salomon Berkowicz French Zone, Saulgau August 8, 1948

*Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin New York November 29, 1994*

## THE WORK CAMPS IN HEIDEKRUG (SILUTE)

Heidekrug is located in Memel (Kleipeda) County. It is a railroad stop between Pagegai and Memel, not far from the Bay of Courland on the Baltic Sea. Until 1939 Memel County belonged to Lithuania, and Heidekrug was one of the few larger cities. Many Jews had lived there from the earliest days. With their efforts, their sweat and their capital they had developed light industries, which considerably benefited their neighbors as well. Most of the latter were Germans, but there were also many Lithuanians. The Jews in Heidekrug did not live badly from the economic standpoint, and they had their own social, religious and cultural institutions.

From the first, the Jews had gotten along tolerably well with their neighbors. They worked and traded together, and they were all concerned with the economic development of their province.

After Hitler came to power in Germany, virulent anti-Semitic agitation was begun in Memel County, which successfully poisoned Christian attitudes toward the Jews.

There was a large German minority in Lithuania and in Memel County they constituted a majority. They couldn't forget that they had been torn away from their "fatherland" and handed over to Lithuania after the First World War. The Germans in the county viewed the Lithuanians as an inferior, culturally backward race. Their entire East Prussian patriotic passion was devoted to returning to "the Reich." Hitler and his party exploited these patriotic feelings to great effect. Hundreds of agents throughout the towns and villages successfully disseminated Nazi teachings and an uncompromising hatred of the Jews.

In the year 1939 Hitler had little difficulty occupying all of Memel County, and assigned it to East Prussia, in his "thousand-year Reich."

A dreadful panic began among the Jews in the county. They were well acquainted with German fascism. They had read enough newspapers and had enough opportunities to speak with Jewish refugees from the Third Reich, to understand quite well what was in store for them. All the Jews in the entire county, from all the cities and towns as well as from Memel, moved into Lithuania proper, leaving behind their old homes and a good deal of their possessions.

All of Memel County became Judenrein, empty of Jews. Germans bought the businesses and some of the houses of the frightened Jews for next to nothing. Many Jews did not sell their houses, and went off to Lithuania hoping some day to return and live to see better times. But the Jews' tragic fate would have it differently. Some refugees from the county actually did return, but against their will, and not to the homes they had left behind. Rather they were forcefully brought to work camps where, together with Lithuanian Jews from Tawrik (Taurage) County, they were tortured, beaten, mocked and exploited like horses, or like living machines. Many Jews lost their health there, and very many lost their lives.

### The Outbreak of the War

On Sunday, June 22, 1941, the war between Hitler's Third Reich and the Soviet Union broke out. In one day Hitler's troops occupied virtually all of Tawrik County. Many towns located close to the border were occupied in the early morning hours on Sunday.

Recently-created bands of armed Lithuanians who called themselves "partisans" shot at the retreating Red Army units, assisting in and securing the forward march of the Germans. They greeted the Germans joyfully on the roads and in the streets, with bouquets of flowers and with music. On account of the sudden attack and speedy advance of the German armies, only a small number of Jews managed to evacuate to the Soviet Union. The rest fell into the hands of the brutal Hitlerites and the treacherous Lithuanians.

The armed Lithuanians carried out various acts of vengeance against the Jews in the towns of Tawrik County. They simply confiscated a good deal of the Jews' possessions, becoming their "heirs" while the Jews were still alive. Like rabbits, which grow helpless and weak from terror when they see a snake close by, so - if the comparison may be forgiven - felt the Jews after the German army advanced into their towns. They had been tragically disappointed by their Lithuanian neighbors, with whom they had lived for centuries.

Sadly, the Jews didn't realize this treachery, and by the time they understood what their neighbors were doing, it was too late; there was nothing they could do to save themselves. The Lithuanians did everything they could to be rid of the Jews and to inherit their possessions. Together with the Germans, they first killed the Jews morally and spiritually, by means of assorted degrading labors, torture and chicanerie, and then began the physical annihilation.

For more precise details about the spiritual and physical annihilation of the Jews in the towns, see the following eyewitness testimonies, collected by Leib Koniuchowsky

For Tawrik County:

1. The Destruction of the Jews of Laukuva (Laukuva)
2. The Destruction of the Jews of Kveidan (Kvedarna)
3. The Destruction of the Jews of Koltinan (Kaltinenai)
4. The Destruction of the Jews of Shvekshne (Sveksne)
5. The Destruction of the Jews of Vainute (Vainutas)
6. The Destruction of the Jews of Nayshtot (Naumiestis)

For Kretinga County:

7. The Destruction of the Jews of Verszan (Veivirzenai).

The men from all these towns who were healthier and capable of working, exactly 500 in all, were led away by the Germans to various camps around Heidekrug. The Jewish men thus started on the torturous, hellish road which led from the labor camps and work places near Heidekrug through the Hell of Auschwitz, Warsaw and Dachau concentration camps. Some earlier and some later, nearly all of these men ended their lives with various unnatural deaths. Of these five hundred men, only a few dozen survived the Liberation.

The men from the towns around Tawrik were led away by German SS men from Heidekrug, led by Dr Schau from Heidekrug and his adjutants, Yaksht and Dembrowsky. The partisans from the towns actively participated. The civilian Lithuanian population was happy that the Jews were being driven out of "their" towns.

The Jewish men from the towns around Tawrik were taken away at the end of the first week, and the rest during the fourth and the beginning of the fifth week of the war.

1. The men from Verszan were taken away on Saturday, June 28, 1941 there were fifty of them altogether. They were quartered in a camp near the Heidekrug city hall.

2. The men from Laukuva, eighty altogether, including five from Heidekrug, were led away on Sunday, June 29, 1941, and quartered in a camp near Mactubern.

3. The men from Shvekshne 120 altogether, were taken away Saturday, June 28, 1941. A few of them were taken away Sunday, June 29, 1941. They were brought to the camps together with the Kveidan men that same Sunday.

Some of the men from Shvekshne were taken to a camp called Piktaten, and some to Camp Silwen.

4. The men from Koltinan were taken on Sunday, July 20, 1941 to the court of Kalwilischken near Heidekrug. They were there until the next day, Monday, July 21, when they were taken to the camp at Mactubern. It is not known exactly how many men were taken from Koltinan.

5. Some of the men from Kveidan were taken away Sunday, June 29, 1941, and some on June 30, 1941; there were eighty in all. Some of the men from Kveidan were settled at a camp at the Heidekrug town council. Another group was settled at Dr Schau's compound near Rabenwald.

6. The thirty men from Vainute were taken on Saturday, July 19, 1941 to the compound at Kalwelischken near Heidekrug. Some of those from Vainute were taken to the camp at Mactubern and some to the central Heidekrug camp.

7. The twenty-five men from Nayshtot were brought together with those from Vainute on Saturday, July 19, 1941. Some were assigned to the Mactubern camp, and some to the camp at Silwen.

At the beginning of the war men from Nayshtot had escaped to relatives in nearby towns, where they were seized together with local men and brought to the camps. Thus, the total number of men from Nayshtot in the Heidekrug camps was between thirty-five and thirty-seven.

## **I. The work Camp at Mactubern**

The work camp received its name from the village in which it was located. The village of Mactubern is 35 kilometers from Heidekrug, eighteen kilometers from the town of Vainute, and twelve kilometers from the former border on the German side.

Until the night of Saturday, June 28, 1941, French prisoners lived at the camp. They were taken away, and the next day the men from Laukuva were brought in. The camp consisted of one large barrack, surrounded by barbed wire. The barrack contained iron beds with straw mattresses.

The Jews who were brought in had to enter the barrack through a narrow door. SS men stood on both sides, striking the men on their heads with rubber clubs. They also kicked the men with their heavy East Prussian military boots. Everybody tried to run through the doorway as quickly as he could. The worst beatings were received by the older and weaker men, who didn't run through the doorway quickly enough.

Avrom Moyshe Yeznerovitz, a man from Laukuva aged over 65, fell dead by the door from the blows he'd received. It was dark in the barrack. None of the Jews noticed him, and they trod on him as they ran through the doorway. The camp commander, a German from Tilsit named Kirsch, stood in the dark barrack giving out black coffee. Around two in the morning the men finished drinking their coffee, and had to lie down to sleep. They were all forced to lie quietly without exchanging a word.

## **The Camp Command**

At four in the morning whistles and shouts were heard: "Jews, fall in!" The sighs and moans of the Jews resounded in the large barrack. Dressing quickly, the men lined up in the yard. They were counted in their rows. One was missing. Now everyone discovered the death of Avrom Moyshe. The Jews looked at each other fearfully: "Just the beginning, and already we have a martyr!"

Frightened, sorrowing and hopeless, the men tried to see with glazed eyes into the unclear future. The camp commandant Kirsch introduced himself to the Jews and announced what he was liable to do if the Jews didn't work well, or didn't try hard to please him. He listed all of the laws the Jews would have to obey, all of the directives they would have to carry out, and how to do their work. He promised various sadistic punishments if his directives were not carried out, and a cold shudder ran through the unfortunate Jews' bodies. He spoke at length about capital punishment. Two foremen stood at the roll call, along with two SS men, like dogs considering their future victims.

One of the SS men recognized the Heidekrug merchant Yoysef Smilyansky standing in line. He took Smilyansky out of line, and demanded that he explain and "tell the truth" about how many Christians he had cheated, and where he had hidden his "stolen" capital. The two SS men murderously beat the Jew, and then assigned him to be a cook along with several other Jews.

A Jew from Laukuva named Monish Kagan, a former reserve officer in President Smetonas' Lithuanian army, was named the head of the Jews. His task was to maintain internal order, and to see that the Jews became good workers.

The men were assigned to work on a construction job for the Tilsit firm of Richter.

All of the camps in and around Heidekrug were commanded by the regional commander, Dr Schau. He was a murderer and a bitter anti-Semite. Firms conducting various projects rented the Jewish men from him, looked after them while at work, and paid Dr Schau for the work they did. The doctor's adjutants were two high-ranking SS men, one a greater sadist than the other.

The two SS men Willy and Otto, who guarded the Jews in the camp and at work, were extraordinarily zealous in their sadism. The men were immediately divided into two groups of 60 and 20, respectively, and they were taken away from the camp.

## **At Work**

At a stop roughly two kilometers from the camp, the foremen explained how the Jews would have to work. The location where the work was to be done was a swampy pasture with old, neglected drainage canals. The Jews had to remove the fascines; bundles of sticks used to strengthen the walls of the canal; clear out the canal and reinforce it with new fascines.

The Jews stood three meters deep in the canal, their feet bare and their pants rolled up, hungry and short on sleep, and worked the best they could. Some of the men were old and weak. There were students and yeshiva boys, merchants and rabbis, who were unaccustomed to physical labor. The foremen and the SS men drove them with sticks to make them work harder and with "more diligence."

The first day the men were tormented at this "labor" from five in the morning until four in the afternoon. But they weren't permitted to rest, and they didn't dare to. In the evening plates were distributed, and the men were given lunch. But even this meager lunch didn't come easily. Everyone had to stand one after the other in a straight row. The two SS men murderously beat those who didn't keep straight in line.

The first evening, there was a roll call right after the meal. All the men had to line up in rows. The camp commandant Kirsch gave a lecture on how to behave in the camp, in the yard and in the barrack: how to stand and how to sit, how to speak and when to keep silent, and how the Jews were and were not permitted to follow the call of nature.

He repeated the entire catechism several times, accompanied by warnings. He didn't forget to promise the Jews that if they worked well, they would be "sent home" in three months. It wasn't even close to sunset yet. Night was still far off. Nevertheless the men had to lie down in their beds. Each one of the men was a separate, tragic little world unto himself. Each one tried in his own way to understand and get at the heart of the situation. The first day in the camp and at work had left them with no sign of good things to come.

Sleepless nights and tormented, difficult days began, at work, at roll call, everywhere and at all times.

Every morning they had to get up after a whistle blew. In the rush they didn't even have time to wash up before they ran to the kitchen for coffee and prepared for work. At one o'clock the men were led back to the camp for lunch, and then immediately back to work until dusk.

The men received very little food; no more than 250 grams of bread, which was always wet and heavy as clay. Once in a while a bit of margarine or marmalade came along with the bread in the morning, and at night, black coffee with no sugar. At first the lunches weren't bad. Later the lunches, too, became quite bad.

The Jews began to lose their strength. The hope of quickly finishing the work and returning home encouraged and strengthened them to make the days go by. They were still naive and believed their Lager-Aeltester, who told them that after they finished the work they would go home. In fact, they were tragically mocked by the horrible reality.

### **The First Extermination of Men**

On Saturday, July 19, 1941, the camp commandant Kirsch came to the workplace and announced that all of the men who were weak, sick or old should report to him, and that he would let anyone who wasn't fit for work "return home and take care of their families."

Eyes shining with joy could be seen on the faces of fathers with children, of the weak and the aged. They didn't know how to thank the camp commandant. And commandant Kirsch wrote down on a list the elderly and weak, and two young men as well, calmly and with a smile. He allowed those on the list to say their goodbyes. Fathers kissed their children, and brothers kissed each other as well. Everyone who remained behind to work asked their comrades to give warm regards and kiss their mothers, wives, brothers and sisters. Tears of joy and longing ran from everyone's eyes. A number of those left behind wept with jealousy of those who were going home.

Those who were on the list were taken away from work at three in the afternoon and brought to camp. When the workers returned to camp in the evening, those who had been on the list were not to be seen.

On the evening of Monday, July 21, 1941, 40 new men were brought into the camp at Mactubern. Some were from Nayshtot, some from Vainute and the rest from the town of Koltinan.

The men from Laukuva found out from the newcomers from Nayshtot and Vainute that everyone who had been taken away from the camp had been shot that same Saturday night, not far from Nayshtot in the Schaudvitz forest. The newly-arrived men from Vainute even recognized the possessions of the Jews who had been shot. Quite a few of the men in the camp, however, were sceptical that such cruelty was possible.

Several days later the two SS men, Otto and Willy, boasted while at work, teasing the Jews and pointing to their revolvers: "This week we knocked off a lot of Jews." The tragic incident was also confirmed by Lithuanian peasants. The incident made clear to all the Jews the full terrible scope of their situation.

That same bloody Saturday, July 19, 1941, the healthier men from the towns of Nayshtot and Vainute were taken away and brought to the camps around Heidekrug.

All of the elderly, weak and sick men were taken from their towns and shot near Nayshtot, also in the Schaudvitz forest, under the leadership of Dr Schau and his two adjutants, with the active co-operation of the local partisans.

On that same bloody Saturday, July 19, 1941, Jewish men were taken from all of the work camps around Heidekrug and shot in Schaudvitz.

The following men from Laukuva were taken from the work camp at Mactubern and shot that Saturday:

1. Khayim-Zelik Koplinsky, rabbi of Laukuva for 25 years;
2. Yoysef Kagan
3. Bendet Kagan, owner of a sawmill; Yoysef's brother;
4. Aron-Fayve Katin, owner of a grocery store;
5. Eliyohu Rubak, a dealer in textiles;
6. Yoyel Levi, a merchant;
7. Aba Fayvman, a yeshiva student;
8. Meyer-Yankl Gershon;
9. Shabsay-Leyb Gershon, Meyer-Yankl's son;
10. Aron Shapiro, a baker;
11. Shabsay Shnayder, a farmer;
12. Yankl Fuks, a butcher;
13. Mordkhe Kohan, a baker;
14. Ben-Tsyon Katsef, a grain dealer;
15. Avrom Mayerovitsh, a dealer in textiles;
16. Yankl Fritsal, a cabinet-maker;
17. Shraga Nayvidl;
18. Zalkind Vayner' a merchant.

Others from Laukuva were shot that bloody Saturday, besides those listed above. However, the eyewitnesses no longer remember their last names.

### **The Two Comrades, Willy and Otto**

After that tragic Saturday the Jews in the Mactubern camp began digging a new canal to drain the water from the swampy pasture. The canal was twelve meters wide and three meters deep. The deeper the Jews dug the harder the work became and the more strength they lost tossing out the earth. The more strength the Jews lost, the more they were driven to work faster, and the more blows fell on their weakened bodies. The foremen would set certain quotas which everyone, weak or strong, young or old, had to meet, or else they would be murderously beaten. And the two comrades Otto and Willy, the two refined fascists, did everything they could to embitter the lives of the Jews at work and after work.

The Jews were not allowed to go take care of their natural functions without permission. They had to approach the guards with a rigid military posture and request permission to step out. The punishment for an insufficiently military approach was a beating. If the request to step out was not properly made, there would be another beating. When they finally gave permission, they would beat anyone who stayed out longer than two minutes. Leaving the camp, on the way back to camp, everywhere they constantly struck the Jews.

In addition to these beatings, they wrote down whoever didn't work fast enough or well enough, and these were whipped on returning to camp. If they took a disliking to someone, they beat him every evening. They had victims whom they whipped regularly. These were:

1. Efrayim Lentin -- a yeshiva student and slaughterer from Shvekshne;
2. Two brothers, Efrayim and Velvl Yeznerovitz. Their father had died the first evening.
3. A man named Shvartz from Koltinan;
4. A man named Kaplan, the father of a young son named Avremele, from Heidekrug; and others.

The two always had reasons for a whipping. Efrayim Lentin was whipped because he was a kosher slaughterer; Shvartz was whipped because he had a German last name; and so forth. In addition to the regulars, the two looked for new victims to whip each day. The whippings took place during the evening roll call after work.

During the roll call the men were tormented with various calisthenic drills, or they were forced to run around the barrack. If someone fell behind, they beat him. They threw a dagger at whomever was last. Every day after the roll call they used to bring the Nazi newspaper, Der Sturmer. The head of the Jews, Monish Kagan, had to read it from cover to cover. All of the men had to stand in a circle and listen. If anyone turned his head, he was immediately beaten. The same newspaper was read every day after roll call, until a new one arrived.

The two SS men lived in a separate room in the same barrack. The Jews weren't allowed to even lie down before 10 o'clock. On several occasions both of them would come into the barrack in the middle of the night and whistle, play harmonicas, shine portable lamps at everyone and order them to sing religious hymns, make them get out of bed and dance, and so forth.

Once the two S.S. men took the slaughterer Kosower from Kveidan out of line during the roll call and beat him as they did every evening. They ordered all of the men to immediately lay down in their beds. They ordered the slaughterer to dig himself a grave in the yard. Then they took him into their own room. Bread, butter, cheese, sugar and the like were laid out on the table.

"Eat as much as you want before you die!" they ordered. The slaughterer had forgotten that such food still existed. Kosower had been starving for weeks. He forgot himself and began eating as much as he could. For this last time in his life, he wanted to taste good, nourishing food. He wanted to die with his belly full.

While the slaughterer was eating Otto and Willy entered the barrack and woke up Monish Kagan. They ordered him to get ten old religious Jews ready to say Psalms in memory of the slaughterer. They went out, and shot several times.

In the main room of the barrack, by the weak light of a summer's night, ten Jews sat in their underwear and said Psalms by heart. Tears flowed constantly from their eyes. The words came out as sighs and moans, torn from their sorrowing hearts. For half an hour they said Psalms, mourning the slaughterer and themselves. Then they had to lie down to sleep. A few minutes later the two SS men came into the barrack. They brought the slaughterer in, holding him up under the arms on both sides, and ordered him to shout out loud: "Good evening Comrade Jews!" This "performance" took place a short time after Sukkot, 1941.

One time they woke up the Jew Shvartz from Koltinan. They gave him a serving plate and ordered him to pass urine into it. Shvartz pleaded with them: "People eat from that plate!" They beat him so badly that he collapsed.

Shvartz had to carry out their barbaric order: "You dog, you! Cursed Jew! How could you do such a "thing, urinating into a plate people eat out of! That's the kind of education you Jews got?!?" They beat him so hard with whips that he almost fainted. They forced him to drink the urine.

At the end of the summer the Jews settled into a barrack nearer to the workplace, by the canal. There the two SS men were alone in the guardroom. The men were tormented by hunger. The Jew from Tawrik Haushe Dorfman left the barrack at 7 o'clock to see the German neighbour Schulz, who was sympathetic to the Jews. (Unfortunately, there were few like him LK)

The German gave Haushe bread, butter, pork and eggs. The local Germans were strictly forbidden to meet or talk to Jews. On the way back, a neighbor of Schulz' saw Haushe. The neighbour warned Schulz that he'd better report the Jew to the camp commandant himself. If not, he threatened that he would report them. He forced Shultz to write a complaint attesting that during the night a Jew had forced him to hand over food. Haushe managed to be at the roll call in time. He hid the provisions in a cupboard.

After work the next day came a strict order from the camp commandant to fall out for roll call. Nobody understood what was happening. Camp commandant Kirsch demanded that the Jew who had gone the previous evening to beg from Germans voluntarily hand himself in. He threatened to shoot ten men if the guilty party didn't confess. No one confessed.

The camp commandant sent for Schultz and his wife to have them identify the Jewish beggar. Schultz immediately recognized Haushe in the row. But he didn't want to have him killed, and pretended not to recognize him.

Schultz's servant woman was brought, along with her grown son. They immediately pointed to Haushe. The servant and her child were Russians.

Kirsch reassured them that Haushe would certainly be sentenced to death, and reported the same to Dr Schau. Meanwhile, he decided on his own to give Haushe 50 lashes right away, and 25 lashes every evening. Kirsch commanded that he was to be whipped by the head of the Jews, Monish Kagan. Monish categorically refused to do so. Kirsch gave Monish ten minutes to think it over, and went into his own room.

Otto and Willy looked at Monish and rubbed their hands with joy at the chance of being able to whip Monish at least once. They had grown to hate him for his "friendship" with Kirsch.

Ten minutes later Kirsch came out and asked Monish whether he had thought it over. "I have nothing to think over! I don't whip my comrades!" Monish said proudly and with assurance.

"Then bend over yourself!" the camp commandant ordered brutally. Otto and Willy were overjoyed. Monish prepared to take the lashing.

The camp commander pushed him over to the side. "I just learned something!" he shouted, and went into his barrack. The two bandits Otto and Willy gave Haushe 50 lashes. Several nights in a row he received ten lashes. The Jews in the camp couldn't get over their wonderment at Haushe's ability to endure.

### **Torture and Chicaneries**

Late in the autumn of 1941 the two sadists Otto and Willy were transferred from the Mactubern camp to the camp at Silwen. The two SS men who replaced them were no less sadistic than the predecessors. One of the two new ones was named Falk. He applied every conceivable sadistic notion to the Jews in the camp. He was extremely fond of torturing the Jews with cold. It was late autumn already; the famous cold autumn and winter of 1941. He used to drive the Jews out of the barrack at night, and after an entire day of hard work in the bitterest cold; force the Jews to kneel with their bare knees on the ice and snow. He would drive the Jews into snowdrifts and make them do somersaults. Those who didn't quickly carry out his orders were murderously beaten.

The two sadists greatly tormented the Jews during the time of the "utensils roll call." During the winter, Falk often ordered the Jews to carry out their dishes and spoons. The dishes were made out of tin. He searched for dirt on them with a magnifying glass. If he found dirt, he always found victims to whip.

Once at such a roll call the Laukuva Jew Yose-Velve Aranovitz took from a friend a dish that Falk himself had already checked. Falk, however, found that the dish was very dirty and Yose-Velve got ten lashings. Before the roll call Monish himself would check the dishes.

For a whipping, the victim had to bend over on a bench. One of the SS men held his head, and the second did the whipping.

Among the twelve Jews from Nayshtot in the Mactubern camp was Heyne Elert. The Jews in the camp used all the means at their disposal to keep abreast of what was happening in the world. Above all they were interested in the battles on the eastern front. Jews would steal newspapers from the foremen, and sometimes from the SS guard.

Elert had saved up a pocketful of newspaper clippings. The SS men noticed it one time, and accused him of espionage. The two SS men first gave him 50 lashes. During the whipping, Heyne (Henokh) fainted several times. Heyne could neither sit nor lie for several days and nights. But he had to go to work. Falk himself reported the affair to Dr Schau. The latter commanded that Heyne be severely punished.

At work and during the after-work appeal Heyne was constantly beaten and tormented. Before New Year 1942 both of the SS men went off to the front. The guards who followed them were S.A. men, who were frequently rotated. Those who were newly assigned always took up the work with zeal and began the torment afresh. The Jews worked on the canals until November 15, 1941. The cold was terrible. The earth was frozen deep down, and it was not possible to continue working.

### **The Winter of 1941-42 in the camp at Mactubern**

Some of the Jews spent almost the entire winter working at the railroad station at Stonisken, twelve kilometers from the camp. Early in the morning a group of men would be taken in two long wagons to the train station. By the time they got to work, the men's limbs would be frozen. At the station the Jews loaded straw and hay, and some of them loaded rye into the cars. Everything was destined for the front. Late in the evening they were brought back to camp in the wagons.

There was a great deal of hunger that winter. The Jews at the station would steal rye, pouring it into their pockets and their pants. There were two small coffee grinders in the barrack, with which the men ground the rye. They cooked the meal on small ovens in the barrack. That winter, the cooked rye meal was the tastiest thing the Jews could imagine. They used to say to each other that if they managed to live to see the Liberation, the only thing they would cook and eat would be rye meal.

Meanwhile there was virtually nothing available to put into the kettle in the kitchen. Yoysel Smilansky, the cook, requested that the rye meal be put into the common pot. The Jews agreed, because many men used to stay in the barrack without a thing to eat.

By this time there were men in the camp who were swollen from hunger, such as the Verne Jew Mane Klaz and the slaughterer from Koltinan. There were about ten such in all. The sick men didn't go to work, and stayed in camp instead, peeling potatoes and beets for the kitchen.

### **Disease in the Camp at Mactubern**

The Jews in the camp didn't receive any clean laundry. What they had brought along from their towns was worn, torn and filthy. There was an infestation of lice. Nor was there anywhere to wash oneself that winter. The dirt caused itching and rashes. There were several sick men with wounds covering their body. Monish' brother Khatski Kagan was assigned to take care of the sick. Khatski took the work very seriously. He managed to get hold of an ointment, washed the sick himself, and healed them.

Among the seriously ill was Velve Yeznerovitz, who suffered from fever. In the hallway stood buckets to be used as chamber pots at night. In the darkness, Yeznerovitz couldn't find the bucket quickly enough, and had to relieve himself on the floor.

In the morning a man from Kelrn named Berl Keltz came in and saw what had happened. He set the feverish Yeznerovitz down on the floor and began kicking him. A commotion began among the Jews in the barrack, who tried to force Berl to ask Yevnerovitz' forgiveness. But Berl declared that he would do the same to anyone who relieved himself on the floor.

The hunger, cold, dirt and various diseases all made the Jews nervous. They began arguing among themselves and couldn't find a common language, though everyone was threatened by the same fate and everyone understood their shared, inevitable end. Tormented by hunger, cold, disease and heavy labor the Jews survived to see the spring of 1942. The winter of 1941-42 was the worst time for all the Jews in the labor camps around Heidekrug.

## **II. The Labor Camp at Silwen**

Some of the men from Shvekshne, roughly 50 altogether, were brought to this camp at the beginning of the second week of the war. The camp was located in the village of Silwen at a peasant farm, consisting of an old house and two half-collapsed barns. The Jews were quartered in two small rooms on bunk beds built two high. The camp commandant was an SS corporal named Smailius, a former teacher in a German public school and a terrible sadist. Four SS men guarded the Jews. The names of the four murderers who took turns at watch must be recorded, because of their brutality: Zhelenys, born in Rusne; and Bitner, born in Meislauken. In addition, from the late fall of 1941 on, there were the two dreadful sadists Otto and Willy.

The work was being done by a firm which had ordered the workers from Dr Schau, and paid for their work. The head foreman who was the boss on this job was named Anstipl. He had red hair. He was capable of killing a man for the least infraction. More than one Jew lost first his health and then his life on account of this murderer. The Jews called him "the redhead."

The supervisor of all the firm's various projects was a construction engineer from Heidekrug, an intelligent scoundrel. The head foreman, the engineer's assistant, was the infamous Gorgl. He was a cripple, and the worst of all the foremen in the Heidekrug labor camps.

The work consisted of building a new road one and a half kilometers long in the direction of Mactubern. The Jews had to dig up mounds of earth and carry them away in lorries to low spots. They had to toil continuously from morning until evening in the heat. The guards and foremen mercilessly drove the Jews to make the road faster and better.

Beside the burning heat the Jews suffered from thirst, and there was nothing to quench it with. Even if there was drinking water available, the Jews were not allowed to leave the workplace. The bullies were even reluctant to let the Jews go relieve themselves. The Jews worked under a constant hail of blows, with empty stomachs. They couldn't rest, worrying about their near and dear ones at home.

The Jews were a toy in the hands of the guards and foremen. They tormented and beat the Jews whenever they wanted to have a good time, when they grew tired of hanging around all day long with nothing to do. From day to

day the Jews' strength diminished. They sensed it inside them, and saw it on the faces of their relatives and friends.

The food was bad and scarce. Even if they hadn't been working, it would have been too little. In the morning there was a dish of black coffee. At midday and in the evening, a poor potato soup. Rarely was there a bit of meat. The firm was responsible for feeding the Jews. They skimped as much as they could. What they did provide would "evaporate" in the camps, in the storehouse and in the kitchen. By the time the provisions reached the Jews, there was very little left.

Other conditions were very bad as well. The only way one could wash was at an old well in the courtyard of the camp. The Jews went many days without washing, either because there wasn't enough water in the well, or because there wasn't enough time in the morning, because anyone who was late getting in line for work would be beaten.

The Jews received no clean laundry. They were lousy and broke out in itchy rashes, and various diseases spread.

## **Torture and Victimization**

It was the first week in the camp. Hopeless and exhausted from a hot day of hard work, the Jews lay on their cots. But outside it was still quite light. The hot summer's day didn't want to surrender to the cool and darkness of night.

Suddenly a wild roar broke the surrounding calm. "You aren't outside yet?" came the loud reprimand from the SS men, just as though the Jews had know about their order a long time and hadn't obeyed. The SS men struck the frightened Jews and drove them out of their cots. In the yard they lined everyone up as if for roll call, and then they announced that whoever had to relieve himself could go do so, and the rest should go to sleep.

Ten or fifteen men went off to relieve themselves. But a long time passed, and they didn't return to the room. The SS men found that the men hadn't relieved themselves at the right place. The men were tortured for a long time, forced to do calisthenics. Most of those who had gone to relieve themselves were elderly men, including Naftali Ziv's father.

The young man Berl Yofe from Shvekshne was one of those who were tortured every day. He was also among those who went off to relieve themselves that night, and he was terribly tortured. Berl no longer had the nerves to survive the devil's game the SS sadists played. He didn't have the strength for calisthenics anymore, and decided it would be better to die. While the ten or fifteen men were being tortured, he tore off toward the old well in the courtyard, trying to throw himself in. The SS men caught and beat him. Then they let all the men go to sleep.

The same night Yofe waited for an opportunity, left the room, stole into a nearby field of rye, and escaped. The SS men chased him and shot at him. However, they didn't catch him. Yofe ran to the border between Lithuania and Memel County. Border police arrested and shot him. Ber Yofe was the first to fall from the camp at Silwen.

The Jewish pharmacist Vitkin was another one of those from Shvekshne in the camp. The head foreman Anstip had it in for him from the very first day. The "redhead" hated and tortured all the Jews, but he hated and tortured Jewish intellectuals above all. Vitkin was mostly guilty of being a Jew with a university education.

At work, driving to and from work, and above all in the camp after work, the "redhead" tortured, beat and whipped Vitkin. All of the Jews were forced to watch, in shame and resentment, as the upright, innocent Vitkin was tortured. In those tragic circumstances there was nothing they could do to help him.

As a result of the beatings and filth, Vitkin's body was full of wounds and abscesses. His soul flickered like a candle. He survived the torture until the winter of 1941-1942, and then died. By then the sadistic SS men were at the front, and the camp was guarded by old SA men, who permitted Vitkin to be buried and to receive a wooden grave marker.

That same winter the Jews found out that both of the SS murderers, Willy and Otto, had fallen at the front. The Jews in the camps at Silwen and Mactubern thus had at least a partial revenge.

The Jews had it hard in the camp, the work was hard as well, but the worst thing was the "spade roll call," which was held every evening after the meal. The Jews would have been content if they hadn't been taken back from work to the camp every night. A veritable Gehennom roared and seethed for the Jews interned there.

After eating the men had to clean their spades. SS men watched to see that the shovels weren't scraped with stones or pieces of brick. The shovels had to shine like a mirror in the setting summer sun.

After he finished cleaning, everyone had to stand in line with his shovel. The Jews in the camp didn't have names, only numbers. Each shovel bore an engraved number which corresponded to that of the man who used it.

The camp commandant, accompanied by the F.F.D. (work director), first checked the first row, and then the second and third. The work director wrote down the numbers of the spades that weren't clean enough. After the "spade roll call" the Jews had to fall in around a circle that had been scratched on the ground. The numbers of those whose spades had been found to be insufficiently clean were called out, and they had to go into the circle. Whoever was called in had to bend over forward and call out loud the number of lashes he received. After being lashed, the man who was punished had to stand up straight and shout: "Thank you very much!" Whoever didn't say this clearly enough was lashed all over again.

There were regular victims at every "spade roll call," and others were added. The German sadists weren't looking for clean spades, but victims for a whipping. Many were broken by these constant whippings and became invalid.

After the roll call everyone had to put his shovel away in a certain place. But several times it happened that the Jews were already on their cots when they were driven out and tormented for hours. The sadists always managed to think up a reason for the torture. Quite often they threw several shovels into the yard themselves. Then they accused the Jews in question of not putting their spades away, and tormented them with calisthenics for a few hours. Thus it continued every night without letup. So it was that many men became invalids the first weeks, and were taken away and shot with the first transport in the Schaudvitz forest near Nayshtot.

### **The First Extermination of Men**

That bloody Saturday, July 19, 1941, the camp commandant announced that any Jew who felt too weak to work or who was sick, should report to him, to be sent home to their families. Not all of the Jews believed in the bandits' goodwill. Yet there were several Jews who sensed that they would die in the camp from hard labor and assorted tortures.

The following men from Shvekshne signed up:

1. Mote Bas, a merchant;
2. Yankl Preyde Klip;
3. Meyer Markus, a butcher;
4. Eliyohu Shmulovitsh;
5. Khayem Ment;
6. Shmuel Ripkin;
7. Hershl Meyerovitz;
8. Moyshe Ziv, Naftali's father;

and others whose last names the eyewitnesses no longer remember. Several days later the men remaining in the Silwen camp found out about the tragic end of those who had been taken away.

### **The Winter of 1941-42 in the Camp at Silwen**

The Jews were in the camp the entire winter of 1941-42, until the middle of the spring of 1942. Meanwhile they finished the 1-1/2 kilometer road during the fall. That was the only project which Jews in the Heidekrug work camps began and finished.

All winter the Jews prepared stones for the construction of a new road. In a forest they pulled stones out of the frozen ground. They removed the largest of them with dynamite. When they blew up the rocks, the foremen forced the Jews to remain standing in dangerous places. The Jews split the biggest stones with hammers and dragged them out of the forest to the road with wooden barrows. A German foreman named Tzebedys directed the work. The stones which had been dragged out or carried out had to be split with heavy hammers into little paving stones.

The work was hard. The weather was terribly cold that year. The Jews had little to eat. Where they slept, it was also cold and dirty.

The Jews felt completely drained of strength. Many of them collapsed and lay sick on their cots. There was no medical help, either. The Jews barely survived until spring 1942. When it grew warmer, they were driven out to

work on the new road. The foremen teased the Jews, constantly telling them that the good times splitting rocks that winter were over, and now they'd really be black and blue.

But the foremen had fun with the Jews for only one day at the job on the new road. An order came from Dr Schaus to stop the work and bring all the Jews into the central Heidekrug camp. The camp at Silwen was liquidated.

### III. The Work Camp at Piktaten

About 60 men from Shvekshne and a smaller number of men from other towns were brought by the SS on Saturday, June 28, 1941 into the village of Piktaten, twelve kilometers away from Heidekrug. Some 60 men were quartered in a house on a peasant farm, on bunk beds stacked two high which had been set up in two small rooms. They were brought in during the evening. In the middle of Saturday night they were driven out into the yard and arranged in two rows. SS men first beat everyone, then wrote down their first and last names and assigned them numbers.

On Sunday morning the men were driven into the yard. They weren't even allowed to wash. The camp commandant arranged the Jews in rows, and presented them to a fourteen year old Hitlerite dressed up in his Hitler Youth uniform. They were ordered to obey the fourteen-year-old, and to punctually carry out all of his orders. If not, the camp commandant listed all sorts of unnatural deaths which he would hand out to the Jews. He pronounced these warnings joyfully and with a laugh. The Jews understood nevertheless that he was as capable of doing what he said as a demon from Hell.

The fourteen year old Hitlerite immediately began to bully the terrified Jews, who had only a few days earlier been free men.

The young Hitlerite ordered the Jews to do various calisthenic exercises. The smile of a poisonous snake spread over his mouth, as he watched several people in agony as they carried out his commands.

When he finished making the Jews do exercises, he ordered them to crawl over a large heap of dried branches. Nearby German peasants came to see this original "show," as elderly and younger Jews climbed on the mountain of branches. The young Hitlerist played with the Jews for hours.

Another construction foreman came to the camp that same Sunday and introduced himself to the hopeless men. It was the infamous German, Gorgl. That Sunday he was as drunk as Lot, and he presented himself to the Jews as their father, who was ready to feed his children well if they worked well. If they worked badly, Gorgl promised to beat them not the way a father strikes his children, but the way a Hitlerite sadist beat and tortured Jews in those tragic times.

The Jews could tell from the way the murderer looked what they could expect from him. As they say, "you can tell from the beak what the peck will be like" and the Jews immediately realized that since he was an ugly cripple and lame, they would have all kinds of trouble from him.

That same Sunday Gorgl drove all the men to bathe in a nearby body of water. The Jews were overtired and cold. They were beaten and forced to bathe. Some of the Jews were driven in with their clothes.

Monday morning, June 30, 1941 at three o'clock, voices were heard in the room: "You haven't gotten up yet?" All of the Jews were driven out into the yard, arranged into rows and handed pieces of bread.

The men were driven to work with shovels on their shoulders. The crippled foreman and the fourteen year old Hitlerite rode on bicycles.

The heat that day was terrible. Fire poured from heaven onto the men, who weren't allowed to speak to each other and were forced to run, not walk, as fast as Gorgl and the young Hitlerite rode on their bicycles.

They stopped 24 kilometers from Piktaten. Heaps of gravel stood in a road. The Jews had to spread it on the road and even it out. Everyone had to take off his jacket and shirt. There was another foreman on the job, who walked up and down the road with a straight stick. Every now and then he struck a Jew on his bare back. As well as the Jews worked, he was still displeased. He always decided that the Jews weren't smoothing properly the gravel they had spread out. He constantly pointed out with his stick: "You've got a hole here!" and finished with a switch of his stick on the Jew's bare body.

The men in the camp gave him a nickname: "the hole." More than one Jew had welts on his body where "the hole"

had beaten him with his stick. The first day at work, the Jews stayed until it grew dark. At ten at night they were brought back to the camp on foot.

48 kilometers a day by foot the Jews had to walk, and they worked throughout the day. They were only fed in the morning and at night after work.

Nor did the Jews get any rest at night after they ate. Just like in the camp at Silwen, here too there were "spade roll calls" and Jews were whipped.

Obviously Gorgl, who had the final say at both camps, invented and introduced the "spade roll calls." Beside the "spade roll calls" the men were bullied after work, or even in the middle of the night.

The weaker and older men could not bear the dreadful conditions, and they were taken out across the Lithuanian border for extermination. A few weeks after the first transport the camp was liquidated, and the Jews were brought to Versmininken.

#### **IV. The Work Camp at Versmininken**

This camp was in a village 26 kilometers from Heidekrug, near the town of Katits. The Jews were quartered in a peasant hut there on bunk beds stacked two high, and lived in crowded and dirty conditions. There was no place to bathe. They received no clean laundry and there was an infestation of lice. The living conditions were even worse than in Mactubern. The work was much harder as well, especially since throughout the entire winter of 1941 the head foreman was the cripple, Gorgl.

The Jews began digging a new road there in the fall. From morning until evening they labored, driven by blows with sticks, whips and fists to work as fast as possible.

Head foreman Gorgl used to gather the Jews every Monday morning, show them the hill they had to excavate, and solemnly promise them that they would be released to go home after they finished the excavation.

The Jews dug up mountains of soil and carried it away in various directions. First they used a small railroad, and then there were lorries. They dug out deep cuttings, preparing the bed for a highway. Sunburned Jews used to stand working day in, day out with shovels and spades, thinking all the time, but there was no way they could think of to free themselves of that Gehenna.

The men used to stand at work remembering their homes from which they had been torn away, thinking of their mothers, brothers and sisters, about their wives and children who had remained in the towns, and tears came to the eyes of more than one of them. And thus thinking, several of them forgot where they were, until blows from a stick woke them up away from their homes, where their thoughts had easily borne them.

Every day they were driven to work, whether it rained or not. The autumn of 1941 was cold, and the men had to work all day. The winter was bitterly cold, and the men still had to work every day. They chopped at the rock-hard ground with their last strength. They had to constantly raise and lower their picks toward the frozen ground, or else they would be beaten. Many blows with the pick loosened a piece of earth the size of a nut. Working on the road during the winter was altogether foolish, idiotic. During one day in the summer the men could have accomplished as much as they did all winter. It wasn't their labor that the sadists needed, but to weaken, embitter and destroy their life and health. They were several days on which the Jews had to first sweep away the snow in order to remove a few small pieces of earth.

And the head foreman Gorgl continued, every Monday during the winter, to point to the mountain and promise that after the road was excavated the Jews would go home free to their wives and children. The massive cripple certainly knew by that winter that all of the Jews, men, women and children in the towns of Tawrik County had been annihilated in the fall of 1941.

Until the end of May 1942, the Jews suffered in the vale of tears, Versmininken. From there they were taken to the central camp at Heidekrug.

After the Jewish holidays, roughly the 20th or 21st of October 1941, some of the men from the camp at the Heidekrug city council were brought to Versmininken. Among them was the eyewitness Motl Druzin. Motl recalls: The camp commander was an SS man. The head foreman Gorgl came to the camp or the place where we were working only once a day. Gorgl's aide was a murderous German named Bublik Vencus.

He tormented and beat the Jews at every turn. Every day he noted the numbers of the Jews who, in his opinion, had taken too much time when they went out to relieve themselves, or who hadn't worked well enough.

In the evening, after work, everyone ate quickly and then fell out for roll call, which lasted hours. The foreman Vencus meted out punishments to all those whose numbers he had noted during the day. The camp commandant received the complaints. The accused had to bend forward and suffer a certain number of lashes. Those who fell down during a whipping were whipped all over again. The owner of the workshop in which the workers were quartered was named Zubaitis. The peasant warned that he would tell higher authorities about the torture, because his old mother was sick and couldn't stand to hear the screams of those being whipped and tortured. Therefore the whippings were meted out on a chair in the barn, so that they could neither be seen nor heard.

The head of the Jews in the Versmininken camp was Ruven Shenker, a Jew from Shvekshne. He did not treat his fellow Jews well. The food in the camp was very bad. Every day beets were cooked with a bucket of potatoes and one kilogram of meat. The cooks and foremen kept the fat for themselves. At breakfast and supper there was black coffee. No more than 250 grams of bread was given per day. All of the clothes the men had been brought from home and were torn. The men walked to work half-barefoot through the snow in the worst cold. In midwinter everyone was given wooden shoes.

In the spring of 1942 work on the road was stopped, and everyone was brought to the central camp at Heidekrug.

## **V. The Work Camp at the Heidekrug City Council**

On Saturday, June 28, 1941, roughly 50 men from the town of Verszan were brought to the work camp. They arrived in the middle of the night, and found not a single Jew there. Before dawn on Sunday SS men removed the rabbi of Verszan, Rabbi Yoysef-Nesanel Graz, together with several other Jews, from the stall in which they were sleeping, and forced them to run across the yard, fall down, and get up again. The Jews were meanwhile beaten mercilessly. When the rabbi fell down, the SS men drenched him with cold water. The same day the men who had been beaten were taken into the streets of Heidekrug and forced to pull grass out from between the sidewalks.

Engineer Nakhman Falkovski, who had been a Soviet citizen for many years before the war, had come from Moscow to Verszan before the war on a visit to his mother and brothers. The torture by the SS men centered on the engineer.

That same Sunday during the day, SS men called out individual Jews from the stall, beat each one and threw them into a pool of water. After this "inquisition" they handed out a portion of bread. All day long the Jews chopped wood. At night they slept in the stall again. That same Sunday evening a large number of men from the town of Kveidan and a few from the town of Shvekshne (who had been in the study house since Saturday the 28th - LK) were brought to the camp. Some of the men from Kveidan were taken the same evening to Dr Schau's courtyard near Rabenwald.

After the men from Kveidan were brought in, SS men arrived and began "having fun" with the Jews in the stall. They ordered all of the Jews to grunt and snort like pigs out loud. They shined flashlights at the Jews, checking to see who wasn't grunting, for which they threatened shooting.

Then they ordered all the Jews to leave the stall one by one. They stood at the doorway with sticks, and beat each one. The Jews put their coats on so that they wouldn't feel the blows. The SS men immediately noticed this, and ordered everyone to take his coat off. They tormented the men one by one in the yard, and then drove them back into the stall. On the way back into the stall the Jews were beaten again.

On Monday morning the second group of men from Kveidan were brought into the camp. (They had been left behind on Sunday.-- L.K.) That day, all the men in the camp had to carry large stones on wooden barrows. The barrows had to be loaded so full that the Jews were bent over double carrying them, and the handles of the barrows would bend and groan. The SS men threatened to shoot those who broke handles. The Jews carried the stones all day, until evening.

That same Monday evening the head of the camp, the mayor of Heidekrug, came to the yard and asked Binyomin Lapin to read a newspaper to all the Jews. The Jews were lined up in rows in the yard, and had to listen carefully. The mayor was an extremely evil person. He gleefully explained to the Jews how they were to behave in the camp. For complaining or for not working well enough, he threatened death by shooting.

## **The Administration of the Camp**

The camp commander was an SS man from Heidekrug named Paltin. The guards changed frequently. The first weeks the Jews were guarded by SS men, and then by SA men. A Jew from Nayshtot named Mendl Vinik was named head of the Jews in the camp. Vinik did not treat the Jews well. Of course, there was no way he could help them.

After they had been in the camp for some time, camp commander Paltin sent letters from the Jews to their close relatives in the towns. He got good clothes and food for the men from their families. The better clothes and the food he kept for himself. The poorer clothes he first sent to be deloused, and then distributed among the Jews who worked at Dr Schau's yard.

The camp was located in the middle of the town in the courtyard of the Heidekrug city council. The Jews were quartered in a stall on bunk beds. In the camp French prisoners had been held; they were removed one day before the Jews were brought in.

## **The Worksites**

The Jews in the work camp were sent off to various tasks. Every morning foremen came to take the Jews from the camp and take them to work. Almost always they took the same Jews to work with them.

The worksites were the following:

1. Domestic work in the compound of Milshin. The eyewitness Berl Levit was once brutally beaten by a foreman at this job.
2. Some of the men worked in Rabenwald, a suburb of Heidekrug. The Jews worked hard at leveling a street there. They loaded the soil they had dug out onto lorries and took it far from the work site. Lunch was brought to them from the camp at the city council.
3. Some worked at carrying large rocks for the construction of a monument in the middle of the city of Heidekrug. The Jews had a difficult time; they had to split the rocks with heavy hammers.
4. The synagogue in Heidekrug was already in ruins. A group of Jews worked at finishing the removal of the stones from the foundation, 1-1/2 meters underground. The Jewish cemetery in Heidekrug was vandalized and destroyed. The gravestones were collected in the courtyard of the city council.
5. A building was constructed in Heidekrug for the processing of milk. Jews worked there as well.

In addition to these regular worksites, men were selected from the jobs for planning a rifle range, cleaning out the sewers, sweeping and cleaning the streets and parks, and so forth. A group of Jews working in a small marmalade factory weren't badly off.

## **Twenty Four Hours in this Work Camp**

At six in the morning a whistle blew in the camp. The Jews got dressed quickly and washed up in the courtyard where a trough full of water stood. The men quickly drank bitter black coffee, accompanied by a piece of black bread spread with marmalade. The men received 250 grams of bread for the entire day.

After the coffee the men got in lines of four. The foremen picked out "their Jews" and led them to work. All of the work was carried out under the supervision of head foremen. They constantly rushed, tormented and beat the Jews at work.

At twelve an hour's lunch break began. Those who were at nearby work sites came to camp to eat. Lunch was brought to those further away. The lunch was not bad. From one o'clock the men continued working until six.

There were frequent "tool roll calls" at the worksites, which were similar to the "spade roll calls" at the camp at Silwen. After the Jews were counted, the Jews went to camp under the watch of armed SA men. On their way through the streets those who smoked often picked up cigarette butts, for which a number of men were beaten. As they walked through the streets, young Germans often followed, shouting: "Jews, where did you hide your capital?"

After eating supper, which consisted once again of black coffee and a piece of bread, the Jews had to cut their hair and shave. The guards and foremen took great care to see that rabbis were shaved and had their hair cut frequently and precisely. There were no roll calls while the men slept in this camp.

Following an order of the mayor, the Jews had to be in their cots at ten o'clock, and they couldn't go out into the yard after that. He often came to personally see that everyone went to sleep. And although the Jews were exhausted from a day of hard work, they didn't want to go to sleep so early. As they lay, they talked about their situation, trying to imagine or guess what their wives, mothers, brothers and sisters were doing in their little Lithuanian towns.

And when the day was nice and warm and the evenings were magically pleasant, the men's gaze played with the few rays of the summer evening's sun that penetrated the stall. Meanwhile they listened to the joyful shouts and commotion of children and young people, the loving laughter and high-pitched calls of girls in the nearby streets. And a desire, a rock-hard yearning to be free of the camp tormented them until they wept. At those moments the men on their hard cots compared their lives and the lives of their wives and children to the cheerful, carefree life of the Germans in the nearby streets. Every evening before he went to sleep each Jew reviewed his life in the camp and the prospects facing his loved ones in the town.

### **The First Extermination of Men**

On the bloody Saturday, July 19, 1941, Dr Schau's adjudants Jaks and Dembrovsky announced to all the Jews that whoever wanted to go home to his loved ones, or whoever felt too weak and sick to work, should report to them. That was at lunchtime. Young and healthy men reported as well. Most of the men doubted whether this was really a great opportunity. Those whose names were written down remained in the camp. The rest went back to work. When they came back to the camp after work that evening, those who had signed up to go home were no longer there.

The next day the Jews in the camp found out that their clothes had been brought by automobile to a second camp in Heidekrug. They were all shot in Schaudvitz. Those who signed up to go home and shot that Saturday were:

From Verszan:

1. Mote Bunis, a retail merchant;
2. Reb Yoysef-Nasanel Graz, the rabbi;
3. Yudl-Meyer Segal, a butcher;
4. Moyshe Girshenovitz, a student;
5. Nakhnran Falkovski, the engineer;
6. Mendl Falkovski, Nakhnran's brother;
7. Yisroyel Kvort, a heder teacher;
8. Avrom-Dovid Sheftelovitz, a merchant;
9. Avrom Kahan, a leather merchant;
10. Moyshe Sher, a merchant.

The rabbi's son, Nokhum Graz, was sick. After the first transport, he was taken away separately. It is not known when or how he was killed.

From Kveidan:

1. Fayvl Gavron, the rabbi;
2. Shmuel-Binyomin Rakhmel, a retail merchant;
3. Simkhe Nokhomovitz, a merchant;
4. Shiye Yung, a farmer;
5. Naftoli Gurvitsh, a dealer in textiles;
6. Moyshe Marik, a retail merchant;
7. Yank Hamelan, a butcher;
8. Binyomin Yavnelovitz, a peddler;
9. Moyshe Aron, a forest dealer;
10. Yoysef Marik;
11. Ore Zalmenovitz, a tailor;
12. Yosl Azarner, a cattle dealer;
13. Yosl Rapoport, a yeshiva student;
14. Avrom Bloch, a cattle dealer;
15. Azriel Balkin, a storekeeper;
16. Shaye-Leyb Leybovitz, owner of a shoe store.

There may have been a few others who were shot that bloody Saturday, in addition to the men from Verszan and Kveidan listed above. Those who provided this collective eyewitness testimony provided no other names. Exactly

one week after the holidays in 1941, the camp at the Heidekrug city council was liquidated. Some of the men were brought to the Versmininken camp, and the rest were brought to other camps.

## **VI. The Central Heidekrug Work Camp**

This consisted of a large square, surrounded by barbed wire and gates granting entry to the camp. There was a long wooden barrack in the square. The camp was set up not far from the town of Heidekrug in the suburb of Rabenwald. French prisoners of war had been held in this camp as well, before the Jews were brought there.

On the evening of Sunday, June 29, 1941, a large number of the men from Kveidan were brought to this camp, together with men from Shvekshne and other towns.

### **The First "Reception"**

The men from Kveidan were brought in cars to the site of the camp. SS men stood at a narrow door of the barrack, "having fun" with the arriving Jews, preparing to "welcome" them.

The Jews went into the barrack one by one, and were brutally beaten with pistol butts and items of iron. When they went into the barrack, many of them wiped blood from their faces. Many of them had swollen faces and welts under their eyes. The Jews slept that night on cots covered by sacks of straw.

Not only the SS men "welcomed" the Jews. The thousands of bedbugs and fleas in the beds greeted the Jews in their way as well. All night long it was impossible to sleep.

On Monday, June 30, 1941 in the morning, Dr Schau's adjutant Dembrovski came into the camp. The Jews were lined up in rows in the square, and Dembrovski lectured them. He suggested that the Jews "be careful" and strive to work well. He listed the various good meals the Jews would receive for working well, and the various ways they would be killed if they tried to escape or didn't work well. He also recited an entire catechism of orders and rules which the Jews had to observe precisely.

Seventy-odd Jews were brought to the central camp altogether.

### **At Work**

The major task the Jews in the camp had to carry out consisted of deepening and widening a canal near Rabenwald. On the banks of the canal there was a narrow-gauge railroad with lorries. Some of the Jews stood in the water up to their waists, digging out the banks of the canal and shovelling the sand onto the lorries all along the canal. The Jews had to toss the sand high above them, and the work was very hard. A second group took away the sand which had been loaded up into the lorries and dumped it into a swamp. This group had an easier task than the first. A group of older men worked in a second spot at various lighter tasks.

Other Jews reinforced the banks of the canal with fascines, poured soil onto it and put down grass roots. The foremen beat and tormented the Jews here just as they did at other camps. They were never satisfied.

Some of the Jews had clothes they'd brought from home, which they'd give to the foremen for a little food. The foremen took the clothes but instead of bread or other foods, they handed the Jews blows.

Every chance they got, the guards and foremen accused the Jews of bearing the major guilt for all the sufferings of the upright German people, which was forced against its will to make war on the entire world.

Jews who worked privately for SS men had it very bad. The Jews worked very hard and didn't receive food. They had to sleep outdoors. Several Jews died while working privately for SS men. When the cold autumn of 1941 came, the work conditions deteriorated. The Jews had to stand barefoot digging in the cold waters of the canal. When it grew even colder, the work on the canal was stopped.

There were smaller worksites where the men from the central work camp spent a short time working. The head of the Jews was a Jew from Vainute named Yoysef Blat. He was good to the Jews.

## **Twenty-Four Hours in the Central Camp**

At dawn the Jews had to jump out of their cots when a whistle blew, and they dressed quickly. A trough of water was set up outside for the men to wash. Afterward they received a dish of black coffee. The Jews, guarded by armed Germans, were led by the foremen to work, which began at seven o'clock and didn't stop until six at night. There was one hour for lunch, from noon until one o'clock. Those who worked near the camp came to eat in the camp. Lunch was brought for those who worked further away to eat on the spot. The lunches consisted primarily of vegetables and grass. The little bit of fat which was distributed to the kitchen was stolen by the foremen and the German cook.

In the evening, after work, there was a roll call at the worksite, at which the men were counted and the tools were checked to see whether they had been cleaned properly. At eight in the evening the men received a bit of soup and a portion of bread. At nine the Jews had to be in their cots. It often happened that the guards woke the Jews in the middle of the night and forced them to do exercises, or checked to see whether their feet were clean. Meanwhile they beat the Jews murderously. Dr Schau and his adjutants visited the camp quite often. The Jews had nothing good to look forward to before or during their visits.

## **The First Extermination of Men**

On the bloody Saturday, July 19, 1941, all of the older and weaker men were taken to Schaudvitz near Nayshtot and shot. Before lunch that Saturday Dr Schau's adjutants and other SS men came to the worksite, separated out all the men who weren't fit for work and took them to the camp. After work in the evening, when the men were brought back from the worksites, those who had been selected were no longer there. The men from Kveidan and Shvekshne who were shot that day have already been listed.

## **The Winter of 1941-42 in the Central work Camp**

The men were forced to do various jobs during this period. Some of them worked in the forest, chopping down trees, preparing wood, cutting off branches and tying them into bundles. They carried the fascines to the banks of the canal as reinforcement. Some of the men had the hard job of clearing away the snow from the streets of the town and cutting ice. The terrible cold that winter, the bad food, the dirt in the camp all ruined their health. Several became invalids that winter and never recovered. There were various diseases in the camp. The Jews in the central camp received no medical assistance.

## **The Second Extermination of Men**

Thus the Jews called the selection of groups of men from the work camps, who were taken away across the border to Lithuania and shot. The execution of this group of men also took place in the Schaudvitz forest near Nayshtot. Peasants who came later from Lithuania spoke of the place.

The witness Meyer Shrnulevitz attests that this took place on the Thursday before Rosh Hashana (the 18th of September LK).

On that Thursday the camp commandants and SS men in all the camps selected Jews who had complained that they were weak or sick, and couldn't do any hard work. Among the Jews there were young people. The following Jews were taken out and shot that day:

### **Jews from Laukuva in Camp Mactubern:**

1. Ruven Getz, a restaurant owner;
2. Shloyrne Sharanovitz, a dealer in textiles;
3. Mordkhe Katin, a bachelor aged 32 or 33;
4. Todres Levin, a butcher.

The Jews in the camp saw the camp commandant Kirsch a few days later, dressed in Shloyrne Sharanovitz' fur. One of the Koltinan Jews in Mactubern was the kosher slaughterer from Koltinan.

### **Jews from Shvekshne in the camps of Versrninken and Silwen:**

1. Yankl and Leybe Shrnulevitsh; two brothers, both butchers;
2. Hushe Ovseyovitz, a baker;

3. Mote-Yose Yaselovitch, a furrier;
4. Meyer Press.

#### **Men from Verszan in the camp at the Heidekrug city council:**

1. Yankl Shlornovitz, a merchant;
2. Yankl Kirzhner, a peddler;
3. Yisroyel Kirzhner, aged 15, a son of Yankl;
4. Leyb Borukhovitz, a textile dealer;
5. Khayem-Leyb Borukhovitch, a butcher;
6. Preyde Gershinovitch, a peddler.

The guards and camp commandant ordered the remaining Jews to write to their families in their home towns, saying that the work was going very well for them, and that they were all content.

#### **Men from Kveidan, taken from the worksites and from the camp at the Heidekrug city council:**

1. Hirshl Aron, a flax dealer;
2. Moyshe Aron, Hirshl's brother;
3. Yosl Katz, a horse dealer;
4. Shmuel Nadel, a tinsmith;
5. Leybe Glukh;
6. Yitskhok Fleker, a merchant;
7. Don Khatzkelevitz, a shoemaker;
8. Leyb Druzin, a storekeeper;
9. Yankl Fish, the pharmacist;
10. Ore Gurvitz, a restaurant owner, a refugee from Tawrik in Kveidan;
11. Leybe Kopelovitz, a merchant.

It is possible that there were a few other men from the various camps in the second transport. Those who contributed to the collective testimony do not remember any more names.

### **Spring and Summer 1942 in the Central Work Camp**

#### **IA. Working with Peat**

In the beginning of spring 1942 all of the camps and worksites were liquidated, except for the work site at the courtyard of Dr Schau. In the fall of 1942 all of the worksites at the peat fields and at private peasant farms were liquidated.

#### **II A. The Worksite Varus**

After the work camp at Mactubern was liquidated in the spring of 1942, all of the Jews were brought into the central camp. Some thirty men were taken away to repair one dike and to build another at the shore of the Bay of Courland.

The same foremen and the same commandant Kirsch from Mactubern built the dikes. The same firm that had worked on the canals in Mactubern worked here. The thirty men were taken with their beds and straw mattresses from Mactubern and settled in the village of Varus, in a large room in the local public school. Camp commandant Kirsch had his own room there. A kitchen was set up in another room. Here, too, the cook was Yoysef Smilansky, and the head of the Jews was Monish Kagan. The guard, an SA man, was also the same as in the Mactubern camp.

The security was not tight. At night the camp commandant locked the door of the room in which the Jews slept, and that was all.

The village of Varus is four kilometers from the town of Rusne and thirteen kilometers from Heidekrug. For the first month the Jews worked at reinforcing an old, neglected dike. Then other Jews were brought to the camp, and they all began building a new dike. They dug earth in a field, and a narrow-gauge railroad carried it to the dike. The Jews filled the lorries, and then emptied them near the edge of the water and spread the soil. Then they secured it with cuttings of grass roots.

Smilyansky woke everyone at five in the morning. The Jews were able to go wash themselves in a nearby canal. After they had drunk coffee and eaten a piece of bread, they were taken to work. When they were working close to the camp, they would go eat lunch at the public school. If the work took them far from the camp, then lunch was brought to them at work. The food there was better than at Mactubern. For the most part the Jews ate fish and potatoes. The company bought old fish from the local fishermen for next to nothing. The camp commandant knew the Jews well by now, and was looser with them. In this camp the Jews recovered from their difficult winter. In the fall of 1942 the thirty Jews were taken from Varus to Kalwelischken near Heidekrug. This compound also belonged to Dr Schau.

