

GERSZON TAFFET

THE HOLOCAUST OF THE JEWS OF ZOLKIEW

translated by
Piotr J. Drozdowski

Lodz 1946

The publication of this book is made possible due to the support of the members of the Organization of Zolkiew Survivors, and with the help of Frieda Taffet, the wife of the author. The book is intended for the second and third generations of the Zolkiew Survivors, as a means of commemorating the birthplace of their parents and grandparents.

"Organization of Zolkiew Survivors"

Josef Hirszhorn

Alexander Orli

Publishers of the Central Jewish Historical Committee
at the Central Committee of Polish Jews

No.27

Copyright by
The Central Jewish Historical Committee
Lodz, Narutowicz St. 25

Lodz, No.D-06493 - 660

PREFACE

G.Taffet's work entitled The Holocaust of the Jews of Zolkiew is based principally on (the author's) own recollections and on the testimony of the handful of eyewitnesses who managed to survive the entire gehenna of "operations" and camps. In spite of the absence of original documents, destroyed by the enemy in an attempt to conceal all traces of the crimes, G. Taffet's work recreates the story of the experiences of the Jewish population of Zolkiew quite well, sometimes in a very lively and expressive manner.

The author, a Zolkiew-ian who personally endured the inferno of Nazi atrocities, who was in the train-load of Zolkiew Jews heading for Belzec, who was also among the men cunningly transferred from Zolkiew to the Janowski camp, knows the territory and the environment very well.

For this reason no significant event or circumstance has escaped his attention and no momentous incident has been forgotten.

The author preserved the chronological order (continuity) in his narrative, outlining the total experience of the Zolkiew Jews, while focusing on what he knows best and what he personally witnessed. Unfortunately "the German war-machine annihilated the Jewish population of Zolkiew almost completely": out of the five thousand Jews (in 1941) only some seventy people survived. The reader can find their names at the end of the book.

Priceless cultural monuments fell victim to German barbarity; the fortified synagogue from Sobieski's time and the old cemetery were (both) destroyed.

The wave of the initial "operations" in the Spring of 1942, in the district of Galicia, certainly affected the Zolkiew Jews. As early as March 15, 1942, one of the first transports left for Belzec. Some of the mystery was unveiled by two Jewish women who were fortunate enough to return from the death camp, but "to some

their story appeared too fantastic, simply too incredible".

The sections of this work devoted to the discussion of the "jumpers" who leaped out of speeding railway cars of the Belzec transports, are particularly engaging. First of all the "jumpers" had to be hidden from the German policemen and Ukrainian militiamen who would shoot them on sight. The Jewish population of Zolkiew showed the "jumpers" a lot of heart. The Jewish Medical Brigade which recruited not only professionals but also representatives of the local intelligentsia, walked along the railway tracks with stretchers or a cart, and carried the wounded to the Jewish quarter where extensive aid was administered to them. "Despite difficult conditions - states the author - the Medical Brigade willingly fulfilled its duty while often risking (its members') lives". Thanks to (its efforts) many of the wounded and crippled were returned to health.

It is symptomatic that the great November "operation" of 1942 was launched on Sunday (Nov.22) in order to take the Zolkiew Jews by surprise; they expected the deportation (to take place) on a week-day. As a result of this "operation" which lasted two days, 2500 Jews were captured. Taught by experience, the Zolkiew Jews equipped themselves in advance with specially prepared sets of tools (a small, pocket-size steel-saw for wood and metal, wire-cutters, etc., possibly some primitive tools like a knife, crow-bar, axe.) Throughout the journey guards shot at the Jews jumping out of the train. For this reason hundreds of dead and wounded lay along the tracks.

There is a vivid account of the inspection of men fit for labor which took place on March 15, 1943, arranged with perfidy by the Germans under the pretense of handing out the "W" and "R" patches to the Jewish workers. As a result of this "inspection" 618 men were shipped to the Janowski camp.

The liquidation procedure was launched on March 25, 1943; during this operation children and the sick were savagely murdered. Incredible bestiality was exhibited particularly by Heinisch, an

SS-man from the Janowski camp who used an ax to kill children, the sick and the elderly.

Of great interest are the numerous references to the behavior of the local population during the most difficult moments of the ghetto's existence. For example a certain Roman-Catholic priest sent a considerable amount of money to the committee gathering contributions. The Polish inhabitants of the village of Bar (near Grodek Jagiellonski) risked their lives in saving a group of over twenty Jews. One should also mention the handful of Jews who remained in hiding after the final destruction of the ghetto, in cellars and attics, and who were being "helped by their non-Jewish friends who often risk their own lives and make great sacrifices." On the other hand there are the individuals who - either poisoned by the venom of Nazi propaganda or out of a desire for profit - aided the Germans in tracking down and exterminating the remaining Jews. As a result, "human malice, blackmail and constant searches are wreaking havoc with this tiny group."

The minor but invaluable details concerning the dignified behavior of the Zolkiew Jews during moments of calamity and devastation have not been omitted. Mojzesz Saft, for example, lunged at a German gendarme and a Ukrainian militiaman and wounded both of them as he was being led out of a shelter.

It is a pity that the author did not have an opportunity to gather the testimony of the representatives of the local, non-Jewish population among whom there must have been individuals who carefully observed the course of events in the ghetto, often precisely for the purpose of conveying the whole truth to future generations. One should also bear in mind that the author's memory as well as the memory of the eye-witnesses on whose testimony this work is based, might in some instances have faltered; as a result this account may have come out a little feeble when viewed from the perspective of several years.

In spite of these shortcomings, G.Taffet's work is without question a valuable contribution to the history of Jewish martyrdom

fulfills the author's wish that "the history of the martyrdom and destruction of the Zolkiew Jews, immortalized in this work, serve as a tombstone over their unknown grave."

Dr. Jozef Kermisz

Lodz, July 1946.

INTRODUCTION

The Jewish community of Zolkiew - one of the oldest communities in the Ruthenian lands - played a major role in the city's history.

The first historical mention of the Jews of Zolkiew comes from the year 1600. In that year Hetman Stanislaw Zolkiewski gave the Jews permission to build a house of prayer and assigned to them "a seperate place and seperate streets for the construction of a brewery, a malt-house, cellars, baths and a well for the purification of their bodies in accordance with their Laws"1).

Thus the Jewish colonization of this town dates back to the beginnings of the 17th century (the oldest tombstone at the Jewish cemetery which survived until the Nazi occupation, is from 1610).

"Beginning in the middle of the 17th century the Jewish community of Zolkiew emerged as a leader of the District and maintained its dominant position for several decades"2).

In view of the major role played by the town of Zolkiew in the history of the Ruthenian Jews, Jewish historians have focused their attention on the history of this town for some time now.

Salomon Buber devoted an entire work entitled "Kiri Nisgawa" (Lofty City) to this area; many pages in the disquisitions of Dr. Majer Balaban are dedicated to Zolkiew (The History of the Jews in Galicia, The Jews of Lwow at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries, etc.). A sizeable work entitled "Old Zolkiew and its Jews" which deals comprehensively with the history of the Jews of Zolkiew, was published in 1939 by Dr. Jakub Schall.

The present work is also devoted to the history of this Jewish community, during the Nazi occupation.

The German war machine almost completely destroyed the Jewish population of the city of Zolkiew and thus put an end to the cycle of history of the Jews in this town for a long time to come,

perhaps even forever. Out of over five thousand Jews in Zolkiew in 1941 - only about seventy people survived (as can be seen in the list at the back of this book).

Let this work be a monument commemorating one of the most important Jewish communities, a community which produced many Jewish philosophers and scholars and which made a significant contribution to the enlightenment movement of the "Haskala" Jews. I shall only mention Nachman Krochmal - the author of "More Nebuchej Hazman"; Aleksander Sender Schorr - scholar and author of "Twnat Szor"; Eliezer Fawir - writer and author of the book "Sipurej Haplaot"; Jewish man of letters Dr. Majer Halevy Letteris, and many others. From among our contemporaries one ought to mention Dr. Henryk Lauterpacht, a renowned expert in international law - presently a professor at Cambridge University, and Dr. Mojzesz Goliger, Semitologist and professor of the Institute of Judaic Studies in Warsaw (he died in the September 1942 "operation" in Lwow).

Unfortunately no documents or photographs from this period have reached us. The material contained in this work is based on the recollections and the testimony of a handful of Zolkiew Jews who survived: Rachela Zimand, Izydor Hecht, Michal Melman, Majer Berisz Szwarc, Zalmen Mandel and the author of this book. I also made use of the memoirs of Klara Szwarc and Izydor Hecht. I would like to express my sincere thanks to them and to all the above mentioned Zolkiew Jews who assisted me in preparing this work.

Let the history of the martyrdom and destruction of the Jews of Zolkiew immortalized in this book serve as a tombstone above their unknown grave.

The Author

Lodz, July 20, 1946.

I

ZOLKIEW BEFORE THE WAR

The district (capital) city of Zolkiew is located Northwest of Lwow.

According to the information provided by the Central Statistical Office (the Second, Comprehensive [General] Census in Poland conducted on December 9, 1931) there were 7848 Jews living in the district of Zolkiew. It is to be assumed that out of this number, approximately 4500 were the Jewish inhabitants of the city of Zolkiew.

Bearing in mind the growth of the Jewish population in this city in the years 1931-1941, due to the migration of large numbers of Jews from the villages to the cities as well as a result of the flow of refugees from the territory of the General Gouvernement (1939-1941), one should accept that at the outbreak of the German - Russian War, the Jewish population of Zolkiew exceeded 5000.

Zolkiew lies in a valley, it is surrounded by woods. It has architectural monuments which are several hundred years old; a royal palace from the time of King (Jan) Sobieski, a fortified Synagogue named "Di Sobieski szul" in honor of her founder, the King of Poland Jan Sobieski, and a parish church (also) several hundred years old. Until the war, the Jewish inhabitants of Zolkiew occupied a prominent position in the city's trade and crafts. A specific kind of cottage-furriery gained renown: the sewing together of small pieces, patches and snips of skin for a fur lining out of which in turn ladies' coats and furs were made. The Zolkiew furriers attained such perfection in their craft that the furs they pieced together could not be distinguished from ones made out of whole skins; they were beautifully set and very well selected for quality and color, they were attractive and inexpensive. Thanks to the highly developed furriery many Jewish families lived in affluence, drawing their income directly or indirectly from this profession. Jews were also well represented in

other crafts. Finally, the entire grain trade, including foreign export, was in the hands of Jewish merchants.

Zolkiew, located so close to Lwow, had convenient and quick (public) transportation. Jews developed and expanded a system of bus lines connecting Zolkiew with Lwow and other neighboring towns. In the learned professions Jews also occupied prominent positions. In Zolkiew there were about 10 Jewish lawyers, 3 doctors, and about 10 school teachers. There was an exemplary Jewish orphans' home named after Councillor Ignacy Fisz. This institution paid particular attention to the education and vocational schooling (training) of the orphans. A trade school for Jewish girls was organized next to the orphans' home, (it was) a branch of the trade school run by Dr. Cecylia Klaften in Lwow. This school was attended by approximately 70 Jewish girls getting an education in tailoring and embroidery. In addition to being taught a practical profession the pupils also studied theoretical subjects. A Patronate was established at the school whose goal was to provide care for the working Jewish youth and to raise their cultural awareness; a club room (community center) was opened and additional training courses were offered.

The "Tarbut" school where Jewish children learned Hebrew and Judaic subjects, was in existence till 1939. According to 1939-41 estimates, there were close to 700 school-age Jewish children in Zolkiew. In the primary (grade) school (8 levels in the Soviet system), created by the Soviet authorities in Zolkiew, with Jewish as the language of instruction, there were more than 600 children. Jewish children also attended schools where Polish and Ukrainian were the languages of instruction. Moreover, Zolkiew had a Society ("Kultura") for the appreciation of culture and art among the Jews; it also served as a club. Here cultural life found its focus; lectures, meetings, games and parties were hosted 3).

