"AISHISHUK"

ITS HISTORY AND ITS DESTRUCTION

DOCUMENTARIES, MEMOIRS AND ILLUSTRATIONS

COMPILED AND EDITED BY

PERETZ ALUFI

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PUBLISHED THROUGH THE COMMITTEE

OF THE SURVIVORS OF AISHISHUK IN ISRAEL

JERUSALEM, ISRAEL

1950

THIS BOOK CONTAINS THE

HISTORY OF THE SMALL JEWISH

TOWN CALLED AISHISHUK(YIDDISH)

EJSZYSZKI(POLISH)

AISISKES (RUSSIAN)

LOCATED APPROXIMATELY 35 MILES

SOUTH-SOUTHWEST OF VILNA, LITHUANIA

AND DESTROYED BY THE NAZIS AND

THEIR COLLABORATORS DURING WORLD

WAR II

TRANSLATED IN 1980 FROM THE HEBREW BY SHOSHANNA GAVISH

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MEMORIAL PRAYER

May the people of Israel and their G-d remember the 4,000 souls of the sons and daughters of the community of Aishishuk as well as the souls of those that were brought from neighboring communities and which includes infants and children, men and women who were all holy and pure and among them great scholars of the Torah and people of good deeds, people who followed the path of G-d, honestly and righteously, that were murdered by the hands of the Nazis and their Lithuanian and Polish assistants on the fourth and fifth day of the Hebrew month of Tishre in the year 5702. Their hearts cry towards the heavens and demand that their lives which were cut short before their time be remembered, " Earth don't cover their blood and let their cries forever be heard and not forgotten ". May their souls be bound in the land of the everlasting life. Rest in Peace.

PREFACE

When the terrible news of the tragic deaths of the Jews of the city of Aishishuk by the hands of the impure Nazis was verified by the refugees who survived the destruction and arrived in Israel, a Committee was formed in Jerusalem under the initiative of Naphtali Berkowitz, Moshe Kaganowicz and Uri Rozovsky to commemorate the pain and suffering felt by the destruction of their community.

A convention was held on the 23rd of Chesvan 5706, shortly after the first refugees of Aishishuk arrived in Israel. Among those attending were thoses from Aishishuk but already residing in Israel and including Rabbi Meir Stalitz, Dov Dechasalvitz, the chief of Zichron Moshe in Jerusalem, the great scholar Rabbi Chaim Paltiel and others.After a memorial prayer and eulogy, a committee was formed whose headquarters would be in Jerusalem, which was the residence of most of the survivors. The main function of the committee was to support and aid the survivors of the city who would immigrate to Israel after their many hardships that had befallen them.

Uri Rozovsky, Naphtali Berkowitz, Zessel Chensky, Yosef Goldstein, Rivka Shezer, Chaim Levyatan, Avram Schmuel, Gross, Nachum Radensky(Petach Tikvah) and Chaya Reznik(Tel Aviv) were elected to work on the committee. From this group, an executive committee was formed A. Rozofsky-Chairman, Z. Chensky-Secretary, N. Berkowitz-Treasurer, Y. Goldstein-Associate.Sholom Sonenzon was added to the committee when he arrived in Israel.

The committee collected monthly dues the sum of which was distributed among the refugees of Aishishuk who arrived in Israel. It was at this time the committee corresponded with the " Natives of Aishishuk in Boston" and with the " Committee to aid Citizens of Aishishuk in New York" from whom they received large amounts of money and distributed to the needy refugees.

During the second convention which was held on the fourth of Tishre, 5707 in Jerusalem, it was decided to follow the suggestion of Dr. Saul Barkali, a native of our city, to publish a compilation to commemorate the community of Aishishuk. A committee was formed to take care of all the matters which would be involved in the publishing to this compilation. The members of the committee were: Dr. Saul Barkali(Kliko), S. Sonenzon,and Perez Alufi(Kliko). Dr. Barkali and P. Alufi volunteered to gather all the material and do the compilation.

A letter was sent to all the natives of Aishishuk in Israel and the Diaspora which requested their participation in the compilation by writing memoirs, testimonials, notes, etc. about their city from its past to its last day. Also, they were requested to aid the committee by sending donations to pay for the publishing of the compilation. The decision to publish the compilation was accepted with goodwill and sympathy by all the natives of Aishishuk in the Diaspora and Israel and as a result much material was accumulated.

It is appropraite to make special mention of the " Natives of Aishishuk in Boston" and the "Committee to aid Citizens of Aishishuk in New York" for their generous contributions for making publishing of this compilation possible and for the selling of

a tombstone to commemorate our dearly beloved holy ones for us and for the forthcoming generations.

Committee For The Aiding of Survivor of Aishishuk

Uri Rozovsky, Chairman
Zessel Chensky, Secretary
Naphtali Berkowitz. Treasurer
Yosef Goldstein, Member of Committee

INTRODUCTION

Recognizing the great responsibility we took upon ourselves to edit this compilation in the memory of the Aishishuk community, so dear to our hearts. Our desire was to set up a memorial and monument in Israel's community even though the community of Aishishuk was not considered one of the larger communities according to the number of Jews living there. However, it was famous in Lithuania and Russia as one of the great 11 cities of learning in the previous contury.

We split the material available to us into two main parts: A. Aishishuk in the past and B. Aishishuk in its last years up to the day of its complete destruction on the 4th and 5th days of Tishre, 5702. All the records, books and documents of the various organizations that were active in the city, and which could provide a clear and complete picture of the Jews in Aishishuk in the past were destroyed along with its residents. We therefore gathered information for the compilation from old newspaper articles and books which date back as far as 80-100 years ago. We also gathered information from Polish and German encyclopedias. We also received important information from the few elder survivors of the city who are still alive in Israel. From these sources we succeeded to obtain a picture of the cultural-economic and religious life of our community in the previous generations. As for the second part, the complete information was obtained from the survivors of the city who arrived in Israel and who are living witness ot the destruction of our city and

and who saw the suffering of our brothers and sisters under the bloody rule of the Nazis and their Lithuanian helpers up to the very last tragic days. The information obtained were recorded as told without adding any literary style. The words will speak for themselves. In order to enable the people who do not understand Hebrew to read the material a translation into Yiddish is also provided.

We regret very much not including all the material provided to us, but the space in the compilation was limited. To all those who provided information we thank you your help and support in this work.

May the memory of Rabbi Meir Stalitz and Rabbi Mordechai Kaleko be blessed, two of the natives of Aishishuk who lived in Israel and died before this compilation was completed.

Last, but not least, we are greatly thankful to the members of the Committee of the Survivors of Aishishuk in Jerusalem and to Mr. Naphtali Berkowitz, one of the community members who aided us unselfishly and made this publication possible.

The Publishers

The beginnings of Aishishok are obscure as are those of many other small and medium sized towns of the wide plain between the rivers Miemen, Viliga and their streams. This area was largely overgrown with thick forests and green meadows runningover thousands of square kilometers.

The Russian general encyclopedia (Brokhoize-Efron) informs us that Aishis was founded by the Lithuanian military commander Aishis in 1070 and named Aishiskas after him. According to this version, Aishishok was founded about 300 years before Vilna, whihc was founded by Gadinmin, the great Lithuanian prince (1341-1316). Apparently, Aishishok also preceded Lida, also founded by Gadimin and lately become capital of the district.

It is difficult to assess the economic and strategic importance of the town in that period. Aishishok is surrounded by no natural fortifications.There are no important mountains or rivers powerful enough to carry boats or rafts. It's importance came later when it was situated on the main transportation route connecting the fortified cities of the Lithuanian princedom:Vilna-Lida-Novogrodek. In any event, we do know that Aishishok was capital of the district for hundreds of years and the great Lithuanian prince Vitold(14th century) erected a Catholic church in the adjacent town Yourzdiki. (In Aishishok there was no Christian Church).

Over the years, Aishishok passed from one political power to another according to the political situation in the area. Thus, in 1569 Aishishok was an estate of the Polish king while 200 years later in 1771, its owner was Prince Joseph Solohor, of White-Russian origin.

Following the division of the Polish state(at the end of the 18th century), all of the Vina region including Aishishok was transferred to the Russians. Aishishok was subsequently part of the Lida distric in the Vina region. When Poland was re-established in 1918 followin the first world war, Aishishok was annexed to Poland and became part of the Novogrodek region.

The Origins of the Jewish Community in Aishishok

The Polish general encyclopedia of 1883 informs us that Karaite lived in Aishishok back in 1145, that is, many years before the big Karaite community in Troky was founded in the 14th century. Thus, though we have no other evidence that a Jewish community existed in Aishishok at that time, we may nevertheless assume that the Jewish community there dates far back and is probably among the first to exist in Lithuania.

The presence of the Jews in Lithuania back in the 9th and 10th centuries is confirmed in several documents. The Prague bishop Adalbert who was sent in 997 to preach the new covenant to idol worshipers in Lithuania, wrote the "many Christian prisoners were sold to Jews because of avarice and we have no means to ransom them".

It is also known that both Prince Gitimin (1321) and his grandson Vitold (1341) gave rights to the Jews in Lithuania. Vitold published a special Jewish law which had 37 sections and was meant to define the relations between the Jewish inhabitants of Brisk, Troky, Horodona, Lozk, Meretsh and other places. There is no doubt that the Jewish community of Aishishok was among them.

The elders of Aishishok claim that they themselves saw in the old cemetary, tombstones dating back 600 years ago.

Exact information concerning the numbers of Jews in Aishishok their profession and public intstitutions, we find only from later centuries, particularly the 19th century when Aishishok became a renowned center for the study of Torah and learned Rabbies. Accordi to one source, there were approximately 660 Jews in Aishishok in 1847 but fifty years later in 1897, during the general population count in Russia, the number grew to 2376 and constituted 70 per-cent of the population of the area.

The growth cannot be attributed to natural increase only. The Jewish population of Aishishok in 1897, included many Yeshiva boys. The Jewish community also absorbed the country Jews who were forbidden to live in the villages by order of the 1882 "May Laws". More details of Jewish migrations in the Aishishok district were listed in the old register of the burial company which was burnt in the "great fire"of 1895.

It is interesting to note that the increase in the Aishishok Jewish population came to a nearly total standstill at the beginning of the 20th century. Many left to make a living in the countires of the sea, in the regional city Vilna and in other Lithuanian and Polish cities. According to the Polish count of 1921(which, though not particularly accurate, is the only relatively reliable source for numbers), there were only 1591 Jews in the town, a decrease to 65% of the general population.

The appearance of Aishishok of 70-80 years ago is described by Mr. Yaapaz, an Aishishuk Yeshiva student, in the paper HaShucher (Dawn) of the year 5639 and also by the HatzoFe editor Horshai Freedman in his book " My Memoirs ".

The following years brought great changes to the appearance

of the town. After the great fire of 1895 which nearly completely destroyed Aishishok, the town was rebuilt, many brick houses were errected, the streets became straight and tiled and pavements were later laid. The main road connecting Warsaw with Vilna passed throu the town and thus the formerly remote town (the nearest station in A toni being 24 km away), was now situated on an important crossroad and full of traffic . The town merchants, no longer satisfied with the merchandise available in Vilna or Lida, now reached Bialgstok and Warsaw, the biggest industrial and commercial centers in the country

The Surrounding of Aishishok

Situated in the great plain of Lithuania, Aishishok was not surrounded by high mountains or wide rivers. Only the two streams o the "Hakantil" and "Hoyrshoki" wound round it and disappeared in a horizon edged by dark forest shadows. The two closest forests, "Seklutzki" and "the Big Forest" were more than a Kilometer away.

In our childish eyes, the big far miraculous world began behind the "Conucillary" Building (the town's municipality) located on the crossroads of the Vina road and the ~~o~~rad leading to the "Yourzdiki" village and the catholic church. But, there were three laces which attracted us in their atmosphere of myth and mystery:

The Old Cemetary

Amid wide fields far from the town, behind "the Big Forest", rose a long wide stretch of land, approximately 30 meters wide and 1(meters long, overgrown with low wild bushes. Most of the tombstones were deeply sunken in the land, and those few Hebrew lettered stones were barely distinguishable. These were the remnants of "the old cem tary" which had not been used by the Jews for 200 years.

In our days, one could reach the cemetary by using the Vilna road, through the meadows behind the bridge on the Virshoky river,

along the Yourzdiki village and thence via the road to Voronova villa to the Seklotzky forest and thence down through the field paths...

But this way was dangerous for us children since there was the possibility of encountering gentiles with viscious dogs. We never ventured so far without adult accompaniment.

The elders claim that in early years a shorter and safer way wa used, from the alley of the new cemetary, through the fields to the "Hakantil" river, over the bridge and straight to the old cemetary. But in our time this way was impassable. Both sides of the Hakantil were overgrown with trees and bushes hiding it from sight and a large deep swamp made passage impossible. The Hakantil was visible only from near the bath house where the women liked to wash their linen and the children to play on its smooth stones.

There was no alternative to using the long dangerous road adjacent to the gentile village. One hot summer sabbath, a group of us decided to take the risk and attempt to see the old cemetary with our own eyes. Our hearts were thumping with fear when we passed the dangerous stretch by the Seklotzky forest. As on every sabbath, the forest was the gathering place of young men and women an the sounds of their merriment resounded. We bore right, passed through the tall corn and a few moments later were facing the cemetary which rose about two meters above the fields and was surrounded by a deep ditch. From that place one could see the whole town with perfect visibility. The two yeshivas were especially prominent and heading them stood the big synagogue with its three roofs, one above the other like three hats on the head.

The land was hard and barren-there were no signs of mounds or graves. A few stones were scattered interwoven with bushes and thorns. The "expert" among us pointed to the place where horses,

brought to plow the cemetary land, twice broke their legs...There is a legend about the cemetary and the story is the following: When the old cemetary became too small to absorb all the village dead, a new land was acquired, closer to the village. This was the new cemetary, which lay behind the synagogue court. The old cemetary remained lonely and deserted among the harvest fields of the gentiles. These latter eventually began annexing parts of the cemetary and ploughing there. All appeals to the farmers of the district authorities to avoid desecrating the memories of the righteous buried there for centuries, were in vain. The farmers continued their ploughing andthe cemetary became smaller, while the Jews looked on in despair.

Then the miracle happened. One day, a farmer who was a renowned Jew hater, again began ploughing the cemetary ground. But as his horse stepped into the cemetary, it fell and broke two legs though there were no holes or howes in the particular spot. When the farmer returned with another horse-the same happened. This recurred several times until the farmer realized the "accidents" were not accidental at all. Fear of the G-d of Israel fell upon them and they ceased ploughing there. Thus the olde cemetary was saved. It remained in loneliness and wilderness for 200 years surrounded by gentile fields, overlooking the village for afar, till the days of terror and destruction-the 4th and 5th of Tishray, 3702(1942). Then again, it was filled with cries of thousands of Jews, men, women and children, led to slaughter by beasts in human form., again the parched earth soaked the blood of pious Jews. Four thousand holy bodies of tortured and murdered Jews found their final rest alongside the bones of their ancestors.

The Maiak(Fortress)

One of the places we children loved most was the "Maiak". On Saturdays and holidays, we loved playing hide and seek or thieves and policemen in its deep channels-overgrown with bushes and trees, among them raspberry and bloodberry bushes. One of our favorite sports was running down its steep slopes to the opposite side where the wheat fileds lay.Often this sport ended with torn trousers or a bloody nose but the dizzying run, which required lots of courage, not all of the boys were able to muster, made us forget the punishment awaiting us for our torn clothing.

It was said that the "Maiak" was erected by Napoleon during his invasion of Russia and that the Poles greatly fortified it during their great upriseal against the Russians over 100 years ago. The mountain was not a natural one-it was man-made as was evident from its ring-like shape enclosing a rather large plain and surrounded by deep channles approximately 50 meter deep. There was only one entrance, from North, via a bridge crossing the channel. This bridge used to be lifted every evening by iron chains and then the Maiak was inaccessible.

In our time there was no trace of the bridge. The channels were overgrown with trees and bushes. In the court there remained a few buildings formerly belonging the the owner of Maiak-the landowner, Seklotzky. These houses were empty and half ruined and we played there often, increasing the ruin.

Of the towers,, only one ruin remained. On the north west side, hidden among trees and bushes, arose on stone-heap, surrounded by mounds of earth and stones, which testified to the former massivity of the tower.

The "Maiak" was a favorite gathering place of the Aishishok youth. There they held meetings of the "Hashomer Hatzair", "Hachalutz", the club in memory of Brewer, "Herut ve Techiya" and others. Also, its scenic corners were a common place for picture taking and during the sabbath and holidays, the air resounded with the sounds of youth rejoicing.

However, one year Maiak was chosen as the seat of the former Polish general,Dr. Riligion, Jewish children were forbidden access, and the attractive "Maiak", so full of memories for us all, became a place to behold but forbidden to approach.

The Pool

The pool was the third attraction. It was situated behind the river "Vershoky" not far from the Aadmovitz farm. It was not visible from afar since it was surrounded by high banks. There was also a legend connected to the pool. During the Polish revolt against the Russians, a group of Polish rebels fled from a Cossack battalion. The Poles reached the pool and decided to throw in their money box and ammunition, swords, hand grenades etc. Some say they even threw in a cannon to avoid it being captured by the hateful Russians. The Poles then fled and scattered and thus no spoils were found by the Cossacks.

