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The New War

On 22nd June 1941, from before daybreak to late at night, we saw thousands of vehicles rolling by, with cargoes of armaments, in the direction of the German-Russian border that had been established in 1939.

A report appeared in the press, to the effect that a war had broken out between the great and powerful German Reich and weak communist Russia, to which all the Jews in the world belonged, automatically, including ourselves in Poland.

We did, in fact, immediately feel the war between Germany and Russia in a special manner. Within a few days after the outbreak of the war, the Gestapo stormed Jewish residences in the night, seeking according to a prepared register of names, people who, before the War, had belonged to socialist parties. Many of those who were wanted had died a long time ago, while others were in Russia. But the Gestapo was not so keenly particular as to the names, but arrested anyone whom they came upon in the stormed dwelling. In those days, hundreds of people were arrested in this manner. After gathering a large number of people, they were all sent away to Oświęcim.

Large posters were pasted throughout the ghetto, in which it was stated that Russian captives would be led through the streets. No one was to get near them, shout out any word or offer any item or food. Whoever violated this would be shot on the spot.

Over the course of a few days, we saw small groups of German military personnel, leading large dogs, arriving by train. It became known that these divisions would be guarding the Russian prisoners who were to arrive here.

In the hot summer days, thousands of captives arrived with the train. Large divisions of German military went out in front, herding all the "Aryan" passers-by onto the pavements. All the "Aryans" passing by were forced to wait until the great mass of prisoners was led past through the "Aryan" streets.

But it looked completely different in the streets of the ghetto, when the same prisoners were led through them. Before the captives marched through, German military divisions drove the Jewish passers-by into the houses. The gates were locked and they shot into the windows if anyone showed oneself there. When the prisoners entered the ghetto, the streets were empty, the windows closed and the gates locked - it looked like a town which had died.

Nevertheless, hidden behind the window curtains, a few Jews looked outside and saw the terrible state of the prisoners, who passed by in long columns. They seemed amazed at the emptiness in the streets, while a few minutes earlier they had passed through lively streets. They wore wooden clogs on their feet, which clacked noisily as they trod on the cobblestones. On their faces, one could tell that they were weary and starving. Those who fainted and the

very weak were led along by their colleagues in the rows. Those utterly exhausted collapsed on the cobblestones and, whoever did not immediately get up, received blows from the rifle butts and was flung onto carts that were following from behind.

A German soldier suddenly shouted at a prisoner, who was walking barefoot and carrying the wooden clogs in his hand. The soldier ordered him to put on the shoes. The prisoner, with a justificatory gesture, pointed to his wounded feet. A blow with the gunstock forced the captive to put on the clogs.

A while later, the following scene was played out: a man, who was hiding in a narrow passageway between two houses and thought that no one had taken notice of him, threw a small parcel of food to the prisoners. But a soldier saw this and stabbed him with his bayonet.