After the outbreak of the German-Polish war and the annexation of Zolkiew by the Soviet Union, the Jewish population of the city increased as a result of the arrival of refugees who were fleeing from the Germans occupying Polish territory (and coming) to the

Our family owned and developed the bus lines. It all began with your grandpa then. Mom shipping an early Ford bus to this town in the late 1920s.

Soviet Union. Several dozen Jewish refugees from Czechoslovakia and Austria also made their way to Zolkiew. Among those one should mention Ernest Lederer, former Chairman of the District Court in Prague, and Handel, a lawyer from Vienna.

II

THE FIRST PERSECUTIONS

Zolkiew was located about 40 kilometers from the 1939 German-Soviet border. It is not surprising, therefore, that already on the first day of the German-Soviet war - June 22, 1941 - there was considerable commotion in the city. Cars, tanks, motorized and horse-drawn artillery and various other army units cross the town, heading for the front and coming back from it, alternately. The population, especially the Jewish inhabitants, looked upon the initial military activities with great trepidation. Due to the proximity of the front, the Soviet authorities did not manage to conduct a full mobilization.

Because of the harassing German air-raids, many Jews gave up on an attempt to flee to the East. Some individuals tried to leave but the (repeated) murders of fugitives committed by Ukrainian nationalists, served as a deterrent. During the first few days after war broke out, two Zolkiew Jews (Lejb Weichert and his son) were killed on the way to Lwow (in Zboiska, outside of Lwow).

Meanwhile, news making its way from the front was getting worse and worse. By the fourth day of the war all institutions & agencies were forced to evacuate fearing an encirclement. It appeared that the enemy was about to enter the city, but the following day the situation at the front improved and local authorities returned, unfortunately not for long - only for two days. The Jewish population in particular was seized with fear; it dreaded the arrival of the Germans. When military operations reached (the outskirts of) the city, the Jews, before heading for the basements and the shelters in order to hide from the air-raids and artillery barrages, said good-bye as if sensing that they would not see each other again. The prevailing attitudes left one with the impression that the Jews were anticipating a pogrom.

On the seventh day of the hostilities, Saturday June 28, 1941,

after a whole day of fighting, the Germans marched into the city.

The fortified Synagogue, "Di Sobieski szul", built during the reign of King Sobieski, became the first casualty of German barbarism. The Germans set fire to the Synagogue upon entering the city but because the walls were very thick and heavily buttressed, the fire could not consume them. Only the interior furnishings and the wooden parts of the Synagogue burned. This, however, did not satisfy the Germans, and in a fit of rage they bring in canisters of gasoline which explode after being ignited. This way the Germans wanted to shatter the walls of the Synagogue, but they were unsuccessful. The Germans unload their anger on the Jewish inhabitants of the city. While the Synagogue was in flames, the Germans brought in 10 Jews who were to be thrown into the blaze, but a German major unexpectedly appeared at that moment and saved the unfortunate victims from a horrible death. The half-burnt Synagogue smoldered for several days.

In the meantime another, more ominous danger confronted the Jewish population of the city: after the Germans marched in, the bodies of several Ukrainian nationalists were discovered in the municipal jail, filled with individuals who had previously been arrested by the Soviet authorities. The nationalist Ukrainian element took advantage of this event to incite the crowds to a pogrom of the Jews. An official funeral of these "heroes" was to serve as a prologue to an anti-Jewish affair.

Inflammatory speeches were delivered at the cemetery, aimed at the "zydokomuna" and Jews in general. In keeping with the criminal scheme, the incited crowd was to attack Jewish houses and apartments after the funeral. There were meticulous preparations. The speeches (eulogies) were permeated with the venom of hate and the crowd was eager to "go for it". This time an accident also saved the Jews. It was on Sunday afternoon, June 29, 1941. At that very moment the newly appointed city Commander issued a decree introducing curfew for civilians from 6 p.m. till 6 a.m. Due to the late hour, the disappointed crowd was forced to go home immediately after the funeral rites.

The degree of hatred felt by Ukrainian nationalists for the Jews can perhaps be attested to by the fact that at the first meeting of the newly appointed town council of Zolkiew, the then mayor Ciuropajlowicz, a baker by profession and a man with a criminal past (a member of Petlura's army), moved a resolution to dislodge all Jews from the city and to settle them in a nearby village, Wola Wysocka. When this proposal was rejected by the German authorities which had by that time a more radical solution of the Jewish question in store, the bloodthirsty mayor suggested that the Jews at least be banned from coming to the town marketplace and doing their shopping there. This proposal was later approved by the German authorities in a somewhat modified form 4).

The first days of the German presence in Zolkiew were characterized by repeated roundups of Jews for odd jobs at which they were ruthlessly beaten, ridiculed and abused. The Jews would hide in homes, attics and cellars/basements. Because the need for laborers continued to grow, there was a danger that the Germans themselves might start extracting the hiding Jews; this could produce human casualties. In an attempt to protect the Jewish population from the unpleasant consequences of not showing up for work, an unofficial Jewish Committee was spontaneously formed in the first days of July, 1941. It consisted of three people:

Dr. Otto Szlosser, Dr. Mojzesz Sobel, and Dr. Abraham Strich. The purpose of this Committee was to regulate the process of supplying the German authorities with the number of laborers they demanded. Members of the Committee visited Jews in their private homes and alerted them to the dangers facing those who do not show up for work. Gradually more and more men report to work in a spirit of communal responsibility.

After a few days the above-mentioned committee was summoned by the Ortskommendant; he informed them that the Jews have to form a permanent representative body, the so-called Judenrat - a Jewish Council which would mediate between the Jewish population and the German authorities. Prompt delivery of the requested number of laborers and the performance of various other services were the

main duties of the Council. Thus, the Zolkiew Judenrat came into existence.

The Judenrat consisted of (some of) the most respected citizens of Zolkiew (intelligentsia and social activists). The Jewish Council - Judenrat - was set up in the following way: Dr. Febus Rubinfeld - chairman, Dr. Abraham Strich and Dr. Filip Czaczkes - deputy-chairmen, Natan Apfel, Sender Lifszyc, Ozjasz Czaczkes and Izrael Szapiro - members of the Judenrat.

*

*

*

Shortly after the Germans marched into Zolkiew, the Jews who lived on Kolejowa and Lanikiewicz streets were evicted from their homes. These are main streets with the prettiest houses and best furnished apartments in the city. Jews were forbidden to appear on those streets. The next decree bans Jews from the sidewalks; they are only allowed to walk in the streets. Soon a decree is issued which calls for the wearing of the mark of shame. Every Jew over 12 years of age is obliged to wear a white arm-band 8-10 centimeters wide with an embroidered Star of David, on the right arm. The police hour (curfew) also begins earlier for the Jews, at 5 pm, than it does for the non-Jewish population. In accordance with the orders of the German authorities, Jews have the right to buy farm products at the market only between 10-12 in the morning (when the non-Jewish inhabitants have already done their shopping). In addition to the Germans, Ukrainian militiamen were in charge of making sure that these orders were carried out; they took advantage of every opportunity to engage in a clearly sadistic harassment of the Jews. The Ukrainian militiaman Duszenczuk, son of a bank clerk and a Zolkiew school teacher, was particularly nasty. Jews suspected of communist activity are arrested and executed without a trial. That's how the Hamerman sisters were arrested during the first days of the German presence; they were later taken to Rawa Ruska and executed. In another instance the whole Lebwohl family

was arrested and killed: the father, mother and several children - all because the two eldest daughters who fled from the Germans, were communist activists.

For the first few days after the Germans marched into Zolkiew, the city was governed by the Ortskommandant (a representative of the military authorities). In time, however, once the front moved east, a permanent Landskomisar was appointed for Zolkiew: Rockendorf, a German who said he had previously been the Landskomisar for Piotrkow Trybunalski. In his first official act he levied a contribution on the Jews: they were to pay 250 000 roubles, a 100 kilograms of silver and 5 kilograms of gold within three days.

This levy was accompanied by the following circumstances: panic set in the city one afternoon; the Ukrainian police had arrested the town's most respected and wealthiest Jews: 70-year old doctor Wachs, Izrael Patrontasch, Cyrla Chary (instead of her husband who fled), the brothers Eliasch and Markus Chary, Jozef Post, Lejb Patrontasch, Juda Szlajen, Sender Lifszyc, Symcha Turk, and the Chairman of the Judenrat Dr. Febus Rubinfeld. Altogether 12 people. The Ukrainian police took full advantage that day of its license to beat up, torture and harass the Jews. Some Jews, Aron Astman and others, were bloodied. When all the detainees were brought to the prison, they were told that the above-mentioned contribution had been levied; if the contribution were not to be paid on time, the detainees who were henceforth (treated as) hostages would be shot and all the other Jews would face heavy repressive measures. In order to inform the Jewish population of the levied contribution and of the (need to) organize the collection, Dr. F. Rubinfeld, chairman of the Jewish Council, was temporarily released from jail. All the other hostages remained in prison.

Fear gripped the Jewish residents of Zolkiew. The Jewish Committee which was to enforce the taxation of individual Jews, deliberated continuously all night. In the presence of this calamity which affected the entire Jewish population, in the spirit

of collective responsibility and (in response to) the gravity of the situation, all the inhabitants - even the poorest ones - contributed to the removal of the threat. The most destitute gave a symbolic ransom of 18 roubles (Chaj). The wealthy offered silver and gold objects, often priceless family souvenirs - the pride and glory of many generations. In spite of the difficulties, the required contribution was paid on time and the hostages were released.

We should note at this point that there was also evidence of compassion acted upon by noble individuals in the non-Jewish community; a certain Roman-Catholic priest, for example, sent a considerable amount of money to the Committee. The fact that such a distinguished person demonstrated solidarity with the Jewish population raised everybody's spirits. This magnanimous act was met with great appreciation and gratitude by the Jews.

Regardless of the contribution, Jewish homes are systematically looted for furniture, rugs, curtains, bedding and other valuable things which end up furnishing the homes of German dignitaries and their cronies. At the end of December 1941, a proclamation of the Judenrat appears on the streets of the Jewish quarter which announces that in compliance with a decree of the German authorities Jews are obliged, under penalty of death, to hand over to the Wehrmacht all mens' and ladies' furs, fur collars, gloves, oversleeves (muffs), shoes (boots) and ski gear, by noon on January 1, 1942. Once again the Jewish population complied with the Germans' demands. 5000 ladies' and mens' furs alone were collected.

Equally painful was the Germans' utter disrespect for the ashes of deceased Jews. The Jewish cemetery fell victim to their savagery. Headstones (dating back to the 17th century - the initial period of Jewish settlement in Zolkiew) were demolished and the stone (itself) was used for building and repairing the roads of the so-called Strassenbau. This profanation was made even more painful by the fact that the Germans forced the Jews to destroy these tombstones themselves. Sometimes Jews were forced to smash the monuments of their loved ones. Anxious that the trace of their

deceased family members' graves not be lost, Jews used all kinds of signs and measurements to accurately mark the location of the graves, hopeful that when things change new headstones will replace old ones. Mojzesz Babad, Emmanuel Hai and engineer Lichtenberg devoted a lot of care and work to the creation of a detailed map of the cemetery. Unfortunately, with the death of the above-mentioned persons all diagrams and notes were lost. Razed to the ground, the Jewish cemetery later witnessed many executions of individual Jews and whole groups (of Jews) sentenced (to death) for such "crimes" as jumping out of a transport train heading for Belzec (and certain death), the presence of a Jew on the "aryan side", an escape from the camp, not wearing the arm-band, or finally if the Jew had the "audacity" to live in Zolkiew after it was declared "Judenfrei" by the Germans. The desecrated cemetery was henceforth used by the local population for grazing cattle.

