

The Destruction of Motol

By A. L. Polick

Translated from the original Yiddish and originally edited by Shimon Yojok

Edited by Dr. Dov Yarden

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Translator's Note

The English translation is based on a previous translation from Yiddish to Hebrew. Although Yiddish is also written in the Hebrew alphabet, it itself is a European language and various letters and combinations of letters are used to indicate vowels. When the original text was translated into Hebrew much of the phonetic information of various proper names was lost. In order to assist the reader searching for a particular name, there is a **Transliterations** section indicating the original Hebrew and its English transliteration for all people and place names.

The original Hebrew language copy of "The Destruction of Motol" was mimeographed and is not widely available in Israel or in the Diaspora. It is my hope that this English translation will make this first-hand account of one community during the Holocaust available to a wider audience.

Rosh Hashana Eve, 1997

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Dear Sons of Our City!

You have in your hands the first document containing a description of the destruction of our city as recounted by an eye witness, a Holocaust survivor. The description that was written mostly in Yiddish, translated and originally edited by my brother Shimon Yojok was then mailed to someone from our town living in Israel. The simple words coming from a heart filled with anguish present to us this frightful chapter and remind us of the enormity of the tragedy that cut us off from our dear ones. A voice calls out from this abyss of suffering commanding us to do the little in our power for the souls of those killed: to raise a memorial in the form of a book that will inscribe as a remembrance their names, show their pictures and tell the new generation of the humility of those that left us never to return. This you can do. Turn your attention to the recent past, but so removed from us, and let the memory of our dear ones who were cut off before their time enter into your hearts. The time is short. Every passing year weakens and distorts the memory. While there is still time let us save from the void what can be saved. We will build a sanctuary to our loved ones in which will dwell their souls so that we can unite with them and so that their children who came after them will know who were their parents and from what source they drew their strength and willpower in the Diaspora until they fell helpless and defenseless into the hands of the enemy and oppressor.

The following members of the Jerusalem committee merit a blessing for their assistance in publishing these pages: Sharmayahu Bartov, Yehudah Gotanski and Shmuel Pisatski. My special thanks to my brother Shimon Yojok -- committee member -- who translated this work from Yiddish to Hebrew and who invested in this work much of his energy and talent.

The editor

Introduction

The City Motol that existed for centuries is about 40 Persian miles¹ from Pinsk at the center of Poloisayah. The name "Motol" can be traced back to the legend of the Swedish conquest of the entire area in 5408 (1608 C.E.) in which a female Polish spy murdered one of the Swedish ministers of war and stole important military documents. In order to revenge the murder that took place in Motol - for which there is no historical record of an earlier name - The Swedish army encircled the town and set fire to all its sides and with it its people and property. Only one Jew escaped from the inferno - Mordechai "Motol" the grave digger - who hid himself within the cemetery in a hole that he had dug until the army retreated after it finished its destruction and plowed the earth so as not to leave a memory of what once was a city. Mordechai the gravedigger labored diligently to build a small house. The beams were created in the nearby forests and after a short time the house became an inn for the many merchants making their way from Pinsk to Minsk. The house acted like a magnet principally to the Gentiles of the area who always were after the "bitter drop" and who were able to get plenty of it cheaply from Motel the gravedigger and cheer each other on in their language: "Poydium du Matoliyah" - in other words let's go to Motol. After a time, Jews and non-Jews began to concentrate around the house and slowly the city returned and reformed itself and again became an important city of the area. But the name "Motol" was on everyone's lips and stuck to the city until the Nazi beast turned it to a city without Jews.

It was a city of laborers, merchants, artisans, but also filled with a yearning for a spiritual and cultural life. Despite the life of hard work and poverty of most of its Jewish inhabitants, there was not a person who did not send his child to a "Heder" that supported a high level of elementary learning for our people. The "Chumash"² and the Bible were taught in the "Heder" as well as serious understanding of a page of Talmud. But its brightest areas of learning were expressed in the love of the Land Of Israel that was implanted in the hearts of the young and the great effort invested in the acquiring of the Hebrew language and its grammar by all the children of the "Heder" and also the knowledge of our people's history throughout all its periods. The leaders and notables of the city during the intermediate days of Passover and Sukkot - between terms - and would seriously discuss the results of the preceding term and carefully plan the upcoming term, and the teachers also would come under their supervision, and more than once the teachers would be replaced with better ones.

This effort produced a youth that was educated in both Jewish and national cultures. The best of its representatives left for the sake of their education to Pinsk, Vilnah, Warsaw and the most daring of them went overseas - some to a Yeshivah and some to a university and some of them were world renowned.

Motol was not really a city or a village but a town and within were about 120 Jewish households. Two "main" streets crisscrossed it and the other three or four streets huddled together at its sides were more like alleys or courtyards than streets. The one main street whose length was about two kilometers long wound its way from Jonava by villages and thick forests to the train station. The other side descended to the city's center and split near the "Pilnah" a long and deep brook never wider than one hundred feet and across it a bridge joining the two sides of the city. Gentiles lived on both ends of the second street that encircled the old cemetery and continued until the shore of the "Yaselda" river that

¹ About 160 miles

² First five books of the Bible

bordered the city from its north east side. And so the city was naturally divided into two also by its character. The sides had special names. The west side was called "Marak", i.e. the market. The east side was called: "Nishtut", i.e. the new city.

The residents of "Marak" were the veterans that according to historical records originally settled it during the 17th century. While the residents of "Nishtut" were the more recent residents who settled in the city over the years. The distinguishing mark that could differentiate between these two groups was imprinted on the eyelashes of the veterans that helped form their thin mocking looks towards the newer residents. The veterans who had managed to become urbanized and who had grabbed all the best professions looked "down their noses" at the laborers, the ordinary people of "Nishtut". But in fact, this superiority was never openly expressed. Instead, this intellectual pride created an admiration of writers and interacting with the alert and vibrant youth created the exalted type of nationalistic, intelligent and proud Jew.

A small town, and in some ways primitive, but the community life was highly organized. The Jew carried this burden with courage and endurance.

A small and weak community - with two synagogues, a Rabbi and sometimes for not short periods - two rabbis - one for the people of "Marak" and the other for those of "Nishtut", two butchers, "heders", sick funds, hostels, a respectable library that was acquired with much effort by some very stubborn people, bath house, Mikve, Hevra Kaddisha, two study groups, a few "Ain Yakov"³ groups, Psalm reciting society, and also some regular Minyans for various groups of Hasidim and all this thanks to the generosity and volunteerism of the town's Jews. Warmth, loyalty and love of Israel and love of fellow man ruled the town. Beyond the usual quarrels, petty squabbles and competitiveness, there was warmth and mutual support that all of "Israel is responsible for one another." More than once, a merchant willingly took money out of his own pocket to save his competitor from legal problems and the police.

At the center of the "Marak" was situated the Great Synagogue, that besides serving as a place for prayer and conversation, was also the focal point for all the important events in the town. The Great Synagogue was the meeting hall for selecting a Rabbi and division of the wheat for Matzot. Also the Rabbi "Mora d'Atra" would give his traditional sermon on the Great Sabbath and during the High Holidays in the Great Synagogue. Even if the vast majority of the attendees to these types of events were from "Nishtut" who were enthusiastic over the lively subjects - unlike the people of "Marak" who were coldly indifferent - nobody doubted the seniority acquired by the "Marak" during the years past. This apathy quickly forced a wedge between the residents of "Marak" and their synagogue. The youth that was raised in the cool atmosphere slowly grew apart from religion and left it to the elderly. The heart would feel a twinge from the emptiness of the synagogue on the Sabbath and holidays.

Unlike the Great Synagogue of "Marak", the smaller synagogue in "Nishtut" was crowded on weekdays and festivals from the early hours of the morning until late by the many worshippers that passed through it, Minyan after Minyan, followed by Minyan after Minyan. At first, laborers, carpenters, masons, butchers, village peddlers and cart drivers, to be followed by shopkeepers and people from the market. Later came the merchants of manufactured goods and educators. And finally came the last of the Minyans - the Rabbi's

³ Moral tales from the Talmud

Minyan in which participated besides the Rabbi, the elderly and leaders of the community, students, scholars, young men and Jews who simply were not hard pressed to earn a living.

On the Sabbath and holidays, the synagogue's courtyard strained to contain the young and the old. The young would crowd in the corners of the "Polosh", wise with youth's enthusiasm about affairs of the day full, full of advice on enlarging the library, making plans for the annual Hanukkah and Purim shows, trying to increase manpower at the shelter and so forth. With the increase of Jewish political parties, the debates turned into propaganda and everyone tried to attract support to his own party, and the peace and tranquillity between friend was replaced by grudges and feeling of political "one upmanship", and with this the club began to replace the synagogue until slowly the youth drifted from the sanctuary and became indifferent to religion and the enthusiasm of the "Polosh" died away.

A special charm enveloped the town when the heavy heat of the summer days died down during the evenings. The flocks returned from pasture. They met, tired from the day's labor and would sprawl themselves all of the "Prizbs", hanging out near the houses and on the shaky benches or they would wander in the early evening's breeze with the fringes of their Talit Katan waving in the breeze, and the air filled with odor of hay and garbage, the joy of work and the night with the sounds of life. The mooing of the fat cows with their full udders mixed with the bleating of the calves and with the neighing of the horses and the colts, barking of the dogs, chirping birds getting ready to sleep blending in with the musical sounds pouring from the shepherds' flutes and shrieks of the Gentiles accompanied by the hysterical laughter of their women returning from work to their villages. The housewives would quickly set the table and prepare dinner and their monotone voices calling their children would shatter somewhere in the distance.

In contrast to this was the gray tedium of life in the town during the winter's short days and long nights while a snow storm raged outside or rain angrily stuck the earth. During these nights the loneliness and cold grew. How few are the occasions in the town that elevated its isolation and allowed it some light and joy. A wedding, a Brit, an engagement would bring a little happiness to dissipate the gloom. It was natural that the youth would seek relief at a friend's house, meeting from time to time, singing songs full of longing, trading stories and jokes, eating fruit, snacking and that is how they passed the time.

The Rabbi's house deserves a chapter unto itself. Motol was lucky to have produced some outstanding Torah scholars who were snatched up by larger cities. The Rabbi was a symbol that always personified grace and beauty. He would always be well groomed and exacting in his dress and his festive appearance would dissipate the gloom. Everyone felt affection for, honored and admired him. The Rabbi's home was the fortress to which everyone turned towards. All hurried to its entrance: some for advice and wisdom, some for a heart to heart talk and some to unburden themselves. The Rabbi would receive everyone pleasantly, with patience; he would guide and encourage, train and develop, tactfully extend a helping hand to those who need it. He himself lived modestly and was the victim of a poor and restricted life. His blessing went with the youth on their way to Zion. He put out his heart and soul to strangers, without being granted the right to reach the land of his dreams, to which he gazed at with love and awe all his life.

The ax of the Holocaust against the Jews of Europe carried out by the German people and their helpers fell on our small city. Our town stood as an isolated island in a stormy sea surrounded by Gentiles, which for hundreds of years emanated light and learning, material and medical help to its Christian neighbors. But this did not help it or its Jews. Friendly

relations with the Gentiles that prevailed for centuries were forgotten, in front of the Christians of the city and with their full cooperation, Jews were cruelly murdered in cold blood. To the two cemeteries of the town, were added another two major burial places - a mass grave for the men and a mass grave for the women and children. Besides these, there remains almost no courtyard in the town that does not contain an isolated grave of a Jew who did not wish to leave his home or was caught hiding and was murdered and buried in place. And the Jewish Motol, the small isolated city in the swamp of "Polisiyah" is no more.

How was it almost wiped off the face of the Earth? How was the fate of the warm hearted Jews who were overflowing with love of Israel, faith and tradition stretching back for generations decided by profane evil doers? How were they uprooted from their land and their homes? What did the few remaining homes look like, half destroyed and sheltering the despised blood thirsty Gentiles. Reflection on these questions came from the mouth of a witness that escaped, his eyes glinting with death.

With simple but penetrating words, the refugee describes to us the frightful path of destruction. The harrowing picture of the cruel march of our brothers and sisters to the death pit passes before his eyes. Only the heaven above and the Earth below heard their cries and felt their tears and listened to their sighs and confessions.

While reading these words, we join with our dear martyrs. May their memory be a blessing. Do not let the Earth hide their blood; do not let their cries be contained until a God fearing avenger obtains retribution from the foes for the spilt blood of His servants.

Shimon Yojok

I am the poor man who saw the staff of his rage... I am the miserable creature who was chosen by the hand of providence, for some reason, to see with my own eyes the destruction of our city, our brothers, our sisters, our children and old people by the German nation, its officers and its armies.

I am the only one saved from the wrath of God and who suffered the sorrow, distress and hardship. And I vowed that if God would allow me to survive, I would write a book and tell the world what the German people did to us - they being a people considered advanced and cultured - so that our people would take revenge and make judgment when the day of retribution and peace arrives; and so these terrible events would serve as a warning to the Jewish people scattered over the Earth, that there is no security in any of the lands of their exile except in their own country from which they can fight back against all who raise against them.

The Destruction of Motele

1. The War

21st of June in the year 1941. A rumor was spreading in the town that we once again were facing war. We had not yet been able to absorb the events of the war from a short time ago and the change of Polish to Soviet authority which turned upside down all the accepted ways of life and traditions that stood for generations and which brought down the mighty while it raised the lowly; before we managed to recover from the legal collapse brought on by the entrance of the Russians who confiscated the best parts of the town and stole with their laws the fruits of years of labor by different hands, once again war.

I went outside and the town was seething with excitement. Groups of people standing about and exchanging confidences and their eyes filled with fear and terror. The rumor is confirmed at once. A group of Russian officers who made up the authority of the town, ran around from house to house with their police mobilizing the youth and mean of army age, arranging them in columns in the street and without giving time for farewells marched them out of the town towards the administrative centers of Brisk. Among the draftees were Chaim Yashpah, Meir Shuchman, Shmuel – the shoemaker's son, Chaim Libshavski and his brother in law Yehudah Feldman, Moshe Polick, Avraham – the cart driver's son, Shalom Lazer Gliberson, Simchah Goldberg, Abba Yashpah, Benyamin Stravitch and others who I no longer remember.

The broken hearted, harried mothers of the draftees ran to a from with a blanket or Talit and Tefilin, trying to hand them to their sons and unable to find them. The fathers stood in shock and mourning, their eyes filled with deep sorrow. The words forming unconsciously on the lips: who knows what this war will bring us.

The parents did not wait long for their mobilized sons. They all returned to town after two days pursued by the Nazis and their helpers who greeted them before they reached their destination and scattered them to the winds. The treason was prepared in advance and the entire Brisk district was sold to the Germans by a general named Pablov who made all the preparations to allow the Germans to take over the area without any fighting. According to the residents of the area around the town of Valodovah that lay on the bank of the Bag river, the traitors prepared there a full forest of artificial trees and stood them along the length of the river to hide the German invasion. The people who worked at the airport narrated that on the day of the German invasion they received an order from the above mentioned general to empty the gas tanks of all the planes parked there, to disassemble each plane as if to give them a good cleaning, and by this to prevent receiving any help from the Red Air Force. The residents of Brisk saw a totally different type of treachery. It was known that an agreement between the Russians and the Germans existed from 1939 that Russia would assist Germany with grain and wheat and in return Germany would send coal to Russia. The main shipments of coal went by Brisk. On the day of the invasion, a train arrived at four in the morning that was supposed to be carrying coal, but instead of coal thousands of German troops jumped from it and immediately began to take over the city with the assistance of thousands of paratroopers that the Germans set down in the area occupied by the Russians near the old border. One group of paratroopers met on its way a group of these draftees from our town who were being led by the Russians to a meeting point and scattered them to the wind.

2. Reports of Terror

Before many days passed, reports of thievery and murder began to come in from the neighboring towns. Some Jews from Talchan came to Motol telling the bitter news that the Gentiles launched a pogrom against the city's Jews, plundered and looted their property, and also killed some Jews, set fire to their houses and drove many out of their homes. Another report came from the town of Svintah-Walyah that its Gentiles gathered all the Jews into one house, beat them without mercy, and did not allow them to leave the house in order to finish them off with hunger. These events occurred before the Germans setup a stable authority and the Gentiles made do with a small scale pogrom. The fear of authority still governed them. But with the conquest of the area by the Germans, they were given a free hand to their most base, wild desires that were kept in check until now.

We had guarded nights since these reports were confirmed. The people that stayed awake all night gathered and took care from a sudden attack as took place in the other towns. Also during daylight, we would not go out without defensive weapons such as iron bars, axes, hammers and the like. There were also cases when the Jews succeeded in driving out some "Black Century" gangs and cooled off their wild passions with a few broken skulls. But the gangs multiplied hourly and sprouted like mushrooms after the rain. We especially suffered from the gangs that organized themselves from the villages: Aufolyah, Aufirvah, Zaziryah, Dadvitch, Pantsvitch, Talchan and Svintah-Walyah. These were among the last that already developed a taste for larceny and when the impulse came it was hard to stand up against them.

3. German Rule

On the fourth day of the War, the Germans appeared in our town. We did not know how to behave with the new authority: should we receive them with bread and salt as was the custom with all new rulers or not? We had already heard of how Germans treated the Jews and how they incited the Gentiles to torment the Jews, but maybe this was only a bad wind that would soon pass over and the new authorities planned to leave us alone.

But the Germans did not leave us in doubt for long and they revealed their true face as soon as they came in. As they entered the town, Leibel Yashpah crossed the street and was pointed out as a Jew by a Gentile, the son of Sergei the tanner. The soldiers lifted their whips and struck him with heavy blows and with difficulty he was able to flee while still alive. This was the first German reception that showed us their warped faces and our mood grew darker and darker.

Many of us did not want to believe the spreading rumors of the German plans for the Jews and to comfort themselves belittled the importance of the incident by saying that it was the wickedness of a few isolated soldiers and without doubt most of them are different and tried to calm things down. But there was immediately another incident that woke them up. Remember Yisrael Chimerinski who was known as "Malyosh". He was a horse trader. Some soldiers came in and demanded horses for the army. When he showed them some horses that they did not like, they fell on him and struck him with such blows that he was confined to his bed for several weeks.

Incident followed incident filling the cup of woe and sorrow until even the optimists among us who comforted each other with the theory that establishing a stable authority would rein in the wild spirits and restrain the wild mob, also bowed their heads and were seized by fear and trembling.

