

FRIGHTFUL DAYS AND YEARS

-- Chaim-Meir Zaltzberg, Toronto

In 1938 the Polish Government began to regulate the Zagozdzshonka Stream, which flowed along the east side of the town and formed a natural boundary. On the opposite side, to the east, there no longer lived any Jews. There was the village, Staraviesh. As soon as it would get warm, and the snow and ice melted, the stream swelled its banks and flooded large areas.

The Huge Melyoratzie-Project

The bridge, which led to Demblin, became flooded, and many villages were cut off from the city. This flooding caused great damage to many people who lived near the stream. They had to leave their poor hovels and be put up with relatives. The situation changed when the regulatory work was done. The city no longer suffered from flooding. It meant that the project had been carried out, thanks to the efforts of the Seim (Polish Parliament), initiated by the Deputy from the Kozienice area. A similar project, but on a larger scale, was planned by the government in the area called "Povishle". Many years before the Vistula had flowed there. Surprisingly the largest river in Poland had changed its course, leaving good fertile soil, and also large areas of swamps. The objective was to cut canals which would draw off the water, dry up the swamps and make the land fruitful. For this objective, outside laborers were brought in from an area of chronically high unemployment.

The few hundred workers, who were employed on this project, brought some life to the town. When the "Viplate" (payment) took place, they would appear on Radomer and Lubliner Streets, where they bought food and on Koshtshelne Street where they bought clothing, and Jews earned a livelihood from them.

In 1939, when the war broke out, the workers went home. In brief, the Polish Government also fell, and the work ceased. A larger number of German military settled in the city. The condition of Jews was poor. They knew what to expect from the so-called "Bearers of the Western culture." Jews were seized for all kinds of labor: Chopping wood, building barracks, grooming horses, etc. Jews were beaten very often. In spite of it, many had contacts with German soldiers, and they would daily come to work hoping to bring home a bread to their families. The majority of Jewish workers were unemployed and didn't have the means whereby to live. The production of shoes for export to Galicia ceased. Other industries, such as the manufacture of boards and glass works ceased to exist.

The Two "PLATZUVKES" (Work Places) at the Water

Nature was also cruel: It snowed a great deal, combined with severe frosts. In a word: 1940 was a severe winter for Kozienice Jews. The engineers from the two firms that had been carrying out the draining project, tried to convince the German authorities in Radom (the Germans didn't recognize the Kozienice authorities, and the district was administered from Radom) to authorize continuation of the project. Their attempt was crowned with success. The Jewish authorities received an order to provide workers. A notice was posted about the work, and the major condition: That an extra bread would be given! In spite of the low pay, many willingly volunteered. Every morning the workers would assemble, and a Jewish policeman would accompany them. This was the beginning of the two "platzuvkes" which was called by that name according to the engineers, who carried out the work: "Gortshitzki". I maintain that this gave a few hundred Kozienice Jews a chance to play the "lottery", whose big prize was surviving the war. For two years, a large number of Jews carried out the slave labor under horrible conditions: In water, hungry, fearful of the morrow. In the winter the work ceased for a few months.

The gendarmerie would make searches and take away a few potatoes, or a beet, etc. There were cases when they would shoot someone for no obvious offense. When I think of it there arises before me the puzzle: What interest did the Germans have in carrying out this project? It was only useful for the immediate region. Did they really believe that the area would remain a part of their imagined 1000 Year Reich, or was this but another way to torture Jews? In 1942, a few weeks before Succos the news spread that the end is near. Panic increased. People ran to sign up for labor. I was among them. A few days later the volunteers were assembled in the horse market, where about 20 horses and wagons were already waiting.

We Fool Ourselves

Representatives of the Jewish establishment and the German gendarmerie took us in the direction of the village of Vilke, where we were duped. Everything was carried out with German efficiency. Midway, two gendarmes ordered us to stand still. They had realized that they had let slip by the opportunity to rob a few Jews. They searched us thoroughly and whatsoever pleased them, they took. At dusk, we came to the place. It was an unfinished village schoolhouse, without windows, and doors, standing by itself. Here we had to accustom ourselves to a new life. It was already fall. When it did not rain, many of us slept out-of-doors. It was much worse when it rained: Everyone had to sleep on the floor, where there wasn't any room. After such a night, we would get up in the morning, barely managed to eat something, lined up, and marched a few kilometers to work. The overseers were a better class of gentiles. We were divided into groups of 10 and the work assigned accordingly. My group consisted of my relatives: My brother Yakl and cousins.

