

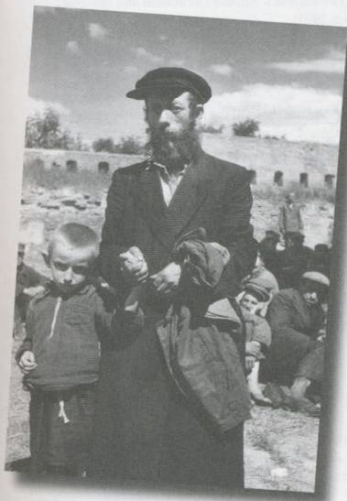
THE UNKNOWN BLACK BOOK

THE HOLOCAUST IN THE
GERMAN-OCCUPIED SOVIET TERRITORIES

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*Published in association with the
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*

INDIANA UNIVERSITY PRESS
BLOOMINGTON AND INDIANAPOLIS

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III LITHUANIA

Lithuania was once the home of a proud tradition of Jewish life and scholarship, renowned for rabbinical academies in Telz (Telshyay, Telsiai), Slobodka (Viliampol, Viljampole), and Kelme. Vilna (Vilno, Vilnius), its historic capital, was called "The Jerusalem of Lithuania." Following the German and Soviet invasions of Poland in 1939, the city of Vilna and its environs were transferred from Poland (to which it had been assigned in 1920) to Lithuania. The Soviet Union formally annexed Lithuania in the summer of 1940. By the spring of 1941, Lithuania's Jewish population reached 250,000, including 15,000 who had fled German-occupied Poland. Some 6,000 of these succeeded in emigrating to Palestine, the Far East, and elsewhere; several thousand more were deported by Soviet officials to remote parts of the Soviet Union.

The Germans actually began their campaign of mass murder in Lithuania, killing over five hundred Jews in three small border towns—Gargsdai, Kretinge, and Palanga—at the end of June 1941.¹ At the same time, SS commanders observed the enthusiastic willingness of many local people to kill their Jewish neighbors. The Balts, the Romanians, and others, blamed the Jews for Sovietization, and this attitude hardened their hostility toward them. On June 30, 1941, Einsatzgruppe A reported from Kovno (Kovna, Kaunas) that "during the last three days Lithuanian partisan groups have killed several thousand Jews."² By July, another communiqué reported

1. Yitzhak Arad, Shmuel Krakowski, and Shmuel Spector, eds., *The Einsatzgruppen Reports: Selections from the Dispatches of the Nazi Death Squads' Campaign Against the Jews in Occupied Territories of the Soviet Union July 1941–January 1943* (New York, 1989), p. 10. See also Konrad Kweit, "Rehearsing for Murder: The Beginning of the Final Solution in Lithuania in June 1941," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 12, no. 1 (1998), pp. 3–26.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

that "In Kaunas, up to now, a total of 7,800 Jews have been liquidated, partly through pogroms and partly through shooting by Lithuanian kommandos."³ Such murderous cooperation helped the Germans kill 80 percent of Lithuanian Jewry by the close of 1941 and over 95 percent by the end of the war.

Near Vilna, where the pre-war Jewish population had reached 57,000—one-fourth of the total population—the city's Jews were killed in the Ponary Forest. In Kovno, whose Jewish population was 40,000, the Germans used a network of fortifications dating back to tsarist times, and in particular the "Ninth Fort," as massacre sites. By 1942, after the initial waves of killing, the Germans established ghettos, principally in Vilna, Kovno, and Shavli (Shaulay, Siauliai), in order to employ the Jews in the service of the German war effort. As in all the wartime ghettos, the Jews were confined, permitted only starvation rations, and forced to perform slave labor until they either perished of disease or were murdered when they were no longer strong enough to work.

It was in Vilna that Jewish leaders first understood that there was a comprehensive German plan to kill all the Jews. On New Year's Eve 1942, three weeks before the Wannsee Conference and even longer before the main killing centers became fully operational, the poet and leftist youth leader Abba Kovner issued an exhortation to his fellow Jews: "Let us not go like sheep to the slaughter."⁴ Kovner warned his listeners that the Germans were planning to kill every Jew they could find, beginning with the Jews of Lithuania. Such calls led to the creation of an underground movement that united various ideological groups in a common struggle. It also helped hundreds of Jews to escape the ghetto and join anti-German partisan units.

Jews who remained in the ghettos documented the drama of their steady destruction. In Kovno, they collected photographs, drawings, music, memoirs, statistical graphs, and theological essays. The material was concealed from the Germans and after the war survivors were able to retrieve at least some of this precious archive. The surviving ghettos, nonetheless, were liquidated in the autumn of 1943. When the Red Army reached Lithuania in the summer of 1944, they found very few Jews alive: about 2,500 survivors in and around Vilna, and another 5,500 elsewhere in the republic.

62. The truth about the terror against the Jews in Lithuania during the German occupation of 1941

AN APPEAL TO THE NATIONS OF THE WORLD

FROM THE DIARY OF DR. VIKTOR KUTORGA⁵

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN BY K. GERSHATER

3. Ibid., p. 17.

4. For the full text of the proclamation, see Arad, Gutman, and Margalit, eds., *Documents on the Holocaust*, pp. 433–434.

5. The oncologist Viktor Kutorga lived in Vilnius and died in 1992. He was a participant in the Lithuanian underground movement and a nephew of Dr. Elena Kutorgiene-Buivydyaitė, who was

Let the whole world know of the dreadful terror which the Germans inflicted on the Jews! We ask that you publish this document in the free press of the entire world so that all freedom-loving nations will know what befell us. We ask that the leaders of all free countries take steps to distribute news of these evil deeds to the entire world and thereby to force the mad leaders of Germany to cease these crimes. It is necessary to show their true face to the whole world and to bring them to justice for their bestial deeds, which are aimed at the extermination of the Jewish people as a whole. We ask that everything possible be done so that the entire world, and the German people in particular, should be told of these crimes. Do everything possible to put an end to these vile actions.

The present document concerns the mass murder of approximately one hundred thousand people for the sole reason that they were of Jewish descent. This document deals with the indescribable violence perpetrated against them and constitutes the most terrible of accusations against National Socialism. It demonstrates the true face and methods of the builders of the "New Europe" to the entire world. We will recount here unheard-of events that might seem improbable and fantastic, but we nonetheless categorically affirm that all the descriptions presented are based on harsh reality, and that all the facts presented are known to everyone in Lithuania. These bloody crimes against mankind and God must enter into history as a monstrous insanity contradicting any concepts of culture and humanity. We once again ask that everything possible and conceivable be done to circulate the testimonies presented here as widely as possible, and in this way to assist those who are not yet beyond the reach of help.

All free countries are morally obliged to demand of Germany, clearly and openly: To hand over all the Jews in their occupied territories. I recognize the difficulties involved in such a demand, but it represents the only possible way to save millions of human lives. We demand decisive action: thousands of people are perishing daily.

The facts in chronological order

June 22, [1941]. The beginning of the war. Toward evening, many of the Jews of Kovno flee the city—by rail, in carts and carriages and on bicycles, on horseback and on foot, along with the departing Communists and family members of Red Army soldiers. They head east, for Vilnius and Dvinsk [Daugavpils]. Throughout the night,

awarded the title of Righteous Among the Nations by Yad Vashem in 1982; parts of her diary from the years 1941–1943 have appeared in the following publications: in the Soviet journal *Druzhba narodov* (Friendship of the Peoples), Moscow, no. 8 (1968), pp. 198–226; in Hebrew in the journal *Yalkut moreshet* (Anthology of our Heritage), Tel Aviv, no. 17 (January, 1974), pp. 31–72; and in Yiddish in *The Black Book*, I. Ehrenburg and V. Grossman, eds. (Jerusalem, 1984), pp. 472–490. This "Appeal" is clearly based on the above-mentioned diary, in which Viktor Kutorga is mentioned several times. No information concerning the publication of the Appeal in the West has been found. It was probably written at the end of 1941.

thousands of people were abandoning the city in which they had spent their entire lives, people whose ancestors had lived on this land for many centuries. They were fleeing for the borders of the Soviet Union with their children, with hand luggage, with as much as they could take with them.

June 23. Beginning in the early morning, trains (around ten in all) with 20 to 35 open platforms and freight cars overflowing with Jewish refugees, have been departing in the direction of Vilnius. Masses of Jews are hurrying to the station with their hastily packed suitcases. There are scenes of desperation, the crying of children (several orphanages are being evacuated), the screams of the insane. Around seven thousand people are leaving from Kaunas by train. The last train bound for the border of the USSR did not cross it: the Kovno-Vilno line was the target of bombing and destruction. Some of the passengers were killed.

When all the jails were opened, all manner of political prisoners came out into freedom. In a burst of anger at Soviet power, they joined ranks with various shady characters who had been armed ahead of time by German secret agents and spies. At this point so-called "partisans" emerged who hurled themselves in a frenzy on every Red Army straggler.⁶ That very evening, these bands began terrorizing the Jews. It was a fact that Jews had participated actively in Party, soviet, and administrative work, and so the unenlightened masses, dissatisfied with Soviet power, were given the possibility of taking revenge against the unarmed Jewish population. In addition, secret German propaganda made thorough use of the excited mood of the local population, which had been aroused by the deportation of 25,000 Lithuanian citizens to the interior of the Soviet Union between June 14 and 21.

These "partisans" burst into Jewish apartments, killed men, women, and children, and looted the property of those murdered. Subsequently, a battalion wearing the former Lithuanian uniform of the Smetona⁷ era was formed from these "partisan" elements. Under German leadership, this battalion earned a reputation for harsh cruelty when it voluntarily carried out executions of masses of Jews in provincial cities. As a reward for their zeal these bandits were granted permission to take the clothing of their victims for themselves and sometimes even their valuables as well.

The scenes of the executions of Jews were filmed with great care.⁸ They made an effort to avoid including in the film a single German among the leaders and accomplices in these killings. In this way, the Germans painstakingly prepared falsified records for future historians which would show the Lithuanian people responsible for all the vile actions committed in Lithuania upon the arrival of the Germans.

6. The word "partisan" usually refers to Soviet fighters, either Red Army soldiers or Soviet civilians, who fought the Germans behind enemy lines. However, in this document, Dr. Kutorga is referring to Lithuanian civilians who joined the Nazis in terrorizing Jews and Soviet POWs.

7. Antanas Smetona was president of Lithuania from 1926 until 1940, when he fled the country following the occupation by Soviet forces in the wake of the Hitler-Stalin non-aggression pact.

8. The atrocities were recorded either on film or by still photography.

Throughout the night of June 24, the wild orgy of killings and looting continued without interruption. Entire families were put to death. Synagogues and schools were looted. The terror was in full swing.

June 24. Persecuted and hounded Jews were escorted en masse to jails on the charge of having fired at "partisans" or German forces which toward evening on that same day had occupied the city. The prisons filled up again. There were many cases in which "partisans" broke into Jewish homes, terrorized those living there or took them all to jail (on Kant Street, they led away a man, a woman, and two children) and then looted their houses and apartments.

From the moment the Germans reached many provincial towns, the Jews were partly, and sometimes entirely, wiped out (for example, in Zarasay—two thousand; in Kretinge, Zhezhmary, Zhosli, Baltishkis—three thousand people).

June 25. The hunt for isolated Jews continues. They assault old people—men and women. Jews who are ill are transported in carts to the prisons. "Partisans" hound children and women with infants in their arms, beating and kicking them. The Jews cannot make up their minds to leave their apartments, since they are arrested immediately on the street and sent to jail or formed up into work parties and sent off to do the dirtiest and heaviest jobs, such as, for example, burying the bodies of the slain, digging ditches, carting away rubbish and animal carcasses, and so on.

