

## KDRG YVA-182

# Testimonies about the Jews' Struggle before the Liquidation of the Krzemieniec Ghetto, Poland, up to the Execution of the Local Jews in the Firing Pits

The testimonies were given by Jewish survivors and Ukrainian inhabitants in 1956–1958 as part of a study by Hensch Gelernt of New York.

RG O.33, Testimonies, Diaries, and Memoirs Collection of the Yad Vashem Archives,  
File No. 646, Item 3542885

<https://collections.yadvashem.org/en/documents/3542885>

Translated from Ukrainian and Yiddish by Elijah Baron and Theodore Steinberg;  
edited by Ellen Garshick, November 2024

[page 1]

[originally in Ukrainian]

### Research Institute of Volhynia in Winnipeg

Inquiry into the town of Kremenets in Volyn

The native and former resident of the town of Kremenets, G. Gelernt, who has now arrived in the USA and is residing there, requested that the Research Institute of Volhynia submit materials for his investigation into this town. This book will be published in the English language in America, and in the Jewish language in Argentina.<sup>1</sup>

Based on his letter as well as our personal considerations, below we present a number of questions and ask that you provide an answer to them.

The answers and descriptions of events should be written and sent in two copies, typed or copied.

We will be grateful if you could provide sources that have already addressed these questions, including their titles, numbers, years of publication, etc.

1. How long have Jews been living in the town of Kremenets?
2. Participation of Jews in the areas of culture, science, education, etc.?
3. Statistical data on economics, industry, and commerce from the early 19th century to the last war?
4. Demographics of that period, in numbers?
5. Occupations of Jews apart from commerce (agriculture, crafts, etc.)?

---

<sup>1</sup> This may refer to *Kremenits, Vyshgorodek, un Potshayuv yizkor bukh*, edited by Falik Lerner and published in Buenos Aires in 1965. Hensch Gelernt wrote the chapter "A Short History of Kremenets."

6. Persecution of Jews by the Polish government?
7. Their involvement in political parties?
8. The role of Jews in the struggle for liberation of Ukraine in the years 1918-1920?
9. First and second coming of Muscovites (in the year 1939) and the situation of Jews under them?
10. Arrests and persecution of Jews under the Muscovites.
11. Coming of Germans and limitations of the freedom of Jews?
12. When was it ordered to keep Jews in the "ghetto" and by whom?
13. What section of the town was turned into the "ghetto" (provide a sketch)?
14. Help of the local population; hiding, food, etc. (provide names)?
15. How did Ukrainian partisans treat the Jews, and vice-versa?
16. How did the Ukrainian Security Service treat the Jews?
17. Confirm by testimony that the Ukrainian departments refused to monitor the "ghetto" and the Germans had to deport the "Gestapo"? (describe with precision)
18. How many Jews were wiped out by Germans in Kremenets?
19. Methods of torture and burial grounds?
20. Who gave the order and who destroyed the Jewish cemetery?
21. Did Muscovites and Germans deport Jews from Kremenets (when and how many)?
22. Do you know the protocol of the special commission that investigated Jewish burials in Kremenets in 1944?
23. Did the Jews Shvarts and Chatskiy belong to "KAPO" (the German police force)?

Please submit everything that has not been asked above.

Answer the questions that you know well. It is advisable to provide dates, names, and verified testimonies. The testimony can be signed with your own name or a pseudonym, but we must know your real name.

We are sending several copies to some people, asking that they submit them to someone who is able to provide materials.

PLEASE DO NOT DELAY YOUR ANSWER

We will be grateful for any help in this matter.

Administration of the Research Institute of Volyn

P.S. For those who are not interested, we are forwarding this list of questions for information.

*[page 2]*

[originally in Yiddish]

### [Survivor Testimony](#)

About the Jewish fight in the Kremenets ghetto, related by Frida Bernshteyn at the Jewish Historical Institute in Poland, record number 302.

I have, until now, never met a single person from the fighting group who took part in the ghetto battle in Kremenets. Probably because none of them escaped. Together with those fighters, we have lost the possibility of recovering all the precise details about how the organization prepared for battle and conducted it in the ghetto. A whole array of Christian witnesses have talked about the heroic battle that occurred in the ghetto. These witnesses tell about the large number of Germans and police who were killed, more than those witnesses even knew; the Christian witnesses also tell about the fire in the ghetto that burned for a week. But the ash and the ruins are the only (mute) witnesses to the many-sided battle in the ghetto.

The Christians confirm that the weapons used by the Jewish youth came from the arsenal that was used by a Polish drill unit of young men and that was hidden. The Poles had no entrance to that place because it was in the area of the ghetto.

Our witness, Frida Bernshteyn, now a student in the university at Lodz, graduated from the Kremenets middle school, where she had many friends and colleagues. At the time of the (German) occupation, she lived with her family in the town of Shumsk.

On August 3 or 4, 1942, two friends came to her in the Shumsk ghetto—Ludvig Shapiro and Ratshiner—with others. They were on a mission to gather wood in the forest two or three kilometers from Shumsk. From there they stole over to Shumsk.