### **III A. The Worksite in the Town of Rusne**

The small town of Rusne is located on the left bank of the Nieman, some twenty kilometers from Heidekrug. After the camp in Versmininken had been liquidated, all of the Jews were taken to the central camp at Heidekrug. Some of them were taken to work with peat, and about thirty of them were taken to the town of Rusne. Several of them were men from Shvekshne who had been in the camp at Silwen.

The worksite was located at first in the courtyard of the Rusne town council. The Jews lived simply there. There were no SS guards. The Jews walked freely around the town, and went to peasants' homes to get food. But the Jews weren't kept there long. Dr Schau was informed that the Jews walked freely in the streets of Rusne. They were taken from the town council and handed over to a firm that worked on water construction projects. The company housed the Jews in huts on the water, which allowed them to spend their free time on the Nieman.

A man named Jusutis, who was in charge of controlling the flow of water in the river, was the Jews' boss. He was very good-natured. He was one of the righteous gentiles during those tragic years for the Jews. He considered the brutal treatment of Jews to be a great mistake. Furthermore, he was a German. Jusutis did everything to see that his Jews suffered no hunger. True, he made sure they were kept hard at work, but he didn't, heaven forbid, beat them and he fed them well. The Jews had enough fish there. Just as in Rusne, they were also able to visit peasants and were free to walk to the villages. The work consisted of reinforcing the banks of the Nieman with fascines and stones.

Some of the Jews would frequently go work for individual peasants, who also fed them well. The Jews recuperated, and gathered strength for the continuing struggle for their lives. But they were fated to lose one of their number here as well.

Among the Jews in Rusne was a mute tanner named Ruben Rikhman. One time he and another Jew went to a village. They were seen out on their own; and they were betrayed to Dr Schau. On one occasion the doctor himself came to the camp. All of the Jews were called out for a roll call. The doctor pulled the mute forward, and got him to agree to point out the other man. Jusutis stood behind the doctor's back, giving signs indicating that everyone should keep his mouth shut, and not point out the other man.

The doctor took the mute Ruven Rikhman back with him to Heidekrug, where he shot him. Jusutis found out who the peasant woman that had betrayed them was, and refused to let her pass by the camp. In that incident, Jusutis saved the second Jew from certain death.

In midsummer 1942 Jusutis brought another group of Jews from the central work camp at Heidekrug, and they too had a chance to rest. Jusutis would find out when it was a Jewish holiday, and permitted them to hide and not go to work. He obviously risked a great deal in doing so. There were other Germans working there, who were displeased with this overly kindly attitude toward the Jews.

The Jews worked in that camp almost the entire summer of 1942, all of the winter of 42-43 and halfway through the summer of 1943. Then an order came to bring all of the Jews from Rusne back to Heidekrug. Jusutis parted with "his Jews" with a heavy heart, and encouraged them, saying that it wouldn't take long before the end of Hitlerism came and the Jews were freed. By the summer of 1943 it wasn't hard to predict the defeat of Hitler's armies on every front. All of the Jews at the worksite were brought to the Kalwelischken camp at Heidekrug in automobiles. Jusutis personally accompanied the Jews out and took his leave of them.

### **IVA. In the Brick Factory of Dr Schau**

When the Jews were distributed in the spring of 1942, thirty men were assigned to work at Dr Schau's brick works in the village of Kermalenen, not far from Heidekrug. The work conditions were difficult. From early in the morning

until nightfall the Jews dug clay, mixed it with the help of horses in a pit, and loaded it onto lorries. Others shaped the clay into bricks and laid them out on wooden boards. They then took them on lorries to dry off in an open shed. The boards with bricks were loaded on very high shelves. The Jews' arms grew swollen from lifting the bricks. After they dried, the bricks were taken to the kiln to be fired, usually during the autumn or winter.

The work conditions were hard, but still the Jews felt freer and better off here than they had in the work camps the first summer and winter. True, they slept in a barn on the bare earth, but they were able to wash more frequently, and they didn't have any "spade roll calls" or whips over them. There were no guards, either.

Some of the thirty Jews frequently did domestic work in the compound where the brick works were located. The food was poor and there was little of it. The Jews often stole off to see peasants in the villages.

The Jews worked in the brick factory until the end of the summer of 1943.

In the summer of 1942 a Jew from Kveidan named Hamelman grew sick and died. The Jews buried him near the edge of a forest, not far from the brick works. His name was Moyshe Tzvi.

### **The Third Extermination of Men**

In the fall of 1942 all of the weakened or sick men from all of the camps and worksites were taken to Lithuania to be shot. Those who were taken away were:

From Verszan: Tevye Berelovitz, a merchant.

From Koltinan: Mane Klaz, a merchant.

From Shvekshne: Leyzer Elyashevitz; and Ore-Yoshe Girshovitz, a storekeeper.

From Laukuva: Mote-Meir Katz, a shoemaker; and Moyshe Getz, aged 20.

All of those who were selected were first taken to Kalwelischken and thence to Lithuania.

In the summer of 1942, some of the men worked privately for SS men under extraordinarily difficult conditions. They were tormented by the hard work and hunger. Three of them died:

1. Khayem Likhtenshteyn, a kosher slaughterer from Verszan;
2. Khayem Falkovsky, from Verszan, a cousin of Engineer Falkovsky;
3. Shloyme Klip, from Shvekshne.

### **VA. The Worksite Kalwelischken**

The worksite at Varus was liquidated in the fall of 1942, and the Jews brought to Kalwelischken. This was another of Dr Schau's compounds. They slept all winter in a cattle barn on cramped cots. It was always cold and damp in the barn. There was never any water for washing. The Jews had lice and broke out in rashes.

That winter the Jews were always hungry, and they begged from the peasants at the compound and the nearby villages for a piece of bread, which put their lives in danger. The commandant in Kalwelischken was Butkerait. He had the final say over the Jews in the central camp that winter. There was no heavy guard over the Jews. The entire winter of 1942-43 the Jews helped grade the town square. Dr Schau came to observe the work several times a day.

From all of the worksites at the peat fields and at private peasant farms the Jews were brought to the central camp at Rabenwald in the fall of 1943. The living conditions were the same as in Kalwelischken. The Jews were driven off to do various jobs, just as they had during the first winter in the central camp. There wasn't work for all the men, so every day many of them remained in camp.

As already mentioned, the Jews in the camp at Rusne and in Schau's brick factory worked all winter, until midsummer 1943. When the spring of 1943 arrived, a large number of men were once again sent out from the central camp and from Kalwelischken to work for peasants on private farms as well as in the peat fields. Both the work sites and the conditions were quite similar to those in the spring and summer of 1942. This spring and summer, too, the Jews recovered from the second winter in the camps.

## The Serpent on Two Feet

A few months before all the work sites in Heidekrug were liquidated, ten Jews who had been brought from other work sites were placed at Dr Schau's brick factory. At the factory they slept on a bit of straw on the ground in the barn together with the other Jews, and they ate there as well. The ten Jews worked on the narrow-gauge railroad between the village of Koleschen and Heidekrug, fixing up the railroad embankment and loading and unloading the freight cars. Among the ten Jews was a refugee from Shilele who had been living in Laukuva named Kaplan, together with his young boy Avremele. Two older sons of Kaplan named Eliyohu and Hirshl, both painters, were already working in the brick factory. They worked at their trade in the compound, and were relatively well off. The two brothers helped their father and their younger brother in every way they could.

Avremele was the darling of all the Jews at the brick works. Somehow everybody felt that they had sinned against him when they were in his presence. Everyone liked him and regretted that he had to waste his blossoming youth at the camp in such terrible conditions. Years of pain and suffering had made the Jews nervous. They would argue a bit and then make up. But no one ever grew angry at Avremele. If one of his elders grew cross with him, it was like a father admonishing his child.

Avremele never parted from his father, as if he were afraid of losing the last protector he had in life. When his father was taken to work, Avremele went along, although he would have had an easier time staying with his older brothers. His father watched him to see that he didn't catch cold, and gave him a substantial piece of bread out of his own small portion. At work, his father used to lend a hand and help him out. Unrelated Jews also helped Avremele do his work. The ten Jews had been brought by the head foreman Gorgl.

He directed the work on the line and at the station. He had little control over the other Jews at the brick works. And this Gorgl was not an ordinary person. He was visibly crippled, and his appearance was of the kind to which the Yiddish saying refers: There's nobody there to slug on the snout.

Gorgl was short, and he had one stiff leg which he jerked with every step, just like the stick he held in his hand. He was a peasant of around fifty years. He looked like a rag with two fiery snake's eyes stuck in, and at his side the man who wasn't worthy of being slugged in the snout wore a revolver, which terrified the Jews.

Before the war "his Jews" wouldn't have hired him to sweep the street. Now they shuddered before him because he wore the revolver Dr Schau had given him.

Once, after work, when a marvelous summer evening was complacently stretched above the surrounding grain fields and pastures, and a fiery red sun slowly slid lower toward the horizon, the lame crippled who called himself Gorgl got drunk as Lot.

And then, as the Book of Esther says: "The heart of the king was merry with wine." Gorgl decided to show off his power to the workers in the compound and ordered "his ten Jews" immediately to fall out in the courtyard. He and one of his "equals" led the Jews away not far from the brick factory to a swampy pasture, and began harrying the Jews, ordering them to run and fall down and get back up. Gorgl felt cheerful and happy, like a general among his obedient soldiers. His cruelty blazed more and more. The cripple with the stiff leg was like someone on hot coals, changing his position. Inside his snake's soul seethed the desire for blood. Gorgl suddenly began to smile. The snake on two feet had had a "brilliant idea." He ordered all the Jews to lie on their bellies and crawl forward in the direction of a dirty canal in the pasture. He ordered them to slide across the canal on their bellies. Everyone obeyed the command. Young Avremele was afraid of the canal and the mud, and jumped over, ignoring Gorgl's order.

The cripple called Avremele over, took out his revolver and aimed at Avremele's head. His father ran over and began pleading. Avremele too fell to his knees, begging not to be shot and to be permitted to crawl through the mud on his belly.

But a snake has no mercy, not even for such an innocent child. A shot was heard. Avremele lay dead at Gorgl's feet. A trail of red blood ran down from near his ear. The child fell asleep forever. Shining eyes full of joy burned forth from Gorgl's rag face.

The rest of the Jews stood as if petrified. Tears poured from their eyes. Avremele's father moaned incessantly. The two-footed snake ordered everyone to take their hats off and pay their respects to the dead. The sun had already fallen below the horizon. On every side the croaking of frogs could be heard. The Jews buried Avremele's body next to Hamelman's grave, in a forest not far from the brick factory. The tragic incident threw all the Jews into depression and deep sorrow. Avremele was the last victim of the work camps around Heidekrug.

## **In the Extermination Camp Auschwitz**

During the last days of July 1943, an order arrived at all of the worksites from Dr Schau to bring all the Jews into Kalwelischken.

Various rumors flew among the Jews. Some of them asserted that foremen they knew had recounted that all of the Jews were being taken to Germany to work in rubber factories. Others, on the other hand, no longer believed in reassurances, and in their opinion people were being taken away to be exterminated. But the latter were a minority.

Jusutis had made up with the Jews from the Rusne worksite that he would talk to a Gestapo officer of his acquaintance, and find out where the Jews were being led, He agreed to come to Kalwelischken and give them a sign: If he scratched his head, it was bad, and whoever could should escape; but if the men are really being taken to work, he would button and unbutton his coat. The same day he came to Kalwelischken and constantly toyed with the buttons of his coat. He found an opportunity to speak with the Jews. He told them that the officer he knew had reassured him that they were being taken to work.

The Jews were taken to Kalwelischken on the last Thursday of July 1943. They spent the night there, and from there they were brought to the central Heidekrug camp under heavy guard. There the Jews were handed over to the authority of the Gestapo.

On Friday they were taken in groups by tractors to the train, where they were loaded onto freight cars, thirty to a car.

Each Jew received one kilogram of bread, a package of margarine and a piece of sausage. Gestapo troops assured the frightened Jews that they were being taken to do easier work at a much better place. 292 men were loaded into the cars in all. They were strictly ordered to remain quietly in the cars and not to look out. If not, they were threatened with shooting. The doors of the cars were locked from outside.

The transport began to move. The further they went the faster the wheels spun, and the heavier the locomotive panted. The Jews in the cars tried to guess where they were being taken. They had never ridden so far in their lives, and they did not know the direction they were going in, so far from their hometowns in Lithuania.

Between the boards of the cars the Jews read the names of Koenigsberg, Tarnowitz and others. The guards in their huts near the cars deliberately spoke loudly amongst themselves, so that the Jews would hear that they were being taken to work in factories. As they rode in constant darkness, the Jews lost track of the days and the nights. When they arrived at the station in Auschwitz, the Jews read the signs. To them, Auschwitz was as innocent as any other station. They had no idea of the place they had been brought to.

For several hours their train manoeuvred back and forth in the station.

## **On the Platform at Auschwitz**

A short time later, after the trains had stopped, the doors of the railroad cars could be heard clanging. With their hearts pounding, the Jews awaited the coming moments, in order to find out where they had finally been brought after two and a half exhausting days. The doors of the cars opened up. A stream of light and fresh air poured into the dank cars.

The Jews were taken to the platform at Auschwitz. SS men with death's head insignia shouted "Juden raus!" They were all armed with automatic rifles. Large dogs ran back and forth nearby. Jews in striped clothes ordered them not to take their bundles from the cars. Others among them shouted: "Crazy Jews! What are you taking those bundles for? You're being taken to be burned!" Still others insisted with pity in their voices: "You can get your bundles later!"

Before leaving Heidekrug,. Monish Kagan had received a special affidavit from Dr Schau, in which it was written that all of the Jews were very good workers, and that they should all be put to work.

That same Sunday afternoon, August 1, 1943, Polish Jews were brought to the platform. They were men, women and children from the liquidated ghettos in Bendin and Sosnowiec. There was a terrible commotion on the platform. The weeping of women and children, the barking of dogs and murderous commands of the SS men could all be heard.

When they had left the cars, the Lithuanian Jews were sent in two directions. Some of them were sent to the left and some to the right. Those who were sent to the left were forced immediately to climb into trucks covered with tarps. Those who had been sent to the right had to stand in rows of five. Most of those the SS sent to the trucks were weaker men. Several men ran away and got into the rows to the right, wanting to be with their comrades and acquaintances. The trucks containing the Jews who had been selected drove off. The same day all the Jews were gassed and burned in the crematorium. The remaining Jews found out about this that same Sunday, the first of August 1943. Among those gassed and burned that day were:

**From Laukuva:**

1. Leyzer Kagan, a miller;
2. Yoysel Smilyansky, the cook in the Heidekrug camps.

**Mactubern and Varus;**

3. Bere Keltz , a refugee from Kelm, who owned cars;
4. David Gershon, a student;
5. Alter Gurvitz, a farmer;
6. Zusman Khayet;
7. Azriel Khayet, Zusman's brother;
8. Leybe Tabatshnik;
9. Khayem Goldfus, a lumber dealer;
10. Binyomin Goldfus, a student, Khayem's son;
11. Zev Schneider, a farmer, father of Shrage;
12. Shrage Schneider, an agricultural lessee, Zev's son;
13. Efroyim-Yoysel Aranovitz, the slaughterer from Laukuva;
14. Binyomin Levite, a merchant;
15. Shloyme Levite, a yeshiva student;
16. Monish Khayet, a peddler, father of David;
17. Dovid Khayet, a student, Monish's son;
18. Dovid Rubak, a merchant;
19. Yitskhok Levin, a textile merchant;
20. Efroyim Yeznerovitz, a baker;
21. zev Yeznerovitz, a storekeeper;
22. Moyshe Kaplan, a storekeeper;
23. Yekhezkl Kaplan, a carpenter;
24. Yankl Kesler , a tinsmith;
25. Shimke Kesler, aged 18;
26. Gedalye Kesler, aged 16;
27. Shimon Yankelevitz, a student.

**From Koltinan:**

1. Meir Shereshevsky, a merchant;
2. Kesler, a miller;
3. Zundl Yofe, a yeshiva student;
4. Khayem Shvartz, a textile dealer;
5. Binyomin Karebelnik, a merchant.

**From Kveidan:**

1. Moyshe Yavnelovitz, a tanner;
2. Fole-Yudl Khatskelovitz, a tanner;
3. Bentshe Berelovitz, a merchant;
4. Yerakhmiel Aron, a student;
5. Yitskhok-Borukh Aron, a merchant;
6. Shimon-Yitskhok Robinzon, a merchant;
7. Yankl Zekhanovsky, a rabbi's son;
8. Mikhe Katz, a merchant;
9. Uri Hirshberg, a merchant;
10. Meir Kapelush, a student;
11. Osher Shvartz, a tailor;
12. P.yzik Gershon, a tailor;
13. Fayve Segal, a merchant;
14. Daniel Aron, a student;
15. Ruven Kosover, a kosher slaughterer;
16. Shaye Rupl, a smith;

17. Meir Shapiro, Shabsay's brother, a butcher;
18. Shabsay Shapiro, Meir's brother, a butcher;
19. Yudel Blekher, a coachman;
20. Shmuel-Dov Mel, a merchant;
21. Khanon Posl, a bathkeeper;
22. Fishl Posl, Khanon's son.

**From Verszan:**

1. Leyb Shlomovitz, a merchant;
2. Shloyme Shlomovitz, a fur dealer;
3. Ivrom Shlomovitz, a farmer (the last three brothers);
4. Yoysef Shlomovitz, Shloyme's son;
5. Yankl Pups, a merchant;
6. Khone Pups, Yankl's son;
7. Meir Hirshovitz, a butcher, Itshik's brother;
8. Itshik Hirshovitz, Meir's brother;
9. Gershon Hirshovitz, Meir's son;
10. Yose Khonenovitz, a peddler;
11. Khayem Khonenovitz, Yose's son;
12. Hirsh Falkovsky, a brother of the engineer;
13. Shloyme Tarshish, a coachman.

**From Shvekshne:**

1. Shmuel Glukh;
2. Khilke Landon, a student;
3. Avrom Eliashevitz, a leather merchant;
4. Eliyohu Markushevitz, a farmer;
5. Mikhe Osherovitz, an iron dealer;
6. Nisn Yoselovitz, a student;
7. Yitskhok Alter, an agricultural lessee;
8. Borukh Shmulovitz, a butcher;
9. Azriel Mayerovitz, Yankl's brother;
10. Yankl Mayerovitz, Azriel's brother (they leased orchards for a living);
11. Hillel Yavner, a miller;
12. Ruven Shenker, Moyshe's brother;
13. Moyshe Shenker, Ruven's brother (both horse traders);
14. Yoke Rifkin, a worker;
15. Dovid Matis, a tailor;
16. Khatski Velvelovitz, a shoemaker;
17. Velve Alter, Osher's brother, a retail merchant;
18. Osher Alter, Velve's brother, a retail merchant;
19. Hirshe-Shmuel Shayevitz, a farmer;
20. Ayzik Markus, a student;
21. Zalmen Hiller Laks, a bathkeeper;
22. Yoysef Shmulovitz, a tanner.

**From Vainute:**

1. Yoysef Blat, a merchant;
2. Alter Ayzikovitsh, a textile dealer;
3. Moyshe Yavnelovitz, a tanner;
4. Hirshe Hershler, a farmer.

**From Nayshtot (Tawrik):**

1. Yose Yoselevitz, farmer, Mote's son;
2. Daniel Yoselevitz, a student, Leybe's son;
3. Ruven Sheftelovitz, a butcher;
4. Shloyme Tarniter, a gardener;
5. Betsalel Volpert, a merchant;
6. Mende Vinik, a butcher;
7. Shmuel Zusmanovitz, a merchant;
8. Berl Yofe, a watchmaker.

In all, one hundred of the 292 that were brought were gassed and burned that Sunday.

## In the Birkenau Extermination Camp

The 192 men who had been sent to the right were arranged by the SS in rows of five and marched for ten or fifteen minutes. An incredible scene appeared before the Jews' eyes. On a large, flat space they saw a forest of wooden barracks in even rows, laid out like German soldiers called to muster. The area was surrounded by a high fence of barbed wire, so thickly intertwined and twisted that even a bird would have had a hard time flying through. The fence had a high-tension electric current running through it. High towers with machine guns poking out guarded the huge camp.

When they came to the main gate, heavily armed SS men greeted the Jews with an ironic smile. They were led through the gate into the women's camp. An orchestra made up entirely of women played a march to greet them. The SS men ordered the Jews to march to the beat and "watch their feet." The hearts of the 192 men quickened. For exactly two and a half years they had seen no Jewish women, and here there were so many women and girls? The orchestra consisted of Jewish women. Rays of hope that they might remain alive sparked in their minds. They tried to recognize each of the women as their mother or sister. Yet the pale faces and dull eyes of the women and girls expressed so much Jewish sorrow, so much terror and hopelessness, that the men immediately realized what was going on in the camp.

They were brought to the baths through the women's camp. They were led into a long barrack. Jewish and Christian kapos, room elders and others with authority surrounded the Jews and asked for cigarettes. They assured the men that they wouldn't need a thing in the camp. The "veterans" explained in a few sentences what kind of camp it was. The Lithuanian Jews learned from them about the bitter fate of the hundred men who had been separated out on the platform.

The kapos and various taskmasters ordered everyone to undress, keeping only their belts. From this barrack they were led to a second corridor, to the wig makers, where all the hair on their bodies was cut. The wigmakers, too, explained what the camp was in short sentences with simple words.

Then the men went straight to the bath. They came out into a different room, where they were given a shirt, a pair of pants and a jacket. These were clothes which had belonged to the men who were gassed. On the backs of the jackets a cross had been daubed on in red oil paint, and on the legs of their pants, red stripes in oil paint.

The Jews didn't recognize each other. They all looked like circus clowns. Everyone who looked at his acquaintances saw comic caricatures, the kind people would have run after in the streets and doubled up with laughter during the good times before the war. Here in the extermination camp at Birkenau no one laughed. This was how the Germans dressed their victims on the road to their deaths, which was not a long one.

From the bath they were returned to the first barrack, where they undressed. They no longer found their own clothes there. They all stretched out on the bare brick floor and lay until morning. The Jews were organized alphabetically in a row in the barrack. Two Jewish overseers sat at two tables and tattooed a number onto everyone's left arm.

The Jews had a frightful night on the brick floor. They were cold after the bath. The nights in Birkenau are humid and the days are hot. At first light they were awakened and taken to a quarantine camp consisting of unfinished barracks. The 192 Jews were held there for five weeks. They had no particular places to work. They could lie in the sun all day. There was very little food. There were frequent roll calls, which exhausted the Jews. Overseers came to take volunteers to work. The Lithuanian Jews became famous in the camp as good workers.

The camp kapo saw to it that they got special rations. The work camps in Heidekrug, the last summer working with peat and the decent food had all strengthened these Jews, and they were real working men.

After spending five weeks in the quarantine camp, a committee came and determined that the Jews would be returned to the labor camp. They were taken to the bath and given striped clothes, which meant that they were now citizens of the Birkenau extermination camp and had been assigned as workers.

The Lithuanian Jews became popular in the labor camp as well because of their good work, and they were assigned to the Gleis Brigade. The job was to build a railroad line from the Auschwitz "Jew platform" directly to the gas chambers.

Every day, and sometimes at night as well, transports of Jews; men, women and children, were brought to the "Jew platform." Then trucks covered with tarps brought the unfortunates to the gas chambers, and from there their dead bodies were brought on trolleys to the crematorium. From the "Jew platform" to the gas chambers the trucks were accompanied by a sanitary vehicle, so that the victims wouldn't realize too soon where they were being brought.

Six chimneys smoked day and night, exhaling in the heavens the gassed bodies of human beings. In the crematorium yard rose heaps of ashes from the burned bodies. And the 192 Jews were assigned to carry out a job which would complete, simplify and rationalize transportation to the horrible death factory.

Monish Kagan's sensitive soul could not bear this. He went out of his mind. He was taken out of the work camp. He was never seen again. Several dozen of the 192 men collapsed, first spiritually and morally and then physically as well, from the poor food, from the dirt, from fear and from everything they had to see being done to innocent Jews, even women with children.

A special committee observed the men during roll calls, and a doctor determined who was ready for the gas chamber and oven. Those who were indicated had their numbers recorded. After the roll call they were taken out of the camp to the crematorium. Those on the list knew quite well where they were being taken, and they tearfully took their leave before going off to the "Heaven brigade." That is how those assigned to the gas chambers and crematoria were called.

The Lithuanian Jews experienced two more selections. Many of them died:

**From Laukuva:**

1. Monish Kagan, a former reserve officer;
2. Yankl Kagan, a miller;
3. Moyshe Fritzal, a peddler;
4. Binyomin Katin, a merchant.

**From Kveidan:**

1. Khonon (Khone) Druzin, a tanner;
2. Dovid-Yitskhok Blekher, a student;
3. Azriel Galis, a merchant;
4. Zorakh-Mikhl Berelovitz, a student;
5. Meir Gurvitz, a textile dealer;
6. Avrom Gurvitz, a textile dealer;
7. Moyshe Yofe, a merchant;
8. Berl Blokh, a cattle trader;
9. Tevye Epshteyn, a storekeeper.

**From Verszan:**

1. Moyshe Soyfer, a butcher;
2. Bere Girshenovitz, a coachman;
3. Shloyme Shadov, a printer;
4. Ruven Kirzhner.

**From Shvekshne:**

1. Nosn Alter, a horse trader;
2. Mende Yavner, a miller;
3. Mote Hille Girshovitz, a coachman;
4. Berl Pres, a student;
5. Yitskhok Nadl, a roofer.

**From Vainute:**

1. Kalman Murinik, an electrician;
2. Khayem Khatskelevitz, a merchant;
3. Shepe Markus.

**From Nayshtot:**

1. Leyb Yoselevitz, a farmer, son of Khaye;
2. Daniel Yoselevitz, a farmer, son of Mende;
3. Yoysef Pil, a tailor.

The Lithuanian Jews listed did not all die during selections. Many of them became swollen with hunger and became apathetic, which was referred to in the camps as becoming a "Musulman." They died in the camp. And a large number of Lithuanian Jews were left in the camp and died shortly after the healthier ones were taken on a transport to Warsaw.

## **Among the Ruins of the Warsaw Ghetto**

The healthier and more productive workers in the Birkenau extermination camp were assigned to a certain transport. There were Jews from other European countries in the transport, but none from Poland.

The Lithuanian Jews as well were assigned to this transport. Everyone envied them for being rescued from the Hell of Birkenau. More than a few Polish Jews passed as residents of other countries, and wound up in the transport.

Of the 192 Lithuanian Jews, only one hundred and forty odd went with the transport. The sick and the Musulmen were not brought along; they stayed in the camp. As the Lithuanian Jews were being led out, they looked at the smoking chimneys of the crematorium and parted with their comrades and acquaintances who stayed in the camp, and who later arose into eternity with the smoke of the chimneys.

Those taken out onto the transport were brought into a camp in the city of Auschwitz. They received a bath, and first-class civilian clothes which had belonged to exterminated Jews. Their shoes were taken away, and they were given slippers with wooden soles, covered with white canvas.

After they slept all night in the camp, they each received one and a half kilos of bread, a package of margarine and a piece of sausage, and loaded in groups of sixty men onto freight cars.

On the eve of Yom Kippur 1943 the transport stopped at a bombed out station not far from the ruins of the Warsaw Ghetto. For roughly a half hour they walked until they arrived at the ghetto, to the site of the former Judenrat on Gensia Street, which was fenced in. There were nine unfinished barracks in the yard, lacking floors, windows and ceilings. There were already Jews there who had been brought from Birkenau, primarily from Greece and Hungary, with some from other countries. The ruins of the ghetto were still smoking. They knew nothing of the uprising in the ghetto.

The Lithuanian Jews were led into barrack number 7. A German block elder was appointed. The room elders were Jews. The Jews had to sleep on the naked ground in the barrack. There was no water. During the first two days everyone was registered and taken to a bath in Warsaw. On the third day, commandos were assigned to the various tasks.

## **The Commando at the Gensia Cemetery**

This group had to prepare an embankment for a narrow-gauge railroad line. The gravestones were removed. The better ones were taken to the railroad station, loaded onto railroad cars and brought to Germany. The Jews were forced to dig up the graves beneath the better gravestones and search for gold teeth. SS men guarded them as they worked. Dozens of stones were overturned in every part of the cemetery, and the dead were exhumed.

## **The Search Commando**

Under the supervision of troops from the Waffen SS, a group of Jews walked among the ruins looking for buried cellars, bunkers and tunnels. There they found textiles, leather, money, provisions, sugar and so forth. The SS men carefully saw to it that the Jews took nothing for themselves, otherwise, they threatened to shoot on the spot. But hunger forced the Jews to take that risk.

More than a few of them found money, gold and valuables. With the money and gold that they found, the Jews traded for food or bought it from Polish workers who were taking bricks from the ghetto ruins to a railroad station. Many Jews in the commando were thus able to acquire money or gold and bought themselves food. There were several of the Lithuanian Jews in this commando. Several times the Jews found in the cellars and beneath the ruins Jews who had suffocated or been burned, men, women and children who were barely identifiable. There were cases in which burned mothers were found with suffocated children in their arms.

## **The Demolition Commando**

These Jews, under the supervision of Waffen SS men, completed the demolition of still standing walls and chimneys of ruined buildings. Several men were killed at this job. The air trembled from the explosions. The Jews in this commando also found food and valuables.

## **The Brick-Cleaning Commando**

The older and weaker men, or those who became Musulmen in time, worked in this commando. The Jews spent entire tormenting days at this work, summer and winter. A number of them died from hunger in a sitting position. In winter, many of them froze upon the heaps of bricks. They didn't have sufficient tools to clean the bricks. The Jews had to clean the bricks with pieces of iron, and arrange them in lots of one hundred. Then Polish coachmen took the bricks to the stations and loaded them onto railroad cars. The bricks were taken to Germany. If the Jews didn't prepare a set number of bricks, the SS men beat them mercilessly. Sometimes one of the better Polish coachmen gave the Jews a piece of bread if they provided him with bricks for himself.

All of the worksites belonged to German firms which carried out the work. There were other, less significant worksites as well.

## **"The Last of the Mohicans"**

After working some time in the ruins of the Warsaw Ghetto, the Jews learned more details about the uprising. They nurtured a profound respect for every ruin, every cellar and tunnel in which the legendary heroes of the uprising had shed their blood, as they conducted a desperate and unequal struggle against the worst barbarism in the history of the world. The entire ghetto quarter, a scene of destruction marked by huge mountains of bricks, gravel and dirt on the ruins, became holy to them. They found out that the Germans wanted to clear the entire area and turn it onto "Adolf-Hitler Platz!"

The Jews met Jews from Warsaw working in a "special commando." Each day they burned the bodies of Polish political arrestees who had been shot. The Jews learned everything about the ghetto uprising from the Jews in this special commando, and from the Poles who brought the bricks to the station.

The Jews in the "special commando" gave newcomers tobacco and food. They got good rations for their hard work. Suddenly they disappeared, and no more was heard of them. Peasants related that they had somehow gotten into trouble, and they were shot.

One time during the work in the ruins, a Jew with two automatic pistols appeared among the mountains of bricks and shot an SS. man. He immediately disappeared, and he escaped being caught. He was "the last of the Mohicans," the last of the heroic Warsaw Ghetto fighters.

Another time a Jewish girl was found hiding in a room of a ruined building. She was pale and terrified. She still had a large reserve of food in the room. SS men brought her to the camp and fed her. A few days later they shot her.

## **The Life of the Jews in the Warsaw Camp**

Some five thousand Jews had been brought together in the camp. For three months they slept on bare earth in the unfinished barracks. They did not even undress. The good clothes they had received before leaving Auschwitz turned to junk as they constantly wore them.

At five in the morning they were woken up and got coffee. After the coffee there was the morning roll call before work. They worked until late in the evening. When they returned from work, the evening roll call began, and it lasted for hours. The roll calls dragged because each evening there were people missing. Some were buried among the ruins. Others grew weak while working, and fell asleep forever. A number froze to death while sitting in the wintertime. It took hours until it was determined who was missing and where he was. People died from hunger and weakness during these roll calls. One who expired during a roll call was Avrom Kagan, a boy from Laukuva aged 19 or 20.

After the roll call the men were given "lunch," consisting of rotten potatoes and beets, which stank up the entire camp. This "lunch" the men were given a quarter kilo of bread with some marmalade or margarine, which had to last them the whole day. The Jews continued to wear the wooden shoes with white canvas tops until January 1944. They were always wet. The Jews wrapped their feet in rags they found among the ruins.

Zelik Markus from Vainute was found with his feet frostbitten. During the winter thousands of Jews became Musulmen and gradually went out like candles. Yoysef-Velve Aranovitz, who took part in this collective testimony, was one of the most badly weakened among the Musulmen. He was often beaten as well. He remembers with

deep gratitude Binyomin Lapin from Nayshtot, who had found some money and provided for him and other Lithuanian Jews. Binyomin Lapin is also a participant in this testimony.

When the cold of winter arrived the living conditions in the camp grew much worse. An epidemic of spotted typhus broke out.

### **The Epidemic in the Warsaw Camp**

The men became infested in lice because of the dirt, the inability to change their clothes and the need to sleep in their clothes for a long time. Their clothing and pockets were filled with all sorts of lice. There were so many that the unfortunate men used to pull heaps of them out of their pockets. The men had received sweaters. At night after work they used to stand and hold their sweaters near the fire. Thousands of lice used to fall to the floor, burned. The next day the sweaters were once again full of lice.

The bodies of the unfortunate Jews were consumed by the lice. Everyone's body was scabbed and full of all sorts of wounds and abscesses, from which pus flowed. There was no medical help for the men.

In the winter of 1943-44, spotted typhus spread fast as lightning in the camp. Because of the epidemic, the SS organized a hospital in two blocks, surrounded by barbed wire and painstakingly isolated. Two Jewish doctors from France and one Polish Jew worked in the hospital. The head doctor was a German named Jup. The doctors only served on the ambulance. They did not see the sick patients, because they had no medicine. The sick lay in their beds, which were stacked three high. In each of the small beds lay two bare bodies, with a straw bedding beneath them and a blanket above them. Those who were brought into the hospital were considered as if already dead. The food was the same as in the camp.

The sick were "attended" by Greek and French Jews, who could do nothing to help them.

The elder in charge of all the rooms, called the Wirtschafts-Leiter, was a German Jew named Emil, who stole the little bit of food that was doled out to the sick. This Emil also struck Jews for shaking straw from one bed onto another, for letting the edge of a blanket slip down, and for other trivial reasons. Every morning he went to the sick in their rooms and shouted: "Who's alive and who's half-alive?" Emil ordered the dead and nearly dead to be thrown out into a yard, where they became frozen and were stacked up. "You have to throw out the nearly dead, because there's no room for new people!" Emil commanded the workers in the corpse detail.

The corpse detail was made up of four Jews. Their head was a French Jew named Berman Presman. Every morning the corpse detail checked who was dead and who was nearly dead, and they threw still-living men off of the bunks onto the floor. The bones of the living cracked. Their moans could still be heard. A while later they lay frozen in the stacks. Yoysef-Velve Aranovitz asserts that in his bed fifteen to twenty Jews died.

The corpse would be taken out of its bed, and another brought in immediately. His comrade from Laukuva Tzvi Sharanovitz, aged 25, was one of those who died in his bed, along with Bebbe Kapelush from Kveidan. In a nearby bed died Yoysef's comrade Shoyel Zaltzberg, the only man from Namoksch in the camp.

The dead were carried out of the yard on wagons to the courtyard of a former Jewish school on the other side of Gensia Street. There a row of boards would be set up with a row of corpses; flammable fluid was poured over them and they were ignited. The bodies of those who died in the epidemic were burned day and night that winter. The corpse brigade helped in this "task."

The SS men were afraid of the terrible epidemic. They were terrified of becoming infected, and hurried to finish a bath where the men could be disinfected. The plague of lice was liquidated. Yoysef-Velve Aranovitz, a participant in this testimony, was feverish with spotted typhus for three weeks, and immediately suffered a lung inflammation. After he recovered he had abscesses on his entire body, from which a great deal of pus flowed. He lay in the hospital for exactly two months altogether.

Some three thousand Jews died in the terrible epidemic.

Lithuanian Jews among them were:

#### **From Laukuva:**

1. Tsvi Sharanovitz, a student in the eighth class;
2. Betsalel Levitan, a farmer;
3. Mordkhe Khayet, a peddler;

4. Elkhonon Margolis, a merchant, originally from Antalept;
5. Yisroel Ber, a glazier;
6. Mikhl Shlakhter, a peddler (remained in the hospital during the departure from Warsaw);
7. Yisroel-Dovid Fritzal, owner of a windmill;
8. Arye Fritzal, a peddler;
9. Elyezer Fritzal, a youngster (the last three all brothers);
10. Yisroel Fuks, a butcher;
11. Yekhezkl Kagan, a miller;
12. Avrom Kagan, a gymnasium student;
13. Shoyel Zaltzberg, a refugee from Namoksch in Laukuva at the beginning of the war;
14. Freyde Yankelevitz, a teacher.

**From Koltinan:**

1. Sheftl Valk, a restaurant keeper;
2. Alter Shvartz, a petty trader in the marketplace.

**From Kveidan:**

1. Meir Blokh, a cattle dealer;
2. Bebke Kapelush, a student;
3. Yekl Levit;
4. Ruven Zalmanovitz, a baker who lived in Laukuva.

**From Verszan:**

1. Yoyses Shlomovitz, Yankl's son;
2. Mote Shlomovitz, Avrom's son;
3. Ore Gershinovitz, a farmer (remained in the hospital in Warsaw);
4. Arke Kirzhner, Yankl's son;
5. Berl Kotzin;
6. Shloyme Blokh, a chauffeur
7. Borukh-Meir Borokhovitz, Leybe's son;
8. Borukhke Borokhovitz, Khayem-Leyb's brother;
9. Nisn Graz, a rabbi's son.

**From Shvekshne:**

1. Noyekh Markushevitz, a postal clerk;
2. Mordkhe Shmulovitz, Yeshaye's brother, a butcher;
3. Yeshaye Shmulovitz, Mordkhe's brother, a butcher;
4. Yehude Leyb Ment, Khatski's brother, a student;
5. Khatski Ment, Yehude's brother, owned an automobile;
6. Fayl Klip, a merchant;
7. Ayzik Shayevitsh, a yeshiva student;
8. Todres Ladon, a merchant;
9. Sholem Lurye, a tanner;
10. Khayem-Leyb Mayerovitz, a merchant;
11. Shmuel Zelikovitz, a horse trader;
12. Nisn Mayerovitz, a merchant;
13. Shloyme Shapiro, leased orchards;
14. Moyses-Yitskhok Glukh, an electrical technician;
15. Moyses Movshovitz, a merchant;
16. Motl Shenker;
17. Shmuel Shenker.

**From Vainute:**

1. Khatse Markus, Yitskhok's brother;
2. Zelik Markus, Yitskhok's brother;
3. Dovid Bender;
4. Leybl Sukhavolsky, who had escaped being shot in Vainute;
5. Hoyshe Fridgut, from Tawrik;
6. Yoshe Nekush, Meir-Yitskhok's brother;
7. Meir-Yitskhok Nekush, Yoshe's brother (both brothers died the same day);
8. Yoyses Aranovitz, a roofer;
9. Shloyme Markus;
10. Khone Markus;

11. Moyshe Mendlson;
12. Yankl Leybe Gordon, a farmer;
13. Hirshe Hershler, Ore's brother;
14. Ore Hershler, Hirshe's brother.

#### **From Nayshtot:**

1. Hirshke Elert;
2. Berl Lasky, Moyshe's brother;
3. Moyshe Lasky, Berl's brother, taken to Auschwitz;
4. Eliyohu Berelovitz, a merchant;
5. Peysakh Vinik, a worker, a butcher;
6. Berl Grosman, a merchant;
7. Meir Glat, proprietor of a guesthouse;
8. Leyb Levinson, a watchmaker;
9. Khayem Traub, a wigmaker;
10. Daniel Yoselovitz;
11. Yisroel Yoselovitz --Daniel's brother; their mother's name was Tzese.

All of the Jews listed above died in the epidemic or from other diseases. Not all of them died in the hospital, because there was insufficient room. For instance, Yoshe Nekusht died while sitting at the table in the barrack. His brother Meir-Yiskhok died sitting in the toilet. Meir-Yitskhok was an ordained rabbi and ate no unkosher food the entire time. Hushe Dorfman from Tawrik lay in the hospital. He had regained his health and was waiting to be released. But there were no clothes for him. He lay in the hospital after the Jews were taken from Warsaw to Kutno, and died there.

#### **The Transport from Warsaw to Birkenau**

Before New Year's 1944 some four hundred men were taken to Auschwitz to be exterminated. A committee went through all the barracks selecting Musulmener. Yose-Velve was on the list of those to be sent away. He escaped this fate miraculously. Among those taken in this transport were the Lithuanian Jews Elkhonon Feygus from Koltinan, proprietor of a guesthouse; and Borukh Zalmanovitsh, from Kveidan; and Moshe Laski, from Nayshtot.

Several Lithuanian Jews died at the hands of kapos at work. Berl Kotzin from Verszan asked his kapo for some food. He was beaten, and remained lying on the ground. He was later found frozen.

Replacements for the 3,000 Jews who died were constantly brought from other locations. Before Passover 1944 the number of workers was back around 5,000. Before Passover a transport of men were taken to work in Bromberg. This time healthier and stronger men were chosen. The Lithuanian Jews in this transport were:

1. Shaye Itzik Matusa, tailor from Nayshtot;
2. Borukh Yudelevitza, merchant from Shvekshe;
3. Khatske Ladon, an orchard keeper from Shvekshe;
4. Tsvi Gershon, a peddler from Laukuva;
5. Shmuel Khayet, a peddler;
6. Yitskhok Murinik from Vainute;
7. Yankl Levitan from Tawrik;
8. Dovid Markus, Shloyme's brother.

#### **By Foot from Warsaw to Kutno**

In the spring of 1944 Yose-Velve Aranovitz was back in the hospital. He had pleurisy. This time his acquaintances and friends didn't believe he'd survive such a disease under such circumstances. He spent ten days there before the Jews were taken from Warsaw to Rutno.

Once Yose-Velve overheard a conversation between a Jewish doctor and a Czech Jew. He understood that the conversation had to do with the evacuation of all Jews from Warsaw, on account of the quick advance of the Red Army. The next morning Yose-Velve approached the doctor and asked to be released. The doctor refused, however, because Yose-Velve had a high temperature. Finally he agreed. Yose-Velve received clothing and left the hospital while still ill.

At that time a new camp was completed. Transports of Hungarian Jews were brought. The recently brought Jews,

together with some of those already there were quartered in the new camp. Yose-Velve was also assigned to the new camp, where he found the Laukuva Jew Aba Halpern.

Aba worked in the SS supply warehouse. He risked his life to steal food and bring it to his acquaintances in the barrack. He brought Yose-Velve bread, butter, sugar and meat. Yose-Velve began to recover.

The preparations for the transport began. The Red Army was nearby and threatening Warsaw. The Jews' hopes of staying alive grew stronger. But the dreadful German devils refused until the last minute to release their victims, and prepared to evacuate them to Germany. Yet there was no means of transportation, and the evacuation was put off from day to day. It went on like this for ten days. The men were not taken to work. There were roll calls for two days. The SS men repeatedly explained and taught the men how they were to march. They warned that entire groups would be shot if any individual tried to escape.

An order came to prepare for evacuation on foot. Groups of one hundred Jews were divided up, under the supervision of German kapos and three head workers. The SS predicated that the progress on foot would be difficult, and proposed that those who were weak and sick ride in trucks.

About one hundred of the Hungarian Jews, who never got wise to the German's tricks, signed up. The Shvekshne youth Berke Shmulovitz had swollen feet, and also signed up. Those who signed up were put into the hospital. Many recovered men stayed in the hospital because of the shortage of clothing, and all were later exterminated. Details concerning their death are lacking.

The worst culprit in the murder of those who remained in the hospital was the SS man Muelenc, nicknamed Kaposbauet.

Four hundred Jews were assigned to stay in the camp and help evacuate the SS stores. Most of them died at the time of the Polish uprising in Warsaw.

Those who died in the hospital and during the Warsaw revolt after the removal of the Jews from Warsaw were:

1. Eliyohu Kaplan;
2. Hirsh Klapan. These two men were brothers, artisans from Heidekrug. At the outbreak of the war, they had come to Laukuva together with their father and their younger brother Avremele, who was shot by Gorgl.
3. Bere-Leyb Shmulovitz, from Shvekshne;
4. Yoysef-Yitskhok Elkon, from Koltinan, remained with the four hundred Jews;
5. Meir-Hillel Fayn, from Kveidan;
6. Shloyme Taytsh, from Verszan.

At five in the morning on July 28, 1944, the Jews were awoken. They were arranged in rows of five and groups of one hundred. Each one received a small loaf of bread with a bit of margarine. Their tragically difficult march began. They were taken through the streets of Warsaw. The Polish population, which had lately been suffering bitterly themselves on account of the Germans, felt for the Jews and stood by sympathetically as they left Warsaw.

The Jews came out onto the Lodz- Kutno highway. The days were hot. A burning sun poured down seas of seething rays on the tormented Jews. A stain a kilometer long moved slowly forward among fields of grain, green pastures and forests. Some of the Jews wore concentration camp uniforms, and some were in civilian clothing. Their feet were wrapped in rags, their eyes dull, their faces yellowish-green. They moved with difficulty.

It seemed as though the Jews were demonstrating their anguish and rage, the pain and suffering they had accumulated through the years in the work camps and concentration camps; it was a demonstration against the world, against the nature surrounding them and against the burning hot sun. In front of them, at their sides and behind them walked well-fed SS men driving the living skeletons forward. They marched ever further from liberation, from the only liberator in that region, the advancing Red Army.

On the first day of the death march many men passed out from weakness, hunger and especially thirst. Those who fell and didn't get up were shot by the SS men and thrown into the ditches on the side of the road. Nobody paid any attention to them, and no one mourned for those who were shot. On the contrary: some of the men envied them for having been freed by death from their terrible sufferings. The first day they marched some thirty kilometers. At night the Jews were taken into a field, where they spent the night.

The second day of the march was more difficult still. The Jews received no water to drink. In the middle of the day they reached the Vistula. Everyone's eyes began to shine. The Jews "drank" and "were revived" with their glances. With their last strength, they began to hurry toward the water. Everyone was brought near to the riverbank and ordered to set themselves down. The camp commandant allowed the men to go to the river and drink in groups of

a hundred. The terrible thirst threw thousands of men into the water. The camp commandant became upset and ordered them to march on. Dozens of Jews were shot in the water. By far the largest number of Jews did not manage to drink. The march forward recommenced. The thirsty Jews parted with the waters of the Vistula, which lazily slid forward, basking in the rays of the sun.

Yose-Velve Aranovitz could stand no more, and decided to stay behind. The two brothers Leyb and Dovid Goldfus from Laukuva comforted Yose and begged him to hold on. Until nightfall they supported him under both arms. The second night everyone slept in a field again.

On the third morning the men could no longer stand the thirst. Dozens stayed behind and were shot. Sender Linkimer from Koltinan took care of Yose that day, and he survived until the evening with great difficulty. They stopped at a swampy pasture of peat. With spoons and plates the Jews dug deep holes, and found warm dirty water. In a nearby field they found raw potatoes, which they ate.

On the fourth day of the march the heavens opened, and a rainstorm poured and raged all day and all night. At nightfall the men were driven into a swampy forest. Soaked through, they lay on the damp ground and wrapped themselves up in the wet blankets which they had brought from Warsaw.

Soaking, they dragged themselves through the fourth day of the march. More men were shot and left behind in the ditches. In the evening they stopped not far from Kutno, near a station. Among those who died on the march was a Lithuanian Jew, Nosn Shadov from Verszan.

Yose-Velve Aranovitch, the chronic Musulman, was also close to death. Sender Linkimer helped him, and wouldn't let him stay behind. He saved his life. Both are participants in this collective testimony.

### **In Freight Cars from Kutno to Dachau**

On the fifth day of the march the men were taken to a railroad station, and loaded onto freight cars, ninety to a car. The Jews were packed in tightly, their legs intertwined. The space between the doors of the cars had to be left free for the kapos and head workers. Thus only two-thirds of each car was available, 45 men on each side. They received neither water nor food. They ate salted preserves, which only increased their thirst. Some of the unfortunates drank their own urine.

Steam rose from their wet clothes. It was hot and dank in the cars. The Jews had to perform their natural functions sitting where they sat crowded together. Many went out of their minds and tore the hair from their heads and bodies. In Yose-Velve's car there was a German kapo named Paul. In the course of four full days he tortured fourteen Jews to death with blows and whippings. A Hungarian Jew went insane from hunger and was murdered. He was the fifteenth victim in the car.

The windows of the car were sealed with boards. Yose-Velve could no longer breathe properly. He stood up and leaned toward a crack in the wall of the car to get a bit of fresh air. Then he tried to lie or sit back down. His place was already taken. He began to be pushed around from one spot to another. He "flew" in the air for several minutes. Paul the kapo and his assistants began beating him murderously. Yose-Velve managed to shout: "Sender, save me!" and fainted. Sender Linkimer was actually in the same car, on the other side of the open area.

Those who were murdered or had suffocated to death were thrown into a special car for corpses. Yose-Velve was also thrown into this car, half-dead. Four days the Jews suffered in the dank, sealed cars. On August 4, 1944 the transport was brought to the central Dachau concentration camp. Over 4,000 Jews had left Warsaw by foot. A large number were shot on the way from Warsaw to Kutno. Some 500 died or were killed in the freight cars. Hirshl Zalmanovitz was among the victims.

### **Three Days in the Central Dachau Concentration Camp**

On the western and eastern fronts the Allied armies were dealing death blows to German fascism. On all sides the liberating armies tore at lightning speed straight into the nest of the Hitlerite venom. The central Dachau camp contained thousands of political arrestees from the lands which the German army division were forced to evacuate. Of course, they were all Aryans. Among them were high-ranking military officers who could no longer participate in the bitter end of the Third Reich's Satanic play.

Under the constant thunder of Allied artillery and the repeated bombing raids, the behaviour of the German murderers toward the prisoners improved.

The living and barely living Jews were brought from the freight cars onto the huge Appel-Platz at Dachau. They were allowed to drink. They were given a bath and new clothes. The sick were taken to a hospital. They were attended by political prisoners who treated the Jews well. For three days the Jews were allowed to rest. During those three days they were neither tortured nor beaten.

They were fed decently and allowed to sleep longer. The healthy ones were then sent to various auxiliary camps of Dachau, where they finished drinking to the dregs the goblet of pain and suffering which German sadism had prepared for them.

A large number of the Lithuanian Jews were sent to the concentration camp at Muhldorf and the concentration camps at Landsberg.

### **The Dead Return to Life**

Miracles happened in the Hitlerite Hell as well. As mentioned above, Yose-Velve was thrown into the corpse car. When the transport stopped the living were brought to the Appel-Platz in the central Dachau camp. Four Red Army prisoners of war loaded the dead and murdered onto dollies and dumped them in a room near the crematorium.

It was five in the morning. Outside the air was thick and cool. When Yose-Velve was carried out of the corpse wagon, the fresh cool air began to revive and encourage him. When he was unloaded from the lorry onto the crematorium yard, Yose-Velve sensed that he was still alive. His arms and legs were atrophied, as though they'd been chopped off. He gradually moved his head.

An older German Jew, about fifty years of age, was carried on the same dolly. While he was being unloaded from the dolly one of the German kapos, named Mall, shouted: "This one's still alive!" The Jew was laid on the side. The same kapo noticed that Yose-Velve was also alive. Both Jews were taken to the hospital on a dolly with rubber wheels. There Yose-Velve was shaved, washed and placed in a clean bed by himself, just like in a hospital before the war.

In that part of the hospital lay sick French and Dutch prisoners and German political invalids. Yose was the only Jew in that ward.

The ward elder was an Aryan from Luxembourg. He did everything he could for Yose-Velve. He fed him well and saw to it that Yose-Velve lacked for nothing. He spent exactly three months in the ward; all his wounds healed and he recovered from the pleurisy. Yose-Velve had miraculously returned to life. Until this day he does not understand how he, as a Jew, managed to spend three months in that ward among pure Aryans, when all the other sick Jews, totalling about fifty, lay in a neighboring block.

As the number of political arrestees from the occupied territories grew, and the sick among them were brought to the hospital, Yoysef was released. Yose-Velve was sent to an auxiliary camp seven kilometers from Dachau, together with the other Jewish patients. This concentration camp was called Allach. There were some 12,000 Aryans and 3,000 Hungarian Jews in the camp at that time.

Yose-Velve did not see again the comrades from Lithuania with whom he had gone through so much suffering. Yose-Velve worked in the camp for some nine months, under terrible conditions. The American army was not far from the camp. But the German devils didn't release their victims from their claw until the last minute before their death.

All of the Jewish inmates were taken as far as possible from liberation, to the Tyrolean Alps. But this demonic plan was spoiled by the American army. On April 30, 1945 Yose-Velve was liberated by the American army in Staltach, together with the rest of the Jews.

The Jews in the other Dachau auxiliary camps were also forced to march on foot or taken in freight cars to the Tyrol. They too were freed by the American army at the same time. Yose-Velve's comrades mourned for their comrades who had died in the camps. None of them dreamed that the chronic Musulman, who had been murdered in the train and taken on a dolly to the crematorium, was still living somewhere else. A short time later they met him again, to everyone's great joy.

## The Tragic Reckoning

In the Dachau auxiliary camps, too, there were a number of victims. The Shvekshne Jew Zundl Gershinovitz, an unmarried young man aged about 26, committed suicide in a camp near Landsberg. He could no longer stand the suffering, and threw himself under a train.

In Camp IV near Landsberg the following Jews from Heidekrug camps died from hunger or torture:

1. Velvl Druzin, a teacher;
2. Ayzik Druzin; these two were both Motl's brothers;
3. Hirsh Galis, a storekeeper;
4. Borukh Gershon (in Camp II).

In the extermination camp near Muhldorf died:

1. Leyzer Ladon, a student from Shvekshne;
2. Moyshe-Leyb Berman, a merchant from Verszan.

In the course of a false liberation on April 27, 1945 at the railroad station of Poing, in Germany, Leybe Kahan from Verszan was shot with a rifle. He died one day before the Liberation.

Of exactly five hundred Jewish men interned in the Heidekrug work camps and work sites at the beginning of the war, very few survived. These are their names:

**From Laukuva:** Yose-Velve, Aba Halpern, and the brothers Dovid and Leyb Goldfus, four men.

**From Koltinan:** The only survivor was Sender Linkimer, a participant in the collective testimony.

**From Verszan:** The brothers Shimen and Yoysef Shlomovitz, Avrom Khononovitz and Mendl Borukhovitsh, four men.

**From Kveidan:** ,Motl Druzin, Gershon Yung, Hirsh Tarlov and Pinkhes Abramovitz and Berl Levit, five men.

**From Vainute:** Mendl Nekush, Yitskhok Markus and Zalmen Yavnelovitz, three men.

**From Nayshtot:** Binyomin Lapin, Azriel Glub, Gold, Refoel Laski, Henokh Elert, Mendl Yoselevitzh, and Berl Glaz, seven men.

**From Shvekshne:** Shaye and his son Shmuel Osherovitz, Naftali Ziv, Moyshe Ment and his brother: Zev Ment, Yitskhok Markushevitz, Meir Shmulovitz, Meir Ladon, and Gutman Shayevitz, nine men.

**Thirty three men in all.**

*Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin New York September 1, 1986*

**Attestations of Shimen Shlomovitz, Yoysef Shlomovitz, Yoysef Aranovitz, Sender Linkimer, Berl Levit, Gershon Yung, Motl Druzin, Naftoli Ziv, Moyshe Ment, Gutman Shayovitz, Zev Ment, Gutman Shayovitz, Zev Ment, Binyomin Lapin, Heyne Elert and Yitskhok Markus**

At a special meeting, held on July 11, 1948, of the surviving Jews who had been in the work camps at Heidekrug (Silute), Engineer L Koniuchowsky read a collective eyewitness report about the camps near Heidekrug, and about the suffering experienced in Auschwitz, Warsaw and until they were brought to Dachau.

We the undersigned heard the collective report through to the end, and attest to it in its entirety with our signatures.

The seal of the Feldafing Camp Committee is affixed on each page, instead of the signatures of the eyewitnesses.

Engineer Leib Koniuchowsky -- July 11, 1948 (signature)

From Verszan: 1. Shimen Shlomovitz (signature)

2. Yoysef Shlomovitz (signature)

From Laukuva: 3. Yoysef Aranovitz (signature)

From Koltinan: 4. Sender Linkimer (signature)

From Kveidan: 5. Berl Levit (signature)

6. Gershon Yung (signature)

	7. Motl Druzin	(signature)
From Shvekshne:	8. Naftoli Ziv	(signature)
	9. Moyshe Ment	(signature)
	10. Gutman Shayovitz	(signature)
	11. Zev Ment	(signature)
From Nayshtot:	12. Binyomin Lapin	(signature)
	13. Heyne Elert	(signature)
From Vainute:	14. Yitskhok Markus	(signature)

At a special meeting of a group of Lithuanian Jews, Sunday, July 11, 1948 in Beit Herzl, Feldafing Camp, Engineer Leib Koniuchowski read to them a collective eyewitness report about the work camps around Heidekrug (Szilute), and it was attested to by the participants with their own signatures.

The signatures are certified by the chairman of the camp committee:  
Chairman of the camp committee E. Reif (signature) Feldafing, July 11, 1948

Note: Those who provided the collective eye witness testimony have decided not to publish information on the improper behaviour of the Jew Jozef Smilanski toward his brother Jews, which was mentioned in this collective report.

*Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin New York September 1, 1986*

# THE HEROIC RESISTANCE AND LIQUIDATION OF THE JEWS OF MARCINKONIS

## A Collective Report by Leyb Koniuchowsky

1. **Shloyme Peretz**, born in Marcinkonis on January 10, 1907. At the outbreak of the war between Hitler Germany and the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, he lived in Marcinkonis. Education, public school; occupation, merchant. Father's name, Abraham; mother, Shifre.
2. **Leyb Kobrovsky**, born in Marcinkonis on January 18, 1914. At the outbreak of the war on June 22, 1941, he lived in Marcinkonis. Education, public school. Father's name, Abraham; mother, Khaye, Abraham's first wife.
3. **Khayim Kobrovsky**, born October 15, 1922 in Marcinkonis. At outbreak of the war on June 22, 1941, he lived in Marcinkonis. Education, Polish public school. Father's name, Abraham; mother; Perl Aizenshtat, Abraham Kobrovsky's second wife.
4. **Khane Gorfing**, nee Kobrovsky, born October 1, 1912. Graduated from Polish public school. Father's name, Abraham; mother, Khaye, Abraham's first wife. Leyb, Khayim and Khane are brothers and sister.

## Before the war, June 22, 1941

### Geographic Location of the Town

Marcinkonis, a railway station between Grodno and Vilna, two stations before Grodno. Distance between Marcinkonis and Merez, 21 kilometers; to Aran 20 km. The town is situated on the small stream, Grudi.

Up to the collapse of the Polish state in 1939, the town was within the borders of Poland. When the Red Army in the fall of 1939 occupied Vilna and its environs, the town was given to Lithuania. The town of Marcinkonis was inhabited mostly by Poles and Jews. The surrounding villages were inhabited mostly by Lithuanians and only a few Poles.

## Jewish Population

Three hundred and seventy Jews lived in Marcinkonis when the war broke out on June 22, 1941. This number included men, women and children. The majority of the Jewish population was engaged in commerce, petty trade and handicrafts. The larger Jewish enterprises included: (1) a sawmill and a flour mill belonging to Shloyme Kaplan; (2) a small mushroom factory belonging to the partners Leyzer Rushanski and Yaskulko (who came from Bialystok); (3) a mushroom factory belonging to Abraham Kobrovsky.

There were in Marcinkonis large Jewish lumber merchants and shopkeepers. By and large, the economic life of the Jews was prosperous.

The town had a Hebrew elementary school (Tarbut) of six grades; a Yiddish and Hebrew library, a beys-medresh. Jewish children from nearby communities came to the school in Marcinkonis. The youth was organized in various Zionist movements. The attitude of the Christian population towards their Jewish neighbors was friendly.

## After the outbreak of the war Arrival of the Germans

On the third day of the war, on Tuesday, June 24, the Germans entered the town without a struggle. They did not stop but rapidly marched on. A few Jews managed to leave the town. Armed Lithuanians appeared immediately, sporting white armbands on their sleeves. The great majority of them came from nearby villages and from the interior of Lithuania, They called themselves partisans. The chief leader of the partisans was the Lithuanian J Zuraula from the village of Roduky, eight kilometers from Merez.

The partisans immediately turned their attention to the Jews of Marcinkonis. All able-bodied Jewish men and women had to report for work every morning on the square in front of the municipal building. From there they would be sent out to do all sorts of useless and dirty jobs. Jewish laborers were guarded by armed partisans. The first job consisted of cleaning out all the toilets in the town, while the on-looking partisans ridiculed and beat the Jews.

The Jews were ordered to carry water and chop wood for the partisans and to peel off the bark of the logs near the railway station. The partisans incessantly maltreated them and beat them with sticks and lashes. During the second

week of the war they mercilessly beat up the Jewish merchant Yokhl Kaplan and three other Jews. The Jews received neither pay nor food for their work. After a day's hard labor, accompanied by blows and insults, the Jews would return to their homes before dark.

### **Oppressive Measures and Insults**

On Thursday July 3, 1941 the partisans drove out of their homes shohet David-Leyb Shereshevsky, Raphael Lubotzky, Khayim-Yitskhok Berman and Shimen Latz, all four orthodox Jews. The partisans forced the four Jews to drive a large pig through the streets of the town. Two Jews were made to hold the animal by its ears, one had to hold it by its tail and the fourth Jew had to drive it on with a bread shovel. With bowed heads the four Jews were forced to carry out the orders of the partisans, who regaled themselves with laughter. The townspeople accompanied the "spectacle" with cries of joy and applauded as at a circus.

On the following day, Friday, July 4, the partisans gathered up all the portraits of the Soviet leaders found in the town. They drove all the young people out of their houses and lined them up in a row. Then the partisans addressed the young Jews as follows: "You used to enjoy and kiss the portraits of Soviet leaders. Now you shall gouge out their eyes and lick the dirt from them." The portraits had been dipped in toilets and smeared. The partisans whipped every young Jew who hesitated to kiss the portraits covered with excrement.

