

The People in the Bunkers and Their Fate

Starting from the first *akcja* on 22nd September and to the fall of the Nazi regime, there was a hunt for “*bunkerowces*” – meaning those who were in hiding and wished to avoid falling into the murderous hands of the Nazis. *Bunkerowces* were found on a daily basis and were shot on the spot.

When one of the largest bunkers, in which seventy Jews were found, was uncovered, it caused a great stir. This event aroused a terrible bitterness, because it was the result of Jewish informers.

On Berka Joselewicza 15, beneath a factory building, a bunker had been especially built, where the seventy people were found. The bunker was supplied with food and so well camouflaged, that it was impossible to uncover. The Jewish informer Rozenberg¹, who served in the ghetto police force, found out about the bunker. He reported the matter to the chief of police, Parasol, who communicated this “confidentially” to the deputy of the arch-murderer of Jews, *Oberleutnant* Rohn.

As a result of the denunciation, the Jew-killer Rohn went with the commander of the ghetto police, Parasol, to the location that had been indicated to them and they began searching. After a lengthy search and hacking at the walls with pickaxes, they did not uncover the bunker. Rohn gave up and said that there was no bunker there and wanted to leave. Despite the fact that the SS officer Rohn had given up on the whole story, Parasol, the commander of the Jewish ghetto police, did not let him leave, declaring that he knew for certain that there were Jews hiding there. Once more, the work began with pickaxes and, after a couple of hours of digging, the bunker was uncovered. The following families were there: Nuchem-Luzer Sztajnhardt, his wife Brajndla and daughter Ester-Ruchla; Fiszhof and his wife from the shoe trade; the photographer Zanwel Biber with his wife and child; the owner of the leather and shoe accessories shop, Birenbaum, and his wife; Mrs Srebrnik; Mrs Bencelowicz from Królewska Huta, with her several children; Reb Josl Frajermauer with his wife and children, and other families.

The first seven individuals, who were taken out of the bunker, were meticulously searched and then taken into the courtyard on Berka Joselewicza 9. The guard, who was standing there, was ordered to shoot the *bunkerowces*. The SS guard positioned himself at the gate and shot each Jew who entered. In this manner, Nuchem-Luzer Sztajnhardt, Josl Frajermauer, Fiszhof and others were shot one after the other, as victims of the Nazi killings and Jewish denunciations. This happened three days after Sukkos, following all the killings, *akcje* and deportations.

In the course of this tragic story, the following dramatic episode occurred:

In that same courtyard, the elderly Mojsze Klajnman, an old man of nearly eighty, was hiding. He emerged from his hideout of his own accord, wearing a *kittel*, *tallis* and *tefillin*. He addressed the SS men in the following words, “I have already said my prayers. I am ready. You

¹ [TN: According to *Sefer Częstochowa*, Vol. II, col.207, Rozenberg had come to Częstochowa from the ghetto in Łódź.]

may shoot me.” The SS immediately shot the old man. Those shot were interred, that same day, in the mass grave on ul. Kawia. There are 1,500 Jews in that grave.

There was a bunker in Horowicz’s factory - a [purpose-]built hideout. A large number of Jews were hiding there. Somebody reported it and Rohn, unexpectedly, entered the factory. A large number of Jews, who happened to emerge from the hiding place, were caught by Rohn, taken to the *azył*² and transported along with the [Jewish ghetto] police to Treblinka.

The bunkers were built in various manners - primitive, common and elaborately planned, camouflaged [and fitted] with different coloured electrical signals. When the door of the dwelling was opened, a red electric light came on inside the bunker. All these projects, plans and installations were carried out by Jewish engineers.

Numerous bunkers were uncovered as a result of malicious denunciations. Others [were discovered] accidentally, when the buildings under which the hideouts were situated were being demolished, such as under the Synagogue, which was destroyed and all the building material taken away. When the Jewish houses on the right side of ul. Warszawska were demolished, a bunker was uncovered in house №6, which belonged to Kopl Mitelman. The entire Mitelman family was in the bunker. The bunker was fully built all around and isolated from the outside world, with all the technical installations and a food supply to last two to three years.

All these *bunkerowce* were immediately shot. They left no trace of their experiences and the emotional and physical pain that they endured during their time in concealment. Many of them wrote memoirs, which were destroyed by the Nazis along with their lives.

Later, the bunker in Kopiński’s building was also uncovered. In hiding there were those who had escaped from the truck that was taking the intelligentsia to the cemetery to be shot. These were Moryc Kopiński with his son and Bernard Kurland. Moryc Kopiński and his son were shot, and Bernard Kurland was pardoned by Degenhardt.