June 26. An epidemic of suicides among the arrested Jews. The newspaper *Ilaisve* (what cynicism, it is called *Toward Freedom*) is mounting a desperate campaign of persecution against the Jews, giving sanction to the widespread insinuation that the Jews have supposedly been agitating for the enslavement of Germany.

June 28. On Vitauskas Avenue, in the open yard of the Letukis garages at 4:00 PM, the Lithuanian "partisans" and the Germans gathered around forty Jews and, after spraying them with water from fire hoses, beat the unfortunates to death with clubs. This scene took place in the presence of many German officers and a large crowd of people made up of men, women, and children who avidly observed the terrifying picture. No one tried to intervene; the victims (communists, they were sure) died in front of everyone after two hours of suffering. After that, the bodies were finally taken away.

June 30. In the Seventh Fort (of the old central archives), around five thousand Jews, most of them intellectuals who had been picked up over the previous few days, were exterminated. This mass killing was carried out with machine guns. The executioners in this case were Lithuanians, supplied by the Germans for the task. They forced the Jews to undress and lie down on the ground, and then wiped them out with machine guns. Large heaps of corpses were intermingled with still living victims who had not yet been finished off. The sufferings and horrors of these unfortunates were indescribable. They said at the time that they were getting even with the Jews for the killing of a German officer that had supposedly been carried out by a Jew. "A hundred Jews for one German." It was very doubtful that any such thing

happened at all; in any case, it was only a pretext for the carrying out of the German plan to exterminate all the Jews of occupied Lithuania.

July 5. Jews have been treated contemptuously at every turn. They have been receiving food via their ration cards much later than the rest of the population, and in quantities below the norm. They divided the Jews into groups and sent them out to do hard manual labor. German soldiers often took over their apartments. Radios and bicycles were confiscated from the Jews.

July 10. The commandant of the city of Kaunas issues a special order to the effect that Jews who abandon their apartments for any reason whatsoever lose any right to return to them. All Jews are obliged to wear a yellow identifying mark in the form of the "Shield of David" on their chests (later, they will be obliged to wear the same sort of mark on their backs). By August 15, the Jews must relocate to the ghetto in the suburb of Viliampol (on the right bank of the Vilia River), which consists of old wooden houses without running water or indoor plumbing.⁹

August 1. Carts carrying the belongings of Jews are heading in the direction of the ghetto. For the most part, the Jews have left their property in their old apartments. After all, each person will be given only two square meters of living space. German soldiers and Lithuanian "partisans" often burst into the Jews' new apartments in the ghetto and take whatever they please.

A ghetto-concentration camp has also been set up in other Lithuanian cities. They have brought Jews from small towns to the ghettos of the larger cities. At the same time, they are exterminating groups of Jews and also entire families. Families that have lost fathers go hungry. The food rations for Jews are being sharply reduced. Every day they have to stand for hours in long lines in front of stores designated especially for them in order to receive their two hundred grams of bread.

August 15. The ghetto-concentration camp is being closed off and surrounded with a barbed wire fence. They allow Jews to leave the ghetto only in groups to go to work. Not long before that they were forbidden to walk on the sidewalks. These groups always walk with German soldiers, police, or Lithuanian sentries escorting them. These are the "gentlemen" who kill the Jews en masse whenever it suits them. In order to get themselves watches or other valuables, for example, they have been going into the ghetto and grabbing more or less anything of value that comes to hand. And if anyone dares to offer even a word of objection, it is death on the spot. From August 15 to 20, 1941, ten people were killed in this way. For entire days, the terrorized and cowed population stands in lines outside the food shops. The normal ration consists of 200 grams of bread per day and 250 grams of flour, 150 grams of groats, and 50 grams of salt for an entire week. There has been not a trace of fat or meat for some time now. Those who work in brigades in the city bring greens and potatoes with them when they return from work.

9. This area was also infamous under the name Slobodka.

The commandant of the Kaunas ghetto is a German named Kazlauskas, and his adjutants are Welle and Krause. The Oberkommandant over all the Jews in Kaunas is Jordan, a terrible and cruel "judge." One day, in the marketplace, in full view of everyone, he shot a Jew who in spite of the restrictions had bought some vegetables. The entire quantity of greens that had been purchased by the victim (all of four peasant cartfuls) was divided partly among the witnesses present, while the rest was sent to the hospital. After every such killing, he would assure the Jews that that execution had been the last one, and the poor people believed his words, like drowning people clutching at straws.

August 18. The Germans announced that they needed five hundred well-dressed men who speak German. They began to choose them from among the intelligentsia, of course. The Germans picked up these people and took them away, but no one saw them come back. It became clear that they had all been shot. This was the first large execution (action) in the Kaunas ghetto.

August 25. An order has been issued stating that the Jews have to give up all their money so that none of them have more than one hundred rubles, along with any pots, pans, and electrical appliances, and all valuables, including silver and gold. The German police, together with the "partisans," have repeatedly searched and ransacked every Jewish apartment, in the process shooting more than twenty people whom they had caught with concealed goods. In these searches, they took everything that there was to take from the Jews.

September 1. The mass extermination of Jews in the provinces by members of Lithuanian "partisan" units under the leadership and control of the Germans has begun. According to a systematically worked out plan, the action moves from one town to another. The Jews have been made to dig their own graves. Then they have to bring their sick and their children and remove their outer clothes. After that, they are shot in groups. Those still alive have to bury the bodies of their loved ones, wives, and children, and then they themselves are shot. All of this has been happening in broad daylight, often in front of thousands of witnesses. It would be quite impossible to describe the horror of these scenes, just as it is impossible to find an example of similar crimes in the history of the last thousand years (centuries). In some places they have asked for Jewish engineers, announcing that they are needed to work on the water supply system. When the wells were dug, these engineers were shot, tossed into the wells, and then buried (Mariampol). Each time, care was taken to have chemicals (calcium chloride) on hand to cover the bodies. The slightly wounded were finished off with bayonets or else buried alive; the small children were treated the same way. Often, the "partisans" simply killed children with shovels. This has been going on throughout September in all the small towns of Lithuania: Mariampol, Vilkavishky, Rumnishky, Zhezhmary, Ariogal, Keydany (3,000 people), Simny, Alitus, Vilki (500 people), Zapishki (150 people).

The peasants were very frightened. The intelligentsia, lawyers, and the Catholic church tried to intervene, but the Germans were implacable. They refused to engage

in any discussions or explanation on the subject. Many half-Jews and Jews of the Catholic confession and the Protestant church were killed as well.

In many cases, the Germans filmed these massacres, all the while taking great care to insure that only Lithuanian executioners appeared before the camera lens.

Jewish homes have been confiscated, and all the personal property in them divided up among the killers in the guise of a reward.

And in the newspapers, not a word about any of this. The German regime could not reveal these awful secrets to its own people. Many German soldiers have unambiguously spoken out against these bloody and horrifying killings.

September 15. [This entry and the following one are reversed in the original.] It is absolutely impossible to describe the cruelties that have begun. The "partisans" have demanded that all the Jews in every provincial town and village be wiped out by the end of September. Only in Kaunas, Vilnius, Shaulayay, and Shumelishkis are there any remaining.

September 14. Five thousand Jews in Kaunas received tradesman's licenses (including seven doctors). They were organized into brigades and worked in different parts of town. They have been paid quite sporadically for their work, or not at all. These people believed that the tradesman's licenses would save them from death. As it later turned out, these hopes were in vain.

A council of elders directed all the affairs of the ghetto. The head of the Kaunas ghetto was the well-known doctor [Elkhanan] Elkes. The Jewish police saw to internal order. There was a hospital in the ghetto with wards for surgery and infectious diseases, but the doctors were forced to perform operations in the most primitive conditions, without the necessary preparations or medicines.

September 16. Jordan is taking all the available funds from the coffers of the ghetto commune, the food cooperative, and the infectious disease section of the hospital.

At the Ninth Fort, approximately two kilometers southwest of the ghetto, Russian POWs are digging ditches.

September 17. At 7:00 AM, Lithuanian patrols chased all the inhabitants out of their apartments in the direction of the hospital square. They loaded the elderly, women in the late months of pregnancy, and the sick onto carts. The square is surrounded by German police under the command of Tornbaum. Machine guns were posted all around. There was no time to get dressed. Many people were in their pajamas. Children were driven out of the orphanage and onto the square. Transfer to the Ninth Fort, the place of execution, was already underway. Just then, a German officer appeared from his automobile brandishing some piece of paper, then announced for all to hear that thanks to the military authorities (the Wehrmacht) the projected mass action had been cancelled, and that the Jews were obliged to the Wehrmacht for this. All of this was captured on film, and gave the impression that what was happening was a skillful *mise en scène* aimed at confusing the facts in such a way as to convince everyone that it was the Lithuanians who were supposedly demanding these

executions, while the Germans were opposing them. After this, all the Jews, including those who had already been sent to the fort, were released to their homes. Once again, the Jews believed, and Jordan was convincing them of this, that there would be no more such actions.

This incident coincided with the beginning of work by the Jews on the airfield. Some 1,200 men and 500 women were going out to this project every day. At first, two shifts were established, then later three. At first they took the Jews to the airfield in trucks, but starting in October, they marched them there on foot. Work on the airfield went on day and night without let-up. The guards on duty at the airfield, German soldiers (including many who were unhappy with the Nazi regime), displayed a sympathetic attitude toward the Jews. The police and soldiers of the SA, however, behaved with utmost cruelty and savagery toward the Jews. Almost every night the inhabitants of the ghetto were frightened by all manner of attacks by the sentries, who would try to intimidate the Jews with their frequent shooting, and then break into their apartments. One night a woman was killed in her bed during one of these assaults.

The inhabitants of Kaunas were forbidden to sell anything to the Jews, to give them anything, or even to talk to them. In fact, they were forbidden to have any sort of contact with the Jews.

There were cases in which Christians who, in defiance of the ban, had had some dealings with the Jews, were taken off to jail. After that, they led the "criminal" along the streets of the city with a sign on his chest reading "Friend of the Jews." There were many instances in which Jews were shot on the spot for having tried to receive goods or food through the barbed wire barrier (the official ration, after all, was not enough). Many of the elderly and children who had not received enough milk died from exhaustion.

When the Jews of the Kaunas ghetto learned of the terrible killings of Jews in the provinces, they began to expect the same fate any day. On the night of September 26, they could hear a large number of shootings.

September 26. From four in the morning until sunrise, Lithuanian patrols (now in the uniform of the old Lithuanian army), as well as German police and units of the SA, herded all the inhabitants of the blocks on the left side of Paneriu Street (the so-called "little ghetto") onto a square, formed them all into ranks, and marched them off to the Ninth Fort. They loaded children onto carts and told them that they were being taken to some other ghetto. They took those who were unable to walk in trucks. Around four hundred people were taken to the Ninth Fort and murdered with machine guns. As usual, they were made to take their clothes off before they were shot, then the clothing was taken in trucks to a disinfection point.

October 2. Jordan and several men of his command searched the entire ghetto and found twelve people near the infectious disease ward of the hospital.

On the night of October 4, horrific shooting was heard in the area of the ghetto.

October 4. Beginning at 3:00 A.M., all traffic was halted across the bridge above

Paneri Street that connects the "big" and "little" ghettos. German and "partisan" patrols ringed the entire small ghetto, and in particular the hospital building for infectious disease. Jews were forced to dig ditches around the hospital. There were forty-five patients in the hospital (with typhus, scarlet fever, tuberculosis, and appendicitis), Dr. Davidavichus, and one nurse. While the Jews were digging ditches, the Germans, under Tornbaum's command, chased everyone onto the square. They brought children (including 145 from the orphanage) and the sick here from their apartments. The order was given to divide the people up into ten groups. They transported one woman to the Ninth Fort. Around twelve o'clock, they doused the infectious disease building with fuel. Dr. Davidavichus and the nurse, who had tried to get off the hospital premises, were shot in the courtyard, while all forty-five patients were burned alive. All that remained of the entire hospital were blackened smokestacks! One X-ray and ten EKG machines in the hospital building were lost in the fire. The Germans explained their appalling action—the burning of people alive—by saying that in this way they had cut short the spread of the terrible disease of leprosy. A barefaced lie!

