

The Destruction and Annihilation of Jewish Żarki¹

The hand trembles as one takes up the pen to chronicle that gruesome era – the fearsome events of the years 1939-1945. Thousands of books have already been written about the destruction and annihilation of the Jews [and] thousands more shall be written yet about Hitler's modern-day genocidal cannibals - but it is hard to believe that the language exists, with which one may express everything which we experienced during that tearful epoch. The appropriate terminology with which to record the tragedy that we went through is lacking.

The scope of this tragedy is too great for a historian to be able to describe it - [too great] for him to have the capability to depict the frightful suffering of human beings. Each individual, who lived through that period and experienced it, by himself, constitutes a history of blood and tears. It is possible that, from everything individuals will write, the general picture of the destruction will, in due course, be created and, in this manner, will emerge as a monumental work, which will tell of the horrifying machinations of Man and his culture.

Where are you scientists, poets and thinkers? Where are you bearers of culture of all the ages? Where are you preachers of morals, honesty, humanism and love of mankind?

Rise from your graves, Schiller and Goethe, Kant and Hegel - come and see the workings of your hearts and minds! And you, the composers, who represent the sentiments - the language of the soul - you, who made the name of your nation great and put it in the foremost position within general human culture - Bach and Mozart, Beethoven and Händel - look how low your folk has fallen, how they have outdone the cannibals, barbarians and wild Huns of all the ages!

In the general catastrophe, we Jews suffered the most, due to the fact that we lived in all the countries where Hitler's boot trod.

By the time the sorrowful events started taking place, Poland already lay in ruins - and the fire soon spread to other European countries. The cannons thunder in France, Belgium and Holland. [Then] Norway's turn comes. The skies of Yugoslavia are blackened by aeroplanes [and] Greece is burning.

Before long, the East is in flames. At the same time, the vast expanses of the Russian territory are being bathed in the blood of millions of victims - the detonations of exploding bombs are heard in hot Africa. The silent desert shakes, in its entire length and breadth, in the terrible battles between the two opposing sides, which wage war with the most modern military technology.

The soil is burning and the sea is aflame. The skies are glowing and the air is fire - the entire globe is ablaze. And in this sea of fire, the Jewish People, in its dispersion, is singled out, falling first victim to the Nazi beasts, who stab, shoot, burn and poison the Jewish population, anywhere they arrive on their bloodied march.

A *shtetl* named Żarki also appeared amongst the hundreds of cities and towns on the map. It was a town with a history of almost 600 years of existence, with a population of 5,000 souls, which was made up of 3,000 Jews and 2,000 Christians.

¹ [TN: As there are numerous significant differences in style, and indeed content, between this original Yiddish article and Yitzchak Lauden's translation to Hebrew "The Matter of the Holocaust", which appears in this book on pp.109-143, we have deemed it necessary to translate both texts separately, each in its own place.]

The Jewish populace consisted mainly of small traders, merchants [and] craftsmen of different trades. Most of them were religious Jews who would congregate three times a day in the *shtieblech* and study-halls for public prayers. These were Jews with beards and sidelocks, who wore long caftans. The youth, on the other hand, was more progressive and they wore European clothes. There were also some religious youth and they studied at the Study-hall, from which the hoarse voices with the specific Talmud chant emanated all day long, until the late evening hours.

In 1939, when antisemitism reached its culmination point, the financial situation of the Jews was a difficult one. The antisemitic financial war against Jews was waged by all means and manners. Due to these circumstances, the Jewish youth was prematurely brought under the yoke of providing an income. But, despite the work and the worries of livelihood, Żarki youth did not fall behind in their national [viz. Zionist] education and in their fight for culture. Their nationalistic aspirations were manifested in the Zionist work and particularly in the collections for the KKL and Keren Ha'Yesod funds. Thanks to the youth's nationalistic drive, many made *Aliyah* to [the Land of] Israel, thus avoiding the bitter fate of their brothers and sisters.

The General Zionist Organisation had a library, which was founded by a our *landsmann* - Abram-Josef Szybel. The library was named after his deceased wife, Zysla-Malka Szybel. In this library, there were thousands of specimens of the best works of Yiddish and Hebrew literature. In this manner, the library became the main factor in the general and national education of the Jewish youth in Żarki and it gave impetus to their nationalistic awakening.

The autumn of 1939 was one of the most beautiful in Poland. The sun shone continuously. The sheaves of warm rays streamed [down] from heaven, making everything all around shine. There was little movement in the street - everyone sat in the shade of their own little house. Business was slow too and everyone lived in tension and in waiting. At the thresholds of the shops, people sat napping. These were those who were waiting in vain for some work. A serene stillness spread over everything and everyone.

Above the *shtetl* hung a deep-blue sky and, as if with pity, looked [down] on the peaceful people who were not yet aware of the imminent catastrophe. In this calm, one could sense the great storm that was brewing. Some strange nervousness gripped everyone. The anxiety increased along with the fear. People gathered by the radios, listening with bated breath to the reports, the news and the speeches of the European statesmen.

Eventually, Hitler's great war-speech came - may his name be obliterated. I shall never forget the last words of his address - he declared war on Poland and, thus, on the whole of Europe, which stood armed in readiness to take on the fight. But he also declared war on us - the unarmed Jews. He finished his speech with these words, "Central European Jewry must disappear!"²

While the date 1st September 1939 will remain in human history as a major world event, this same day will remain in our Jewish memory for all eternity as a gruesome spectre, which will make every Jewish heart shudder.

Contemplating our horrific destruction, we, [the survivors,] stand by our own graves³, crushed. We do not believe our own eyes. We are incapable of grasping the horror of the destruction and

² [TN: These infamous, closing words do not seem to appear in any historical sources. Hitler did, in fact, deliver an address to the Reichstag, on 1st September 1939, justifying the invasion of Poland. However, there is no mention of Jews in it at all. See the English translation here: <https://fcit.usf.edu/holocaust/resource/document/HITLER1.htm>]

³ [TN: Rendered in the Hebrew translation as "by the graves of our dear ones."]

obliteration. We are as if under the influence of an anaesthetic – without feelings. Perhaps later, from a more distant perspective, may it be possible to perceive reality in all its brutality.

[Only] after the terrifying events did we first recognise how guilty we had been of our [own] misfortune. Sadly, we had learnt too little from our distant past, and even less from the most recent one - the period 1933-1939. We did not observe the destruction of our brethren in Germany and Austria. We did not look to their experiences, their destruction and misfortune, in order to learn something from it. We were, therefore, not sensitive to the immediate danger from Hitler's Germany, which was preparing the destruction and annihilation of us all.

Only later did we perceive what a weak sense of politics we possessed, how meagre was our political orientation. We were immersed in the tumult of day-to-day life, in all kinds of commerce and business. We worshipped the *Golden Calf* and other idols - but we did not see reality, as a result of which we also did not foresee our future.

The Jewish community in Poland was torn and splintered. Diverse ideologies and orientations had split up our unity, weakening our potential as an ethnic minority. This situation, in Jewish life, led us to not recognise the perils which were standing behind our backs. It was under such circumstances that we apprehended the first cannonade which reached us from the nearby Polish-German border - a distant echo of the huge tempest which, later, wiped us off the surface [of the earth].

The events did not keep us waiting for long. Everything came with lightning speed. The cannons spewed fire and made the ground shake. Everyone was seized by fear and terror. Long convoys of wagons, horses and people passed through the *shtetl* in haste. These were the fleeing peasants with their families, who had left their homes and set off, not knowing to where they were headed. These long caravans portrayed an image of horror. The wagons were loaded with all manner of household items. Men, women and children, along with livestock, trudged behind them. The cows, sheep and goats stared with wide-open, panic-stricken eyes, mooing [and baaing] mournfully.

This was on Friday, 1st September 1939. A tremor seized the entire *shtetl*. In an agitated state, people ran each to the other, as if one were seeking aid with the other. By government orders, one had to paste paper on the window [panes], as protection against the bombs. Everyone did this with the greatest of speed. That Friday, at dusk, it was like before *Kol Nidrei* - a scramble [and] a rush. One could see people dashing about everywhere with paper and glue, with which to make their "fortifications".

The trudge of the convoys did not cease and, when night fell and the sun left a long, fiery strip in the west, the terror increased even more. The cannons boomed constantly. The detonations thundered and the whistle of the projectiles cut through the air. Already that night, the *shtetl* did not sleep. People stood by the windows, looking into the dark night and listening to the monotonous rhythm of the dozens of caravans which, in the night, resembled ghosts.

Thus the night passed, waiting for something extraordinary. Daybreak began - a golden ball appeared in the east, which quickly grew and cast forth fiery rods. The sun was shining on the sorrowful *shtetl*. On the soul it was so hard, [and] inside the heart so dismal, and the sun was teasing [us] with its resplendence, as if saying, "Look at how beautiful I am, look how radiant the world is!" That early morning, the birds also sang so sadly - as if they were mourning the bitter fate of our hapless town.

The movement in the streets became livelier. People looked at each other with questioning eyes - "What have you heard?" Very soon, we found out that the Polish military could not withstand the

pressure of the German offensive and were hastily retreating. Already on Saturday, 2nd September, around eleven o'clock, the first Polish soldiers from the front appeared in town. They were exhausted, and ran terrified without any order. Characteristically, under such circumstances, they did not forget to plunder Jewish shops.

The retreating military augmented the panic even more. Large groups of uniformed policemen also ran further and further away. The nervousness and anxiety grew. The desire to flee pervaded everyone. People started packing their effects. The psychosis of flight gripped the entire *shtetl*.

Just then, German aeroplanes suddenly appeared. All at once, detonations of exploding bombs resounded. Everything, all around, turned black from the billows of smoke and dust from the houses that had fallen. The bombardment lasted only a few minutes - and part of the town lay in ruins. A tremendous terror and panic broke out. People ran about like madmen, themselves not knowing where they were going.

When I went out to the street, my eyes met with a terrifying scene. The chimneys of the fallen houses jutted out everywhere. Plumes of smoke arose from the burning houses. The streets were full of glass from broken window panes. On the bridge, dead people, fallen horses and cows and upturned carts lay strewn about. Dozens of people were trapped under the collapsed buildings. The German aviation's short visit caused the death of almost two hundred individuals.

Seized by a dreadful panic, the *shtetl* began to run. People fled without a clear itinerary. In the pandemonium, people forgot those nearest to them. Most ran in the direction of the town of Lelów.

This chaotic flight presented a sorrowful picture. Panic-stricken, men, women and children ran aimlessly. Exhausted from running and hunger, many threw away the few belongings they had taken with them. Others hid in villages, until the German murderers arrived there also.

On the roads, scattered about, one could see rifles, revolvers and machine-guns that had been left behind by the Polish military. [Discarded] motorcycles, automobiles and pickup trucks blocked the highway. Garments, merchandise, valises, money and valuables also lay strewn about in the road.

After a day or two, everybody realised that escape was senseless. The motorised German Army caught up with everyone. Part of the population did not turn back. They managed to flee eastwards - to the territories which had been occupied by the Soviet Army.

My family did not wander far afield and on, Monday, 4th September, we returned to Żarki. It took us a long time to go back, through woods and fields - each one with a trembling heart, with dismal thoughts. From afar, we perceived the gleaming helmets, the uniforms and the countless motorcycles, cars and tanks driving about everywhere.

Immediately upon arriving in town, we were stopped by German guards. They searched us for weapons. After they let us go, we ran home.

Once inside the house, we heard a violent volley of gunfire and the shouts of the Germans, "*Alle raus! Alle raus!*" [Everyone out! Everyone out!] The rampaging German soldiers shot in every direction. They drove people out and herded them into the church [courtyard]. There, they ordered everyone to stand, facing the wall, with their hands up. If someone was unable to hold out and he dropped a hand, he was beaten until he bled. There were also cases of shootings. Thus the assembled remained, in mortal fear, until six in the evening. Then, a command was given - everyone

was to run home. In five minutes, anyone [still] found on the streets would be shot. The *Bloody Monday* of 4th September in Żarki cost dozens of victims.

This Bloody Monday cast a terrible fear upon everyone. All stayed at home. Men were not to be seen in the street at all. At night, people did not undress before going to sleep. All the tenants in our building gathered in one place and spent the night together - sleeping on the floor, for lack of space. Any rustle from outside made us tremble - every time, we thought they were coming to take us away.

Thus [the] sleepless nights drew on and [the] days of terror, alarm and pain. We sat inside the houses, not daring to stick our heads out. Outside was the beautiful world - the sun was shining and the ripe fruit was giving out its delicious fragrance. In the world, it was beautiful and bright but, for us, dark days of fear and suffering had begun.

Military rule was implemented on the town, which came into contact with the population. The representative of the Jews was Josl Zielonka.