The young girl Beyle Pugachevsky was so brutally beaten up that she fainted. The "spectacle" was attended by peasants who gathered from the nearby villages and hamlets and all laughed uproariously at the "ingenious" schemes of the partisans. For several weeks peasants from the surrounding villages would come into town to "enjoy" themselves watching the humiliation of the Jews.

The shohet David Leyb Shereshevsky was once harnessed to a cart and made to draw it through the streets. At the same time the partisans lashed him with their whips.

Moyshe Kobrovsky, a respected member of the community, was arrested by the partisans. Jezukevicius, one of the partisans, accused Kobrovsky of communism and threw him into jail. The partisan also accused the Jew of having torn off the stripes from Lithuanian officers when the Red Army entered Vilna. Moyshe was brutally beaten up. His relatives then succeeded in ransoming him from prison.

At the same time the partisans arrested the brothers Berl and Moyshe Sosnovich and the Jewish wig-maker David Podberesky. Berl was brutally beaten and released. Moyshe Sosnovich and David Podberesky were beaten brutally in the prison every day. One day both Jews were driven out about two hundred meters from the railroad station, on the way to Druskieniki. In a grove near a stream the partisans shot both Jews to death.

Jews from the town were forced to bury the two on the spot where they had been killed. Those were the first two Jewish martyrs in the town of Marcinkonis.

On July 14, 1941 the chief of the Lithuanian division of the German Gestapo, Antanas Jezukevicius, a university student, the secretary Gaidys and others issued various decrees and regulations against the Jews:

- (1) Jews were to bring all their cows, bicycles, machines and food stocks to the municipal office;
- (2) Jews were not to converse with Christians and were to put on yellow stars of David on their shoulders and chest;
- (3) Jews were barred from all places of amusement;
- (4) Between 7:00 p.m. and 5:00 a.m. Jews were not to leave their homes.

Anyone violating these regulations was threatened with shooting.

On one occasion the partisans detained the Jews Peretz Bloch, David Gudovsky, Lozer Rozenlut and others and held them until it was past 7:00 p.m. The Jews were taken to prison where they were subjected to beatings and torture all night long, so that they had to stay in bed for several days.

There were quite a number of such cases. On the day after the decrees were issued, on July 15, all the Jews in Marcinkonis, men, women and children, had to report to the town hall. The commander of the partisans, Zuraula, Gaidys and a few others inspected the yellow stars of David of the Jews to see that they were sewn on properly. Whoever, in their opinion, had not carried out this regulation properly was brutally beaten and lashed.

## **Looting and Indemnities**

During the first weeks of the war, Germans accompanied and directed by partisans, would go through Jewish homes and plunder the possessions of the Jews.

One day Antanos Jezukavicius and two Germans came to the house of Khane Gorfing and they gave her two hours to secure cloth for twelve pairs of trousers. The material for all twelve pairs was to be of the same kind. Khane tried to beg off, explaining that it was impossible for her to carry out the order. She opened the closet and asked them to take all its contents and release her from the impossible assignment. But the Lithuanians assured the Germans that Khane was in a position to secure the cloth.

The Germans threatened to shoot her and her whole family if their demand was not met. Thanks to the assistance of friends, Khane succeeded in filling the quote on time. There were many similar requisitions made to the Jews by Germans and Lithuanians.

Apart from these requisitions there were many cases of plain robbery. Any Lithuanian partisan and any German could take from the helpless Jews whatever he wanted.

In the beginning of September a new partisan commander came to Marcinkonis in place of Zuraula. He came from the interior of Lithuania. On Saturday, September 13 he called to his office the brothers Khonen and Ahron Kobrovsky and ordered them to collect from the Jews all their money, gold, silver and other valuables and deliver them all to him at a specified time. He warned the two brothers that the fate of the Jews was in his hands and that it depended on the manner in which his order would be carried out. Balancing his hands up and down, he said the fate of the Jews was in them as in a pair of scales.

The brothers promised to endeavor to carry out his order. Reluctantly the Jews gave up a part of their valuables. When the two brothers brought the loot to the commandant and laid it out on the table, he became incensed and threw everything on the floor. He warned that if by Sunday, September 14, his request was not properly complied with, he would do what he thought necessary. The collected indemnity he considered insufficient. But he did not name any definite amount.

The two Kobrovsky brothers then called a meeting of the Jews in town in the home of Yeshue Berezovsky. There it was decided to raise more money and valuables. Every family was assigned a definite quota for the indemnity. The Jews sensed the seriousness of the situation and everyone gave according to his means, as decided at the meeting.

The collected sum was brought to the commandant of the partisans. This time he agreed to accept the proffered sum and was pacified for a while. While the Jews were collecting the gold, money and valuables, they learned that the peasants of three villages had received orders from the county office not to leave their villages for three days and stand by with their horses and carts.

## **The Town of Marcinkonis is Detached from Lithuania**

The town of Marcinkonis was at this time situated on the border between Lithuania and White Russia. A dispute arose over the town. The Lithuanians tried hard to have it assigned to the Alita district in Lithuania, while the White Russians in Grodno sought to have it become part of the Grodno district.

The Lithuanians sought before anything else to obtain authority from the Germans to deal with the Jews. Three requests of the Lithuanians were turned down. The German military commander, who was also in charge of the railroad station, did not turn the Jews over to the Lithuanians nor did he allow them to be moved to Alita as he needed them for work at the station.

The Jews of Marcinkonis knew quite well by this time what was transpiring in the nearby Lithuanian villages. They had received detailed information about the fate of the Jews who had been taken from Merez, Aran, Dugai and Bultermonis to a forest in Alita, where they were all shot.

On Friday, September 19, 1941, the Lithuanians spread a rumor that Marcinkonis had been assigned to Lithuania, to the Alita district. To the Jews it meant that they had all been sentenced to death. They hastily gathered their most necessary possessions, abandoned their homes and property and fled to villages in White Russia, where the Jews lived in comparative quiet and were not annihilated.

Some of the Jews fled to the Grodno ghetto and to Druskieniki. Very few Jews remained in town. The German military commander assured the remaining Jews that he would not permit the Lithuanians to take out of the town any Jews whom he needed for work at the railway station. After a while Marcinkonis was made part of the Grodno district of White Russia. German police came into the town and drove out all the Lithuanian officials, police and partisans.

The Jews who had fled began gradually to return to their homes. In many of the houses the doors and windows had been broken and all the goods left by the owners plundered. Little by little the returned Jews began to settle down and to prepare for the winter.

### **The Judenrat**

The German police demanded that a Judenrat be elected to represent the Jews. Elected to the Judenrat were Ahron Kobrovsky, Dr Shmuel Leytman, Yeshuye Berezovsky and Ruven Svirsky. Ahron Kobrovsky was elected President of the Judenrat and Dr Shmuel Leytman Vice-President. The Judenrat was the body representing all the Jews and was the intermediary with the German authorities. The Judenrat supplied the required number of laborers to the Germans. The demands of the Germans were not overly stringent.

A Jewish police force was formed consisting of 6-7 men with Chief Berke Aizenshtat at the head, The police maintained order among the Jews of the town, distributed notices to the Jews about coming to work, etc.

The Judenrat served as a kind of an office for placing orders for the German rulers. The Judenrat had to supply the Germans with anything they demanded. Every Jew in town was assessed a definite tax determined by the Judenrat. The money thus collected was used to fill the "orders" placed by the Germans, to bribe local civil administrators and to purchase "gifts" for the Germans. During the fall of 1941 the Jews of Marcinkonis were near to hundreds of mass graves of Lithuanian Jews who had been shot. The Jews of Marcinkonis worked diligently, carried out the orders of the Germans with meticulous care and they "battered" the Germans profusely. They were always on guard, however, against any unexpected dangers to their lives that could come at any time.

### **In the Ghetto**

Shortly before Passover 1942 the Commissar of the town office informed the Judenrat that the Jews of Marcinkonis would have to settle in a ghetto. He allowed them to remain where they were until after the holiday "so as not to interfere with the Passover," as he explained.

The day after Passover all of the three hundred and seventy Jews had to settle in three small houses, one kilometer from the town. The Judenrat brought the commissar a present of a gold watch, a fine fur coat and some other valuable articles and succeeded in having him reassign for the ghetto, 14 small houses near the railway station. Two days after Passover the Jews moved into this section and they themselves had to close it off with a wooden fence.

The Jewish police force was stationed at the gate and around the fence and it was alerted to report on any possible dangers to the ghetto to the Judenrat and to the Jews of the ghetto. The police force was also charged with the duty of protecting the ghetto population from robbery by Jews inside and by Christians outside.

It was not a hermetically sealed ghetto. Jews could move freely in and out. Some even resumed their pre-war trade with the villagers. Compared to other ghettos, the Jews of the Marcinkonis ghetto lived fairly well. All summer of 1942 they worked at the railway station, on the roads and in the mushroom factory.

In the middle of the summer of 1942 reports began to arrive about the terrible annihilation of Jews in the towns of White Russia. A considerable number of survivors of the carnage came to the little ghetto of Marcinkonis. The Judenrat was responsible for every new arrival in the ghetto. Those who held power over Jewish life in the ghetto warned the Judenrat not to admit any "outside" Jews from the White Russian towns. These Jews had to be concealed. Seventy odd refugees found shelter in the small ghetto in the summer of 1942 and some were sent to Grodno. The arrival of these Jews who had miraculously escaped and the horrid details of Jewish liquidation reported by them created panic among the Jews of Marcinkonis. The inhabitants of the ghetto and the Jewish police intensified their watchfulness.

In the fall of 1942 information reached Marcinkonis about the activities of Red partisans in the forests of White Russia. Some of the young people in the ghetto, together with the refugees began to prepare to leave the ghetto in order to join the Red partisans. The Judenrat knew of these plans and assisted in the efforts to secure arms and to

prepare for armed resistance, in case the ghetto was threatened with liquidation. A sum of money was raised for the purpose and 12 rifles were purchased. The rifles were expected any day in the ghetto but they arrived a few days later than agreed upon.

### **The Heroic Resistance of the Jews of Marcinkonis**

During the night of Sunday, November 1, 1942, the Jewish ghetto police noticed that the ghetto was being surrounded by a heavy and strongly armed guard. They immediately notified the Judenrat and all the Jews in their homes. Many Jews had returned late that evening from work and had gone to bed very tired, but no one slept that night. Everyone anxiously waited for the coming of dawn. Marcinkonis at that time had already been severed from White Russia and joined to the Third Reich.

On Monday, November 2, at 6:00 a.m. the Jews gathered at the gate to go out to their work in the town. But they were not allowed to leave the confines of the ghetto. The members of the Judenrat came to the ghetto gate. The Commissar of the Town Office, accompanied by armed police, told the Judenrat that the Jews would no longer go to work and ordered everyone to pack up their belongings and make ready to leave the ghetto to go to "work" in another place. Freight cars stood in readiness a small distance from the ghetto. The Commissar told the Jews to make haste and that all must be at the station with their families by 8 o'clock, lined up, six in a row.

A few had managed to steal out of the ghetto at night. A few left the ghetto in the morning and stole through the armed ring. Only a few score Jews came to the place before 8 o'clock. The German murderers began to feel nervous. The military commander of the White Russian town of Sobakince had come to help in the successful liquidation of the ghetto. He was a notorious butcher who had experience in several acts of annihilation of Jews in ghettos in White Russia. This time he failed.

He sensed that something was going on which he had not been accustomed to see in the destruction of Jews. The Jews had not even dreamed of carrying out his order to line up.

A group of bold Jews, among them Bentsiyon Kobrovsky, 17 years old, Fayvl Rapoport and others, were preparing to attack the assassin with the "red boots" (this is what the Jews called the commander of Sobakince) and to take away his automatic pistol. The members of the Judenrat made as if to approach him, in order to make a request, but he would not allow them to come near. Ahron Kobrovsky, President of the Judenrat, then cried out: "Jews, whoever wants to live, let him run where he can! The play is with the devil!"

The Jews began to run toward the ghetto fence. They also began to run from the houses towards the ghetto fence. The Commandant with the "red boots" began shooting his automatic pistol in all directions. His subordinates did likewise. Cries of women and children were heard and the groans and rattling sounds of the wounded and the dying. Everybody ran from the ghetto. The fence was broken down. The panic and pandemonium in the ghetto was indescribable. There were a few cases of Jewish men beating the armed murderers with their bare fists and trampling them underfoot.

The shooting on every side became intensified. Many dead and wounded fell. Groans and wails filled the air. The Germans did not succeed in catching alive one single Jew, man, woman or child, to throw into the freight car. One hundred and five Jews remained lying dead in the ghetto and outside the enclosure.

The diabolical plan to transfer the Jews of Marcinkonis to Kelbasin near Grodno and thence to the crematoria in Poland was frustrated by the heroic Jews of Marcinkonis, who paid for their effort with their blood. Like wild beasts the murderers set upon the abandoned Jewish houses looking for hidden Jews. But even there they failed to capture any Jew alive.

The President of the Judenrat, Ahron Kobrovsky, his brother Bentsiyon, Yossly Gilinsky and Berl Aizenshtat had managed to hide in a bunker underneath a house. The Germans discovered the bunker and ordered the Jews to come out. Revolver shots came out of the bunker in reply. The Germans threw two hand grenades into the bunker and put an end to the lives of the brave Jews. A number of women and children had gone into the underground hideouts previously prepared under their homes. Apart from the hide-out of Ahron Kobrovsky not one such place was discovered by the Germans.

Christians, however, who came in search of loot, stumbled upon some of them and reported them to the Germans and their collaborators. That very day hundreds of peasants from the surrounding villages and many of the local inhabitants came to the ghetto.

They volunteered to bury the 105 Jewish victims. Their object was loot. They pulled off the clothes and boots of the Jews and joyously filled their sacks. One hundred meters from the ghetto, near Lake Kastinis, they dug a mass grave into which they threw the dead along with the still living wounded. Peasants who took part in the burial of the fallen heroes later reported that many Jews had been thrown into the grave while still alive. The mass grave is situated not far from the saw mill which belonged to Shloyme Kaplan.

The German constabulary and armed German civilians took part in the siege of the ghetto and the shooting of the Jews. They were joined by a number of Lithuanian police and partisans from nearby Lithuanian towns.

The mass grave remained unfilled with earth for two days. A wild and desperate chase began for the escaped Jews through the whole countryside. But the pursuers failed to seize a single adult alive. Only small children and a few women were apprehended.

A special detachment of the German constabulary came to Marcinkonis to help catch the escaped Jews. They were assisted by many local Lithuanian peasants, who saw a chance for easy loot. The Germans distributed arms to the peasants and promised them the property found on the Jews. Singly and in group formations the peasants then undertook the chase after the hiding Jews. They called it "jeskoti turto" (treasure hunting). They looked upon the Jews who were hiding out as upon fur bearing animals who had to be trapped for the sake of the profit their skins would bring.

Scores of Jewish women, children and men were brought to their death at the hands of peasants. The peasants demanded gold of the Jews. The harrassed Jews called the peasants auksonikai (from the Lithuanian word aukso, meaning gold) and watched out for them. The Lithuanian peasants of the villages Musteika and Darel distinguished themselves especially in the hunt on the Jews.

### **The Family Kobrovsky**

The father Avrohom had been granted the blessing of the command to be fruitful and multiply. Fourteen children; twelve boys and two girls the Kobrovsky parents had raised. All twelve boys were tall, handsome and healthy as the pines in the nearby forests. Both of the sisters matched their brothers in stature and health. The names of the children in order of birth were: Eliyohu, Ahren, Khone, Yitskhok, Borukh, Moyshe, Khane, Leybl, Yakov, Khayim, Bentsiyon, Beyle, Ruven and Fayvl. Eliyohu and Borukh left for Palestine before the war, and thus avoided sharing the suffering of their brothers and sisters.

The last five children were by Avrohom's second wife Perl (Aizenshtat). Avrohom the father died before the war. Ahren and his brave brother Bentsiyon were killed in a hiding place during the liquidation of the Marcinkonis ghetto, on November 2, 1942. Yitskhok Kobrovsky had married years earlier and settled in Grodno.

Some time after the arrival of the Germans in Marcinkonis, Leyb Kobrovsky got himself to Grodno, where his brothers Moyshe and Yakov were already. Khayim and Ruven ran away from the ghetto at the time of the liquidation, and met up with their escaped nephews, Elke and Shloyme Kobrovsky, their brother Khone's sons.

### **Murdered After the Liquidation of the Ghetto**

(1) The wife of Ahren Kobrovsky, Sheyne (nee Kunevsky, from the nearby town Alytus) had left the Marcinkonis ghetto for Grodno a few days before the liquidation, in order to pick up an "order" for the bureau commissar. On November 2, the Grodno ghetto was also surrounded, Sheyne made her way out of the ghetto, took the yellow insignia off her clothes, and arrived by train at the Marcinkonis station, the morning after the liquidation of the Marcinkonis ghetto. There she found out about the disaster in the ghetto and about her murdered husband. From the station, she entered the nearby forest.

The townsman Antanas Tamulevicius spotted her, and immediately informed the Germans. Armed German civilians hurried out into the forest and captured Sheyne Kobrovsky. They shot her by the ghetto the same day.

(2) Perl, the stepmother of Ahren Kobrovsky, together with her 16 yearold daughter Beyle and her 11 year old son Fayvl, lay hidden during the time of the liquidation, together with Mrs Dragutsky. On the third day after the liquidation of the ghetto, Mrs Dragutsky left the hiding place. While running away she fell into a well near the ghetto, and was noticed by local peasants, who informed the Germans. With various threats and tricks, they found out from the unfortunate woman the location of the hiding place. Mrs Perl Kobrovsky and her two children, together with Mrs Dragutsky, were shot the same day. It was, 1942.

(3) Ahren Kobrovsky's son Binyomin, eleven years old, ran away from the ghetto on November 2 to a Polish acquaintance of his father's named Waclow Dakenewitz. A neighbor noticed Binyomin and reported to the Germans, who went off to Dakenewitz looking that same day. The Germans didn't recognize Binyomin as a Jew, because his appearance was not characteristically Jewish, and he spoke Polish and Lithuanian well. To the German's question who he was; Binyomin answered that he was from a nearby village. Dakenevitz explained that he didn't know who the boy was. The Germans took Binyomin to Marcinkonis. Peasants from the town recognized him. The Lithuanian policeman Jonas Labonas led the child off near the mass grave and shot him. The Lithuanian murderer threw him into the mass grave, badly wounded, but still alive. That was on the day the ghetto was liquidated.

(4) A woman from Merez (Merkine) had brought her sick daughter Rivele, who was eight years old, into the Marcinkonis hospital before the outbreak of the war. The mother had come from Merez several times to visit her Rivele. After the shootings of Merez Jews, during the holiday season in 1941, little Rivele was left bereft of both parents. The Polish hospital doctor, who was known to be descended from Jews himself, looked after Rivele and brought her to health. The doctor informed the Judenrat about the little girl. Ahren Kobrovsky took Rivele into his home and kept her as if she were his own child. Ahren's boy Leyzerl grew accustomed to Rivele, and the two played together like brother and sister. Leyzerl was just the same age as his friend Rivele. Precisely one year Rivele lived with the Kobrovskys, who took the place of her parents. When the ghetto was liquidated, the two children ran away together and hid for three entire days in a forest. By day they lay in the forest. At night they left the forest for the nearby village to seek food. The third night they went to the peasant Raula Miskinys. He fed both children and then led them into the barn to sleep. The Germans were told about the two children, it is not known by whom, and they found the two children sleeping in the barn. The Lithuanian policeman Jonas Labonas and the Pole Falkowsky, both townspeople, led both children off to the open mass grave and shot them.

When the murderers left, Rivele regained consciousness and recovered. As it turned out, she was only lightly wounded. Rivele crept out of the mass grave and ran back into the forest. The eyewitness Khane Gorfing ran away from the ghetto with her boy Khayiml into the forest and became separated from him. Searching for her boy, she found Rivele. Rivele was wounded in the side, and a thumb of one hand was shot off. Rivele wasn't crying, and like a grown up she looked at her bloodied hand and at her side. Khane bandaged her hand and side. It was quite cold outside in the evenings. On one foot all she had was a sock; on the second, a torn shoe. Rivele was terrified and pale. She clung to Khane as if to her own mother. She was hungry, and had been collecting berries in the forest. Rivele and Khane wandered around the forest until the evening.

At nightfall the two went into an open stall in the middle of the fields in a settlement near the town of Marcinkonis, belonging to the peasant Motejus Mackelis. In the stall they found an 18-year-old girl named Zelde Novik, and a man from Butrimonys, a beltmaker by trade, with his wife. The beltmaker and his wife had escaped the slaughter of the Jews of Butrimonys and come to Marcinkonis. At the peasant's, Khane met her husband Yitskhok, who had escaped the ghetto with their second son Shimele. She found her lost child Khayiml at nightfall. The family Gorfing left the place at midnight for another village. The little wounded Rivele remained in the stall with the other Jews.

(5) Wandering through the forests, the Jews from Butrimonys took Rivele along and met more Jews. All of them together went into the forest called Natzer Pushcha. A young peasant led the way. When they had come close to the village Mancigeriai in the woods, they sat down to rest and made a bonfire to dry out their wet clothes and warm themselves.

The infamous Jew-killer at Ponar near Vilna, the Lithuanian Vincas Likauskas from the village of Mancigeriai, noticed the Jews sitting by the fire. Fifteen Jews had already come together, escapees from the ghetto on November 2.

Likauskas reported about the Jews to German border guards and together with them, he surrounded the group of Jews and opened fire on them with various weapons. Henokh Novik, Fayvl Rapoport and his 14 year old daughter Fanye, the beltmaker from Butrimonys and his wife, the wife of the Marcinkonis dentist Shvartsman, 35 year old Leye Tikulsky, Rivele Magadowsky, aged 18, and little Rivele from Merez, who had escaped the Marcinkonis ghetto and then the grave lost their lives.

Those of the group who survived were: Rokhel Magadowsky, Dine Sane Kravetsky from Alytus, Yeshayohu Rozenlut, Berl Novik, Zelde Novik, and Moyshe Tikulsky.

(6) Khone was killed while escaping from the ghetto. His wife, Rivke Kovrovsky, aged 38, and her little daughter Feygele couldn't run from the ghetto, because Feygele lay sick. The Germans left the ghetto the same day. Village peasants and town dwellers let themselves plunder the abandoned Jewish possessions. The Pole Mecislaw Kochansky came to rob Rivke Kovrovsky, and noticed the mother and child in their hideout. Mother and daughter didn't try very hard to hide from their neighbor.

Kochansky clearly didn't want to be a robber, and decided better to be an heir to his Jewish neighbors. He reported the mother and her sick child to the Germans. The same day, November 2, Rivke Kovrovsky and Feygele were shot in the ghetto.

(7) The morning after the slaughter in the ghetto, six surviving women came to the Pole Juzef Kawalier, who lived in a settlement nearby Marcinkonis. The women wanted to buy food from the peasant. Among the six women was the girl Beyle Beresovsky. Juzef used to be a frequent guest of Beyle's family and was well acquainted with Beyle. Juzef led the six exhausted women into a barn and promised to bring them food. He locked the barn. The women, trusting the peasant, lay down to sleep. Juzef brought armed Germans to the women instead of food. The six women were led off to the open mass grave of the 105, and they were shot the same day, November 3,

(8) Aleksandras Jurelevicius and his brother-in-law Jonas Kaseta voluntarily assisted in the liquidation of the ghetto. They furthermore helped to annihilate the hidden Jews. Jonas was taken into the Marcinkonis police force for his "services". Both of them had lived with the Jews for years and worked for them. The same two bandits, together with a third bandit from the town named Falkovsky, attacked Jews hidden in a forest near the village Darzel, eight kilometers from Marcinkonis. The group consisted of five women and two men. Killed on the spot in the attack were: 16-year-old Rokhel Berezovsky, B. Karzmer, Nokhum Pogacevski aged 17 and his sister Vele aged 14. Three out of the group survived: Yeshayohu Berezovsky, a former member of the Judenrat; his daughter Bashe and his niece Peshe Karzmer. These three lived to see the Liberation. The attack occurred November 20, 1942.

(9) In the same village of Darzel Fayvl Karzmer was killed (whose wife had died in the forest near the same village, see case 8), as was Yerakhmiel Shapiro and his wife. The group wandered in the area looking for food. Fayvl Karzmer went to the mayor Kazimir Miskinys. Germans caught and shot him. Yerakhmiel Shapiro and his wife saw Germans in the village and began to run away. They were both shot by the Germans.

(10) The young boy Shmuel Novik, together with a Jewish girl, ran away from the ghetto and hid in the forests and fields for a week. At the home of a peasant named Bladas in the village of Drucminiai, in the county of Rudno, the two youth hoped to get weapons. The peasant was well acquainted with Shmuel's father. Shmuel came into the village at night and instead of the peasant he knew, he went to the ranger Povidaike. The ranger grabbed his gun, arrested Shmuel and led him off to the White Russian town Sobakince, where he was shot.

Shmuel's comrade, a nurse, stood outside waiting. Seeing her comrade being led under arrest, she ran away. Some time later she made her way to a group of Red partisans and remained alive. She had come to Marcinkonis from the Soviet Union. At the outbreak of the war, she hadn't managed to return.

(11) The elderly woman Libe Lubotsky and Mrs Hene Krenice came, after escaping the slaughter in the ghetto, to the village of Krakslai and had already crossed the border stream Uli into White Russia. German border guards stopped the two women and shot them on the spot. This was four days after escaping from the slaughter in the ghetto, November 6, 1942.

(12) Tzemakh Shelkovski was wounded while escaping from the ghetto; Together with Mrs Freydl Rosenlut and her two small children Henokh (aged 5) and Itele (aged 4) Tzemakh arrived at a forest near the village of Linici, ten kilometers from Marcinkonis, on the fourth day after escaping from the ghetto. Aleksandras Jurelevicius, a worker at the Marcinkonis railroad station, spotted the four Jews sitting in the forest. Tzemakh was swollen from his wound. Both children's feet were frozen. They were unable to run further. Jurelevicius and some Germans caught the four unlucky Jews and shot them on the spot, the sixth of November, 1942.

(13) Yeshayohu Rozenlut and his wife Vite, their children Hirshl, aged 15, Henele and their youngest child, aged 6, escaped from the Marcinkonis ghetto on the day of the liquidation. They hid in forests, fields and villages until the end of 1942. Shortly before New Year's 1943 the family arrived at the forest "Natzar Pushcha" and began to set up a hiding place for themselves. A few days later nine Lithuanian peasants armed with rifles attacked them, opening fire on the family from all sides. Yeshohu and his elder son Hirshl tore away from those surrounding them and escaped.

Several hours later both returned to see what had become of their family. The wife and the youngest boy lay shot on the ground. Henele was badly wounded. The father was unable to help her in the circumstances, and she died several days later.

The nine Lithuanian peasants who participated in the attack were from the village of Pademb, Rudno County, in the region of Alytus. Their names remain unknown. In that village at that time there were tens of peasants, who volunteered to help the Germans catch Jews hidden in the area. They were strongly attracted by the possibility of

finding the Jews' assets. When they searched the helpless Jews, they used the expression "seeking fortunes" (in their language, jeskoti turto). For these murderers, hunting Jews was a kind of gold digging, a way to get rich quick.

(14) Yeshayohu Rozenlut and his son Hirshf found a 12-year-old girl from Marcinkonis, Khasele Shelkovitsh, while they were wandering around the forest. They took her with them. Several days later, they met Ayzik Krenice (see case 19), Beinish and Khencinski. All six stayed together for a long time. One time the latter three men went into their dugout to sleep. They took along a piece of tin, bearing coals from their fire, around which Yeshayohu Rozenlut and the two children stood watch. Before going to sleep, the three men closed the opening of the bunker. The next morning, Rozenlut found them dead; a white foam dribble from their mouths. The three men had been choked by smoked. Rosenblut remained in the bunker for quite some time, because potatoes had been laid in there for the entire winter.

Some time after, Rozenlut enlisted Khasele in a detail of Red partisans. He never met Khasele again. Yeshayohu and his son remained alive.

(15) The Jews of Marcinkonis Alter Grocki, aged 40 and Sheyne Zabner, aged 40, with her girl Rivele, aged 6, stayed together for a long time, conducting a hard and bitter struggle for their daily life. A young boy named Noah clung to the three Jews. His father David Magadovski, aged 45, had hung himself after the Marcinkonis ghetto was surrounded by the Germans. While robbing Jewish houses, peasants found him hanging and reported to the Germans.

The Jews kept Noah close and watched him like their own child. By day they hid themselves. At night they sought food from the peasants in the villages. In the village of Tresnik, Merez (Merkine) County, the four Jews were caught and led off to the Merez jail. The peasants of the village handed over the four Jews. A policeman from the same town arrested them. For a certain time the four Jews were taken to the prisons in surrounding towns. The survivors do not know where the four Jews died.

(16) Six kilometers from Marcinkonis in a forest, on the road leading to the village of Linici, lived a Russian ranger. An elderly Jew who had run away from the Grodno ghetto came to this ranger and received food and the chance to rest. A worker from Marcinkonis by the name of Karlon came to the ranger. He immediately realized that a Jew was sitting at the table. Karlon wanted to call in to Marcinkonis about the Jew immediately. The Russian begged Karlon not to kill an innocent person. Karlon threatened to inform on the Russian as well. The Jew begged Karlon to let him live, and offered him everything he possessed. Karlon didn't agree. The Jew was already severely weakened and the worker was a young, healthy peasant. Karlon called the Marcinkonis police from the ranger's.

The Lithuanian policemen Luozas Cesnulevicius and Falkowsky, together with several German gendarmes came riding to the ranger. They forced the Jew to take off his overclothes, drove him into the nearby woods and shot him. The Germans took the Jew's watch. The two policeman shared his overclothes.

(17) While escaping from the ghetto, Monday November 2, Mrs. Hene Frukhtenber was wounded in the arm. While she wandered through the fields for some time, the bone of the wounded arm began to rot. She disguised herself as a village peasant woman and went to the hospital several times. The doctor, who was descended from Jews, cured Hene and treated her well. A Lithuanian girl named Jacente "Maskaukaite" reported Hene to the Germans, who arrested Hene and carried her to prison. Some time later, they shot her in Marcinkonis, near the train station.

(18) Joseph Kravetz with his wife, two sons and a daughter lived before the war in a village called Ashoshnikis. After the Marcinkonis Jews were confined to the ghetto, the family was driven into the ghetto. Before being taken to the ghetto the family Kravetz left their entire fortune along with a sewing machine in the care of a Lithuanian peasant, who was a neighbor of theirs in the same village.

When the ghetto was liquidated the entire family managed to escape to a peasant of their acquaintance named Jonas Averka who lived on a settlement two kilometers from the village of Musteika. Joseph Kravetz went off to the village of Ashoshnikis to his former neighbor to pick up the sewing machine and give it to the peasant Averka for hiding him and his family. His former neighbor asked Joseph to come the next morning; he would have the machine ready. The former neighbor followed Joseph and found out who was hiding the family Kravetz. The next morning German gendarmes and two Lithuanian policemen came to the peasant Averka. They found the Kravetz family and led them off to the village of Ashoshnikis. The Lithuanian policemen, the brothers Veiksneriai from the village Svendubri, five kilometers from Druskinikai shot the entire Kravetz family in the village of Ashoshnikis. The good peasant Averka spent six months in prison for trying to save Jews.

(19) The Jews Zalmen Kunyavsky, Joseph Rapaport and his brother Yankele were killed by the Lithuanian brothers Veiksneriai. The three youths had hidden themselves in a forest three kilometers from the village of Musteika, after escaping from the ghetto. The peasant Makoris Karalius, from Musteika, found out about the three Jews and

immediately reported to the police in Ashoshnikis. The brothers Veiksneriai, together with several other policemen, surrounded the indicated place and shot the three Jews. Together with the three Jewish youths, Ayzik Krenice from Marcinkonis was hiding in the forest. He managed to survive. He later recounted the episode to the hidden Jews in the area. (See case 14).

(20) The woman Zlate Krenice hid in the village Marcinkonis. The Lithuanian townsman Julius Korsakas caught Zlate in the village took her himself to the Germans in town, who immediately shot her. The Lithuanian Korsakas had worked for Jews in town his whole life, and had always gotten along well with them.

(21) A few weeks after the liquidation of the ghetto, Mrs Sara Z"r and her small child Hirshele, aged 4, hid in a shanty of the Lithuanian townsman Jonas Krikstapas in the village Marcinkonis, one kilometer from town. The peasant spotted the mother and child and immediately reported them to the police. To the shanty came the infamous murderer Jonas Labonas, who shot the mother and child on the spot.

(22) During the attack on fifteen Jews in a forest near the village Mancigeriai (see case 5), Moyshe Tekulsky ran away wounded and came running to the village Marcinkonis, one kilometer from the town of Marcinkonis. Moyshe went to the farmer Petras Vainelevicius. His neighbor Ana Filimoncik noticed this, and reported to the Germans in town. Two Germans who came shot Moyshe next to Ana's house. Moyshe had hidden some of his better possessions with the peasant woman.

(23) Mrs Sheyne Sosnovitz and her two girls Miriam and Sara, aged 5 and 7, were captured in the village Darzel by Germans, at the home of the peasant Motejus Kibirktis. Mrs Sosnovitz and her two children were shot in their village. The peasant himself was suspected of having reported on the three women in the town of Marcinkonis.

(24) About one month after escaping from the ghetto, a group of 21 Jews; men, women and children were gathered in a bunker in the forest near the village of Musteika. Three peasants found out about the hidden group of Jews and immediately reported to the Germans in Marcinkonis. German gendarmes surrounded the bunker, fired on the area with machine guns and finally threw two hand grenades into the bunker. All 21 Jews were killed. Among the Jews killed in the bunker were: Yosl Khayet with his wife and three children; Yosl Jurberg with a daughter and a son-in-law, and a wounded small child; Rakhmiel Sosnovitz with his wife and a small child; Ruven Svirski, Sara Zalishanski, aged 28, Blume Niselevitz, aged 30, with a son. Yerakhmiel's brother Moyshe Sosnovitz was among the first two Jewish victims in town, during the first days of the war.

Blume Niselevitz and her son were refugees from the nearby town of Merecs (Merkine). The three peasants from the village of Musteika who betrayed the 21 Jew were: Mocius and Eduardas Sakovicus, and Svirskis.

(25) In the same forest, near the village of Musteika, a second group of Jews was hiding. Peasants from the village found out about the Jews and together with the German gendarmes, they surrounded the group of Jews and shot all of them. Among those killed in the group were: Shloyme Dragutsky with a daughter, aged 21; Yudl Kobrovsky with his wife and child; Shloyme Zahner and his 16 year-old daughter Beyle; and Feyge Krenice, aged 15.

The peasants who betrayed them were J Tamulevicius and Makoras Karalius.

(26) Motl Neierman, a butcher, an invalid, escaped the slaughter with a small child in his arms. For some time he wandered and hid. Next to the village of Darzel Germans stopped him and shot him together with his small child.

(27) In the neighborhood of the village Dar el small Jewish children wandered. They had become separated from their parents while running away from the ghetto during the liquidation. Many of the children's parents died while running away. In that tragic time, the small children were like "grown up Jews."

They understood clearly the dangers hanging over their young lives. This was just before New Year's 1943. Many of them had frozen hands or feet. The children knew how to disguise themselves. They made themselves little bags like the Lithuanian children who went to the village schools. With these bags in their hands the children made their way across the villages begging for a piece of bread. The children slept outdoors under the open sky, or else they would steal into a barn.

The fields and pastures were already filled with snow and it was already quite cold. Three little children named Rabinovitsh: Shloymele; his sister Itele and the youngest sister Sorele, wandered through the fields and villages until Sore's feet became frozen. Shloymele could no longer help his unfortunate younger sister and handed her over to a peasant woman in the village of Kopinikis. For several days the peasant woman kept the five year old Sore. Neighbors found out about it. The peasant woman became afraid to keep Sore any longer and reported her to the Germans in Marcinkonis.

The same woman later told those who participated in the collective eyewitness testimony: The Germans who came interrogated Sore and wanted to find out where she had slept the whole time, and where her brother and sister were. Sore was careful to answer in such a way as not to harm them. Sore was a clever and beautiful child. One of the high-ranking Germans took out his revolver and aimed at Sore. The child began to smile. The German sighed and put his revolver back into its holster.

Other Germans tried to shoot Sorele. But the German murderers' hands were too weak. Sorele's moist clever eyes, her looks filled with prayers for mercy, softened the cruel hearts of the German murderers, who stood confused and ashamed.

Together with the Germans stood a Lithuanian policeman named Gulgis from the village of Margewitz, nine kilometers from Marcinkonis. Gulgis was famous for having shot Jews at Ponar near Vilna. You can't shoot a Jewish girl? Give her to me! The Lithuanian murderer caught Sore out with one hand and shot her with the other.

(28) A larger group of small children wandered in the area of the villages of Darzel and Margewitz. Next to the forest stood an unfinished, roofless barn. By day the children would beg for food in the nearby villages. At night they would come into the barn. Thick snow fell, and the children didn't know how to cover the footprints of their half bare feet in the snow. Germans discovered the spot. In the barn they found 18-20 small children, lying clinging to one another half-frozen on a layer of straw on the ground. The Germans shot all of the children next to the barn in the woods. On that tragic day, about three weeks after the liquidation of the Marcinkonis ghetto, the Germans with the help of Lithuanians ended the wandering of Jewish children in that area.

Among the children shot were: Khaykele Zar, aged 11 and her brother Shimele, aged 9; a boy named Ayzikl Pugachevsky, aged 7; a boy named Ezra Blakh, aged 8 and his sister Beyle, 15 years old.

The participant in the collective testimony Khayim Kobrovsky, together with several other Jews, were in the region several days before the shooting of the children and saw the children in the barn, but they could not help them in any way and had no place to bring them.

Some of the Jews who had escaped from the ghetto, came together near the village of Musteika, in a forest. In this group was also one of the witnesses, Shloyme Peretz with his little daughter (3 years old), his mother Shifre and his sister Libe. Shloyme's wife, Sheine-Khaye and his father Abraham perished in the ghetto.

The group also included Abraham Weinberg with his three sons: Khayim, Leybl and Motl; the family Pilevsky, Khayim Shloyme with his wife Khane, a son, Efrayim and a daughter, Sarah. Several days after the liquidation of the ghetto some 20 Jews, men, women and children, gathered in the forest.

These Jews "settled" in tents, covered with branches and foliage, three kilometers' distance from the village of Musteika.

After a few days the Jews established contact with the Lithuanian peasant, Jonas Balevicius, in the village of Musteika. He was one of the few truly fine peasants who fully sympathized with the plight of the Jews and did all he could to help them. He was a good friend of the Kobrovskys.

Jonas would get money from the Jews and buy them food, traveling many miles to make the purchases and to bring the provisions to the forest. A few days after they settled in the forest he sold the Jews three rifles and ninety bullets, for which the Jews paid him 25 rubles in gold. The possession of firearms made the Jews feel more secure.

On November 2, when the ghetto of Marcinkonis was liquidated, the ghettos in the neighboring towns and in Grodno were also liquidated. The three brothers Kobrovsky, Moyshe, Leyb and Jacob escaped from the Grodno ghetto on November 2. Other Jews escaped from Grodno together with these three brothers, including the daughter of the Jewish druggist of the Lithuanian town of Daugai, Miriam, the young man from Visei, Meyer Khmilevsky and others.

The Grodno Jews went to stay with friendly peasants in Lithuanian villages. The three Kobrovsky brothers with the girl from Daugai came to a peasant they knew by the name of Balevicius who brought them to the Jews in their hiding place in the forest. This was exactly one week after the flight from the ghetto. The brothers began looking for some of their close friends. From the peasants they learned who had perished in the ghetto. Friendly peasants in the village of Kupiniskis informed them that their sister Khane with her husband Yitskhok Gorfing and their two boys had fled the ghetto and were now in the neighborhood. But all their efforts to locate their sister and her family were in vain. They asked the peasants they knew in the surrounding villages to let them know as soon as they learned anything.

While looking for their sister and her family in the forest, near Musteika, they came upon a group of three Jews: Ayzik Krenica, Joseph Rapoport and their cousin Khayele (15 years old) who was Khonon's daughter. The brothers Kobrovsky took Khayele along to her brothers Elke and Shloyme. Joseph Rapoport and Ayzik Krenica perished a short time later (Rapoport in the forest near Musteika and Krenica suffocated in a bunker).

During this time the Jews obtained, with the help of friendly peasants of the nearby village of Kupiniskis, more arms: two more rifles, a pistol and three hand grenades.

The cold and the snow made it impossible to continue hiding in the same place. Shloyme Kobrovsky had been wounded while fleeing the ghetto and he could not think of recovering in wintertime in the forest. The Jews broke up into small groups. The Kobrovsky family with the girl from Daugai went to a peasant in the village of Kupini kis. Khane Aizenshtadt, her daughter-in-law Gitl with her child and Khane's son Ayzik went to live with another peasant in the same village. Shloyme Peretz with his family and the rest of the group went further into the forest belt of White Russia known as "Russkaya Pushcha".

### **Abraham Vidlansky and His Desperate Struggle for His Life**

The family Kobrovsky obtained space for a certain sum of money with a peasant named Gudas Balis in the village of Azerelis on a settlement near the village of Kupinikis. The brothers Kobrovsky hoped to spend part of the winter there, until their nephew Shloyme would regain his health. They rested there for one week only. The Lithuanian peasant Balis Bakanauskas and his family were neighbors of the peasant Balis Gudas.

This peasant had taken in for several days, a man named Abraham Vidlansky from Aran, who had managed to escape the slaughter of Jews in his hometown of Aran, then from Redune and finally from the slaughter of Jews in Pariece. That ghetto was also liquidated on November 2, 1942. The Jews had been led out to Kelbasin, near Grodno. Late at night, lying on a bench at the peasant's home, Abraham noticed the peasant testing out the material of his new suit. The next day the peasant was in Marcinkonis. In the evening he came back bringing medicine for Abraham. The peasant suggested that Abraham climb up on the oven, because he was expecting guests.

After he had been lying on top of the oven a short time, the door opened and in came a German gendarme with the Lithuanian Jonas Labonas, a policeman. The gendarme and the policemen had originally come into the village to go to the house where the Kobrovsky brothers were.

The Kobrovsky brothers ordered the housewife to go into a corner. They had four rifles, a pistol and a hand grenade. The German and the Lithuanian went straight to their house. The four rifles and the pistol were ready and aimed at the door. The peasant woman knelt and murmured a prayer to Jesus Christ. At that moment the German and the Lithuanian spotted the wife of the peasant, to whom they actually had come. They asked where the peasant Bakanauskas lived. The woman showed them her house.

The Lithuanian and the German went there. The Kobrovsky brothers and their friends got out through a rear window into a nearby forest.

The German and the Lithuanian dragged Abraham down from the oven and asked if there were other Jews. To convince the neighbors that there were no Jews at her place, the peasant woman Gudas called the German in for a drink, shortly after the Kobrovskys ran away. Abraham was left at Labonas'.

Abraham attacked him, and tried to take away his rifle. There was a life and death struggle. Abraham bit the Lithuanian murderer with his teeth. He bloodied his face with his nails. Abraham had already torn the rifle away from the Lithuanian and shot at him, but then, the rifle jammed. The peasant Bolis Bakanauskas came to help the policeman, and then also his son, with an axe.

Abraham was weakened by blows from the axe on his back. Then the policeman shot, but missed. The German was sitting quietly in the other house, from which the Kobrovskys had escaped a short time earlier. He sat eating and drinking homemade alcohol. Hearing a shot, he ran in to Bolis Bakanauskas' house, where Abraham was struggling with the Lithuanian murderer.

He immediately ordered Abraham to strip to his underwear and made ready to take him outside and shoot him. Abraham tore away toward the door, struck the German in his face and fell out into the darkness outside.

It was a cold, wintry night. A powerful storm wind blew drifts of snow around in the air. The sharpest eyes would not have been able to see more than a few meters forward. Half-naked in his underwear, Abraham jumped over a

fence and fell into a snowdrift semi-conscious. The German and the Lithuanian chased after him and shot. However, they neither hit him nor saw him. They ran past him to the nearby forest. Abraham recovered and ran in a different direction into the forest and from there into a second village. He begged some old clothes from a peasant woman. Some time later he made his way to the "Russkaya Pushcha" to the Kobrovsky brothers and was freed together with them.

### **The Tragedy of the Aizenshtat Family**

Aroused and distressed by his failure, the peasant Bolis Bakanauskas led the German and the Lithuanian policeman away to another peasant in the same village, where the family Aizenshtat were hiding.

Fortunately, the boy Ayzik Aizenshtat was out of the house. Seeing the German and the policeman coming, he ran away. His sister-in-law Gitl Aizenshtat hid under the bed. The Lithuanian and the German led out the elderly woman Khane Aizenshtat together with Gitl's little boy Yudele and shot them in the courtyard. Gitl lay under the bed and heard the crying and screaming of her boy Yudele. The murderers didn't look under the bed, and Gitl remained alive.

The peasant Bakanauskas then argued with the policeman over the possessions of Gitl's stepmother Khane and her child Yudele. Some time later Ayzik Aizenshtat and Gitl came to Shloyme Peretz's group in the "Russkaya Pushcha" and remained alive.

### **The Bold Raid on a Bakery in Marcinkonis**

After escaping from the peasant Bolis Gudas the entire Kobrovsky family went into the "Russkaya Pushcha". They had finally convinced themselves that it was impossible to survive among peasants. The Daugai girl went with them. While wandering around they found Shloyme Peretz and other of his group who had remained in the Pushcha. They found other escaped Jews as well. A few tens of Jews gathered together.

They decided to prepare several bunkers and get ready to spend the winter in the Pushcha. The men used to "organize" food at night from neighboring villages. They bought with money; but also didn't stop at taking food with the help of guns. But precisely these trips to the villages meant the danger of being discovered by peasants, who sought the Jews' "fortunes".

It wasn't always possible to disguise footprints in the snow. Thus it was decided to take steps to obtain at once a large amount of bread and other supplies. Moyshe Kobrovsky proposed a bold plan to everyone. It was two days before New Year's 1943. Moyshe proposed a raid on a bakery in the town of Marcinkonis. Some of the Jews were against the plan. It was a beautiful moonlit night before New Year's. A group of eight men under the command of Moyshe Kobrovsky left the bunkers in the "Russkaya Pushcha" and approached their hometown of Marcinkonis through the forest.

With their hearts pounding, they stepped through deep, creaking snow. Carefully they approached the bakery one by one. Leyb Kobrovsky made his way to a window slowly and quietly, scratched out the putty and removed a pane. Then he opened a window and entered the bakery. After him went Moyshe and their nephew Elke.

Two bakers, a German and a civilian Pole, slept soundly and seemed to be enjoying their dreams. They were slowly woken up. Two pairs of sleepy eyes filled with terror and in astonishment saw rifles stretched out before them. The Kobrovskys ordered them with a smile to keep quiet and not to budge from the spot.

In honor of the New Year the shelves were full of small loaves of military bread, challahs and fancily decorated tortes with various items baked out of white flour. The warm bakery air aroused the appetites of the starving, exhausted Kobrovskys. The brown, fresh challahs were snatched into the dirty hands of the hungry Jews and wolfed down.

The brave Jews carried off into the nearby forest over 600 kilos of bread loafs, challahs, pastries and fancy New Year's cakes. Outside, a few fighters always stood ready to receive any unwelcome guests. Everything went well according to the plan they had worked out. Everything that the Jews found baked and ready for the German border garrison they carried three kilometers into the forest and disguised well. The entire operation lasted from midnight until 6:00 a.m. The Jews carried the bread out twice. The third time they all made ready to go. They tied up the German and shot him in the bakery. They ordered the Pole not to report anything for at least four hours.

They "promised" that if he didn't follow their orders they would "visit" and shoot him and his entire family. The Pole followed their order.

In the course of two evenings the Jews carried the bread from the forest next to Marcinkonis into the "Russkaya Pushcha. Having so much bread, the Jews less often risked going into the villages. For two full months the Jews had enough bread. The tortes and some of the challahs they held in reserve for their sister Khane, her husband and children, whom they had not yet managed to find.

## **The Disrupted New Year**

That year, the Germans' New Year was ruined. The border garrison was left without bread and without challahs. The bold raid made the Germans and their followers fearful, and they stopped living peacefully next to the huge mass grave of the men, women and children shot at the time of the liquidation of the ghetto.

The Polish baker was immediately arrested. He was tortured and interrogated, and then released. The Pole wanted to show his loyalty and friendship to the two gendarmes in town and organized a party for them. There were women at the party, and everyone got drunk, ate and danced.

Two Lithuanian policemen in town, the infamous Jew-murderer Jonas Labonas and his comrade Jonas Miskinys, informed the bureau commissar about the party. Both German gendarmes were arrested on suspicion of having murdered the German baker in cahoots with the Polish baker and robbed the bakery before New Year's. Both gendarmes were led off to the Grodno prison. After a lengthy investigation both were freed and they returned to Marcinkonis. They found out that the two Lithuanian policeman had libeled them.

At the beginning of February 1943, the two policemen Labonas and Miskinys stood watch one evening in front of the building where the bureau commissar lived. The two gendarmes disarmed the policemen and shot them on the spot.

The Kobrovskys often visited their hometown at night. They had a confidante, the Lithuanian Juozas Jezukevicius (Krauciunas), who obtained soap, razor blades and tobacco for the Jews in exchange for money.

On just the night when the two policemen were shot, they were in town. Jezukevicius was certain that the Kobrovskys had done it. He told them what an impression the attack had made in town and in the entire area. The Kobrovskys didn't let on that it hadn't been their work.

The next day a rumor went around the town that the two policemen had been killed by the Kobrovskys. The bureau commissar left his house in terror and settled in the house occupied by the gendarmerie. In town and in the surrounding villages the rumor spread that the sons of Abraham had shot the two policemen. People began to say that the Germans were offering a bounty of a centner (50 kilograms) of sugar and a thousand marks for catching one of the Abramuikai (the sons of Abraham, in Lithuanian).

But catching the Kobrovsky brothers wasn't so easy. They had meanwhile obtained more and better weapons for the group, and they boldly ignored all of the laws and orders against Jews in general and against themselves in particular. But they had women and children with them, and they were rather careful.

After New Year's the peasants of the surrounding villages began carrying out of the swamps the hay they had cut during the summer. Taking out the hay during the summer is impossible, so the peasants do it in winter when the swamps are frozen solid.

To avoid being spotted by peasants, the Jews had to leave, and they moved 4 kilometers deeper into the forest. They built three bunkers and settled in for the winter. They got everything they needed from peasants with the help of their weapons. They also got themselves a horse and sled, and used to ride far from their base to see peasant acquaintances in distant villages, to get food and weapons. During that time they made confidences with people in all the villages, who provided them with important news, food and weapons.

At that time the Kobrovsky brothers established relations with the peasant Pranas Kaset from the village of Kaset, nine kilometers from Marcinkonis. The Lithuanian peasant was a very good man and helped the Jews in their difficult struggle for life.

## **The Village of Arodisce**

This was a White Russian village some seven kilometers from the winter bunker where the Kobrovskys and the rest of their group lived.

In the forests at that time there were surviving Jews from White Russian towns and a few wandering groups of Red Army soldiers, escapees from prisoner of war camps. They often raided and robbed peasants, most often those who were known for their commitment to the Germans. The rest of the attacks did a lot of harm to the Jews hidden in the forest. There began to be inspections in the villages. The Germans and their accomplices did not rest. On the other side of the village of Arodie, across from the winter bunkers of the Jews from Marcinkonis, about twenty kilometers distant, some fifteen Jews who had survived the slaughters in White Russian towns maintained themselves. They were in the forest called Wilci-Nori in the Russkaya Pushcha. This group of Jews were well armed.

A forester from a nearby village found out about them and reported to the Germans. Apparently the forester underestimated the capacity of the group to defend themselves. He and seven armed Germans approached the group of Jews. All seven Germans were felled by machine gun fire. The forester managed to escape. The possessions and weapons of the seven Germans who had been shot fell to the brave Jews in the Wil i-Nori forest. This was in the beginning of February 1943. One Jew from among the White Russian group fell then.

A few weeks later a detail of Germans came to Arodisce and shot all of the inhabitants, including women and children. Four men managed to escape. These four White Russians, too, began to hide in the forests of the Russkaya Pushcha.

## **The Gorfing Family Is Brought to the Russkaya Pushcha**

After leaving little Rivele from Merez with a group of Jews at a settlement near Marcinkonis (case number 4), Khane and her husband Yitskhok, together with their two boys Shimon (aged 7) and Khayiml (aged 3) left with no hope of finding a hideout with a peasant. They wandered around for a long time through the forests and fields. The struggle for mere daily life was hard, especially with two helpless children. They suffered cold, wet, hunger and fear of the Lithuanian peasants, who sought "turto" fortunes.

Coming into a forest near the lake Trikampis, between the villages of Rudi-Kaset and Marcinkonis, they built themselves a little bunker and lived there from November 17 1942 until one day before New Year's 1943.

It was terribly cold in the forest. Snowdrifts surrounded them on all sides. At night Yitskhok left the forest and went to buy food from peasants in the villages. Individual peasants did not have enough to sell, and in order to put together a package, Yitskhok had to make the rounds of several villages and buy from many peasants. Thus Yitskhok left the forest when it was snowing or stormy.

Once Yitskhok noticed footsteps near their bunker, and they had to abandon the spot. At a second place Yitskhok couldn't manage to dig out a pit for a new bunker, and Lithuanian youths noticed.

Yitskhok and his family left the forest and went deeper into Lithuania. Here a day, there a night they made their way with the two small children until they arrived in the village Boro-Korojsceliai next to a lake, to the home of the peasant Jonas Cviklas, an elderly Christian who had come back from America.

The good peasant accepted the family and became attached to them like a father. He didn't accept any money from the Jews. He did everything he could to satisfy the hidden family Gorfing, who rested thoroughly at his home and gathered their strength to continue the struggle for life.

A few weeks before Passover the family Gorfing found out from the peasant Pranas Kaseta of the village Kaset, that the brothers Kobrovsky were in the Russkaya Pushcha, 50 kilometers away. The family Gorfing received from the same peasant a letter from the Kobrovskys, saying that they should join them, and that the peasant Kaset would show them the way. In the forest near the lake Trikampis, at the bunker the family Gorfing had first abandoned, waited three of Khane's brothers. The peasant Kaset brought the Gorfing family to the bunker.

## **The Family Aizenshtat Is Brought to the Russkaya Pushcha**

The Jewish family of Lipman Aizenshtat, his wife Reyne, a son named Borukh (aged 21) and a daughter named Rivele (aged 5), escaped the ghetto on the day of the liquidation. Their youngest son Leybele had died that day.

The entire family hid at the home of peasant Jonas Kazabulis in the village of Dubinik.

This peasant was one of the righteous gentiles, and greatly helped the Aizenshtat family. Jonas Kazabulis was a brother-in-law of the peasant Kaset, who also knew about the hidden family Aizenshtat.

Kashet also brought the family Aizenshtat to the bunker next to the lake Tricambis. The brothers Kobrovsky, the family Gorfing and the family Aizenshtat left this bunker for the Russkaya Pushcha.

That night they made some 50 kilometers by foot. The two families were brought into the forest ten days before Passover 1943. A group of surviving Marcinkonis Jews, some 45 men, women and children, had already gathered in the forest.

### **The Sorrowful Reckoning**

The 45 Jews made a sorrowful reckoning. They already knew what had happened to a large percentage of the Jews who survived the ghetto. They restudied the reasons why nearly all of the small children who survived the ghetto, and not a few of the adults, had died.

It was recognized that it had been a mistake to go seeking each other among peasants, who had themselves killed Jews; or had delivered them in the hands of Germans. Seeking help from peasants with whom one had hidden possessions was recognized as a great mistake.

The Jews decided that they had to do just the opposite: locate themselves as far as possible from the villages, deeper in the forest. It was decided that they would obtain weapons for all the adults.

The frequent raids by escaped Red Army prisoners of war on peasants in the surrounding villages took the Germans' attention away from the forests. The group still had only a few weapons with which to defend themselves during a roundup. It was also impossible because of the women and small children in the group. The Jews decided to avoid as far as possible going into the villages and to try to get themselves weapons as soon as possible.

### **The Tragic Death of Dr Leytman**

Dr Shmuel Leytman, former vice-chairman of the Marcinkonis Ghetto, escaped from the ghetto on the day of the liquidation. Together with him his sister Sara and brother-in-law Yokhl Kaplan survived. The doctor's wife and two small children were shot while escaping.

For four months the doctor, his sister and brother-in-law hid in a bunker in the Russkaya Pushcha, five kilometers from the brothers Kobrovsky and their group. A Polish acquaintance of the doctor's in the village, named Pagerenti, provided food and essentials for the doctor and his group in exchange for money.

Hiding in the same forest was the Pole Ludowitz, whom the Germans had caught making homemade alcohol and given a sound punishment. The doctor's Polish acquaintance Stefan advised him to make a bunker together with Ludowitz. The doctor accepted the suggestion. This was in late autumn 1942.

At the same time and place the doctor's group met up with five wandering Red Army soldiers and with two White Russian escapees from the village of Arodisce, who had fled while the Germans shot all the residents.

Some 15 people gathered into the group, a friend of Ludowitz named Gancaruk among them. They prepared a bunker together and gradually obtained weapons. They all wintered together in the bunker. Ludowitz never agreed with the doctor. More than once the doctor expressed to the Red Army soldiers he trusted and to the White Russians, the brothers Alyoshka and Nikolai, that they should do anything in their power to rid themselves of Ludowitz.

In the beginning of May 1943 the doctor's group received reliable news that a big roundup was being readied in the forest. The entire group abandoned the place and fled ten kilometers further, near the village of Pogerelek, White Russia. And in that place the tragedy occurred.

On the fifth day after they settled in the new spot, a large group of men set off to the villages to obtain food. At the new place was left Dr Shmuel Leytman, his old friends Lukash (from Marcinkonis) and Parkhuczek (a White Russian Communist). Aside from these three, the two friends Ludowitz and Gancaruk and several other men were also left in the new spot.

At night, when everyone had gone to sleep, Ludowitz and Gancaruk stood watch around the fire. Before daybreak the two shot Dr Leytman, Lukash and Parkhuczek in their sleep. The two traitors stole the weapons of the men they had shot and ran away. The others in the camp first thought that there was a roundup, and ran away. Coming past the fire, they saw their three shot comrades.

Ludowitz ran out of the forest and reported to the Germans. He became the leader of the roundups of Jews in the forest. Ludowitz's friend Gancaruk came back into the forest. The White Russian brothers were accustomed to Gancaruk and wandered through the forest with him. Several weeks later the White Russians appeared in the Jewish camps and told of the traitorous role of Ludowitz. They did not accuse Gancaruk. Gancaruk too later appeared among the Jewish groups in the forest.

During the winter, Dr Leytman often visited the bunkers of the Kobrovsky brothers and their group. More than once those Jews had proposed that he settle with them. But the doctor was already well accustomed to the people whose group he was leading. The group was already then getting ready for active work against the Germans.

Before moving to the new place, Dr Leytman brought his sister Sara and his brother-in-law Yokhl Kaplan to the Kobrovskys. The two were miraculously saved and avoided being shot by traitors.

### **The Tragic Death of Moyshe Kobrovsky**

The treachery of Ludowitz and his comrade began to bring the Jews one disaster after another. The Jews found out that Ludowitz and some Germans were following the movements of the Jews, preparing for an attack. It was dangerous to remain in the winter bunkers, because Ludowitz had been there several times in the course of the winter.

The brothers Kobrovsky and the others in their group decided to move to another place, and settled in huts and swamps. For three or four weeks, until about the end of May, the Jews stayed in that place. During that time they received reliable information from peasants they knew, that the traitor Ludowitz was spying on the Jews in the forest.

Shloyme Peretz and another man went to the nearby village for potatoes. On the way back, they saw Ludowitz with a German, not far from their huts. The Kobrovsky brothers and their comrades immediately began searching for the two, but could not find them. It was decided that the group would split into two and leave the place in the swamp.

The Kobrovsky brothers and their relatives and close friends moved to another spot in the same forest, nearer to the Marcinkonis forest.

The second group, consisting of Shloyme Peretz, his mother, small daughter and sister, together with some others, set off for a different part of the same forest, nearer to White Russia. Together with Shloyme's group went Gancaruk and both of the White Russian brothers Nikolai and Alyoshka, who knew the area well and knew all the paths through the Pushcha. The Kobrovsky brothers and other men in their group wanted to find out about the traitor Ludowitz. Late in the evening they passed by the spot in the swamps they had just abandoned. Moyshe Kobrovsky was exhausted, and decided to stay by himself for the night and return the next day to the new place to his brothers and comrades. This was several days before Shevuoth 1943.

The next morning Khane's boy Khayiml noticed Germans in the distance. He let those in the camp know about this. A group of several hundred Germans and Lithuanians surrounded the whole region and began to comb the forest. The traitor Ludowitz conducted the roundup. He led the Germans straight to the spot which the Jews had abandoned six days earlier and in which, unfortunately, Moyshe Kobrovsky had stayed for the night. The entire group of Jews in the new place got away from the blockade without encountering any Germans. From a distance they heard shooting and understood that Moyshe was in danger. Moyshe had the final say in his group.

Some three hours later, after the German attack, several of the Kobrovsky brothers came to the swamp and found their brother Moyshe shot to death. His body was shot through with holes. His entire forehead was torn off. All the bullets had been shot from the back. Moyshe was buried on the spot by his brothers and relatives. Moyshe was the second victim of Ludowitz's treachery, but unfortunately it didn't stop there.

### **The Kobrovskys' Group Leaves the Russkaya Pushcha**

It was impossible to remain in the same place due to the treachery of Ludowitz, who was always looking for the Jews. The entire group left the place and the Pushcha altogether. They settled in the dense Marcinkonis forest, 7

kilometers away from Marcinkonis. There the Jews set up a good bunker and disguised it well. The Kobrovsky family and their relatives spent several weeks there. But the situation regarding food for everyone was bad there. Besides that, the spot was noticed by peasants, who went through the forest looking for mushrooms.