Here is once incident. When the Germans entered the town Lahiszyn adjoining Motol, their soldiers attacked Jewish houses to loot them. One of them entered the house of Meir Novick (cousin of the late Professor Chaim Weitzman), a resident of our town who settled in Lahiszyn. His wife was busy diapering a six week old infant and when she saw the soldier about to enter the house she panicked and left the baby and hid herself. When the soldier entered and saw the baby unattended by anyone he lifted his voice and shouted: where are the people in this blasted house who leave a baby alone? The mother, hearing his words, innocently thought that the infant's crying touched the soldier's heart and left her hiding place and ran to the baby. But the soldier arrived first. He lifted the infant on its pillow and cruelly smashed its soft skull on the wall. This murder placed fear in everyone's heart and blotted out any hope that a stable authority will bring quiet and calm.

With this, the Germans began to incite against the Jews the local Ukrainians and White Russians who gladly received the freedom to go wild and let loose their base instincts. All our friends, with whom we maintained personal and business connections, became our enemies. And on the day that the hobnailed boots of the Germans marched in our town's streets and it was forbidden for Jews to appear on the street, the Gentiles burst into our shops and took out everything they could find.

Meanwhile, the Germans publicized some orders to the residents. Most of the orders were directed only towards the Jews. These were:

- a. The Jews must wear an armband on their left sleeve, at least ten centimeters large with a yellow Shield of David.⁴
- b. It is forbidden for Jews to have any contacts with Gentiles.
- c. It is forbidden for Jews to be on the streets after six in the evening.
- d. The Jews must appoint a committee of six people that will be responsible towards the town's management for faithfully fulfilling all orders.
- e. Anyone possessing a radio must bring it to the market place and hand it over to an army representative. And other orders such as handing over gold and silver, jewelry and food, especially butter, to the German army.

4. The Sneaky Theft

When we realized that our property was up for grabs, many of us began to hand over our most precious possessions to Gentile acquaintances and friends of many years for safekeeping until the danger passed. They also hoped during the time of the danger that they would find sanctuary in the good Gentile's house in return for a few promised things and they could survive. The Gentiles jumped at this opportunity and began to appear at the homes of their Jewish acquaintances and told them they received authoritative information that the Jews will be attacked soon and their property robbed, and they are willing to take some possessions for safekeeping. Some of the more sober among us warned not to hand

⁴ Jewish Star

over property and jewelry to the Gentiles, because by doing this we turn them into mortal enemies, for they will be the first who want to rid themselves of their Jewish "depositors" and enjoy the loot, but no one listened. Everyone hoped to survive and wished to keep a little property for life after the war.

When it became known to the other Gentiles that Jews are handing over their property to their acquaintances, others went after Jewish homes and demanded deposits also. And when they received no reply, a crowd of Gentiles gathered in the market square and incited them to go after our property.

Not many days passed after this merciful and sneaky theft and we began to feel that the faces of our good Gentile friends were not as they used to be. They distanced themselves from us, when we turned towards them with a request for help they avoided us, and rumors came to us that they helped hatch up a plot to more quickly rid themselves of the Jews so that the Jewish property could be kept permanently. The rumors kept on increasing that an extermination plot was hatched against us. From the neighboring town rumors reached us of killing and destruction. But we still did not want to believe. We deluded ourselves into thinking that the evil had not yet reached us. The will to live was very strong, we wanted to live. We believed that our oppressors would be satisfied with our property and maybe they would enslave and torture us. But in this case, the strong will survive, and everyone thinks himself as strong. We held out the shred of hope that the slight sanctity of life would float on the waves of hate and torture. And only a few of us saw correctly that there was no escape or refuge and nobody would escape alive from this Hell.

The sober among us tried to raise a defense movement by saying: our end is approaching, our fate is sealed and if to die - let us at least die with honor. Let the foul murderers know that our blood is not cheap! We would buy with the last of our money weapons and defend ourselves until our last breath. We will not go like sheep to the slaughter.

But the majority of the city dwellers raged against them: What! Do you want to bring destruction down on an entire community and on all the Jews? A miracle can still occur and somehow we will be saved, we must not lose hope, and what strength do we have against the multitudes surrounding us. And so the people were split in their opinions and dispersed without making a decision and without preparation.

5. The Final Joy

The eight of Av, Friday.⁵ The Jewish Committee of our town received an order to report to Jonava and receive the Gestapo's new orders.

At this opportunity, I will present the committee's members. The first is Dalogin the druggist, Kamintski the doctor, Moshe Pisatski, Berel Cheej (Tabolker), Loyal Krickon (grandson of Reb Yicheal Moliyar), and Yehoshuah Daniels.

When these appointees appeared at Jonava, they saw how the authorities and Gestapo heads ran in confusion and the army was returning from the front. The Gestapo said to them: go home and conduct your life as you wish. We are leaving here and tomorrow your

⁵ August 1, 1941

beloved Russians will return they saw with their own eyes how they gathered the possessions and joined the retreating army.

As could be understood, the committee's members did not waste much time and immediately returned to the town and with overwhelmingly joy told everyone what they saw with their own eyes and heard with their own ears. And as if to confirm their words, Russian airplanes were seen in the sky attacking German airplanes and the retreating army; the sounds of the explosions rang in our ears like a song of redemption.

An additional confirmation that heightened hopes was received from the few that courageously hid radio sets and listened to them in deepest secrecy. These daring ones were: Hershel Shuchman, Moshe Shuster, Meir Shuchman, David Kroyitski, Izik Bonovitski and myself. It must be understood that we were in mortal danger if caught in the act. That evening we received the news that the Germans had suffered a great loss and were retreating to the Pinsk area. We were afraid, but the hope deepened that this was really the final fall of the Germans.

The next day, on the Sabbath, I went to synagogue. The people wandered around confused and nothing was known clearly. But as we returned, we were amazed to see two Germans riding on their motorcycles, dressed in elaborate uniforms toward Nishtut. Together with me, went my uncle Benyamin Hanger (Bahon) and his children, Reuven Mishkin (son of Mordechai Dam Kromins), Shlomke Kroyitski and his children and some others. As we went, besides the two above mentioned Germans, there were two others similarly dressed. We looked at them with obvious pleasure. They must be the remnants of a beaten and bewildered regiment searching for a path of retreat. We remembered that also in 1918 when the Germans were beaten in that war, how they ran through the town without knowing where they were going. We went home feeling lighthearted.

But even this momentary joy was immediately diluted with a drop of torment. Before entering our homes, we met Yisrael Chimerinski's wife and she told us of Christian information from the village of Aufolyah who told her that the Germans with the help of a Gentile mob killed all the Jews there from young to old.

Although she added that it was likely that the Gentile only intended to frighten us so that we would deposit our property in her care, even with that our joy was frozen and our world had turned black.

We begin to notice that the Germans were traveling in complete calm and did not appear to be beaten. They traveled and spread themselves through all the streets and alleys and did not leave the impression that they planned to uproot themselves. In a moment our mood changes and the fear returned in all its terror.

6. The Beginning of the End

We arrived at the house of my uncle Benyamin Polick (that before was of Hershel Nechamias and next to the house of Leebah Leeman [Hobs] that now belonged to the above mentioned son-in-law Shlomo Kroyitski on Hazamoshai Street) and with dread we surveyed what was before us. Suddenly a frightened Gentile passed by and said that in the town there are now more than a thousand Germans on horseback, all of them in elaborate uniforms and they

are surrounding the town on all sides and driving all the people from the fields to the city. From afar, I saw how Moshe Pisatski was being led in the direction of the market under gun point, with the Gentile children joyfully running around him and shouting wildly. After this, we heard the proclamation ordering all male Jews from the age of fifteen to sixty to immediately report to the market square.

Some of them rushed pass us saying they killed the little boy of Benyamin Gotanski (Mahashamarchoks) when he wanted to cross the street and the Gentile children pointed out he was a Jew.

We dashed off an escape plan that took us by the Gentile cemetery adjoining the river and along the river to the Vigodah forest. We spoke and acted. We were joined by Reuven Mishkin, his three cousins Yosef, Shlomo, Hershel, David Kroyitski and his brothers. During our flight we managed to warn some other people who hurried and escaped as the extermination closed in.

As soon as we arrived at the forest we saw that some Germans reached the edge of the city from which we left and stood guard in order to block the way from the other escapees. In the forest we met some Gentiles who fell upon us shouting, "Zid! You escaped for nothing, You're finished!" We went further and met some acquaintances among the Gentiles who told me in the village of Zaziryah, a man, a woman and their two children were shot and the reason for the killing was that they were Jews.

My cousins, on hearing this, said they would return to town to save the remainder of their family. David Kroyitski accompanied them. They passed by the first watch that allowed them to enter, but the second watch opened fire on them and with difficulty they escaped to the other side and ran back to the forest. When we saw this, I began to beg the Gentiles to let us pass to the other bank of the river, but they refused even though I offered them different things in return.

I calculated that it was essential for us to cross the river and arrive at the village of Tishkavitch of my cousin and there we could hide ourselves. We had many Gentile acquaintances and if we needed to hide in the forests or in the known swamps of the area, the area was known to my cousins who were familiar with every track and path and would be able to help us with food and clothing. But how to cross the river?

Deliverance was not long in coming. The guiding hand that wanted me to stay alive send a guide in the form of a Gentile whom I observed going directly to the river, taking off his clothes and beginning to cross the river. Without hesitation, I removed my clothes and Reuven Mishkin and I followed the Gentile to the other side of the river. I came to Tishkavitch and entered my aunt's house and they also were hiding in fear of gangs that organized themselves from time to time to loot Jewish property in our town and enjoy our suffering and help finish us quickly off.

On my arrival, they arranged a hiding place for me and I requested my aunt to entice one of her Gentile acquaintances to go to Motol to see what is happening there. She did get someone who was agreeable to making a try after a proper gift was promised. He lingered there until Saturday night and returned at midnight and we watched in impotent despair while listening to his words.

7. The Extermination

The Gentile returned with his tale of destruction and poor I listened. My heart did not break although tears flowed like a river; I did not go mad, although my temple throbbed like a hammer. The bitter faith kept me alive to tell the world what the German people did to us exterminating baby and infant, aged and elderly, and on the Lord's Day of Judgment not a remnant of them will remain.

The Gentile related the following. (Here I must note that I have entered into the Gentile's account many things that I heard from those who managed to survive by various ways and who I consulted with before the second slaughter.)

When I arrived in town the German guards let me enter. But a great fear fell on me when seeing the guards wandering the streets and houses and shooting in the air all the time to frighten the people in hiding and they took all the men and forced them into the marketplace.

I was seized by trembling on approaching the marketplace. I saw how they forced Reb Yisrael Valodavski (Havigodar) to sing and dance. They did not like his singing, naturally, because who among us does not remember what sort of singer he was, so they beat and whipped him into a dance.

Yishayahu Portnoy was ordered to fill a water tank on which people stood and watched, and when the tank emptied he had to bring more.

At the same time, another group of Gentiles under German command was selecting people. They separated out a group of thirty young men and led them seemingly in the direction of Molodovo. Among them was Chaim Benderand Shmuel London from Drogichin who was the son-in-law of Avigdor - Reb Avraham Yitzchak's son (from the Tzdokis family).

After that, they were all ordered to arrange themselves in rows, four people to a row and all were ordered to sing. In the first row were Berel Cheej (Tabolker) and his four sons. He implored his sons who were with saying "My dear sons! Let us sing! Even at the last moment of our lives we will sing and these defiled ones will know that we scorn death! Reb Lib Mintz tottered and fainted. But the tormentors had no pity on him and ordered a refugee from Lodz who wandered into our poor town to carry him on his shoulders.

In the second row, marched the doctor Kamintski with Dalogin the druggist, and by their side were Germans with heavy clubs that beat those two without letting up because they did not want to sing.

Among the people could be seen the only son of Noach Bonovitski - Izikil - who was laden with Channah Polick's son, the lame Mordechai Shatz. He was chosen ironically because he spoke German and the sin of a Jew daring to be similar to a member of the "enlightened" people could not be forgiven. Naturally carrying the heavy burden over such a long way was beyond his strength and he collapsed under it. Immediately some Germans fell on him and struck him and his cries pierced the sky.

Among those being carried was also the wife of Avraham Nun, the barber, who was bleeding all the way. The reason for this was when the Germans were going from house to house checking if any men remained, they found her in her house taking care of herself after a late

miscarriage resulting from fear. Certainly in such a state it was impossible to carry out the order to leave the place. They immediately shot her and ordered her body to be carried.

The locals did not keep their hands out of the till and did not pass up an opportunity to murder people with whom they lived with for generations and participated in both times of joy and mourning. One of them -- Pinchok -- was unable to control himself until the Jews was forced off the town's streets and immediately ran to the attic to grab the loot. In one of these attics, he found Menachem Tubianski hiding. He immediately attacked him and forced him to go down to the cow shed in the yard, and killed him with a wooden beam that he was carrying. Another Gentile found Yitzchak Bagon, the haberdasher, hiding with his wife and four children. Yitzchak begged him not to reveal the hiding place and would pay him in return the few dollars he had in his possession. But the Gentile hardened his heart, went out, called to some Germans and they stood them against the wall of the house and took from them their money and dollars. After that, they read the sentence and said for not obeying the order to report to the market square, the sentence is death by gunfire and they were shot on the spot.

The thirty young men who were chosen were brought to Fritz Skirmont's estate in Molodovo and there were forced to dig a giant pit twenty meters in length, three meters wide and two meters deep. The was to the left of the path leading from Motol to Molodovo, next to the Yaselda River leading from Motol to Pinsk. At the time they were busy digging the pit, eight hundred Jews were brought and held in the shacks on the estate.

When the digging was finished, the thirty young men were commanded to enter to the pit and lay with their faces toward the ground along the width of the pit and two of the killers began their murderous work.

There was a small table next to the pit with wine and spirits and every murderer gladdened his heart before loading the machine gun with bullets as the other shot at those lying down. The thirty were quickly finished and without checking if their work was actually completed, they went to the shacks to remove the remaining eight hundred Jews. The job of getting them out was given to the crowd of Gentiles who gathered around to enjoy the rare sight that they anticipated for many years and with a wild shout they went to carry out the order.

Now all hope was put away. Now even the heart that until now beat with a faint flicker of hope for a miracle and rescue was overcome with dark despair. No illusion! The voices of despair and prayer broke out from the shacks. The voice of terror and horror lifted to the heavens: Hear O' Israel!⁶ Lord of the Universe! Are you going to destroy your people that you glorified so that there is no rival to the people of Israel on Earth? See how it is now a despised and despoiled people, Save Us! Have mercy on the remnant of your people! From another corner pleading voices split the air, "We are the most guilty of all peoples, the most disgraced of all generations!" But the gates of Heaven did not open. The miracle did not occur. The judgment was sealed and it cannot be changed. Only a single path lies before them -- to the pit of annihilation.

When the doors of the shacks opened and the command was issued to go out, the Jews refused to leave. The Nazis began to beat the heads of the Jews with the whips in their hands. Then the first group left. They went down into the pit by themselves and lay down according to the order, four in a row. For a moment, the awful firing of the machine gun

⁶ Daily prayer also said at moment of death

would be heard and all would be silent. The first row filled. They put boards over them with German exactness. Immediately, the remainder of the people streamed to the pit. If before everyone refused to enter the pit of darkness, now everyone pressed to quickly get over the ignominy of being sheep sent to the slaughter and pass to the other side of this evil world.

This was the way eight hundred men of our town were wiped off the face of the Earth. Two remained at the end. One was Shimon Klitnick (Feebles) and another was a woman of whom to this day no one knows how she came to this group of men, because the women were not exterminated until only after another day passed. This woman was Rachel Fein, daughter of Loyal Pinus. Shimon Klitnick began to beg that he be allowed to stay alive as he was a good tailor and he could be of use to the army. Rachel also begged that only by chance she was in the men's group and women are not being exterminated, but the ears of the murderers were sealed. They were thirsty for more blood. It was so easy for them! They waited hundreds of years and anticipated this moment and their wild thirst raging within them for destruction and killing and murder know no bound. The two of them were also shot and they then closed the pit with dirt and leveled the ground.

The Earth still shook and rose for hours and hours from the tortured writhing of those not yet shot to death and suffering from only light wounds. A Russian investigator who opened the pits after the liberation told me that more than half the people died of suffocation. He determined this by the known fact that a person who is suffocating grabs onto anything by his hand and in the hands of more than half the martyrs were found bits of clothes of those lying next to them and in the hands of others pieces of flesh. It was difficult to recognize those who were shot. The murderers shot them with dum dum bullets. This bullet leaves only a small hole where it penetrates, but tears a hole of twenty centimeters when it explodes inside and anyone wounded by a bullet like this is torn to ribbons.

The Gentile was stuck dumb and was seized by trembling and tears streamed without pause.

8. Extermination of the Women

My aunt arranged a hiding place. An elderly Gentile neighbor agreed to put me up in his cow shed's loft filled with straw. And this is how the first Saturday night passed. The next day, the above mentioned Gentile consented to go into Motol again to see what happened there and if there remained any men and what was done to the women. Reuven and I lay there all day, watching with despair, waiting for the return of the Gentile and to hear his report. The day stretched out for us without end. Every slight noise filled us with fear. Every dropping leaf frightened us; hearing approaching steps raised the hair on our scalps. I did not even notice from nervousness that I was chewing the straw all the time. Reuven lay there crying without pause and I had no words to comfort him. At six in the evening we heard the sound of weeping. It was of the elderly Gentile woman in whose loft we had hidden. She cried and told us of the destruction of the town and how the Germans shot all the Jewish men, and how the Germans gathered all the Gentile children, giving them candy and sweets and ordering them to search in the gardens and hiding places for Jews concealing themselves. They spread out at once and began to search and would announce on finding a Jew: Sir! Here's a Jew! Those that were found were immediately order to strip off their clothing and give them as a prize to the child finding them. After that, they were brought to a courtyard of the main street and there shot and buried in place.

At the time all the men were gathered in the marketplace before being killed, all the women, children and babies were confined in the synagogue and the adjoining Polish school in the marketplace square and all the windows and doors closed to suffocate them. I later learned that the Nazis did not think of exterminating them at the time, because the orders were to exterminate only the men. But a Polish prostitute - a well-known whore - named "Malishbashkah" intervened. She invited the German officers and after entertaining them for some time and praising their actions to clear the town of the hated Jews, expressed her surprise that the Jewish women were still alive and encouraged them to continue to clean the town. Together with this, she sent on the same Saturday, two Poles to Molodovo, seat of the high commanders to lobby for the removal of the despised Jews from the town. There, it became known to them that the high command was in Jonava. I know from survivors that the prostitute Malishbashkah bragged how she got the Germans to exterminate also the women, because the local commanders had no such order. The two messengers returned with a "permit" to clean the town from the lice ridden Jews and the two came after midnight on Saturday night waving before her the extermination document.