During the summer, when the pool dried up almost completely and only frogs populated its bottom, we would go there despite the danger of the ranch dogs, and search among the bushes for the lost treasure or the ammunition. Despite repeated disappointments, we never stopped visiting the pool, looking down its clear water and listening to the frogs croak, as this was the only pool nearby.

Aishishok Town of Torah and Pharisees

Of all the towns in Lithuania, Zamut and White Russia,where Pharisee congregations existed, our town was renowned for its congregation of the best Yeshiva students some of whom later became Gaonim, and for the large numbers of students studying in the two Yeshivas, the "old" and the "new". The townsmen were distinguished for their love of the Torah and respect for its students. The Rabbis of the town were Talmudic scholars distinguished for their acumen in the Gemara, Posekim and Tosaphat as well as in practical teaching. They were of great service to the Yeshiva students studying to be teachers. Hence the attraction of the town.

The elders-of Aishishok claim that the founder of the congregation of Pharisees in our town was a renowned rightwous Rabbi named Rabbi Moshe. The following story about him was told: "On stormy, snowy saturday night, Rabbi Moshe was not to be found among the students in the synagogue.When the janitor came at dawn, He found the Rabbi standing outside the door to prevent it from blowing open so that no chill should disturb the Torah students. Since the lock had broken and there had been no time to repair the door, the Rabbi spent the stormy night guarding the door with his won body-those inside had not noticed anything?

We may assume that this Rabbi Moshe was Rabbi Moshe Berabibi(son of) Aharon Halevi Horwitz, an Aishishok teacher in the time of Hagra, and one of the three Rabbis in Lithuania called upon to decide in the controversy of the Vilna Congregation, between Rabbi Shmuel Berabbi (son of) Avigdor the last President of the Court in the Vilna congregation and his congregation.

Eventually, a bigger and more elegant synagogue was erected and more Pharisees came to town.

In those days, approximately 150 years ago, the President of the Court in the town, was the famous Rabbi Yosele of Liphishok, one of the best students of Rabbi Haim of Nalozia. He supported the Pharisee students in the town and was an example of Rabbinical authority.

At that time, Aishishok was famous for its Biblical expanders and the Pharisees had an opportunity to study this Rabbinical task. Thus, in 5574(1814), Rabbi Yom-Tov Lipman, son of the Vilna Rabbinical teacher Rabbi Moshe Shlomo, was an active Rabbinical teacher. His book, "Kerod Yom Tov" (Honour of Holiday), on all the weekly portions (Sdarot) of the Pentateuch, met with the Approval of all the Lithuanian Scholars of the period, among them the author of "A Human Life". In later years, the renowned preacher Rabbi Itzhak of Vilkomer, the author of many books on Biblical exposition widely read in all Jewish communities in Lithuania, Zamut and White Russia, was an active expositor and preacher. Rabbi Idla of Volozna called him "the little Alshich" and the author of "Pithai Teshura" (Gates of Repentance) referred to his novelties in the Aggadah as "faithful to the Torah". He spent the latter years of his life in Jerusalem and lived to be over 100.

The "Golden Era" of the Aishishok Pharisees was during the service of Rabbi Abraham Shmuel(5607-5615; 1847-1855), student of Rabbi David Teveli of Minsk and Rabbi Alexander Ziskind of Novohorodok. He was called the Great Gaon by Rabbis of the time and indeed, his excellent book "Pillars of Fire" published after his death, testifies to his greatness.

Rabbi Abraham Shmuel was also famous for his righteousness, his deeds and his noble character. He was sickly form youth and also very poor. Some large communities asked him to honour them by residing with them but he rejected these offers since he wished to remain in Aishishok, the town of Torah, There he died in 5629 (1869), He had served for a few years as president of court in Reisen in Zumut but then returned to Aishishok where he died,

In the book "Ahavat David"(the Love of David) we read these words of appreciation for this treat man: "...He never ate unless a guest joined his table, his law was law of truth and all was based on moderation and observation;"

Of the rabbis in the town who exerted much influence on the Pharisees, on must

note Rabbi Ben-Zion Sheternfeld, whose talmudic composition "Shaarei=Zedek" (Gates of Justice) is well-known in the Rabbinical and Yeshiva worlk. He was an advocate of traditional education and his great pamphlet "The Way of the Torah" which is a sharp reaction to the new system of education and the method of learning a summary of the main principles of the Torah, made a strong impression. The author of "Hephetz Haim" appreciated him greatly and adorned his own first compositions with Rabbi Shterufeld's approval. Notable among the later Aishishok rabbis is Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Ma-Yafit, a very clever man who held public office. He later became president of Court of the Volkobisky community of the Sovlek district. Also notable was Rabbi Joseph Zundel Huther, former rabbi of Dretshin, considered one of the great Lithuanian rabbis of the era and whose important compositions on all parts of the Shulchan-Aruch made him famous.

Some famous "Gaonim" spent time in Aishishok as "Pharisees". After studying in the Yeshivas of Volozin and Mir, some of these then made Aishishok the center for their studies. For some, Aishishok served as their only center beside their home towns. Of these we should note Rabbi Meir Simcha Hacohen author of "Or Sameach" (Happy Light), president of the court of Devinsk, Rabbi Moshe Denishevsky, author of "Beer Moshe" (The Well of Moses), president of the court of Deslovocoka and one of the founders of "Hamizrachi:, Rabbi Avraham Ben Haim Liv Tiktinsky and others.

One of the natives of Aishishok, Rabbi Meir wrote of his native town that it was "world famous as a great Torah Center, which attracted many great Torah scholars who later became Rabbis and leaders.

Other notables who studied as Pharisees in Aishishok are the learned Rabbi Mordechai Flungian, teacher of Talmud in the Vinal Yeshiva for rabbis, later chief proof-reader in the famous publishing house of the widow and brother Raam and author of famous books on linguistics and Hebrew commentary.

With the establishment and development of the Kovna Yeshiva, the increase of Yeshivas in Lithuania and especially the develpment of the Talmudic of the Talmudic commu-

nity of nearby Redon to a large and central Yeshiva, the importance of the Aishishok "Kibbutz" decreased. Yet, till the outbreak of World War I Aishishok held a considerable collection of Pharisees.

When Aishishok was annexed to the Lithuanian state of Kovna in 5700 (1840), the Redon Yeshiva transferred to Aishishok which also served as an initial transit station for the Polish refugees, especially Torah students, who fled from the internal Jewish enemy, the Jewish communists. Teh people of Aishishok headed by their last Rabbi, Rabbi Shimon Rozovsky, acted in accordance with the famous Aishishok tradition and did much to ease the suffering of the refugees.

When the Jeiwhs communities in Poland, Lithuania and Russia were destroyed, Aishishok, was among them. In the spiritual history of Israel, Aishishok will symbolize glory and beauty. (Published in "Hazophe" no. 2437, 1846).

From Letters to the Editor

Rabbi Meir Setlevitz, may his memory be blessed.(the late rabbi of Zichron Moshe, Jerusalem)

If I should wish to depict my native town Aishishok, my whole life on this earth would not suffice for doing so. Who can be more familiar than myself with the town, its people, how treat they were and how much they contributed to the world. I know that great men, observant and Gaonim, renowned in all the world, studied as children in Aishishok . Aishishok was world famous as a Torah town, and from the time I have been aware, I remember the names of the learned great rabbies if Aishishok: the Gaon Rabbi Ben Zion of Bilsk, the Gaon Rabbi Elyakum of Grodna, the Gaon Rabbi Zvi Hirsch of Volkovishk, the Gaon Rabbi Zundel Hotner and the last Gaon Rabbi Shimon Rozovsky, may G-d avenge him!

....Many of the students of the town's Yeshiva later becmae treat bibilical scholars ... The home owneres of Aishishok boasted that inthis aspect their town was superior to all the big towns. One great scholar once suggested to them that they

dispatch envoys in all the world and thus increase their "kibbutz" and they could support an additional few hundred Pharisees, but they replied that they did not wish to share with others. After the Almighty had endowed them with wise hearts to support 100 Pharisees in great honour, they did not wnat to give their goodness to others.

How my heart aches now that these towns were ruined and the great scholars murdered, their blood shed for no reason. Why was the anger poured on them???

I do not know if ever there was such a time, and there is nothing left for us to do but turn to G-d, Judge of the World tant He may do justice when He judges the whole world.

Rabbi Avraham Brish Rosing

I am pleased that you wish to perpetuate the memory of Aishishok, since it was the first center of our holy Torah in the state of Lithuania. I am greateful that I had the privilege of studying there in my childhood in the company of great scholars. Many of those who studied there later became great and renowned scholars. I do know that the Gaon RabbiMeir Simcha may his holy memory be blessed, and the Gaon Rabbi Eli Haim Meizel, The Honourable president of the Court of Lodz, and the Gaon Rabbi Yonatan who was Rabbi and president of the court in Bialystok, and was called "Vilaavaar Elui" and the Gaon Rabbi Haim Ozer Grodzensky of Vilna and many others, learned in their childhoodin Aishishok.

The rabbis who held rabbinical seats in Aishishok were famous in the Jewish world. Eighty years ago, the great Gaon Rabbi Avraham Shmuel, authors of "Pillars of Fire" (Amudei Esh), was in Rabbinical serivce, followed by the great Gaon Rabbi Benzion Bilskaar, the energetic author of several books of "Questions and Answers", followed by the energetic Rabbi Elyakum Grudnaar who was followed by the great Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Ma Yafit who had great insight into worldly affiars. In the days I studied there, the great Gaon and rightwous man was Rabbi Yosef Zundil Hotner, whose nights were as days and who was extremely sharp and knowledgable in all aspects of the Torah. He was author of several books on the four parts of the "Shulchan Aruch"

(The Prepared Table). He was brother in law to the righteous Gaon Rabbi Haim Liv Stwisker my his sacred memory be blessed, author of the Question and Answers" book "A Lion's Face".

Father of the great Gaon Rabbi Meir Stelevitch, author of "From the House of Meir", formerly Rabbi in Heslevitch and later Rabbi in Zichron Moshe in Jerusalem, Rabbi Avraham may his sacred memory be blessed, was a great expert in the Torah as well as being a very righteous man. Teh excellent Rabbi Gaon Yohanan Zopovitch, Rabbi of Tiberias and formerly of the Lithuanian town Redzibilishky, was also a native of Aishishok. Also the famous preacher of Minsk, Rabbi Benjamin Minskaar, was a native of Aishishok. And the righteous Gaon Rabbi Henich Hacohen who taught Tprah for over 40 years, was also Aishishok born; he fathered the following Gaonim Rabbis: Rabbi Yoel Hacohen who was also dean of the rabbinical college in Kelwiz for nearly 40 hears, and the Rabbi Gaon Aharon Shmidt, formerly Rabbi of the Vison Community in Lithuania and presently of the rabbinical society of the Hagra(Gaon Rabbi Eliyahu of Vilna) Yeshiva and preacher in the "Gemara Society" and the society of "Tiferet Bahurim". Also the "Gaon of Devinsk" studied in Aishishok in his childhood as well as the Rabbi Gaon Avraham Kalmanovitch Honorable President of the court of Tiktin.

The Gabbais (managers or treasureres of the synagogue) who endeavored on behalf of the Yeshiva students were: in the old Yeshiva, Rabbi Avraham Ofenheim and his brother in law Rabbi Benjamin Rether and in the new Yeshiva Rabbi Shlomo Brover ("Farbaar"), father of the Rabbi Gaon Yaakov,president of the court of Avstrin and author of "Proverbs of Wisdom" (Imrei Haskel) and other books. He was very knowledgable in the bible and an excellent expositor, intelligent as well as a very pleasant man.

The second Gabbai was also an excellent man of the distinguished lineage of Rabbi Baruch Eli, son of the Gaon Rabbi Menachem Mendel, the honorable president of the court of the Radon community.

The home owners in Aishishok were excellent people, G-d fearing and knowledgable in the Torah and even the poorer ones supported the needs of the yeshiva students with

threat respect. Due to their respect for the Torah, they had the privelege of having rabbis as sons and sons in laws. Aishishok was the only community which did not send emissaries to the diaspora communities since the home owners shouldred the responsibility of supporting the Yeshiva students and donated considerable sums of this purpose, even beyond their means. Not only prosperous and middle class home owners participated in this effort; but also the artisans; coachmen, shoe makers, tailors, and other hard workers. It was a great pleasure for them to support the "Pharisees" and they treated the students as loyal fathers threat only sons. Happy is the eye which beheld all this! And how great is our sorrow that this large town if Israel and its dear inhabitants, worthy before G-d and their fellow men, were victims of evil men and that we have no remnents of this Torah center, mother of the largest Yeshivas in Lithuania.

Written by Rabbi Avraham Brish Rosing, founder of the "Tehilat Israel" society in the big synagogue in Tel-Aviv, Rabbi and president of the court in the Limbaarg community in Latvia, called "Baar Salantaar" in Aishishok.

From the Press of the Period;Hashachar(The Dawn)

(4th copy,1879;by Yaapaz, written in 1878)

Aishishok is a small town iwth lots of people, one of the worst towns in Lithuania. It has three crooked streets. Its market is very wide, equalling in width its length, and at its center there is a circle of 30 shops, which have turned green with age. The elders believe that demons dance there at night. The shops are as small as chicken pens, they have side-entrances and iti si no small difficulty to enter them. The turnover is small since there are more shops than buyers. Thursday is market day and then the air is filled with the quarrels of old ladies. They are surrounded by stacks of barley bread and cakes as black as raven wings. These are bought only when someone is ill because otherwise people bake for themselves. The noise and curses here remind one of Yatkaaiva street in Vilna. In 1865 the whole town was burnt down, adn only the circle of shops, the end of Vilna street and the "old"

Yeshiva remained. The houses are dilapidated, the streets unpaved and dirty. The women are occupied chiefly with washing clothes while their husbands roam the villages to make a living. The two Yeshivas and a synagogue form a triangle. They are surrounded with stables, a toilet house and not for- the cemetary.

There are about 80 "Pharisees" studying in the two Yeshivas. One man, Haim "Traagaar", brings food to the Yeshiva for 10 kop a week form each Pharisee. In the old Yeshiva, the food carrier is Gedalya Shekradz. Ropes are tied round his back and these are beaded with pottery and mugs. Gedalya goes from door to door to collect cheese, milk and herring for the Pharisees. In the old days when the inherited land still belonged to the Aishishok Jews, Gedalya was a cow herd.

Each year a Rabbi would come to test the Pharisees in the laws of Tfilah and Niddah (non kosher food and impurity) and for 5 RO he would give them rabbinical ordination. But because of lack of rabbincal seats most were forced to become teachers and remained bitterly poor.

The town ahd three butchers, two shames and tow permanent Dayanim. The new Yeshiva had four Gabbais, L... the baker-an old sinner who harassed the learned, -a repentant who afflicted himself and was as dangerous as "a bear robbed of its cubs". The second Gaggai, Shalom Gershom G.-harassed the Haskalah lovers. The third-.,, Bitz-was as hypocritical as Lavan the Aremite. The fourth-Yehuda K,...., a commoner from a family of wagoners- was a cheat and a thief.

Their righteous rabbi isssued a decree forbidding the acceptance of bachelors to the Pharisee community but when the numbers of those joining the community decreased, the decree was cancelled and as a result the nubers of boys who came increased among which were many Haskalah lovers. At the point, the fanatics began persecuting the latter and one yeshiva boy, son of a famous rabbi, was expelled in disgrace. Letters were written to his home town accusing him of scepticism and he was tormented on this account. In the month of Elul, the synogoguetreasurers and the fanatics convened and decided that those who handed over their heretic books to be burned and signed in the

book that they would turn their back on their evil ways, would not be harmed. Many of the soft hearted succumbed and turned over their books to the fanatics. But other Haskalah lovers continued to pore over their books in secret until an informant made the practice known. Arie, the baker, turned heaven and earth till at last it was decided to burn the books in public and this was done. One boy was found to have an edition of "Hashachar"(The Dawn) and the town was in uproar but he could not be expelled since he supported himself.

The Gabbais invaded the Pharisee rooms, broke locks and carried away books by Shulman, Smolenskin, "The Sins of Youth", "Love of Zion" to the rabbis' house where they were burned.

In the summer of 5637(1877) a bookseller came to town with Haskalah books most of which he had in the hotel. Judge Rabbi ben Yehoshua wrote the hotel owner to hand over the heretic books to Gabbai Shalom Gershon and pawn them till the bookseller left Aishishok so that he would be unable to sell them to the Pharisees and influence them.

(The above letter is presented in its entirety though some matters mentioned are vastly exxagerated. We can learn however of matters concerning earlier generations which the author mentions incidentally. It is an irrefutable fact that Aishishok supposedly so dark and obscure, porduced many authors and learned mena who honorably represented their home town , the town of Torah and Pharisees. signed, The Editors.)

From the Memoirs of A.A. Freidman

(5686(1926) Tel Aviv)

Mr. Friedman was formerly Warwaw Editor of Hazopheh.