The powers-that-be issued orders to the effect that [all] men aged sixteen and up were to gather on the marketplace square. Whoever stayed at home would be shot. Almost everyone heeded the summons.

Once we had been assembled and were standing in rows, high-ranking military officials arrived, accompanied by a Pole named Kowalik who, immediately, became the mayor of our town.

This Pole had been prepared in advance, having been a spy for the Germans back before the War - despite the fact that he occupied a high position in the Polish Government.

This type of fact shows the great demoralisation of the Poles, among whom were thousands of informers, denounciators, spies and traitors. This bears testimony to the decay of huge factions, who had first waged war against the Jewish population and were now prepared to sell all national interests to foreign powers, who had come to rob Poland of its independence. Thousands of Poles sprouted up as if from under the ground and they assumed positions of responsibility under the German authorities.

The military men held short addresses in the form of - *lehavdil* - the Ten Commandments. They told us, first of all, who we were - "You are the greatest enemy of the German People and we shall, therefore, settle accounts with you". Our possessions are ownerless - they no longer belong to us. A Jew is not allowed to buy from a Pole. Every Jewish house is to be marked in oil paint with "*Jude, Żyd*" - in German and in Polish.

Following this brief address, which was translated into Polish by the aforementioned Kowalik, we were all taken to the church [courtyard once again]. We remained there all day, in the shadow of death. On top of the church's walls, machine-guns had been set up aimed at us. We were encircled by military on all sides. From every breast, deep sighs were heard and mouths whispered, "*Sh'ma Yisrael!*"

The sun had already begun to set. Its last rays caressed the tall church spires. Soon, a silent, calm and gloomy night fell - one as gloomy as our situation.

Finally, a change in our circumstances came. We were taken away to the Great Synagogue, where we were held under strict, military guard. The Synagogue was ruined. The *shtenders* and benches -

smashed. Here, in the Synagogue, we were given a bit of straw - like for animals. Denigrated and humiliated, in a state of shock and exhausted by the difficult experiences, we lay down in the straw with hard, doleful thoughts.

The night went by sleeplessly, with bizarre nightmares, until a purer and fresher dawn arrived. The sun glinted through the boarded-up windows.

These were already the *Selichos* days. Many of the assembled prayed and said *Selichos*. Their heart-rending prayers cast an even greater gloom. A profound melancholy pervaded all those gathered. The worshippers prayed and said *Selichos* with the greatest ecstasy, believing that their prayers would be accepted.

I envied them and a thousand thoughts passed through my head. I saw the endlessly, long chain of our bitter Exile. I saw all those burnt and dishonoured. I heard in the sorrowful *Selichos* chant the echo of all the groans, which are carried to us from above the heads of dozens of generations - aged tears [and] belated groans, which no one any longer accepts. This sorrowful melody is already too old, the suffering and necessity experienced is too much and, to this day, our agony has not abated.

All this hurt so much. I knew that no one was taking up our tears [and] no one was listening to our groans.

Around eight o'clock in the morning, they allowed women to bring us food. We felt no taste in the victuals but, like ravenous hounds, we swallowed it up, together with tears. The enemy wished to degrade us, to turn us into animals, to take all human worth away from us.

We lived in constant, mortal fear, not knowing what they would do with us. Bloody Monday stood before everyone's eyes. People said that we would be sent away and, each time we heard the noise of cars, we began to tremble, thinking that they were already coming to get us. The fact is that, at the time, [people] were [already] being sent away to different concentration camps, where they went through a terrifying hell of pain and want [and] where thousands died of starvation, cold and epidemic diseases. A few days later, a German military officer came to the Synagogue accompanied by the representative of the Jews, Josef Zielonka and they began to release various professionals. The rest were divided into groups and taken, under military escort, to work - to clear away the debris of the houses fallen during the bombardment.

23rd September was *Yom Kippur*. On that day, a special military squad arrived - a sort of disciplinary expedition. They selected one hundred of us Jews, put us in rows in the marketplace square and gave each of us a shovel. We were ordered to shoulder the shovels and march in straight rows of four. The one escorting us commanded us to sing. In this way, he wished to increase our humiliation and belittlement. The Poles watched this march. They laughed and were delighted to see the "Moszkes" being taken off to work.

They led us towards ul. Kozięłowska and, there, they put us inside the roadside ditches and ordered us to extract the accumulated mud and rubbish. Two soldiers with rifles stood over each of us, urging on the work by shouting, "*Schneller, schneller, Faulenzer!*" [Faster, faster, layabouts!]. We worked with full force and could not rest even for a moment - because [if we did,] we received blows from every direction with the rifle-butts. By twelve o'clock, we were already so spent that we could faint. We hoped that, now, lunchtime would come and that we would have the opportunity to rest a little. But how dismayed we were, when the guards rotated. The first ones went to lunch and other murderers stood in their place with even greater cruelty.

Near me, Moryc Torbeczko was also working. He was a vigorous and powerful lad. The two Germans had a particular wish to torment him and they ordered him to run, with the shovel, to and fro across the road. While he ran, the two soldiers prodded him with the rifle-butts, incessantly yelling, "*Schneller, schneller!*"

Szlojme Grinwald, a tall and slender lad, also caught the attention of the sadists. Over [viz. across] the road was a small bridge. Between the bridge and the ground, there was very little space. The Germans forced him down under it, to clear out all the swampy mud from there. When Grinwald could hold out no longer, he emerged [like] a wild man, unbuttoned his shirt and, revealing his chest, yelled deliriously, "*Shoot me! Shoot me!*" But, after a hail of blows, he was once more pushed under the little bridge, where he was only able to remain in a recumbent position⁴.

Standing in the ditch as I was, up to my ankles in sludge, I tried to improve my footing. That very instant, blows fell upon me from all sides and I collapsed exhausted to the ground.

It is under such conditions that we laboured on that *Yom Kippur*, which seemed to last an eternity. Only once night had fallen, did the Germans order us to run to our holes. Despite having been left without any strength, we ran, driven by the terror and by the gunfire from behind. That is what the murderers wanted - on top of everything, to play a game with our nerves.

As in other cities and towns in Poland, in Żarki, too, a so-called *Judenrat* was created. As Chairman, Izrael Borensztajn z''l, formerly a Zionist public figure, was appointed.

It is generally accepted that the *Judenräte* played a negative role in Jewish life during the Nazi occupation, if only due to the fact that they cooperated with the Nazi murderers and, willingly or unwillingly, carried out Hitler's commands. It must, however, be firmly asserted that there were obvious differences between the chairmen of the *Judenräte* in the different localities.

If we wish to present an objective evaluation of Izrael Borensztajn, we must acknowledge that his actions, during the time that he was "*Judenältester*" [(Chief) Jewish Elder], showed that his upbringing in the Zionist spirit helped him to remain, for a long time, on a certain moral level. He displayed great selflessness in saving a Jewish life. Certainly, when the time of the most difficult tests came - when the life of Jews became, with each day, ever freer for the taking - his disposition, too, was altered. As was the case throughout Poland, and also in other European countries, under the Nazi regime - "*Judenälteste*" saw, first of all, to themselves, their relatives and their closest friends - thus it was also with Izrael Borensztajn.

We must stress the fact that no Jewish policeman in Żarki ever raised his hand against another Jew - this was only because Izrael Borensztajn was their leader and commander. His constant intercessions usually brought about positive results for the entire Jewish populace and, not infrequently, there were cases when he, literally, rescued sentenced Jews from a certain death.

The *Ältestenrat*⁵ included representatives from all factions of the Jewish population. The *Ältestenrat's* highest department was the Labour Department. In the beginning, Mojsze Rotsztajn - a long-standing member of *Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair* - worked with the Labour Department. The Committee⁶ created a fund in order to support the poorer strata of the Jewish populace.

⁴ [TN: Meaning that he lay there in a state of unconsciousness, according to the Hebrew translation.]

⁵ [TN: Council of Elders; alternative name for *Judenrat* which was used in some locations, such as the Łódź Ghetto or Theresienstadt.]

⁶ [TN: Viz. the *Judenrat*, according to the translation to Hebrew.]

Those, who required aid, were mainly those classes of society whose head of the family was compelled to engage in forced labour without any remuneration. The tailor, cobbler or joiner, instead of sitting at his work and earning a livelihood, was forced to take up the pick or the spade and go for forced labour, for which no one paid him. The Committee had to raise the necessary monetary means for this from amongst the town's wealthier Jews.

A plague in their own right, were the frequent contributions that were imposed on the Jewish population. Within a small period of time, several contributions were levied. They included one as high as 20,000 zloty. The Committee required a great deal of money for unofficial expenditures: bribes for the governmental agencies upon whom the lives of the Jewish population depended.

The *Ältestenrat* was officially established in Żarki on 30th April 1940. Thanks to the fact that the authorities in Żarki were corrupt, the life of the local Jews was much easier than that of those in other cities and towns. Six months passed by in relative peace in our *shtetl*, but the sorrowful news about the life of our brethren in other localities reached us. Rivers of Jewish blood and tears were pouring all across Poland. Tens of thousands of Jews were, at the time, already being tortured in various camps.

The news that reached us was terrifying. When one ponders the savage deeds of the Nazi murderers, the blood curdles in one's veins, the heart bursts with rage, the fists clench themselves, the brain ceases to think and only one desire pervades one's entire being – *Revenge!*

Our whole two-thousand-year-old history of exile, each page of which is filled with horror and fear, blood and tears, pales in comparison with modern events. The history of the world tells of sanguinary rulers, cruel Caesars, Roman emperors, Torquemadas⁷ [and] wild Huns. But the contemporary happenings, in the 20th century, surpass in their cruelty anything that took place in the past.

[Then,] life in our *shtetl* took a turn [for the worse]. Earlier, Żarki had belonged to the Zawiercie district, whose rulers had not interfered too much with affairs of life in the *shtetl*. All functions had been concentrated in the hands of the mayor, Kowalik. He was the sole ruler, controlling the fate of the Jewish populace.

This same Kowalik embodied the most depraved type of person. He was an outspoken antisemite with a dirty character - dishonest and vile. In addition, he had a great greed for money and all manner of base passions. This was the type of fellow with whom the *Judenrat* had to maintain, to comply with all his demands and to hold him back from the vile schemes against the Jewish population.

This situation changed when our *shtetl* was attached to the Radomsko district. Zawiercie belonged to the Reich, whereas Radomsko was part of the *General Gouvernement*. The Radomsko *Kreishauptmannschaft* [Office of the County Governor] was very much disposed towards the hatred of Jews. Soon, new decrees and so limitations against the Jews poured out. Among all kinds of other decrees, an order was issued to seize all the shops from the Jews. This was a terrible blow. The *Judenrat* struggled against this decree by every means and, with great sums of money to the rulers in Radomsko, [they] managed to achieve the fact that the poor grocery-shop owners should continue to remain in their bit of livelihood.

⁷ [TN: Ref. to Tomás de Torquemada, the Spanish Inquisition's first Grand Inquisitor and one of the chief supporters of the expulsion of the Jews in 1492.]

We had barely been rid of one trouble, when another immediately arrived - a uniformed *Selbstschutz*⁸ group, comprising *Volksdeutsche* [ethnic Germans] and Poles, was established in the *shtetl*. This was a very base and crude element, who took advantage of their power in unlimited measure. The *shtetl* turned into darkness. It was impossible to cross the street. Whomever they happened upon, they beat murderously. The situation became unbearable. And, once again, the *Judenrat* employed every machination to be rid of this plague. Once more, the means of old were effective: "*Money answereth all things*" [Ecclesiastes 19:10] - [and] the band of murderers was taken away from town.

In the second half of 1940, a permanent gendarmerie outpost, made up of twenty-two men is established in Żarki. The situation in the *shtetl* becomes more serious. Life becomes much harder in every respect. The fresh enforcers of the law peer into every little corner. On top of that, there is now a plague of informers, who report everything to the authorities. Searches and confiscation of Jewish property become an everyday phenomenon.

The butchering profession has its own chapter in this affair. The men in that line of work suffered the most. Jewish ritual slaughter was strictly forbidden. Infringement of this prohibition was punishable by death. How severe this ban was, may be seen from the following incident that occurred in Tomaszów Mazowiecki. There, a mass killing was arranged. They rounded up all the butchers and *shochtim* - over thirty individuals - and shot them all.

Our *shtetl*, too, suffered much due to this ban on *shechitah*, but rather less than other towns. One butcher, Korcfeld, a young man thirty-odd years of age, was shot.

Kalman Kalkopf was active in the *Judenrat's* Labour Department. He showed great initiative in the problem of forced labour. Thanks to his efforts, only a small portion of the youth was sent to forced labour in the camps.