There are no words to describe the agony of the women and children as they were locked in under horrible overcrowding in the heat of the blazing summer and there is no way to put on paper the horror that passed over them during their last day on Earth. The overcrowding was so awful that there was no place to sit, even for a moment. The children and babies cried without stop asking for a little water to revive them. Many fainted in their mothers' arms that could not help them. All their physical needs had to be carried out while standing. The stench was suffocating. There was so much moisture from their breath and sweat that the outer walls of the building were moist as after a heavy rain. Some women wounded themselves and the wet the dry lips of their children with their blood.

On Sunday at eight o'clock in the morning the doors holding them were opened. All the women and children were taken out and stood in rows. The women arranged themselves by family, i.e. mothers and their children, grandchildren, sisters, aunts and in-laws. The sight of them leaving the house was horrendous. The fallen faces, the wild hair, eyes red from crying and lack of sleep, their collapsing knees from the awful standing. The children breathed with difficulty because their life was nearly extinguished after the exhausting and suffocating day.

They were led to the place by the murderers, limping, broken, crushed. Upon leaving the city on the way to the village "Kalil", they were divided into two groups. One was led to the square between the hills where horses and animals were buried; the second was brought to the village "Zamushah" to the right of the windmill that stood behind the city. There ordered to strip naked, kneel down to the ground and chew the grass. Anyone not carrying out the order was cruelly whipped. And as they were kneeling to the ground, the first shots of the camouflaged machine-guns in the area rained down on them. As if they all spoke with one voice, the great eternal cry of our people burst out "Hear O' Israel!" The mothers pressed their children to their breasts and hugged them and with the final cry "One" a final terrible silence settled on the place. The Black Gang jumped on these martyrs searching for rings and earrings, gold teeth, watches and other jewelry. They did not spare the dying and turned them from side to side to see better, and those still alive were killed without mercy by the hobnailed boots and with hoes brought to bury them. Many were thrown alive into the pit.

This was told to me about my Aunt Pearl from the village Zaziryah who was only wounded in the leg when they shot her and she gathered the rest of her strength and crawled for more than a kilometer along a ditch and distanced herself from the killing place. Unfortunately, an old Gentile on his way to join in the killing noticed her. He jumped from his cart, at once

grabbed and loaded her into his cart and brought her back to the open pit and there ended her life with sledgehammers and hoes.

Within the pile of body, the mob found a single child of Hershel, alive and well in his mother's arms, because his mother protected him with her body from the murderers' bullets. Then, a German soldier approached and with one blow from his rifle butt, he shattered his skull.

After they finished covering the pit with dirt, the German soldiers got up and sang their despised song "When the Knife Drips with Jewish Blood" and rode their horses over the pit to wipe out any traces of the murder and returned to town.

At the same time a group of German soldiers gathered children from the age of six to ten, all from Nishtut, and led them in the direction of the windmill to the pit that was not yet filled from Saturday. This was told to me by Avigdor Chernomortz (son-in-law of Leebah., son of Yishayahu). He was hidden in a corn field at a distance of 150 steps from the killing pit and saw with his own eyes what happened to the martyrs and innocent children. Among them were three of his own children. When the group of children was brought, they were ordered to arrange themselves in two rows and were told they were going to be photographed. As the attention of the children was directed towards the photographers, the machine-gun opened fire on them. The poor children hugged each other, kissed one another and began to run in all directions. They shot them one by one like frightened rabbits and threw them into the pit, and ordered some from the crowd to fill the pit with dirt.

9. Finishing Off the Survivors

The murderers gaily whistled while returning to town and began to finish their satanic task of clearing the town of Jews. Methodically, they searched house by house, going into every nook and cranny, and anyone that fell into their hands was shot in the house or in the courtyard and buried in place. Many fell into their hands during the cleanup and there was almost no home without a death. And here is a list of people that found their eternal rest in their yards: Benyamin Gotanski - Shmarchuk's son, Menachem Tubianski in Chaim Leeb's garden, his brother Aharon Tubianski who was hiding by a Christian acquaintance and upon hearing that his wife and children were killed returned to his home, went up to the attic, hung himself and was found that way and was buried in his yard. Moshe Chaim Cheej of the Tzdokis family was buried by the river. He was hiding by the river bank. The Gentile children while scattering to search for hidden Jews, found his hiding place and called for a Nazi to eliminate him. He pleaded before them that he was a good shoemaker and that he was willing to do any job placed before him. He groveled in the dust of the Nazi's foot and kissed his shoes. But, the Nazi ordered him to rise and go, and as he went behind him, the Nazi sent a bullet to split his head and smashed it and tore it to ribbons. That is how he found his final rest in the yard of Abba Benner, son of Rachel-Leah. In the yard that once belonged to Meril Koppels and later to Dalogin the druggist, Yisrael Lib Jabinski and Yosef Menachems and someone else who I cannot identify found their final rest. In the vicinity of the Jewish school, in a place called "Pilnah" (a type of small, thin channel of water) was the final resting place of the butcher Reb Berel's (Dov) son-in-law, in the courtyard that once belonged to Chanan the shopkeeper and afterwards, belonged to Mordechai Kot (known as the Black). In Gorodishich the druggist's yard that once belonged to Shalom the doctor, were buried two men and a girl. It became known to me that the two men were refugees from the town of

Kondaniah and the girl was the daughter of Mordechai, son of Shmuel Hersh (the blacksmith). Mendel Pinski was at one of the gardens near the ancient cemetery on the riverbank. Yosef Yojok, the caretaker of the Denishtut Synagogue and his wife were shot in their home and found their final rest in the synagogue courtyard near his house, and during my last visit to Motol after the War, I visited his grave. It was difficult to find because the Gentiles did not respect his remains and seeded the entire courtyard with flax. In the yard of Leebah Greenfeld, who was Chayah Feigel's daughter were laid to rest important women known for their public activity in town, and they were: Rivkah, wife of Reb Mordechai Gotanski (Layzarus) and her daughter Nechamah Dolinko⁷ and Leebah Niditch with her husband, the only one of all the men that had the privilege to die and be buried with his family. In the other courtyard next to the previously mentioned one, the elderly mother of Yehoshuah Portnoy found her final rest. Even in the yard of Yehoshuah Kroyitz, Avraham Maporitcha, an old Jew was laid to rest who was shot in bed. He ended up in Motol after another town. And there are many other yards where many graves can be found.

10. Wanderings

All day Sunday, my friend Reuven Mishkin and I lay in the attic of the Gentile in the village of Tishkavitch. My aunt came to us in the middle of the night. Her face was reddened from crying and she told us horrifying news from Motol. She told us of some Jews escaping to the swamps where the hay was harvested between Saforvah and Mintz and some escaped to the Molodovo forest. Some of them passed by the village of Tishkavitch and went to her house and asked for bread and they confirmed to her the slaughter in Motol, and that the Nazis intended to come here and also warned her to flee and hide herself in the Mintz swamps. One of them was barefoot. She showed them the way and they went, and it seemed to her that he was Mordechai Natan Chimerinski Malyosh). She handed us some provisions in a small bag and also some clothes and instructions to continue in the same direction that the Jews turned towards and we separated in tears.

We went. Our knees were weak. A leaf falling would freeze our blood and we felt like someone was chasing us. It was a pleasant summer night. The stars were bright, but their light did not shine on us. There were not created for persecuted Jews, frightened to death. As we passed the village, we crossed the river until we reached the crossroads. After agreeing on a decision, we turned left and continued all night until the break of dawn. At the end of the path were piles of hay and small patches of forest. We entered the forest and I fell helplessly onto the ground. My friend Reuven was very anxious and absolutely did not wish to sit. He went back and forth for several hours until his steps created a path as if were created over a period of many days. Suddenly, we heard shots in the distance. We then crouched down and began to clarify to ourselves the directions of the shots and where we were. We rested only for a moment. We felt that we were burning up with thirst. We began to crawl on all fours to some ditches at the forest edge. Meanwhile, we noticed some small walnut trees. We arrived at a small ditch full of water and drank our full even though the water was stagnant and yellow, and on our way back, we picked some nuts that were not yet ripe because it was before their season, and we came to the first place that seemed to be able to serve as a hiding place. That is how we spent the first long day of our wanderings. Not a living soul was to be seen in the whole area. The Gentiles celebrated their victory over

⁷ Wife of a Rabbi

the Jews and they rolled around drunk in their villages or were busy looting and did not go out to their fields.

Slowly we realized that during the night we were wandering around in circles and had returned to the same place only from the other side of the village. As the day turned to dusk, we planned how to return and enter the village without crossing the main road and without crossing the bridge that certainly had a guard posted in front of it. But all our plans came to nothing because we knew no other way and we wandered almost the entire night until we returned to the bridge and finally crossed it. Suddenly, we heard the sound of a moving cart. We rushed and quickly covered ourselves with some crops at the side of the path and intensely listened because we knew that it was forbidden for civilians to be traveling at night. The cart seemed to stop at the bridge and a voice shouted out, "Halt! Stop!", a beam of light spread out from a flare and lit up the entire area. We managed to dive down and lay low. These were men of the civilian police of Motol who had permission to wander and search for escaped Jews whose numbers might have reached up to four or five hundred. They informed the guards at the bridge that they had searched all night and saw no one.

Only after the flare was extinguished, we began to crawl on all fours, returning the way we came and as if pursued by terror itself we began to run with all our remaining strength until we separated ourselves by several kilometers from the bridge, and only then did we start to walk at a regular pace. And again we wandered to and from all night and part of the day until we arrived at the forest. Our feet failed and it was already dangerous to walk during daylight, so we decided to stay in the forest for the day. Before entering the forest, I began to take precaution and cover any steps so that nobody could see that someone entered the forest here. At first, I reversed my steps as if I was leaving the forest. To do this, I passed by a ditch which I did not have to pass at all. I covered up my footprints entering the forest with dirt from my hands and made several paths some distance so they could not find my track. My friend Reuven took no precautions and did not reply to my request to do what I did and he directly entered the forest. After resting a bit we walked and found a clearing where hay seemed to have been harvested and we lie down from exhaustion and fell asleep there. We slept there for some time. Suddenly we were awakened by the voices of people. We listened carefully and heard a voice speaking Polish. My friend Reuven wanted to stand up and follow the speakers. He was sure, he said, that these were Jews. I held him down and whispered to him that if they were Jews we could follow and then call out to them. But he did not listen to me; he stood and began to go in the direction of the voice. I stayed on the ground, observing all of his movements. Before walking even ten meters, I saw him dive to the ground and sign to me to continue to stay down. My blood froze. We stayed down for about fifteen seconds without knowing what happened, but I understood that death was very close. Reuven began to crawl towards me until he got close and said to me", do you know who they were? These were the murderers that killed our loved ones." They were with bayonets and rifles ready to fire; they were mounted and going in the direction we came from. I rebuked him for not listening to me and covering his tracks which they apparently discovered and which brought them to here and he agreed with a nod of his head.

During the entire day, we did not move from our place. Planes flew above our heads so low that they scattered the hay stacks all over. That is how we passed the day and also the night and all of the next day. The hunger afflicted us very much; we could not eat much of the nuts that were still not ripe. We came to a decision to reach some place and decide what to do in the village from which we left and maybe get some food.

We armed ourselves with clubs as we decided that if we met someone with ill intentions we would attack them and deal with them, and we left the forest in the light of day on Wednesday, 13th of Av.⁸ We went by a field being harvested and turned towards the harvesters because we so much wanted to know where we were. When we got close, we saw that the harvesters were women and one saw us and shouted "Zhid idiot!", Jews are coming, and they fled in panic. We did not know what to do - to continue or go back, but the hunger afflicted us and urged us to continue going no matter what! And then we noticed a cart standing far off on the side of the road next to the forest and it was full of hay. We approached it and there was a Gentile, about forty years old, standing and handling the hay. When he noticed, he immediately grabbed his pitchfork and aimed it at us shouting "don't come near or I'll stab you!" We began to speak to him from far off, but he did not want to reply. But when we began to plead that he answer us and tell what happened in Motol and the village, he consented to open up to us and told us that three hundred Germans came to Motol and the village and they gathered the civilian police and dispersed to search for escaping Jews hiding in the forests and swamps, but until now it was known who had been caught. Only two women and a child were shot yesterday in the village and the husband escaped. They were buried on the river bank. During our conversation, it became known to us that one of the women was Itkah Hatishkavitchait. So he told us that my aunt and her children are still alive. When we asked him to grant us some food, he answered us that if we would move away from him he would leave something of what he had on the side and we could pass by and take what he left as if by chance. I asked him to also give me a bottle so I could supply myself with clean water for drinking. He returned a positive reply to this and actually kept his promise. On the side of the road we found a little food and a bottle. When I asked him the reason for his strange behavior and why he held his pitchfork all the time on our direction, he answered us that he was being careful since the Germans ordered that anyone doing anything for a Jew would be killed. Therefore he was doing this as a cover-up so they would not suspect him of offering help. Also, because he read notices warning the public not to get too close to the Jews since they were bitter and likely to attack anyone and kill him. Even though he did not believe this because the Jews are warmhearted, but it is better to be careful and we are two, while he is only one. To our question where he comes from, replied that he is from the village of Dostoyvah and that all the Jews fled from there to the forest and although nobody was taken, all their property was stolen. We thanked him for his kindness and interrogated him on different paths and where they led to and finally we took an entirely different path so that he would not know where we turned to. By twisted paths and super human efforts we arrived back at the village of Tishkavitch and entered the Gentile's house where we first hid. He hid us in the first hiding place and warned us to be careful also of the villagers. Since they had their fill of Jewish loot and were afraid of a returning Jew demanding his property back, they were likely to hand over any Jew they could get their hands on to the Germans or eliminate him themselves. He continued on to tell us that in the town of Jonava, the Germans eliminated during half a day all the Jewish men and left the women live and only two women were inadvertently killed and from there the death squad went to Pinsk.

My aunt also returned with her sons to the Gentile. At night she told me that her daughter Itkah and her child were killed and her son-in-law managed to escape from a hail of bullets that missed him. She also said that the two sons of Mordechai Zaditovski, the blacksmith were in the swamps. Her son spoke with them and they confirmed the news of the killing of all the people from Motol and warned them to keep in hiding. The Gentile told us of the known "Sheigetz"⁹ of the Black Gang that chased Yehudah Cheej (Bergmans) with a pitchfork

⁸ August 6, 1941

⁹ Male Gentile

trying to stab him for not wanting to hand over his boots, but he escaped to the forest. He went on until he met a Gentile farmer from Motol who told him of one of the town's Gentiles killing a Jew while escaping through his yard. He was hit on the head with a metal bar. After a while, it became known that the Jew was Moshe Cheej (Demah). The Gentile brought us food from the supply that my aunt left with him before her escape, and he sat and spoke with us and told who stole the aunt's property, livestock, cart etc... We finished eating and made plans on where to go because we could not stay here. One of the aunt's sons joined us and became our "eyes" to lead us in the journey, because he was an expert on the area. We also decided on a meeting place if we stayed alive. We went to the place where we first hid and on the way we discussed how to defend ourselves however that may be. That is how we stayed in the swamps for an entire week. My aunt's son would go out with us from time to time and put his hand out to Gentile passerby's and get some food to sustain us. Some Gentiles would honor us with the crack of the whip or a stick without giving anything; among them were those who we knew as always being quiet. During those days we met with the aunt and her second son several times. They were in the area of their village.

11. Between Hope And Despair

On the eleventh, I went to the aunt and she told me that Soltus, the village elder, was called to Jonava, to the authorities in order to receive new instructions. When he returned the next day, new notices were pasted saying not to cause harm to the remaining Jews and that all Jews leaving their hiding places and reporting to the police would receive food, clothing and also places to live.

Our healthy instincts said to us that this was only a poisonous and devilish trick to get rid of the last remnant. But nevertheless we became less cautious and went out more frequently to ask what was going on in Motol and if any Jews were to be seen there, because we have not met any Jews for days even though we searched for them. Here we met a village Jew from our area and he told us of two Jews from Motol who walked back to town after it became known to them that Jews were beginning to get together again and twelve Jews were already there and they resided in two large houses that were returned to the Jews. His words were confirmed by Gentiles from the village that we happened to meet along the way and they added that already more than fifty Jews were in Motol. We decided to also approach the town and see with our own eyes what was happening. By a twisted path, through gardens and yards we entered before evening the village and arrived at the aunt's house. But our eyes were on the houses and our ears to the walls, and despite all our care not to be observed, immediately some villagers came to us. Some brought us a few potatoes and a bottle of milk. We cooked the potatoes in their presence and for the first time, a cooked meal. We cooked in the middle of the road, because the stoves and burners were smashed by those seeking booty. We stayed in the village at the aunt's for a number of days. Every morning, we would leave the village and sneak into the field to hide ourselves from the villagers, many of them who openly expressed their sorrow that we were still alive.

Mostly we spent our time in washing and cleaning by the river. We had not changed our clothes during the entire time and were infested by lice and other creatures that multiplied on us and sucked the remainder of our blood.

One bright morning, Mordechai Chimerinski's son (Malyosh) came and he told us about life in town and who was still alive and by what miracles they survived and the attitude of the authorities to the remaining refugees, and the activities of the local police; who among the police treated us fairly and who not. He told us of the destruction of the houses and streets and the graves in the yards, of the Jews who arrived in the town of Jonava and met their tragic fate. He stayed with us that day. The purpose of his coming was to verify if anyone of his family remained.

He told us about some other sad incidents, how even the heavens conspired to fight the Jews, exterminate them and hand them over to the enemy. The incident was like this. He was hiding by a Christian in the village of Molodovo and the few Jews of Molodovo were also hiding in the granary of a Christian far from the village. And to fill the cup of sorrow with tears, rain began to fall, mixed with thunder and lightning and the lightning struck the granary and killed a young man, father of three children on the spot. Actually, many afterwards were envious that he died without humiliation and suffering, but the tragedy broke their spirit horribly.