The Germans come up with even more ways of persecuting the Jews, for example forcing them to transgress against their own religious laws. And so, in compliance with the order of the German authorities, Jews are forced to shave their beards and side curls. Many pious Jews not wanting to show themselves on the street without a beard, constantly wear a kerchief [scarf] tied around their head. Group prayer and the celebration of holidays are also forbidden.

In other spheres of life the Germans also inflict moral and physical pain on the Jews; this is manifested in humiliating decrees, in taunts, beatings, torture, etc.

When the Jewish Council (Judenrat) is formed, as stipulated by the Germans, the Ortskommandant orders all the Jews, women as well as men, to show up every morning in front of the Judenrat building; the members of the Jewish Council were held personally responsible for (this order being carried out). The Germans came there with their whips and selected people for labor. Of course, during this procedure humiliating taunts, beatings, insults, etc. were not infrequent. This decree was very burdensome.

Thanks to the efforts of the Judenrat, the decree was

eventually modified. From then on only a specific number of people (had to) report for work 5), nursing women and the sick were excused from work completely by the Judenrat. There was even a short period of time when persons obliged to work (on a given day) were allowed to bring replacements (paid for by them) or to make a payment to the Jewish Council (directly). Money collected in this fashion was then used for social welfare causes, especially for food (an extra slice of bread) for the laborers.

The attitude of the Germans towards the Jews can be illustrated by the following fact: one of the Germans supervising the work of the Jews at the railway station, an Obergefreiter from the Ortskommand, used a thick cane to mercilessly beat the Jews who were loading the huge 5000 liter canisters, while at the same time constantly shouting: "ungeschicktes Volk! Du willst mit uns Krieg fuhren" 6).

* *
*

Following the order of the Landskomisar, an Ordnungsdienst was organized and attached to the Jewish Council - a Jewish militia. Dr. Filip Czaczkes, a member of the Judenrat, was made the head (of this militia). The Ordnungsdienst consisted of 18 members. Its main function during the initial period was to ensure the prompt delivery of the demanded number of Jewish laborers and to maintain order in the Jewish quarter.

With time, however, the demands of the Germans grew in regard to the number of Jewish workers and to other services. Jews loaded and unloaded the freight-cars at the station, in HKP 7), worked on the repair of vehicles, the removal of damaged tanks, cannons, cars, on the construction and repair of the roads (the so-called "Strassenbau"), etc. During work the Jews were mercilessly harassed not only by the Germans and the Ukrainians, but also by the "Aufseher" 8) of other nationalities.

The first victim of this ruthless abuse of working Jews was a

man of about thirty years of age, Mendel Herszrit; he was bludgeoned to death while working a few kilometers outside of town. He left behind a wife and a 6-year old child. When compared to other cities like Lwow, Tarnopol, etc., where "spontaneous" pogroms took place within the first couple of days after the Germans marched in, in Zolkiew this period passed in relative calm. And this is precisely why the senseless (unjustified) murder of a young man engendered such terror. Almost the entire Jewish population participated in the funeral of this victim of bestiality. Calling on (the Jews) to desist from [the public demonstration of] grief in the streets, Dr. Strich, a member of the Judenrat, said: "The loss is great but despite the enormous pain, we have to display the utmost calm and self-control because (now) we have to be ready for anything".

The above-mentioned fact offers clear testimony of the legal status of the Jews under German occupation. After the murder of Herszrit, the municipal inspector of the Ukrainian police decides to make things look good officially, and initiates an investigation into the matter. He comes to the German in charge of the non-Jewish labor brigade (it was known that workers from this brigade committed the murder) and wants to make an official record of the incident. The German, with a grin on his face, proceeds to lead him to a wall and draws a large flea. He points to the drawing and says: "look, this is what a Jew means in Germany", in other words the killing of a Jew means as much as the killing of a flea; no punishment is necessary. This fact convinced the inspector that his eagerness is not only unnecessary but even undesirable 9).

The next victims were Jews in the camp "operation" in the middle of March, 1942. It happened on a certain Friday afternoon. SS-men arrived from the labor camp in Lacki Wielkie near Zloczow and organized a roundup. About sixty Jewish men became casualties of this roundup and were taken away to a labor camp. These Jews soon died in that camp due to emaciation, hunger and beatings.

Within a few days after these Jews were taken to the camp in Lacki Wielkie one of them, Luzer Stein, escaped and returned to

Zolkiew. The escape was detected on Friday and already on Sunday a special emissary from the camp, an SS-man, came to the Judenrat in Zolkiew and demanded the immediate release of Stein; his punishment was to be made an example of in the camp. The Judenrat used all possible means to convince the SS-man that Stein never even returned to Zolkiew, at least the Judenrat knew nothing of it. Requests and gifts were of no avail. The SS-man wouldn't budge. It was only after a Jewish camp doctor, who had come from Lacki together with the SS-man, made the point that the SS are ready to shoot 30 Jews from among those taken to Lacki Wielkie, in place of Stein, that the Judenrat was persuaded the stakes were too high; when all other means failed, Stein was handed over to the SS-man who took him back to the camp where the poor wretch was publicly hung. Both the Judenrat and the families of those who had been shipped off to the camp try to ease the suffering of the interned. Food packages were sent once a week. Those who left no close family behind received personal packages from the Judenrat. On several occasions Efroim Landau, a member of the Judenrat, visited the camp in Lacki Wielkie carrying food for the Jews and valuable gifts for the SS-men and the Ukrainian militia - hoping to obtain milder treatment of the Jews during work and to protect them from excessive harassment. Once, when Efroim Landau arrived at the camp with Szymon Wolf, another member of the Judenrat, he beheld an incredible sight: Dawid Astman, a completely emaciated Jew from Zolkiew, was standing with a shovel in his hand digging his own grave. The Judenrat emissaries immediately offered the SS a lavish ransom. 10).

Because Astman was no longer fit for work, or for life - he was a living corpse - the SS-men "kindly" agreed to release him. Back in Zolkiew Astman soon died, despite tender care. It was he who informed us of the terrible life and work conditions in the Lacki camp. He told us that every day at dawn they had to walk for 2 kilometers to the workplace. They worked all day with no respite under the watchful eye of the Ukrainians who were not sparing with blows. After work they walked back to the camp. Considering that

meals consisted of 10 decagrammes of bread, a liter of watery soup and a portion of black coffee per day, one should not be surprised that this camp consumed many victims 11) - it was created before the Janowski camp in Lwow was established.

III

THE JUDENRAT AND ITS ACTIVITY

The Judenrat's most important functions were to supply the Germans with the requested number of laborers, and to meet the needs of the gestapo, the Landskomisar, the police, the German "szupos", militiamen and Ukrainian officials as well as others in whose hands lay the fate of the Jewish population. For the sake of "averting the danger", hard earned money, valuables, furs, furniture and other precious objects flowed into the hands of the German butchers and their lackeys in the form of gifts and souvenirs. As I mentioned earlier, the Jewish population of Zolkiew was relatively affluent before the war. The Judenrat, taking advantage of this fact, solicited more and more money from the Jewish inhabitants, in the naive hope that in such a way it would be able to save the Jewish population from the insatiable German Moloch. It should be noted that because the Judenrat was successful - through the use of bribes, gifts and souvenirs - in "appeasing" the appropriate authorities, i.e. the Landskomisar Rockendrof, Pappe, the SS-Sturmfuhrer of Zolkiew, the commandant of the German gendarmerie Kather, the German police, the Ukrainian militia, etc., and even the gestapo from Lwow, the Jewish population of the city of Zolkiew to a certain extent avoided excessive harassment, and the appropriate authorities tried to protect this district from the approaching destruction as much as they could, in order to derive profit from it as long as possible. This can help explain the fact that the November "operation" of 1942 and even the liquidation "operation" (end of March 1943) both took place somewhat later than in other towns of the Lwow voivodeship [province]. With time, the Lwow Gestapo developed such a taste for the "presents" received from the Zolkiew Judenrat that they sent word in advance as to what should be prepared for them. It reached a point where a certain group of Gestapo men from Lwow started coming to Zolkiew every

Sunday to hunt in the local forest, and the Judenrat had to supply them with beaters from among the Jews. Of course the lavish gifts which they received from the Judenrat every time they arrived enticed them more than the game. The committee which took care of "preparing" the gifts was called the "Sachleistungskommission", but the Jews referred to it as the "Raubkommission" since sometimes it had to resort to threats or force in order to obtain the necessary objects. Jakub Altin was the head of this committee.

IV

THE FIRST OPERATION

In the beginning of 1942, in compliance with an order of the German authorities, every Jew had to report to the medical board which was to determine the degree of his aptitude for physical labor. There were three categories: 1) Cat.A - completely healthy and fit for hard labor, 2) Cat.B - healthy and fit for lighter physical work, 3) Cat.C - incapable of physical labor. As a result of this medical examination a special file is created for the Jews. Some Jews, thinking that receiving category "C" (unable to work) will relieve them (of the need to) work and particularly of the concomitant harassment, try all means possible to be included in this category. The district doctor of Zolkiew demanded a high fee in cash and valuables for granting category "C", and so only the privileged few among the healthy were able to be receive it.

One does not have to wait long to see the effects of this order: on the 15th of March, 1942, right before Easter, the Gestapo descends on Zolkiew Castle. The entire Judenrat is ordered to report immediately. After arriving at the castle, they are informed that they are under arrest. Escorted by two "szupo", one of the members of the Judenrat goes over to the Judenrat building and brings (back) the files of the laborers/workers. Now the Germans demand a list of all those unfit for work with category "C", so that they can be moved (resettled) to a place where they will be able to work; with the files in their hands the Germans quickly made a list of the persons who were given category "C". Even before the beginning of the "operation", the Gestapo commandant announced to the members of the Judenrat that the resettled Jews will come to no harm, that they are going to drain the Pinsk bogs and that's where they will live and work. As proof of this, he allowed all the evacuees to take necessary belongings with them.

The city was divided into sectors. Each Gestapo man was assigned a sector and a Jewish ordner (militiaman) as a guide with

an accurate register of those to be resettled.

Thus the first "operation" was conducted in Zolkiew; its toll in people was approximately 700. Whenever the person sought was not apprehended, another member of the family was taken; when in the family of Jakub Stiller his son Moses was missing, they took his daughter. Because this "operation" took place just before the "Pesach" holiday (14), many pious Jews took matzoth prepared for the holiday as their only luggage (they were worried that they would not be able to get any matzoth in the new place). As it turned out later, the matzoth was of no use to them since the Jews resettled in this "operation" died in the Belzec death camp.

Towards the end of this "operation" the Germans took randomly encountered Jews, who were not on the list, to supplement the "quota". It was only at the rallying point that the selection of the latter took place; (they were) divided into those who did and those who did not possess an "Arbeitskarte".

In order to cover up their tracks, the Germans implemented a shrewd and carefully premeditated plan of genocide during the "operation". The Gestapo exempted all those who could produce an "Arbeitskarte" from being resettled. The Jews started believing that labor would shield them from resettlement, and a frenzied pursuit of the work permits began. At the cost of their last savings, and forced to sell the rest of their clothing, Jews equipped themselves with an "Arbeitskarte" in the belief that this would [prove to] be their deliverance. In particular, they flocked to the company "Alt-u.Rohstoffeffassung", convinced that such a work permit guaranteed inviolability.

Meanwhile the families of those who were resettled during the first "operation" can find no peace of mind and do their best to try to learn something of the fate that befell the evacuees. At the news that they were shipped in the direction of Belzec, but not knowing that there is a death camp there, the families dispatch "aryans" and at one time even a Gestapo man to obtain some information, but to no avail. No trace of the evacuees was found.