Not once did we think to ourselves: This is how the Chalutzim worked in draining the Hula swamps (in Israel). I envied them. They had an objective, an ideal. My heart clamped with pain, that so many Jews are being forced to lend a hand in bettering the conditions of the Poles, who so readily cooperated with the Germans, in order to exterminate Jews. On Sundays the Polish overseers didn't work, so we also had a day off. Some would bathe; others made their beds, and some cooked outside.

The Terrifying News

Suddenly there was heard in the neighborhood the whistle of a locomotive. To Kozienice there ran a narrow track which existed thanks to the Jewish shoe workers, who had sent shoes to Galicia. On the morrow we found out that the deportation had taken place. A special train with many cars had carried away our dearest and most beloved to extermination, to Treblinka. That was on September 27, 1942. The second day of the Intermediate Days of Succos they perished. That was the tragic end of Kozienice's Jews. To this day the whistle of a locomotive and a train remains for me a nightmare. All were strongly affected by the horrifying news. Many collapsed. On the morrow all had to again get up, and march to work as "normal".

How I Saved Chantchele

A few days later, there came to us the rumor that in the women's camp there had been a selection and that those selected were to be sent away. Chanatchele, my sister's little daughter, was also among them. I, my brother, Yakl, and my cousins were beside ourselves. She was the only member of my eldest sister's family, Mirl and Yosef Zaltzberg, who had so far saved themselves. We decided that I should go see the architect, Taras. I told him, that I can't remain here, if they are going to send away my sister's child. He shrugged his shoulders. He cannot help at all. Then I offered him money.

He thought it over a while, and then he called out: "You know what, come in at 12 o'clock to the office. The cashier will be there." The cashier played the chief role in all transactions. I quickly ran back to my group and told them of the results of my interview. We worked on, pushing wheelbarrows full of mud, but our thoughts were concentrated on the bad news about the selection. The time passed very slowly. Finally the clock showed 11:45. My brother, Yakl, gave me a sign that it was time to go. All gave me encouragement.

Soaking, I opened the door of the office, where there were to be found already the cashier and other officials, all Poles. I immediately announced why I had come. I was very surprised, when he told me that he knows. The architect, Taras, had told him about my money. I gave him the money, and he wrote out an order: "Chana Zaltzberg is immediately to be freed, and the Jewish police are to return her to the women's section". When he gave me the "document", he added: "See to it that this gets to the Jewish police, who are guarding the women, quickly." Encouraged by my success, I ran back to my group. I showed them the paper. We consulted about what to do next, and decided that I should take a shovel in my hand and remove my shirt, a sign that I work at the canal. All of the laborers worked almost nude, because we stood in water.

Armed with the "document", I ran swift as an arrow, along the canal, in the direction of the camp. It was approximately 4 kilometers. The entire way, I only thought about not being too late. I had no time to think about the danger that I myself was in, if a gendarme or some other German would meet me. Finally, I approached the camp. Here I met a boy named Shtecker. He worked in the kitchen. He told me that the gendarmerie is in the camp, in order to carry out the selection. I became fearful that maybe I was too late. With my heart pounding, I approached closer. I looked in and saw that there were no Germans. I went to the barracks where those who had been selected to be sent away were assembled. They were resigned to their fate. Unfortunately, I remember only a few names, which I want to enumerate: Gitele Zilberberg, Baile Korman, Esther Mandelboim, Angie Flam and her mother, Frimet Rappaport and others. I told my sister's little daughter, Chana, that I had come to take her out, and I went with her to the two Jewish policemen.

I showed them the note from the cashier. After reading it, they shook their heads and said that they couldn't free her, and they certainly can't take her back to the women's section. Meanwhile there came in a jeep, the camp commandant, Zolech, a Pole. I showed him the letter with the cashier's signature. He carefully read it and ordered: "Take her out of here!" We left hastily out of the camp and headed for the men's quarters. We were thoroughly afraid that some Germans might notice us. Finally we arrived. My brother and cousins were overjoyed to see that we had returned safely in the evening when we returned from labor, they didn't let us into the camp. They told us to wait outside the gate. We discovered that the gendarmerie were there, in order to remove women and men, who had been selected to be sent away.