Aishishok is an old, worn-out town. It's streets are covered knee-high with mud. Its houses are decrepit wooden sturctures and its Jewish inhabitants are bent and broken. Their whole life is concentrated on the worries of making a living, petty minded details of their trade and low pay.

But their deep black eyes also transmit feeling of pride, This pride is

due to their being inhabitants of Aishishok which is a center of Torah in Lithuania, second to the nearby Volozhin. The Yeshivas are full of all kinds of students from near and far. All studiously pore over the Torah while the townsmen provide them with bread and stews and some of the fanatic orthodox home owners conduct the wholebusiness. Some of these are hypocrites who furiously persecute any student found with a suspect book. In such cases they invade the students sleeping quaters and search through their belongings. Any "unkosher" book is confiscated. At times, following a general search, they conduct an auto-da -fe in the synagogue court. I myself witnessed how a book found in the quaters of Pharisee was brought to one Gabbai but the title page had been torn off. Students did this several times in order to prevent suspicion. On the first page of that book a dedication had been written. The dedication began with capitalized letters reading "El Kavod". The "learned" mistook these words for the title of a famous banned book and truimphantly ordered it burned.

One tall man whose face was roughly lined was pointed out to me. His name was Tudrus and the following legend was tokd about him:when he was a baby, his parents gave him to the care of a wet-nurse, as was the general practice in Lithuania. His parents later took him from the first wet-nurse and transferred him to another. The first lady issued a legal claim to the court in the town and later transferred the claim to a higher court. The baby had meanwhile spent two years with the second wet-nurse and eventually reached the age of Bar-Mitzvah, marriage and good deeds. When Tudrus was 30 years old, the court finally issued an order that he be treated by the first wet nurse... who by that time was an old woman. Hence the Lithuanian proverb, "Tudrus must suck" which is said to express dissatisfaction when settling a matter is delayed for a long time.

The Great Fire of 1895

One of the major events in Aishishok was the great fire of 1895. Most of the houses in the town, which were build of wood, were destroyed in this fire. Also the Yeshiva schools were burned. After the fire, the dates of event in Aishishok such

as births and weddings were calculated as of the "great fire". The big register of the burial society which was several hundred years old, was also destroyed.

The fire received wide coverage in the Hebrew press of the time. Rabinovitz, the editor of "Hamelitz" and author A.L. Levinsky, both former Aishishok yeshiva students, wrote several articles on the subject. It is interesting to note that Levinsky and other writers emphasized the fact that the home-owners had themselves supported the yeshiva and its hundreds of Pharisees and did not turn for help from the outside as was the practice of the other famous yeshivas of the time, Volozhin, Novogrodek and others. There is therefore, these writers claim, a double duty to help reconstruct and generously support the Torah-town.

A special committe was formed under the patronage of the district governer, which collected contributions for the town.

We now bring excerpts from "Hamelitz" newspaper and the book of the Dayyan Rabbi Elazar (Rabbi Layzar) Vikensky. The Jews of the village were responsible for reconstructing not only the ruins of their village but also the center of Torah learning. The yeshiva schools were slowly built and Pharisee students again began to flock there. The Aishishok Jews despite their own financial distress, welcomed them hospitably and shared with them their bread. Their main concern was the scarcity of books many of which had been destroyed by the fire. An article published in the newspaper "Hatzfira" a year after the fire, testifies to this need. In this article, Mendel Itzhak Berman appeals on behalf of the committee of Hatzfira readers, for contributions of books to the yeshiva schools in the town for Aishishok to become once again a center of learning. He writes that the treasury of the yeshiva is empty and there still remain outstanding bills for the yeshivas burned in the fire. Contributors names, he promises, will be immortilized in the regester of the community.

Hamelitz

(24 Sevan, 5655-June 4, 1895)

Three weeks have passed since G-d's anger was poured upon the Jewish towns and newspapers are full of terrible descriptions of the state of these towns and their

unhappy inhabitants. It is wondrous that among the other burned towns, the forsaken Aishishok is mentioned only in passing. ..."the child will not cry and its nurse will not rush to its aid" ....Aishishok is silent and no one takes it to heart, Indeed, the town has been silent thus far...shocked into silence since the disaster is unbearable. 400 houses were destroyed and the few whose houses were spared, lost their money and property to the destitute who saved nothing. Thus all the town's residents are wretched together.

Aishishok is situated far from a city, the business of the town was concentrated in the town itself and the residents made their living off each other. The fire left them naked and therefore the disaster is so great and intolerable,

Please be merciful, generous Jews and have compassion for the 3000 destitute people now tramping the streets and fields, hungry and naked, with no support and nothing to lean on. Remember how Aishishok has served as a center for Torah learning and has never depended on outside assistance. Support it now as it is so very poor.

The Fires and their Victims

A.L.Levinsky(Hamelitz-20 Tamuz, 5655; June30, 1895)

Had Aishishok been the only town burned, there would be hope for its reconstruction. But Aishishok has no luck even in burning. It was burned just when Brisk, Kovrin and others were also Bruned. This makes everyone think: what is Aishishok in comparison with Brisk? Only a native of a small town who realizes what ruin a fire can cause to such a small town, will understand the situation of Brisk and Aishishok.

In Aishishok no Jew can earn a decent sum of money in one year to enable him to build himself a house-so who would take the trouble of rebuilding the ruined town? But Aishishok is not a town to be compared with other small towns, Aishishok is extraordinary, It is a center of Torah learning in the full sense, It cannot be compared even to Valzhin. Valazhin lives off its student guests, Its Torah is of Israel and its living if off its Torah. Aishishok in contrast, supported its Torah center not for the sake of a reward, And indeed, it supported a fine Torah Center,

All its guests were satisfied and earned their bread honorably.

In my childheed I heard wounders about Aishishok's live of the Torah and its Pharisee students who were supported by the natives themselves. The natives would rather go hungry and thirsty so long as the sutdents would suffer no want. Those who study before G-d will not want for bread or water; there will always be a candle to porvide light and wood to keep them warm. The good people of the town supplied everything-they never asked for charity, nor did they send out emissaries, not did they negotiate nor make a big fuss. This small town often supported 500 students. And this town was burned.

We have an obligation to honour and rebuild it. Aishishok never asked the holy congregation of students for anything and preferred to support the Torah itself and this involved supporting perhaps myriads of our brothers. Now the town is burned, we all have a responsibility to support the survivors. May they rebuild their homes and the center of Torah studies!

Hamelitz-September 14, 1896

Four months have passed since our town-center of Torah studies-has voiced its appeal for the mercy of our merciful brothers. Chaos and destruction are still widespread. More than anything else, we are concerned about the yeshiva schools which we , residents of Aishishok, can in no way completely rebuild ourselves,... Well-Known Gaonim came form our town. For approximately 100 years the Aishishok schools provided education and when the Valuzhin yeshiva was destroyed, Aishishok remained alone. Aishishok has not healed from its heartbreaking misfortune even after the contribuitons it received. Where shall Aishishok look for help if it cannot depend on those pure-hearted people cpable of appreciating its qualities and importance?

We must conclude with the following anouncement: our president of the court is moving to the town of Vlkavishky. We therefore request the hnorable rabbis to avoid exerting themselves to come to Aishishok to apply for the vacancy since we will only summon and offer the rabbinincal seat to a rabbi of our choice.

Speech of Haim son of Rabbi Moshe Sterlitzky

Speech of Avraham Offenhiezer
Speech of Benjamin Raatner
Speech of Elyahu Dombelinshky

Excerpt from the book "From Wave to Wave"

(by Meir Vilkensky)

It was market day and the town was full of goyim and carts. When the fire broke pit everyone tried to escape from the town, pushing through the pedestrians...The fire leapt from roof to roof... it suddenly appeared in unexpected places...The fire spread throughout the town, women and children were rushing through clouds of dust and flames of fire.. the whole town became one great flame...the people fled to the grass banks of the river andcrouched there or rushed about. A howl arose from the crowd for the babies and holy books burned in the fire. Children ahd hid from the fire beneath the bench in the "Heder" and there burned alive. My neice was burned in her crib. Her father came running home form his shop; he shouted out to find out of anyone was at home and no one answered; he grabbed a pillow in his hand and fled. Woe! He did not look in the crib! The pillow was saved and the baby burned....

People were pushing along the river and through the fields frantically searching for lost ones...the day was ending ...the fire receded. but the sky was red and enflamed...when dawn broke the city had vanished from the face of the earth...only a group of houses in the "new street"(Rudin St.) survived. This was due to the trees in the Pharmacy garden which blocked the fire and arrested its advance. The weeping did not cease... people searched for burned bodies...seven mothers were howling beside the bones of thier children burned in the heder and the sound of their cries rose to the skies.. the ruins of the two yeshivas and the synagogue stood naked.

Days passed. Carts loaded with bread and clothes came from nearby towns. Money was also sent. The editor of "Hamelitz" sent 3 rubles for the survivors and published an article and a call for support for this town which had always provided support for its yeshiva students. He neither took vengeance nor bore a grudge. He forgot how Aishishok had expelled him in shame form the yeshiva and the town (after being caught readingHaskalah books-the editor).

The Zionist Organization of Aishishok

Rumours of Dr. Herzl's appearance and the first Zionist congress reached even remote Aishishok (70 km. away form the district town Vilna). On the initiative of the eldest son of Rabbi Eliezer the Judge, Itzhak Vilkensky (now Prof. Itzhak Volkani, head of the Institute for Agricultural Research in Rehovot) a meeting of the town's "Maskilim" readers of "Hamelitz" and "Hatsfira" was held. These people were painfully aware of the distress of the Jewish people and yearned for liberation. The Zionist idea was fiercely opposed by the orthodox and extremist "home owners" who, like the orthodox everywhere, viewed Zionism as a danger to religion and opposed "the anticipation of the coming of the Messiah supported by the western atheists and the eastern enlightened A few young people did however, master enough courage in the compressed extremist pharisee atmosphere of Aishishok at that time, to lay the foundation of the Zionist organization. It is interestiong to note that these early and few Zionists received enthsiastic support form the simple naive warm hearted and straight minded cragsmen. These poeple flocked to the zionist meetings "drinking in" with befief and enthusiasm the lofty and wonderful words of Jewish revival, a Jewish state and great leader Dr. Hertzel.

Meir Vilkensky, the youngest son of Rabbi Laiser the Judge (known in Israel by his literary name M. Elazari) describes in his book "From Wave to Wave" the formation and early days of the Zionist Organization in Aishishok:

"...This is what my brother did upon his second returning from the place of Torah. He went whispering with some of his friends to the tavern of Yaakov Setzkin, the american(fictitious name-the editor). There they decorated the walls with pictures and hung a bright lamp from the ceiling. In the rear they arranged a table with books and cpybooks. That evening my brother stood at the head of the table and in the lamplight announced to the people the plans for a Jewish State in Israel...,

Ajewish man has arisen by the name of Dr. Herzel, who will reddem his people, bring them to their country and create a state for them. A license will be obtained...

He did not spread his arms in the manner of a preacher to the Holy Ark and the people. His head was bowed, his hands grasped the table and in his suppressed voice seemed to be talking more to himself. But his face was flushed and his voice quivered. Also other faces became flushed and other hearts were struck.. In this enthusiam the Zionist organization was founded.

.....Again the platform was taken by a speaker. Not a fortune-teller but a preacher sent by the regional Zionist center. Each preacher was directed to adopt his words to the spirit of each town. This preacher stood in his Tallith before the Holy Ark. The Yeshiva was completely full. Zionist youths and Zionist artisans came; also other Jews who wanted to hear of Israel's plight and redemption attended. A long table was placed at the entrance so that everyone would buy a shekel and a share after the preacher concluded. (the shekel was the annual membership fee of the Zionist organization).

The home owners and really orthodoz did not attend. They timed their entrance exactly for the beginning of the Maariv prayer. But the prayer was depayed due to the preacher's sermon.

....The hall was vibrant with the fiery words which captured the hearts- that evening the Maariv prayer was as fervetly recited as on Yom-Kippur eve. The crowd pressed upon the table at the entrance of the Yeshiva. The deep bowl filled with coins for the settlement of Israel and Rabbi Avraham Haneeman, who had also prayed close to the door, approached the table and cried "Give me a Shekel"!

My town divided,,while all the wealthy objected, the young were attracted and the artisans enthused, Shlomo the tailor preached in the tailors minyan, Abba the shoemaker, preached in the shoemakers Minyan. They bought shekels and shares. They cried,"We shall rise and succeed!"

The Zionist prganization in Aishishok was founded by Itzhak Vikensky in 1897, after the first Zionist congress, Those chosen to the first committee were: Rabbi Tuvia Rubinstien (known as "Darr Yaaraamitshaar), Yehoshua Slovotsky, Yehuda Yaakov Snitzky, Zvi Levzovesky, may he long live(now residing in Petach-Tikva), Zvi

Levzovesky and myself. The heartn and soul of the committee and society was Itzhak Vilkensky who served as secretary. When he went abroad to study, Shmuel Senitzky took his place. As was usually the case, in those first years of political Zionism, activities were limited to selling shekels and shares of the Colonial Bank.

Sometimes preachers would come from the district town Vilna. Initially the attitude of most of the townsment to Zionism was hostile and negative. The Orthodox tried to besmirch us and accuse us falely of being "anticipators of the Messiah" and atheists. But a large portion of the younger home owners and most artisans supported us and so the fanatics battle agianst us did not succeed. One example of the zionist enthusiasm in Aishishokat the time is that 140 shares of the zionist bank were sold; as the price of a single share was 10 rubles, this was a very cinsiderable sum for an Aishishok Jew.

When the fanatics saw our success, they tried to recruit the Gaon "Hachafetz Haim" whom they brought to preach against the Zionists. But all their efforts were in vain. The town's rabbi, Zundil Hotner, who spent his days and nights studying the Torah and working, did not persecute us. As a gentle hearted man, he avoinded fights all his life. It was typical of him to reply to Meir Shalom Dovinsky, who came to ask whether, as an orthodox Jew his permitted to buy a sheke, that that is no sin according to the Torah.

Thus many Torah and yeshiva students joined our society. Besides the Zionist sociey, another socieyt was founded. The speakers there were Rabbi Paltiel, Zvi Levzovesky and im particular Joshua Slovotzky. Members of the Zionist organization were on men-Aishishok was too pharisee-fanatical to allow the membership of women. But in our practical work we were at times assisted by women.

In the Minsk conference of Russian Zionists (1902) our represetative was the lawyer Snitzky. When the teacher Archimovitz, brother in law of Liv Rodzin came to town, the society of "Poalei Zion" (workers of Zion) was founded. Druing the years of 1904-1905 also a Bund party existed which attracted the working youth of the town. The Bund was then at the geight of its activities and its influence was great while

ours decreased slightly. The conflict between the Zionists and the Bund concentrated mainly on the conquest of the municipal library whihc was the only one in town.

At a later period, close to the First World War, Raphael Nahimovitz and Botvinik were chiefly active in Zionist matters.

When "modern heders" were extablished in Lithuania, wer decided to extablish one also in aishishok. We invited Mr. Archimovitz to be the teacher. When the orthodox found out, they raised hell and loudly warned of the danger to Judaism. They convened, preached in public and nearly excommunicated us.

When they realized how strongly we desired to open a "modern heder" ("dangerous heder" is what they called it) and that pupils had already registered, they rushed the Gaon Hefetz Haim from nearby Radon to influence us to cancel our evel and dangerous plan.

Rabbi Israel Meir came . Meir Kyotzevsky and myself were called upon to see him and he began to appeal to us to cacel our plan. When he saw our resistence, he burst into tears. This affected Meir Kyotzevsky who promised to withdraw but I was stubborn. The "modern heder" was established to the horror of the fanatics and it became a fact. It operated intermittently in various apartments till the extablishment of the modern hebrew school after World War I.

The Society for "Hebrew Only"

Aishishok's very special activity was the teaching of Hebrew to school children. On the initiative of Sara Vilvensly (now living in Rumania), daughter of the Judge Rabbi Leiser, a society was established in 1905/6 in Aishishok by the name of "Hebrew Only". Students were girls from the age of six and up. The main duty of these "members" was to talk only Hebrew among themselves. For each word spoken not in Hebrew, they were fined one kopek (an agura) which was given to the society's treasury. Each evening the girls would get together and the tutor Sara (who was replaced after her Aliyah, by her sisters Esther and Lea, may they rest in leace) would read the girls stories, tell them about Israel and the Zionist organization and teach them the few national songs then circulation ("Hatikva", "Where the Cedars Grow", "Hurry Brothers, Hurry" and others)

From time to time, public "parties" were organized for parents and relatives and the girls would present small plays, declaim and sing in chorus and so on. This society was the oundation of the Hebrew movement in the town and due to its influence, the Hebrew language became common usage till the end.

The first world war brought a temporary cessation to the activities of this society. Immediately upon the establishment of a routine of life under German occupation, the "hebrew Only" society resumed its activities. Sara Rubinstein, daughter of Rabbi Tuvia ("Darr Yaaraamantsar") who was herself a member of the society in her childhook, returned to Aishishok and began reestablishing the society. About a year later, she was joined by Shaul Kliko who also came to Aishishok and began working on spreading the Hebrew language. The society grew and embraced nearly all of the learning youth in the town. The new society of Hebrew speakers by the name of "Hauerkaz" (The Center) was founded for older youth. A club was opened (in the house of Eliyahu Bestonsky) where nearly all the young people convened each evening to spend their free time reading newspapers, playing and attinding lectures on Zionist and literary subjects.