All these decrees and limitations on the Jews brought about a frightful impoverishment. For a large part of the population, the want was great. The *Judenrat* created a soup-kitchen and gave out lunches to impoverished Jews.

With every [new] day, the number of hungry and needy increased. At first, many held back from coming to the kitchen for a lunch. But necessity compelled them to forgo all ambitions [and] to forget the disgrace and shame of benefitting from the free lunch.

Thus, days and weeks went by.

In the world, blood - especially Jewish blood - is spilt like water. Summer departs and autumn arrives. Nature does its thing. Soon, a harsh and snowy winter comes. It was as if Nature was helping to make our lives difficult. The snowfall, during that period, was extraordinary.

Żarki lay in a strategic location. All the highways and roads constituted vital arteries for Hitler's occupation forces. The roads, therefore, always needed to be clean. Early every morning, we were all taken out to clear the snow from the roads. Often times, we were also taken to clean them at night.

This is already the second winter of war. Already, for the second time, the bloodied earth dons its white winter garment. It is deep into winter - February 1941. The sky is dismal - heavy clouds cover its face, casting sadness and gloom on everyone.

⁸ [TN: "Self-defence"; a paramilitary organisation which the Nazis mobilised from among the German minority living in Poland.]

We found out that Jewish deportees from Płock were about to arrive. They were to be housed in our *shtetl*. Upon [receiving] information over the telephone from the *Kreishauptmannschaft*, the *prezes* [Chairman], together with two other members of the *Judenrat* and Dr Margulies, travelled out to Złoty Potok, eighteen kilometres from Żarki. That is where they were supposed to receive the refugees from Płock.

The plight of the refugees was indescribable. Upon alighting from the wagons, dreadful scenes took place. Dozens of fainting and exhausted people received on-the-spot medical attention from Dr Margulies. There were also several dead amongst the refugees.

Drained by the long journey, the tribulations and suffering, physically and mentally broken, the deported Płock Jews arrived in Żarki, where they enjoyed warm and heartfelt treatment from our impoverished community. According to his means, each person brought aid to the refugees. A special committee was formed, which was tasked with housing the refugees, the number of whom reached two hundred and fifty.

The majority were given lodgings and meals in private homes - a smaller number, in a public refuge. A relief operation, in aid of the refugees, was conducted among the wealthier section of the Żarki Jewish population. Money, clothes, linen and bedding were collected.

Thus, the plight of the refugees eased a little. We helped them in every way we could. Even so, their hearts were always filled with hate and their eyes - with pain. These were people who were half wild from pain and chagrin, from humiliation and denigration.

These refugees made up just a small part of the Płock Jewish population. Płock had had many thousands of Jews and they had all been driven out of their homes, robbed of their houses, possessions and shops – everything that they had built during long years of effort and toil. In one fell swoop, the work of generations disappeared and was lost. One must, therefore, not find it surprising if there was such embitterment in the hearts of these people.

Life in the *shtetl* continued following its course. Each day that passed was like a heavy load one casts off one's weary shoulders, for each new day brought its troubles and worries.

This was during the first half of 1941. A glimmer of hope shone in the dismal hearts of the Jewish populace. Rumours spread that, very soon, war was about to break out between Germany and Russia. These rumours brought with them the hope that Nazi rule would already not last long.

The 22nd June 1941 arrived. The war between Hitler's Germany and the Soviet Union began. The multitudes of the German military, with their implements of war, flowed incessantly through our *shtetl*. Thousands of tanks and cannon, motorcycles and cars streamed relentlessly towards the eastern border.

Our hopes, however, did not hold up for long. The first results of the war between Germany and Russia were very different from those we had expected. Hitler's offensive on the Eastern Front soon broke the resistance of the Soviet forces. Like an avalanche of fire, the German troops engulfed vast swathes of Soviet territory, bringing with them destruction and annihilation to anything they encountered on their way. Wherever Hitler's armies arrived, the first bloodbath they perpetrated was on the Jewish population. Together with the German victories, the barbarism against the Jews also grew.

Our *shtetl* was just one kilometre from the border with the Reich. Jews risked their lives by engaging in smuggling, aided by Poles. The plague of informers caused great damage. Raids were often conducted in the ghetto, which were followed by confiscations and fines. Many of the smugglers were sent to Oświęcim.

The area where the Jews lived was not fenced off, but we were not permitted to leave our living quarters - on pain of death. The order, forbidding leaving the ghetto, was a hard blow to the Jewish population. Until then, while Jews still had some freedom of movement, they conducted a bit of business illegally. With the prohibition on exiting the ghetto, this trade ceased completely. When certain people, driven by hunger, left the ghetto, they paid for it with their lives. Exceptions were those who received so-called "*ausfahrscheinen*" [exit permits] from the *Kreishauptmannschaft*. But the number of these permits was minimally low - only a small, insignificant percentage of the populace received these *ausfahrscheinen*.

In June 1941 a typhus epidemic broke out in town, which took on very severe forms and brought, with it, a large number of fatalities. The *shtetl's* antisemites took advantage of the opportunity and wrote to the authorities that the Jews were those spreading the typhus, so that they needed to be completely isolated and the ghetto need to be fenced off. This intervention achieved immediate results and, at once, orders came from the Radomsko *Kreishauptmannschaft* to seal off the ghetto and to isolate it. The *Judenrat* undertook an intensive operation and, with the aid of a large sum of money, they succeeded in not allowing the ghetto to be sealed off.

As a result of this epidemic, a commission was created, with the participation of the Polish Dr Secomski from Częstochowa, the director of the Częstochowa municipal hospital for epidemics at the time. The commission also included from Żarki - the Polish Dr Gawędzki and the Jewish Dr Margulies, from Częstochowa - the two Jewish physicians, Dr Wolberg and Dr Warhaftig. The commission determined that the epidemic had broken out not exclusively through the fault of the Jewish population, but also due to other reasons. Based on this assertion, the command to isolate the ghetto was not carried out.

This was also a certain alleviation for the Jewish populace. During the Nazi era, Jewish life in general was one long chain of suffering and pain. But the ghettos were the greatest plague in the lives of the Jewish masses. They completely subverted Jewish life in every aspect - spiritually, morally, and physically. Conditions in the ghetto absolutely ruined the Jewish populace. Leaving one's former place of abode, wandering from street to street and from town to town, being crowded into filthy dwellings, the hunger, need, cold and the inhuman attitude [towards] life - caused all manner of epidemics, which cut young lives short and sowed death and destruction.

Being relocated to the ghettos also brought with it a shocking impoverishment of Jews. There were those who, wishing to hide their few possessions from the Nazi robbers, had concealed their goods, jewels and other things inside walls, in attics and in cellars. But upon entering the ghetto, they left all this for everyone's taking and were left without means of living.

Gruesome reports of the hell of the Jewish masses reached us from the whole of Poland. Wherever the Nazi boot only tread, Jewish blood was spilt.

The whole of Eastern Europe became one great pyre upon which the wretched victims were burnt.

At the end of 1941, a second typhus epidemic breaks out in the *shtetl*. In this period, it rages throughout Poland - especially amongst the Jewish population. This time, the epidemic takes on an acute character. Dozens of sick require assistance. The beloved doctor works tirelessly and beyond

his strength. Luckily, a very nice couple come to us. These are Dr Feldman and his wife, a dentist. They set to work at once. Dr Feldman works alongside Dr Margulies until he, himself, later falls ill.

The number of afflicted was very great. It became necessary to set up a special epidemic hospital. And, once more, the Jewish population contributed. Everyone donated according to his means. The hospital was outside the town, in Leśniów, and was set up quite well. The two aforementioned doctors, three nurses and also housekeeping employees worked there.

An isolation point was created for those families in which there had been a case of typhus. The *Judenrat* also appointed a Sanitary Commission. Thanks to these great efforts, the typhus epidemic was, after some time, defeated. At the close of the epidemic, the second physician, Dr Margulies, also succumbed to typhus and spent his illness in the hospital.

In the first half of 1942, the Radomsko *Kreishauptmannschaft* issued a command to construct a modern bathhouse. This was, once more, a harsh decree for the *shtetl*, because building such a bathhouse entailed vast sums of money. But it was all to no avail - we were forced to provide the necessary funds and to carry out the forced labour, in compliance with the orders.

The Jews worked hard for long weeks to build the bathhouse, but they did not enjoy its benefits. Even though the Żarki Jews had put their blood and sweat into this building, they were forced to leave it all [to others].

The second half of 1942 brings, with each day, ever harder suffering for the Jews.

Poverty increases. Everywhere, one sees starving and naked children, who portray a horrifying picture of neglect. The *Judenrat* is forced to create a children's home for these children, which includes a pedagogical panel. The homeless children are placed in this children's home, [where] they are fed and clothed, within the bounds of possibility.

But the little children did not rejoice long with their home. They, too, shared the bitter fate of all the Jews.

Time takes its course. It knows no hindrances and limitations. It proceeds onwards, casting away anything it finds in its never-ending path.

Our suffering increases with tremendous speed. With each [new] day, the sadism of our oppressors increases. The groans of our brethren, who are vegetating in the ghettos and dying in the prisons and camps, reach us from everywhere.

In our *shtetl*, also, life becomes harder and more unbearable with each day. Poverty rises, indigence reigns in almost every household. Of the 3,000 souls in our community, only 130 families bear the monetary brunt of the *Judenrat's* budget. The expenditures grow ever larger due to the great impoverishment, which the *Judenrat* must alleviate to some extent.

All Jewish livelihoods have long ago been disrupted. The restrictions have isolated the Jewish population. Everyone is forced to stay at home and cannot go outside to seek a source of income. Many of the Żarki Jews used to make their living by travelling around the surrounding countryside and trading with the peasants. Once the hunger became intense, certain Jews - despite the prohibition - left the *shtetl* and went to the villages. Many of them were captured by the Germans and shot on the spot. They would inform the *Judenrat* about it afterwards and order [them] to take the dead bodies away.

Some two kilometres behind the town was a stone quarry, which was managed by the German company “*Chemische Werke*” [Chemical Works]. Up to one hundred Jewish forced labourers were compelled to work at this stone quarry. The toil was most arduous and under the worst conditions. Many labourers were unwilling⁹ to go to this work. This kind of thing was considered sabotage and it threatened the *shtetl* with severe consequences.

And it is no wonder at all that the labourers did not wish to go to this work. When one looked at the group of workers returning from their labour in the evening - weary and broken, wearing wooden clogs and tattered clothes – one’s heart bled.

We must, by the way, observe that only the very poorest worked at the stone quarry. The wealthy Jews, still in existence, paid their way out with money. This created an unbearable situation and the *Judenrat* was forced to change its treatment of those working. A special commission was formed, which conducted a collection amongst the rich. This enabled them to provide the workers with food, as well as paying them with money for their work. In this manner, the problem of working at the stone quarry was solved.

It [lies] heavy on the soul, the heart is overfilled with sorrow and agony - so many mournful thoughts oppress the mind. The quill is eager to start writing, to depict the image of our destruction. But who is then able to find the fitting words? Who has the ability to describe that which our eyes have seen, that which we, ourselves, experienced?

Rise up, our Prophet, Chaim-Nachman Bialik! Could *you*, Master of the Word, perhaps find a way to express our misfortune, sorrow and agony? Could *you* perhaps find a name for the deeds of cruelty, for the crimes, that were perpetrated by a cultured folk in the middle of the twentieth century?

Our language is too pale to give to the world an account of what we experienced. A large part of our tragedy will surely remain an eternal secret to humanity.

The year 1942 brings with it such events, which lead, in their finale, to the wildest of absurdities - the most gruesome tragedy of the Jewish communities in the whole of Central Europe - the total obliteration of Jewish life.

This same year, the individual lives of Jews become progressively more non-consequential. The murder of Jews becomes an everyday phenomenon. A wave of horrifying bestiality sweeps over the whole of Europe. From every corner, despairing cries of pain of Jewish people rise. Jews are shot for the merest trifle and without any reason at all. The searches in Jewish houses become a regular phenomenon and, when a Jew is found with something of value, he is shot on the spot.

Many cases of execution were brought about, by the law, regarding the confiscation of fur wares from Jews. By an order from the German authorities, all Jews were required to turn over their fur garments. Noncompliance with these orders was punishable by death.

Many Jews hid their furs in order to buy bread. Afterwards, during the searches, they paid for it with their lives. They were shot on the spot.

The killings take on a mass scale character. All the Jewish communities and their ghettos become gripped with fear. Everyone already senses that something terrifying and gruesome is imminent.

⁹ [TN: The labourers were obviously in contact with the *Judenrat*, and not directly with the Germans.]

The horrific deportations to the extermination camps begin. These are no longer those deportations, when tens of thousands of Jews were expelled from their places of residence. Then it was still possible to save one's life. In those deportations, those who had particularly suffered were the Jews of the Lublin region, who already, by then, suffered thousands of casualties. The current deportations, in 1942, are already of a completely different nature. This is already absolute eradication and annihilation.