A Father with a Great Deal of Courage

Not far from us there was a former neighbor. He had been one of the wealthiest Jews in the city: Eliezer Itshe Zilberberg. He had heard that his little daughter, Gitele was among those who were to be sent away. Suddenly he said: "No, I won't allow my child to go out in the world alone!" Quickly he went to the headquarters of the camp and requested that he go along. His act made a strong impression on me. When I recall the incident, I come to the conclusion, that he was not only an outstandingly good father, but also a man of great courage!

In a few days we found out that all of the people, including the Jewish policemen who guarded them, had been sent to Zvolin.

We Are Taken to Skarzshiska

On a nice autumn day, the sun reflected brightly from the fluids which we drank. The warm weather revived us. The surrounding fields were already bare. The peasants had already harvested their grain. A light wind blew the falling leaves from the trees, which remained bare. The entire surrounding panorama bore witness to the fact that winter was coming. Suddenly our eyes darkened. A gendarme approached us and ordered to cease our labor and line up in a row. Yisroel Tenenboim's little boy did not line up quickly enough, so the representative of the "master-race" beat him mercilessly. His eyes glazed and he began to faint - this partially stilled his cries.

At the order of the gendarme, we went to the camp. On the way the gendarme noticed how a Jew was leaving the home of a peasant. He probably had been buying some food from the peasant. He drew his revolver and immediately shot the Jew for his terrible "crime". The one who was shot was Fritz Rozen, the husband of Dina, the son-in-law of Issachar Shabason from Kuzmir. During the war, he and his family had come to Kozenice. In the courtyard of the camp they lined us up and again counted us. Suddenly a Jew stepped backwards and began running. The gendarmes and their helpers chased him. In a few moments they disappeared among the trees. A few shots were heard, and the Jew fell dead. He was a son of Mote Shvartzberg.

They gave us 10 minutes to take our possessions. In our great hurry and excitement we left more than half. A few months later, we would become aware of the fact that an undershirt or some other piece of clothing was an unreachable fortune.

In four rows they led us to the main road, which was pitted, and there waited for us large transport trucks. During the two kilometer march to the main road, we were guarded by the Polish overseers. Many used this opportunity to flee. I remember a few of them: Yerachmiel Tepper Shalom Vasserman and others. The Polish overseers were helpless. They shouted: "Ya poviem!" which means: "I'll tell on you!" You can ask: "Where was there to run?" We were surrounded by enemies. Those, who ran away, were afterwards, together with all the women, and a few tens of Jews who worked for the firm "Tsharnota", were taken to the Skarczshiska Concentration Camp. We passed through our city. This was a last chance to catch a glimpse of the place where we and also our parents, and grandparents had been born. With great longing and sorrow we looked at the Jewish houses and places of business, that stood empty and orphaned.

The Camp Volanov, A Second Babi-Yar

The camp was located about 10 kilometers from Radom and a few kilometers from Volanov. Here the Germans had confiscated from the peasants a very large area, and had set up a city of barracks for the military. A few kilometers further along was located the camp for Jews. At the entrance we saw a few large mass graves of Russian prisoners. They had died of hunger, or were shot for bringing a bit of water. In the camp itself, there was no water, even though there were wells at the surrounding homes of the peasants. For the guards it was sufficient excuse to shoot, when someone approached the fence. I want to answer the critics who ask: "Why didn't the Jews put up any resistance?" My answer is a typically Jewish one: "Why didn't the Russian prisoners put up any resistance?" They were actually starving to death. They were also only young military men. They would have also gotten more sympathy and help from the surrounding Polish population than we Jews. The Commandant of the camp was a German named Bartman - a murderer in the full sense of the word. He had a characteristic figure: very tall, with two cross eyes - one never knew where he was looking. He was dressed in civilian clothes, I would say Tyrol style. At all shootings and mass murders he played the leading role. At the head of the Jewish camp administration stood Zygmunt Immerglick. With his strictness and use of force, he could be compared to the SS. He came from Radom. The Radomites said that he was actually from Cracow. He and his chief helper wore on their hats three and two stars.

A professional policeman wore a special hat with a red stripe and a pair of better boots. Their sidearms consisted of a rubber hose, which they often used. The official language was Polish. I wondered: "Why Polish?" Because the highest posts were held by the so-called Jewish "Intelligentsia", whose fathers were a bit wealthier and they were able to obtain more education. Or, maybe because the Polish language is so rich in banalities, which flowed so lightly from their tongues.