Zionist Youth movements

After the First World War, the younger generation became predominant in Zionist activities. In 1920, a Poalei Zion party was founded in Aishishok on the initiative of Shaul Kliko and with the active participation of the young Paykovsky and Dezmeverovsky. "Poalēi Zion" embraced the great majority of the labor youth of the town and the "unrestrained" yeshiva boys. But the party did not last lon-when the active members left Aishishok it fell apart and was succeeded by the various Zionist youth movements.

During the years 1919-1920 the youth society "Cherut Vetehiya" (Freedom Revival) was active. Its participants were most of the "home owners " in the town. This society was headed by Shalom Sonenzon, Shaul Shneider, Rachel and Peretz Klika, Zeev Kegnovitz, Mordechai Levsovsky, Shlomo Kyotzevsky and others. For youngsters 10-14 years of age, there was the society "Pirchai Zion" (Flowers of Zion) and during 1922-1923 the club in the memory of Breuer founded by S. Shneider and P, Kliko. In 1924,

the latter two founded the "Hashomer Hatzair" organization which existed till 1939. During 1925-1926, with the increase of immigration to Israel, the Zionist movement reached the height of its activity and success. Immigration was instigated during the rule of the Polish minister Grevesky, notorious for his behavior to Polish Jewry. The pressure of heavy taxes and other economic persecution imposed by the Grevensky rule, with the aim of "liberation " Poland of its large Jewish population, resulted in the immigration of many to Israel-"the fourth Aliyah". In each city, "Hachalutz" organizations were founded.

In Aishishok an organization of "Hachalutz Hamizrachi" was first established by Yoseph Reznick, Pesach Kopelenski, Fruma Rachel Katz, Peretz Kliko, Zipporah Lovetzky and with the assistance of N. Redonsky and Munin who were members of the who were members of the "Hachalutz Hamizrachi " center in Vilna.

The "Hachalutz Hamizrachi" organization humbered more than 100 members from various circles not necessarily orthodox and during its two years of existence was very active in providing information on Zionism and Pioneering as well as in training people for Aliya. And many members did indeed make "Aliyah" to Israel. The "Hachalutz Haklali" was founded two years later bu Uri Rozovsky and Simcha Kliko. As the saying goes "jealousy among scholars will increase knowledge"; indeed, a very lively competition existed between the two parties with fertile results: numerous meetings, conferences, parties and balls were held and public life was very active.

Garden plots were leased by the two parties so that their members, all of whom were candidates for Aliya should undergo a practical course in agriculture to train them for work in Israel. On the streets of the town one could often see pioneers striding or foot or sitting on carts filled with hay, big sickles in their hands or on their shouldres and their young, sweating faces beaming with truimph and pleasure.

The dream of all these youths was to obtain an immigration permit to Israel. The lucky few were escorted by their friends and the townsmen irrespective of party affiliation; parties and processions were held, wild hora was danced and fiery speeches were made by the renowned "brave mouths" of the town.

The few anti-zionists, remnants of the Bund and the communits, vanished from public life and were not heard from. They dared not appear in public because the general atmosphere was Hebrew-Zionist. The aritsans children i.e., the lowere and working classes, filled the ranks of the youth Zionist organizations. Also the economic organizations: the merchant union and the artisan union, were dominated by Zionists and no one objected.

When the Beitar organization appeared in the zionist world, a strong Beitar unit was also formed in Aishishok. At a later period, also a Zionist Revisionist organization was established in the town. Both organizations reached the peak of their activity during the last years prior to World War II and were headed by Shlomo Kyotzevsky, Meir Shimon Politzky, Dov Shlipek and others.

Cultural life also flourished. The Hebrew school was growing despite its many difficulties. Plays in Hebrew and Yiddish were held by local or outside actors. The young people saw no future in Poland and dreamt of Israel, waiting for the moment they could fulfill this dream and live a free life in Israel.

And then came the terrible Holocaust which brought an end to the dreamers and their dreams.

The Library and Amateur Theatre

The public Library was founded when the Zionist movement first came to Aishishok. During World War I when most of the well to do and active townsmen left for Vilna (in the end of the summer of 1915) in dread of the Russian Cosacks, the library was almost completely destroyed.

After Aishishok was captured by the Germans in 1915, most of the refugees including many Jews, returned to the town. As is known, also the Nazi's ancestors were not overly affectionate to the Jews but it must be noted to their credit, that they hardly intervened in the social and cultural life.

At that period, Aishishok was very fortunate in its leader, Rabbi Meir Kyotzevsky, an enlightened and clever man of action with a profound social sense. He won the trust of the Germans and therefore succeeded in re-establishing a normal and public life in the

town.

On his initiative, a "comitat" was founded whose main purpose was to supervise the just distribution of the portions of bread and wheat the Germans administered, as well as the clothing which later began to arrive from the U.S. for the Jews.

Asoup-kitchen for the poor was also established. The vital spirit in the "comitat" and the executor of ths decisions was young Shmuel Kliko,may G-d avenge his blood. He concentrated all activities and was its representative before the local anoutside charitable committees.

Since he also loved books, he began, when first returning from Vilna, to devote time and effort to reorganizing the destroyed public library. Benjamin Chorno and he went from house to house to collect the few remnant books of the old library which were to form the foundation of a new one. Actually, thelibrary was at that time a basic "necessity of life; the Germans had imposed a curfew after 7 p.m. so the young people were confined to their homes every evening. In such a situation, what better past time than reading could they have?

Efforts were made to expand the library by donations of books and money, lotteries etc. Nevertheless, the limited numbers of books could not satisfy the hunger of the increasing number of readers. A big operation to purchase more books was then launched by staging plays the proceed of which were used for that purpose.

Sara Pinon the teacher(who was not a native if Aishishok) organized a drama group which staged the well known play of Gordin "Hassia De Yethoma".

The customary theatre, stage and curtain were set up in the stable of Arie Liv, the horse merchant, on Radon St. All the work involved in arranging the stage, the benches etc. was of course, donevoluntarily by theatre and library supporters.

One most note to the German's credit that they generaously supported this project both in providing the necessary materials and purchasing expensive tickets.

The dramatic group consisted of Fruma Rachel Katz, Shmuel Haim Gross, Shaul Kliko, Benjamin Chorno and later Yosef Michelovsky, Shin Katzenelboygen and others. When Sara Pinon left Aishishok, Shaul Kliko took her place at the head of the group and he was

later succeeded by Yosef Michelovsky. The plays of the Aishishok theatre were attended also by guests from nearby towns.

In 1918 the foundation was laid for a separate Hebrew library. With the increase of Hebrew readers as a result of the spreading of Hebrew by Zionist societies and evening classes, there was a corresponding increase in the demand for Hebrew books. As the general library was more concerned with the purchase of Yiddish books, a special play was staged (Darr Intaligant by P. Hirshbin) the proceed of which, amounting to several hundred German marks, were used to purchase Hebrew books.

Meir Kyotzevsky demanded that this money be contributed to poor people ill with typhus (at that time there was an epidemic of Typhus in the town shich killed about 100 people in one year), but the younger people objected strongly claiming that care of the sickly poor was the duty of the community leaders. As is always the case, the people were devided on the issue but the matter ended well since Havale Sterlitzkv (now residing in Israel) who was representative of the youbg people, ahd already reached Vilna, bought books with the money and sent them to Aishishok, the elders felt compelled to leave it at that. Thus the peace was restored.

The public library which later contained several thousand Hebrew ahd Yiddish books played an important part in the public life ot the youth. The library represented a strong "position" over which the Yiddishists and Hebrews fought through the years. The amateur acting group continued to perform many and various plays. Later the youth societies also formed drama clubs which staged plays and playlets in Hebrew.

The Economic Situation

What were the occupations of the townspeople? In early days, the Aishishok Jews dealt mainly in commerce but many were Farmers. The Jews owned wide fields reahing far beyond the Virshoky River. But during the reign of Nicholai the 1st, who was an oppressor of Jews, most of the fields were taken from the Jews and divided among the Goyim of the town. The latter built houses and planted trees as boundries between their land and the and still remaining in Jewish hands. Thus the "Pigs St."

(Svinaga-Ulitsa), which surrounded the Jewish Streets on the west and north, was created.

The townspeople were related mainly to a few prominent families (Hashrovitzim, Shimshelevitz, Kubatznik and others) who owned most of the houses, fields and gardens on the west and south sides. The vegetable gardens were planted with potatoes, cucumbers, beets, carrots and more, the produce of which not only answered to all the Jews' needs all year round but also left a considerable surplus to be sold on market days. Most homeowners also owned cows and goats which grazed in the public pasture near the village, "Dumblaya". Attempts were constantly made by the village Goys to rob the Jews of this pasture and thus began a large seires of trials which lasted tens of years and which were alternately settled in favor of the Jews and the Goys. These trials drained the public treasury but the Jews were unwilling to surrender the Jew remnants of the many lands once belonging to them. Only when the Polish rule began, did the Polish townsmen get a settlement in their favor and all this land was transferred to their ownership. The Jewish community then leased another pasture-land on the community's name, by the water mill on Mill's Road, and there the Jewish cows grzed without disturbance.

The Jews were also occupied with shopkeeping, peddling and horse and hide dealing. At the center of the town, a row of fancy goods and fabric shops was located.(Ryad-Kraman). These shops turned into the general market on their eastern side and faced the horse-market on the west where iron and paint shops were located. At the northern and southern sides shops were located.

Market day was on Thursday which was also the redemption day. All the shopkeepers and artisans, such as hatmakers, blacksmiths, bakers, greengrocers, fabric dealers whose livelihood depended on the Goyim, looked forward to this day. Hundreds of peasant carts came from all over the vicinity and filled the market square and adjacent alleys. All week long the town lived off the redemptions of this day. On Friday, the shopkeepers and artisans collected their debts and settled their accounts. On

other workdays, except for Sunday, one rarely saw a Goy in the market and if by chance one one appeared, all the shopkeepers pounced on him and attempted to persuade him to enter their respective shops by spinning stories of unmatchable bargains or even by actually pulling him by the ahnd or button hole. Four times a year a fair was held which attracted merchants also from other districts, especially horse and pig merchants as well as several horse-theives.

The town also had big tanneries most of which belonged to the "Kabatznikim" where cheap and plain leather was tanned for the peasants and softer leather for the Jews. The tanneries also sent leather to the city. Merchandise needed by the shop-keepers and artisans was brought by coachmen from the city. Sunday morning, 12-15 coaches would leave for the district city of Vilna, filled with sacks and merchants sitting on thim containing the produce of Aishishok: leathers, geese, chicken, flaxen, pigs-bristles, etc.

Wednesday afternoon the coaches returned stacked with city good for market day. Wednesday evening was a sleepless night of hard work organizing the merchandise on shelves, preparing boxes etc.

At the end of the 19th century an actual factory existed in Ashishok. This was the match factory of Joseph Stelevitz which worked for several decades; it employed 100 workers, mainly women and thus supported many families and provided dowries for the girls.

Initially, the matches were lighted by triking a wall or shoe-sole. Later the modern matches, lighted by striking the coating of their box, were produced. When the Russian government imposed a tax on matches, so high that it comprised 50% of the income, the factory could no longer support itself and was closed.

An "alms box" was founded to assist the poor shopkeepers and artisans. They could borrow a few rubles without interest by pawning goods. A public sick fund was also founded.

The "alms box" was handled by Rabbi Eliyahu Dumblyanski. It was a private box yet he did not profit from it. He lent everyone small sums and received a pawn on

on the loan. He would wait several years for repayment and only after giving numerous notices, would he sell the pawned objects at a public auction.

When he died, at 105 years of age it is said, his alms box stopped operating.

This was not the case with the sick fund which supported the sickly poor of the town. Also this fund was founded on the initiative of one person, Rabbi Benjamin of the Kegnovitz family, called "Benjamin Daar Kapalyoshaik" by the townspeople. He carried the treasury box in a little bag round his neck. The money was put in special boxes by Jewish women before candle lighting on Shabbath and holidays. Twice a year Rabbi Benjamin would come round to empty the contents and thus the funds increased. The trustees of the treasury were Rabbi Moshe Streletzky who was succeeded by Rabbi Meir Shalom Dubitzky and others.

In 1909 a bank was founded on the initiative of Rabbi Meir Kyotzevsky and Hersheel Remz and also, may they live long, Rabbi Zeer Shneider and Zvi Levzovsky. Each member deposited a certain sum which formed the capital of the bank, New members joined and the capital increased.

Later the bank received 2,000 rubles from J.C.A. (Jewish Colonization Association) and in 1914, its credit amounted to 15,000 rubles. Meir Seiritzky served as first secretary of the bank, followed by Michael Vilensky, may he rest in peace, whose successor for many years was Haim Mordechai Patzyamku.

During the final ten years before A's destruction, several big economic enterprises were erected such as the flour mill and power station of the brothers Kyutzevsky, the latter of which provided the town with benefits of electric lighting. Economic organizations were also formed and these provided their members with financial and organizational aid and also promoted the development of the town.

First and foremost of the economic organizations was the merchants' union. This union was created in 1919 when the Polish government took over and most of the shopkeepers and merchants were members. The main cause for its formation was the hostile attitude of the Polish authorities to Jewish commerce and their desire to drive the Jews out of the business. To this end, they used taxes which were increased yearly and regulations of all sorts and kinds as to make life for the Jewish merchant and shopkeeper as difficult as possible. The Jews were forced to unionize to overcome, by joint efforts, the difficulties created by the government. The union's duties included providing credit to needy shopkeepers, explaining the endless new rules and regulations and affording legal support against all the controllers and inspectors who seized the opportunities to impose heavy monetary fines for 'breaches' of laws of commerce.

The union was formed by a few shopkeepers headed by Mr. Zeev Schneider who also served as its first chairman until his immigration to Israel in 1924 (He now lives in Rishon Le-Zion). He was succeeded by Dov Kyotzevsky, Yosef Vydenberg and others. The union's secretary and its "life and soul," till its last day was Binyamin Chorny.

The merchants thus set an example of a unified effort to overcome mutual difficulties. They were followed by artisanswho finally attempted to create an organization too.

The Artisans Union

In contrast to other small towns, A was also a town of Jewish craft and industry. Jewish artisans were inhabitants of the town from its earliest times. We can find an indication of the large artisan population in the many minyan's of observant craftsmen: the tailors' minyan, the shoemakers' minyan, and the mixed minyan where members were chiefly artisans: carpentars, blacksmiths, potters and others.

In these minyans, the members of worshippers reached the hundereds. We have no exact numbers of previous eras, but we do know that at the beginning of the century, the artisans (laborers formed about a third of the total Jewish population in A. and they constantly increased. It was due to this that also the Jewish Socialist Movement, the Bund, had a very strong hold in A. In 1905, the Bund had over 100 members in A. These were mainly young people, since the older people were usually employers and as such not acceptable by the Bund, even if the wanted to be. Artisans (such as tailors, watchmakers, and other "clean" craftsmen) were members also in other Socialist movements, such as Poalei Zion and later the S.S.

After several abortive attempts, craftsmen with a heightened sense of awareness and social consciousness, did succeed in 1924 to form an "Artisans Union." This organization embraced most of the town's artisans and assisted them considerably.

The heavy hand of the government was the main factor also in the formation of this union. The Anti-semitic Polish government attempted to pressure Jewish artisans out of business by burdening their lives. When the government realized that heavy taxes and arbitrary regularions would not scare the Jewish artisans, it invented a law requiring artisans to have a license.

Under the disguise of "concern for artisans' expertise," the government decided to force each artisan to undergo examinations testing his technical ability and knowledge of his trade and additionally, his knowledge of Polish. Jewish artisans who were "old-hands" at their trades, were forced to prove to anti-semitic officials that they indeed had mastered their craft. This created a wide opening to bribery, blackmail and presecution of the artisans by their

examiniers. The greatest torment was to prove knowledge, in reading and writing, of Polish, the language of the state, which most of the elderly artisans could not do. The artisans' union intervenend on behalf of its members to ease the harsh decree enforced by the evil and ignorant examinier, and in many cases saved the livelihood of members who had failed the examination by proving that indeed they were experts and well deserved the license.

The union embraced approximately 180 families and its organizors were; Yehuda Liv Solomyanski, the watchmaker; Eltzik the barber; Koremin the tailor and others. The fact that they succeeded in organizing and preparing for public life a collection of people who were difficult to organize, helped promomte the public image of the artisan and proved to be a great blessing.

Some Figures Concerning Trade and Commerce in A.

In the last years before Worl War II, the economic crisisbegan to have its effect and the shopkeepers and artisans were its victims.

Commerce depended on the farmers of the vicinity who sold their produce and purchased their needs on Thursday the market day or during the four yearly fairs. During the thirties however, the number of Christian shops increased and these competed very successfully with the Jewish shops, since the former paid much lower taxes. Additionally, the chain of co-operative agricultural shops supported by the government widened, and the widened, and the farmer no longer depended on the Jewish shopkeepers. Thus many Jewish families lost their livelihood.