News, from all over Poland, reaches us of the deportations and of the mountains of ashes of burnt Jews. The fear of death falls upon our *shtetl*. The wave of deportations now advances towards Radom, Kielce and the vicinity. The mass murder is drawing nearer and nearer to us.

The deportees are herded into freight carriages in great numbers. People literally lay one on top of the other. The carriages are bolted shut. The hapless [victims] are taken away to Treblinka [or] to Oświęcim, where they are gassed and burned in the crematoria.

In the emptied cities and towns, only a few dozen Jews are allowed to remain - mainly the Jewish policemen and the *Judenrat* representatives, with their families. Those remaining are tasked with liquidating the Jewish possessions left behind in the ghettos.

The barred Jewish houses are opened up and cleared out. All the Jewish property is collected in special warehouses - furniture, clothes, etc. Afterwards, the German authorities come and carry out a classification of these items. The cheaper things are sold to the Polish populace [and] the more valuable items are shipped to Germany.

The length of the liquidation operation, in the different localities, is relative to the size of the Jewish population - sometimes, it takes several months. Once this work is completed, the remaining Jews are [either] shot or sent to labour camps - to fill the positions vacated by those who perished.

Our *shtetl* is at fever pitch. Sorrowful tidings continuously reach us from the neighbouring *shtetls*. We maintain telephone contact with the surrounding towns and with Radomsko, in particular. Various bits of contradicting news arrive - [some] black and [some] gladdening. Suddenly, a rumour spreads, according to which, by orders from Berlin, the deportations have been brought to a halt. This rumour is corroborated by the town of Włoszczowa, where all the Jews - who were already gathered pending deportation - were let off and sent back home. Factually, that *is* what actually happened. But the reason for this was that there was [simply] a lack of carriages. The deportation in Włoszczowa was brought to a halt just for a few days and the Jews said *Hallel*¹⁰.

The extermination squad sets upon its work. It does not just murder in Poland, but also in an array of Western European countries. Long trains stretch forth, packed full with Jews from France, Belgium, Holland, Czechoslovakia and other [lands]. At some stations, the trains stop and permission is given for a little water to be brought in for the wretched [victims]. The passengers think that they are being taken for work. They ask, "Where is Treblinka?" By now, all of us know what Treblinka means - and we await our own destinies in fright.

The extermination operation nears us. The *Judenrat* works feverishly to avert the catastrophe. Great sums of money are raised and all the institutions in power are given valuable gifts - thinking it will help. Various workplaces are created, in order to give employment to the entire Jewish population. Like in other towns and *shtetls*, the Jews of Żarki, too, were gripped with a job[seeking] frenzy. Everyone made efforts to find work. This psychosis blinded everybody and no one perceived that, even if the Jews were being employed, it was still impossible to avert the catastrophe.

¹⁰ [TN: Special prayer of thanksgiving which is only said on occasions of monumental communal rejoicing.]

The already-existing workplaces - [the] "*Chemische Werke*" stone quarry, "*Straßenbau*" [Street-building] and others - are up-sized. New ones are also created [in the villages] Przewodzisowice¹¹ (a good two kilometres from Żarki) and Zdów, the Złoty Potok estate, etc. There was also a horticultural farm in the *shtetl*, where youth - mostly [members] of *Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair* - worked. This was an exemplary farm, run by an intelligent young man - Cwi Brandes z"l. The *Judenrat* also makes efforts to set up a workshop in which to also employ older people. However, this plan never materialises due to the events that have developed with lightning speed.

The extermination battalion is now working in the Kraków District, [in] Miechów County. The deportations from Wolbrom and Pilica ensue. A great number of Jews, fleeing from these two towns, comes to us. They managed to escape these *shtetls* before all the exits were sealed. Exhausted and shattered, they find temporary refuge with us. They must be hidden from the authorities. The local Poles immediately inform the gendarmerie regarding the arrival of the out-of-town Jews. The results of this denunciation are not long in coming. The gendarmerie searches around for the Jewish newcomers and seven of them are shot.

The financial situation of the fugitives is also a hard one. They fled at the last minute, naked and destitute, and even if someone did manage to take something with them, the peasants stole it from him. The escapees were forced to pass through villages. There, the peasants fell upon them and robbed them. There were also some peasants who captured Jews and turned them over to the police.

That is how the Christian conscience of our Polish neighbours looked. When we found ourselves in the greatest need, they tread upon us with their feet and abetted the Nazi murderers in our destruction. That is what the Poles did, despite being the object of German hatred and loathing themselves.

That is how the Christian compassion of the surrounding Poles looked. Due to this, our isolation and pain increased exponentially. Wherever we turned our eyes, we met with a sea of hate and contempt. Such was the attitude of the Poles towards us - who could, indeed, have constituted the last plank of salvation in our catastrophe. One can imagine the impression these accounts from the Jews of Wolbrom and Pilica made on us. It is difficult to describe the barbarism the murderers displayed during the deportation from these two *shtetls*. Hundreds of Jews were shot there and then or were murdered with iron [rods] and pitchforks by the rabble - the Polish riff-raff, who helped the Germans in their extermination operation. Hundreds of Jews were forced to dig mass-graves for themselves and then they were shot on the edge of the open pit. Dozens of them were thrown into the pits half-alive and became trapped.

There were 8,000 Jews living in Wolbrom, including those who had fled [there] from other cities and towns. A Polish youth group was also active in the extermination operation in Wolbrom - the so-called "*Yunakes*"¹². At first, they worked in the German construction undertakings and, later, they assisted in the deportations - they carried their task out splendidly. Their weaponry consisted of sharpened spades.

Pending deportation, the *Wolbrom* Jews were rounded up in one place, where they were guarded by Germans and Polish *Yunakes*. Old and young, men, women and infants were [all] under the open skies. At that very time, torrential rain was pouring down relentlessly and it was in such state that the Jews of Wolbrom awaited their end.

¹¹ [TN: These places are mentioned above in the article *The Last Days of Żarki*, p.156.]

¹² [TN: In the book "*Notes From The Warsaw Ghetto: The Journal Of Emmanuel Ringelblum*," it is explained that these were "the uniformed ethnic Germans in the service of the Commissar".]

The Jews of Pilica were also supposed to be brought there. Meanwhile, they congregated in *shul* and fasted. Even the suckling infants were not given the breast. They recited Psalms, lit candles, rolled about on the ground and also prayed at the graves in the cemetery. Their supplications and wails were carried afar. Their voices made the air tremble. But no one listened to their cries. No one was touched by their groans. Their prayers and tears fell as into a desolate desert. All the Jews of Pilica were taken to Wolbrom.

The neighbouring Jewish *shtetls* were wiped from the face of the earth. The entire region was drenched in Jewish blood. In the empty streets of Pilica and Wolbrom, one could hear only the echo of the footsteps of the small group of Jewish policemen and representatives of the Judenrat, who were left behind to liquidate the Jewish property.

The Pilica and Wolbrom Jews, staying with us, already perceive the peril approaching our *shtetl* Żarki and they begin returning to their desolate homes. Fogel, the *prezes* of the Pilica *Judenrat*, comes to Żarki. All the Pilica Jews fall upon him as their only saviour. He takes home his family, which is in Żarki. Groups of Jews, once again, travel along the roads to Pilica and Wolbrom. Once more, they pass through the same villages and are, once more, attacked by the Poles. They are stripped of their last garment. Not uncommonly, the Jews happen upon German gendarmes or Polish policemen travelling by. In such cases, they are shot on the spot. Many are captured by the peasants and turned over to the German authorities.

The *prezes* of the *Judenrat* in Pilica manages to receive permission to bring one hundred Jews back to Pilica, to work in liquidating the Jewish property. This authorisation creates the opportunity for hundreds of other Jews to come to Pilica and hide with the legal Jews.

Thus, once again, a cluster of Jews is formed in Pilica. They live there temporarily, in the greatest need and inhuman conditions. They sleep in attics and stables, like dogs thrown out.

In short strokes, I have mentioned the *shtetl* Pilica here, with which we, the Żarki Jews, maintained close contact and followed anything that happened there. Now, on the eve of the plague of deportation that is drawing nearer to us, our *shtetl* is at fever pitch.

The Jewish population of Żarki begins to sell off everything in their houses for pennies. Bands of peasants arrive from the surrounding villages and buy up the few Jewish possessions and goods that still remain. Like hungry crows on the carcass of a dead animal, they swooped in on the Jewish items. Taking advantage of the hapless plight of the Jews, they wish to purchase everything for pennies and they pay for valuable objects with a bit of butter or a [loaf of] bread. Many Jews take their linen, garments and also goods to Christian acquaintances. This time, the Poles are charming. They willingly take in everything. Other Jews make hiding-places into which they stow their possessions. They also build bunkers for themselves. Attics, cellars and stables are walled up, leaving only a small entrance.

Jews start to leave Żarki *en masse* and run to Wolbrom and especially Pilica where, again, there is already a considerable number of Jews.

The most mournful events in our *shtetl* take place in September and the beginning of October 1942 – when the culmination point of our tragedy arrives with all its gruesomeness.

It is *Yom Kippur* Eve. The gloom in Jewish hearts is boundless. Even the faintest shadow of a smile cannot be seen on anyone's face. Everyone is possessed by terror and fear, [as he] gazes into the black cloud that is coming over our heads.

It was in this state and with these emotions that our *shtetl* went to *Kol Nidrei*. Most of the Jews recited Psalms all night long. Everyone spent the day of *Yom Kippur* in prayer. This was no regular *Yom Kippur* worship. Rivers of tears streamed from everyone's eyes. The air shook with cries and wails. Everyone tore his heart and soul into little pieces and threw them before God.

In the midst of [all] this, like thunder [on a bright day], came the news that the city of Częstochowa, with its tens of thousands of Jews, had been surrounded by Gestapo, gendarmerie, Ukrainians and other murderers. The news was brought by a Jew from Pilica named Wajnsztok, who had been able to flee from Częstochowa and had arrived, at dusk, in Żarki on *Yom Kippur*.

The gendarme Götz came to [the house of] the Żarki baker Mojsze Fajner, where a crowd of Jews had gathered and were praying. He struck the worshippers, dragged the Torah scrolls out [from the Ark], laid them on the ground and trampled them underfoot, while screaming, "Where is your God? Let him come and punish me!"

The day of annihilation begins to draw near. Every day, many Jews flee to Pilica and Wolbrom. A large part of the youth work in German undertakings is outside town. Chaos and disorder reign in the *Judenrat's* offices. An array of [its] members and officials has escaped. There is a terrible nervousness and unease in the *shtetl*.

A rumour suddenly spreads that a large quantity of peasants' carts has been ordered to Żarki for the morning of Tuesday 6th October. This news comes from Złoty Potok, where a group of Żarki Jews is working. Fear falls upon everyone. People go about sad and depressed. The *prezes* of the *Judenrat* calls his family circle together. Bidding them farewell, he says, "The time, alas, has come, when each one must think for himself. Each one must proceed as his mind dictates. I will not leave this town. I remain at the service of the public and [will] do anything possible. I have forfeited my life for the *shtetl*". Tears choke him. He bursts out in a spasmodic weeping and everyone around him weeps along with him.

The festival of *Sukkos*, the symbol of happiness and joy, goes by in deep sadness. On Sunday, *Simchas Torah*, the panic already reaches its highest level. At one o'clock in the morning, the *prezes'* whole family leaves for Pilica. It was as if, at that moment, the entire *shtetl* had shaken. Heedless of the late night hour, a great movement ensues. From all sides, people walk and run. They wring their hands like madmen. Carts are sought and any price is paid. The Christian coachmen take advantage of the opportunity and wish to become rich from the Jewish misery. For a cart [ride] to Pilica, people pay 2,000 *złoty*, when the regular price is no more than 300. Those, who have no money or who cannot find any horse and wagon, start on foot towards Pilica - which is 40 kilometres from Żarki. The fear and panic are indescribable. The movement does not cease throughout the entire night. In the *shtetl* nobody sleeps.

It is already Monday morning. I go out into the street and look around my poor *shtetl*, which now lays destitute and still. Only a small portion of the Jewish population - about 35% - has remained in town. All the others have fled or hidden in the bunkers which they prepared in advance. The escapees and those in hiding took nothing with them - [they] left everything for anyone's taking. Their only desire was to save their very lives.

This possibility to flee or hide, which existed in our town, was among the rare exceptions. In other localities, the Jews were already encircled by guards several days prior to the deportation.

Some of the Jews fled to Lelów. But there, they were met with the same fire. The deportation was also being carried out on that same day in Lelów and those, who escaped from Żarki, shared the fate of the *Lelówer* Jews in the Treblinka gas chambers.