Not once did I grit my teeth, when such a person would "sing out" about an upright Jewish woman, who had not lined up fast enough, or for being tardy in coming out of her barracks. I must say that we are an exceptional people, "chosen by You." In all the countries the Germans arrested the intellectuals, because they knew that the intellectuals are the kernel of resistance. Among us Jews, exactly the opposite: the intellectuals were the first to collaborate. In the Volanov Camp there were Jews from Volanov, Radom, Shidlovtze, and Kozienice. We lived in the worst barracks, worked at the most difficult labor. The firm "Vunderveter" was a very bad place to work. There they poured cement. The German overseers were a gang of criminals. They would beat us mercilessly. After a difficult day's work, when we returned to the camp, we had to line up in front of the kitchen and wait, because our privileged "goodhearted" Jewish women, who worked in the kitchen had not managed to have every thing cooked in time.

In 1943, there broke out an epidemic of Typhus in the Camp, and almost all Kozieniceites "danced at the wedding" (meaning they came down with the disease). We were afraid to inform that we were ill, because there had been a case, when all of the sick in the infirmary had been shot. Every morning, when they chased us out to work, the rows were filled with sick who had temperature, and could barely stand on their feet. I once worked next to Yakele Shpigel. He was burning up with fever, probably about 104 degrees, and was shoveling snow. A few other Kozieniceites died in the camp of natural causes. Among them were: Yoachil Huberman, Velvel Zaltzberg and Shmelke Rozentzveig. Half, about 60 men, died in the various executions.

A Frequent Appearance

Slaughters were a common occurrence in the camp, and were carried out in the camp itself. It was not so common in other camps. The first shooting which we experienced, was carried out against the patients of the so-called hospital. They told the sick to go out. The murderers stood at the door and shot. A few Kozieniceites were among those shot. Unfortunately, I remember the name of only one: Rachel Leah Vasserman. The second shooting that we experienced, was carried out against Jews who were removed from the small Ghetto at Shidlovtze, and had come to Volanov. The Germans employed a ruse. They proclaimed a few towns as Jewish towns, in order to fool Jews into leaving their hiding places. The Jews that were left in each town after the evacuations, to clean up the Jewish homes, saw in this a spark of hope that maybe they would allow this small remnant of Jews to remain there. Unfortunately, the disillusionment soon followed: All were led away to extinction. One of these towns was Shidlovtze. Twelve Jews, who had escaped the small Ghetto there, came to the camp, and among them were a few Kozieniceites, who went daily to labor. They didn't have any ration cards because they weren't registered. In this way they lived illegally for a few weeks.

The mass murders were carried out by a special group from Radom, which consisted of Ukrainians, may their names be blotted out!

Two Kozienice Victims

There is a suspicion that one of our Jewish helpers reported to the authorities and I maintain that as a result, he is responsible for the deaths of Yakl Fligelman and Yoske Lederman, both from Kozienice, who were the victims of a false accusation that they had set fire to barracks number 117. Ten of us from Kozienice, and I among them worked on the "Plaza". We helped the bricklayers, who set up the clay kilns. So that the clay shouldn't freeze we heated small iron stoves. It often happened that a stove with live coals was brought into a second room. When we went to work and saw that a fire had broken out, we felt a bang on our hearts. Before we had a chance to turn back Bartman appeared and ordered us to follow him. He was our judge. In just a few moments he decreed the death penalty for Yakl Fligelman and Yoske Lederman: shooting for sabotage.

My brother, Yakl, and Meir Shalom Luxenburg, intervened with the Jewish authorities, thinking that perhaps they could do something to repeal the decree. The condemned were put in a wooden prison far from the sentry who guarded the camp. We would converse with them and comfort them. They knew that this was their end. The next day, as soon as we came back from work, we went immediately to see them. Unfortunately the chamber was empty.

In the autumn the largest mass murder took place. All was prepared in accordance with German efficiency. At two o'clock we were ordered to stop work and return to camp. We were lined up in rows. The murderer, Bartman, accompanied by the boorish Pole, Banak, made the selection. Those to whom he pointed with his finger, were separated. Some others went over to that group, because they didn't want to be separated from their brothers. I remember such a case with the Halbershtat brothers.

They ordered us to run into the barracks. The Ukrainian murderers, who had sprung up from the earth, opened fire on the second group, until all had fallen. The murderers ran among the victims, worried that none should remain alive. The camp yard looked like a battlefield. Unfortunately I only remember the following names of those who were massacred: Chaim Berman's wife, Chana, and her young son; Moshe Goldtzweig; Issachar Frish; Moshe Fuks; Yoel Weinberg; Itshe-Meir and Hershl Weinberg; Eliezer and Hershl Halbershtat, Yisroel Lichtenshtein and many others.