Ludvig Shapiro and Ratshiner told me that the young people of Kremenets had organized and obtained a number of weapons and grenades. These young men said that in fall 1942, the Jews of Volhynia would be subject to a German “action.” All the members of the Kremenets fighting organization had received documents (identity cards) that allowed them to enter and leave the ghetto. Thanks to that, they devised a plan not to allow the Germans inside the ghetto to carry out the “action.” The fighters outside the ghetto would later be able to go outside, to a certain place in the woods where a group of partisans would be.

The young people spoke enthusiastically about their ability to take vengeance and survive the Germans. They strongly urged me to be a member of that fighting organization. Then they looked after documents and instructions. I could not, however, leave those close to me, so I stayed with them, not leaving with the young people.

On the morning of August 9, 1942, the ghetto was suddenly surrounded by police and gendarmes. Having the documents did not help them. No one was allowed out. Then began an unplanned and totally unorganized battle inside the ghetto. On the first day, 6 Germans and police fell. On the second day, 10. On the third day, the young people began to set fires in the ghetto. In the tumult and among the flames were battle and annihilation. The ghetto burned for eight whole days. The flames ceased with the destruction of the ghetto.

*[page 3]*

[originally in Yiddish]

Henoch Gelernt  
112 Haven Ave.  
New York, NY 32

March 20, 1958

Dear Manus,

I take this opportunity, through my friend Zerubavel's son, to send my letter with the recorded copies of the responses that I received from a couple of Ukrainian Kremenetsers. Professor Kholmiski is himself a victim. I have a special report from him. The pair of responses were recorded as the result of a questionnaire given, at my instigation, through the Ukrainian Research Institute in Canada. They sent it to many of those who had been scattered in different countries after the war. The second record is one of the responses. But he describes the conditions around Pochayev and Radzivilov, where he moved among the partisans. About those active in the jurisdiction of Kremenets I have already informed you. Now a request for you: before you respond to me, don't give this to anyone. And something else: please don't delay. This is what I want.

Shvarts should give you information about the Jewish partisans, who they were and where they went in the woods. He has described this to his friend Hertsberg in Russian in November 1948. I have his letter. He says there that he awaited the decision from his friend Idzi to flee to Galicia or join the partisans. If he knew where the entrance was ... why was he silent? Why was this missing from his report? Also, why was he silent on the question of whether his own wife was saved from death in the prison where the Kremenetsers were taken and shot? Did someone know his wife and tell him? Then, he mentions in his letter that he chooses to write about his life with the partisans. This is good work, but tormenting. In his first manuscript he also has the name of a young woman—Mendszszceki. Her whole family from Warsaw was in Kremenets, involved in exporting apples. Their father lived in the house with them. He is now in Israel. Yes, for several years. But the girl was involved with a Nazi officer who was involved in the murder of Jews in Lodz, Diamont. This should, once and for all, be clarified. What did the father say about it? Where are her brothers? The father knows of his son, who is in New York. He should talk about Kremenets from the whole time they were there. Yes, they should be compelled. Shvarts should do so. Our duty is to tell all. He describes the young woman: "A nice figure, with blue eyes, not too tall." He should get details from Barry Grinberg. What was the outcome? Who is left? Where was he at that time? They lived then, as Shvarts says, on Stara Potshava near Dr. Landesberg, and in the ghetto at Poltorak's. But this is curious: the whole family was not hopeful ....

You understand how everything irritates me? You, for your part, are absorbed by the world to come. Never mind. The heck with such concerns.

*[page 4]*

People now have the nerve even to separate morally the Jews, like slaves in exile, when they take on the new, the progressives, the “fighters,” even to the extent of taking away with their hands what happened under their very noses.

So what is the point? It doesn’t matter. Better get to business. Neglect whatever is irrelevant.

In Shvarts’s report, there is a child with a basket. Who could not wonder whose child that was? It is unthinkable to forget such a thing.

In Kremenets on the sidewalk they shot a provocateur from the partisans. Then the partisans shot. Is that true? What does he know to say about the leader of the partisan brigade? What does he know to say about their ambush of the prison, the release of the inmates, and their flight into the woods? What does he know about a Soviet leader in the partisans around Kremenets, Dubno, and Smiga?

What is the story with Vaynberg?

I want this chapter on Jewish death not only to be complete, but for there to be no sign of our own judgment. Here is an example. Earlier in the manuscript, Shvarts relates that when the Jews were being led to their deaths, “Passersby were indifferent.” The published text is different: “They laughed.” You see the alarming difference. I will not defend, but I will not prosecute what is false. We ourselves lose the truth of the whole story. And another thing. Liana Grinberg wept for him, for Shvarts. So Shvarts, too, was led to the slaughter. Ha? And—

What does he know to talk about Tshatski? Let us know who the Jewish kapos from Kremenets were. Yes, yes. You see that I don’t rest, even though you quickly tossed off a book with photos from your generation. No, I will also learn about the other young people who were lost. Hersh Mendel Roykhel’s grandchild has been silent, although I pressed him. But I will not go that way. This cannot be permitted to hypernationalists who lack courtesy. Because those who were annihilated demand it of us. That’s something these newcomers don’t know.