12. The First Extermination In Jonava

Chimerinski told us about the fate of Jonava's Jews with the following words:

Some of the Jews were from Motol and they were: Shimon Bolonditski and Hershel Shuchman and his sister Chayah and Yosef Polick and David Shuchman, Shlomke's son. They arrived after much hardship and suffering to the town of Jonava on that same Saturday night of death, and told them there of the cup of sorrow that overtook Motol. But the Jews there mocked them and said that such things could not be, and only on Sunday when some Christians arrived and told what happened also to the women; only then did they begin to fear that it was true. On the second night, they gathered the Jews of Jonava, stripped them of their clothing down to the skin and forced them to sing and dance while in their underwear¹⁰ and sent them home. Now the fear began to infest their minds, but nevertheless they comforted themselves that these degradations finished the matter and no more harm would come to them. The four mentioned Jews, refugees from Motol, were at their brother-in-law in Jonava at his house which was at the edge of the city on the way leading to Motol and since they had learned from experience, they refused to sleep in the house but hid in the attic. But bad luck - in the form of a Polish policeman from the Bankarovski family who lived next to the brother-in-law's house- pursued them. He noticed Chayah Shuchman as a new face and reasoned that there certainly must be more Jews in the house. On Tuesday the 12th of Av¹¹ the blood thirsty command was issued for all Jewish males from the age of sixteen to sixty to gather in the market square. Then the eyes of the Jews of Jonava were opened and they understood that what the people of Motol said was true and they all immediately went underground and only a few followed the command. When the Nazis saw the small number of men, they took several Polish policemen and went from house to house picking up the Jews. That is how the above mentioned policeman arrived at the Bankarovski residence who of his own freewill joined the Germans in order to kill and loot came to the same house where the people from Motol were hiding and found them in the attic together with the head of the house. There they attacked them with heavy blows and afterwards ordered them to go down a ladder that was placed there. But the slow

¹⁰ This contradiction might be because of mistranslation from the original Yiddish.

¹¹ August 5, 1941

descent did not please the blood thirsty one who threw them from the room to the ground; And David Shuchman broke a leg. When commanded to go out into the main street wretched David begged to be killed on the spot, but they refused in order to increase his suffering and ordered two Jews to carry him to the place being shown. Shimon Bolonditski's fate was very sad. He was also staying with a family from Jonava and when the Nazis began to search the houses, they begged him to hide with them. But he was overcome with a terrible despair. He remembered the fate of the people of Motol and especially that of his wife and children, and declared that death was better than life without his family. He left the hiding place to the front of the house, stood on the steps and waited for the Nazis to take him and free him from his terrible loneliness. He did not wait long. The blood suckers appeared at once and took him with them. They tied him to the horse reins and dragged him as they hurried to carry out the terrible cleansing.

That was told by one of the survivors. The Nazis led those they found in groups and at every street corner and intersection, bands of Jews stood under heavy guard and on the main street, all of them were combined into a horrific procession on their final journey. Some of the people who could not keep up and continue were taken out of the line and shot on the street in full view. A terrible silence settled as they passed by. It was forbidden to utter a sound. They were brought to some sort of side road, stood up in rows of four, photographed, and were immediately shot by a Nazi riding on his horse. After four knelt and were shown down, another four were brought and another Nazi was given the honor of spilling blood. Every Nazi there saw it as a great privilege to take part in the murder of Jonava's Jews, and divided it up among themselves until the last of the Jewish groups that included our poor refugees.

That is how Chimerinski's story ended. As evening approached we began to prepare to go and stay at the village and Hershel headed towards Motol. Before we separated, he invited us to come to Motol to say Kaddish for our relatives, because there were already two Minyan¹² in the town and they all said Kaddish.

13. The First Visit

We decided to visit Motol. A tremendous yearning came over us to express our feeling of being orphaned and be among Jews, to hug them, to cry on their shoulders until our last breath, and to find comfort in the prayer that was handed down from generation to generation that would give a feeling of peace and security. This is a wonder prayer that does not blind me to what need prompted it. But, after reciting it, you feel as if you are gently held by strong hands, pressing you like a merciful mother and you feel lightened and relieved. This is the magical prayer which I recited in the synagogue when my father died during my youth leaving me an orphan with my broken, mourning mother. Nothing could console her and she calmed down only when she heard me say, "Yitgadal, vaytkadash, shmay, rabah." My feeling of bitterness gathered within me until I felt that I would explode. The tears welling in my eyes did not ease this terrible burden and with every fiber of my being, I yearned for the moment, I could spill out my anger and terrible sorrow, declaring protest through the calming, caressing words of the Kaddish. I now began to understand their meaning and eternal value. There are many attempts to destroy the Jew during his lifetime, but if he turns only towards the one worthy of worship despite the wrath He pours down on us, the Jew's strength will be eternal. Despite of all the Hitlers who stood and stand

¹² A minyan is the minimum of ten Jewish men needed to recite certain prayers such as the Mourner's Kaddish.

against us during every generation, we survive and continue and even if just a small group, but a Minyan of Jews to proclaim loudly, "Yitgadal, vayitkadash, shmay, rabah." And anyone disparaging Him also disparages us as it is written, "The blood of your servants will rise up and seek vengeance against their oppressors."¹³

Reuven and I at once felt exalted as if some secret force was urging us on and without saying a word our feet carried us toward Motol. That was on Thursday, the fourteenth day after the terrible slaughter. By roads that could barely be called roads we arrived at the wretched town. The cursed inhabitants looked at us with horrible eyes radiating hatred, saying to each other that despite everything Jews are still alive.

We arrived at Berel Gotanski's (Minx) house where some of the wretched refugees could be found. We embraced each other and no pen could describe our feelings and wailing. Here we were all equals. There was no rich or poor, high born or lowly. All of us were poor orphans who for some reason were passed over by death leaving us in pain and sorrow without a tomorrow or future and expecting, at any moment, to be wiped off the face of the Earth.

After we calmed down a bit, everybody began to tell what happened and how they were saved. Between sentences, a heart wrenching sigh would be heard. Between the words lay the piercing question: Would it have been better for us to be with our friends, parents, children, wives and relatives? Was it better for them or us?

While still talking, I heard one call another let us try to get a little food to revive us. "Get" meaning to stand with our hand out like beggars in front of the murderers of our parents, our children, the thieves of our own property and labor who perhaps might return us our bread which they stole, a torn shirt, a pair of shoes which were taken. How great was the pain and how great was the shame. But the will to live controlled us and we were too weak to resist and logic had no sway with us. You do not ask if you want to live but you bang your head like the plants in the legend who were commanded by an angel, "Grow!" I remember the passage Ezekial 16:6 XXXXX

In the midst of all this, messengers from the other group of refugees came to bring us to them. They were in Zelik Stravitch's (the butcher) house. Here was a heartbreaking scene. Each survivor was so precious to his friend, more than brothers longing for each other for years. It was no wonder that our crying split the heavens and we could not refrain from hugging and kissing each other.

Here I found three of our children who miraculously survived. One was twelve years old and the child of Chaim Hatabolkai. The second was the child of Berel Pomerantz from Holyush. The third was the above mentioned Zelik Stravitch's grandson, the son of Hanyah Rebah. A great miracle happened to him and everyone had to talk about it. Everyone tried to talk about the boy's cleverness despite his youth, almost an infant; he felt the terrible sorrow of our people was not a burden and tried to help with all his strength according to his young understanding.

Look at what had happened to this child. When the Nazis issued in the town the proclamation ordering the women and children to gather at the religious school, the child's mother, her sister Chinkah and another woman with an infant from the town's refugees,

¹³ Psalms 137:8

decided to escape from the murderers. By using the yards and gardens, they managed to pass the guards and reach the river behind the town. But they were pursued by a bad luck. They were spotted from afar by someone from the Black Gang who pursued them on horseback, blocked them and forced them back to town. Meanwhile, they left the path and found themselves stuck in one of the many swamps near the river bank. Slowly they began to sink in the muck and only with super human strength they held each other's hand so as not to completely drown. One of the Nazi guards spotted this scene and found pleasure in shooting at these live targets. He aimed his machine gun at the miserable people. The bullets whistled pass and around them without hitting them. He toyed with his victims for about a quarter of an hour and when tired of this cursed game, he switches to automatic and a hail of bullets rained down on the unfortunate ones. First, the mothers were hit and then the children, but the above mentioned child was hurt only in his hand and he crouched under his Aunt Chinkah in the water. Afterward he crawled to a dry, less exposed spot and stayed until sundown and from there reached the forest.

The boy's father miraculously remained alive. But everyone envied the boy's grandfather. He was the only one remaining with a family.

14. A Meal Together

Little by little, those who went to the city searching for food gathered. They set up a table for everyone. There was no mine and yours. This rule was not only for food but clothes and underclothes also. The danger united everyone. The proximity to the great grave united the remaining refugees more than family ties. But my conscience would not allow me to share in the food that others risked their lives for. So I went out with my friend Reuven to "grab" something. I succeeded in getting some underwear a few loaves of bread and some more food. All this was from the property that I handed over to a Gentile neighbor during the crisis. I saw the Gentile's hands shake as he handed over things from my own store. He had not expected that he would have to give up the sacks of wheat and grain, the clothes and shoes handed over to him, and I felt what he wished me in his heart, but nevertheless he gave. Thank God, I was later able with some other partisans to send him and some other thieves to the same place they want to send us.

My friend Reuven had no luck. He was chased out of every place by a pitchfork and threats.

Most of the food that I gathered I left for the other refugees and the rest I kept for us. We quietly ate and chewed the bread that was so bitter. We sipped some cold water and so ended the meal. We departed from everyone and promised to return on Saturday for services, because we did not dare to get together and we returned to our village of Tishkavitch.

15. Hope and Despair

When we returned, we met my aunt and her sons and their faces were glowing with joy. When I asked the reason for their happiness they answered that an old man from the village let them harvest the fields that belonged to her and from now on there is no need to beg for

bread and we would have our own bread. Also those that stole from her the animals and cows agreed to bring us a bottle of milk every day. We would start to harvest already tomorrow. We would harvest with a scythe and not a sickle and after the harvest we would thresh right away. On Monday of next week they would already prepare us bread and we would send the rest to those in Motol.

At dawn on Friday we went out to the field and worked diligently until evening. The Sabbath Queen arrived. We received the Sabbath with Psalms and the "Song of Solomon"; we recited the Sabbath and evening service and made a Kiddush¹⁴ on a few slices of bread given to us by the cursed Gentiles and lay down to rest.

The next day we rose and went town. A Christian woman appeared before us gave us an apple and whispered, "Run for your lives!" Notices have been posted in Motol promising a large reward for every live Jew found and handed over to the Germans. My blood froze and I did not know what to do. Should I believe this or be doubtful? If she just wanted to frighten me, why give me an apple? Why tell me that she saw my cousin Piniah Karolinski and the two sons of Yoel Yashpah -- Abba and Yehudah and also Eliezer and Yakov Sharashavski who passed through her yard on the way to the main street. I returned to my aunt and repeated what I heard. She said that they certainly meant only those who have not yet returned and are still in hiding, but we already came back. But my mind was not easy until we decided that we five men who are here will go to the village of Dadvitch where the family of Mishkin Shalom (the son of Yakov Shlomo Ben Reuven) and Reuven Mishkin's sons lived, and where we could more easily hide if necessary. Because it was told to us that the village's Jews and some Jews from the village of Pantsvitch returned from their hiding places.

Only four people finally went to Dadvitch - Reuven Mishkin and I and my cousin and another Jew from the village unharmed from the bullets during his escape. We traveled on convoluted paths until arriving at the village. We met a farmer and asked him about the village's Jews. His answer was that he saw them yesterday begging. He advised us to be careful because the Germans want to deceive us and pretend they will not kill more Jews but actually they will be captured as soon as a group large enough gathers. We thanked him and immediately went to the house containing the remaining Jews. There we repeated the tragic scene and greeted one another with heart breaking cries. After we calmed down, I asked what was new in town and they answered nothing except for old problems. During the conversation, two more Jews arrived, father and daughter, the only girl still alive in the entire area. They came to search for one of their relatives who they heard was still alive. I asked him about the notices posted in Motol. He told me that when the Germans arrived at Molodatchnah next to Vilna to rid the city of its Jews, the Jews met them with rifle shot, killed a few of them and escaped. So they put up notices throughout the area stating that anyone capturing a Jew from the above mentioned city and handing him over would receive a prize of a thousand Krovinitz (type of coin) and also ten hectares of land. This claim settled our minds and so as not to lose time we rose at once to go to Motol. Before going, a Jew tossed me the information that Nisan and Chaim Zaditovski (sons of Mordechai the smith) also returned home from the forests and with them also was David Kroyitski. They were in their house at the edge of the city. The house was old and made a very poor impression so no Gentile desired to live there and it remained empty. Now the sons returned home in the hope they would find some food they had hidden. With a lighter heart, I parted from them and Reuven and I went to Motol while the two others went back to Tishkavitch to calm those still there.

¹⁴ Prayer recited at home on the Sabbath eve usually over wine

We arrived in town and entered directly into Mordechai Zaditovski's to meet friends. There are no words to describe this emotional reunion. We cried on each other's shoulder and could not stop from embracing and kissing each other. After the excitement of the meeting passed, we sat down, tired and worn out, and sobbed silently, unable to regain our composure. We gradually calmed down and everyone began his "story" and David Kroyitski had the most to tell. This was his story:

16. David Kroyitski's Story

After I departed from you with my cousin Shlomo-Benyamin Bahones in order to save my parents and family, the German guard let me enter. But as they noticed us sneaking in by winding paths, they began to fire on us. With great difficulty we managed to break into Avigdor's garden and arrived at the forest back at the same place from which we left them (that is from me and Reuven Mishkin and my cousins Yosef and Hershel Polick and Moshe, David's little brother) and we crossed the river. As we crossed over, some Gentiles from the black gang attacked us, and in the melee they grabbed the youths and dragged them back to the river, and we managed to escape without knowing what was done to the youths. We ran towards the fields of Fritz Yorgenson. We were pursued by Hachcriflboy's sons, Chavdor, riding a horse and shouting all the time, "Here are Jews! Your end is near!" Suddenly Shlomo Ungerman popped out from some place and joined us calling out, "Guys! Do you know which direction and where you're running to?" We looked and saw two Nazis chasing us and shouting, "Halt, Stop." We then split up and began to run in different directions. They fired at us and I was hit in the hand. I fell to the ground and heard Shlomo Polick sighing bitterly. My head was spinning but I was able to hear nearby footsteps. I held my breath and lay dead still. My ears picked up voices, "The Jew is still alive." I felt a great blow and lost consciousness. I do not remember for how long I lay there. When I woke up, it still felt like I was in the throes of a dream and I did not know if I was alive or not. Gradually my senses returned to me and I remembered what took place. I tried to move a hand and it did move. Encouraged by the experiment, I tried also to lift my head and did not succeed. My head felt heavy as if it was lined with lead. I opened my eyes and noticed a puddle of blood around me. I began to feel the blood still flowing from me. I tried to remember how I arrived at this situation and what to do in such a case. I then remembered the rule taught in the army that I must first stop the flow of blood. In order to do this it was necessary to rip my shirt to shreds and tightly bind the wounds. I ripped the rest of my shirt and after a few attempts managed to rip a wide swath of cloth and bandaged my hand. But I still felt the blood flowing from my body and with my healthy hand felt my body to find the place of the wounds; my hand stopped on the part of my neck as it was glued to it. I kept on feeling around until I began to again feel with my hand warmth and also pain. I tore another strip from my dirty shirt and bandaged my neck. After these efforts, I was forced to lay still and rest. After a quarter of an hour, I once again gathered my strength, opened my eyes and looked around. I noticed that I was barefoot even though before I wore shoes. My eyes happened upon one shoe. It was next to me. A few meters away was the other one. I remembered that I had a wrist watch. I felt my hand to check if it was there - it was not. Also my wallet and money was taken from me. I was seized by helpless rage as some hidden strength lifted me off the ground and I began to run some distance towards the swamps. Every minute I stopped to gather strength and wet my dry lips with swamp water. Evening was approaching as I arrived at the river. I walked all night along the river until arriving at the house of an old Christian woman. When the old woman saw my sorry state, she took pity on me and immediately tore a strip from her clean blouse and picked some leaves that were known to stop bleeding and bandaged

my hand and neck. I realized then that fortunately no bullet remained in my body, but passed through my hand and neck and then exited. The old woman also gave me bread to eat and milk to drink and another proper slice of bread and a bottle of milk for the road, and showed the way to the forests of Saforvah and its swamps. After a few days there, I met Nisan and Chaim Zaditovski who also hid there. For two weeks, my wounds became scabs as I bandaged them each day. After three weeks a rumor reached us that the Jews of Motol were gathering again and we also returned. During the day we stayed in Mordechai Zaditovski's house and only at night we slept in the loft of the cow shed.

17. And Your Life Hangs On a Thread

Just as he finished his story, we noticed two Jewish women from Molodovo walking in the direction of Zaziryah. We called for them and they told us that they were going to the above mentioned village to verify the rumor that two children remained alive there and they wished to take them because they were relatives. We asked them if they had seen Jews from Nishtut and one joined the women to show them the way to Dadvitch because by that time there were no Jews in Zaziryah and in the house that had lived the Jews there were already some Gentile "punks" from the Black Gang. The four that went to Nishtut were: me, Reuven Mishkin, David Kroyitski and Chaim Zaditovski. Nisan went with the women.

When we began to cross the main road in the direction of Nishtut and passed by the Jewish homes, I felt a pang in my heart and said to my friend that it would be better to go by an indirect route. Deathly silence settled on the street. No longer would children's laughter be heard as they played street games, no home owner would discuss the news of the world. Weeds spread around the houses, and in the most beautiful houses, new faces were seen, the faces of our successors, our Christian neighbors.

We crossed over to the side streets, and went by my Uncle Benyamin Polick's house from which I fled the day of the killing. So, we went by David Kroyitski's house. In these two houses were the new owners and their little brats playing and raising a ruckus and chasing us calling "Zhid idot" (Jews are coming).

Once again we came to the main street of Nishtut. There we saw houses without windows and houses without doors, a ceiling or a floor. From time to time some Gentile would appear sneaking through the back door with a household item in hand that he needed. We saw some Gentiles poking around and digging under the floors looking for buried treasure. With a heart full of rage and sorrow we arrived at the house in which gathered the remainder of the refugees. There I found my cousin Pinchas Karolinski and also Eliezer and Yakov Sharashavski and the brothers Abba and Yehudah Yashpah. There was a scene of sobbing and tears. I embraced Pinchas Karolinski and we bitterly wept and he continually sighed, "The children! They all suffered an unnatural death, all of them..."

We continued our conversation punctuated from time to time with bouts of tears in order to unburden ourselves, and then began to pray the afternoon service. My heart was full of sorrow and anger and found it difficult to pronounce the words and felt that something bad was about to happen near me.