A Miracle Took Place

Even so a miracle occurred - three Kozieniceites were saved from the Angel of Death's hands: Gedalya Lichtenshtein and M. Rappaport, two young men, who hid behind the barrels. Gedalya lives in Belgium and M. Rappaport in Israel. It cannot be understood how come the children didn't die of fright. The third one was Itzik Fuks. When the shooting started, he fell, and on top of him some of the dead. As soon as the murderers rode away, the Jewish police counted the dead. Suddenly they heard Itzik Fuks' voice. They asked him if he was alive. They helped him get up and brought him to the barracks. He wasn't even wounded, but covered with blood. With a weak voice he called out: "This must not be forgiven!" This scene I'll never forget. Unfortunately, he perished later in a different camp.

How Mrs. Berman Perished

I want to mention an event which happened to the woman, Chana Berman. She was working once with other women shoveling snow, not far from "Yunakan-Camp". This was a work camp of young Poles, only men. They would wear uniforms and go home on leave. They were treated a lot better than were Jews. Their commandant was a Pole, named Banak, who went around dressed up as if he were a general. This boorish character would pass through when the Jewish women were working. He stopped and turned to Mrs. Berman, and with his boorish tongue said: "Come, I will have sexual intercourse with you!" She looked at him and said that she hadn't come here for that. At the big selection, this vile one pointed to Mrs. Berman and the murderer, Bartman, placed her on the left side. This meant annihilation!

Guests Visit Us

In spite of the intense week, we had a few guests from the "Aryan side". Tzeche Frilich came to see her father, Pinchas. She told us what was happening on the Goyish side. She had dyed her hair blond and obtained Aryan papers. I admired her for her courage and daring. Reizele Shvartzberg also came to see her father, Mote, and helped him a bit. Every word, which came out of her mouth we held on to with great eagerness. Another woman, Sarah-Leah, a sister of the woman, Starovshtshik, came to see her brothers, Yisroel and David Rozen, from Glovatshav, who were friends of my brother Yekl. We wondered how a woman with Semitic features could hide her identity with Aryan papers. She came to give regards to the Rozen brothers from five members of their family, who were in hiding. They were: Yakl Rozen, their father, and the brothers, Yehoshua, Yoel, Meir and the wife of Yisroel, Rachel. Also four members of the Eliezer Starovieshtshik family, his wife and her sister, Sarah-Leah.

Yakl Rozen knew a forest ranger, Tomashevski. He dealt with him. When the situation became unbearable, the family made an agreement with the forest ranger, and with his consent they came to the forest. He made a cave for them among thick woods and provided them with food. Understandably, the Goy was well paid. These Jews slowly settled in, and hoped to survive the war. After a few visits to the camp, Sarah-Leah went back to the cave. She related how the situation was in the camp.

The Horrible Death of the Rozens

A number of months passed, since the brothers Rozen last received regards from their hidden families. With great effort they located a Christian woman whom they trusted. They wrote a letter and sent it to the forest ranger. She was supposed to bring back a letter. Understandably, for her effort she was well paid. Days went by. The Rozens were very impatient. Each day seemed like a year. Finally the woman returned and brought tragic news. With tears in her eyes she told how one time, at night the forest ranger and his sons had placed straw on the door of the cave and set fire to it. They stood with guns so that no one could escape. One brother, Meir, succeeded in crawling out of the burning cave and ran.

They chased him and shot him in the leg, but he escaped. He maintained himself in a neighboring village and healed his wound. A few days later peasants caught him and brought him to Soltis. He locked him in a chamber, and went to call the German gendarmerie. When the murderers came, they found him dead. He had cut his veins with a razor. Thus, alas, the prominent two families came to a tragic end. The Rozen brothers in our camp collapsed. We were also besides ourselves, because of the bitter news.

We Arrive At Strachovietz

In 1943, the building of the barrack came to an end. The liquidation of the camp began. The first group was sent to Radom, in the "Viturnie" (ammunition factory). That is how I parted from my brother Yakl. I never saw him again. He perished in Germany, in the Alach Camp, a branch of Dachau. A few months later the second group was removed. I was among them. We came to Strachovietz, where we worked at heavy industry.