They sent two thousand people to the Ninth Fort and shot them there (including 145 children from the orphanage). All of those left in the little ghetto were transferred to the big ghetto. The residential block on the left side of Paneri Street was left empty, while the apartments remained open.

They took all the patients in the surgical ward away and exterminated them. Only seven women in the maternity ward were left alive. And again they gave assurances that this was "the last time."

October 16. They did away with 900 Jews in Semelishki. There, in the ghetto, the "partisans" and the Germans particularly distinguished themselves by their savagery—they robbed, killed, and raped women. The Jews worked every day in three shifts, day and night, at the airfield—1,200 men and 800 women from the ages of 17 to 55. When on any day these numbers did not reach their preliminary levels, the Germans would go through the apartments in the ghetto and drag men and women out of their beds to work.

The same thing was happening in Vilno. They killed Jews there en masse. Everyone lives there under constant threat of terror, in a state of mortal fear. There were cases in which the Germans wiped out entire Polish families for keeping Jews hidden in their homes.

October 27. It has been announced in the Kovno ghetto that all Jews—a number amounting to approximately 28,000—must report to the main square with their families by six the next morning, where they will be formed into brigades.

October 28. On the square, Jews were surrounded by a cordon of "partisans" and Germans. Jordan and Tornbaum divided them into two groups. The Jews had to march past them, and each one was told whether to go to the right or to the left. Old people were sent to the right first of all. When the Germans finally grew tired

of this job, they simply divided the entire group into two sections: for the most part, the children were placed on the side opposite their parents. The Germans said that they would be sending them off to a new job on the night of October 28–29. All those “rightists” (that is, those put on the right side) were led to the vacant apartments in the little ghetto and, the next morning at 5:00 AM, all of them, ten thousand people, were sent to the Ninth Fort. The sick, as always, were taken in carts. All of them were exterminated on that very day. The entire city was stunned by these horrific events. The intelligentsia was extremely indignant about it. The slaughter took place in the trenches of the fort. All those passing by saw the execution and the clothes left on the ground, which were then collected and sent to the disinfection chamber.

Behavior like this cries out to the heavens!

November 2. The ghetto and the remainder of its population are a dreadful sight today. The apartments of the murdered, located among those of the still living, stand empty, looted; all the household items have been thrown together in a heap. Poor, homeless people overcome with grief move around behind the barbed wire. They try to exchange clothing for bread, shoes, and other items. The “partisans” often allow these operations, receiving a corresponding bribe in exchange. Many times they forbid such an exchange and even kill people for making them.

The soul is torn in two at the sight of the pathetic state that men, women, and children are in as they walk along the streets of the ghetto, separated from the rest of the world by barbed wire. These people have lost all hope and any urge to live. The only thing they now live for is that the world should know of their sufferings. They hope that not all the Jews in the world will perish in this way and that it is only they themselves who have fallen under such a curse. The situation is hopeless. Small Jewish children run around without supervision, little boys play across the barbed wire fence with their former friends. Death is reflected in the eyes of their mothers. The faces of these women, visible across the barbed wire fence, are testimony to their aimlessness and indifference. Their smiles seem to come from another world, as though they are issuing a challenge to the world’s conscience.

Help them! Tell everyone the real truth, let the whole world know about it, all the Germans. Publish this throughout Africa and North and South America.

Help, oh help as soon as possible!

Dr. Viktor Kutorga.

GARF f. 8114, op. 1, d. 958, ll. 143–157. A typewritten manuscript with handwritten corrections.

63. Kaunas during the occupation

ACCOUNTS OF LOCAL RESIDENTS AND THE PARTISAN ARON VILENCHUK

RECORDED BY MAJOR Z. G. OSTROVSKY

[1944]

We are on the streets of Kaunas, which has just been liberated from the German occupation.

Three women, residents of Kaunas, come toward us. They say to us, in Russian with a heavy Lithuanian accent:

"We waited a long time for the coming of the Red Army, and we lived to see it. Thank you!"

The inhabitants of the city tell of lootings and killings. The Germans intended to turn Kaunas into a purely German city. They wiped out the Jews, deported some of the Lithuanians to Germany, and resettled some in Belorussia and even the Smolensk Region. They plundered the property of the murdered Jews and the displaced Lithuanians. The Germans took over local enterprises, the state-owned ones as well as those privately owned.

The stories of local residents entirely confirm the horrors that I had occasion to hear of several days ago from a group of Jewish partisans who had emerged from behind enemy lines. The majority of them were from Kaunas. And here is what they told me.

The Germans captured Kaunas in the first days of the war. Around thirty thousand Jews remained in the city when the Germans reached it.

The Jews did not have to wait long for their fate. Pogroms and mass shootings began in the very first days. As early as the end of June 1941, passers-by could read the inscription "*Yiden, nemt nekome far mir*" [Jews, avenge me] written in blood on the wall of a house on Linkuvos Street. It was written by a woman who had been fatally wounded in the chest with a dagger by a fascist bandit who had robbed a Jewish family.

There was looting everywhere. German occupation authorities took an active part in this pillaging. An announcement was posted: "Any robberies are to be reported to such and such a telephone number." Anyone who actually dared to resort to this usually paid for it with his life. German police would turn up at the address of the victim, seize him, then take him away; such a person never came back.

Three weeks after the Germans took Kaunas, the first announcement concerning the Jews appeared on the walls of buildings, signed by a well-known butcher who had a great deal of experience in the mass extermination of the Lodz Jews, namely Brigadenführer Kramer. The decree contained fifteen points. Jews were forbidden to

- walk on the sidewalks
- ride in cars, in buses, or on bicycles
- trade in shops and outdoor markets
- speak with local residents
- go to and from the city
- go to restaurants, theaters, or movie houses
- attend schools and universities.

Jews appearing on the street without the yellow Star of David on their chest and back were subject to execution.

Finally, it was announced that all Jews were required to move to Slobodka, on the edge of town, on the other side of the Neman River, by August 15.¹⁰

As of August 16, 1941, they closed the gates to the ghetto. From that moment on, not one Jew had the right to appear on the streets of the city. The move into the ghetto was accompanied by mass looting. People were not allowed to take even underwear with them; they had to leave for the ghetto in what they were wearing, and clothes were often taken from the unfortunates if the robbers—German officers and soldiers—liked them. In those days, one could see on the streets of Kaunas revolting scenes of fighting between German bastards who could not divide the property of the Jews among themselves.

On August 16, 1941, the first “action” against the doomed Jews began. It started with the intelligentsia. The advisor to the local commissar on Jewish affairs, the butcher Jordan, announced that the commissariat needed five hundred well-dressed Jewish intellectuals with a command of foreign languages, supposedly for work in the archives. The ghetto provided the five hundred. None of them returned. Soon, traces of the shootings of this first group of Jewish victims were discovered in the Kaunas forts.¹¹

After that, it was quiet for two weeks. The Jews were not touched. By decree of the Lithuanian ambassador to Berlin under the former bourgeois government, Dr. Elkes was appointed head of the ghetto. The Germans summoned him to help resolve organizational questions, or more accurately, every time they wanted to extort valuables from the Jewish prisoners in the ghetto.

In mid-September, the German police surrounded part of the ghetto. By order of a butcher commanding this latest action, they drove all the Jews onto the square. Here, according to lists drawn up ahead of time, all those capable of work or trained in some profession were separated from the rest. The others—two thousand people—were sent to the forts and shot there. Two weeks later, the other three thousand were executed in the same way.

The next large “action” took place on October 27, 1941. The day before came this announcement: “Everyone to assemble on Democrats Square by 6:00 AM.” There was an autumn frost. Trembling from cold and fear, the innocent people condemned to death began to assemble on the square. Children, the ill, the elderly were on the move. They were ordered to report to the square without any belongings. The looting began as soon as people left the places where their remaining things were. The rowdy German swine rummaged through every corner in search of anything that they could profit from.

10. There is a mistake in the text. Slobodka is located on the other side of the Vilia River.

11. Not counting the mass killings in the first days of the occupation.

They began to sort people into groups. Large families were taken off to one side, single people to another. Around ten thousand people were selected for the next act of savagery. As before, the shootings were carried out in the area of the forts.

After that, Dr. Elkes, the head of the ghetto, was summoned to the office of the local commissariat. They assured him that there would be no more shootings in the ghetto. "Now," they told him, "the ghetto has been purified of all undesirable elements. You can reassure everyone that they may go about their own business. We won't touch you anymore." At the same time, they demanded of Dr. Elkes that the Jews contribute money for "the maintenance of the Jewish affairs system."

The well-known Rabbi Shapiro from Kovno lived in the ghetto. They came for him one day. It turned out, however, that Rabbi Shapiro was no longer among the living; he had died, not having been able to withstand the hardships of the ghetto. So they began seeking out his relatives. Rabbi Shapiro's son, a professor of Jewish literature, was taken away, and did not come back.¹²

In September 1942, it became known that Sturmbannführer Goecke, who was famous for his bestial treatment of Jews in Riga and Warsaw, had been put in charge of Jewish affairs. No one spoke of him as anything other than "the Butcher of Riga and Warsaw." This out-and-out hangman came to Kaunas with new powers given by Berlin. He did not have to answer to local military authorities, but only to Berlin.

The first measure that he took was a new mass "action." He demanded that two thousand people be moved out of the ghetto, supposedly to work at peat processing. On October 24, Dr. Elkes went to see the butcher in order to see for himself that all these people would in fact be sent to work. The butcher Goecke received the mayor and calmed him down, assuring him that not a single person would be shot. Two days later, however, the police began to surround the ghetto again. Fifty trucks rolled up to the gates. In a few hours, the trucks were loaded with 1,700 people. The number of healthy people capable of working at peat processing in the ghetto was insufficient. Then two companies of police began seizing anyone they could get their hands on, one after the other. In this way, they took another 1,900. They brought all these people to the airfield and loaded them into cattle cars. All their belongings were taken from them. They took the entire group off in the direction of the frontier. The women and children remaining at the airfield were exterminated on the spot.

So it continued until April 1944. The population of the ghetto grew smaller and smaller. One of the last large-scale actions took place in April 1944, when 1,200 women and children were transported to the forts and shot there in bestial fashion.

I was speaking to a Jewish partisan, a young student named Aron Vilenchuk. He was mobilized along with other Jews in the ghetto for the disinterment of the bodies of those who had been shot. In order to conceal their crimes, the butchers decided to

12. American relatives tried to gain Rabbi Shapiro's release in exchange for a large number of German prisoners, but without success.

dig up all the corpses and burn them. It is easy to imagine what it was like for those still alive to unearth the bodies of their loved ones, family, and friends, and take part in burning them. "Many of them," Vilenchuk tells the story, "could not bear it and committed suicide then and there." Vilenchuk himself and several of his friends fled the fort while they were working and joined a partisan unit.

After the Red Army liberated Vilno, the fascists decided to liquidate the Kaunas ghetto. Seven thousand Jews left in the ghetto were loaded onto convoys and driven in the direction of the German border. They all shared the same fate. The only ones who survived were those who managed to escape.¹³

No matter how hard conditions were under the regime of the butchers, there always existed two underground organizations in the ghetto: the "Union of Activists" and a self-defense group. Unfortunately, they were almost entirely unarmed. Their activities consisted of organizing escapes from the ghetto and mutual assistance. From time to time the underground organizations would contact the partisans, and, with great care, smuggle small groups of Jews out of the ghetto to partisan units.