Nu—I hope that my message to you will not be, this time again, a voice crying in the wilderness. You will attend to it. I hope to hear back from you. And I remain,

With best wishes,

Your Henekh

*[page 5]*

[originally in Yiddish]

The account of a Ukrainian witness from Kremenets, Ivan Lisiak, about the extermination of the Jews by the Germans in 1943. Translated from the Ukrainian manuscript. The map of the murder was drawn by witness Y. L., who lived there until the liberation of the city.

The Germans ordered the Jews to gather their things because they would be taken to a certain place. Everyone was taken in trucks in the direction of King's Bridge. (The bridge had existed outside the city since the time of the Polish queen Bona Sforza in 1530. So the name remained for generations.) Through Monastery Street, which ran the length of the Dubno suburb to the train station, a stretch of 3 ½ kilometers. From there they turned toward the [illegible] of the holy [illegible] near the barracks, where once stood the Yakutsk People's Army, known as "the hill." There they remained standing. At that spot, people had prepared deep graves earlier. An order was given for everyone to undress. Around the graves stood Gestapo men with automatic weapons. Before everyone undressed, the rabbi said his last words, which I did not understand but which were translated for me. "Do not fear death. This is God's will. We ourselves are guiltless, but the sins of the older generation are upon us. Thus is it written in the Torah. 'Your children will be punished for your sins.'"

Then people were ordered to stand along the whole length of the grave. Dazed with drunkenness, the Gestapo men fired their automatic weapons. The Jewish girls covered their nakedness with their hands. As the grave filled with bodies, the remaining victims were ordered to lie on the corpses next each other, where they were shot. When each row of the dead was full, they were covered with lime, and then the shooting resumed.

When the executions ended, the blood flowed so that everything was covered in blood. Everything in the grave rose. The earth had lime two meters deep, and the blood did not go down to be absorbed.

The clothing, gold, and jewelry were sent to Germany. What happened later to the graves I don't know. They also brought Jews from the towns there: Berezhitsy, New Pochayev, Katerburg, Vishnevets, Dederkaly, and from the surrounding villages. I estimate that they killed about 20,000 Jews there.

[illegible] 1956

*[page 6]*

[originally in Ukrainian]

### Vaynberg

I knew him by sight, but we weren't well acquainted. I knew him because he was an official of the Starostwo, he became a Catholic (so I read in the newspaper). Then he started practicing Judaism again. Reading a note about this last fact, I was struck by this man. It so happened that I was on Dubenska Street when, after the Jewish population had already been shot, he himself was arrested. He was taken [in a carriage?] in the direction of the prison. After a few minutes,

the word on the street was that he had already been shot. "The Moor had done his duty," and the Germans decided he was no longer needed.

### Tsvik

I knew the whole Tsvik family well. I have nothing to say about them, I can only put a bouquet of roses on their tragic grave. They were good, cultured people who left me with the most positive feelings, respect, and memories.

### Prof. A. Kholmkiy

6. During my time with the partisans in 1942-1944, I knew the following Jews. In the camp near Kremenets, there were two Jewish doctors with their families. Seven or eight people in total. Close to the Gliboka Dolina settlement in Dubno on the farm were two Jewish families. In total, there were about six people. Merchants by trade. I remember a conversation we had: one was the owner of a textile company in Lviv, the other was his brother-in-law in Kremenets. I remember one of them by name. His name was Yakub. All these families were under the care of Ukrainian partisans, and if a raid by the Germans were to happen, they had separate territorial guardians who, in times of danger, took those Jews away from the villagers so the villagers would not risk being shot or burned.

S.D.

*[page 7]*

2. As to the number of Jews arrested and imprisoned near the railway station, they were generally there in very small numbers when the prison was liberated by Ukrainian rebels. This is because the ghetto was a bigger hell than the prison, and the Germans drove all the Jews there. Only once the ghetto had all been shot up and burned were the rest of the living taken to the prison, and from there were taken to be shot. It didn't last long, maybe two or three weeks in the summer. Both attacks on the prison took place in the winter.

5. Tivoli was a park where executions took place. The Germans made it their headquarters, they ruled from there, especially at the time of their arrival. That is where they shot people. Of course, I don't know exactly who was killed there, but there were familiar names among the murdered Jews (in the beginning), that's for sure. Among the Poles killed there, I remember the name Pototskiy, official of the Starostwo. In general, these killings could signal a pogrom, which had already taken place in the evening of July 4, when at 10:00 a.m. the Germans entered Kremenets.

6. They eventually made such summer houses in Kremenets too. I personally knew such a "dacha" in the town of Berezhitsy. Gebietskommissar Miler had it built for himself. He forced people to carry materials and work. The first head of the volost, by the name of Savchuk, I believe, also made people do this, and the partisans killed him for it.

The murdered man was replaced by the engineer brigadier, previously the burgomaster of Kremenets. During his time, the partisans attacked Miler's "dacha," where there were guests (the Germans started to flee) and [set the place on fire. Some of the people burned there, and others jumped out the windows. There are supposed to have been 10 or 12 dead. The brigadier quickly vacated his seat and went into hiding with his young wife.