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A mass grave in Proskurov, 1941–1942.

USHMM WS #17880, COURTESY OF JULIUS SCHATZ

teered for or were drafted into the Red Army. Precise figures are unavailable, but it appears that around 10,000 Jews remained in Proskurov at the start of the occupation.

Proskurov became the center of Gebiet Proskurov in Generalkommissariat Wolhynien und Podolien. The Gebietskommissar in Proskurov, Hundertschaftsführer Schmerbeck, made his residence on Aleksandrovskaia Street.

From the start of the German occupation, a pattern of plunder, humiliation, abuse, and murder of Jews emerged. Units of Einsatzgruppe C, as well as a self-organized Western Ukrainian Bukovina Battalion, headed by Peter Voinovsky, carried out these measures.

The Germans established a Jewish Council (Judenrat) in Proskurov, and Liza Lindenboym was appointed its chairwoman. She was responsible for implementing all the directives issued by Gebietskommissar Schmerbeck. She appointed 10 other Jewish men and women to serve on the Judenrat. Its main function was to provide Jewish forced laborers for the Germans. Many Jews hated Lindenboym. Most survivors maintained that there was no Jewish police force in Proskurov. Iosif Groysman, however, stated that “Jewish policemen” assembled the Jews for work.<sup>1</sup>

In September 1941, Gebietskommissar Schmerbeck ordered Jews to assemble in a ghetto—two blocks on Kupecheskaia and Remeslennaia Streets—near the open market, surrounded by barbed wire with only one gate. Prisoners failing to appear would be shot. Ukrainian policemen supervised the assembly. The majority of people did not resist the order. The barbed wire gave the Jews a false sense of security that it “protected” them from the Germans and hostile Ukrainians. Most of the residents on Kupecheskaia and Remeslennaia Streets were Jews. Jews from other parts of the city moved in with them. Three to five families crowded into each house, 15 to 20 people per room. No one was allowed to leave the ghetto without a permit. Ukrainian policemen guarded the ghetto.<sup>2</sup>

The first ghetto existed less than four months. Jews worked as forced laborers. The work included harvest collection, fruit

## PROSKUROV

*Pre-1941: Proskurov, city and raion center, Kamenets-Podol'skii oblast', Ukrainian SSR; 1941–1944: Proskurov, Rayon and Gebiet center, Generalkommissariat Wolhynien und Podolien; post-1991: Khmel'nyts'kyi (Proskuriv), Khmel'nyts'kyi oblast', Ukraine*

Proskurov is located about 340 kilometers (211 miles) southwest of Kiev, on the Bug River. In 1939, 14,518 Jews lived in the city (38.7 percent of the total).

Units of German Army Group South entered Proskurov on July 8, 1941. Between June 22 and July 8, only a few Jewish families left the city. Able-bodied men aged 19 to 36 volun-

concentration, demolition of the Jewish cemetery, the clearing of ruined houses, shoveling snow in winter, and other jobs outside the ghetto. Unless they possessed their own tools, the laborers performed nearly all work manually. Ukrainian and Lithuanian policemen guarded the Jews to and from work. They beat men and women with whips and occasionally shot those who were unable to work any longer. Shoemakers, tailors, tanners, welders, coopers, and other skilled workers labored inside the ghetto, and many received permission to work in shops outside the barbed wire, under close supervision. Children of the specialists worked with their parents. Elderly Jews, the sick, and toddlers lived in constant fear of the Germans and policemen when the able-bodied Jews left for work.<sup>3</sup>

Forced laborers received 200 grams (7 ounces) of bread daily. The nonworking Jews were not entitled to food. Skilled laborers, also not entitled to food, received food in compensation for their work from local non-Jews and Germans. Townspeople and villagers traded food at the barbed-wire fence for clothing, utensils, and any commodities that the Jews still owned. Both sides risked being beaten or shot. Volodymyr Lanko, a Ukrainian agronomist, helped many people in the ghetto. Young people crawled out of the ghetto at night and begged their former non-Jewish neighbors for food. The barbed wire hardly presented an overwhelming physical barrier to young people, and the Stars of David were easy to remove; however, by daylight, the local policemen knew the faces of the Jews and would shoot anyone without a permit. Jews who did not live in the city before the war and those youths who could pass as non-Jews had a better chance of smuggling themselves in and out of the ghetto.<sup>4</sup>

