

## INTRODUCTION TO THE SWISŁOCZ MEMORIAL BOOK

Published in Israel, 1966

What motivated us to publish this memorial book? This question is redundant. Would we question the motivation of a mother who lost her son, and wanted to erect some way to keep alive the memories of her lost son? The bitterness of the holocaust survivors cried for a way to keep the memory of the martyrs alive. This could be done by monuments, institutions to carry the name or a memorial book. We came to the conclusion that a memorial book is better than anything else. Articles of the cities who survived can express best the vitality, life way and special activities of the holocaust victims.

It is very hard for us to convey this message to the young generation in Israel. They cannot understand (how come they were able to fight the Arabs, and the Jews in Europe were unable to fight the Germans). At this time the young people of Israel felt ashamed to be descendants of those forefathers who went like sheep to the slaughter. They couldn't understand that the European Jew was a little lamb surrounded by 7 wolves. They couldn't appreciate the heroism of the Jewish partisans or any other Jewish victims putting up a fight for survival, rather than resign without resistance to their destiny.

We felt that memorial books will be the best tool to acquaint the young generations of Israel with the life and heroic death of resistance all over and realize that this was the groundstone of further heroic action of Israelies later on.

The initiative came from **Swisłocz** Jews in Israel, aided by activists in America and Canada. Special credit should be given to Abraham Ayn, who worked with unusual dedication until the last minute of his life.

The book deals with four aspects; the history of the city, the city in later days, the holocaust period and contacts among survivors.

We are sorry to admit, the book is not as good as we liked it to be. There are very few survivors who could give us a clear picture of the agonies, physical and spiritual sufferings before their death.

We accepted a detailed article by a lady born in **Swisłocz**, who went through all the tortures of the holocaust in Vilna and finally in Lettland. Unfortunately, the pattern of the Nazis applied to exterminate the Jews was about the same all over. (1966 is a fairly early date for a memorial book publication. It was only one decade after, the few survivors were not yet allocated, and those who were, too close to the years of sufferings unable to provide a good perspective.)

It seems that **Swisłocz** memorial book editorial staff had some special problems with funds that reached them too late or ended up in other hands. There was a sharp argument about the language in which it should be published. It seems that the survivors preferred Yiddish over Hebrew. The editorial staff insisted on Hebrew, Yiddish was used only for articles where no permission of translation was received.

/s/ The Publication Committee.

## WOŁKOWYSK MEMORIAL BOOK

### The Destruction of Wołkowsky.

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At the time we put up a memorial for our town, **Swisłocz**, we have to remember also the Jews who lived nearby, at a distance of a few kilometers. I refer to two Jewish farm settlements: Olivud (Colony Gliliska) and Mikhalka (Colony Israelska). The two colonies had very close ties with the city, such as schools, synagogues, etc.

The colonies were established some 200 years earlier by Czar Alexander II. His intention was to establish rural settlements for Jews, and according to his doctrine, turn them into a productive element. In order to achieve his goal, he freed those Jews from military service and payment of taxes for the first 25 years. He granted them the same rights that he gave to the Russian peasants.

In the beginning, there was a good relationship between the Russian farmers and the Jewish farmers; they even helped the Jewish farmers in their new profession of work in the field. By the end of the 19th century, waves of anti-Semitism after the killing of Alexander II wiped out the good relationship.

The farm Jews as well as the Jews established in other trades such as tailors, shoe makers, painters, flour mill workers, mail house owners, etc., felt unwanted by the Russian farmers.

At that time, Baron Hirsh founded the agricultural colonies in Argentina. Many Jewish farmers were enticed by the benefits offered by Baron Hirsh and emigrated to Argentina. Others emigrated to Israel.

The small number left on the farms felt even more insecure, but it was hard for them to part from their homes. It is estimated that at the time the war broke out, Mikhalka still had 10 Jewish families, Gliliska had a few 10, before the holocaust.

(by Naftali Eden.)

### Expulsion to the Bunkers.

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. . .Everybody looked for a place where he could put to rest his exhausted body. It took hours until everybody found some corner to squeeze in. From time to time, you could hear the cry of a child, the sighing of a woman who was separated from her husband. Old Jews kept on praying in a loud voice.

It lasted this way all day long. The fear for the night was unbearable. Wild yelling and crying could shatter your nerves. One by one missed his family members. Not one person could fall asleep, it was just a terrible situation. It was hard to wait until daybreak; then came the time to inquire about family members. The good news was family members are permitted to unite. There was a big

panic. One by one, they started running along the bunker, calling out names of family members in the overcrowded corners. Finally, family members found each other, they started to relocate to other bunkers as family units. Only then came the time to examine the sad predicament and attempt to comprehend its future consequences.

Their spirit was fallen; the mood was "dim" and "grim" as the dark bunkers in which they were enclosed. People walked around with sunken heads. All you could see outside was a triple barbed wire surrounding the camp.

#### The Arrival of Jews from Around Wolkowysk.

Jews from the little towns and villages were brought to the bunkers. S.S. men brought them heavily guarded. They kept on coming all night and the following day. They brought along packages on their backs and, in general, more luggage than the Jews from the city. They did not undergo the torture of family separation.