It was decided that they would leave that spot as well. The Aizenshtat and Golubtshik families decided to go away to the village of Marcinkonis to a peasant whom they knew named Petras Garbulis.

The Gorfing family had decided to cross the border and come to Lithuanian villages where Yitskhok knew some peasants.

Yakov Kobrovsky decided to go along with the group to help care for the two small children of his sister Khane and the two small children of his brother Khone. With heavy hearts the large family began their march. The Aizenshtat and Golubtshik families were accompanied by the Kobrovsky brothers until very close to the village of Marcinkonis, and said their farewells. The family Gorfing was accompanied by the brothers up to the border. Yakov left with the family to the Lithuanian villages.

### **The Tragedy of the Aizenshtat and the Golubtshik Families**

Lipman Aizenshtat, his wife Reyne, son Borukh (aged 18), daughter Rivele (aged 16), and little boy Itshele (aged 8), and Fishl Golubtshik with his wife Dora came to the peasant Petras Garbulis in the village of Marcinkonis. The family had been hidden with this peasant for some time after escaping from the Marcinkonis ghetto. But Garbulis no longer agreed to hide the family.

Aizenshtat arranged with the peasant to buy some weapons for him. The peasant promised to get the weapons in a few days. Aizenshtat left the peasant's and went back into the forest, where his family and the others were waiting. The peasant Garbulis apparently used the darkness of night to watch where Aizenshtat had gone. Before dawn the next day the peasant Garbulis brought German gendarmes and Lithuanian police from the town of Marcinkonis to the spot.

They surrounded the group of Jews. From all sides bullets from various types of weapon rang out at the unfortunates. In that unexpected attack were killed: Lipman Aizenshtat, his wife and two small children, and Mrs Dora Golubtshik.

Borukh Aizenshtat and Fishl Golubtshik were not near the group at that moment, and managed to escape. Both of them lived until the Liberation. Among the Lithuanian policemen who took part in the attack were: the two brothers Jonas and Alfons, whose last name is Liola, and the brothers Veikaneriai from the village of Svendubri, near Druskinikai.

### **Yitskhok Kobrovsky: The Beginning of Revenge**

The brothers Leybl, Khayim, and Ruven Kobrovsky and their nephew Elke Kobrovsky, together with Yokhl Kaplan and his wife Sara, settled in the neighborhood of the village of Kopiniskis, 13 kilometers from Marcinkonis, after accompanying the Gorfing family into Lithuanian and the Aizenshtat family to the village of Marcinkonis.

For exactly three weeks the brothers' lives were not bad, as they stayed with various peasants in the village. They had peasant acquaintances and confidantes from before, and meanwhile established new friendships. They did not eat badly, slept at the peasants' homes and were well rested. Eventually they got themselves new weapons, exchanging their rifles for machine guns, buying hand grenades with money, and growing to feel more secure and more proud.

The tragedy that befell the Aizenshtat family and Mrs Dora Golubtshik made a terrible impression on everyone. The Kobrovsky brothers sought and found the two survivors of that tragic attack, Borukh Aizenshtat and Fishl Golubtshik. It was decided that they would go away from the villages and hide in the forests again. In a wood between the villages of Zurociskis and Kaset they built a bunker and disguised it well. The bunker was located in a burned-over forest. The Jews chose the place so that the peasants from the villages would have no interest in coming around and wouldn't notice the bunker.

A terrible unrest, a call to take revenge for the murder of Jews, had overtaken everyone. They decided to take revenge on the peasant Petras Garbulis.

## **The Jews began to prepare for their act of revenge.**

They took steps to obtain more provisions and weapons. Their connections also helped to get the Jews everything they needed.

One day the brothers Kobrovsky were astonished by some sensational news. Coming to their confidantes, they were received coldly. The Kobrovsky brothers asked for an explanation. The peasants complained that the Kobrovskys had robbed the possessions of quiet, guiltless peasants. They also recounted that the robbery had been committed together with four Lithuanians, and had been led by one of the Abramukai a "storulis," meaning someone fat.

The whole matter became clear to the Kobrovsky brothers. They joyfully ascertained that their brother Yitskhok had escaped from the Grodno ghetto and found himself not far away from them in the same area. After a week's looking and asking around they indeed met up with their brother Yitskhok.

Everyone was overjoyed. Yitskhok Kobrovsky had been living in Grodno for years. After the arrival of the Germans he had survived several life-and-death situations in Grodno, in Kovno and finally in the Grodno ghetto. While the Grodno ghetto was surrounded on November 2, he escaped with his wife Ade and his daughter Khaviva. A 70-year-old Jew with a daughter, who had come into the Grodno ghetto from the Druskinikai ghetto, had escaped with him.

Yitskhok and his group had made their way to the neighborhood of his hometown Marcinkonis. While wandering he met four Lithuanians who were hiding from the Germans. The group, led by Yitskhok Kobrovsky, had good weapons, were well armed and well clothed. More than one village shuddered speaking of them, after they had appeared in their area. Peasants whose sons served in the police force and who held stolen Jewish property, or who did not have good relations with Jews, learned from Yitskhok's group a lesson they would never forget. With their merciless attacks on a certain part of the peasant population, they threw the fear of death on the surrounding villages. (For more about Yitskhok Kobrovsky, see the eyewitness report entitled "Jewish Furs and German Officers," - L Koniuchowsky.)

With the arrival of Yitskhok and his heroic group, the team which was already there, was strengthened morally and physically. Full with confidence and boldness, they began the period of vengeance.

## **Deeds of Revenge**

R1. The first in line to be punished for his crimes against Jews was the traitor Petras Garbulis. The women and children slept in the bunker. All of the men left the woods and approached the village of Marcinkonis. A small group led by Leyb Kobrovsky set off first to reconnoiter. The reconnaissance group met up with a group of Germans hidden in the forest. A bitter, close-up battle broke out. Two Germans were badly wounded.

The reconnaissance group suffered no losses. But the taking of revenge against the peasant Garbulis was put off for another time. The Germans decided to put an end to the bold attacks of the forest dwellers. Their friends among the peasants provided precise information about the Jewish group in the forest. Roundups of Jews began. The roundups were conducted very carefully, because the Germans and their lackeys already knew that simply shooting Jews in the forest was out of the question now.

The village peasants were promised large bounties for catching Jews or showing where they were hiding. One time, a group of Germans led by peasants, chanced upon the bunker of the Kobrovsky brothers and their friends. The situation was dangerous. It was too late to run away, because there were women and children in the bunker.

But Leybl and Yitskhok kept their heads. They ordered all of the armed men to lie among the burned shrubs ready to begin an all-out battle, and to wait for their order before they began to shoot. They let the Germans approach quite close and suddenly began firing all their machine guns at once. The Germans dropped everything they had and barely escaped with their lives. It was no longer possible to remain in that spot, so the heroic group of Jews moved to a new location near the village of Randemanci.

The bold encounter with the Germans put the entire region in fear of death. Peasants ceased seeking "turto", Jewish fortunes in the forest. The heroic group of Jews felt stronger and more bold.

R2. Some of the men in the group went to the peasant Bolis Bakanauskas, who had been about to kill the youth Abraham Vidlansky and who had indicated the hiding place of the Aizenshtat family. Khane Aizenshtat and her grandchild died then. The men didn't find the peasant and his son in the house.

They took whatever they found at the peasant's. They shot his cows and pigs and burned down his stalls and barns. After beating Bolis' wife and children, the heroic group of Jews left. High columns of smoke and fire let the entire area know about the deserved punishment of the Lithuanian family of Bolis Bakanauskas.

R3. Jozas from Kluciai is what the Jews called a Lithuanian murderer from the village of Kluciai near the village of Virsuroduki, 8 kilometers from Marcinkonis. This Jozas had been a fearful murderer in the times just after the arrival of the Germans in Marcinkonis.

One night a group of Jews surrounded his farm. The Jews didn't find Jozas at home. The Kobrovskys burned down his farm. Jozas paid dearly for shedding innocent Jewish blood.

R4. After the liquidation of the Druskinikai ghetto, a group of nine Jews hid in the village of Latezeriai, eight kilometers from Druskinikai. The peasant tricked the nine unfortunate Jews out of their possessions and then reported them to the Germans. Eight Jews died then. Berl Pikovsky miraculously managed to survive and he told the story to Yitskhok Kobrovsky. (See the eyewitness testimony of Berl Pikovsky concerning the annihilation of the Jews of Druskinikai - L. Koniuchowsky.)

The Kobrovsky brothers and their comrades came to the village of Lateferiai one night, when a dance was being held. Peasants pointed out the murderer in the hall. He sat there dressed up and content. Next to him his wife sat dressed up, probably in stolen Jewish things. The Jews surrounded the hall. Several of them went inside with their guns. The Jews "played" with their victim for some time. Khayim even managed to take a turn dancing with the girls.

All of the peasants and their wives were "invited" to listen to a death sentence. Several Jews stood close by the murderer and his wife.

Yitskhok read aloud a paper on which the accusation against the murderer and his sentence had been written. In order to avoid disrupting the dancing and amusement of the others, the Kobrovskys led the murderer out to his house and shot him there.

The death sentence was carried out by two Jewish youths from a partisan detail, which had met up by coincidence that day with the Kobrovsky brothers, and had gone along to carry out the act of revenge.

R5. Jonas Kaset was the head of the village Kaset. Several times he had followed the brothers Kobrovsky and their comrades along the roads, together with Germans. The Jews had dug potatoes in his fields a few times without knowing to whom they belonged, and therefore he had decided to kill them. His son Jonas was a policeman in Merez (Merkine) and had taken part in the annihilation of the Merez Jews. The confidante of the Jews had several times protected them from an attack which Jonas had prepared together with Germans.

One night the Jews surrounded his farm. Jonas wasn't at home. The Jews found stolen Jewish clothes, bedding, radios, phonographs and so forth in his barn. All of the radios, phonographs and sewing machines were in good condition. The soft things the Jews packed into eight sacks. They broke the radios and phonographs into small pieces. They took the sewing machine along with them. The Jews beat the peasant's wife and daughters and returned to their base with the items they had packed.

### **The Four "Machine Guns"**

These several reprisals took away all desire from those peasants who still thought of killing Jews and getting rich quick. Everyone became afraid of the Kobrovsky brothers and their heroic comrades. The betrayals of Jews stopped, except by some of the peasants from a village called Musteika, who continued searching for Jews and their possessions. Revenge came to that village a bit later.

One evening the heroic Jews came to the county writer Kraunelis in the village of Rudni. They forced him to type that any peasants who killed a Jew, or who bore any guilt whatsoever in relation to the death of Jews would pay with their lives and the lives of their families, and that their farms would be burned.

That night the announcements were posted in several villages in the area.

At that time there were already peasants who sought friendships with the Jews. Their confidante Bronius Krusas from the village of Kopiniskis once reported to the Kobrovsky brothers that in the village of Darzel, three kilometers from Kopiniskis, the peasant Tamulevicius had machine guns for sale.

Tamulevicius asked Bronius to bring the Kobrovskys to him concerning this matter.

One night five members of the Kobrovsky group went to see Tamulevicius. The peasant received them warmly and took them off to show them his "machine guns".

He led them into a nearby wood to a camouflaged pit, and lifted off a hidden covering. He shined his flashlight into the pit, which emitted choking, moist, heavy air. The Jews were bewildered.

Their boldness and heroism dissolved. Instead of four machine guns, they saw four pairs of eyes belonging to "living, moving skeletons". These were four sisters: Ester, Khane, Dobe, and Itke Zang. The four sisters had escaped November 2 during the liquidation of the ghetto. Nine months the four unfortunate sisters lived hidden in the pit.

The Jews jumped into the pit. On a two-level bare wood cot lay the four "living skeletons". Terrified and with a plea for mercy in their eyes, the four girls looked at the strangers. They could not speak. Their eyes, sunk deep into their yellow faces, were wide open and glassy. They did not recognize anyone.

The Kobrovskys and their comrades took the four girls out of the pit. The girls were unable to stand up. They were carried into the peasant's house. It was terrible to see how the four surviving Zang sisters looked.

Their hands and feet were thin and shriveled. These were not even complete bones, but dried-out skeletons covered with a thin, dirty, yellow skin.

The Jews remembered the four Zang girls from before the war and from the ghetto. They had been four brave, full-bodied, heavy girls. The Jews looked at each other fearfully. They looked angrily at the peasant who had starved and tormented the four girls. Yitskhok Kobrovsky proposed that the peasant be shot. The rest stopped him from doing so.

The peasant pleaded in terror that he was extremely poor, that he had a large family and that he had wanted to save the girls.

Milk was brought. Quickly it was heated and given to the girls to drink with sugar. The fresh air and milk brought the girls to a bit. As if gravely ill they began moving their heads and murmuring quietly: "Is Elke here? Is Khayim here?" They began to see with their "glassy" eyes and recognized the Jews from Marcinkonis.

It was impossible to take the girls to the wood. The Jews gave Tamulevicius goods and money and strictly ordered him not to be stingy in feeding the girls, and to do everything to make them healthy. They promised to return in three weeks to take the girls. The Jews took Ester to their base.

The Jews found the four "machine guns" later on the same night as the attack on the village head Jonas Kaseta, for which they had made a special trip.

Some of the things they had taken from Kaseta they gave to Tamulevicius, so he would have something to trade for food for the three girls.

The peasant took the three girls into his house and began to feed them. A few weeks later the Jews returned to the peasant to pick up the girls. Dobe and Itke had already died. The peasant had begun giving the girls too much to eat, and they had grown sick and died. As the peasant told, he had carried away the dead bodies of the two girls at night in a sack and buried them on one of his fields.

The third sister, Khane, escaped the clutches of death. She didn't look bad, and her strength was returning. The Jews took her to their base.

Khane and Ester Zang healed well, looked healthy and remained alive. Together with the Kobrovskys and their comrades, they were eventually liberated by the Red Army.

### **Return to the "Russkaya Pushcha"**

After the reprisal in the village of Lateteriai against the peasant who had deceived the nine Jews from Druskinikai and betrayed them to the Germans, there came to Marcinkonis a special detachment of Germans whose mission was to liquidate the bold group of Jewish heroes from Marcinkonis.

It was impossible to remain in the same place any longer, especially since the group was responsible for helpless women and children. It was decided to move back into the "Pushcha".

While going to the "Pushcha" the heroic Marcinkonis Jews had to cross a railroad line which was heavily guarded at that point. They broke through with the use of arms and arrived safely at a spot in the "Russkaya Pushcha".

After accompanying the Gorfing family across the border into Lithuania, the Kobrovsky brothers had no further news from them. All their efforts to obtain any sort of information about them were fruitless. They had totally disappeared. Before returning to the "Pushcha" they left a letter with their confidante Pranas in which they wrote that they were all leaving for the "Pushcha" and that in order to find out where they were, a peasant acquaintance in the village of Kotre should be consulted.

Returning to the "Russkaya Pushcha," the Kobrovskys and their comrades often met the group of Jews who had remained there when the Kobrovskys and their entire family left for the Marcinkonis forest. The group which had not left the Pushcha had not lost any people.

### **Family Gorfing in Lithuania**

Grodno and the entire surrounding area as well as Marcinkonis and the surrounding area were included by the Germans in Hitler's "thousand-year" Third Reich. Between occupied Lithuania and the Grodno region there was a border patrolled by German border police. Without a special pass, peasants were forbidden to cross the border, which was heavily guarded that summer.

In the month of June 1943, the family Gorfing, Khavele and Shloymele Kobrovsky, Khanon's children and Yakov Kobrovsky, crossed the border and went 50 kilometers deeper into Lithuania. In a forest in the neighborhood of Merez and Aran the group settled into a bunker and lived there the entire summer of 1943, until the end of the Jewish holidays.

Shortly after the holidays, the group was spotted by peasants from the village of Milioniskis, in Aran County. The peasant reported the group of Jews to the Lithuanian police in Merez. A group of armed Lithuanian policemen, among them the infamous shooter of Jews, Bobonis with his comrade Lekavicius, attempted a roundup of the Jewish group.

The attack was sudden. Yitskhok Gorfing grabbed his eldest son Simon by the hand and they began running away. The policemen chased them and shot them both. Shloymele and Khavele Kobrovsky were wounded while running away. The policemen caught both children and shot them on the spot.

Yakov Kobrovsky managed to run out from the encirclement and escaped. Khane and her boy Khayiml were caught by the Lithuanians and murderously beaten. Suddenly they noticed that Yakov had gotten up and was running. The Lithuanians aimed with their machine guns. Khane was desperate. With her own eyes she witnessed the death of her nearest and dearest, hoping that at least her brother Yakov would remain alive. A couple of times she grabbed the gunner and distracted him from shooting at Yakov, who quickly disappeared into the thickets of the forest. They beat Khane and her child again and led them both off to the village of Milioniskis.

They undressed Khane, and in just her underwear they drove and beat her. The peasants from the village came running, laughed and took pleasure in the performance. From the village, Khane and the child were taken to the Merez prison. A student from Marcinkonis, the Lithuanian Vincas Pagacaushkas, who was in Merez at that time, recognized Khane and her child.

Several times the police took Khane and the child out of the jail, drove her through the streets of Merez half naked and whipped her. The townspeople came running to see the bloodied, half-naked Jewish woman. For the Lithuanian cannibals Khane and her child were strange creatures who provided them with amusement and a feeling of self-contentment.

### **Khane and Her Child Escape from Merez Prison**

Several times each day the Lithuanian policemen came to Khane in the prison. They promised to give her all sorts of things, and asked, then harshly demanded that she tell them where she had hidden her "turtos", her fortune. They gave her and the child neither food nor drink. On the third day Khane asked them to bring something for her little Khayiml to eat. The Lithuanians assured Khane that she didn't have to worry about her child any more, because the next day, Monday the sixth of October, they were both to be shot.

The last night before this awful death Khane could find no place to rest. Her heart beat fast. Her blood beat in her temples like hammers. One thought came on the heels of the other, one experience after another tormented her. Just three days earlier she had still had her husband and her elder son Simon, along with both nephews. Now Khane and her only child were waiting for death. She wept until her well of tears ran dry. It was late already, the middle of the night.

Morning approached, and with it the pressure of the death promised by the Lithuanians. Khane felt apathetic and depressed about her own life. But she could no way make peace with the thought that her own eyes would have to see the death of her Khayirnl. Khane turned and lay on the bare ground. Next to her Khayiml lay awake; like an adult, he understood the danger but he didn't cry. Khane lulled him to sleep. The jail was filled with the thick, heavy darkness. Khane patted her sleeping child and decided to hang herself. But there was nothing to hang herself with. She took out the laces of her shoes and underpants. By daylight, she saw a hook built into the brick wall. She kissed Khayirnl and put on the noose. She tried to hang herself. The laces tore.

At that moment Khayirnl began to cry. Khane quieted him down and prepared to try hanging herself a second time. Suddenly it grew quite light in the prison, so light that Khane could distinguish the individual bricks in the wall, the bare floor beneath her feet, and in the corner she saw her father Abraham, who had died before the war. He comforted Khane and warned: "You mustn't do it! You mustn't!"

In the prison, it grew dark again, even darker than before. From Khane's eyes long rays of light began to flow. After that, Khane began digging an exit. With a bent old metal wheel she began digging out the soft dirt and sand from under the doorway. The prison consisted of a small, one-story room, which had not been completely finished. It was a Sunday night and the policemen didn't show up, but not far away, on the bridge over the Nieman, stood a guard post.

Khane first pushed Khayirnl out through the exit she had dug, and then she came out herself. A cold, dark night gave them an unfriendly greeting. Without any goal, Khane ran with Khayiml across strange woods and field.

Khane knocked on the door of a peasant woman's house in a village not far from the town. The woman came out and struck Khane. Wandering further with the child, she arrived at the village of Keibu, not far from Merez. Here, too, she tried to find a place to rest at a peasant's house. But no one allowed her into the house.

Several torturous days after escaping from prison, Khane climbed into the attic of a cabin. In the village of Keibut lived the wife of the Jew-killer Bonbonis. Lying with her child wrapped in the cotton on the cabin attic, Khane saw the murderer Bonbonis approaching the cabin. He looked around underneath.

Fortunately, he didn't look in the attic and Khane and her child were saved from certain death.

Bonbonis had been standing watch on the bridge the night Khane escaped from the prison. He was also responsible for guarding the arrestees. As punishment, his weapons were taken away until such time as he found the escapees. He did everything he could to find Khane and her child. But he was unsuccessful.

### **Khane Meets Her Brothers and They Return to the "Russkaya Pushcha"**

The second Monday night, October 13, Khane and her child ran away from the cabin. She was feeling very weak and hungry. Her body was filled with terrible aching. All of the blows she had received from the Lithuanian policemen now began to make themselves felt. And on top of that, the hunger: Khane stole into a peasant's courtyard and picked out pieces of potatoes for herself and her child.

Late at night Khane arrived at the home of a peasant she knew named Vaclav Grazenis. That day in the same village there had been roundups, and they had searched for Khane. Grafenis, however, was a very good peasant, the best of all the good peasants Khane met after escaping from the ghetto, The peasant received Khane and her child warmly, guarded them and gave them food and drink. The first night Khane discovered that her brother Yakov had been there just one day before and asked after Khane and the child.

The next day, when Khane and the child already lay hidden in the barn, the murderer Bonbonis and his comrade Lekavicius came to the peasant and searched the house. The good peasant got both murderers thoroughly drunk and they went away.

The next night Khane's brother Yakov came to the peasant's. Khane lay hidden in the fore-house in a cellar, and heard her brother talking to the peasant, who assured Yakov that he would certainly see his sister. The peasant didn't want to tell Yakov suddenly that his sister was already at his home. Yakov sorrowfully told the peasant that

the same day he had received reliable information that his sister and the child were no longer alive. At that moment, Khane crept out of the cellar and surprised her brother, who stood astonished next to Khane and her child.

Yakov understood that to remain on the bloody soil of Lithuania in hiding was to risk their lives. He decided to seek out his brothers and together with them bring his sister and her child across to a more secure place in the "Russkaya Pushcha".

Yakov left his sister and child with the good peasant and went off to seek his brothers. For ten days Khane stayed with the goodhearted peasant Grafenis. During that time Khane rested from her terrible recent experiences. She brought Khayiml, too, to better health.

The peasant did everything he could to make Khane and the child feel well. He filled them with the best of food and watched them like the apple of his eye. On the tenth day a group of men, including Yakov and his nephew Elke Kobrovsky, came to the peasant. Elke's sister Khavele and brother Shloymele had died together with Khane's husband Yitskhok and elder child Shirnele. On the other side of the border, in the "Third Reich", Khane's brother Khayim and several other men from Kobrovsky's group were waiting for them.

The Jews from Marcinkonis came well-armed with machine guns and hand grenades. After crossing the border the same night, they all returned safely to the "Russkaya Pushcha" the next day. Khane and her Khayiml were back together with her brothers and comrades.

### **Shloyme Peretz and His Group**

After the departure of the Kobrovsky Brothers and their comrades from the "Pushcha", Shloyme Peretz, together with his daughter, mother, sister and several other Jews from Marcinkonis remained in the "Pushcha" the entire summer of 1943. They moved to a different spot and settled into tents. The group lived at the new spot not long, a few weeks all told.

Three Christians were together with Shloyme's group: Alyoskha and Nikolai Sakovicz, both brothers survivors of the annihilated village Arodisce, and Ludowitz' friend Gancaruk.

In the course of time Gancaruk had very often said that he didn't believe in the possibility of surviving under such conditions in the "Pushcha", and more than once spoken about a single solution: to report himself and turn himself over to the Germans.

He often mentioned his plans, without worrying or being afraid of the Jews, for whom even such a traitorous solution was impossible. Several times the Jews tried to think of plans to get rid of him.

The three Christian comrades would often disappear for entire days and nights, and the Jews were always afraid that they had gone over to the Germans. That would have put an end to the possibility of remaining in the forest, because Gancaruk knew all the spots where Jews were to be found; His White Russian comrades also knew their way around all the paths and byways of the forest. If they carried out the betrayal, it would have been impossible to escape from the "Pushcha".

During the grain harvest the three would spend entire days in the surrounding field talking to peasants. Once they brought back to the Jews the news, which they had found out from the peasants, that three thousand Germans were preparing a roundup in the "Pushcha". They decided to separate from the Jews and to hide separately. Alyoskha advised the Jews to go back to a spot they had abandoned not long previously. He justified his advice by saying that the present spot was too close to the narrow-gauge railroad line, from which the first lines of the roundup might begin. Gancaruk and his two White Russian comrades left the Jews to their own fate and left.

Peretz and his brother-in-law Khayim Vaynberg left the same day for the nearby village of Kotre to their confidante, the forester Shilka. They found out from him that several thousand Germans had indeed come to Marcinkonis, and that the latter had already climbed onto cars on the narrow-gauge railroad. Yet for unknown reasons, they had gotten back out and rode away by train on the wide-gauge railroad.

Shloyme and his brother-in-law breathed more easily. Coming back into the forest, the Jews decided to settle in a different spot, so that the three Christian comrades would no longer know their whereabouts.

For a few weeks the group lived relatively quietly. The men used to steal out into the nearby villages of Kulesi, Twasi, Zamoscina and others. They used to trade money or valuables for peasant's provisions.

The group of Jews consisted of the following persons: Shloyme Peretz and his daughter Elenke, mother Shifre and sister Libe; Dovid Lampert (who had escaped from the Grodno ghetto) with his wife; Yeshuye Berezovsky with his daughter Basha and niece Peshe Karzmer (see case 8); Ayzik Aiznshtat and his sister-in-law Gitl Aiznshtat; Abraham-Ele Vaynberg with his three sons Khayim, Motl and Leybe: all told, fifteen people.

The group got along well together and lived in two separate tents, one not far from the other. The provisions which were obtained were divided among the two groups. Lampert and Khayim Vaynberg were the oldest in the group. The group was poorly armed. All together the Jews in the groups possessed three rifles.

In time Lampert got himself a rifle. Berezovsky, too, managed to get a rifle. There was no lack of bullets.

### **The Parkhuciks**

At that time a group of five or six Red Army soldiers who had escaped from a prisoner of war camp were wandering in the forest. The group was well armed and used to terrorize all the inhabitants of the Pushcha. The group was known by the name "Parkhuciks", and thought of themselves as the masters of the forest. Once Khayim Vaynberg and Gitl Aiznshtat were on their way to do an errand in the town of Marcinkonis. It was evening when they arrived in the village of Arodisce.

Out of the ruins suddenly appeared three of the Parkhuciks, and held both Jews. They demanded that the Jews tell them where Gancaruk and his comrades, the brothers Nikolai and Alyoshka were.

Quite some time earlier the Parkhuciks had already been looking to settle accounts with the three, with whom they had personal scores. Khayim assured them that the three were no longer with the Jews in their camp. The Parkhuciks demanded that they say where the Jewish camp was. Khayim categorically refused.

They then took away Khayim's rifle and ordered him to go back into the forest. When Khayim had returned part way to the forest, they called him back and gave him back his rifle. Khayim and Gitl didn't go to Marcinkonis, but went off back into the forest.

Before returning Khayim's rifle, the Parkhuciks asked for his word of honor that he would come back the next evening and tell them about Gancaruk and his comrades. The Jews considered what to do. It was decided to remain "good friends" with the Parkhuciks and to keep their word. The next evening Khayim went back to the village of Arodie and met the same Parkhuciks, whom he assured, that his group didn't know where Gancaruk and his comrades were.

### **The First Red Partisan Company**

Approximately two weeks after the encounter with the Parkhuciks, the first organized company of Red partisans came from the East. At the head of the company was a Russian Red Army captain, Stankewitz. The company called itself: "Leninski Komsomol". Captain Stankewitz began to establish order in the forest. He forbade the existence of independent groups and ordered them to report to his company. Those who didn't follow his order he threatened to disarm and drive out of the forest.

The Jewish family groups had to report to the command and could then continue living separately in the forest under the control of his company. For the Jews, the situation rapidly improved. They no longer had to tremble in fear of various wandering armed bands. Stankewitz related well to the Jewish groups in the forest. Captain Stankewitz issued a strict order to find Gancaruk and his two comrades. In the Pushcha and the surrounding villages, a hunt for the three began.

### **The End of a Provocateur**

Several days after the arrival of the Red company, the survivor of the Marcinkonis ghetto Berl Novik and his comrade Abraham Asner, from Nacz, came to Shloyme Peretz' group. The two comrades came with Stankewitz' company, which they had joined some time previously.

That very same day the White Russian Alyoshka came into the camp. He complained that he and his brother Nikolai had gone out of the frying pan into the fire, because Gancaruk was being sought in the villages and in the Pushcha and they were suffering on his account.

He pointed out a shrub behind which Gancaruk sat with his brother, asking those in the camp to do what they wanted.

It was decided that Asner would hide behind a bush and Berl Novik would pretend to fight with Gancaruk, get his hands behind his back and tie him up. The two brothers would, meanwhile, be arrested together with Gancaruk.

Gancaruk and Nikolai were invited to lunch. Everyone sat down around the fire, ate and had a friendly conversation. Novik could not decide to play his agreed role, to struggle with Gancaruk and tie him up with the help of the other comrades.

At that moment Abraham Asner suddenly appeared from behind the bush. On his head he wore a side-cap from which hung a thick shock of hair. He was armed with a machine gun and hand grenades. He looked like a real fighter, like a tiger. Asner shook everyone's hand and greeted them warmly, as if he had just come to the group. When he came to Gancaruk he watched him closely and ordered him to stand up and hold his hands high.

Gancaruk thought that Asner was teasing and began to smile. Asner placed his pistol against his head and ordered him to stand up, if not? Deathly pale, Gancaruk stood up with his hands high. Berl Novik examined him for any hidden weapons and tied his hands. They pretended also to arrest the two brothers Nikolai and Alyoshka.

Asner and Novik led Gancaruk to the command, which was located not far from the Jewish family group. The commander of the company and the head of the staff interrogated him. Gancaruk didn't answer a single question. Stankewitz and the head of staff also interrogated the brothers, who were freed and had their guns returned. That same day Gancaruk was stabbed with a rusty Russian dagger and the inhabitants of the Pushcha, especially the Jewish family group of Shloyme Peretz, were freed of the constant fear of being handed over to the Germans and their lackeys.

A short time after the liquidation of the traitor, the Jewish family group of Shloyme Peretz grew larger. From White Russia there came to them Yeshayohu Rozenlut with his son Hirshl (see case 13) and Sholem Bernstein from Aran. Throughout the summer of 1943 this group had no reports from the majority of surviving Jews from the Marcinkonis ghetto who were with the brothers Kobrovsky.

### **The Jews of Marcinkonis meet again in the Russian forest belt**

The group of Jews in the woodland began to receive reliable reports about a well-armed German army which was evidently getting ready to carry out raids in the forests. The group did not remain idle. It sent out scouts to every trustworthy friend in the villages to obtain more detailed information about the impending blockade and they prepared to change their quarters and to move into the more remote part of the woods. In the villages of Kotre and Pagarenci they learned that the Jews who had left the woodlands in the spring of 1943 were now again situated somewhere in a forest. In the village of Gzibaulai they had left a letter for the Kobrovskys telling them where and how they would meet. In a few days the two brothers Yitskhok and Leybl Kobrovsky came to the appointed place where they met with Jews of Shloyme's group. All went together deeper into the woodland where Shloyme's group was camped. That very day the Germans began their heavy blockade. Yitskhok and Leybl could not get back to their group, and to their families, wives and children.

### **The Great Blockade**

The inhabitants of the woodland learned that the famous union of Red partisan brigades led by Major Kapustin was waging a bitter battle with a large German army not far from the "Pushcha". Their trusted informants in the surrounding villages told them that Major Kapustin's Red partisans had arrived from the east. On their way they had occupied cities, towns and villages, had liquidated small German army units and had destroyed the civil administration along with the Gestapo and SS groups.

Whole divisions of the German forces, armed with every kind of weapon, engaged in bitter battles with Kapustin's partisan units who were slowly retreating towards the "Russkaya Pushcha".

In the autumn of 1943 a great battle took place between the Germans and Kapustin's Red partisans about one and a half kilometers from Kobrovsky's Jewish group. The Germans used heavy artillery, tanks and airplanes in that battle. Kapustin's Red partisans were also fairly well equipped and they had artillery. They could not stand up, however, against the regular German army units and they were surrounded on all sides.

The supply convoy with a substantial portion of the Red partisans including Kapustin and his staff broke through the ring and penetrated, into the forest. A short distance from the Kobrovsky group the supply convoy bogged down in the swamps. The Germans stopped at the edge of the forest, fearing to go into the interior of the "Pushcha". Kapustin and his aides visited the Kobrovsky group and held a friendly conversation with its members. He listened attentively and with interest to their experiences, and told them of his own struggles with the Germans during the past few days and about the losses inflicted on them by his brave soldiers.

Khayim Kobrovsky, Efrayim Pilevsky and a few others of their group led Kapustin's staff out to the edge of the Pushcha near the village of Kotre. At Kapustin's request the Jews and a few of his partisans brought to him the forester Shilka, a confidant of the Jews. The forester showed Kapustin and his staff the trails of the vast woodland and took him nearer to its eastern part. A number of the partisans remained in the Pushcha with the wounded. The whole supply convoy, with produce, horses and dogs, remained bogged down in the mire not far from Kobrovsky's group.

The Jews transported most of the supplies further into the interior of the forest where they hid it and camouflaged the hiding place. The Jews now had enough food for several months. The rest of the supplies fell to pilfering peasants from the surrounding villages.

A few days after the blockade the two brothers Yitskhok and Leybe came back to their group. They had heard the cannonade during the few days they spent with the other Jewish group and knew about the desperate battle. They were certain that all the members of their group had perished in the fire of battle. The Kobrovsky brothers and their friends moved deeper into the "Pushcha" with the other Jewish group from Marcinkonis, where they stayed together as one group until after liberation.

### **The Jews of Marcinkonis become Red Partisans Misunderstanding with the Stankevich Company**

A short time after the blockade, life in the forest became calm and the inhabitants carried on their precarious and care-laden existence. It was already late in the fall of 1943. The Marcinkonis Jews were now preparing for the hard winter life in the woods and they energetically set out to provide whatever was necessary. One day Red partisans from Stankevich's company came to the Jews with the impudent request that the Jews deliver to them their choice arms. To the Jews this meant depriving themselves of any possibility of protection against the least attack by Germans or their collaborators. The sorely tried, hardened and stubborn Jews of Marcinkonis who had learned to understand the significance of weapons refused and stated in no uncertain terms that they would not willingly allow themselves to be disarmed and left defenseless with their women and children.

They stood facing one another; the Jewish heroes of Marcinkonis with their weapons and the Red partisans. Yitskhok Kobrovsky negotiated with the Red partisans and asked them to appreciate the position they would be in if they would give up the weapons they had collected at such peril. He also spoke to them in harsh tones, scolding them and ridiculing their demands. He tried to convince the partisans that such conduct on their part only brought disgrace on their cause and on the reputation of the Red partisans. The latter then proposed that all the young people among the Jews should fight with them. The Jews agreed on condition that the women and children go with them. The Red partisans insisted they wanted only the fighters. The Jews categorically refused. The partisans, seeing that they were faced with determined men who were excellent soldiers not likely to allow themselves to be disarmed, left. In a few days the Jews moved to another place in the woods and began to avoid being seen by the Stankevich Red partisans. The best weapons they concealed.

After ten days thirty well-armed Red partisans arrived at the new place. They demanded vigorously that the young people join their company. The Jews refused to leave their wives and children without protection. A long and bitter wrangling ensued. The partisans spent the night in the forest with the Jews. The next day they strictly forbade the Jews to get food from private peasants in the villages.

Four Jews of the group, Elke Kobrovsky, Borukh Aizenshtat, Motl Weinberg and Ayzik Aizenshtat, joined their company and took along with them two rifles. The resentment of the Jews was intense.

The men in the group did not lose their heads. They secured more weapons in distant villages and began to obtain food from the large government depots, despite the dangers which this entailed, since German military units were frequently stationed at these depots. But the orders of the Stankevich company against obtaining food from peasants in nearby villages were carried out.

The Jews, together with the fighters in the Stankevich company, began to carry out acts of sabotage. They derailed three military trains and jointly dynamited several road bridges. The Stankevich company made use of the Jews

who were familiar with the whole countryside. From day to day relations between the Red partisans and the Jews grew friendlier. The fighters of both sides began to visit one another and spend nights in one another's quarters

## Davidov's Company

Late in the fall of 1943 a company of Red soldiers took up its quarters in the Russkaya Pushcha, commanded by Davidov and known as the "Davidov company". It engaged in parachutists sabotage and intelligence activities. They were all first class fighters and well equipped with the most modern weapons, which were parachuted to them from planes. This company, which arrived from the east, took over command over all Red companies in the forest. Among the soldiers in the Davidov company were many Jews from White Russia, who had escaped the massacres of the spring and summer of 1942, including Lipe Skalsky, a good friend of the Kobrovskys, who had survived the massacre at Aran.

Lipe spoke with enthusiasm and admiration of the virtues of Commander Davidov and of his help to the Jews. Davidov was himself a Jew. Lipe took Yitskhok, Leybe and Shloyme Peretz and a few others of the Jewish group to Commander Davidov for a consultation. Davidov received the Jewish representatives very cordially and listened with interest to the tale of their experiences. He expressed his sympathy, comforted them and promised to do all in his power to help their family group.

The next day Davidov paid a visit to the Marcinkonis Jews. He chatted amiably with everyone and played with the children and kissed them. They all lined up before him and Davidov promised to provide everyone with automatic pistols and to see that they received food supplies. He appointed Yitskhok Kobrovsky as commander of the Jewish family company and asked that he be obeyed. All other partisan companies were forbidden to molest the Jewish unit. No one could now deprive the Jews of their weapons.

The Jews in the new family company were now infused with a new spirit of hope and confidence. Firmly resolved to be loyal to their new "father", Davidov, and to the newly appointed commander Yitskhok Kobrovsky, the brave Jews of Marcinkonis now commenced the life of true partisans.

The Marcinkonis Jews together with the fighters in Davidov's company set out on their work in earnest. A joint group of both companies derailed a military train and the locomotive was blown to pieces and three cars were damaged. The fighters of Yitskhok's company once adopted a resolution at a conference to ask Davidov to let a group consisting only of their men blow up a military railway convoy. Davidov agreed. Khayim, Leybl, Shloyme Peretz and Khayim Weinberg, led by Yitskhok Kobrovsky, blew up a military train on the road between Grodno and Vilna, nine kilometers from Marcinkonis.

Twelve cars of ammunition and the locomotive were damaged and several hundred meters of railway tracks were destroyed. The great success of this undertaking meant that the Jewish unit had stood its first test of sabotage action. It now became endeared to Commander Davidov and to his company. The success of this act of sabotage was all the more amazing since it was carried out in broad daylight. For several days the railway connection between Vilna and Grodno was paralyzed. Davidov and his fighting men congratulated the Jews on their success.

All acts of sabotage after this event were undertaken with the participation of the Jewish unit. The Marcinkonis Jews went enthusiastically to carry out such tasks and came back happy with their execution, fired by a desire to avenge the extermination of the Jews of Europe. Dozens of military trains never reached the front. Those that did arrive, were badly damaged and were behind schedule. Other Red partisan groups hammered away at the German military machine.

The trains that managed to get through without damage at one place, were harassed at other points. Davidov's company destroyed not only military trains but also many bridges of all types. Here too the Marcinkonis Jews displayed their courage and their daring. Following each successful act of sabotage the fighters were given testimonials. The Jewish family company acquired a very large number of such testimonials. Many Jews of other companies were taken by Davidov into his own lines. The four Jews who had joined Stankevich's company also went into Davidov's unit.

The Jews, thoroughly familiar with the whole region, successfully carried out acts of espionage with the assistance of their friends in the villages. Many German spies were thus liquidated by Davidov's group during that winter. Under the command of Yitskhok Kobrovsky, the family company derailed fifteen troop transports. For this Yitskhok was awarded high Soviet commendations: "The Fatherland's War", first class, and the "Partisan Medal", first class.

The Jewish family company took revenge at every opportunity against everyone who had committed crimes against the Jews, and first and foremost against those who had actively participated in the annihilation of the Jews.

## **Reprisals Carried Out By Red Partisans**

1. In the village of Kotre a White Russian who was a German spy, was liquidated together with his entire family. He had even led roundups. On account of his treachery, the village was threatened with annihilation by the Nazis.
2. In the village of Matili lived three White Russians who spied for the Nazis. All three were caught and brought to the forest. One of them was freed after being beaten. Two were liquidated.
3. In the village of Gfibaulai lived a traitor named Waluntikevitz. The Jews discovered that he was constantly spying on them. Once a group of Jewish men, from Yitskhok's company, forced him to take them into the forest with his horse and wagon. When they reached the edge of the forest Elke Kobrovsky, who had lost his parents, brother and sister, shot him. The group laid his dead body into his wagon, and the horse brought him back to his village.
4. In the fall of 1939 Jewish refugees from Poland settled in Marcinkonis. They were an entire family named Shvartzshteyn: the father, a dentist; his wife, daughter, and son Henek. After the arrival of the Germans, the girl was shot in the winter of 1941, after being brought out of the town on a sled. Jews buried her next to the first two Jewish victims: Moyshe Sosnovitz and David Podberesky (see page 4). The father and mother died during the liquidation of the ghetto. Henek was left alone, and made his way to the Red partisans. He was in Stankevitz's company.

In the winter of 1943 fighters from that company attacked the narrow-gauge railroad through the forest, and derailed a train. Henek Shvartzshteyn and several others took prisoner the German head forester of Marcinkonis the chief of all forest watchman in the region of Marcinkonis!. This German had actively participated in the liquidation of the ghetto. Henek brought him into the forest and gave him a painful death.

## **Revenge against the Village Musteika**

In early spring 1944 there was a shortage of provisions. In the "Russkaya Pushcha" large groups of Red partisans had settled. Mayor Kapustin's Red partisan settled in the Pushcha as well. The surrounding villages were no longer able to provide sufficient provisions. Davidov's group was also enlarged, becoming a brigade. The commander of the second company was now a Russian named Kolka. Fighters from both companies rode further out from the Pushcha into the village of Kobele for provisions.

On the same day, just a few hours before the attack on the village of Musteika, the brothers Leyb and Khayim and several of Davidov's non- Jewish partisans derailed a military train not far from the village of Musteika.

After years of suffering and bitter struggle for life, the Jews of Marcinkonis were filled with joy at their sweet revenge against the hated, cursed village and its murderous inhabitants. Everyone's hearts were filled with the hope of living to see the glad day of liberation. The village of Kobele had its turn for revenge later, after the liberation.

## **Recruitment into the Red-partisans**

According to Davidov's orders, his fighters were to bring people into the Red partisan groups and try to recruit among the White Russians. At the suggestion of Commander Yitskhok Kobrovsky, a group of fighters went closer to Marcinkonis, to a forest where peasants were preparing wood for the Germans.

The Red partisans established relations with the White Russian workers and discussed their joining with the partisans. The discussions went on for several days, however, without bringing any results.

The partisans then forced the group of 40 workers to go along with them, bringing their tools. On the way to the forest they destroyed a large number of telephone poles, and they destroyed a few kilometers of the narrow-gauge railroad line through the forest. Many bridges over small streams were burned.

German military details began harrying the Red partisans, but without success. Davidov's fighters returned to the forest safely, with the 40 lumber workers.

The recruitment was done in the villages as well. Through the partisans' confidantes, it was found out whom the Germans were preparing to take away to work in Germany. Dressed in German military uniforms, the partisans

came to the peasants to take them "to work in Germany". After they were brought into the forest, it was explained to them that they were at a Red partisan camp, and it was proposed that they work with the partisans. In this manner the partisan's numbers grew. Davidov's brigade grew by several companies.

Yitskhok Kobrovsky's company of Marcinkonis Jews also lent a hand in the job of recruitment.

## **The Liberation**

In the spring of 1944, the Pushcha was filled with joy. The inhabitants of the forest gladly heard the news of the great advances of the Red Army and impatiently awaited their liberation.

The thunder of artillery and Soviet Katyushas was heard in the distance. The Red Army took Vilna. With a shudder of joy the inhabitants of the forest heard on the radio the news of the constant victories and steady advance of the Red Army. The Hitlerite armies panicked and retreated in haste steadily "to the Fatherland".

But it was not easy for them to leave. The partisans everywhere "saw them out" with fire and sword.

Davidov's brigade didn't sit in the forest with its hands folded. More than one retreating transport of soldiers and ammunitions was derailed by the brigade. The Jews of Marcinkonis were among the first and most dedicated of those who "saw out" the Hitlerite armies of murderers.

On a beautiful summer's day, the eleventh of July 1944, Khayim and his brother Leyb Kobrovsky, Efroyim Pilevsky and three other Russian fighters exploded a German transport of gasoline. Flames and clouds of smoke reached to the sky, and to the nearby forests and fields. An entire transport of gasoline blazed, crackled and howled. Bits of fire flew in all directions. It was like a celebration, the last act of diversion by the Marcinkonis Jews and their Russian comrades from Davidov's brigade.

On their way back from this diversion, the six fighters were stopped by a command in Russian: "Halt! Hands up!" In front of them stood happy Red Army soldiers with machine guns at the ready.

A sea of undescrivable joy seized the six fighters, especially the three Marcinkonis Jews. Tears of joy at the sudden, un hoped for liberation began to run down the faces of the Marcinkonis Jews who had been through so many trials and worked so hard to survive. They wanted to embrace and kiss their liberators. But the Red Army soldiers stood in wonder and kept repeating their order: "Stand still!" The six partisans were brought to the command post. There the situation was explained. The six comrades were warmly greeted by the officers in command.

In honor of the meeting, the six comrades stayed with the commanders overnight and enjoyed themselves. There was no lack of vodka, either.

At the command post the six comrades found out that on July 11, while they were burning the German gasoline transport, Marcinkonis had been freed by the Red Army.

When the six returned to their base in the forest, no one had yet heard about the liberation. The six were the first to tell them the good news. Tears, tears of joy flowed from everyone's eyes. Even the exhausted, heroic men could not keep themselves from weeping. All the Jews then began to weep and mourn anew for their murdered relatives, dear ones and acquaintances, wives and children, fathers and mothers. No one spoke about it, but every Jewish fighter sensed that at that moment, among the celebrants in the forest, fluttered the image of the tortured and murdered Jews in the ghettos.

The same day, Davidov sent his fighters to other partisan groups. He himself, together with his Jewish family company, climbed into wagons on a narrow-gauge railroad and triumphantly arrived at the Marcinkonis railroad station.

Hundreds of pairs of murderous eyes among the local population hatefully and fearfully met the surviving heroic Marcinkonis Jews.

That day, July 12 1944, the hard and painful struggles of Davidov's partisans against the Hitlerite occupiers ended. Ended, too, was the heroic epic of the few surviving Marcinkonis Jews.

## After the Liberation

The surviving Jews in the forests and fields came together in their town of Marcinkonis. These were the survivors:

- From Davidov's brigade:

Yitskhok, Leyb, Yakov, Khayim and Ruven Kobrovsky, five brothers; their nephew Elke Kobrovsky; Borukh Aizenshtat; Ayzik Aizenshtat and his sister-in-law Gitl; Khayim-Shloyme Pilevsky, his wife, Khane, son Efroyim and daughter Sore; Yekhiel Kaplan and his wife Sore; Shloyme Peretz, his daughter Elke, mother Shifre and sister Libel Khane Gorfing and her child Khayiml; Fishl Golubtshikl Yeshayohu Rozenlut and his son Hirshl; Avrom-Eliyhou Vaynberg and his sons Khayim, Leybl and Motl and daughter Rokhl; the two sisters Ester and Khane Zang; Yeshayohu Berezovsky, his daughter Basha and niece Peshe Kartzmer; and Mrs Lampert.

- From Stankevitz' brigade:

Berl Novik, his brother Zelik and sister Zelde; Henekh Shvartzshteyn; Borukh Matikovskyl Khayele Nayerman.

Ayvush Vidlansky, his wife and two sons Moyshe and Yakov survived by themselves. Some time after the liberation, Ayvush was murdered by bandits who began hiding out in the forests. He was murdered in a village.

At Davidov's recommendation, his heroic fighters were appointed to create the civil administration of Marcinkonis. Leyb Kobrovsky was the head of the town militia. His heroic brothers and comrades were members of the militia. Others went to work in the Soviet security forces in Marcinkonis and the surrounding towns.

Knowing all the murderers and criminals, they accomplished a great deal for the security forces and used all their force and practice to take revenge on the slaughterers of Jews.

The day after coming into Marcinkonis the Jews arrested the traitor and murderer of six Jewish women; Juzef Kavalier (see (7) ). The traitor was shot like a dog. They came to do the deed bearing a death sentence signed by Davidov. Dozens of Jew-killers from the town and surrounding villages could not avoid the revenge of the Marcinkonis Jews. Several dozen were sentenced to long years at heavy labor in Siberia by Soviet courts. After they were sent to the Siberian prisons, their families as well were sent to Siberia.

Dozens of Jew-killers and traitors began to hide, as the Jews once had, in the nearby forests. Many of them died in conflicts with the armed Soviet security forces.

The murderers and traitors from the village of Kobele were hidden in a bunker in the nearby forests. Armed details of the NKVD (the Soviet security force), together with Jewish militiamen, surrounded the bunker and threw in hand grenades. All of the murderers in the bunker got their deserved punishment.

The Jews of Marcinkonis turned all their resources to the capture of the provocateur Ludowitz. But they found out that while spying on the Red partisans in the area of Bialystok, he had been shot.

A large number of the murderers who had taken active part in the annihilation of the Jews of Marcinkonis ran away to Germany before the arrival of the Red Army.

## The Memorial to the Destruction of the Marcinkonis Jewish Community

The body of the Grodno Jew Dovid Lampert, who had fallen near the village of Kobele, was exhumed by the surviving Jews and brought to the town of Marcinkonis. They did the same for three White Russian Jewish partisans. All four heroes were buried in a common grave in the Marcinkonis town park. On the grave a monument bearing the following inscription was established with great ceremony: "In eternal memory of four heroic Jewish partisans, by their surviving comrades".

Next to Lake Kastinis, not far from the sawmill which once belonged to the Marcinkonis Jew Shloyme Kaplan, lies the large mass grave of the murdered Jews who fell on the day of the liquidation of the ghetto, November .2, 1942.

The monument in the town park and the mass grave are like two living witnesses, which will tell the coming generations of the tragic death and heroic struggle of the small Jewish community of Marcinkonis. The town remained intact after the war. In the homes of the murdered Jews lived Christians, who looked at the surviving Jews in town with hate and bitterness. Almost all the heroic Jewish fighters and their families left forever with a curse on their lips for the bloody Lithuanian earth and its murderous inhabitants, for whom they didn't care to stay and build socialism.

As former Polish citizens, almost all travelled to Poland and thence to Bavaria in Germany, from which they are preparing to travel onward into the wide world.

Translated from the Yiddish by

Dr. Jonathan Boyarin

Signed: *Jonathan Boyarin*

April 4, 1986

We ourselves carefully and precisely recounted all of the information concerning the destruction of Marcinkonis Jewry, our difficult struggle for life after the liquidation of the ghetto, and later concerning our struggles in the partisan group.

After having this collective eyewitness testimony read to us, we find that Engineer Leyb Koniuchowsky has precisely recorded everything that we have recounted, and we attest to all this with our signatures on every sheet.

Participants in the collective testimony:

1. Shloyme Peretz -- Signature
2. Khane Gorfing -- Signature
3. Leyb Kobrovsky -- Signature
4. Khayim Kobrovsky -- Signature

The collective eyewitness testimony was recorded by: Engineer Leyb Koniuchowsky. -- Signature

Ulm a/ Donau, August 25, 1948

I hereby attest to the signatures, in their own hands, of: Shloyme Peretz, Khane Gorfing, Leyb Kobrovsky and Khayim Kobrovsky.

Chair: Mgr. B. Delatycki -- Signature  
Ulm, Sedan Kaserne, September 5, 1948

Translated from the Yiddish by

Dr. Jonathan Boyarin

Signed: *Jonathan Boyarin*

April 4, 1986

## **MASS SHOOTINGS OF JEWS IN A MILITARY FORTRESS - THE SEVENTH FORT KOVNO**

A depiction by surviving witnesses, who observed the terrible torture, rape of women, beating and shootings of thousands of Jews. This was carried out exclusively by murderous Hitlerite Lithuanians, at the military installation called the "Seventh Fort", near Kovno, Lithuania, during the very first days after the outbreak of war on June 22, 1941. At the same time, in the infested, stifling darkness of the murderous Hitlerite occupation of Lithuania, an incredible comradeship between an Austrian staff sergeant-major in the German army and a Jewish engineer in Kovno, shone like a meteor in the sky.

### **The Fortress**

The Seventh Fort on the green hill near Kovno; in a ring of forts around Kovno; was built by the Russian tsars many years before the First world War. Lithuania was occupied then, and considered as a distant province of the great Russian Empire.

High-concrete walls with even higher watch towers surrounded the fortress on all sides, protecting it from unwanted strange eyes. All along the wall was a high fence with a tangle of barbed wire. The entrance to the fortress was through a high, wide iron gate in the outer wall. Attached to the gate were thick hinges and thick iron bars on which large locks were hung outside, and thick bolts and locks inside. It opened onto an area which had apparently been intended for military exercises and drills. The yard led to the entry to the fortress.

A large portion of the fortress was deep underground. Above ground there was a high concrete wall with an iron door, which opened into a corridor in the fortress and thence to long tunnels and large casemates. The windows were covered with iron bars, and looked out from the dark casemates onto the huge iron door in the outer wall, and onto the training ground.

Most of the time, between the two world wars, the old, sleepy fortress, overgrown with moss, was not used by anyone. Residents of the surrounding area spoke fearfully of the "fortress" at the Seventh Fort and could tell various superstitious legends and stories about bizarre voices which they heard coming from the fort, especially at night, both in summer and even more terribly during the long winter nights. They told of the shrieking of strange creatures, against whom rats as big as cats battled for their lives; about a meowing of cats, a barking and whining of insane dogs or maybe even wolves, and sometimes just a noise like that of millstones grinding grain at a mill. All these weird tales which were passed around increased the dread and the mystery of the Seventh Fort.

For some time in the twenties and thirties, between the two world wars, the Seventh Fort often served as a prison for political arrestees, and often also for convicted murderers and criminals.

### **Outbreak of War**

A day or two after the unexpected, brutal attack of Nazi Germany against the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, the Seventh Fort was occupied by Lithuanian mass murderers, who called themselves "partisans". They transformed the Seventh Fort into a terrible, gruesome concentration camp for Jews. All of the watch towers were occupied by partisans with automatic rifles, dressed in military and civilian clothing. They managed to be well-organized, disciplined, and well-armed, and shot with success at the evacuating Red Army soldiers and Jews.

Along all the roads leading deeper into the Soviet Union, long columns of Jews formed: men with large packs on their backs; women with children in their arms and in baby carriages; the old and the sick in wagons pulled by horses; intermingled with dust-covered, exhausted Red Army soldiers. All of them hoped to rescue themselves from the gruesome Nazi enemy. Those days it was very hot. Sunbeams flooded with light and heat the pine forests, fields of grain and green pastures, decorated with many kinds of multicolored flowers. In the deep blue sky Nazi planes flew low and unmolested, wave after wave, dropping bombs and strafing with machine guns the thick human mass on all the roads. After the planes stormed through, fires broke out among the nearby forests and fields, and in the tanks which had been hit. Shattered parts of bodies hung on trees in the forests. The dead bodies of women, men and children were strewn among the damaged tanks and flower-covered fields. From all sides the moaning and shrieks of the lightly and seriously wounded was heard, along with the wheezing of those in the throes of death. There was nobody who could help. Children who remained alive nearby a dead mother or father and wouldn't leave them, bitterly sobbed and sobbed; no one paid any attention or helped them. Mothers tore hair from their heads and wailed and wept over their dead or badly wounded husbands or children; no one could help. The dreadful fear of the Nazi murderers and the powerful desire to save oneself along with the nearest and dearest, from one's own family, left no time or room for feeling of mercy for those who badly needed help. Whoever

still had strength left the dying and badly wounded of his own family, for whom nothing could be done, and ran further hoping to save himself and at least part of his family.

The blockage of all the roads by the crowded human mass seriously interfered with the panicked escape of motorized army details and tanks. Many Jews were crushed and cut by the tanks. In that frightful Gehenna on the roads, caused by the barbaric Nazi Blitzkrieg, beams of love and pity for small children nevertheless appeared here and there. Sadly, there were only a few cases when tank crews stopped for a short time next to small children, who had gotten separated from their parents or who were already orphans, and stood by the side of the road crying and begging for their parents. The tank crews hastily grabbed a child and brought it into the tank, and even faster and more noisily raced forward toward their homeland in the Soviet Union.\*

Most of the possessions which Jews had carried along from home; packs of bedclothes, pillows, blankets; women's, men's and children's clothes of all sizes and colors; small and large, half-open or shut suitcases; remained tossed about and spread out by the sides of the road, in forests and in fields, and on flower-covered pastures among dead bodies.

### **The Seventh Fort -- A Dreadful Extermination Camp**

Very few Jews succeeded in evacuating to the Soviet Union. Tens of thousands, chased by the Nazi army, were stuck in villages and small towns. Armed, drunken local partisans (as the local Nazi collaborators called themselves) freely lorded it, without orders or supervision. Even before the Gestapo murderers set up their staffs, the partisans robbed Jewish possessions, raped and shot women, and thousands of local and Kovno Jews were tortured and shot.

The exhausted, despairing surviving Jews, hungry and thirsty, began retreating to their homes. They hoped to find more order and more security in a large city.

But all of the roads around Kovno were blocked and heavily guarded by armed partisans. They detained the Jews, took everything they still possessed, shot hundreds of men and drove thousands of men, women and children, including the sick and the old, into the Seventh Fort. Only a few of the Jews succeeded in making their way back to their robbed and emptied homes.

The Jews who hadn't tried to evacuate and had remained in Kovno had already survived tragic, dreadful pogroms in all parts of the city, which had begun in the very first days of the war.

Jewish women who stood in line to buy bread were hauled out of line and assigned to columns of arrested Jews, who were driven to the Seventh Fort under heavy guard by armed partisans.

Parents sent their under aged children to stand in line for bread, certain that nothing ill would happen to children and partisans took children too out of breadlines and drove them off to the Seventh Fort. Women who had come to the headquarters of the partisans to find out where their husbands or children had been led off to were arrested and brought to the Seventh Fort.

\*In the year 1944, a Jewish soldier from the Lithuanian Brigade came to Kovno. He discovered that a tank crew member had left his little sister with a childless Russian family in Dvinsk. The brother took the good Russian woman in, together with his little sister. The woman was like a mother to his sister until the end of her life. Women who tried to convey small packages of food to their husbands or children were beaten and driven into the fortress at the Seventh Fort.

A young woman locked her small baby in her apartment and brought a package of food for her arrested husband. She was detained. She bitterly pleaded and explained about her baby in the locked apartment. The partisans mocked the woman. She was beaten and thrown in together with her husband in the fortress at the Seventh Fort.

Day in, day out, long columns of arrested Jewish youth could be seen being driven through the streets of Kovno, guarded by armed partisans. The young boys and girls had to hold their arms crossed behind, and were forbidden to speak among themselves. The columns included even more youths arrested in the courtyards and in their homes. The Jews had no idea why they were being arrested and where they were being led. The boys and girls in the columns went proudly with their heads held high for the last time in their young lives, to the Seventh Fort.

In the courtyard, by the huge iron door in the high outer wall, and also in the open spaces around the fortress, the partisans heaped some of the Jewish possessions which they had robbed from Jews homes in the city and from the Jews arrested on the roads around Kovno.

Packages of phylacteries, torn prayer shawls, finely embroidered Torah covers and silver Torah crowns; torn pieces of parchment from Torah scrolls; several still intact unrolled Torah scrolls flecked with blood; Talmud volumes, prayer books and other items of holy, symbolic value to Jews, lay discarded in a corner.

Mountains of shoes, clothing, furs of all sizes for adults and children, bedding, pillows and featherbeds, sheets and blankets were in a second corner. Copper and silver holders for ceremonial candles, copper pots, pans, kneading troughs, mortars and a large number of valuable porcelain vessels, silver plates, knives, forks, spoons and other kitchen utensils lay in a separate spot. In an area to the side of the fortress heaps of Yiddish and Hebrew books lay orphaned and photographs of old Jews with beards, photographs of weddings and funerals; photos of entire families; of Jewish gatherings and of communal activists and youth groups belonging to various parties. Even more striking were the framed pictures of Maimonides, Montefiore, Dr Herzl, and the pictures of famous authors and poets of Hebrew and Yiddish literature.

It looked as if the spirit, the culture and the traditional ways of life of the Jews of Kovno lay orphaned, violated, soiled and shamed, together with their physical being, at the Seventh Fort; and no one paid any more attention to it.

Among the tossed together Jewish possessions and violated spiritual and religious relics, the permanent, long-time residents of the fortress ran about freely: mice, great rats with shining eyes, wild howling cats, spiders and all sorts of colorful beetles, angry, stubborn fleas and bizarre creatures with long tails and numerous feet. Arrested Jewish doctors who were there, ascertained that these were poisonous creatures called scorpions.

Nothing that was alive could leave the fort for the world outside without the permission of the drunken partisans, not even the wild cats and the huge rats. Thousands of Jews who had been detained by the partisans on the roads around Kovno were first herded into the long, dark tunnels in the fortress. Then the women and children were separated from the men and herded into casemates. Drunk partisans estimated the age of young boys and decided who had already had his bar-mitzvah, and would therefore stay with the men in the tunnels. The bitter, heartrending wailing of the separated families resounded with an echo, accompanying the women and children out-of the tunnels.

The men received neither food to eat nor water to drink. Their spiritual and physical strength spent, despairing and apathetic, they already seemed like skeletons which were temporarily still alive. The partisans mocked them, or beat them and designated the Jews as "ripe" (their expression) for execution by mass shooting. In a field not far from the fort, Red Army prisoners dug long pits day and night. Groups of naked men were led out from the tunnels to the edge of the pits. A hail of bullets from machine guns hurled the men into the pits. The executions were held day and night. Blood thirsty flocks of crows and birds of prey circled in the air above the place of the executions. They accompanied the descent of the shot Jews into the pits with a mad intermingling of voices and aerial acrobatics. Surviving men in the tunnels were lead out by the partisans into a valley covered with grass, in the open field next to the fort, where they held many thousand Jewish men under arrest.