Those who fled to Pilica only had their sentences postponed, but not for long. Shortly afterwards, they went through the same as their brethren elsewhere.

The 35% of the Jewish populace still remaining in Żarki - around 900 souls - sit in their desolate homes, sunk in deep sorrow. They are well aware that they will remain here for just one night – that, tomorrow, they will disappear from here and never see their homes again.

Monday, 5th October, four o'clock in the afternoon - I look around at the deserted streets. A dreadful dolefulness engulfs the *shtetl*, seldom is someone seen on the street. I mull over my situation - what to do? My wife and child are waiting for me in Pilica, where I sent them a few days ago, promising that I would join them. I meet a former Jewish policeman, Zajdman. We give each other frightened and despairing glances. We decide to flee from Żarki together.

Without thinking long, we take two bicycles and set off towards Pilica. As we are travelling out of Żarki, we are stopped by three gendarmes. We show our certificates, from the *Kreishauptmannschaft*, to the effect that we have the right to leave town. We receive the reply that the permits are no longer valid. Standing thus in despair, we see two of the Germans go off to one side, leaving only one. We hastily take advantage of the opportunity. We press a bundle of coins into his hand and he shouts out, "Quickly! Be gone quickly, so that the comrades should not see you!" In a flash, driven by the fear of death, we set off, at a demonic pace, in order to get as far away as possible from there. The whole while, we think that we are being chased. Thus racing with all our strength, we arrive in Pilica together with nightfall.

There was a large Jewish cluster in Pilica at that time. Several hundred Pilica Jews had hidden from the deportation. There were also many Jews from Żarki, Radomsko and Piotrków. Most of the Jewish houses were still sealed up. Only the small numbers of dwellings, which had already been cleared of all things, were made available to the population, which numbered 3,000 souls.

These hovels were small, half caved in, ruinous and extraordinarily filthy. Twenty people lived in a hovel of this type. Most people slept on the floor. Nevertheless, they took it well. Anything was better than deportation and death.

I stayed in Pilica and followed the news from Żarki, which was brought by Poles.

The Jews in Pilica were greatly suffering. The poverty was unimaginable. Living conditions in the little houses were uncommonly hard. Everything was destroyed. The cooking ranges were smashed - they had ruined them during the liquidation, looking inside them for gold and jewels – so that there was nowhere to cook a little food.

In general, life among the Jews seemed free and unhindered. It looked as though slaves had remained without an owner. Some people were pleased with these circumstances - they did not evaluate the situation at all. Only those, who thought it through, comprehended that this could not last long, that the catastrophe must come.

The remaining *Judenrat* in Pilica began persecuting the out-of-town Jews who had fled from other *shtetls*. At first, the Jewish police made raids on the younger people and sent them to the labour camps of Płaszów and Prokocim. In this instance, too, it was primarily the poorer population who

suffered the most - those who still had a little money bought their way out. They began driving the poor Jews out. In the process, heart-rending scenes were played out. The Jewish police rounded up a band of people in tatters, barefoot and hungry. They took them several kilometres outside the town and ordered them to be gone from their sight. These people were left in the greatest despair. Some went onwards, not knowing where they were headed. Others returned once more to town, where they were met with the bolted doors of their houses/burrows. They remained completely without a roof over their heads.

On Tuesday 6th October 1942, quite early [in the morning], the *prezes* and three¹³ members of the *Judenrat* in Żarki were summoned to the gendarmerie outpost, where they were met by the *Sturmführer* of the extermination commando - the high-ranking Gestapo officer [Adolf] Feucht - and his entourage. *Sturmführer* Feucht informed the *Judenrat* delegation that the deportation of the Jews in Żarki would take place today. All the town's Jews would be sent to work in the Far East. Each one could take with him ten kilograms of bare essentials. One was also allowed to take money, jewellery and other valuables. They were to bring along food for five days. Within an hour, all the Jews needed to assemble in one concentration point - in the market square.

The Jewish police were also immediately summoned and were ordered to bring the Jewish populace to the market square. The well-known Ukrainian beasts also arrived in order to assist in this "sacred quest". Before anything else, they ran to the vacated Jewish houses, robbing, plundering and grabbing anything that came to hand. If they found someone still at home, they beat him murderously and dragged him to the assembly point.

[Once] the Jews were already standing in rows in the square, the *Sturmführer* counted them and saw that a large number were missing. Infuriated, he said to the assembled, "It is useless to run and to hide in the fields or woods. Wherever there is a Jew, we will find him - all come in a row"¹⁴.

The assembled Jews stood in the square, woebegone and roughed up. Those who worked outside town soon arrived. They were brought to the concentration point by the Polish police. Gendarmerie, Ukrainians and Polish policemen searched the town for hidden Jews. Some of them were found. Among others were Abram Goldberg and his daughter, whom they dragged out from a cellar and shot on the spot.

One young man, a butcher, was discovered in a haystack. When they pulled him out from there, he stabbed one of the gendarmes with a knife. This was a desperate act of revenge by the young Jew, Korcfeld. Needless to say, he was shot there and then.

The murderers also entered Fajwel Rozenbaum's house. He and his son Icze had decided not to go out to the concentration point. The father, wrapped in a prayer-shawl, sat with his son by an open Talmud [tractate], studying out loud. When the killers entered bellowing wildly, father and son remained seated and continued studying. These two Jews were shot on the spot.

On the ul. Synagoga, in Krzepicki's daughter's dwelling, the rogues found a young woman who had just given birth to a child. They shot the new mother together with the baby, who only an hour earlier, had seen the first brightness of light.

¹³ [TN: The Hebrew translation mentions three individuals altogether: the *prezes* Izrael Borensztajn and two members - Kalman Kalkopf and Lajzer Studenberg.]

¹⁴ [TN: Viz. each in his own turn.]

A Ukrainian was leading an elderly woman to the concentration point. The old lady was unable to walk quickly. The Ukrainian beat her murderously, until the poor woman collapsed - whereupon the murderer shot her and broke out in resounding laughter.

The number of people shot that day reached a total of twenty-three.

The sorrowful ceremony in our *shtetl* did not take long. Within just a few hours, the town was left forever bereft of its Jewish inhabitants.

The hapless [people] were taken to the Złoty Potok [railway] station. There, they were loaded onto freight carriages and transported to the Treblinka gas chambers, where all of them were annihilated.

Thus ended the story of the Żarki Jews. They had lived in the *shtetl* for generations, building houses, conducting business [and] experiencing suffering and joy.

Centuries have passed since when the town took in Jews for the first time. Here, they put down roots and lived. Now, the long lines of Jews, with bowed heads, stretch forth. They look up and cast their last glances upon the dear home which they will already never see again.

Thirty solitary “lucky” Jews were left in Żarki. It was as if they had been left behind to eat up the entire sorrow and agony remaining after their brothers and sisters.

The gendarmerie, headed by Lieutenant Schmidt, had the entire unlimited authority over the 30 remaining Jews. It was made clear to them, that were a Jew to be found who did not belong among the 30 authorised ones – he would be shot on the spot. These same 30 would also be held accountable for those who hid in their midst.

All the remaining thirty Jews were taken, firstly, to Kalman Kalkopf’s flat and later to Szlomke Tenenbaum’s house. Their state was one of infinite mournfulness. Each of them felt as if he had returned from the graveyard¹⁵, where he had left his nearest and dearest behind.

The lieutenant of the gendarmerie in Żarki, Joseph Schmidt, had once displayed a lenient attitude towards the *Judenrat*, due to the gifts he would receive regularly. Now, following the deportation, he became cruel and sadistic. He allowed no one to approach him and made huge troubles for the remaining thirty Jews.

While these remaining thirty Jews were working at clearing out the private Jewish dwellings and liquidating the Jewish property, hundreds of Jews lay in the walled-up attics and cellars. Their reserves of food and water had already run out. They were in a state of mortal peril - death lurked at every step. The stillness in the deserted Jewish streets rang in one’s ears and cast dread on one. But, nevertheless, many crawled out of their holes and burrows and, in the middle of the night, set off towards Pilica. A great many of them were captured and shot. Those, who succeeded in making it to Pilica, resembled shadows. Hunger, terror, suffering and pain swathed their features.

The thirty authorised Jews in Żarki sought means to aid the rest, who were hiding in their bunkers. Heedless of the great perils, they provided the locked down Jews with water and bread. After this had gone on for [quite] a long time, once more, some of those hidden began to escape. They no longer had anything to lose.

¹⁵ [TN: According to the Hebrew translation: “They felt like corpses returning from the grave” (p. 129).]

A group of Jews, among whom were Chaim Tenenbaum with his son Abram, hid out amid [some] boulders in the woods. Once food was lacking, as well as the strength to remain under the open skies, Abram Tenenbaum went to the *shtetl* to find the possibility of hiding somewhere. In Leśniów, at the back of Żarki, he was caught by *shkutzim*, [who] tied him up with ropes and brought him to town, to the German gendarmerie. Izrael Borensztajn, *prezes* of the *Judenrat*, who was a cousin of Abram Tenenbaum, made every effort with Lieutenant Schmidt to rescue his cousin. He was barely able to achieve that the detainee should not be shot then and there. The official version was that they were sending him to a labour camp. But all traces of him vanished.

The plight of the homeless Jews in Pilica becomes ever more unbearable. Those who remain in hiding in Żarki suffer the hardest pain. They lie in their burrows, despairing in their hopeless situation. Hunger forces them to go out into the street for bread, which reveals their hideouts. The Polish population immediately informs the German authorities regarding any bunker which is uncovered.

In one such hideout, at Mojsze Borensztajn's house, they found forty Jews - men, women and children - whom young Poles had discovered. These forty Jews were sent to Częstochowa, where they were shot in the nearby woods. Among these forty Jews were Abram Rapoport and his wife and children, Fiszl (the) Baker and his wife and children, Mala Szulman and her mother and others.

The *prezes* of the *Judenrat*, Izrael Borensztajn, once again, manages to soften Lieutenant Schmidt's heart with the aid of gifts and money. He is granted permission to increase the number of legal Jews in Żarki to 120 individuals.

After a short time in Pilica, I came to Żarki as an authorised person, together with my family. I shall never forget my first impression upon arriving in the *shtetl*. I was seized by a strange fear. My footsteps rang out in the dead silence and their echo was carried far, far off. The *shtetl* looked like a cemetery, the houses - like tombstones. Not a trace of life was to be noticed. From every window, from every door, eyes filled with terror and horror seemed to be staring out. But there was nobody there - no one here was alive. Only the shadows of those who had once lived here were hovering in the air and filling the space.

I was assigned to work in the *Möbellager* [furniture warehouse], which was situated in Chaim Tenenbaum's former tannery. Together with two other Jews - Chaim Tenenbaum and Herszl Monat - I was tasked with sorting the furniture from the Jewish houses. All day long, peasants' carts brought the furniture from the Jewish houses - cupboards, beds, tables, etc. In every object which I touched, I saw the tragic fate of their former owners - the Jews who were sent to the gas chambers.

The 120 authorised Jews were allotted the three houses of Szlomke Tenenbaum, Berisz Wajsman and Kalman Kalkopf for their accommodation. Thanks to the increase in the number of the legal Jews, the plight of those in hiding was slightly alleviated, in that a better opportunity to provide them with food had been created. But, in general, their situation worsened from day to day. The filth in the bunkers became unbearable. They slept on the ground, on the bedding which they had brought with them. That is where they discharged all human necessities, in absence of the most elementary hygienic conditions.

Winter has drawn near. It becomes colder. The first snow has already fallen. The wind buffets from all directions and pierces one's bones - the hapless [people] are forced, in this state, to remain in their bunkers.

The plight of the homeless Żarki Jews, in Pilica and Wolbrom, also becomes increasingly harder and more horrifying. The German governmental agencies begin to take an interest in the large number of illegal Jews - with these "criminals", who are running from death. The day of the second deportation from Pilica and Wolbrom arrives.

The hounded and tormented Jews had not yet drunk the bitter cup of their destiny to its dregs. They found out about the deportation a day in advance. In the greatest panic, they ran in all directions. Many crossed the nearby border into the Reich. Some went in the direction of Kraków and others, for the price of money and jewels, his with peasants who, afterwards, slew them.

A large number of them returned to Żarki and hid in attics, cellars and also in the already vacated liquidated dwellings. The situation of the returnees was a hopeless one. After so many experiences and tribulations, frozen and exhausted, wearing summer clothing, they were now tormenting themselves in the attics and cellars.