A few individuals still managed to survive thanks to the bunkers and evaded the Nazi sword. One of those, who survived in a bunker, was Natan Kurland, who was born in 1911 in the village of Bernatowizna³, six kilometres outside of Częstochowa. During the entire period of the deportations, he was barracked in his workplace. When the “Small Ghetto” was liquidated in June 1943, the *Möbellager* - his workplace - was also liquidated, and he was transferred to the ironworks in Raków, where several thousand Polish labourers were working.

There, he met numerous acquaintances, among them a certain Władek Caban, with whom he had gone to school. Władek was affluent enough, and he was working in the ironworks as a forced labourer. Władek had built a simple bunker in the courtyard where he was living. The bunker consisted of a pit, measuring one and a half metres long, seventy centimetres wide and seventy centimetres high. It had a trapdoor on the side, which made up the entrance. The bunker was camouflaged with brushwood. A tube was stuck in on one side, through which

² [TN: Pol., *asylum/shelter*; a concentration point for people about to be deported, which was situated in the Old Study-Hall, as the author later explains on p.121.]

³ [TN: *Bernatowizna* was a mill on the River Warta.]

air entered the bunker. Every night, Władek would open the trapdoor and Natan would emerge from his living grave for a little while to take in a little fresh air and food. Every day, Władek secretly listened to radio broadcasts from London at a friend's house, and he was deeply convinced that the War would end in a matter of weeks.

One day, the following incident happened - one of Władek's pigs was running about in the courtyard and, with its snout, it dug right next to the bunker. This resulted in the air tube being clogged and Natan Kurland was in danger of being suffocated. Władek noticed this and immediately put everything back in order.

Due to the fact that it had gotten colder, a new plan was hatched – to build another bunker in the attic of the cowshed. This plan was carried out. After two months of lying in a living grave, Natan Kurland moved to the new bunker in the attic of the cowshed. Compared with the previous one, to him, this new bunker was like a palace. In the hayloft, a false wall was built with a secret entrance. It was six metres long, seventy centimetres wide, and the height was forty centimetres on the one side and a metre forty on the other. There was also a little light, which shone through the cracks in the roof and wall. The secret entrance consisted of a trapdoor, which was pried off every time he went out and afterwards put back up again. Every night, Władek would come to bring him food, tell him the news and leave him newspapers to read.

It once happened that Władek did not come. He came on the following day, late at night, in a bad mood and told him the following story, which was spreading amongst the Polish population with various commentaries:

Two days earlier (that was in April 1944), one of the Raków Poles had entered the church in the morning and, to his amazement, noticed a large stain of blood there. He immediately reported this to the priest, who began to investigate the affair with him. They ascertained that the blood had dripped down from the ceiling, from which they saw that a trickle of coagulated blood was hanging. The priest called out the police, who confirmed that a twelve-year-old Polish boy had been murdered in the church's attic. The child had been stabbed all over his body with a knife and his ears had been cut off.

According to the rumours that were spreading, the boy had been murdered by Jews, due to the following reason - the child had noticed birds' nests in the attic and had gone up there. There had been eight Jews hiding in the attic and, upon seeing the boy, they feared he would give them away and killed him. The Jews were from Raków and had been well acquainted with the church's sexton, who had hidden them for large sums of money. The Jews had been caught and taken away.

Natan Kurland knew Władek well as a friend of Jews, but he had changed completely under the influence of the story. It could be that Władek now regretted harbouring him. The tale caused both of them pain and discomfort.

The following evening, Władek arrived and opened the trapdoor in a gleeful mood. He took out a bottle of schnapps and asked Kurland to drink with him, telling him the following about the tragic occurrence:

When the police conducted their investigation in the church, they found a bloodied knife, which belonged to the sexton's assistant. The assistant, a young man of twenty, who was mentally under-developed and a psychopath, explained, during the investigation, what had occurred. He had lured the twelve-year-old boy up into the attic and murdered him with the knife. He also recounted that, three weeks earlier, he had killed the organist with a blow to the head. In its time, there had been an incident where the organist had been found dead. The medical commission had carried out a post-mortem and determined that the organist had fallen from the pulpit and the fatal blow had left him dead. In this current investigation, everything had become known in detail. There had been no Jews in the attic, which had turned out to be a fabrication. The actual double-murderer had been the psychopath - the sexton's assistant.

Władek apologised many times for having believed such things, and the rumours that evil tongues had invented and told.