Jews of **Swislocz** were housed in six bunkers. Some eight bunkers were dedicated for Jews of Rudzan. The other bunkers were shared by Jews from Amstobow and **Jałowka**. It was not sufficient for all the Jews from the vicinity. (There were not enough bunkers.) The Jews from Porzewe, Zelwe, Most, Piesk, Wolp. Liskawe and Isabelin were driven into the stables. They were to sleep in tree storage, so-called "beds."

#### The Camp of Bunkers.

The series of bunkers were actually one big camp, located near the military camp put up in 1941, by Russian war prisoners. It consisted of a large number of underground bunkers. Some 30,000 Russian war prisoners lived in these bunkers under German occupation in 1941. Almost all of them perished within a few months. They died from hunger and sickness. They were buried in graves, a few thousand in one grave.

The Wolkowysk camp was located on five lots, separated one from the other by barbed wire. Each bunker was an independent camp, part of a larger camp. On the outside, the camp was surrounded by double barbed wire, three meters high. The space in between was filled with horizontal barbed wire. At a distance of 100 meters stood guards with large projectors. "They didn't leave their post neither at daytime or at night." The large camp was subdivided by groups of six to eight bunkers.

The Nazis imprisoned in this camp about 20,000 Jews, 13,000 from the locations around Wolkowysk and 7,000 Jews from the city of Wolkowysk.

#### The First Transport.

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Two days later, Jews of Rujan received a command to be ready the next day at 2:00 o'clock for the transport. There was also a demand to supply precise lists of the people in the bunkers with details: name, age and occupation.

The Jews of Rujan occupied the bunkers right across from the Jews of Wołkowysk. Their conditions were far worse than the conditions of the Wołkowysk Jews. Only part of the Rujan people could enter the bunkers to sleep; under the sky was the lot of the rest. The death rate was very high, especially among older people. On some days, there were 20 deaths, other days even more.

When transports to the extermination camps began, they were first to go into the fire.

It was exactly 2:00 o'clock when the Gestapo men showed up in the Ghetto. They began to drive out the Rujan Jews from the bunkers. Under a hail of clubbing and shooting, they were driven out from the bunkers. All they could carry along were very few belongings. This was the German command. They were driven into a place not far from the camp, put in lines and under strict supervision of guards. As soon as the required quota was filled, they were loaded on railroad cars waiting in the open field. The train started to go into the direction of Wołkowysk. It was a snow storm and it reach 20 degrees celsius. Crying and wailing "split the heavens." This was the first transport from the Wolkowysk bunkers. The next day, the whole block occupied by Rujan Jews was empty.

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The entrance to the camp was closed. After three days, the authorities demanded some people to clean up the block. When packages were examined, it was found that also dead bodies of some elderly and sick people were there. They could not keep up with the march and dropped dead before reaching the destination. The Germans have exposed them to a slow death. Only at the time they were sure nobody is alive any more they arranged cleaning of the block. All the dead, as well as those who died earlier, were buried in a mass grave outside the camp.

Three days later came the second transport. This transport consisted mainly of Jews from Porzew, Most, Piesk, Jałowka and Amstibar Jews. This was the only transport to leave the camp day time. The Jews were commanded to gather on a spot between the Zelew and Wołkowysk. The two camps were separated by barbed wire. They were put in lines of four and let stay this way in the snow and mud for a few hours. When they were already exhausted they were commanded to move ahead. Most Wołkowysk Jews approached the fence and shared the fear and agony of their brothers. It could be that they envied the Wołkowysk Jews who still remained in the camp. Unfortunately, their lot was not pushed of for too long. The wish to survive was so strong, any delay was having another ray of hope not to be killed. At this point, Wołkowysk Jews came close to the fence and handed over anything they could to the Zelwer Jews on their last journey.

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Zelwer Jews took anything they could; a piece of dry bread, a potato or an onion. They were so hungry and afraid for tomorrow's days that they stretched out the hands over the prickly fence. The nice gifts of their brothers mingled with the blood of their injured hands. A strict command came from the Germans to move ahead. Ahead they moved in the same direction as their brothers, the way where a few days before had perished all Jews of Rujan.

After two large transports, a chain of small transports began. The number of the Jews of the camp decreased daily. By the end of November, no more than 6,000-7,000 Jews remained out of the 20,000. Among them were some 1,000 Jews from **Swislocz**. By a slow process, the bunkers and stables were emptied from all the Jews around **Swislocz**, including **Jałowka**.

Noah Fuchs took sick. He had a severe pneumonia case. When Circa, the camp supervisor, visited him, he said, "You have to recover quickly; you are to be appointed as the head of the camp of at least 70,000 Jews." He was a senior member of the Judenrat and the other Judenrat people did not comprehend too well what was said. Where were all the transports sent to? Nobody knew.

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The Judenrat was trying to get in touch with Polish train officers. Finally, they found out that the transports go West. Later on they found out that the transports take the direction of Bialystok, Malkin and Treblinka, Northern direction. It was not clear at that time what those transports and resettlements meant. Very soon, the message became undoubtful; nobody will ever return from them.