This was during the November days of 1942. The winter which, that year, came early greatly worsened the plight of the new arrivals. Among them were also my [own] family members, who arrived in Żarki one dark, cold night. My elderly, broken mother z''l ran forty kilometres from Pilica. My heart bled inside me. There was little I could [do to] help my mother in her mournful state. Depressed, weary from the long road, so frozen through and through that her teeth were chattering. I let her into a coal stable¹⁶. I could not take her into the house, as this would have put the lives of the 120 authorised Jews in peril.

At night, I found a hiding place for her in a little isolated house in the square of the tannery [viz. the furniture warehouse], where I worked. This enabled me to bring food to her and the several people who were there. Polish children and adults, also, ceaselessly persecuted these wretched [people]. They uncovered the hideouts and called the German gendarmes. They captured many Jews - often thirty in one bunker and even more. Anyone attempting to flee was shot on the spot.

But, generally, the gendarmerie did not shoot the discovered Jews, but only put them in jail. Once they had gathered a certain number, they were sent to the ghetto in Radomsko, where they were later killed.

Hundreds of illegal Jews are scattered about in the *shtetl*. All day long, they sit quietly in their burrows. Only once night falls, do they crawl out of their holes. They besiege the houses of the authorised Jews. It is painfully hard to look at these hapless Jews. The fear of death swathes every face. They are filthy, hungry and tattered. They are trembling with cold. Each one hurriedly snatches a chunk of bread, a little something warm and then quickly disappears back into his burrow.

With every [new] day, the number of illegals and those in hiding decreases. Their persecution by the Poles - mainly youth - never stops. We frequently see the gendarmerie leading groups of Jews [away]. The Jews, who are found, are stripped of everything and are sent off to Radomsko half-naked and barefoot. There are many cases in which those in hiding die in their holes of hunger and cold and of mortal fear.



The November days of 1942 were bleak. Rain, mixed with snow, pelted one's face. Early each morning, we 120 "legal" Jews were required to gather in the Synagogue for roll call. The sadistic

¹⁶ [TN: Coal *cellar*, in the Hebrew translation.]

lieutenant would count us while we stood in straight row, and [then he] put us into groups and sent us off to work.

On one of those days, deliverance came for the illegal Jews in hiding. An order appeared, in the German authorities' daily book of laws, to the effect that four ghettos were to be established in the Radom district, in four separate towns - Sandomierz, Szydłowiec, Ujazd and Radomsko. The orders further state that Jews are permitted to live in these four localities. Every Jew in hiding has the right to choose one of these four towns as his place of habitation. By 30th November, all illegal Jews must be inside the four aforementioned localities. After 30th November, any Jews found outside the four towns will be shot. This does not include the authorised Jews - the labour squads - who have been left by the authorities to liquidate Jewish property and for other jobs.

The news spread with lightning speed. For the Jews hiding in the bunkers, these orders seemed like redemption. Living like a dog in the holes would finally come to an end. All the hidden Jews left the bunkers and presented themselves before the authorities.

Several points were set up in town, where all the illegals were concentrated. We, the 120 authorised ones, provided the people with linen, garments and shoes. We took these from the Jewish houses which we had cleared out and liquidated. Needless to say, this was done without the knowledge of the authorities. Taking an item from the liquidated Jewish possessions was punishable by death.

The illegals, streaming in from all directions, resembled shadows. Many Jews also came back from the surrounding villages. In Radomsko, there was already a large number of Jews who had been brought in from various localities. In Żarki, some 600 Jews gathered. They remained in the [concentration] points in Żarki for several days.

On 29th November, the illegal Jews were all herded into one spot - the Town Hall Square - and put in rows. Lieutenant Schmidt appeared, accompanied by several gendarmes. Here, too, our lieutenant vented his sadism. He struck the assembled over the head with his rubber baton.

This was a horrifying picture. I looked at the people who had been rounded up - weary and shattered by their harsh experiences. They had already been chased back and forth so many times. They had run so many times from one fire to another.

I saw their distress and isolation. All the suffering and pain of a nation, which had already been suffering for millennia, was reflected in their faces. Here, in the square, I perceived all those who escaped the woodpiles¹⁷, the Marranos¹⁸ in the cellars, those expelled from Spain, those driven out¹⁹ during the Crusades and the pogrom victims of Chmielnicki's times and of Kiszyniów [Chişinău, Moldova]. I saw all these, now in the rows of rounded up Jews, who stood with their bundles on their shoulders, [about] to go wandering once again and to lose their homes forever, forever ...

The newly-created Radomsko Ghetto held the largest number of Jews. Five thousand souls came together there - Jews from different cities and *shtetls* - Wolbrom, Pilica, Sędziszów, Wodzisław [Śląski] and a considerable number of our own Żarki residents.

¹⁷ [TN: Viz. being burnt at the stake.]

¹⁸ [TN: **Marrano**, in Spanish history, a Jew who converted to the Christian faith to escape persecution but who continued to practice Judaism secretly. (Encyclopaedia Britannica)]

¹⁹ [TN: And, indeed, slaughtered. Recent genetic research shows a "bottleneck effect" in the European Jewish population c.1300, which reduced the relatively large Ashkenazi Jewish community to just 350 breeding individuals, from whom all Ashkenazi Jews alive today are descended; see article here: <https://www.engineering.columbia.edu/mapping-dna-sequence-ashkenazi-jews-0>]

At first, life in the Radomsko Ghetto was very hard. All these Jews were [only] allotted seven big houses. The crowding was extraordinary. Twenty souls or more lived in one room. These houses were already completely emptied out, following the first liquidation in October 1942. The most elementary [things], which a person needs for life, were lacking there. There was nowhere to rest one's head or to cook a little food. Only sometime later, were we - the "legal" Żarki Jews - given the opportunity to send the bare necessities to our brethren in the Radomsko Ghetto. We sent them clothing, bedding, household items, foodstuffs and also money. Thanks to this, the plight of our refugees in Radomsko became easier.

In the Radomsko Ghetto, a relative freedom reigned. Only a small number of Jews were sent to forced labour. The German hangmen already knew, in advance, what fate awaited the Jews gathered in Radomsko and they took no notice of how the condemned, who were waiting their turn to be annihilated, lived their lives.

All the power in the ghetto lay in the hands of the Jewish police - the so-called "*Ordnungsdienst*". These boys, whom we knew well, who had learnt much from the German beasts, set themselves loose upon their brethren, sparing no one.

Perhaps it is no wonder that their demoralisation reached such a level. They had already seen so much cruelty, so much of their brethren's blood, that this had dulled their hearts. They were the sole rulers in the ghetto. They hit [people], robbed and lived it up at the expense of their charges. The German authorities hardly interfered with the internal life of the Jews in the ghetto.

One could obtain anything in the ghetto. Cafés and confectionaries were opened. But some people began mulling over the newly-created situation. There was something curious about the freedom in the ghetto and this ate away at their minds. They asked themselves the question: [how could it be that,] earlier, enjoying white baked goods or meat was punishable by death, whereas now, one saw roast geese and fish, [and] all sorts of bakery goods in the shop windows without anyone interfering? Nevertheless, the life of debauchery continued. There was no other option, so people took life as it came.

In December 1942, the labour squad in Żarki was reduced from 120 to 60 people. Sixty authorised Jews from Żarki were sent to Radomsko. There was a sense of uneasiness. Fear began to pervade the Jews in Radomsko. Rumours started spreading that another deportation was being prepared. The commentaries were varied. Some held that there would only a partial deportation of a few people - of women and children - whereas the working element would remain and be integrated into the work. All were, once again, seized by a working psychosis. Everyone scrambled to work, in order to be covered.

In Radomsko, there was a furniture factory - Thonet-Mundus. This factory was now producing military wagons. Everyone wished to be admitted to this factory. Some succeeded, for the price of money or valuables. This enterprise employed 300 workers.

With each [new] day, the uneasiness and nervousness increased. The familiar symptoms of the eve of a mass murder began to show. It was the depth of winter - copious snows and harsh frost. There was nowhere to run. The people went about crushed and awaited their Day of Judgement.

The perfidious Germans thought up all sorts of diabolical ways to subject the victims to ridicule and derision, suffering and bitter disappointment. Posters appeared in the ghetto, announcing that an exchange of German [POWs] for Jews was going to take place - meaning that the British Government would release a number of Germans for an equal number of Jews. All the Jews in the ghetto had the opportunity to travel to the Land of Israel. These posters went on to state that the first to be taken into account would be those Jews who had relatives in the Land of Israel - [and] first and foremost, those who had husbands, wives, parents or children [there]. Then came other privileged categories and, at the end, just common Jews wishing to travel to the Land of Israel.

An indescribable joy enveloped the Jews in the ghetto. The thronging at the enrolment bureau was tremendous. Everybody wanted to be at the top of the list of those travelling to the Land of Israel. Enrolment cost ten zloty. The pushing was so great, also due to the fact that it was stipulated in the announcement that the list of applicants needed to be with the Gestapo by the following day.

These perverts and the lowliest of liars could not gorge themselves on Jewish blood to their satiety. They loved playing with their victim and delighted in his writhing and death throes. Day and night, the Germans, with their perverted, sly perfidy, shouted out to the whole world, that they were fighting for a New Europe [built] on foundations of rectitude and justice - [while] at the same time, they stopped at no vile deceits and sadistic subterfuges. They issue orders concerning [the four] ghettos [they have] created, stipulating dates and with legal paragraphs in order to trap the victims in their outspread net. In the end, they stage an announcement regarding the exchange of Jews to the Land of Israel and this, on 3rd January 1943, just days before the deportation.

Filled with joy, Jews ran home from the enrolment bureau. After all, they would all soon be free. There were, however, also some who treated all this with scepticism. They perceived, in this operation, just one more of the hangmen's ploys.

During the first days of January 1943, the local gendarmerie in Żarki receives orders to liquidate the labour squad consisting of the sixty legal Jews and to send them to the Radomsko Ghetto. The representatives of the *Judenrat*, among these sixty Jews, make huge efforts to annul the orders against them, in which they attain partial success. Lieutenant Schmidt agrees to retain thirty persons for the labour squad.

Thirty Jews are chosen, need to leave Żarki and be sent off to Radomsko. Lieutenant Schmidt issues the command that, within one hour, these thirty Jews are to pack their effects and present themselves at the assembly point by the Synagogue, where peasants' carts await them. Yet not all the thirty present themselves at the assembly point – some ten Jews are missing, hiding out among Christian acquaintances.

Hereafter, these ten Jews are [deemed] outlaws, meaning that they no longer have the right to be alive. They are terrible criminals who deserve execution, forever carrying their death sentences with them, forever are the barrel of a revolver pointed at their heads. A few among these ten managed to survive and witnessed Hitler's downfall.

The twenty men, with their families and luggage, were put on peasants' carts and sent away to Radomsko. The frost was at its peak, an icy wind was blowing, whistling mournfully. Once again, I saw the gloomy convoy of those departing. The wretched people were bundled up in their coats and scarves. They did not know that they were travelling on their last road. [Only] when they arrived in Radomsko on Tuesday 3rd January, in the evening, did they first recognise their disaster and misfortune. They at once entered the fire of death and annihilation.

The ghetto in Radomsko was already under guard. People attempted to extricate themselves from the ghetto. Some succeeded, using money or valuables. Many were shot as they were running away. There were cases in which the guard took the money from the Jews, told them to go and immediately opened fire on them.

The thousands of Jews in Radomsko already did not sleep that night. Filled with fear, they tallied up the sorrowful account of their experiences until then. Now the last phase of their gruesome journey came - now, the finale of their tragedy was drawing near.

Wednesday morning, the 6th January 1943. All the inhabitants are driven out of their houses and herded into one spot. The frost is at its peak. Deep snow is all around. The people are crushed, exhausted and famished. There is no bread to be had, as the ghetto has already been living in mortal fear for two days.

The terrifying game has begun. Gendarmes, Gestapo officers and bands of wild Ukrainians and Lithuanians besiege the ghetto and commence their bloody work. It looks as if Asmodeus has been freed of his chains and has come here with his millions of demons to a cruel *Dance of Death*. Countless victims fall. Many Jews are discovered in the bunkers where they have hidden - they are shot on the spot.

A small group stands on its own. These are the workers of the Thonet-Mundus factory. Many Jews pushed their way to this group, but few of them had the luck to remain among those selected. Fearsome scenes were then played out. People pushed and shoved, [scrambling] on top of each other. Everyone wanted to be as near as possible to the gendarme who was taking down the particulars of those who needed to remain behind. The Ukrainians hit right and left with their rifle-butts.

Only 270 Jews were left behind for work. All the others gathered at the [assembly] point were led off to the waiting [railway] carriages. Before letting them into the carriages, everything was taken from them. They were stripped of their clothes and shoes and, in the dreadful frost, they were flung half-naked into the cold freight carriages. The carriages stood on the tracks at the Radomsko station for many hours and, only in the evening, did the shipment commence moving towards Treblinka.