In the middle of the prayer a policeman showed up and asked Moshe Chimerinski (Fashischber) who was appointed by the local authority to be responsible for receiving and

carefully carrying out their commands regarding the Jews. The policeman asked Moshe if the Jews had enough food and he answered that nothing was lacking for now. The policeman left by the courtyard. After ten minutes we saw a truck pass by with two Nazis and began to sense that something not good was about to happen. Moshe Chimerinski went out at once and found a kid that he knew to send to the market to check out why the Nazis were here, what was their purpose and where they were staying. My cousin Pinchas Karolinski could not control himself and wait until the "informant" returned and went himself to the market to find out why the Germans had come. The Sharashavski brothers and the Yashpah brothers also went with him and they asked me to go with them. We went to the market by the river and when we arrived we first entered the house of a Gentile woman, a friend of the Sharashavski brothers and they requested her to find out why the Nazis had come. She refused at first. But after much pleading one of the family's kids agreed to go. At the same time, my cousin went to another Christian; before he went, he said to me to come to him once I know what is going on and tell him and discuss what to do. I answered him that I could not part from my friend Reuven and leave him alone after all that we had went through together had bound us together and also when I hear something I will first tell all the surviving Jews.

I soon as the kid left for the market, the Gentile woman started "rebuking" the Jews. In her opinion the extermination of the Jews is a good thing because all Jews are cheats and thieves and traitors. We listened to her in silence as her words pricked our flesh. May what we wished upon her at the time befall on her today. Meanwhile one of the Yashpah brothers looked at the window and saw a Gentile acquaintance of his return from the market square. He went out and asked him the news. The Gentile told him that the two Nazis came to get milk and butter from the dairy and other than that, nothing was new. They were still talking when one of the Christians returned with the same story. We thanked him for this "kindness" and went. Abba Yashpah agreed to come with me to Nishtut and calm the refugees. The Sharashavski brothers and Yehudah Yashpah returned to their place promising to meet Pinchas Karolinski and give him the news. It was growing dark as we reached Nishtut. Those that arrived first had already told that the Germans had come only to take milk and butter from the dairy and so there was nothing to fear. I searched for my friend Reuven Mishkin and David Kroyitski and Chaim Zaditovski, but did not find them. I asked Leibel Rozenkrantz about them and he told me that all of them except for Reuven went to Chaim Zaditovski's house and Reuven went to his nephew Shalom Mishkin in the village of Dadvitch and will return tomorrow and asked me to wait for him. During the conversation, we began to pray the evening service. I stood at the window and looked out. Suddenly I noticed three policemen on bicycles passing by and looking into the house in which we were staying. This was the house of Berel Minx. My head began to swim and right away told everyone there, but they told me only because I was used to being in hiding was I seeing the shadows of mountains as mountains and after a few days in the city, I will adjust and not be frightened by the appearance of a policeman. Abba Yashpah told me that he was going to his uncle Zelik Stravitch's house which was only two courtyards away and was able to reach it by a garden and he would see me tomorrow. Leibel Rozenkrantz invited me to come with him to sleep in a house that nobody knew was being used by Jews.

We finished praying and began to prepare to eat the rough bread and water, but I could not eat. Something made me uneasy. I was filled with foreboding. I told those sitting around the table that I want to see the street at night and if anyone is lurking around on the street because I was concerned that some of the locals had learned what was going on and might attack us in the night's darkness. I went out to the yard myself and began to look around. I noticed some policemen around the house in which the refugees were eating their meager

fare. One of the policemen sneaked around on his tiptoes and looked through a window that was blacked out. I heard them whispering to each other. After this, they went on their way. I suddenly heard steps in the yard. I understood from the glint of a white shirt that it was not a policeman walking about because the police wore dark uniforms. I began to walk in the direction of the steps and there was Banyah Stravitch (Zelik's son) who had come out to check how I was. With a choked voice, I told him about the police wandering about, looking through the window and asked him to stand in my place for a while as I informed the other residents. But they ridiculed me and my fear and only a few said that they would take precautions. They went out and asked Banyah if he had seen the police and he told them on the other side of the street, opposite from the house stood a few police and they were also hiding lest they be observed when whispering to each other. Fear began to affect everyone but it was still necessary to eat and Moshe Chimerinski told the people that it was necessary to knead dough in order to make bread tomorrow. Abba Kot (the mason Moshe Fridel's son) began to prepare the dough. The others began to prepare to disperse to sleeping places.

18. Crying In the Night

The refugees dispersed each one to his own hiding place. Every group of two or three had a hiding place unknown to the other Jewish groups and nobody knew of the others' hiding places. This was a tactic, not a hard and fast rule, taken as a precaution because when a Jew was caught in a hiding place, he was tortured and forced to reveal the hiding places of his friends; there were instances of being unable to withstand the torture and even some handed over family members. Two others and myself found a place to sleep and they were Leibel Rozenkrantz and Avigdor Chernomortz - Leebah Yishayahas' brother-in-law. The "hotel" was in Avigdor's house. The house was in Nishtut. On one side was Yishayahu Portnoy's (Daniels) house and on the other side, about four meters away, stood the house of Abba Kot who was known as "Kaban." Behind Abba's house was the house of MordechaiNatan Chimerinski and opposite stood the house of Valul Pomerantz (known as Piniuk) and in towards the exit from the village stood the house of Avraham Chimerinski (Galiup). In all of the houses, could be found Jews staying the night. Avigdor's house was blocked from all sides; the doors and windows were boarded up. When we reached the yard, Avigdor went to the wall of the overhanging porch and opened some sort of secret window, dragged over a wooden log and stepped on to it, and that is how he entered the porch and singled us to follow. After we also went through the narrow window, he closed it from within and camouflaged it and led us to a small, dark room, lit a candle and arranged for us sleeping places on the floor. Before laying down, I watch him carrying a pile of letters and some torn photographs and breaking into bitter weeping as he approaches and joins scraps together and shows us pictures of his children and the letters he wrote to his fiancée seventeen years ago who was afterward his wife and bore him seven children. Among the letters, one stood out that had a red heart drawn on it, and he explained that he sent this letter to his bride when he feared that she would not agree to marry him and expressed his feelings with a wounded heart. He showed us more letters full of longing and hope of a bright future. And so he sat and revealed to us his most private feelings and his eyes were wet with tears. Finally he packed his letters and shred of photographs and cried out "miserable me, father of seven children whom I loved with all my heart and forced to watch them standing among forty children clutching and kissing each other and I could not lift a finger to help them."

My heart broke watching this man whose fate had been treated so cruelly and with tears in my eyes, I tried to comfort him and could not. We sat and cried over our private fate which made up only a small part of the cold and dark fate waiting our people.

19. Destruction of the Remnants

We lay down to sleep. Below us was spread some old clothes and on them a sack as sort of a sheet. Avigdor and Leibel Rozenkrantz took off their clothes, but I kept my clothes on because I was uneasy and restless. I fell asleep immediately and did not hear the two others whispering to each other.

Suddenly I felt as if a hidden hand was waking me from a dead and I heard the sound of footsteps. I opened my eyes and strained my ears to prove that I was not dreaming and heard a clear command, "Two of you stand next to the window to make sure that nobody escapes." Right afterwards, came the sounds of knocking a shout of "Otkroy", that means "Open!". The voice seemed to come from afar and I could not understand what was going on around us. After a while, the voices grew louder and closer, "Open now!" The knocking became more insistent, "Open Up! This is the police! We came to search." Now I was wide awake and woke my friends. Frightened and hard pressed they sat helplessly without knowing what to do. I shook them a bit to make them more alert and spoke to encourage them to get a grip on themselves so that we could decide what to do, but they already had a plan that I was unaware of. Avigdor was unable to put on his pants because he was so nervous that his limbs were shaking. Despite this, Leibel Rozenkrantz calmed himself a little, brought us into another room and said to me, "Find a ladder, climb to the attic and we'll stay there until the danger passes." I felt around with my hands until I found the ladder and with shaking knees, I climbed it and after me Leibel and Avigdor came up. There I clearly heard voices from the street, "Open, Jews! The police!" and we stood frozen without knowing what else to do. Avigdor was the first to come to his senses and quietly said, "Let's go up the ladder and camouflage the entrance to the roof." The three of us began to pull ourselves up the ladder. The ladder banged several times with the roof beam and the knocking sounds froze our blood, but luckily for us nothing was heard outside amidst the din and the shooting augmented the din. We managed to go up the ladder and closed the entrance and shut it tightly so that someone standing below could discern that here was an entrance. The sounds of shooting grew louder and desperate cries pierced the silence of the night. A mounted rider approached and we heard the command, "Gather all the prisoners to one place and see that they don't escape and make them unable to escape..."

The morning light began to reach us through the cracks of the roof. Avigdor approached the crack and peered out onto the street. Suddenly a horrible cry pierced the air, "Gevald! Help!" and echoes of rifle butts. The shouting went on for a few minutes and afterwards silence... Avigdor jumped from his place and burst out, "Oy! Look how they're killing our brothers! With spades!"

For the thousandth time, our blood froze and we were seized by a terrible despair. There was no escape here! No chance! We stood together in utter confusion, suddenly Avigdor jumped from his place and ran to the other side of the attic, lowered from there a rope that hung since they lived there and was used for hanging laundry and shouted that he was going to put an end to his life...death is easier than waiting for the murderers to split his head with a hoe. We jumped on him and got the rope by saying there would be sufficient chance to

hang himself when there was no hope of escaping from the murderers. The words were aimed more at ourselves than at him and while talking I took out a pocket knife, cut the long rope in three pieces and gave one to each. Each of us went to a corner of the room and prepared a hang man's noose to be used in case our hiding place was revealed. We were enveloped by a cold tranquility as each of us carefully measured the rope around his neck, checking its length and if it will do the job. We felt the rustling of the wings of the Angel of Death as he looked down on us and we prepared to greet him and carry out his work by ourselves. But during all this, we gave each other sideways glances to see who was really doing it.

Destruction reined around us. In cow sheds and cellars were tens of broken and decrepit Jews, closer to being skeletons than human beings. They had done no evil to anyone and had not broken the law. Their only desire was to shut their eyes for a few hours and to gather strength to suffer the persecution and to beg for a crust of bread. But this group of shadows loomed large in the minds of the murderers who jumped on their hiding places, dragged them from the piles of hay and rags which they slept on, beat and tortured them and finally "mercifully" put them out of their misery with a bullet.

This time too, some managed to escape. There were those that escaped unharmed from the murderers and those who were honored with injuries on different parts of their bodies from the shooting. Among the wounded was Moshe Chimerinski (Fashischber) whose hand was hit by a bullet and the brothers Meir and Hershel Chimerinski (Malyosh) who were wounded in the feet. Unfortunately, they were caught and fell into the hands of the murderers.

This bloody game continued until five in the morning and quieted down for a half an hour because the rain began to fall. It was not worth it to get wet because of these dirty Jews and any case they won't escape and will fall into their hands. When the rain let up, Avigdor looked through a small hole outwards. There were ten local Gentiles walking with hoes in their hands, being led by a mounted policeman.

Again a half an hour of anticipation passed that seemed to us like years, and sounds of voices and shouting and water splashing reached our ears. Avigdor signaled to us to get down and crawl over to him. When we got to the edge of the roof, we saw through the cracks a horrible sight. The refugees were standing in the street. They were beaten and wounded and almost unrecognizable, all of them were barefoot and only partly clad. They were surrounded and guarded by Gentiles riding bareback. One of them put reins on the druggist David Gornisch's neck while he was carrying a wounded person on his shoulders, and from time to time, the Gentile would add to this burden by urging him on with a blow of the whip to his head. Later it became known to me from one of the survivors that the wounded person that David was carrying on his back was the handicapped daughter of Yisrael Eizenberg, the shoe maker. She lived in the Gentile's house on the Gentiles' street. She survived the first slaughter because the Germans said it would be a pity to waste a bullet on someone who would anyway die of hunger, since no one will give her food. How did she survive until now? That is the secret of the Lord above. But now that the local Gentiles have been given permission, they did not hesitate to waste the bullet and shot her in her bed, loaded her on the above mentioned David and ordered him to bring her to a pit they prepared. The blows echoed all around. The sounds of the whips mixed with the whistling of the pitch forks and the wild voices of the bloodthirsty hooligans who drove the Jews yelling, "Skoro! Frencko! am Chika Nah Magilah". In other words, "Hurry! Move! The grave is waiting for you!"

Our eyes filled with blood at this sight. Exhausted and helpless, we knelt in the corner of the attic. We watched without reacting because our tongues froze. Our tongues loosened a bit and each began to mumble the names of those he knew among those being led to death. The noise of an approaching car, interrupted our thoughts. Avigdor looked out and recognized the truck with the two Nazis whom we saw on the Sabbath and said that they came for butter and milk and they were now traveling in the same direction as the Jews were being led. After a few minutes, the sound of gunfire announced to us the end of the remaining Jews. Our hearts were shattered. The end came to our remaining brothers with whom only last night we spent time in the hope that we would see the end of the cursed Germans. The end has come! No illusions. No hope. And how I envied them. They already finished their all so stupid and cruel lives. Avigdor suddenly got up and ran right to the place he prepared his rope, but we managed to stop him in time and with the remainder of our strength we sat on him so that he could not move. Wild singing reached our ears and marching was heard accompanied by arrogant whistling and barbaric cries. These were the locals who finished their work quenching their thirst for poor Jewish blood. I also heard boasting of a murder to the police commander, "Sir, I myself murdered twenty seven Jews" and the second bragged that he shot eight Jews. We stopped looking out of the cracks. The suspense drained away and we lay there helplessly trembling.

My thoughts charged ahead. It had been a long time since I could contemplate in the midst of such "tranquility". The imagination set sail too far off worlds. Images of my nearest and dearest floated past. Everyone had a face, a look, a smile and they were so close that I could almost reach out and hug them. And I cling to each one of them in my imagination. It's so good! And I turn towards the table with fragrant bread, so tempting and I'm so hungry and in a little while, I will wash my heads and my teeth will bite into tasty, delicate bread and I swallow my spit...a burst of shooting stops my ruminations. They split the morning air and invaded my thoughts and forced me back into the cramped air of the attic. The morning light began to pierce the cracks of the roof, and we lay down and were afraid to look up lest we be spotted. Only now I understand how ridiculous it was to be afraid of being spotted through a crack, but then I was genuinely afraid. As the saying goes, "Fear has big eyes." I sometimes think that a deeper reason prevented me from looking outside. I was afraid to discover that we were the only ones remaining from all the Jews of the town and I was afraid of the terrible truth that the three of us make up what was once the town of Motol.

For about half an hour we lay there observing and hearing the voices speaking the vulgar language of the Gentiles, "Yah vesich tav vasich tarbah zabiti", i.e. We have to kill all of the! "Htg, michitisayeh, "it's tiring." Leibel threw out a glance and uttered between his teeth, "That's Tsagan, the cop and speaking with him is Tarsichah Makorjovkah. We continued to lie down quietly and I will relate to you what I saw. They are going to Danielichah's yard. A voice rips into us, "Come over here and help us get at the Jewess." The two of us got up and we got close to the cracks of the roof in order to see who was being talked about. A heartbreaking sight was spread before our eyes. Several Gentiles were dragging an old Jewish woman. One held her by the hand and the other by her foot as she was dragged on the ground. We recognized her as Yishayahu Portnoy's (Danielichah) mother who was bedridden because of ill health and was somehow passed over by the Angel of Death during both slaughters. But now the Gentiles entered the houses with impunity to loot and pillage, knowing full well that the Jews would never return, found her struggling with bitter death. They stopped a policeman from the locals that who volunteered to help the Germans and requested him to finish her off and wipe out the memory of the Jews of Motol. He was receptive to their suggestion. He called for some more Gentiles and they dragged her to the backyard of her house, placed her on the ground and then the police said to her, "Now

Jewess, death comes to you too" and shot her. He ordered those standing around to bury her, jumped on his bicycle and rode off.

The entire day we lay down as if we were paralyzed. It was clear to us that we were the last observers of the sorrowful picture because all was over finished. Our world had sunk into oblivion and there was no purpose to our lives as individuals, lonely, depressed, an invitation for abuse to anyone who discovered us.

20. A War for Survival

Sunday arrived, the beginning of the month of Elul.¹⁵ This day was designed, one time, to remind Jews that the "Days of Awe" were approaching; the Days of Judgment now broke out over a city empty of Jews and reminded the Gentiles that they were rid of their hated enemies and they loudly expressed their joy. They will not have to return the stolen goods. Nobody will glare at them if they decorate themselves with the Jew's jewelry.

During that Sunday, we heard of different plans by the "Black Gang" to divide up the windows and doors of the houses. This one would need some window panes which could certainly be obtained from some house and another said that he needed bricks to make an oven for his son-in-law and he needed to enter a house at night in order to pick up some bricks. Others came by and speculated that certainly none of the Jews remain and even if two or three are left none would dare show himself in town.

All that Sunday we lay and shook with fear that perhaps someone would come here and discover us, but the day passed with no one showing up. And so also passed Monday. Hunger began to bother us and more than that, thirst. Avigdor slowly and carefully went over the entire length of the attic, searching every nook and cranny and came up with some cucumbers that he had kept for planting. The cucumbers were yellow and rotten, but we choose a few of them and hid them for later use as a source of iron and we divided one of them into three parts and gave one to each to eat. I can still taste that cucumber, but the smell of mold and rotting also lingers in my nose. But we saw in these cucumbers a lifesaving feast and ate them with a hearty appetite. The trouble was that the third of a cucumber aroused our appetites for more and all day long we dreamt up plans for getting real food the next day. We went under the assumption that it would be impossible to poke our nose out for the first three days from the second hiding place because there would certainly be guards in the streets and alleys in waiting for a surviving Jew. Meanwhile, Avigdor discovered another nine cucumbers that kept us for another three days and if we are not discovered and we should remain here as long as possible until the storm passes. We stayed put from lack of choice. Another night and day passed by for us and during the next evening the sound of knocking reached us from the house. Every part of our bodies froze and we lay there without moving a muscle. From snatches of conversations that came up to us, we understood that they intended to also go up to the attic to check what was there, but luckily for us they put it off until tomorrow because of the darkness and the lack of a ladder, but we clearly heard that they decided to at dawn in order to beat out the others.