Natan Kurland hid with Władek Caban from 23rd July 1943 - the first two months in the pit-bunker and, afterwards, in the attic – until the Soviets marched into Częstochowa on the night of 16th January 1945. He survived the War and lived to see the defeat of the Nazi murderers. He found his wife and son, who had also survived in the HASAG-Pelcery camp in Częstochowa. For some time, they lived in Schwabach, Bavaria, where he was the cultural leader of the Jewish Committee. In the beginning of July 1947, he and his family emigrated to the Land of Israel.

In March 1943, a group of ten people left the "Small Ghetto" in Częstochowa and went to a bunker in Mstów. They were nine adults and one infant. The people were Fiszal Wolski, aged thirty, his wife Nacia, aged twenty-seven, and their child Fela, aged three; Jadzia Leszczyk, aged thirty-eight, and her daughter Mania, aged eighteen; Srulek Bieda, aged thirty, and his sister Róża Bieda, aged twenty-five; Munysz Chrzanowski, aged twenty-five; Lola Fajfer, aged twenty-three and Szyja-Lajb Wajnryt, aged thirty-two.

The bunker was in the house of the Polish Pijanka family. The husband's first name was Bronek, and they called his wife "Bronkowa". They had a small child. The Pijanka family was very poor and, in a bid to make some money at the expense of Jews, they built a bunker. The house had a false wall, which was concealed with a huge quantity of boards. The entrance was through the attic. One went down a ladder to the hiding place in the house and, from there, down to the one in the cellar. There were five people in the cellar hideout and five in the one in the house.

On 27th July 1943, the Gestapo arrived unexpectedly at half past three in the morning and conducted a search. The "*Gestapowces*" rummaged about and searched the whole attic. As fate would have it, one of the searchers took the chest that was there in the attic and put it on top of the entrance, thus concealing any trace of a bunker. The search lasted until half past six in the morning. Bronek Pijanka, upon perceiving the "*Gestapowces*", sprang out the window and escaped to the woods. "Bronkowa" was beaten and they threatened, with a revolver, to shoot her child if she did not give up the bunker, because they knew for certain that there were Jews in that house.

Despite everything, she held her tongue and did not give up the hideout. The “*Gestapowces*” went away, leaving a notice to the effect that she and her husband were to report to the Gestapo. They did not present themselves and the whole story was forgotten.

“Bronkowa’s” demands increased day by day. She demanded various sums of money on a daily basis. Under different pretexts, she cheated the Jews out of large quantities of money. In the end, she began to threaten and terrorise them.

From a poor life, she began to live a wasteful life of luxury. She wore silks and furs and also had a row with her husband and threatened to report him for harbouring Jews. “Bronkowa” fell in love with a *Volksdeutsch*, who would sit in her house day and night. Her husband, Broniek Pijanka, was terrorised by her and could not say a word, because the *Volksdeutsch* was very well aware of the bunker.

Things at home became more unbearable from day to day, due to the frequent rows. Once “Bronkowa” sensed that the Jews in the bunker had no more money left, she herself informed that there was a bunker in her house and provided exact details regarding the entrance and the number of Jews hiding there.

As a result of this denunciation, on 17th June 1944, gendarmes arrived, went immediately to the entrance to the bunker in the attic and, holding grenades in their hands, declared that if the hidden Jews did not come out at once, they would blow up the whole bunker. The Jews emerged from the hideout. They were ordered to take with them all their things that were in the Pijanka house. They were taken, in chains, to the Częstochowa prison in Zawodzie.

Upon the walls of the prison, there are inscriptions in Yiddish – “*Revenge for our lives!*”, “*Revenge for our blood!*” It is clear, from these inscriptions, that many Jews passed through these cells and fell as victims of the Nazi regime.

Arrestees were summoned to a hearing at the political department. They were read a protocol stating that they were political criminals and had set themselves up against the law. The Jews had to sign this protocol, whereupon they were taken back to prison.