### **In the "Kettle"**

It was midday on a Friday, in the beginning of July 1941, the second week after the German army had marched into Kovno, the capital of Lithuania. It was a fearfully hot day. The heavens were deep, crystal pure and bright blue.

A fiery sun and its sharp, simmering rays laughed at the soil of Lithuania, which was even then soaked with the flowing blood of thousands of Jews. Nature breathed tired and heavily in the stuffy atmosphere. But nowhere in Lithuania was the air so heavy and stuffy, the heat so tortuous and the sun so hot, as in the valley next to the Seventh Fort.

The valley was named the "kettle" by the Lithuanian murderers, who held several thousand Jewish men there until they would, in their expression, be "ripe for death".

On the edges of the "kettle", the partisans stood guard, always ready to shoot their automatic rifles. They felt like they were on vacation. They made themselves comfortable, arrogantly strode around, and constantly provoked and bullied the Jews.

"Don't move, don't get up, if not we'll shoot, Zhidsl!" they constantly, gleefully reminded the Jews in the "Kettle". Every two hours they would change guard. The newcomers would sing the same "Song" over again, with more intensity and conviction.

"Oh Help! I'm being burned up!" "I'm dying of hunger and heat!" "Mama, dear God, save me, have mercy Help!" the sighing and moaning of the Jews in the "Kettle" could constantly be heard.

Day in, day out, the Jews had to lie stretched out, with their faces exposed to the burning sun. Thousands of half-naked bodies covered with sunburn, sweat and mud, darkened, unshaven faces with the eyes extinguished, looked at the blue sky and the burning sun in amazement and despair, as if carrying out a silent debate; as if demanding and insisting: "Why? For what sin?"

And the sun, as if oblivious, still kept roasting and frying the bodies of the Jews in the "Kettle", who were expiring from heat, hunger and thirst. Their tongues were stuck to their gums. Their intestines were cramped up from hunger and they didn't dare move, because "Otherwise we'll shoot!" the murderers constantly reminded the Jews.

But if it happened that someone could no longer control himself and turned to hide his face from the sun, the bandits fired into the whole area with their automatics, and the dead and wounded were left lying.

### **The Lithuanian Student Who Was a Good Shot**

A young man was wounded in his sex organs by one of these shootings. His shrieks were wilder than all the sighing and moaning of the dying and badly wounded around him. He wept, screamed and drowned out the wheezing and moaning of the badly wounded who were slowly dying.

Two partisans came down into the "Kettle" and tried to quiet the wounded with their whips.

"Mama! Dear mama save me! I'm dying of pain!" he didn't stop shrieking, and continued twisting with his teeth clenched. The partisans commanded four Jews to carry the wounded youth up onto the edge of the "Kettle".

"Take your clothes off, cursed frog!" one growled to the wounded youth.

"It's interesting how he screams and meows like a cat, or barks like a dog!" observed a second cheerfully.

"Got the voice of a devil, or a wild goat who's about to croak!" the first confirmed.

"Croak, croak, just like a frog!" the second one persisted, and broke out in laughter. "Ha ha ha, just like a frog!"

"Take off your lousy things, frog!" they ordered.

The wounded youth tried to undress, but could not. They violently tore his clothes off and the wounded youth lay naked. He hid his wound with both hands. Blood dripped constantly between his fingers.

The two Lithuanians stood with their legs spread apart and their hands on their hips, and like two great connoisseurs looked at the wounded youth with a satisfied, happy smile. The first partisan was of medium stature, about thirty years old. His large head was sunken into thick, high shoulders. He had a strange face, the likes of which the Jews had never seen on the streets of Kovno. Two large cheeks boldly stuck out on his round, measly face. His yellow-green eyes moved quickly; casting fear with their sneaky, serpentine look. His huge palms, covered with dirt and calluses, his wide, bare feet caked with dirt, testified that just a few weeks earlier he had still been a peasant in his village; or a swineherd.

On the other hand, the second was urbane, an "intellectual". He was tall and slender, about 25 years old, and his long, full-blooded face was clean shaven. He was dressed in a Lithuanian army military coat, with shining buttons which flashed like lightning in the sun. On his feet were shining military boots.

Among the Jews in the "Kettle" there were students and engineers who recognized him. He was a student of the technical faculty in Kovno.

"Just look! In his privates! See! Take a good look! Ha ha ha! Oh! Oh Jesus! Oh Jesus!" "You're really a specialist! Shot from so far away and so accurately!" the partisan with the large head and the green-yellow eyes praised the student "intellectual" in amazement.

The wounded youth's tear-covered eyes cast glances of submission and pity at them. He nodded his head, and quietly begged: "Yes, yes, in my privates! It hurts me so much, help me, have mercy!" He pressed his hand ever harder against his wound trying to stop the blood. "I don't know where my mother and my father are! I lost them while I was running..." he said, attempting to arouse a sense of pity.

"Shut up, frog! Who's asking you about your cursed father!" the student growled, and cut into the youth's naked body with his whip.

Several dark-blue welts immediately arose on his shoulders. He lay on the ground curled up, bemoaning his tragic, blossoming youth.

The two partisans whispered between themselves, and laughed out loud again and again: "Ha ha ha!" Now look, that's really a great idea, you're a student for a good reason! On my word!" the partisan with the measly face swore, walking away while he laughed. It wasn't hard to recognize that the student was the senior among all those standing watch around the Kettle".

After hearing what the student had to say, other partisans also burst out laughing: "This will be Hoo, ha! What a show! Ha ha ha!"

## **Two Girlfriends Always Together**

Two girls had been born at the same time of year; two gifts for parents in two families who lived near each other on the same street in Kovno. Both of the children grew like two lovely roses in the spring, laughed, enjoyed and played together; always together.

In grade school, and then in the Jewish gymnasium, they both sat on the same bench. They both finished the seventh class when they were still under seventeen. The two grew up smart and pretty, tall and slender, like young pine trees in a new forest. One a blonde, the second with dark hair, they both had blue eyes. The parents of both were happy and satisfied, and hoped for nakhes fun kinder, "joy from their children".

Like all youngsters, the two girls enjoyed their vacation, spending most of their time at the beach on the banks of the river Nieman. They rolled over in the sand, soaked up the sun's rays, swam and splashed in the water, made a huge racket and laughed without concern.

The last Saturday evening before the war, a red sun was mirrored in the waters of the Nieman. On the other side of the river, the forests were overgrown with green trees and various, multicolored flowers. Somewhere among the trees a nightingale sang as it did every spring, with a prolonged, wonderful trill. The two girls strolled on the sidewalks by the shore of the Nieman with friends, singing, clowning and laughing, revelling in their youth. Some of them tried to imitate the nightingale's trill and laughed just for the fun of laughing. When one is young and healthy, any little thing can bring laughter.

The young girls couldn't imagine, nor did it enter their heads that Saturday would be the last day of their happy youth, and they would never be able to laugh again in their lives. They wouldn't be able to, and they wouldn't want to.

The next day, Sunday at sunrise, the bloody war began. The dark-haired girl and her parents attempted to evacuate. After a murderous attack by Nazi airplanes, she could no longer find her parents and ran onward among the stream of Jews, until the German army caught up. She returned to Kovno together with many other Jews, and was detained by partisans. After taking from her everything she possessed, dressed in a blouse and short pants, she was herded into a casemate in the fortress at the Seventh Fort, together with other women.

The parents of the blonde girl missed the chance to evacuate, and the entire family remained at home. Being the youngest in the family, the blonde girl, looking like a young child dressed in short pants and a blouse, got in line to buy bread at a store not far from her family's residence. Partisans drove her out of the line and assigned her to a column of young people who were driven to the Seventh Fort. There she was herded together with other women in a narrow casemate in the fortress, where the two girlfriends met.

They kissed each other and bitterly wept. Both somehow managed to get themselves settled on the concrete floor, in a corner of the casemate jammed tight with women and children.

Without food or water to drink, filled with their tragic experiences, the two sat with their hair undone and spoke little between themselves, only communicating with sorrowful looks. Upon their small, unwashed faces, premature signs of age set in: wrinkles around the eyes and dried, cracked lips.

One midday the iron door opened noisily, creaked open and the partisan with the large head and measly face entered the casemate. His green-yellow eyes examined the women. He stopped next to the two girlfriends: "You with the blonde hair! How old are you?" he asked in a hoarse, drunken voice, and continued without waiting for an answer: "Young women under the age of 18 will be interrogated and if innocent, they will be released today."

"I finished the seventh class this spring, I'm not quite 17 years old" the blonde girl assured him in terror. "And I'm the same age, I finished the seventh class together with my girlfriend" the second girl pleaded.

He regarded the two girls from head to foot, and his measly face grew sweaty and red. "So, you've both finished the seventh class. Hoo, ha! Not quite seventeen, young girls, ha?" He started to cough.

With a choking voice he made a vile decision: "Good! Very good! Both of you come along! You'll be interrogated together, and if you're not guilty? If you're not guilty?" he repeated, "You'll be released today!" Many women and girls believed that that two young girls would really be freed, and watched them go with jealous looks. The drunken partisan was very nervous, and viciously slammed the iron door of the casemate.

Going out through the huge iron gate in the outer wall of the fort, the two girls sighed and inhaled deeply the fresh spring air. Their eyes, which had grown accustomed to the darkness of the casemate, bit by bit opened wider and looked out at the blue sky and the panorama soaked by bright, hot rays of sun. Their hopes of being liberated grew stronger.

"Over there straight ahead!" he said, pointing with his whip. "And don't speak!" he warned. Slowly and carefully the two girls walked forward on their weakened feet, with the partisan behind them. When they noticed a naked man sitting with his head bowed down, and the "Kettle" full of suffering men, they broke out wailing and didn't want to go any further.

"Where are you taking us?" the two cried, not wanting to go any closer to the "Kettle". They even tried to return but the partisan began whistling his whip with mad cruelty over their heads, warning: "Keep on going! Move on! Cursed frogs! Don't talk to each other, dirty whores!"

With their heads bowed and their eyes full of tears, they approached the naked man by the edge of the "Kettle".

"Two girls from gymnasium, finished seven classes, youngsters, not quite seventeen years old" he pointed to the two girls, standing erect as he reported to the student.

The student considered the two girls from head to toe: "Good morning to you, birdies! You had a nice, easy life under Stalin, hah? The "invincible Red Army" ran away, hah? They left you here, hah? Had a short, fun vacation this year, hah?" "It's going to be a real show!" the student assured the partisans standing nearby.

"Stand up Zhid, you frog!" He lost no time commanding the wounded youth. The youth tried to stand up, but fell back down.

"Dovidl? It's You?"

"Help that Zhid stand up!" he turned to the two girls, challenging them with his whip. The two girls looked at each other in shame and terror, and slowly lifted the wounded youth.

"Dovidl! Oh no! Dovidl, is that you? Quick!" the blonde girl shouted and wept.

"Help! Call a doctor! He's our friend from school! We went through seven classes together! Call a doctor! Save-him! He's bleeding heavily!" the second girl shook the whole area, running all around the wounded youth.

Dovidl shuddered, and pressed his hand even harder against his wound. His head bent further and further toward the ground. His locks, dark as pitch, fell across his brow and covered his eyes.

"Really you two?" he wondered. "It hurts me so much, oh how it hurts me!" Dovidl was embarrassed to say. He recognized his friends from school. At that moment they all stood as if petrified, even the murderers became thoughtful and concerned for a moment. No more than three weeks before, the three young people had finished the seventh class in gymnasium. Dovidl had then been less than seventeen years old. He was tall and slender. Dovidl had large black eyes, and more than one girl in the class loved to look at them. A lock of black hair always lay across his high forehead, lending him charm and putting the final touch on his marvellous, slim youth. Everyone in the class liked Dovidl, the students and the teachers.

"Dovidl," he was affectionately called by everyone. Dovidl was the class geographer. The girls loved to go walking or to study with him. But Dovidl was reserved and tragically shy. He was unable to look the girls straight in the eye, as if he felt guilty towards them in some way.

Both girls noticed Dovidl's embarrassment and withdrew from him. Tears flowed endlessly from their eyes, sparkling like diamonds in the sun and dropping quickly down their still childish faces.

"What are you standing there for? Kiss that Jew, frogs!" the student whistled with his whip in the air.

The two girls looked at each other, terrified and amazed.

"Kiss him!" the one with the big head and measly face threatened with his fist.

The blonde girl's heart had never beat as hard as it did then. All of the wellsprings of pity opened up wide in her young heart. Like a mother with her small child, she took Dovidl's head into her little white hands and kissed the tears away from his eyes.

"Dovidl, dear Dovidl, be strong! We're all lost, all of us here."

She gathered her courage, threw her face against Dovidl's throat, and covered him with tears.

"Just look, you call that a man?" the student mocked Dovidl.

"Give her a kiss! Embrace her! Just look! Give her a kiss, I tell you, frog!"

The second girl looked like an angel, standing and caressing Dovidl and her girlfriend with trembling hands, and soaking both with tears of pity.

The student called the partisan with the large head to the side, and confided something to him. The two exploded in laughter: "Ha ha ha! Can't wait to see it!"

"Everybody in the Kettle sit up and look this way!" the student commanded. "We're going to give you a show," he added.

The whole mass of bodies in the "Kettle" began moving and moaning: "A drink, I'm dying! I'm dying of hunger!" The "fried" Jews saw three young bodies on the hill. Thousands of fathers in the "Kettle" tried to recognize their children.

More partisans standing around the "Kettle" gathered at the spot where the "show" was being held.

"Cursed Jew, do what you're told! You're a performer, a performer now! You're putting on a show for your brothers in the 'Kettle'! You hear? Ha!" the student kept insisting to Dovidl, poking the handle of his whip into Dovidl's sides. After every poke Dovidl trembled as if he had received an electric shock.

"Raise your hands high, Zhid!" he ordered with a blow of his whip on Dovidl's body. Dovidl pressed his hand still harder against his wound. "He's nothing but a damned snake!" shouted other partisans gathered around.

"Well, fine!" he insisted, trying to convince Dovidl: "Your penis wasn't cut right, they left it too long. Now you've been cut a second time, and it's better now," he mocked.

All the partisans standing around broke out into hearty, delighted laughter. "Ha ha ha! Hoo,hoo! Jesus! Oh holy Jesus!"

The student, drunk and pleased with his ideas, continued in an almost friendly tone: "We just cut your penis for a second time! The wound isn't serious. You'll be freed quite soon, together with the girls. They'll take you away to a doctor, and you'll get better," he promised Dovidl. "But first you have to give us a performance! Your brothers in the 'Kettle' are waiting for it too!" he went on in a calm tone, as if pleading with Dovidl. "You're going right home, but first you have to try to have sexual relations with that Zhid girl!" and he pointed to the blonde one.

All the partisans exploded again into loud laughter: "Oh Jesus! Holy Jesus! Oh!"

The partisan with the measly face tore the blonde girl away from Dovidl.

"Take off your blouse, little birdie. Show your little breasts to that dirty friend of yours from school" begged the student in a drunken voice, using "elegant speech." "We want him to xxx you. Let him prove that he's a man. Let him xxx. There has to be a show for the dirty Jews in the "Kettle"! And take off your panties too!" he didn't neglect to command.

Weeping bitterly, the two girls embraced each other and refused to be undressed. The student and his fellow separated them violently. The student tried to take the blonde girl's blouse off by force. She fought and resisted with her last bit of strength. She kicked the student with her weak, bare feet, struck him with her fists, wept loudly and didn't stop shouting: "Murderer! No! No! I won't! I won't let you undress me! Murderer! Hooligan! Save me!"

Help!" And the girl with the dark hair shrieked at the measly-faced partisan, her fists clenched: "Ugly murderer! Liar! You tricked us! You should be feeding pigs! Ugly gorilla!"

The partisans at the Seventh Fort had never had such a commotion and resistance to their will. They began to grow uneasy and nervous, and ran to catch the girl. She didn't let them catch her, and shouted while running:

"You're going to pay for spilling our blood! Murderers! Murderers! You will!"

Suddenly Dovidl went wild. He jumped up like a wounded tiger, moaned loudly, and with his right hand full of blood from his wound, with his last ounce of strength, he punched the student straight in the face. Bits of congealed blood from Dovidl's wound remained on the murderer's face. More blood flowed from the student's nose and mouth onto his military uniform.

On a hill, in the shade of trees, local Lithuanian residents had gathered, cheerful and dressed up for the occasion. Couples hugged each other, enjoying the bizarre "performance" in the "zoo". That's how the happy, calm, dressed-up Lithuanians called the "Kettle": "The zoo!"

"The nerve of that Jew, struck, insulted and bloodied a Lithuanian!" cries of protest were heard.

"Shoot him, shoot that nery Zhid down like a dog!" the demand was heard from among the ,mass of Lithuanians.

The murderers grew angry as wild animals, and everyone that was close to the three children began kicking with their feet, striking them with fists, with whips. The girls shouted and cried, and Dovidl stood frozen with his hands on his-wound. But his head was by now bowed very low toward the ground. His face could no longer be seen. Black locks hung in disarray all over his face, on which blood was streaking down.

"Stand up here next to that cursed Jew and don't move!" the student ordered, while constantly spitting out and wiping the blood from his face. He placed the two girls so that Dovidl was between them.

"Hands up!" he ordered viciously. "Just keep standing like that, Jewish whores, or else we'll shoot!" he threatened, and then left.

Surrounded by drunken partisans, the student nervously and hastily gave short, clipped orders. He and his comrade with the large head and the measly face got down on their knees some distance away from the three youths. Both aimed their automatic rifles, and "One! Two! Three! Fire!" counted the student. Shots were heard, along with Dovidl's scream: "Mama! Ohhhh!" Dovidl bent over, and like a young tree chopped down, fell heavily onto his back. His hands were stuck fast to his wound. The Jews in the "Kettle" covered their eyes with their hands, and moaned bitterly: "Oh, no! No! How can they?"

Both girls, frightened to death, cast short glances at Dovidl's dead body. Their moans were enough to shatter Heaven, and bitterly weeping, they shouted: "Murderers! Ugly murderers! You'll have to pay yet for the blood you spilled! Murderers!" and they prepared to run away.

"Don't move, or else!" the student called out. Both of the murderers, satisfied, looked first at the girls and then at David, who lay in a pool of blood.

That Friday at the edge of the "Kettle", David's dead body and on either side, petrified, two young and lovely girls, their hands up and their proud heads skyward, were mirrored against the background of the bright blue Lithuanian sky. Tears rolled constantly from their eyes. They wept for their dead classmate and for the men in the "Kettle". The two Lithuanian murderers; student with his feet in military boots, and the second with his huge bare feet, covered with mud set them up on top of Dovidl's body and, together with a group of partisans standing nearby, sang their national hymn.

And above the whole scene the hot, brazen sun continued to shine after the "performance", as if nothing had happened! And it "ripened"; the men in the "Kettle" for shooting the same tragic Friday, at night.

The murderers ordered four men from the "Kettle" to carry Dovidl's dead body into the courtyard of the fort. Both girls followed sadly arm in arm, with slow tread. They didn't speak between themselves, and had no strength left for weeping. Above their heads, following behind them, the partisan with the large head whistled his whip through the air: "Walk quicker, lazy frogs! Jewish whores!" he ordered nervously, and shouted again: "If you want to live, I'm telling you, you better not tell! Don't tell anybody! Don't tell about your classmate who we shot, and don't tell about your lousy fathers in the 'Kettle'! You hear? Nobody! If you want to live!"

He brought the two girls back to the same casemate they had been taken out from.

The men who brought Dovidl's dead body to the courtyard of the fort didn't return to the "Kettle". They were never liberated from the fort.

### **Three Young Girls Shot -- Robberies**

The women in the casemate received the two girls, wringing their hands and weeping quietly. The appearance of both; the sorrow and terror in their eyes, the blue signs of blows on their faces; bore witness to the terrible things that had been done to them. Both girls avoided speaking, even among themselves. They crept under a cot, and lay down on the concrete floor. The crying of children, begging for a drink of water and a piece of bread, drowned out the quiet weeping of the two girls.

It was half-dark in the casemate, even during the day. The wall around the fortress was higher than the window, which was covered with iron bars. Only a few lost rays of sun wandered across the concrete floor and the dirt. The women lay crowded on rags, old blankets and torn, dirty pillows. The walls, which had been painted blue many years before, were damp and faded. More women with small children lay pressed together on wooden cots stacked two high against the walls. The women took care of their bodily functions in a huge tin jug, waiting in a long line. At night, and often by day as well, huge rats ran among the women on the floor. For days they received nothing to eat and no water to drink.

That same Friday, while the student and his partisan comrades were giving a "performance" for the Jews in the "Kettle" and killing Dovidl another group of drunken partisans shot three young girls, in the courtyard of the fort. Women in the casemate near the window saw this, and broke out into bitter weeping. The murderers stood by the dead girls, whistling and laughing, enjoying themselves and besmirching forever the Lithuanian national hymn.

Also on Friday, at night, the heavy iron doors of the casemate scraped open to the shouts of happy, drunken partisans. They set up a wooden chest and one of them called out viciously: "Each one of you, without exception, is to stand up and form two lines! Each without exception must throw all of your gold and silver jewellery, your watches and other valuables into the chest. Whoever doesn't follow orders and hides something, will be shot without mercy!" The one who had given the order was dressed in a uniform from the former Lithuanian army, precisely the same as the uniform of the student in the "Kettle". The women, frightened to death, raced forward to be the first to surrender and throw into the chest their earrings, rings, watches and other valuables, including money. The partisans happily carried the chest of jewellery out, and locked the iron door.

That same Friday evening the door of the casemate noisily opened again. The partisan, dressed in a military uniform, asked calmly and almost respectfully: "Which one among you is the midwife who helped a woman give birth yesterday? Another woman is about to give birth. You people have so many children! You had a good time under Stalin, hah?"

The midwife, a woman named Sorenie from Mariampol, got dressed. "I need a doctor too! Very important! Very important!" he said, as if he had just remembered. He took Dr Miss Frida Perlmanaite out of the casemate. Neither of them ever returned.

### **Young Women to Peel Potatoes**

A short time later, the partisan in the military uniform, together with two more partisans dressed in civilian clothes, came back again to the casemate, and once again almost respectfully, quietly, explained: "A good meat meal is being prepared for tomorrow. Who wants to volunteer to peel potatoes? For peeling potatoes in the kitchen," he repeated. "We need twenty women," he added with a smile.

Too many women volunteered, hoping to get a bit of water and perhaps something for their children to eat. "Only twenty and no more!" he shouted angrily. He himself chose twenty young women and girls and led them out of the casemate. When midnight came and the group of women still had not returned, everyone in the casemate became uneasy, wondering about their fate. The two girls came out from beneath the cot. They found themselves old, torn clothes which were lying around, and drew them onto their young slender bodies. The clothes were too long and too large. They smeared their faces with ashes from the nearby iron oven, in order to make themselves look older. Several young girls did the same. One, an intellectual woman who had her sixteen-year-old daughter nearby, jumped up and shouted angrily: "What are you doing? Why are you causing a panic?"

Other women were also optimistic, and insisted angrily: "We have to have patience! They'll definitely come back from the kitchen! There were a lot of potatoes to peel!"

The two girls, especially the blonde, insisted quietly and sadly: "You can't believe the murderers! They trick you and then they torture, just like they did with us!" and both climbed back under the cot, covering themselves with discarded old clothes and torn pillows.

After midnight the iron door opened with a crash and commotion.

Drunken partisans demanded twenty more volunteers: "Young women only! For peeling potatoes in the kitchen!" they all shouted and made fists, ready to strike. This time, there were no volunteers. Young women rushed to undo their hair, to smear their faces and upper bodies with mud from the floor and ashes from the oven. The drunken partisans sought out the youngest twenty women with electric torches. Among the women they took was the sixteen year old girl, the daughter of the intellectual, optimistic woman.

"If you take my young daughter, I want to go too!" she begged the partisans.

They looked at the daughter and the mother: "Good! Let's do it! The mother and the daughter! That'll be just enough!"

Accompanied by bitter shouts and weeping, the chosen women kissed and said goodbye to their nearest and dearest. Others said goodbye to their small children, who were sleeping on the cots. The iron door closed. Those who remained in the casemate lifted their tear-soaked eyes upward to heaven which was blocked by a dirty ceiling covered with spider webs. Many-footed spiders ran back and forth, performing acrobatic stunts as they hung from their webs.

Long after midnight, the iron door opened once again. Behind the open door dead drunken partisans caroused, but they did not enter the casemate. Suddenly they threw in through the open door some sort of heavy mass, which looked like a bundle of torn women's clothing tied together. It was a woman, her hair gray and dishevelled. Her creased face, full of mud and dirt, was covered with bits of dried blood, and her mouth twisted to the side. She said in a low, broken voice, her lips trembling: "All the women raped! All of them shot! In the dark tunnels! All of them shot!" and she fell helpless. Women recognized her. She was the intellectual woman, the mother of the sixteen year old daughter. Women broke out in a wailing, panicky weeping, which cannot be described or conveyed in everyday language. The women who still had their little or grown children, pressed them to their weakened bodies, frightened to death. Many of the small children woke up from sleep, never found their mothers again and were already solitary orphans. They pleaded and wept incessantly: "Mama! Ma-ma!"

The two girls, the blonde and the one with the dark hair, crept out from beneath the cot, sorrowing, weak and lacking sleep. They tried to quiet and comfort the children, with gentleness and warm kisses. The same Friday evening; that the women were taken out from the casemate to "peel potatoes," women who were near the window saw other drunken partisans bringing rows of Jewish men and stopping them in the courtyard.

They took the men's passports and documents and forced them to take off their shoes, boots and outer clothing. Tortured, badly beaten, half-alive with their hands stretched out in front of them, the men were led out of the courtyard. A short time later the women near the window heard the shooting of machine guns. In this fashion one group of men after the other, like on a conveyor belt, were driven in haste to their tragic death. Until late the next morning Jewish men brought from the "Kettle" were shot. That Saturday morning, various birds of prey and black crows made the entire area around the Seventh Fort resound with their mad calls.

### **Friendship Between a Staff Sergeant-Major and a Jewish Engineer**

In the center of the city of Kovno stood an old palace with high windows. In front was a large balcony resting on high columns, decorated with assorted plaster figures. Around the palace was a large garden with beds containing various multi-colored flowers. A high brick wall with a huge bronze gate, decorated with bronze and copper figures, separated the palace from the surrounding streets. The palace had been the residence of the Lithuanian President until the outbreak of the war. Several days after the war broke out, the palace was occupied by the German military. The large flower garden was filled with tanks and trucks.

Not far from the palace, among old buildings, at Number 42 Luksho (Lukse) Street, was a new, distinctive three-storey building, with two apartments on each floor. In one of the apartments in the second floor two young couples lived in two of the rooms, and in a third room was a bachelor, a construction engineer, whose parents lived somewhere in the provinces, in a small town on the banks of the river Nieman. Both young couples left their

furnished rooms on the first day of the war, and disappeared. The engineer didn't believe that the Nazi army would advance rapidly, and missed the evacuation. A young cousin of his, a schoolgirl from the provinces, was staying with her brother's family in Slobodka, where the partisans carried out dreadful pogroms against Jews. She escaped at night and came to the engineer's apartment. Officers settled into apartments of Jewish families which had left the same building. Jewish houses and apartment buildings near the headquarters were avoided by the partisans, and did not suffer pogroms.

The engineer had enough food left over by the two escaped couples. Through his window he watched columns of Jewish arrestees being driven by armed partisans. But he had no idea why and where they were being taken to. He didn't let his cousin leave the apartment.

On the morning of Thursday, June 26, five days after the outbreak of war, someone knocked loudly on his door, and commanded in German: "Open up! Quick, open up!"

"That's it! The beginning of the end! Hitlerites are coming to take him!" the engineer said to himself, terrified, and he quietly ordered his cousin to hide under the bed. With trembling hands he unlocked and opened the door.

"Good morning, sir! May we come in?" asked one of them very politely.

"Good morning! By all means, sirs!" the engineer greeted them, opening the door. Two Germans entered. One was above average height, thin, with sunken cheeks, a jutting chin and large eyes, wearing on his small head a tall cap with a long visor, decorated with various commendations. The second was tall, with wide shoulders, long arms, a red face and a very large head covered by a large cap, also decorated with various commendations. Both wore tall, shining boots. When both had come into the apartment, the tall German closed the door.

"Good morning! Good morning sir!" and he smartly touched the long visor of his cap with his hand, clicked his heels and concluded in a loud voice: "Heil Hitler!" "I am a staff sergeant-major (Stabs-Feldfebel)!" the shorter one introduced himself. "I need an apartment for just a short while," he requested calmly and politely. He didn't touch his cap with his hand, didn't click his heels and didn't call out: "Heil Hitler!"

"Sirs! The house has been nationalized. I live in one room with my young cousin, two other rooms are free, the engineer informed them fearfully.

"Your first name, sir?" asked the staff sergeant-major calmly. "My name is Leon, Sir Sergeant!"

"Not Sergeant, sir! Staff Sergeant-Major, please!" the taller one corrected him, and saluted, clicked his heels, and called out, "Heil Hitler!" The shorter one looked at the taller as if he'd never seen him before. Both of them looked over the rooms, the kitchen, the bathroom and the sparkling parquet floor.

"This evening, Herr Leon, we will come to settle here. Your profession, if I may, Herr Leon?" the shorter one wanted to know. "I am a construction engineer, Herr Sergeant!"

"Oh no, no! My God! Not Sergeant, please! Staff Sergeant-Major!" and with his hand smartly to his cap, with a click of his heels, he finished: "Heil Hitler!" The taller one corrected.

Trembling, the engineer asked: "Sirs, may I ask when I'm to move out of my room?"

"Move out of your room? Why, sir? We aren't good enough for you?" asked the short one.

"No, sirs, no! I am aware that Jews are not allowed to live under the same roof with Germans. I'm ready to move out of my room immediately," said the engineer, as if making a request.

"Eh! It's ridiculous! Herr Engineer, we'd be pleased to have you stay here with us!"

The engineer suspected that he might get into trouble, and wanted to find an excuse to leave the apartment. "Sirs, I can't be responsible for your things. Armed Lithuanians might find me here, arrest me and take everything in the apartment on account of my presence here."

"We know what the Lithuanian swine do to Jews. They won't come here. You stay here, Herr engineer!" the shorter one stubbornly assured him.

"I have to go out sometimes to buy something to eat, and they could find me in the street and arrest me. They've been doing so for several days already," he said, still looking for an excuse to move out of his room.

The taller German took out of his briefcase a special paper bearing an announcement that the apartment had been occupied by the Wehrmacht, signed and officially sealed. "Any Lithuanian swine who tries to get in will be shot," the tall one assured him angrily, and with his hand to his cap, a click of the heels, he finished in a loud voice: "Heil Hitler!" Heil!"

The shorter one took a half loaf of bread out of his briefcase, along with marmalade and margarine, and handed them to the engineer. "Leon! Don't lose hope, Leon! Don't go into the street, Herr Engineer! We know what the Lithuanian swine are doing!" he warned in a friendly tone. And with that they both left.

The engineer and his cousin remained in their room. Yet Leon was very afraid that the two Germans would cause him problems and eventually liquidate him. "Two Hitlerites!" he worried all afternoon. "Who knows? Who knows how this could end?"

In the evening, the shorter German came with his servant, who set down a bundle of food and left. Leon locked himself in his room with his cousin. A while later the staff sergeant-major knocked on the door. "Herr Leon! You and your cousin are invited to come to my room for supper!"

On the table in his room stood several bottles of beer, cans of jam, marmalade and fresh military bread. "Don't be reserved, you two!" he repeatedly reminded them. "Don't hold back! Eat whatever you want and as much as you want!"

All three ate with gusto, and didn't talk.

"Leon, I don't want you to be afraid of me! Be my friend! Yes! Be my friend!"

"May I have the honor of knowing how to address you, sir?" asked Leon, a bit afraid.

"Meanwhile, Staff Sergeant-Major, that's my present military rank."

"May I know how I am to address the second gentleman?" Leon asked, pointing to the second room. He thought a moment, a bit, and then answered with a broad smile: "Call him Herr Idiot!" He laughed out loud then: "Ha ha ha!"

"Herr Staff Sergeant-Major! If I'm not mistaken, the word 'idiot' indicates someone who is, unfortunately, a simpleton in a number of languages. The sergeant-major laughed even more, and swallowed down his laughter with a glass of beer.

"Good! Leon! You can call him Herr Heinz. That's his first name. But he's an idiot *all* the same! Always with his hand flying to his cap, his heels clicking and like a damned clock you hear his loud 'Heil Hitler!' It's like a sort of disease with him already. In the beginning I used to suffer from it, now I'm used to it and I don't pay any attention. One after the other, "Heil Hitler! Heil Hitler! Ha ha ha."

Sunday evening, one week after the beginning of the war, the staff sergeant-major came with his servant, a simple soldier who carried in a package of food and left immediately. Leon and his cousin closed the door of their room. A while later the staff sergeant-major knocked on the door. "Leon! You and your cousin are both invited to my table for supper."

"Thank you! Thank you, Herr Staff Sergeant-Major!" Leon replied.

Leon and his cousin went into his room. On the table stood several bottles of beer, loaves of military bread, cans of sardines, marmalade and margarine. All three ate with enjoyment, and spoke little. When they had finished eating, he helped Leon's cousin carry the dishes into the kitchen. She thanked him, and went off to her room.

"Leon, please, stay here with me! I want to spend some time with you," he asked in a friendly tone. He closed the door to his room. "Please, Leon, please tell me, what did you used to do after work? What did you busy yourself with in your spare time? Don't be afraid of me, please!" he reassured Leon intensely.

"I read a lot," Leon answered carefully.

"What did you read, Leon?" he asked with curiosity.

"Fiction, especially historical novels, Herr Staff Sergeant-Major." He thought for a while, and then asked with a trembling voice: "You must have read about the Schutz-Bund in Austria, which fought on the barricades against the cursed Chancellor Dolfus and his Fascist government?"

The engineer grew even more afraid, and answered as little as possible: "I didn't get involved in politics."

"Yes, Leon! I understand you. You're afraid, but you read about it in the newspapers?"

"Yes, Herr Staff Sergeant-Major I read about it in the newspapers."

After a brief silence, he carefully and with a certain pride introduced himself: "I am a teacher from Linz! A classmate of the famous Schutz-Bund leader Koloman Walischl. I fought at the barricades with him against Dolfus' Fascism! Did you read about the tragic martyrdom of my dear comrade Koloman Walisch?" With his fist clenched he stood up as if making an oath, and in a few, slow words he ended with intense wrath: "Forever! For all times! The workers in Austria and in the entire world will remember that beloved, brave fighter, my comrade Koloman Walisch! I, too, will remember him until the last day of my life!" the teacher promised enthusiastically.

Both of them sat still and thoughtful for a while. The teacher pressed the engineer's hand. "Leon, now we are two good friends! I hate Hitlerism like I hate death! After suppressing our struggle, the Fascists came after me. I hid and lived underground, until the Nazis occupied Austria. I was mobilized. I couldn't hide any longer. Leon! To him" he pointed to the other room "don't talk to him about this, please!"

He knocked on the door of the other room: "Herr Heinz! Please come in and drink a beer. Leon, I'll send him off to take care of something at headquarters and we can keep talking, agreed?" he turned to the engineer.

"Agreed, Herr Teacher!"

"I thank you very much for the honor you've shown me."

All dressed up, Heinz came into the room and immediately, with his hand to his cap, with a click of his heels, he greeted them: "Heil! Heil Hitler!" and sat down next to the engineer at the table. The three of them drank beer together. The teacher ordered him to go to headquarters and take care of an urgent matter. Heinz stood at attention, repeated word for word exactly what he was to do at headquarters, and then with his hand to his cap, with a click of his heels, he parted with a "Heil! Heil Hitler!" and left the room.

The teacher, losing no time, began: "Leon! Every day we get reports from the front. Large cities and small fall without fighting. The Red Army is retreating. Why don't they fight? Why do they retreat? Yesterday at headquarters someone tried to break a Red Army helmet. He banged on it with a heavy hammer and couldn't break it. One blow of the same hammer and our helmet was shattered in pieces. Specialists, engineers from the Reichswehr examined and tried out a captured tank. They determined that the tanks the Red Army is using aren't worse and may be better than those the Reichswehr has.

So why are they running away? Why are they running? Please, Leon, what's your opinion, why are they running? Why aren't they fighting?" the teacher wanted to understand.

"I'm not a military man, I can't answer for certain."

"Leon, you're an engineer and you've read a good deal about war. Tell me what you think of this. In several places they've resisted, and they've surprised our generals with their battle readiness. In this region they held back from a major victory, and began retreating again. Leon! Tell me what you think about their retreats," he tried to draw out the engineer again.

"Russia's territory is incredibly large. They're running back home, closer to their military bases. The Wehrmacht is advancing fast, and growing distant from its bases in Germany. Hitler's army will keep advancing, so fast that they'll lose their breath. They'll occupy so much territory that Hitler's general staff won't have enough soldiers to rule all of the occupied cities, towns and villages. The Russians' strategy is based on the idea that by running and retreating from the enemy, they win wars. The terribly cold winters are their loyal allies. It's well known that after all his victories, Napoleon lost the war because he ran after the Russian army divisions too far and too fast.

"And the Russian winter?" Leon began boldly to express his opinion; "Leon! Thank you! Thank you! That's just what I think, and I tell the idiot so! But he believes that damned crazy Fuehrer and his generals! Day and night, at every opportunity he keeps shouting 'Heil Hitler!' When he gets up in the morning, before he eats, after he eats, it's 'Heil Hitler!' Such an idiot. That sly Stalin's going to defeat our crazy Fuehrer!"

He rested, drank a glass of beer and began again: "Leon! Agreed, that Hitler and his generals are going to destroy cities and villages in England, they're going to bombard their industrial plants; will Churchill capitulate? He and part

of his army could evacuate, let's say, to Canada; would Germany fight against Canada as well? Churchill is a great man, a determined opponent of this German government. Churchill isn't like that stupid Chamberlain!"

For hours he and Leon talked about politics. "Herr Teacher! Do many people think the way you do about Hitlerism?"

"Leon, certainly there are many of us. Together with me at headquarters works someone who's also a staff sergeant-major, a social democrat, and a bloody enemy of Hitler and his party. He doesn't hold back from me, and boasts that his grandfather, his father and all the members of his family were social democrats. He is my closest, most trustworthy comrade at headquarters. He knows everything about me, and we stick together. We help each other out in various situations, the teacher unburdened himself.

With that, the long conversation concluded. He got dressed up and went off to headquarters. The engineer was very pleased by his amazingly intimate friendship with the staff sergeant-major.

On the orders of the staff sergeant-major, the soldier who waited on him brought the engineer and his cousin every day a kettle of soup, bread and other food. Each evening the staff sergeant-major invited the engineer and his cousin to eat dinner with him in his room, told them the news from the front and spoke in amazement of the Red Army's continued retreat. Several days passed in this fashion.

One time his cousin decided to go to the suburb of Slobodka, where her brother and sister-in-law lived, and where there were daily robberies, murders and kidnappings of men and women in the streets, courtyards and homes, committed by murderous drunken partisans. Leon warned her about the danger she would encounter. She wouldn't obey him, and instead dressed in her best clothes. She looked like a Lithuanian girl; what they called "a good appearance" in those days. She put together a small package of food for her brother's family. "Don't worry Leon, I'll just see my brother and his family, and I'll be right back. I'll be back today," she reassured him, and went out of the apartment.

She did not return that night. Several days passed, and still she did not return. The staff sergeant-major often reiterated, with worry and regret: "Leon, you shouldn't have let her go, you shouldn't have let her go out into the street! Oh! That little girl! Where could she be now? Where?"

### **Leon's Cousin and a Neighbor's Family - At the Seventh Fort**

On the same floor as the engineer lived a Jewish family: a husband, Abe Kagani his wife Peshe and his wife's father Jude Kiml and step-mother. All four of them had evacuated, and the German army had caught up to them. On their way back to Kovno they found out that all the roads were blocked by the partisans, who detained Jews, robbed, beat and murdered, and drove them into the "Fortress", as the Seventh Fort was called. The family split up: Mrs Kagan and her parents went ahead on the highway, and were detained by partisans. The husband followed after, hiding in the fields. At night he managed to return to his apartment.

Two officers occupied the two larger rooms in his big apartment and he, the owner, was left with only a small room to live in. He often went over to the engineer and complained that the two officers avoided greeting him and didn't answer his greetings. And when they were in the apartment, he didn't go out of his little room. The engineer helped him out with a bit of food on several occasions, because Kagan was afraid to go out shopping in the street. He told details about the attacks in the city, about the pogroms in Slobodka, and especially about the torture and shooting of Jews at the Seventh Fort.

The engineer didn't believe everything his neighbor told him. "You sit here locked up in your apartment, so how and from whom do you receive all this terrible news?" he asked once.

His neighbor looked at the engineer in astonishment and explained: "A friend of mine who lives on this street was in the 'Fortress'. The Germans took him and some other Jews out of the 'Fortress' to work in the military hospital. Every morning he goes to work by himself, and every evening he returns to his home. He saw my family at the Seventh Fort. He told me everything, and my friend also saw an engineer Frenkl of his acquaintance, whose family is living on our street."

Leon grabbed at his head and sorrowfully cried out: "He too? I was sure that he had managed to evacuate! I worked together with him for years and he was a good friend of mine! A competent engineer!" Leon added with a moan.

His neighbor told him more: "On our street too, no more than a block away from us, lives a Jewish family. The father was a well-known businessman, and had a good reputation as a community activist. After the Soviet system was instituted in Lithuania, his business was nationalized. Thanks to his popularity and his reputation as an honorable, cultivated man, the Soviets appointed him to a very good position in a brewery. His wife took a university degree in languages, and taught at the Jewish gymnasium. They have two children, an older son and a daughter. They didn't get a chance to evacuate. Their daughter is blonde with blue eyes, nice as an angel, tall and thin; she ended the seventh class in gymnasium just before the war. She went out to buy bread at the bakery. The partisans took her out of line and led her off. My friend saw her being brought to the Seventh Fort, too."

The neighbor rested, sighed and carefully, quietly, declared as if he wasn't quite certain: "I believe I believe, my good neighbor, that your cousin, too, was taken off to the 'Fortress'".

"My faithful neighbor" Leon began, "since the beginning of the war I've been living like I was under house arrest, under the protection of my good staff sergeant-major. He brings me enough to eat. I don't have to go out in the street. Every evening he gives me reports from the front which arrive at headquarters. And I myself sit by the radio all day, listening to the news. But I must admit that I knew little, too little, about what the partisans are doing to the Jews in the city.

Every day through my window I watch armed Lithuanians driving long columns of Jews. But I didn't know where they were taking the Jews. Now I know more, and I believe everything you tell me. Thank you my good neighbor! Thank you! Let's hope we live to see better times!" Leon wished both of them.

When his cousin, Tshernele Cicelsky, hadn't returned two days after her departure, Leon could not rest. He analyzed and thought through various plans. He decided that the only hope was to get help from the staff sergeant-major. Like every evening, the staff sergeant-major invited the engineer to come into his room. Leon lost no time.

### **Leon's Plan to Save His Cousin Along With Other Jews**

"Herr Teacher I found out that my neighbor's wife, her father and mother were detained by Lithuanians and are in a fortress at the Seventh Fort. A friend of his was liberated from the fortress together with a group of Jews, and they're working in the military hospital. His friend also told him that armed Lithuanians have already managed to shoot thousands of innocent Jews, men and women."

The teacher listened to everything and grew serious: "Leon, I know about that. My friend at headquarters, the social democrat, was there already, and he saw the Lithuanian pigs torturing the Jews in an open field. He took many photographs. Terrible! Horrible! There's an extermination camp there! He talks on and on, telling me about the terrible things he's seen with his own eyes."

"Herr Teacher! May I trouble you about my cousin? I'm afraid that she has been dragged off, and is already in that fortress."

The two of them looked at each other sorrowfully, and were silent for a while. Leon's face took on a submissive expression: "If I have found favor in your eyes, please, allow me to ask you to do a great thing for my cousin, and for several other Jews."

The teacher thought for a moment, as if he was remembering something, and laughed loudly: "Ha ha ha! Leon, you used a phrase from the Bible, and I recognized it! So let's have a drink. He poured out two glasses of beer, and raising his glass, he answered: Good, I'll also use a phrase from the Bible in my answer: 'Leon, until a half of my kingdom it shall be given to you!'

"Oh sir! You're not a teacher for nothing! You remember how that evil Haman wanted to kill all the Jews, thousands of years ago, Leon responded, admiring the teacher.

"A teacher and a freedom fighter!" the teacher laughed amiably. "Please tell me what you want.

"Sir Freedom Fighter! Leon decided to call the teacher. "If you could, and if it wouldn't be too much for you, if you could go to the fortress, and demand that my cousin be released, because you need her as a servant, and she knows where all the keys to your lodgings and the cupboards and cabinets are."

"That's all? Of course! Of course I'll try to do it!" he answered without hesitation.

"Thank you so much, my friend! I think that if you only ask to have my cousin released, it will look like you have a personal interest in the matter. The Lithuanian murderers might suspect that you're being paid for it, and make it hard to free her. But if you ask for workers, a detail of workers, it would be more credible to them. What I'm asking you to do is affected by the fact that all authority over the Jews in the fortress is exclusively in the hands of the Lithuanian partisans, without any possible intervention by Germans."

The teacher walked around the room a while, nervous. "I have to talk to Heinz now," he decided, and went into the other room. He didn't spend much time consulting with Heinz, and when he returned he was content. "Leon! It'll work! Everything's in order! He readily agreed to work with me in order to get your cousin and a small detail of Jews out, all of your acquaintances!" After thinking a while, he added: "Basically Heinz is a decent fellow. He has a lot of sympathy for your cousin and for all the Jews in the fortress. But he's a professional, disciplined soldier, raised in the spirit and tradition of the Prussian Junkers, born in East Prussia. Marching, accepting and carrying out precisely commands from those of superior military rank, and giving commands in turn, is as natural and necessary to him as the air he breathes. Raising his hand to his cap, clicking his heels, isn't a conscious act for him, but a reflex. He's never been a party member and he's still not a member of the damned Nazi Party. He never deceives anyone and he keeps his word, he never lies. Tell me my friend, how many people are in the detail we have to demand they free from the "Fortress?"

"My friend, between six and eight people! I believe there are four women and four men."

"Good, Leon! 'Unto a half of my kingdom it shall be given to you'". And he added with a smile: "It's a perfect piece of literature about the clever, beautiful Jewish queen and her husband, the stupid king," he said, wanting to show that he was familiar with or had perhaps even read a German translation of the scroll of Esther.

Leon told his neighbor all the details of the plan to liberate a group of Jews, a detail, on the pretext that they would be doing various tasks.

His neighbor opened wide his eyes, reddened from lack of sleep at night and from weeping. "Almighty God! Maybe the staff sergeant-major will be your messenger, and free my family?" He broke out into spasmodic weeping.

Leon began to review and count the names he had written on a slip of paper: "The first one will be my cousin, your wife and her parents that makes four. I'll write down the engineer I know, that makes five. Who else?" Leon turned to his neighbor.

His neighbor thought it over. "Hal Yes! The blonde girl! Her mother has already passed out and fallen several times from sorrow. She doesn't stop weeping and wailing. She can't eat or drink anymore."

"Good! Her name, please?" Leon wrote it down and counted: "Six people! I spoke to the staff sergeant-major about six or eight people. Yes" Leon remembered "If possible? Eight people?"

His neighbor closed his eyes, knitted his brow and tightened up as if he's gotten a bad cramp in his stomach. "Oh! Yes! Yes! I remember! A well known writer and correspondent for the Jewish newspaper, along with his young son!" He thought until he remembered their names. "Yes, a good writer! I used to enjoy reading everything that he wrote!" Leon wrote down the names of the father and son: "There, we have all eight already. I just hope we're able to liberate all eight. I believe the staff sergeant-major will agree to eight," said Leon, and finished the list of names.

After the neighbor went back to his room, Leon began again to analyze the composition of the eight names on the list, and was dissatisfied. "The men and the women should appear on the list in two separate columns. On the right side, the women, and on the left side, the men," he made up his mind, and began to write: his cousin's name first; his neighbor's wife, in the second spot; the wife's mother, in the third spot and he stopped writing and thought: "The young blonde girl, taken away from her parents! How would my parents survive if the Lithuanian murderers tore my fifteen year old sister away from them, and kept her locked up in that dirty prison, in that little provincial town? In the care of guarded by drunken partisans? My little, innocent sister!"

With tears filling his eyes he decided: "I'll beg him, I'll beg the staff sergeant-major to do everything, not to leave her to stay in the fortress any longer. That young blonde girl must be freed! I'll remind him over and over again. The young blonde girl in the fourth spot!" and he ended the women's column.

Engineer Leon still didn't know then that when he was working so hard to save eight Jews from the risk of death at the Seventh Fort, near Kovno, his parents, brother and sister and all of the Jews in his provincial hometown had

already been tortured and shot by local Lithuanian partisans the very first week of the war, and that they already had been thrown into a mass grave in a nearby forest.

Leon paced back and forth. He reminded himself that he had agreed with the staff sergeant-major to have six to eight people liberated. He had already written down four women. There was room for two in the men's column, if the teacher only agreed to six. The neighbor's father-in-law was one and "Who should be the second? My good friend, the engineer, who has a wife and children? Then the writer and his son will stay at the Seventh Fort, exposed to torture and perhaps even to a risk of death? It's no good! a tragedy! It's very bad! Why did I mention six? On account of my foolishness it'll be my fault if something bad happens to them. Oh, how could I?" Tearfully, Leon declared himself guilty and responsible: "I'll ask the staff sergeant-major to have mercy on me and convince him to agree to eight people," he decided. "So with eight, my neighbor's father-in-law is first on the list of men! So who will be the second? The third? If my friend, the engineer, is the second, then the writer and his son will be the last ones on the list.

It may be that the partisans will grow stubborn and insist that only two men can be freed, and no more! So naturally the last two on the list, father and son, will have to stay at the fort." Leon went over the possibilities for so long that he got himself into a frightful state of mind. He grew horrified at the thought that because of his determination of the order of men in the list, he was taking on himself the right to determine, perhaps, who would be liberated and who would remain at the Fort, God forbid, to die.

Ruminating like this, he began to feel weak, his head hurt, he was dizzy, and his eyes could not see clearly. He grabbed his head with both hands and leaned over on the table, sighing "Oh, oh!" He began to doze, and fell into a trance, overflowing with memories.

### **Leon's Youth and Prior Life**

Leon's parents in their provincial town were always full of worries concerning their livelihood. As the eldest, at the age of thirteen he already spent the first of the day in school, and the second half working. He gave his entire earnings to his parents, to help ease their financial burden. At sixteen, he finished the sixth level, the highest in the school in his town. He was accepted into a gymnasium in Kovno. The teachers helped him to sign up enough private students to tutor so that he could pay for his expenses. He finished the gymnasium, and was accepted into the technical faculty in Kovno University. Tuition and obtaining the necessary books were a heavy burden on his financial means.

Leon managed to obtain more private lessons. With all the fervour of his youth, with stubborn will, he pushed forward to his goal: an engineering degree.

While taking the advanced courses, he began working every summer vacation at a construction firm as a technician, and all year round he continued tutoring privately. Then it was easier for him to save money to send to his parents, and he had enough for himself as well. He began to wear better, more elegant clothes. Leon, taller than average, slender, with a head of black hair and large black eyes, was intelligent and good-looking. No wonder that several of the young female students noticed him and were eager to make his acquaintance. The one who succeeded was a girl from Kovno who studied pharmacy at the university. She was lucky: as the only daughter of wealthy parents, she didn't lack for money. She didn't let Leon pay for any of their dates, calming him with a smile: "Sweetheart, don't be silly! Is it my money? It belongs to both of us!

Leon finished his studies at the university and received his diploma exactly a year and a half before his girlfriend. He was 24 years old, and immediately began working for a large construction firm.

In 1939 the Red Army obtained the right to build military bases in several places in Lithuania, by agreement with the Lithuanian government. There was a shortage of engineers for these major construction projects. In 1940 the Soviets took power in Lithuania. The government of President Antanas Smetana escaped to Hitler in Germany. Lithuania became a Soviet republic. The firm in which Leon worked was nationalized. Engineers received large salaries. The two lovers received permission from her parents, and the date and place of the wedding had been set. On the Saturday before the war broke out, the two spent a pleasant day with Leon's parents in the country. That evening, Leon's mother had told them, with tears in her eyes, wringing her hands: "My dear children! A Polish neighbor visited us today, and confided that in the next few days war is going to break out between Germany and the Soviet Union, and the 'Lithuanian shepherds' are getting ready to exterminate all the Jews.

He advises us to go with you to Kovno, where it will be easier for us to hide."

Leon and his girlfriend looked at each other. "False rumors!" both of them reassured his mother, and broke into loud laughter. Leon's father had gone to the synagogue for the afternoon prayers. Leon and his girlfriend kissed his weeping mother, his brother and his sister, and left the house. His mother accompanied them out with tears in her eyes. The next day, Sunday, the war began. Leon did not know where his beloved was, and perhaps his girl was already.... God forbid... Who knew? Who knew where?

### **Fate Decides**

Leon woke up from his trance. Shaking his head rapidly, he quickly became alert. "Not me! Not me! Let Fate decide! I'll draw lots to see who the last three men are!" he made up his mind resolutely. He wrote their names onto three separate slips of paper. He rolled the slips of paper into little balls, threw them into a glass and shook it up. With his eyes closed, he took each slip out of the glass separately, and wrote the names down on the list of men. He then carefully read the names he had written on the men's list: the first was his neighbor's father-in-law! The second was the engineer, and the third was the writer and the fourth was his son. "Fate! Fate decided, not me!" he breathed a little easier.

In the evening the staff sergeant-major returned from headquarters bearing detailed news of battles at the front. "My friend! I've prepared the list of names of four men and four women," Leon dared to interrupt him, and added: "One of the eight is a young, blonde girl, less than seventeen years old, but she's already finished seven classes of gymnasium. The staff sergeant-major tried to read the names and burst out laughing: "Ha ha ha! Strange names! Very complicated names! Good, Leon, everything is organized. Sundays the officer isn't in headquarters. My friend the social democrat stays at the telephone; Heinz and I will ride to the fort. In case the Lithuanian swine want to cause problems, I'll suggest they call headquarters. My friend at the telephone will speak to them in a tone which will convince them that they'd better immediately free the eight persons we're demanding.

"My dear friend! I don't have words to thank you for what you're going to do!" Leon pressed his hand, and after a brief silence, began to speak again: "Oh yes, I almost forget to bring something to your attention. It would be good if the eight names were written on a piece of official stationery from, your headquarters and stamped, with someone's signature. That will be more credible. The Lithuanian's won't have to call headquarters, and you won't have to waste a lot of time. After all, Sunday is your day of rest!"

"Leon, you're a good strategist! You're precise! That's how an engineer should be! It's really a good thing you made me think of it good, I always have several pieces of stationery with me." He took out a sheet of official paper from his briefcase, stamped it, and gave it to Leon with a smile.

"Dear friend! I thank you very much! You are clever, more precise and a better strategist than any engineer.

They both laughed, and drank beer.

On that tragic Friday, July 4, 1941, when Lithuanian partisans shot Dovidl at midday near the edge of the "Kettle"; when three girls were shot in the courtyard of the Fortress; when they took fifty young women out of the casemate at night, raped and then shot them; when men were taken out of the "Kettle" all night long and shot, Leon the engineer prepared the list of names of four Jewish women and four Jewish men, on official paper from the German military headquarters.

### **The Rescue Operation Successful; Nine Jews Liberated**

On the morning of Sunday, July 6, Heinz and the teacher dressed up in their military uniforms and their shiny boots.

"Herr Engineer, don't worry! We'll do everything in our power," the staff sergeant-major assured him.

Leon thanked him and then turned to Heinz: "You look so fine in that beautiful uniform. May I know your military rank, Herr Heinz?"

"Certainly, of course! Herr Engineer! My military rank now is sergeant-major! Sergeant-major!" he responded happily and loudly and then a flick of his hand to his cap, a click of his heels, and he shouted "Heil! Heil Hitler!"

They both hurriedly left the apartment.

When Leon was alone, he began very nervously to pace back and forth across the apartment. He remembered his last visit to his parents, together with his girlfriend. As if to increase his despair and spiritual pain, he started

worrying about his beloved girlfriend: "where could she be now? Where?" he tormented himself. Suddenly he stood still and in a drawn-out, broken voice, he accused himself: "What if she, too, is in the Fortress? Why did I forget? Why didn't I put her on the list too? Idiot! What a good for nothing I am!"

There was no comforting his pain and suffering any more. His neighbor was also very nervous, waiting impatiently for his wife and her parents. He went over to the engineer's several times, but didn't stay long; he spoke little, and then went back to his apartment. It seemed to both of them that time was dragging, and that the hands on the clock were moving slowly.

Just before midday, they heard many footsteps on the stairs to the second floor. They both fixed their gazes at the door, which quickly swung open. First the two Germans came in, and after them five women with an elderly man. The teacher lost no time, and called out: "Leon, dear Leon! All eight of them! And we liberated one more! Your friend the engineer, the writer and his son, got off near their homes on the way."

In worried silence the neighbor watched his wife and her parents, and broke out into a wild, bitter weeping. He spread out his arms to embrace and kiss the staff sergeant-major.

**"No, no, sir! Don't kiss me, sir! Please!"** The staff sergeant-major protected himself with both hands. Heinz, too, would not let himself be kissed. The old man, the neighbor's father-in-law, could not stand on his feet, and almost collapsed into a chair. With his eyes protruding from his face, burned and creased by the sun, he looked at a spot on the ceiling. And with a cry expressing the terror of death, he shouted without respite: "Gevalt! gevalt! The Lithuanians are shooting all the men! They're shooting Jews at the Seventh Fort! Oh, oh, oh!"

The neighbor and his wife and mother-in-law supported the old man's arms, and went off to their apartment, taking short steps.

The three women remained in the engineer's apartment. The eldest understood what was troubling him, and she introduced herself: "Leon, unfortunately we didn't meet before the war. I'm a cousin of yours by marriage, the wife of your cousin. Your little cousin Tshernele came to us in the evening. I went out to buy something to eat, and partisans detained me near the store and led me off to the fortress together with other Jews. Don't worry! Your little cousin isn't in the fortress! She's definitely with her brother, my husband, in our apartment in Slobodka."

The engineer breathed easier. The two girls and the cousin he had just met were hungry, exhausted and saddened. Their faces were creased, full of dirt, dust and black ash. They showered and washed themselves. In the closets they found clean underwear and clothing, and put it on. When they had washed, the two younger girls looked like wilted roses after rain.

The staff sergeant-major ordered Heinz to go to headquarters, and take his friend's place by the telephone. He also asked Heinz to send the soldier who served them with enough food for five people. "Heinz! Please! The women are hungry! We need a lot of food! Understand?"

He set several cans of sardine and some bread on the table, and invited the engineer and the three women to eat. "That's just for now, later there will be more food," he excused himself.

## **The Account of the Rescue**

As concisely as a military report the staff sergeant-major related: "We arrived at the fortress in a rented coach. We saw thousands of men lying on the ground in a valley. The valley was in an open field. Armed men in civilian clothes and military uniforms stood watch over the Jewish men. A uniformed Lithuanian met us and greeted us. I explained to him the kind of work we needed the men and women to be liberated for.

He argued that only he had the right to determine who was to be freed. I showed him the names of the men and women and the telephone number on the paper, and demanded that he immediately call in to headquarters. He read and examined the official stationery from headquarters, seemed to grow afraid and wrote down the names in a notebook. In a submissive tone he smiled and assured us that he would find the four men. He showed us the spot not far from the valley where the four men would be waiting for us. He also showed us which gate to go through to get to the part of the fortress where the women were.

"A Lithuanian in a military uniform opened the gate for us. He was so drunk that he swayed on his feet. When he saw the paper from headquarters with the official seal and the name of the women, he greeted us warmly and asked us to accompany him. He spoke a poor, recently acquired German, and led us through a number of iron gates and dark, long corridors. He opened a heavy iron gate and led us into a large room.

My dear Leon, it was terrible! Horrible! What we saw was unbelievable! The air was stifling, and it stank. Heinz covered his nose with a handkerchief. Both of us looked at the 'Lithuanian swine' furiously. I felt like shooting down like a dog that drunken, uniformed Lithuanian murderer who was the guard and master over those unfortunate women and small children in that chamber of Hell. Dear Leon! I don't have the words now, and I'll never have the words to communicate what the women and children looked like. I'll leave it to the women, who are now sitting here with us at the table. Let them tell you how it was!" he concluded, pointing to the three women. "They! They can tell you many dreadful things!"

The three women sat in sorrow with their heads bowed, and he began to recount further: "We need four women to do housekeeping! My good ladies! Four women! Please come forward!" I read out the first and last names of your cousin, and instead of your young cousin these good women came forward" he indicated the women at the table. "What is your last name?" I asked once again. She explained to me that the woman I was looking for was a younger sister of her husband. 'Do you have relatives in Kovno?' I asked, wanting to be sure of her identity.

"Yes! I have a cousin. He's an engineer.' "What is his name?"

"His name is Leon!"

"Good, very good! Please come with me!' I ordered in a louder tone. I called out the names of your neighbor's wife and her mother, and both of them came forward. I had no problems with those two." I looked around the room for the blonde girl. It was very, very hard to recognize her. All of the women's faces and entire heads were smeared with ashes and mud. With difficulty I managed to call her first and last name out loud. She responded. She was sitting with another woman and there were several small children near them. 'Are those your' children?' I asked

"No, they're not ours. They're orphans. They don't have any mothers anymore one of them explained."

"I calmed her and explained: 'You're being freed! We need women for housework' She broke into loud weeping, and locked her arms around the woman who was sitting next to her. I called out her name again.

She pressed herself even closer to her girlfriend and categorically refused to come along. 'Without my friend I don't want to go! I won't let her stay here alone!' she angrily shouted.

