

KDRG YVA-127

**The Destruction of Belozirka: Testimony of Milshteyn, David—
Given in Tel Aviv, September 1957, on the
Eve of His Departure from Israel**

RG O.33, Testimonies, Diaries and Memoirs Collection of the Yad Vashem Archives, File No. 1651, Item 3727582

<https://collections.yadvashem.org/en/documents/3727582>

Translated from Yiddish by Theodore Steinberg

Edited by Ellen Garshick, February 2025

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Belozirka was located 2 kilometers from the Soviet Russian border on the Tarnopol-Zhitomir Road. Before the war, 3,000 Ukrainians, 1,000 Poles, and 650 Jews lived in Belozirka.

Before the Polish period, Belozirka was a border city, and entering and leaving the city was forbidden to Jews from sunset to sunrise. (This was the rule for the last 10 years before the war, because of the proximity of the Soviet Union.)

The Jewish population in Belozirka consisted mostly of craftsmen and merchants. In the town there were 4 study halls, and there were many Zinkover and Trisk Hasidim. There was no [Jewish] school in the town, and the Jewish children studied with private teachers or in the Polish school. In order to study in the ORT¹ school, one had to travel to Kremenets. All Zionist parties existed in the town; there were also several places for preparing to emigrate, especially to Israel.

In 1939, at the outbreak of the Polish-German War, many Jewish families came to Belozirka in carts in order to escape from the German animals. The Jews of Belozirka showed great hospitality, and every Jewish family took in refugees with their children and provided food and lodging.

On September 17, at about 3:45 in the morning, the inhabitants of Belozirka were subjected to a severe attack of shooting. The Russian army had taken the city. But they did not remain in Belozirka. They went through in the direction of the Romanian border, which was about 120 km away. After they passed through, the town was left without a government, and Poles started shooting at the city.

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The Jewish and Ukrainian inhabitants of Belozirka called a meeting, and they elected a city council of four Jews and six Ukrainians. The council made signs that within 24 hours, all city

¹ *Obshchestvo Zdravookhraneniia Evreev* (Society for the Protection of Jewish Health), a St. Petersburg-based public health organization founded in 1912.

residents had to turn in their weapons. A few Poles brought their weapons, but most of the weapons were held onto.

Life in the city slowly returned to normal. The Soviets resumed power and worked together with the committee, or city council, which adopted the title "Valastnaya pravlanya."²

The Jews opened cooperatives in Belozirka, craftsmen opened workshops, and people adapted to a new way of life. People also opened a hospital in the town. At that time there was a large epidemic among children. They could not turn their heads. The local people called the illness "zavalatshki." The epidemic also spread to nearby villages. The Soviet government brought doctors and nurses from Russia, and the local committee created the hospital.

For the Soviets, Belozirka belonged to the Tarnopol area. There was normal traffic with Russia, and several Russian Jews came to seek their relatives.

So life went on normally until June 1941.

At the outbreak of the German-Soviet War, the Russians mobilized the local military, I among them. Eight days after the war started, our town was taken by the Germans. I was with the Russian army in Russia.

In June 1945, I returned to Belozirka to learn what had happened to my family and to the Jewish population of the town.

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I came first to Lanovtsy (which was the train station for Belozirka).

In Lanovtsy, I encountered not a single Jew. Going into the street in Lanovtsy, I met a Ukrainian from Belozirka who had been close to my family. He recognized me immediately and asked, "Are you still alive?"

"Does it bother you that I'm still alive?" I asked him.

He was the head of the village council. I began to ask him about my family and other Jews from the town, and I suggested that I would accompany him to Belozirka so that I could ascertain the fate of my family.

"You don't have to go there," he told me. "There is nothing in Belozirka. There aren't even any Soviet police. You would be risking your life, because criminal gangs roam freely there."

I told him that I feared nothing. I had to go there to see what was happening.

On the way to Belozirka, he told me how the Jews were killed in a terrible fashion.

This is what I learned:

² State administration.

Even before the Germans had created their order in the town, the Ukrainians had created their own order.

One Sunday they seized four young women, the prettiest: my sister Rachel Milshteyn, Roza Papik, Batye Sukhars, and Shilman. They stripped them naked. The villains flew into a frenzy and pulled them by the hair. With pitchforks and axes they attacked them for four hours, until they fell dead. They were buried in a cellar in the town. This happened before the German decrees.

The Germans ordered a ghetto to be made in Lanovtsy. The Jews of Belozirka were brought there along together with the Jews from Lanovtsy and Katerburg, near Kremenets-Podolsk.³

Before they were forced into the ghetto, while they were still in Belozirka, the Jewish population was forced to make "contributions."

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People had to give leather, shoes, manufactured goods, and money. They were told that if they gave up these requisitioned items, they would be allowed to remain in their places. After one such "contribution," after the Jews had turned in everything they owned, they were forced to go to Lanovtsy to the ghetto.

In the ghetto there were 2,000-2,500 people. People were forced to go from the Lanovtsy ghetto to work in Belozirka (12 km). The work consisted of taking the fallen houses and turning them over to the Ukrainians. If a gentile gave a Jew a potato, the police would shoot. After a while day of hard work, people would return to Belozirka, where they suffered from hunger. People remained in the ghetto until the middle of 1942.

On September 15, 1942 (2 Elul 5702), it was announced in all the surrounding villages (50-60 villages) that on that day there would be great joy in Lanovtsy, and the peasants should go there. The Ukrainians prepared horses and wagons and descended on Lanovtsy from both sides of the road. The Jews were led out of the ghetto, 100 at a time. The Ukrainians stood with sheets over their heads so they could not be recognized. An order was given to shoot any Jew who tried to run. Thus in groups of 100, the whole ghetto was led to the cemetery, where everyone was shot and buried.

This is what the Ukrainian told me.

Arriving in Belozirka, I did not recognize the town. Everything was displaced and plowed up. I went to the post office to see who remained alive.

A Ukrainian woman whom I had known earlier was sitting there. I asked her in Russian if there was any mail for Jews from Belozirka. She took out a telegram and tore it up in front of me without saying to whom it was sent, and she told me: "Get away from here before I inform on you."

³ The author probably means Kremenets, Volhynia, which is the main town in the region. Podolsk is probably an error.

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Leaving the post office, I went down Post Office Street, where houses on both sides were damaged, and I went to the market. Everything around was destroyed. I noticed that gentiles were going around me and watching me. I was dressed as a Red Army soldier. I realized that my life was in danger, and I dared not stay long in Belozirka.

I headed back toward Lanovtsy. From the local police I gathered that bandits were running free, those who had killed my sister and all the Jews. Why should I come and be ruined? And now the Soviet government was allowing them to run around freely. I asked the police to go into the city with me and give the murderers the "reward" they deserved.

They answered that this was not the time. Later the Soviet government would give them their "reward." If I tried to reckon with them on my own, it would be on my head.

With great sorrow I had to leave without being able to get vengeance for my dear ones.

I went back deep into Russia.