A Russian woman in uniform was taken to that same cell, and she suffered from such pains that, at the beginning, she was unable to utter a single word. Once her pain had dissipated, she recounted her experiences. Her name was Lena Banderjanka. She came from the *Woroszyłowgradzki obóz*⁴. She herself was captain of a tank division, her husband an air force pilot and the father a general. She had a five-year-old child, a son and she, herself, was twenty-two. She had been dropped down with a paratrooper in the Kielce region in order to work alongside the partisans there. But she fell into the hands of the enemy. The Germans proposed that she put herself at their service, but she had categorically refused. They burnt her body with white-hot irons (she showed her wounds). She was [then] sentenced to death, [but] managed to escape to the woods shortly before her execution. From there, she had been transported, by the partisans, to Moscow, where she convalesced. Once her health had

⁴ [TN: Pol., “Voroshilovgrad camp”; Voroshilovgrad was the name of the modern-day city of Luhansk in Ukraine, which was under the control of Nazi Germany between 14th July 1942 and 14th February 1943. The reference to a “camp” is most likely a Nazi one for Soviet POWs, as was the lady in question.]

been restored, she came once again [to Poland] with a paratrooper and, during an operation, fell once again into the enemy's hands. This time, she was brought to Częstochowa. The same "Gestapowiec", who had earlier sentenced her to death, recognised her during the interrogation.

She was sincerely on the side of the Jewish arrestees, but she herself was in the claws of death and could do nothing. Once, she went up to the jail's little barred window and, seeing two men strolling about, she stretched out her hand. The two responded by waving white kerchiefs with red fringing. She called the Jewish women over and, pointing out the two men, assured them that the partisans would come to free her and she would take the Jewish women with her to the forest. It all seemed like a fantasy, yet everyone still wished to believe in a lucky chance or miracle.

At twelve midnight, two men in German uniforms approached the jail. These were partisans. As no one was allowed to approach the prison gate, the watchmen wanted to check their identities. They immediately opened fire, broke down the entrance and entered the jail.

Accessing the cell was not easy, because they had to saw through the bars of the door leading to the large corridor and, from there, come to the cell and, once again, saw through the bars. Due to the fact that the sawing took too much time and that the partisans had not disconnected the telephone lines, the jail warden was able to ring for help and call the chief of the prison. The operation of freeing the detainees was unsuccessful. The partisans were forced to abandon their work and retreat.

The lady, Captain Lena Banderjanka, had faith and was convinced that they would return and carry out the operation properly.

Meanwhile, the transport took place. In July 1944, the men were sent to an undisclosed location. On that same day, at seven in the evening, the Jewish women were taken from the cell out into the prison courtyard. The murderer Schimmel and the two others - one of whom was nicknamed "White Head" and the other "Fessale"⁵ - began tormenting the women with their sadistic gambits. They stood on different sides and discussed the amount of ammunition that would have to be used - exactly how many rounds they needed to have - if they were to shoot each one with two bullets. After two hours of torment, the women were led back into the cell.

Tragic were the gruesome experiences of the unhappy child, three-year-old Fela Wolska, who was hidden for sixteen months in the bunker without sun, without air, without a smile, without friends of her age, in perpetual fear - and now in prison as an inmate. The child sensed her cruel fate, and constantly asked her mother, "Will you leave me?" Her mother could give no answer, but only tears streamed from her eyes, for her heart was bleeding and aching with sorrow.

At ten at night, the door of the cell was opened and the Jewish women were led out to the transport. Little three-year-old Fela was left in the prison with a Polish woman. The Jewish

⁵ [TN: Yid., "Little Barrel", a nickname he was given due to his alcoholism (see *Sefer Częstochowa*, Vol. II, col. 34); all three were members of the infamous Schutzpolizei, or Nazi gendarmerie.]

women were taken in a sealed police wagon to an unknown location. They believed that this was the end. At any minute, the wagon would come to a halt and they would be executed. The wagon travelled to Beuthen (Bytom), where they were jailed for the night. On the following day, they were taken to Lubliniec. They were transported in this manner from place to place, until they were brought to Oświęcim (Auschwitz), where a new procedure began of delousing, tattooing a number on the arm, quarantining and similar things which the Nazi authorities had thought up.

As it turned out, those who had been brought from the prisons belonged to a different category. They were considered “security prisoners” and also “political prisoners”. Such prisoners were neither gassed nor burnt in the crematoria. They were subjected to a different kind of pain and suffering - to die “naturally”. These were the rollcalls that lasted from four to seven or eight in the morning, in addition to which they were beaten and badly nourished.

In Auschwitz, they met with an entire array of Czechochowers. These were those who had been captured in the “Small Ghetto” and sent away to [the forced labour camp in] Bliżyn. When Bliżyn was evacuated, the people in the camp there, and among them the Czechochowers, were sent off to various concentration camps in Germany and also to Auschwitz. Among others were Silnicki, Rzesak, Jerzyk Blajwajs and Fajwel Leszczyk, the husband and father of the Leszczyk family, who had been brought over from the Czechochowa jail.