"I looked at the two girls, and then I turned to the blonde: 'Tell me please, tell me my child how old are you?'

"We're both the same age, not quite seventeen years old,' she answered for both.

"My child, don't answer for both of you!' I demanded, and asked further: 'Your education? Tell me please!'

"We both finished seven classes of gymnasium,' she again answered for both.

"Is she a relative of yours?"

"No! we both grew up together, we've been together our whole lives! I won't go without her!"

"Her girlfriend pleaded with tears in her eyes: 'Dear sir! If my friend has found favor in your eyes, please, for her sake, take me along as well!'"

He grew thoughtful, emptied a glass of beer in one long swallow, and looked a while at the two friends who had been freed. Then he turned to the engineer: "Leon, after I had heard and seen their friendship, my throat began to tighten and I had to hold back the tears from my eyes.

In order to avoid that, I began to walk among the women and children in the room. I stopped next to the two girls, and ordered in a loud voice: 'Both! Both of you come with me!'

"Heinz, who had been silent the whole time, also thanked me out loud: 'Thank you Staff Sergeant-Major! Thank you for your brilliant decision to take both of them along!'

"Before leaving that chamber of Hell Heinz said goodbye: 'Ladies! Don't worry! You will all be liberated!' and with his hand to his cap, a click of his heels, he shouted out: 'Heil! Heil Hitler!'

"We left the fort with the women and came to the valley in the open field. The Lithuanian dressed in the military uniform led us to the four men, who were already waiting for us. The old man didn't want to go, and kept pleading incessantly: 'I don't want to go along! Please let me die a natural death! I'm so old already, I don't have much time left to live. Why do you want to shoot me? Let me die by myself.'

"His daughter begged him: 'Dear father! These good Germans are freeing us! They're taking us to work for them at our home! Don't be afraid, father!'

"The older and weaker got into a coach together with me. Heinz walked together with the rest, and all's well that ends well!" Thus he finished. his account.

"Now, Leon, please take the women into your room, and let them lay down to rest," asked the staff sergeant-major.

### **The Staff Sergeant-Major Records the Women's Account**

The soldier assigned as his servant brought packages of food from headquarters and left. The staff sergeant-major loaded the table with cans of jam, marmalade, margarine, Swiss cheese and bread. He invited the women and the engineer to the table. The women held back, ashamed. The staff sergeant-major encouraged them, and amused them with pleasant stories and anecdotes to make them feel at home.

After everyone had eaten, the staff sergeant-major prepared a large steno pad: "Please, ladies! Tell me everything you saw heard and experienced," he asked in a friendly tone.

With tears in their eyes .the women retold what they had lived through, describing it as graphically as 'human language permits'.

He took everything down very fast in stenographic code.

"I'm going to write to my family and friends in Linz about these atrocities," he assured us.

Each of the women received a package of food; The soldier returned. The staff sergeant-major ordered him: "Bring this woman to her husband, healthy and unharmed; bring back, also unharmed, a young girl who is this woman's cousin!"

The woman kissed the staff sergeant-major's hand. The soldier took the woman's arm, and they left the apartment. He carried out the staff sergeant-major's command exactly. Leon the engineer had his young cousin back with him. Both of the girls insisted that they wanted to be with their loved ones.

"Where do your parents live?" The blonde girl answered that her parents lived not far from where they were presently. "Good," he agreed. "Where do your parents live?" he asked the other girl with the dark hair.

"We'll go to my parents together!" the blonde girl declared.

"So! You're both going to the same place? Good! Still both together! Very, very good together!"

He gave orders to the soldier, and turned to the two girls: "He knows exactly what his task is. In case you don't find your parents at home, he'll bring you both back here. You'll stay here with my friend the engineer under my protection, as long as Heinz and I stay here."

Both girls wept, and couldn't find the words to thank the staff sergreant-major. Both of them kissed the engineer. The soldier opened the door for the two of them; and they left. It didn't take long. He returned and announced: "Herr Staff Sergeant-Major! Both girls have been returned to their parents!"

### **From Civil Administration to the Gestapo**

The staff sergeant-major turned to Leon the engineer: "Leon, what you've done was a good thing! Your plan to free these people has been successfully concluded! You should be content now, too!"

"Sir Teacher! It was only possible thanks to your help you gave me like a true friend. Without you it wouldn't have been possible." He thought, and then resumed: "I've already told you many cheerful, nice things about the girl I decided to marry. I don't know where she is. Perhaps she's in the fortress too? Who knows? The thought tortures me. How could I forget to include her in the list? Instead of four women, my girl would have been the fifth."

The teacher thought for a while: "Leon, I'll speak to my friend, the social democrat, and try to convince him to go to the fort with Heinz, while I stay at headquarters by the telephone. It wouldn't be good for the armed Lithuanians to see me freeing Jews a second time. I'll do whatever is possible. Meanwhile stay calm!" Leon thanked him.

Acquaintances of the neighbor found out about the "good Germans" and asked the engineer to have pity and help liberate those in their immediate families. The engineer once again wrote a list; this time with the names of three women. His girl was the first name on the list. The following evening, he handed the list to the staff sergeant.

The teacher looked at the list of names of women to be freed, and shook his head no. Then he explained: "My friend! It's no longer possible! The gruesome Gestapo gang has already settled in the city, and are administering

every aspect of civilian life. It's been announced at headquarters, together with threats of severe punishment against anyone who concerns himself with questions pertaining to civil administration and especially severe punishments for having contacts with Jews. The Gestapo murderers are spreading rumors that Lithuanians don't want to live with Jews. Therefore, a fenced-in ghetto is going to be built for the Jews, just like in the Middle Ages!" he told Leon angrily. And if remembering something, he added: "My friend! They're saying in headquarters that an order is going to be posted saying that by August 15; all the Jews must move into a ghetto in the Kovno suburb of Slobodka"

Hearing this bad news, the engineer painfully realized that he had no more hope of seeing his girl again. In his sadness, his face broke out in perspiration. Leon was preoccupied day and night. The steadfast engineer, who had lived through all sorts of troubles in life starting with his early youth, grew nervous and couldn't sleep at night. Together with his young cousin, he prepared to leave the apartment and settle immediately into a ghetto.

### **The Difficult Parting**

Exactly one week after the four men and five women were freed from the fortress, the staff sergeant-major came back in the evening worried and downcast. "My friend," he said to the engineer, "a command came into headquarters that our division is to leave Kovno in two days, and get closer to the front."

The last evening, everyone ate supper in the staff sergeant-major's room. Each one of them was sunk in his own thoughts. They ate without speaking much. Before going to sleep, the staff sergeant-major invited the engineer into his room.

"Dear Leon! We have to get up very early tomorrow morning, and we're going to leave the apartment. I want to say goodbye to you now. We're going to the front, deeper in Russia. I have a feeling that we won't come back from there alive. We're being tricked into a certain death by Stalin. I want to give you my address. If you survive I ask you to promise me that you will write to my family in Linz, Austria, and let them know the dates when I entered and moved out of your apartment, and the date on which I was sent to the front. Please don't forget! Thank you, Herr Engineer! Here is the address.

He thought for a while and continued: "My friend, terrible times are coming for the Jews. They're saying at headquarters that what's happening at the Seventh Fort and what the Lithuanian swine are doing to the Jews in the countryside is just a beginning. The Gestapo murderers are preparing to do terrible things to all the Jews. Keep your head high above the tragic waves! Don't believe anything the Gestapo murderers say! Do the opposite of what they command, and stay alive! You're an intelligent and a good person." As if unburdening his heart, he sat drinking beer with the engineer, thought awhile and resumed: "I saw how the two girls held together with such commitment, and wouldn't let themselves be parted. I believe that all people can and must be that comradely, that friendly with each other. Entire nations can be the same way. That was the ideal and desire of my comrade in struggle Koloman Walisch, who died heroically and tragically on the barricades, fighting in Linz against the ugly Fascism of Mr Dolfus."

In silence the two pressed each other's hands, and the engineer went off to his own room. But he couldn't and didn't want to fall asleep, so that: he could see the staff sergeant-major once again.

In the wee hours of the morning the staff sergeant-major pressed both hands of the engineer with his two hands. They cast piercing looks into each other's eyes, parted and eternalized their friendship. Then Leon took leave of the sergeant-major: "Herr Heinz! Thank you for everything you've done for me and the others. I wish you a speedy return, healthy and strong, to your family and home!"

"Herr Engineer," he responded in a friendly tone. "You are a fine man. We're going to the front. We will win! With the Fuehrer's help we will win. And with his hand to his cap, with a click of his boots, he took his leave: "Heil! Heil Hitler!" And they both left the apartment.

**Feldafing, Germany**

P.S. According to an investigation by the council of elders immediately after the Kovno Ghetto was sealed, approximately 8,000 men and 50 women from Kovno and the surrounding area were shot at the Seventh Fort.

*Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin New York July 6, 1986*

Attestations of Khasye Khodash and Peshe Kagan

Handwritten Yiddish text, likely a signature or attestation, dated 1947-5-24.

Everything that was written on the three sheets of paper about the annihilation of the Jews at the Seventh Fort was told by me, Khasye Khodash, to Leyb Koniuchowsky, and I attest thereto with my signature.

Eyewitness: Khasye Khodash (Signature)

The transcript was written by Leyb Koniuchowsky, May 24 1947

Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin New York July 6, 1986

Handwritten Yiddish text, likely a signature or attestation, dated 1947-5-19.

Everything that was written about the annihilation of the Jews at the Seventh Fort near Kovno, was experienced by me, Peshe Kagan, nee Kilm, and I told it to Leyb Koniuchowsky. All the facts and dates, as well as the names of persons, are in accordance with the reality, and I attest thereto with my signature on each page.

Eyewitness: Peshe Kagan (Signature)

The transcript was written by Leyb Koniuchowsky while in the Munich Hospital (Signature) Munich Hospital May 19, 1947

Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin New York July 6, 1986

## THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS OF ANVKSHTSIAI

### The Outbreak of the Second World War; Dreadful Executions and Total Annihilation of the Jews of Anykshtsiai

*Note: From here until the conclusion of this part, I have faithfully followed the original text of the eyewitness, except for minor changes in style and punctuation. — L K*

#### June 22, 1941, Sunday morning. The German Attack on the Soviet Union

Sunday morning, June 22, 1941, was beautiful in Lithuania. The early-morning rays of the red sun inflamed the eastern portion of the sky. The sky was endlessly deep and wide that day. As far as the eye could see, not the slightest wisp of cloud was to be seen. The sky seemed to be molded from a single sheet of pure blue. At daybreak the sun began growing hotter and hotter, flooding the fields, pastures and forests with its rays.

A kaleidoscope of multicolored flowers bathed in the dew that settled on the fields and pastures, sparkling and flirting with the sun. That Sunday morning the air of Lithuania was full with the song of bird in the fields and forests. Nature seemed lovely, fresh and young that morning in Lithuania.

At 3:00 that Sunday morning, the German army began its blitzkrieg attack on the Soviet Union. Thus began the great historic struggle between the swastika on one side, and the hammer and sickle on the other.

That Sunday the Hitler-Stalin pact burst like a soap bubble. Towns and cities were bombarded by German airplanes. Tongues of fire and mountains of black smoke stormed upward toward the blue sky. Hundreds of innocent civilians, men, women and children, lost their lives while they still lay sleeping. Thousands were wounded or crippled.

It was quiet in Anykshtsiai that morning. Not until the sun rose high into the sky and its seething rays began to bake the streets of the town did the inhabitants hear radio announcements that war had broken out.

The inhabitants of Bath Street slept late that morning. The coachmen weren't in a hurry, because there was no work at the Soviet bases on Sundays. It was Frume, Mentke the Hare's wife, who brought the news to Bath Street. Frume found out about the outbreak of the war the first thing in the morning, when she went to deliver baked goods to the wealthier families.

When she finished her deliveries, Frume rushed as fast as she could to bring the tragic news to Bath Street.

"Wake up, Bath Street! Jews, get out of bed! War! A war's been started! How can you lie sleeping? Listen, listen Jews! War! Hitler's started a war," Frume sounded the alarm, finally waking the inhabitants of Bath Street.

Half-dressed men and women appeared on the porches and by the open windows, some with their hair already combed but still rubbing their eyes. Among them were young, pregnant women and women with small children in their arms. Bath Street had never had as many babies as it did that spring. Never had there been as many pregnant women as that spring. Their mouths and eyes wide open in fear, everyone listened to the dreadful news. Then, with their heads hanging, they all turned back into their houses. Through the open windows the sighing and weeping of women and children could be heard.

When Mentke the Hare heard the news, he wasn't terribly surprised. "I've been warning you all along that a war was going to start here, too. But none of you wanted to believe it!" Mentke was pale, and his breath came in short gasps. "With a neighbour like Hitler, we should have been expecting this," Mentke said to himself, but loud enough for Frume to hear.

Frume woke her daughters, and sat down at the table wringing her hands. "What terrible news! What terrible news! What will happen now? What's going to happen now?" she repeated, sighing constantly.

Mentke ran to the Kuritskys' house. The children were all still asleep. Yerakhmiel had just gotten out of bed and washed up. He was ready to set off for the synagogue. Golde was still in bed. Her face was pale. Her eyes stared dully at the armoire.

"Yerakhmiel, Yerakhmiel, we have to wake up the children," Golde said carefully. Then she began to sigh, "Dear God, what's going to happen now? What's going to happen to us? Dear God!"

"Motke! Get up, Motke!" It was Mentke who woke Motl. Motl opened his eyes, looking to see where Mentke was. "What's happening, Mentke?" Motl replied, as he looked around in fear.

"Don't you hear, Motl? The war's started. It began this morning," Mentke said to the bewildered and sleepy Motl.

"Come on, it's impossible!" Motl tried to reject the news.

"What do you mean, impossible? Just go outside into the street and look! German airplanes are flying back and forth for everyone to see," Mentke insisted.

Motl quickly dressed, washed up and went outside together with Mentke. Crowds stood outside, their heads tilted toward the sky, fearfully searching for German airplanes.

On the way home, Motl was silent. He walked around near his house, casting frequent looks upward. He avoided speaking to his mother. But Golde didn't leave him alone: "Motl, tell me, please, what's going to happen now? What's going to happen now?"

"Nothing's going to happen now, Mother! The Red Army will keep up the fight at the border for quite some time. Things will be calm here for the time being. Later, we'll see. We might have to evacuate to the Soviet Union," Motl calmed Golde.

But no one; neither Golde, nor Yerakhmiel, nor anyone else in Bath Street, found any rest. They all sensed that the situation was desperate.

At the command of the Soviet authorities in Anykshtsiai, everyone had to go to work Monday and Tuesday. They were threatened with severe fines if they failed to report. The majority of the Jews in town weren't even thinking about evacuating deeper into the Soviet Union. No one expected the Germans to advance rapidly. The Jews were also afraid lest they be accused of causing panic in town. So they waited, tensely following the course of events.

But the events followed each other fast as lightning, and the Jews didn't have time to plan their strategy. On the evening of Tuesday, June 24, a stream of refugees poured into Anykshtsiai, on foot, on bicycles and in trucks. They came from the surrounding cities and towns, many of them from Kaunas, Jonava and Ukmerge. That same Tuesday evening the leaders of the local Communist party, the municipal employees and the Red militia all fled the town. The Soviet authorities left without sharing any final communique with the townspeople. Nor did they warn anyone about the seriousness of the situation.

When they saw the crowd of refugees arriving, the Jews of Anykshtsiai fell into a terrible panic. They began running away from town, wherever they could go. The coachmen of Bath Street removed the slats from their wagons and replaced them with lattice-like sideboards. The inhabitants of Bath Street packed everything they could into the wagons. But no one spoke, no one cried out. The coachmen didn't even curse their horses.

Sighing, worried and depressed, the Jews carried bound packages out of their houses and threw them onto the wagons. The Kuritskys hurriedly packed as well. Golde found more and more things to bring along. Everything in the house seemed essential to her.

"Mama, you've packed and loaded enough already. Everybody else is finished, and they're on their way." "Right away, Motl. There's one more thing I forgot." Golde came up from the cellar bearing a large container, copper pots and pans, and a mortar and pestle. "I think that's everything," Golde thought to herself, standing still and wringing her hands.

The time came for saying goodbye. Golde sat down on the porch, pressed her hands against her eyes, and broke out into bitter weeping.

"Look, Yerakhmiel, look what we are coming to. All our lives we've lived here. We've had so much sorrow here and so little joy. It's been so hard for me to get everything we need. Can we just abandon everything?" Thus Golde wept at the thought of losing her poor home and all her possessions. For the last time she cast sad glances at her world, and said goodbye to everything in it. The fingers of her shriveled hands caressed the doorknob, the mezuzah, the chairs on the porch, and she took her leave of each object. And just like Golde, all the other housewives went through the difficult ritual of parting with their homes.

Yerakhmiel stood by the wagon, his dreamy, caring eyes brimming with tears. He looked sympathetically at Golde and at the children who sat weeping on the wagon. Motl walked around with his hands thrust into his pants pockets, watching the residents of Bath Street taking leave of their homes.

Yerakhmiel tore Golde away from the porch, as if she were someone who had to be forced away from a new grave after a funeral. Weeping and barely able to stand on her feet, Golde settled into the wagon next to her children.

Wagons packed full of bedding, clothes and kitchen implements and occupied by women and children left Bath Street one by one, heading for an unknown, huge and stormy world.

When the summer evening gathered over Bath Street, the last rays of the sun wandered like orphans across the sand, onto the porches and into the empty houses.

The non-Jewish population of Anykshtsiai didn't even think of evacuating the town. With contemptuous smiles they watched as the terrified, weeping Jews departed. All the roads leading to and from Anykshtsiai were filled with columns of Red Army troops in retreat, and with Jewish refugees.

Large, heavy tanks, artillery, trucks filled with soldiers and ammunition raced down the roads, leaving behind them clouds of dust. Their noise echoed throughout the region as they hurried further and further away...away from Lithuania, towards the endless plains of the endless Soviet Union.

In the mad rush of the tanks and trucks, dozens of people; including civilians and Red Army soldiers; were crushed, killed and wounded, along with horses and cows. Meanwhile German airplanes freely bombarded the roads and highways. Every bombing raid left behind dead and wounded Red soldiers and civilians; most of the latter were Jews. Suitcases full of clothing, coats and bedding were scattered along the roads, but nobody gave them a second glance. Destroyed tanks, mortars and overturned trucks blocked the progress of the retreating Red Army. All civilians, whether walking or riding in wagons, were forced off the highways and roads. Many Jews returned to their abandoned homes in Anykshtsiai.

On the morning of Wednesday, June 25, armed Lithuanian supporters of the Germans took power in Anykshtsiai. They wore white ribbons on their sleeves and called themselves "Partisans." They remained organized under that name throughout the remainder of the war. At 4:00 p.m. that same Wednesday, June 25, German army units entered Anykshtsiai, without encountering any resistance.

Crowds of Lithuanians dressed in festive clothing greeted the Germans with bread, flowers and wine. Music played in the streets, and a considerable sector of the population danced and celebrated joyously. The happy ones were the devotees of the Fascist party and its various organizations, who hoped to gain independence under German protection. They had managed to maintain their organizational structure in secret throughout the time of Soviet occupation, and they had also kept in touch with their members who had escaped to Germany after the Soviets entered Lithuania. After the war broke out, they had sniped at the retreating Red Army, as well as at Jews who were trying to escape the Nazis by making their way further into the Soviet Union.

There were others who celebrated as well: Fascist Lithuanians who had gone to Germany, and who now returned in the company of the German army as specialists in the murder and annihilation of Jews.

The members of the Verslas society were thrilled. They now had the opportunity to realize their slogan of "Lithuania for the Lithuanians," to carry out the "Lithuanization of the cities," and finally "kick the Jews out of Lithuania."

Others who celebrated were Lithuanians whose possessions had been nationalized, and who hoped to get them back. The wealthy noble landowners were happy at the prospect of getting back parts of their holdings which had been nationalized and distributed to poor peasants. There were Lithuanians who hated the Soviets for deporting entire families to Siberia, and they were happy to see the Germans come too.

A number of Lithuanians who had accepted positions under the Soviets managed to evacuate. Some Lithuanians had remained neutral and avoided political involvement. They neither celebrated the arrival of the Germans, nor did they miss the Soviets.

From the moment the Germans entered Anykshtsiai and the partisans took civil power the Jews realized that they were in a desperate and tragic situation. On one hand, the Jews were terrified of the Germans, and on the other hand they were afraid of the partisans. From the very start they were alone and isolated in a world full of enemies. The Jews immediately sensed that the very ground under their feet was rejecting them.

## **How It Began**

Some of the Jews stayed in their homes, rather than leaving Anykshtsiai. Large numbers of Jews living in the surrounding towns, had been harried by the Germans, and ended up stuck in Anykshtsiai. When they saw how the Lithuanians were celebrating the arrival of the Germans, the Jews locked themselves inside their homes. No one dared go out into the street.

Through the cracks in their doorframes, through their shuttered windows, Jews looked out onto the street. Motorized German army units raced through the town as fast as the wind, carrying away with them bouquets of flowers as gifts from the Lithuanian population.

Those left behind to rule the town were individual armed Lithuanians with white ribbons on their sleeves, as well as organized partisans. Not a single one of the Jews slept that Wednesday night. The merest rustle, the least motion in the street terrified them. They sat waiting, waiting for the situation to become clear.

At 5:00 a.m. on Thursday, June 26, there began a sudden loud pounding on the doors and windows of Jewish homes. Shouts rang out in German: "Jews out!" They were echoed in Lithuanian: "Jews out!"

Armed Lithuanian partisans broke into the Jewish homes like wild animals. They drove the Jews out into the street, beating them with the barrels of their rifles, with whips and with sticks. They didn't allow the Jews to bring anything along, not even the smallest package.

Once the Jews were in the street, they were lined up in rows and marched through town in long columns. As they marched the partisans beat them, insisting that once the Jews were assembled in the synagogues and study houses, they would be blown to bits with dynamite and hand grenades.

Children became separated from their parents. Husbands lost sight of their wives and children. While they marched, however, they were forbidden to look for their families. The Jews were forbidden even to speak to one another, or even to weep out loud. The partisans punished those who disobeyed their orders by kicking them with their military boots or cracking their whips over their heads.

When they had herded all the Jews into the synagogue yard, the partisans began beating the Jews with sticks and whips, and especially with military shovels. All the women, children and men ran as fast as possible through the open doors of the synagogues and study houses. Partisans stood by the doorways bearing posts, sticks and shovels, which they brought down on the heads and sides of the mortally terrified mass of Jews streaming through the doors.

The loud thud of the blows of the sticks and military shovels blended with the weeping and shrieking of women and children. The partisans did their work diligently and skillfully. Very few of the Jews managed to avoid their blows. As the Jews moaned in terror and pain, the partisans doubled over in gleeful laughter. The Lithuanian devil was having his day.

When all the Jews had been driven into the synagogues and study houses, the doors were closed. It was terribly crowded. More than half the Jews were injured and bloody. They bound each others' wounds, trying to staunch the blood. Those with broken arms or ribs leaned against the walls, pale, barely able to breathe, moaning through lips which they bit to keep from screaming. Those Jews who hadn't been bloodied by the beatings they received didn't even try to get help, because there was no way even to help those who were bleeding from broken skulls, sliced ears or noses, or knocked-out teeth.

All day Thursday, until evening came, Jews were brought to the synagogues and study houses. These Jews had been chased by the Germans, and had tried to return to their homes. That same Thursday evening, only some of the women with children, along with children under the age of ten, were freed and permitted to go home.

At 11:30 p.m. that same evening, there was a banging on the windows along with mad cries in German and Lithuanian: "Jews out!"

All of the men, women and children in the synagogues and study houses were driven out into the yard. The men were separated out, and lined up in a row facing the women and children. "Begiti" (run), ordered the partisans. The men started running in the direction they'd been told to. At that moment the partisans began shooting with automatic weapons. The synagogue yard was filled with the shrieking and weeping of the women and children, who watched as their fathers, husbands, brothers and sons were shot. Those who had been shot gasped for breath, and the wounded pleaded and shouted piteously. A chorus of terrible shouts, constant shooting and moaning echoed through the night time darkness.

The men whom the bullets had missed hid in nearby courtyards. Some of them obeyed an order to return to the synagogue.

On Friday, June 27, the partisans rounded up the men who were in hiding. At the entrance to the synagogue they were once again beaten with poles, sticks and military shovels. All of the men who were brought back were brutally

beaten. But there was nothing that could be used to bind their bloody wounds. Many of the injured stood, their faces pale, pressing their hands against their wounds. Blood poured out between their fingers.

More than thirty men were shot to death that Thursday night. They were buried in a mass grave in the synagogue yard. Two young boys were buried right at the threshold of the old study house. In order to fit them into the narrow grave, they were placed inside head to toe.

On Saturday, June 28, the Jews went back and forth with stretchers, bringing wounded men to the town's Jewish doctor, Noyekh Ginsburg.

The Lithuanian partisans kept thinking up "clever" ideas. Every day they thought up new methods of sadistic torture. Each night bore its own distinctive program of tragedy for the helpless Jews in the death camp at Bath Street in Anykshtsiai. By night as well as by day, the Lithuanian "devils" amused themselves at the expense of their victims. They entered the synagogues and study houses with flashlights, seeking out young women and girls and taking them away for entire nights. In the morning some of the women were brought back to the study houses and synagogues. They were pale, exhausted and depressed.

More than once the partisans woke the Jews in the middle of the night and forced them to do heavy calisthenics. The partisans tortured the Jews until they collapsed in exhaustion. Then they drenched those who had fainted with buckets of water. The Jews on the ground weren't allowed to get up, but were forced to stay prone on the ground in the water and blood.

Every morning the dead and dying were removed from the study houses, and buried in mass graves in the synagogue yard. The man in charge of death was called the "Leather Cap." He was a Lithuanian from the Klaipeda area who had arrived in Anykshtsiai after the German conquest.

During the period of Soviet rule in Anykshtsiai, the Leather Cap had been the secretary of the Communist youth. The Leather Cap used to beat the unfortunate Jews with a long, stout beam. He would barely be able to lift it before he brought it down on the Jews lying on the floor. The screams of the helpless, tortured Jews could be heard throughout the area surrounding the synagogue yard. Each time the beam was raised and brought back down, the blood of a new victim began to flow.

One time in the middle of the night, when the Leather Cap raised and lowered the beam over and over, and screams of pain resounded through the synagogue yard, whistling was heard through the windows of the old study house. Two German Wehrmacht soldiers looked through the window. A short time later both of them were inside. When they saw what was happening, they reached for their revolvers, and argued sharply with the Leather Cap.

Two of the Jewish women told the German soldiers everything. At night the two soldiers came back well-armed, and defended the Jews in the old study house against the Lithuanians. It was the first quiet night in the synagogues and study houses, the first time the Jews weren't tortured.

The home of the Leather Cap was searched that evening. The searchers found gold watches, rings, valuable furs and other items he had robbed from Jews. The murderer was arrested, and not seen again.

What was happening to the Kuritsky family during this time?

Together with other Jews from Anykshtsiai and other towns, they set off on the road to the Lithuanian town of Rokishkis, hoping they would be able to continue further toward the Soviet border. In the Shvadas forest between Anykshtsiai and Rokishkis, armed Lithuanians shot at the Jewish refugees from all sides. Many Jews were shot. The terrible weeping of women and children, of the dying and wounded blended with the sound of heavy gunfire, echoing through the forest. On the side of the road lay dead and wounded Jews, some of them strangers and others from Anykshtsiai. Among those who were shot Motl noticed the Feldman family, consisting of the father, Khone-Yitskhok, a quilter; his brother Nosn; Nosn's wife; and Nosn's two small children, a boy and a girl. Because of this attack, the surviving refugees didn't make it to Rokishkis until the morning of Thursday, June 26, 1941.

The Rokishkis Jews were amazed to see the refugees. They didn't believe the Germans would be able to advance so quickly and easily. They were still staying in their homes, waiting. There were Red Army units in Rokishkis, which were evacuating gradually and calmly. The Soviets told the refugees who wanted to go further that they would be able to repulse the Germans, and that it was important not to cause panic by fleeing. They didn't let the refugees travel on the highway.

At 8:00 a.m. on Friday, June 27, 1941 the Germans were close to Rokishkis. Bitter fighting began. There was artillery and heavy mortar fire. The Jews hid out in cellars. It was quiet for twenty minutes. Then the Germans entered the town.

Lithuanians wearing white ribbons on their sleeves and carrying flowers in their hands immediately appeared on the streets. Many of them were armed. They welcomed the Germans ceremoniously. They kissed each other, danced and sang Lithuanian nationalist songs.

The Germans rested for a short while, and then marched further on. During the same day, Lithuanian partisans appeared in the streets. They ordered all the Jewish refugees to leave Rokishkis within one hour.

That day hundreds of Jews, including women and children, left Rokishkis either on foot or in wagons, and returned to their homes. The Kuritskys also left Rokishkis, together with other Jews from Anykshtsiai. None of the peasants would sell any food to Jews. They wouldn't give them a drink of water. They wouldn't even let any Jews cross their thresholds. The Lithuanian peasants drove away the hungry, thirsty and exhausted Jews as if they were lepers.

In the evening on Saturday, June 28, 1941, the Kuritsky family and other Jews returned to Anykshtsiai. All of the roads and paths surrounding the town were guarded by armed partisans. They arrested all of the Jews coming back to town, and robbed everything they had. Among the armed partisans were Lithuanian townspeople whom Motl recognized; neighbors with whom he had once met and spoken every day. Not one of the returning Jews re-entered Anykshtsiai without permission from the armed Lithuanians.

### **When the Devil Laughed Out Loud: The Death of Yerakhmiel Kuritsky and Other Jews**

On Saturday, June 28, 1941, when the returning Jews were arrested by partisans, the younger men who were suspected Communists were taken to prison. The rest were taken to the study houses and synagogues.

Motl and a group of young men were separated from their families, and taken to the local prison under a heavy guard. There Motl encountered young people he knew from Anykshtsiai and from other towns. It was terribly crowded in the prison. It was impossible to sit down. Everyone was forced to stand crowded closely together. The Lithuanian guards constantly teased the Jews, threatening them with various forms of death.

The Anykshtsiai quilter Beynish Statler, a father of four children, couldn't stand it any longer. On the morning of Sunday, June 29, he hung himself in prison.

Groups of Jews were constantly brought to and from the prison. Many of them were brought to the synagogues and study houses, because the prison was overcrowded. Motl was included in one such group, which was taken to the Shoemakers' Synagogue. There he found his father Yerakhmiel, who was pale, apathetic and hopeless. His mother and the other children had been freed and allowed to go home. It was as crowded in the Shoemakers' Synagogue as it had been in prison. Jews from Anykshtsiai were herded there together with a large number of refugees from Ukmerge, Jonava, Kaunas and other towns. Everyone in the synagogue had been brutally beaten, and they were pale and hungry. Motl noticed how all of the Jews tried to hide in corners to avoid being seen.

At noon on Sunday, June 29, 1941, three armed partisans came into the Shoemakers' Synagogue. All of them were Lithuanians from Anykshtsiai. They ordered the father of the Kuritsky family to come forward. Yerakhmiel responded. They took him out of the synagogue, deathly pale, planning to kill him in the courtyard. One of the higher-ranking officers advised them to put it off, rather than causing a commotion in town on a Sunday. Yerakhmiel went back into the synagogue. He sat down next to Motl. The hearty Yerakhmiel had turned into a shadow of a person in the course of that short period. Yerakhmiel sat with his head resting on his palms, lost in sorrowful thought.

Terrified and astonished eyes regarded Yerakhmiel from all sides. The tormented Jews in the synagogue knew that those who were summoned by the partisans didn't come back. Yerakhmiel stared through his fingers at the mass of Jews lying on the floor; some with bloodied faces, some with their skulls bandaged, some who had lost the ability to speak.

"My child, my Môtele! Look what they've turned us into! You don't know what they did during the short time we were on the road." Yerakhmiel removed his hands from his face, and looked at Motl with love and empathy.

"I do know, father! I know what they did here! I heard about it in prison!" Motl's eyes never stopped looking at his father, who was so greatly changed.

"Listen, my child! For years, for long years I rode from village to village. I was acquainted with hundreds of peasants. I would never have believed what their children are capable of doing."

"Father! I would never have believed it either! Look who's torturing and killing Jews! My Lithuanian friends from the orchestra, who used to go visiting at Jewish homes, who were friendly with Jews, who used to go to their homes on the Sabbath to eat gefilte fish. Some of them were Communists. Who would have believed this? Who would have imagined it?"

"Yes, my child. We lived among them for so many years, but we didn't know them. I never knew what the peasants were thinking, sitting there with a fur robe thrown around their shoulders, smoking their pipes and lost in thought. They always hid all their thoughts in clouds of smoke. We recognized them too late, my child, and now...."

"Father, don't worry! We'll live to see better times!"

"No, no, my child. I've already lived through two wars. I won't survive this war, my child. The Lithuanian Devil knows no mercy. You, my child; save yourself any way you can. You're still young and strong. But me. I've wasted all my health and strength travelling around the countryside."

They were together for ten minutes all told. Then two partisans came back into the synagogue and called out Yerakhmiel's name. "My child! My Motl! Be well! Stay alive! Don't forget your mother! Take care of your mother and the rest of the children! I'm going to my death, and I do not know why."

Father and son looked at each other for the last time. Both felt their eyes brimming with tears. Yerakhmiel was led out of the synagogue. Motl never saw his father again. That same Sunday, while it was still light, partisans took two Jews named Artshik Birger and Henokh Rits out of the synagogue. They were both handed shovels. Some time later they both returned to the Shoemakers' Synagogue. They told Motl that a retail merchant from Anykshtsiai named Velvl Fisher and an iron dealer named Yankl Rivesman had been found hiding in their homes by partisans. Both of them were taken to the Jewish cemetery and shot. After they were shot, the partisans took Yerakhmiel to the pit and shot him as well. Artshik Birger and Henokh Rits had filled in the grave of the three murdered Jews.

Among the three partisans who took Yerakhmiel out of the synagogue to the cemetery and shot him were Grazhys, a local coachman, and someone named "Lopatke" Kanapkis.

Immediately after Yerakhmiel was taken out of the synagogue partisans found a bricklayer from town named Yoshe Karebelnik hiding under the platform at the center of the synagogue. The partisans mocked him, beat him, threatened to shoot him and demanded that he tell them whether he wanted to live or not. After he begged to be allowed to live, they shot him.

In the evening that same Sunday, June 29, the partisans assembled a group of six elderly Jews from among those on the floor, all with long gray beards and all with stooped postures. The partisans drove them all onto the platform. "Frogs! Communists! Stalin's children! Sing Psalms! Shout out loud! Frogs!" This was the order the partisans gave.

The old Jewish men didn't protest. They didn't say a word. They looked all around the synagogue through moist eyes. From the platform they could see all the Jews at once. Their glances lingered over the Ark of the Covenant and on the Ten Commandments inscribed on the wall above the Ark. They looked and looked, and began to prepare themselves. They pulled tallioth and prayerbooks out from the table on the platform.

"Faster, faster, frogs! Come on, sing those Psalms out loud already!" The partisans kicked the Jews and waved military shovels in front of their faces.

The old Jews stood, threw the tallioth around their heads as if it were time for Kol Nidrei on Yom Kippur, held the prayerbooks in their hands and swayed back and forth. In long, drawn-out, pleading tones they prayed to the almighty Jewish God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Tears poured from under their tallioth, and they prayed that God would have mercy on them, on their families and on all the Jews in the synagogues and study houses in Anykshtsiai. At first it was an almost silent prayer, thin and sharp as a slaughtering knife.

"Let's hear your Psalms louder! Louder, frogs!" The partisans began to crack their whips over the heads of the elderly Jews. The quiet prayer was transformed into an ecstatic chant of praise to God. The Jews began to say the Hallel prayers enthusiastically. "Hallelujah, Hallelujah servants of the Lord!"

It seemed as though in their ecstasy they had forgotten their surroundings. In their own imaginations they had apparently left the platform, left the earth; they had elevated themselves, and were hovering in the heavens, right

by the Divine Throne. In loud voices, in heart-rending tones, they continued pleading. "From the depths I called unto God" They no longer heard the partisans' orders. They no longer moaned when the whips struck them, and their voices were heavenly, sacred. Some of the Jews on the floor were swept along with them. Anyone who had an ounce of strength joined in the Hallel prayer.

The Shoemakers' Synagogue had never heard such an enthusiastic Hallel prayer! The partisans stood holding their sides in hilarious laughter. For that moment, the "voice of Jacob" won out over the "hands of Esau."

The old Jews on the platform no longer heard or paid any attention to the partisans' commands. The partisans became overcome with rage. One by one, the partisans first broke the old Jews' skulls with military shovels, and then shot them.

When a military shovel came down over the head of the last Jew standing on the platform, the Hallel was finally silenced. The Jews on the floor watched in terror as the old men were murdered one after the other. They backed into the corners, covering their eyes and ears.

The partisans forced several Jews to carry the murdered men out of the synagogue. The six murdered men were carried off to the Hare Hills in a wagon, and Jews were ordered to bury them there. After the six murdered Jews were buried, the partisans shot another Jew named Meyshke Lafer right next to the grave. The Jews who buried the six elderly Jews told of this incident after they were brought back to the synagogue.

### **Motl Kuritskv Escapes Certain Death**

During the time one group of Lithuanians was torturing the elder men on the platform, other Lithuanians beat the Jews in the synagogue with pieces of iron, with heavy beams and with military shovels. After the elderly men who had been murdered were taken out of the synagogue, shouting and weeping could be heard on all sides: this one was dead, another one was dying. The moans of the dying could be heard along with the pleading for rescue of those who were badly wounded. But nothing could be done for them. The synagogue looked like a slaughterhouse for innocent Jews. The floor was covered with freshly-spilled blood. The entire mass of people tried to crawl into the corners, seeking refuge with wild looks in their terrified, staring eyes. But this wasn't the end of the terrible slaughter in the Shoemakers' Synagogue.

At 5:00 p.m. that Sunday partisans came into the synagogue one more time. They indicated to various individuals that they were to leave the synagogue. After they were taken out, shots were heard. A youngster from Anykshtsiai named Mikhke Karabelnik dared to look out through the window. He saw that those who had been taken out were being lined up next to a pit and shot. Mikhke began loudly telling the other Jews what was going on. Everyone lay down on the floor, hiding their faces to avoid being recognized. The partisans who had come in ordered everyone to stand up. They spotted Motl Kuritsky, and ordered him to go with them. Motl was the seventh man the partisans took out. At the exit stood two rows of partisans. The men who were taken out were forced to run the gauntlet between two rows of Lithuanians. While Motl walked between the partisans, they began beating him with sticks, whips and military shovels. In the line Motl spotted a Lithuanian from town named Bakzevitshius Viktorius, who had played in the orchestra with Motl.

Motl shouted out: "Help me stay alive! They're taking me off to shoot me!"  
Viktorius answered, "You're a Jew! I can't save you!"

When he arrived at the pit, Motl saw three Jews; Henokh Rits, Yankele Feygin and Artshik Birger; who were shoveling dirt to cover the corpses in the pit. Next to the pit Motl saw a fourth shovel. He grabbed it, and joined those shoveling dirt. One of the three Jews shouted, "What are you doing? You're going to destroy us!"

At that moment a nineteen-year-old boy named Abke Segal was taken out of the synagogue through the gauntlet. He stood next to the pit. He was shot, but only wounded. He ran away from the pit. He fell near Motl's house. The partisans finished him off there, and threw him into the pit. The four Jews resumed shoveling dirt over the corpses. In all the confusion, the drunken partisans forgot about Motl.

While Motl's uncle Hirsh Romang was being taken out of the synagogue through the gauntlet, he broke free and began to escape. The partisans shot at him, and wounded him in the stomach. Hirshl fell to the ground. The partisans surrounded him. Hirshl begged the Lithuanians: "Let me live. I have three children. Their mother died in childbirth. They'll be complete orphans!"

The Lithuanians forced him to recite Psalms, and then, laughing out loud, they shot him and threw him into the pit. Motl shovelled dirt over his uncle's body.

Nekhemke Tunkel (whose father was Motl the chimney-sweep) also broke free while being led through the gauntlet. He continued running until he reached the threshold of his house. His wife looked through the window and saw everything, and quickly opened the door to their hallway. A bullet ended his life at the threshold of his house. The top half of his body was already inside the house. The partisans let him lie there until the pit had been entirely filled in.

At seven or 7:30 in the evening, the shooting at the pit stopped. Apparently there had been an order to hide the evidence as fast as possible. Suddenly a commotion broke out in the courtyard.

Motl lowered his head and worked diligently, in order to avoid being recognized. When the pit was all covered over, the partisans ordered the Jews to cover the pit with a large stone. Motl moved the stone with his last ounce of strength. After that all four Jews were herded back into the synagogue.

That Sunday the partisans shot more than thirty Jews from among those in the Shoemakers' Synagogue.

The partisans carried out similar slaughters in all of the study houses and synagogues in Anykshtsiai. When the mortally terrified and tormented Jews saw Motl coming back, they forgot about their sufferings for a while, and abandoned themselves to amazement. Motl told everyone all that had happened, and hid in a corner, so that the partisans wouldn't notice him again.

### **Women Raped. Then Everyone Is Shot**

That same Sunday evening around eight or nine o'clock, partisans brought into the Shoemakers' Synagogue a group of 25 or 30 girls from Anykshtsiai and from other towns. Among the group was Motl's sister Rokhl-Leyke, his cousin Peshe Romang and his sister's girlfriend, Khaye-Sorke Beder.

The girls sat down next to Motl and told him that while the men were being taken from the Shoemakers' Synagogue and shot, a second group of partisans had taken young, attractive girls out of their houses and raped them in the streets and in courtyards.

The women whom the partisans found in hiding were taken to prison. From the prison, the girls who had been seized were taken to the Shoemakers' Synagogue.

At about midnight, half-drunk partisans came into the synagogue. They began shining powerful flashlights into every corner of the synagogue. Motl hid his sister close to him. The other two girls also hid close to Motl. The half-drunk partisans in their heavy boots stepped on the tortured bodies of the Jews, who lay crowded on the floor like herring in a barrel. The helpless people were forbidden to moan or shout when they were stepped on.

Anyone lying on the floor who sighed was stabbed by the Lithuanian partisans on the spot. The other Jews lying nearby were forbidden to get up. They had to continue lying still next to the one who had been stabbed.

The women who were picked were forbidden to moan or scream. Among the women who had been brought to the synagogue was a woman from Kaunas. She lay next to her husband. The Lithuanian partisans spotted her and ordered her to go with them.

The husband wept and pleaded, "Don't take my wife!" The partisans stood on his throat and choked him. The next day he was found strangled to death. His wife was taken out of the synagogue.

The muted voices of women could be heard outside. One girl named Dobke Dubinovsky fainted after she was raped, and was carried back into the synagogue. When she came to, she wept constantly and related everything that had happened.

After the women were taken out of the synagogue, several Lithuanians would hold the victim by her hands and feet. Meanwhile the rest raped her. After they raped the women, they shot them. Only a few managed to return to the synagogue.

Among the women who were raped were Peshe Romang and Khaye-Sorke Beder. Khaye-Sorke Beder was shot after she was raped.

Motl successfully managed to hide his sister.

The next day, the morning of Monday, June 30, 1941, the partisans loaded all the women who had been raped and shot, and all the men who had been stabbed in the synagogue, onto wagons and took them away to the Hare Hills. The Jews whom they forced to bury the dead were subsequently shot on the spot and buried.

### **Motl Escapes from the Synagogue and Goes to His Mother**

While the partisans were busy raping the women, during the night from Sunday to Monday, Motl seized an opportunity to escape from the synagogue through the window. Yosel the slaughterer lived near the synagogue. Motl crept through the darkness on his belly until he arrived at the yard of the slaughterer's house. Then, still crawling on his belly, Motl arrived at the porch of his own house. Above all Motl wanted to show his mother that he was still alive.

"Mama, Mama, open up for me!" Motl knocked on the door. Apparently his mother didn't hear him, and Motl knocked on the door again. It was a dark night. The sky was clouded over. The town was cloaked in mourning. Suddenly there was a beam of light from flashlight. A partisan approached Motl's house. Motl's heart banged so hard he thought it would burst. He threw himself down against the floor of the porch. The partisan didn't spot him, and went on.

"Mama, Mama, open up!" Motl knocked more loudly this time. The door opened up. While Motl had been taken from the synagogue to the pit, his mother had been standing at her window. She had begun tearing her hair, and then fainted. She was certain that her darling Motl was no longer among the living.

When she opened the door and saw Motl alive, she collapsed in astonishment. Motl's smaller brothers and sisters, half-naked, crowded around Motl weeping. Motl calmed them all down, revived his mother and remained standing in the middle of the room.

Motl didn't recognize his mother. Her face was drawn, and there wasn't a drop of blood in her cheeks. Her eyes were filled with sorrow that could have darkened the sun. Her clothes hung on her body as if draped over a living skeleton. Meanwhile Motl's little brothers and sisters all seemed terrified and depressed. Their shining eyes looked at Motl with pleading and affection.

Motl sensed that he was about to fall apart, here in his own home next to his mother. He quickly realized that he could easily endanger his own life and the lives of his near and dear ones. It had to be quiet in the house. He quickly smoked a cigarette he found lying around, and with difficulty managed to calm himself down.

Motl explained to his mother that he had come to show her that he was still alive, and that he was ready to escape town for the forest immediately. Motl assured his mother that no harm would come to her or the children.

"Motl, Motl! You're the one who has to protect and care for the little children now! Stay here, Motl, don't leave me alone!" Golde pleaded with tears in her eyes.

Motl was no longer afraid of the most horrible death, and at that moment he made up his mind. "For you, Mama, I'm ready to sacrifice myself," he reassured her with an iron determination. He began to design a hiding place for himself. His mother hid Motl under her bedding.

In the morning on Monday, June 30, 1941, partisans went to all the Jewish houses and announced to the women and children that they had to wear yellow Stars of David, to designate that they were Jews.

That same Monday, a group of partisans selected from their houses all the elderly Jews with beards and sidelocks, gave them shovels and brooms, and led them off to clean the market place and the streets of the town. While the old Jews were working, the partisans beat and tormented them, and forced them to sing various songs in chorus.

Peasants from the countryside and Lithuanians from town gathered to watch the "performance." They enjoyed themselves immensely. After the old Jews had been tortured all day, they were allowed to return home in the evening, barely alive.

The selections and murders went on daily in the synagogues and study houses. The dead were buried in the synagogue yard, or else they were carried out to the Hare Hills in wagons. On Wednesday, July 2, 1941, all of the Jews from other towns and cities were permitted to leave Anykshtsiai.

## **Motl Is Rearrested and Meets His Childhood Friends in Prison**

On the morning of Thursday, July 3, 1941, one of Motl's younger brothers noticed the infamous murderer "Lopatke" Kanapkis walking on the street near their home. With all his strength he ran to warn Motl. The murderer noticed Motl's brother running in fear, and became suspicious. He entered the house and found Motl. Golde wept and begged him not to take her son. She offered to let the partisan take anything he wanted from the house. But Kanapkis was not to be swayed, and he took Motl and Golde to Yurzdikas Street to clear ruins. He left Golde to continue working, together with some other Jews. He assured Golde that Motl would only be carrying wood to the offices of the town council, and that he would bring Motl right back. Golde wept and moaned in a heart rending voice as the Lithuanian took Motl away, lifting his revolver out of its holster and getting ready to shoot.

Kanapkis took Motl to the prison on Skemeny Street. At the prison Motl was thrown into a room where he found three men from Anykshtsiai, including his best childhood friends, Khayemke Feygin and Elke Binder. They had been imprisoned from the very first days.

Motl saw a terrible scene in the prison cell. The three men lay like pieces of bloody meat, wrapped in bloody rags. They could barely stand up. They were hungry, beaten and tortured. In trembling voices, like invalids on their deathbeds after a major operation, they told Motl: "Several days ago, the prison was still full of Jewish men from Anykshtsiai and a number of refugees as well, all of whom had been arrested. The partisans used to come into the cells every night and brutally murder Jews with military shovels, poles, beams and pieces of iron. They took the corpses away to the Hare Hills in wagons. Only a few of us have miraculously managed to stay alive, and even we are struggling against death."

Motl stared at his comrade from school days Khayemke Feygin, who had once shared his bench in the classroom. He looked at his other two friends as well. He tried to discern his friend's true features, but was unable to do so. It was a grotesque, bloody mass that took the place of Khayemke's features.

The floor was covered with dried out, black blood. On the walls various slogans had been written in blood. One, in Lithuanian said, "I am not guilty!" Another, in Yiddish, said "A time will come when things are good again!" "Avenge our spilled blood!"

In the evening on Thursday, July 3, newly-captured Jews were brought to prison. Every time steps could be heard in the corridor, the three men in their corner began to tremble as if they were receiving an electric shock. The new arrivals were thrown into a different cell.

The first sleepless, bitter night was extremely difficult for Motl. The next morning, Friday, the four men were allowed to go to the toilet. In the corridor Motl spotted a local Lithuanian partisan who had played in the orchestra with Motl. Motl promised him everything in the Kuritskys' house if he would free him from prison. At night the partisans let Motl out of the prison, in exchange for the agreed price.

The next day, Saturday, July 5, 1941, the partisan came to Motl's house. He loaded a wagon full of items he had chosen, and a horse pulled it all away. Golde was together with Motl again. She wept for herself, for her children, for Yerakhmiel, for her entire family and for her Yerakhmiel's hard-won possessions, which the Lithuanian had inherited.

The partisans used the Jews' misfortune as an opportunity to get rich quickly. In exchange for large sums of money, they allowed wealthy Jews to leave the study houses and synagogues, and permitted them to go home. Of course, only a minority were lucky enough to be temporarily freed in this fashion.

In the morning on Saturday, July 5, 1941, the total annihilation of all the men began.

## **Gruesome Torture and Murder of the Men in the Study Houses and Synagogues**

Motl saw groups of partisans going to the study houses and synagogues. They were armed with military shovels, pieces of iron, thick poles and whips, in addition to their firearms.

Motl understood that something terrible was about to befall the helpless, interned Jews. He began looking for a place to hide. Every place seemed insecure. He climbed up into the attic and crawled into the pigeon coop. From there he could see everything that was taking place in the study houses and synagogues. What Motl saw and heard that Saturday will remain as an eternal mark of shame, a glaring stain on the Lithuanian people and on all of humanity.

The men in the study houses and synagogues were forced to strip naked. Overclothes and underclothes began flying out of all the windows. Long coils of dust flew in the air. Blows could be heard. All kinds of blows. Blows from shovels, blows from posts, pieces of iron and whips. All these blows fell on the naked bodies of Jews in the study houses and synagogues. All kinds of shouts and weeping echoed through the entire area. The screams of the beaten Jews, the bizarre, heart-rending shrieks of Jews with split skulls, Jews with broken ribs, arms and legs, made their way through the open windows together with the dust, like a massive cry for help; a cry to help the Jews save their very lives, which the partisans violated, trampled with their feet and destroyed.

To Motl it seemed that the helpless screams of the men, none whom wanted to die senselessly, were appealing to the entire world for help.

And the great, wide world did hear their cries! The residents of the surrounding area, the Lithuanians to whom the dying men called for help, stood nearby with their wives and children, and gleefully grabbed the bloodied clothing which flew through the open windows together with the last screams of pain. They joyfully took home the clothing they had grabbed, while the screams of pain died out in the wide space of the universe. No one responded to the shouts of the tortured Jewish men, not even the heavens, which were so blue that which were so far away from the earth.

Motl tried to stop up his ears with his hands in order to avoid hearing the pained screams. But the screams pierced through his ears into his brain. His heart banged as if trying to burst his chest and his entire body trembled feverishly. Choked words broke through his mouth "My God, what's happening here? Are these the people we've been living among? Is it possible?"

Motl didn't know to whom he was talking. He didn't know to whom he could scream and plead. He saw his beloved pigeons hopping around so calmly, so happily, as if nothing unusual was going on just *there at* the study houses and synagogues.

"How lucky you are, my pigeons! How fortunate that you don't have to live in this murderous world; the world of those who are tortured to death by their fellow human beings. Thus Motl addressed the pigeons.

Motl desperately wanted to become a pigeon like them, so *he* could fly away from this place of slaughter. He began imagining what he would do if he could fly. "I'd fly away from here, and I'd fly around through the entire world without resting. I'd pass along this terrible weeping and screaming wherever I went. Perhaps somewhere, someone would take pity and come to help?" These were Motl's feverish thoughts in the pigeon coop.

The screams of those who were being murdered kept up. Motl lived through an entire, dreadful eternity, starting in the morning and continuing through the afternoon, until the screams began to lessen, began to be quieter. The gasps of the dying and continued deep moans took the place of the screams. Then the moans and gasps died out as well. Finally the last, flickering lives of the men of Anykshtsiai were extinguished in the study houses and synagogues on Bath Street.

The dust coming through the windows thinned out. The screams, moans and weeping died out. A deathly stillness reigned all around. A cemetery-like quiet spread out among the study houses and synagogues, in the middle of that bright, sunny day on Bath Street.

Some time later, partisans ride into the synagogue yard with wooden platforms. Several surviving Jewish men were forced by the partisans to carry the "products" of the slaughter out of the synagogues and study houses on Bath Street.

The murdered men were piled onto the platforms. From their edges hung the split heads, the broken arms and legs of the victims, who were entirely naked or in their underwear. The dead bodies on the platforms looked like massive pieces of bloody meat which were being brought from a slaughterhouse. Partisans stood next to the platforms, watching the shattered corpses, thinking up witticisms, celebrating and feeling entirely satisfied with the successful "work" they'd accomplished. The Lithuanian Devil laughed out loud that day.

The platforms began to move. Thick drops of blood poured out on every side, and in them the sun's oblivious rays were reflected. All the men who had been murdered were taken away to the Hare Hills, where they were buried in mass graves.

That terrible day, Saturday, July 5, 1941, between 450 and 500 Jewish men were murdered. The younger women and several men were left in the study houses and synagogues.

The next day, Sunday, July 6, 1941, there were people in the study house who had died of the tortures inflicted the day before. Partisans murdered several Jews that day as well. The corpses of these men were also taken to the Hare Hills. The women along with the few surviving men were freed from the synagogues and study houses that day.

This was the end of the torture and slaughter of Jewish men in the study houses and synagogues in Anykshtsiai. Among the women who were freed was Motl's sister Rokhl-Leyke. With terror, pain and tears, she related all the horror she had watched, while the men in the Shoemakers' Synagogue were being murdered. After all she had lived through, Rokhl-Leyke could not be recognized. She constantly wept, and was reluctant to talk about what had happened.

### **Motl Defeats Death**

After Motl saw what had been done to the men in the study houses and synagogues, he decided not to stay in Anykshtsiai, but rather to run wherever his legs would carry him. He took his leave of his brothers, sisters and mother, and at 10:00 p.m. that Sunday, he left the house, hoping to make it to the Jewish cemetery.

A peasant named Davidonis lived next to the stream near the bath house, not far from the synagogue yard. His two sons were partisans who had taken active part in the slaughter of the Jews of Anykshtsiai. As he ran past the farm, Motl saw partisans celebrating the annihilation of the men. Suddenly Motl was attacked by a large dog, which chased after him barking constantly. The peasants raced out of the house with guns in their hands. Motl threw himself down among the potato plants. The dog chased after him. The partisans caught Motl, had "fun" with him, and took him to prison after giving him a beating.

In addition to Elke Binder and Khayemke Feygin, who had already been in prison when Motl got out, Motl saw many more Jews who had been in hiding and then were caught. Among them were Yitskhok Tal, Motke Veynik, Dimant and his wife, Gavriel Kats, Ester Rits, Dr Noyekh Ginsburg and his wife, and Motl's girlfriend Khaye-Leyke Garber.

The partisans teased the Jews they had captured. They said that the Jews they'd caught wouldn't be left alive. They constantly reported the latest news from the regions the Germans had just conquered. They said that the Germans were already approaching Moscow. They mocked the Red Army. They made the Jews in the prison suffer in every way they could devise. The next evening, Monday, July 7, 1941, partisans took several groups of Jews out of the prison and brought them to the Hare Hills.

At 10:00 p.m. they took out a group of eleven men. Among the eleven were: Gavriel Kats, None Diment, the pharmacist, Dr Noyekh Ginsburg and his wife, and others. Motl Kuritsky was also among the group of eleven. Everyone was led to the Hare Hills under heavy guard. On the way the partisans teased and beat the Jews. When they reached the Hare Hills and saw a pit already excavated, the entire group of eleven began to run in desperate confusion. The partisans shot at them, and struck a number of them. Some of them managed to escape. Motl Kuritsky made his way to the Jewish cemetery. Motl sought out his father's grave and shed countless tears there. Then he went to see his mother and show her that he was still alive. Motl spent just one last night in his house together with his mother, brothers and sisters.

In the morning on Tuesday, July 8, 1941, posters appeared in the streets announcing that all Jews; men, women and children; had to leave their homes by Wednesday, and move into the dachas in the Shilalis forest, two or three kilometers from Anykshtsiai. They would be allowed to bring along small packages which they could carry in their arms.

The announcements promised that nothing would be done to harm those men who had been in hiding the entire time. The partisans made the same promise when speaking to the Jews before they left their homes. The naive Jews believed these promises, and left their hiding places to join their families.

Weeping bitterly, the women and children, along with the few surviving men, left their homes. They bore small packages in their arms. As soon as the Jews left their houses, their Lithuanian neighbors began to rob them. Their eyes filled with tears as the Jews watched their neighbors happily removing all their possessions.

The Kuritsky's neighbor, a peasant named Davidonis, came to Motl and demanded that the Kuritskys leave their house as fast as possible. Davidonis was employed by Leybe the bath house keeper. He pumped water into the bath. He spoke Yiddish well, and was friendly with the Kuritskys. On the Sabbath he used to come to eat gefilte fish and slices of challah which Golde gave him.

Motl wasn't taken in by the Lithuanians' promises. He wanted to escape from town, rather than entering the ghetto. His mother spoke to him, trying to convince him to go with her and the rest of the family.

Motl obeyed his mother.

All of the streets and alleys were sealed off and guarded by policemen and partisans. The Jews had to leave town by way of Mill Street (Malune Gatve).

Motl walked along next to his mother, brothers and sisters. Every ten meters stood an armed partisan. Not far from the police station, Motl noticed a policeman pointing him out. Golde noticed it as well, and she began trembling with fear. Closer to the police station a policeman stopped Motl and arrested him. Motl's mother and the children broke out weeping. Before Motl was taken away, Golde took her final leave of him: "We're done for! But you, my child, don't lose hope!"

Mother and son looked at each other for the last time in their lives.

As the Jews were being taken down the street, the police and partisans arrested all of the men who had been hiding, and took them to prison. Before the men were taken from their families the partisans assured them that they were being taken to work. They gave a solemn oath to bring the men to the newly-created ghetto in the evening.

A half hour later a few dozen men, including Motl, found themselves once again in prison. There Motl found some of the surviving men who had escaped after they were all taken to be shot at the Hare Hills the previous night, and then been recaptured.

In the evening that same Tuesday, July 8, the Jewish arrestees were permitted into the courtyard of the prison and allowed to walk around. The men found out from the partisans that the women and children had moved into the dachas. The partisans said that the women and children would subsequently be moved into a ghetto into the county seat, Utena. The fact that they were allowed out into the yard to walk around gave the Jews some hope of seeing their families in the ghetto.

Thirteen men whom the partisans considered "dangerous" were interned in a single cell in the prison. These thirteen men had previously escaped; some from shootings, some from prison; and had been in hiding. The leaders of the partisans and police had sought the thirteen unsuccessfully. Among the thirteen was Motl Kuritsky.

After the exercise period the thirteen men were taken to the office of the prison. Every one of them had to recite his first and last name, his date of birth and his occupation. There were additional questions. Everything was written down. Everyone had to testify to the information with his signature. Also in the office, the partisans examined everyone from head to toe. After they signed the papers, the thirteen were led into a single cell.

A deathly quiet reigned in the cell. The thirteen men looked at each other mournfully. No one dared to be the first to break the silence with speech. They all sensed that the situation was desperate. Everyone was silent, but at the same time they all spoke: they spoke a mute language with the sad looks in their eyes. First one of them would sigh deeply, then another. The rest would respond with a sigh. It was the only language in which the hopeless situation of the thirteen men could be expressed.

At 9:30 p.m. there were people in the yard, illuminating the area with electric flashlights. The thirteen men thought they were going to be beaten and tortured. They all began looking for a place to hide. Their ears strained to listen to the ringing of the keys in the corridor. The door to their cell was opened. The smiling faces of partisans appeared in the doorway. They asked for volunteers to go out and help with a truck that had gotten stuck in the mud outside of town.

Not one of the thirteen men volunteered. Then they were ordered to get out of the cell and line up in rows of three in the corridor. They assembled in four rows of three, with a single man behind. Everyone was taken out of the corridor into the prison yard. When they got out into the street, the thirteen men were surrounded by more than thirty policemen and partisans, armed with revolvers and automatic rifles.

They all kept their arms cocked and aimed at the thirteen Jews. The partisans strictly forbade the men to speak to each other. They threatened to shoot the entire group if any one of them tried to escape. The thirteen men understood clearly where they were being taken. They understood but there was nothing they could do to save themselves. Everyone was taken in the direction of the Hare Hills.

The evening was fine and warm. It was one of those summer evenings on which people enjoy life to the fullest. It wasn't dark yet, but rather a summer twilight, neither day nor night. In the sky, a full moon slid smoothly along

among fleecy, light hills of clouds, looking down naively and indifferently at thirteen young lives which were being taken to a senseless death.

Outside of town, the partisans ordered the thirteen men "to make themselves lighter," by taking off their shoes. When they got a little further, they ordered the men to take off their pants, then their jackets, and so forth. The thirteen men were left in their underwear.

When they reached the Hare Hills, they ordered the Jews to walk along a narrow path. A partisan named Grazhys spotted Motl: "You've escaped death a few times already! But this time you're not going to escape!" Grazhys emphasized the promise with a blow of his rifle butt on Motl's head.