One day, one of these groups, numbering sixty, was coming out of the ghetto with the intention of making their way to the partisan detachments operating in the Avgustov Forests. The group was provided with weapons that had been gradually collected by the underground over a long time. On the way to the Avgustov Forest, a German punitive unit wiped the group out almost to the last man. Another group of 130 made it safely to the Rudnya Forest, where they were taken in by the "Death to the Occupiers" partisan detachment, in whose ranks they successfully operated until the coming of the Red Army.

GARF f. 8114, op. 1, d. 963, ll. 103–108. A typewritten manuscript with handwritten corrections.

64. The Kaunas ghetto

THE RECOLLECTIONS OF VIKTOR LAZERSON

[1944]

The nightmare began on a beautiful sunny morning, June 22, 1941, which would later be cursed by so many thousands of people. The streets of my native city ran red with blood. I lost my brother on the fourth day of the slaughter. The introduction of a distinguishing mark, the ban on using the sidewalks and means of transport followed the pogrom. From June 24 until August 15, abundant streams of Jewish blood flowed at the Sixth, Seventh, and Ninth Forts. The butchers demanded new victims.

On August 15, the gates of the barbed wire barriers of the village of death called Viliampol (a ghetto) closed behind 28,000 people.

Several weeks later, a demand was issued to gather five hundred young people for work in the fields. Mothers let their sons go, hoping that the work would save them.

13. Several hundred of those deported to the camp survived.

It was the earth at the Fourth Fort, however, that gave them shelter. They learned of this only in 1944.

This “action” was followed by a strict order to hand over all money, valuables, and clothing. Silently, people gave up their property, hoping that once they were naked and barefoot, the Nazi bandits would leave them in peace.

The director of this measure, Hauptsturmführer SA Jordan, a fiend with blood on his hands, drove away trucks loaded to the top with gold, silver, and other riches.

After this came the searches, the so-called *Stichproben*. The Nazis would go house-to-house with packs of dogs, beating people, looting what was left, mixing up stocks of provisions: salt with sugar, with flour, and so on. Jordan delighted in beating naked women into unconsciousness. Before my eyes a German killed an old man who had left some money in a book. The earth received the maimed victims.

On September 17, 1941, there was, so to speak, a dress rehearsal. The ghetto area was cut off from the city; people were brought out onto the main square, then trucks arrived. All at once, though, they were allowed to go home. The Jews could not fathom what miracle had saved them.

But soon, on September 22 and October 4, the bloody feast began to play out for real. The hospital, with its patients, doctors, and nurses, was burned down, and whole blocks were made *judenrein* [rid of Jews]. The inhabitants of these blocks breathed their last at the Ninth Fort.

The ghetto was growing smaller and smaller. Going to and from work under armed guard, forced labor, the whole bag of sadistic, fascist tricks used on the prisoners of the ghetto, starvation, and so on—all of these were mere insignificant chords in this symphony of death.

On October 28, they herded all of us out onto the square in the middle of the ghetto and stood us in ranks of four families each. The “lottery of life” began there. Families were divided arbitrarily in half, and the “halves” were led off in opposite directions. Toward evening, one side was released, and the ten thousand on the other were led off to the Ninth Fort, where they were put to death the very next night. Wild howls and sobs resounded through the half-empty ghetto.

This operation was headed by a Gestapo agent named Rauke. After such experiences, Jews could relax for a day or two, or so Jordan considered. Soon after the “large action” that has been described, convoys of Jews from Western Europe went to their rest at the Ninth Fort. We had to load their belongings, filling up Jordan’s warehouses.

Dreadful days of terror against individuals and shipments to the camps continued until the autumn of 1943.

The police battalion guarding the ghetto was replaced by the so-called 4th NSKK company.¹⁴ The black-shirted NSKK band headed by the young sadist Widemann,

14. *National Sozialistische Kraftfahrer-Korps* (National Socialist Driving Corps).

Jordan's successor, took up our case in earnest. They turned up in the ghetto in order to observe everything that was going on there. New humiliating laws, the obligatory removal of one's hat in the presence of Germans, back-breaking work, new acts of mockery and abuse filled this period of grief and stabilization. After the return from work, they organized searches: they undressed people, beat them, took away everything that they were trying to bring into the ghetto so as somehow to feed themselves and keep their wretched families warm—food, firewood, and so on. The heroes of these “humane” tortures, NSKK members Ross, Baro, and Levrenu were masters of their craft.

It was around this time that news reached us of Jordan's death at the Front. This event was celebrated in the ghetto.

Labor deportations began in March 1942. The Riga deportation, deportations to hard labor in the camps of Ionava, Palemonas, Kaisiadorys, and Mariampol created new torture points and gave rise to new acts of savagery. When the work was completed, the camps were liquidated.

The colossal number of victims of the Gestapo agent Stitze, the organization's adviser on Jewish matters; public hangings for “educational” purposes; executions for failure to take off one's hat, for buying a newspaper during working hours, for a patch (or a “target” as it was called) not sewn on; the execution of an entire family for the transgression of one of its members; sadistic displays like the shooting of bottles on our heads—such were the conditions they made us live in during this period of “stabilization.”

Moreover, we fed on the dreadful rumors reaching us from Majdanek, Vilnius, and other camps, and on the replies given us by the German bosses.

We managed to learn during this time who our executioners were. Kramer, the commissar for the city of Kaunas, believed that Jews should not use doors, and made the Jews who worked for him come in through the windows. Jordan considered a conversation with a Jew *Rassenschande* [a racial disgrace]; General Vysoki claimed that he lost his appetite at the sight of a Jew; Rosenberg, like the legendary dragon, could not stand the smell of Jews; district commissar Lenzen regaled Jews with bouillon made from a dead cat.

In the autumn of 1943, we were taken over by a band of savage Hungarian SS commanded by the head blood drinker, Obersturmbannführer SS Goecke, who had wiped out the Jews of Warsaw.¹⁵ This individual—one look at him made your hair stand on end—started out by acting diplomatically. His assignment was to finish off the Jews. He made everyone work, from the ages of thirteen to sixty-five. He increased our rations, but we knew that they were fattening the cattle for slaughter.

15. Earlier in this account, Wilhelm Goecke is referred to as Sturmbannführer (major). Obersturmbannführer is the equivalent of a lieutenant colonel. It seems more likely that he was a Standartenführer, the equivalent of a colonel, as of 1942.

On October 26, 1943, the Estonian deportation took place, which reduced the population of the ghetto by three thousand people. It would be impossible to describe the horrors of this deportation. People began trying to escape from the ghetto. The authorities took severe measures; spying was increased. Earlier, work outside of the ghetto had offered the possibility of obtaining some sort of food or fuel there, and, albeit at a risk, of bringing it into the ghetto. Now that possibility was taken away; dealings with the outside world were strictly forbidden. The ghetto was under the command of Kittel, who had arrived after the liquidation of the Vilensky ghetto.

The Unterscharführers of the SS—Pilgram, Fiffinger; Oberscharführers Ridell, Pich, Auf; Hauptsturmführer Ring; Bemichen, the commandant of the central concentration camp; Walther, the doctor who was practicing medical extermination; all of these Ober and Unter bandits had decided to put an end to our existence. In Kaunas, they opened another two forced labor camps, in Aleksoty and Shantsy. The area of the camp was surrounded by two rows of barbed wire, with machine gun towers at the corners and barracks with three tiers of bunks—in all, the camps of the new system held another 2,500 people. The variety of sadistic devices was significantly enriched by Unterscharführer Mie, the former commandant of the Aleksoty POW camp, who considered that wholesale beatings would have a good effect on his “inventory.” He would send Jews to swim in the swamps after a rain, dragging them from the bunks at night, and so on.

Meanwhile, there was a smell of burning bones in the air in the ghetto. Goecke was covering his tracks. After the death of Shmitz, who was killed by the partisans, Kittel took care to see that the fire at the Ninth Fort did not go out. Eight thousand Jews were waiting for their sentence.

On March 27, 1944, bands of butchers surrounded the ghetto and began catching children, the old, and the infirm. I saw a German shepherd tear a baby from its mother's breast. I saw the eyes of a mother after a German had taken her child and smashed it against the side of a truck. That image haunts me even now, making me forget that I am free. I saw a German officer who had ripped a child away from its mother roar: “You wanted a war, well, here it is!” Mothers pleaded to be shot, and the Germans eagerly did them this favor. The Jewish police of the ghetto, lured to the fort under the threat of death, gave away the hiding places where mothers were concealing themselves and their children.

And the day ended like all of the others—the heavens did not open and the earth did not turn red. The little bodies were buried, the eyes of their mothers dried.

We were expecting new tortures. The days of individualized terror began again. They counted us every day, escape became impossible. In the camps, they dressed people in Sing-Sing pajamas,¹⁶ shaved their heads and herded them out to work like zebras. They separated me from my parents and sent me to the camp at Shantsy.

16. The clothing of the prisoners in the concentration camp.

But the end was approaching. On July 9 [1944], we were stunned to see suspicious troop movement, and we realized that our moment had come. One Feldwebel, seeing us riding along in a convoy, stared at us wide-eyed and yelled: “*So was lebt Noch?*” [Something like this is still alive?]. This phrase contained the answer to the question of our fate.

And after that? Boxcars packed with people, with the words of a German officer in our ears: “We won’t hand you over to the Red barbarians.” So I jumped through a window from the train while it was traveling at full speed; the prospect of seeing the “New Europe” did not appeal to me.

Three weeks in the rye fields. The sweetness of liberation! I woke up. I am without a yellow star, I am no longer a dog or a slave. I am standing in the middle of the ruins of the ghetto and I do not recognize this place.

Vengeance!

GARF f. 8114, op. 1, d. 953, ll. 3–8. A typewritten manuscript with handwritten corrections.

65. Extermination of the Jewish children in Kaunas

ACCOUNT OF MARIA ILINICHNA YAROVSKAYA

The Germans built a ghetto that turned into a death camp in Slobodka, beyond the Vilia River. Periodically, executioners would show up there and exterminate several thousand inhabitants. This was called the “cleansing” of the ghetto. So, on December 17, 1941, more than 10,000 people were removed from the ghetto and shot. In August 1943, a certain Goecke came to Kaunas; he was already known in Poland as “the butcher in white gloves.” He had just carried out the liquidation of the Warsaw and Vilnius ghettos. Once in Kaunas, what interested this German beast most of all was whether or not there were many children left in the ghetto. On October 27, [1943], the Germans collected 3,500 women and children and herded them to the station. There they separated the children from their mothers and poisoned them. The children were dying before their mothers’ eyes. But some of the children were left with their families. Goecke issued a special order for the immediate handing over of all children. It was announced that severe punishment awaited those who evaded carrying out this order. A couple named Zeller was publicly executed for failing to hand over their child to the butchers. The unfortunate parents were beaten, forced to sit on a red hot stove, and had needles shoved under their fingernails. When they lost consciousness, they were carried to the gallows. Holding their victims in the nooses in a way that was calculated not to kill them, the Germans took them down and put off completing the execution until the next day. Then they lashed the father to a stake and lit a fire beneath his feet. They stripped the mother naked and continued to torture her.

“That’s how it will go with anyone who puts up resistance to us,” Goecke announced through a megaphone.

66. Killing the Jews in the shtetl of Stoklishki

ACCOUNTS OF MARIA YARMOLINSKAYA AND SARA EPSHTEYN

RECORDED BY MAJOR Z. G. OSTROVSKY

[1944]

I met several Jewish women in the Lithuanian shtetl of Stoklishki. They were walking along, trembling and looking around with every step. The town had already been in the hands of the Red Army for several days. These women had seen with their own eyes how the Red Army, sweeping the enemy before them, was liberating their country. They had seen the Germans running, throwing away their weapons, equipment, clothing, and booty as they went. Even so, the horrors that they had lived through over the previous three years had left such deep sadness in their faces that they would not easily be able to free themselves from it.