According to the statistics of 1936, 792 people in A. made their living from commerce and shopkeeping. This includes some shops whose capital did not exceed some tens of golden coins.

Jewish and Christian Shops

TYPE	1925 JEWS	1925 CHRISTIANS	1935 JEWS	1935 CHRISTIANS
Grocery	51	1	31	4
Fabric	22	-	11	-

Jewish and Christian Shops cont.

TYPE	1925 JEWS	1925 CHRISTIANS	1935 JEWS	1935 CHRISTIANS
Shoes and Fancy Goods	11	-	16	-
Restaurants& Pubs	13	-	15	5
Ready Made Clothes	4	-	7	-
Pharmacies	4	1	3	1
Leather	5	-	6	1
Iron	8	8	6	-
Miscellaneous	12	-	11	-
Total	130	2	106	11

These numbers show how the Christians slowly entered the market of Jewish livelihood and the number of their shops increased from 2 in 1925 to 11 in 1935 while the number of Jewish shops decreased in those 10 years. The competitionwas fierce and profits meagerly.

Artisans

(23 Different Crafts)

332 families dealt in crafts. Of these there were 139 Jewish artisans and 55 apprentices; a total of 194. Of the Christians, there were 88 artisans and 50 apprentices;: a total of 138. Of these there were 51 Jewish shoemakers and 57 Christians; 63 Jewish tailors and 19 Christian; 22 Jewish wheelmakers, cabinet -makers and carpentars and 8 Christians.

The Professional Union of The Laborers

The number of labourers in A was relativiely small. Most were members of the "Hachalutz-Haklali" and "Hamizpachi" organizations in the town. The minority whose beliefs resembled the Bund and Communists, organized themselves in a professional union of labourers with no division into the various professions. They were organized Zeev Katz, an unbalanced individual who oscillated from one party to another with no compunction. Originally, he was an enthusiastic Zionist who actually immigrated

to Israel but he quickly returned and became a communist. He worked for the Polish secret police, was an enthusiastic Yiddishist and also knew Hebrew. With the force of rhetoric and energy, he succeeded to organize the handful of labourers in a "professional union" to fight the "battle of the classes" against the "bourgeoise employers" ie; the tailors and the shoemakers, representatives of "private property" in the town, who in fact struggled to make ends meet and employed one or two labourers in their workshops.

This union provided a facade for the communist Yiddishists who were an insignificant minority in the town. Their fight against Zionism was expressed in their resistance to the Zionist management of the general library. This library was the "bone of contention" and constant battle ground of the two camps: the Hebrews and the Yiddishists. Meetings for the election of the library management often ended in blows. Torn shirts and bloody noses were a frequent result of this language battle. The question of the amount of money to be assigned for the purchase if Hebrew books was a hard and painful problem, inciting "battles" which lasted for years. The weighty question of whether a Zionist or Yiddishist would be elected as chairman entailed a heavy war of schemes and strategies. And Although the results were known from the outset, since most of the readers were members of the various Zionist organizations, this didn't decrease the fervour of the war. This was a war of beliefs, and in A., before its terrible destruction, the Jewish youths, so naive and enthusiastic, felt it was a matter of life and death!

THE DESTRUCTION OF AISHISHOK

Before the "Storm"

After the district of Vilna was "annexed" to Lithuania in 1939, A. was only a few kilometers away from the Russian-Lithuanian border. It became a major passage for the many Jewish refugees who escaped from the Russian and German occupied Poland to the still independent state of Lithuania, which at that time, was a center of the Zionists -Hebrew movement and other Jewish movements. Vilna, the new capital

of the enlarged Lithuania and referred to as the Jerusalem of Lithuania was the main attraction since it still offered possibilities of immigration to Israel and other countries across the sea. And in this "between the wars" period, A. had and important function as a "transit town" for thousands of refugees.

We now present the stories of three people who found temporary refuge in A. along with thousands of others. They have nothing but admiration and praise for the Jews of A. for their helping-hand, warm treatment, and the Jewish love which they offered their unhappy brothers.

In those difficult days, the Jews of A. proved that they were indeed truly merciful. They provided the refugees not only with financial means to continue their their journey to Vilna and Kovna, not only with "Kosher" documents, but also surrounded them with a warm and encouraging atmosphere which strengthened their hearts and gave some comfort to their sorrow.

The wonderful conduct of our townspeople is a living monument in the hearts of the thousands of refugees who met them and is a source of pride and appreciation for us the town's survivors.

M. Chororovsky

"Do not fear, we will get you out!"-- Excerpt from the diary of a military translator

1939

Poland collapsed a few months ago. Its eastern part was "liberated" from freedom of speech, of movement, of press and even of food and clothing. Persecution of Zionists has begun....there is an increasing desire to escape and many plans are laid ti cross district, border, sea and continent to reach the country we have dreamed of from our youth on.

.....Only one way is open: through Vilna. Even there, chances are slim, but a prisoner will attempt to escape even through an invisible crack. The BeloRussian-Lithuanian border is sealed tight. Lithuanian and Soviet authorities have tightened border security and chances of passing grrow slimmer daily. ...Yes, there is no

choice, we must hurry or else it will be too late... We gathered in Lida, some tens of kilometers away from the border. Our group consisted of 14 people. One woman with two children, an aged violinist with his handicapped son, three girls and the rest, young men of 20-25 years of age.

It was a cold night in the middle of 1940. When we stepped on the snow, it creaked and groaned, as if to inform on us. "Here goes a border smuggler." ... I will not forget that nightas long as I live. Nine hours ... in straits,frozen ... puddles, a river, frost, ice, woods ... shots ... the weeping of the children and their mother, a frozen old man and his handicapped son, miserable, beside him.... the wailing of the girls and a cry of "Half!" Only nine of us reached the outskirts of A.

"Stop! Do you have any money?" demanded a tall Lithuanian policeman, the first to appear before me in the Lithuanian republic. Joseph Sh. began negotiating with him. We took off our watches and collected all of our valuables- we had no Lithuanian currency and he refused to accept Russian rubles.

Just as we finished with the first policeman, others appeared demanding more money. We told them we had no more valuables, since we had given all to the first policeman. We were promptly taken to the A. prison to sit there among the other "candidates" for Aliyah.

Through the prison windows, the faces of A. Jews peeped in. Many braved the cold to come greet us, give us breakfasts, encourage us and promise to help us.

"Do not fear, we will get you out"

During the day we were visited by the heads of the Jewish community of the town. They brought us food, linen and more encouraging words. The children of A. gathered round the prison asking us what else we needed. The elders issued orders, dispatched delegations, pledges were made, and finally we were freed.

Yes, our A. stood the test and truly deserves its reputation as a "refuge for refugees." All 15,000 refugees who passed through the town praise it. It comforted, provided warmth, encouraged and gave provisions for the rest of the journey. And we

do not mean only provisions of food but spiritual provisions as well and an increased will to survive and continue our wanderings to the shores of our homeland.

If you were lucky enough not to be spotted by a policeman, you could approach, in th dark of the night, any Jewish home, without question, and be welcomed. They offered their beds and the beds of their children, rose to warm up tea, and helped you and your children.

Thus was the conduct of Aishushuck.

And therefore I dared , in a special song for A., to wish the Hebrew land if Israel, that it, too, will be blessed by such in A., on its Northern and Southern borders.

"A. too, was destroyed, together with its dear and warm Jews," my fellow Joseph tells me with tears falling from his eyes.

*Published in "Haboker"(This Morning)

Shlomo Breuer

"The Warm-Hearted Jews..."
(by a Zionist "Border-Smuggler")

After the Vilna district was given, by the Soviets, to the "independent" state of Lithuania, a widespread transfer of pioneers was organized from the Soviet part of Poland, where all Zionist activity was prohibited, to Vilna and Kovna. The Zionist movement, in all its different branches, flourished in Lithuania at that time, and the pioneer movement had many, many members.

When my native town, Lotzk, became part of Russia, I was forced, as a Zionist, to escape to Vilna. The "Hachalutz" center in Vilna assigned me the task of organizing the smuggling of pioneers from the Bialystok-Polsia district, across the Lithuanian-Russian border. I accepted the assignment and went to the town of Vorovna, which served as a meeting place and last station before the border smuggling. Some Jews in the town had connections with reliable peasants who took pioneers and

other Refugees over the border for 100-150 rubles a person. The money was given to the peasants, by the Vorovna Jews, only after they presented a note signed by the head of the group indicating a safe arrival. This activity continued successfully for several months till the matter was brought to the attention of the Soviet authorities(mainly through the fault of our Communist brothers). The border security was consequently tightened and those caught were sentenced, administratively, to 15 years of exile in Siberia.

My name was brought to the attention of the Soviets as organizer of the smuggling activities, and they began to follow me. I had to act extremely cautiously. One day, sitting at the barber,s in Vorovna, I overheard one Jew, probably a communist, telling his fellow that tonight they were going to bring an end to the Zionist gang.

I quickly shaved and left, pretending to have heard nothing. I hurried to the butcher,who served as a middle-man between the other involved Jews and me, and told him what I had heard."Yes, I have heard of the matter." he told me, "The town is surrounded by policemen and N.K.W.D. detectives. This evening they intend to search for pioneers and refugees who are not natives of the town. You have to get out of here!"

"What shall I do?" I questioned him. "Where can I escape and hide? Give me some advice! You know what awaits us if I am caught by the police!"

The butcher thought for a moment and was suddenly struck with an idea. "Come, I have a place for you. I hope that even the Soviet eye won't be able to find you there."

He brought me to a storage house for wood, in the corner of which there was a two meter deep pit. He covered the pit with torn sacks, old clothes and boarch, on top of which he placed dry wood. I lay hidden in that dark and airless hole for several hours. At midnight, I emerged and, assisted by one of our peasants, made my way across the fields to an isolated house in the woods where nine pioneers awaited me. I intended to make my last trip across the border with them and

A., which served as the first station across the Lithuanian border. From A., the pioneers were sent to Vilna or Kovna to join pioneer training groups.

We walked in a single file, headed by the peasant. In the middle of our journey, in a big forest, the peasant disappeared, leaving us to ourselves. We didn't know the way nor where we were. We had to decide whether to return or continue alone and pray for a miracle to happen. We decided that no matter what happened, we would continue.

For us, Russia meant Siberia and hard labour camps in the Taigas. We walked for another two hours and came to a wooden pole lying across the way. We realized we had reached the border. The journey was arduous, the ground was frozen, and the walk across the forest paths(we dared not use the roads) was very difficult. Each of us was also wearing several suits of clothes and underwear, the only property we could smuggle with us, and carrying backpacks. We had one girl with us. Suddenly as if springing from the earth, three peasants appeared. These were robbers who waited in ambush for refugees smuggling across the borders to rob them of their money. Frequently, the stripped their victims down to their underwear and sometimes even murdered them. They had pistols and demanded we accompany them to the Russian border station. We pled with them and gave them the rest of our money, but they were still not satisfied. They demanded gold and jewelry. One of us gave his watch. another, his only ring, the third gave clothing. They demanded more and more- and since we had no more to give them, they began beating us. We could not even shout for fear that the soldiers would hear us and we had no weapons. We were desperate. Finally, after pleading and begging them, they left us. Frightened and beaten, we mustered what was left of our strengths and plodded on. We were exhausted and hungry and though frozen, we were covered with sweat from our encounter with death.

About an hour later we reached a small house faintly lit from within, standing on the outskirts of the village. We knocked and a peasant came to the door. We asked him to let us in to warm ourselves and he agreed. We found out later that he was one of the border smugglers and accustomed to such encounters. He informed us

that we were on the village of Tabshun, about four kilometers away from A. For us, that meant that we were happily on Lithuanian territory. We sighed with relief and thanked G-d that we had safely crossed the border and escaped evil. The peasant knew the Jews in A. who were involved in smuggling Jews across the border and agreed to escort us to them. We decided to leave the girl in the house with our belongings so that she could get some rest. The peasant's daughter, who appeared to be a quiet and honest Christian, remained with her. Thus, after a short rest, we started on our way to A.. The peasant went ahead of us and we followed, scattered, about fifty meters behind him. About one kilometer away from his village, seven Lithuanian soldiers appeared. They beat the peasant and shouted at him. We did not understand the language. The peasant escaped and returned to his village. The soldiers surrounded us and thus we reached A. at daybreak. On the first street we met Jews who looked at us with sympathy and compassion . One of them approached the soldier who appeared to be the officer of the group, and confeered with him for some minutes, hinting to us not to fear. We then went to a large house situated on the corner of two streets and belonging, as we later learned, to a warm-hearted Jew named Lubetzky. We were received with a Jewish warmth that touched our hearts, given food and drink, and made to feel that we were among brothers. Upon a hint from the Jew , the soldiers left us. More Jews came to the house and we learned later that these these were the members of the committee which took care ofthe refugees from Russia.

We told these warm-hearted Jews of the girl we had left behind in the village and they sent a coachman to bring her. We spent three days in A. and liked the town immensely. A. was full of Refugees from all paerts of Russia, germany, and Poland. All found rest there after their hazardous journey. The "spirit" of the "Committee to Aid the Refugees" was the rabbi of the town, Rabbi Shimshon Rozofsky, who had a majestic face and wise eyes and could also recite a good Jewish joke to hearten the spirits.

The members of the committee used to gather in his house. The work of the

committee involved ransoming refugees caught by the Lithuanian authorities. It also obtained Lithuanian passes for the refugees so that after a few days rest, they could continue their journey to Vilna, the Lithuanian capital. Money was also provided by the committee for the first few days of the journey. All this was done with such Jewish warmth and heartiness that all who passed through the town in those turbulent days were full of praise for the pleasant town and its kind inhabitants.

On the fourth day the committee rented a truck to take 60 refugees to Vilna. This was necessary because the train did not pass through the town, and the buses, leaving from the market-place station, were so full of people that strong elbows were necessary to get us on one. About one hundred kilometer away from the town, a Lithuanian police car, coming from the other direction, stopped the truck and began questioning as to who we were and what our destination was. We seemed suspicious and the driver was ordered to return us to the police station in the town. We knew that once the Lithuanian police discovered our identities, they would return us to the Russian border and we would be doomed to Siberia.

There was only one Lithuanian policeman with us and he was seated beside the driver. I and two other refugees, who on no account wished to face the Russians again, jumped off the truck when it reached the first street in A., Vilna Atreet, and disappeared among the houses. We returned to the house of the kind man who had accommodated us and told him what had happened. The committe was alerted and it decided to send to send another truck and transfer us to Vilna before the police would be able to conduct a wider investigation. Unfortunately, this truck was also stopped and we were all returned, under Lithuanian police guard, to the police chief.

The police chief ordered the whole group, some 80 people, to be transported that same evening to the Russian border, which was located six kilometer from A. The night was dark and I decided to escape again, since returning to Russia was out of the question for me. We were escorted by 18 policemen. I slowly began to lag and fall behind the nearest policeman. When walking alongside of a ditch, I

dropped to my belly, crawled to the ditch, and rolled into it. When the group had moved some distance from me, I began to run back to A.. I heard the sounds of shouts and shooting behind me, but I safely reached the first house. I knocked on the window and a Jewish voice answered me. He took me in, I told him what had happened, and asked him to take me to the Lubetzky house where I had spent the previous night. Next morning, Mr. Lubetzky found me a place in a car going to Vilna...Two hours later I safely reached the "mother city of Israel", the "Jerusalem of Lithuania". I, later, learned that the whole group was returned safely to A.. The dear Jews of that town had followed the policemen and on the order of their chief, whose heart was softened by a few hundred coins, returned them. I met many of that group in Vilna and together we reminisced about our mutual experiences in A. and its wonderful people, whom I will never forget.

Blu Zion Ben Shalom

Aishishok, Aishishok, how pleasant and beautiful you were.....

(excerpt from the book "In the Storm on a Temptuous Day")

We are going to Vilna. We arrive at a small town. At the station, an assistant of the man organizing the smuggling accross the Russian-Lithuanian border awaits us. At midnight we leave the town. The skies are cloudy but the layer of show affords some light. The pathless route is difficult. We cross fields and meadows "rich" with pits. The heavy back-pack is burdensome. One of the peasants heads the procession, the other brings up the rear. The Jew carrying the child is first on the line and I am last.

We have walked three hours already. Our guides promise us that in half an hour we shall reach the Lithanian village accross the border. We are at the end of our strength. We finally arrive at the first houses of the town. The town is asleep. Our guides knock on the door of one of the houses. We enter a

small room lit by an oil lamp. My heart is full of happiness the like of which I have not experienced in years. My lips cannot move but all of me inside is whispering "Thank G-d I have lived to see this day!".

A heavenly morning. The earth is frozen but a wintry sun is shining. We walk the streets of the town and love every bit of it. Aishishok, Aishishok, how pleasant and beautiful you are! How every heart blesses you! We see your small, beautiful homes and your streets blessed with a special grace. You were so beautiful and perfect in our eyes that morning. Our first stop on Lithuanian soil! My pleasant town, we will remember you always with gratitude and love.