The mystery was only solved later.

Following a journey which lasted several days two Jewish women who had (also) been shipped, Mina Astman and Malka Thalenfeld, returned from the "operation". After recovering from the nightmarish images which haunted them, they told their loved ones of their experiences, in great secrecy. The evacuees were shipped to the Belzec camp in locked freight cars. There, they were ordered to strip naked. They were overcome with fear. One of the more courageous men, Jakub Segel, asked a Gestapo man who was standing next to him: "why are we told to strip?" The latter answered with sadistic satisfaction that they are going to their death. Then Segel embraced his wife and sobbing, said: "Let us say goodbye, these are the last moments of our lives". Seeing this, other Jews fell into each others' arms, in tears. At that moment the Germans ordered the men to stand on one side, the women and children on the other, next to the barracks. Then, the women were ordered to go into the barracks; realizing what awaits them, they tarried. Markus Gutman's wife was the first to enter the barracks, with her daughter Zofia. All the others followed. Taking advantage of the lamentation, confusion and the Germans' lack of experience (these were the first shipments of [people condemned to] death in the Belzec death camp), Mrs. Astman jumped into a nearby garbage ditch with Mrs. Thalenfeld and they sat there, unnoticed, until dark. Availing themselves of the (cover of) darkness, they stole away from the camp grounds and returned home after a few days.

To some, their story appeared too fantastic, simply too unbelievable.

Presently, possessing the knowledge of the history of the Belzec death camp based on the testimony of Jozef Ruber, the only witness who survived the camp, we realize that such an escape could have taken place only in the beginning when appropriate security measures had not yet been introduced.

The event of the escape itself and what these women had related, was kept in great secrecy; only the nearest relatives and the most trusted friends were informed.

At the same time Kulikowiec, a baker by profession, the "Aryan" who had been dispatched by Bernard Tempelsman, returns to Zolkiew and offers the following account: a side-track was built from the station in Belzec surrounded by thick barbed wire and leading into the woods which were also surrounded by a thick barbed wire fence. The moment a transport of Jews enters the railway station in Belzec, the Polish engine-driver gets off and a German driver takes his place and steers the train along the side-track into the forest. Desperate screams and shrieks can be heard for some time, then they subside until finally they cease completely and the train comes back without people, only with their clothing. Smoke rises over the camp.

Similar news was imparted in the letters of two Jewish women who worked in the vicinity of Lubycza Krolewska, not far from the Belzec camp grounds. In a letter to one of the residents of Zolkiew, Mojzesz Silber, the women wrote as follows: "We are going through horrible days here. We can hear with our own ears the moans and screams of our brothers, murdered on the camp grounds. In order to drown out the groans of the murdered victims, even before the train enters the compound, a machine is turned on whose rumble steadily increases and mixed with the moans of the dying, muffles them. We are writing all this because we want to acquaint you with the reality of the Belzec camp 15).

V

SOCIAL AND MEDICAL AID

From the moment the Jewish Council of Zolkiew (Judenrat) was organized, there was a social care (welfare) division. Its function was to bring assistance to those among the Jews who were destitute, the orphans, the elderly, the invalids, etc.

The welfare division drew its income (resources) from the dues paid by the Jewish population directly to the Judenrat (something like a Kahal tax), from the dues initially paid by Jews exempted from labor (craftsmen operating unofficial workshops), from payments for bread ration-cards, and finally, as long as the ghetto existed, from postage payments.

The assistance offered by the welfare division took the form of small financial grants, meagre food allowances, free food ration-cards, free medical consultation and medication, servings of soup at noon, and from time to time extra portions of bread for those who went to work regularly.

Apart from that, there was also a sanitary committee whose purpose was to monitor the sanitary conditions in the homes of the Jewish quarter, to prevent the spread of epidemic diseases, to offer medical assistance, etc.

With time, new circumstances led to a strict coordination of these two branches of social care. Zolkiew, as we know, lies on the Lwow - Rawa Ruska line which leads to Belzec. When the horrifying news of the Belzec death camp began to filter through, that Jews are being burned alive, electrocuted, poisoned in gas chambers, many Jews who were already in the freight cars decide to save themselves at all cost. Some jumped out of the speeding train, either through the small grated window or by knocking down the boards in the sealed doors, walls or in the floor of the freight car. Many (of them) perished under the wheels of the train, others dies as a result of bodily injuries suffered while jumping out, but most of the casualties are caused by gunfire: the train guards,

gestapo or "szupo", were shooting from the sentry-box (cab) at those who jumped. The "jumpers" who managed to survive were in need of special care; (they had) to be hidden within the city from the German police and the Ukrainian militiamen who promptly executed any Jew who could not prove that he was a town resident - the wounded had to be transported into town where they could receive medical assistance, clothing and a hot meal. After putting them on the mend, a return to their home-towns was facilitated.

It should be emphasized that the Jewish population of Zolkiew showed a lot of heart in helping these "jumpers". The feeling prevalent among the Jews at that time is described in the diary of Klara Szwarc who at that point was in hiding somewhere in Zolkiew:

"Summer of 1942. Fear and panic in the city. Jews are digging shelters, i.e. all sorts of underground cellars, others seek refuge with the "aryans", still others wring their hands over the loss of loved ones. Daily transports of Jews passing through the Zolkiew station on their way to Belzec are the reason for this. They ship several thousand of them at a time in dozens of sealed freight cars, 100-150 in each car. The Belzec area is densely wooded and that's where they kill these people. How they are killed, we don't know. Some say they're gassed, others maintain they're electrocuted, burnt or shot. Only one thing is certain, no one comes back".

Repeated gunfire was heard almost daily along the tracks outside the city. The train carrying those unfortunate victims off to Belzec passed by like a terrifying phantom. Everyone was seized with compassion and with fear. People started speculating about the point of departure of individual transports. Not long after a train passed by, news would come that there are wounded "jumpers" on the tracks. At that point a medical brigade, given unofficial permission by the German police commandant who had been suitably "won over", walked along the tracks with stretchers and carried the wounded back to the Jewish quarter. There they were given medical

aid, and depending on their condition were sent for further treatment: those with light wounds would go to private homes, those who were seriously wounded went to the hospital.

There was no special Jewish hospital in Zolkiew during the occupation. Thanks to the "good" relations between the Judenrat and the German Police commandant, and the lavish gifts offered at every juncture, the German authorities did not react during the first period of resettlement to the admission of wounded "jumpers" to the municipal hospital, even though this was officially prohibited. The non-Jewish doctors who practiced there accepted and assisted Jews willingly because they received remuneration from the Judenrat for the treatment and surgery.

In the second part of 1942 the German authorities no longer admitted Jews for treatment in the hospital and the effort to bring assistance to these victims was greatly hampered, particularly after the German gendarmerie prohibited helping the "jumpers"; the gendarmes would make their way to where the wounded were lying and kill them.

At this juncture it will be useful to quote an excerpt from the testimony of Hieronim Majzlisz born in Lwow in 1934, presently in an orphanage, who jumped out of a transport heading for Belzec in November of 1942, outside of Zolkiew:

"...People had tools with which they cut the grating in the window. Many jumped out. My mommy also jumped out of the speeding train and injured her leg. I jumped out after her, hit my head and hurt myself badly. Granny was very pious and she didn't want to save herself, she said that if her fate is to die, she wants to die with other Jews. My mommy escaped to the ghetto in Lwow. I lay unconscious among the bodies of those who had been unlucky in jumping from the train. OD-men 16) who removed the bodies lying along the tracks took me to Zolkiew where I remained for two weeks. I don't know what was going on because during the two weeks I had flashes of consciousness only twice. My mommy found out that I was in Zolkiew and she managed to bring me to Lwow, to the ghetto" 17)

Despite difficult conditions the Medical Brigade willingly

fulfilled its duty while often risking (its members') lives.

The Medical Committee consisted of Dr. Henryk Wachs - doctor; Pepka Fisz - professional nurse; their associates included Dr. Izrael Kiken - former school inspector, well-known pedagogue, collaborator of many pre-war pedagogical journals; Cwi Unger - director of the "Tarbut" school; Idek Bendel - attorney and civil servant; Jakub Strom - a teacher; Dr. Jakub Rittel - a teacher; Altin Mozes - an industrialist, Fiszel Sochaczewski - a teacher, and Gerszon Taffet - a teacher.

Pepka Fisz deserves special commendation for the assistance she gave to the wounded and the sick; in her work she showed great heart and displayed unselfish commitment.

Three girls showed great devotion in their work with the Medical Brigade and particularly with Pepka Fisz: Klara Letzter, Mundzia Degen, and Klara Szwarc. Only the last of the above-mentioned is alive today and in her diary she writes as follows: "Nurse Pepka Fisz has a heart of gold. The girls help her (as I do). I go with her to dress the wounds, I collect clothing, food, the Judenrat gives a little money. The town helps as much as it can (the Jewish population). I spend most of the day away from home, in the hospital or in town".

Some Jews rounded up in several different "operations" jumped out of the trains taking them to Belzec more than once. Thanks to the work of the Medical Committee many wounded and disabled persons returned to health. Snatched once from the jaws of death, they unfortunately lost their lives in subsequent "operations" or in death camps.

The Medical Committee had a particularly heavy workload after the November "operation" when an epidemic of spotted fever spread at an alarming rate. As I mentioned earlier, there was no Jewish hospital in Zolkiew. Only during the rapid growth of the epidemic did a temporary/provisional Jewish hospital open on Turyniecka street. The purpose of this hospital was to combat the typhus epidemic spreading among the Jewish population. The hospital was located in two houses, one of which was in a secluded spot even

beyond the area of the ghetto; it had 6-7 lavatories, and almost no beds, bedclothes or basic facilities. Because the epidemic reached enormous proportions it was simply impossible to put all the sick in the hospital. Thus the fight against the epidemic did not yield satisfactory results.

VI

EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

Jews, for centuries referred to as "Am hasejfer" 18), did not forget, even during the most difficult times, about the young people and about the need to educate them at any cost.

Attending public schools was of course prohibited. The creation of an educational system for Jewish children by the Judenrat was out of the question, yet the youth was very eager to study. There were many instances of children turning to us, their former teachers, with questions about the possibility of studying again. This premise gave rise to a project for organizing clandestine classes in groups of 6-8; the number of qualified, professional teachers reached 30 in 1940-41. Seeing that the parents' goal was to combine the normal program, compulsory in schools with Polish-language instruction, with instruction in Judaic subjects, it was necessary to construct the curriculum in such a way that it would encompass both comprehensive and Judaic subjects. Two groups of teachers were organized which matched sets of children representing a comparable level of knowledge; each group tutored 5-6 such sets. Dr. Izrael Kiken, Cwi Unger and Gerszon Taffet were the teachers in the first group, the second was comprised of prof. Jakub Strom, Pola Strom and Fiszel Sochaczewski. The work schedule was put together in accordance with the school (lesson) system; the teachers rotated every hour in conformity with the subjects taught. There were serious obstacles; the teaching had to be done in various places, mostly in private homes.

Aside from these study groups for older children where some degree of specialization was possible, there were also other groups of children who got their education from individual teachers. One should mention those who were the most active in this field: prof. Berta Friedman, Sabina Knopf, Chana Szelles, Janka Szapiro-Mandel, Lusja Kiken (preschool), and others.

We must add that it is to the Jewish youngsters' credit that they were serious, eager to learn, tolerant of all the unintentional shortcomings and deficiencies in work. They understood and appreciated the effort made by their parents and teachers for the sake of their education; that is why they did not waste any time, fully aware that the following day they might be deprived of any freedom of movement.