People told us that we had arrived in a Paradise, in comparison to what it had been previously. The commandant was a bandit, Altaf. He used to shoot Jews in the courtyard and the barracks. For him this was some kind of sport. The total of Kozenice people was about 20. Here we were called Volanover, because we had come from that camp. A few months later they took the remaining ones out of the Volanov Camp and ordered them to march. On the way they were driven along and beaten. They came to the Blizshin Camp where they were employed in a stone quarry. Life in Strachovietz Camp was like in all other camps.

They Shot Me in My Foot

I will here tell about an unusual accident which befell me. A Ukrainian shot me in my left leg. It happened while going home from the second shift in the factory. Because it was already dark they would take us back by truck. Since everyone could not be taken at one time, the truck would make a second trip to take the remainder. I saw how people were shoving to get into the truck quickly. The guards were "having a fling"; shouting and beating with the butts of their rifles. A friend remarked to me: "Chaim, we'll go on the second trip." We stepped aside. All of a sudden we heard a shot. The Jewish policeman came running and asked who had been hit. I wanted to take a step and felt heat in my leg. I was brought to the camp hospital. My cousin, Yakl Shapiro, and my good friends, the three Lengha brothers, were awaiting me. For eight weeks, I lay in the hospital. Too much medical help, I didn't get, but I didn't go to work, and the food was a bit better. The head of the hospital was a Jewish doctor from Starachovitz, a good, upright person. Unfortunately, I can't say this about the hospital aides. They were a privileged group, who had bought their positions for money.

A Selection in the Hospital

One time, in the morning, I heard a commotion outside. When I looked out through the window, I saw that we were surrounded by armed Ukrainians. A bit later, the German administrator of the camp came in and a selection began. All of the sick people were driven out of the barracks and ordered to run. In the middle stood the boor. To whomever he pointed with his finger, his fate was sealed. The Ukrainians would immediately push him onto the truck. This procedure took place in each barrack separately. Then the fat German entered the hospital and commanded: "Everyone out!" The camp administrator questioned me, since I was first in the line of the sick, while the doctor and other hospital personnel were lined up on the other side. I yelled out: "I'm healthy!" And with that I stretched myself out like a string. He immediately went to the second one and made a motion with his hand; then to the third, and so on. In short, I was left all alone. The murderers had pushed all of the rest onto the truck. Among those from Kozienice, was one in particular called Huberman. He had injured a finger and went around with his hand bandaged. That's why he was in the hospital. He asked me to watch over his things. That same day, the murderers brought back the clothing of the victims to the camp warehouse. As to the question: "Why was I left behind?" I can give but one answer: "A miracle!"

I Flee to the Partisans

At the beginning of the summer of 1944, I, together with a group of Jews, escaped. Our goal was to join the Partisans. We were under the impression that all those who were fighting against Hitler were our friends. Without mishap we entered the forest and began making contacts. Alas! We discovered that here, too, we are Jews...no one wants us, and our lives are in danger even from the Partisans. We had experience with the A.K. (a Polish Partisan group) which was large and armed with British Sten guns. They were supported by the Polish Government-in-Exile in London, and possessed English pounds. The Poles were more occupied with killing Jews than with fighting the Germans. A second group, the N.S.Z., were also armed with British weapons. They collaborated with the Germans. Their main task was the killing of Jews. We succeeded in making contact with the so-called "friendly" group, B. CH. A., a peasant party that was supported by Russia. Their leader heard us out and his answer was: "We don't take in Jews!" We were the oldest inhabitants in Starachovitzer Forest. Our numbers increased. Every Jew that we found in the forest and in the surrounding villages we took in. Larger Partisan groups would not remain for long in one place. We would intervene with every Partisan group to take us in. The answer was always a negative one. In the area was a Russian intelligence group. Among them was a pair of Jewish youths from the Lublin area. They were sincere Jews, who came to us, bringing news, and also giving us instruction. Once we became very excited. An armed messenger came to tell us that we were being summoned to headquarters where they will give us 10 weapons. Very cautiously, we followed the Goy.