In that Jewish house we met the first group. Greetings were exchanged. They tell of their plights in passage and we tell of ours. In the corner the Jew's daughter is sitting doing her homework. I approach her. The books are Hebrew books and so is the lesson she is writing. Dear child, may you be blessed!

We spend that day in Aishishok. There is no train station here and it is very difficult to find room on the bus. We spent the night in the town. Next morning we "capture"places on the bus and after two hours drive, finally reach Vilna.

The Holocaust

Of 3,000 Aishishok Jews, most of whom were murdered by the defiled, only some few tens survived. Some of the latter have already come to Israel. From the stories told us by those who were "snatched from the fire" we have compiled this chronicle of the destruction and terror which befell our beloved. The nightmarish scenes of the Jewish life in the town during the three months of the Nazi occupation till the day of slaughter, flash before our eyes. Aishishok was on of the few towns that the Nazis and their satellites vent their furor upon during the first months of occupation. Our pen has no strength to describe in full the horror and enormity of disaster which hit the Jews so suddenly. Only a fragment of the

of the whole is described here, in the notes of the survivors who reached Israel.

The authors of these notes were eye-witnesses to all that happened to the Jews until their last day. They continued living lives of hidden "marranos" in the homes of "good goys" who agreed, for huge sums of money, not to betray them to the Nazis and their Polish and Lithuanian collaberators. At a later period, once the Jews ran out of money, the "goodgoy" cooperated no longer and they were forced to flee to the forests and join the partizans there. With them, they led a life of fear and danger but were at least encouraged by the feeling that they were fighting their enemy with arms and revenging the slaughtered.

The stories presented here are truthful; they are not exaggerated nor poetically adjusted. We read here the truth in all its horrible and horrifying simplicity.....

Shalom Ben Shemesh(Sonenzon)

The Last Days of Aishishok

During the last years before the Russian and German occupation of Poland in 1939, the anti-semitism greatly increased . Attacks on Jews walking through the streets of Aishishok became frequent. Drunken thugs, most of whom came from out-of-town, dared stand by the Jewish shops and forcefully revent the entrance of Christian shoppers. On market-days the thugs, including some who wore uniforms of Polish students, assaulted the Jews, injured them physically and damaged their property. A venomous propaganda was launched against the "blood-suckers of the Polish people" and there were cries of "Jews go to Palestine!", "wait cursed Jews, your fate will be like that of your German brothers, we will kill you without Hitler!". The Jews dreaded the Market Day on Thursday. If the day ended with some tavern window's smashed and only a few beatings, the Jews would thank the Heavens for their mercy. The atmosphere became more and more tense. Then the town's own goys, who previously had few gleeful spectators,

began showing signs that they too were willing to participate in the "holy" war against the Jewish "reign" in the town.

Thus the Polish people and leaders were too busy fighting the war against the "internal enemy" to have the will or time to anticipate the real danger from the west, where the enemy was insolently and openly preparing its arms and enjoying the confusion which overcame the Poles.

So when the Nazis invaded Poland on Sept 1, 1939 and captured more than half of the big country in a matter of days, it came as a dreadful surprise for both Poles and Jews. The danger of war had been much discussed but neither the leaders nor the people really believed that Hitler would dare carry out his threats.

The notorious Polish arrogance and the exaggerated faith in the strength and courage of the "splendid" Polish army and its great commander, the Marshal Ridz-Smigli(whom Pilsodsky himself had named as his successor and deputy)-blinded the Poles from seeing their economic and military weakness of Poland, divided and wasted by party fights and peoples' quarrels.

The rapid conquest of POland and the disintegration of its army stupified the Jews too. They had hoped that the army would prevent the advancement of the Nazis and hold out till the allies came to the rescue. With the approach of the Germans, the Jewishpopulation was stricken with mortal fear. Their hearts dreaded the worst-and were not mistaken.

Treachery appeared from all sides. The "folksdentsdien", the Ukranians, the White Russians and the Lithuanians-all gleefully watched the defeat of hated Poland and the bitter end anticipated for the Jews.

The goys of Aishishok showed their hatred of the Jews and their pleasure at the fate awaiting them, though no one could have foreseen the immensity of the holocaust about to hit millions of Jews so rapidly.

On the 17th of September, 1939 troops of tanks and armoured cars of the Red Army entered the town. Initially, rumours spread that the Russians had come to

save and assist their slavik Polish brothers against the common enemy-the Teutonic beast. But all illusions and hopes quickly proved groundless-the bitter and bare reality was soon exposed.

A Revolutionary council ("Revkum") was founded in the town and headed by the communist Haim Shuster, a native of Aishishok . Its first decision was to prohibit the various zionist organizations in the town and transform the Hebrew reactionary school to a proletarian Yiddish school. The Aishishok Bourgeoisie children were expelled in shame form their school whihc was intended only for children of the "working" and "oppressed" classes.

But the communist rule did not last long. A month later, the district of Vilna including Aishishok, became part of the "friendly" state of Lithuania and the Lithuanian rule substituted the Russian. This year, 1939-1940, was the year of light preceding the darkness.

The communists and their families left the town together with the Red Army which remained in the big cities only. The Zionist groups renewed their activities and the school became Hebrew again. The Jews adjusted quickly to the new government and business flourished. Connection with the Lithuanian Jews were renewed after a forced severance of over 20 years.

Aishishok, situated close to the Lithuanian White Russian border, served as a transit station for thousands of refugees who excaped from Russain and German occupied Poland. The refugees smuggled over the border at time in mortal danger. But when they arrived at Aishishok, they found there a brotherly hand ready to help them. Aishishok's committee to aid the refugees was organized , headed by the community's Rabbi, Rabbi Shimon Rozovsky, may he rest in peace. this committee provided the refugees with money and "kosher" documents and sent them to the capitol, Vilna.

The Rabbi's house was full of devoted community workers and the town's streets were full of authors and bibilical scholars.

But this era of splendour did not last. In June of 1940, Lithuanians entered the Russian Soviet pact and the reign of the local communist Jews in all its terror,

returned. This time they were harder. Arrests and persecution began. Zionism was prohibited, Hebrew was declared a "reactionary" language and the shops of the "big bourgoeise" were confiscated and their owners had to find other employment. Among the confiscated shops were Abeliov's, Kyotzevsky's, koppelman's, Veidenberg's and others, (Abehor became a blacksmith, Markel Koppelman-a clerk in a Vilna pharmacy, etc.). Merchandise was scarce and prices soared, searches and fines became dialy incidents. But most of the Jews seemed somehow to manage also under soviet rule. The Black Market flourished.

A communist party was established in the town, headed by Libke Ginonsky, an Aishishok girl, who served a five year prison term under the Poles on account of her communist beliefs. The "Komsomol" was headed by the communist Reuvaleh, son of Shmuel the Shoemaker (nicknamed Pi "Bolvitzke").

Life became increasingly more difficult but the Jews comforted themselves with the fact that Jew-haters were forced to conceal their fellings and mainly becuase they had been spared Hitler-the undiscriminating Jew hater.

And then the Russain-German war broke out. Already on the second day of the war, the 23rd of June, 1941, Nazi troops entered the village. The Russians retreated, offering no resistance. The Vilna-Bialystok Road corssed Aishishok, and the German invaders' march through the town lasted two weeks. There was a steady stream of tanks, cars, canons, and military personnel of all kinds which continued day and night. The immense force proceeded in three columns, heading east. The wihdow panes trembled from the sounds of the heavy wheels. The Jews dared not ememrge from their homes. Seized with deathly fear they sat behind their closed blinds and doors listening to the echoes of the triumphant Nazi march and the joyouse shouts of the goys lining the road sides and hailing their"saviours" from the "Judo-Communist' rule.

When the huge stream decreased and only the German troop reamained to guard the town, the Jews emerged to the streets, with faces pale and eyes expressing despair and fear of the future.

The German army had not yet harmed the Jews. They only declared contemptously 'The Jews will go away from here", and the Jews did not yet comprehend the meaning of the sentence. A division of the Ministry for Public Works, which was founded by Todt, came to the town. Aishishok's decree was issued ordering all men 16 to 60 years old to report and register for work. Any evader who would be caught-would be shot. The work involved repairing the road leading from Aishishok to Vilna. Each work day lasted 14 hours, from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. One half hour break was allowed for lunch. The pay was 50 pfennings. Since the work site was 10 km away from Aishishok and one had to report there before 7 a.m., the men set out at 5 a.m. ahd returned at 11 p.m. The guards were "folksdutsche" that is Polish citizens of Greman origin, who had settled in Polands humdreds of years before but once the Germans took over, they betraued Poland and resumed their "german" identity. These people were horrible sadists who surpassed the Germans in their curelty. They tortured us in various ways. After an exhausting day's work, when we were hungry and tired to the bone, we were foced to perform military excerises- to strip naked and beat each other to the defiled merriment of our guards... the officer Weber surpassed the others in cruelty.

Two weeks later a new military commander came to town. He summoned Rabbi Rozovsky, amy he rest in peace, to his headquarters (the Kyotzevsky house) and ordered his to organize a 12 member Jewish committe (Juden Comitat).

"You cursed Jews are responsible for all wars, and therefore you must pay a high price-and you certainly will" He ended his barking order and ordered the Rabbi to leave his presence immediately. Rabbi Rozovsky gathered the men in the synagogue and informed them of the oreder. There were no eager volunteers for this duty. It was decided to choose the members by lot. The names which came up were Avraham Kaplan-who served as chairman, S. Sonenzon-deputy chairman, Yehuda Dvilomsky, watchmaker Zelig Sevitzky, Itzi Mendel Yurkansky, Yosef Michalovsky, Ephraim Karhovsky,(son in law of Bara Yankil Reznik, the last chairman of the Aishishok community before the war) Hanan Michlovsky, Mordechai Kegnovitz, Markel Koppeman and others.

Some days passed and a troop of border guards came to the town instead of military troop. Torture began. The committee was ordered to prepare big boxes inform the Jews to bring all their jewelery and silver and gold coins to dquarters. This booty was put in the boxes and sent to the "fatherland"- many. New orders were issued daily. They demended cigarettes, wine, cakes, s, butter. All orders had to be supplied by the committee within a few hours days. Delays were paid for by murderous beatings. The Lithuanian police ntually also came to town, headed by the murderer Ostrobskas and the committee thenceforth obliged to fulfill the greedy demands of both Germans and Lithuanians.

The German border-guards maltreated us with various tortures; their sick and istic minds invented new methods daily. They freuqenlty rooed us, the committee bers, down stairs, set their dogs on us, rushed us to headquarters several times ly for trivialities and fired their guns above our heads for amusement.

On the Saturday, Rosh Hodesh of Elul, the Germans and their Lithuanian Assis- ts, seized a group of men, led them to the river near the bridge on Vilna Street, ced them to bathe, fully clothed, in the river and then to roll on the road in er to clean it of dust. Finally they set their dogs on them and drove them home.

One day they gathered 250 bearded Jews in the market place. They arranged n in two rows and ordered them to pluck out each others beards. The wretched vic- s were surrounded by the defiled sadists who made sure no one wascheating. The ps whistled and mercilessly lashed at heads and bodies. The scene was accompanied he wild laughter of the murderers and village goys who had gathered to watch the sing spectacle.....

One day when Mordechai Kegnovitz and myself ahd come to headquarters we were red to strip to our waists and climb up to the roof. Fire engines of the e department were brought and my brother Moshe was ordered to direct torrents of er upon us to throw us off the roof. We held on to the tiles and chimney with our strenght. Our ahdns froze and our fingers became paralyzed from the cold effort but we managed to hold on. After half an hour of wild laughter of the

Germans and goys we were allowed to descend ahd we fled home.

Before leaving the town, they robbed us of everything. They stripped the schools of decorations and took the ancient candlesticks. They broke the benches of the synagogue and burnt the books of the public library in the market place. They desecrated the cemetary by breaking the gravestones. They destroyed the bathe house and the Mikveh.

The teutonic vandal showed their face. Eventually, the rule over the town was transferred to the Lithuanian police and the latter expressly showed that they surpassed the Nazis in cruelty and latred fro Jews.

Peasants began to spread rumours that towns were emptying of their Jews and that the Jews were being murdered in Masses. These peasants suggested the Jews turn their goods over to them rather than let the Lithuanians enjoy the spoils. "Your end will come anyway" they said in feigned sympathy.

But we did not want to believe these therrible rumours. We deluded ourselves that we, perhaps, would be saved. The catstrophe would not reach us, we hoped. Our will to survive was very strong. We believed the oppressors would take all our belongings, starve us and torture us, that the weak would not withstand the torture but that the strong would survive. We held with all our strength to the board of life floating precariously on the waves fo hatred and suffering. Only a small number realized the truth and said "We are all lost". No one will survive this hell. One of these was Rabbe Shimon Rozovsky, may he rest in peace.

When he was informed that many Jews hid money, jewery and valuables with their christian acquaintances, he called the community leaders and arned them not to hand over any more of the ramianing goods to the goys.

"You will cause the goys to be your deadly enemies if you hand over the rest of your goodss. They'll be the first who will want to get rid of your to enjoy the spoils". Reiterated the wise Rabbi but no one heeded.

Each of us hoped in his heart that he would be saved and therefore wished to protect what remained of this belongings for his life after the war.

And the bolled chilling rumors of the extermination of Jews of the adjacent villages persisted. When we learned of the slaughtering of the Jews of the town of Aran we sent a reliable goy to check out the rumour. The latter returned and told us that the streets of Aran were still full of unburied Jewish bodies rolling in the dust. Yet many of us still refused to face the appalling reality and tried to continue the life of illusion and unfounded hopes.

The Rabbil again gathered the community leadres and told them:"Jews, you see our end is approaching rapidly... G-d did not want us to be saved. Our destiny has been decided, and we must accept this. But if we must die-let us at least die homorably. We most not hold out our necks like sheep brought to slaughter. With the money we still have, let us buy weapons and protect ourselves till our last breath. Anyway our money is worthless. We must not go to slaughter like a flock of sheep! Let us die but take the Philistines along!."

Ephraim Karnovsky supported the rabbi but Yosel Veidenberg attacked him in fury: "You want war? Your want to bring destruction on our whole community and on all the Jews" Each day a miracle might still happen and we will be saved-we must not give up hope.. What is our strength when compared to the enemy's? You don't care", we told Ephraim Karnovsky "you are a stranger here-but I tell you, they want only to plunder our money and possessions-they will not butcher us all!..."

Opinions were divided and the meeting ended with no decision taken and no preparation made. Meanwhile the Lithuanian commander, the murederer Ostrobkas announced that if we would give him 1000 rubles in gold he would protect us from the destruction awaiting us.

This roused more hopes and illusions. No gold or silver coins remained but gold rings and jewelry were quickly collected and ahnded as "ransom" to the murderer. Hope and fear mingled in our hearts.

On Sunday, Rosh Hashana eve of 5700(1942) Wolf, the district commander in Vilna, issued an urgent order that the Jews hand over to the police, during that day, all their money and good clothing.

The order stated that if money or valuable clothes would be found in any house, all the family members would be murdered. The committee realized that the end had come.

And indeed, the day of judgement had arrived. We, the committee members, went from house to house that evening advising everyone to secape. But where? We ourselves did not know-each person must find some hiding place and escape as best he could. The main thing was to secape for time was running out. That same day the Jews of the towns of Ulkeniki and Selo-about 1000 people in all-were brought to Aishishok and put in the stables near the "Gemina" in the village of Yurzdiki. They were told that they were on their way to Aishishok where they would live in a ghetto.

Next morning, the first day of Rosh Hashanna, all the Jews of the town including their children and babies were ordered to gather in the two schools and synagogue. Any person found in his house would be shot on the spot.

Many Lithuanian policmen-another big troop of Lithuanian and German soldiers ahd recently arrived-went through the houses thcheck whther any hews remained. I decided not to go to the school. My house stood at the edge of the village and I decided to escape. All that day the members of my household and myself hid in the stable amidst boards and sacks. We heard the murderous shouts of the policemen and the cries of beaten children. At eight o'clock that night my wife, my two children and myself escaped through the fields till we reached the "Sanidvor" forest. There we found Shlomo Kyotzevsky, his brother in law Yefim Shifel, Reuven Kalyeko and his brother in law Lev Kovensky with this wife, children and elderly father, Aita Shishka, (84 years old). We decided to divide into two groups,one of which would head for Voronova and the other for Radon. Both towns belonged to Belorussia. had no ghettos and in both the Jews still had some freedom of movement.

My family and myself reached Radon.

We later learned that 490 people had escaped from Aishishok on that day. Most were killed by Germans, Lithuanians and native peasants. Bluma Michelovsky

and her sister were shot on the Lithuanian-Russian border, not far from Radon. They were given a Jewish burial in Radon - the lucky ones! The graves of the rest are unknown.

We sent a goy from Radon to Aishishok to find out what was happening there.

Only some days later we learned details of the dreadful tragedy from the Jew who succeeded to secape.

During the two days of Rosh Hashana, 4000 Jews, men, women and children, were locked in the two schools and synagogue with no food or water. They also had to relieve themselves inside. On the third day of Tishrai they were taken out of the buildings, arranged in four rows and led to the animal market on Radon Street.