The ocean of suffering of the captured *bunkerowces*, who grappled with death during the entire period, did not end so quickly and easily. With each day - new torments. Mania Leszczyk fell ill with typhus and Róża Bieda, with both typhus and malaria at the same time. Under the most horrific conditions, they fought their illnesses and recovered.

The political and strategical situation changed. The Soviet armies, which were pummelling the German enemy on all fronts and driving them away from the conquered territories, were already nearing the Auschwitz crematoria and death camp.

On 18th January 1945, the *bunkerowces* were evacuated, along with the women’s transport, to Ravensbrück. The transport took twenty-four days - fourteen days on foot and ten days in freight carriages. with 140 people in each carriage, without food or water. Most of the captives died along the way. Some starved, some froze and others were shot. Only a small percentage made it - starving, withered and with swollen feet.

There were also women from Czechochowa in the Ravensbrück women’s camp. They had been brought there from HASAG-Pelcery with the evacuation transport on 16th January 1945. After spending four weeks in Ravensbrück, the women, who had been in the bunker in Mstów, were once again sent to another concentration camp at Malchow [in Mecklenburg]. The camp could hold up to 2,000 people, but they crammed in over 5,000. The crammed-in conditions were horrific and, in addition, the prisoners were constantly starved and beaten. Under the ground, in tunnels, there was a large munitions factory. Russian captives and civilians worked there. Those who had arrived from Ravensbrück were not sent to this work.

On 1st May 1945, everyone was herded together into one part of the camp, and a strict “isolation zone” was declared. It was forbidden to exit the barracks. Men were also brought in - they were shrivelled, drained, starved and half-dead.

Another transport ensues - the exhausted, starving, half-dead men and women are driven, on foot, towards an unknown destination. At the same time, they see German soldiers from defeated divisions fleeing in panic from the front. Many of them have changed into civilian clothes and had cast away their weapons.

Jadzia Leszczyk and her daughter Mania, seeing that it was utter foolishness to continue on foot with the transport, for they would perish of hunger and exhaustion, hid in a forest with a group of women, numbering ten in total. Once the transport had gone far enough away, the women went into the village of Plau⁶, where they took potatoes off the market stalls and cooked them in the woods in order to still their hunger. The “goodhearted” German peasants of the Plau village filed a complaint to the effect that the female prisoners were robbing them and taking their potatoes. A guard arrived - an old German - and arrested them. Nothing they said to him was of any avail, and he would not leave the women in peace. He continued to escort them, until a soldier, fleeing from the front, came up and addressed the guard with the following words, “Old animal! The Soviets are already in the next village - everyone is fleeing. You could be taken captive any minute and, instead of saving yourself, you are making a fool of yourself and escorting these women.” The guard, upon hearing these words, quickly removed himself and disappeared. The women went back towards the front and took lodgings in the first house of the nearest village.

On 5th May, the first Soviet soldier arrived on a horse and, afterwards, the Soviet divisions marched in. The women, who had escaped from the transport, were liberated.

Of the ten individuals from the bunker in Mstów, those who survived are: Jadzia Leszczyk and her daughter Mania - they live in Bamberg and Mania works as a nurse; Nacia Wolska is in Poland; Lola Fajfer is in the English Zone in Bergen-Belsen; Róża Bieda is in Paris, France, and Szyja-Lajb Wajnryt is in the US Zone, in the Regensburg region.

The poor, three-year-old infant Fela Wolska was shot in the jail in Zawodzie, in Częstochowa. The other three men - Fiszl Wolski, Srulek Bieda and Munysz Chrzanowski - were killed.

In one large bunker, Szyrkarski’s parents and a large number of Jews were hiding - thirty people in total. Zalman Szyrkarski, in a bid to save his parents from the “Small Ghetto” and also the Jews who were hiding with them, bribed the chief of the *Werkschutz* in HASAG-Pelcery, Klemm, with a large sum of money and valuable objects to take them into HASAG in a freight van.

The plan was ready. Klemm regularly drove freight vans to the “Small Ghetto” to fetch various things. He was to take along the Jews in hiding as workers who were supposedly employed in loading the things.

⁶ [TN: Plau am See is a town in the Ludwigslust-Parchim district, in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Germany.]

The *Werkschutz* leader Klemm took the money and valuables and drove to take the Jews from the bunker and transport them to HASAG. He took the Jews out of the bunker, but instead of bringing them to HASAG, he shot them on Degenhardt's orders.