In the first ghetto, radios and newspapers were confiscated. News passed through the barbed-wire fence by word of mouth. Ukrainian pottery makers, who traveled from town to town, carried letters and messages. The Jews in Proskurov knew that throughout the region Jews were subjected to the same conditions. In the fall of 1941, the Germans shot a Jewish minyan in the center of the ghetto. Nazi officers and administrators raped Jewish women. To protect themselves, Jewish girls smeared their underwear with lipstick; Germans cringed from the site of "blood." Following the orders of Schmerbeck, Lindenboym collected gold, jewelry, and valuables from the Jews. The Jews perceived the collection of valuables as a "contribution" to stay alive. Young people got married, and women bore children. They still believed they would survive.<sup>5</sup>

On November 4, 1941, SS-Obersturmführer Theodor Salmanzig organized a large-scale Aktion against the Jews in which the main ghetto was liquidated. The pretext for the Aktion was the discovery, in the basement of the State Political Directorate (GPU) building, of 25 to 30 corpses of German servicemen. On Hermann Göring's orders, a special commission headed by Salmanzig was sent to Proskurov to investigate the circumstances of these deaths. Several days later, Salmanzig reappeared in the town with a detachment of 20 to 30 men to "restore order," which meant that the Jews would be shot.<sup>6</sup>

Just before the Aktion, Gebietskommissar Schmerbeck ordered the Judenrat to distribute a limited number of "work certificates" to the skilled workers. The certificates contained two words (*Jude* and a trade), Schmerbeck's signature, and no names. Not every specialist received a work certificate. On November 4, 1941, after the skilled laborers left the ghetto for work, their wives, parents, and children woke up surrounded by the SS. The members of the Judenrat circulated on the street, ordering Jews to come out with their belongings, documents, and jewelry, for resettlement to Kamenets-Podolskii. A pogrom was threatened if they failed to come out. The majority of people hid in shelters in their houses. Those who came out and hundreds who were discovered were driven on foot to the textile factory on Kamenetskaia Street. Those who tried to resist or to escape on the way to the factory were shot by the SS and local policemen.<sup>7</sup>

Inside the textile factory, Jews left their documents, valuables, and other possessions on long tables. Nazis and policemen then drove the Jews on foot to Ruzhichnoe on the city's outskirts. The people were forced to undress before being shot. The Nazis and policemen with machine guns and dogs lined up wailing people in a long line on the edge of a natural ravine. At the edge of it, they shot rows of 15 to 20 people in the back of the head or in the back of the neck. Most executioners were drunk. After the war, the Soviets found 5,300 corpses at Ruzhichnoe, some embracing and others clutching tightly to corpses of children. Everyone in Proskurov heard and saw that the Jews were being driven to be shot that day. Some indigenous non-Jews rejoiced and plundered abandoned Jewish homes. Others were powerless to help. Approximately 20 Jews remained at the textile factory on the evening of November 4. About 5,300 Jews from Proskurov were killed.<sup>8</sup> In late December 1941, a new census recorded only 3,040 Jews in the city.

Two days after the first pogrom, Schmerbeck ordered the partitioning of the first ghetto into an "old" ghetto, which remained behind the barbed wire, and a "second" ghetto located across the street between Remeslennaia and Kupecheskaia Streets and Aptekarskaia and Sobornaia Streets. The skilled workers moved into the second ghetto along with specialists from neighboring towns who were resettled into the same ghetto. The Jews left in the old ghetto shoveled snow on the highway throughout the winter of 1941–1942. Germans confiscated winter clothing from Jews, non-Jews, and Soviet prisoners of war (POWs). Ukrainians continued to toss food over the barbed-wire fence of the old ghetto. During the first winter, some Jews were killed at work, others died from exhaustion, and still others died from hunger and cold.<sup>9</sup>

In the spring and summer of 1942, it became easier to obtain food because of new crops. Germans confiscated horses from kolkhozy in Gebiet Proskurov and conscripted approximately 70 Jews, selected by the Judenrat, to drive the horses to the Donbass front line.<sup>10</sup>

Concurrently, throughout 1942, the Germans gathered and concentrated young Jewish men and women remaining in the Proskurov region in several camps along the main

road from Proskurov to Vinnitsa (Durchgangsstrasse [highway] IV). They used these people as forced laborers and hired Ukrainian workers for wages to do construction work for the Organisation Todt (OT) highway construction project.<sup>11</sup>

The Jews in the old ghetto were ravaged by typhus and famine fever in November 1942. Dr. Khromoy took care of the sick, although no medicine was available. Famine fever did not spread to the second ghetto. A number of escapees from nearby camps, ghettos, and mass shootings hid in Proskurov temporarily.