We began to feel the ground crumble beneath our feet because we could not remain here. With all our efforts we concentrated on finding another place, but could not come up with

¹⁵ Elul - Summer month of the Hebrew calendar

anything. Until Leibel Rozenkrantz mentioned that he knew of a good place to hide in that could easily be reached. We directed our eyes at him checking if he was sane and what did he mean by a "very good" place, but he did not take notice of us at all and continued to say that a good place would be Denishtut Synagogue which could be reached in the darkness by some yards. We could enter through the back windows and stand on the Bimah¹⁶ and from there it would not be difficult to reach the attic. Avigdor looked around and found a bag, wrapped the cucumbers with it. He also found a cup that we could use to draw water from the sink in the synagogue. In his search, he found an infant's shirt which his brother had bought him as a present. He stood there in confusion and began to sob out loud. His entire body began to shake with choked crying and with difficulty calmed down a bit. To this day, I am amazed how it possible for a person to mourn and weep with such fervor. During the days of destruction, with the deaths of thousands, I did not see another person express his sorrow so dramatically. The heart hardens and the feeling dull, but the love for a child is overpowering, for a baby which was born in pain, raised despite the difficulties and whose future could be seen.

At midnight we lowered the ladder and climbed down. The doors were open after the locals burst through them. We left the house and lay down in the garden where potatoes are growing. The weeds hid us a bit as we lay in the garden and listened for people milling about. Meanwhile, we took some potatoes and stuck them in our pockets. After verifying that no one was around, we went on our way smelling of death. As we passed by the yards, we came to some of our martyrs' graves. There were the graves of Basha Gotanski and her two daughters Nechamakah and Leebah, and the old lad Deanielichah's grave with its smell of freshly turned earth, and also the grave of Yosef Yojok (Daront) and his wife Devorah who was the sexton of the synagogue. The minutes passed as slowly as our crawling. But finally we arrived at the synagogue. The windows were broken and the wind blew everywhere. We helped each other up to the window and entered. Avigdor immediately ran right to the sink and filled our cup with water. The water was stagnant and yellow and it smelled from afar. But we were so thirsty that we did not notice the odor and drank to our fill. Avigdor first fell on the sink and sipped from it for a long time. I followed him and I never tasted water like that. We also filled the cup and together climbed up into the attic. Meanwhile we lay down an old prayer books and worn talitim¹⁷ and waited for the light of day so that we could camouflage the entrance. At the break of day, we made a bed and piled up high many copies of Exodus and worn prayer books and also books of Psalms and afterward recited Psalms. Chapter after chapter, the words left our mouths with a different flavor for each word and sentence, "Why did the nations rage...against the Lord and his anointed one."¹⁸ I understand now that the Germans are fighting a war not only against the Jews but the Lord above himself. This is a war of the most despised creatures against the Torah of "You will not murder" and "live by the sword." Our murderers know that as long as a single solitary Jew still lives, their wild lust won't be satisfied, because the Jew is more elevated, exalted and gentle and the heart breaks and pours forth, "Until God forgets me forever, until He hides his face...unless my enemies rejoice in my fall."¹⁹

The children of our parent's and children's murderers ran around, enjoying from time to time a Jewish house and returning with full hands. The looting continued. It was still possible to take our doors, remove windows, demolish floors and destroy ovens. And I am wondering: how strange it is, why destroy a house that they can live in? According to our

¹⁶ Bimah - Raised platform in the center of the synagogue from which the Torah is read

¹⁷ Prayer shawls

¹⁸ Psalms 2:1-2

¹⁹ Psalms 13:2, 5

calculations, every Jew in town was already finished and they would never return and who would stay their hand from committing murder. Maybe this shows they are doubtful of a German victory and they have a creeping thought that after the Nazi's fall, the Jews of the world will rise and demand retribution - at least monetary. Who knows, maybe?

Some young thugs also entered the synagogue and ripped the Torah scrolls before our eyes pressed to the cracks. We heard one say to his friend that this would serve as a covering to his dog house. Their hands did not freeze, their mouths were not struck dumb and our eyes burned from the insult and sorrow. I continued reciting Psalms with a pain in my heart,²⁰ "Your enemy gathered in anger...they confound your plans...They said go and wipe out their nation and the name of Israel will no longer be remembered...Oh, Lord of the Universe! Treat them as you did Midyan and Sisra... they were exterminated in Ain Dor, the blood ground into the earth...they rolled in the dusk, like a straw in the wind...pursue in storm and startle them in a tempest...they will dry up and cower, pale in shame and be lost..."

That is how our first day passed in the synagogue. The next day was a holiday for the Gentiles called "Seps". For the whole day, village Gentiles came and went in carts and bicycles stolen from us. They passed by, at time to view the destruction of the Jewish quarter. They stooped with folded arms and enjoyed the sight of the destruction. We heard two Gentiles from the village Ausovanitzah whom Leibel knew talking next to the synagogue, and one said to his companion that he supposed there remained some extra windows in the synagogue's attic that were used during the Winter. He needed the panes of glass and it would be worthwhile to go up and get them. We were shaken to the core on hearing this, but we said to ourselves that they would not do this in the light of day, especially on their holiday when many people were milling about the streets. Truly the day passed and they did not come. The third night also passed by without anyone showing up at the synagogue. Friday arrived. We were laying and thinking of food and water and planning perhaps to make our way to the swamps or forest and hide for a few weeks until we found out what was going on in the towns such as Jonava, Drogichin, Pinsk etc.

Before we were able to come to a decision, the choice was made for us. We heard faint voices coming from the lower part of the synagogue. The raised area which we used to reach the attic was being dismantled. Voices reached us and one said to his companion, "Check up there with your bayonet and maybe you'll find something". Leibel who was looking through a crack, announced that we were dealing with the police.

The policeman examined the ceiling with his bayonet until he reached the entrance to the attic. When we had come up, we fastened the entrance door with one of the four pillars used to hold up the Chuppah²¹ and supported the pillar with a wooden beam so the door would not easily open. Leibel crawled over to the beam and held it so that it would not move, but the knocking of the policeman was too strong and Leibel was not able to hold on any long, and he fled to the corner of the roof facing the street and from there jumped to the roof of the synagogue's entrance which was lower than that of the synagogue. After him, also jumped Avigdor and I managed to see them jumping from the entrance roof to the ground. I was alone. With lightning quickness, I went to the beam, tightened it so it would not move. I figured out for myself what to do, because it was possible that the police noticed the people jumping from the roof and if I now jumped, they would open fire on me, so I decided also to jump onto the roof of the low room and stay there. And if I saw the police

²⁰ The following quotes are from chapter 83 of Psalms

²¹ Bridal canopy

burst into the attic, then I would manage to jump down to the street and hide in one of the gardens, and if they went to go up the ladder that stood outside, then I would jump back to the synagogue's attic and from there lower myself into the synagogue. In other words, I would play with them a game of cat and mouse. Meanwhile the knocking ceased, I saw two of the policemen leave the synagogue, rifles with bayonets in their hands and they went to the well next to the synagogue. What did they want there? I do not know to this day.

21. The Discovery of Water

I climbed back to the attic, lay down and looked through the crack to where the policemen were now going. My teeth were chattering so loudly that I feared they would be heard by the policemen and I could not stop myself. I was thirsty and my throat was parched. If I only had some water to wet my lips. The police stood for another few moments and looked all around; afterward they got on their bicycles and rode away. I began to look around the attic. Maybe I would find a Bible to look through, because I no longer had patience to "grind" out Psalms, for or five times a day. Maybe I would find some clean bottle to fill with water, because if I left this place tonight, a bottle will be the most essential thing. I suddenly opened my eyes and saw from the side a corked bottle containing some water and near it a piece of paper rolling about. I picked up the paper which was a letter sent about two years ago to Moshe Nun. These are the contents of the letter. Moshe Nun, a resident of our town was a bureaucrat for the Poles. When the Russians came in, he was afraid that his enemies would inform on him. He fled and hid himself in the synagogue's attic until he could see how the wind would blow. After a few days passed by and no Russians came to investigate him, his wife sent him a letter and also a bottle of water and wrote him, "I am sending you this water and telling you that nobody is concerned about you and you can come down and return tonight and once again live among people." After finishing reading the letter, my eyes lit up, because I concluded that the water in this bottle was clean and definitely safe and I immediately brought the bottle to my lips and sipped from it all the water I wanted. Meanwhile I noticed another two bottles that were almost clean except for the odor of oil wafting from them. Nevertheless, I took with me the three bottles and crawled back to my old place. While crawling back, I noticed that the attic door was pierced in a few places from the stabbing go of one of the policemen's bayonet.

I lay there and considered my situation and what to do next. I remembered Leibel and Avigdor. I was sure that they were in the vicinity of the synagogue and hiding on some garden and certainly knew what had happened to me and would definitely return at night to see how I was. Another strong reason for their returning was they left their clothes here and without them it would be cold at night. So I felt it was my obligation to wait here and not move from this spot tonight. That night there was heavy rain accompanied by thunder and lightning, but they did not return. Meanwhile, I made some holes in the roof and I stood the bottles up in them in order to fill them with rain water because the thirst still bothered me.

22. To The Hiding Place

The light dawned on the Sabbath day of the seventh of Elul. I lay there. I debated with myself to wait for my friend tonight also or try another plan that was forming in my mind.

The plan was to reach the Gentile woman who my cousin Pinchas Karolinski told me about on the last Sabbath before we parted and with whom he could be found. I impatiently waited for daybreak. The day dragged on like a whole year, because this was the first day since the beginning of the Holocaust that I was totally alone, wretched and solitary. Finally the anticipated night came. I packed my belongings which included two rotten cucumbers, an empty bottle, a book of Psalms and went on my way. I came down from the attic to the synagogue and my eyes darkened from the destruction that I saw. Pages from the Torah scrolls rolled on the floor, pages of "Etz Chaim" were scattered here and there, the benches were stolen, the Holy Ark²² stood empty, frightening in the night's darkness. I gathered up what I could of the torn Torah scrolls and with eyes filled with blood and tears, I placed them in the Holy Ark, kissed them fervently and clung to the naked walls of the Holy Ark and silently recited a prayer close to my heart, the last Jew, a remnant of the hundreds of precious Jews of the town.

With a heavy heart, I went outside and was about to cross the street. One of the Gentiles approached the synagogue from the other side of the street. I was not able to hide. I stood behind the synagogue's door that was open and the blood froze in my veins. I held my breath until he entered the synagogue, lingered there for a few minutes, left with a package in hand, passed me by without noticing me and then went on his way. I left immediately after him, crossed the street and by way of some gardens, I arrived at the "Old Cemetery" and from there went to the river. Then I crossed over the river and reached the path that led to the "Pilnah" - Shalom the doctor's street on which afterwards lived Gorodishich. I stayed for a few moments to see if anyone was going by and then crossed the river again toward the town. I filled the water bottles and walked along the shore of the Pilnah to the Gentile woman who had hid there Pinchas Karolinski.

The name of the Gentile who hid Pinchas was Alexi Popil. His house was on the same street as that of Gorodishich except on the other side of the of the main street as that continued towards Nishtut. The courtyard and garden continued until the Pilnah to the east of the town, and at the west side of the Pilnah were Jewish gardens and a bridge connecting both sides of the street. While walking, I took care not to touch a plant or a branch in order to avoid making a sound; harmonica sounds reached me, but I continued. As I approached the bridge, there were some youngsters from the Black Gang making music including harmonica sounds. Obviously, it was impossible to cross the bridge. I thought there was no choice but to wait until they dispersed. With great effort, I climbed the fence of Chanan the shopkeeper (where later Mordechai Kot lived) and lay down in the garden waiting in anticipation for the thugs to leave. I was laying there and an hour passed by and the sounds of singing and dancing continually grew louder and it seemed that they had no intention of leaving before morning, while the earth was burning under my feet and in a few hours I would be exposed to the light of day - and then... I decided that I must continue no matter what. If it was impossible to over the bridge, then I must try to under the bridge. I began to crawl on all fours towards the bridge and when I reached it I entered the water and passed beneath it. Above the thugs wildly danced and showed their joy over the end of the Jews, not imagining that under their feet was a crawling Jew, struggling with every fiber of his being to remain alive. My foot was wounded by glass and blood began to flow, But the struggle for land and the hope that perhaps I would find my cousin urged me on so that I did not pay attention to the bleeding. I passed the area of the bridge and some distance away I once again walked on dry land, jumped at once into a garden and slowly continued on my way. Suddenly I ran into a man walking by me. The two of us stood without the power of speech and we could not

²² Used to store the Torah scrolls

open our mouths. I recovered first and recognized him as the Christian Stephen Lazarus in whose house was staying Yisrael Eizenberg (Hatishkavitchait). He then told me how they killed my handicapped cousin in the house during the second slaughter and then loaded her on David Gorodishich's back to carry her to the killing place with the rest of the martyrs. I asked him in a whisper if maybe he knew which of the Jews had survived until now, but he could not answer. This he told me that he was going around carrying out the task of looking for hidden Jews. I was very frightened and thought who knows if will turn me in right away, but I gathered courage and asked him, "if that's so why do you say that you don't know if any Jews remain alive?" He answered, "It's true, I don't know but they say the Yashpah brothers and also Pinchas Karolinski and the Sharashavski brothers, Lazer and Yakov, are still alive, and so they ordered me to stand guard and maybe they will pass by to their houses in order to take something or remove a hidden treasure." I asked him, "What are you supposed to do when you see them?" His answer was that it was up to him to spy on them until they revealed their hiding places and hand them over to the police.

Upon hearing these explicit words emanating from the Gentile's mouth, waves of cold and heat came over me and my whole body shook, but I gathered strength and with a calm voice as if I was not personally involved I asked, "And what are you going to do with me?" I heard this tranquil answer, "If you were one of the other Jews, I would do my duty, but I know you as a good Jew, so I'll pretend that I never met you or saw you." I was relieved to hear his answer, but I knew not to place my trust in predators. So I gathered my cunning and with an imploring voice I turned to him and said, "listen Stephen, 'mountains never meet, but men do'. If this is so then be kind to a Jew who knows you and whose mouth has not tasted a drop of fresh water for a week (and at that moment I slowly pulled the cork from the water bottle and filled it from the river). Here's my bottle, bring me a bottle of fresh water and a slice of bread, I will give you my watch. I'll wait for you by the cow shed in the garden in the hay." He agreed and took the bottle from me and went to bring me water. All the time that he was in my field of vision, walked as if in the direction of the cow shed, but as soon as he was out of sight, I jumped the fence and went to a Christian, Alexi Popil, and went to his shed without being sure if my cousin was there or not. I slowly opened the shed door and whispered, "Piniah, Piniah", entertained by the thought that I would find him alive. After all the Gentile mentioned him as still being among the living. Silence. I repeated my call and it seemed to me that I heard a choked whisper, Nu...Nu, who's there? A wave of joy came over me and I whispered again, "Piniah, where? This Aharon-Leb calling you". And I heard a voice full of surprise and wonder as if I had said something improbable, "Who? Aharon-Leb?". "Yes, yes", I answered him, "This is no dream. Come out and show me how to reach you." His head suddenly sprung up and he whispered to me to get on the wagon standing here and extend my hand. I did what he asked and he pulled me up to the roof of the cow shed. The weeping began. I cried from joy on finding my cousin and once again not being alone. And he also cried and continually sighed and called out, "Oh, God! Why were the Jews of Motol punished more than those in other towns." (We did not know yet that the mass murder that began in our town would spread to all of the Jewish centers.)

23. Description of the Second Extermination

When he began to calm down, he told me who was killed and who remained alive. The conclusion was dismal. Only seventeen people remained and he knows the place of six of them and I was among them. The six survivors were those mentioned by the Gentile and they were the Sharashavski brothers, two Yashpah brothers, Pinchas and myself. He was in

constant contact with all of these survivors. I continue to say that among the living must also be counted Avigdor Chernomortz and Leibel Rozenkrantz. I asked him if he knew if I was among the living. He answered me,

Listen to all what I am now telling you. I know fully well who was among the fallen during the second [slaughter]. You should know that when they began to again concentrate the remainder of our refugees, leading them to the slaughter, the Germans mobilized some local Gentiles to prepare a large pit next to the cemetery. Even the Gentile who I hid by was mobilized for this work. According to what he told me it was worth this for him to see with his own eyes who is being killed so he could inform me. When he returned, the Gentile told me who of the Black Gang were policemen who watched over the work and with which tortures they killed them. From him, I learned that the second slaughter was perpetrated only by members of the Black Gang and local Gentiles. A well-known Pole by the name of Kocharski who lived all the time in the town of Talchan organized a gang of sixty Gentiles from his town and from the town of Svintah-Walyah and they took it upon themselves to burn out the remnants left from the official killing. Kocharski promised them that all the property belonging to the murdered Jews would go to them, especially the clothes stripped from the dead and the animals left in the villages and homes. The villagers themselves were dressed in worn clothes with sandals on their feet. They possessed rifles since the escape of the Russian soldiers at the beginning of the war, who from panic and in order to ease their escape tossed their weapons aside, allowing the Black Gang to gather and hide them until they were needed. Now they used the weapons to pillage and rob. On that Saturday night, the first of Elul, the gang arrived in town to negotiate with Motol's police over the killing of Jews in return for sharing the loot. Unfortunately, Kocharski met two Nazis who really came only to pick up butter and milk for the military hospital in Pinsk; they right away encouraged him to burn out the remnants not only from Motol, but from the remaining villages in the area. In an order given to Kocharski, it was written that the Motol police were ordered to provide a sufficient number of policemen to help him find the hiding Jews and exterminate them under the authority of D. In the village of Molodovo no Jews were found because the surviving Jews were clever enough not to sleep in their houses and changed their sleeping places nightly so as not to be found. But in Tishkavitch they were able to capture my cousins and my aunt (of the author of these lines) and Itka's son-in-law and brought them by cart to Motol. They also gathered survivors from the village of Dadvitch and only Shalom Mishkin and his cousin Reuven Mishkin managed to escape from the cow shed in which they slept. They told me when I met them, that they woke up in the middle of the night on hearing noise in the street and sensing from what they heard that they were being surrounded in shifts, they climbed onto the shed's roof and reached outside through a hole they had previously prepared just as those outside started banging on the shed's doors. In the house were two brothers who arrived on Saturday and when one heard the cry of "Police!" he burst through the window and jumped outside. But a deadly bullet struck him and killed him on the spot. Reuven and Shalom Mishkin began to run while the bullet whisked by them, but they managed to jump into a garden and from there to a field and so were saved from the second slaughter. Also in the village of Fashischbah they caught all the Jewish families living there and brought them to Motol for elimination. In the village of Zamushah they caught only one family of the two living there. The members of the second family - Shmuel Giber and his wife were saved like this. When the gang arrived at the village, the villagers told them that there was a man who still had all the property well-hidden and for all this time they were unable to take a thing from him because he had a gun which he used to kill any members of the Black Gang if they dared touch his wife or property. So the gang members gathered some Gentiles from the village gave them heavy clubs and ordered them to beat anyone trying to flee. They did not wish to kill them outright in the hope that if they

captured some of them alive they would reveal the hidden treasure of jewels and other valuables under torture. When the police began to bang on his door, he also grabbed a heavy club that was ready and jumped through the window, and when one of the policemen ran to catch him. They began to shoot at him but he was uninjured (Shmuel told this to me himself afterward). The murderers managed to capture his wife and bring her to Motol. They first tried to drag out of her if she knew to whom he fled and where their property was hidden. After that, they defiled her and brought her to Motol.