In the Radomsko Ghetto, many Jews in hiding in their bunkers still remained, but the Nazi hangmen found them all, and put them in prison, where they gathered some 400 people. In some of the Jewish houses, small children were found whom mothers had left behind. In one bunker, where several dozen Jews were hiding, there was also a woman with an eighteen-month-old infant. The child cried incessantly, thereby putting the lives of all those hidden in peril. With the mother's consent, the infant was smothered. However, this was also to no avail. They were all discovered later anyway and executed.

The discovered Jews, who had been rounded up, were taken as a group to the Jewish cemetery and everyone, without exception, was shot - men, women, and children. I spoke with one individual who was in the cemetery during the shooting, but was miraculously saved. He provided me with the details of the horrifying execution. The victims were laid out on the ground facing downwards, on the very edge of the newly-dug mass grave. In this position, they were shot and immediately flung down into the open pit. Many of them were still alive when they heaped the soil on them.

Who could believe all this? Who is able to think up a punishment for such atrocities and murdering? Such a punishment has not yet been created.

Also among the Jews at the cemetery was Cyrla Tenenbaum, Chaim Tenenbaum's daughter, a girl of sixteen. She fell at the feet of Lieutenant Kempenik, who was conducting the execution. All her entreaties and tears were to no avail. Together with all the others, she, too, was shot.

With the last deportation from Radomsko, the story of the Jewish community in Żarki ended. The temporarily saved Żarki Jews, who had for a time wrangled with *Destiny*, going through such pain and suffering and always running from fire to fire - had been annihilated. In the Radomsko graveyard, the foe got them between his paws and had destroyed [them] in such a horrific manner.



In January 1943, following the last Radomsko deportation, a group of Żarki Jews fled from the Radomsko Ghetto, which was surrounded by bands of Ukrainians, gendarmes and Gestapo. Among the escapees were Motl Rapoport and his family, Ale Rapoport and his twelve-year-old daughter, Heniek Pesak, Herszl Monat and many others - approximately forty individuals. Some of the escaped Jews hid in abandoned, collapsed houses [or] in attics and cellars.

This was in the middle of winter and one may easily imagine how they suffered from the cold. In addition, they were dying from hunger and were in mortal fear every instant. The escapees had very meagre prospects of surviving, but they were driven by an inner force - the instinct of self-preservation. In the end, however, the majority of them perished under various circumstances.

A small number of the Jewish fugitives smuggled themselves into the house where the thirty legal Jews were living. We hid them in the attic there. A concealed trapdoor led from one of the rooms into the attic. The authorised Jews put their lives in peril by hiding these escapees.

Among the Jews hidden in the attic were Motl Rapoport and his family, Ale Rapoport and his daughter, Herszl Monat, Krajndla Plawner, and others. Mojsze Rotsztajn and his wife Bella *née* Grundland who, for some time, had been with a peasant.

It is also worthwhile mentioning the story of the fifteen-year-old boy Jechiel Borensztajn, a son of Hercl Borensztajn and grandson of Lajzer Krzanowski.

During the last deportation from the Radomsko Ghetto, Jechiel had hidden inside a rubbish bin for two days and two nights. He later emerged from his hiding-place and made his way to Żarki - [he] came to us together with his cousin Karol Krzanowski, a son of Szyja Krzanowski. We took them in as well and hid them in the attic.

We had particular trouble with that same Jechiel Borensztajn due to his frozen feet. Mrs Cywia Fiszer - one of the "legal" [women] - took a special interest in the boy. Every evening, she brought him down from the attic, bathed and soaked his feet, applied ointment and bandaged [them].

Once he felt better and could already walk, Chaim Tenenbaum took him and his cousin Karol Krzanowski over to a Pole [named] Bojanek, who crossed them over the border into the Reich. There, they were sent to a labour camp.

Karol Krzanowski survived the War - he is now in America. Jechiel Borensztajn, however, perished. Smuggling the two boys entailed huge monetary expenditures and the risk of death. In this operation, Chaim Tenenbaum put his own life in peril.

Because of the illegal Jews, the legal ones lived in permanent fear. Were they to find even a single illegal Jew in the house of those authorised, they would kill everybody. Yet there was no alternative. The wretched people had nowhere to go and we had to hide them from the eyes of the Nazi murderers.

In February, a gendarme came to us and secretly told *prezes* Borensztajn that, on the next day, a search would be conducted in the house of the legal Jews. For this purpose, a *Sondergruppe* [special unit] was arriving from the Gestapo in Częstochowa. We immediately held a consultation and decided to move the illegal Jews over to a bunker, until the matter was cleared up.

The house of the Lewenberg family was located in the market square. We knew that there was a bunker in this house. One by one, we began transferring the illegals to the bunker. We did this during the night and moving the twenty or so illegal Jews went smoothly.

They all sat down on the floor, shivering with cold and fear. In the bunker, there was simply nothing to breathe. Due to the lack of air, it was impossible to light a candle. Yet, in view of the risk of death, everyone was content with their temporary safe haven.

On the following day, it turned out that the alarm had been baseless and, in the evening, we began to bring the illegal Jews back into our house. Inside the bunker, they were at risk of being suffocated.

The transfer of the illegals back from the marketplace was carried out in the same manner - little by little. When the last three Jews were being taken from the bunker - Mojsze Rotsztajn and Ale Rapoport with his young daughter - the gendarme Siebert, whom we knew [only too] well, arrived unexpectedly and noticed at once what was going on. Ale Rapoport's daughter had frozen feet and could not walk. Her father carried her in his arms and this drew the gendarme's attention. The three Jews were imprisoned.

Izrael Borensztajn exerted all his influence on Lieutenant Schmidt for the captured Jews to be sent to a labour camp. He gave him many gifts and he received a promise, from the Lieutenant, that he would send the three Jews to a labour camp. But he did not keep [his] word. On the following day, at six o'clock in the morning, the three were taken out to the cemetery, escorted by several gendarmes and one Polish police officer, and the three Jews were shot.

Mojsze Rotsztajn *z''l* had, from his earliest youth, been an active member of *Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair*. An educator and a teacher to his younger fellow members, [he was] always cheerful [and] full of life and energy. He fell victim to the Nazi murderers at the blossoming age of thirty years. Honoured be his memory!

The Polish constable Saturnus, who was present at the execution, described to me the gruesome scene of the shooting of the three Jews. The hapless ones wept miserably, fell into each other's arms and kissed one another. They fell at the feet of the killers, who remained cold and murderously indifferent. First, they positioned Mojsze Rotsztajn and Ale Rapoport, and shot them at short range. Upon witnessing this horrifying scene, Ale Rapoport's twelve-year-old daughter began screaming wretchedly. Her screams shook the silent graveyard. Heedless of her ailing, frozen feet, the girl began to run, clinging to the tombs. [She] ran in a frenzy, falling down and getting back up. The murderers chased her down, caught her, bound her hand and foot, laid her out on the ground and shot her. Two of the "legal" Jews, Mane Grundland and Chaim Tenenbaum *z''l*, were sent by the gendarmerie to bury the bodies. The three Jews were interred in a joint grave in the Żarki Jewish cemetery in February 1943.



The 270 Jews left behind in Radomsko were sent to labour camps - mainly to Skarżysko[-Kamienna]. Among these 270, there were several dozen Żarki Jews. Among those working at the HASAG munitions factory in Skarżysko was also Herszl Rottenberg, who later escaped from there. Below, I wish to present his impressions upon arriving in HASAG Skarżysko:

When I entered the factory, it became dark upon my soul. I had the impression that I was seeing half-dead people. In their tattered garments, with the black faces, unwashed and emaciated, they hardly resembled human beings. The factory was one of the largest in Poland. Ten thousand labourers worked there, of whom 3,000 were Poles, who were free workers and received payment for their work. However, the situation of the Jewish forced labourers was different. Their life was confined within the factory walls, where they slunk about like mangy dogs. They lived in permanent fear of being selected [for deportation], sentenced to death and other troubles.

This is just a small part of his description of the hell in Skarżysko. In the first half of 1943, he was able to escape from there and make it to his town of birth, Żarki, where he found a bunker [to hide in] at the house of a Christian friend. But the Pole later robbed Herszl Rottenberg of his money and murdered him.



The calendar shows the [date] 1st April 1943. In a few months, four years of war will have passed, four years of Jewish martyrdom, four years of suffering and pain beyond human [bearing] [and] four years since the Devil set off on his wild demon-dance throughout the whole of Europe, sowing death and eradication everywhere. Rivers of blood and tears have been spilt.

Central European Jewry has already almost disappeared. The largest Jewish communities have been wiped out. In the cities and *shtetls*, one no longer meets any Jews. The handful of remaining Jews is still bleeding incessantly.

And during this time, in Żarki, thirty remaining authorised Jews sit. The same number [of people] are hiding out in holes and bunkers. The thirty "legal" Jews work arduously, building stables and garages for the German gendarmerie - like true descendants of their forefathers in Egypt, 4,000 years ago. A few of the illegal Jews are in a bunker in our house's attic. Their life is hard and miserable. Every tiniest rustle from anywhere makes them tremble.

Everyone - the authorised and the illegals - is well aware that their verdict is the same. There is only one difference, which is [the length of] the term until the sentence is executed. And how one desires to live, how one desires to delay the sentence being carried out! Everyone is still young - life beckons and entices.

There is a tiny little window in the attic. Through it, the sun steals inside with a few scanty rays. From the street, there comes a tumult - the movement of people. But it is not that of Jews, but only of Christians, who bustle and push with their children. They live - they have the right to live. We are condemned. The loud laughter of our little children has already disappeared long ago and we, the handful of Jews in Żarki, have already been handed our death sentences. We are terrible criminals. Our crime is that we are Jews.

We are sitting here like on an island. Around us, the sea is raging. Events race by in general and Jewish in particular. It is difficult to keep abreast of all that is happening around us. The only sources of our meagre knowledge, at this point, are the Christians, who are permitted to move about and travel undisturbed. We are only silent observers of all that is taking place outside.

All of us in Żarki know that our chances of surviving the gruesome catastrophe are but minimally small. Our numbers steadily decrease. But the life of the illegal Jews is especially hard. Every instant, they see death before their eyes. They evade the foe, like a mouse chased by a cat. When the gendarmerie enters one part of the house, they flee to the other.

That is what life looks like for the few remaining Jews in Żarki. Often times, we envy those who have already long since passed. The worst of fates is that which has befallen *us*. We are forced to be the last spectators of the gory drama, [to see] the cruellest images and scenes, which seem so incredible - like a horrible dream.

During this time, an international press conference swims up from the bloodbath in Europe. It is called by Hitler's Press Chief, Dr Dietrich. This Dr Dietrich addresses the world and calls on European journalists to begin the fight for the New Europe, which Hitler wishes to build on foundations of general justice. Europe, he says, is the conscience of mankind. Europe created the culture of the world. Now come Russia, England and America, with their barbarism, who wish to destroy the old European culture. He enumerates all the carriers of culture, inventors, poets, thinkers, musicians and painters, who created the immortal European culture.

When a copy of this newspaper fell into my hands at the time, it made me boil to the depths of my soul. Seized by an impotent rage, I noted down the following words, as a response to Hitler's Press Chief Dietrich:

It is true - Boccaccio, Kepler, Galilei and Giordano Bruno stormed the walls of the scholasticism²⁰ of the dark Middle Ages. They fought for free human thought, for liberty and light, while you, the vampires, have plunged humanity into the greatest darkness. Your barbarity makes the malefactors of all the eras seem pale.

It is correct - painters like Rembrandt, Raphael and Rubens created monumental works in European art, while you, the savage Huns²¹, also painted. You painted your picture with one colour, one red colour - with the blood of millions of innocent men, women and children.

Most certainly so - Goethe and Schiller, Heine and Börne gave Europe and the entire world models of the highest poetry, while you gave the world that immortal lyrical creation, the Horst Wessel Song²² - "Wenn [das] Judenblut vom Messer spritzt!" [When [the] Jew-blood from the knife sprays].

Yes - European musicians and composers - Bach and Beethoven, Chopin and Mendelsohn - created the most heavenly sounds, the music that heals hearts and souls, while you, beasts, have also created a composition of your own. You sing to the world your forever bloodthirsty song, "Deutschland, Deutschland über alles!" [Germany, Germany above all].

Great and mighty was the European culture and you lit a global Molech²³ fire, on which you burnt the cultural achievements of centuries. Your morals and ethics are built upon hate, upon blood and tears, upon misery and pain, [and] upon need and suffering. Your culture is Oświęcim, Bełżec and Treblinka.



²⁰ [TN: Scholasticism was a medieval school of philosophy.]

²¹ [TN: Pejorative term used in reference to Germans widely used by the allied forces during the First World War.]