Rumors about an imminent pogrom spread in Proskurov in the late fall of 1942. Approximately 80 to 100 Jews fled the ghetto before the second pogrom and hid with Ukrainian friends. Many were discovered and shot, sometimes together with their hosts. Only Jews with no family left attempted to flee in the snow to Transnistria, 90 kilometers (56 miles) southeast of Proskurov.<sup>12</sup>

The Jews in Proskurov had no weapons for an uprising. Many able-bodied Jewish men and women wanted to join underground partisan brigades, which they believed to exist in the woods. After the war, E. Lantsman testified that in Proskurov "the shooting lasted several hours. Jews killed three SS men and five policemen recruited from the local population. Several young people succeeded in breaking through to the forest and escaping." However, it is unclear when and under what circumstances this incident took place.<sup>13</sup>

There is no consensus on the exact date of the second large-scale Aktion. More than 7,000 people who remained in the two ghettos of Proskurov, from the labor camps, and from the nearby village of Nikolaev were killed. The murder Aktion lasted more than one week. Most probably, it began on the night of November 30–December 1. SS men, Lithuanian Schutzmannen, and local policemen broke into the homes of the Jews in the old ghetto and into the homes of the specialists. Crying, beatings, shouts, pleading, and shootings accompanied the roundup of the Jews. People were driven daily to the execution pits dug in the village of Leznevo. Mikhail Orlov, a local policeman, testified after the war that Germans "shot them [Jews] point-blank in the back of the head and threw the children alive into pits."<sup>14</sup>

Including those brought into the city from outside, more than 12,000 Jewish civilians are believed to have perished in Proskurov. Only some 60 Jewish men, women, and children from Proskurov are known to have survived the Holocaust.<sup>15</sup>

For days after the start of the second pogrom, more than 100 Jews remained in hiding without food or water. One by one, they tried to sneak away, but most were immediately picked up by local policemen and the Germans. Policeman Ivanov saved the life of Hana Gritsershteyn by sneaking her into the house of Volodymyr Lanko, who hid Hana and Byata Beyter for 11 months. At the end of 1943, both Hana and Byata fled to Transnistria.<sup>16</sup>

By December 1942, Romanian-governed Transnistria offered the best possibility of survival. Iosif Groysman and Veniamin Grinberg were among those Jews who escaped to

Transnistria. However, some escapees were betrayed by the locals. Every Jew who reached Transnistria met a non-Jew who helped him or her with a piece of bread or advice or simply did not betray them. The Blekhman family bribed a Ukrainian train conductor to smuggle them onto a train to Zhmerinka. In Transnistria, the survivors from Proskurov then found shelter with the local Jews.<sup>17</sup>

After the Soviet victory on May 8, 1945, the few Jews who had evacuated from Proskurov before July 7, 1941, gradually returned home. Only a few Jewish soldiers came back from the front alive. Three monuments, established by Jews after the war, commemorate those who perished in the Holocaust in Proskurov.

**SOURCES** Most of the information for this entry came from the author's unpublished M.A. thesis, "The History of Jews in Proskurov, Ukraine" (master's thesis, Union College, 2001). The article by P.M. Shkrobot, "Navichno v pam'iaty narodnii," in A.G. Filiniuk, ed., *Ploskyriv, Proskuriv, Khmel'nyts'kyi, 1493–1993* (Khmelnitskyi: Podillia, 1993), pp. 46–53, includes some relevant information on the fate of Proskurov's Jewish population. The book by David A. Chapin and Ben Weinstock, eds., *The Road from Letichev* (San Jose: Writer's Showcase presented by Writer's Digest, 2000), also includes several testimonies that touch on events in Proskurov.

Documents and testimonies in relation to the Proskurov ghetto and the fate of the city's Jewish population can be found in the following archives: GARF (7021-9-813); USHMM (e.g., RG-31.002M); VHF (# 44315); and YVA (O-3/3734, 3766). A number of oral testimonies, videos, letters, and telephone interviews with survivors from Proskurov have been collected by the author and are in her own personal archive (PADV).

Diana Voskoboynik

## NOTES

1. YVA, O-3/3766, Hana Vaiskop, p. 5; Etya B., letter to the author, January 8, 2000; Lyusya Blekhman, personal interview, October 14, 2000; Iosif Groysman, personal interview, January 2, 2001; Veniamin Grinberg, personal interview, January 7, 2001.