Pinchas continued to describe how the martyrs were stripped of their clothes in the middle of the street where they were placed together, in front of their eyes, the gang members divided up their clothes. From there, all of them were brought to the other side of the new cemetery. All the way, they were whipped in their heads and by rifle butts to their sides. When they arrived at the abyss, they were stood in two rows at the edge of the pit; they were shot and fell directly into the pit. Pinchas continued to tell in the name of the Gentile Alexi how Shalom Mishkin's daughter, who was four years old, fell into the pit with the other martyrs who were shot, without being hit by a bullet; and she began to run on the dying bodies of the martyrs struggling with bitter death. All the barefoot policemen aimed at her with their rifles and shot about twenty bullets, and the girl ran to and fro as if the bullets had no effect on her. Until one of the policemen approached her kicked her in the head with his foot and knocked her to the ground. Then he put his rifle to her head and put an end to her child like life.

After they finished killing all of them, the truck arrived and with it the two Germans that came to take butter and milk. They came up to the pit to see if the work was properly done, photographed the full pit and ordered the pit to be closed and went on their way to Pinsk.

Before they finished closing the pit, the policeman bringing Shmuel Giber's wife from the village of Zamushah arrived. The blood thirsty beasts received her with wild cries. Each of them tried to force out of her where her husband escaped to. But the courageous woman went directly to the still open pit and looked at the martyrs and said to the Gentiles in their language, "Too bad that you brought me here so late and I can't join the rest of them." The ragged policemen immediately brought down two of their companions who busied themselves in covering the first pit and had them dig a pit for the courageous woman. They tried all sorts of inducements to tempt her into revealing where her husband hid and where they buried their property. But she rejected them with contempt and said that they were wasting their breath because she was not going to answer them. Their patience expired and one of the policemen jumped up with a shout ordering her to take off her clothes. The poor woman could not remove her dress quickly enough so some of the lowly beasts ripped her dress from her and with a shout threatened to kill her on the spot if she would not tell where their property was. But she stood up to them and defiantly said the following words, "Thieves! You already stole all our property and there was nothing left for us to hide." The first blow of the rifle but fell on her back and they shouted at her, "Tell or don't tell, you die Jew." They brought her to the pit which had been dug. The pit was not deep because they were in a hurry to finish the game of death. They ordered her to stand facing the pit so as not to see who was shooting her, but she also refused this and said, "You're shooting me; I'll look into your foul faces. I want to see who is my murderer". The blood thirsty policemen did not hold back and two shots rang out from their guns simultaneously and put an end to the life of the brave woman. They closed the pit and happily returned to the town. They were happy that they ran into two Nazis who gave them the instructions to carry out this dark work and clean the town of Motol of Jews. They made a party in the middle of the street and

divided with the police of Motol the property and clothes looted from Jewish homes in the villages.

The town's Gentiles, calling themselves policemen, took advantage of this gang's presence and incited them to search the houses of Gentiles who were known to have stolen valuables from the Jews and grabbed some of the loot by way of confiscation. They were too uncomfortable doing this themselves and did not want to make enemies out of the locals, so they requested help from the gang members who were more than willing to help and heavily laden with clothes and objects they dispersed to their villages.

So all night, Pinchas and I lay there relating to each other the story of how each had remained alive. I told him all that had happened to me since the first slaughter. He told me that had sent some Gentiles to the villages searching for me and to set up a connection between us. When we saw that the night was nearing its end, Pinchas rose from his place and arranged for me a pit and told me that in his opinion I could stay here with him for several weeks and regain my strength; the Gentile Alexi would not tell that I was here and would even ask people to continue their search for me. Meanwhile, maybe we would learn what was going on in the surrounding towns because Alexi told us that Jews were no longer being disturbed in Jonava and Drogichin and that Jewish women moved through the streets almost freely and only the men were interfered with, although the authorities announced several times that men were permitted to leave their hiding places and would no longer be attacked. If it turns out that there are Jews in Jonava, we will try to reach there. I agreed to Pinchas' plan from lack of choice and entered the hole he prepared for me. The first rays of morning began to penetrate from outside.

24. The Sound of a Broken Leaf

After a half an hour had passed, I heard footsteps approaching the shed. Pinchas made a light knock with his foot on the roof of my den that was beneath his as a sign calling for watchfulness. The shed's door opened wide and someone knocked twice on the door and also added a dry cough. Right away, I heard someone climbing on the straw in the shed's attic.

Pinchas stuck his head out of his lair and consulted with someone. And once again silence reigned. I felt a light knock above my head that was different from the earlier ones and a hand coming towards me from below. It was the hand of Pinchas. He touched me with his hand as a sign for me to rise. When I stuck my head out, Pinchas whispered into my ear to try to stay as seated as much as possible and I could eat from the food served to me. In a small jug there was some cooked potatoes and a bottle of milk. He served me a piece of bread that he saved from last night and he told me. "This time you'll eat lone. I'll manage with a single potato and a slice of bread and we have to try to leave some aside so that the Gentile will not think that there is still someone here with me." I quickly swallowed the food and returned to my lair. Time crawled by and I thought, "Outside, the morning Sun is intermingling with the dawn, its rays spreading on the wall downward, kissing each flower and bud longing during the entire night. The dog left its lair shaking off the clinging shackles of sleep, arched its back and barked as if to say, "so what." The morning birds chirp in unison, jump from place to place and chatter to each other. The time has come for the morning prayer...but here my train of thought is interrupted. The barn door opened again and the wife of the Gentile Alexi brought food for the pigs and sat to milk the cows. The

cows stood upright after the night's rest with thick mucus flowing from their mouths and emanating warmth and vapors. The cows were free to walk in the street unmolested and we who were made in the image of the Creator were worse than them. She finished milking them and left and after a few moments the shepherd took them out to graze. Now came the time to stretch our limbs and Pinchas estimated that not a person would pass by for up to half a day, but after a short time children from the Black Gang gathered in the yard near the cow shed and began to nosily play and raise a ruckus. They innocently played. But every word they spoke chilled our blood. They also opened the barn and began to hide in the straw. All that we needed was for them to climb up to the attic and discover us at once. We laid down in anticipation. Their game was "Jews and Germans" and they ran around calling out to each other, "See, here's a Jew." They divided themselves up into two groups. Some of them played the German and the remainder fled from them and hid and whoever was caught was led to a wall, and they would make a shooting noise and would finish by saying, "So there was one less Jew." They played like this for about two hours as our flesh crawled. Pinchas was no longer able to control himself, burst into choked tears and sobbing said, "those little bastards had a big part in exposing Jews during the time of the first slaughter. Many Jews revealed their hiding places in the gardens and fields and handed them over with their shouts to be killed." I gathered all my strength to comfort him because tears were also flowing from my eyes and my heart ached.

Alexi went up to Pinchas several times a day and told him what was going on and what were the Gentile saying. He told him also which of the Gentiles were parading around in clothes belonging to the Jews and they began to mock those that refrained at first from looting and were not able to steal any valuables. They would say, there will be no more Jews in the town... they'll never return... and even if they unfortunately return everyone who joined in will be accusing each other.

25. A Polite Request: Get Out

Once Alexi showed up in the middle of the day. He was shaken and frightened and fearfully told us that about fifty arrived in town and ordered all the men to gather in the town square. He promised that he would inform us of the purpose of the gathering once he returned. He returned after two hours and told us that they were ordered to follow all the instructions of the local authority, and they must all bring more milk to the dairy for the army, and anyone possessing a weapon must immediately bring it to the police. They were required to bring herds of sheep, especially those stolen from the Jews and to carefully observe the blackout regulations. Anyone violating the rules would be punished by...death. If the instructions were not carried out within a few days a house check would be made. Alexi began to plead to Pinchas and said to him, "Look here, if you could leave tonight to Jonava, lots of Jews wander the streets freely there." Pinchas told him, "Look Alexi, you've been good to me all the time, after all that, don't betray me now. How could you send me this evening when tomorrow is Sunday and many people will be coming from the towns and countryside. Gather up some courage for another day and verify if the rumors from Jonava are true and what is the situation of the Jews there, and once I know that for sure, I'll be on my way." Alexi said to him, "Look, I agree with you but my wife is very frightened and won't leave me alone. She says that she is willing to supply you with as much food as you want every week as long as you hide in another place. So I'm requesting that for a few days at least you hide somewhere else until the Nazis leave town. When Pinchas did not reply he said, "In any case I'll talk to my wife again", and left. After a short time he brought food and did not say a

word. We did not close our eyes all night and made various plans for hiding for a few days. We wanted to investigate and discern more clearly the conditions of Jonovah's Jews. The day before, we received news from a Gentile who was sent to us by the Yashpah brothers with Alexi knowing about it. They sent him to Jonava to ask their friends about the situation and they answered it would be better to say in their hiding places for a few weeks and only if there was no other choice other than to endanger themselves and they would be welcomed with open arms.

The morning had not yet brightened and Alexi showed up. He entered and with a choked voice said, "Pinchas, have pity on me and go and hide in another place today already." When Pinchas asked for the reason of his change of heart and why he did not tell him while it was still night, Alexi began to pour out the bitter conversation and told him of the fear that passed over his wife at the beginning of the evening and how she argued and cried the whole night to get rid of the Jew and let him go. And this is the fright that passed over her. "A group of soldier passed by to inspect the blackout while a ray of light poked out of our house. I wasn't home. The soldier began to knock on the shutters to darken the windows. My wife was terrified at the thought that they came to search her for hiding a Jew. When I came, I found her crying and she said that if I continue to harbor the Jews she would take the children and go to her father's house. I don't want to die, she said. So I'm pleading before you Pinchas, before the light of day, please go by the garden to your shed or that of Shmuel Kaplan's, or go into the ice shack, because you'll find straw and lay there for the day and in the evening you can come to the me again."

Pinchas could not resist his pleading. He came down from the attic and said to me, "Wait here for a few moments and then come to our shed." After a few moments, Alexi already wanted to close the shed door and I lowered down my feet. But when Alexi saw my feet being lowered down he almost fainted with fear. When I quietly approached, thinking he was Pinchas, I saw Alexi lay out almost without the power of speech. I asked him where was Pinchas and he pointed with his fingers in the direction that he went and his lips whispered, "I thought the Dev..." and I almost would have burst into laughter if the situation was no so tragic.

When I entered into Pinchas' shed, I saw him standing on a woodpile and arranging for us a hiding place. I also helped him by bringing down straw and hay from the roof and making a bed for us; we lay down and covered ourselves with hay. The light of morning began to pierce through. I took out the prayer book that I kept with me and we began to pray..."my soul thanks Thee...Praise Thee for not making me a Gentile".²³ I contemplate, "the Jews are a strange people." Here are two blocks of wood lying with no future and no present, without a crust of bread and without hope. The slightest tremor can hand us over to our murderers. And still, "My soul thanks Thee." Even though you hide your face from my by handing us over to the beasts. Every Gentile, even the lowest and most despised has the right to live, not to be pursued, or pointed at, can walk freely down the street or roll around drunkenly in the mud. While we are despised and oppressed, a target for every bullet, lower than a dog wandering the streets. And nevertheless, "Thank you for not making me a Gentile! Because a Gentile is a flesh eating beast, a bloodthirsty creature! Gentile means boundless cruelty, to steal and murder for the pleasure of killing itself. I concentrated on every word coming out of my mouth; I count every syllable. Time lays heavy on my hands, the day is endless and I have nothing to do and I continue, "Praise Thee for providing all my needs." I suddenly wonder. Is this a blessing in vain? Am I really receiving "all my needs?" I do not have a crumb

²³ Excerpts from the morning service

of bread or a drop of water and even if I had these, would they make up "all my needs?" But before I managed to look around carefully the sounds of running steps reached me and after that the sound of rifle shot and a shout of "Halt!" We sharpened our ears and by listening to the words from Shmuel Kaplan's (Ganzalah) yard we understood the reason. One of the two Gentile women wanted to drag away some wood from Kaplan's shed. A policeman passed by, saw her mischief and fired in the air to frighten her. She threw off the wood to the side at once and returned to her place because if she was caught thieving a second time, she would be shot. Silence once again reigned. We continued to pray, but I could not concentrate and only my lips formed the words with my thoughts elsewhere. Once again we heard footsteps and a conversation between the two of them, "We have to look at what's in the shed." Another voice replied "Why go to the shed, you have what you want right here." These two Gentiles had come to steal building materials that Pinchas had prepared before the Holocaust. They left. But after a short time, one returned and went right into the shed in which we were hiding behind a wood pile. He began to pick through the wood and while moving the wood around almost discovered us. Our hearts stopped beating. We stood at death's door and silently parted from each other. But as the Rabbis said, "Even when the sword's edge is place on your neck, do not despair of receiving mercy." Now the Gentile once more picked through the wood and the entire pile began to collapse with a large noise. He was startled by the noise and afraid that it would be heard from outside and immediately left the shed leaving us buried under the pile, wounded and stunned. We regained our breath. We managed somehow to rearrange the pile and decided to mark the day as a memorial and if we manage to survive, make it a holiday.

26. Over the Grave of Our Loved Ones

With a terrible impatience we waited for the Sun to disappear and when it darkened we returned to Alexi's shed so that Pinchas could talk to him and verify the situation in Jonava and prepare food for the way. After a short wait, Alexi appeared with a package of food in hand. He turned to Pinchas and said, "I'm angry with you for not telling me he's here with you", pointing a finger at me and adding, "if you had told me I would have brought more food and you wouldn't have to go hungry." He told us that the Germans conducted searches in many houses and confiscated flocks of sheep and boots and evening time they made their way to Molodovo taking with them policemen from the town. He continued to say that he had reliable knowledge of the situation in Jonava according to which that there were many Jewish men in the streets and some were already working in the saw-mill. He encouraged us and showed us a back way out of town and promised us to come from time to time to Jonava and bring us flour to bake into bread. We warmly parted from him and thanked him for all his kindness and we went on our way without tarry. In a roundabout manner we made our way out of the city. When we reached the road to Joanava, Pinchas said to me, "Let's go a little out of the way and visit the grave of our loved ones. Who knows if this will be our last chance to visit here?" We arrived at the place and reclined weeping and lamenting our beloved family members who were cruelly cut down and a bitter question was in our thoughts, "Why God, did you bring us to this? Are we more guilty than any other people? More decadent than any generation?"

I was the first to recover a bit and turned to calm Pinchas. With great difficulty I managed to pull him up from the fresh, loose soil, which with all the attempts to cover up traces of the grave, it was easy to distinguish here the final resting place of our parents, brothers and sisters, our elders and all our loved ones. We very slowly raised to our feet and lamented,

"My wife! my mother! My sisters and children!" You sweet loved ones who did not part in life or death, why did you leave me to sigh? Why am I condemned to a life without you? And we once again fell down onto the loose earth crying bitterly.

I gathered my remaining strength and began to speak heart to heart, saying that his tears will not bring the dead back to life and will not do a thing. We have remained alive through divine intervention and the great task before us was to tell the World what the Germans did to us - that "enlightened" people who turned into a wild and blood thirsty animal! And a greater task awaited us and that is to seek an opportunity for revenge. Yes, to avenge the blood of our brethren and loved ones, so Pinchas, please pull yourself together; there is a long road before us and the night is passing. Maybe we will gather together and recite "Kaddish" for the sake of these holy martyrs. I continued to speak like that on end with my eyes continuously weeping. But when I mentioned the word "Kaddish", Pinchas told me with a choked voice, who knows when we will all be together again, meanwhile let us recite "Kaddish" now. In the dark of the night we echoed to each other eternally holy words, testifying to the eternity of the Jewish people, "Yitgadal vyitkadash, shmay rabah." And it was like the their Universe froze on hearing those holy words after witnessing the despicable murder that took place here. The echo was heard and spread to become an uproar and thousands of sounds.

Yitgadal vyitkadash, shmay rabah.

27. The Way to Jonava

We bypassed the two villages of Zamushah and Drojilovitch and arrived at the forest. My knees gave out and I was overcome by a terrible weakness and I asked Pinchas to arrange a short rest to allow myself to recover, because during the last few weeks I have been weakening and it was as if my legs had turned to stone. We took out some bread and sliced a thin slice, ate and continued on our way. But a feeling rose within me that I could not go on. I spoke, heart to heart, with Pinchas about entering the thick of the forest and lying down to rest for a few hours until we regain our strength. If in the beginning, against my will he said, "It will soon be light and there is a long way before us," but I pleaded and he acquiesced because he was also exhausted. We agreed to have a good rest in the thick of the forest and continued on our way as the evening darkened. With the remainder of our strength we arrived to the thick wood and went to sleep at once.

I do not remember how long we slept there, but voices woke me and it was still dark in the forest. It was the voices of the locals who had come to pick mushrooms and were shouting to each other so as not to lose one another. I said to Pinchas, "Let's go to that old Gentile who's walking towards us and ask him about rumors from Jonava." I was thinking that this old man will do anything for us, but what have we got to lose? In any case he will discover us right away because he was heading right in our direction. We approached the old man and wished him "Good morning" and he answered in turn. We asked him, "How are things in Jonava?" He told us that his son was there yesterday who said that he saw Jews walking in the streets and some were already working. Among them he mentioned Itsik, the blacksmith, whose smithy and house stood at the city's edge near the way leading to Motol and from whose attic several refugees from Motol came down after the first slaughter and died there. They were Yosef Polick, Hershel and David Schuchman. Itsik was the son-in-law of one of Motol's inhabitants Shmuel-Libkah, the shoemaker. The old Gentile mentioned

names of some of other Jews who we did not know. We thanked the old man and went on our way. We almost had left the forest and a car's clanking reached our ears. We quickly left our path and hid behind some bushes. A car loaded with German soldiers passed by. We waited until the car was out of sight and continued to walk.

We arrived in Jonava after eight in the morning. We went right to the smithy and appearing suddenly before us was Chayah Shuchman, the daughter of the above mentioned Shumuel-Libkah. She had survived the first massacre in Motol.