The Jews were forced to go uphill and downhill again several times. Then they were brought amongst some low brush and pine trees, and ordered to stand still. Motl spotted the pit among the brush. At that moment the pit looked like the open maw of the most dreadful beast, in the world. The partisans ordered the thirteen men to stand in a line, one behind the other. The police and partisans lined up on both sides of the row. Each one of the Jews had to walk through this gauntlet toward the pit. As he walked, he was struck with blows from boards and wooden beams from both sides. Everyone had to jump into the pit.

Anyone who refused to do so was beaten with boards and rifle butts until he fell into the pit. The partisans responded to the heart-rending moans and screams of pain of the Jews with laughter and more blows.

Motl Kuritsky was the seventh in line. He ran the gauntlet and jumped into the pit on his own, in order to avoid being beaten. When he fell into the pit, Motl immediately ran into a cranny and curled himself up tightly. All of the men were in the pit by then. They all clung closely to each other, squeezing each other's hand, putting their arms around each other. They all braided themselves together in a corner, forming an indestructible part of the eternity that was to follow their deaths.

Khayemke Feygin, Motl's best friend, lay near Motl. Khayemke and Motl had gone to elementary school together. They had done their homework together, had often eaten supper at each other's houses, had chased pigeons together. Khayemke pressed Motl's hand.

"Motele! We've played together, lived together and now we're going to die together." Khayemke sighed deeply, and pressed Motl closer to him.

"Yes, Khayemke! Life is so beautiful, and now we're going to be killed!" Motl answered with a sigh. They pressed each other's arms tighter.

In Motl's subconscious, in the depths of his soul, there remained a spark of hope. He pressed himself even further into the corner of the pit. The partisans stood close by to the pit, cracking jokes and getting drunk.

Thirteen hearts banged like motors, making the walls of the pit tremble and bringing bits of earth falling down. Everyone sighed and breathed with difficulty. Motl took his final leave of the world. He looked upward at the starry sky and the moon.

The images of Motl's murdered father, his mother and the rest of the children appeared in his eyes. He saw himself together with his beloved Khaye-Leyke, riding on a sleigh on a cold winter's night, not far from the Hare Hills. That night, too, the moon had looked down just as naively. And Motl's heart thumped and thumped.

Thoroughly drunk and ready for the massacre, the partisans asked if anyone had any last words to say. It was quiet for a time. Then suddenly the mewing of a cat was heard. A small young black and white cat had fallen into the pit. The partisans ordered the men to throw the cat out of the pit. Yitskhok Tal, who was among the ones lying in front, threw the cat out.

"We have pity on the cat, but you Jews...." one of the partisans explained. They all broke out laughing. They laughed loudly.

Some of those in the pit said their "last words." They pleaded not to be shot, because they were innocent. A certain fifteen-year-old boy named Khonke Beder pleaded: "You've accused my comrades. But I'm still so young; what could I have done? Let me live!"

The partisans burst out laughing again.

Then there was an order: "Fire! (Ugnisi)" This was followed by a shout of "Shema Yisroel! (Hear O Israel)" from the thirteen Jews. It was Hell: a mixture of fire and pieces of earth which began raining down on the Jews in the pit. Then the cries of "Shema Yisroel" began to die down, and switched to moans and gasps. The partisans standing above stopped shooting.

Henokh Segal lay next to his son Aba. His son asked weakly, "Father, are you still alive?"

Henokh answered with a moan, "Yes, my son, and you?" The two clutched each other more tightly.

A new shower of bullets began to rain down. Aba began to gasp again, "Fa-a-ther... are you still li-i-iving?" And with that, his soul left his body. Henokh did not respond this time; he only gasped and twitched. The shooting stopped and started once again.

Motl felt that Khayemke's hand was growing weaker and colder. He felt a warm stream of blood pouring over him, growing heavier and heavier. Motl hadn't been wounded yet. He removed his hand from Khayemke's and covered his head with his arm. Suddenly he felt a stab in his backside, and then in his arm. A warm stream of blood poured from his arm onto his face.

The shooting stopped. Then it was quiet for a while.

"Well, that's it! They're all dead," one of the partisans called out.

Motl was squeezed and hemmed in on all sides. Pieces of earth dislodged by the bullets fell down onto the Jews' bodies, which were still trembling and twitching in the throes of death, and which closed together and pressed against each other like marionettes. Motl lifted his head with a moan. When the partisans heard his moan, they began shooting into the pit again. Motl was slightly wounded in the head. His body was racked by a cold sweat. He lay there, as if unconscious.

"I'm dying, I'm dying," was the thought that overcame him. But Motl was still able to hear and sense everything going on around him.

"Well, that's enough already! We've got to shovel some dirt over them," one of the partisans suggested. A horrible "earthquake" began. A great deal of sand and dirt poured down from above. The mass of corpses, together with the dirt, became very heavy. Motl began to be squeezed and pressed on all sides. He felt his guts closing in against his heart and lungs, which were already full of blood and dust. Only his head remained out in the air. He kept his eyes squeezed shut. He breathed dusty air through his nose. Motl felt himself being suffocated under the heavy mass. With a desperate burst of strength, he tore himself out and jumped upwards.

Dirt poured around his body on all sides. His head was further away from the dirt. He gradually came back to his senses. He opened his eyes, sighed deeply and at that very moment Motl saw a man standing in underwear, in white underwear, not far from him in the pit. Motl's tortured, wounded body was overcome with trembling.

The man in underwear crawled closer toward Motl. He looked at him and asked quietly, "Motl Yerakhmiel's?"

Motl replied with a sigh. Next to him stood Mentke the Hare.

Mentke took hold of Motl under his arms, and pulled him upward. A pile of sand poured down onto Motl's arms in the corner where he lay. The dead bodies fell into new groups. Motl began to breathe fast. His eyes grew even darker, and multi-colored, long rays of light flew from them like lightning. Motl's heart beat quickly and then grew very, very weak. Motl swayed like a tree that has been sawed down and is about to fall.

Mentke supported him. The fresh air began to revive Motl. He opened his eyes and looked at the heap of dead comrades, and at the corner where he had lain. He felt terrible pain in his arm and leg.

His head rolled on his shoulders as if it belonged to someone else.

Mentke tried to reach the top of the pit with his fingers, but was unable to. He hastily dug out a foothold in the side of the pit with his hands. He placed one foot in the foothold, leaned on Motl lightly, and pulled himself out of the pit. Motl placed his uninjured foot in the foothold, and Mentke pulled him out of the pit by the arms. For a short while the two men stood next to the pit. A strong, fresh breeze hit Motl's face. Nearby Motl saw the peaks of the Hare Hills, with rays of moonlight pouring down over them. Everything was calm. Yet the two men were afraid to rest any longer.

"Mentke, should we run?" Motl proposed.

"Yes, let's run," Mentke answered.

The two men set off running in the direction of a dense forest nearby. Motl suffered terrible pain in his leg. Placing his weight on his good leg, he ran forward with all his strength, further and further from the pit.

Suddenly, shots began to ring out from among the bushes. The partisans hadn't left yet. Apparently they were waiting for more groups of men to be brought from the prison. When they saw two naked men running, they opened fire. Motl threw himself to the ground. Mentke fell without having managed to run far away from the pit. Like lightning, bullets flew around Motl with a cruel whistling sound. The shooting stopped. Motl lifted himself up with his last ounce of strength, and ran into the woods near the hills. From there he continued into a valley, where he lay exhausted.

Gradually he came to, gathered his wits and began feeling stronger. He ran as fast as possible and made his way to the Jewish cemetery.

The tops of the trees were still. It was a calm, quiet night. Indeed, it was too quiet. The fall of Motl's bare feet resounded in his own ears and terrified him. The kingdom of death was shrouded in mysterious solitude and sorrow, barred in by the rays of the moon, which still looked down naively from the heavens. Motl made his way to his father's grave and fell on it weeping. He pressed his arms and his naked body against the mute, cold grave.

"Father, dear father, tell me! What should I do now? Where should I go now? Father!" Motl pleaded and demanded, but there was no answer. When he had finished pleading and weeping, Motl looked at the mute grave and went away.

### **The Lithuanian Girl Varute Mishunaite**

Not far from the Jewish cemetery lived a Lithuanian friend of Motl's named Varute Mishunaite. Before the war, Motl had often danced and spent time with her. She was fond of Motl. Motl left the cemetery and went into her yard. He quietly entered the foyer of her house, and then made his way into the attic. By now it was after midnight on that tragic Tuesday, July 8, 1941.

In the morning the sun appeared on the distant horizon, glowing red. Motl looked through the cracks in the wall of the attic and saw Varute leaving the house. She stopped several times, looking in amazement at the blood stains on the walls.

"Varute, Varute!" Motl carefully called out several times. Varute recognized Motl's voice, and went up into the attic. When she saw Motl in his torn, bloody underwear, with his bruised and bloody face, Varute couldn't recognize him. She screamed and fainted. Her mother immediately ran up into the attic, and found her daughter unconscious. She brought a pitcher of cold water, and revived Varute.

Motl drank an entire pitcher of water, and fell into a deep sleep. Thick, white foam bubbled from his mouth. Varute stayed near him, wiping the sweat from Motl's brow and the foam from his mouth. Never in his life had Motl slept as deeply as he did then.

When he opened his eyes, Varute was still sitting next to him. She washed Motl's wounds, and bathed him with iodine. His right arm and hip were swollen.

By then it was Wednesday, July 9, the day after the women and children had been taken to the dachas. Peasants from town and from the country were still busy robbing Jewish possessions. Varute went to Motl's house, and brought back some men's clothing, along with Motl's winter coat. Motl washed himself and changed his clothes. Motl began to be ruled by a stubborn will to stay alive and tell the world what he had seen. He didn't lose hope. Yet before his eyes he constantly saw the images of his twelve comrades who had been shot to death in the pit. Their last, pleading words and their cried of "Shema Yisroel" resounded in Motl's ears for a long time afterwards, tormenting and oppressing his heart and soul.

The names of nine of the twelve murdered men were:

1. Elke Binder, a flax merchant;
2. Chonke Beder, a quilter;
3. Avrom Beder, a quilter, Chonke's brother;
4. Itske Tal, owner of a shoe factory;

5. Henokh Segal, owner of a woollen boot factory;
6. Abe Segal, a woollen bootmaker, Henokh's son;
7. Moshe-Motke Vaynik, retail merchant and orchard leaser;
8. Leyzer Garber, a student;
9. Khayemke Feygin, a harness maker.

The names of ten of the thirty Lithuanian murderers were:

1. Mishkinys, a student, the chief of police at the time;
2. Talotskis, a student and sports instructor;
3. Antanas Pumputis, a shoemaker who played in the orchestra;
4. Victorius Bakzevitsius, a bagel baker;
5. Bakzevitsius' brother, a bagel baker;
6. Grazhys, a coachman;
- 7,8. Two brothers named Davidonis, whose father worked for Leybl the bath house keeper;
9. Viliutis, who owned a sausage shop;
10. Kanapkis, nicknamed the "Spade" (Lopatke).

How did Mentke the Hare get to the pit? That remains an eternal riddle. That evening several groups had been taken from prison before the group of thirteen which included Motl. All of them were taken to the Hare Hills to be shot. The pit was long. It is possible that at the other end of the pit, previous groups had been shot and buried over, and that Mentke was among them and had managed to remain uninjured. Motl was never able to figure out exactly how the bizarre incident had come about.

### **Golde and Her Children Are Taken to Their Deaths**

After Motl had been separated from his mother, Golde had been constantly on the verge of fainting. Her weeping and screaming was louder than the shouts and moans of all the rest of the mothers and wives whose men had been taken away.

All of Golde's children walked close to her, comforting and trying to calm her.

"Mame! Keep up your courage, Mama! You're not the only one! The rest of us children are close by, and they still need your help." Thus Rokhel-Leyke and Sorele pleaded with their mother. The smaller children held onto Golde's skirts, pleading: "Don't cry, Mama, don't cry! Motl will come back. You'll see, Mama, you'll see!"

Golde tried to control herself. Her head was thrown back. Her face was pale. Her eyes stared toward Heaven. She no longer wept out loud. Yet from time to time a moan would make its way out from her heart: "Oh, what do they want from my child? Why did they take him away from me? Help, help!" Her moans were so powerful and anguished that it seemed they were ready to challenge the entire, murderous world.

Rokhel-Leyke and Sorele walked along supporting their mother, as if they were headed toward a funeral. "Frogs, frogs! Move it, faster! Let's go, faster, frogs!" The Partisans constantly drove them onward, cracking their whips over the heads of the women and children. Those who were beaten screamed and wept even louder, and the partisans whipped them even more and laughed out loud. Oh, the Lithuanian partisans had a good laugh that day.

The Jews were forced to set up tents and cover them with sheets on a pasture in the forest, near the dachas. Every tent was packed with women and children. There were children of various ages, including a number of suckling infants. There were a number of pregnant women.

Day and night the screams and weeping of small children could be heard in the camp, along with the heartrending weeping of their mothers, who didn't know what to do. They had only been allowed to take a little bit of food along when they left their homes. So the mothers went without, and instead nourished their children with the food they'd brought along. For the first days the partisans didn't provide any food whatsoever. The women were forbidden to leave the camp and go to nearby houses to get something for their children to eat. Armed partisans stood guarding the camp, preventing anyone from leaving the spot. The partisans called the camp the "ghetto."

Golde, her children, her loyal friend Khane Kats and Khane's children, all settled into one tent. They helped and comforted each other to the best of their abilities. But both of them had suffered such disasters, both were so miserable, that it was hard to offer each other any comfort.

"Khanke, you've still got something to hope for! Your Gavrielke managed to escape being shot. He could still be in hiding. But my Yerakhmiel! They shot him at the Jewish cemetery," Golde would often say to comfort her friend, while she herself would weep bitterly.

"Golde, Golde, my crown! Where could he have run to? Where could my Gavrielke escape to? To whom? Don't you see that the Lithuanians are against us," Khane would reply, refusing to be comforted.

"You see what a disaster befell me! My Motl wanted to escape rather than going into the ghetto with us, and I asked him to come along. With my own hands I... I don't know! I don't believe he's still alive," Golde would repeat, tearing her heart out in remorse.

The children wouldn't leave Golde alone for a minute with these agonizing thoughts.

The partisans assured the women that all the men who had been arrested on the way to the ghetto the day before were alive and healthy, and had been taken away to work.

In addition to cold, hunger, worry about the fate of the men who had been taken away, and their tragic helplessness to obtain a bit of bread for their children, the women and girls were in deathly fear of being raped.

At night the partisans would wake the women and shine flashlights at them. They would select women and girls who appealed to them, herd them into the nearby woods and rape them. The screams of the women who had been violated could be heard in the camp; they echoed through the forest. The partisans would use their whips to force the women to be quiet, and they laughed out loud. The Lithuanian devil ruled, and he laughed fiendishly.

Young people from town, including Jews, used to come out strolling to that spot on summer evenings before the war. Now the only ones walking around were Lithuanian boys and girls who often came to see the "zoo." That's what the Lithuanians from town called the camp full of Jews. The local Lithuanians were eager and curious as they happily regarded the "zoo." They listened attentively to the boasts of the partisans about what they had "invented" and accomplished in the field of tormenting the innocent Jewish women and children.

During those summer evenings, the music and singing of the carefree Lithuanians in the houses nearby, and of the youth in the nearby woods, carried to the makeshift camp. The air was full of the singing and trilling of assorted songbirds in the forests and fields.

In the midst of this carefree sea of joyful life, the camp appeared like an isle of tears, where loneliness, terror and hunger ruled day and night, and where one constantly heard weeping, heartrending moans and sighs of Jewish women and children.

Motl rested well in Varute's attic, and his wounds healed quickly. But he couldn't remain there quietly very long. He was deeply distressed about the fate of his mother and the children. He absolutely had to know where the women, children and the few surviving old men had been taken. Motl convinced Varute to go to the dachas to find his mother and convey to her the message that he was alive, and that his life was no longer in danger.

Varute had acquaintances among the partisans guarding the camp. This gave her an opportunity to meet Golde. Of course, Varute didn't relate the story of how Motl had survived the slaughter. However, she assured Golde that Motl was alive. The astonished Golde broke out in hysterical weeping. She didn't believe what Varute told her, and asked her to bring a letter from Motl. When she got home, Varute went to the attic and told Motl everything.

With his left hand, which had not been injured, Motl wrote just two words on a piece of paper: "I'm alive." Varute took the note to Golde, along with a package of food.

Her eyes filled with tears, Golde read the note from Motl several times. "Listen, I beg you; do what you can to save my son's life," Golde begged Varute, caressing and kissing her.

That day, Wednesday, July 9, 1941, Varute learned from some partisan friends of hers that the next day, Thursday, July 10, 1941, all the Jews in the camp were to be shot. When Varute had given the note from Motl to Golde, she had still been unaware of the terrible news. Varute told Motl the news.

On Thursday, July 10, Motl was unable to find any rest in the attic. He was feverish and overcome with trembling. He was constantly consumed with the thought that his mother, sisters and brothers might no longer be among the living in God's beautiful world.

All day long, various thoughts and plans raced through his head, as he sought ways for save his near and dear ones. Every tortuously invented plan quickly evaporated in light of the gruesome reality.

While he lay in the attic, Motl looked out through the cracks toward the sinking sun and it seemed to him that this evening the sun was setting for all eternity. When it grew darker outside, he was overcome with a dreadful feeling. He felt drawn, dragged, torn and summoned. At night he descended from the attic and went to the Hare Hills.

In a nearby forest, among some shrubs, Motl hid himself and waited. His heart pounded in fear and agitation. The sky was illuminated by a full moon. Motl remembered how he himself had lain in the pit two days earlier. That night, too, the moon had looked down naively. That was when Motl learned to hate the moon. But now it had come back again.

From a great distance, Motl's sharp eyes spotted a large crowd of people. Motl's heart felt like it was about to burst. The more he looked, the more clearly he saw the crowd coming closer and closer to the Hare Hills. And Motl saw that most of the people were women and children.

The partisans made the crowd stop among the bushes. The terrible weeping and screams of women and children could be heard. Motl had never heard such painfully heartrending screams, yells and moans in his life. He also heard salvos of automatic rifle fire. The screams grew even wilder. Motl's heart felt like it was going to burst in agitation. He felt the presence of death in various bizarre ways, the same ways he had felt it when he himself lay in the pit.

Figures began to appear in his brain. He saw the figures of his mother and the children next to the pit, and then their corpses in the pit. He knew exactly what that would look like. He himself had barely survived the same thing just two nights before.

Motl tried to move, and sensed that he had become chained to the cold ground. He was unable to tear himself away. He felt that he was about to die. With all his strength, with his heart and soul bloodied, he tore himself up from the ground and ran toward the Jewish cemetery. Like a tree that had just been chopped down, he fell down at his father's grave.

While he lay on the grave, he heard shots coming from the Hare Hills. Motl began bitterly complaining to his father's soul. He poured out everything his bitter, weakened heart held, accusing his erstwhile Lithuanian friends who had tried to shoot him on Tuesday, and who were now shooting his mother, brothers and sisters. He addressed his father for a long time. He poured out endless tears onto the grave. As much as he weeped, his heart felt no lighter. He caressed and smoothed the sand covering the grave, and then he got up.

He began to wander among the graves and gravestones like a shadow. At every gravestone he stopped, complained, recited his tale and repeated the accusations. He felt exhausted, weak, on the verge of collapse. His wounded arm, hip and head all pained him. He lay down between two graves, and stayed there for a few hours. From the direction of the Hare Hills, he continued to hear salvos of shots, followed by individual shots.

Suddenly Motl heard footsteps at the cemetery. He looked around and spotted two children. They were carefully searching among the graves, looking for an appropriate place to lie down and hide themselves. Motl understood that the only children who would look for a place to hide at the Jewish cemetery in the middle of the night had to be Jewish children who had escaped death.

"Who's over there? Who?" Motl called out carefully.

"Oy, oy, Mama!" the two children cried out in terror. They began to run away.

"Don't be afraid," Motl calmed the children. They stopped. Motl approached them. It was terrible to see how the two children looked. They were both deathly afraid, pale, cold. In their terror they were both unable to speak.

Motl recognized them. They were a pair of brothers. The elder, Hirshele, was fifteen years old, and the younger, Moyshele, was thirteen years old. They were Gavrielke Kats' children. All three went to Motl's father's grave and sat down. The children calmed down a bit as they grew accustomed to the lonesome cemetery and began to tell their story:

That evening (Thursday, July 10, 1941) the partisans ordered everybody to get ready to move to a ghetto in Anykshtsiai. Nobody believed the partisans' promises. The Lotver rabbi and his wife volunteered to be transported with the first group. He explained to everyone that he was relying completely on God. After that, women and children began to volunteer. Motl's mother hoped that once in town, she would have a better chance of getting information about Motl, and so she had volunteered as well. The boys' mother Khane didn't want to be separated from Golde, so she volunteered as well.

About 300 people were taken from the camp. They were heavily guarded by partisans as they left. There were no rows. A large crowd slowly made its way toward town. Everyone thought they were being taken to prison first. When they arrived at the prison, the partisans ordered everyone to turn left, on the road leading toward the Hare Hills. Everyone understood by then that they were being taken to be shot. Women and children began screaming and weeping.

Golde's smaller children began tugging at their mother's skirt, pleading, "We haven't done any harm to anybody! We want to live!"

"My children, what can I do? They're taking us all away to be shot." Golde broke out in bitter weeping. She felt weak, and nearly fell down.

"Don't cry, Mama, don't cry. Mama, are they taking us away to be shot at the same pit where Motl escaped?" the younger children asked.

"Be quiet, my children, be quiet! I'm not afraid of death. I can't help you. But what's going to happen to Motl?" And Golde began weeping again. The whole time Golde walked together with the boys' mother Khane, and so they heard everything that was spoken.

When they arrived at the Hare Hills, the partisans ordered everyone to lie down on their bellies. The two mothers lay down next to each other, along with their children. The children clung tightly to each other, and to their mothers. Everyone wept and screamed, and begged the partisans not to shoot them. The partisans began striking with their whips, laughing as they did so. The mothers told the children to run away. Motl's brothers and sisters didn't want to leave their mother. Khane's two sons, however, had held each others' hands and began running toward the forest. Nobody noticed them. From the forest they had run to the Jewish cemetery.

All three stayed at the cemetery until just before daylight on Friday, and then they went to Varute's house. When Varute saw all three Jews, she became terrified. She was afraid to hide all of them. But she offered to let Motl stay in her attic, and promised to help him.

Motl didn't want to leave the children alone, however, and went away with them to hide in a potato field. All morning the three lay still, afraid to move at all. At midday, Varute brought food to all three. She dressed Motl's wounds as well. It was a very hot day. The sun burned, baking the bodies of the three tired Jews. When evening arrived, Varute took them into the foyer of her house, and fed them. That Friday night all three slept in the potato field.

On the morning of Saturday, July 12, when Varute brought food to the potato field, Motl asked her to go to town and find out exactly what had happened to the Jews in the camp. When she came back Varute related that on the evening of Thursday, July 10, partisans had taken some three hundred women and children, along with a few old men, out of the camp and shot them at the Hare Hills. She also reported that people in town were saying that the surviving women and children had been taken from the dachas to a ghetto in Anykshtsiai.

When Varute went to the potato field, she would pretend to sing and casually wander about, in order to avoid anyone's suspecting her true reasons. One time an aunt of Varute's found her in the potato field. "Why are you out in the potato field all the time? It seems pretty suspicious to me. Tell me what's going on here," her aunt demanded. Varute had no choice but to tell her aunt the truth. Her aunt wiped tears from her eyes.

"Don't be afraid, Varute! I'm hiding Gavriel Kats, the two boys' father. He ran away, while he was being taken off with a group of Jews to be shot." Thus she calmed Varute, who later reported everything to Motl.

That night Motl met Gavriel Kats and reunited him with his two children. The four survivors never separated again. Varute offered again to hide Motl at her house. Motl thanked her, but he didn't want to be alone.

Thus began the four Jews' hard and bitter struggle to stay alive. They had no valuables or money with which to buy food at night. Nor did they have a place to hide. They remained close to town in forests, fields and in small barns in the countryside. They would steal into a barn to sleep, without the peasants' knowledge. At every step, they were in danger of being spotted by partisans. Varute was one of the very few who helped Jews during that tragic period. She always knew where the four Jews lay in hiding, and would bring them food and drink.

### **The Small Ghetto in Bath Street**

At the end of the fifth week after the war broke out, Varute related to the four Jews that the last few hundred Jews had been taken away from the dachas and settled in Bath Street, near the synagogue yard. She also said that there was no guard posted nearby. The Jews were only allowed to move about in the small area which had been

assigned to them. The four Jews decided to enter the ghetto for a short time in order to rest, and find out what had happened to their relatives and friends.

At 4:00 a.m. on Saturday, July 26, the four Jews stole into the potato field of the peasant Davidonis. Then they crawled on their bellies through the potato field belonging to Leybe Moyshe the bath house keeper, near the bath house. Gavrielke and the children remained lying there. Motl continued alone, through the yard of the study houses, to the home of Eliyohu Hechter. He looked through the window and saw women sleeping there whom he recognized. He slowly entered the door, and went into the house.

Motl saw a dreadful scene. He could barely recognize women whom he knew. Some of them lay on beds which had no bedding. Some of them lay on the naked ground. They were all covered with mud and dirt and wrapped in bits of rag. Among them he saw a friend of his sister's named Rokhel-Gitke. Motl slowly woke her. Rokhel-Gitke opened a pair of red eyes, and screamed when she saw Motl, whom everyone assumed had been shot. Motl calmed her. The young girl looked like an old woman. Her eyes were red and dirty. Her entire body was caked in mud. Her hair hadn't been combed in weeks. Motl was frightened by her appearance. She looked to him like a symbolic memorial, indicating the entire situation of the last Jews of Anykshstiai. Rokhel-Gitke looked at Motl, sorrowfully shook her head and wept.

"Motke, Motke, look! Look what they've done to us in the twentieth century! We innocent people, who want to live!"

Motl understood Rokhel-Gitke well. Tears began to flow from his eyes. Motl wanted to comfort her, but he could find no words. He calmed her as best he could. She told him that his cousin Peshke Romang and her brother Shmuel, aged fifteen, along with two younger sisters, were still alive.

Motl signaled for Gavrielke and the two children to enter the ghetto as well. Motl, Gavrielke and the two boys went to see Peshke Roruang at Motl's house.

Motl barely recognized Peshke Romang. The unfortunates once again wept, over what had already taken place and over what was about to happen. All four hid in the pigeon coop on the attic.

That same Saturday, Motl and Gavrielke were visited by representatives of the Council of Elders in the small ghetto of Anykshstiai. The men who came were Avrom Pantinovitz and Zalmen Shmushkovitz. The latter had formerly been the owner of an automobile transportation service. These were the few Jewish men who had managed temporarily to bribe the partisans, at a high price, into letting them stay alive. They brought food for the four hidden Jewish men. Various acquaintances came to them to ask about their sons, fathers and mothers.

A girl named Kunke had been a friend of Avremke Beder for some time. They had been preparing to get married before the war broke out. She asked Motl about her fiancée. Motl told her that he had been among the twelve men who were shot in the pit. Kunke screamed and fainted. The whole time she had still been hoping that her fiancée was alive.

Friends brought the group of four food which they had saved from their own reserves. Varute brought Motl food several times as well. The group of four began to get their strength back. Motl's wounds began to heal.

The situation in the small ghetto proved that there hadn't been any major change in the attitude of the Lithuanians toward the few remaining Jews in Anykshstiai. When partisans would pass through Bath Street, where the four were hiding, everyone in the house would become terrified, not knowing where to go and hide.

The small ghetto was located in part of Bath Street, near the synagogue yard. Some of the houses on Bath Street were locked, their windows broken, the frames of the doors and windows ripped out. Everything in these abandoned houses had been vandalized and robbed. All that remained was some larger pieces of furniture. A sad and lonely emptiness reigned on Bath Street.

During the day the sun's rays wandered solitarily, like yellow fallen leaves in late autumn. There was no longer anyone left for them to caress, to warm, to fill with joy. By night, the abandoned houses looked like old ruins, frightening the residents of the small ghetto. The residents of the ghetto were the last Jews from town still surviving. In these poor homes there were also thrown together Jews from the finer parts of Anykshstiai, Jews who had lived in comfortable homes before the war, who a short time earlier had still had businesses, had run factories and workshops. Now their homes were occupied by Lithuanians, especially the partisans and their families, who had also inherited all their possessions.

The residents of the ghetto seldom left their homes to go outside. They didn't sit on their porches. Like mice, they did their best to remain discreetly hidden. If anyone did look out the window, it was only a short time before he disappeared again. There was no fence around the small ghetto. No one guarded it.

The partisans were confident that their tortured victims didn't have anywhere or anyone to escape to or to hide with. Anyone who left the ghetto area was threatened with death.

The Jewish representatives of the ghetto population; the Council of Elders; had been appointed by the partisans. The Council of Elders had virtually nothing to do except to assign women to do the various tasks required by the partisans, or simply to "entertain" the partisans and be laughed at by them.

Constant hunger reigned in the ghetto. The Jews lived on potatoes they found in the cellars, or which they dug up in the gardens on Bath Street. In some of the houses people found coarse food which the Lithuanian residents hadn't paid any attention to when they robbed the houses after the Jews were driven to the camp near the dachas. The small ghetto existed for precisely two weeks and no longer.

At the end of the sixth week of the war a rumor spread through Anykshtsiai that the Jews of the ghetto were going to be transferred to the ghetto in Panevezhys or in Utena. Varute told Motl about this.

On August 6, the Jews in the ghetto reported to each other in terror that preparations were being made to transfer everyone to the ghetto of Utena. The women walked around like shadows, not knowing what to do. They had no choice but to believe in whatever they really wanted to. And all of them wanted so much to live. Motl openly expressed his opinion that nothing the Lithuanians said was to be believed. His terrible experiences had already convinced him of this principle.

Motl explained to his cousin that he was the only young man still alive, and he could not show himself to anyone under any circumstances. He began to get ready to escape from the ghetto. His cousin Peshke Romang begged him not to leave her alone with the smaller children.

In the evening of Wednesday, August 6 Motl, Gavrielke and his two sons left the ghetto, and slipped past the study houses. Shots followed them from every side. It turned out that the area of the small ghetto had already been surrounded. The four Jews ran around like poisoned mice looking for some place to hide. They made their way to the steps of the new study house, leading up to the women's section. From there they made it up to the attic, where they hid. The partisans ran up onto the stairs, looked around and then continued further. They didn't notice the opening which led to the attic. The four Jews stayed in the attic all night. Through the cracks between the boards they saw groups of heavily armed partisans guarding the ghetto.

### **The Ultimate Liquidation of the Jewish Population of Anykshtsiai**

On Thursday, August 7, 1941, at 4:00 a.m., a glowing red sun began to slip down from the mountains. The Jews in the ghetto still twisted in their agony upon the bare beds or on the naked earth. Groups of partisans began banging on the doors, breaking windows and shouting, "Jews outside!" (Zhydai isheikyte). Deathly terrified faces of sleepy women and children began to appear through the open doors. The partisans drove some of the women out of the houses in their underwear. Motl saw through the cracks in the attic women with one shoe on a foot and the other in their hands. Some of them were in their underwear, with their clothing in their arms. The helpless women and children quickly ran out of their houses, not knowing what else to do. There was a terrible panic, as if a fire were racing through Bath Street. Wild screams and weeping could be heard on all sides.

All the Jews were driven into the yard between the old and new study houses, near the walls. Some of the women sat down on the steps of the new study house. They sat wringing their hands, while others held their heads on their palms. It looked like the women were mourning their loved ones. Among those on the steps sat Motl's cousin Peshke Romang. Motl stood up in the attic and saw everyone. When a partisan left the stairs, Motl called out "Pesh..." Gavrielke's hand quickly stopped his voice. But Peshke had heard Motl's voice. She looked around, but couldn't figure out where he had called to her from.

Gavrielke led Motl over to the other side of the attic.

When all the Jews had been driven out of their houses, the partisans ordered them to line up in rows. The small packages the Jews had managed to bring along were ripped out of their hands. Reyzele, the 17-year-old daughter of Abrashe Pantinovitz, was dragged up the steps by partisans and locked behind the door.

Motl went close to the steps again. He saw Reyzele laying next to a karakul lamb coat. At first there were three partisans. They raped her. In a muffled voice, Reyzele wept and moaned. Motl wiped his moist eyes with his hands. One of the peasants said: "There's no reason to pity her! They're going to be taken off and shot at Lake Utena anyway." Motl couldn't stand it any longer, and went to the other side of the attic. He heard the partisans leaving, and others coming in. When Reyzele was half-unconscious, they rolled her back down the stairs.

That Thursday, in the middle of the day, the sun poured hot rays down on the roof of the new study house. The heat was terrible in the attic. Motl, Gavrielke and the two children looked out through the cracks in the attic, watching in terror as the partisans drove the last Jews out of Anykshtsiai.

They saw elderly mothers with sorrowing, wrinkled faces, with scarves on their gray heads. They were barely able to drag their feet, and younger women had to support them under their arms.

They saw young girls and newlywed wives with unkempt hair and aged, unwashed faces. They saw pregnant women, their swollen bellies sticking out, getting ready to bring new lives into the world. Children of all ages clung tightly to their mothers' skirts. There were still a few old men with gray beard and pale faces. The formless mass of lives slowly and lazily crept forward. Sorrowing eyes looked around, mourned everything and took their leave for the last time.

On the side of the street, dressed in light summer clothes and with the sun's rays on their faces, stood happy Lithuanians from town. Wearing satisfied smiles, they accompanied the last Jews of Anykshtsiai out of town. They prepared to inherit whatever Jewish possessions they hadn't yet managed to rob.

Partisans, carefully groomed and dressed in their uniforms and well armed, stood guard around the tragic mass of Jews on all sides. They cracked their whips now in the air, now over the heads of the women and children.

With tears, with heartrending moans and sighs, the tragic mass of Jews slowly went further and further from town, further from their homes and then they disappeared from view. That day the Jewish community of Anykshtsiai breathed its last breath.

That day Anykshtsiai was finally "Lithuanianized."

### **Motl Mourns for the Murdered Spiritual and Cultural Beauty**

At 2:00 p.m. that Thursday, partisans began carrying out the furniture, bedding, clothing and dishes from all the Jewish houses into the new study house. They also threw in the small packages they had taken away from the Jews before they marched them out of Anykshtsiai.

In the evening they locked and sealed the doors. Motl, Gavrielke and the two children remained in the attic of the new study house, with partisans standing guard all around.

In the evening the four Jews sought a chance to make their way out of the study house. The partisans outside heard footsteps, and began running around looking for them. Apparently they thought people had come to steal the goods being stored there. But they couldn't go into the study house because the doors were sealed.

In the morning on Friday, August 8, Motl carefully went down onto the stairs and into the women's section. Motl looked out through the windows down into the men's section. A tragic scene was revealed there. Some of the possessions of the town's Jews which the local Lithuanians hadn't managed to rob lay there piled in heaps.

Motl called Gavrielke and the boys to come down from the attic into the women's section. They examined and looked through the orphaned Jewish goods. There were furniture, bedding, brass and silver candlesticks, mirrors, wristwatches. In smaller boxes, other valuables were thrown together: wedding rings, clocks, golden earrings, old pocket watches with long thick chains, and the like.

The weather was dreadfully hot. They had no water. The four Jews were tormented by thirst. Motl went down to look for water, but was unsuccessful. Among the packages there was a bottle. Motl was overjoyed, thinking he'd found water. He opened the bottle. He was disappointed by the strong, bitter smell of kerosine. In the small packages Motl found bread, hard-boiled eggs and other food which the women had prepared to take along for the road. Motl also found a jar of preserved cherries. He found no water. Motl took the food he'd found, including the jar of cherries, back upstairs to the attic.

Gradually the four Jews got used to their situation. Every day they crept down through the oven into the men's section. Each one, in his fashion, "had his way" with the possessions of the town's Jews. On the floor lay tefillin with torn straps, tallith, books, torn volumes of the Talmud, thousands and thousands of photographs, and a number of pictures of Jewish writers and personalities.

The four Jews found ways to fill the long, hot summer days. They looked through the photographs of the Jews of Anykshtsiai. They found different kinds of photographs there; photographs of aging parents, young couples in love, photographs taken at the Puntikas Stone, groups of young people belonging to various youth movements, marriages, dances, everything. Everything was scattered on the floor, violated and orphaned. On the back of almost all the photographs was written, "as an everlasting memory." Motl "spoke" to a number of the photographs, asking them why the tragedy had come. He found a number of photographs of himself together with his beloved Khaye-Leyke, and pictures of his entire family. Motl looked at them, read the phrase "an everlasting memory," and tears poured from his eyes as he mourned all the living Jewish worlds which the Lithuanians had cut short, for the "eternal memories" which were fated for annihilation.

One afternoon the four Jews in the new study house sat down on overturned lecterns in a corner. They looked through the pile of books the partisans had taken out of the library. They looked through thousands of photographs and pictures. Without saying a word to each other, they mourned their tragic situation in the language of the mute. As if they were reciting the Book of Lamentations on the Ninth of Av, the four Jews sat mourning the great catastrophe of their own Jewish community of Anykshtsiai.

Motl was overcome by a strange feeling which he had never sensed before, and which he was unable to comprehend. He began to hover, to live in an entirely different world from the one he'd been in until that moment. His feverish imagination, his burning soul, began to revive the Jewish lives which had been cut short, the Jewish worlds which had been murdered.

In his imagination he saw once again all the pictures hanging in Jewish homes, in the headquarters of various organizations and in the libraries. He saw all the photographs back in place in their albums or hanging on the walls.

And thus trembling in a holy fever, Motl gradually reassembled and reincarnated in his imagination the rich variety of spiritual, cultural, nationalist and religious Jewish life in Anykshtsiai.

Motl felt his heart pounding and his pulse racing in his temples. In his brain appeared the figures of elderly Jews, sitting at tables in the study houses between the afternoon and evening prayers, studying the Talmud with intense concentration. He saw the glorious Jewish youth organizations of every tendency and conviction, all dedicated to the nation. He saw their expeditions to the Puntikas Stone, to the dachas, and the way they marched with pomp through the streets of the town, blue and white flags flapping in the wind, bearing fire torches, accompanied by their own small orchestras as they sang Hebrew and Yiddish songs.

In his feverish fantasy, Motl saw the young men and young women of Anykshtsiai, whose thoughts and concerns were bound up with the Jewish nation, who celebrated the victories of the Jewish people and who suffered when the Jewish people were in pain. Motl saw once again hundreds of young people from Anykshtsiai who were prepared to leave their parents' homes in order to build a better, richer future for the Jewish people, in order to assure the eternal continuity of the Jewish nation.

Motl saw himself together with his comrades in the Communist youth movement, struggling with determination for a better future for all humanity.

Gavrielke looked at Motl, whose eyes were glazed over as he stared at the pile of pictures and photographs, and he was unable to understand why Motl had such a satisfied smile on his face. Motl was indeed happy. He actually laughed, because at that moment he was living in a world his imagination had awoken from the dead. In one instant Motl saw the entire physical, cultural and spiritual world of the Jews of Anykshtsiai, everything together, murdered by military shovels, poles, beams, whips and firearms, at the hands of the sons of the Lithuanian nation.

And Motl began to understand what the Jews of Anykshtsiai had once possessed, and what it was they had lost. For the first time Motl really understood and appreciated this slaughtered spiritual and cultural beauty. His heart was filled with a devastating longing for the cultural beauty and glory, for the blossoming, growing, full-bodied and varied Jewish life which had once seemed so natural. Motl's heart and nerves couldn't stand it. As if deranged, he threw himself down on the shapeless mass of books, photographs and pictures. As if there were an alien soul in his body, wild moans and a shrieking sort of weeping broke forth from his mouth: "Weep, Gavrielke! Mourn and weep! Children, mourn and weep for this dead beauty! We must mourn for our murdered national and religious beauty! Oh, oh!"

"Motke! What's with you? What are you doing? Have you forgotten where we are? Have pity on the children? The partisans will hear you!" Gavrielke put both his hands over Motl's mouth.

The children looked at Motl in astonishment and terror. Gavrielke reminded Motl of the actual, tragic situation. Motl shook his head, rubbed his eyes in wonder and looked around. Biting his lips in a storm of anguish, Motl lifted himself up from the floor and began to tear, break, pluck apart, cut and destroy everything that fell into his hands.

"Gavrielke! Children! Help me destroy all these things that belong to Jews, so that the murderers won't be able to enjoy them," Motl ordered.

The four Jews looked through all the goods. They tore apart all the better bedding, pillows, quilts and blankets, and let the down and feathers pour out of them. They plucked and tore several dozen good fur coats. They broke, bent and hid heaps of items made of gold. They broke and bent large copper containers, pots and pans. They ruined everything, throwing it all mixed together into one huge pile. They continued this work for several days. They assembled the books, photographs, pictures, tallioth and tefillin together in a single spot.

It was hot during the day. They were so unbearably thirsty that they were forced to drink their own urine. They found a bit of moisture in the drain near the basin, and they licked that up as well. They jealously guarded the jar of cherries, and gave it gradually to the children, who were so overcome with thirst that they became nervous and began to argue amongst themselves.

For the first half of the day, they would stay in the attic, looking out at the beautiful, free world, at the blue sky and the fiery sun. In the afternoon and evening they would lie idly or sleep downstairs on the pile of pillows and quilts. Thus it continued, every day, every night. They lost count of the days and nights, which swallowed each other in an unchanging series, which were transformed into tortuous eternities.

The Jews could no longer stand their thirst. They were also afraid that after the goods were removed, the attic might be searched. They found long, sturdy towels, tied them to each other, and waited impatiently for night to come.

They threw the "rope" of tied-together towels out through the small window of the attic. They tied one end fast at the top. First the children, and then Motl and Gavrielke, made their way down to the ground. When all four had reached the ground, the partisans heard their footsteps, and began running around to find where they had come from.

The Jews quickly jumped over a fence and fell into the nearby stream.

The partisans began shooting after them. But the four Jews didn't pay any attention to the shooting. They lay next to the stream, finally drinking their fill of the cold, refreshing water. It made them more alert, gave them strength and encouraged them to continue struggling for their lives.

Thanks to the picket fences and walls around the new study house and the nearby courtyards, the partisans found it hard to chase the four Jews, who knew the area intimately. All four of them ran to the nearby Jewish cemetery, rested there and conferred about how to proceed. The partisans ran around wildly, shooting in the opposite direction.

The four Jews knocked at Varute's door. She fed them and arranged where she would meet them in the forest to feed them. The Jews found out from Varute what day it was. They had been in the synagogue attic from Wednesday, August 6, until Saturday evening, August 16.

It was dangerous for them to stay at the cemetery any longer. That same evening the four Jews set off for the Kunegishkis forest, and arranged a hiding place among some bushes on the banks of the Shventoji River. Varute was supposed to find them there. Several days passed, and she had not come. The Jews no longer had any food. Motl went to her house by himself. Varute agreed to hide Motl by himself. He refused to leave Gavrielke alone with the two children. Then Varute thought up a new plan. She promised to hide Motl at her place. She would hide Gavrielke and the children in an empty house which belonged to a Jew. It was not far from her house, and had already been filled with hay. She promised to bring food and drink to Gavrielke and the children. There was no other solution. Motl accepted the offer. The Lithuanian girl did a lot to help the Jews.

During the day Motl lay hidden in a stall full of straw at Varute's house. Varute had her own room in the other half of the house. At night, Varute would bring Motl in to sleep in her heated room. Her mother knew about it, and didn't try to stop it.

## Motl Refuses to Convert and Marry Varute

Before the war Varute had been in the habit of seeking out chances to meet Motl, to dance with him, walk with him or simply spend time together with him. Motl didn't want to upset his girlfriend Khaye- Leyke, who was jealous. He often avoided Varute. Now Varute exploited Motl's helplessness, and helped him a great deal.

More than once partisan friends of Varute's came to her house in the evening and knocked on her window. Then she would hide Motl in a large chest of clothing, which stood next to a window in another room. Motl would lie in the chest, overhearing various conversations, carefully controlling his breathing even as his heart pounded.

Once, when it was already late in the evening, a partisan knocked on Varute's covered window. Motl quickly ran over to the other side of the wall and lay down in the large chest. The partisan was garrulous, boasting of his "heroic deeds" and brutality during the slaughter of the Jews. All the partisans were eager to talk about their deeds at that time. They were especially boastful when they talked to their girlfriends.

"I can't listen to any more," Varute protested.

"What? You can't listen to it? We visit girls and go dancing with them, and they're very interested in the shooting of the Jews. Some of the girls don't want to dance with any one of our men who hasn't shot enough Jews," the partisan insisted to Varute.

"Just tell me, what did you do with the Jews who were taken away from Anykshtsiai," Varute asked.

"We took them away to Utena that very day on the small-gauge railroad. We kept them locked up in the cars overnight. The next day, August 8, we took them away a kilometer and a half from Utena, near a lake not far from the White Prison, and we shot all of them there."

"Oh, you frogs! How could you have the heart to shoot innocent women and children with no provocation!"

"What do you mean, how could we have the heart? At first, actually, it was hard, but then we got used to it."

"Not one of the helpless people escaped?"

"Our men stood with guns around the spot where they were executed, making sure no one could escape. A lot of the Jewish women and children threw themselves into the lake, as if they were crazy. So we shot them in the water, for the fish..."

"Remember! Innocent blood which has been spilled will not remain silent! We will have to account to the world for this! What will happen then? What will people say of our nation?"

"You're crazy! Not one of the Jews will live to tell the tale. We're making sure of that! After the war? If the Germans win, then no one will take us to account. If they lose the war, then we'll say the Germans killed all the Jews in Lithuania. Everybody knows the Germans kill Jews wherever they go."

"There will be enough Lithuanians around who'll tell the truth," Varute reminded him.

"The Devil take them! Meanwhile we have to get rid of the Jews, and Lithuanians have to inherit their riches. And what happens later, we'll deal with later."

"As far as the older ones go, you thought up slanders about Communism to accuse them. But why are you shooting small children?"

"When you clean up a house and bottles are broken, you break little ones as well as big ones," the partisan responded, casually comparing Jewish lives to glass bottles.

"Oh, my God! Lord Jesus! Lord Jesus! I saw them being driven from town. There were so many pregnant women among them!"

"Oh, the pregnant women? Ha, ha, ha! You know, Varute, as soon as we brought them to the pits near the lake, a lot of them began to go into labor. They bore their children just like mice. They begged us to shoot them before they bore their children."

"So what did you do?"

"Us? Ha, ha, ha," the partisan laughed. "We explained to them that first they had to bear another little Jew for us to shoot. After they were born, we shot the mothers, and we threw the living babies at them in the pit."

"That's degenerate! Murder! Frogs!" Varute could no longer stand it, and she burst out weeping. "Have mercy on me, oh Jesus! Dear Jesus! Jesus!"

"Varute! What are you, a Jewish girl? We can't be sentimentalists. We can't calculate with pity. Anyone who doesn't have the courage to kill Jews isn't a good Lithuanian patriot. We have to get rid of them once and for all, you understand?"

From his tone of voice Varute understood that he was quite agitated. She didn't want to upset him any more by cursing at him. She began again, more calmly:

"Tell me, do you remember the Garber girl?"

"Which Garber girl do you mean, Varute?"

"You know! The butcher's daughter, the one who studied at the Lithuanian gymnasium."

"Oh, that Garber girl? A damned snake!"

"Why? She was beautiful, and she spoke Lithuanian well."

"You know, under no circumstances would she give herself to our men. That frog! You could have killed her on the spot! They took her to the jail, and tortured and beat her, and she never gave in. So she was taken with some other women to the Hare Hills to be shot. They all snorted like pigs and took their clothes off. But her? Under no circumstances would she take her clothes off. The other ones at least took some of their clothes off, but her? She decided to start a revolution! She felt like having a revolution! One of our partisans got angry. He grabbed her by her braids, and banged her over the head a couple of times with a military shovel. He knocked part of her skull out. He took her clothes off and threw her naked body into the pit.

"Oh, Jesus! Oh Jesus," Varute screamed.

And in the chest, behind the wall. Motl heard the entire conversation. His heart felt faint. He was desperate for air, and he almost fainted. Until that conversation, Motl had had no information about the fate of his beloved Khaye-Leyke. Motl heard similar boastful conversations a number of times. Afterwards he would tell Gavrielke and the children about them.

"Listen, Gavrielke! Listen, children! Remember! Remember! If any one of us remains alive, we have to remember this and tell the entire world."

"Absolutely, Motl! We definitely have to remember, and tell the world after the war," Gavrielke decided. Varute hid the four Jews and conscientiously nourished them. She took care of Motl like a loyal sister. But Varute wasn't satisfied with what she already had. She wanted to make sure that Motl would be hers forever.

On Friday, August 22, Varute came to see Motl in his straw-filled stall in the middle of the day. She brought him a plate of berries with sugar sprinkled on top. Motl thanked her sincerely. But he noticed that Varute had been weeping. Motl became very afraid. He was afraid that she had revealed to someone the secret that she was hiding Jews, Varute told Motl that she had been to see the priest that morning, and had spoken with him about the possibility of having Motl converted, and then openly marrying Motl. Varute was naive enough to believe that by having Motl converted, she could save a Jewish life and have him for herself.

The blood rushed to Motl's head. He shuddered as he listened to Varute's plan.

"No, no, Varute! I thank you sincerely. I'll never do that."

"Motl, I beg you! I love you, and you're fond of me as well. I know that you loved the Garber girl, and you avoided me before the war broke out. I suffered so much. I was jealous! Believe me, Motl, I didn't want the Garber girl to die. But you must face the fact now. She'll never be alive again!"

"Varute! I'll never forget what you've done for me, for Gavrielke and for the children. I know that you've risked your own life, and I don't know how I can thank you. But Varute! Don't forget that I am a son of an innocently slaughtered people, and I'll never betray the faith of my murdered parents! Never, not even formally. And I know also that the same thing happened throughout Lithuania as happened in Anykshtsiai!"

"Motl, believe me! I understand very well what you think of my people. But I'm not guilty. I love you, Motl! You're so young, Motl. Stay alive! Stay alive! Conversion is only on paper. After we get married, you can live your life the way you want to. Meanwhile, save your life! Motl!" Varute pleaded and wept.

"No, no, Varute! I won't do it! I'm fond of you, and I don't want to die. But I don't want to survive by joining the camp of such bestial brutes and murderers. I don't even want to belong on paper to the religions of the Lithuanian partisans!"

The two of them looked at each other for a while, as if they had just met for the first time. Two alien worlds looked at each other. Varute broke out weeping and left the stall. Motl began to fear Varute and her desperate love. He was afraid that if he continued to refuse to convert and marry her, in her desperate disappointment she might surrender him to the partisans.

That same Friday evening, without telling Varute, the four Jews fled to the Shilela forest. Motl never saw Varute again.

### **The Great Miracle in the Attic of a Field Bath**

No matter whose door the Jews knocked at, whether at the edge of town or in the countryside; everywhere they were driven away, and no one gave them so much as a bit of bread or a drink of water. The Jews fruitlessly tried to find a kinder peasant. Most of them were very hostile toward Jews. Some of them were afraid.

Motl and Gavrielke were left with no alternative, if they wanted to still their own hunger and that of the children. They stole three chickens from a peasant at night. Then they stole a tin pot out of a bath belonging to a Russian named Fedodka, and dug some potatoes up from a field. They took everything away to the Kunegishkis forest, made a fire and prepared a "meal."

Days and nights began their weary cycle into eternity. The four Jews lost count of the days. Every time they searched for food they placed their lives in danger. Their chances of remaining alive seemed minimal. They decided to leave the blood-soaked soil of Lithuania and go to White Russia, where they hoped to find people who were more friendly toward Jews. But they felt worn out, overtired, chilled and sick. By that time it was already cold in the forest at night. Autumn came early that year. The Jews decided to let themselves rest for a while, gather some food and then begin to march toward White Russia.

They didn't know about the ghettos in Kaunas and Shavel.

They went to the edge of town near the old post office, and stayed in the attic of a field bath. At night the two adults would leave the attic and pick cucumbers and fruit from the nearby gardens and orchards. They kept the leftovers of the three chickens for the children.

When the peasants heated up the bath, the attic where the four Jews lay was filled with smoke so thick that they couldn't see each other. The Jews would stick their noses into the cracks between the boards, trying to breathe fresh air from outside. After the smoke would come the dreadful steam and heat, which the peasants made by pouring water over glowing-hot stones. This was torture for the four Jews in the attic.

When they climbed up into the attic, the Jews had to pull apart the boards in the ceiling, which hadn't been nailed together. Stalks (often from flax plants) would fall down from above. As far as possible, they cleaned this up. But the peasants noticed it, and often looked up at the ceiling.

After the men were finished, women would come to bathe. Once again the attic turned into a steaming Hell. Older and younger Lithuanian women came there to wash themselves, talk and babble on. They spoke in revolting terms about love, about sexual relations, and meanwhile the four Jews lay in the attic, listening to the conversation. Embarrassed smiles and stifled laughter played across the sweaty faces of Motl, Gavrielke and the two young boys.

After the women left, the four Jews would get down from the attic at night, wash themselves and drink water. They would stay warm on the benches of the bath all night.

One time, when the Jews were staying warm after a bath, a peasant woman walked by and looked through the window of the bath. It was impossible to run away, because it was still light out. Before a half hour had passed, the bath was surrounded by armed partisans. The Jews managed to make it into the attic. Partisans entered the bath.

"Who's in there? Get down!" they ordered.

The terrified Jews remained sitting on the boards. The partisans checked the boards with their rifle barrels. Stalks and dust flew down from the attic. The partisans left the bath.

"But somebody was obviously here," one of them insisted.

On one side of the bath was a tall hill. One of the partisans climbed up on the hill, pushed the barrel of his rifle through and ripped apart two of the boards in the attic. Rays of light poured into the attic from outside. The four Jews saw the partisans' murderous eyes. Their hearts began to beat in terror. The four helpless Jews were sure that they had been caught. Then the incomprehensible miracle occurred: the partisan didn't notice the four Jews. One of them proposed going to the nearby forest to have a look. They all went away.

The four Jews barely made it until nightfall, and then they went to the Kunegishkis forest, at the bank of the Shventoji river. They gave up hope of finding a hiding place at the home of a peasant, and began preparing a bunker. It was impossible to lie on the ground in the forest any longer, because of the rain and the early cold.

The Jews concentrated on digging a bunker, first with sticks of wood and then with shovels stolen from peasants. When they had been digging for some time, the earth would collapse. They didn't have any tools. They risked their lives when they went to steal from peasants. Their greatest night time enemies were the peasants' dogs, who would bark loudly and strain at their leashes as soon as the Jews began to approach a house. The Jews carried away in bushel baskets the dirt they dug up and dumped it into the river, so that there would be no evidence of their

work. After they'd been working hard for two nights, the sides of the pit collapsed once again. They abandoned the plan of building a bunker, and decided to leave Lithuania.

### **Motl Remains Alone and Is Unable to Find Gavrielke and the Children**

All four of them were worn out from hunger and several nights of hard work. Gavrielke suggested that they go see a peasant who was a good friend of his, get something for the children to eat and begin their march toward White Russia.

At 11:00 p.m. they all left the forest. The sky was clouded over. The earth was already frozen. The entire area was locked in darkness. They quietly reached the modest houses at the edge of town. Suddenly they heard commands in Lithuanian: "Stokytei" (Halt). Flashlights shined on them from every side. The Jews had nowhere to run. The circle around them began to narrow. There was only one chance of survival; by jumping into the Shventoji River.

At that spot the banks of the river were high, almost vertical.

The partisans were sure that none of the Jews would run in that direction. But Motl saw that there was no alternative, and that he was in danger of being captured alive. Motl didn't think twice, ran to the bank of the river and jumped down from the top of the bluff. Still wearing his clothes, he threw himself into the river and started swimming toward the other side. The partisans shot at him from the bank. Bullets splashed into the water all around him. The current washed Motl up on a boulder, which he grabbed and clung to with his hands. He kept himself underwater up to his neck. The partisans ran along the bank, shooting continuously.

Motl felt desperately cold and heavy. He was being dragged down.

The partisans left. Motl swam to the other side of the river. He saw the situation clearly. He realized that the partisans would cross over the bridge and chase after him down Kowarski Road. Motl set off back toward town.

At the edge of town stood a warehouse belonging to a Jew named Yankl Fisher. Raw pelts lay in the warehouse, which was surrounded by a wooden fence, topped with barbed wire. Climbing over the fence, Motl got one of his feet caught in the barbed wire, and got stuck there. And suddenly he heard riders on horseback and on motorcycles racing down Kowarski Road, and then disappearing. Motl got his foot free of the wire, and fell down into the compound. But he wasn't safe there either. He broke a windowpane, planning to go inside and hide under the raw pelts. But the window was barred from inside. Wet, tired, hungry and fearful, Motl stayed outside for a while. His last comfort, the last Jews; Gavrielke and his two children, had been lost somewhere. Motl didn't see them again.

He stayed in the yard of the fur warehouse until just before daybreak. It was late in the autumn of 1941 by then. Outside everything was white and frozen. It made no sense to stay there any longer. Still wet, in need of sleep and hungry, Motl set off across the fields toward the train station. He fearfully made it over the bridge, and arrived at the Hare Hills. In the thick brush Motl rested a bit.

Not far from the Hare Hills, near the edge of town, stood the home of Khonke the quilter. The windows were boarded up. Motl made his way through a window into the empty house. There was a little bit of hay inside. Motl curled up in the hay and fell into a deep sleep.

Before noon a peasant named Bruzhinskis who lived on Skemeny Street near the prison began bringing hay and piling it up in Khonke the quilter's house. The peasant had inherited the house and turned it into a barn.

Motl crawled into a corner under the hay. The peasant brought wagonload after wagonload of hay, and piled it through the window inside the house. It was too dangerous for Motl to leave the house during the day, because the sons and fathers who lived in the surrounding houses were partisans. Motl was afraid to begin a conversation with the peasant. His mind was already made up concerning the Lithuanian peasants. He had to remain still and wait until night came.

The peasant continued energetically loading the hay, and his feet trampled Motl. Motl felt the urge to appeal to the peasant, but his mouth seemed to be sealed shut. He had no air. All day long the peasant kept bringing hay and loading it into the house. In the evening he boarded up the windows and went away. Motl didn't know whether it was dark yet. The utter stillness outside was the only indication.

Sweat began to flow from Motl's body. Everything around him became steamy and began to smell of rot. Various worms and flying insects crawled around his body. His mouth was full of dust. He felt as thirsty as if he were in the middle of a desert.

Motl didn't know how long he'd been lying there. He didn't know when day ended and night began. Beneath the hay it was as dark as in a grave. He fell asleep there. When he woke up, covered with sweat, he began sweeping the hay away with one hand, and crawled to the edge of the wall. He dragged his wounded arm behind him. His wounded hip was swollen, and his head rocked unsteadily on his shoulders. With difficulty he managed to reach a window. He squeezed his eyes and opened them again several times, but he was still unable to determine whether it was night or day. He fell asleep again near the sealed window. When he aroused himself again, it was already daylight.

Through the cracks in the boarded-up window he saw the autumn landscape. The yellow fields of autumn stretched out into the distance, and pigs and cows grazed beneath the cloudy sky. Shepherds ran back and forth, happily whistling and singing. The bells in the church of Anykshtsiai began to ring. They called on all faithful Christians to come, kneel and pray to Jesus of Nazareth, king of the Jews. Peasants from the countryside and Lithuanians from the edge of town, along with their wives and children, walked and rode to church in their best holiday clothes.

Motl was seized by a painful thought at that moment. He couldn't understand what was happening to the world. He couldn't understand why faithful Christian partisans who had murdered thousands of innocent Jewish men, women and children in such a brutal fashion could now come to kneel before a dead Jew, before the image of a Jew in church. And everyone was allowed to go to church to pray to that Jew. Everyone, including the partisans, stained as they were with blood, the same partisans who now sought to take his young life, could go to church. Motl was tormented by the thought. But he was unable to comprehend it. In any case, he knew that brutality and cruelty lurked all around him. Like in jungles filled with angry humans, like snakes, lions, tigers and other monsters, hunting for him, Motele Tarzan, seeking to destroy his young life. Motl finally decided to leave the familiar landscape, the fields, villages and wonderful woods, and to try his luck somewhere far away, far from these Lithuanians. He decided to set off for White Russia by way of Dvinsk.

A creaking sound broke the silence of the dark night. Motl broke one of the boards covering the window, and left the hay. Motl drank at the nearby stream. Then he left and lay down in the bath house belonging to the peasant Fedodka. Motl took off his wet clothes, and lay down naked on the bench. The bath house had been used during the day. It was warm inside. Motl slept there all night, and through the entire next day.

He began to be tormented by hunger, and had already forgotten how many days he had gone without anything to eat or drink.

Not far from the bath lived the Russian peasant Fedodka. Motl decided to get something to eat from him before he went away. He knocked cautiously on the door a number of times. Fedodka came out in his underwear. His teeth chattered in fear when he saw a Jew. He gave Motl a piece of bread and asked him to go away as fast as possible.

Motl didn't eat the bread; he wolfed it down in huge chunks. The little bit of food merely increased his appetite. He decided to go to the home of another peasant named Klimanski, who lived on the other side of the bridge.

### **Motl Parts with Anykshtsiai and with His Father's Grave**

Actually it was possible for Motl to get to the peasant's home without going through town. But he was overcome by an overwhelming longing, and he decided to go through town so that he could see the streets and the orphaned Jewish homes for one last time.

It was a dark autumn night. He didn't think there was any danger of his being recognized by Lithuanians. Motl felt like he was walking in a huge cemetery as he walked along the dark streets and alleys of Anykshtsiai. With his heart pounding and a feeling of sorrow he thought about the empty Jewish houses, which stood like sphinxes shrouded in mourning. In most of the houses the windows had been broken and the doors ripped from their frames. Every house reminded him of the Jewish heads of households which had lived and enjoyed life there just a few months before, whereas now Motl was reminded of the long, deep pit at the Hare Hills, where he himself had lain nearly dead, and where his childhood friends and acquaintances lay murdered.

Through the pitch dark night, the sounds of an orchestra playing wafted through town. It was the same orchestra in which Motl and other Jews had played a few months before. Motl looked through the window of a dance hall and saw happy, contented Lithuanian boys and girls dancing together. Among them were a large number of uniformed

partisans, all of them drunken and sweaty. Motl cast a final look at all of the streets and alleys, especially Bath Street, and then he left town.