A profound understanding of the situation contributed to the fact that smiles disappeared from the faces of even the smallest Jewish children. Hunger, cold, poverty, moral and physical suffering, the cares of everyday life, distressing (Job-ian) news and the fear of losing loved ones all left an indelible mark on the disposition, way of thinking and behavior of Jewish youngsters. In an effort to give the children at least a moment of forgetfulness, some teachers (fem.) organized semi-public entertainment for the kids, particularly in younger groups. Recitation, singing, rhythmic dancing, games and amusement released the Jewish children from the grip of a depressing reality and carried them off into a world of fantasy and carefree childhood, even if only for a moment. These shows played a very important role in keeping up the spirit of the Jewish youth. Three teachers: Friedman, Knopf and Szelles made a particularly significant contribution to the organization of such activities.

Despite the persecution and the harassment by the Germans, despite the burning and profanation of the synagogue and houses of worship, religious Jews assemble in private homes for prayer. There were many such "Minjani". Saturdays and Sundays drew the largest crowds. On those days the services commenced in the early hours of the morning so that they could be concluded before it was time to go to work. On holidays the prayers often had to be split up: "Szachrit", the morning prayer - in the morning, and "Musaf", the supplementary prayer - after work in the late afternoon.

During the existence of the closed ghetto, i.e. from December 1942, the Judenrat was the only place where Jews could receive any kind of information concerning the region, and [get] news of

international politics. Every evening avid newspaper and magazine readers would gather there and willingly discuss what they had just read; people who had contact with the outside world would also come over. Szyja Tempelsman who had access to a radio and listened to the forbidden broadcasts from London and Moscow showed up, too. (Others also dropped in). Each piece of news from the front was widely discussed and debated. Jews perceived their salvation in every [new development]. They wove dreams of freedom from every glimmer of hope; they believed that fascism would collapse, that law and order would be restored, and that the remnants of the martyred Jewish nation would get their own country to which they will return to begin a new life. Back in their homes, they shared the obtained information with their closest neighbors; this way words of comfort reached even the most remote parts of the ghetto.

VII

ECONOMIC LIFE

As a result of the extermination policy of the Germans, Jews were forbidden to operate stores and workshops, and (were not allowed) to practice the learned professions. In order to survive, Jews were forced to live off accumulated cash savings and when those were exhausted (relatively quickly - due to inflation) they had to resort to the selling and trading of household goods, garments, bedding, valuables, etc. The process of discarding personal property (movables) in order to satisfy one's everyday needs advanced at a rapid pace particularly among the intelligentsia. Bartering became extremely popular. The villagers were more satisfied with this form of trade because they were able to come in possession of sheets and blankets, clothing and other valuable things.

A villager with a chunk of butter, some flour or other products in his basket, went from house to house, demanded from the Jews the most valuable items of clothing, undergarments or bedsheets in return, and got what he wanted. Other elements also favored the peasants: German decrees limiting the hours during which Jews were allowed to shop in the market, harassment by the Ukrainian police during shopping, and the fear of beatings, abuses and roundups for labor. On account of this, many Jews preferred to limit their consumption (of food) to a minimum and pay the higher prices for food products, rather than go the market.

Resourceful, venturesome Jews who had acquaintances among the villagers, now face a golden opportunity: they engage in illicit trade (contraband). Risking their lives, Jews import various food products, initially into the city in general, later into the ghetto. They charge a lot of money, however, since they have to earn enough not only for their own needs, but also to buy gifts and bribe the German and Ukrainian police, and the volksdeutschen. The latter were often on the lookout for smugglers, particularly the

infamous Kriegel who extorted great sums of money from them.

Generally speaking the smugglers made a lot of money, but at the same time the Jewish consumer had to pay inordinate prices and was forced to get rid of his cash and property very quickly.

The spectre of destitution and hunger visited Jewish homes more and more often. The period between the spring and fall of 1942 was especially hard. Cases of people fainting and even dying of hunger in the streets of the Jewish quarter were not infrequent. The impoverished Jewish population lived on potato peelings and glop. The soup kitchen run by the Judenrat enjoyed an ever greater attendance. People with faces swollen from hunger, particularly under the eyes, were often seen barely dragging their swollen legs. The mortality rate among the Jewish population rose sharply during this period. Each day several or even more than a dozen people died of malnutrition and hunger. The prices (for food) kept climbing every day. A kilogram of potatoes cost 8 zloty then, and a Jewish laborer working for the Germans earned barely more than 1 zloty for a day's work.

VIII

THE SECOND OPERATION - NOVEMBER

In the summer of 1942 transports of Jews taken to the death camp in Belzec passed through Zolkiew almost every day. These transports were a result of the "operations" in various cities, particularly the so-called August "operation" in Lwow which lasted a long time and took a very heavy toll in human life - tens of thousands of people died.

Usually the Germans launched their "operations" on weekdays, and not on Sundays, so the Jews breathed easier when Sunday was approaching, convinced that at least on that one day there would be peace. But because the Germans were trying to bring about destruction at the smallest possible cost to themselves and to use the method of surprise, in Zolkiew they employed a surprise tactic on Sunday November 22, 1942. The "operation" began on that day at dawn (5 o'clock). The Gestapo, the "Szupo" and the Ukrainian militia surrounded the streets inhabited by the Jews. They were in combat gear, wore helmets, were armed with guns and grenades, and wielded axes to smash down gates, doors and shelters. Having no confidence in the Zolkiew ordners (Jewish militia), the Germans bring in the Lwow ordners who assist in the "operation". In two days - Sunday, November 22, and Monday, November 23 - 2500 Jews are captured and assembled under the open sky inside the Zolkiew castle courtyard. For two days the Jews sat there in the cold, with no food. The Germans forbid any movement. Whoever stood up was led away from the ranks and shot 19). On Monday, November 23, around noon, the freight cars were prepared at the station. The Jews were formed in fours, surrounded by a cordon of the SS, szupo, and the Ukrainian militia, and amidst merciless floggings and beatings they were rushed to the train station. Once there, they had to quickly jump into the cars or risk a savage lashing by the Germans, administered to those who tarried. After the Jews were loaded into the freight cars, the doors and windows of the cars were tightly

bound with barbed wire.

Several dozen shot or strangled victims were left in the castle courtyard where the Jews had been assembled.

On the same day, at midnight, the train left the station and headed for Belzec. Now the feverish work began on making holes in the doors, windows, floors or roofs of the car through which one could jump out. This was done with the help of previously prepared tools. One should mention that many Jews never parted with a specially developed set of tools in case of an unexpected "resettlement". Heading for the shelters and bunkers Jews took these tools with them (in order to avoid resettlement, Jews built such shelters for themselves making use of basements, cellars, attics, digging underground passages, etc - the better constructed shelters were referred to as bunkers). The sets (of tools) consisted of a small, pocket-size steel saw for cutting wood and possibly metal, wire-cutters, a wrench for loosening screws, etc. These tools were to be used in cutting the boards in the walls, in the doors and in the floors, and for cutting the wire around the doors and windows of the cars. Others used more primitive appliances: knives, hatchets, iron bars, small crow-bars and anything they could lay their hands on. Often several units worked in each car; one group would cut holes in the floor, another in the walls, etc. Sometimes it would happen that one group of people jumped out of a car through the window while others jumped through the door.

In my car 20) no one had any tools. In spite of that people did not lose their cool and decided to get out at any cost. As the Polish railwayman was fastening the doors and windows with wire, he was offered a 1000 zloty to accidentally leave the iron bar he was using on the window of the car. The railway man agreed and when the Germans were not looking, he threw it into the car through the window. Making use of this bar we first removed the barbed wire around the window, and people began to jump out. It turned out that this opening was insufficient for the number of people in the car. So a board in the doors of the car was smashed and crawling on our

stomachs we got out onto the steps of the car and jumped off (provided, of course, that one didn't get hit with a bullet from a Gestapo guard in the cab). Gunfire could be heard throughout the entire journey; guards were shooting at the leaping Jews. Hundreds of dead and wounded lay along the tracks. In and around Zolkiew alone about 800 Jews were killed during this "operation" (including the "jumpers"). These victims were carted off and buried in the Jewish cemetery in Zolkiew.

A "certain segment" of the local population walked along the tracks carrying the train with Jews - hyenas in human garb who searched the killed and wounded and pulled even the most paltry garment off the still warm bodies. Those with heavy wounds died in terrible pain: from their wounds, from the loss of blood, from hunger and cold, and those who made it to the next day were shot by the militiamen patrolling the railway tracks. Many of those who had more luck jumping out do not reach their destinies even if they survive the jump itself. On their way back, most get caught by the Germans or the Ukrainian militia and are shot on the spot. Only a handful of Jews return home, stripped bare by the various outcasts of society who lie in wait for them in their misery 21).

After the resettling of the Jews, irrespective of the theft and plunder perpetrated by the dregs of society, the Germans confiscate all the possessions of the evacuees, with considerable assistance from the volksdeutschen.

The young Zolkiew volksdeutschen: Tilzer, Kriegel, Ptasznik, Schlichtling, Daks, Siemaszkiewicz and Zarzycki play a shameful role in these "operations". It is they who lead the Jews out of the bunkers, shelters and hand them over to the German authorities. Ptasznik specialized in the plundering of property left behind by the evacuated Jews.

Quite apart from this or that instance of behavior of certain individuals, there was no shortage of noble people among the non-Jewish population who were deeply committed to helping the persecuted and exterminated Jews. I am thinking of those who risked their own lives by concealing Jews in their homes.

Among those we should first of all mention Mrs. St. P. (a Pole) who unselfishly and with great personal sacrifice hid 5 Jews in her home and in doing so saved their lives, and the Becks - Julia and Walenty together with their daughter Aleksandra - who showed equal commitment in saving the lives of the 18 Jews they were concealing (in their home).

Izydor Hecht offers the following comments on his benefactor Mrs. St. P. in his diary:

"June 4, 1943. There is a look of madness in each of us now and we complain about our hearts. Are we going to make it? In addition to that we are not only risking our own lives but also the lives of these good people who want to help us with all their heart..."

"...December 23, 1943. Posters have appeared in town which list individuals who have been executed for belonging to secret organizations or for hiding Jews. When St. P. came back, she told me this and my hair stood on end from horror. Why should these good people die? I even wondered whether it would not be better if we did away with ourselves and finally released them from this nightmare. The end of our suffering and theirs is nowhere in sight..."

"...After all, this is not just about us, this is about our benefactors. They also risk their lives with their high-mindedness. I never really thought of myself even for a moment. I was thinking only of St. P. She has renounced life and is making these sacrifices, but why? It breaks my heart to look at her: the poor thing has faded, she has (completely) neglected herself, her health has deteriorated; she is at the end of her tether. This war should come to an end, even if only for her sake. I was prepared to take my own life if we were found and I couldn't get away. I have a sufficient dose

of morphine, but she? Why should she suffer?"

And here are the facts offered by Klara Szwarc as testimony of the noble deeds of Mr. Beck and his family:

"Sunday, April 18, 1943. Lying by the open window in the basement, I suddenly smelled something burning. Before I had a chance to reflect on where the smell was coming from, we were told that the fire is in our street. A moment later, the neighbors' house was burning together with the factory which was three meters away. And there was a very strong wind. We all got scared and we started to get dressed. Some favor running away, others prefer to go underground to the shelter and would rather suffocate than be killed by the gestapo; leaving the house was certain death. After all, it is impossible for 17 people to walk out (of the house) unnoticed, with crowds gathered outside. I was among those who opted for locking ourselves in the shelter and relying on luck. I take the children and we go down to shelter with my mother. We seal the opening very tightly so that the smoke doesn't get through, and we sit. Secretly, we envy the apothecary (who is hiding with us) who has some poison with him and he will at least be able to cut short his suffering.

In the meantime, my sister Mania runs up for a moment and when she sees the fury of the flames and notices that the doors and windows of our house are beginning to burn, she screams to our father: "Daddy, I am going" - and she runs out.