There was another similar incident: Laszynski, one of the liquidators of the "Small Ghetto", found a nineteen-year-old girl who was hiding. She knew Laszynski to be a brutal murderer and understood that he would shoot her. She tried to buy him off. She offered him all that she had left from her annihilated parents, which amounted to 60,000 złoty. Laszynski agreed and took the money. He went with her, leading her to HASAG-Pelcery, as it were. On the way, he made her trip and she fell down. He pulled out his revolver and shot her. That was what the Nazi hangmen would do - they would first rob the Jews of their possessions and then of their lives.

On Yom Kippur, 21st December 1942, when the tragic news of the [imminent] deportation arrived, Machel Birencwajg sent Rabbi Elia-Nysn Wajsler's son Rachmil and his son-in-law Mojsze Berkowicz, who were working at the *Möbellager* [furniture camp], to fetch the Rabbi and his family to be hidden in the *Möbellager*.

At first, the Rabbi did not wish to acquiesce, but under the influence of the whole family, he went along with them. The family consisted of twelve people: Rabbi Elia-Nysn Wajsler, aged sixty; his wife Chaja (née Berkowicz), aged fifty-six; their daughter Ruchla Krakowska (née Wajsler), aged thirty-five, and her two children – Lusja, aged thirteen, and Tosia, aged nine; their son Josef Wajsler, aged thirty-four, his wife Rywca (née Jaskowicz), aged thirty-three and their two children – Bajla, aged four, and Chaimek, a five-month-old baby; Mojsze Wajsler, aged thirty, and his wife Gitla (née Jaskowicz), aged twenty-seven; their daughter Bajla Wajsler, aged eighteen, and their cousin Szymon Krakowski, aged sixteen.

The Rabbi's son, Rachmil Wajsler, aged twenty-two, and the son-in-law Mojsze Berkowicz were also there. These two had no need to hide, as they were employed in the *Möbellager*. Hideouts (bunkers) had been made in the *Möbellager*, where a hundred Jews were hiding, including a large number of children.

Once the "Small Ghetto" had been set up, a building on ul. Nadrzeczna was assigned to the *Möbellager* workers. Bit by bit, they began to transfer the Jews hidden in the bunkers to the "Small Ghetto". Disregarding the assurances of the German authorities that, in the "Small Ghetto", life would be peaceful and nothing would happen, precautionary measures were taken by building an entire array of bunkers. The *Möbellager's* cabinetmakers made two bunkers in the courtyard on ul. Nadrzeczna for the Rabbi's family. One of the hideouts was in the attic and the other in the cellar.

The "Small Ghetto's" agitated life was also manifested in the atmosphere inside these hideouts. At any minute, they could be delivered into the hands of death. Before Chanukah, Degenhardt issued a directive that, on ul. Nadrzeczna, only men should live, on ul. Garncarska married couples and on ul. Kozia and ul. Senatorska only women. This directive was to be implemented in one day. People began moving to the designated streets. In the Rabbi's family, there were also some couples who decided to move to ul. Garncarska. These were Josef Wajsler, with his wife Rywca and their two children, and Mrs Fuks with her two

children. The Rabbi and his wife and the Krakowski family stayed put for the time being. Already, that very same night, a rumour spread that, on the following day, there would be an *akcja*. In the middle of the night, everyone returned to the bunkers in face of the imminent peril. These were the families of Josef Wajslers, Moszek Berkowicz and Chaskiel Berkowicz, all with wives and children, as well as the wife of the ritual slaughterer of Kamyk, the sister of the *Rebbetzin* [rabbi's wife]. The children, who had been woken up in the middle of the night, stifled their tears, in the knowledge that crying could spell their deaths.

On the following morning, all the groups of labourers went to work in the best order, and people thought that the rumour regarding the *akcja* had [just] been a malicious fabrication. The *Rebbetzin* and the youngest daughter, Bajla went over to ul. Garncarska to prepare the little room. Berkowicz immediately arrived and told [the others] to hide in the bunkers, because the gendarmerie had surrounded the ghetto. He was unable to inform the *Rebbetzin* and her daughter, who had gone to the other street.

This was the gory day of 4th January 1943. All those, who were in the houses, were taken out to the square in the Rynek Warszawsk, and a selection ensued to send 500 Jews away to Radomsko. The *Rebbetzin* and her daughter Bajla were among those who were led out to the selection.

There was then a terrible tumult, due to the resistance of the two young fighters, [Mendel] Fiszlewicz and Izio Fajner. A gruesome spectacle was played out on the spot - twenty-seven young men were shot and the *akcja* was carried out.

Bajla did everything possible to hide her mother, so that she should not fall into the hands of the murderers. That time, they were fortunate - the *Rebbetzin* and Bajla emerged with [only] a fright.