When he came close to the home of the peasant Klimanskis, dogs began to bark loudly. Motl didn't go to the peasant's house. Instead he went to say goodbye to the Jewish cemetery and his father's grave.

This time Motl perceived the cemetery in its entirety. The graves and mausoleums were wrapped in darkness. Sorrowful, strong autumn winds whistled angrily. It seemed to Motl that the trees were swaying back and forth reciting the Kaddish, or "All Merciful God" in memory of the dead lying in the graves, in memory of so many generations of Jews who had lived and died in Anykshtsiai. He felt very depressed and lonely.

After peering around in the darkness until he found his father's grave, Motl "prepared" himself. He thought about exactly what he should say, what he should relate, and finally what he should ask of his father in the grave. When he arrived and threw himself onto the grave, he abandoned all of his carefully arranged thoughts and "prepared" words.

An endless flow of tears poured from his eyes. He told his father everything that had happened to him in the past few months. Before he left Motl begged, "Dear father, intercede for me, and see that I have luck in my struggle to stay alive!" Motl remembered these last words all throughout his journey to Dvinsk, and indeed for the rest of his life. With a heavy heart he took his leave of his father's grave, and headed away from the cemetery in the direction of Dvinsk, through fields, pastures and forests.

### **Motl's Route to Dvinsk**

During the day Motl would lie hidden in forests, among shrubs or in haystacks in the fields. At night he would walk through unfamiliar regions. He was afraid to go to peasants' homes for food, and he fed himself on white beets, raw potatoes, carrots and cabbages which he found in the fields.

When he had already made it close to Dvinsk, near the town of Subota, Motl felt that he was losing his last strength. A dreadful pain in his guts forced him to think about finding some food. He lay in a haystack in a field all day, observing a peasant farm. He saw that the only ones going in and out of the house were women and children. He didn't see any men.

At night he went into the house. A frightened peasant woman let him in and fed him. It was the first hot, cooked food he'd had in exactly two months. Motl briefly related his experiences to the good peasant woman. She burst out weeping. She, too, had lived through a tragic experience. Her husband and son had been involved in politics, and had occupied responsible positions during the year of Soviet rule. One day Lithuanian partisans and Germans arrived and took both of them out of the house. She never saw them again.

She told Motl that there was a Jewish ghetto in Dvinsk. Motl was glad to hear the news. She did everything she could to ease Motl's suffering. She let him wash himself, gave him a change of clothing and nourished him. He stayed in the haystack for two full days. He rested thoroughly, gained a bit of strength and then took his leave of the peasant woman.

It was too dangerous to walk along roads or highways. The roads and highways were filled with German automobiles. Motl decided to make his way along the banks of the Dvina river. He thus was forced to walk several dozen extra kilometers. He walked at night, and when day broke, he decided where to spend the day. Sometimes Motl had to retreat several kilometers in order to find a safe and comfortable place to spend the day.

Every step was filled with danger. The region was completely strange to him. He didn't even know how to enter Dvinsk. As he walked along the banks of the Dvina, he arrived one morning at a destroyed bridge. A bit further on he noticed a newly-built wooden bridge, over which workers were making their way to work. Close by he saw German soldiers stationed in booths on either side of the bridge. The guards checked everyone's papers. At that moment Motl felt the full weight of his desperate situation.

He had survived so many dangers, and now Motl was tormented by the realization. But he was determined to make it to the Dvinsk ghetto and meet other Jews. His appearance, his unshaven face, the little package of food in his hands all frightened him. He saw that without documents it would be entirely impossible to cross the bridge. But even at this point he didn't lose control of himself. He made it to the side of the bridge, climbed up along an embankment and walked among the workers who'd already passed a control point. The German guards in their posts were behind him. A German stood at the other end of the bridge as well, but he didn't recheck anyone's

papers. In order to avoid suspicion, Motl abandoned his package of food on the bridge, and safely reached the other side of the Dvina River.

Not far from the bridge Motl saw the fortress of Dvinsk. There was a high brick wall around brick buildings. Two Germans stood guard at an iron gate in the wall. Motl was certain that the ghetto must be located in this strange place. He had no idea how to make it inside, just as he had no idea what a terrible place it was, just as he had no idea that his life was in danger. But Motl was cautious.

Around the fortress there are swamps and moats, and between the moats there is a road. Motl set off down the road. He stopped a peasant who was carrying bricks in a wagon and asked him where the Jewish ghetto was. The peasant eyed Motl suspiciously from head to toe and pointed to the fortress: "There are the Jews !"

### **Motl in the Dvinsk Fortress (Citadel)**

Motl had read Jewish history. He knew that once upon a time Jews had lived in segregated areas called ghettos. But the German guards at the gate frightened him. He didn't quite understand why they were standing at the gate. He approached the gate, looking around on all sides. Suddenly his heart jumped. A cold sweat bathed his body.

Through the open gate he saw crowds of Red Army soldiers, half-dead and miserable. He didn't see any Jews at all. Nor did he see any women or children. Motl realized too late that the peasant had sent him straight into the jaws of death. He moved over to one side and made his way down toward a moat which surrounded the walls of the fortress like a belt. He sat down among some shrubs and small trees, and thought about what to do next. He took off one pair of pants (he'd been wearing two pairs the whole time), washed his bloody face, "combed" his hair with his fingers and cleaned his black beard with water as best he could. Then he made his way to the nearby swamps, where he sat down to rest and think about what to do next. But as it turned out, he had no time to think.

"Hands up! Hey you! Hands up!" came orders from all sides. Motl saw that he was surrounded by German soldiers, all with automatic weapons cocked and ready to fire. The Germans ordered Motl in strict military tones to walk "straight ahead" toward them onto the road. With his hands up, Motl began pleading with them to let him go around the bodies of water and the deep puddles. But the Germans repeated their order to walk "straight ahead," through the puddles, and they reinforced the order by threatening to shoot him. With his hands up, Motl crawled through mud and water up to his neck, and climbed up to where the Germans stood on the road. With a satisfied smile, the Germans looked down at him and took him into the fortress.

Motl was placed next to a tree, near the fortress headquarters. Various high-ranking military men came to interrogate him. His only option was to relate where he had come from and how he had ended up there. Motl told them that he had never belonged to any political party, and that he had played together in an orchestra with Lithuanians who had been his friends. When the Jews of Anykshčiai were slaughtered, his Lithuanian friends had protected him; they had advised him to go to Dvinsk, where there were Jews living in a ghetto.

Naturally, the German officers didn't believe him. They accused him of being a spy, or a Russian parachutist. When he heard these accusations, Motl understood what was in store for him. He didn't need to imagine what they would do to him. Right before his eyes, in the yard of the fortress, he saw tragic living examples. He looked around, trembling in fear. Large crowds of captured Red Army soldiers lay hungry and discouraged on the cold autumn ground. Their cheekbones stuck out sharply, and their faces were yellow as wax. Only their half-extinguished eyes were still alive. They didn't look like human beings anymore. They looked like skeletons covered with greenish-yellow skin, mixed together with dirt and mud. Their military uniforms and overcoats were torn, worn out and dirty, and lay on them several sizes too big.

Motl was kept standing by the tree all day and all night, near the headquarters of the fortress. Several thousand prisoners slept outside. It was already late autumn. The autumn of 1941. Thousands of half-dead coughed, wheezed and whistled. It was a chorus of the almost dead, the likes of which the world will never imagine or understand.

In the morning dozens of men were found dead, stuck frozen to the ground. Every minute shots were heard in the courtyard. The German guards were shooting the living skeletons in their overcoats. Other Germans walked around with heavy poles in their hands, striking the helpless prisoners over the heads for anything and for nothing. No scream nor weeping, not even a sigh of protest was to be heard. The living skeletons no longer had the strength. And the Germans would "have fun" with the mass of dying lives. They would approach the helpless prisoners with bits of dry bread, move away a little bit and point to the bread: "Khleb!" (bread).

The starving men would creep forward on their knees and on their bellies. The Germans would gradually move back, repeating, "Khleb! Khleb!" The German soldiers teased the poor, barely-living beings as if they were dogs. When they had had their fill of teasing and mocking the prisoners, they would throw the pieces of bread onto the ground. The living skeletons became more mobiles, began arguing over the bread and then the Germans set upon them with poles, striking them on the heads and sides, and doubling over with laughter. After they had their "fun" dead and wounded victims would be left. But no one paid any attention to the dead. It was easy to recognize the recently-captured Red Army prisoners. They pushed wagonloads of wood or swept the yard. Those who were too weak for the work were immediately shot by the guards. The rest had to continue working as if nothing had happened.

The Jewish Red Army prisoners were kept in a separate group. Their appearance was slightly different. They all had bloody faces and heads, bound with bits of torn underwear. A number of them had broken ribs, arms or legs. Many of them lay in their death throes. The guards would go up to them and shout, "Here you go, Communists, Stalin's children!" and thick boards would break their bones, which were covered in greenish-yellow skin.

Prisoners of other nationalities still received small rations of bread. The Jewish prisoners got nothing. Some of the Ukrainian prisoners sold their services in exchange for slightly larger bread rations. They were designated by white armbands, and they tortured the Jews just as badly as the Germans did. They would run around the yard shouting that the war was the Jews' fault, and that the Jews were responsible for the suffering in the fortress.

On the second morning, the Germans brought a Christian boy into the fortress. The Germans forced Motl to take off his good shoes and give them to the Christian. They forced Motl to put on the Christian's shoes, which were too small for him. He barely got the shoes onto his feet. Motl complained that the shoes were too small, and that they hurt his feet. The German looked at Motl with an ironic smile, and ordered him to dance in place at his command. Motl felt the tight shoes tearing bits of flesh from his feet. But he had to keep dancing. The German sadist asked contentedly, "Well, do the shoes fit you now?"

"Yes, they fit me now," Motl pleaded.

After that Motl was taken into the headquarters. As soon as he opened the door, a German officer aimed a revolver at him and fired. The revolver wasn't loaded. Several German officers began asking him again who he was and where he had come from. He told them the same thing he had said the day before. He was taken out of the office. Motl was placed near the wall in the courtyard of the fortress, together with the Christian. A German officer looked at them, and ordered them to press their noses hard against the wall and stand still.

Motl had no doubt that he was going to be shot. Memories of his childhood began to race through his mind. He saw his parents, brothers and sisters, and he saw their tragic end. The pit which held his comrades flashed before his eyes. *Once* again he relived the moments before he was shot, and once again he saw the little black and white cat which clambered on the walls of the pit, trying so hard to avoid being killed with the Jews. The partisans took pity on the cat, but they shot his friends. And dozens of Jewish Red Army prisoners were lined up at the same wall. Motl's heart nearly burst in terror.

"Fire!" came an order in German. Shots rang out. Brief screams from the Jewish prisoners; "Oy! Oy!" blended with the whistle of bullets. All the Jewish prisoners lay dead near the wall. Several meters to one side, Motl and the Christian boy stood petrified.

Some of the stronger Red Army prisoners began to carry away the murdered men. Motl couldn't figure out whether he was still alive. It took some time before he regained consciousness and convinced himself that he was still alive. Two German soldiers took Motl and two Red Army prisoners out of the fortress. Motl wondered why he was being taken out of the fortress to be shot, and why he hadn't been shot before.

### **Motl Arrives at the Dvinsk Ghetto**

Motl tried to find out where he was being taken. He asked the Germans who were pointing their rifles at him. One of the Germans shouted in exasperation, "Shut up your snout, damned Jew!" Motl didn't ask any more questions.

He was brought back across the bridge by which he'd arrived, and taken to the gate of a half-destroyed barracks. Latvian police or partisans stood on either side of the gate. Motl didn't know exactly where he'd been taken. One of the Germans put Motl inside a narrow gate, facing forward. The German rested, took several steps backward, then ran toward Motl and kicked him from behind. Motl flew into the courtyard.

Motl was overcome with joy. He didn't believe his eyes. He saw Jews in the courtyard. Jews! All of them wore yellow patches on their chests. Women, children and a few men went back and forth across the yard. Motl felt like throwing himself at the Jews and kiss them, kiss and hug them and weep for joy, and tell them everything he had suffered. But a Latvian stopped him and took him to the ghetto commandant on the second floor. There the Latvian ghetto commandant once again interrogated Motl and ordered him to be incarcerated.

The jail was in a small storehouse, with a small, unbarred window. There was no place to sit down. Inside there was only smooth walls and a concrete floor. Motl looked out jealously at the Jews who were walking around freely in the yard. He saw a number of families with children and babies lying in the yard, because there was no more room in the barracks.

Motl shouted through the windows, "Jews, save me! I'm a Jew from Lithuania! Are there other Jews from Lithuania here? Call them over to me!" Two young boys from Lithuania came over.

"Reb Yid [a polite way to address a religious Jewish stranger], tell us where you come from," one of them said to Motl.

"I'm from Anykshtsiai! I'm not Reb Yid, I'm just a boy in my twenties. I haven't been able to shave, and that's why I look like an old Reb Yid," Motl said in a pleading tone.

And in those tragic days, at that agonized moment, Motl saw and sensed with all his being the Jewish soul, shining like a meteor in the murderous darkness all around him. Although it was dangerous for them to talk to Motl, Jews came around from all sides to bring Motl food, handing it to him through the window. He had an appetite for everything that was brought to him, and he continued eating and eating. He saw young boys and girls walking nearby, looking sympathetically through the window where Motl stood. Some of them wept.

"Oh, my dear, beloved Jews! My helpless people," Motl sighed, looking out through the window. At that moment he felt stronger and more confident, full of hope to live to see better times and then tell the entire world what he had seen and survived.

He wasn't allowed to go out to relieve himself. He had to evacuate himself in the cell. After he had been in the cell for several days, a Latvian came with a bucket and ordered Motl to toss all his excrement into it with his own hands.

On the fourth day a boy aged about sixteen came over to the window. "Reb Yid, what town are you from," he asked. Motl tried to remember where he knew the boy from. "Elke, it's you," Motl began to shout, and became frightened of his own high-pitched voice. It was Motl's second cousin, Elke Berkovitz, from Anykshtsiai.

Every day Elke came to the window, brought Motl food and talked with him from a certain distance. Motl was tortured in the cell for seven days and nights. Every other day he was taken to the Latvian ghetto commandant and interrogated. On the seventh day he was freed from the cell. It was late in the autumn of 1941.

Motl gradually pulled himself together. He shaved his long beard, cut his hair and washed. People got him clothes and saw that they were clean. No longer was Motl a "Reb Yid," but once again a young, tall, good-looking man with pitch-black hair and fiery black eyes.

Motl had work to do. Lithuanian and Latvian Jews from Dvinsk and the surrounding area came to visit Motl and asked him to recount his bizarre experiences. At first Motl spoke readily, and then he tired of it. Then Jews would come simply to look at Motl, and wrinkle their brows. There were pious Jews, elderly men with long, gray beards, who ascribed Motl's survival to the realm of the miraculous, which lies in God's power alone.

The wandering Jews from Lithuanian who had been chased to Dvinsk by the German Army, took care of their countryman as far as their means permitted. There weren't many Lithuanian Jews left. A large number of them had been annihilated together with thousands of Jews of Dvinsk at the beginning of the war, a short time after the Germans entered Dvinsk. But the few surviving Jewish refugees clung to each other and assisted each other. Thanks to his remarkable experiences, Motl earned them all considerable respect in the eyes of the Jews from Dvinsk.

*Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin    October 18, 1989*

## EVENTS DURING THE OCCUPATION OF GRODNO AND KOVNO

### GERMAN OFFICERS AND JEWISH FURS

This is a stirring tale about a Jewish merchant from Grodno, who for a period of six weeks fought for his very life by resorting to various ingenious, fantastic plans. Unfortunately, this tale is not a myth or fairy tale, but a tragic episode that occurred during the German occupation of Grodno and Kovno,

This is an authentic eyewitness account which is part of my Archive Collection about the annihilation of the Jews of Lithuania.

On one of the most populated streets of Grodno lived the Polish Major Roznatowski, who was descended from a prominent military family. He was tall and slim, with characteristically Polish long, twisted moustaches, and steely, sky-blue eyes in his pale face. Although he was not yet fifty years old, the hair on his head, like his whisker was white as snow.

At every opportunity, when talking to his friends, the Major would boast; "I am a Pole...; A Pole and a Major in the Polish Army: I am descended from the... "

In his relations with people, the Major always behaved with pride and dignity. He walked proudly and arrogantly on the streets of Grodno, taut as a string. When greeting friends or army men, he would smile and quickly touch the brim of his hat.

His wife, a woman of forty, of medium height, with blonde hair and large eyes, was also blessed with a sense of Polish honor. Although born in a German aristocratic family from Berlin, she did not regard herself a German, but was an ardent Polish patriot.

Their only son, a student in the Polish University, resembled his father, the Major, not only in external appearance but in character.

For years the Major served in the Polish Army, his son was a student, and the Major's wife ran her sumptuous home and was proud of her husband and son.

When barbaric anti-semitism raged in Poland in the last years before the war, the Major and his family were outraged and condemned it. "They are humiliating and demeaning the honor of my people:" the Major declared to his Polish and Jewish friends at every opportunity.

One of the Major's neighbours was a Jewish merchant, Isaac (Yitskhok) Kobrovsky, and his wife and daughter. He was a frequent visitor to the Major's home and the two families were close friends.

Kobrovsky and the Major enjoyed mutual benefits from their relationship, and exchanged many favors.

Isaac Kobrovsky flaunted his friendship with the Major's family to his Jewish acquaintances, and was as proud as though he himself was not descended from Abraham but from Jan Sobieski.

Isaac Kobrovsky was a tall, broad-boned, corpulent Jew about 45 years of age. He had shrewd black eyes and a clever, round, rosy face. A perpetual smile lingered on his fleshy lips, as though in mockery at this foolish world. He had a slow, plodding walk like a heavy tank. He was a cautious and circumspect man in all his thoughts and actions. These traits were very useful to him in life, as we shall see.

Kobrovsky amazed and amused his friends with an unending store of anecdotes and jokes which made everyone laugh. The Major's family also enjoyed hearing Kobrovsky's comical tales. The Major and his family were devoted to Kobrovsky. Most devoted was the Major's wife, Not, God forbid, because she harbored any improper feelings for him, but because she depended on him to help her in the running of her household,

"Please, Pana (Mr) and "Please Pana Kobrovsky," the Major's wife would address him, demonstrating her utmost respect for the Jew.

Isaac absorbed and emulated the manners and behavior of his Polish friends - their mentality, manner of speech and way of thinking.

Not one other Jew in Grodno could ever feel so comfortable, so at ease, like an equal among equals, in the society

of the Polish aristocracy, as did Isaac Kobrovsky.

Every Sunday, when they had a drink together, the Major, with a rush of affection for Kobrovsky, would call him "the best Jew in Grodno,"

In this manner the friendship between the Major's family and Kobrovsky's family flowed peacefully for years, like the water of the Niemann River through Grodno.

The collapse of Poland in the autumn of 1939 broke over their heads like a furious storm, an onslaught of nature, destroying their idyllic existence. Both the Major's family and Kobrovsky's family sank into deep melancholy.

Poland was divided between Hitler Germany and the Soviet Union; the arrogant, self-confident faces of the proud Poles were replaced on the streets of Grodno by the Soviet military.

Hatred of the new rulers of Grodno blazed in the Major's heart. He avoided going out, but sat at home, clad in his uniform and shining Polish boots.

Deep in thought, his mind spinning fantasies, he paced the spacious rooms of his dwelling. In his heart he remained a proud, honorable Polish Major; a Major without an army.

Now Kobrovsky visited his Polish friends even more frequently, listening as the Major poured out his bitter heart, he always found words of consolation and reassurance that restored the Major's hopes, and gave him the strength to wait for better times. In such sanguine moments the Major would sing the Polish anthem, "Poland has not yet been destroyed", with a happy smile lighting up his face.

One morning, a short time before the German-Soviet war, several armed Red Army soldiers burst into the Major's house and in simple soldier's language "had a long talk" with the Major. Smiling, and in "plain talk" they shattered and reduced to ashes the pride and honor of the Polish Major Roznatowski, ordering him, as though he were a humble man, to come with them. His face ashen, the Major kissed his wife and left the house. He never returned.

A short time later his wife learned that the Major had been removed to a far, far place, to Siberia to the white bears, together with hundreds like him.

Now Kobrovsky became even more helpful to the Major's wife in the running of her household. He also sent packages of food and clothing to the Major. Roznatowski, the Major's wife, could not find enough words to express her gratitude for Kobrovsky's help to her and her son.

Then the situation changed. Crimes of terror and tragedy descended like a storm on the Kobrovsky family and all the Jews of Grodno.

On Monday, June 23, 1941, a day after the outbreak of war between Hitler Germany and the Soviet Union, German planes bombed Grodno. The suburb of Slobodka was razed. The same day the German army marched into Grodno.

The German military was followed several days later by the Gestapo, which immediately imposed its anti-Jewish edicts. All Jews were forced to wear white patches and a Star of David on their sleeves. Sometime later these were replaced by two yellow Stars of David; one on the chest, and one on the back.

Jews were only allowed to walk in the gutters, one behind the other, like a row of geese.

The Polish population of Grodno exulted at the degradation of their Jewish neighbours.

Every day the Gestapo seized Jews; mostly intellectuals from their homes and in the streets, transporting them to points unknown. They were never seen again. Still at this time no-one could bring himself to believe that the Jews were being executed.

Many Jewish men worked for the Wehrmacht. The Gestapo often arrested them as they left work. It was life threatening to leave one's home to go and buy food. The Jews of Grodno lived under a perpetual cloud of terror.

Kobrovsky, his wife and daughter, no longer visited the major's wife. Like his Jewish brethren, Kobrovsky stayed home and starved. During this time, however, the Major's wife did not forget her Jewish friend Kobrovsky and supplied him with food, for which he paid her. One day she informed him joyfully that the commandant of Grodno had moved into her home.

"Please, Pana (Mr) Kobrovsky please! What do you say to that? Ha? The Commandant is tall, handsome and very intelligent. He comes from the Riedel family of Hamburg and he'll do anything for me," she smiled coquettishly, and invited Kobrovsky to visit her without fail.

"Pana Kobrovsky, I will introduce you to Commandant Riedel," she pleaded.

Kobrovsky was panic-stricken. He could not shake off the thought that his long time friend Roznatowski the Major's wife was luring him into a lion's cage. She kept reassuring him: "Don't be afraid, Pana Kobrovsky. You are a visitor in my home, and the Commandant needs many things! I will convince him! Proshe Pan! (Please Sir!)" she begged until Kobrovsky, still doubtful, promised to come.

The seizure of Jewish men continued. No one was sure of his life. Kobrovsky went to Roznatowski's house. She welcomed him cordially: "In my home, Pana Kobrovsky, you are my guest and a friend of our family: "Take off the yellow patches:" she commanded, and Isaac obeyed.

Roznatowski knocked at the door of the commandant's room, and without waiting, opened it and announced that Herr Kobrovsky had arrived. Commandant Riedel let Kobrovsky into his room. This is Herr Kobrovsky. He is a Jew, and worth more than a thousand Poles." She smiled at the Commandant coquettishly and left the room.

The Commandant, a tall, elderly German in a stiff military uniform, paced for a while, his glistening boots squeaking loudly. Then he shut the door, sat down in a deep chair by the table, and beckoned to Isaac to sit down opposite.

For a short time they stared at each other in silence. Under the Commandant's keen, knife-like gaze, Kobrovsky lowered his eyes, "How are you getting on?" the Commandant began.

"Personally, until now, not bad, Herr Commandant, But I'm not sure of my life from minute to minute," said Isaac nervously.

"Why?" Isaac grew bolder and told the Commandant about the men who were being seized and led away to be shot.

"That's impossible" cried the Commandant, as though affronted, Isaac asked the commandant to find work for him, any kind of work, and get him a special permit to protect him.

The Commandant had previously employed Jews, to whom he gave permits stating they were not allowed to work for anyone else. He promised to get one for Kobrowsky, with the understanding that Isaac would provide him with fur skins for a coat. Kobrowsky promised to get him excellent fur.

The commandant was pleased, thanked Kobrowsky gratefully, adding:"Could you get me some karacul skins? I'll pay you well."

Isaac promised to get him karacul skins within four days. The two parted on the friendliest terms. The next day Roznatowska brought Isaac a permit, stating that he was working for the Commandant, and that no-one else was allowed to employ him.

Isaac, who had never dealt in fur, had no fur pelts. In addition, it was difficult to get them in Grodno. At that time Isaac took counsel with the Judenrat. This official body had initially intended to try to benefit from the commandant's presence for the advantage and benefit of the Jews, and promised to Isaac the fur skins. Four days passed, but the Judenrat failed to get the furs.

Kobrovsky begged the Major's wife to prevail on the Commandant to allow him to go to Vilna or Kovno, where he had many friends, and hoped to get a good supply of fur skins.

The next day, at 6 in the morning, Kobrovsky visited the commandant at home and was given a special letter of transit for Kovno. On the morning of July 6, 1941, Kobrovsky, in the company of a German officer, set out for Kovno in an open car. The journey was a pleasant one. His companion, the lieutenant, was an artist by trade. He offered Kobrowsky food and flattered him unceasingly, hoping, of course, to get some skins for a coat for his wife, although he did not ask directly.

The car sped swiftly on the highway towards Kovno.

## **IN KOVNO**

Kovno had suffered an overwhelming catastrophe. Immediately after the departure of the 'Red Army', armed Lithuanians, who called themselves "partisans" assaulted the unfortunate, innocent Jews. In Slobodka they carried out a bestial pogrom. Dead bodies of men, women and children littered the streets and courtyards. The fiends seized young people, even children, from their homes, from courtyards and off breadlines and made them form rows with their hands behind their backs, and herded them to the green hill at the Seventh Fort. Day after day long lines of young boys and girls, their hands tied behind them, their heads proudly raised, were marched on their last road toward the Seventh Fort.

Brides searching for their betrothed in "Partisan" headquarters, women looking for husbands and sons, were detained and herded to the Seventh Fort. The helpless victims were kicked and spat at, while the "Partisans" and civilians stood on the sidewalks looking on and cheering, on one such a tragic day, a light auto drove into Kovno and stopped on Leisvess Boulevard.

Isaac Kobrovsky, the Jew from Grodno, stepped out, on his way to visit a friend about the possibility of acquiring karacul skins. As he approached the street corner he was approached by a Partisan. "Zhidas?" (Jew?) he screamed savagely at Isaac, who, without his yellow patches, was walking along deep in thought.

Before Isaac could reply, the Partisan struck him on the head with his club, kicked him, and pushed him into a row of Jews who were being taken to the Yellow Prison of Kovno under close guard.

The Lieutenant who had accompanied Kobrovsky was not aware of all this, because he was waiting for him in the car.

## **AT THE SEVENTH FORT IN KOVNO**

In the courtyard of the Yellow Prison the Jews were stripped of all their belongings and taken to the Seventh Fort in trucks. The Seventh Fort was crammed with thousands of men, women and children. The Partisans drove the women and children into cramped, dark, damp casements under the ground. On the grass in a valley, guarded by Partisans with automatics at the ready, thousands of Jewish men were made to sit with bowed heads, their bodies twisted, pressed close to one another or were forced to lie on their backs with their faces turned to the burning sun. For stirring without permission the Partisans would fire their automatics, leaving dead and wounded. There was no food or water.

The blazing sun burned the bodies of the starving Jews in the valley. On a hill not far away strolled Lithuanian young men and girls, festively clad, happily watching the Partisans guarding the Jews in the "zoo", as the Seventh Fort was called.

The valley where the Jews were being tortured was called "Katilas" (kettle).

Every night groups of men were led out of the "kettle" and shortly after there was the sound of shooting.

Isaac Kobrovsky, like all the Jews in the "kettle" expected death at any moment.

One morning Gestapo officers came to the Fort, demanding artisans for various kinds of work. Isaac had no trade, but swore that he was a specialist in preserving foods, and named a well-known firm in Danzig where he had supposedly been employed. He and 24 more men were taken to the Yellow Prison and confined in a single cell, No. 40.

## **IN THE YELLOW PRISON IN KOVNO**

The air in the cell was stifling, and it was hellishly hot. Once a day the prisoners were let out to attend to their natural needs. There was not enough water, and they could not wash. They were not given clean linen and everyone was tormented by fleas and lice and hunger.

The Jews received 150 grams of bread a day. In the morning they had coffee without sugar, at noon a thin soup; and in the evening boiled flour. They had nothing to do, except in rare cases when they were herded out to the courtyard of the prison to work. Their sole occupation was to wait for death.

After five weeks, the Jews were taken in trucks to work at the University Clinic, which had been transformed into a

military hospital. They were guarded by Lithuanians with automatic guns. After a long days work, the Jews were transported in trucks back to the prison for overnight.

Here Isaac and the other prisoners were able to revive a little. They were fed, and given an opportunity to wash. Isaac worked at preserving meat and vegetables, although he knew nothing about this process.

His supervisor was a Polish nurse, who taught him the trade. She was very good to him, and looked away when he stole something. More than once she saved him from the blows which the Lithuanian Partisans, wanted to give him.

While in prison, Kobrovsky wrote to his wife to let her know where he was, hoping that, with the aid of the Major's wife, she could save him from death.

One of the painters in the military hospital was a Pole. Isaac lied to him, saying he had a Polish wife in Grodno, and persuaded him to bring her a letter, promising he would be well paid. He wrote the letter in Polish, giving instructions that the bearer should be paid the sum of 2500 rubles. The Pole took the letter, but did not return.

Several days later, in the evening, a German officer called Isaac out of his cell. To his amazement, he saw Commandant Riedel of Grodno in the corridor. His heart began to pound. He was on the verge of pouring out his story and begging the Commandant to save him, but the Commandant was accompanied by Gestapo men. Undaunted by their presence, the Commandant boldly asked about the furs that Isaac had promised to get for him. Isaac assured him that he had gotten the furs, but the Lithuanians had arrested him. The commandant glared at Isaac, muttered something, and left. Isaac was taken back to the cell. Evidently the Polish painter had delivered the letter to his wife, and the Major's wife had prevailed upon the Commandant to go to Kovno and try to save him, however, the Commandant's visit to the prison brought Kobrovsky closer to death, because the Gestapo promptly executed any Jew on whose behalf there was intervention. He was afraid his days were numbered, and began to plan an escape.

In his working conditions this would not have been difficult, but when he confided his plans to his co-workers, they became panicky and did everything in their power to hinder him. If Kobrovsky escaped they would all be shot. In the past, entire groups of Jews had been murdered in retaliation for one man's escape. Isaac could not bear to see his comrades' anguish, and promised not to run away.

In the horrendous conditions in prison and at work, Isaac felt like a caged eagle. His chances of survival were minimal. Finding no rest in his prison cell, he paced back and forth, with folded arms, from window to door and back.

Standing at the window, he saw a clear blue sky and a blazing sun. At night he saw serene, contented people strolling in the street. Inside the cell, he was surrounded by his victimized comrades, who were innocently condemned to death. He would sigh deeply, and his fellow inmates would answer with a sigh. This was the tragic, bitter language of the Jewish prisoners, a language which they all understood, but which was incomprehensible, inaccessible to those outside their experience.

That night Kobrovsky devised another plan of escape, and it did not let him sleep. Spending so much time in the cell, each of the prisoners in turn told his life story, the most important events in his life. One of the prisoners was a furrier, a specialist from whom Isaac learned about all kinds of furs.

The fact that Commandant Riedel had humiliated himself by coming from Grodno to visit a Jew in the Kovno Prison, to inquire about furs, convinced Isaac not only that fur skins were a precious commodity for the Germans, but that if the Commandant was eager for them, Gestapo officers were also trying to get them.

He waited impatiently for morning, to see his supervisor, the Polish nurse.

"Good morning, my dear, kind-sister, he greeted her as he entered the cellar where he worked.

"Good morning:" she replied. "How are you?"

"Dear Sister, I have decided to give you a beautiful present because of your kindness to me. A new caracul coat;" he cried in a strong, confident voice.

Surprised, she thanked him very politely,

The same day Kobrovsky had another surprise for the nurse. He asked her to tell the Chief Physician of the hospital that he owned a warehouse in Grodno full of fur pelts. The nurse warned him that he could be shot, but he was insistent. The same day she gave the doctor this information.

Several days later, two top German officers visited Kobrovsky where he was working in the cellar. The Chief Physician was a stout man of medium height, with a thick red neck, smoothly shaven red face, and gold spectacles. His blonde hair was combed ala Hitler. His adjutant was a tall blonde German with a chest full of medals. They wished Kobrovsky a cordial "good day," and he snatched his cap from his head and bowed deeply.

"Are you from Grodno?" the Chief Physician inquired affably.

"From Grodno," Herr Chief Physician Kobrovsky stood erect, and replied in military fashion. The two officers smiled at each other. "Is it true that you have a warehouse full of fur pelts?"

Inwardly Kobrovsky rejoiced, for now the first steps of his complicated escape. Plan had been taken. The wheels had been set in motion. He remained outwardly nonchalant, lest the German officers grow suspicious. "No furs, Herr Doctor; I have none;" and he dropped his eyes, in innocence.

"You're lying, damned Jew:" shouted the adjutant. Kobrovsky looked at him, again pretending innocence, and was silent.

"Shit-head: we know everything!" The adjutant slapped Isaac's face.

With his plump hands the Chief Physician pushed the adjutant aside, and said to Kobrovsky "Don't be afraid, we're not barbarians. You will work for us and you'll be well off. All I want is a few fur skins," he cajoled.

"I have a wife and child in Grodno, Herr Chief Doktor. I can't give away my fur coats and fur skins for nothing. You know I don't earn anything from my work here. Who will support my wife and daughter?"

The Chief Physician begged the Jew to sell him two karacul coats and two silver foxes, asking politely what they would cost.

"270 marks," again Isaac stood at attention like a good soldier, "70 for myself, and 200 for my wife and daughter," he added.

The adjutant and his chief exchanged glances, with pleased smiles. "Here I'll pay your price!" The Chief Physician slapped the Jew on the back, and grinned.

"I'll also improve your working conditions," he promised, "But remember what I told you:" and he put his finger to his lips. And the adjutant warned "Not a soul must know about this:" he warned,

"Of course, of course, nobody must know!" Kobrovsky nodded in agreement, hiding a smile.

Still, he was worried that the Gestapo could liquidate him because of Commandant Riedel's visit to the prison.

"What if they take away my work permit?" Isaac asked the two officers.

"Come with me!" cried the Chief Physician.

The three made their way to the office of the military hospital. There a blonde German girl wrote an official request to the prison warden to the effect that Kobrovsky be assigned to daily work in the hospital. The note stressed that Kobrovsky was a skilled worker and a specialist in his trade whom no one could replace. Kobrovsky was greatly relieved. The Chief Physician accompanied him along the long, well scrubbed hospital corridor, whispering that in a few days he would go to Grodno to get the furs.

Isaac returned to work, proud of his brainstorm, laughing to himself at the "clever," "cultured," and "polite" German officers.

In the evening, the prisoners were brought back to their prison cell. Isaac stood at the window, looking pensively at the setting, blood red sun beyond the hills of the Kovno suburb of Alekset. He gripped the heavy iron bars of the window, and sank into deep thought.

His cellmates noticed Isaac's agitation and winked at each other. One of the prisoners in the Yellow Prison was the popular Jewish engineer Blumenthal, from Kovno. During the era of Lithuania's independence, Blumenthal had worked for the aviation industry, and had introduced many inventions for which he was awarded high honors. All his achievements did not deter the Lithuanian fiends from arresting and imprisoning him for the crime of being a Jew.

"Why are you so downcast, lately, Isaac?" Blumenthal asked with a friendly smile.

"I have a lot on my mind" replied Isaac. Then he revealed his plan of escape to his comrades, some of them waved their hands in resignation to him with a cynical smile. Others thought the plan was a quixotic idea and still others compared it to the impractical notions of Sholem Aleichem's Menachem Mend!

Isaac heard them all out, lowered his eyes like a shamefaced boy, wringing his hands.

Engineer Blumenthal was the only one who supported him. "Isaac, I am on your side and approve of your plan. Play out the tragic-comedy to the end, dear brother: You have nothing to lose!" exclaimed the tall engineer, clapping Isaac on the back and smiling sadly.

After their supper of boiled flour, all 25 cell-inmates stretched out on their hard plank cots, covering themselves with rags, but no one could sleep.

Crimson beams from the setting sun lingered in a corner of the dusty cell. The air was hot, stuffy and heavy as lead. Hundreds of dust motes floated within the long shaft of sunlight. Outside there was youth and life, laughter and song from the Lithuanian passersby.

Isaac's plan to escape brought the sleepless prisoners thoughts of their families; wives and children; beloved brides and devoted mothers and fathers. They lay on their cots staring into the darkness, their hearts aching with yearning. Each of them was convinced that he would never again see his loved ones.

Only death could liberate them from their anguish, and no one knew how much longer he had to live.

Isaac was plagued by doubts about the success of his plan. Three days passed, and still the Chief of the military hospital had not summoned Isaac. There was no further talk about going to Grodno for furs, and Isaac's hopes began to fade.

His fellow prisoners began to ridicule his plans; some even told jokes at his expense.

Although he was tormented by the fear that the Gestapo might still shoot him because of Commandant Riedel's visit, Isaac refused to give up his scheme of action. He decided to change his plan in the hope of tricking the "clever" and "cultured" Germans.

Once at work he approached the Chief Physician, and told him that the prison officials had decided to send him to his native town of Grodno to complete his mission. The doctor looked disappointed, afraid that his chances of getting the furs were lost.

"They won't take you to Grodno:" he shouted, angry and determined. In the evening he sent a message to the prison warden, then told Kobrovsky to stay in the hospital for "night work."

After work a German guard escorted Isaac into one of the hospital rooms, brought him a good meal and prepared a soft, clean bed. The German guard sat outside Isaac's room all night. Isaac could not sleep. He was confused, and strained all his energies to come to terms with his tragic situation, for the end was uncertain.

He was eager to get to Grodno, where he hoped that Roznatowska; the Polish Major's wife, would call upon Commandant Riedel to set him free. If the worst came to the worst, he wanted to die in Grodno, so that his family would know where he was and could bury him in a Jewish Cemetery. Hot tears ran down his face.

## **BACK IN GRODNO**

A young, summer morning sun cast a radiant glow everywhere. Its warm rays poured into the large, tidy room, where Isaac had been awake for hours. Haunted by fear and doubt, he stared out the window at the summer morning. There was a painful gnawing in his chest. A question mark loomed before his eyes, huge and black, "What will this day bring?"

At six in the morning, the Chief Doctor's adjutant opened the door of the room. "Good morning, Herr:" he cried with a cheerful smile,

"Good morning, Herr Lieutenant," replied Isaac, sitting up in bed, his old, ragged black shirt spread like a dark stain against the gleaming white bed linen.

"Everything is ready. Please get ready to go to Grodno." said the Lieutenant, gaily and cordially, and left the room. Isaac dressed quickly, casting a last, lingering glance at the clean bed.

A sergeant brought him a bowl of soup. After eating it, Isaac asked for food for his wife and child in Grodno. The sergeant brought him a box of apples and four loaves of fresh partly white bread.

A large bus, with comfortable seats was waiting in the hospital courtyard. Three passengers boarded the bus; the Jew Isaac Kobrovsky the lieutenant; and a sergeant. The bus driver was a Lithuanian, several empty crates and some sacks were piled up in a corner of the bus.

The lieutenant double-checked his travel permit, nodded, and said to the Lithuanian driver "Get going." The bus started to roll. Passing through the streets of Kovno, Isaac did not see a single Jew.

Leaving the city, the bus gathered speed. It raced along the highway like a speeding bullet past green meadows, sunlit woods, fields of multi-colored flowers. But even the beauties of nature could not gladden Kobrovsky's gloomy heart. Thoughts spun round in his head like the wheels of the bus. He had no idea how his complicated hoax would end when he arrived in Grodno, he knew only that his life was in danger. Only his desire to see his wife and daughter, his brothers, his close friends and the Jews of Grodno gave him home and strength to persist. A vague plan began to form in his mind, illogical and impossible.

When they passed through the towns of Alita (Alytus) and Meretch (Merkine;) again there were no Jews in the streets. On the highway not far from Grodno he saw Jewish carters, unguarded, bringing lumber from the forest. They wore yellow patches on their chests and backs. At the sight of these Grodno Jews Isaac sighed with relief. Five kilometers from Grodno he saw Jewish and civilian Polish laborers on the highway, very lightly guarded. Isaac called the lieutenant's attention to the big difference between Grodno and Kovno in the treatment of the Jews.

"That is Lithuania, this is the Reich:" the lieutenant explained, The more tolerant treatment of the Jews of Grodno raised Isaac's hopes for escaping death.

During the trip the lieutenant and the sentry kept a sharp eye on Isaac, lest he try to jump out of the bus. They did not talk to him, and were careful of the Lithuanian bus driver. When they approached Grodno, the lieutenant took out a pencil and notebook.

"What's your name?" he said to Isaac.

After a moment Isaac said confidently: "Edward Kotlinski."

"Edward Kotlinski," the lieutenant repeated and wrote it down.

Isaac did not give his real name and surname because he was determined, if worst came to worst, to try to escape, and did not want his wife and daughter to suffer. The lieutenant, although he had a travel permit was afraid of entering Grodno, and stayed on the outskirts. The two Germans, together with Isaac, continued on foot.

At the edge of the city lived a Polish storekeeper, Novacka. Before the war she had done business with Isaac and Roznatowska, the Major's wife, used to buy from her, and they were good friends. Isaac suggested to the Germans that they go into the store and find out whether the house where the furs were stored had not been occupied by the military.

There was a Lithuanian officer inside the store. Remembering the persecution of Jews by the Lithuanians in the Seventh Fort in Kovno, Isaac could no longer restrain himself, and burst out "You, Novacka, a decent Polish woman, talking to a Lithuanian?"

The German officer, understanding that Isaac would not discuss anything with the storekeeper in the presence of the Lithuanian, pushed the latter out of the store. This Lithuanian, who was stationed in Grodno with a group of Partisans, was active in the persecution of Grodno Jews.

Isaac asked the storekeeper to get a message to Roznatowska that he had come from Kovno to get his furs. The storekeeper was well aware that Isaac had never dealt in furs, but she grasped the situation and immediately set out for Roznatowska's home.

Isaac and the two Germans walked slowly through the twisted streets, to give the Major's wife more time to make rescue plans for him. Finally they arrived at her home, she was startled to see that Kobrovsky was accompanied by Germans, however, she greeted them cordially, in a Berlin-German accent, inviting them to be seated and rest themselves.

Roznatowska promised Isaac to do everything in her power to help him. Speaking in Polish, she assured him that she would be able to get the furs.

Isaac told the two Germans that Roznatowska needed twenty minutes to get the fur coats.

"Twenty minutes:" she assured the lieutenant, with a gracious smile, in perfect German.

"Will it all be ready?" the lieutenant was still uncertain,

"All will go so smoothly that you will be surprised! Roznatowska reiterated confidently, smiling coquettishly at Isaac.

Seeing the smile, the lieutenant looked in amazement from Isaac to the attractive middle-aged woman. When Isaac and the two Germans left the house, the Lieutenant, eyeing Isaac from head to foot, asked with envy "Is she your mistress?"

"Not a mistress but a good friend."

As they walked on, Isaac resolved not to depend entirely on the Major's wife, but to try to do something himself, to help himself. He invited the two Germans into his house, saying he had one caracul lady's coat.

Isaac's wife had already been previously informed by the storekeeper what the situation was.

When they arrives at Isaac's home, he and the guard went in, while the lieutenant remained outside.

Isaac's wife and small daughter fell weeping into his arms. He embraced them, held them close, tears rolling down' his cheeks. "Hurry up: Make it snappy:" the chief guard shouted,

Moshe, Isaac's brother, was also there, sitting at the table in an agitated state, his fist clenched. Noticing this, the security chief held his revolver armed and ready.

Isaac, who was distressed that his wife had to witness this, decided to use force to get rid of the security chief. "Go get your fur coat:" Isaac ordered his wife.

"What fur coat?" she replied, astonished, unaware of the scheme that her husband was cooking up.

"Get the fur coat, I tell you:" he repeated angrily and pushed her out of the room.

The security chief took Isaac outside. Isaac told the lieutenant that his wife could not bear to part from her fur coat and refused to give it away. The lieutenant advised Isaac not to worry, and not to make a fuss over such a "trifle."

The lieutenant, impatient and worried kept looking at his watch. Fifteen minutes later they returned to the city to Roznatowska's home.

She told them, in German, that the Commandant wanted to see them. "Please, gentlemen:" she pointed triumphantly to the commandant's room. The lieutenant and his security chief grew pale. With angry glances at this impudent woman, they moved towards the door. At this moment Commandant Riedel emerged from his room. The two Germans quickly sprang to attention, and saluted,

Calmly fastening the collar of his uniform, the commandant ran his eyes over the lieutenant; the security chief and Kobrovsky. His gaze fixed on Isaac, he pointed to him and shouted: "Donnervetter: Where have you been keeping this man!? I've been looking for him for six weeks: What the hell, and he slammed his fist onto the table.

The lieutenant and the security chief shook with fear. Isaac lowered his eyes, hiding a small smile. The Major's wife stared out the window. For a short time the commandant held them in suspense while he finished fastening the collar of his uniform. Several times he paced the room, his gleaming boots creaking, and finally came to a halt opposite the two German, his hands in his pockets. "Your documents, please:" he ordered.

The lieutenant showed his papers, explaining that the "Jude" was employed in the military hospital in Kovno as a skilled worker, and they had brought him here to get linens and winter clothing. The commandant heard them out, then examined their documents. He kept the travel permit, and told them, in no uncertain terms, to appear at his headquarters in half an hour together with the "Jude."

"In the meantime" he pointed to the door.

At the outskirts of the town, the lieutenant said he was convinced that the woman had betrayed them and would keep all the furs. They decided to leave Grodno as quickly as possible and return to Kovno.

The bus was waiting. Isaac realized that instead of leaving with them, he should have tried to escape. So close to his goal, and such a fatal ending: But even at this moment, his heart pounding with chagrin and agitation, he did not lose his head.

"Herr Lieutenant:" he; cried. "You are mistaken: That woman did not betray you. She told the Commandant nothing!"

"Hey, Jude, what did you get out of it?"

"Herr Lieutenant I don't want you good people and the Chief Physician to suffer because of me. He has been very kind to me. I'm telling you the truth. Before the Soviets came I was leader of the Communist Party in Grodno. Then the commandant wanted to detain me and I fled from Grodno to Kovno."

The two Germans took out their revolvers and pointed them at Kobrovsky. They ordered the driver to go immediately to the commandant. Isaac, on the other hand, became very calm, feeling that he had succeeded in saving his life at the last moment.

The bus stopped opposite the Commandant's headquarters. The Germans, their revolvers aimed and ready, took Kobrovsky inside.

Riedel came forward to greet them, and told his guards to escort Isaac to the prison. He invited the lieutenant and the sergeant into his office. In an effort to identify the Jew, the lieutenant read from his notebook; Edward Kotlinski. Smiling, the Commandant corrected him: the real name was Isaac Kobrovsky, a Jew from Grodno, for whom he had been searching for several weeks. They decided to let "the Jude" out of jail.

A minor officer brought Kobrovsky from the prison which was a short distance from the commandant's office.

"What is your name and surname?" The Commandant asked.

"Isaac Kobrovsky" was the answer.

The irritated lieutenant interrupted: "I have you down for Edward Kotlinski!"

"No I am Isaac Kobrovsky"

The Commandant cut short this exchange and sent Isaac back to the prison, telling the two Germans to be out of Grodno in half an hour.

Several hours later the Commandant sent for Isaac again. He stared at him for a few minutes, then smiled and told him he was free and invited him to visit him at home the next morning. Kobrovsky thanked him and left.

As a result of his ordeal, Isaac fell ill. He suffered severe chills and ran a high temperature. The doctor told him he must stay in bed for at least four days. Kobrovsky sent his wife with a message to the Commandant that he would visit him in five days.

When his friends came to visit, he told them about his gruelling experiences. He learned that the Commandant had come to the Kovno Yellow prison to set him free leaving for him an award of a fur coat and 5,000 rubles with the Major's wife. When he returned from Kovno he did not take anything, and asked the Major's wife to return it all.

"I could not get Kobrovsky out of the Kovno prison," he told the Major's wife regretfully.

One of Isaac's brothers managed to get skins for a karacul coat, some excellent cloth for a suit, and a gold watch. When Isaac was well again he paid a visit to the Commandant, bringing these as gifts.

Riedel received him with a warm smile, locking the door. He was delighted with the presents and asked Isaac to sit down. He put a bottle of cognac on the table and they had a drink together. Isaac told the Commandant all that he had suffered. The Commandant, in turn, told Isaac about his efforts to save him from the Yellow Prison in Kovno, and about his conversation with the lieutenant in his headquarters.

They laughed together and Riedel rose majestically from the table, went over to Isaac and kissed him on the forehead. He listened admiringly to the complicated course of action by means of which Isaac had managed to save himself and had also managed to get karacul skins for a coat, keeping his promise.

Riedel assured Isaac that during the time he, the Commandant, remained in Grodno, he could promise Isaac security, unfortunately, however, he would be leaving in a short while to go deeper into Russia.



## A HORSE SLIPPED

It was an evening in late autumn, 1941. The sun had already slipped down below the mountains around the Kovno Ghetto. Gray twists of cloud monotonously circled in the deep blue sky. They snaked past each other and braided themselves and their edges were seared by the infernal fire of the setting sun.

Bits of ice were scattered among the stones on the frozen earth. Trees on the slopes of nearby mountains stood naked, their outstretched branching skeletons covered with ice. Heaps of yellow leaves were still scattered on the ground, mixed with fresh white snowflakes. Columns of smoke hastened toward the sky from the chimneys in the houses, as if they wanted to lift the chimneys and the houses up with them into the heavens.

On the back of the shrunken river Nieman white floes of ice lazily moved, pushing each other further and further towards the sea. It happened in Aleksot, a suburb of Kovno, near the river.

A sleepy peasant slowly rode along a crooked, frozen asphalt road. The horse, pulling a wagon-loaded with wood, climbed uphill with measured steps. The peasant sat wrapped in an old, dirty jacket. A cap with a visor masked his face. Between his teeth he held a pipe, and there was a whip in his hand.

Suddenly the horse's front feet slipped! It snorted loudly through its broad nostrils and it began falling and climbing back up, falling and climbing back up. Sparks flew from its front paws. All at once its back paws became caught in the harness, and like a piece of shorn hide it collapsed and began to choke. Fast as lightning the peasant jumped off the wagon and began to release the harness.

Men and women passing by surrounded the horse and released it from the harness. The horse turned on to its side and lay on the ground, its head outstretched.

"Nu! Nu! Stand up!" the peasant ordered the horse, and beat it with his whip. But the horse remained on the ground.

The peasant stood for a while in confusion. With one hand he pushed his cap further up on his head, and with the sleeve of his other arm he quickly wiped his sweaty face right and left. It seemed that the peasant's patience had given way.

"Get up, get up, you worthless hunk of meat!" he began to shout cruelly. The whip quickly began to whistle through the air and land on the horse's sides, between its legs, on its head and then between its legs again. Long, swelling blue lines of blood appeared on the horse's coat.

"You damn snake! You frog!" threatened the peasant, still beating the horse, who yet remained on the ground.

From a small house nearby with a tin roof, crooked, old wooden walls and little windows and a low, narrow door, out came a fat woman. She was wearing a man's fur coat and a man's boots, and a flowered kerchief on her head. She ran quickly, her fists clenched, waddling like a duck.

"Criminal! Good-for-nothing! Oh, Jesus! Oh, Jesus! Don't hit! Don't hit him, you rotten frog! Don't beat a living creature! Murderer! Remember there's a God! You're tormenting one of God's creatures!" she shouted as she ran toward the peasant, spitting with fury. She waved her clenched fist in the peasant's face.

The peasant seemed to be afraid of her, for he stood frozen with his whip in hand.

The impressed bystanders looked at the woman. A few of them approached the horse, caressing its mane and back, raising its head and caressing its chin, which hung like a bit of rag. "Kosh-kosh! Kosh-kosh!" they comforted and calmed the horse, which lay staring with its huge eyes.

"The poor thing's exhausted, sick or suffering from beatings!" the peasant woman with the flowered kerchief on her head bemoaned the horse, and wringing her hands in anguish, she called out a prayer to Heaven: "Oh, Jesus! Oh Jesus! Jesus!"

Downhill along the slippery, twisting asphalt road appeared a long column of people, dressed in torn, old clothes, smeared with mud and clay. Their heads were bowed and their eyes sad, half-extinguished.

These were Jews being driven from backbreaking labor at the nearby airfield. The Jews were guarded by armed Lithuanians in country-style furs and military boots.

"Keep in line! Don't talk to each other!" the guards teased and warned the Jews in a commanding tone. From time to time the Jews stole a glance around them. Eyes full of sorrow and anger cast an eternal curse on the Lithuanian murderers who had recently been their neighbors, who had betrayed them as soon as the Germans had arrived.

The Jews already knew about the total annihilation of the Jews in the Lithuanian countryside, which was carried out by Lithuanian murderers with the permission of the Hitlerite Gestapo. Most of the Jews in the ghetto had already lost part or all of their families in various deceptive "actions," especially during the "big action." On October 29, 1941 the Nazi murderers, with the willing active assistance of armed Lithuanian murderers drove out of the Kovno ghetto more than 10,000 men, women, children, elderly and sick people, and in the course of two days shot everyone at the Ninth Fort near Kovno.

Those Jews still alive for the time being had to continue going out hungry every day to do hard labor in the city and at the airfield. "Tick-tock! Tick-tock!" the Jews, some in torn shoes, others in heavy shoes with wooden soles, accompanied the dreary march back into the ghetto. The column approached the spot where the fallen horse lay.

"Jews! Here come Jews!" one of the Lithuanians shouted. "Let them help, the Kikes, let them get the horse back up on its feet. Let them work a bit, that lazy gang of parasites!" called out bossy voices within the crowd. The entire column of Jews stopped. A guard decided on two rows of four Jews each and brought them over to the fallen horse. "Two at the tail, two at the head, the rest on either side!" the guard boastfully ordered the Jews.

The Jews looked at the horse, at the cheerful, curious crowd standing nearby, and they did not carry out the order promptly.

"Cursed Jews, don't you hear me?" the guard muttered angrily, and began kicking the Jews with his new military boots.

The owner of the horse quickly pushed his double-visored cap further up on his brow, and with the sleeve of his other arm wiped his forehead and nose. Trembling with fear he looked at the Jews, at his horse and at the armed guards. One of the guards, who was short and fat, tore the whip out of the peasant's hands and quickly began to rain blows on the bodies of the Jews, who hid behind each other. The guard chased after them with his whip and beat them.

One elderly Jew neither hid nor ran away from the blows. He was beaten more than anyone, both with the whip and with a rifle butt. The Jew placed the ends of his half-black, half-gray beard inside his mouth and bit down hard on them. He was beaten until he collapsed. Red snakes of blood flowed from his ears, mouth and nose. He lay with his bloodied face looking up. His beard was entirely soaked with red blood. His face was covered with red and blue welts. He kept his beard clamped between his teeth and moaned. His eyes opened wide, he looked at the broken red clouds, the mute heavens.

The whip whistled again, the rifle butt broke more bones.

"Ha, ha, ha!" the mad laughter of the satisfied crowd was heard, ever and over.

"Just look at that character with the beard!" the woman with the flowered kerchief pointed to the old Jew.

"Must be a rabbi, with such a long beard!" someone else burst out laughing.

Suddenly the horse raised its huge head, looked around at the cheerful crowd and at the old Jew lying near him on the ground, and shook itself. It raised itself first on its forelegs, then on its hind legs, and stood with its head bowed.

It was already late in the evening. There were no more rays of sun.

Only the edges of the clouds remained dark red. The horse stood calmly with its head bowed down, constantly swishing its tail.

Next to him the old Jew lay covered with blood. The peasant owner of the horse and wagon stood with moist eyes, and looked sympathetically at the bloodied Jew.

From his lips, covered with a thicket of unruly hair, he murmured a prayer to the man from Nazareth: "Oh, Jesus! Oh, Jesus!" And he quickly and repeatedly crossed and crossed himself.

"Get in lines of four, you frogs!" the guard commanded like a general and looked at the surrounding crowd of curious Lithuanians with proud self-confidence.

Two Jews lifted the old man from the ground and got into the first row. But the old man could not stand on his feet. They repeatedly bent over and comforted him: "Reb Moyshe, gather your strength, hold on, Reb Moyshe. Your wife and children are waiting for you in the ghetto. Have confidence!" one of the Jews begged. The old man leaned on

the two Jews.

"Forward march!" came a drawn-out command from the guard.

Slowly the rows of Jews began to descend. Reb Moyshe barely dragged along his injured body.

The woman with the flowered kerchief on her head tore herself from the human mass around the horse. With one hand she held her skirt up over her boots, and with her other hand clenched in an angry fist, she ran after the Jews crying repeatedly: "Kikes! Lousy, stinking Kikes! Frogs!"

The whole crowd broke out into joyful laughter: "Oh, Jesus! Oh, Jesus!"

With sympathy in his eyes, the peasant looked for the column of Jews, which had already disappeared. He remained standing alone next to his horse, and crossed himself without stopping. "Jesus, oh Jesus!"

A cold autumn night flooded the world with dense darkness.

*Translated from Yiddish by Dr Jonathan Boyarin July 30, 1987*

*There is no relief in this book for the 200,000  
Lithuanian Jews slaughtered or those that remember them,  
but there is in it a eulogy and a kaddish which was not said  
when they were slaughtered, and which will be said now,  
whenever we shall take this book in our hands.*





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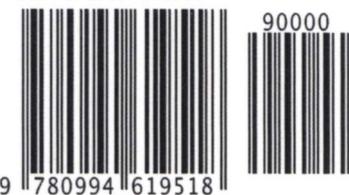


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# THE LITHUANIAN SLAUGHTER OF ITS JEWS

THE SLAUGHTER OF JEWS IN THE LITHUANIAN COUNTY SEAT TELZH (TELSHAI) Compound at Rainiai, Camp at Geruliai and Telzh Ghetto *Testimonies of Malke Gilis (nee Rabinovitz) and Khane Pelts* THE SLAUGHTER OF JEWS IN THE LITHUANIAN TOWN OF RIETAVAS Vieshvenai Compound *Testimony of Yente Alter (nee Gershovitz)* THE SLAUGHTER OF JEWS IN THE TELZH COUNTY TOWNS: Towns: Nevarenai, Varnai, Tverai, Zarenai, Liplauke and Alsedzhiai. 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Supplementary testimony of Tobe Rosenshteyn-Gurvitz* THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS OF ERZHVILIK (ERZVILKAS) *Testimonies of Khayem Goldshteyn and Menukhe Goldshteyn* THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS IN THE TOWN OF LAUKUVA *Testimony of Josef Aranovitz* THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS OF LAUKUVA AND SHILALE *Testimony of Lea Szapiro-Rudnik* THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS OF PAJURIS *Testimony of Peshe Meltsner* THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS IN UPYNAS (UPYNAS), BOTIK (BATAKIAI) AND SKAUDVILE *Testimony of Peshe Meltsner* THE SLAUGHTER OF JEWS IN THE SMALL LITHUANIAN TOWN KOLTINAN (KALTINENAI) *Testimony of Sender Linkimer* THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS OF SHVEKSHNE (SVEKSNA) *Testimonies of Moyshe Ment, Naftoli Ziv, Mayer Shmulovitz and Yitskhok Markushevitz* THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS OF KHVEIDAN (KVEDARNA) *Testimonies of Motl Druzin, Gershon Yung, Berl Levit, Khayem Nadl, Roze Rakhmil and Rosa Rachmil.* THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS OF NAY-SHTOT *Testimonies of Henekh Elert, Azriel Glukh and Leyzer Gold* THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS OF VAINUTA (VAINUTAS) *Testimonies of Yitskhok Markus and Yakov-Mendl* THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS OF VERZHAN (VEIVIRZHENAI) *Testimonies of Shimen and Yoysef Shlomovitz* THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS IN JONISHKIS *Testimony of Efroyim Veinpres* THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS IN THE LITHUANIAN TOWN OF ANYKSHTSIAI *Testimonies of Golde Yed and Zalmen and Galya Bregman* THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS IN KRUONIS, PAKUONIS AND DARSHUNISHKIS *Testimony of Yosef Gar* THE SLAUGHTER OF JEWS IN THE SMALL TOWN OF RUMSHISHKES *Testimony of Khane Shuster* THE SLAUGHTER OF JEWS IN ZAPYSHKIS AND KRUKIAI *Testimonies of Shakhne, Yerakhmiel, Yitzkhok and Nosn Volk.* THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS OF VILKIJA *Testimonies of Moyshe Karnovsky and Rokhel Gempl* THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS IN VENDZHIOGALA AND BABTAI *Testimony of Abe Lison and Sheyne Nozhikov* THE SLAUGHTER OF JEWS IN THE LITHUANIAN TOWN OF JONAVA *Testimony of Shloyme Katsas and Gershon Reybshteyn* THE SLAUGHTER OF JEWS IN TOWNS IN THE VILNIUS REGION: Towns: Pabershe, Maishiogala, Rieshe, Suderwe, Dukshtas, and Jerusalimka *Testimony of Khyene Katsev (Izrailsky)* THE SLAUGHTER OF JEWS IN RIESHE *Testimony of Khyene Fridberg-Mindes* THE SLAUGHTER OF JEWS IN MAISHIOGALA *Testimony of Moyshe Fridberg and Dovid Rudnik* THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS IN THE TOWN OF VALKININKAI *Testimony of Leyzer Goldman* THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS IN THE TOWN OF NEMENTZINE *Testimony of Sore Eynbinder, Yekusiel Gordon and Avrom Daytz* THE SLAUGHTER OF THE JEWS IN THE COUNTY OF SHVENTZIONYS The county includes: Ignalina, Tveritzius, Tzeikinia, Malagenai, Adutishkis, Kaltinenai, Shventzioneliai, Daugilishkis, Stajatzishkis, Padbrade, Shventzionys and smaller settlements. 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