#### Command to Liquidate the Camp.

It came quickly, like thunder: the camp will be liquidated completely. Noah Fuchs and Shamai visited the German authorities a few times. They bribed the supervisors and managed to delay the final transport until August 1943. They agreed to leave in the camp some 1,700 men, i.e., all men under the age of 50, all worked employed by the city.

The Nazis did not keep their promise. Intervention of the Judenrat continued. They asked that part of the 1,700 Jews should be 100 women. No pleading helped to rescue some children. Among the 1,700 Jews were some from **Swislocz**. How come that **Swislocz** Jews were privileged over other camp deportees? There is a good reason for it. **Swislocz** was a wealthy city, they supplied goods to the Germans, in particular leather goods for the German commando. They probably paid "an arm and a leg," so it was approved that a few hundred **Swislocz** Jews should be spared for a while.

#### Demand for Lists from the Judenrat.

The situation became very serious. It was for the Judenrat to determine who the 1,700 people to remain would be. It was their task to submit a list to the Nazi Commando, i.e., their function to become helpers to the Germans in the implementation of the final solution.

#### Tortures Endured by Jews From **Swislocz** in Ghetto Wolkowysk.

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The material has been taken from "Yewe Bletter" (I guess a Russian newspaper). The facts concern themselves with the sufferings and tragic end of Jews from **Swislocz** and neighboring places.

Miss Finkelstein recalls that all the Jews age 40 and over were gathered in a narrow ghetto, the yard of the synagogue and the new street. The young people, the (the Germans) had sent to the prison in Wołkowysk. Before the young people were sent away their number was reduced by 10%. A random selection was used by the Germans. Dr. Noah Kaplinsky writes: In **Swislocz**, the German comisar had fun. He approached the line of 200 men ready to be sent away and shot every tenth of them.

Hershl Rottman gives some more details. The last date for Wołkowysk Jews to be assembled in front of the military camp was 11/2/42. The Jews from the other places came later on from the vicinity, not later than the 3rd day by 12:00 o'clock a.m. They came from Zelba, Porzova, Amstobava, Piesk, Mosty, **Swislocz**, Rozno, Liskiva and Zbelin. They arrived dead tired, beaten up, in torn clothing. Only in very rare cases children were brought by wagons.

A Letter From Yerahmiel,  
A Partisan from **Swislocz**.

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Germany, 10/8/47

Shalom to you Moshe, and all those who wish us well,

I would like to apologize for my poor Hebrew. As you know, I didn't speak it for seven years, my stay in Russia. The tendency was to forget any other language in favor of Russian. You would like to know what happened to Naftali.

I met Naftali in 1941, at the time of the German occupation. We were both in ghetto **Swislocz**, and met frequently. We used to talk about our sad predicament and about the lucky ones far away. Naftali was working at the time as the secretary of the Judenrat, headed by Pinie Klinerman. This function freed him from forced labor for the Nazis. I met your father often. Your father had to perform forced labor. Naftali joined occasionally the other Jews working for the Nazis, but in general he was exempt from it, as a member of the Judenrat.

On the terrible day of slaughter, your father and mother were killed. Right afterwards, all the older Jews were killed. Naftali was assigned to a younger group and sent to camp Wołkowysk. Your brother ran away from there with a few other young people from **Swislocz**. One of them, Jacob Golombitz, suggested they hire some peasants to protect them from the Nazis. Jacob had the money for it. The others claimed it would be better to get in touch with the partisans, get from the some ammunition and join the partisans. Your brother had no support from his friends, he returned to **Swislocz** and was killed by Nazi patrol.

Now I would like to tell you a little bit about myself. I lived in **Swislocz** at the time the war with the Nazis broke out. I figured that the only way of rescue is

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to join the partisans, to act with them and take revenge on the Nazis. I moved slowly in the beginning, but later on I came out openly fighting the Nazis. I

attempted to impress on my town people that this is the only way, unfortunately, they didn't listen. My close family members were killed, even though they knew that I am close by in the woods. My heart aches, I cannot find any comfort.

I was more successful in Białostok. There my appeal bore fruit. Under my command, a group of partisans from **Kriniki and Swisłocz** acted very successful. The group had also some non-Jews, but the nucleus consisted of Jewish partisans. Most of them are still alive today. Regretfully, most of my medals received from Stalin remained in Russia. Five letters of praise are with me. My eyes do not tear any longer. I resumed a normal life. I left Russia, despite being a dedicated communist, I married and have a wife and son. My greatest satisfaction to be noted is that I had a chance to kill hundreds of Nazis and take revenge on them for the honor of my nation and family.

Last year, I visited **Swisłocz**, I found there many letters of survivors sent to Abraham Ayn, this gave me also some comfort.

I saw **Swisłocz** of today, the mass graves of our "Ladsleit", the destroyed cemetery, where tombstones lay around on the side walk.

I walked through the streets and the alleys. I saw the grim past, ran away from it to a better future.

I wish you all a year of redemption and complete liberation.

Yerahmiel