The selection did not go by without any losses for the Rabbi's family. Three people were taken: the *Rebbetzin's* mother, and a sister-in-law [named] Estusia Kowalska with her child.

That same evening, once again, a rumour spread to the effect that, on the next day, there would be another *akcja* - and this was indeed so. The Jewish police ran about among the bunkers and hiding places and dragged out children and old people. They also discovered the bunker in the attic. The Rabbi and part of the family were in the cellar bunker. The Jewish police brought the Fuks family's two girls and the Birenbaums' four children down from the attic - the parents were at work. Their grandmother, an old lady, had been looking after them. The children started weeping terribly and calling for their grandmother. Once more, the police then went up into the attic and took the old lady with them. On that day, 5th January 1943, the attic bunker in the house on ul. Nadrzeczna gave up seven victims. As it was clear that the Jewish police would [also] discover the bunker in the cellar, the Rabbi's family decided to leave the "Small Ghetto".

On 7th January 1943, the Rabbi and his family left the "Small Ghetto". The children were wrapped like packages and one hid the other so that no one should be caught. In this manner, they went to the *Möbellager*. The Rabbi and his family were hidden there for three months, being in constant danger due to various unfortunate incidents.

In the *Möbellager's* many bunkers, there was a hideout, where there was a woman [named Chana] Kongrecka with her two children. Her son [was] a twelve-year-old boy. This boy went to buy something at the shop. Even though the child had an "Aryan" appearance, he was recognised by an SS officer, who began beating him murderously, so that he should reveal where he was staying. The boy, unable to withstand the torture, revealed the location of the bunker.

The mother and the other child were taken out to the courtyard, and a search ensued. It was on that occasion that the group of partisans in the *Möbellager* were captured and weapons were found. Nearby was a bunker with thirty Jews, who were being watched over by an elderly Jew - and it was only "by a miracle" that they were not discovered. That [particular] episode ended with the shooting of the woman and her children, the partisans, and all those who were to be found in the *Möbellager* courtyard at the time. This happened on 19th March 1943, at five o'clock in the afternoon.

The following morning, on 20th March, when [the labourers] went out to work, a huge *obława* [manhunt] took place in the "Small Ghetto". People were seized to be sent away to [the concentration camp in] Bliżyn. Among others, the Rabbi's son, Josef Wajsler, was also seized. Josef's [potential] deportation constituted a catastrophe for the Rabbi and his family, because he was the bunker's provider - the one who supplied it with food.

Machel Birencwajg employed all means possible to free Josef from being sent away to Bliżyn. He got him back from the Germans on the grounds that Josef Wajsler was a mechanic, who carried out the work that arrived on the orders of the *Kreishauptmann*. It was thus that he saved him.

In the *Möbellager*, the ground was also starting burn under one's feet - as a result, other bunkers were made in other buildings. The children were taken over to a new place in small crates. The Rabbi and his family decided to move to a new bunker. The small boy Chaimek, the son of Josef Wajsler, was given over to be raised to the Christian woman Rzeszkowska in Stradom.

In "Warta", there was a Pole who belonged to the underground movement and who harboured a large number of Jews in various bunkers. He was denounced by other Poles and, as a result, fell as a victim. The Germans shot him. When the tactics of the AK⁷ towards Jews changed, the hidden Jews also fell as victims through their former protectors.

The Christian woman Rzeszkowska, who had taken the child to be raised, sent a Christian named Mietek Stawicki to the Wajsler family, who told them that he had a good bunker in a village, at his mother's house. On those grounds, he continually squeezed money from them, due to which he aroused mistrust in him.

Mietek Stawicki, in a bid to win their trust, declared that there was already one Jew staying with his mother and that he could bring them a letter from him, stating that he could be fully trusted. The next time, he came with a letter written in Yiddish, which said that the writer of

⁷ [TN: *Armia Krajowa* (Home Army), a right-wing partisan group.]

the letter was a Jew and that he was staying with the mother of Mietek Stawicki and that he could be trusted. Based on that letter, the whole family of thirteen people went to the Christian woman Zofja Stawicka in the village of Rzerzeczyce near Kłomnice. At first, she showed some displeasure but, nevertheless, she let everyone into the bunker, which consisted of an attic, a box room and a cellar. The Jew, who was there, turned out to be a man from Łódź named Izrael Ajnszylder, who had escaped from Treblinka.