The rabbi and the cantor led the procession. The cantor loudly recited the vidui(the confessional prayer before death) and the whole community, weeping and crying, echoed the prayer. The death procession included the Ulkeniki Jews who had been brought from Yurzdiki. There was no escaping them. The market place was surrounded by German and Lithuanian troops. The crowd of Jews stood there all night. Day break dawned on the fourth day of Tishrei, 5702, the last day in the lives of those thousands of people. From afar, the Jews saw goys walking in the direction of the old cemetary with spades in their hands.

At 8 a.m. that morning, the Lithuanian police commander Ostrobikas chose 250 of the youngest and healthiest men and took them in an unknown direction. Each hour they took another group of men. To calm the agitated crowd, the lithuanian hang man brougt a forged letter from Liv Milikovsky, written in Polish. It read, "We are in Seklotzky yard preparing a ghetto for you. Do not fear. My wife, and I are waiting for you."

This letter raised hope again in many hearts so no objection was made when 250 additiona men were taken. At 4 p.m. no men remained in the crowd, all had been butchered by the wild beasts in the old cemetary. Next morning, the thursday, the same was repeated with the women and children.

The butcher Ostrobikas dressed in a white apron and wearing globes was constantly

on the scene in the old cemetary. With his own hands he shot children and threw them, while still alive and quivering, to the pits prepared by the native goys. This was told to us by a goy who was witness. But the rabbi's torture was not over yet. He had to drink his cup of agony to the last dreggs. On the order of the sadistic butcher Ostrobkas, the rabbi was to be present in the cemetary all the while to witness the destruction of his community. Only at the end did the murderer have pity and shoot him and thus deliver the last Rabbi of Aishishok from this defiled and miserable world.....

Yaffa, daughter of Moshe Sonenzon(10 yearsold)

In Hiding

...when the Lithuanian policemen broke into the Jewish houses to hurry the Jews to the School buildings, my brother Itzhak and myslef hid in the storage hut for wood in our yard where we lay all day. We heard the scoldings and curse of the policemen, the shouts of beaten Jews and the cries of children. My father had escaped the day before but my mother with my one year old brother could not escape. She also didn't manage to reach the storage hut where we were hiding and so was taken to the synagogue. Before leaving my father told us that if we managed to avoind the policemen , we should secape to a goy who was a good acquaitance of ours, who would hide us. When evening came, and the village was quiet we left the hut and made our way through the fields and gardens to the house of Yashka Elyashkovitz who was a worker in our tannery.

His house was located at the edge of the village. He received us kindly and dressed my brother in the clothes of a christian boy. There we found the children of David Moshtzenik, the girl Mira, her younger brother Neir and some other Jews. Yashka calmed us and we fell asleep from tiredness and fear.

Towards morning the goy woke us and transferred us to the house of another christian, located at the end of Pig's street. I began to cry and demanded to be taken to my mother. All explanations and pleadings were to no avail. The goy agreed to take me to the synagogue. On the way we met a lithuanina policeman who told

us that christians were forbidden to walk the streets at that time. We had to return to the worker's house where I spent the whole day crying.

In the afternoon a young christian came and told us he ahd been sent by my father to take us to him to the village "Dumbliyeh". That night the christian put me on his shoulders and took me and my brother, who was dressed in the attire of a chriestian shephard, to Dumbliyeh. There we found father and the family of Sarah Kabatznik. For five days we hid in a barn belonging to a peasant lady wbo was an acquaintance of ours. At night she brought us food. During the day we dared not expose ourselves. On the sixth day, the christian lady told us that she was too scared to hide us any longer for fear we would be discovered on her ground. She transferred us to her brother's house in the village Paradoon. At his house we saw many stolen Jewish articles brought from Aishishok, among them our own brass menorah. The peasant told us that all Aishishok Jews had been killed.

We did not trust him and we decided to leave his house. At night my father, brother and myslef made our way through fields and woods to the village Vasilishok considered part of Poland, unlike Aishishok which was considered Lithuanian. We found refuge in the house of a polish acquiantance. But he demanded that my father go register with the police-or else he would be too afreaid to keep us in his house. The police chief there was a pole by the name of Smgola, a real Jew oppressor who ordered my father to jail for coming with no license from Lithuania.

Once Smigola spotted me bringing my father a bottle of milk. He became very angry and smashed the bottle. He drove my away with curses and threats. Only 10 days after being jailed was my father freed due to Jewish efforts and a large ransom.

Meanwhile we learned that mother and the baby had safely reached Radon. My mother disguised herself as a christian and with the help of a christian acquaintance, who said my mother was her sister, was allowed.. by drunken Lithuanian police to cross the border. But shortly after that, one of the policemen began to suspect and chase her. When my mother apprehended the danger, she threw the baby beneath

a haypile and herself hid in a second one. When the policeman saw no one he returned to the town. My mother emerged, took the baby who luckily had not cried, and reached Radon.

We arrived at Radon where a ghetto had been established, and there found my mother and brother. One day the Germans spread the rumour that the Russians were coming and pretended to pack their belongings and prepare themselves for flight. A few moments later, we heard sounds of shrieks and shooting. The Germans surrounded the ghetto, gathered the Jews in the market plcae, selected the young and healthy, and shot the rest on the spot.

We hid with 16 other Jews in an attic waiting for the end. Suddenly the baby began crying and we were struck with deathly fear. Surely the germans would hear the baby and discover our hiding place! The Jews began whispering among themselves while mother tried to breast feed the baby but the poor thing would not calm down and only cried louder. The whispering increased and one Jew said-we must "silience" the baby; 16 adult lives were more valuable than the life of one baby. Mother was paralyzed and froze and did not answer. The Jew took an article of clothing and threw it on the crying baby. It's cries ceased...we sat there frozen. Mother fainted.

Next day the remaining Jews were gathered together with those caught by the murderers. Anyone above 50 was shot. The rest had to bury them in a mass grave and cover the bodies with limestone.

After that things quieted down a bit. The searches and killings stopped. We descended from the attic and lived with the survivors in the Ghetto. On the day the surviving Radon Jews were transferred to the Lida ghetto, we managed to secape with smae other Jews to the village Kurkushani where a goy acquintance of ours hid us for a large sum of money. This peasant dug a big pit in a pig pen, covered it with boards and on the boards heaped sachs and pitaties. We lived in that pit for a whole year, my father, mother, brother Itzhak, a girl from Alita and myself.

When we ran out of money, my father, disguised as a peasant went with the

goy to Aishishok took money from a hiding place on our house and gave it to the goy. After that, the goy became more and more impudent. He demanded more money for the potatoes he fed us daily and threatened to betray us to the Germans if we did not hand over all our money.

The pit was horribly smelly and suffocating. Our diet consisted nearly solely of potatoes and turnips.. and when we ran out of money the goy made us leave. At night we returned to the village Lebetznik where we found Uncle Shalom and his daughter Gitele. We lived there for another year in a pit which we dug in a storage house of a peasant acquaintance whom we paid well. And once again we were forced to leave our hideout and escape to the forests. We joined the partisans who began appearing at that time. We lived there in danger and suffering till the Russians came and we returned to Aishishok. My mother in an attack of the polish partisans and her baby were killed. My father was arrested and senteced to eight years imprisonment due to a false charge of the goys. I reached Israel with my Uncle Shalom who became an Israeli citizen.

I hope to see my father again and my brother Itzhak who remained in Russia-here in our country.

Rachel Potchter with the Partisans

When the Germans came to Aishishok all economic and poblic life came to a halt. Shops were closed and houses bolted. Initially no one dared leave his house. Everyone sat behind the locked doors and blinds with the fear of death in their eyes. When steps were heard approaching the house, the heart stopped beating. During the first weeks a ceaseless stream of Hitler's soldiers passed through the town day and night. Tanks and cars of all kinds streamed through like a wide river. Even when the stream of soldiers ended and the town quieted down, people dared not emerge though walking outside was permitted till 6p.m. Jews, of course, were not allowed on the sidewalks, only in the cannels alongisde them and had to wear the "yellow patch" on the tack and chest. But who felt like walking outside meeting a German or a Lithuanian policeman and being abused? People went outside

as seldom as possible and then only when absolutely necessary as to bring water from the nearby well or to go on the forced labor of the Germans.

Peasants from the vicinity no longer came to town to buy or sell their produce. Anyone caught buying from or selling to a Jew was punished. But food was not a serious problem since every house had supplies of flour, sugar, potatoes etc. prepared back in the days of Russian occupation. The poor were provided for by neighbours or the Jewish Council. Jewish neighbourliness and brotherhood in need were revealed in all their beauty. But the terrible unknown future depressed the spirits and the evil tidings carried by peasant acquaintances, which stole their way into Jewish homes, made hair stand on end with fear and desperation. The synagogue and schools were closed even on Shabbat. People dared not congregate to draw comfort and strength from each other. The terror of the German and his cruel collaborator, the Lithuanian policeman had struck us all.

n the fourth day we were taken out of the school in rows and led together-men omen and children, to the new horses market on Radon St. Till the last moment any deluded themselves that the Lithuanians and Germans were setting up a ghetto. t was inconceivable that we were actually being led to slaughter...

When the Lithuanian commandant arrived, Yosel Vydenberg approached him and sked what he planned to do with the Jews? In response, the commandant ordered him o head the group of healthy men who were later led in an unknown direction. We hought they were being led to work. We did indeed hear gun shots from afar but hought they were only intended to frighten. We did not yet realize the horrible ruth. The goys who went to see what was being done with the Jews came back and old us they were being led to the old cemetary and shot there. But we did not even elieve them....And each two hours the policemen came and took another group of men...

Towards evening only the women and children remained.

Evening came. Hundreds of women and children lay down on the ground in :he horse market yard in a state of hunger and total exhaustion. The horrible iaked truth was exposed. We had no strength even for tears. We lay there stunned ind paralyzed awaiting daybreak. In the middle of the night a peasant who was a good acquaintance of mine, stole through the boards of the fence which surrounded :he market and told me, Aitka Kanichovsky and Shoshanna Yuraknesky:"If you want :o live-escape immediately before the light of day". We decided to escape. My two sons and myself (my husband had been killed that day) along with Aitka and ner two sons, Shoshanna and her son and another girl, moved a board in the fence, escaped through the opening and were on our way: The police gards were far away from us.

The good peasant led us to the village of Duchishok to the house of another peasant who was also a good acquaintance of ours. He fed us and we sent him to Aishishok to find out what was happening there. He returned and told us that there were no more Jews in the village. I decided to go to Benyakoni since the peasant was afraid to keep us in his house. There I found my two sons.

Later Haikel Kanischovsky, his wife Gutta and their two sons joined us. When the German ordered all Jews in the vicinity to assemble at Vorovna, to the ghetto about to be set up, I decided not to go. My heart told me that a ghetto spelled cetain death. Despite my family's objections I decided to disguise myself as a peasant, reutrn to the Aishishok vicinity and find refuge at one of our peasant acquaintances with whom we had ties of friendship and business for years....and so I did. Dressed as a goy and barefooted I went on my way. I reached the Aishishok vicinity and in a field there, I met a goy who was a good acquaintance fo ours.

I told him of my intention. He too advised me against entering the ghetto-he told me to fetch my sons while he would think of some plan and place to hide us.

I returned to Benyakoni and succeeded in transferring my children disguised as peasants. This peasant was a "sultis" and on authority of his servant, the Germans and Lithuanians came and went freely in his house. His house therfore was not a possible refuge for us. A Jew days later came and told us that the "Bagmina"(thevillage committee) suspected him of hiding Jews. He was very sorry but he could accomodate us no longer, his life was in danger! According to the "law" a peasant caught hiding Jews was sentenced to death.

It was the beginning of November. The earth was already frozen and snow had already begun falling...Where should we go? I remembered that we had some acquaintances in the village of Yurtzishky. I begged the peasant to lead us to this village and point out to us, from a distance, the house of my peasant friend. This would spare me the search for the house and the danger such a searchcould entail of falling in the hands of policemen or anti-semitic goys. He agreed. On sabbath morning we left and made our way through forests and fields until we reached the outskirts of the village. From there the peasant pointed out the house we were looking for. I knocked on the door and the peasant came out. When he saw me he shouted in amazement: "Good G-d! They told me you too were killed!" He took us in his house, fed us and hid us in his pantry for a few days . But since his house stood on the road he suggested transferring us to his sister who lived in an isolated house in a big forest far from the highway.

We accepted his generous suggestion gladly and gratefully. At night we set out for his sister's house, located about two kilometers away from the village, hidden in the thick of the forest and hence not at all visible from a distance. Her house was clean, beautiful and new and our hearts were gladdened.

She welcomed us warmly. She was a wise and good hearted woman but poor. The monetary question did not disturb me. Before the war we had hidden a large amount of merchandise from our store in the homes of many peasants. Many debts owed to us were also outstanding.

In exchange for the merchandise, paid for by honest peasants, I was able to obtain enough food and also pay the peasant woman for our food expenses. To my request that we be allowed to spend at least two weeks in her house, the woman responded:"You can stay as long as you like, the war will not end so soon..."

We stayed for six months at her house. During the day we all remained in one room, and hardly emerged. Nevertheless inhabitants of the adjacent village began whispering that the woman was hiding Jews and we felt we must continueour wanderings in search for a new hideout. We decided to dig a pit in the forest and hide there.

In June of 1942, my sons and I dug a pit 1.20 meters deep and 2 meters wide and set up a stove of stones. We lived in that pit for eight months. When it rained the pit filled with water and we had to dig another pit somewhere else in the forest. In the second pit we lived for seven months. We obtained food through the peasant woman who did not know the location of our second pit. It was I who always approached her. We knew the truth of the proverb "Happy is the man who is constantly afraid". We uprooted a hollow tree, erected it on the entrance to our pit and entered the pit by sliding down the hollow.

In the forest I met a soviet soldier who was also in hiding. He helped us a great deal in finding food which had become hard to obtain. White Polish partisans appeared in the forest. These fought not only the Germans but also and mainley against the Red Partisans. Their hatred of the Jews was boundless and any Jewish partisan or refugee who fell in their hands was killed on the spot.

We realized the situation was becoming unbearable. Food was hard to obtain and we could not approach the village since most of the peasants supported and assisted the white partisans. We therefore decided to try to reach the "Red" partisans among whom, we heard, there were many Jews.

My elder son decided to try his luck at locationg these partisans. After mnay attempts, he came upon a troop of Jewish and Russian partisans. When he told them of our plight their leader agreed to accept us.

One dark night, it was already the beginning of 1944, we took our few belongings and set out. We entered the "Podborze" forest. White partisans appeared in that forest and we were in great danger. To our luck we met a reconnaissance group of Russian partisans and told them who we were and of our wish to join them. They demanded weapons and would not let us enter the "Lepushcha"(forest) without any. After much pleading and when we showed them the note the partisan leader had given my son they agreed to let us enter the forest. On the way we were stopped by hidden and well camouflaged partisan spotters.

"Do you have weapons? No? And money, do you have? Also not? In that case we cannot let you join the partisans". They agreed to accept my elder son but not my younger son or myself. We did not agree to these terms. We would neither move on nor return. We lay on the snow for six days. The partisans brought us food. One day a Jewish partisan girl came to us and told us in the name of the Partisan commandant to go to the "Visinche" forest. I told her there were white polish partisans in that forest.

"I refuse to go there! If he wants to kill me-let him kill me here. I don't care about anything!..." Finally I "won" and the three of us were accepted to the partisans. I was employed in the kitchen, my elder son in the reconnaisance

troop and my youngest, in the spotters. So we were "useful" after all. To our luck, Russian planes brought weapons at that time, and in a quantity suffcient for everyone so the partisans resigned themselves to the fact that we had come weaponless and penniless.

We stayed with the partisans for four months till July of 1944. When the Russians liberated us we reached Vilna and from there we returned to Aishishok. We lived in Aishishok with the other survivors till the big attack of the Polish partisans. In that attack, Ziporah Sonenzon and her child were killed. My elder son, driving in a car to Vilna to bring our belongings back to Aishishok was also wounded in his right leg by white partisans and after an illness which lasted nearly a year-he died in Lodz. My younger son and myself, left the valley of death, the Poland soaked with our blood, and after many plights, finally reached our homeland.

SHNEOR GLEMBOTZKY

FROM A PRISONER'S CAMP TO A PARTISAN TROOP

When the Polish-German war broke out I was stationed with my regiment in Vilna. I had been in service for a year at the time. My regiment and others were transferred by train west to Warsaw. But the frequent bombings by the "Luftwaffe" forced us to leave the train cars several times a day and hide in the woods and fields. As we were traveling with no protection we were at the mercy of the German pilots. On the third of September we finally reached Sedlitz but from the east, the direction we had come from, streamed the stunned and beaten Polish troops. The hasty and frightened retreat of the Polish army had begun. Its commanders had "lost their heads" already during the first days of war. Each regiment or rather each company, mindful of its own interest, followed its own plans and proceeded where it wished. Weapons of all kinds were scattered on roadsides. The German army which advanced into Poland from all directions, assisted by numerous fifth columnists, surrounded whole troops and took them into captivity. The situation was utterly chaotic. We threw away our guns, split into groups and each group attempted to find its way through the forests to its village. Not far from the city Vishkor our troop , consisting of approximately 200 men, was surrounded by the German army and taken prisoner. But on that day a big troop of Polish cavaliers appeared on the road and the Germans fled to the woods. We continued on our way and were taken captive again. We succeeded in escaping again. The fourth time we were taken captive by a mechanized troop and imprisoned in the prisoners camp at Sedlitz, near Warsaw, where many thousands of Poles were held. We lay there on the ground for six days without food. The Germans paid us no attention and showed no interest in us. The badly wounded lay moaning and died. Officers and

soldiers in torn, filthy clothes, hungry and lice infested, rolled on the cold ground cursing out loud.