They had seen the brown-shirted plague destroy Jewish towns and shtetls. These women had been witnesses to shootings and mass *auto-da-fé* that the Germans had organized in Kaunas. Near the Ninth Fort, there is a place that the Jews called “the Altar” (*Mizbeakh* in Hebrew). Masha Yarmolinskaya was a witness to how five respected Jewish families of Kaunas were burned alive. She saw with her own eyes how the butchers armed with submachine guns escorted several hundred Jewish children through the streets of the Kaunas ghetto. Among them were three- and four-year-old toddlers. The children had been torn from the arms of their parents. Mothers rushed to save their little ones, so the Germans released the dogs from their leashes. They hurled themselves on the women, sank fangs into their arms, tried to bite at their throats. The mothers jumped back, howling, and their unfortunate children were led away to be shot.

The Germans snatched the sick mother of Khaya Shuster of the shtetl of Stoklishki. For five years, she had been lying in bed without moving. The entire family, exhausting itself, had tried to prolong the life of their mother, to ease her sufferings. It would have been better for her to have died from her illness without living to see the day when these repulsive enemies of humanity showed their faces in her house. They grabbed her from her bed and dragged her off like a sheep to be slaughtered.

Khaya Efron gave birth to a child. The next day, they snatched her along with her newborn, threw them into a cart, and hauled them away to Butrimantsy, a shtetl where mass “actions” had been carried out against the Jews. Another woman, the pregnant Feyga Miller, was seized by the butchers on the day when she was supposed to give birth. They dragged her to a car. She was struggling and moaning; her Lithuanian neighbors saw how the innocent woman was struggling. One dared to say: “What are you doing? Can’t you see that she’s just about to give birth?” The Germans then grabbed this Lithuanian as well and took him off to be executed along with the Jews.

As Sara Epshteyn tells the story, her mother, not wanting to wait to be executed, took poison along with the Rabinoviches (a married couple and both of them doctors), and died by her own hand. There were many other cases of suicides, but one can hardly remember or name them all.

There were hundreds of reported cases of Lithuanian peasants hiding Jews who had fled the ghetto in their own homes. The very same Epshteyn family—eight people—hid out for more than three years with thirty Lithuanian peasants in various villages and homesteads. These were complete strangers who had not known this Jewish family before the war. In the village of Romashishki they were hidden by the Lithuanian Vevioras Antonevich; in the village of Vashtatany by Khmelevsky and Gavinovsky; in the village of Yaromlishki, by Tarasevich and Milevich. A Roman Catholic priest from the village of Vysoky Dvor concealed Vilna Jews in his home. And to this day, Jewish women, girls, and children who were saved from the Nazis live with Lithuanian peasants as though they were family. Lithuanians adopted many Jewish orphans, whom they are raising with redoubled tenderness, taking into account their tragedy. I saw such families in Troki and in Keydanyay, Zhizhmory, Preny, Yevno, and Stoklishki, as well as in Vilna and Kaunas themselves.

The bestial German behavior toward Jews in Lithuania demands a thorough investigation. The criminals must answer for everything with blood. As these lines are being written, the Red Army is not making a bad job of seeing to this already, even as it is approaching Germany's very borders.

Now, peace has come to Kaunas and Vilna. A few isolated families that miraculously survived the fascist terror are returning. Soviet organizations have already begun excavating in the area of the Kaunas forts where the mass "actions" against the Jews were committed. Shocking new accounts of the inhumane tortures and sufferings to which Jewish people guilty of nothing at all were subjected in these cities have already been found and will soon be given a public hearing.

GARF f. 8114, op. 1, d. 963, ll. 97–99. A typewritten manuscript with handwritten corrections.

67. The shtetl of Stoklishki

THE RECOLLECTIONS OF RASHA SHUSTER

[1944]

On June 22, 1941, our little town of Stoklishki heard the sad news that the barbarian murderer, who maligns our people, had burst into Lithuanian territory along with his fascist gang of hooligans. This sad news struck like thunder and penetrated the heart of every Jew from young to old. Every Jew felt and knew that Hitler meant evil for us. Yet we somehow did not want to believe that the end of our young days of innocence had come. We felt it right away. The sky of our lives immediately filled with gray clouds. A savage, Lithuanian, fascist band of hooligans started to chase after us. The scoundrel Hitler had untied their bestial paws, and the savages immediately

began to dig their dirty claws into our pure, innocent Jewish hearts. They tore, tortured, and clawed our hearts until they ripped them out; they spilled pure, innocent blood on all the fields and sowed them with corpses. In our towns there was a sign hanging over every Jewish door saying that Jews lived there, and they put yellow patches on our arms. I, however, decided, that I would not put on such a thing, even if it meant being shot. But they soon gave the order to tear them off and to sew the Jewish symbol—two triangles—in their place: one on the chest and one on the back. All Communists and propagandists were supposed to appear at six o'clock. If anyone delayed, he was immediately shot or hauled off to jail. Jewish doors and windows had to be shut by eight o'clock. Anyone who did not have shutters was made to hang black curtains, and no Jew was to appear either on the street or in the courtyard of his building before 6:00 A.M.

No sooner would someone appear than he was arrested. One case is worth remarking on. A ninety-year-old man came into the synagogue to pray, and, after finding no one there, sat down on a log to wait for other worshippers. A Lithuanian bandit came up to him, began to beat him, and took him off to prison. The old, ill, and nearly blind Jew, named Shmerl-Leyb, barely dragging his feet, went to jail escorted by this hooligan. Similar tragedies occurred daily. At night, they would deliberately open fire so that Jews would come running outside and they could shoot them. We would run to the cellar every night and carry our mother, Khaya-Riva by name, who had been ill with her nerves for five years. But this was only fear, after all. After that, they got down to practical work. A month after the invasion by these bloodthirsty beasts, they led forty of the sturdiest young men and women out of our little town. They told them that they were taking them out to work; this was only a pretext, however, and two weeks later the police ordered more people to report. And those who went there were rarely released. Barbarians were standing at the police station with rifles, and immediately in front of them were the worst bandits and criminals. And still they seized another seventy people and took them to another small town twenty-eight kilometers from ours and shot them there. Just before their deaths they were ordered to write letters saying that they were alive and working. But this was only a ruse so that the rest would not be frightened and think about fighting back. Quietly, like sheep, calmly and without resistance they went to the slaughter, not knowing where they were being led.

We were a family of ten. I had three sisters: one was named Dvoyra, the second Ester, and the third, married and younger than I, Lyusya. I also had two brothers: a married brother named Isaak and an older brother named Zeylik. There were my sisters-in-law, a brother-in-law, and my ailing mother. My father had vanished without a trace; where he went I myself do not know. Perhaps he took off for Russia. I have not had any news of him; perhaps he is still alive somewhere. No one from our house was taken out those two times, supposedly to be led to work. We had a small plot of land, you see, and worked it ourselves, and so they could not take us away.

But when for the second time they began taking people away, we began to clear out of the house and hide in the fields. Our sick mother stayed in her bed alone. At night we would run home to see her. She lay there pale and weak, unable to believe that she was seeing us, just as we considered ourselves lucky that we could still come and see her for whom we were suffering so much. To kiss her pale, thin hands and to be racked with quiet, heartrending sobs. We could not allow ourselves to cry loudly; the local bandits were standing watch over every Jewish home at night.

I remember that when I came into the house, I was afraid even of the walls. A deathly silence reigned there. It was dark in every corner and it seemed to me that no one could be more unhappy than I was. Unfortunately, however, I was wrong; these were the happiest days of my unhappy life to come, when I was forced to go into hiding. For three weeks our entire family would assemble in this way, until one sad day, we learned that the next day, August 9, they would be taking away all the remaining Jews. We all took off from the house that night under the great, tragic impression that we were leaving our mother for the last time. I wanted to stay with my ill mother, but my mother sobbed that she would die if I stayed.

We took off, and the next day they took everyone to the nearby shtetl of Buttrtsymani, twelve kilometers away. They stood twelve thousand Jews beside open pits and stripped them. Anyone who did not want to undress was savagely beaten, and children were thrown alive into the pit. This was how they exterminated Jews in Lithuania, and it happened in this way everywhere the German barbarians went to work. I escaped along with my two sisters, and the others went individually. My sisters made for the home of a Russian, while I ran into a friend, and he took me with him. The next evening, I went to look for my sisters. I was walking along on a dark night, wandering alone, and suddenly I heard a familiar voice: "Rashka, is that you?" I recognized the voices of my unfortunate sisters. We were walking along through a field crying as though our hearts would break, not knowing where to go. We went to the nearest Russian bathhouse.

We stayed there for three weeks; a peasant would bring us food. His name was Vintsis Yaskutelis, and he took me into his home for a month where I stayed in the attic. My sisters stayed for weeks on end in the dilapidated barn of one of the neighbors, suffering from cold and hunger. This was in September. The neighbor knew nothing about this, and from time to time they would come to me at night to get warm. So it went until the final night. Toward morning, they went back to the farmer's place, and while they were giving their daughters something to eat, the father managed to go for the police. My sisters were shot on the spot. I stayed in the attic during all of this. I heard the shots which pierced the hearts of my young sisters and spilled their pure, innocent blood on the fields. I lay there quietly, entirely frozen, feeling neither alive nor dead. When the peasant came up and called to me, it seemed that I woke up. He told me that he could no longer harbor me and that that night he would take me into the village. No one there was taking anyone in either, and I was

forced to come back. My brother was hiding not far from here, and I went to him. I told him the sad news about our sisters and stayed with him for two weeks.

After that, they chased me out again. I went to another peasant's place where I stayed for only one day. I was lying low in the barn, when suddenly they called me to the house. I sat at the window and listened to the awful barking of a dog. I looked and saw a dreadful sight: a policeman standing out in the yard with a rifle in his hands, with another pacing by at the window. I did not know how I was going to escape but when they went to look for me in the barn, I jumped out of the window, crawled across the road on all fours and then went into the forest. I was in the forest for the first time. I came out onto the road, but I did not know where to go. A cold, autumn wind hit my face, along with a light snow. I remembered that a Russian woman, an acquaintance named Malanya Griboy, lived somewhere on the edge of the forest. I found a small grayish-black hut, knocked at the window, and they let me in. I lived there for two and a half months. In January I learned that my brother Isaak had been shot. They chased me out of there, too, because the police were on the hunt for Jews again.

This was in January 1942. There was a minus-forty-degree frost, tall snow drifts covered the fields, there was nowhere to go, so I left for the Jewish cemetery. I hid there for a day before the police came to look for me. The peasants had seen me and I heard the police questioning them. So I turned my back and thought: "Let them shoot me, so that I won't have to see the criminals." By chance, they did not find me. The next day I went back into the forest, where I lived for a week in the winter snow. It was clear that if the peasants found out about me, I would have to get out of there. My feet swelled up, I could barely walk, my hands became terribly swollen as well. Streaks like icicles appeared on all of my fingers. From the forest I go out again into the cemetery and lie there for two days without food, and feel that I no longer have the strength to stand the cold and hunger. I would get up in the night. There is a fierce frost, not even the dog is barking; he lies there in his house. And I am alone, hungry, walking on my own. I do not know where the wind is coming from and the frost is hitting me in the face, and I fall. I return to the cemetery and sit down in a corner where the day before they had shot two Jews. I slip in and sit down in Jewish blood because that spot had been shielded from the wind. I sit there for a third day, and at night walk through the fields, barely dragging my feet through the snow. I come to a peasant's place; he gives me bread, but does not allow me to warm myself and chases me away. I go off to the place of a peasant woman who lives next door, and stay there for a day. The police turn up in the evening, informed by the peasants. I leap from the roof and run off into the fields. Upon returning to the peasants when the police had gone, I come upon a Russian¹⁷ who agrees to take me in for a day. I lie down in his sled, he covers me with hay, and takes me toward his place.