As it turned out, Zofja Stawicka's son was a man of the underworld, whose aim was to murder the entire Wajsler family in order to rob them. He had already organised a bandit attack on Izrael Ajnszylder, but he did not succeed in this, due to the following reasons: Mietek Stawicki had convinced two Poles to murder Ajnszylder, together with him, and rob him (he said that the Jew had fled from Treblinka and had probably taken a large quantity of gold and money with him), and then throw him into the river. The two Poles, who arrived with Mietek Stawicki, had thought that Ajnszylder was a Jew with a beard and *payes* [sidelocks]. But when they saw that he was a progressive man and that he was held in great esteem by the members of the household (i.e., Mietek's brother Staszek and their mother Zofja), they became frightened that they would pay with their own lives and gave up on the robbery and the murder. From that time onwards, Mietek Stawicki's attitude towards Ajnszylder changed completely.

The story, with the note that he sent, was as follows: Mietek Stawicki had declared that he was thinking of bringing a group of Jewish partisans who were armed. Izrael Ajnszylder, desiring to be with people who could put up a resistance if needed, wrote the note.

The Christian woman, Zofja Stawicka, who was a fifty-odd-year-old widow, had certain feelings for Izrael Ajnszylder. She deluded herself to the effect that, when the War was over, he would become the mayor, whereupon she would be the one to decide all matters in the locality. As a result, she obeyed him fanatically in everything he told her. And, in fact, it is thanks to this that the Rabbi and his whole family remained alive.

The AK found out that the Wajsler family was staying with Mrs Stawicka, and they came with the purpose of killing the Jews. In the end, they set a weekly payment, giving the entire affair an ideological character, as it were, stating that they needed to have money for organisational duties.

Once again, Mietek Stawicki organised an attack upon the hidden Jews. He came with a whole group. A huge commotion ensued - everyone started to yell. The son, Staszek Stawicki, who happened to be at home, took up an axe and ran to fight against the attackers, among whom was also his brother Mietek and, on whose account, he later fell as a victim.

The Christian woman Rzeszkowska from Stradom, who had taken in the little boy Chaimek to be raised, had simply fooled the parents out of their money and had probably killed the child herself. She came, a few times, to the Christian woman Stawicka to inquire whether the Jews were still alive. The response she received was that the child's parents had already been dead for quite some time. She went away happy that no trace would be left of her crime.

Mrs Zofja Stawicka had several sons, who were known in the entire vicinity as thieves and robbers. In every case of a theft or robbery, suspicion fell upon them. As a result, there were frequent searches there. This constantly put the Jews hiding there in peril.

Once, the following incident took place: a neighbour was robbed and suspicion fell upon the Stawicki sons. As consequence, on Sunday, 13th December 1943, at half past six in the evening, the whole house was surrounded by sixteen gendarmes and a search ensued. The situation of the Jews was desperate. Ajnszylder, who was always in the house, hid in the cowshed and covered himself with muck. The Christian woman's son, Staszek, began to run away, but the gendarmes caught him and also his brother, who lived in the neighbouring village.

The Wajsler family was in the attic and they distinctly heard a gendarme say that they would now search the attic. The situation of the Jews was a hopeless one. The Rabbi started to recite *Vidui*⁸. As fate would have it, they only shone searchlights into the attic and the Jews emerged with [just] a fright. The Germans executed Kazik and Staszek Stawicki, whom they had captured. They also looked for Mietek, but could not catch him. Mietek had been boasting that he had fooled sixteen Jews into going into the woods, under the pretext of taking them to a bunker, and that there, with the help of his comrades, he had murdered and robbed them. After his two brothers were shot and seeing that his own life was not safe should the Germans capture him, he calmed down and stopped terrorising the Jews.

By good fortune, the entire family who hid with Mrs Zofja Stawicka survived.

Following the liberation, Mietek Stawicki, wishing to erase his tracks, moved to Breslau [Wrocław], where he plays the role of "protector", serving in the police force.

Izrael Ajnszylder married Ruchla Krakowska. Both suffered together in the bunker under the reign of the Nazis and, after the liberation, they joined forces to build a future in the Land of Israel.

Rabbi Elia-Nysn Wajsler and his wife Chaja née Berkowicz, their daughter Bajla Wajsler and Izrael Ajnszylder with his wife Ruchla and two children are currently in France, on their way to the Land of Israel; one of the family members is in Cyprus; Mojsze Wajsler and his wife Gucza and Josef Wajsler with his wife Rywczka and their daughter Bajla are in Bad Kissingen, and Rachmil Wajsler is in Eschwege.

⁸ [TN: Heb., "confession"; a prayer in which one asks forgiveness for his sins, which is recited, among other instances, by one who is about to die.]