I don't know by what miracle our house survived, maybe the crying of children reached the throne of the Almighty. But God afflicted us (with grief). Mania was caught near a convent. She was walking there, she probably wanted to get to some of her "aryan" acquaintances. Well, it suffices to say that she ran into Schichtling, a volksdeutsch who took her to the gendarmerie. Mania, knowing what awaits her, said to engineer Kincler whom she ran into: "tell my family, when they

come back, what happened to me".

...No words can describe our grief. Daddy almost lost his mind. But there was no time to grieve. A new and grave danger confronted us again. The neighbors saw Mania running out of Beck's house. They informed the gendarmerie. Fortunately, an acquaintance of Mr. Beck who had some influence in the gendarmerie found out about this in time and pointed the accusation at our neighbor, a certain Stefaniuk (a Russian). Of course they found it much easier to believe that a Russian and not Mr. Beck was harboring a Jewess, and they went to search that house. During the search Stefaniuk, in Mr. Beck's presence, said: "I have witnesses that the Jewess walked out of his house" - pointing at Beck. Not having found anything, the gendarmes left and announced that a thorough search and an investigation would be conducted in this matter. That evening Beck told us that he expects a search and that we should all leave his house. Where should we go? Maybe straight to the gendarmerie.

On top of it all the night was dreadful. A strong wind was raging, you would not want to let a dog out in such weather, and we even had two small children. This night was one of the most horrible we ever experienced. We couldn't blame Mr. Beck for not wanting to keep us (any longer). We have been sentenced to death anyway, but he doesn't have to die for us - he is a free man. Once again, as always in the most critical moments, this man's extraordinary character was responsible for our salvation. After a conversation with Mrs. Melman, Mr. Beck was so moved that he said: "go to sleep, whatever will be, will be". The following day Mrs. Beck was summoned to the Kriminalpolizei for an interrogation. They told her that Mania had confessed she was a maid in her house. Mrs. Beck denied this and called two German gendarmes who came to her house every evening as witnesses. The matter was laid to rest.

Sunday, April 11, 1943. Zygyus and Zosia, the children of

aunt Ucka, came today (the boy is 7, the girl 4). They knocked on the door and said that Dudiu (the uncle) sent them here because auntie Salcia and mommy are here. Mr. Beck let them in the house, led them upstairs to the attic and came down himself to talk to us. I will always remember that day. All those present began to express doubt about taking a 4-year old child into the shelter. Some were indignant at Dudiu for sending little children here and telling them where their aunt is, knowing (full well) that he could bring about the death of 15 people. Indeed, it must be a miracle. In broad daylight, at 10 o'clock in the morning, two Jewish children walk down a street on which they have lived since birth and where everybody knows them, and no one stops them. If someone had stopped them and asked where they were going, they would surely have spilled the beans. Maybe they were born under a lucky star and are meant to live (survive). Mr. Beck put an end to this reflection and speculation and in his noble-mindedness declared: "come what may, let the children come down to the shelter". Oh! For that one act alone God should reward this man".

*

*

*

The following excerpts from the diary of Klara Szwarc portray some episodes from the November "operation":

"5 in the morning. We are still lying in bed, only Patrontasch is out reconnoitring as usual. After a while he comes back and tells us to get ready because two gestapo and

Jewish militia (the Lwow ordners) cars have gone towards the market square. He goes out again and comes back quickly. "An Operation!" He saw people being led from the toll-gate, shots could be heard. Gestapo men are running under the windows. There is no time to run to the oil mill, only Mister Melman rushes out through the courtyard to warn the neighbors (the Brytwics). When Melman darts in, they are eating breakfast completely oblivious to what is going on. They barely managed to open the shelter when the gestapo banged on the front door. Melman flees out the back door and Brytwic blocks the door with (his own body). He held on until the shelter was locked, and then he let go and ran off to divert the gestapo man. The latter ran after him. We found out about all this from Brytwic himself when he returned to Zolkiew after jumping off the train. In the meantime my parents, my sister and I, Melman with his wife and child all go down to the shelter located under the floor. We sit in the dark for two days, the candle doesn't want to burn for lack of air, (physiological needs are taken care of down there). On the second day Mundek Patrontasch and Melman take the chance and go out to see what is going on. After a few minutes which to us seem like an eternity, they return. The operation is still being conducted. At that very moment Lockman (one of our neighbors) was shot trying to escape. We sat through another night. We in the shelter, Patrontasch at the vantage point - a small window under the floor. Early in the morning Lajbek, Patrontasch's brother who was an ordner, walked by this opening. Patrontasch called him and found out that the "operation" was over and that the train for Belzec is leaving. We sit (down there) for another hour, just to be safe, and then we get out".

Klara Szwarc offers this description of what the city looked like right after the "operation":

"Devastation, tears and grief in the city. Cart-loads of bodies of those they shot on the spot are being brought in; some (were killed) for trying to escape, others for daring to get up for a moment in defiance of the gestapo order to sit (still) in the castle courtyard; they are also carting off the bodies of those who died after jumping off the train, who froze or starved to death, or who were given away by the local peasants".

IX

THE GHETTO

After resettling most of the Jews in November 1942, a closed ghetto is created in Zolkiew in the first days of December 1942; it incorporates the Sobieski, Perec, Rajcha, Snycerska streets together with Plac Dominikanski (on the left side), and Turyniecka street (on the right side).

Aside from the Zolkiew Jews, Jews from the nearby towns such as Kulikow and Mosty Wielkie are also crammed into this ghetto. Jews are brought into the ghetto under the escort of the German gendarmerie. During the resettlement from Mosty to Zolkiew several Jews are shot on the way, allegedly for attempting to escape. For lack of room, these Jews are put in the demolished temples "Belzer-Klaus" and "Zydaczower-Klaus". Several dozen men and women are placed in three rooms, utilizing every centimeter of free space on the floor. The ghetto is fenced in by barbed wire. Jews are not allowed to leave the confines of the ghetto unless they have special permission (to do so). The ghetto gate is permanently guarded by a Jewish militiaman. A Jew captured outside the boundaries of the ghetto is shot on the spot. To what extent this "law" is heeded can be illustrated by the following fact: on a certain Sunday at noon, when people were leaving the nearby Catholic and Orthodox churches, a Jewish boy noticed a woman who was selling something from her basket close to the ghetto. So he ran over to her, but unfortunately at that very moment a German policeman appeared, Heisler, a volksdeutsch from Upper Silesia, and grabbed the boy by the arm, dragged him to the ghetto fence and pulled out his revolver to shoot the "criminal". The boy burst into tears, began to plead with the policeman and kissed his hands, but the policeman was implacable; when the revolver jammed, he jerked at it until the gun fired. The boy fell, bloodied.

As a result of the cramped conditions (8 or more people per room), and an awful sanitary environment, an epidemic of spotted

fever spreads with alarming speed and reaps its harvest in full, consuming 10-15, and sometimes even 20 victims a day. This epidemic brought terrible devastation, particularly to young people. There was hardly a single home where there were no victims. Jewish gravediggers could not keep up in preparing graves, especially during the winter when the earth was frozen. Many a time the dead were buried by moonlight; there were so many bodies that they couldn't bury them all during the day.

It is not easy to forget the terrible scene in the house of Chana Szelles, a teacher. Her mother and husband died of spotted fever on the same day. Before they breathed their last, she kept running between the two beds and kissing her loved ones begged them to take her with them, or at least to infect her with this terrible disease so that she could die right after them. But it was not to be; she did not die of what was considered to be the death of choice. Unfortunately she was to experience a lot of grief before she was killed by the German butchers.

Seeing the abundant harvest of the typhus epidemic, SS Sturmfuhrer Pappe whose headquarters were in Zolkiew, declares with satisfaction: "die Juden krepieren jetzt selbst" 22).

In February 1943 the epidemic abated slightly. On the other hand ominous news of "Judenfrei" liquidation operations began to filter through; the remnants of the Jewish population in a given city were being killed or shipped to death camps. Rawa Ruska (30 kilometers from Zolkiew) is one of the towns which was made "Judenfrei" relatively early. There, the ghetto was liquidated in the second part of December 1942. The SS-man Grzymek was in charge (of this liquidation); he later became the lord and master of the Lwow "Julag" and conducted the liquidation operation in the Lwow ghetto in June 1943. Many Jews now begin to seriously reflect on how to survive. Some seek salvation in building safe shelters, others try to establish contact with non-Jewish friends beyond the confines of the ghetto who could and would be willing to help them; either by concealing them in basements, attics and other suitable quarters, or by helping them obtain "aryan papers", especially for

those who looked "right". Certain individuals secretly disappear - some (go) to the prearranged hiding places in aryan homes, others leave town carrying "aryan papers" and head for the unknown, left to their fate.

The threat of total extermination hangs over the Jews everywhere, but unfortunately for the majority of the Jews there is no hope for survival. The pious waited for a miracle, but no miracle came.

Below is a quote from the diary of Izydor Hecht who was hiding in Zolkiew; from these excerpts one can tell how and in what circumstances the underground shelter was built and inhabited. These passages contain a large dose of very grim humor, the humor of a desperado who does not lose hope and believes in the victory of truth over falsehood.

Here is the excerpt which includes the peculiar "origin" of the shelter - "palace":

"The Germans began to deliver us Jews first from property (contributions), then from freedom (ghetto), and finally from life ("operations"). We are grateful to them for all these "acts of kindness", but they have one flaw: they take place too quickly one after the other. I would allow myself to be liberated from life, for example in about 40-50 years; I am in no hurry, but they insist on doing this before the end of the war. Due to a difference of opinion between the Germans and myself, and power is on their side, I have decided to hide for a while and make it more difficult for them to carry out their plans. As a few of my fellow tribesmen thought the same way I did, we reached an agreement with Blumenfeld and with the approval of some good people, we built this shelter of ours".

Here is the description of the shelter:

"March 25, 1943. We are sitting in the shelter. There are four of us and we are waiting for better times and for... Filip M., the fifth tenant of our small "palace". This "palace" is a part of an apartment block inhabited by diverse creatures.

We - the people, no, I am sorry - the Jews, dwell in the basement, the ground floor is occupied by two pigs which cost 700 zloty. There is a rooster there, too. The first floor is taken by rabbits, of which also there are four. Above us is the last lavatory, an attic. Aside from that, we have a cow next door. That's more or less the layout of our "palace" - 2 X 2 meters. All of us, i.e. Jews, chickens, pigs, rabbits and the cow, are taken care of by the higher beings, i.e. people - "aryans".

In the meantime, the German authorities try to put the Jewish population's vigilance to sleep by spreading news that Zolkiew is being turned into a city of labor; all the Jews fit for work are to be employed in businesses working for the army. That means they will (all) get the "W" (Wehrmacht) and "R" (Rustung) patches and this way their lives will not be in any danger. In order to transform the city into such a work center, the German authorities demanded that the number of ordners be increased from 18 to 50 by March 15, 1943 - so that the organization of labor is better supervised.

According to the Germans, a review of the workers - men fit for work - was to take place on that very day, March 15. The following fact can illustrate the extent of the local German authorities' perfidy: barely a couple of days before the designated time, test rallies were conducted at the Germans' insistence which were supposed to demonstrate the proficiency and good appearance of the Jewish workers. The chief of the German gendarmerie, Kather, even attended one of these rehearsals.

A committee consisting of members of the Lwow SS was to arrive for the inspection and to hand out the "W" and "R" patches. In its naivety, the Judenrat tried to make the workers look their best on that day. The newly appointed ordners helped to keep order in the rallying square for the first time. Around 10 o'clock the chief of the gendarmerie, Kather, came to the ghetto and stated that the committee had arrived and wanted the inspection to take place on

the "Sokol" sports field. Everybody went to the sports field in silence, sensing that something was afoot. Particularly the women sensed the imminent danger and began to lament as the men marched away.