17. The author misspeaks here; the rescuer's name below is clearly Lithuanian.

On the way there, he tells me that I will not be able to stay with him after all. With great difficulty I prevail upon him and he takes me home. But I felt awful from all that I had been through.

A tumbledown, smoky little house, all white inside from snow, a half-ruined stove without a pipe, and dirt everywhere. I climbed onto the stove and warmed myself a bit. I stayed with him and lived there for two and a half years. The poor peasant, a forty-five-year old plowman by the name of Yuzus Yaskutelis, lived alone. He would buy bread and give me some of it. And when I asked him why he was doing this and risking his life—if the police had caught me at his place they would have shot us both, after all—he answered that it was because I was not guilty of anything. When the German search teams were operating, he would take me everywhere, digging holes in other people's granaries and hiding me. He would take me out into the forest, where I stayed for a week at a time and more. There were times when German spies would tell him that they knew that I was at his place, and then I was forced to take off for anywhere that I could. To lie beneath the burning sun in the summer and to claw at the earth with my fingernails in order to give myself cover. I would go for two or three days without food. I would take bread and water with me; the water I would drink straight away, but I could not swallow the bread afterward. I lived with this peasant in this way for two and a half years. And on July 14, 1944, the Red Army came and liberated us.

I forgot the most important thing. I am the sole survivor of the village of Stoklishki.¹⁸ All of my brothers and sisters were shot.

GARF f. 8114, op. 1, d. 955, ll. 56–63. A manuscript.

68. What happened in Telshyay to the entire Jewish population of Zhmud¹⁹
ACCOUNTS OF LOCAL INHABITANTS NESYA MISELEVICH, VEKSLER, AND
YAZHGUR
RECORDED BY L. YERUSALIMSKY²⁰

Nesya Miselevich:

When the war broke out, I was in Taurogen. I fled to Roseynay [Rossiyeni]. In Roseynay the Germans and local fascists had already been wreaking havoc. They were arresting men and women and herding them out to work. While they were working, the women were subjected to all sorts of humiliations. The arrested men were first sent to do forced labor in the forests; there they were abused and tortured.

18. Compare with the previous testimony.

19. Zhmud (Zemaitija) is a region located in northwestern Lithuania. Telshyay is considered to be the capital of the region.

20. Lazar (Eliezer) Yeruslimsky kept a diary of the Siauliai ghetto, which was published in Hebrew in Tel Aviv in 1959. In 1944–1945, at the request of Ilya Ehrenburg, he assembled eyewitness accounts of massacres of Jews and sent them to the Literary Commission of *The Black Book*.

On July 15, [1941], I left Roseynay for Plunge (Plungyany). There were no more Jews in Plunge; they had already been liquidated on July 7 and 8. I went to the hamlet of Laukovo. I spent one night in Laukovo. In the morning, our house was surrounded by the local white bandits.²¹ They came into the house, supposedly to make a search, but in fact grabbed everything of value that they found. After that, they herded all the Jews into the synagogue; these were almost entirely women and children, since the men had already been deported to Germany a week earlier to do forced labor (we in Shavli received letters from Germany from some of them—the Kaganov brothers who ran a flour mill in Laukuvo, and Smelyansky from Smaleninkesh—at first from the camp at Lauksergen, later from camps in Silesia with the stamp *Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland, Berlin* [Reich Association of Jews in Germany, Berlin]). They told me in the synagogue that the Germans were raiding the homes of Jewish inhabitants at night and stealing everything of value. They were torturing the men. They had beaten up a rabbi, shaved off half of his beard; they made threats to the women, saying that they would shoot them all. They took two young girls and a boy, members of the Komsomol, to the Jewish cemetery, made them dig a hole, then shot them. It was crowded in the synagogue. They would not allow food to be brought in, they would not allow anyone to go outside. Every so often, the bandits would burst into the synagogue, jeer at the prisoners, and threaten to shoot them all.

Then the Germans began spreading rumors that they were all to be taken to Lublin or to the firing range.

On July 23, when it was raining terribly hard, heavy trucks rolled up to the synagogue and the Germans herded some of their prisoners into them. The next day, the twenty-fourth, another group was driven away, including me. They let us out in a large enclosure in which there were horse stables with dirt floors and with two tiers of bunks. It was filthy in the stables and in the bunks. Even so, those who arrived later were given even worse places to stay, in barns knocked together from thin boards with big holes in them, or in storerooms without walls. This was in Vishvyany near Telshyay. Life there was awful. They gave us 150 grams of bread per day. They would not allow us to go out to buy food. Anyone who went out fell into the hands of the guards and was beaten in the cruelest way imaginable.

The commandant of the camp, Alexandrovicius Platakis, and the Anzilevicius brothers particularly distinguished themselves by their cruelty. Dirt and lice increased the sufferings of the people even more. The bandits would burst into the camp by night, drag young women out, then have their way with them.

To avoid these night raids, the women themselves organized duty shifts, and the women on duty would not even let the guards in at night. These nocturnal scandals came to an end then. Upon entering the camp, everyone was picked clean by the

21. Lithuanian collaborators who wore white armbands.

guards. What did the women tell me about what was happening in the Reynyay and Vishvyany camps?

In the Vishvyany camps, where I myself was, and in the nearby Gerulyay camp there were only women and children. There were no longer any men. They had been done away with in the Reynyay camp.

They had the following story to tell about what happened in Reynyay:

On June 26, the Germans gathered the entire Jewish population of the town of Telshay around the lake; they posted machine guns around them and announced: "We're going to try the force of machinery on you, and may your God help you." The rabbi of Telshay replied to this with: "It won't do you any good to laugh at our God. He's the same for us and for you." (He later paid for this insolence.)

They kept the Jews under the threat of death for a long time and then let them go to their homes. On June 27, they released the women, but they kept the men behind.

On June 27, that is, the next day, all those who were still free were herded onto the estate of the well-known singer Kipras Petrauskas—the Reynyay camp. The men who had been arrested a day earlier were taken there as well. Along with the Reynyay camp, another camp, Vishvyany, was opened for the Jews of the shtetls in the environs of Telshay.

The resettlement of the Jews of Telshay and the surrounding shtetls was carried out in the course of an hour, meaning that those displaced had the chance to take only their vital necessities with them. The property remaining in their homes, of course, was looted.

Upon entering the camp, everyone had to hand over their valuables to the guards and the Germans on pain of death. They began abusing and humiliating everyone living in the camps, particularly the men, who were driven to desperation. One torture stands out most clearly—the so-called "devil's dance."

Around July 18, 1941, two Gestapo agents came to the Reynyay camp along with an entire detachment of local bandits. They called out several men and forced them to dig several large pits, the purpose of which these unfortunates did not even guess.

The next day, the Gestapo again called out all the men. They locked the women in the barracks, with the exception of those who happened just then to be collecting valuables to be handed over to their butchers. They encircled them with armed guards, and then one of the Gestapo men made a speech to the following effect: "You, the Jews, have mounted a conspiracy against the entire cultured world. You, along with the Bolsheviks, have ignited a worldwide conflagration, and because of that, the hour of retribution has arrived. You will pay for the evil that you have done." When he had finished, he gave an order, and the ring of guards around those assembled grew tighter, and a dreadful torture began.

The Gestapo officer gave an order and all the prisoners formed a circle. Then he "explained" to them the meaning of different commands: "Run! Fall down! Run fast,

turn right, turn left" and so on, and the "gymnastics" started. The executioners put sticks in between everyone's legs, then they had to run, turn, fall down, bend, jump, and so on like this. Local fascist bandits followed behind them, beating them with clubs and rifle butts. Anyone who fell was finished off on the spot with gun butts. Many of the old and weak left the formation and were tortured where they fell. Some of the younger ones picked up the weakened and the fallen and took them on their shoulders and ran along with them, but the butchers would beat them all together. The commands came faster and faster with every passing moment, the pace was picking up, so that those running were gasping for breath and becoming even more tired. The butchers would hit them even harder. The number of those who had fallen out of the formation was steadily increasing, and those left in the ranks were using up their last strength, while the executioners kept on beating and torturing them more and more.

Women, sisters, and mothers were looking out from the barracks through wide chinks and wringing their hands, pleading, fainting, while the butchers laughed. One of the women caught up among the guards could not stand it anymore and collapsed half dead. Just then, another one, who was carrying valuables collected for the butchers, pleaded with the guards to let her go, so that she could bring some water to save the exhausted woman, but the guards would not allow it. "Let that kike woman croak," Commandant Platakis said and refused permission. Then one of the women in the barracks broke out, burst through the chain of guards, and brought water. This dance went on for three whole hours. Only when all were absolutely exhausted and could no longer stand on their feet, were beaten and bloodied, did they let them go.

The tortured, beaten men, faces twisted in pain from suffering and abuse, returned to their home, the barracks. With no more strength, humiliated, they did not say a word—they were scarcely even breathing—and climbed directly into the bunks (in the words of Veksler, the wife of the director of the Telshay national bank). At that moment they had been stripped of all will of their own. Nothing mattered to them, just so long as it would all be over as soon as possible.

The end did come very soon. That same night (approximately July 20–21), thirty-three men, for the most part between the ages of twenty and twenty-five, one of them the Yeshivah teacher Rabbi Avner, were taken away from the barracks and did not come back. Their cries and moans could be heard throughout the night. As people who were in the barracks close to the place of execution tell the story, and as the butchers themselves boasted, including the Inzulevich brothers, they were tortured the entire night. They bound them and lowered their heads into the waters of the lake, pulling them out half drowned; then they would revive them and plunge them in again. The butchers took turns beating them about the head with gun butts, and tortured them until they breathed their last. Their bodies were the first to fill the pits.

Early the next morning, the butchers burst into the barracks and shouted: "Rabbis and half-rabbis (Telshyay was a center of rabbinical seminaries) come out!" Then they called all the men out of the barracks and formed them up outside. They led them out in groups of fifteen to twenty to a nearby grove in which pits had already been dug; bursts of submachine gunfire were heard from there. This slaughter went on all day Tuesday until four o'clock. All at once a storm blew up, and the butchers wanted to go home. They were so unashamed of themselves that they sent the last group back from the edge of the pit to the barracks. Those same victims were chosen the next day, Wednesday. They knew it already and went out to sure death. There was a lawyer named Abramovich whose wife and mother-in-law wanted to save him and could have saved him, but he did nothing about it, saying that he desired to be where the other Jews would be. (I asked those questioned how they explained such passivity on the part of the Reynyay victims, and they told me that the tragedy had come upon everyone so unexpectedly that there was no time to make any preparations. Furthermore, no one imagined that the Germans, even Nazis, would be capable of killing women and children, and they cherished the hope that the women and children would be spared death. In the event of resistance or mass escape, they would have feared for the lives of their women and children.—L.Y.)

There were isolated cases of resistance. When they took Dr. Zaks from Retovo to be shot, his wife would not allow him to go alone, and went with him along with her infant. The butchers drove her back, but she would not give in, struggling, cursing the executioners with the harshest language she knew. The butchers finally grew tired of dealing with the unhappy woman, and they did her the service of shooting her and her child.

Itskhak Blok asked for permission to say a few words before his death. His executioners allowed it. He stood up and said: "Now you are shedding our innocent blood. The time will come when your damn blood will spray the pavement." They beat him to death with their rifle butts.