Bitterly weeping we fell on each other and no human power could describe the joy of this meeting once again seeing with our eyes someone from our town. She showed us the place from which they took down her husband Yosef Polick and her brother and cousin Hershel and David Shuchman, and brought them from there to the killing place.

We asked her to stop weeping and tell us what is going on here. She told us that the Sharashavski brothers arrived yesterday and informed us that Pinchas Karolinski was still alive. She turned to me and said, "We also knew that you survived. We heard that from Avigdor Chernomortz and Libel Rozenkrantz. Afterwards she listed the names of the survivors and who remained in Jonava. Among them were: Shalom and Reuven Mishkin, Abba Kot (Moshe Fridels' son), Yishayahu Kroyitz, Valul Chimerinski, Meir Gotanski (Berel Minx's sons), Yisrael Chimerinski (Mordechai Natan's son), Moshe Cheej (Rivkah Tabolker's son), Berel Chimerinski known as Galiup, and another three that had arrived at Motol from the town of Kondaniah next to Brisk. She also told us that the Yishpah brothers were expected to arrive here, because the day before they sent a messenger to inform them of the situation and she announced to them that they will come.

We entered Itski's house. The same emotional scene repeated itself with even more force. Here Itsik was able to tightly control his feelings. He was the first to calm himself and took out a pair of scissors to cut our hair and beards because they were growing wild, and meanwhile they prepared us a light meal. While we were still eating, he sent one of his children to request of my aunts to come and also the Sharashavski brothers. They came at once with the good news that another person from Motol is still among the living who we did not know of until now and his is Menashe Benner who hid in a village during the time of the first slaughter. My aunt also came and invited us to her place as she had an available spare room. By a roundabout way we reached her house where we washed and within a short time all the remnants of Motol gathered to tell of the story and miracles that passed over them.

After another day, the Yishpah brothers came and said that they managed to contact their cousins Banyah Stravitch and Chinkah with her husband. From the first slaughter they managed to hide by a Christian acquaintance and we did not know of their survival and here they were in Jonava.

28. Life in Jonava

Life was very difficult for Motol refugees because most of us were in Jonava illegally and we did not have the ration card to receive the ten grams of bread and we had no other acquaintances. In addition to this, we were afraid to wander freely in the streets and so

more than once we felt the hunger pangs. The continual fear that surrounded us was like the third plague from Egypt and it was hard to remove it from our flesh.

After about another two weeks we heard that an elder from Motol who was appointed by the Germans to run the city (in their language he was called a "Wit") arrived in Jonava. At this point he was approached by the head of Janovah's Jewish community who was appointed by the Germans to be responsible for the Jews here. His name was Alther Diuinski and he requested from the "Wit" that he act to obtain permits for the Motol refugees that were here to remain here legally and receive ration cards. But to obtain ration cards we would have to register for work. The various kinds of work were: ditch digging, manual labor on the railroad tracks or work in the saw mill.

After a while it became known to us what was going on in Pinsk. The first contact with the Jews of Pinsk was by Pinchas Karolinski who contacted his sister there. From her, it became known that David Kroyitski was in Pinsk. Afterward David informed us that the Zaditovski brother managed to survive and they were in Drogichin by their brothers who lived there. Letters were not exchanged by the Post because Jews were forbidden from using it; it was done through Christians who dealt with them - for a high price of course.

After we had stayed a few months in Jonava, suddenly Shmuel Kaplan showed up. He told us how he had survived.

"Back in 1939 while the Russians invaded Poland, I was forced to hide because one of the town's residents with whom I had dealings with had threatened to turn me into the Soviet authorities, so I moved to Pinsk. The hated peasant was appointed a Soviet official and so I could not return there. From there I traveled to Vilnah and decided to travel from there to America or the Land Of Israel, but I wasn't able to. The war broke out between the Germans and the Russians and the Nazis invasion of Vilnah started a pogrom in cooperation with the Lithuanians in which 15,000 Jews were killed. The hand of fate that guides man saved me from the pogrom and I somehow returned to Pinsk. When I heard that the remaining refugees were here, I came and I want to know the details of the destruction."

They told him the chronicle of the destruction and one of the refugees told him the name of his Gentile to whom his wife gave a lot of their possessions for safe keeping. Then he had an urge to travel to Motol to see the destruction with his own eyes, especially to see if he could get back some of his property or at least some clothes and underwear.

He succeeded in receiving a travel permit in order to travel there, sleep and return. But that night it became known to members of the "Black Gang" that Shmuel Kaplan had returned; they gathered and set fire to some house near the barn in which they imagined that he stayed and they set up as a false witness the old Gentile sinner known as "Tsiduchah" - Shahik Tamyia to claim that Shmuel Kaplan deliberately set fire to the house. He was arrested immediately by the police of Motol and brought to Jonava in handcuffs and from there brought afterward to Pinsk and handed over to the Nazi headquarters. He was of course quickly dealt with and killed at once by shooting. From that moment on we walked in fear of Gentiles from Motol putting stories in our mouths because they saw us in the street sometimes when they came to sell stolen Jewish property.

29. Transports

A few quite months passed by. Some Nazi leaders arrived at Jonava and turned to the Jewish community, requesting from them one hundred and sixty workers to send to the Russian areas under German occupation. With great difficulty it was agreed to take only one hundred and twenty and among them Shalom Mishkin met his fate as did another who escaped to Motol from the town of Kondaniah. As it became later known from two people who escaped from there and returned to Jonava, also one hundred and twenty people were transported to the Jitomir area. On their arrival, they found another sixty Jews gathered from other cities and all of them were brought to the forest together; there they were busy making some sort of mysterious weapon and only after they finished the work they were brought to a pit that was previously dug and they were all killed, and only they miraculously escaped.

On the same night that one hundred and twenty people were removed from Jonava, five of the remaining refugees from Motol left for Pinsk because they saw that they too would be sent with this group to Russia.

Those who left were Pinchas Karolinski, Reuven Mishkin, Meir Gotanski, Yishayahu Kroyitz and another two whose names I have forgotten. They perished there with all the other Jews of Pinsk when the ghetto was destroyed.

Those that remained got by doing work such as cutting trees, manual labor on the railroad, carrying logs at the saw mill and so forth. I managed by working in a hospital for contagious diseases.

30. Ghetto

The year 1942. A bright red sun is rising. The beams of light fall on the ground. But it did not brighten and warm us Jews; instead it burns us and sucks out with its heat the remaining moisture from our exhausted bodies. Suddenly automobiles appear and in them German soldiers and Gestapo men - all of them armed - and with German military precision they began to surround the courtyard containing the Jews. What are they planning? Is it a new cleansing - in another words a pogrom or forced labor? They suck us out from the cracks seized by fear and trembling, without knowing what to do - to hide in the cellars and other secret places that we prepared or to try to flee and escape.

The time was two in the afternoon. The sound of confusion reached us from the street. The street was full of thousands of Jewish men women and infants. All of them bent under their great burdens. Everyone dragging what he could take with him, because from now on that is all that he owned, the rest abandoned. The bundles are wrapped with white sheets and colorful blankets. Children running in panic, looking for their parents, running into people, being yelled at breaking into better and loud crying. The German soldier maintains order from time to time with their whips. Going to the ghetto.

I went outside and stood among the Jews. A whistle pierced the air and the crowd began to move. I was swept away by the whirlpool of the people and the bundles. I looked around me and I noticed some of our remaining refugees near me. I told them that we would try to stay

together and to gather all those left so we could be one large family. The Christians gathered in the streets and on the doorsteps and looked at us. Most of them were shouting and enjoying themselves, "You deserve it, you yearned for Bolshevism in Palestine, Good for you!" The young whistled from the amount of pleasure to express - there derision of those walking by. The Sun was very hot. Most of the people wore more than one suit and several pairs of underwear in order to save what they could The bundles were a burden; here and there some were thrown aside, trembled, scattered to the cheers of the Black Gang.

The area of the ghetto was very small; there was about 1.020 square meters for every living soul to live. The crowding was terrible. In one room, that in normal times would contain one person or at most three people, now lived up to ten people. The houses soon would be filled with filth and the people sunk in despair and hopelessness. Because after a day of back breaking labor there was almost no energy for cleanliness and order. It was also necessary after work to search for extra food in addition to the ten grams of rationed bread, and to worry about clothes, shoes washing underwear and drying them. So it was not surprising that everything was neglected. The pipes were broken, the water did not flow, the toilets were backed up. Piles of trash, potato peels, moisture and mold, bugs and lice - that was our lot in the ghetto in which we thought of how to keep up our courage and pass the short time until evil Germany would fall apart; this we believe with all our heart.

It was forbidden to leave the ghetto without a special permit. Only those who worked outside the ghetto's borders received these permits. Every morning we would arrange ourselves next to the ghetto gate and the police would examine and check and count how many people exited. And the same on our return. While this was going on there was no lack of blows and whips and particularly during the return when the workers were found to be smuggling food into the ghetto. I was one of those who held an exit and entry permit because of my work in the hospital for contagious diseases that was outside the ghetto. While I was outside of the ghetto, I made contacts with partisans and helped them with medical supplies that I "lifted" from the hospital.

31. The First Memorial Day for Our Martyrs

The night of Tishe B'av²⁴ came. The night designated for us Jews from earliest times for remembering our tribulations, and the first memorial day for our martyrs and loved ones. A full year since they were murdered and buried alive. It was a year of suffering and hard labor for those who survived. Some survived the year, many were killed during the second slaughter and some found their deaths on the paths and in hiding places.

We all gathered together, "the surviving few" in a seminary to observe the first, gloomy memorial day. We were all observing the fast despite the expected hard day of work. After reciting the elegies, we read Psalms accompanied by the sound of sobbing. During this heart breaking scene we broke out into "Kaddish." The recitation of Kaddish was interrupted from time to time by bitter, piercing weeping and a long time passed before we could regain our composure and continue until the awful crying resumed. We sat for a long time and told each other for the hundredth time the story of the destruction. Everyone remembered and added details gathered from the locals and the horrors passed before our eyes as if the

²⁴ Commemorated the destruction of both the First and Second Temples, and other tragedies in Jewish history

event were still fresh. We especially remember the children and infants, those pure souls that have not yet experienced life, untouched souls innocent of any sin who were murdered with such cruelty. And how jealous we were of the Jews of Jonava, who mostly still had their children. Even though the children in the ghetto were a very difficult problem because not only were they difficult to provide for and went around hungry and parched, infested by vermin, with no one to care for them, but they were also a difficult problem when running for a hiding place, since a child that did not grasp the serious of the situation would start crying and put all those hiding at risk. But nevertheless, the yearning for a child or a baby continued to grow, to hug him to press to your hear and to impart all the warmth still residing in a hardened heart.

At midnight we got up to disperse and promised each other to at least raise tombstones for our martyrs and loved ones. We also decided that if we survived to try to take revenge for the blood that was spilt. Spontaneously a curse emanated from our mouths cursing any person who decided ever to return to Motol and live their life there, and cursed by the earth that opened its mouth, swallowed our brothers' blood and covered this horrible crime.

32. The Destruction of the Ghetto

Elul 1942.²⁵ A German newspaper fell into our hands, containing a speech that Gobbels and Goering addressed to the German command structure in the occupied territories which were to be cleaned of Jews by the end of the year. We understood the meaning of this speech and from then on we arranged guards in the ghetto all night so we would not suddenly be surrounded without means of escape. People from Motol, full of sad experience, were especially on guard. Many of them would sneak out in the night to sleep in the fields or instead of returning to their work in the ghetto would go to hiding places. Only the Jews from Jonava took no precautions and said that there was nothing to fear; they already drained out most of our blood, no more will be killed. They need us for our labor and who would suddenly wipe out their own workers.

Two days before Yom Kippur news arrived of deep pits behind the town near the village of Rodisk. But they did not pay attention. I realize that anyone could have dismissed the threat saying a pit only good for killing Jews? A pit can be used for other things. Never the less, fear crept into the hearts of many Jews of Jonava and some of them began to prepare to flee to the forest. Some of them went around in despair saying, "Whatever happens will happen! If a man is destined to die, there is no escape in any case." We knew that we would not be late for death, but as long as our hearts beat we had to escape to any place to where we could.

Yom Kippur passed by. The atmosphere began to calm down a bit after nothing occurred during the previous two days. We began to prepare for the upcoming Sukkot holiday and some took the trouble to even build a Sukkah. On the Monday after Yom Kippur, towards the evening the ghetto was surrounded by strong components of guards and a mass expulsion to the pits that been dug began. Anyone who refused was shot on the spot the extermination lasted three days because most of the Jews hid in secret places that had been prepared underground or between double walls. The Germans knew the exact number of Jews in the Ghetto and did not want to pass up a single one, and so they went from house to house, sniffing in every crook and cranny and discovering many of the hiding places,

²⁵ Summer 1942

removing the hidden Jews and joining them with the rest. But some were still missing, because most of the hiding places were craftily made and not easily revealed. Even with the assistance of the local police and many of the local Christians who volunteered for this despised work with their long time knowledge of the place, were not able to reveal the hiding places. Then they began to blow up each house with dynamite and burn them. Who knows how many Jews perished horribly under the wreckage - who by strangulation, who by crushing debris, who by fire and who lay there in hunger without possibility of escape. Only from the German newspaper did we know of the destruction of 4,000 Jews, among them the remnants of Motol's refugees. I hid during the time of the destruction of the ghetto in the attic of the hospital in which I worked. Seven people from Motol similarly survived: Abba Yishpah, Eliezer Sharashavski, Banyah (Benyamin) Stravitch, Menashe Benner, Yisrael Chimerinski, his brother Daniel (who was in one of the Russian legions during the outbreak of the war and was captured by the Germans with the rest of his regiment. He hid his Jewish origin in captivity by claiming to be Ukrainian, was set free and reached the ghetto), and another refugee from Kondaniah.

But death pursued this group and overcame it one by one. Abba Yishpah and Eliezer Sharashavski with tremendous effort reached a group of partisans from Motol that were considered to be admirers of the Russian regime. Actually they were provocateurs who laid wait in the forest for Jews. They cunningly deceived Abba Yishpah and brought him to a secret place that no one knew until this day by saying they planned to ambush a group of Germans, but they returned without him, wearing his clothes and boots. I later learned that his killing was arranged by Mikitah Kaliltz (Yunger), but he managed to escape from my hands after the liberation when I kept track of some of our brothers' murderers. Banyah Stravitch fell victim to German policemen while traveling to Motol next to the village of Drojilovitch. The policemen were hiding in fields by the side of the road in wait for partisans that had to pass by in order to receive food from the village. His bad luck brought him to the same place where the Germans were preparing an ambush and he fell into their profane hands from which there is no return.

Menashe Benner fell while hiding by the Gentile Mitivo in the village of Zakliah on the way from Motol to Drogichin. He was captured in a strange manner. Mitivo the Gentile's son served the Germans as a volunteer policeman. A group of partisans had taken over the Gentile's house. They went over the entire house looking for anything to take and in the attic of the shed they found Menashe Benner and killed him on the spot. Yisrael and Daniel Chimerinski (Malyosh) escaped to Drogichin and perished there in the ghetto that was liquidated two weeks after the liquidation of the Jonava ghetto. The refugee of Kondaniah who passed through all the rings of Hell and who mourned the loss of his entire family from Motol escaped to the forest and survived. And I - after I lay three whole days on the roof of the hospital, came down from it and hid by a Christian acquaintance in a shed full of straw during the entire Winter. The living conditions under which I suffered cannot be described by paper and pen, and I prayed more than once to drink once to satiation and then to die. On the thirty first of April²⁶ of the year 1943, I left the shed and reached a group of partisans.

There still remains for me to mention the Zaditovski brothers who escaped from Motol on the day of the second slaughter, reaching Drogichin and perished there during the ghetto's liquidation. Eliezer Sharashavski reached a genuine group of partisans and passed through all the baptisms of fire until the Red Army liberated the area. I made a great effort to contact him and help him avoid being caught up in the military draft that the Russians instituted

²⁶ The month of April has only 30 days so this must be an error in either the original manuscript or the earlier translation.

when they entered but to no avail. Eliezer was part of a group of partisan volunteers that took it upon itself to seek vengeance against the German murderers of our brothers which went to the front. I was very frightened that I could not make contact with him. I would have prevented him for sure from going again to the front and I could have arranged for him a job in Pinsk. There were also personal reasons for wanting to keep him near me. I was isolated and lonely without being close to another living soul. I also wanted to help him in seeking revenge against the people of Motol who participated in the murder of our brothers. But fate was otherwise. So he was not fated to seek the vengeance that I took with my own hands on some of the murderers. I later learned that Eliezer fell in battle in 1945.

Before I left the area, never to return, I visited the cemetery. That was in 1945. Most of the tombstones were overturned and it could be easily seen the signs of looting and destruction that did not even pass over the final resting place of our elders and ancestors. The fence surrounding the area was destroyed by the local inhabitants who used its boards for their own needs. Paths ran through many graves and sometimes tombstones were taken to build their houses. I was there with a group of Soviet officials whose job was to investigate the crimes of the Germans the escapades of the locals. On my request, they ordered the local officials to immediately fence in the cemetery and the communal grave of our martyrs. But if they carried out the command or not, I do not know, because I had to continue on my way. But spurred on by my pleading, they issued orders in my presence to the local official in the harshest language to carry them out within the week. After about a week, I left Pinsk in which I found myself after the liberation, and through various ways I arrived in defiled Germany. I stayed there for seven months in a camp with other displaced Jews like myself. I succeeded over time to meet up with two friends from Motol and they were: Yosef Widman and Chaim Yishpah who miraculously survived like myself and were waiting to immigrate to the Land Of Israel. I contacted relatives in American and they immediately sent the necessary legal papers needed for immigration. I departed from the defiled and cursed land of Germany with the hope that I would be privileged to reach the Holy Land of Israel to which I swore the tradition oath, "If I forget you Jerusalem, let me forget my right arm..."²⁷

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This was the scroll of torture and suffering of the people of our city - poor Motol. This was the end of our holy martyrs. I fulfilled my goal of telling the World about the murderous killing machine, about the destruction of humanity, the negation of all that is holy in man. I am sure that someone who has not seen with this with his own eyes and did not feel this on his own flesh cannot grasp it and perhaps will not believe and think that this is only a nightmare of blood and death. I carried out my mission to perpetuate the memory of the depths that humanity reached in the image of the German monster, so that the thirst for vengeance against the lowly murders will be quenched.

I will always carry in my heart this awful and bloody vision. I know that thanks to the martyrs, I remained the single witness to tell of the destruction of Motol...

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