On the "Sokol" field everybody formed a square. Slowly the German gendarmerie and the Ukrainian militia began to move in from all sides and surround the field in what was at first a discrete circle that kept tightening. It then became clear to all that this was just an insidious ruse on the part of the Germans, and that the time had come. Everyone was only wondering what the "method of annihilation" would be, and whether death would be preceded by drawn-out suffering.

At about 11:00 a limousine drove onto the sports field and out of it emerged the butchers of the Janowski camp in Lwow: Wilhaus, Kolanko, Heinisch, Siller, Brombauer, with SS general Katzmann at the head. Wilhaus, the Janowski camp chief, seeing that the victims prepared for his death factory are standing in perfect order, directs the columns to march towards the gate. The trucks were ready, the SS and the askarzy 23) were waiting at the gate. Cruel beatings and floggings were used to rush the Jews into the trucks. Members of the Judenrat, the Jewish militia, and craftsmen who were vouched for by individual German businesses, were the only ones who remained on the "Sokol" field. They were told to form a line, two deep. Kather, the German gendarmerie chief, must have concluded that too many Jewish men had been left behind. Consequently, he tells Wilhaus that most of the militiamen are newly conscripted and their proper mission - assisting in the organization of this rally - was over. Wilhaus walks up to the line of Jews and issues the order: "alle neue Ordner heraustreten" 24). Once they stepped out, he announced: "Sie fahren mit" 25), and they were hustled onto the trucks. For the price of watches, money and other valuables, the Jews find out that they are going to the Janowski camp in Lwow. Looking to fill their pockets at this opportunity, the askarzy promise the Jews good treatment during work, and extra portions of bread and other food products every day, provided that the Jews

give them all their money and valuables which, as the askarzy insist, they would have to surrender immediately after entering the camp whilst being searched. Taking advantage of the Jews' sympathy towards the Russians, they add: "better give it to us than to your murderers - the Germans". On that day 618 men 26) were shipped to the Janowski camp in Lwow.

The convoy of trucks carrying us to the camp was closely guarded by the askarzy and the SS who were driving in the back with their machine guns ready to fire in case any of us attempted to escape. At about 3:00 in the afternoon the transport entered the Janowski camp in Lwow. Once in the courtyard, everyone was told to get off the trucks and to assemble in one place. Before sunset they aligned everybody in front of the camp's administrative building where each person had to hand over all possessions, including papers. The SS were present at this "ceremony" and beat the Jews mercilessly. A certain SS-man, a cripple missing an arm and a leg, demonstrated exceptional zeal; he brutally beat each person who approached the table, and screamed: "Jetzt werden Sie sich bekennen mit unserem Erholungshaus"! "Verfluchte Juden, ihr seid das dummste Volk in der Welt" 27).

After a thorough search of each individual the transport is placed in the isolated barracks No.1 where we spend the first night. Even before we entered the barracks Pinchas Liberman was shot by Heinisch, the infamous sadist, because one of the camp guards was missing a cap. Liberman was selected as a victim for exemplary punishment.

The Zolkiew transport is assigned to several brigades. A substantial number of Zolkiew Jews were sent to Grodek Jagiellonski where an affiliate of the Janowski camp was established at that time to work on the construction of roads - Strassenbau. This affiliate was under the command of the SS-man Kolanko from Raciborz in Silesia. A portion of the Zolkiew Jews is incorporated into the camp brigades which work in and around the camp courtyard. The fate of the members of these brigades was lamentable; they worked under the constant watch of the SS.

Wilhaus, the camp chief, often visited them as he was walking or riding by (on a horse). They had no contact with the outside world and so they could neither get nor buy any bread; they were condemned to die of starvation.

The initial period of the Zolkiew Jews' presence in the camp coincides with the shooting of an SS-man by a Jew in the "Czwartak" in Lwow. Enraged and appropriately incited, the SS descend on the camp and begin to murder left and right. Among the 200 Jews who were killed that day on the Janowski camp grounds a significant number were Zolkiew Jews.

The Janowski camp in Lwow also absorbed the Zolkiew Jews who were at the labor camp in Mosty Wielkie, not far from Zolkiew. This was the "Beute-u. Sammelstelle" camp run by the Wehrmacht under the command of Oberleutnant Krupp from Austria. Krupp treated the Jews relatively well and that is why such a large number of Zolkiew Jews, wishing to avoid the fate of those who were resettled or taken to the Janowski camp in Lwow, "volunteer" to go there. With time, conditions in the camp deteriorate considerably as it falls under the jurisdiction of the SS. On several occasions operations were conducted inside the camp during which a portion of the laborers died, and on May 10, 1943, the camp was finally closed down. The laborers who remained alive (mostly women) are executed on the spot, only a tiny group of men and a certain young girl, Amalia Freund, are brought to the Janowski camp in Lwow. Soon thereafter these Jews die of exhaustion during various camp operations.

Because there was a substantial number of Zolkiew Jews in the camp in Mosty Wielkie whose fate is of the utmost concern to us at this point, I will quote an excerpt from the diary of Klara Szwarc (dealing with) one of the last "operations" conducted within that camp:

"On April 6 Artek, Patrontasch's brother, arrives from the camp in Mosty and relates the operation in Mosty Wielkie. Hilderbrandt (a very important personage in the gestapo) shows

up for the morning roll-call and orders the roll-call to be conducted with the women first. At the same time, the gestapo marches off to the men's camp and surrounds it. It was immediately understood that this was an "operation" and some people began to run away. Majer (the diary author's uncle - G.T.) also ran away but was shot just beyond the fence. Then they brought in the women. They paraded them in front of the lined up men. Not a few saw their wives led to their deaths, but nothing could be done with the gestapo breathing down your neck. Finally Gicia was marched by (the diary author's aunt - G.T.). Seeing her, Artek tried to hide (he was grieved by his helplessness and the inability to help her) but she spotted him and cried (out to him). He had no choice but to step out of the ranks. The women marched on and Artek, Gicia and a gestapo man were the only ones left standing in the middle. Gicia embraced Artek and began kissing him and saying goodbye, and she asked him to greet her loved ones. She cried a lot and said that there was nothing left to live for anyway; she had already seen Majer (her husband) killed. She just wants Artek to avenge (their deaths). They stood like this for about 15 minutes until the gestapo man said "genug". Then the German told her to take off her coat (he liked it). After Gicia joined the rest of the women, they were all led out of town to be killed. As they marched, they sang "Hatikwa" (the Jewish national anthem). The gestapo also took 20 men to dig the graves and those men too were shot there. Before they died they were ordered to strip and the belongings were shipped to the warehouses".

THE LIQUIDATION OF THE GHETTO - "JUDENFREI"

During the period between the camp operation on March 15, 1943, and the liquidation operation on March 25, 1943, the Zolkiew ghetto was gripped by panic. The final calamity was expected each day. No one harbored any illusions as to the fate of the Zolkiew ghetto, even when most of the men fit for work had been taken to the Janowski camp, and women and children were almost the only ones left in the city. Life in the ghetto was completely disorganized. Hardly any Jew showed up for work.

The anticipated catastrophe came on March 25, 1943. On that day, at dawn, the ghetto was encircled by the SS, Schupo and the Ukrainian militia armed with helmets, guns and axes. The latter were to be used to break down gates, shelters, hiding places, etc. Heinisch, the SS-man from the Janowski camp, was especially conspicuous in his use of an axe to murder children, the sick and the elderly. The majority of the Jewish population, mainly women and children, were captured and steered to the Dominican Square. From there they were transported by car to the nearby forest, the so-called "borek" 28), where they were shot and buried in the previously prepared mass graves. These graves had been dug beforehand by Jewish workers in the following circumstances: in the morning one of the SS-men came to the square and asked for Jews who knew something about farming; a dozen or so young, healthy men volunteered. The Germans loaded them into a truck and drove them to the "borek" where they were ordered to dig the graves.

In order to save bullets and save themselves the trouble, the Germans used axes to kill the sick in their homes and shelters. They murdered Jewish children by smashing their heads against a wall. Non-Jewish witnesses speak of blood dripping down the walls of the ghetto after this "operation". In her diary Klara Szwarc describes the city after the "operation":

"Mrs. Beck told us that the city looked terrible after the "operation"; all the way to the "borek" the road was lined with corpses lying in pools of blood. Bodies also hung from the (barbed) wire enclosing the ghetto. And this is how they loaded captured Jews onto the trucks: a truck was parked under the windows and people were thrown in sacks from the first floor. Some Germans used axes to hack people who were still alive; one gestapo man axed the 12-year old Nusiek Lichter. The remaining Jews were sealed off in the ghetto in a very small area".

The execution of the Jews in the "borek" proceeded as follows: once they were stripped naked and thoroughly searched (especially the women), they were lined up above the open graves. One by one, they had to step onto the plank which hung over the ditch, so that when they were shot they fell straight into the open grave. There were many instances of lightly wounded or simply stunned people falling into these mass graves. After the operation the graves were covered up.

The non-Jewish population reports that for several days after the operation the earth covering the graves moved; it seemed to ripple.

Only a small number of men - about a 100, and about 70 women are removed to the Janowski camp in Lwow. It should be emphasized that that Jewish women brought from Zolkiew formed the nucleus of the womens' camp which was created at that time and attached to the Janowski camp. These women worked in the DAW (Deutsche Ausrustungs Werke) in the hosiery (knitting) section; compared to other groups of women brought to the camp at a later period, (the Zolkiew women) survived the longest: right up to the moment when the Janowski camp was liquidated in November 1943.

The following facts are noteworthy. The Germans offered to spare the lives of some women and send them to the Janowski camp if they agreed to give up their children; they replied that they want to die together with their children. Mrs. Mandel (nee Szapiro) can

serve as an example (of this). The conduct of Symcha Turk, a respected citizen of the city of Zolkiew, can be cited as an example of the commitment of a father and husband. The Germans told him that he, as a professional, can be saved if he abandons his family. In response, he ostentatiously took his wife's arm on one side and his child's on the other and thus united they walked to their deaths with their heads held high. The behavior of Febus Rubinfeld, the leader of the Judenrat, is also worth mentioning; the gestapo also suggested that he go to the Janowski camp after the liquidation of the ghetto. His reply was: "Ich gehe dort, wo meine Bruder" 29) and he was killed on the spot.

At 7:00 in the evening the operation was concluded. Officially only members of the Judenrat and the Ordnungsdienst were left in the city. It should be added that during the operation some members of the Judenrat and Ordnungsdienst were hanged or axed to death for the "unreliable" performance of their duties (Szerman, Glazer, Dornfeld and others).

The other members of the Judenrat and Ordnungsdienst thought that they had temporarily avoided death and that they would be the ones to sort out the so-called "Judennachlass", i.e. property and possessions left behind by the murdered Jews, but it wasn't to be. After 7 pm the Germans summoned everybody for a roll-call, loaded them onto a truck, cunningly insinuating that they were going to the Janowski camp, and drove them to the "borek" where they were shot. Hats, photographs and other memorabilia which they threw out of the trucks on their way to the "borek" attested to the fact that they were going to their death.

Taught by experience and driven by their survival instinct, Jews had built such excellent shelters and hiding places that even the seasoned SS "hunters" from the Janowski camp were unable to capture them all. The actual goal of "Judenfrei" had not been achieved. The perimeter of the ghetto is reduced and now the ghetto is limited to two streets: Perec and Sobieski.

The Jews who survived were starved, heart-broken and listless; they wandered about like shadows casting fearful, far-away glances

in all directions. In order to deceive them, the Germans kept spreading rumors that those Jews who had survived were in no danger; that the Germans had decided to take care of them and to prove it, cart-loads of bread and marmelade would roll into the ghetto. The distribution of the food supplies was set for the morning hours on April 6. Jews began to gather in front of the store soon after daybreak, and that's where the final "operation" caught them by surprise. The majority of those caught meet their death in the "borek" in mass graves, and only a handful are shipped to the Janowski camp in Lwow. Zolkiew is officially declared "Judenfrei".