2. Tatyana Uzenkel, letter to the author, December 2000; VHF, # 44315, Lyusya Blekhman, May 17, 1998; Iosif Groysman; Moishe Einhorn, "In the Medzhibozh Ghetto," in Chapin and Weinstock, *The Road from Letichev*, p. 693.

3. Etya B.; VHF, # 44315; Iosif Groysman; Lazar Bover, letter to the author, December 15, 2000; Klara Melamud, telephone interview concerning her husband, Mikhail Melamud, a Holocaust survivor, January 21, 2001.

4. YVA, O-3/3766, Hana Vaiskop, p. 9; VHF, # 44315; Yefim Lerner, personal interview concerning his late wife Sima Lerner (Blekhman), a Holocaust survivor, December 16, 2000.

5. Etya B.; VHF, # 44315; Iosif Groysman; Yefim Lerner; Klara Melamud; Tatyana Uzenkel.

6. BA-L, B 162/20816, pp. 165ff, testimony of Karl Bauernfeind, December 22, 1964.

7. Iosif Groysman; YVA, O-3/3766, Hana Vaiskop, p. 4. Available sources disagree about the precise date of the first pogrom. The testimony of Hana Vaiskop is probably the most reliable source, as she was a high school graduate at the time.

8. USHMM, RG-22.002M (GARF), reel 2, 7021-9-813, Soviet Extraordinary State Commission (ChGK) report, Act of the Judicial-Medical Committee for Investigation of the German-Fascist Atrocities in Proskurov; VHF, # 44315; Lazar Bover; Iosif Groysman; Klara Melamud; YVA, O-3/3766.

9. Einhorn, "In the Medzhibozh Ghetto," p. 693; Iosif Groysman. Although in Letichev and Zinkov (neighboring towns) there were no pogroms in the fall of 1941, the Jews of those towns survived the first winter under conditions similar to those of the remaining Jews in Proskurov; see the testimonies of Vladimir Goykher and Semyon Gluzman, in Chapin and Weinstock, *The Road from Letichev*, pp. 710-714 and 730-736, respectively.

10. Iosif Groysman; Veniamin Grinberg.

11. Veniamin Grinberg; Goykher, in Chapin and Weinstock, *The Road from Letichev*, pp. 712-714. Also see Moyshe Rekhman, "Hard Labor in the Letichev Camp," testimony on file in USHMM; also Rekhman, in *The Road from Letichev*, pp. 701-702.

12. VHF, # 44315; Lyusya Blekhman, October 14, 2000; Etya B.

13. Iosif Groysman; Shkrobot, "Navichno v pam'iaty narodnii," pp. 48-53.

14. Veniamin Lukin and Boris Khaymovich, eds., *Sto evreiskikh mestechek Ukrainy: Podoliia*, ser. 1 (Jerusalem and St. Petersburg, 1997), p. 184. There is no consensus on the start of the second pogrom. Witnesses give various dates in November and December. Since the pogrom lasted more than a week, November 30, 1942, seems most plausible as the first night of the pogrom; Mikhail S. Orlov, protocol of interrogation, May 10, 1944, ChGK materials, USHMM, RG-22.002M, reel 2 (GARF, 7021-9-813).

15. ChGK report, USHMM archives, RG-22.002M, reel 2 (GARF, 7021-64-792); list of the inmates of the ghetto and concentration camps who belong to the Khmel'nyts'kyi Oblast' Organization, signed by Boris Levin, September 11, 1994; Etya B.; Lyusya Blekhman, October 14, 2000; YVA, O-3/3766, p. 13.

16. Veniamin Grinberg; Klara Melamud; Eva Oksman testimony in PADV; YVA, O-3/3766, pp. 10-13.

17. Veniamin Grinberg; Iosif Groysman; VHF, # 44315; Lyusya Blekhman, October 14, 2000; YVA, O-3/3766, p. 11; Etya B.; Einhorn, "In the Medzhibozh Ghetto."

#### Abbreviations used in Sources and Notes.

BA-L Bundesarchiv Aussenstelle Ludwigsburg (German Federal Archives External Branch Ludwigsburg)

ChGK Chrezvychainaia Gosudarstvennaia Komissiiia (Soviet Extraordinary State Commission)

GARF Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv rossiiskoi federatsii (State Archives of the Russian Federation), Moscow

USHMM United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington DC

VHF Visual History Archive of the Shoah Foundation

YVA Archive of the National Institute for the Memory of the Victims of Nazism and Heroes of the Resistance,

Yad Vashem, Israel