Our hearts were struck with bitterness and despair. The terrible and shameful defeat combined with the hunger, cold and filth needed a scapegoat to provide an outlet for the anger and bitterness. The Jewish soldier served as a target for the fury. Antisemitism exposed its evil face. Phrases of brotherhood and friendship voiced at the outset of the war, when the Poles demanded all minorities to combine forces and save the common fatherland, were now forgotten.

Beatings of Jewish soldiers, curses, offenses and accusations that Jews had caused the war and Polish defeat increased constantly. The Germans did not intervene. On the seventh day of our arrival, we were loaded on freight cars and transported to Kenisberg and there devided into groups according to race: Polish, Ukrainian, Belorussian, and Jewish.

The guards of the camps were "folksdeutschen"-Polish citizens of German origin who declared their German identity and surpassed even the real Germans in their cruelty towards the Jews.

Polish prisoners attacked the Jewish prisoners, a few hundred in number, seized their boots and clothes, leaving them in their underwear. The days were cold and the nights colder. The first snow had already begun falling. We were not spared beatings.

The food ration consisted of 200 grams of bread a day. Berke Kaganovitz and Yona Tavshovsky were in the same troop with me. Two weeks later we were loaded again on freight cars used for transportation of beasts and taken to a village called "Klien Deksin". From there to the prisoners camp we proceeded on foot. We passed a German farm on the way. A German boy was standing there beside the fence holding two apples. Berke Kaganovitz left the line, snatched the two apples and returned to the line. The boy began shouting and the guards began shooting but Berke mingled with the other soldiers and was not detected. Those two apples shared among us were our only food for two days. After two hours marching we reached the camp. A representative of the German sanitary committee was standing at the gate. We were ordered to undress in the cold; it was 25 degrees below zero. The medical orderly dipped a pen in ink and gave us injections against typhus! This was their preventive medicine against typhus! The next day we were dressed in clothes which were mere rags.

Our work consisted fo cleaning the roads or constructing huts. We rose at 6 a.m. organized ourselves and then were devided into work groups under the supervision of armed Germans. We worked till 6 p.m. The food ration consisted of 200 grams of bread a day, occasionally a little margarine and at noon turnip soup containing no fat. The Jews were given the most difficult and vile jobs.

The German citizens treated us brutally. Each step we took was accompanied by a stream of beatings, kickings and cursing. With sticks, rifle butts and kicks they beat us to amuse themselves and satisfy their sadistic instincts. In that prisoner camp we met the photographer Leibovitz, the son of the teacher Shaul Lidsky, Leizer Stotsinsky and Meir Shimon Politatzky.

One day several hundred prisoners were taken to clear the road of snow for a military procession. Yona Tavshovsky was beaten by a German policeman and in the evening he died of the beating and was buried in the cemetary of the camp. There were several tens of dead daily.

A year passed in this manner. Then the Germans announced that soldiers of Lithuanian citizenship could return home. By bribery, Leizer Stotsinsky obtained Lithuanian citizenship and returned to Aishishok.

Leizer's success made us all want to try our luck. On the second day after Stotsinsky had left the camp, when the German in charge of our row of huts asked which of the soldiers wer Lithuaninans, Meir Shimon Politatsky replied:"Iam! I am an Aishishok native and Aishishok is part of Lithuania". "What is your name?", the German asked. "Meir Politatsky", he answered. "A Jew?" "Yes." "Good. Come with me Jude!" He was taken to a hut and left there. We did not know what happened to him and were extremely worried. In the evening, the door of our hut was opened and a body thrown inside. The body lay there on the ground, seemingly lifeless. Only when we bent over and looked into the face we reconginzed Meir Politatsky... he looked terrible. He was blue and swollen all over. His eyes were invisible for his face was swollen with wounds. We could barely revive him. He later became ill with epilepsy....Thus the Germans punished a Jew who "dared" request release from a prisoner camp. Meanwhile Lithuania was annexed to Russia. Lithuanian soldiers were no longer released and our last hope of escaping the Germans through that cannel vanished.

From Germany we were taken to Poland to Biala Podlaska. Politatsky was released after the visit of a committee for the treatment of the ill. Berke Kagnovitz and myself decided to escape the camp to one of the adjacent villages still inhabited by Jews. Jews were forbidden to use trains or buses but freedom of movement by carts or by foot was still permitted. Assisted by Belorussian soldiers who had some Christian acquaintances in the vicinity, we disguised oursleves as Jewish citizens, sewed the yellow patch on our clother and thus reached Lokov. We there found work at a Jewish carpenter.

When Jews were ordered to work for German employers only, the Jewish carpenter found us work as apprentices in the carpentery of a German acquaintance in need of workers. The German was happy to find such cheap, nearly free, labour. I was an experienced carpenter and the German was very satisfied with my work. Thanks to him we escaped five "actions"(Jewish liquidation operations). When the number of Jews in Lokov dropped to a few tens, the German told me:"Listen Jude, you've got

to leave Lokov-they say that soon Lokov will be "Judenrein". I can't hide you any longer, and I feel sorry for you. You're a good worker and an honest Jew. Go to Mezritz, there are still many Jews there." We thanked him and Berke and I set off for Mezritz. The Jews and German supplied us with a little money and clothing. We hid in the forests by day and continued our journey by night. We were of course, disguised as Christian peasants and we obtained food from peasants on the way. On the third day we suddenly encountered a Polish policeman who demanded that we accompany him to the German police station in the neaby village for an investigation. We were in great danger. The policeman did not believe we were Poles!..... We made a show of agreeing to to along with him but when we reached a thicket-Berke suddenly attacked him, grabbed his gun and killed him. We fled to the forest but having heard the shot, the Germans appeared, and seeing us running they began shooting at us. Berke was hit and he fell only a few metres away from the forest. He did not get up. I was luckier and managed to reach the forest. I ran with all my strength. The sun had meanwhile set and the Germans apparently did not want to follow me into the forest. All that night I ran. I entered another thicker and bigger forest and hid there for three days, living off forest berries. In the evening of the fourth day I left the forest and finally arrived to Mezritz. There I became friendly with a soldier prisoner serving as head of the Jewish police. He supervised the big store of murdered Jews' clothing and allowed me to sell to the peasants as many clothes as I liked, purchase weapons and go to the forests. At that time, partisan groups appeared but no one was allowed into the forest without weapons.

I collected some thousand roubles from the sale of clothes and purchased a revolver. The peasants had loads of weapons from when the Polish army had retreated. At that time a Jewish partisan messenger came to Mezritz to enlist Jews with weapons and take them to the forest. Since I possessed a revolver he took me along with ten other Jews. Our troop was headed by the partisan leader known by his nickname "Piri".

Our numbers increased. Many Russian prisoners transferred by train to Germany, jumped through the train windows or through holes they forced in the car floors and fled to the woods. Some of them succeeded in reaching the partisans uninjured. But there was a severe shorgae of weapons. We decided to confiscate the pigs of rich peasants in nearby villages, distribute them among the poor peasants in exchange for information on which peasants had weapons. This plan worked successfully. We obtained not only guns and grenades but also machine guns. Our numbers reached 800, 300 of which were Jewish. We obtained food from the villages in the order and amount we imposed on them. We assumed an increasingly military form. Service units such as cooking, sanitary, etc. were organized and we became bold enough to confront openly Germans stationed in the big villages. We were informed that a German troop

of 15 men was at the Voronitz estate. The head of the estate was an S.S. officer. A troop of 40 partisans was dispatched and they surrounded the estate on all sides. It was an unexpected attack. The Germans were killed and their weapons taken. As time went on and our operations increased, we contacted Moscow. Airplanes were sent carrying supplies of weapons, food, radios, money, chocolate, etc. A group of saboteurs, headed by the renouned partisan "Uncle Petya", was organized to blow up bridges and destroy railroads.

Once I was sent, with two other Jews, on a sabotage mission. Our assignment was to blow up the train rail near a village about 40 kil. away from our base. At night we approached the village. From afar we heard sounds of music playing and dancing. We entered the first house at the outskirts of the village and the peasant there told us there were Germans in the village. We returned to the rail, dug a pit, placed the explosives and blew up the rail. We returned safely to the forest.

Such sabotage operations and surprise attacks on German stations in the villages or on military units on their way to and from the front, increased daily and the Germans were forced to transfer who battalions from the front to reinforce security of the railroads, roads and their guard stations.

But we did not only have the Germans on our hands. White Polish partisans appeared in the forests and they fought us with greater hatred than they fought the Germans. We fought back and gave them the treatment they deserved. Their hatred of the Jews and communists was boundless. Any Jewish partisan captured was tortured to death. We too killed them when we caught them. Once when our troop was returning from a sabotage operation, and passing close by a village, they shot at us from an ambush. Piri, the head of our troop, was killed. We decided to teach them a lesson and make an example of them so others would be too afraid to try any tricks. At night some of our troops surrounded the village and set it on fire. Any one trying to escape was shot and killed. No one survived from this village and no house remained standing.

The partisans war was a war of life and death. We took no prisoners-anyone captured was killed following interrogation. The Germans did the same when they caught a partisan. If one of us was severely wounded and it was impossible to carry him to the forest or save his life-he would shoot himself to avoid falling in the hands of the cruel enemy.

When the Russians returned in 1944 and liberated Poland, I joined the regular Red Army. I returned to Biala Podleska and was there assigned as chief of the department of criminal offenders in the Distruict Police. I served there for half a year till I felt that I could no longer stand being in Poland. The chief of Police hinted to me that I must leave for there were many complaints about me from the personal

engeance I took on the White Poles(of the "Armia-Krayova") and on the other anti-emitic hooligans who had showed excessive cruelty to the Jews under the German rule. understood the hint. I also had a strong desire to leave Poland which was soaked n so much Jewish blood. In a Russian military car I crossed the border and entered ustria. From there I reached Italy and then Israel.

ALTER MICHELOVSKY
THE WHITE PARTISAN ATTACK ON AISHISHOK

After Lithuania was annexed to Soviet Russia, I served for four months as ilitia commander of Aishishok. When the Germans entered the town, I was of course orced to go into hiding for I did not manage to escape with the Red Army. As t was, most of the Red Army in Lithuania had fallen prisoner.

A few days after the Germans arrived, they caught Avraham Krishilov, Yehuda ev Solominsky and his wife, Manos ,Son of Yosel Belechrovitz and nine other Jews, ook them outside of the village and killed them.

I hid in the Jewish cemetary. At midnight I went to the house of Yehuda Mendel eimin and knocked on the window. His wife came out, gave me 1000 roubles, some irts and peasant's clothes and told me to escape quickly for I was being serached or high and low.

That same night, disguised as a peasant, I set out for Vorovna, 24 Kilometers way from Aishishok. I arrived there safely. From there I went to my sister Mina ho lived in Dzevinishok.

When all Dzevinishok Jews were ordered to move to the Vorovna Ghetto, I returned he Vorovna. On the fourth of May, 1942, the Ghetto Jews were assembled in the arket place at the center of the town. Bent on our knees, we remained there, with o food or water, from 8a.m. to 3 p.m. Then, Lithuanian punitive troops came and divided he crowd into professionals and non-professionals. When I replied to the question f the police-chief that I was a watchmaker, he said "Well, for the time being you ill live". I was told to stand on the right, while a huge crowd of non-professionals esignated for slaughter, was gathered on the left.... Before our very eyes the police-en attacked the crowd and displaying the barbarity of wild animals, seized the little oney the Jews had, their rings, watches and other posessions. Meanwhile the peasants ad finished digging the long pits. Then those unhappy people were forced to lie in he pits. Those who lagged behind or tried to resist were beaten with rifle butts nd whips. When all the people in the pits were arranged "inthe typical German rder and methodology", they fired the machine guns positioned behind the Jews, and, heir horrific rattle, silences the cries of the Jews. The murdered and wounded Jews

were covered with earth by the peasants. Puddles of blood spread over the whole market square around the awful pit...and we were standing there witnessing the scene...

I will never, ever forget that awful sight!

When the slaughter was over, the Lithuanian district commander approached us and announced"All Jews are communists and responsible for the war. Therefore they were killed. This will be the fate of all the Jews in Europe. You will remain alive for the time being. We have need of you !"

The survivors amounting to 60-70 people were led, on foot, to the Lida ghetto which was strictly guarded by Germans and Lithuanians. The latter proved to be even crueller than the Germans.

Rumours had meanwhile spread that there were Jewish partisans in the nearby forest. A movement rose among the youth of the ghetto to steal out and reach the forests. We knew that those who remained in the ghetto were doomed, be it to a slow or quick death, all would surely die! But without weapons no one was accepted in the woods. Partisan messengers succeeded in stealing into the ghetto and they began enlisting people. I bought a gun for 30,000 rubles from a young christian boy who visited the Chrisitian lady assigned the task of delivering the cakes baked in the ghetto for the S.S. officers. I dismantled the gun, hid its parts in my trousers and one dark night, by cutting the barbed wire surrounding the ghetto, escaped with 100 others to the woods. The wood we escaped to was the big forest Naliboky, where, according to our informaiton, the partisans headed by the brothers Beilisky of Novogrodek were operation. During the day we hid in the forest and at night we continued our journey. We crossed the river Nyeman not far from a German post and in the forest we met partisan guards of the Beilisky group. We were brought to the camp and accepted as members. We all possessed weapons. In our camp there were several hundred partisans, all Jewish, among them women and children who prepared food, cleaned the clothes, and took care of the camp necessities.

Our assignments were attacks on solitary German and Lithunian guards, exploding rail roads and bridges and other acts of sabotage. Peasants found to be traitors or informers were liquidated. Food was received, or rather taken, from the peasants in the villages from which we operated. Our history during the 2½ years spent in the forest, is described in Beilisky's book"The Jews of the Forests".

When the Russians returned, I went back to Aishishok. There I found Shalom Sonenzon, his brother Moshe and his wife Zipporah and their children, the family of Zirl Yurkensky and Sara Kabetznik.

I enlisted in the N.K.W.D. troop which operated in Aishishok and the vicinity to purge the area of the Hitler collaborators and the White Polish partisans who we had learned to know during our "hot" "encounters" with them in the forests. Moshe Sononzon and myself, thirsty for revenge belonged to an armed unit which, while

pretending to search for Germans and traitors took reprisals on the evil goys as they richly deserved.

We terrorized the goys. We collected many articles and clothes robbed from Jews we had known and made those goys pay, if only a fraction for what they had done to us and our children.We also caught Germans who had fled in small groups to the woods during the big retreat, and "framed" them.....Once we captured six Germans , one of which was an S.S. officer Moshe Sonenzon, myself and some other Jews took them to the o. cemetary where the Aishishok Jews had expired in terrible tortune. We placed the officer to one side and told him:"You will remain alive!" "Yes, since I have a wife and sons in Germany", he said and a flicker of hope lit his extinguished eyes. The rest of the Germans stood pale, trembling with fear.

We did not prolong settling our account with them . A volley of bullets was fired and the contaminated bodies rolled on the ground by the big mass grave of our brothers. A small revenge for their crimes. "Now its your turn, dirty murderer", Moshe shouted. The officer was palid with terror and realized that his end had come. He threw himself to the ground and started kissing the earth at our feet, crying and whimpering: "Good Jews! Pity me-I have a wife and children, I did you no wrong."

"You have a wife and children, do you?"Mosheshouted,"andwe, didn't we have wives and children? You had no pity for our families and all that was clear to us-you filthy murderer!You want to live?! You won't live-you'll die like dogs!" While he was speaking he lifted his rifle butt and smashed the skull of the loathsome German..... He then raised his hands , and cried in a terrible voice,"Here, my hands have spilled this defiled blood! For the sake of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters-for my baby son who was strangled by unhappy Jews-because of you, you murderers, you scum of the earth!..."

Thus, we continued to terrorize the "German collaborators" and those who had "enjoyed" the spectacle of Jewish murder. The Russian army had meanwhile left the village on its way west and only three militiamen remained in the village. Rumours reached us that a group of White Polish partisans were preparing to attack us while the goys of the village were expectntly waiting for a sign to destroy us. We were informed that the attack was to be launched one night soon. These rumours reached us through those few goys who had remained human and who welcomed with with joy the return of the Jews, their good friends from before the was.

A Russian captain passed through Aishishok and we told him of the danger awaiting us and we requested that he idspatch troops of soldiers to the village. He tried to allay our fears by saying we had no reason to fear for our lives for under Russian rule such a predicament was impossible. He then continued on his way.

We all decided to gather in the house of Sonenzon which was a brick house.