²² [TN: The following words are not part of the Horst Wessel Song, but of the "Heckerlied" (Friedrich Hecker Song).]

²³ [TN: Biblical name of a Canaanite god to whom children were sacrificed, typically by fire.]

The story of the Jews in our *shtetl* reaches its finale. As mentioned, the thirty illegal Jews were living in permanent fear and under difficult conditions. But the conditions, under which the thirty authorised Jews were living, were good enough. They were working and living in comfortable dwellings. Their labour and their staying in Żarki depended upon three [different] authorities. The first was the gendarmerie, with Lieutenant Joseph Schmidt at its head. He is the one who had requested, from the higher district authorities, the thirty Jews for different kinds of work. He could liquidate them at any time. The thirty Jews literally heaped gifts on him and gave him anything he desired. A tailor, Naftuli Rabinowicz, worked regularly for him personally. He tailored all his raiment, military and civilian, and also for his family in Germany. Entire loads of clothing were shipped there. Naftuli Rabinowicz also sewed for the other gendarmes. The thirty Jews supplied the gendarmerie post with everything necessary - especially those articles which were hard to come by, such as meat, butter, eggs, coffee, cocoa, tea and expensive beverages.

The second authority, upon whom the lives of the small group of Żarki Jews depended, was *Hauptmann Dale*²⁴ in Częstochowa. He, too, extorted quite a lot from the Jews in Żarki. Every week, he would come to the *shtetl* and take away the parcels that had been prepared for him in advance. He also received gold and other valuable things.

The third authority was the Gestapo in Radom. With the latter, the Jews in Żarki had no direct contact.

In June 1943, orders arrived from Radom to the effect that the thirty Jews in Żarki were to be liquidated. Thanks to the intercession of the first two aforementioned authorities, this sentence was not carried out.

On 3rd July, the house of the thirty authorised Jews is surrounded by the gendarmerie and all its tenants are taken away to the Synagogue. They remain here several days, until a freight lorry arrives from the munitions factory in Pionki, with eight Ukrainians from the factory's security force. The former *prezes* of the *Judenrat*, Izrael Borensztajn, is able to convince Lieutenant Schmidt to allow several illegal Jews, who have been hiding in the bathhouse, to come along. Thanks to this last intercession by Izrael Borensztajn, a small number of Jews, who, in July 1943, travelled together with the authorised Jews to the labour camp and survived the War, were saved from certain death.

Among them were the Wolhendler family²⁵, Hillel Goldman (now in Israel), Mrs Wajnryb, Zosia Dauman and others. They have their lives thanks to the last intercession of Izrael Borensztajn, who did not survive the War himself.

While the freight lorry with the Ukrainians was already waiting outside, three people among the Jews in the Synagogue escaped, jumping out through a small window. These three Jews were Mojsze Zborowski, Mane Grundland and Lajzer Rottenberg. Mojsze Zborowski was captured by Poles and, to this day, there is no trace of him. It is almost certain that these Poles killed him. Lajzer Rottenberg and Mane Grundland fell into the hands of a Pole and his two sons. These Poles took the shoes off their feet and led them barefoot back to town, to the gendarmerie. They had already been positioned, facing the wall, pending execution but, once again, Izrael Borensztajn was able to convince Lieutenant Schmidt that they should be sent with the other Jews to Pionki. Lajzer Rottenberg survived all the camps, and to this day lives in Israel. Mane Grundland, on the other hand, was cut down in the prime of his youth by the Nazi murderers.

²⁴ [TN: דאלע in the original; we have as yet been unable to ascertain the identity of this individual. It may be a nickname for *Hauptmann Paul Degenhardt*, who was Chief of Police in Częstochowa at the time.]

²⁵ [TN: According to the Hebrew translation: *Mojsze Wolhendler with his wife and daughter.*]

The freight lorry, with the last of the Żarki Jews, departed. They were brought to a camp where thousands of other Jews were vegetating and suffering. Thus was sealed the chapter of Żarki - the Jewish *shtetl* with a legacy of centuries of Jewish life.



The human instinct of self-preservation is strong, but it expresses itself in a particularly strong manner when you sense that your life is threatened. The struggle for existence was great - the will to survive pushed people to every effort, to every means of avoiding annihilation. A *shtetl* feverishly [tried] to cling onto life. Yet the Foe's savage killing frenzy was even greater and that is why the death throes of the victims were so, so hard.

At this point, I wish to tell of one of the families in Żarki, who employed every means to remain alive. This family's story is an illustration of dodging death, [and] of human instincts fighting for survival. Theirs is a tale of flight and wandering, of hiding in holes and in bunkers, of suffering hunger and cold - eventually to fall into the paws of Hitler's hounds. This is the story of the Nunberg family

The Nunberg family consisted of a father, a mother and two sons. Financially, the family was well positioned. They had owned a "traffic-shop", meaning one that sold tobacco, chemist's products and newspapers. Even during the War, until the deportation in October 1942, the Nunberg family suffered little, thanks to their being materially well-off. They had the possibility to pay their way out of hard physical labour, out of being sent off to camps and similar decrees.

In September 1942, when rumours began spreading about the imminent liquidation of Żarki, the Nunberg family was among the first to liquidate and sell off all their property and to flee in time to Wolbrom, where a few Jews, who had been left after the deportation that had already taken place there, were living. The Nunberg family lived in Wolbrom for [quite] a long time, until the second and last deportation from Wolbrom ensued. Then, during the second deportation, the family fled back to Żarki, where they hid in an attic. This was at the start of the winter of 1942-43. With the publication of the orders concerning the establishment of a ghetto in Radomsko, the Nunberg family, together with other Jews in hiding, travelled to Radomsko. There, this family lived well enough, as they still had sufficient money and, for money, one could obtain anything in the ghetto.

However, as I have already commented, creating the new ghettos was merely a ruse by the Nazi authorities by which to catch the victims in their net. After a few weeks, the Radomsko ghetto was also liquidated.

The Nunberg family did not give up, but took further steps in order to save themselves. Paying off the guards, they managed to escape from the ghetto to Częstochowa. At this point, the "Small Ghetto" there still existed, with a considerable number of Jews. In Częstochowa, they found their relative, Abram Sojka, who assisted them. But here, too, the Nunbergs were not able to stay for long. Before the "Small Ghetto" in Częstochowa was liquidated, they fled it and came, once again, to Żarki.

At the time, the thirty authorised Jews are still in Żarki, but they cannot take in the Nunberg family. They are answerable with their lives for any illegal Jew found amongst them. The Nunbergs are, by now, utterly spent. They are ruined physically and financially by all their wanderings and experiences. The legal Jews raise a sum of money for the Nunberg family and they hide out with a peasant in a small village near Żarki.

Before the War, a Polish housemaid had worked for the Nunberg family for many years. Now, she supported her former bread givers and aided them extensively. She purchased all necessary foodstuffs for them. She was also in contact with the thirty authorised Jews who, from time to time, gave her money for the Nunbergs.

Now bitter times come for the Nunbergs. Żarki's thirty legal Jews have also already gone away. The family is left without any support. Through a Christian intermediary, they receive a little financial aid from a relative of theirs, who is then still in the Zawiercie Ghetto.

However, the Nunbergs' former maid had a row with her sister-in-law. The latter, wishing to get back at her, ran to the gendarmerie and told them about everything which the Christian woman was doing for the Żydzi. The Polish woman was immediately arrested at once. After several days in jail, she was expelled from Żarki, never to return.

The Nunbergs found out about this in time and fled their hideout. When the gendarmerie came to capture them, they were no longer there. The Pole with whom the Nunbergs had been hiding was also arrested and deported.

It was the middle of winter and the Nunbergs wandered about without a roof over their heads. Nobody let them in - they no longer had any money. Mostly, they wandered about in the woods, under the open sky.

One evening, Mrs Nunberg goes into town. She comes to a baker to buy bread, but he refuses to sell her any. In despair, she walks aimlessly around the town. There, in the woods, her hungry husband and children are waiting for her. Thus walking, she comes up to her former abode. She walks in the gate and looks through a window. Inside, it is bright and warm. A Pole, with his family, sits at the set table, eating a tasty supper.

One can imagine what this hapless wife and mother is experiencing. Here, in the house in which she has spent almost her entire life, here, where she has enjoyed so much happiness and good fortune, here, where she has brought up her boys, who are now waiting hungry and frozen in the woods. She has the idea to knock on the window. The Pole comes to the door - [it is] the chemist Maszczyński, a well-known antisemite and a perennial [business] competitor of the Nunbergs. She asks him to help her with something, to give her a little bread for herself and her dear ones. The Pole tells her to wait and, in the meantime, sends one of his sons to the gendarmerie, who come at once and detain her.

The wretched Mrs Nunberg was imprisoned and, the following day at six in the morning, she was shot.

The father and sons waited in vain for their wife and mother. The father and one son then went in one direction and the other son in another. They separated because they did not wish, and could not bear, to witness each other's sorrow.

Thus they wandered through villages, begging peasants for a chunk of bread, passing the nights under the open sky and suffering from cold and hunger.

After some time, the two - father and son - made it to Żarki and came to a Pole of their acquaintance to ask for bread. Here, too, the same thing occurred as with Mrs Nunberg. The Christian turned them over to the gendarmerie, which shot them.

The last of the Nunberg family wandered about yet a while longer, begging from the peasants, [and] sleeping in the open or in some ruin. Once, he went into a barn and lay down in the straw. A Pole, who happened to pass close by, heard a cough from the inside. He went to the owner and asked him who was in his barn. The owner [said] he knew nothing and, together with the passer-by, entered the barn. There, they found the *Żyd*. The owner of the barn wanted to let Nunberg go, but the other Pole would not allow it. He took the Jew to the gendarmerie which, immediately, shot him.

Thus ended the martyrdom of a family who waged an embittered war of existence and who were finally cut down by the Nazi murderers. That is also what the struggle looked like for hundreds of thousands of [other] Jews, who clambered with all their strength to survive. Thousands and tens of thousands waged this very same war by various means - some, silently – putting all their efforts into surviving Hitler’s murdering spree; others, actively - with weapons in their hands. The Foe, however, was disproportionately strong, and sowed death and destruction everywhere.



When we call all these events to mind, our soul weeps inside us. An eternal sorrow has been left inside our heart, and we shall never be freed of it. We will always remember you, dear little *shtetl* of ours. You will forever remain in our memories, our dearest ones - brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers, who were annihilated for only one sin - for being Jewish.

I see you now, my *shtete’le*²⁶ *Żarki*, as you lay in ruins. Our enemies live in your houses – they, who abetted the Nazis in their killings. Like a flock of crows, they swooped down on your still-warm body, pecking and devouring, cawing with frenzied joy over your ruination.

[It is] already after the tempest. The soil is still wet from your blood, the graves are still fresh. Your enemies dance upon them, making merry and laughing, gagging with joy over the misfortune which has reached you.

I wander aimlessly about on your now deserted streets and alleyways, *shtete’le* of mine! I seek a trace of that life which has been extinguished. I desire to perceive, at least, a rustle of that movement which was once boiling here. Yet it is to no avail. The streets are deaf and dumb. The laughter of the little Jewish children, who once played here, is no longer heard. The sing-song Talmud chant, which used to emanate from the Study-hall, has been silenced. The voices of the worshippers at the *shuls* and *shtieblech* have been cut off. The joyous Holidays have forever disappeared. The “*Hatikvah*”, the song of hope and yearning of the dear youth, who sang this song of Zion, this song of Redemption, from the cores of their very souls - has forever been brought to a stop there.

Be assured, our *shtetl*! All of us survivors will forever carry your memory in our hearts. You fell victim, together with hundreds of Jewish cities and towns in Poland. You shared the bitter fate of destruction and annihilation of six million Jews.

We, the survivors, are the most tragic generation in the history of Jewish martyrdom. We were the ones to whom it befell to drink the bitter cup of sorrows to its dregs. We took upon our shoulders the whole horror of the destruction and annihilation.

Yet, at the same time, ours is the happiest of the seventy generations, which dreamt and yearned of redemption and freedom. We also carry the burden of the labour pains of the rebirth of the nation

²⁶ [TN: Diminutive form of “*shtetl*,” affectionately used.]

and the country. We witnessed destruction and eradication and we also witnessed how, from ruin and devastation, a people has risen from the dead in its own land. The Foe has not succeeded in destroying and annihilating us. Upon the ruins, a free people stand in a free land - the State of Israel.

We find our consolation in the blossoming of the State of Israel. And, even in our joy, we shall never forget you, dear *shtete'le* Żarki. You will remain in our memory for all eternities and, with the tears that will never dry up in our eyes, we will shout out, "*Am Yisrael Chai!*" [The People of Israel lives].

Jakow (Jancze) Fiszer