Only about 70 specialists without whom the Germans could not yet cope were left alive. These Jews were placed in a single apartment block on Sobieski street. Etinger, a refugee from Czechoslovakia, was the block commandant; the Germans tried to persuade the rest that they would definitely be spared. Well-acquainted with the Germans' "truthfulness", these Jews did not believe this and a few attempted to escape. Some of them indeed managed to elude death. From among the residents of that block the following persons survived: Emil Lifszic, Nachman Szuman, Szepsel Blind, Basia Silber, Golda Keifer, Dawid Schreckenhammer, Jozef Hochner and Filip Mandel. The last-mentioned contracted tuberculosis while hiding and died a couple of days after the liberation. The block existed till July 10, 1943.

This is what Izydor Hecht writes in his diary about the liquidation of the block:

"In the morning, when they showed up for the roll-call as usual, they were sent to work at the railway station. Having arrived there, they were surrounded by the Germans and the Ukrainian police and taken by car to the place of execution, the "borek", where they ended their lives the same way as most of the Zolkiew Jews - in mass graves".

From that moment on, Zolkiew is not only officially but

genuinely "Judenfrei".

*

*

*

Only here and there, in cellars and in attics, a handful of individuals continue to hide helped by their non-Jewish friends who often risk their lives and make great sacrifices in order to come to their rescue. Human malice, blackmail and constant searches wreak havoc with this tiny group.

Every other day one would hear of a new tragedy striking one or more Jews who were caught and put to death in diverse circumstances. As these individual tragedies are enacted, some Jews demonstrate heroic feats: Mojzesz Saft lunges with a sharp instrument at Rause, a German gendarme, and at a Ukrainian militiaman and injures both of them as they lead him out of the shelter. Szpigiel, captured by a Ukrainian militiaman, commits suicide before the execution. There are also instances of inhuman behavior by certain individuals from the non-Jewish community who offer their assistance in tracking down the remaining Jews who continue to hide. 30).

In some cases, those who are still hiding lose their mind when the strain of their terrifying ordeal causes the nerves to snap.31). Others reach such a point of apathy that death no longer terrifies them, it simply becomes their liberation 32).

EPILOGUE

In spite of the inhuman persecution and terrible suffering experienced by the handful of Jews who survived after Zolkiew was declared "Judenfrei", Jews did not lose hope and believed deeply in historical justice and the forthcoming defeat of Nazism (Hitlerism).

The liberation, long anticipated and paid for with the blood of their loved ones, (finally) came on July 23, 1944.

Thanks to the zealous work of the city's inhabitants, (Zolkiew) began to rise from the ruins and evidence of the physical devastation was slowly being removed. Only the wound inflicted on the city's population by the murder of a large number of the inhabitants, especially Jews, did not want to heal. Out of more than 5000 Jews living in Zolkiew at the outset of the war, only about 70 are left alive after the liberation. Among the survivors there are people who had been hiding in underground shelters and had not seen the light of day for over a year. There are also those who, regardless of the changing seasons, spent many months in the forest with partisan (guerrilla) units. We also encounter people who lived on the "aryan side", with "aryan" papers, etc.

Thanks to the help of honorable people in the non-Jewish community, some individuals were able to survive the most difficult period in the history of humanity in general, and the history of European Jewry in particular.

I consider it my sacred duty to document at this point the honorable conduct of the entire population of the Polish village of Bar (near Grodek Jagiellonski) the inhabitants of which risked their lives in helping to save a group of Jews (over twenty people, myself included). These Jews were hiding in the nearby woods.

E N D N O T E S

- 1) Castr. Leop. p.369, w.544-548, The National Archive in Lwow.
(Dr.Jakub Schall - "Old Zolkiew and its Jews").
- 2) Dr.Jakub Schall: "Old Zolkiew and its Jews".
- 3) Adolf Frydman, an apothecary, was the Chairman of the "Kultura"
society until the outbreak of the German-Polish war.
- 4) According to the testimony of M. Melman and M. B. Szwarc.
- 5) Those who were obliged to work did not report every day, only
every other or even every third day.
- 6) Indolent nation, you want to fight us!?
- 7) Abbreviation: Heeres-Kraftfahr-Park - Mechanized military
supply-line (?)
- 8) Supervisors
- 9) From the memoirs of Zalmen Mandel who was present at the
conversation of the Germans with the inspector.
- 10) Astman's family sent the amount necessary for the ransom.
- 11) Mostly Jews from the Lwow and Tarnopol voivodeships (provinces)
were in this camp.

- 12) Let the names of the German gendarmes and the Ukrainian militiamen who murdered thousands of innocent victims from among the Jewish population of Zolkiew be covered with eternal shame. German gendarmes: Kather, Heisler, Kropp, and Sander. UKrainian militiamen: Romanczuk, Pidhoreckij, and Popowicz.
- 13) Abbreviation - Schutz Polizei
- 14) Easter
- 15) The contents of the letter was provided by Mechel Melman and Majer Berisz Szwarc who read the letter personally.
- 16) Abbreviation: Ordnungsmann - orderly. Here: Jewish militiaman.
- 17) The Archives of the Central Jewish Historical Committee, records of the Regional Jewish Historical Committee in Krakow, lb. 814.
- 18) Nation of the book
- 19) The author of this book and his wife and child were among those captured.
- 20) The author of this work was in that car
- 21) The author of this book, after jumping out of the car, stripped of his money, jacket and sweater on the way back, after several nights of walking, comes back to Zolkiew cold and hungry, physically and morally devastated after the loss of his wife and child.
- 22) "The Jews will die on their own now".

23) This name was previously used in the German colonies in Africa in reference to the auxillary police consisting of natives - here: Russian White Guardists and the Volksdeutschen.

24) All the new orderlies, step out!

25) Come with us!

26) The author of this work was one of those shipped to the Janowski camp.

27) Now you will get acquainted with our rest home! Cursed Jews, you are the dumbest nation in the world!

28) A relatively small forest, 2-3 kilometers outside of town, along the road leading to Kamionka Strumilowa.

29) I am going where my brothers went!

Endnotes 30, 31, 32 are excerpts taken from the diaries of Klara Szwarc and Izydor Hecht which provide us with information concerning the circumstances in which some of the Zolkiew Jews who were hiding in and around the city died. In the diary of Klara Szwarc we read:

30) "Tuesday, November 30, 1943. Mrs. Beck's sister-in-law brought some very sad news: three Jews were caught today, two in the attic of the synagogue (among them a certain Lotringer), and one was caught in the pharmacy. It would appear strange to find a Jew in the pharmacy, but he just came to ask for some bandages. He thought that he could make it. And indeed the pharmacist gave him the bandages, but Romanczycha (a vendor), an antisemite who had already brought many Jews to ruin, was in the pharmacy at the same time. She screamed at the apothecary for giving the Jew bandages instead of handing him over to the

police. She began to call for the police and grabbed the door handle so that the Jew couldn't escape. In the meantime the Jew fainted and the pharmacist had a heart attack, either out of pity or fear, I don't know. The difference is that the pharmacist was revived and the Jew was carried out to be shot"...

..."Tuesday, December 28, 1943. Four Jews were brought in to Zolkiew to be shot. Mensch was among them. He was supposed to have been hidden in a peasant's house in the village of Dzibulki together with another Jew. That other Jew ran out of money and the peasant threw him out. The Jew knew about some shelter in Zameczek (a nearby village) where two other Jews were hiding, and he went in that direction. On the way there, he was caught by peasants from Zameczek who tortured him so much that he gave away (the location of) Mensch and the other two Jews. This could not have happened here, even if no one had any money left"...

In Hecht's diary we read:

..."December 26, 1943. I heard an incredible story this morning. They said that yesterday in the evening, on Xmas Eve, the Jew Segal came to K. Gl. (a Polish woman) and asked for a piece of bread. K. told him to wait in the kitchen, she went into the room where a "kripowiec" was sitting and told him that there is a Jew in her house. They both escorted him to the police"...

- 31) "May 10, 1944. Another Jewish victim. A Pole was hiding a Jew in Wola (a village near Zolkiew). Because of murders (committed by bands of Ukrainian nationalists or Germans) this Pole had to flee and leave the Jew on his own. He sat there quietly till

yesterday. He was supplied with food for an extended period of time. What he did yesterday can attest to what was going on in his soul. He walked out, gave himself up to some peasant and asked to be taken to (the place) where people are executed; he couldn't take it any longer. He was led to the police in Zolkiew. They say that he lost his mind. He asked for the report to be written quickly so that he could be shot"...

- 32) "May 21, 1944. Today yet another round of misfortune. 6 Jews were caught on Zielona street in the home of Mrs. Litoplowa, a Ukrainian. Apparently the two Bergsteins, Mrs. Pundyk and Brener with his wife and children. The captured Jews were driven out of the shelter in the following manner: the Germans poured gasoline into the shelter after opening the hatch and set in on fire so that the Jews themselves had to jump out. The "Heroic Germans" were afraid that the Jews might do something bad to them. After leaving the shelter these Jews did not cry or scream, on the contrary, they spoke calmly and talked about their life (in the shelter). Apparently the year spent in the hideout was so excruciating that they no longer feared death".

A LIST OF ZOLKIEW JEWS WHO SURVIVED
having lived through the German occupation

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Blumenfeld Mozes | 51. Szwarc Sara |
| 2. Brener (child) | 52. Szwarc Klara |
| 3. & 4. Bergstein (brothers) | 53. Silber Basia |
| 5. Elefant Lola | 54. Steger Jakub |
| 6. Elefant Jozef | 55. Steger Szebsel |
| 7. Ehrenwert Samuel | 56. Ms. Singer |
| 8. Ehrenwert Szyfra | 57. Szuman Nachman |
| 9. Gems Zofia | 58. Taffet Gerszon |
| 10. Hecht Izydor | 59. Tempelsman Anna |
| 11. Hochner Jozef | 60. Wachs Drowa |
| 12. Keifer Golda | 61.- 63. Dr. Henryk Wachs |
| 13. Mrs. Keifer | with his wife |
| 14. Lowenstein Fryda | and his daughter |
| 15. Lerner Izak | 64. Witlin Abraham |
| 16. Lichtenberg Edek | 66. Witlin Estera |
| 17. Leiner Zygmunt | 67. Witlin Henek |
| 18. Letzter Izio | 68. Wolf Szarlotta |
| 19. Lauterpacht Gedale | 69. Wassner Golda |
| 20. Liberman Frydka | 70. Wassner Roza |
| 21. Liberman Reizla | 71. Waldman Nela |
| 22. Lifszic Emil | 72. Weinbaum Zosia |
| 23. Mrs. Landau | 73. Weinbaum Zygmunt |
| 24. Landau Giza | 74. Zimand Rachela |
| 25. Melman Mechel | |
| 26. Melman Stefa | |
| 27. Melman Igo | |
| 28. Mandel Drezla | |
| 29. - 32. Mandel Zalmen | |
| with his wife and two daughters | |
| 33. Meister Jozef | |
| 34. Orlender Regina | |
| 35. - 37. Patrontasch Mundek | |
| with his wife and daughter | |
| 38. Patrontasch Artur | |
| 39. Patrontasch Jakub | |
| 40. Patrontasch Klara | |
| 41. & 42. Reichman (sisters) | |
| 43. Rozenberg Jozef | |
| 44. Mrs. Rozenberg | |
| 45. Rozenberg Lutka | |
| 46. Strich Antonina | |
| 47. Strich Beata | |
| 48. Steckel Emil | |
| 49. Steckel Anna | |
| 50. Szwarc Majer Berisz | |