General Motshar Gives Us Ten Guns

Finally, we came to a large Partisan camp. Everyone wore Polish uniforms. These were units of A.L. (Armia Lyudova) also supported by Russia. A tall Pole came out, whose name was Motshar; the present well-known General in Warsaw. He spoke briefly to us, and then we were given ten rifles with two rounds of ammunition. Among us was a Galician Jew, a certain Meizlitsh, who had been an officer in the Austrian Army, and he became our military leader. He quickly organized a military drill for the Pole, in order to express gratitude. We marched past him and saluted. The bystanders accompanied us with shouts: "Moishy! Moishy!" We parted and went away to carry on with our own "kingdom". At the time we were overwhelmed by the noble treatment that we had received from the "staff." Later on we understood their intentions: We were stationed a few kilometers away from them. They gave us the weapons, so that we could serve as their advance-post. If the Germans attack, they'll hear the shooting and be able to flee in time. But there is a Jewish God in this world, and exactly the opposite occurred: The forest was surrounded and attacked from the other side, where the large Polish Partisan camp was located. Later we were attached to a different group of Partisans.

We Want to Cross Over to the Russians

The winter began, and the neighboring villages were inhabited by the German military. Survival in the forest became very difficult. The leadership decided that we should steal across to the other side which had been liberated by the combined Russian-Polish military forces. Not far from Sandomiezsh-Tzuzmir the Russians had crossed the Vistula River and occupied a small bridgehead. It was our goal to reach that point. We were separated from the front by 40 kilometers. For two nights we traveled in snow and cold. Finally we reached the German trenches. Because of a misunderstanding we failed.

The Germans opened fire on us. The Russians heard the shooting and thought that the Germans were going to attack, so they also began shooting, and we found ourselves in the middle. We quickly withdrew, suffering casualties. We wandered for a few days until we reached the forest. Two weeks later we again attempted to penetrate the front; this time led by a Georgian, Hatshek. We strayed, and when we reached the trenches, dawn was already beginning to break. We were uncertain, and didn't know what to do. Hatshek gave the order to advance, but he and his helpers, stayed behind.

Understandably, no one moved from his place. We, the handful of Jews, took counsel about what to do, since we very well understood our situation. We decided to reach the nearest village where there lived a civilian population. We went on our way. We noticed a large stand of straw in the middle of a field. I suggested that we hide ourselves in the straw, because it was risky to proceed during daylight. A few people agreed, and we went into the straw. The others went on their way. It just so happened that the snow covered our tracks.

A whole day military trucks passed to and from. This was actually at the front, and we were literally "in the lion's mouth". Suddenly, a wagon stopped. Somebody pushed aside a bit of straw. I noticed a woman. Seeing us, she also became frightened and said: "O la boga!" She went away, and we heard as she said to the Germans: "No, no potatoes!" Apparently, they were looking for potatoes. As soon as it got dark, we again set out in the direction of the forest. On the way, we learned that there had been a "hunt" (search) in the first village. Our fellow Jews and other Partisans fell into German hands, and all perished!

We tried a third time to cross the front. This time we were better organized. A portion of the underground leadership was also with us. We also had better information about the way, yet there was no lack of excitement. As dawn began to break, we already found ourselves on the other side. We sent out a reconnaissance patrol. They returned with two Russian officers. Yakl Binshtok, from Shidlovtze, fell upon me and we kissed each other. "Chaim, we are free, free!" he said. We put aside our arms, and remained a few days with the army. They permitted us to use their bath, and we felt actually revived. A Polish officer arrived with a truck, and he took with him all Polish citizens to Lublin.

A Meeting In Lublin

The truck stopped on a beautiful, wide street. The officer entered an office to take care of the formalities. We were cold so we descended to warm ourselves. We eyed the passers-by with curiosity. Many looked like they were Jewish. I didn't have the boldness to stop anyone. Suddenly an elderly person approached. He was carrying a small package under his arm. He remained standing and looked at us. I screwed up my courage and asked if he were a Jew. "Yes," he answered and we began to converse. When he found out that I was from Kozienice, he pointed to the package, and said that he was bringing Kosher meat to Kozienice. "I don't remember his name, but I know that he had a movie theater in town," he said. "Oy, Zelick Berman!" I shouted. I asked him for a pencil and paper, and I wrote a few words to Zelick.

They conscripted all of us into the Polish Army, which was still fighting. After two weeks of intensive searching in various military units, Zelick Berman found me. I was besides myself with joy. I believe that the lines that I have written, will shed some light on that terrifying epoch, that Jews had lived through, during Hitler's occupation of Poland, and will serve as material for future historians.

ON OCTOBER 17, 1939, THE HITLERITE MURDERERS BURNED
THE PONIATOVSKI PALACE IN KOZIENICE.