Each group of those shot was covered with a thin layer of sand, then another group was shot on top of them. There were many cases of wounded people who were still alive being covered over. The following story is told of one such example. Leybzon from Laukovo was taken up to a pit along with others and there was made to cover those who had just been shot. When he began sprinkling them with sand, he burst into loud sobs; he had heard from the pit the voices of his own children, who had been taken out with the previous party. "Father! Don't cover us over! We're still alive!"

This slaughter continued on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. Approximately five thousand men from Telshyay and its surrounding shtetls were exterminated. The earth on top of the pits was heaving the entire time, since many had been buried alive. For an entire week after this, blood burst from the pits like a fountain.

For several days after this massacre, life in the camp came to a virtual standstill. The women and even the children lost interest in life. No one would go out of the

camp for food, no one would even accept any food from the hands of the butchers. They even stopped taking care of their small children. The only desire of each one was to somehow break out of the camp and to steal up to that awful place where their loved ones had perished, to follow the fountain of blood with horror, to find among the clothes and shoes left behind something belonging to a loved one and to feel the earth heaving beneath their feet (in Veksler's words).

Seven days after the slaughter, all those still alive were transferred to the new camp at Gerulyay. At Gerulyay, everything was even dirtier than at Reynyay. The lice problem was unbearable. Lice were everywhere: in one's clothes, on the walls, even in the bushes by the river. The food there was terrible. The assigned work in the forests and fields was too much for them.

The nights were awful. The exhausted women would hallucinate: the entire barracks appeared full of the ghosts of the dead before their suffering eyes. The horror of what they were suffering was made even greater by the abuse of the guards who threatened and shot them. To make the terror greater, the butchers spread rumors that the entire camp was to be liquidated soon, that the date for this liquidation had even been set. They would talk about the separation of children from their mothers, about new acts of extermination. And each time the terrified women would send delegations to town to ask for help. They went to see Staugautis, the local bishop of the Roman Catholic church; Romanauskas, the district governor; and other close acquaintances. No one, however, could offer any help. The bishop spoke out against the butchers several times in the cathedral. Others expressed sympathy, but, of course, nothing came of any of this. Others, like Romanauskas, scared off the delegations. There would be no more hope of rescue.

Rumors of the liquidation of the camp were becoming more and more persistent. On top of all that, various epidemics were raging in the camp: typhus, diphtheria, and others. The majority of the small children died in them, since there were neither doctors nor medicines, and those children who were sent to the local hospital also died as a result of poor care. Some seven weeks after the establishment of the camp, two trucks full of armed bandits pulled up to the gates and surrounded the camp with armed guards. Commandant Platakis and his bandits feasted throughout the night. That night, he invited the representatives of the camp—Yazhgur, Blokh, and Fridman—to come and see him, and demanded the last remaining valuables in the camp as a bribe for stopping the planned "action." The frightened women made the rounds of the barracks and gathered what was left from the whole camp, saying that in this way they would buy their way out of the slaughter that was being prepared. At 2:00 AM, the representatives brought their final cash installment to the commandant, and found him and his accomplices in a state of complete drunkenness. The commandant deigned to accept the money and valuables—around thirty thousand rubles and several dozen wedding rings—and promised to spare the camp.

Early in the morning, however, the bandits burst into the camp, awakened everyone, and ordered them to come out into the yard, saying that the camp had to be prepared for evacuation. They advised everyone to take only good things with them and to bring them out into the yard. And indeed, carts belonging to peasants who had been ordered to come were standing there. Everyone got dressed, took their last remaining belongings, and went out into the yard. They were immediately hemmed in by a closely packed formation of bandits and ordered to sit down on the ground. They began separating them into groups: young women and girls up to around the age of thirty were placed on the right; the others—old women and boys regardless of age—on the left.

At first, the disconcerted women did not understand the significance of the two sides, but afterward, when they guessed that those standing on the left were marked for death, they began to jostle each other to get to the right. But the bandits were no longer allowing anyone to pass from one formation to another. On the right were about four hundred people; on the left, several thousand. Those on the right were sent on foot and by cart to the ghetto at Telshyay, while those on the other side remained where they were. There were cases in which the bandits themselves wanted to move someone or other to the right, but the victims themselves preferred death to leaving their loved ones to die alone.

Yazhgur received a special "favor" from Commandant Platakis, and he took her and her daughters (who died in the summer of 1944 in action with the partisans) under his personal protection, installing them in his own room. Yazhgur, however, also had a son, who was unusually gifted (in 1941 he had been sent to art school), and he ended up going to the left. All her pleas to have him brought over to the right were of no help. The mother, then, went to die with her son of her own free will. One of the bandits wanted to bring the girl Ioselevich over to the right, but she insisted on bringing her aging mother with her; to this the bandit refused. Three times he offered to take her over to the other side, but she would not go without her mother, and with her mother she went to be shot.

There were many similar cases.

The slaughter began—women were taken out of the ranks in groups of fifteen or twenty to the nearest grove, where pits had already been dug. They were ordered to undress and were shot. They did not want to waste bullets on children, so they took them by the legs and smashed their little heads against trees, then threw them into the pit.

Mira Shlemovich, who escaped from the pit, saw for herself how one of the bandits took a seven-year-old child out of his bed, and before the eyes of his mother (Dveyre Levi from Laukovo) smashed his head against the side of the bed. Yet there were also cases in which mothers themselves asked the executioners to shoot their own naked young daughters before their eyes, so that they would not be raped.

The massacre went on for an entire day, and about four thousand women and children died in it.

The butchers looted belongings and divided them up among themselves or sold them to peasants who had gathered around. In the evening, after this "job" had been accomplished, the bandits drove two heavy trucks to the next town. Along the way they were howling and laughing. Madame Veksler was a witness to this. On that day of slaughter, she was working at a peasant's place, and on the advice of the man (who in all probability knew what was happening) stayed with him. She saw the butchers returning from their glorious "work"; they were singing songs in high spirits.

A new life began for the four hundred women who were still alive. They were lodged in several small houses. There was no furniture, bedding, or pillows. They had to sleep on the floor. The inhabitants of the ghetto received next to no rations, and they had to feed themselves by begging.

Some of them escaped to the Shavli ghetto. The rest lived until Christmas, 1941. On Christmas Day, 1941, the bandits gathered everyone still left in the ghetto and dispatched them to be shot. A small number of them ran off; they were caught, held in jail without food or water, and in the cold, and, half-dressed and barefoot, were then taken out to be shot. The Jews of Zhmud, of the shtetls of Rietovo, Alseday, Akmyane, Telshyay, and other towns died in this way. Only three ghettos remained in the whole of Lithuania—Vilnius (about 22,000), Kaunas (about 17,000) and Shavli (4,000).

The Jews of Alseday suffered the most bitter fate of all. They were protected there by the town's Roman Catholic priest and prelate. He stood among the Jews and said to the bandits: "You'll go to your bloody work over my dead body." The bandits held back. At the demand of the priest, the bandits allowed the Jews to be evacuated, taking provisions and belongings with them, even farm implements and livestock—horses, cows, goats, and chickens.

In Telshyay, however, they were made to do convict labor, and in the end were killed. On the last day, they were harnessed to carts full of stones and made to drag the load through the town. Along the way, the bandits beat them with their gun butts. Some were beaten to death, while those remaining were taken out of the camp and shot.

The last four hundred women living in the ghetto were liquidated on Christmas Day, 1941. Some ran away and were caught. They were held in prison for four or five days in rags and barefoot, and then, half-naked, were taken out and shot.

Several dozen managed to survive until September 1944. They lived in dugouts until they were discovered and executed. The man who had been keeping them, a Lithuanian named Bladis, was tied to the tails of two horses and dismembered.

L. Yerusalimsky

GARF f. 8114, op. 1, d. 960, ll. 101–125. The original manuscript.

69. Slaughter in the shtetl of Utyan

THE RECOLLECTIONS OF TSODIK YAKOVLEVICH BLEYMAN

[1945]

As the sole living witness, I am able to share the following.

I arrived in Utyan on July 25, 1941. My father was Rabbi Yakov Bleyman, the former rabbi of Karasubazar in the Crimea; he had recently been a rabbi in Utyan. I also had a brother-in-law, Efraim Yudelovich, who lived there with his family. I was in Kovna when the war broke out. I decided to go to my parents' place and to be evacuated along with them if necessary. But that was no longer possible: the Germans entered the town on the day of my arrival. Our fate was determined in advance; we were destined to die.

Thursday. The first day of the German regime. Dozens of Jews are herded out to work. They are taken to the Germans and to their assistants, the Lithuanian fascists. The work is entirely unnecessary, useless, good only for abusing Jews: to chase them around for days on end with brooms, shovels, and other tools. They are given nothing to eat. Only isolated groups manage to beg for a bit of bread. When they return home from work, the condition of the Jews is even worse. German units, along with Lithuanian scum, are killing them and stealing their goods and property. This state of affairs continues uninterrupted for a week. Over this period, not a single Jewish building remains intact. Dozens of Jews are killed. Fear of death grows stronger and stronger. In the morning, they waited for the evening, and in the evening they waited for the morning. "Order" was established in the town.

The first step toward "order" was the humiliation of the Jews. The scoundrels came along with Lithuanian bandits and tossed out all the Torah scrolls, books, and other things from three synagogues. They brought my father, an old man, to the place where all the books had been thrown out, and ordered him to tear them up and burn them. He refused. So the murderers set fire to his beard, while one of them shot him.

They brought my father back in very serious condition. His brother-in-law operated on him. The operation was a success and he could have recovered. New misfortunes begin, however. Jews are forbidden to show themselves on the main streets unaccompanied, and on every Jewish house appears the inscription "Jew." Jews are made to sew two yellow patches on their clothes—one in front and one in back. Gentiles are forbidden to have any dealings with Jews, and yet they are arrested for that reason without any basis in fact. All the synagogues are turned into prisons, and in addition to these there is still the old, large, and spacious prison. They also arrested two Jewish doctors and their families: my brother-in-law Yudelovich and Dr. Aks. They left one Jewish doctor alone for the time being, but later on they lured him in and killed him as well. In addition to the large number of those arrested, they took another forty-one hostages, among them Zurata, the Jewish vice-bürgermeister²² of Utyan, and other prominent citizens of the town. More than a month went by. Everyone was living in the shadow of death. The terror against the Jews did not diminish. The struggle for a crust of bread became more and more difficult.

22. Essentially, the deputy mayor of the town.

On July 14, 1941, at 6:00 AM, the following decree was posted on walls: All Jews in Utyan would have to leave the town by twelve noon. Anyone found after that time would be shot. One has to walk two versts through the forest from the town, along the road to Malat.²³ At 7:00 AM, though, armed Lithuanians chased many Jews from their homes and arrested them as well. A terrible state of anxiety arose. The Jews wanted to escape into the forest as quickly as possible. Everything looked awful. The population of several thousand Jews was forced to leave the places in which they had always lived, where they had spent their entire lives, to go into the forest with their possessions in little knotted bags, not realizing what was waiting for them there.

Lithuanian police and Germans were posted near the forest and examined the bags. They confiscated money, gold, silver, and all valuable items. The forest was under guard. They were strictly forbidden to spread out over long distances. Building a fire was not allowed either. It was possible to fetch a bit of cold water if escorted by one of the sentries. They were told that they would be held for only three days and that during that time they would enclose a ghetto in town for the Jews. They believed that things would turn out this way, but it took longer than three days.

The situation in the forest was becoming worse and worse: more people were sick and there was no medical care. All those in the synagogues and in the main prison were shot. Some of the hostages were taken into the forest in order to show them that no more Jews would be killed. Everyone dreamed of finally being let into the ghetto. On August 1, 1941, the police came into the forest and registered all men and women between the ages of seventeen and sixty. They thought that this was for work. I registered, too.

After that, they took me and ten other Jews to work, and the rest remained in the forest. They took us to the job: we worked late into the night cleaning up a ruined house. Just before evening, they led a group of around four or five hundred Jews out of the forest past us. Among them was the young Utyan rabbi Nakhman Girshovich, and Zurata with both of his sons. They were taking them in the direction of the prison. We thought that they would take us there as well, but they marched us back to the forest. In the forest, we found all the men ready to return to the town. At the last minute, though, a policeman turned up and whispered something to the other agents. After that, they dismissed everyone and gave the order to go back into the forest. Another week passed this way. The Russians secretly communicated that the group that had been led away had been shot.

But they did not believe these rumors, and they did not spread them in the forest; this would have deeply affected the women whose husbands had been taken away. On Thursday, August 7, they drove us all out to work at dawn. Just as before, we did not notice anything in particular at the time. I kissed my father and mother goodbye, certain that I would come back after work. Unfortunately, this was the last time. I never

23. A verst is equal to about 3,500 feet, about two-thirds of a mile.

saw the deep, kind-hearted eyes of my father again, and would no longer touch the trembling hands of my mother. I was saying goodbye to them forever. They told us that they were taking us out to work. There were three hundred of us; three sentries escorted us. They took us to the jail, searched us carefully, confiscated everything, and left us there to wait for the boss. There were more Jews in the prison yard brought from Lelig, Malat, Aniksht, and other shtetls near Utyan. We were forbidden to talk to them. At midday a German from the Gestapo arrived. He formed us all into rows of four. The warden of the prison appeared and ordered those who were wearing outer clothing to take it off, explaining, "Now you're going to go work a bit." We walked out of the prison. Before us was the following scene: a group of Jewish women standing in ranks four deep, with columns of armed Lithuanians facing them on two sides. They began leading us off; as soon as we were outside of town, they began beating and chasing us. They chased us in this way for some distance. Anyone who fell along the way was shot, while the rest were beaten and chased. We asked to die, as we were in no condition to take any more.

All at once they ordered the men to lie face down on the ground and the women to continue walking. We heard gunshots and women's cries. When they had finished off the women—this went on for around twenty minutes—they ordered the men to keep on going. And once more the same: shooting, cries, then silence. My turn came next. We were all young, strong men, and we quietly agreed to defend ourselves as best as we possibly could. The place of slaughter had the following appearance: a hillock enclosed on three sides by woods, with a swampy landscape stretching out below it, overgrown with dense grass, shrubs, and low trees. Trenches three to four meters deep and up to ten meters long had been dug in the hillock. A Lithuanian in uniform stood not far from the trenches. He was wearing a special mask that made him look like a scarecrow. He held a long whip in his hands with which he hit each man so as to make him jump into the trench as quickly as possible. A German with a light machine gun, shirtless, just like a butcher, stood off to one side from the trenches on our left, and was shooting the Jews as they approached the trenches. Not far away were several Germans and Lithuanians, including the *bürgermeister* and others whose names I did not know. The German with the machine gun ordered us to come up to the trench. We rushed him. I grabbed him by the legs and he fell. Bullets came down on us like hail from all sides.

I heard the moans of my other three friends, who had been killed beside me. Playing dead, I rolled down the hillock. Thanks to the high grass and the bog, crawling on my stomach, I managed to reach a watery pit, which was also full of dense overgrowth, several hundred meters from the place of execution. I lay there for an entire day in the water and breathed through a reed until nightfall. During this time I heard them bringing up new groups and shooting them. A heavy rain was falling and it was getting quite dark. I was nearly frozen, and decided to crawl out of the pit. I was warned a bit by the walk and made for the forest. I did not find anyone there.

Not knowing where to go, I walked down the road in the direction of Kovna. For six weeks or so I wandered through the forests, barely dressed and hungry, until I reached a camp in Kovna. There I found other Jews, and a life of suffering, privation, and fear started again. The year 1944 arrived. The Red Army was approaching the borders of Lithuania. We believed that they would free us, and our hope did not disappoint us.

I escaped from the camp in the spring, lying low in various places, and waited for liberation.

GARF f. 8114, op. 1, d. 959, ll. 141-144ob. Handwritten by the translator.

70. Killing the Jews of Sventsyany

A LETTER FROM A LOCAL RESIDENT NAMED GURYAN TO ILYA EHRENBURG
NOVEMBER 20, 1944

Dear Comrade Ehrenburg!

I received your letter of February 17 and am now replying. Excuse me for not writing in Russian. It is very difficult. I lived in Poland for 20 years.

Comrade Ehrenburg! You have given me a very difficult task. It is very hard to describe for you what we went through during the German-Lithuanian occupation; my nerves are too weak to describe everything. No matter how much I write, I will not be able to relate everything that I saw with my own eyes. I decided not to write to you. I hope that I will manage to come to Moscow, then I will tell you everything face to face. Comrade Ehrenburg, you probably know that toward the end of 1943, some Jews were taken away to Estonia. I was in Vilna just recently and spoke personally with a Jewish girl who survived the dreadful Estonian pogrom. They took them off on steamboats, telling them that they were being taken to East Prussia, but this was a lie. They threw them alive into the sea, some of the Jews were burned alive, while the rest were shot. This was how they liquidated the Jews of Estonia. Only forty people were saved. This is how they survived: they dug a forty-meter-long tunnel with their bare hands. They kept the earth beneath the bunks that they slept on.

Comrade Ehrenburg! October 9, 1944, was the third anniversary of the pogrom in Sventsyany. There is a common grave fourteen kilometers from Sventsyany. A few of us Jews gathered by this grave. The grave is five hundred meters long and seven meters wide. As soon as the Germans entered Sventsyany, on the very first day, they shot forty people. The White Lithuanian partisans did the shooting because the Germans did not yet know which Jew was a communist.

On July 30, 1941, they shot another one hundred people, among them the well-known Dr. Kovarsky. They made him suffer for a long time, holding him by the legs and lowering his head into a bog before shooting him.

After the pogrom, we were no longer allowed to walk on the sidewalks; we had to wear yellow stars on our chests and clean latrines with our bare hands. The Germans would sit in carts and make Jews take them places. I myself was forced to lie down

and stand up twenty times because I was walking on the sidewalk. On September 27, 1944, all the Jews in Sventsyany and the area around it were gathered in a camp two kilometers from the town of Novye Sventsyany. We had no water or food. There was no place to lie down or to stand up. They were killing us at every step. One day, Comrade Murashkin, a barber from Sventsyany, made a speech to the Jews. He predicted that they would all be killed, and said that they should prepare to defend themselves. To the Lithuanians he said that they were killing us today, but that there would come a time when they would be killed, when the Red Army would come. Then they tortured him to death.

You must have heard the weeping of mothers and children in Moscow. On October 9, 1941, they were all led to the pit in groups of thirty to forty, stripped naked, and shot; some were thrown into the pit alive, children were grabbed by the legs, their heads smashed against stones. Over a period of two days, they killed seven thousand Jews.

In the shtetl of Ionishki, they harnessed a Jew to a cart. Many Germans and Lithuanians got in and forced the Jew to pull the cart while they beat him with whips.

At the Lubany estate, seventeen Jews were cut up with a saw, each of them into three sections. In the small town of Duknin, POWs were bound to train cars with barbed wire in such a way that their knees touched the ties, then the train was run at full throttle, torturing the prisoners. In Novye Sventsyany, one Lithuanian led a POW on a chain like a dog.

That is enough for today. In the next letter, I will tell you about everything that you asked about.²⁴

Regards,

Guryan

GARF f. 8114, op. 1, d. 960, ll. 318–319. A typewritten manuscript.

71. A camp in Kotsynishki [Kochenishki]

A LETTER FROM THE WORKER ITSIK YUKHNIKOV²⁵

I am lying down but cannot sleep. Suddenly I hear a knock at the door. I look at my watch—two in the morning. “Open the door, it’s the police,” I open the door. Two policemen come in. They arrest me and take me to the station house. At the police station they tell me that they are sending me to Riga. They lead me to jail, where I find another eight comrades. Not far from the Kochenishki estate, they unload us and drive us along on foot: “Faster, faster, come on, faster.” We fall behind. They hit us about the head.

24. No other letters from this individual have been located in the archives of the JAC or among Ehrenburg’s papers.

25. On the first page of the document, there is a notation in the right margin that Itzik Yukhnikov was a worker from Kovno made to do forced labor on the Waffen SS estate at Kotsynishki (Lithuanian SSR).

Finally we reached the estate. First order: "If anyone tries to escape, we'll shoot all of you." They order us to take off our six-pointed stars. And then the second order: If we strike up a conversation with anyone, Lithuanian or Jewish, they will shoot us.

They give us a job. When we have not managed to finish it in two hours, we hear them yelling: "All Jews, over here." We present ourselves, then there is a new order. "Lie down! Get up! Lie down! Run!" We run to the Nevvyazha River. Again comes an order: "Into the water!" We go in. The water is up to our knees. We are ordered to keep going. But there is no way to go on; it is twelve or fifteen meters deep. A German sees that we cannot walk any farther and gives the command: "Lie down!" We lie down. For a whole hour they keep us in the water. Suddenly, another shout: "Crawl out!" We jump out of the river. "To work!" We set to work, but things are not going well. We are trembling, our teeth are chattering. We wait for night to come. They order us into our quarters. We get one hundred grams of bread and water. We head off to sleep.

We hear a drunken voice at three in the morning. "Everybody up!" We get up. "Jews, everyone here?" "Everyone." Immediately comes an order: "Everyone take turns lying down on the bench." I step out first. I take thirty lashes on my naked body. And then everyone else, one after another. In the morning we turn up for work. I see a truck going by a long way off; there are Jews in it. I yell: "Give my regards to the ghetto!" The Germans hear me, so I endure a few slaps. They take me to some sort of barn, order me to strip, and I receive thirty lashes. Because I am so weak, I am in no condition to move. They beat me again until I crawl out on my hands and knees.

Once, the Germans show up at two in the morning. They order everyone to get up and show whether or not their feet are clean. Obviously, in the sty that we were kept in along with the pigs, we could not have clean feet. The Germans look at our feet and every one of us—we are nine—suffers ten lashes. The Germans leave. Half an hour later, they turn up again and ask one of the fellows a question: "Was it a good meal?" "*Jawohl*, boss, it was a good meal." They order us to lie down on the bench again and we each receive five lashes. The Germans leave.

They reach the door, come back, and one of them barks: "Who sabotaged my motorcycle?" Everyone keeps their mouth shut, no one could say anything, no one had set eyes on the motorcycle. We each receive another fifteen lashes.

A couple of days go by. They leave us alone. Sunday comes. We go out to work. Toward ten o'clock or so, our boss runs up to me with the look of an animal on his face, drags me to the stove, and asks me a question about the Talmud. Before I can answer, he says: "It says in the Talmud that a Jew is allowed to violate a three-year-old Christian girl and then to kill her." I did not know what to say to him. The German begins to beat my head against the stove and hit me over the head with his revolver until I collapse. Then he throws himself on another worker, striking him hard in the face and putting a hole right through his cheek. The guy falls over. Then the German throws a third worker down the stairs and begins beating him. This last one

breaks free from his tormentor and begins to run. The Germans run after him and wound him in the leg with a shot from a submachine gun. The fellow stops and puts his hands up. The Germans approach him and shoot our comrade Girsh Zaydberg. Then, thirsting for blood, they order us to form up two to a rank, and put shovels in our hands in order to bury our comrade.

All of this happened between February 5 and April 20, 1943.

GARF f. 8114, op. 1, d. 944, ll. 196–198. A typewritten manuscript translated from Yiddish.